

Additional session:

Power

TIME: 120 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: HANDOUT ON POWER, POWER EXERCISE

ACTIVITIES:

- *Power session handout and discussion*
- *Exercise on power relationships*

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- to support participants to explore a challenging, and often taboo, issue within the activist world – how we think about power and how power dynamics affect our lives, including our safety and well-being.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- The power session can be used with participants who are struggling with internal challenges within their own organisations and within their movements. It can also be used with participants who feel particularly ‘powerless’ – for example, working under extremely repressive regimes.
- The session must be employed with care and sensitivity, as these exercises will (and should) bring up very challenging and real issues among participants – and it will challenge the group as a whole. Utilised well, it can help to strengthen organisations and movements and aid them in recognising that true solidarity and integrated security require an honest assessment of power dynamics, and often, a shift in the way we hold power.
- It is best used on Day Two in the morning or possibly in the afternoon.

EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:GROUP
EXERCISE

Power Session

TIME: 60 MINREQUIRED MATERIALS: HANDOUT ON POWER, IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGESUMMARY:

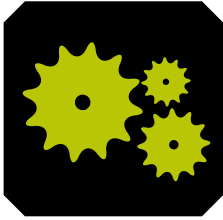
This is an exercise that gives participants an opportunity to explore the concept of power in a group, using the handout as a discussion piece.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- Divide participants into groups of 4 or 5 people.
- Ask them to read through the handout, and discuss for 30 minutes.
- The small groups should return to the larger group and share their observations on the exercise and conclusions from their group for 30 minutes.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- The discussion portion in small groups is deliberately unstructured, as the handout is enough to provoke a lively conversation without guiding questions.
- However, if groups require some additional guidance, you can ask them to consider: 'do they agree or disagree with the points presented in the handout?', 'can they share stories in their lives of challenges they've experienced different forms of power?', 'do they think that power dynamics affect solidarity in their movement?'



HANDOUT

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FORMAT:

GROUP
EXERCISE

Power Session

'For feminists, the issue of power is mostly perceived in a negative way. It's a taboo word. It is acceptable to speak of resisting power, renouncing power – but not of having power, or using it correctly, or sharing it.'

Alejandra Sardá-Chandiramani
Senior Programme Officer,
Women's Funds, Mama Cash

Power is central to our activism. Our work is grounded in resisting and challenging the abuse of power, in all its manifestations – discrimination, violence, homophobia, poverty, patriarchy, machismo, capitalism, racism . . . the list is endless.

That is one aspect of power – what some people would call 'power-over'.

Essentially, this is using power to get someone else to do what you want them to do. This is power as domination: it is about unjust or oppressive power relations, controlling or coercing others to submit to your will. Many feminists would argue that this form of power is grounded in an aggressive worldview that sees life as a win-lose situation – where you are either on top and powerful (wielding 'power over') or oppressed ('power under').

Sometimes, we talk also about shared power – 'power with' – which is about reciprocal, balanced,

equal relationships. Really, that is our goal as activists – creating a world where we celebrate our common bonds and our differences – and where we truly, honestly share. Where we recognise and equally value what we bring to each other, without judgement.

That is the gold standard – the aspiration.

But the reality is that we are all human beings – and we all struggle with our relationship with power. How we feel about our *own* power. How we use power in relation to the people and the communities we say we represent. Or the people who support us in our activism – who may help us to care for our offices, our children, our homes.

And understanding how we use power with each other, among activists. Sometimes, to support, encourage and heal. Sometimes to remain silent, ignore or exclude. Sometimes to wound, betray and isolate.

How power dynamics flow through all of the layers we believe define us – the colour of our skin, the years in our bodies, who we love, how we move in this world, how we make a living – and stand as silent barriers between us as individual activists, between our organisations, in our movements.

All of these aspects of power are painful and complicated. They are grounded in messages we

absorbed into our bodies from day one, how we have been treated, how we learned to treat others, who and what we learned to fear and to value. The ways we have swallowed – and sometimes spit out – oppression, discrimination and violence.

Power is. We all have it. We all use it. All the time. Used with deliberate intent to harm or carelessly, it is a destructive force. Employed consciously with honesty, compassion and passion, it is a tremendous, transformative resource.

So, here is the big question: how do we get to a place where we, as activists, see ourselves as powerful in a good way? Where we share and celebrate that power with each other, with the people who support us, with the people we support?

We start by asking ourselves the hard questions about power in our relationships – with ourselves, and with each other.



WRITTEN EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

INDIVIDUAL
EXERCISE
AND GROUP
DISCUSSION

Power Relationships

TIME: 60 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: WRITTEN EXERCISE ON POWER RELATIONSHIPS, IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

SUMMARY:

This is an exercise that supports participants to explore different forms of power relationships they experience in their life, and how they, as activists, use power.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- Ask participants to fill out the written exercise individually for 20 minutes.
- Once participants have completed the exercise, have them move into pairs or triads to discuss for 20 minutes.
- Finally, all participants can return to the group to discuss their reactions and reflections from the exercise for 20 minutes.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- This exercise should be used as a follow-on from the 'power handout exercise', which provides a framework for thinking about different forms of power.
- Keep in mind that it is always challenging to talk about power with activists, particularly the power that we have to affect others and our own life.
- The exercise also tries to help participants think about how power is consciously or unconsciously used.



WRITTEN EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

INDIVIDUAL
EXERCISE
AND GROUP
DISCUSSION

Power Relationships

1. People who support me

- a) Who has the power to support me in my activist life? (List three key people in the first column, 'People in my life').
- b) For each person, describe two instances where each individual used their power in ways that affected you, one instance in column 'Positive use' and one instance in column 'Negative use':

2. People I support

- a) Who do I have the power to support in my activist life? (List three key people in the first column).
- b) Describe three instances where you used your power in different ways that affected them:

People in my life	Positive use of power (shared power, support)	Negative use of power (power over)

- c) What do you think was the intent behind these actions (that is, were they deliberate and thought through or were they unconscious/accidental)?

- d) How did I react to these various instances and why (that is, how did I acknowledge them, speak about them, challenge them, stay silent about them)?

- c) What do you think was the intent behind your actions (that is, were they deliberate and thought through or were they unconscious/accidental)?

- d) How did these people react to my use of power in these instances and why (that is, how did they acknowledge them, speak about them, challenge them, stay silent about them)?