STRONGER & SAFER

POWER OVER

VISIBLE POWER

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

POWER TO

2019 AT A GLANCE
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**Page 9:** A collage of two images. 1) Community leaders from Amadiba Crisis Committee in Xolobeni, South Africa celebrate the decision by the Pretoria High Court to uphold the community’s right to say no to mining (April, 2018), and 2) Zimbabwean citizens take to the streets to call for change in the wake of Zimbabwe’s worsening economic crisis (2019)

**Page 11:** Workshop on Power with women activists from We Lead, Indonesia (October 2019)
When the actors and forces behind inequality and violence seem to bring new levels of injustice, **fresh, joyful, and courageous** expressions of resistance shine through – reminding us that the forces that unite us around a better future for everyone and the planet are resilient. This year, women were on the frontlines and in the trenches building and mobilizing new kinds of power to make their voices heard, demand justice, and offer alternatives to the status quo. At the same time, women were up against severe backlash in reprisal of their work because as history teaches us when women push harder and win more gains, power reorganizes to reverse their advances.

Across the world, women are confronting increased political repression with the rise of authoritarian and right-wing governments, often accompanied by an aggressive assertion of corporate and elite interests. With these trends, we are witnessing the increased criminalization of activism and activists, the undermining of human rights, attacks on the press, impunity for violence, and the waiving of environmental protection for maximum exploitation of land and natural resources in the name of economic “growth.” Notably, emboldened misogyny and vicious anti-feminist backlash are reversing decades of gains related to gender, sexuality, and identity and contributing to increased intolerance, hate, and violence toward women and LGBTI activists.

This changing context reinforced our mission – **strengthening women’s collective power and safety** to ensure that their leadership, voices, agendas, and organizing are at the heart of broad justice and democracy struggles. Recognizing the importance of power (collective ability to make change happen) and safety (strategies that make it safe to fight for change) in achieving transformative change, we invested in a range of movement building processes, namely:

- **Country-level leadership schools**, paired with long-term accompaniment, to ensure that women leaders are not only effective and strategic, but also able to adapt to changing contexts;
- **Cross-border and cross-movement gatherings** that bridge siloes and forge stronger connections and alliances across issues and identities for bigger impact;
- **Strategic dialogues among women human rights defenders** (WHRDs), donors, and international organizations to deepen a shared understanding of power, gender, and movement-building and influence their efforts to address closing civic space and increasing attacks on activists and their agendas; and
- **New content and feminist popular education tools** on safe organizing in hostile contexts featuring topics such as feminist and collective protection strategies, movement building for power and safety, alliance building, and countering political narratives that undermine human rights.

As a result, women activists and their organizations are more prepared (safer, stronger, and louder) to lead crucial battles and scale up their solutions for quality health care, improved livelihoods, safety, and environmental justice. In this booklet, we share some of the key highlights.
HIV+ women turn their knowledge into health solutions for all
Over the last 12 years, the Our Bodies, Our Lives (OBOL) campaign in Malawi has organized more than 8,000 grassroots HIV+ women into an unstoppable force for access to healthcare and equality for all. They successfully advocated to replace outdated, harmful HIV medicines and built 30 community hubs in 27 districts to educate and advocate for people at local clinics and with traditional leaders.

In 2014, they realized that communities and health workers needed more information about healthcare and the new medicines, so OBOL leaders created the first-ever grassroots feminist treatment literacy manual and educational initiative that meets women’s needs while helping everyone. As JASS’ Sibongile Singini said, “We’ve had so many manuals in Malawi, but they are not women friendly. Women saw a gap, so they decided to create their own manual that talks about their bodies and experiences.” In 2019, along with our partners COWHLA and MANERELA+², we celebrated the official launch in the company of 65 opinion leaders, journalists and policymakers. The manual offers comprehensive HIV/AIDS management steps, centering bodies, sexualities, and gender identities with affirming rather than shaming language. It is used by clinics, OBOL hubs, and even the Ministry of Health to show patients not only how to manage HIV but also why treatment is necessary.

When JASS began its leadership schools and network-building in 2008, in explaining why HIV solutions seemed to leave women out, many local experts and organizations would claim that “HIV+ women aren’t organized.” This is a story that clearly demonstrates that women’s informal networks are an untapped force and that women on the frontlines of crisis have the solutions. By creating safe spaces for women to analyze how poverty, inequality and shame are at the heart of HIV, we can unlock their knowledge, voice and catalyze the connective tissue that energizes their organizing. Today, OBOL’s campaign is seen as a go-to source by the Ministry of Health while taking on a new agenda for women’s access to land.

1. Coalition of Women Living with HIV/AIDS in Malawi
2. Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with HIV/AIDS
Indigenous women claim their rights as part of global women’s rights law
As members of the Ixpop Collective since 2017, and through its ongoing Alquimia school for feminist organizers, JASS Mesoamerica has supported indigenous women to lead their organizations and movements in defense of their culture and land while also advocating for their rights as women. As part of this, JASS has collaborated with allies in support of indigenous women’s demands to create a General Recommendation for CEDAW (the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women) to explicitly protecting their rights.

People often forget that CEDAW, passed in 1979 as the result of decades of feminist organizing worldwide, puts forward what seems today like a radical reorganization and vision of the world: an end to the underlying structural inequalities, compounded by race, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, and gender identity, which perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence.

In June this year, JASS Mesoamerica convened a dialogue among 65 diverse indigenous women from multiple generations to name the specific problems to be addressed in the text of the CEDAW recommendation to strengthen the law overall. Two months later, our team accompanied indigenous allies from Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, and Ecuador in an indigenous women-led global consultation to push for the recommendation.

This CEDAW resolution on the rights of indigenous women would be the first-ever created by the people directly affected – rather than solely initiated by legal experts. Six years of hard work has paid off – the resolution is expected to be drafted within the CEDAW framework in 2020! Recognition in the eyes of global human rights mechanisms means everything to indigenous women who are facing formidable odds in defending their communities while joining forces with feminists everywhere to advance gender justice and equality.

4. The Ixpop Collective is comprised of JASS Mesomerica, Tik Naoj, ECAP (Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team), Mayan Association Uk’u’x B’e, and the Women’s Human Rights Institute.

“We want to eradicate violence against indigenous women and the planet.”
Betty Vasquez Rivera, Lenca indigenous activist and environmental defender
Defending Rights in Hostile Contexts
When JASS refocused our efforts on building the collective power of women in 2006, our aim was to build the kinds of networks that make us bolder while also keeping us safe against the backlash that crossing the line provokes. Yet, the escalating political violence against women and feminist activists in recent years demand new cross-sectoral conversations to better understand what’s driving political polarization and violence, expanded alliances and fresh strategies to protect social justice and human rights organizations.

Building on our “Defending Rights in Hostile Contexts” initiative with the Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR) that began in 2017, JASS Southern Africa and JASS Southeast Asia held regional convenings to continue these timely and vital conversations and alliance-building efforts. Alongside our partners⁵, both convenings centered on a deeper analysis of power and drawing insights from history, conversations about collective self-defense and safety alongside advocacy. By bringing together diverse groups of people – human rights defenders, environmentalists, youth activists, feminists, journalists, lawyers, faith leaders and funders – we heard the stories of activists defending land, LGBTI activists and women who are targets of violence and developed our collective solutions to build activists’ power and protection.

JASS’ work deliberately brings disparate issues and leaders together to create shared agendas and flexible alliances through dialogue and joint analysis. With pre-existing relationships across issues, organizations, identities, and locations, there is a greater likelihood of solidarity among activists, who are then poised to confront political attacks with unity.”

⁵. Amnesty International, Oxfam South Africa, FGHR, Forum-Asia, and Urgent Action Fund-Asia Pacific
We Lead in Indonesia!
This year, building on JASS’ 12 years working in Indonesia with young grassroots women activists and the nation-wide network (FAMM) we’ve incubated, we ramped up and expanded with the kickoff of a 5-year partnership supported by the Canadian government. The launch of our joint initiative, *We Lead: Indonesian Women’s Voice and Leadership*, was a historic moment not only for JASS Southeast Asia (SEA) but for gender justice and women’s movements in Indonesia, a time to reinvigorate feminist movement-building and support emerging leadership.

Through *We Lead*, JASS SEA is equipping five diverse Indonesian gender justice and women’s organizations to become a more powerful movement. Together, we are challenging the efforts by religious fundamentalists to reverse gender equality gains and women’s freedoms. The partners include key institutional support from Hivos Southeast Asia, as well as a group of feminist Islamic scholars who re-interpret religious texts, a network of women who teach in the Islamic boarding schools, a student workers’ alliances and our long-time ally, a young feminist activist network, FAMM-Indonesia. FAMM, a network of 350+ rural, Muslim, LBT, and indigenous young women in 10 provinces, uses creative strategies to counter fundamentalist messages about sex and sexuality and women’s roles.

*We Lead* has enormous reach in the country – 230 villages in at least seven provinces! With their vast networks, the participating organizations are expected to reach more than 50,000 Indonesian women and men. Utilizing JASS’ feminist power and contextual analysis, *We Lead* strengthens a robust grassroots feminist movement in Indonesia that includes a diverse range of activists – university students, religious leaders, environmental defenders, LGBTQ activists, and young women. Together, we are building a feminist future in Indonesia!
WE HAVE A BIGGER STORY TO TELL.

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