



UNDERSTANDING MOVEMENTS

Introduction to Movements

In the context of social change, there are multiple ways to move from point A to point B. The most commonly encountered approach in the modern world is a programmatic one. It is employed by social and private sector organisations and governments through scale programs, like the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. There are also collective-impact-based approaches, which have a more distributed and networked way of approaching change. Lastly, there are movements, a particular kind of collective impact.



In the context of social change, a movement has:



A diverse collective of people and organisations coming together as participants



The shared intention to create wide-scale, transformational change focused on a social, economic, environmental, or political problem that guides the collective direction



Distributed, shared and bottom-up action by multiple participants, including those at the grassroots



Relevance of Movements

Movements are relevant when we intend to shift the field in which stakeholders operate. A movement often commits to **changing norms, attitudes and policies**. It builds a societal muscle in people to participate in this change process.

The approach may be most beneficial while **dealing with complex, adaptive problems** that have:

- ④ Structural Barriers (policies, practices, resource flows)
- ④ Relational Barriers (relationships, connections, power dynamics)
- ④ Transformational Barriers (mental models, paradigms)

The purpose of the movement, the nature of the problem and the length of the commitment are essential factors to keep in mind while leveraging movement-based approaches. Other questions movement leaders must consider are:

- ④ Do they need to mobilise many diverse participants (in the range of hundreds to thousands) to bring about the change?
- ④ Does a significant number of diverse participants recognise at least the symptoms of the problem, if not the root causes, and want to address it? If not, are the movement leaders willing to educate them?
- ④ Do they have legitimacy with their participants? Do they have an authentic narrative and deep-rooted purpose for leading this work?
- ④ Are they willing to engage with the participants to fuel their agency and initiative, often for many years and sometimes decades? Do they have the willingness to engage those on the fence and those who are opposed to change?
- ④ Are they willing to accept sub-optimal or unexpected outcomes yet creatively leverage each outcome towards the underlying intention?
- ④ Do their embodied values align with the purpose they stand for?
- ④ Does their core group align on both the shared purpose for the movement and its evolving tangible outcomes? Is their core group willing to authentically embody and model this understanding in their efforts?





Defining Features of Movements



Power of Grassroots

Thousands of individuals with a shared understanding and intention are far more powerful than a hierarchical monolithic institution.



Balancing Action and Learning at Different Scales

Movements that believe in “Go Big, or Go Home” are less likely to succeed than movements that work simultaneously at the local, national and global levels.



Multiple Sources of Leadership

Many successful modern movements may seem leaderless. But, in reality, they are full of leaders.



Changing Hearts while Changing Policies

Movements that target changing policy without changing hearts are less likely to succeed than movements that aim for both.



Dealing with Adversarial and Unlikely Allies

Great movements allow for healthy, generative dialogue amongst leaders to build shared commitment and view most individuals and organizations as a potential ally-in-the-making.



Diverse and Crowd-Sourced Approaches, Woven Together

Leaders of a movement prefer leveraging the wisdom and initiative of their participants, who may have the interest, experience, or expertise to reach the right solution, instead of offering the solutions themselves.

Differences between Movements, Programs and Collective Impact Initiatives



Programs



Collective Impact Initiatives



Movements



Leadership Paradigm

Management-based approaches with a focus on improving systems led by an organisation.

Management-based approaches with a focus on improving systems, led by a collective of organisations.

Movements bring together diverse organisations and stakeholders, including those not in traditional institutions or seats of power, to transform the field in which political and social change happens.



Direction

Have specific organisational goals that can be achieved independently by an organisation
E.g. improve income levels of 1000 families

Have a common agenda that is impossible to achieve individually.

Have bold, shared aspirations rooted in the values and dreams of the impacted community and that are impossible to achieve with business as usual.

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Movements

Approach to Change

Are focused on one or a few approaches to solving the problem.

Are focused on mutually reinforcing activities, which are meticulously planned and often delivered in a co-located or case management-based way.

See solutions as one of many and invite diverse perspectives of solving the problem, fostering creativity and co-creation.

Stakeholder Engagement

While the community is consulted, the community does not have a seat at the table in organisational decisions.

While the community is consulted in setting the agenda, the responsibility of action remains with the organisations involved.

Movements brings together a carefully curated and diverse group of stakeholders, including those most impacted by the problem, to co-own and co-create planning and action.

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Programs



Collective Impact Initiatives



Movements

Planning and Learning

Have a clear, well-defined, and often efficient path to attain goals.

Has a clear, well-defined and diverse set of complementary activities that drive the common agenda.

Have an emergent path of action that embraces adaptability and flexibility towards a moving goal post.

Ownership of Action and Governance

The organisational representatives lead the action. Organisational management decides actions and roles.

Organisational representatives of the partners involved lead the action. A backbone[#] facilitates decision making and change with all partners. Collective accountability drives action.

Many diverse players support actions. A container* of participants co-decides actions and roles. A social contract drives actions.

[#]A **backbone** could be either 1) one or more organisations taking additional responsibility for planning the organising effort or 2) a separate entity that takes on the work of organising the collective. The backbone facilitates the process with the collective to ensure that the vision, strategy, funding and governance structures support the common agenda.

^{*}A strong **container** enables its participants to "transform their understanding of the system they are trying to change, the relationships with others in the systems and their intentions to act." As a result, it does not force commitment and issue directives. Contrarily, it infuses initiative and energy in the broader group by offering incentives, nudges, role modelling and creating an environment within which all participants feel supported to understand intentions more deeply and opt-in and take ownership of actions.

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Movements



Distribution of Work

Assign people to static roles based on skill sets and qualifications. The organisation recruits and selects these people.

Assign people to static roles based on skill sets and qualifications. The partner organisation recruits and selects these people.

Roles are often dynamic, with the movement empowering people and organisations to contribute in multiple ways based on their choice, their strengths, and the movement's needs.



Attribution of Impact

The impact is attributed to the individual organisation's effort, such that it reinforces their program narrative.

The impact is attributed to the organisations that are a part of the collective and the collective itself.

The impact is usually attributed to the community working together towards the change.

Differences between Movements, Programs and Collective Impact Initiatives



An Important Disclaimer



Programs, collective impact, and movements are complementary approaches to bring social change and are not in conflict with one another. The distinction is worth highlighting to understand how two organisations with similar visions and objectives may organise their efforts differently.



While we distinguish between these approaches, organisations may see these boundaries as blurred and may draw from more than one approach in their design. For instance, many fellowships have a programmatic approach to develop their fellows and a collective-impact-based approach to galvanise their alumni's efforts. Instead of seeing each of these approaches as discrete modes of operating, it is good to visualise them as a spectrum on which organisations may operate.



We observe varying degrees of consistency in applying these principles in collective-impact-based and movement-based approaches. Further research could help us understand and appreciate how these frameworks translate to implementation in different contexts in India.

For References, please see the complete report: <https://rohininilekani.org/understanding-movements/>