

How We Bring About Change

In order to think more clearly about what we do, we need to elaborate our understanding of what we want to achieve and how we think our grant making gets us there. Below are ideas and suggestions that we can use to examine our assumptions and clarify our thinking.

The Problem – Environmental Injustice and Barriers to Funding

Environmental Injustice

There is no shortage of environmental problems in the world – climate change, toxic threats to health, deforestation, desertification, pollution of air, water, and soil, biodiversity loss, etc. They have deep roots in the way we make a living and in how our economies are organized. Accelerated expansion of production and consumption depletes natural resources, stresses ecosystems, and produces pollutants and toxics that exacerbate the problem. Poor communities are inordinately affected by both the problems engendered by production and the waste that the system throws off, both by their often greater dependence on natural resources to make a living and their more limited ability to mitigate the negative effects of the system. Poor communities in the Global South are even worse off, since they often live in societies with less ability to regulate these processes and to deal with the negative consequences. In fact, the increasing ability to regulate environmental damage in the Global North often pushes polluting industries to the Global South, exacerbating the problems there.

Barriers to Funding

But while the ability to protect the environment is often less robust, many citizens of the Global South have organized into community based groups, non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, networks and people's movements in a dizzying array of forms. Yet financial support for these groups is limited. These groups can be ingenious in developing local forms of fundraising and mobilizing people, yet money to support these efforts on a larger scale remains largely concentrated in the Global North. In the United States, for example, less than 2% of all charitable giving supports any international issues. The barriers to giving – both to groups overseas and to grassroots groups -- are too great for many donors in the North: language, legal issues, complicated banking arrangements, inability to track local issues sufficiently, and cost all inhibit even the most enthusiastic Northern donor.

Yet some funding does reach Southern groups, though decisions on who gets what tend to be made in the North. Agendas for funding are defined in the North, even when done by well meaning groups. Most of the accountability for funding is to Northern donors, not Southern constituents. Of the funding that is available for groups in the South, very little goes to grassroots groups and emerging NGOs. Funding tends to support formal organizations working on behalf of affected communities, rather than organizations of people in those communities themselves. Current funding procedures tend to be too slow

and formalistic to support activists to take advantage of or to push for political opportunities to achieve change. Finally, most funding supports discrete projects with short term goals, not processes that lead to the social change necessary to sustain program results.

Solution – Funding Social Change in the Global South

How to solve these problems? Two fundamental things must happen:

- 1) Citizens around the globe must increase their capacity
 - a. to improve our current systems of production and consumption to make them more sustainable, and
 - b. to have a greater say in issues of environmental governance to make these systems work for everyone.
- 2) Funders who want to support citizens in this work must develop systems to finance this organizing and improvement that greatly reduces the cost of doing so and increases accountability to Southern constituents.

In response to these two needs, the overarching goal of Greengrants is to increase the amount of money available for grassroots environmental and social justice groups in countries around the world where funding is scarce. The funding priorities that guide the implementation of this goal follow directly from our understanding of the specific factors and dynamic processes that shape the fate of social movements. This “theory of change” rests on our own experiences as activists and funders, the lived experience of other activists, and a careful reading of the available scholarship on social movements and social change. These sources converge in identifying three general factors as the most important in determining the relative success or failure of movements:

- Resource mobilization and the development of an underlying social infrastructure capable of sustaining movement activity
- Issue framing and consciousness raising work that creates the shared cognitive and emotional basis for movement participation
- “Political opportunities” – that is, change processes that render movement opponents newly vulnerable or receptive to challenge

But this is little more than a check-list of factors. To make our grants program as effective as possible, we need to have a much more sophisticated sense of the dynamic processes that link these factors and ultimately shape the emergence of broad based movements for social change.

Our Theory of Change

To move toward a more dynamic model of social change, it will be useful to describe the above three factors in a bit more detail and to begin to highlight the ways in which these factors are linked.

1. *Political Opportunities* – Under ordinary circumstances, movement groups—let’s call them “challengers”—face enormous obstacles in their efforts to confront entrenched regimes. These challengers are relatively powerless precisely because their bargaining position, relative to established political and economic elites, is so weak. But the particular set of power relationships that define the political environment at any point in time is not some immutable structure of political life. As all-powerful as a given regime may seem, changes—demographic, economic, political, cultural—are always taking place that have the potential to undermine the power and authority of incumbents. Successful movements tend to take advantage of these kind of destabilizing change processes, even as they expand “political opportunities” through their own actions.
2. *Resource Mobilization and the Development of Movement Infrastructure* – Favorable shifts in the broader political environment only affords challengers the opportunity for successful movement action. It is the resources available to challengers, and the infrastructure needed to sustain movement activity, that enable challengers to exploit emerging “political opportunities.” In the absence of these resources/infrastructure, movement groups are apt to lack the capacity to act even when granted the opportunity to do so. Resources—money in particular—can obviously help sustain infrastructure, but in the absence of infrastructure, monetary resources are never enough to make a movement. What do we mean by infrastructure? We define infrastructure as a sustained capacity for organization substantially out of the social control reach of movement opponents. Very often, movements emerge out of the existing organizations or institutions controlled by challengers. So Solidarity in Poland was nurtured within both the Catholic Church and established workers associations. The U.S. civil rights movement took root initially in a network of southern black churches. But newly established, self-identified movement organizations can also serve as the critical infrastructure for a emerging movement.
3. *Framing and Consciousness Raising* – While critically important, political opportunities and resources/infrastructure do not, in any simple sense, produce a social movement. Together they only offer challengers a *certain* objective “structural potential” for movement activity. Mediating between opportunity and action are people and the *subjective* meanings they bring to their situation. Movement emergence always implies a certain transformation in consciousness. Before movement activity can really begin in earnest, a critical mass of people must define their situation as unjust and subject to change through group action. Further, these perceptions must have an emotional as well as a cognitive component. It is not enough that people simply perceive injustice or disadvantage. Strong felt emotion is always critical. Anger and hope are the typical affective fuel of movement activity.

These three factors are not discrete. Rather they are linked in ways that begin to suggest a more dynamic model of movement emergence. To specify all these links is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can at least gesture to some of the key interactive dynamics.

- Lots of research has shown that the kind of transformation of consciousness so critical to movement emergence is *much* more likely to take place in the kind of group settings or “free spaces” that here we have simply referred to as “infrastructure.” That is, as people organize into groups, changes in thinking are more likely to happen.
- But there is a reverse effect here too. That is, as more and more people begin to share a new consciousness about some issue, they are far more likely to commit to building the infrastructure needed to sustain collective action.
- Expanding infrastructure and the spread of a new consciousness may, in and of themselves, constitute a new “political opportunity” weakening the power of entrenched political and economic elites.
- The emergence of true “external” political opportunities generally have positive effects on the development of both infrastructure and movement consciousness. As external events or change processes increase the power of challengers and/or weaken movement opponents, the credibility of movement frames is enhanced, encouraging additional resource mobilization and infrastructure building. In other words, as movements gain in strength, their ideas do not seem so impractical or unrealistic, and the movement may grow in a snowball effect.

The basic model of movement-based social change should, by now, be fairly clear. While most successful social movements benefit from favorable shifts in the broader political environment, “political opportunities” alone do not make movements successful. In the absence of sufficient resources/infrastructure, linked to an emerging radical new social/political consciousness, objective political opportunities rarely produce successful movements. It is when political opportunities emerge *in the context of sufficient infrastructure and consciousness* that movements develop most rapidly and successfully. Indeed, when infrastructure and consciousness already exist to some significant degree, it is not impossible that the movement itself can begin to create its own opportunities for successful action.

Funding Priorities

Our desire to fashion a theory of change—however provisional—is intensely practical. We mean to use it to aid in choosing funding priorities for our program and to continue to use the results of the program to refine our understanding of how movements make change. Based on our current understanding of this process—as articulated in the previous section—we are especially interested in funding projects that attempt to do one of three things:

- *Resource Mobilization and the Development of Movement Infrastructure* - build and sustain movement infrastructure, either locally, or by linking groups together in more elaborated “networks of struggle”

- *Framing and Consciousness Raising* - engage in creative framing, educational, or educational efforts designed to bring about the cognitive/affective shifts so critical to collective action
- *Political Opportunities* - engage in actions—locally, regionally, nationally—that have the potential to render movement opponents newly vulnerable or receptive to change on environmental and/or social justice issues.

We can be still more specific in this regard. Our current grant program favors eight specific movement supporting activities. What follows is a list of these activities grouped under the three general categories noted above.

1. Resource Mobilization and the Development of Movement Infrastructure

- **Growing and supporting civil society groups**
- **Supporting effective networks**

2. Framing and Consciousness Raising

- **Creating solid technical documentation of concerns and alternatives**
- **Supporting alternative media and culture**
- **Promoting alternative production and distribution**

3. Political Opportunities

- **Creating economic leverage**
- **Changing policy**
- **Dealing effectively with external events**

The remainder of this section is given over to brief descriptions of each of these eight priority activities, tying each back to the theory of change sketched above.

1. Resource Mobilization and the Development of Movement Infrastructure

Growing and supporting civil society groups

Successful social movements amplify the voices of individuals and communities. Activists need to build social capacity to analyze issues, frame alternatives, and organize people to act. Organizing communities, creating formal and informal organizations, and building the skills of the organizations that do exist are all essential to increasing this social capacity. Since most donor funding is only for larger groups with track records, it can be very difficult for new groups to get a foot in the door. Small grants are crucial for groups with little experience who are not ready to mount major programs, but who need some money to have an impact. In the final analysis, even if the immediate balance of political and economic power in society is not challenged in the short term, the development of civil society groups represents a major social transformation in and of itself. The existence of a stronger set of citizen groups creates a situation where development decisions are more likely to take the public interest into account. It is this

social infrastructure that maintains momentum and allows movements to get their messages across at the right times.

There is a wide variety of groups that need support, but they can be roughly grouped as follows:

- Community-based groups, which are made up of people directly affected by an issue. While they may all live near each other, communities also arise out of common cause, such as people with cancer, fishermen threatened by corporate overfishing, students, communities from different countries affected by the same mining company, etc.
- Non-governmental Organizations, which here refers to formally organized groups, often with paid staff, that work on issues beyond their own community at any level from local to international
- Professional or production organizations, such as cooperatives, unions, and artisanal associations
- Networks, which are coalitions of organizations drawn together in common cause, often with a formal affiliation
- Movements, which are wide collections of formal and informal organizations working toward the same general goals, often with widely different tactics and strategies, and most often not in tight coordination.

Funders are normally set up to fund only a few of these types of organizations, but there is a role for funding all of them.

Supporting effective networks

The power of these groups is further strengthened by the increased networking of civil society groups, media, and sometimes business and government. The greater the scope of change proposed, the more important cross-sectoral alliances are. This means that local, regional, national and international networking must occur—the latter especially where the issues at hand move across borders. Getting the small amounts of money it takes to support this kind of networking can be very difficult, especially funds that allow smaller, more community based groups to participate in networks of their larger, more established counterparts. Linking local groups with allies in other parts of their region or the world strengthens their work. Networks can multiply the influence of their members. What we also see during such a process is a “frame extension” – a linking of issues -- among local groups, where activists articulate issues and themes that underlie one struggle (for example, pesticides or incineration in Mozambique) and connect them to another, seemingly unrelated struggle (hydroelectric dams and health care in Mozambique and Southern Africa). That is what movement building is all about.

There is a cost to this wider linking, in that the time and resources devoted to connecting with wider networks take away from local organizing. Local leaders may open themselves to accusations of being coopted by outsiders. And issues are often framed differently by wider networks than they are by local groups. So groups need to weigh the

benefits of collaborating with a wider network against the costs of a reduced focus on local issues.

Given the complexity of socio-environmental problems, many perspectives are needed to generate ideas and tactics for experimentation. Solutions are uncertain, and unlikely to occur in single steps over a short period of time. So successful movements tend to be large, diverse, internally inconsistent, and often in conflict, but pushing roughly in the same direction. For a community like Greengrants that wants to grow environmental movements, it is important to have a diversity of members and approaches. The danger of diversity is that different parts of the network will unintentionally undermine the work of other parts, so coordination and communication is important to avoid that. Having said that, not everyone in the network will always agree with every other part, which is fine as long as they are not contradicting each other's work.

One specific effect of diversity within a movement bears mention. The presence of more threatening "outsider" groups within a broad array of organizations tends to benefit the movement for at least two reasons. More specifically, these groups:

1. Tend to encourage elites to bargain in good faith with more moderate movement groups;
2. Are often repressed, which has the effect of generating more support from the general public in sympathy.

These groups are often seen as marginal or radical in the beginning, but as movement gain strength and social agendas shift, their points of view can come to be mainstream.

2. Framing and Consciousness Raising

Creating technical documentation of concerns and alternatives

Technical and scientific documentation deepens understanding of problems and alternatives. Citizens need to analyze problems technically, as well as analyze alternatives. Good, sound information is essential to diagnosing problems and presenting solutions. Also important are qualitative documentation practices—where people's testimonies, stories, and oral histories complement and enrich technical sources. This is a point where the diagnosis and prognosis of the problem can emerge in a way that moves activists, allies, and funders to support an initiative or organization. Creating and documenting these alternative understandings – that dams have high social and environmental costs, that the Green Revolution also brought about a revolution in social relations, with clear winners and losers – are essential to gaining wider public support for a movement's point of view. There is very little funding available to support the work of technically oriented people with a social orientation, so grants for this category are crucial.

Supporting alternative media and culture

Groups need to have access to information (through media and communication technologies and social networks) and produce their own information (via newsletters, Internet, newspapers, radio and research reports). Understanding issues is crucial for citizen groups, so information must be available not from of generally accepted viewpoints, but from alternative perspectives as well. And if groups hope to reframe debates, to shift discussions to their priorities and point of view, then they must be able to get their views out in mass media. Media technologies facilitate a public engagement with problems that may not be widely recognized or acknowledged, and presents alternatives for consideration. Media and culture come together as groups use symbols, stories, and oral traditions to communicate concerns and solutions through web, print, visual, and audio technologies. Often getting the word out does not cost much money, and small grants with the right timing are important for groups to influence public debate.

A critical tool in this struggle to control the debate is the power of moral persuasion, of being “right.” The power of struggling for nature and for the poor can sometimes overcome million dollar campaigns mounted in opposition. Social movements use the power of moral persuasion to reach and convince wide audiences far beyond the power of money.

Promoting alternative production and distribution

More sustainable production and distribution techniques are necessary for consumers and businesses to survive and thrive. Fisheries must be limited to allow continued production, farmers must not poison the land that produces crops, extractive industries must work without destroying surrounding communities and environments. And societies must create governance systems that encourage sustainable production and discourage short term profit at the expense of long term production. This is a key basis underlying any path toward sustainability.

It is important for movements to get beyond what might appear to be an exclusively oppositional orientation toward one that is focused on embracing something positive and transformational (instead of a “just say no to X” we insist that we are “saying yes to Y”). Social movements must be better at articulating to potential adherents what it is they stand for in a way that is consistent with their vision.

3. Political Opportunities

Creating economic leverage

Boycotts and economic pressure tactics directed at institutions can have wide ranging effects. It becomes much more difficult to ignore alternative points of view if movements can have an impact on business as usual. Economic leverage must go hand in hand with political leverage. Economic pressures can create opportunities for movements: they can draw public attention to a previously ignored group, they can raise the cost of ignoring the movement, and they can open up avenues for dialogue and negotiation that would otherwise never become available. There is very little funding for more confrontational

tactics such as these, and small grants are often all that is needed to support these efforts. This is fully compatible with the notion – discussed above – that more threatening “outsider” groups generally increase the leverage available to the movement as a whole.

Changing policy

Policy changes (often as a result of the above activities) – can be legislative, administrative, judicial, or corporate, and can occur at the local, regional, national, or transnational scales. For many movements, achieving change in policy is a watershed moment in the struggle. At this moment, the new policy begins to codify the underlying social change taking place. While policy changes do not guarantee social justice, they do indicate a fundamental change in the social agenda which recognizes the perspective of the movement. Achieving policy change requires funding for the whole range of groups necessary to make it happen: community based groups directly affected by the policies in question, local NGO groups that support them and help articulate their views, groups based in the capital with contacts with policy makers. Just as important, funding must be readily available when the time is ripe for policy changes, not when a funder has a funding cycle approaching. Policy changes often come when opportunities for a breakthrough present themselves, after long preparation by movement groups. Movements must take advantage of those openings to get the policy change they want. These changes are important, not simply for whatever substantive effects follow from the policy shift, but also for the powerful signal they send indicating that the system may be newly vulnerable and/or receptive to change.

Increasing resilience to deal effectively with external events

External events—those beyond the control of activists—must be conducive to change, or at least not hinder it. Activists need to be able to take advantage of unforeseen events quickly and flexibly. Activists must also be able to create those events—*making* political opportunities happen, not just waiting for them to open up. Making opportunities happen can take years of practicing the strategies listed above, waiting for the right time. When the opportunity finally arrives, movement building and networking externally to build pressure on domestic regimes can have a major impact.

There are circumstances where movement leaders set up everything quite well, but wider events outside their control make success impossible under current conditions. So even with the best designed and led movement, external events must not undermine that work for movements to be successful. Movements that are resilient can weather a change in circumstances and choose a more propitious time to press their case.

And How to Do It

Social movement activists know all these strategies. They are constrained most often by a lack of resources. Since the majority of finance for these movements exists in the north and goes to large NGOs, a mechanism is necessary that makes small resources available

to social movement activists in a way that citizen groups can actually use them. This mechanism must:

- Make grants in a timely fashion with minimal bureaucracy
- Provide funding that is unrestrictive to promote creativity and freedom of action;
- Make grants in amounts to do the most good, without overwhelming the capacity of the grassroots groups or create undue burdens for financial management
- Put decision making power in the hands of social movement leaders who have the vision, networks, and timing to know where to direct grants when.

The mechanism must minimize the risk of:

- Orienting groups to grant getting rather than effective action;
- Creating a funding dependence that jeopardizes group survival should funding be withdrawn.

Results: Transformations, Sustainability, and Accountability

It is critical to know how our funding impacts the communities we support. In other words, what kinds of broader changes do we expect as a result of the above actions?

Shifted agendas

We seek to enable sustainable cultural shifts, not just temporary political compromises. This is also a shift in the way that problems and solutions are defined and by whom. That is, a number of problems or concerns are now connected when before they may have been seen as unrelated. Now solutions can be forged when previously few were in evidence. This constitutes a transformation not only in the culture or practices, but a change in the worldviews that guide these practices. This is the context in which social justice and sustainability can emerge.

Redistributed power

We want citizens to increase their ability to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives and their environment, around the world, not just in one or two countries. In this way, we can facilitate local citizens' efforts to transform civil society and impact systems of governance that shape their communities and their destinies. This is social justice.

Sustainability

We support and encourage the development of sustainable communities globally. Sustainability requires an integration of economic and ecological functions. Sustainable economies must exhibit a balance of local and non-local market links, living/fair wages, and minimal negative (if not positive) impacts on ecosystems.

Accountability

Greengrants has a built in system of peer review and accountability, in that we are committed to supporting movements for social and environmental justice for the long term and our reputation must withstand the scrutiny of citizen groups who are increasingly networked globally and sharing information among each other. Word travels fast in such networks and if we make mistakes—or are perceived as having made mistakes—people and organizations will know soon enough. It is imperative, therefore, that our work is as “above board” and respectful as possible, particularly in a world where southern organizations often experience mistrust and misunderstanding with northern organizations and funders. We must also continue to integrate lessons learned along the way, and adapt our work accordingly. Greengrants must operate as a global network that listens and learns directly from the people in the communities where they live, work, play, and struggle for a better world.