



THE STATE OF THE

GROWING MOVEMENT

FIGHTING INEQUALITY

Executive Summary



Introduction

In the 21st century so far, levels of inequality within and between countries have been rising. The neoliberal economic system has enabled an explosion in the concentrations of wealth and power in our societies: 26 individuals now hold the same wealth as the 3.8 billion poorest people.¹ Interconnected and systemic forms of oppression and inequity such as racism, patriarchy and homophobia shape the daily realities of the majority of the world's population.

Rising authoritarianism is fuelled by growing inequality and concentration of power. It is resulting in attacks on freedoms and protections on assembly, association, and speech—rights that peoples' movements exercise in order to organise and influence action—as well as the enhanced targeting of particular marginalised groups and minorities by many regimes.

The Fight Inequality Alliance was formed to fight this growing crisis of inequality. Numerous groups came together to establish the Alliance: leading international and national non-profit organisations, human rights campaigners, women's rights groups, environmental groups, faith-based organisations, trade unions, social movements, artists, individual activists and other civil society organisations. They had a shared vision for radical, systemic change and tackling the root causes of inequality through a people powered movement².

This research was initiated by Fight Inequality Alliance with the support of the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity programme at the International Inequalities Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science. Fight Inequality Alliance partnered with Rhize to lead the research, building on their experience in studying multi-country social movements³.

This study was conducted in response to the evident gap in existing research on inequality, which has to date has focused on tracking and analysing its rise in different forms. Much less attention has been given to the analysis of campaigning and organising against inequality. This research aims to widen and deepen our collective understanding of movements fighting inequality around the world.

The research findings are based on 138 responses to a 30 minute survey and over 40 in-depth interviews conducted between 2018 and 2019 with people in 23 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe.

Atlantic Fellows

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¹ Oxfam International (2019), *Public good or private wealth*, Oxfam International. ² See the full global vision for Fight Inequality Alliance [here](#)

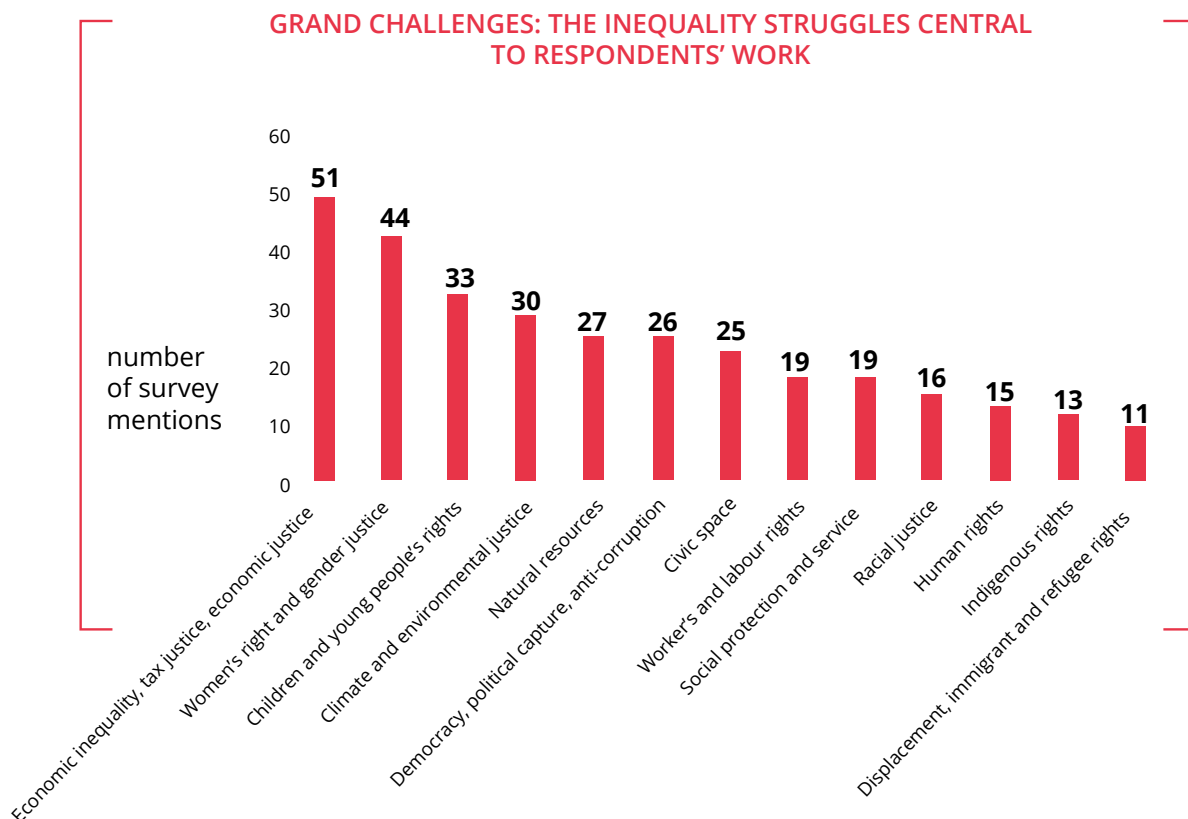
³ Rhize (2017) – *Understanding Activism*, Rhize

Section One: The emergence and structure of movements against inequalities

The report shares how inequality movements are emerging and growing in direct response to the impacts of inequality, visions for a better world, and efforts to better connect and collaborate across civil society. As groups develop questions of structure arise—legal registration, forms of leadership and membership. These affect movements’ relationships to communities, funders, the state and the rest of the movement. Whatever choices movements make, this research demonstrates the importance of being thoughtful and deliberate about how to structure for accountability to grassroots communities and frontline activists. It also shows how important it is to not reinforce, but actively dismantle inequities based on race, gender, age and other dimensions within movements and organisations.

Section Two: What are people fighting for?

This section highlights what movements are fighting for, with the three biggest areas being: natural resources, elite capture and corruption and women’s rights and feminist agendas. Proximity to community grievances and levels of privilege (including political access and influence) affect how groups frame and approach their struggles, and also their connections to the broader inequality movement. Even though at times movements may or may not explicitly define themselves as inequality movements, their struggles are aimed at addressing the manifestations of inequality informed by a deep understanding and analysis of the systemic (and intersectional) nature of the problem.



Section Three? Who is leading and participating in movements against inequalities?

Important questions about who is leading and participating in movements against inequalities arise when considering the composition and make up of movements. The report demonstrates that movements can make a significant contribution to redressing power imbalances if they consciously work to prioritise and support leadership and participation by those who do not have inherited or traditional power. For many movements, this means being attentive to grassroots concerns and ensuring access to power and leadership by people of colour, women and young people. This research has found that this work, to support grassroots leadership, dismantle inequalities within movements, and support feminist and other agendas is a work in progress in these movements.

How feminist are movements against inequality?

There is a critical challenge for all levels of inequality movements: to not reinforce inequities in their organising and operations, and to actively work to dismantle them – especially when the inequities are potent in their societies and contexts. In keeping with the intersectional nature of struggles against inequalities, the research highlights that movements need to continue to address inequities and oppressive structures around race, gender and age, amongst others.

Section Four: Where are the movements holding and gaining ground?

Movements are gaining—or holding—ground on issues that matter to communities. Strikingly, in the face of rising authoritarianism, neoliberal economic systems and austerity, movements are on the defensive in many contexts, needing to defend land, public services or civic rights that are under attack. This can make it more difficult to organise proactively on positive agendas. However, there are groups that are gaining ground on those agendas in many places—building movements and coalitions, reshaping the narrative, and influencing legislative and policy change and implementation.

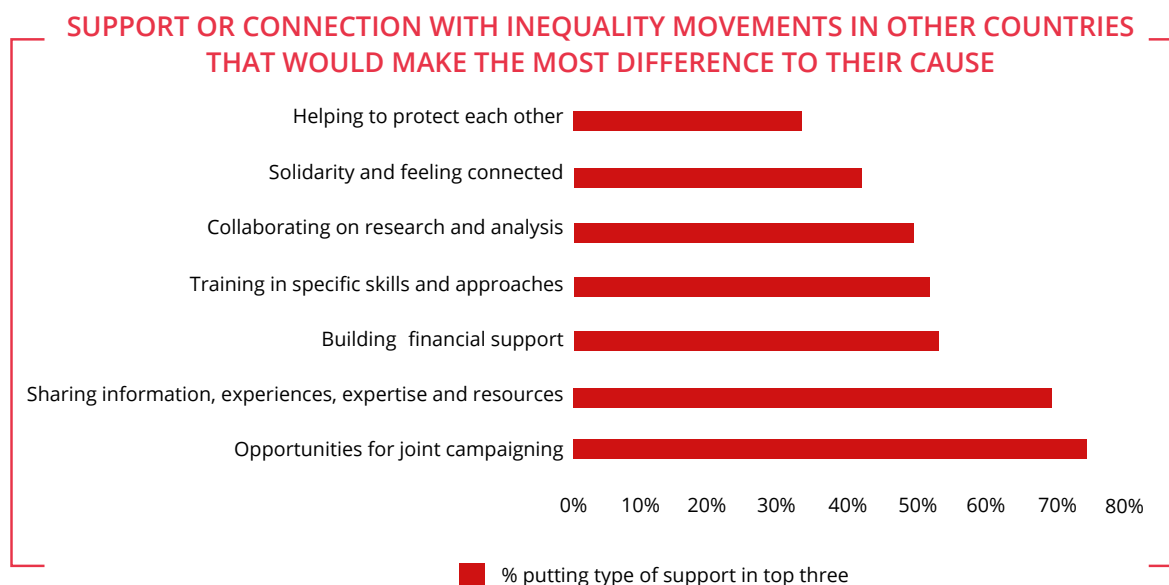
BIG WINS: MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS BY RESPONDENTS' ORGANISATIONS



Number of survey mentions by respondents

Section Five: Building collective strength, navigating power dynamics

The findings highlight the ways in which groups are connecting across the international movement and their hopes for what connection, support and solidarity can generate. A critical driver of collaboration is when groups recognise that they cannot influence systemic change on their own. They may keep being able to hold back some negative changes, but to really aim at transforming power relations, they need to work with others who can bring different kinds of power together. Movements and organisations fighting inequality further recognise that their struggles are interlinked, with common transnational or global drivers. They want to be in common cause together in a way that makes them more likely to shift the structural causes of inequality.



Conclusion

This study gives rich insight into how the dynamic, resilient, brave and bold movement fighting inequality around the world is growing, evolving and achieving success in very challenging circumstances. It also provides direction for the Alliance on how and why movements want to collaborate further to fight inequality and achieve systemic change. It gives clear learnings for activists and organisations on strategy, organisational development and transforming power dynamics internally and externally.

Our hope for this report is that it serves as a practical tool for the Alliance in reflecting, learning and developing from the lessons and questions contained here. We also hope to engage funders, academics and other allies in the fight against inequality further in the role and perspective of grassroots activists and movements in this struggle, and how their efforts can be supported.

We hope that this effort is the beginning of an ongoing research and learning process as the Fight Inequality Alliance and wider movement continues to grow and adapt. The research process also raised a number of questions that could be the basis for further study and exploration, including developing feminist practice within movements, how movements are dealing with issues of sexual harassment and abuse, deeper learning from the successes where movements are holding and gaining ground and developing a more comprehensive understanding of 'organised society' (beyond civil society) that includes all of whose civic rights are denied.

The energy and dynamism within the movement is the fuel we need to create transformative change. We hope that this report helps to further energise our struggle.

We invite you to:

- Download the full report, also available in Spanish, French and Portuguese at www.fightinequality.org/movementreport
- Join the Fight Inequality Alliance or sign up for news at www.fightinequality.org
- Reflect within your own organisation or movement using the exercises in the report
- Send us feedback and your ideas on how to further this agenda to info@fightinequality.org
- Share the findings of this research with your own networks and movements