



Protest as Communication for Development and Social Change

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Abstract

Protest is an instrument used to agitate for social change globally, however, in spite of the increasing use of protest to address socioeconomic and political grievances, there has been limited critical scholarly study of protest in the communication for development and social change (CDSC) scholarship. Protest is communication. It is a communication strategy for drawing attention to developmental and social issues that affect the well-being of citizens. Communication for development and social change utilizes various communication approaches, such as social marketing, public awareness and information

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campaign, entertainment-education, media advocacy, social mobilization, and many others. In addition to these approaches, protest action is situated as a communication approach for development and social change. In this chapter, protest culture is engaged critically by drawing theoretically from conceptual discourses of participation, participatory development communication, grassroots bottom-up social change, social movement theory, collective action theory, and critical analysis of power. This chapter also provides a framework for the use of protest as communication for development and social change by identifying types and methods of protest, and ends by offering critical guidelines of how protest can be effectively used as communication strategy for development and social change.

Keywords

Protest · Mass mobilization · Protest as communication · Participation · Social movement · Collective action

The Prominence of Protest

In 411 BCE, Aristophanes drew a strong attention to the power of protest as a communication tool for social change. In the play, *Lysistrata*, Greek women, mobilized to protest against the Peloponnesian War. Through the withholding of physical intimacy from their husbands, they were able to forge peace and end the war. As frivolous as sex strike may seem, this form of protest has been adopted centuries after *Lysistrata* to mobilize for change. When Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti mobilized thousands of women in protest march against colonial taxation of women in colonial Nigeria, her leadership also highlighted the power of women and the use of protest for social change. From Ghandi's Salt *Satyagraha* against British colonial injunction, the 1963 march on Washington for freedom and economic justice, the 1956 women march to Pretoria against apartheid's laws, to the Treatment Action Campaign's marches for access to drugs for HIV-infected South Africans, protest has been a tool used to communicate grievances and forge social change.

Globally, protest has been a tool used in agitating for social change in economic, health, human rights, politics, and in gender-related issues. In spite of the rising use of protest to address social-economic and political grievances, there has been limited critical scholarly study of protest in the communication for development and social change (CDSC) scholarship. *Protest is communication*. It is a communication strategy used in drawing attention to developmental and social issues that affect the well-being of citizens. A study of protests in "World Protests 2006–2013" shows a worldwide increase in protest actions. Grievances leading to protest actions are related to issue of economic justice, such as unemployment and job creation and elimination of inequality, ensuring affordable food, energy, and housing (Burke 2014). Carothers and Youngs (2015) observe four critical characteristics of the current wave of global protest: First, protest is occurring in every region of the world, and it is affecting every major regime category, including authoritarian

countries, semi-authoritarian states as well as democracies. Second, the era of transnational antiglobalization protest has given way to more localized protest triggered by local issues around economic concerns and political decisions. Third, there are long-term enabling causes such as the development in new information and communication technologies that facilitate protest in multiple ways.

There are also global economic trends in many parts of the developing world and post-Communist worlds that have led to a rise in the middle classes clamoring for change beyond material goals. Increasingly protest actions are not only concentrated among the poor but middle- and upper-middle classes have been involved in protest actions galvanized by social issues, unequal economic growth benefits, and stagnation of the middle classes. In addition, there is the growth of civil society organizations, professional associations, informal groups, religious organization, labor unions, village and local cooperatives, women's groups, students group, pro-democracy groups, and so forth who are leading protest against specific grievances. Fourth, Carothers and Youngs (2015) observe that protest are focused and directed at specific agendas. The ideas of "rebels without a cause" is inaccurate in describing protests, they are often anchored in specific aims, agendas and decidedly aimed at producing specific changes.

Many scholars (Rogers 1976; Servaes 1999, 2002; Melkote and Steeves 2015; Wilkins et al. 2014) have provided conceptual and practical characterizations of communication for development and social change. A summation of the many characterizations is that communication for development and social change is about the application of communication research, theory, approaches, and technologies to bring about improvement in human experience towards a sustainable and fulfilling human well-being. It involves the use of communication tools to influence behavioral and attitudinal change as well as to influence policy directions towards a goal of achieving quality human experiences in many areas of the economic, health, education, political, social, and cultural landscapes.

To this effect, actions are required to produce knowledge through research, planning, and to communicate such knowledge to the public and sites of power in order to achieve social change. As a process, communication for development and social change utilizes various communication approaches, such as social marketing, public awareness and information campaign, entertainment-education, media advocacy, information and communication technologies for development, social mobilization, etc. Various communication tools are used in these various approaches, such as broadcast and newsprint media (international, national and community based media), interpersonal communication, public communication, visual media (painting/photography), performances (community drama and theater), and new digital technology platforms (social media tools). Amidst many tools for communication for development and social change, protest action is situated as a communication approach.

Table 1 Types and categories of protest

Categories of protest	Types and examples
Processions and mass gatherings	Marches, silent processions, picket lines, and public events
Nonobedience, Noncooperation, and civil disobedience	Sitdowns/sit-ins, civil disobedience of “unjust” ordinances and laws, shutdowns, blockades, occupations, destruction of objectionable symbols and images, walkout, strike, boycott
Communication and media	Banners, posters, leaflets, public speeches, newspaper writings, opinion pieces, alternative press, recorded music, graphic arts, and clothing
Religious and sacred activities	Vigils, prayers, religious rallies, and spiritual practices
Written protest	Petitions, letters (mass letters to people in power), and memorandum of demands
Performances	Live music performance, public skits, dramatic performances, and dancing
The body	Nudity (e.g., women going topless to draw attention to women issue), inscriptions and slogans on the body, depriving, and hurting the body (e.g., hunger strike)
Technology and online protest	Online petitions, mass email to people in power, social media campaigns, mass mobilization through social networking sites and blogs, blocking access to websites, and texting (for coordination and mass texting as petitions to an individual in power)

Protest Culture and Social Change

Various types of protest action and mass mobilization (see Table 1) have been effective in drawing public and state attention to grievances from ordinary citizens and civil organizations from national to local community levels. Protest culture is an attitude and a form of expression that reflects the human traits and desires for reasonable well-being through motivation, agitation, and activities that draw attention of location of societal power to these desires and agitation. As such, protest bears inherent traits that are essential for development and social change:

- They are usually grassroots-oriented by reflecting participation of citizens at local levels who mobilize to make their grievances known.
- Protest and mass mobilization generally tend to be participatory in nature; participants are visibly engaging in protest actions.
- While the collective action of individuals is core element of mass action, individuals can equally single-handedly protest certain issues.
- The optics of mass protest usually draw attention of sites of power – at local, national, and international levels.
- Importantly, protests are emancipatory.
- They reflect human aspiration to maintain or achieve well-being consistent with humane existence.
- They are universal, not peculiar to certain regions or groups.

When *Time Magazine* named “The Protester” as Person of the Year 2011, it reiterated the power of protest and protesters in social change, that the action of individual(s) can incite protest that would lead to major political change, topple dictators, and engender global waves of dissent.

Although protest culture is universal and occurs in all social classes, it tends to occur more among the poor, the oppressed, the deprived, the disadvantaged, those that bear brunt of political and social conditions, and in regions with history and occurrences of political and socioeconomic inequalities, which may result in socio-economic developmental challenges. These challenges are present in developed, as well as developing countries. Take the protest culture in South Africa as an example. South Africa experiences one of the most frequent rates of protest in the world, in fact some (cf. Runciman 2017) assume the country may be the protest capital of the world. Although there is no dedicated database for protest action in South Africa, there are speculations and debates that there are about 30 protests per day in South Africa (Williams 2009; Bhardwai 2017). Irrespective of the uncertainty of daily protest rate figure, it is uncontested that there is a strong protest culture in South Africa. But protest as tool for social change has always been essential to South Africa’s pre and post apartheid eras. The struggle for freedom from the apartheid regime was emboldened by various protest actions and social movements (Solop 1990; Kurtz 2010; Brown and Yaffe 2014).

Many forms of protest actions were adopted by ordinary citizens and activists to fight the apartheid regime, these range from mass demonstration, funeral marches as platform for protest, music – singing and dancing, civil disobedience (such as Sharpsville 1960), stay-aways, boycotts, etc. Often these protests were confronted by state violence through the use of the military and the police forces. Internationally, anti-apartheid movements in the UK and the USA were actively using many forms of protest to agitate for the end of apartheid. Take, for instance, the Non-Stop Picket at the South African Embassy in London where the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group maintained a continual presence every day and night at the South African embassy from 1986 until just after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1994 (Brown and Yaffe 2014).

The protest culture has also persisted in postapartheid South Africa. Irrespective of the huge achievements of the postapartheid government in addressing the socioeconomic inequalities and the provision of basic utilities like waters, electricity, and housing, there is still high poverty and unemployment rates, lack of access to municipal and state services, and elective representatives have become self-seeking. All these contribute to a general nature of protest in South Africa, characterized as the *rebellion of the poor* (Alexander 2010). Protest in South Africa is diverse and undertaken by mostly different urban groupings such as labor unions, the unemployed, poor shack dwellers, students, local communities, and ordinary residents with a largely focus on socioeconomic inequalities and justice (Nyar and Wray 2012). Additionally, many social issues around gender abuse and violence, poor state service delivery, access to health services, land and housing, water, electricity,

sanitation/waste, and affordable education have been some of the drivers of protest actions.

Limitations and Criticisms of Protest Culture

While evidence abounds in many countries about how protest actions have drawn attention and awareness to social issues, and how authorities have reacted by addressing protesters' concerns at local and national levels, there are challenges, limitations, and questions regarding the efficacy of protest. There is the criticism that beyond visible demonstration of discontent, protests do not achieve much change. As Heller (2017) cautions, "protest is fine for digging in your heels. But work for change needs to be pragmatic and up-to-date" (p. 72). Heller provides practical cases to question the effectiveness of protest: first, the 2003 global protest against American prospective war in Iraq didn't stop the invasion of Iraq; about a decade after Occupy Wall Street protest, no US policies have changed as a result of the protest; in spite of the active Black Lives Matter protests, a majority of the law-enforcement officers were not indicted, of those that were, three were found guilty and only one to date has received a prison sentence; and the international Women's March following Donald Trump's election did not stop the inception of the new administration (Heller 2017).

Another criticism is that protests are not long-lasting or consistent tool of social change. They are ephemeral in nature, and as such they do not leave lasting impression, rather they are fleeting and ritualistic. Srnicek and Williams (2016) note that protest rise easily rapidly through mass mobilization of large people and then fade away to be replaced with a sense of apathy and another protest. They argue that protests have become a symbolic theatrical narrative with people and the police playing their respective roles.

Similar criticism also follows online activism, which is considered a low involvement form of protest. *Slacktivism* describes the low-involvement trend of people protesting or supporting a cause online, it is criticized for being a culture that creates a feel good feeling of being an activist through the clicking of a mouse rather than the hard and arduous work of physically getting involved through education, lobbying, negotiation, mobilizing, and planning. Although such online action tends to boost the morale of those actively participating in a protest and it has huge value in promoting a cause, being able to "like," "share," and "tweet" support for a cause is considered a low-cost involvement with an imagined sense of active engagement.

Another challenge to the use of protest for social change is the occurrence of violence. The destruction of public infrastructure and private properties during protest tends to distract from the genuine discontent that motivated the protest. While the use of violence through destruction of certain public infrastructure and objectionable artifact has been used effectively in pursuit of social change, the sight of protesters throwing bricks, shattering windows, setting public buildings such as libraries and schools on fire have created an image of protesters as unruly mob. But violence is not only perpetrated by protesters, security forces' unabashed use of

violence in order to manage protest often tends to instigate violence response. Police use of violence create a huge challenge to protest actions and reflect the high handedness nature of the use of state power ranging from close range pepper spraying of students who refused to move during protest action in California, USA, to the sad and disturbing use of live ammunition against striking miners in South Africa killing 34 mineworkers and leaving 78 seriously injured.

State restriction could also be a challenge to the use of protest for change. Through legislative mechanisms, policies and regulatory frameworks states have developed guidelines to manage protest. These guidelines range from the process requesting permission to protest to requiring adherence to guidelines on what is and not permissible in protests. Take the Regulation of Gatherings Act in South Africa as an example, as a regulatory framework, this Act undeniably locates power to the state to manage protest actions. This generates genuine opposition that the state may use its power not only to avoid violent protest but also to determine the shape of and how people protest. For instance, Chapter 3 section 8 (7) of the Act states: “No person present shall at any gathering or demonstration wear a disguise or mask or any other apparel or item which obscures his facial features and prevents his identification.” The state also has the power to impose limitations on the rights of assembly and to protest in cases of public security and use of violence. But state restrictions are equally attempts to balance citizens’ rights to protest with national security, public order, health and safety, and the right of nonprotesting citizens.

In the following sections of this chapter, various conceptual framings and theoretical approaches to protest will be engaged; these include the legislative and state constitutional framing of protest, the conceptual assertion of protest as communication, theoretical issues of power and participation and their pragmatic implications for protest in social change activities, and the theoretical conceptualizations of social movement and collective action. The chapter ends by providing a working guideline for effective use of protest as communication for social change.

Theoretical Approaches to Protest as Communication for Social Change

Peaceful Assembly

Peaceful Assembly is global framework that describes the rights of citizens to protest. Underlining the concept of peaceful assembly is *freedom of assembly*, which provides legislative consent for citizens’ right to protest. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association is a fundamental human right that is important in highlighting the power of citizens to participate collectively in shaping opinions, ideas, and processes in society. This concept is enshrined in the human rights declaration and constitutional framework of many states. For example, the article 20 (1) of the UN Declaration of Human Rights captures this right, and “the right of the people peaceably to assemble” is included in the First Amendment of the constitution of the United States. In the South African context, Section 17 of the

Bill of Rights makes it explicitly clear: “Everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions.”

This right to assembly offers three essential qualities for democracies. First, it helps create space for collective politics. A collective voice has a higher chance of getting its message across than a singular voice, especially in systems where power is concentrated in few hands. Second, it permits citizen to meet and deliberate, which allows citizens to share ideas and talk to one another. Third, this right is essential for those who feel that their demands are not being given serious consideration by the state or institutional authorities (Woolman 1998). In addition to the constitutional framework, states may develop regulatory framework for protest. The regulation usually provides conditions and processes for organizing protest and the power of the state, in the most extreme cases, to prohibit a gathering.

Three important theoretical concepts shape the legislative framework of protest actions: assembly, association, and gathering. While gathering and assembly connote similar meaning, there is a difference between freedom of assembly and freedom of association. While freedom of assembly guarantees freedom to protest in public spaces, freedom of association provides the right to join a labor union, clubs, societies, group of people to assembly, or meet with people. As a result, the freedom of association makes the freedom of assembly more effective.

Protest as Communication

Protest is communication. This assertion is based on the empirical analysis that protest is a tool for communicating grievances and contestation. It is a visible way of communicating support or opposition to certain ideology or practice. Protest as communication can be analyzed from two perspectives. One, as already explained, protest is inherently a communication about certain grievance. Two, protest actions utilize various tools and genres of communication and forms of media in communicating discontent and grievance. *Protest is performance.* The performance may be action of a single person or collective action of individuals. As Ratliff and Hall (2014) note, “protesters, as actors, take the world stage as protagonist (or antagonists, given one’s point of view) in performative dialectics, collectively struggling to control the framing of issues and opponents to foment social change, retain challenged power structures, and/or achieve social justice” (p. 270). As performance, *protest is an “art”* in two ways. Protest utilizes artistic practices, such as street drama, paintings, graphics, images, and many forms of artistic displays. Also, protest is metaphorically an art form that involves a skillful and strategic performance that uses various sensory techniques to invoke emotions for social change (Ratliff and Hall 2014).

The use of *music for protest* is a strong example of how protest can invoke people’s emotion to “get up, stand up, stand up for your rights!”. As Ruhlig (2016) notes, “songs are more than intellectual stimulating texts; they help to create *emotions* stimulating atmosphere of community and solidarity that very often draws on the power of utopia and stimulates people to dream” (p. 60). Globally,

songs have been used in protest actions. Protest and socio-political songs aided African-Americans in the trajectory of historical fights for freedom (Trigg 2010). Freedom songs are historical in the USA from the abolitionist era to civil rights period. Freedom songs also known as struggle songs in South Africa are a form of oral arts that are nonfictitious but also performative in nature. They are a form of resistance and persuasion; they are used to resist the injustice of the apartheid system, as a method of self-persuasion, and to rouse others to grow indignant against an unjust system that oppressed them (Le Roux-Kemp 2014). Movement, procession, theater, sacred and religious performances, public speeches, and many symbolic and cultural activities are all elements of performativity and communicative practices that are used in protests.

Forms of communication media are tools of protest. Protesters use various forms of communication media and technologies such as broadcast and print media (community media, pamphlets, banners, posters, etc.). The revolution in digital technologies has provided new and advanced ways of using information and communication technologies for protest in two ways: one, ICT tools, such as mobile phones, the internet, social media and web platforms, are critical for coordinating protest actions. Two, these are actual spaces of protest actions, exemplified by virtual/online protest and social media activism.

Participation, Power, and Social Change

Participation is an essential theoretical concept relevant to analysis of protest. In democracies, participation is core to citizens' involvement in shaping the functioning of the political system. The theory of participatory democracy reveals that the representative institutions at the national level are not sufficient enough for effective democratic system; as such, citizen's participation in all levels is necessary. As Pateman (1970) notes, for a democratic polity to exist and function, it is paramount for a participatory society to exist. A participatory society is where citizens can participate in decision-making process at macro- and microlevels of society and be able to communicate and exercise their opinions and ideas. Pateman notes that if individuals are to exercise maximum control over their lives and their environment then authority structures must be organized in a way that individuals can participate in decision-making. Jensen et al. (2012) distinguish two forms of political participation: one is representative political participation exemplified by voting and political party activities and the other is extra-representative political participation such as active involvement in activism. Bean (1991) had equally asserted that mass political participation may also take the form of political protest.

Protest is participation. It is a form of participation that reflects the actions of individuals in speaking out about or against ideals and processes that have influence in shaping their well-being. It is a form of social involvement in decision-making about principles that shape their lives as citizens. Carpentier (2011) identifies minimalist and maximalist forms of political participation. While minimalist form tends to focus on the role of citizen to participate in electoral

processes of representative delegation of power, maximalist participation is not limited to sphere of election of representatives, it is a broader and continuous form of participation. This resonates with Thomas' (1994) macroparticipation (relating to national political spheres of a nation) and microparticipation (relating to local spheres of school, family, workplace, religious formations, and local community). Carpentier (2012) also notes the essence of power in participation, this highlights the distribution of power in society and the power to include or exclude in decision-making. Power is exhibited in the complexities of the dominant political authority organs and in the counter-power of resistance by ordinary citizens (such as in protest).

The concept of participation and its relevance for social change influences the analytical and practical processes of communication for development and social change. The participatory model of development and social change emphasizes the liberating ideology that people should be active agents in decisions and processes for social change that impact their lives, that development involves the active "self" and strategies that stimulate people for action at the grassroots local level rather than a top-down, national, international dictates of what social change means to local agent. This analysis is dominant in the participatory model of development and social change; it is a counter discourse of a bottom-up approach rather than the top-down modernization paradigm of early development discourses and processes (Servaes 1999; Huesca 2008).

Power is the over-arching concept in the analytical discourse of participation and social change. To understand the concept of power, as Foucault (1982) suggests, is to comprehend power relations in society. For Foucault, to understand power, and power relations in society, it requires taking forms of resistance against different forms of authority, a form of antagonism to different forms of power. So, "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations" (Foucault 1982, p. 780). For instance, to understand an aspect of the feminist protest will be to question (an opposition to) the power of men over women. Protest is often a form of resistance and oppositional strategies that highlights the power of the individual to participate in society. It provides voice to the people. *Protest is voice as power and participation*. "Voice" is multidimensional. Voice is power to project opinion; it is visibility; it is recognition and communication.

Conceptualizing Social Movement and Collective Action

From the introduction of voice as power, social movements can be understood as formations through which collective voice are projected for social change. Snow et al. (2004) offer a conceptual explanation that applies to the current discourse:

Social movement are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action, such as protesting in the street, that dramatize those grievances and concerns and demand that something be done about them.

Protest is thus one of the many tools of collective action that social movements use in demanding change. Snow et al. note further that some conceptual characteristics are identifiable in studying social movement, and these are: collective or joint action, change-oriented goals or claims, extra- or noninstitutional collective action, some degrees of organization, and some degree of temporal continuity. Social movement as a form of collective action overlaps but also is different from other sorts of collective action such as crowd behavior (in spectator events). While crowd action may be utilized by social movement, this is often a result of prior planning, organization, and negotiation.

Snow et al. (2004) also note that social movements in their collective action tactic overlaps with interest groups but are also different to some degrees. Interest groups are typically defined in relation to the government or state, social movement standing in relation to the government is different. Interest groups are embedded within the political arena and pursued their interest through institutionalized means such as lobbying and soliciting campaign donations. Social movements on the other hand are typically outside of the government or state with minimal recognition among political authorities, and they usually pursue their collective ends through protest, marches, boycotts, sit-in, etc. While social movements may occasionally operate within the political realm, their actions are mostly extra-institutional. The goal of social movement is largely to promote and/or resist change in some areas of human lives. Social movements and their activities are typically based on organization and coordination. Small organizing groups can band together to form a social movement for coordinated activities toward social change. They also operate with a flexible temporal variability, while some social movements may disband after achieving change in a selected area, others continue and move to another similar area for change (see Snow et al. 2004).

Social movement is a social process characterized, through collective action, by three distinct features. They are involved in conflictual collective action – that is, they operate on an oppositional relationship with actors who seek or are in control of political, economic, and cultural power in areas where social movement actors are engaged in to promote or oppose social change. Social movements have dense informal networks of individuals and organized groups in pursuit of common good, as a result no single individual can claim ownership of a social movement. Thirdly, the sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause leads to a collective identity (Porta and Diani 2006).

Theoretical Foundations of Social Movement

Various theoretical foundations shape the understanding of social movement: Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) suggests access to resources is core to the formation and outcome of social movements. Social movements need critical resources and should be able to mobilize them in order to be successful. This theoretical approach suggests the presence of variety of human, social, political, financial assets, and organizational resources that must be mobilized in the pursuit of the goal of collective action of social movements (Tilly 1977; Jenkins 1983; Edwards and Giliham 2013). These “resources” may include labor, money, knowledge, time, skills, and social support from other organization, media, and political actors, among others.

Deprivation theory is premised on the idea that social movements are formed when certain people or groups in society are discontented about their feelings of being deprived of certain resources, services, or goods in society (Morrison 1971; Gurney and Tierney 1982). The sense of the experience of being disadvantaged could be based on absolute deprivation (group deprivation in isolation from the group’s position in society), or relative deprivation (a group in a disadvantaged position in relation to some other groups in society (Sen and Avci 2016). *Political process theory* or *political opportunity theory* offers that the success of a social movement is dependent on the political atmosphere. In this sense, a politically positive or accommodating atmosphere must be present for a successful social movement. Developed in the study of civil rights movement in the USA, the core assumption of political process theory is that there must be a political and economic opportunities for change in order for a successful social movement (see McAdam 1982, 2013; Caren 2007). As Sen and Avci (2016) note, if a government’s position is entrenched and it is also prone to repressive tendencies, the chance are high that social movement might fail, compared to when a government is more tolerant of dissenting behavior, which augurs well for the success of social movement.

The work of Smelser (1962) on value-added theory has been influential in adopting this theory (also known as *social strain theory*) to the understanding of social movement and collective behavior. Social strain theory argues that a problem may arise in the social system that causes some people to be frustrated and subsequently result to some actions, such as protest, to direct that anger. So a rebellion may develop from a group in society as a reaction to limitation they experience which hindered their pursuit of social goals. Women or people marginalized by discrimination may suffer strain due to the limitation that sexism, patriarchy, racism, or social inequalities caused in the pursuit of equal attainment of social and economic goals. Although originally this theory has been used to explain deviant behavior, such as crime, as a way to achieve certain social and economic goals due to strain that developed from people being unable to attain socioeconomic goals as a result of the social-economic structural system in society or the lack of means to attain these goals which cause strain on people. See Merton’s (1938) seminal work on this.

Another theoretical approach to social movement is *New Social Movement Theories* (NSMT). The NSMT approach features social theories that emerge in reaction to the reductionist nature of classical Marxist approach to collective action, which privileges “proletarian revolution” rooted in the economic reductionism of capitalist production and the marginalization of any other form of social protest (Buechler 1995). Rather than the Marxist economic determinism and class reductionism that see collective action as reaction to economic logic of capitalist production, and conflict of social classes based on economic ideology, while placing socio-cultural logics as secondary, NSMT elevates the social and cultural as basis of collective actions. This tends towards a postmodernist approach to social movement analysis. New social movement theorists locate social actions in other areas such as politics, ideology, culture, and identity as basis of much collective action. As such, varying formations of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are the definers of collective identity and action (Buechler 1995). Issues of human rights and individual rights become prominent in this analysis in contrast to traditional social movement theories that primarily relate to exploitation of one social class by another, usually on economic logic.

Protest as Communication for Social Change: A Framework of Guidelines

Protest actions that have maximum impact are those that are planned and executed well. Organizing an effective protest, march, demonstration, or rally for a social change agenda required careful attention to planning, execution and follow-ups. The following are some of the issues relevant to a successful planning and execution of a protest action.

Planning Stage

Do you really need a protest? Before deciding to protest, you need to ask if protest is the appropriate medium to communicate a particular grievance. Protest should never be the first action in communicating grievance. Try to communicate grievances, demands, objections, or support through communication and dialogue as a first step. Protest can be organized when other dialogic communicative methods have failed to yield result. However, in certain instances, a protest action can be the first method of action, for example:

- When a law is about to be signed, a government action is about to be implemented or an immediate action is about to take place that leaves no time for other methods of objections.
- If there is a need to make a big impression or visible impact to draw attention of the public or the media to your cause.

Notification and permits: There are different procedures involved in allowing a protest to occur in different countries. Check and make sure you notify the responsible state authority before proceeding on a protest. In many instances, the notification procedure is included in a policy or Act regulating protest. Also, keep police well informed and cooperate with them. Policies regulating protests usually provide information on how to notify, when to notify, the role of the protesters and the police, conducts, prohibition, etc.

Leadership: Protest actions need a group of coordinators that can form a leadership cohort. They will work together in planning, executing, and following-up processes of the protest. The coordinators will also represent the collective in deliberation and negotiation processes with authority who is the target of the protest action.

Goals and tone: Make sure the goal of the protest is clear, succinct, and memorable. It is also important not to combine too many issues into one single protest action. A single broad issue is more powerful when communicating your demands. Consider a theme for your protest. #FeesMustFall as a theme of student protest against high cost of tuition in South Africa is an effective use of a memorable theme and slogan. Whether the protest takes a solemn or upbeat tone depends on the goal of the protest.

Mobilize support: Ensure there is a widespread support for your issue. Seek endorsement of civic organization and NGOs working around issue of your protest. A prominent figure in society may also add some credibility to your protest.

Media and communication strategy: Contact the news media, provide press releases, create a website, a blog, social media platforms, flyers, posters, and placards to communicate your issue and information on the protest actions. Protest needs visibility and publicity, use all available publicity tools to your advantage, it also helps in garnering community support for your protest.

Decide on venue: Choose appropriate and safe venue where your protest can achieve maximum visibility with less disruption. You may lose community support if people perceive your protest to be disruptive of their everyday life. While this is usually unavoidable, the less disruptive the more you gain public support. If it is a march establish a route that provides maximum visibility. Choose appropriate venue for a rally. Students protesting high tuition cost at a shopping mall surely looks odd.

Funding: Protest and rallies cost money. Funding is usually difficult for protest activities, contact individuals and organizations interested in your issues. Solicit support for supply of equipment and volunteers for services that cost money.

Logistics: Pay serious attention to every small detail, such as:

- *Transportation:* How easy to get people to the venue and to disperse.
- *Time and date:* Appropriate weather condition is important. You do not want to get protesters drenched in rain.
- *Competing publicity:* Make sure there are no conflicting public events in day of your protest, unless your protest is a counter protest to such event.
- *Entertainment:* Music, skit, performances, etc. to keep protesters in high morale.

- *Medical*: Provide first aid supplies, designate transportation to the hospital for emergency cases.
- *Equipment*: Public address system. Depending on the form of protest, it may be mounted in a fixed spot or mounted on a moving vehicle.
- *Refreshment*: Depending on funds, make plans for refreshments, such as water.

At the Protest

No violence: Protest actions with violence generate negative publicity, police high-handedness and injuries that could be avoided. Students in South Africa have burned building, destroyed lecture theatres, set laboratory on fire, and destroy libraries while protesting lack of resources on university campuses. Choosing appropriate method of protest is paramount to a successful protest action without violence. For example, considering that universities function when students attend classes, students embarking on a sit-in or civil disobedience of nonattendance of classes will have more positive impact than destruction of properties. But there are instances where some forms of violence become necessary part of a protest. For example, when protesters destruct objectionable artifact that represent the motive of the protest action.

Speeches and performances: Line up people who would speak at the events and other performances that keep people's attention and boost their morale.

Ensure communication during protest: Provide live updates on social media platforms, and blog updates as events are taking place for maximum publicity. Provide access to the news media during protest event.

Marshals: Identify marshals who are part of the protest and who will monitor that everyone behaves accordingly while avoiding violence and confrontations.

Memorandum of demands and petitions: Have a memorandum of demands that representative of authority or institutions you are protesting against can sign to acknowledge your demands with a promise to address them.

Following-Up

Sustain the energy: After the protest, there is a need to continue the drive for the issue you protest for/against. Keep pressures on the authority or institution that are the target of the protest.

Continue media exposure: Through traditional media and on social media platforms, publicize your success.

Monitor progress: Follow-up with intended audience or target of the protest to monitor reaction and progress and keep the protesters informed of the progress.

Conclusion

In this chapter, protest action is centered as a global strategy in the pursuit of development and social change. In the scholarship of communication for development and social change, the use of protest does not feature prominently as a communication tool. The attempt here is to assert protest as communication, and more importantly, to locate protest and mass mobilization as relevant components of communication tools for development and social change.

Protest is a very old approach to show discontent, but it has often been limited to the political sphere. Asserting protest as communication helps to situate it as a viable way, not only to show discontent, but a strategy of giving visibility to causes, promoting certain ideals, drawing attention to various social challenges to the human condition, and demanding that sites of power pay attention. The inherent characteristics of protest, as visible manifestation of citizens' constitutional right to assembly, as communication, as empowering form of collective action and participation, as grassroots bottom-up mechanism for advocating for change, and a form of citizen's power to demand change, make protest a critical tool of communication for development and social change. While acknowledging challenges and limitations of protest actions, there are many instances where protests have yielded results, some immediate and others after long and persistent actions. These results are evidenced in political decisions, economic actions, and improvement to citizens' welfare ranging from changes in political order, access to health services to affordable access to education.

But success of protest action tends to be influenced by political and economic atmosphere. Although they are conditions for protest actions, entrenched state political position in politically repressive regimes and the seemingly embedded nature of neoliberal economic agenda and the naturalized attitude towards exploitative capitalism tend to diminish the success of protest actions. Irrespectively, protest allow members of communities at macro- and microlevels to mobilize for collective action, create visibility for their grievances, demand responses, provoke behavioral change, and request policy formulation in pursuit of a better well-being. All these describe the core essence of communication for development and social change.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Communication Campaigns for Social Change](#)
- ▶ [DevCom in Kenya, Zimbabwe, South-Africa](#)
- ▶ [DevCom in South Africa](#)
- ▶ [Empowerment as Development: An Outline of a Concept](#)
- ▶ [Health Communication](#)
- ▶ [Participatory Communication, Community, and People](#)
- ▶ [Protest as Communication for Development and Social Change in South Africa](#)
- ▶ [Theorizing Participation as Communicative Action for Development and Social Change](#)

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