An Analytical Paper on Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning from Collective Actions in Africa

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APPRECIATION

This study has benefited from the intellectual contributions of many collaborators, Dr. Doha Abdelhamid from Egypt, and Dr. Ted Jackson from Canada. Both read and reviewed the initial drafts of the research, and contributed from the richness of their own research and evaluation experiences. Two interactive workshops were convened in which several leaders of collective action movements across Africa convened to review and further contribute to the analysis contained in this paper. More than 40 people, some of them leaders of collective movements offered lessons and implications of their life-long struggles to enable the production of this paper. The CLEAR Anglophone Africa was a vital partner in convening and supporting the dissemination of the on-going lessons and potential training efforts that are emerging from this initiative.

Most of all, deep appreciation for the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, for funding this initiative in understanding, monitoring, evaluating and learning from collective action movements in Africa. As this work unfolds, evaluators can hope to learn more about the phenomenon of collective action; and the protagonists of these actions can obtain tools and approaches for deepening their own knowledge and practices, as they seek changes in policies and practices of governance and equitable economic prosperity for Africans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation in Africa is a growing professional practice, focusing on the application of globally-tested methods and tools to generate evidence on the efficiency and effectiveness of development policies, programmes and projects. Increasingly, citizens of the continent are challenging many of these existing policies, programmes and projects, and the governance arrangements that sustain them. One of the increasingly prominent forms of these challenges is manifested in various types of collective action movements by citizens.

This paper is an analysis on Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Collective Action Movements in Africa. It examines how these movements can contribute towards learning on the demand for accountability by citizens; and how citizens are influencing and shaping emerging democracies in Africa. The paper demonstrates that as an emerging field of discourse, collective action movements in Africa are part of a growing global phenomenon, which can be understood partly by applying social movement theories. Yet, as these collective action movements have not yet been institutionalized, their theories of change are fluid and evolving, and their actions are driven by exigencies of their complex circumstances.

The paper presents a number of insights that might help in constructing different approaches to understanding the theories of change underpinning collective action movements, as they evolve. One of the areas of analysis presented in the paper is how the "intentionality" of these movements, and their leaderships, shape our understanding of the purpose and goals of the movements.

The paper further elaborates a diversity of theories of action, borne out of the dynamic nature of collective action movements. The modalities of mobilisation are explored in respect of consensus mobilisation, action mobilisation and final outcome mobilisation. Linking these actions to modes of leadership, the paper argues that understanding the purposes of action can define which stage and strategy of action is adopted at different levels and periods.

The paper also investigates learning within collective action movements; and learning about them. It concludes by presenting typologies of learning--learning in struggle, learning through struggle, and learning to struggle—through which both those involved in collective action and the wider citizenry learn about the contexts, possibilities and strategies of collective action.

INTRODUCTION

One of the phenomena shaping policy thinking and practice in Africa's fast-growing democracies are collective action movements, which have emerged to engage, and sometimes challenge, governance and development discourses and practices. In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Bukina Faso, collective action movements have been observed as seemingly spontaneous eruptions that have rocked the foundations of dictatorial regimes. In Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Malawi, and Nigeria, these initiatives have taken the form of less revolutionary but no less significant collective action efforts that have demanded changes to social, economic and political systems. Like similar actions in other parts of the world—including the Occupy Movement's protests against global capitalism, student-led movements in Chile, the UK protests against public sector reforms, pro-democracy demonstrations Myanmar, anti-corruption campaigns in Spain, India, Guatemala, and protests against police brutality in the US—collective action in Africa countries are "questioning the hegemony that 'there is no alternative'" to economic neoliberal policies and to undemocratic forms of governance (Hall *et al*. 2012, p.113).

Figure 1 A flyer supporting the 'people's revolution' in North Africa and the Middle East

Given their importance as actual and potential forces of change, it is necessary to better understand collective action movements. Specifically, it is important to understand and evaluate how learning happens within collective action movements, on the one hand; and on the other, how we can learn from, monitor and evaluate collective action movements.

Budd Hall, a key figure in social movement learning, emphasizes the centrality of learning to social change:

> [I]t is…the learning and knowledge generating capacities of social movements which accounts for much of the power which is claimed by these movements. Deepening our understanding of learning within the contexts of social movements is a contribution, however modest, to the achievement a larger historic project of a world we want (Hall 2006, para 2).

While there is recognition of the importance of learning for sustainability and effectiveness of collective action (e.g. Hall, 2006; Hall *et al*., 2011, 2012; Reed *et a*l., 2014), there is little research on the strategies and goals of learning within collective action (Reed *et al.,* 2014), in part because of the difficulty of measuring learning that is mainly informal. Some attempts have been made by researchers in adult education and social movements, but the field of evaluation has not engaged in any real way with this aspect of collective action. This reflective paper is thus part of a growing interest in exploring learning in and from collective action (Hall *et al*., 2012), with a focus on how the world of evaluation can become a more

significant part of this effort.

This paper forms part of a broader initiative on Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Collective Action Movements in Africa.[1] The ultimate goal of this effort is to enrich the field of evaluation, and to contribute an African perspective to understanding collective action, which is largely missing in the literature (Hall and Turray, 2005). The initiative employs a participatory approach, and a broad range of instruments, including action research, e-learning, indigenous knowledge systems and appreciative enquiry to investigate emerging theories of change and patterns of action that appear to be challenging and shaping development and governance discourse and practices in Africa. By providing insight into modes of learning within and about collective action, this paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of forces that are shaping new democracies and challenging old regimes.

The challenge of the initiative is its focus on phenomena that are hard to capture, elusive to measure, and difficult to derive learning from. In conventional evaluation of programmes, there are relatively clear goals, methods, and management plans that are the objects of analysis. In the case of collective action movements in Africa, there is less definition, partly because of the novelty and the apparent spontaneity of the phenomenon, but mainly because these movements are dynamic and continue to evolve. Contemporary collective action also makes extensive use of methods such as social media, which is itself a relatively new area of study.

This analytical paper starts with an examination of the theoretical foundations of collective action movements. It then proceeds to examine three key elements about the "evaluability" of collective action: a) the extent of intentionality behind collective action movements, b) the existence or lack thereof of theories of change, and c) the theories of action that define the manifested activities of collective action movements. The ultimate purpose of the analytical paper is to aspire towards a methodology and process for monitoring, evaluating and learning from collective action movements in Africa.

The case studies

The paper uses reflections from three recent instances of collective action: the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt, the OccupyGhana movement in Ghana, and the Bring Back Our Girls campaign begun in Nigeria. Other incidences of collective movements are cited for emphasis, as they buttress our understanding of collective action. The main criterion for the selection of these cases is their salience as examples of 'new' forms of collective action, particularly in their use of online technologies, as well as their information-richness in terms of available literature and (in the case of OccupyGhana and #BringBackOurGirls) the author's first-hand experience as a participant in these actions. In addition, the geopolitical origins of these actions provide some diversity: Ghana is an exemplar on the continent of a stable democracy; Nigeria is the largest democracy and most

[1] The initiative is led by the Ghana-based Institute for Policy Alternatives (IPA-Ghana), with the collaboration of the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR), Anglophone Africa, based in Johannesburg. Funding for the initiative is provided by the Rockefeller Foundation.

populous nation; and Egypt is a North African nation that has hosted perhaps the most powerful example of a protest movement in contemporary African history.

Case Study 1: OccupyGhana

On a Tuesday in June in 2014, driving from court to his office, Nana Akwasi Awuah, noticed a queue of people at a fuel station in Accra. He thought about how he had been part of such a queue himself that morning, and about the fact that he had slept in the dark the previous night because of on-going power outages. How was it that the president could come to citizens when he wanted votes and yet ordinary people could not get access to him to express their discontent when things went wrong, beyond complaining on Facebook? He asked himself, 'How do we take the frustrations of social media on the streets?' That same day, he wrote a letter to the Inspector General of Police informing him of a planned protest on the lawn of the Flagstaff House, the seat of government, and signed it on behalf of 'Concerned Ghanaians for Responsible Governance'. He also posted the letter on social media. It was reposted widely and was soon picked up by radio stations, which broadcast a number of interviews with the young lawyer.

Exactly a week later, on 1 July, a group of protestors gathered at a venue about a mile away from Flagstaff House, intending to march to the president's office to present a petition. They met with resistance from a large contingent of police in riot gear and with tanks, who tried to turn them away from the main street leading to Flagstaff. Through social media, the leaders of the march sent out messages asking the protestors to reconverge at new venues, while they themselves were allowed through the back gate to present the petition.

Wanting to keep the momentum going, a crop of 'older' activists were included in the leadership, including anti-corruption campaigners, academics, lawyers, and members of think tanks, including IMANI, which had become a prominent critic of government policies. Some of the new leaders were also people who had a great deal of following on social media. Using the name 'OccupyGhana', this group proceeded to make a name for itself as an anti-corruption pressure group, famously threatening to sue the Attorney General if it failed to take action on a number of government reports that found government officials guilty of corruption. They also continued with social media campaigns such as RedFriday, which encouraged Ghanaians to wear red one day a week in protest, and put out a number of press statements through newspaper and radio.

While becoming a strong presence in Ghanaian political life, internally there were fault lines developing, first around their strategies: the 'younger' members who had organized the 1 July march were eager for more 'feet on street marches' such as the DumsorMustStop protests against power outages, which Nana Akwasi helped to organize. Nana Akwasi felt OccupyGhana had lost focus: "They abandoned the very things that birthed OccupyGhana. The protest of 500 or 600 people shook the government. I was puzzled by why they would decide to go with writing of letters, organizing forums and issuing statements and then leave it just at that when you could have had a very beautiful and more effective melee of all, including feet on street…[Instead] we were becoming another think tank, like IMANI. We were becoming a talk shop." (Nana Akwai Awuah, interview, 19 August 2015). Another fault line was the decision of one of the leaders of OccupyGhana to contest elections parliament on the ticket of the opposition party, which fuelled the perception (constantly harped on by government officials) that OccupyGhana was in reality an opposition tool, rather than the citizen's movement they claimed to be.

CONCEPTUAL BASIS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective Action Movements are a subset of Social Movements. Broadly speaking, three theoretical strands in social movement theory provide a backdrop to collective action. These include: the 'resource mobilisation' approach that examines the types of resources necessary and how they are marshalled to start and support action; the 'political process approach' which focuses on the political engagement between protestors and those in political power; and the 'framing approach' which explores how collective action is interpreted or framed (Diani, 2008). In this paper, we draw heavily on a framework developed by McAdam *et al.* (1996), which encompasses the mobilisation, political process, and framing approaches to understanding collective actions.

Mobilizing structures refer to systems that support individuals' participation in a collective action. People are more likely to mobilize if they are already part of 'social structures', including both formal organisations and informal network, and also if the 'tactical repertoires' that the movement uses are familiar and accessible to them. *Opportunity structures* include the social, and political contexts, which may or may not create an enabling environment for collective action. Finally, *framing processes* are the attempts to shape the discourses about and around collective action.

Much of what we know about learning in collective action is from the field of social movement learning, which is a part of the radical adult education tradition. Social movement learning subsumes both learning by participants of social movements and learning by non-participants from social movements (Hall and Clover, 2005). Within this literature, Foley's (1999) notion of *learning in struggle* has been influential in the recognition that learning in collective action is often 'informal', 'incidental' and 'embedded in action' (p. 3). The challenge is therefore to explore how such learning takes places, and to suggest how these processes can be monitored and evaluated.

The internet, and in particular social media, has been implicated in our three case studies, and in many other recent examples of collective action on the continent, as a result of the increasing accessibility and use of the internet, with its capacity for faster dissemination of information and coalition building (Bakardjieva, 2015; Margetts *et al.,* 2005). By lowering the costs of these activities, the internet allows small groups and even individuals with relatively little resources can take on more powerful opponents such states, corporations or a global economic system (see van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). The internet has thus been credited by some with transforming the development, methods, and impact of collective action. Other researchers however caution that the impact of technology on collective action may be overestimated and may not be positive (Garret, 2006; Malone, 2012). In this report, we look at the potential and actual influence of the internet (and particularly, social media) on collective action. We will also explore the use of social media as a tool for learning.

Defining collective action

A basic definition of collective action would range from joint actions as simple as the long-standing tradition in many African communities to collectively work on neighbour's farms on rotation to social actions involving thousands of people spread across different parts of a country or even continents. For the purposes of

this analytical paper, our interest is limited to collective action carried out to bring about or resist social or political change.

Even within this delineation, collective action runs the gamut from one-off events undertaken by loosely connected individuals (sometimes referred to as 'collective behaviour'), to sustained engagements by an organized group of people. The former type of collective action by 'non-organized collectives' is still useful because the behaviours of individuals aggregate into mass action that can have positive social effect (Dolata and Schrape, 2015). Examples are the impromptu online campaign that raised $2 million dollars within a week for an activist who fights to free bonded labourers in Pakistan[2], or the one-off marches that drew hundreds of people on the streets of Accra and in Soweto to protest the chronic power outages.[3]

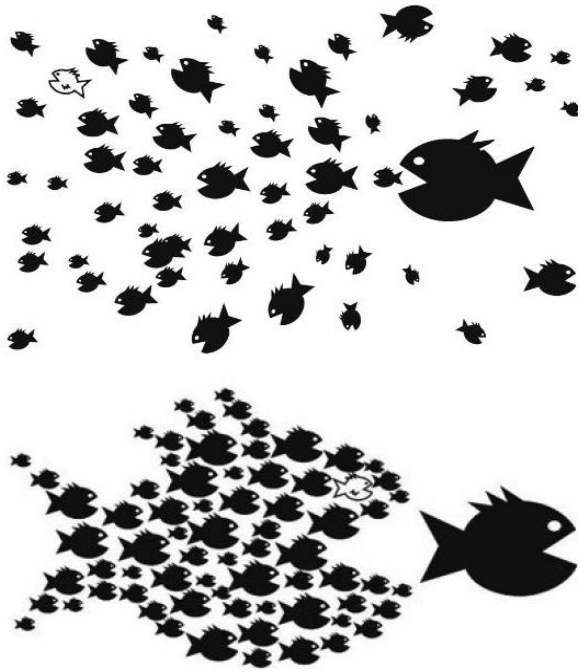

Figure 2 Collective action

On the other end of the continuum are structured groups that draw on networks and collective identity, as well as the resources available through these networks, to engage in long-term, strategic challenges to social and political power (Diani, 2008; Diani & Bison, 2004; Dolata & Schrape, 2015). The 'social actors' in these collective actions have 'shared objectives, resources, action orientations, and decision-making modes' (Dolata & Schrape 2015, p. 3). Typical examples are social movements, which are

> collectivities acting with some degree of organisation, and continuity outside of institutional or organisational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organisation, society, culture or world order of which they are a part (Snow *et al.* 2004, quoted in Hall 2006, para 4).

Undertaking collective action, is therefore, one of the characteristics of social movements, in addition to 'networks…shared beliefs and solidarity;…use of protests' (Porta and Diani 1999, p. 14-15).

Given the variation we have described, what are the defining characteristics of collective social action? Collective action must necessarily involve individuals who have 'participatory intentions'—that is, people who take deliberate action to be part of a collective project (Kutz, 2000; also Chant 2007). In addition, participants

[2] http://www.ibtimes.com/humans-new-york-raises-2m-donations-less-week-end-pakistan-forced-labor-practice-2061650

[3] http://citifmonline.com/2015/05/16/thousands-attend-dumsor-vigil/

of collective action must be 'strategically responsive', acting in response to or in anticipation of the actions of others (Kutz, 2000). *Our working definition of collective action, therefore, is the actions of social actors who perceive themselves to be part of a collective project of social change and are mutually-responsive in their actions towards that common goal.* Therein lies the **intentionality** underpinning Collective Action.

Case Study 2: Tahrir Square

While Egypt's Tahrir Square Revolution is part of regional 'Arab Spring' sparked in Tunisia, it had internal antecedents. One of the most salient immediate catalysts was the public fatal beating of Khaled Said by police officers. Human rights activist have stated that he was murdered because he had obtained evidence of police corruption (Preston, 2011). Social media posts about the murder, with a picture of his body in the morgue, transformed his death into a protest campaign, with a Facebook page—'We Are All Khaled Said—garnering hundreds of thousands of followers (ibid.) However, as with other countries in the Arab Spring, this incident combusted decades of frustration with the Mubarak regime into an uprising (Masoud, 2011). The situation in the country had led to earlier protests, though none of the scale of the Tahrir Square actions; in 2004 for instance, the Egyptian Movement for Change—also known as *Kifaya* (Enough!)--was created, and served as training for many in the eventual leaders of the Tahrir Square movement (Masoud, 2011). In addition, members of the 6th April 'Youth Movement' – a coalition formed in April 2008 in support of industrial workers—became involved in the Tahrir Square movement. Although the revolution occurred without a centralised leadership, some educated professionals in their 20s and early 30s such as accountants, surgeons, engineers and a marketing experts served as organizers of the protests (Levinson & Coker, 2011; Rubin, 2011).

The protestors congregated at Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo city with the intent of bringing an end to human rights abuse, corruption, and economic hardship, among others A summary of these demands has been captured as 'Mubarak must go' (Rashed & El Azzazi 2011). Thus, although the protestors had several demands, the ultimate target of the protestations was to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak.

The revolution was not without opposition by the regime; many protestors were injured, several died (although the exact figures are unclear), and hundreds of arrests were made (Rashed & El Azzizi, 2011; El-Ghobashy, 2011). There were also attempts by the regime to undermine the revolution by tagging it foreign instigated.

The eventual impact of the revolution is also contested, but there can be no doubt of the learning that took place through formal and informal avenues. Key among the learning from the Egyptian revolution and the events leading up to the revolution was the exposure of people to strategies of political activism. For instance, the Egyptian Movement for Change was conducted formal training in political activism for some of the organizers of the revolution (Masoud, 2011). Through this training, the (informal) leadership of the revolution was able to organise various forms of protestations, eventually leading to the overthrow of the regime. Informally, the revolution exposed various groups and individuals to learn and engage in the act of civil disobedience. In the midst of the protestations for instance, there were reports of government employees and other civil servants organising sit-down strikes and other forms of civil disobedience against the regime (Rashed & El Azzazi, 2011).

THE NATURE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION IN AFRICA

In this section, we attempt a description of collective action in Africa in terms of goals, methods, and leadership. This discussion will provide the context for the central question of this paper: how does learning and evaluation happen within collective action? And how can collective action movements provide opportunities for learning about drivers and mechanisms for social and political change?

Intentionality and forms of collective action

Protagonists of collective action are typically civil society actors in 'non-profit and non-governmental organisations, unions, churches, neighbourhood associations, soccer clubs…and a wide variety of citizen initiatives (including NGOs)' as well as 'networks, informal alliances, and social movements' (Tandon & Brown 2013a, p. 603). Despite this broad definition however, a deeper analysis of the "intentionality" behind collective action movements and their protagonists may reveal quite a wide diversity of motives, some of which may be partisan politics, especially in societies which are highly politicised, democratic or struggling to establish democracy and human rights.

Collective action movements can and do change forms, both in the leadership and membership, due to the competing intentions of leaders and members. Loose groupings can develop the strong consensus, networks and collective identity that can transform them ultimately into social movements (Diani, 2008, 2015; Dolata & Schrape, 2015). However, some researchers suggest that we will see less of social movement organisations and more short-lived, single-issue based collective action events as the internet makes it easier for even single individuals to put out information, to coordinate activity and to raise funds, without setting up a full-fledged social movement organisation (Bimber, 2000; Buechler, 2000 cited in Margetts *et al*., 2015).

Catalysts for collective action

There are features of the socio-political environment in any country that make collective action more or less likely; these constitute what McAdams *et al.* (1996) call the opportunity structure. Among these factors are the political system, and the response of the state to challenges to its power. Collective action is more likely if the political system is open to citizen's intervention and if the state is not prone to the use of repression. Further, the political system can influence the forms of collective action that develop. Diani (2008) observes, for instance, that in the Middle East, collective action arises mainly from community networks and is often organized around 'non-controversial issues'. In much of Africa, these networks tend to take the form of "school-mates", professional networks of lawyers, doctors, and lecturers, as these share long-standing professional bonds, as well as principles of rights and responsibilities. Less likely are formally organized and political forms such as coalitions and movements which require organizers and participants to be more public with their agendas and mobilisation efforts, thereby inviting backlash from political authorities.

However, as we have indicated, social media and the internet generally offer some capacity to overcome the political and other costs of collective action. By linking

local and national struggles to global networks, and providing the ability to evade censorship in local/national spaces, the internet expands the opportunity for activism (Garrett, 2006). The internet also allows for alternative or counter narratives to those put out by the state, or by 'mainstream media' (ibid). Yet, evidence from activists suggests that, while social media may be effective in helping to convene people and spread messages quickly, nothing is as effective as the presence of real people manifesting their presence as a show of collective action, as a former activist of OccupyGhana suggests here: 'The protest of 500 or 600 people shook the government. So I was puzzled by why they [the leadership of OccupyGhana] would decide to go with writing of letters, organizing forums and issuing statements and then leave it just at that when you could have had a very beautiful and more effective melee of all, including feet on street—and that is what I referred to as strategic activism.'[4]

Another aspect of the opportunity structure is the existence of prior collective action. Tandon & Brown (2013b) suggest that while the recent 'eruptions' of collective action may indicate some dissatisfaction with the capacity of formal movements and association such as workers' unions, political parties, and NGOS to create change, they nonetheless build on the work of these same organisations in the area of mobilisation and capacity-building. In fact, we see that activists in recent collective action are frequently linked to other political efforts; some of the Tahrir activists were part of pro-democracy and workers' movements in the 2000s (Malone, 2012); a number of the OccupyGhana leaders were already involved in anti-corruption efforts as members of think-tanks or NGOs (Awuah, personal communication); and Oby Ezekwesili, one of the leading figures of the efforts to rescue the Chibok schoolgirls, is a co-founder of Transparency International and was public in her critique of the Nigerian government even before becoming part of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. It may be that the new forms of collective action signal the diminishing importance of traditional social movements, although there is not enough evidence to support or disprove this. Alternatively, these new forms of collective action may continue to flourish alongside social movement organisations because they provide different sets of advantages (Garrett, 2006).

Finally, on the place of spontaneity in the emergence of collective action: collective action movements such as the Arab Spring, the Burkina Faso civic revolt against the former Campoare regime and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign capture the imagination because they appear to be the result not so much of careful planning but a powerful desire for change which then compels people to pour out into the streets to try to bring about that change. However, collective action is rarely spontaneous (Klandermas & Stekelenburg, 2014). Even where collective action seems to be the result of a singular and immediate event (such as the self-immolation of the young fruit-seller in Tunisia, which is frequently presented as the genesis of the Arab Spring), it is often predicated on years of social injustices and structural inequalities. Hall (2012) points, for example, that the OccupyWallStreet movement built on the anti-globalisation protest of the 1980s,

[4] Interview with Nana Akwasi Awuah, 19 August 2015.

which involved protests events against world trade policies and the Davos World Economic Forum, among others. In the case of the Tahrir Square revolution and the Burkina uprising, decades of economic deprivation, oppressive governance, and/or marginalisation and exclusion of citizens may explain what may appear to be sudden explosions of unrest.

This is not, however, to say that there is no role for spontaneity in collective action. Based on a study of protest movements--including the Occupy movement in the US, the Tianamen Square protests by students in Beijing in 1989, and the uprising in Egypt, Snow and Moss (2014) argue that spontaneity can be seen not only in the emergence of collective action, but throughout its various phases. They theorize that spontaneity is encouraged under four conditions: one, where there is a 'flat' organisational structure in which there is less emphasis on hierarchy; two, where there does not appear to be a clear plan for the movement as a whole or for specific events, or where these do not go according to plan; three, where people are conditioned to respond in particular ways to certain stimuli (such as with the symbolic weight that the word 'Occupy' now has, being used for anti-government protests that do not necessarily have the same ethos as the original OccupyWallStreet movement); and, finally, where the physical or social environment allows for quick awareness and response. For example, high density student living among the Beijing protestors made it possible for one individual's action of chanting to lead quickly to thousands of students going out into the streets. The first three conditions can be seen to accompany collective action led by youth and social media: they tend to have non-hierarchical and decentralized organisational forms (Loader *et. al,* 2014); there is less centralized leadership and planning than in traditional social movement organisations (Gladwell, 2010); and the contents of social media communication (specifically Twitter) tends to be more emotive than informative (Ferré-Pavia & Perales Garcia, 2015), to which young people may be primed to respond emotionally.

The goals of collective action

Collective action movements often have many different goals, including 'to redress injustices, achieve public goods, tackle sources of grievances, or express support to some moral value of principles' (Diani and Bison 2004, p. 283). The goals may as diffuse or broad as the stated intent of OccupyGhana to 'end corruption in government,' or as specific as pressuring the state to work harder to bring back the kidnapped Chibok girls. It is possible, of course, for collective action to encompass both, as is true for the Tahrir Square movement, which began as general

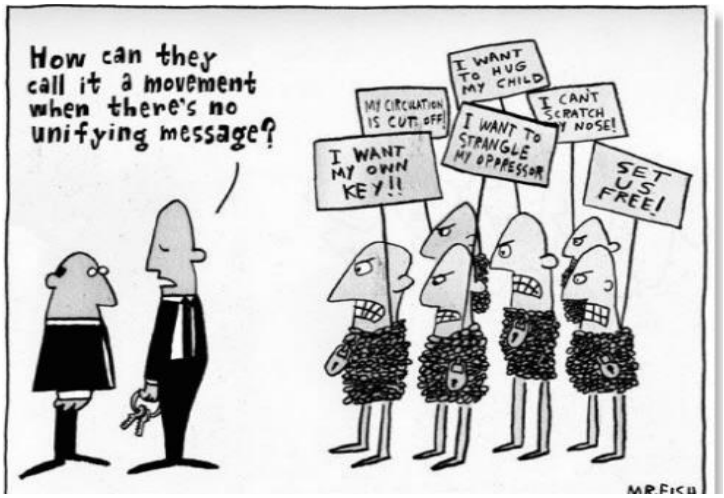

Figure 4 The goals of collective action may be (seemingly) diffused

dissatisfaction with the economic and political conditions in Egypt, but then soon included a specific intent to remove Hosni Mubarak as president. In some cases, as we have observed in our Tahrir Square case study, elements within collective action movements may harbour overarching goals, such as "regime change", which may not be made explicit at the beginning, but which soon attain centre stage as the movement gathers steam.

The Tahrir Square case also illustrates that the goals of collective action may be multiple and dynamic. Human beings are sense-making creatures and, especially in the absence a clear message or of a forum for disseminating a focused message, people may have widely varying interpretations of the goals of the collective action movement to which they understand themselves to belong.

Case Study 3: The #BringBackOurGirls Campaign

Chibok is a local government area in Borno State, Nigeria with a population of about 70,000, both Muslim and Christian. In April 2014, many schools had already closed up because of intimidation from Boko Haram (a group whose name translates as 'Western education is forbidden'). A secondary school in Chibok assembled girls from other schools to take their final exams. On 14 April 2014, the all-girls boarding school was attacked by heavily armed men from Boko Haram and more than 200 students were abducted.

The handle #BringBackOurGirls was a tweeted interpretation of a portion of a speech by Obiageli Ezekwesili—a founder of Transparency International and then Minister of Education--gave on 23 April 2014 in Port Harcout, Nigeria. Prior to this, the families of the Chibok girls had been campaigning, without much success, for decisive action from President Goodluck Jonathan for the girls' rescue. The Daily Trust newspaper quoted First Lady Patience Jonathan as having ordered all Nigerian women to stop protesting, warning that "should anything happen to them during protests, they should blame themselves' (Faul, 2014a). However, it was only when the #BringBackOurGirls tweet went viral, first in Nigeria and then around the world, that the protest campaign grew momentously. Well-known figures around the world—from politicians to movie stars—posted pictures on social media with the hashtag. For her role in starting up and helping to sustain the social media campaign, and because of her activist background, Oby Ezekwesili is considered by many as the leader of the movement.

In addition to the arrest, the motives of the leaders of the campaign were questioned, with politicians from the governing party accusing them of being funded by the opposition party. Naomi Mutah Nydar, a Chibok campaigner, was allegedly detained during a meeting with the First Lady (Faul, 2014b) and Oby Ezekwesili was arrested by security agents at the airport in Abuja, as she was about to board her flight to London to appear on the BBC Hardtalk programme. This arrest generated a frenzy on social media and was likely the reason behind her immediate release.

Sadly, to date the girls have not been rescued. An organizer of the protests, Hadiza Bala Usman, told Al Jazeera that 'We appreciate the fact that the media propelled a lot of support around the world, but that support has not translated into any rescue. For us, if whatever is said and done doesn't translate into the rescue of the girls, it hasn't really achieved anything.' (Ogene, 2014).

Theory of change of collective action

Do protagonists of collective action have clearly stated vision of what world they wish to create, a well-defined set of goals and a clear pathway(s) through which they seek to catalyse the desired changes? The evidence from our analysis of intentionality above suggests that, by their very nature, the mass movements that manifest in collective action tend, first and foremost, to rally around a set of

collective goals for the protest activities themselves (often through social media), but not necessarily on strategy and outcomes.

Many of our current experiences are still unfolding, and this dynamic process reveals the complexities of theories of change of the collective action movements. For some, such as the #BringBackOurGirls, the change they desired and agreed to (the outcome), has been clear from the very beginning – freeing the kidnaped Chibok Girls. Pathways to this outcome are, however, unclear. Local, national and international protests raised the profile of the issues, which was intended to pressure the Nigerian Government to do more (either in negotiating and or increasing military and other actions) to bring about the rescue of the girls. Mass protests could also have been targeted at the captors themselves, to re-think their own strategies and free the girls. This incoherence and less defined pathways appear to be quite common features of collective action movements. In the case of #BringBackOurGirls, the strong role of a small, strategic planning group within the movement reveals a consistent set of ideas, strategies and almost daily review processes that analyse their situation and propose actions, "on the move". As noted by one of the leaders, "we sometimes change the venue and content of our actions" as a result of the strategic team's assessment of the imminent dangers of previously defined pathways. [5] One of the consequences of this apparent incoherence in formulating a clear set of pathways is the dis-connect between the actions and their logical connection to the desired change. To date, the captured Chibok Girls have not yet been freed, yet, the movement is known to be one of the most mobilized, engaged and active citizen groups working on gender rights, consciousness-building on dangers of terrorism and civic awareness.

Indeed, an initial mapping of the theory of change that appeared to have shaped the first steps adopted by the organizers in mobilising for collective action reveals one highly successful phase of the campaign. The movement methodically engaged in raising of the profile of the issue of terrorism in Nigeria, the effects these have on young girls and women as vulnerable groups, and the dire need for local, national and global action. So, while the ultimate goal of freeing the girls is yet to be achieved, properly targeting the campaign towards education and advocacy made the Government of Nigeria (at the time very defensive and protective of the issue as one of national security), to increase its efforts and devote resources to tackling BokoHaram and its associated atrocities.

Theory of Action -- how are participants in collective action mobilized?

There are three levels of mobilisation: 'consensus mobilisation', 'action mobilisation', and the 'final outcome' mobilisation. The first is a movement's effort to garner sympathy for or agreement with its framing of a problem and solutions for change; the second level of mobilisation is about translating people's agreement with the purpose of collective action into active participation in it (see Benford, 1997; Klandermas, 1988; Klandermas & Oegema, 1987; Snow, 2004); and the third (far less understood) is how to mobilize or strategize for the ultimate

[5] Comment by one of the movement leaders – name withheld.

change itself, which often may be beyond the capabilities of the protagonists of collective action movements.

A central but contested concept in mobilisation is collective identity. One school of thought is that collective identity is crucial to collective action, and to social movements as a specific form of collective action. In order for people to take up a joint project, they have to have the same or similar interpretations of their actions, of the problem those actions are directed at, and of the goals that they strive

towards (e.g. Melucci 1989, 1995). Others suggest that, especially in the internet age, the process of negotiating collective identity is not always possible and, in any case, not a prerequisite for collective action (e.g. Bennet & Segerberg, 2012, 2013).

Bakardjieva (2015) intervenes in this debate to suggest that there must be some feeling of 'we-ness' or belonging, however tenuous, because collective action is essentially a political project, one that demands first a sense of 'we' versus 'them', and the idea that 'we' can do something about 'our' situation (Bakardjieva, 2015). She admits that in the world of social media,

> the togetherness of some is simply connective (e.g. flash mobs), many are cloud-like, quickly gathering and dissipating, with particles ever so loosely

Figure 6 'Action mobilization' at La Place de la Revolution, Burkina Faso

> and superficially bonding, (nonetheless) others are symbolically, cognitively, emotionally and sometimes organizationally interwoven into a collective (p. 989).

Thus, perhaps the greatest benefit of social media is 'connectivity' (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012 cited in Dolata & Schrape, 2015)—bringing people together around a cause, but not necessarily reaching consensus. And indeed, a significant amount of attention has gone into understanding how information and communication technology (ICT) affects mobilization.

In a review of the literature on information and communication technologies (ICTs), juxtaposed against McAdam *et al.* (1999) framework, Garrett (2006) asserts that much of what is written in the social movement literature is in reference to mobilizing structures. There is a great deal of optimism about the potential of ICTs to increase participation by offering alternative avenues for communication; lowering the cost of participation and coordination; encouraging group identity by creating awareness of and ability to connect with like-minded individuals; and supporting the creation of community across dispersed and diverse groups of people (Garrett, 2006). Yet others have argued that access to information does not necessarily translate participation in collective action (Bimber 2000, Gladwell, 2000; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). In fact, the fast information flow that the internet allows can be a detriment to collective action because it can lead to information overload (Bimber, 2001; Morozov, 2009) and repetitive sequences of quick mobilisation around an issue followed by an equally quick decline of interest as a novel issue gains attention (Garrett, 2006). The implication is that the internet supports quick mobilisation of people for collective action, but may also work against the sustainability of the collectives thus formed (Gladwell, 2010; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

An important dimension of mobilisation is in regards to the resources to support a movement or what we are calling the 'material basis of collective action'. [6] Short-term collective action might require little resources—perhaps no more than the cost to an individual of internet access—but continuous collective action does need a substantive resource base, particularly since the usual opponents of these actions—e.g. the state, politicians, corporations, and lobby groups—tend to have greater material wealth and political capital.

[6] We credit Ted Jackson (personal communication) with this concept.

What are the methods of collective action?

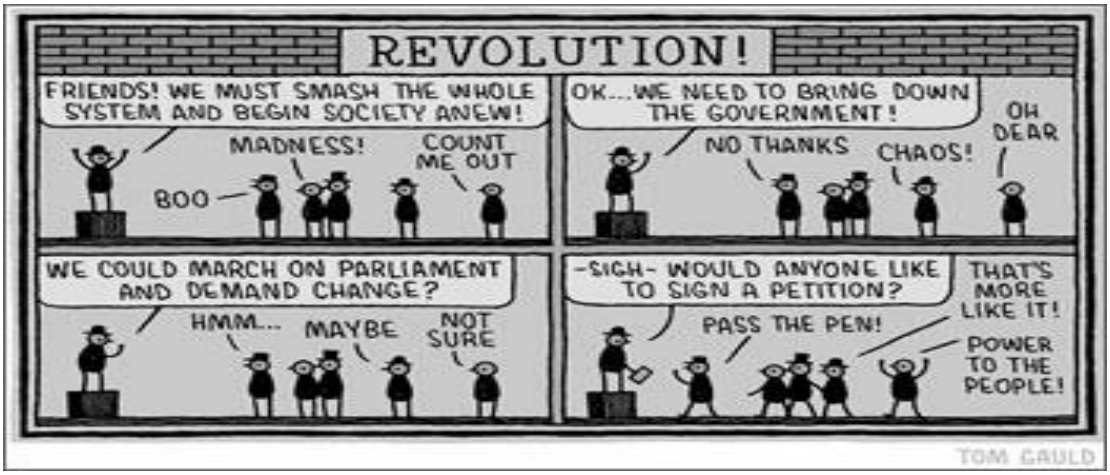

Figure 7 Different methods of collective action

Contemporary collective action utilizes both 'older' methods of mobilisation and organisation as well as new forms allowed by the internet and social media. The majority of recent collective action movements subscribe (at least rhetorically) to the non-violent principles and accompanying methods pioneered by Gandhi, such as street marches, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and occupation of public spaces. Others make use of art forms such as theatre, music and poetry (Tandon & Brown, 2013b). Litigation and civil disobedience such as tax revolts are not as common but have also been used in collective action.

Methods that require the presence of a number of people in the same physical space are used alongside 'individual, home-based, yet (still) collective actions' such as online signature campaigns (ibid). Access to the internet has thus become part of the opportunity structure (see McAdams et al., 1999) for collective action.

Social location—class, gender, education, income, age, rural-urban residence—can influence what methods are preferred and are available for use. For instance, litigation as a method may be more likely to be used by educated and more economically advantaged persons since it might involve protracted engagement with a complex judicial system, whereas street protests historically have been the methods of the working class, although recently it has also been used by the educated youth.

We highlight in particular the generational dimension to the methods of collective action. Loader *et al*. (2014) attempt to create a profile of what they call the 'networked young citizen', which represents the current generation who, among other characteristics, 'are far less likely to become members of political or civic organisations such as parties or trade unions; …are more likely to participate in horizontal or non-hierarchical networks;…and [whose] social relations are increasingly enacted through a social media networked environment" (p. 145). Young people privilege social media out of a disaffection with existing political and social organisations, including those of civil society, and are more likely to be engaged politically through networks that they themselves create than through traditional institutions such as political parties (Loader *et al.,* 2014). Young people

are also highly receptive to the novelty and experimentation that social media provides (Tandon & Brown, 2013b).[7]

Social media was widely used in organising events and sharing information during the Egyptian revolution in ways that sustained the revolution. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube became even more important especially after the regime blocked internet access via personal computers. In response to this attempt at censorship, Yara Adel El Siwi (@YaraElSiwi) tweeted on 26 January 2011:'You who have Twitter and Facebook workin on ur phone, use 'em to spread words of hope. We won't let this end here #jan25 was just the start' (quoted in Zhuo et al. 2011, p.7). As another illustration, Nana Akwasi Awuah, formerly a leader in OccupyGhana, describes how much of the organizing—including drafting of statements, coordination of events, etc.—was done on the text-based platform whatsapp, while dissemination of information to the public was mainly through Facebook.

Twitter in particular received extensive use during the Arab Spring, which some termed the 'Twitter Revolution'. Twitter allows users to consume news and also to (re)produce it, rapidly and efficiently. Thus, young people are no longer just consumers of information but also its creators. The interest in Twitter centres on the shift that has happened where 'traditional media are no longer the only voice that narrates and interprets relevant facts of immediate reality, or the only holders and makers of public opinion' (Ferré-Pavia & Perales Garcia 2015, p. 23). It is this democratizing feature of social media that excites researchers and activists alike: the reality that 'large numbers of people now often have the ability to relate their own experiences and share those experiences, while learning about others, with a speed and scope not seen before' (Malone 2012, p. 176).

Figure 8 The global reach of a 'local' struggle

Social media not only connects local actors together but also allows them to operate at a global level (Garrett, 2006; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). Social media thus changes the opportunity structures for even 'local' struggles by helping them to form networks with actors outside their geo-political space, and by allowing them some ability to avoid the state's control over their communication (Garret 2006). Thus, while the Nigerian government seemed to be working hard to ignore their citizens demand for interventions against Boko Haram, the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls—and the cause it was linked to—went global, given momentum by a series of well-known personalities in the global North, including Michelle Obama, Hilary Clinton and a slew of American celebrities (Lyons et al., 2014). This then had the effect of piquing the interest of traditional media in the movement, leading to even wider coverage. The publicity may

[7] It is worth noting that the use of internet may not be simply a matter of choice, but also of necessity; in countries where there is tight state control over the media, this may be the only accessible avenue for organizing and communication.

eventually have compelled the Nigerian government to give the movement more attention as it subsequently declared its commitment to see the school girls rescued and may have strengthened the resolve of the US president/executive to work harder behind the scenes to push the Nigerian military to act (Lyons et. al, 2014).

The internet provides collective action participants greater independence in terms of the framing process (ref. McAdams *et al*., 1999); that is to say, they have some independence to interpret their own causes rather than have traditional media advance a narrative about collective action that may be at odds with the message that the movement itself wants to put out.

Of course, we should be cautious about overstating the advantages of using the internet for collective action, and especially about its vaunted democratizing potential. The internet also has the potential to widen inequality within any society through the ways income and education mediate access. It is not surprising, for instance, that many of the leaders of the Egypt uprising were young and educated (Malone, 2012) and the OccupyFlagstaff protestors were often described (and derided) as 'middle-class' (Bagoroo & Obeng, 2014).

Again, while the internet provides more opportunity for activists to reach their constituents, the traditional media have better infrastructure and, in many cases, a level of credibility that collective action movements may not match. Moreover, online technologies can also be used by the opponents of these movements, as evidenced in the ability of the Mubarak regime to cut off access to the internet for four days in January 2011, and its subsequent launching of its own Facebook page. Thus, as Malone (2012, p. 177) points out, the internet is 'a site and medium of multiple struggle' in which many actors with unequal levels of power and access contest the framing of their struggles and compete to rally people around their cause (also Loader *et al*. 2014).

Social media, in particular, has its limitations as a source of information. In a study of tweets covering the *indignado* (outraged) protests against government cuts in social expenditure, and against the political system in July 2012 in Spain, Ferré-Pavia and Perales Garcia (2015) concluded that, overall, 'the power of Twitter seems to be rather an opinion and emotion net organizer than a reporting tool' (p. 21). And, indeed, if we consider that tweets are restricted to 140 characters, which means messages will have to be concise and provocative to get attention in the twitterverse, this is not surprising. The phrase 'Bring back our girls' is reported to have been spoken in a speech by Oby Ezekwesili, then the World Bank Vice President for Africa, at a UNESCO event in Nigeria on April 23. It was then tweeted by a Nigerian lawyer, began trending on twitter in Nigeria and, within two weeks, had been tweeted one million times (Howard, 2014). This is one instance of a message that was both succinct and emotive enough to rally people all over the world. However, while #BringBackOurGirls was a massive social media event in May and April of 2014 and led to physical marches around the world, the momentum (within social media, at least) has no doubt died down since then.

Clearly, ICTs have potential to support mobilisation for collective action, but also have their limitations in terms of information sharing. This ambiguity leads researchers against pushing a 'technological determinism which assumes that the mere existence of online technologies brings about social change; rather it is

important to realize that online technologies are only tools to be intentionally used in collective action (Malone 2012, p. 169).

While the internet is powerful as a way to connect people, it is not as helpful in sustaining collective action, nor in bringing about change itself. Moreover, short-term social media campaigns may bring problems and discontent to the fore but it is through sustained action—and usually by or in collaboration with NGOs, social movements, government actors, etc.--that policies change. Thus, online activism cannot be a substitute for 'traditional forms of activism and face-to-face communication' (van Laer & van Aelst 2010, p. 1164). We should therefore consider the combinations of methods that will allow collective action to be more effective in confronting, integrating into, and transforming social and political institutions.

Leadership in collective action movements

Traditionally, the leaders of collective action operate within recognizably hierarchical structures, and often have formal positions. On the basis on this ascribed authority, they set goals, mobilize human and other resources, coordinate the activities of the movement, and communicate to supporters and to the general public.

In recent collective action, where there are clearly discernible leaders, these tend to form sub-groups that work out strategies and pathways for achieving these goals. Often many of these may be seasoned leaders of social movements, experienced in political organizing, using sophisticated strategies, and backed by very powerful and well-resourced think-tanks, civil society organisations, media, and sometimes, political parties.

However, some of the new, internet-supported collective action movements have moved away from traditional organisations with their hierarchical structures and more identifiable leadership, towards flatter organisations that appeal to the younger generation (Loader *et al.,* 2014). While there might be those who initiate action by stirring up feelings of discontent, even if only by sending tweets or texts, they might not be acknowledged or even want to be seen as leaders. Some are sceptical about whether these non-hierarchical organisations, with the decentralisation of leadership they imply, can bring about social change (Gladwell, 2010). The January 2011 Tahrir Square protests had no leadership which made it easier for groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to attempt to take up leadership and impose an agenda of forming a Muslim state. In the second phase of the revolution, primarily to prevent this danger, a recognised leadership was formed[8]. Similarly, in Tunisia, when the government responded to the protests by signalling their readiness to dialogue, there was a need to bring in a group of respected citizens to arbitrate the negotiations. .

At the same time, we need to question whether leadership in these new movements is as democratic and transparent as they would appear. For one, there

[8] Credit to Doha Abdelhamid, a research associate and evaluator, through dialogue and deliberations around the review of the initial paper

may be hidden leadership in some groups, where the appearance of joint decision-making or a non-hierarchical organisation masks the guidance or even manipulation of unseen and unacknowledged agents. For instance, in Latin America, think tanks were incubators for social movements; they created platforms that became the foundations of political parties, and they receive funding from politically interested actors often with partisan agendas. This runs counter to the perception of collective action as being democratic, transparent, and non-partisan. Is one of the features of collective action movements then that there are individuals, groups or institutions (political, academic, etc.) that script or at least influence their activities and strategies? Of course, the reasons for hidden leadership may not be nefarious or self-serving; in some instances, it may be due to concern about the personal security of leaders or where it is in the interest of collective action and activists to keep their strategies secret.

Related to the question of hidden or external influence is the role of 'outsiders' in catalysing and supporting movements. Are outsiders necessary to collective action movements? And to what extent can collective action movements be said to be grassroots and empowering if they are led, funded or significantly guided by 'outsiders'? The question of the role of outsiders becomes even more urgent when it comes to the evaluation process, which is conventionally carried out by 'independent' evaluators—Can and should activists evaluate their own movements, and what does this imply for the tenet of independence in evaluation? (We revisit this particular question latter in the paper).

Another question pertinent to learning within collective action is what happens when the leadership changes, whether from burnout or because the goals of the movement have shifted? How does this affect institutional memory and learning? And as well, how might a change in leadership affect the goals and methods of the movement? Another way to ask this question is: How can collective action movements plan for renewing their leadership in a way that strengthens rather than depletes their capacities?

LEARNING IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

Foley's (1999) idea of *learning in struggle* has influenced thinking within social movement learning:

> While systematic education does occur in some social movement sites and actions, learning in such situations is largely informal and often incidental - it is tacit, embedded in action and is often not recognized as learning. This learning is therefore often potential, or only half realized (p. 3)

Hall (2012) describes this informal process of learning as a participant in the OccupyWallStreet movement:

> Living together, struggling together, arguing, caring, helping, solving problems, singing, and comforting each other all provides an extraordinarily rich epistemological environment. People learn through sharing their reflections, reactions, dreams and frustrations. And all this happens without any structured learning processes whatsoever (p. 135).

One of the first lessons that perhaps every participant of collective action must necessarily learn is that their collective action is 'both necessary and possible' (Foley 1999, p. 5). This is similar to Freire's concept of conscientisation, which is the process through which individuals come to understand their condition in political terms, even making connections to other struggles, and thereby to build within themselves the desire and the will to change their circumstances. Such learning must be informed by knowledge produced by or embedded in the history of collective actions movements within that context (see Grayson, 2011; Zielińska *et al*., 2011).

Langdon introduces two corollary concepts to Foley's: 'learning through struggle' and 'learning to struggle'. Learning through struggle is the 'learning that emerges from a particular moment of conflict over resources/issues/policies that leads to a deepened awareness of the socio-political terrain in which movements operate' (p. 157). Collective action offers different levels of opportunity for learning, as an activist in Langdon's study of collective action in Ghana stated: 'The greatest amount of learning happens in these concentrated moments of struggle' (quoted in Langdon, 2011, p. 157). The second concept—learning to struggle—involves learning that occurs about the best methods or strategies of achieving the goals of the struggle.

Social media is not only a tool of mobilisation, but of learning (Hall, 2012; Malone, 2012). Twitter has gained a place in the popular imagination as the starter of revolutions. In a study of OccupyWallStreet, Hall (2012) writes, 'When one combines the learning resources available via Twitter, Facebook, web sites, blogs, wikis and even image sites such as Tumblr or Instagram, we have living social movement encyclopaedias, but ones that are 'written' by each one of us as we choose what and where to read' (p. 137). Similarly, Malone points to the efforts to document the publications, including 'popular' forms such as flyers, produced by the Tahrir activists.[9] These resources are available to be studied by movements and non-participants alike as learning material. These examples illustrate that learning within movements is not solely about the absorption of information, but also about knowledge creation (Foley, 2001; Zielińska *et al*., 2011).

Finally, while learning connotes a positive, communal process, there is the 'negative' or disempowering aspect of learning. People can learn that their actions do *not* make a difference or learn ineffective methods (see Langdon, 2011; Zielińska *et al*., 2011). We also need to grapple with the fact there are power dynamics to the control of the production and dissemination of knowledge within movements.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING, MONITORING & EVALUATING COLLECTIVE ACTION

We return to the question guiding this this analytical paper and the larger initiative: How do we learn in/from and evaluate collective action? We extract some questions and reflections from the foregoing as a basis for further discussion

[9] Available at www.TahrirDocuments.org

during several sessions to co-construct various elements of understanding collective action platforms.

There are a number of issues that emanate from the preceding, in regards to learning, monitoring and evaluating collective action.

Learning through evaluation

We are concerned here with learning both within and from collective action, and evaluation promotes both types of learning. Activists, especially those engaged in intensely political contestations, may not have the time to purposefully draw lessons from their struggles, or at least to articulate these lessons to themselves and others. The evaluation process, particularly when it is participatory, allows activists the space to take account of what has been learnt. Secondly, through evaluation, others outside the immediate struggle have opportunity for learning also.

In terms of how these lessons are disseminated, again social location has to be considered. For instance, activists who may not have easy access to the internet as a result of location or income, may find the radio may be the best medium. - Generation is an important factor here too; young people might find e-learning tools (e.g. such as webinars and Youtube videos) more accessible and engaging than seminars and workshops with which, conversely, older persons may be more comfortable.

Questioning the utility of traditional evaluation theory for collective action

One of the first lessons that emerged as this paper and the associated processes of deliberating on evaluating collection movements convened was the difficulties of applying traditional modes, methods and approaches of evaluating programs. The conventional results chain used by evaluators for evaluating programs, which begins with inputs and activities and moves on to outcomes and impacts, may not be the most appropriate for evaluating collective action. This model works bests for planned programs or project where funds are deliberately applied to an intervention in expectation of the achievement of set goals. Collective action efforts, by contrast, tend to start with very focused outcomes or changes (that is, a vision of the new situation) and then activities are developed to bring about these change. Therefore a framework for evaluating collective action will have to move away from the implied linearity of the traditional logic model.

Evaluating one-off protests versus sustained collective action

There is the need to acknowledge the difference between one-off protests and more sustained instances of collective action. For the former, the question arises: How do we evaluate these transient actions, especially when the literature suggests that learning with collective action movements requires sustained mutual engagement (Reed et al., 2004)? One way is to use outcome harvesting approaches and tools to establish incremental outcome chains, as well as divergent, sometimes conflicting sets of outcomes. Such an exercise might then reveal different pathways to change, and diverse discernible strategies and actions.

A related challenge is that collective action may be made up of different protest events, or may be fragmented into disparate actions by different groups with mixed purposes and intentionalities. It is therefore important to recognize the connections between what might appear to be the fragmented actions by disparate actors by mapping out the connections between the actors behind the different events or movements. For instance, in Ghana, the #DumsorMustStop (power outages) protests arguably drew inspiration from the success of the OccupyFlagstaff event and, even more importantly, was coordinated by the same people who had been involved in the latter protest (Nana Akwasi Awuah, personal communication). Similarly, the Tahrir movement drew pro-democracy activists who had been part of pro-union efforts (Malone, 2012). In evaluating collective efforts, then, we could explore the continuity or links there might be among collective action events and the actors involved.

Evaluating the intangibles

Evaluation has to grapple with the challenge of evaluating outcomes that are hard-to-measure such as changes in social norms and values, empowerment, changes to gender relations, and even subtle changes that occur within a state system in response to challenges to its power. As much of these sorts of evaluation might need to occur as internal reviews and sometimes of a peer-review type, the use of such approaches as renditions of "most significant change", including chronicle of stories and instances tends to provide the best answers. Learning from most-significant change, also enhances the replication of such change instances, and allows the re-construction of how such changes may have been catalysed.

Deriving theories of change from collective action

As we have defined earlier in this paper, collective action is the planned and sometimes unplanned/spontaneous behaviour of social actors who are mutually responsive in their pursuit of a common goal of social and political change. Identifying a condition that needs to be changed and developing a vision of a more desirable condition implies a theory of change, however inchoate this might be. However, because of the broad base of collective action and its organic, participatory nature, there may not be clearly defined and consensual goals, and perhaps no pre-defined outcome(s). Or there may be 'hidden intentionalities' such as when actions are taken by ostensibly non-partisan activists that have the implicit purpose of supporting or opposing a party in government, or when certain parties attempt to 'hijack' a collective action movement for their own ends. There is also the question of the multiple and changing goals of collective action, which raise the question of which goals one represents within the theory of change. Finally, the theory of change within a collective action movement as understood by its leaders might be inconsistent with the theories of action once the movement advances into the terrain of action.

Given these complexities, and the fact that collective action often takes place in a less 'organised' and planned space than the programs and projects that are often

the objects of evaluation, one of the major tasks when evaluating collective action is first de-constructing the goal and outcomes, then retrospectively re-constructing these in order to establish a theory of change. The deconstruction process can also get at unintentional and intermediate outcomes which can be incorporated into the theory of change. As we have discussed, some of the goals of collective action are long-term processes, such as democratising government or gaining recognition and policy space for slum dwellers or for the livelihood activities for informal traders in Africa's urban centres. When evaluated against these broad processes, collective action may be considered to have failed. However, uncovering the intermediate or unintended benefits of collective action, such as the building of an aware citizenry, may change what we consider to be 'success' or 'failure'. Tools such as 'Outcome Harvesting' can be used to derive evaluation questions around the goals of collective action and to collate scattered outcomes and evidence, based on desk reviews, interviews, focus groups and surveys.

Evaluating Collective Action as a Participatory Process

One of the tenets of traditional evaluation is that it must be 'independent' in order for its results to be credible and usable. What therefore is the implication of conceptualizing the evaluation process as participatory (that is, involving a activist themselves so that they may enhance their own learning)? Activists may believe that the evaluation of their struggles must be a process of empowerment that they must own or have a major stake in. The solution may be to have an internal evaluation committee of activists facilitated by an 'outside' evaluator. This does not entirely address the question of independence since activists will still have a significant role in the evaluation. There is also the question of whether the evaluator can take on an advocacy role. These are questions that need to be thought through and debated.

CONCLUSION

Evaluating collective action movements is a rich and generative area of inquiry that deserves broader and deeper analysis and dialogue. There is the need to develop tools that encourage stakeholder engagement, are results-oriented, capture process, engage with a theory of change that reflects the reality of collection activists themselves, and make use of ICT in a manner that captures some real-time results, as well as the ever-changing processes associated with these. We look forward to working with colleagues across Africa to pursue this important set of issues and opportunities in the years ahead.

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