



## Movement Building Workshops Malawi 2009

*A multi-year political capacity-building initiative is underway to strengthen women's grassroots leadership and community organizing power in Malawi. The focus is on women – at least 50% between the ages of 22 and 35 – who live and/or work with HIV/AIDS.*

JASS is holding workshops and supporting activists, new leaders and their organizations to help them to:

- organize other women to work together in groups to solve real problems in their communities and at the same time, change social attitudes; and
- give themselves and others the confidence and information to demand rights and resources, and to question the prejudice and taboos that prevent healthy living.

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to build the leadership, organizing and advocacy capacity of Malawian women to pressure local and national government to make development resources accessible and to deliver on laws that support the rights of women and HIV+ people.



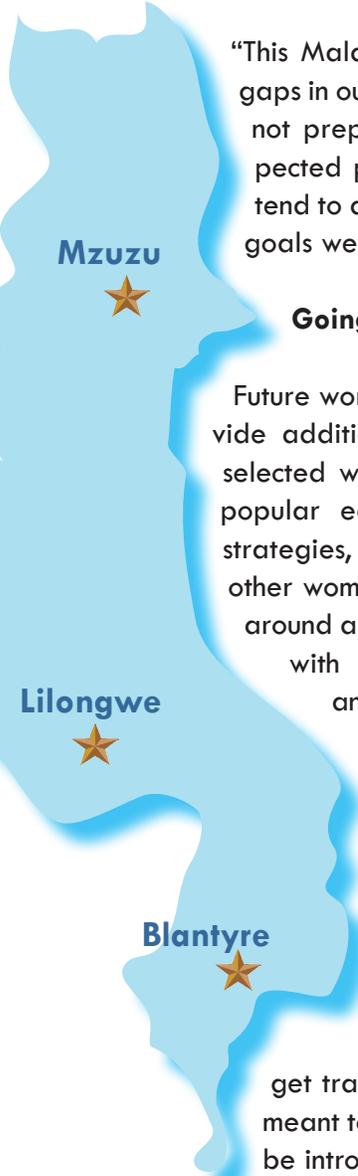
Through February 2009, a three-woman JASS team has been holding workshops in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Malawi. At each workshop, about 20 grassroots organizers working with or on HIV/AIDS came together to share experiences, support each other with self-care guidance, discuss and dramatise the differ-



ent kinds of power at work in their lives, identify key challenges in their communities and, in the process, feel and use their personal and collective power.

Facilitator Hope Chigudu notes that “I have been reflecting on the circumstances of the women we have been meeting during the Malawi workshops, on how they live and how they cope with the changes in their lives in the context of HIV and AIDS. The more women we meet the more I see the vulnerability, fluidity and discontinuity of their lives but also how traditionally assigned roles give them the tools and the courage to reconstruct their lives especially after divorce or when their husbands die. Almost every woman who attends the workshops talks about the disruption of her life by HIV and AIDS but they also share stories of rebellion (crossing the line) and coming to terms with defying the cultural norms. I admire the way they learn to adapt and improvise in a hostile cultural environment, how they combine multiple commitments, how they recreate time beyond the 24 hrs we are used to, and how they manufacture the energy to engage in a mosaic of various survival strategies (even with failing health), resolving conflicting demands on their time, discovering new herbs for this and that opportunistic disease and coping with the new challenges created by ‘dislocation’. Most have re-tooled their skills to survive in new circumstances.”

“The young women, who experienced sex for the first time, at the age of 16-18, got infected but somehow brought all the fragments together, recomposed their lives and reinvented another story for themselves.”



Mzuzu



Lilongwe



Blantyre



“This Malawi experience has shown me gaps in our education system which does not prepare us for coping with unexpected possible shifts in our lives. We tend to assume that once we define our goals we live happily thereafter!”

**Going Forward**

Future workshops and activities will provide additional support and training to selected women activists, making use of popular education and other creative strategies, to help them to: 1) organize other women to work together in groups around a common vision for change and with concrete problems to solve; and 2) educate themselves and others to have the confidence and information to demand rights and resources, and to question social prejudice and taboos that prevent healthy living.

Down the road, economic strategies tied to political organizing and basic budget tracking (finding out how much is meant to come to community level) will be introduced as well as basics of human rights (including all the laws that Malawi has promised) and the African feminist charter will be introduced and applied.



Quick Facts about Malawi	
Population, total (millions).....	13.9
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births).....	76.1
Prevalence of HIV, total (% of pop. ages 15-49)...	13.3
Official Languages.....	Chichewa and English
Currency.....	Kwacha

