Social Change Movements: A Literature Review Summary

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Preface

In the Spring of 2020 Kamehameha Schools commissioned a literature review of Social Change with the goal of creating a framework for understanding how change occurs, in order to better understand its role in the movement to achieving a thriving Lāhui. The Pacific Policy Research Center (PPRC) was asked to conduct the literature review responding to key questions around Social Change theory, case studies, and measuring change. The following is the Executive Summary to PPRC's literature review, organized by these questions.

Summary

This literature review presents an overview of how social movements emerge, behave, and evolve, as well as how they may be evaluated to discern both impacts and lessons learned. The review pays particular attention to community-led movements, focusing on historical examples of efforts within Indigenous and minority communities. Social change movements within and for these communities highlight struggles for political and cultural sovereignty, racial justice, land and water rights, gender equality, health and food security, and the right to practice Indigenous language in education.

What are the theoretical models or frameworks on social change movements?

How is social change defined? How are social change movements defined?

Social movements are defined within the literature as the ongoing, collective actions of people working toward a common goal of social change and/or challenging those in power. They occur at varying levels, from the local, state and regional to the national and global. They also can be established within formal institutions, such as nonprofits and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or occur outside traditional pathways and institutions. **Social change –**

the goal of movements - refers to changes in human interaction and relationships that lead to the transformation of social and cultural institutions.

How do social change movements take shape and evolve over time? Are there common characteristics and evolutionary milestones in the life cycle of social change movements?

Social movements experience lifecycles, typically unfolding in a series of four stages. Movements first emerge in response to a catalyst, and then coalesce to develop a sense of membership, goals, and values. They then establish operating rules/procedures. It is at this point that movements can take multiple paths that lead to some measure of success or failure, cooptation, repression, or integration into the mainstream. Eventually movements decline or pivot their goals to start a new lifecycle.

What are the distinctions between social change in general and community–led social change?

Community-led movements are about empowering people within a particular setting to pursue change. They operate within an expanding, iterative network of community-based support systems and relationships to leverage the skills/talents of their membership. **Community-led change may be differentiated from professionalized social change movements (SMOs),** which are centralized and bureaucratic, with a division of labor, criteria for membership, and rules for governing sub-units. They also rely on external funders. **Community-led change is further distinguishable from social entrepreneurship,** which is when profit models align with the social change mission of an organization.

How do leaders influence social change and what role do they typically serve?

Social movement leaders function as strategic decision-makers who inspire and organize others to participate. **The success of leaders is tied to how they build relationships, engage in storytelling, and devise creative strategies. The ability to mobilize and deploy resources, as well as gain commitments, is critical to the work of leadership.** While individual leaders are important for movement coherence, messaging, and management, the increasingly decentralized and voluntary nature of social movements also necessitates structures for **shared, tiered, and distributed leadership.**

Where have there been historical examples of social change movements?

What can be learned from these social change movements (e.g., organizational infrastructure, critical success factors, key obstacles and risks, etc.)?

What were the common characteristics and evolutionary milestones in the life–cycles of these social change movements?

This literature review investigates recent or contemporary social movements that have emerged within Indigenous and racial/ethnic minority communities in Hawai'i, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Latin America. Key lessons emerge from these movement case studies, which speak to the organizational infrastructure, critical success factors, and common obstacles among others. First among them is the **necessity of shared grievances and interests to mobilize movements.** For Native/Indigenous communities, social change movements are tethered to the ongoing struggle for decolonization and the reclamation of sovereignty. These shared goals are evident, for example, in American Indian resistance at Standing Rock to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Idle No More movement in Canada, Maupache Indian activism in Chile, and the sovereignty movement in Hawai'i.

Another lesson that emerged from the literature is that all **movements form coalitions, which bring opportunities to combine resources and influence.** The presence of three major factors bring about coalitions: **shared threats, flexible ideologies and social and cultural ties.** For example, the movement at Standing Rock capitalized on existing ties between American Indian SMOs and broader environmentalist movements. The Hawaiian language movement - a proliferative network of educational, family, and community-based actors – also demonstrates how coalitions can effect significant social change. **Coalition building also underscores the important role of surrogates in movements.** The activism of Kānaka Maoli, which leveraged the influence of OHA and political officials to deter the Maui Land Pineapple Company's (MLP) efforts to build a hotel in Honokahua, is one illustration of this dynamic.

Noninstitutional tactics can be an efficient means of attracting attention to a cause without significant resources, which is the case for many community-led, grassroots and Indigenous movements. Non-institutional tactics include such activities as fish-ins, occupations, road blockades, sit-ins, boycotts, and marches/demonstrations. The resistance movement at Mauna Kea against the international project to build the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT), for example, has relied heavily on human road blockades and temporary structures, to stall construction efforts. Some of the literature also suggests that **social change movements that operate through the legal system can yield tangible gains.** Multiple campaigns within the Hawaiian sovereignty movement demonstrate core strategies for working through the legal system, including formalizing as nonprofits to pursue legal action against private industry, public institutions, and challenge existing laws at multiple levels. The campaign to repatriate the

island of Kahoʻolawe, as well as battles for water access fought by Maui-based coalitions, demonstrate how this feature of activism has played out. Additional lessons within these examples also emerged, including methods for leverging professional expertise, precedent, and political context, as well as bringing legal challenges through claims for restorative justice, cultural rights, and environmental conservation.

How social movements communicate their purpose and engage the media can profoundly impact their course. From a research standpoint, voices from the field instruct movements on the **importance of analyzing social movements in historical context and through the wide range of media practice they employ, as well as accounting for cultural shifts in society** to elaborate the most effective strategies. In the context of practice, the literature recognizes the complexity of navigating media structures because of the **fundamental asymmetry between grassroots movements and the mass media.** On the whole, media organizations are more powerful, resourced, and operate according to their own interests and routines. The anti-TMT movement at the base of Mauna Kea illustrates the everyday struggles of community activists with the mass media to frame their purpose and goals. The small gains they have made have been attributed to disciplined messaging and favoring local journalists when possible.

Another trend within the literature is the assertion that **online media tools are more viable and democratic alternatives for social movements to disseminate their ideas and information.** For instance, an analysis of the #Black Lives Matter found that social media is critical to generating internal support networks, gaining/maintaining followers, sharing information and organizing events, raising/locating funds and resources, building coalitions, and controlling narratives. Going further, some authors argue that **social media platforms may help Indigenous participants and peoples of color to create their images through self-authorship,** with the intent of generating empathy and breaking down stereotypes. Finally, the use of social media technology in movements may be particularly advantageous for engaging youth and fostering youth leadership. Other voices caution an overreliance on social media, asserting the **importance of combining face-to-face and virtual approaches.** Some downsides to social media activism include participant "slacktivism", trolling, the potential to create filtered/distorted views of a places and events, and forming weak activist networks. For Indigenous movements in particular, some caution that the use of digitial media platforms should be considered within the context of Indigenous community challenges and how social media use is embedded in Indigenous epistemologies.

Some of the authors reviewed in the literature discuss the social, political, and organizational barriers Indigenous social change movements may encounter. They take stock of the **discursive strategies currently deployed by political majorities to roll back the rights, restitution, and representations of Indigenous and minority communities** in the age of late capital. The work of

opponents to Hawaiian sovereignty, such as Harold Rice and Thurston Twigg-Smith, embody this trend. The literature also takes issue with **multicultural education within U.S. schools, which continues to limit understanding of race relations and social movements.** Finally, they note how sometimes **dynamics internal to social movements themselves can undermine progress.** The instance of how the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) movement was delimited by cultural dynamics within the Yaqui, and the challenge of COMARU to represent the interests of the Machigeunga of Peru as a unified community against multinational energy companies are discussed as examples of this obstacle to success.

What are frameworks and tools for evaluating social change movements?

Are there examples of social change evaluations?

What are sample tools for monitoring/evaluating social change?

The literature review concludes with an exploration of existing evaluation frameworks and examples that seek to measure the impact of social change movements on communities. In doing so, the review found that, overall, the **systematic measurement of social movements impacts is highly complex and rare in practice.** Outcomes of social movements are broad in scope, can be explored on multiple levels, require complex categorization, and are sometimes inconsistent with each other. There are also issues with assigning causality. Beyond the complex nature of measuring impact, today's funding world has pushed SMOs to concentrate disproportionate effort on upward accountability, which is not always useful. For instance, the ability of SMOs to understand and act on short-term results may be more important to their work than measuring long-term impacts, especially when it comes to making mid-course corrections and focusing on accountability to clients and beneficiaries. This review looks to examples of evaluations that navigate these aforementioned challenges, highlighting in particular some of the methods and tools used within community change, reproductive justice and community health programs/projects. These projects emphasize the **importance of employing developmental, flexible approaches to evaluation design; utilizing participatory frameworks that invite stakeholder input/participation; and the use of alternative indicators to measure social change, with a importance placed on qualitative methods and tools,** including "interpretive techniques" which are particularly relevant to cultural approaches in the study of social movements. As an example, the California Healthy Cities Project – a project aimed at measuring non-traditional indicators of community wellbeing – developed an interdisciplinary evaluation framework to measure change in five domains: individual, civic participation, organizational, inter-organizational, and community. Each domain aligns to a particular data collection protocol and timeline suited to stakeholder and interaction type.