



JASS 2012

Annual Report

Strengthening and Sustaining Women's Collective Power for Justice

JASS

WHO

WE

ARE

AND

WHAT

WE DO



JASS (Just Associates) is dedicated to strengthening the voice, visibility, and collective organizing power of women to create a just, sustainable world for all. Our feminist movement-building and popular education strategies combine innovative learning, organizing, communications, and action to equip and energize activists and organizations, expand alliances, and mobilize women's movements for greater political influence and to ensure the safety of activists in an increasingly risky world.

Founded in 2002 as a community of practice by activists, popular educators, and scholars from 13 countries, JASS generates cutting-edge knowledge about power, movements, and change to shape theory, practice, and policies for advancing women's rights and democratic change. Working with women and diverse organizations in 27 countries, JASS' agile regional and international structure and processes are designed to support grassroots organizing as well as local-to-global solidarity and action, placing frontline activists and agendas at the heart of our social justice advocacy work.

JASS' holistic strategies empower women activists and strengthen women's movements by:

- **equipping activist leaders** from all walks of life with the confidence, information, skills, strategies, and connections they need to organize women for democratic change and to navigate risky contexts;
- **promoting and sustaining grassroots and local-to-global organizing** to build broad, flexible alliances that are responsive to urgencies and opportunities as well as rooted in the concrete demands of diverse women's constituencies;
- **mobilizing alliances for strategic political action** to engage and persuade governments and international actors to respond effectively to violations of women's rights and to advance gender equality and human rights;
- **maximizing women's use of media to amplify the visibility, appeal, and reach of women's rights agendas** and the role of women's movements in advancing democracy and justice; and
- **documenting and publishing knowledge from practice** – in multiple formats from videos to analysis to training tools – to contribute to smarter thinking and responses to inequality and women's rights challenges.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Two words come to mind when I think of 2012: **amplify and action**. The year opened with strategic opportunities and relationships that literally thrust us into action! In January, JASS hit the ground running with an ambitious fact-finding mission to Mesoamerica led by Nobel Peace Laureates, Jody Williams and Rigoberta Menchu Tum. Soon after, JASS and our partners in Malawi laid the groundwork to launch a national campaign for dignity, healthcare and quality antiretroviral (ARV) treatment, which garnered big commitments to women from the Minister of Health. We ended the year with One Day, One Voice, JASS Southeast Asia's campaign to make violence against women everyone's problem with simultaneous women-led actions, teach-ins and media activism in Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

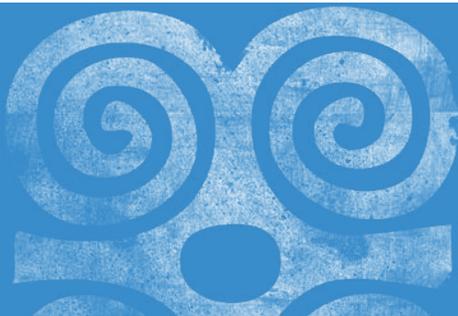
These strategies combined fresh analysis with the kind of organized citizen pressure it takes to be heard and heeded in public agendas dominated by moneyed interests and might. These efforts succeeded in drawing attention to women's positions on burning issues, such as land rights, impunity, healthcare, sexuality, and violence against activists. Above all, they shone a light on the voices and leadership of rural, indigenous, lesbian, young and many other kinds of leaders, and vividly demonstrated the ripple effect of women's collective power from the local to the global level.

But none of this happened overnight. It was the sustained investment in leadership development, organizing, alliance-building, and research that



really paid off. Together with our long-standing partners and allies around the world, we were able to seize critical opportunities to mobilize and speak out, not just to influence decision makers, but to change hearts and minds. And since power operates on so many different levels – *especially* reaching hearts and minds – that is an essential part of achieving durable social change. Information, slogans, and one-size-fits-all interventions are just not enough. JASS' behind-the-scenes organizing aims to promote alternative ways of seeing and building forms of power that can effectively challenge formal oppressive power and the violence that sustains it, as well as the underlying interests, institutions, and ideologies that marginalize and discriminate. What are these alternative forms of power that are vital in our work?

- **Power within ...** to dream, hope, forgive, and problem-solve. Without it, we don't speak out and step up. Sometimes we believe this is the most unstoppable form of power.



- **Power with ...** others – building solidarity out of reciprocity and love, knowing and respecting differences, and working together in an organized (or even disorganized) way for a common purpose and ideals.
- **Power to ...** change lives and make a difference in the world one step at a time; even the power to think, be silent, and resist the status quo.

These are the forms of power that women activists are tapping into as they step out of the margins to challenge their communities' views on sexuality, speak up to de-stigmatize HIV, rally to end tolerance for violence against women and LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) communities, expose the corruption of governments and corporate actors, and protect land and communities.

That said, our courageous allies are often carrying out this important work at great risk to themselves and their families. JASS staff – many of whom are also frontline activists – share that risk. Today, it's vital that we pay as much attention to activists' security and safety as we do to the amplifying and action!

The stories in this annual report are about *how* building and mobilizing these alternative forms of power in different pockets around the world can protect activists against violence and burnout, transform communities, and bring new thinking and solutions to the world's seemingly intractable problems. This year more than ever, we re-learned that stepping out and speaking up carries a multiplier effect, especially when we work alongside opinion leaders and influential friends who open doors and add weight.

I have to admit, though, our momentum in 2012 stretched us to the limit organizationally. And, it's easy to get frustrated knowing that there is so much more we could do to capitalize on the tremendous opportunities we have as an organization with access to local knowledge and insights, and the occasional ear of powerful global players. These growing pains pose difficult dilemmas about how to balance the macro and the micro of our work. How do we maintain our lean agility as we try to play so many roles on such limited resources? We look forward to sharing what we've learned in the next installment.

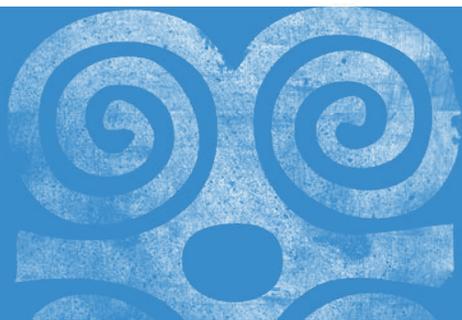
For now, we are most proud of the fact that we are building communities of hope that provide a sense of belonging and connection among very different women, men, and organizations.

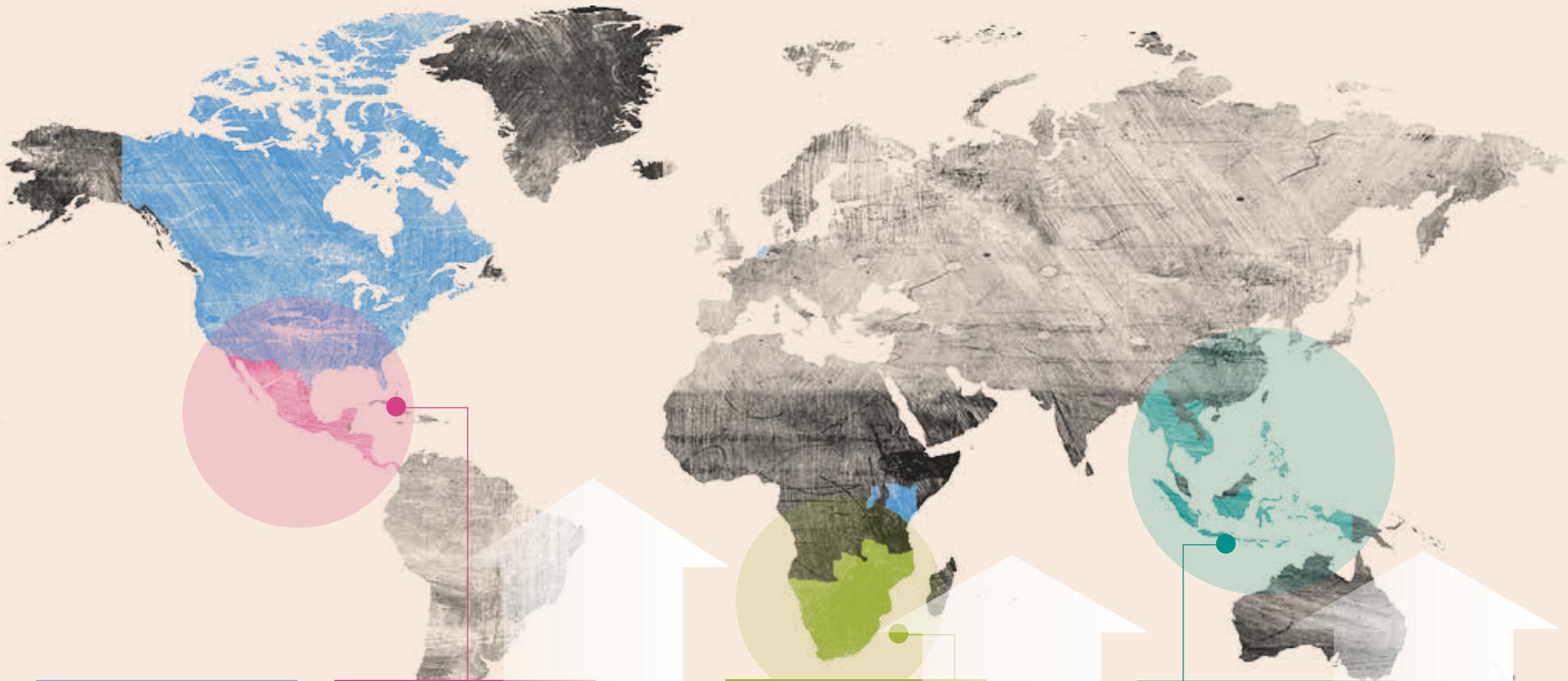
Thanks again for being part of our community, and for your interest, support, and commitment to making sure that women are co-leading the way to making the world a better place for everyone.

Onward and forward.



Lisa VeneKlasen
JASS Executive Director





OTHER PLACES

Canada
Kenya
The Netherlands
Uganda
USA

MESOAMERICA

Costa Rica
El Salvador
Guatemala
Honduras
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panama

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Botswana
Lesotho
Malawi
Mozambique
Namibia
South Africa
Swaziland
Zambia
Zimbabwe

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Cambodia
Indonesia
Malaysia
Myanmar
Philippines
Thailand
Timor L'Este

JASS AROUND THE WORLD ►►► PEOPLE, PROGRAMS, AND PLACES

2012 How do we capture what we did in 2012 in just 350 words? Should we just quantify it? But really, how do you quantify things like empowerment, awareness, activism, and hope? What formula could possibly measure a fundamental shift in the way a woman feels about herself and her ability to make a difference in the world?

But then we actually saw the numbers ... and it left us feeling really inspired by the fact that a small organization with terrific friends and allies could accomplish so much. It is a welcome reminder of why we do what we do. So, we hope the stories in this report do justice to the profound yet immeasurable work of JASS' community. And, here is what we can say with numbers ... in 2012 JASS:

- carried out **42** movement-building and training-of-trainers workshops, face-to-face and virtual strategic dialogues involving **1,285** activists and grassroots leaders from **22** countries;
- collaborated with more than **300** organizational allies through targeted outreach and joint actions to interpret and make noise around important events happening around the world;
- held more than **30** conversations and lobbying events with high-level

government officials and international human rights structures, ensuring women from the frontlines could get their concerns on the agenda;

- mobilized resources, public statements, and media in **13** urgent actions supporting women human rights defenders at risk, accompanied **6** women activists through emergency situations in Mesoamerica, and established two emergency activist support funds;
- equipped more than **25** women 'citizen journalists' and writers to document and publish **65** stories about women's courage and activism in our 'Women Crossing the Line' series;
- collected important analysis, insights, and stories from and with more than **1,100** women activists, including grassroots activists around the world, to produce reports that would inform the priorities and strategies of influential international bodies such as the UN Special Rapporteurs and UN-CEDAW Committee; and
- garnered more than **100** media 'hits' (stories, interviews in print, television and radio broadcast) generating knowledge about JASS' work.

2012

AT A

GLANCE





WELLBEING IS POLITICAL

Wellbeing, self-care, security. In an era of backlash against women's rights and continued and shifting forms of violence against women, these three words have resurfaced with new urgency and political creativity in both policymaking and women's rights activism. For JASS, the questions that must be answered in all our strategies, alliances and even internally are: how can we ensure that women's rights efforts are more influential, and how do we keep activists, their organizations, and our community safe? In this way, addressing burnout, developing safety protocols within our networks, and preparing for conflict are simply practical for promoting women's rights in the 21st century.

MESOAMERICA: FROM SURVIVORS TO DEFENDERS ▶▶▶

In Mexico and Central America, women's activism leads the way in advancing justice even as violence against women and women activists continues to rise at alarming rates. Rather than ensuring public safety, the deployment of the police, military and so-called 'security' forces, with millions of dollars in support from the US government, has only exacerbated the human rights crisis. It has enabled governments to 'justify' a crackdown on rights activists whom they accuse of terrorism and criminal behavior. Places such as Ciudad Juarez, Bajo Aguán, and Guatemala City have become synonymous with danger and femicide and yet women continue to mobilize communities courageously to demand democracy and an end to violence.



The war on drugs and increased militarization in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala are becoming a war on women."

NOBEL PEACE LAUREATE, JODY WILLIAMS

AMPLIFYING VOICES, GAINING INFLUENCE

Women's bodies have become the battleground in the struggle for power between organized crime, corrupt governments, and conservative religious groups bent on reversing women's rights gains. While women's rights activists are fully attuned to these dynamics, a comprehensive gendered analysis of insecurity and the situation of violence has been lacking in the media, in public policy and even in the programs of international human rights actors. To help fill this dangerous void, JASS Mesoamerica and our partners in the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IMD) produced the 2011 assessment report *Violence against Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica*, documenting and analyzing women's experiences on the frontlines fighting for justice.

Building on the report's findings, JASS teamed up with the Nobel Women's Initiative to organize a ten-day high-level fact-finding mission to Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala in late January 2012. Led by Nobel Peace Laureates Jody Williams and Rigoberta Menchú Tum, the delegation included

THE STATS

Mexico

- Over 45,000 troops are deployed domestically
- 7 out of 10 women experience violence in their lifetime
- A woman is raped or sexually assaulted every four minutes

Honduras

- Named "the murder capital of the world" in 2012 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC)
- On average a woman is murdered every day
- An increase of over 200% in recorded femicides since the 2009 coup d'état

Guatemala

- Over 600 femicides recorded in 2011; over 570 in 2012

JASS Executive Director, Lisa VeneKlasen, respected women journalists, filmmakers, performing artists, businesswomen, indigenous activists, and human rights advocates. The heart of the mission involved bearing witness and listening to both grassroots and grassroots activists, urban and rural, tell their stories of courage and pain. Over the course of the ten days, more than 200 women representing 85 diverse organizations and networks shared their stories and strategies with the delegation, establishing powerful global connections and seeding regional networks of solidarity that are crucial for the survival and safety of their movements.

BEARING WITNESS

As part of their mission, delegates met with a number of government officials, including President Porfirio Lobo of Honduras, President Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala, and Mexico's Attorney General Marisela Morales, to share the demands of frontline women activists. Following the mission and throughout 2012, JASS and the Nobel Women's Initiative continued to carry the demands and messages of hope from the brave women activists to human rights organizations, the media, and key policy officials – including members of the US Congress and staff of the State Department, as well as the Canadian Parliament and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Men and women human rights defenders confront serious risks and are constantly threatened. The demand for justice has brought devastating and irreparable consequences for those who document abuses and issue public complaints.”

ALMA GOMEZ, CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN, CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO

Breaking the myth that such women are ‘caught in the crossfire’ of conflict between government and organized crime, the delegation emphasized that both governments and non-state actors are systematically committing crimes against women, and governments are often complicit with organized criminal activity, at times using it as a means of social control. They also highlighted the fact that impunity remains the greatest challenge to combating the rise

in violence against women. Approximately 95% of crimes go unpunished in the three countries. Thirty-five women human rights defenders have been murdered since 2010 and not one individual has been arrested or prosecuted for these murders.

The delegation’s report – *Survivors to Defenders: women confronting violence in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala* – included recommendations to the governments of Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Canada, and the US. Its release drew the attention of dozens of international media outlets, such as Al-Jazeera, National Public Radio (NPR-US), BBC, and CNN, as well as hundreds of regional local news agencies in all three countries. Women activists across the region continue to build on this recognition and visibility to gain wider legitimacy for their analysis and demands, and for their strategies to engage with institutions such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the United Nations Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN-CEDAW) Committee.

BACK TO THE FUTURE



For Lisa and Jody, the journey drew upon a history of working together for peace and justice, both in the region and as campaigners in the US, throughout the 1980s. Fast-forward to 2013: the overt remilitarization and questionable role of the US in supporting corrupt and undemocratic governments in a futile attempt to control the situation through violence seemed all too familiar. As part of their activism in the 1980s, Jody and Lisa co-organized and led dozens of fact-finding missions with US opinion leaders believing that face-to-face encounters between people are the best way to inspire political and social change. Those trips often transformed their participants into passionate, clear-eyed critics of US policy and committed influential advocates for peace.

Another lesson that Lisa and Jody learned – and that both JASS and the Nobel Women’s Initiative share – is the importance of taking the lead from the people and organizations on the ground. The Laureates’ visit afforded them key insights from the frontlines and enabled them to better understand how to strengthen the work and organization of Mesoamerican women. To achieve this, the delegation built on the extensive organizing efforts and relationships of JASS Mesoamerica, whose deep change work in the region since 2006 has forged a platform of political trust among a broad cross-section of women activists and organizations.

JASS Mesoamerica co-organized host committees in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala with over 17 national and local organizations and networks spanning

a wide variety of issues. These committees were crucial to ensuring that the delegation met not only with well-known women activists or only those from the capital cities, but also with grassroots women leaders from different parts of each country.

Many of the women activists travelled from far-flung villages to tell their stories for the first time to an international audience. Few had previously considered themselves to be human rights defenders. For a prominent figure such as a Nobel Laureate to hear and recognize their years of pain and suffering – and connect with the women as sister activists – validated the importance of their activism and affirmed their identity as *defensoras*. As many pointed out, to be heard and to have their stories carried to other parts of the world and shared with others, gave them the hope they needed to carry on.



“They testified to human rights violations in their own lives and the lives of those they love. They talked about the chains of the past and their dreams for their future and their daughters’ futures...[T]hese acts of speaking out, of defiant tears, of bearing witness to silent wrongs and personal rebellions, inspired us all.” **SURVIVORS TO DEFENDERS REPORT**

SOUTHERN AFRICA: STRENGTHENING ACTIVISTS, STRENGTHENING MOVEMENTS ▶▶▶

Witnessing the extraordinary organizing and political skills of Zimbabwean women, it is hard to imagine the high levels of violence to which they have been subjected over more than a decade of extreme political insecurity, repression, and economic instability. During the 2008 elections, 380 rapes were committed by 214 perpetrators against 70 victims ranging from five-year-old girls to elderly grandmothers, according to research by AIDS Free World. It is hoped that future elections will be peaceful, but violence, safety and security remain crucial concerns for women activists.

In daily life, Zimbabwean women continue to experience violence, unlawful arrest, torture, and disappearances. Women are strategically targeted by the police under the Criminal Law Act (2004), a far-reaching piece of legislation covering national security to areas of so-called 'public morality' such as abortion, HIV transmission, prostitution, and witchcraft. Women are often arrested for solicitation or loitering and in some cases harassed for dressing in ways deemed provocative. "It's about policing women's bodies," says Winnet Shamuyarira, a feminist activist.

SELF-CARE AS A RESOURCE

There is a pressing need for safe spaces for women to escape the intensity of their world and to talk about their experiences of repression. In this way, they deal with the trauma, fear and even guilt, in order to renew their spirits and recoup the sense of hope they need to survive and continue. Unfortunately, women activists tend to sacrifice their wellbeing – physical, emotional, and mental – for the sake of the cause. Ultimately, this limits their capacity and the capacity of their organizations to continue organizing



They want to control what I do with my body. I am a citizen of Zimbabwe yet I'm unable to exercise the same rights as a man. You see a lot of men milling around, but no one touches them. I was arrested because I am a woman."

WINNET SHAMUYARIRA OF KATSWE SISTAHOOD HAS BEEN ARRESTED THREE TIMES SINCE 2001



for justice and dignity. Self-care and safety are necessary if activists are to sustain the hope and sense of purpose that enables them to be an effective democracy activist and navigate a violent context.

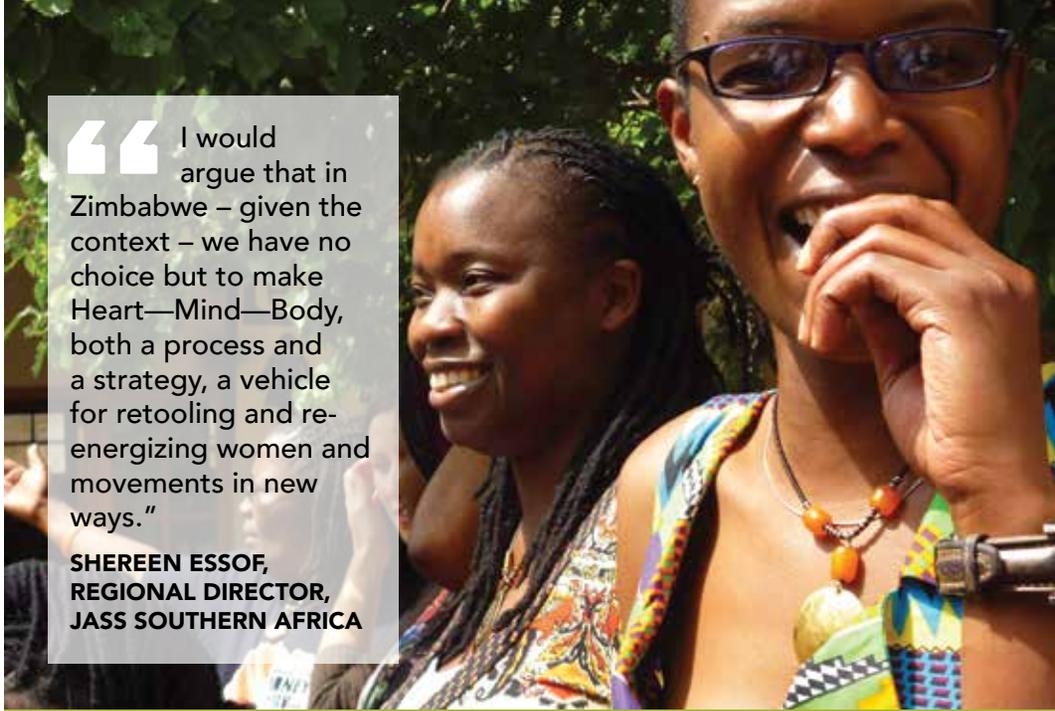
In 2011, JASS Southern Africa and Musasa Project pioneered the Heart—Mind—Body Initiative in Zimbabwe. It emphasizes the critical issues of wellbeing, self-care, and renewal as means to sustain women's important organizing efforts in a tricky political context polarized by years of partisan fighting. Women must leave their conflicting affiliations and organizations at the door as they enter to retool, re-energize, and rebuild. The second Wellbeing Circle, held in September 2012 in Harare, built on the first, and opened up a safe space for activists to share and reflect on their histories, the work they do, challenges they face, and the strategies they use individually and organizationally. The four-day process gathered a diverse group of women from Zimbabwe including LGBTI activists, HIV organizers, sex-workers, young women, and political activists. For many who have been part of the circles, 'wellbeing' is seen as an essential strategy for re-building movements frayed by the harsh context. The reflection and analysis process affirms each person while mending and strengthening the connections between women that have been fragmented along with the social fabric. Women leave renewed for their work and organizing tasks ahead, with a clearer shared vision and deeper understanding holding them together.

RESISTANCE AND SOLIDARITY

Faced with repeated arrests, raids, and harassment by the police, the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) released an Urgent Action appeal in 2012, calling for action to end state-sponsored violence. Organizing alongside LGBTI activists, JASS engaged its international network to spotlight this violence and intimidation, in addition to supporting Wellbeing Circles. For brave LGBTI activists who face acute forms of hate, stigma, and rejection from their families and communities for just being themselves, Wellbeing Circles are a lifeline, enabling them to recover their sense of dignity and optimism, and to recognize their own importance in making the world a better place. This resilience is essential to their effectiveness and survival as citizen activists.

In 2012, the Wellbeing Circle provided an important way to build solidarity between women who have seldom if ever organized together before: sex workers, LGBTI women, young women, church-goers, and grassroots activists.

With activism, you often feel like you're running up a steep incline, with no time to rest, reflect and regroup.



“ I would argue that in Zimbabwe – given the context – we have no choice but to make Heart—Mind—Body, both a process and a strategy, a vehicle for retooling and re-energizing women and movements in new ways.”

**SHEREEN ESSOF,
REGIONAL DIRECTOR,
JASS SOUTHERN AFRICA**

“ I came here feeling like I would not belong. I was very nervous because women look badly on sex workers. But here in the circle I have found my space and my hope, I spoke to a lawyer and she helped me. I came here with a heavy heart and spoke to a counselor who helped. I did not know this circle would give me a chance and change for my life.”

MEMORY, SEX WORKER AND ACTIVIST, HARARE, ZIMBABWE

“ It is sometimes hard to understand a [intersexed] person like me. People always run away from me. But here you accept me as I am, I feel at home. It is with the circles that I started thinking about my life, that I have friends, and that there are things that are possible for me.”

LGBTI ACTIVIST, SEXUAL RIGHTS CENTER, BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE

“ The circles really make me understand myself more and it has given me so much in terms of people understanding me ... here we can see that the LGBTI movement is not only about LGBTI but about and for everyone, for all our rights and for a better just world.”

LESBIAN ACTIVIST, SEXUAL RIGHTS CENTER, BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE

SOUTHEAST ASIA: WOMEN PUSH BACK ►►►

Vast networks of young Southeast Asian women activists are taking action, even as fundamental social and religious agendas and groups are gaining ground in the region. Conservative religious leaders from all religions wield considerable influence on governmental policy. Women around the region are experiencing a pushback against gains in reproductive rights and basic freedoms, as conservative ideas of 'family values' dominate and taboos on sex and sexuality are reinforced. So, talking and learning about sex and sexuality – a critical aspect of how JASS Southeast Asia strengthens young women's leadership – is an act of rebellion and a noteworthy strategy of resistance, supported by the internet and other forms of access to alternative perspectives.

YOUNG WOMEN ORGANIZE

December 2012 marked the formation of Forum Aktivist Perempuan Muda (FAMM) Indonesia or Young Indonesian Women Activists' Forum. Composed of JASS-Indonesia activists, FAMM is a loose network of 162 young grassroots women who have been active since JASS Southeast Asia began creating much-needed spaces in 2007. It was in Indonesia (and Timor L'Este) that the first JASS movement-building institute for Southeast Asia was held. In the country's increasingly repressive cultural climate, JASS' capacity-building activities for young women leaders – skills trainings, dialogues, write-shops, and tech exchanges – sparked and shaped a surge of young women's activism and organizing.

A HISTORY OF STRONG INDONESIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Movement) or GERWANI was one of the largest women's organizations in history. Born out of nationalist struggles, GERWANI had more than a million women members in the 1960s. During the Suharto regime, GERWANI women were imprisoned, raped and even killed. Although the organization was eventually banned, its legacy as a trailblazer lives on.

SMS BLAST

In recent years, Aceh Province in Indonesia has sought to introduce legislation to stone adulterers, flog homosexuals, and ban women from wearing tight trousers. Now, a proposed by-law in Lhokseumawe city in Aceh would ban women from straddling the seat of a motorbike behind a male driver. Women should sit side-saddle, which is deemed more proper, even though it is actually more dangerous, activists contend, as one cannot sit in this position safely for long periods. In response, FAMM-Indonesia launched an SMS Blast, using text messaging to urge the regency (local authority) to halt the passage of the by-law.



“Rape is the woman's fault. They do it for fun and then the girl alleges that it's rape.”

INDONESIAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION

“There is no need for a women's movement in Malaysia.”

**MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER NAJIB RAZAK, WHO IS ALSO
MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

FAMM-Indonesia's vision is to develop the next generation of women's rights leadership. FAMM continues to collaborate with JASS to carry out training institutes and dialogues across generations of feminists. Capacities such as organization-building, budgets and financial management are developed along with communications, political facilitation, critical thinking, political strategy, and coalition-building. Taking actions like the SMS Blast campaign in Aceh Province is only the beginning.

Indonesian women are fighting to halt the reversal of the women's movement's gains. Through its role in advancing FAMM-Indonesia, JASS is propelling vocal young women into the public realm and building young women's movements in the country. And, if the determination of the young women of FAMM-Indonesia is any indication, watch out!



We want to create a space where women from various generations can share their resources, where young women take the lead, and where the skills and capacity of young women are strengthened."

NIKEN LESTARI, FAMM-INDONESIA NATIONAL COORDINATOR





PROFILE

RUDO CHIGUDU

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Rudo Chigudu has spent an entire dry-hot Harare day running a workshop of 20 women by herself, switching effortlessly between English and Shona, and leading women in familiar chants – Sister? Sister! – that bring each one to her feet. The workshop is the first step in Katswe’s efforts to ground their movement-building work, creating opportunities for women to analyze their lived experience and their context and organize to transform their lives and communities. This process begins by asking questions: What are the stories we are telling with our lives? What are the stories we have been told? How can we take ownership of our own stories to empower ourselves?

Katswe creates safe spaces called *pachoto*, meaning ‘by the fireside’ in Shona, a traditional venue for storytelling. Across Harare, women in low income housing and informal settlements gather to share stories and find their voices. From the fireside, they move into action.

JASS’ Maggie Mapondera spoke with Rudo Chigudu about her journey as an activist.

Rudo, what is your current role at Katswe?

I’m the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Coordinator at Katswe, a young feminist organization in Zimbabwe. We’ve set out to push the boundaries on taboo issues around sexual rights and women’s bodies. We must speak about our sexuality freely. Women die because they are embarrassed to name their body parts at hospitals. A woman may not say no to sex because she is embarrassed to tell her partner that she’s feeling uncomfortable. We can only end rape if we can name our private parts confidently because in the court room one is expected to describe the act using this kind of language. The failure to do so may stand between women and justice.

What is your reading of the sphere of women’s organizing in Zimbabwe today and where does Katswe fit in?

Not many organizations are doing this kind of work on the issues we are tackling. There is some strong resistance to the work we do, due to cultural and religious beliefs. Some people simply refuse to participate in these kinds of conversations, saying it’s taboo, it’s westernized, or that, this cannot be discussed by women. Our meetings, *pachotos*, are private, giving women the platform to speak without anyone prying. But that is not enough. We take these concerns into the community in the form of theatre.

When I came back to Zimbabwe in 2008 young women were crossing borders to buy and sell, getting on planes to go to China to order things. A movement of women for survival was in existence, but with no connection to the women’s NGOs. So, that’s the context we want to shift.

We are divided around issues of age. People say, “Let the young women talk about the vaginas because they are the shameless ones”. Divisions exist along class lines too – a woman who has access to pads and tampons and moon cups isn’t concerned that there’s a young woman somewhere too embarrassed to move because she has left a stain on a chair. Urban–rural, privileged–under-privileged, older–younger, party politics–civil society: these distinctions continue to divide women. As Katswe, we are seen as a movement of ‘young women’, even though some are working on economic empowerment, others on sexuality. We have to keep our eye on the ball because patriarchy continues to morph into different forms while we are distracted by unimportant things.

How did you become an activist?

I never really thought of myself as a frontline activist until I found myself in deep trouble because I’d spoken up about injustices against lesbian women in Zimbabwe. That’s when I discovered that the work I was doing was dangerous and was compromising my personal safety and security. In 2012, I performed a vagina monologue at the UN in New York on the rape of a Zimbabwean lesbian who hadn’t been able to access justice because of the high level of homophobia that exists. The piece was taken to be challenging the state, accusing them of not observing human rights. When you know something’s wrong, you say something because you can’t be silent. The idea of ‘security’ only comes later. I gave the performance before Zimbabwe submitted its CEDAW report, so the timing was ... inflammatory.

What kind of risks do you face in your everyday life?

There are loads of risks. Anyone seen to be organizing groups of people gets watched by the police. I’ve been told they know where my children are. Things like that make you a little afraid. But you could also get picked up for supposedly loitering because you’re a woman walking in the street at the ‘wrong’ time. Once they have you and discover you’re a woman activist, they’re out to prove their power. So you can get called in for loitering, but end up in bigger trouble when they start digging into who you are.

What does this mean for women, given that Zimbabwe is soon going into elections?

The election process has been very violent for women in the past. Many women have been left numb or paralyzed by that experience and that has compromised our ability to prepare for future national processes. We’ve been promised by our leaders that there would be no violence but there’s a real fear that most women won’t participate in the elections.

How does the JASS’ Heart—Mind—Body process support your work?

I was talking about that in the training today, because I think that facilitators of community groups need to understand that the struggles in their personal lives are the same as those of the women they’re working with. The moment people feel safe enough to open up, a lot of things come out – you get people breaking down in sessions. Their struggles sit with you; you carry them home. So you need a way to support other people but also protect yourself, otherwise you will burn out.



Saying the word ‘vagina’ in Shona is considered shameful in itself. Re-learning how to claim parts of our bodies as our own is a vital step in a strategy to politicize women’s personal experiences.”

RUDO CHIGUDU

If done effectively, organizing packs a lot of punch. It unleashes and empowers activists and leaders, it surfaces and generates knowledge about common heartfelt problems, and finally, it begins to weave relationships essential for joint strategies and action to address those problems. Today, after several years of lighting the spark, the networks that have formed are mobilizing to change beliefs and pressure governments to be accountable from the community to the global level. Community activists and movements on the frontline activate the global community of JASS to support their agenda.

FROM

ORGANIZING

TO ACTION

SOUTHERN AFRICA: WOMEN STAND UP AND SPEAK OUT ▶▶▶

More than 150 HIV-positive women activists sit forward on the edge of their seats in the stuffy conference room of a hotel in Lilongwe, Malawi, at the MANERELA+ (Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living With or Affected by HIV and AIDS) and JASS National Women's Dialogue. In the center of the circle of women, a representative from the Malawi Ministry of Health presents government policy on HIV and AIDS and antiretroviral therapy (ART). But the women have not come from all corners of the country, some travelling for days, to sit silent. Woman after woman stands up to challenge the Ministry representative, asking why they do not have access to quality ARVs with fewer side effects, why health officials treat women without respect, why adequate testing equipment and side-effect management are not in place, and how the government plans to ensure resources for sustained access to quality ARVs. They share moving stories of their own experiences of sickness, stigma, and violence due to their HIV status and they demand accountability: What is the government going to do? This kind of dialogue was unimaginable only three and a half years ago.

Almost 60% of the estimated 924,800 Malawians living with HIV are women. The current ART regimen (provided free of charge by the government) causes multiple and serious side effects due to an outdated drug called Stavudine. The visible physical deformities caused by Stavudine include shrunken buttocks, loss of fat in the face, arms, legs and buttocks, and prominent veins in the limbs. These changes lead to stigma and discrimination. Many HIV-positive women are unable to afford alternative ART or nutritious food and cannot get information about treatment and quality healthcare that make treatment effective and lasting.

“The current ARV package in Malawi is rotten pie. And it is the women who are eating the biggest chunk of that rotten pie.”
TIWONGE GONDWE, WOMAN ACTIVIST, MALAWI

“When I was interviewed for television, they asked if I wanted to be described as an HIV-positive activist or as a feminist advocate. I said they must write my name and say that I am a feminist and that I am HIV-positive.”
MIRRIAM MUNTHALI, WOMAN ACTIVIST, MALAWI





FROM 'POWER WITHIN' TO 'POWER TO'

“ Through the movement-building process with JASS, I have found my voice and my power within and am able to use my voice on all the issues that affect women in my community. I became a woman activist.”

KWANGU TEMBO MAKHUWIRA, COWLHA, MALAWI

A campaign – ‘Our Bodies, Our Lives: The Fight for Better ARVs’ – was launched in October 2012 at the National Women’s Dialogue, a product of a four-year organizing effort by JASS and MANERELA+ that mobilized hundreds of women around the country. The campaign grew out of an organizing process where women came to realize that their bodies *matter* and that by activating their ‘power within’ and building solidarity and organization, they can change their situation.

To help break the stigma of HIV, JASS Southern Africa created safe spaces to give community activists from rural and urban areas the opportunity to share experiences, identify common challenges and develop collective solutions. JASS built partnerships and networks with HIV-positive women’s groups – including Women’s Forum, the Coalition for Women Living with HIV/AIDS (COWLHA), Women for Fair Development (WOFAD), and Paradiso TB Trust – as well as with the progressive religious network, MANERELA+. The result is a coalition that weaves together an unusual combination of networks of HIV activists, community and religious leaders who share great hope and a feminist movement-building perspective. The campaign that has emerged from this organizing effort designed its own *chitenge* (a traditional wrap worn by women), which features the symbols of JASS, women’s rights, the AIDS ribbon, and the MANERELA+ logo – the dove/holy spirit – in a potent combination aimed at reaching out and moving many hearts to support their fight.

The National Women’s Dialogue in Lilongwe was timed to take advantage of the unexpected democratic opening and opportunity with the new President, Joyce Banda, to put the spotlight on the issues facing HIV-positive women.

Representatives of the Ministry of Health and key civil-society actors were invited to listen and give their input. Held at the same time as the Global Race to Save Lives from HIV and AIDS Conference, the Dialogue enabled women activists to gain visibility and create new networks of solidarity across religions and other differences. The women activist leaders who had steered the movement-building process from 2008, when JASS began the organizing process, led the formulation of a list of demands. These were presented to the Minister of Health, who made a commitment to be accountable to the women and to ensure the availability of the drug Bactrim.

WOMEN DEMAND BETTER ARVs NOW

Women are poised to continue pressuring the government to follow through on its commitments. While the Ministry of Health committed to roll-out alternative and less toxic ARVs by July 2013, there are still many obstacles, including a lack of money in government coffers. Aware of the other intervening actors involved – such as international donors and pharmaceutical companies – women activists are continuing to gather information, seek allies and strengthen relationships as they fight for quality ART and for comprehensive treatment literacy for all Malawians.

“ We pay a lot of taxes and we are sick, so we are challenging the government to ensure a sustainable ART regimen regardless of whether donors are here or not. We also need the government to make sure that positive women can have their own resources such as savings loans and fertilizers. It’s our responsibility to fight for these things.”

SIBONGILE SINGINI, WOMAN ACTIVIST, MANERELA+, MALAWI

SOUTHEAST ASIA: SOWING THE SEEDS OF FEMINISM IN CAMBODIA

When you consider the painful history of Cambodia, the invisible story of systematic violence against women and the cultural pressures on young women to remain silent, the existence and energy of the JASS-inspired Cambodian Young Women's Empowerment Network (CYWEN) is nothing but astounding. CYWEN was formed in October 2010 following a national-level leadership training process carried out by JASS Southeast Asia in 2009 to address the under-representation of women's voices and issues in media and public debate.

As one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, poverty and gender inequality go hand-in-hand. Maternal mortality, low literacy levels, violence, trafficking, and unsafe migration blight the lives of many Cambodian women, while traditional conceptions of the family hold that women cannot do anything besides housework. Gender stereotypes and inequalities are reinforced by the *Chbab Srey* (Women's Law), a moral code that is still taught to young girls as part of the school curriculum. Young people in rural areas lack education and economic options, but are especially vulnerable to trafficking and to exploitation if they migrate to neighboring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia for opportunities.

Since the political changes that began in 2001, equality efforts have gained momentum and official endorsement, although the gap between rhetoric and reality remains wide. For example, freedom of expression – a critical ingredient for democracy and rights to flourish – is still limited in Cambodia. Criticism of the government can often lead to arrest. Activists seeking to protect vulnerable groups or natural resources have even been shot.

STARTING A YOUNG WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Referring to the initial JASS movement-building gathering in Parapat, Indonesia in 2007, founding Chair of CYWEN (and current Program Coordinator for JASS Southeast Asia), Chan Kunthea says, "My idea to set up CYWEN was to apply the knowledge and excitement I gained from JASS and share it with other young women. We used some of the methods and concepts from Parapat in the first Cambodia workshop, especially the story telling which very much inspired us." Influenced by the JASS international and



The Cambodian young women's movement? It is starting now, with CYWEN."

CHAN KUNTHEA, PROGRAM COORDINATOR, JASS SOUTHEAST ASIA

regional meetings, Kunthea and another founder, Vanna Chey, re-convened participants from this first Cambodian movement-building institute in 2010. There, they began to organize as a network, with a name, vision, mission and strategy. "CYWEN started as a very informal group with members who are personal friends who care deeply about contributing to a more democratic and just Cambodia. During the discussion with the team in 2010, we analyzed the challenges and opportunities facing Cambodian youth, especially young women."

As an alliance of 30 young Cambodian women activists devoted to strengthening young women's leadership, CYWEN has made big strides in less than three years of existence. For example, in Cambodia, CYWEN led JASS Southeast Asia's annual regional campaign to end violence against women,

'One Day, One Voice'. Building up to this campaign, CYWEN held a series of outreach activities in urban poor communities and garment workers' factories in Phnom Penh. They discussed rape, domestic violence, and migration. The outreach served a double purpose: CYWEN was able to raise awareness with 200 women while CYWEN members learned a great deal about how other women live and what some of the important community issues are. As part of the campaign, CYWEN also organized a forum on the 'Importance of Participation in the Elections', gathering 300 young people – mostly girls and women from high schools and universities – to create a space for young women to share ideas and understand the importance of voting in bringing about change and building political influence.

GEARING UP FOR THE FUTURE

Step by step, the alliance is becoming established as a reputable source for the perspectives and concerns of young Cambodian women. Sophoan Chan, the new chair of CYWEN, has already been featured on national TV news stations and local radio shows, speaking out on violence against women, women's rights, women in politics, trafficking of women, youth participation in elections, and even responsible citizen's tax payments. Other

CYWEN members have been invited to government-NGO dialogues as resource persons on violence against women, human rights, youth for gender equality, and information and communications technology (ICT). They also represent the country in regional civil-society gatherings to influence the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), such as the November 2012 ASEAN People's Forum (APF) and the ASEAN Grassroots People's Assembly (AGPA) held in Phnom Penh. In the coming years, CYWEN remains devoted to networking, holding regular meetings and dialogues, maximizing the use of social media, team building, and advocacy through radio, newspapers and public dialogue.

Young people are said to be catalysts for change, and the young women of CYWEN are rapidly sowing the seeds of feminism and democratic change in Cambodia. Many young women are still hesitant about participating in the network and political discussions, which is understandable given the dangers activists who challenge the government face. However, with information, confidence, and opportunity, more women are joining. And as the alliance grows, CYWEN will continue to draw on JASS training and approaches to build these young activists' capacity, leadership, and organization toward building a broad-based, sustainable movement for women's human rights.



CYWEN's role is to mobilize young women as a network all over the country to work on common interests. Working together also builds young women's confidence to join in changing society's perceptions of women and to increase women's participation in decision-making."

SOPHOAN CHAN, CYWEN CHAIR

CYWEN members Nim Sopheap, Chap Chandina, and Lay Ratana discuss 'Mothers' on Women's Day on Radio FM 95.7.



MESOAMERICA: ▶▶▶ TURNING TO THE UN TO PROTECT ACTIVISTS



Violence against women human rights defenders and women journalists reinforces and feeds a climate of discrimination and puts democracy at risk. The Mexican government's pretense of protecting us is having a deadly effect on the lives of women whose struggles are fundamental to ensure equality."

MARGARITA MARTINEZ, HEALTH PROMOTER, MEXICO

As Mexico faces a major human rights and humanitarian crisis, women are coming together in extraordinary ways to support each other to engage global institutions in the quest to make their governments end the violence. More than 60,000 women, men, and children have been killed and thousands more have disappeared or been displaced since 2006 when the US-backed 'war on drugs' was launched. The gendered aspects of this growing crisis remain largely invisible. Neither human rights organizations nor governments fully grasp the mix of private and public dynamics shaping crimes against women and the unique vulnerability of women activists.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has criticized the Mexican government and its officials for the culture of discrimination that ignores violence against women, particularly against indigenous, young, migrant, poor, and lesbian women as well as human rights defenders who demand change. There were more than 69 registered cases of violence against women defenders in 2012 alone, and more than 25 have been murdered since 2009.

BRIDGING DIVIDES, MOBILIZING FOR SAFETY

One strategy of JASS Mesoamerica is to mobilize alliances to persuade governments to respond to this worsening context. In July 2012, JASS Mesoamerica and its allies CIMAC, Consorcio Oaxaca and the Women's Roundtable of Juarez, and the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Mexico presented on the violence they are facing as women activists to the UN-CEDAW Committee in New York. Together, and with the support of the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative



WHO IS A DEFENSORA?

Defensoras are women who contribute to their communities and countries – community leaders, trade unionists, feminists, and mothers – in seeking justice for their communities. Prior to working with the IMD and sister networks in Honduras and Guatemala, most would not have called themselves 'women human rights defenders', and many were skeptical about human rights and its 'failed promises'. While often working in isolation or facing social stigma for speaking out, the act of claiming the title of *defensora* has helped them acknowledge the risks they face because of their vital service to their country and take measures to protect themselves. Through the training and information the networks provide, the *defensoras* have learned how to access national, regional, and international human rights tools and mechanisms that explicitly protect human rights defenders and journalists, and often provide protection and funds to women activists.

(IMD), these groups led a delegation of seven women activists and journalists to report on the violence against women defenders and journalists in Mexico, a topic CEDAW had never explicitly addressed. More than 20 women representing more than 113 human rights organizations in Mexico attended the session.

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST VIOLENCE

A particularly inspiring and courageous member of the defenders' delegation was Margarita Martinez, a community health and education promoter working with indigenous women in Chiapas. Since 2009, Margarita has been threatened, continuously attacked, detained twice, and tortured by various actors, including the local police force bent on stopping her community activism.

As she boarded the plane to New York to share her story before the CEDAW Committee, her family received death threats. JASS Mesoamerica and allies came together to protect her family while she was in the US and have been on high alert since her return to Mexico. JASS Mesoamerica has accompanied Margarita through her case, as with many other women activists who, at great risk to themselves and their families' lives, protect the rights of their communities.

PLACING DEFENSORAS ON THE CEDAW AGENDA

Getting Margarita's case and the issue of violence against women defenders and journalists to the already full list of women's rights demands to be presented to the CEDAW Committee by prominent women's rights groups was not a simple task. JASS played a big role in a complex mediation with the diverse representatives of Mexican human rights organizations, and after a lengthy discussion, all agreed to place women defenders and journalists as one of five priorities for the Committee to consider, and for Margarita to

be one of three spokespeople. Behind-the-scenes negotiation and careful alliance-building not only forged an integrated agenda for the presentation, but also a new set of partners in a growing women's alliance throughout Mexico.

CEDAW Committee members grilled Mexican government representatives concerning the situation of women human rights defenders in general and Margarita's case in particular, but the state refused to address the subject.

The shadow report to the CEDAW Committee, *Violence against Women Human Rights Defenders and Journalists*, prepared by JASS Mesoamerica and allies provided a sharp analysis of the gendered nature of violence against women activists, and succeeded in generating the first-ever specific recommendation by the CEDAW Committee to the state of Mexico on the situation of violence against women defenders and journalists.

The success of JASS Mesoamerica's strategy with the CEDAW Committee tapped into the many unique strategic features of JASS. For example, the influential role of JASS' senior advisor, Alda Facio, was critical. She found ways for JASS staff to make their case compellingly and sometimes, unofficially through hallway lobbying to key Committee members. Without the personal support and involvement that Margarita has with JASS' team and other members of the National Defenders Network in Mexico, she may not have had the courage to speak out.



PROFILE

MARGARITA MARTINEZ

MESOAMERICA

As an educator and community leader with limitless energy, Margarita Martinez's courage and personality touches all those who meet her. Because of her human rights work, promoting health and education with indigenous and rural women in Mexico, Margarita and her family have been continuously threatened and attacked. Despite the risks, she has stood up to those who want to silence her – she has become a women human rights defender and a true inspiration. In an interview with a journalist working with JASS, Laura Carlsen, Margarita shares her story.



On November 8, 2009, at 3:30 in the morning, some 50 armed men raided Margarita's home in the southern Mexico state of Chiapas. Identifying themselves as police, they held her, her husband and her children at gunpoint, presenting no official identification or search warrant. Margarita and her husband, who both work as health and rights promoters in indigenous communities, filed a complaint against the police for torture and abuse of authority. After that, they began to receive anonymous threats.

On February 25, 2010, the threats became reality. *"I was illegally held, tortured, raped, attacked physically and psychologically, and threatened with death if we continued to press the case,"* Margarita told the JASS-Nobel Women's Initiative delegation on January 22, 2012. With the help of JASS, Margarita risked her life to present her case to the CEDAW Committee in New York and presented a report on attacks on women human rights defenders in Mexico. Committee members questioned the Mexican government pointedly about her case and about the impunity granted to police and other security forces when they violate women. The Committee ended up citing non-compliance with the Convention on the part of the Mexican government and recommending increased efforts to defend women human rights defenders. Margarita's case is far from resolved. She lives in danger, despite having been granted precautionary protection measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The government is trying to close the case, saying she failed to identify her attackers (she had a plastic bag over her head at the time). To date, no one has been arrested for any of the crimes committed against Margarita and her family.



During the moments of the attack, I was a victim. But by taking on my case and that of my family, I'm a human rights defender. A lot of people don't like that – they wanted to make me a victim. But when the last thing you have is your dignity, and you defend it, you're transformed into a defender."

MARGARITA MARTINEZ

Margarita describes how her experience with JASS was a turning point. *"When I met JASS I was ready to throw in the towel. It seemed like an absurd struggle and I'd lost so much – my home, my job, even my relationship with my kids,"* says Margarita. *"A hug, a kiss, an encouraging glance that says you're not alone – that's what's kept me going – that and finding other women who have the same goal of defending our own rights and the rights of others."* Despite everything she's been through, she dreams of returning to her full-time work with indigenous women.

BRIDGES

AND

'MESHWORKS'





MAKING BIG IDEAS PRACTICAL: WEBS OF ACTIVISM

BY JASS BOARD CO-CHAIR, SRILATHA BATLIWALA

JASS is excited to begin reframing our vision of movement-building and our very structure as an organization around Colombian anthropologist, Arturo Escobar's notion of "movement meshworks"¹

– an idea that is deeply resonant with our history and evolution. Escobar defines meshworks as webs of activism where social movements and networks of activism of various kinds, sharing broadly similar social, economic and political ideologies, begin to act together more synergistically and purposefully, moving in and out of strategic spaces and engagements. The uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa in the Arab Spring are good examples of such meshworks.

This concept speaks very clearly to the community JASS holds together across many borders, as well as what JASS does and the way it works. We are engaged in feminist movement-building – which means that we bring feminist thinking to the way that we organize and mobilize women around an analysis of the heartfelt needs and interests they define. Forging common cause across many organizational and sectoral differences as well as the divides of ethnicity, age, location, class, sexuality and more, we work to weave a shared political agenda that offers solutions to problems and a vision for change. In this process, we inspire women's sense of hope and citizen activism, and build women's leadership to pursue collective strategies for change.² But we work in diverse locations and political contexts, with a diversity of marginalized women, and around different issues and interests. Our aim is to weave these disparate – and often isolated – struggles into a larger web and community to provide a sense of belonging that women activists long for, build their strength and visibility, and create a greater impact, over time, than any single movement can achieve on its own. Our work and how we do it builds community and seeks to mend the frayed social fabric.

So while JASS works in many countries and communities in Mesoamerica, Southeast Asia, Southern Africa and at the global level, with constituencies of women as diverse as indigenous women and LGBTI activists, HIV-positive women in poor rural communities, economically and socially vulnerable single women, and young women activists, there are certain fundamental cross-cutting personal and political experiences and struggles for rights that weave us all into a single web. These include violence of different kinds, such as femicide and attacks on women human rights defenders; the lack of voice and influence in shaping the policies and services that affect the daily lives of our constituents; displacement from traditional lands and livelihoods; and the right to resources to ensure livelihoods and basic wellbeing. Our movement-building targets not only the state, regional, and international bodies, but also works to change cultural and social norms at the community level that justify violence, hate and gender discrimination, and the growing sway of fundamentalist religious agendas and criminal networks. The global level of JASS's work assumes particular importance in this meshwork because, in a globalized world, agenda setting by various state and non-state actors (such as multinational corporations) cannot be addressed solely at the local or national level. But it is the strong connection to the movements at the local and regional level that gives JASS legitimacy and credibility for its global interventions and advocacy.

Our goal, therefore, is to build layers of movement webs that both protect and sustain women – their hope, their energy, and their commitment – and can in turn be woven into a larger meshwork of influence. We seek to weave the grassroots, local organizing of women into a movement web at the national and regional level and, eventually, into a global web that can in turn connect to other movements at all these levels. We believe that such a meshwork will greatly enhance the collective power and voice of marginalized women while retaining the agility and autonomy of local organizations and movements to pursue agendas most relevant to their immediate realities and contexts. In Escobar's words, they will create "place-based yet transnationalised political strategies"³ to influence and change the ideas, institutions, and policies that destroy lives and the planet. We also know that our movement webs will produce new knowledge and strategies of engagement that will enrich theory and practice in the fields of gender equality, social justice, and human development.

1. Escobar, Arturo, 2008, *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes*. Durham: Duke University Press.

2. Based on the definition provided in S. Batliwala (Editor), 2012, "Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements" (Second Edition), AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), P.3,4, and 6, <http://www.awid.org/Library/Changing-their-World-Concepts-and-practices-of-women-s-movements-2nd-Edition>

3. Escobar, Arturo, 2004, "Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalisation social movements", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.1, pp 207-230, P. 207

SOUTHEAST ASIA: COMING TOGETHER AGAINST ALL ODDS ►►►

Irony of ironies at the 21st ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Summit: as regional presidents and ministers met in Cambodia in November 2012 to draft and adopt the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, numerous human rights were violated.

For the first time, Southeast Asian women activists gathered from across the region to present their joint economic and political agenda at the 21st ASEAN Summit. But, this great opportunity was short-lived when they were harassed and attacked by the police. Before the Summit even began, beggars and street vendors were swept off the streets. Six Cambodian women leaders of the urban poor in Phnom Penh were arrested for spray-painting the word 'SOS' on their roofs as a message to US President Barack Obama, imitating the messages that people in New Orleans put on their roofs during the floods after Katrina. Outraged and undeterred by the arrests, feminists and LGBTI activists led protest actions for human rights and against the police, while Cambodian civil-society groups campaigned for land and housing rights.

JASS women activists from Cambodia and the Philippines participated in the ASEAN Grassroots People's Assembly (AGPA), which was disrupted when delegates were thrown out of their lodges, had their electricity cut off, and were denied food. *"The municipal and district officials barred us from continuing our dialogue at AGPA,"* said Yit Sophorn, JASS Southeast Asia Program Assistant and AGPA delegate. *"The municipal official pressured the hotel owner to kick us out so the organizers moved the forum to twelve different workplaces to enable everyone to participate. One venue would only provide enough space for about 300 people."*

The ASEAN People's Forum (APF) and the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC) were forced to relocate their venue several miles from the city. Som Chamnorng, a member of the Cambodian Young Women's Empowerment Network (CYWEN), attended the APF as a delegate. *"The Cambodian officers threatened to cancel our program in the hotels and centers where we were already booked,"* she says. *"Finally, a center along the Mekong River outside of the city agreed to host the forum. We were afraid this would be disrupted by the government again."*



“ The irony is that ASEAN says it is people-centered. Yet, civil society processes were disrupted in Cambodia and we were not able to hold the ASEAN People's Forum. If individual governments are not willing to meet the ASEAN objectives they themselves set, what can we hope of ASEAN in the future?”

Despite the harassment, many participants joined in this event. People saw the ASEAN People's Forum as an important platform to share concerns and make their voices heard. The more the government tried to interrupt our activities, the more keen people were to participate.”

SOM CHAMNORNG, CYWEN

FORGING ALLIANCES

These adverse circumstances forged some of the most promising alliances at the heart of the ASEAN human rights protests, as LGBTI activists from across the region led protests with rural Cambodian land rights activists and civil-society groups of all stripes from all over Southeast Asia.

JASS Southeast Asia has long been nurturing such unusual alliances. At the country level, lesbian-feminist alliances were created in response to the increasingly conservative agenda in the Islamic contexts of Indonesia and Malaysia. The Forum Aktivas Perempuan Muda Indonesia (FAMM), or Young Indonesian Women Activists' Forum, is one such mix of young women: rural activists unite with urban and LGBTI activists, bridging class, religious, and ethnic differences. In Malaysia, this nascent mix is also evident in JASS country-level processes, with transgender activists and young urban feminists working alongside indigenous women leaders. In the Philippines, the Lesbians for National Democracy (LESBOND), involved since the first JASS gathering in the country, has long been a vital player within the women's movement, particularly in the northern part of the country.

The ASEAN civil-society processes and the rights violations that disrupted them proved one thing: now, more than ever, there is a growing need to build alliances across differences. JASS Southeast Asian women have responded to this call with a passion as they build and nurture relationships to weave the kind of collective power needed to make lasting change.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: 'BAD WOMEN'/ 'GOOD WOMEN' ▶▶▶

What makes a 'bad woman'? Does she laugh too loudly or speak out of turn, drink too much or dance all the time, have too much sex or no sex at all or the 'wrong' kind of sex? Does she cry when she's sad and break things when she's angry? Does she wear an impossibly bright smile and laugh so the whole room can hear?

In Southern Africa, as in many other places, women are categorized by society according to very particular ideas of what it means to be a woman, 'good' or 'bad'. These moral types are rooted in conservative religious and Victorian ideas about sex and sexuality. Those who are considered to be transgressing the norms and values – the 'prostitute', 'homosexual', 'spinster' – are considered threats to society. For women in this context, nationalisms, crafted by liberation struggles for independence, demands its 'good women' be true patriots, morally upright and modest mothers who *dress* the part. If they resist these set categories, to claim their independence, they are deemed as deserving punishment. In an era of HIV and AIDS combined with poverty and economic inequality, these destructive ideas are further entrenched, so that certain gender norms and moral codes dictate what is 'acceptable behavior' for a woman.

Women have always found ways to resist these imposed boundaries and liberate themselves, refusing to be defined as 'good' or 'bad'. Currently, Zimbabwean sex workers and LGBTI activists are challenging narrow ideas about what women can choose to do with their bodies, church-going women in Malawi are negotiating the contradictions of the dictum 'practice what we preach', and young women in Zambia are breaking out of the 'good girl box'.

ZIMBABWE: CONFRONTING STIGMA

A 20-year old trailblazing activist from rural Chiweshe who works in marginalized mining communities; a talented, visionary artist from Matabeleland who is gay and proud; a sex worker with peacock-blue eye shadow and a caustic wit: what do these women have in common? Each one has been labeled a 'bad woman'. All three participate in JASS' Heart—Mind—Body Wellbeing Circles, sharing their experience of the stigma that comes



with transgressing societal norms as women and recognizing and reclaiming their right to make choices about their bodies and lives.

LGBTI women in Zimbabwe battle marginalization, discrimination, and stigma every single day, questioning what it means to defy society's boundaries on womanhood and women's sexuality. "What does it mean to identify as an intersex woman when language, society and the law are determined to ensure there is no language or space for you to exist?" asked one activist at the Wellbeing Circle. Wellbeing Circles that draw diverse women together to share their stories and build solidarity become transformative and revolutionary sites of change and deep connection.

MALAWI: CONDOMS FOR MARRIED CHURCHGOERS

"Many husbands refuse to put on condoms," says HIV-positive feminist-activist, Mirriam Munthali. "They say that marriage is about having 'sweet sex.' They might tell the wife, 'If you don't want to, you must leave. I can't eat sweets with the wrapping on.'" A man may divorce a spouse who demands safe sex within marriage. But Mirriam has found a way to detour around this discussion within conservative church spaces. "At church, many people will say that condoms should not be used. But at every service, I take three packets of condoms and put them in the toilets for ladies and men. By the end of the service, I check and all the condoms are gone. The same people who call themselves 'moral' take the condoms and use them! So I try to educate people in the church, to hold sessions right there on the proper use of condoms. Because HIV does not discriminate."

ZAMBIA: REFUSING THE 'GOOD GIRL' TRAP

In Zambia, even talking about s-e-x, sexuality, and reproductive and sexual rights as women experience them, is radical. Institutions – the family, one version of 'tradition and culture', education, and the media – have a stranglehold on women's sexuality. If a woman chooses not to marry or have children, or decides to have an abortion or a same-sex relationship, she is seen as an aberration, someone who needs 'fixing'. These conservative values are reinforced across Southern Africa by right-wing missionaries, many from the US, who finance anti-gay legislation and 'morality' campaigns.

Youth Vision (YVZ), a JASS partner in Zambia, uses the concept of the 'good girl box' to help young activist women in urban areas grapple with conflicting

narratives about women and sexuality, 'good' behavior and expectations, and to give women the tools to challenge and navigate those narrow confines. The exercise speaks to how young women are often trapped in a 'good girl box' by social/cultural norms and expectations, rules and laws as well as stereotypes. This 'box' entrenches gender inequalities. YVZ uses the simple yet resonant image to help women think about strategies to step out of the box and think through what kind of resistance they will face when they do.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PARTNER ACROSS DIFFERENCES?

JASS Southern Africa forges innovative partnerships that challenge sexist and ineffective ways of thinking and working. This means gathering mosque- and church-goers with sex workers, older women knowledgeable about the women's movement with younger women fighting for space and voice differently, and linking LGBTI issues and activists as part of a broad and inclusive feminist-thinking movement. It means listening to each other. But in a context of pervasive sexism and NGOization – the convergence of organizations funded by the international community that are often lacking in local roots or knowledge – these alliances may not be adequately understood or valued. Personal and organizational differences in gender, culture, value, and approach can unravel even the best-intentioned partnerships, minimizing women's collective power and capacity for social change. The JASS movement-building approach tackles this thorny challenge, working with women who want to speak out, find their 'power within' and find solutions to shared problems.



JASS also builds alliances with a spectrum of country-level partners to tackle the complex mix of problems that women face, from religious leaders and HIV-positive women activist leaders in Malawi to LGBTI organizers and sex workers in Zimbabwe to young women activists in Zambia – challenging and breaking down boundaries. Weaving a broader movement across perceived differences changes hearts and minds while wielding much more potent collective citizen influence to address stringent definitions that label women and dictate how they are supposed to act.

DEAR DIARY,

Why do I have to answer the "When are you getting married?" question each time I meet my aunt, my mother's friends, or a grandparent? Why do I have to act dumb just so my male boss will not feel threatened or belittled by a young woman? Why do I have to be all sweet and merry towards my boyfriend? Why do I have to explain myself every time I go to the health centre for voluntary counseling and testing? Why must I be the understanding one, the strong one, the mature one, but the last to be heard?

A YOUNG WOMAN SPEAKS TO THE 'GOOD GIRL BOX'

MESOAMERICA: CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING IN MEXICO

Movements and organizations that had not worked together historically are building bridges in new ways to end impunity and violence in Mexico. JASS has catalyzed this moment, bringing together diverse women activists to demand democracy, accountability, and demilitarization.

Through the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Mexico, formed in late 2010, the daughters of murdered parents and organizations that support mothers of disappeared children in Mexico are coming together with journalists, attorneys, and activists from labor, indigenous, transgender, and reproductive rights groups to respond to the unprecedented levels of violence plaguing the country. The emerging alliance – 112 women defenders from 20 states of Mexico – is managed by a coordinating team from Consorcio Oaxaca, Women’s Roundtable Network of Ciudad Juarez, and JASS Mesoamerica. The group is sustained by enabling participants to gain a better understanding of violence and develop strategies for action and protection. The network has created a crucial sense of belonging for women seeking justice and rights.

MOVEMENTS UNITE AGAINST VIOLENCE

The numbers and diversity of the women and organizations involved in the Mexican network are a surprise even to the participants, given the division of civil society in this volatile context. The longstanding idea that a human rights defender must be an attorney is firmly quashed by the range of women represented in this network. The safe spaces, tools and networking facilitated by JASS and our allies enable the women, many for the first time, to openly discuss the violence they have faced and survived in the street, in their homes and sadly even in their own movements. Fearing the isolation that comes with speaking out about these kinds of crimes, many defenders have chosen to suffer in silence. The unique insecurity they face has become a powerful common agenda that binds this new women’s movement and enables it to respond more quickly than many existing networks to provide the personal and political support that women activists need. With improved strategies, alliances and outreach, they are better able to gain public visibility and support and respond to urgent situations of violence.



“The deaths of hundreds of young women are not random – they are the victims of the lethal combination of a drug war launched by the US and Mexican governments, widespread impunity for violent crimes and a deeply sexist society.”

LAURA CARLSEN, DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAS PROGRAM OF THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY, JUNE 24, 2012

WOMEN BUILDING ALTERNATIVES

The President of Mexico issued a decree in June 2012 passing the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists Act, but the level of violence against human rights defenders has become more acute. The state has not taken concrete steps to combat the situation. The Network has served as a platform to mobilize support for and accompany women defenders in emergency situations. In 2012 alone, the Network accompanied five cases of violence against a woman defender and activated 28 urgent actions, including responses to death threats against a woman labor activist, the death of an LGBTI activist in Puebla, the disappearance of a woman journalist and her son in Saltillo, and the lack of government action in support of the movement of mothers of disappeared migrant children from around the country.

Women defenders in Mexico devote their lives to fighting for social justice, from challenging the incarceration of young and poor women for accessing abortion services, to providing support to migrant women who, in their search for a better life, are enslaved in human-trafficking networks. Many of these defenders have lost sons, daughters, and other family members while seeking justice for others. More than 40% of the women defenders interviewed for the national study are also responsible for their families' needs and domestic duties, and carry out paid activities in order to maintain their families, in addition to their work as defenders.

The promotion and defense of human rights in Mexico is imperative to overcoming the violence and inequality that plagues the country. Women human rights defenders – in all their diversity – make a vital contribution to human rights, not only because of their tireless struggle for truth and justice, but also because their efforts contribute to overcoming deep-rooted discrimination and help to build substantive democracy in all spheres of Mexican society.



 By the end of its second year, in 2012, the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network had organized two national gatherings, held more than ten security and self-care workshops, finalized a national mapping of available resources (legal, health, and financial), and produced a widely-cited national study on violence against women human rights defenders in Mexico.



PROFILE

OEMI FAEZATHI

SOUTHEAST ASIA



Community organizer, Oemi Faezathi brings an infectious laugh, boundless energy and a whole palette of skills to JASS' work in Indonesia and to her organization, PEKKA, JASS' partner in Indonesia. Oemi is not only an accomplished and passionate facilitator, she also writes, takes photographs, and makes videos. An

interview by Osang Langara, Communications and Knowledge Associate of JASS Southeast Asia, reveals how Oemi embodies the JASS vision.



ORGANIZING SINGLE WOMEN HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

I have been working as community organizer for ten years with PEKKA or Perempuan Kepala Keluarga, a women's organization committed to empowering women heads of households, who are among the most marginalized and mistreated women in Indonesia. We organize poor women, most work in the informal sector or as migrants or petty traders. They might provide labour on other people's land, cultivating rice or vegetables, or working in coconut plantations. We define a women-headed household as one led by a single, abandoned, widowed or divorced woman, or a wife responsible for the family's livelihood.

Indonesians have a saying that a beautiful widow is an enemy to other women. Women will not ask to be friends with her; they will not invite her to take part in village discussions, because they see her as a threat, someone who might steal their husband. But if you are a poor widow, you are just asking for charity. It's very difficult to be in a woman-headed household.

The common problem that these women all face is economic. Women earn lower wages than men, and women who head households are treated as second class citizens in the community. So our first challenge is how to bring isolated women together to build solidarity and confidence. We start with money. Saving and borrowing are difficult for the women so the process takes a lot of time and patience and many drop out. But those who continue begin to save, pool, manage, and benefit from resources.

We work step by step on the issues that affect women. Divorced women are eligible for some entitlements such as rice, but only if they have the official documents. So, PEKKA has a legal program that trains individuals chosen by their cooperatives in these skills. These women gain confidence as they learn

to navigate the system for others who need divorce certificates or custody of their children, or other legal processes.

USING MEDIA TO CHANGE MINDS AND INFLUENCE POWER

I started using media as part of my organizing, learning about video documentation through PEKKA training. The women need to identify common issues for themselves and visuals help women understand problems and concepts better. If I don't have any videos to show, I draw something or ask the group to participate, using the methods of participatory rural appraisal.

I do filming and work with PEKKA's team of video editors to make documentaries. Women in the cooperatives make their own videos, take photographs and run community radio stations too. Women show these videos when they invite government officials for dialogue as part of their advocacy work. So the media is powerful in our work and sharing these skills with the women we organize is important.

THE 'BALCONY FACTION'

The women I organized in a part of West Java started what Indonesian activists call the 'Balcony Faction' about four years ago. After several years of organizing, they learned that any member of the community is legally entitled to attend the deliberations of the local council and they insisted on taking up this right. There was a lot of resistance to 'poor widows' entering that official space, but they stood their ground.

Since then, they attend whenever there is a hearing, sitting on the balcony. They have first-hand knowledge of policies in action on the ground, which they supplement with community surveys. They make sure they have all the information on budgets and spending, and challenge officials who are making incorrect claims in the hearings.

This involves another aspect of PEKKA support – we educate women in how these processes work, from local to district to national level. The women encourage reporters to attend as well, to publicise any wrongdoing. When I first met some of these women eight years ago, they were isolated. Now, they monitor elected officials and hold them to account.

EXPANSION AND REACH

Once PEKKA was established in four provinces, we expanded to cover five more provinces in Indonesia and will include others, to bring the total to 18 provinces, about 50,000 women in all. There are different issues in different provinces. West Nusa Tenggara, for example, faces specific challenges

regarding migrant workers. For the first eight years, I worked in West Java but for the past two years, I have been supervising the expansion of PEKKA's program as well as working with teams to organize in West Sumatra and South Sumatra. Community organizers in the team live in the community for a year, but I am now mobile, responding to teams that ask for my help.

A VISION FOR THE INDONESIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE

For me, this work is a calling. I have a vision for the women's movement. Indonesia is a very big country with a huge population – 252 million – many of them lacking resources. A large number of women lack education and have no access to decision-making institutions such as village discussions; the 'Balcony Faction' is unusual! So I am passionate about building the numbers of women we involve in our processes. According to the concept of family in Indonesia, a woman must be married. If you have a child outside of marriage, for example, you are not considered a family. This issue also affects LGBTI people. In one rural hamlet, where I am organizing, there are ten transgender people. They have a beauty salon. It's difficult to be LGBTI in urban areas too, but rural and conservative communities make it especially difficult.





NEEDS

AND

RIGHTS

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIC POWER

Women-headed households are building savings cooperatives in Indonesia. HIV-positive women in Malawi are mobilizing a national campaign for safe ARVs. Indigenous women are leading their communities in defending their territories from corporate land grabs in Guatemala. These are all examples of how the JASS community is organizing women to democratize access and control of resources to improve lives and push for a more sustainable path to development. Drawing on these movement-building experiences with an economic focus, JASS contributes to debates about strategy, for instance at the 12th International Forum of the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID), held in Istanbul, in April 2012. The Forum took the theme, 'Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women's Rights and Justice,' and 50 women activists from across JASS' global community led and contributed to many exciting conversations.

JASS led one of the seven main thematic sessions focusing on access and control of resources titled: 'Organizing for Women's Economic Empowerment'. Frontline activists described the impact of the government-assisted corporate scramble for resources and profits on their communities and on women's lives and shared innovative strategies for building a democratic counterweight and sustainable alternatives to improve lives and promote justice. Indigenous women leaders from Malaysia and Guatemala inspired participants with their vision of a more harmonious balance between people and the earth, and between men and women, while Malawian activists talked about the 'medicalization' of poverty through HIV and AIDS programs and the outsized role of global pharmaceuticals in their lives. Their stories of organizing demonstrated how coming together to address basic needs – for food, healthcare, land, and clean water – can be a potent organizing strategy for advancing political agendas on economic rights and democracy.

Women's grassroots organizing strategies for transforming economic power to better serve communities and care for natural resources are among the riskiest as they step into the raw global scramble to control and exploit resources. What Cornel West describes as "financializing, privatizing, and militarizing"⁴ comes as a pre-packaged mix, and these are among the most brutal forms of reprisal, including, threats of violence to women activists and their families. In this context, local-to-global solidarity, joint advocacy, and urgent action mechanisms are both good politics and life-saving.



WHAT IS ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY?

Imagine a situation in which economic decisions and policies are made by those whose lives are most directly affected. That is the vision of 'economic democracy'. Instead of corporate interests at the helm, driving inequality, and undermining development, this approach proposes that the world's resources – material, financial, natural, and human – be accessed and controlled through democratic, transparent, and accountable mechanisms geared toward sustainability and equity.

4. Lynn S. Parramore (2013) Cornel West Warns of Rising Authoritarianism: "You Can Get Killed Out Here Trying to Tell the Truth!" Available at: <http://www.alternet.org/economy/cornel-west-warns-rising-authoritarianism-you-can-get-killed-out-here-trying-tell-truth>

SOUTHEAST ASIA: WOMEN-DRIVEN ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES ▶▶▶

How do you best support poor women in their struggles for dignity when survival is a daily battle? Rights and public participation can seem like abstract ideas when food and employment are uncertain. But, for JASS and like-minded activists, holistic approaches are crucial. Organizing around practical needs can be a stepping stone to steadier livelihoods, and, eventually, to taking action. A movement to empower single-women household heads in Indonesia demonstrates this concept in action. Building one small cooperative at a time, JASS ally, PEKKA is forging a large-scale movement across half the provinces of Indonesia, from village centers to the capital city.

Over the last ten years, the number of women-headed households in Indonesia (a country of some 250 million) has increased to around nine million, the majority of whom live in extreme poverty. With its grassroots economic and political organizing strategy, PEKKA works to transform the lives of women heads of households through a combination of feminist popular education, leadership development, community organizing, income generation, and cooperatives. While the women benefit from much-needed access to cash, the ultimate goal of PEKKA is more ambitious: to build a grassroots movement of women-led economic cooperatives that empower women individually and collectively to transform their lives and their communities, and to challenge the structures and belief systems that breed discrimination and poverty. This movement and the cooperatives embody an alternative solidarity-based economic and political culture, which members promote in their families and communities.

Since 2002, PEKKA's Women-Headed Households Empowerment Program has organized more than 20,000 divorced and widowed women into more than 800 savings and loan co-ops and community teams in 495 villages throughout 18 of the country's 33 provinces. Overcoming social isolation and stigma that widows and divorced women experience in Indonesia, these women lead productive and engaged economic, social and political lives.

START WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

PEKKA offers a compelling alternative to microcredit, as PEKKA founder and JASS Southeast Asia Director Nani Zulminarni explains.



Women think that marriage can solve the problem of poverty, but the reality is that women deal with many of a family's needs, whether or not there is a man in the household."

OEMI FAEZATHI, PEKKA ORGANIZER



"We start from zero, talking one by one with each woman to find out her priority concerns. Women always start with the problem of money. So we begin with a group savings project as a practical way to bring women together but also to seed a strategy to resist consumerism and debt. At first they tell us they have no money, but then discover that, with the coins they spend occasionally on candy for their children or sweet drinks, they could have a bit of savings. Sometimes they gather and sell coconuts. Pooling these small savings, women are able to invest in joint economic endeavors that generate a growing profit over time, if they are frugal and work hard. They control their own income, which is not owed to anyone. The more women have cash in hand, the more they can bargain with brothers or partners. Individually, they become more independent and as a group, they begin to understand the potential of their economic and political power.

"By setting up democratic cooperatives or credit unions, women also practice new leadership, decision-making, and democracy: one woman, one vote, equal

rights. This leads to more practical and emotional independence. Of course, it takes lots of consciousness raising and capacity building. That's an appropriate role for NGOs, we feel – not bringing in the money and making profit off the interest that individual women have to pay. Participatory democracy and leadership does, inevitably, create clashes and internal conflict – people always resist doing things differently. Some want to take control, which is why we have a leadership change every three years. That's our role as organizers in PEKKA, supporting this growing grassroots movement of women – to develop and support new kinds of leadership and to build women's capacity to manage conflict, basic business, and planning skills, and then, gradually, use their collective power to influence local politics.

"We don't attach women to an existing cooperative. They build their own together. Some groups eventually make enough profit to build their own women's centers. Economic organizing in this way enables us to work under oppressive governments. We say, 'We're doing savings and credit,' and then the authorities leave us alone. Over time, our experience shows that the women promote their own leaders to become village head or members of the village parliament. From there, they have influence and gain more power, and can make bigger change."

CLAIMING RIGHTS

Rather than focusing on a single element – relying on microfinance, for instance – PEKKA has gone on to integrate aspects of the law, education, media and politics into their work. Through the slow, intensive process of establishing savings cooperatives, PEKKA organizers learned about the many other issues making women's lives so difficult. Along with isolation and stigma, women without husbands were invisible to the legal system. Without official divorce certificates, for example, divorcees could not access government resources allocated for poor citizens. The general expectation is that all women, including those widowed or single, are under the support and control of men – husbands, fathers or brothers. Even if they were aware of government entitlements that would alleviate their hardship, women were unsure how to approach local authorities. So, PEKKA began to train members as volunteer community paralegals, with the aim of educating women about their rights and entitlements and supporting their efforts to claim them. PEKKA also trains paralegals about laws related to domestic violence and rape. This equips the paralegals to educate their communities about the legislation and support women in dealing with the police and courts.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY MEDIA

Using popular education methods and the concepts of power from JASS' toolkit, PEKKA starts with women's experience and then brings in important new information, particularly on laws and rights, in accessible leaflets that

depict common experiences. Photos are also used to generate discussions on different types of power and how power dynamics affect women's lives. Literacy classes are based on these booklets, while members nominated as treasurers are trained in bookkeeping and manage the financial records for their groups.

PEKKA also trains and equips photographers and videographers to document all PEKKA processes and mounts public exhibitions of the images. In creative workshops, women learn to write their stories, and these are published in collections and launched at local and national events. Women host daily radio broadcasts on PEKKA's nine community radio stations. They have created and edited dozens of films at PEKKA's seven community video studios, built 34 community centers and rented another 54 locales, and attended or given training workshops too numerous to count.



"Long ago, no one would trust you enough to lend you money because you had no husband. You were 'just a weak woman.' Before PEKKA, I struggled to feed my children. I worked as a seasonal laborer for farmers, in the rice fields twice a year, picking fruit. Then I joined the co-op and borrowed money to start my own business."

RUKINAH, COOPERATIVE LEADER, PEKKA, INDONESIA



"When I had no experience or education, I would not dare to speak to one of the village leaders. I was afraid of the police. But now, with PEKKA to support me, I feel strong. I can call on the police and I argue with the village head if he doesn't want to sign a divorce certificate for one of the women. At election time, political parties come to put pressure on me. Before, we were invisible but now they want PEKKA votes."

KASIRAH, COMMUNITY RADIO LEADER, PEKKA, INDONESIA

SOUTHERN AFRICA: LINKING RIGHTS TO TREATMENT AND RESOURCES ►►►



In Southern Africa, the promise of universal access to quality HIV treatment remains a distant reality, especially for women. A host of development actors – the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the World Bank, and bilateral donors among others – have transferred highly publicized drugs and monies into the region. But these investments alone are not enough to guarantee access, and medication alone is not enough to ensure healthy lives for Malawian women living with HIV.

In a country as poor as Malawi, HIV-positive women have extremely limited access to and control over the resources necessary for healthy lives. Their decision-making power is subject to a complex set of intersecting dynamics. History, politics, culture, attitudes, and practices: any and all of these factors enhance or inhibit women's access to what one needs to survive and thrive in the world. Rights are, therefore, not a separate question from resources, but are inextricably linked with the spread and impact of HIV on women and communities in Malawi. The lack of women's rights fuels the spread



In our village, the chief distributes land and fertilizers so it was natural that, along with other villagers, we as women living with HIV should approach him for fertilizer. He listened to our requests carefully, and then stood in front of all people who were gathered for the fertilizers and announced that he would not waste the resources of the community on walking corpses. 'These women you see are diseased. They are walking but they are dead. Why should we waste resources on them?' The crowd reacted with a raucous round of applause to this statement. It hurt badly."

ESNAT MBANDAMBANDA, MALAWIAN ACTIVIST

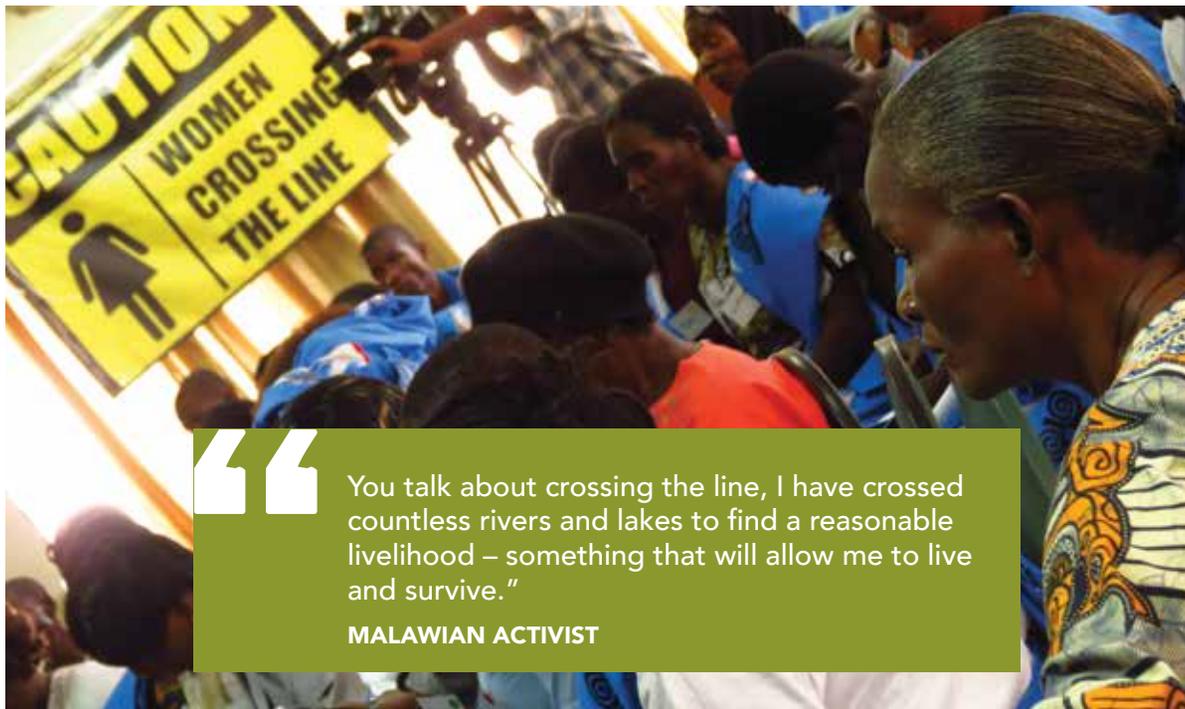
and exacerbates the impact of the pandemic, while at the same time HIV undermines progress in the realization of rights as well as constraining women's livelihoods and access to land.

Through a joint organizing effort by JASS Southern Africa and partner MANERELA+, thousands of Malawian women activists who participated in the 'Our Bodies, Our Lives' campaign (see page 16) are modeling different ways to mobilize not just for quality ARVs, but for equitable access to resources. Campaigning for fertilizer coupons, open clinics, and water is not only about nutrition and access to ARVs: it goes deeper, connecting women's situation to gender inequalities that are exacerbated by poverty and need.

Activist Esnat Mbandambanda views the dynamics like this: women suffer because in relationships men dominate, refusing to use condoms. Families suffer when people cannot find work, when food is not available or not shared, and when women are not self-sufficient. All this, she says, compounds the challenge of getting and taking drugs properly. Women seek out what appear to be quick-fix solutions such as marrying, so they can, hopefully, put food on the table. "I only wish every positive woman in Chirazuru were self-sufficient, then they wouldn't need these guys," says Esnat, "And their health and life would be better." Growing a garden or getting a borehole can be a step towards self-sufficiency.

Where individuals and communities are able to realize their rights – to education, housing, healthcare, and, most importantly, non-discrimination – the personal and societal impacts of HIV and AIDS are reduced. Women are more likely to seek HIV testing in an open and supportive environment

where HIV and AIDS are destigmatized and they are protected from discrimination, treated with dignity, and have access to treatment, care, and support. In turn, those women who are HIV-positive may deal with their status more effectively, by seeking and realizing their rights to resources, thus reducing the impact of HIV on themselves and on others in society.



“ You talk about crossing the line, I have crossed countless rivers and lakes to find a reasonable livelihood – something that will allow me to live and survive.”
MALAWIAN ACTIVIST



MESOAMERICA: ►►► WOMEN DEFENDING THEIR TERRITORIES AND NATURAL RESOURCES IN GUATEMALA

Indigenous women in Guatemala are waging a battle for resources on two fronts. Alongside their communities, they fight to protect their land and their territories, and in their homes and movements, they continue to fight for their voice, inclusion, and freedom from violence. They draw on centuries of resistance and a proud Mayan identity to resist 21st century acquisition strategies. Since 2010, JASS Mesoamerica has supported and accompanied a number of courageous indigenous women leaders and their organizations who are defending their ancestral lands in Guatemala through the national and regional women human rights defenders networks and through JASS' regional leadership training and learning program, Alquimia.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Guatemala's indigenous Mayan communities have suffered violence, exploitation, and genocide from the Spanish conquistadors and colonial rulers of the past to today's land-owning elites, multinational corporations, and foreign governments. Although formally recognized by the state, Guatemala's indigenous population is on the losing end of glaring social inequities. Privatized land has, historically, been plundered from indigenous people. The result today is a tension between legal and legitimate claims to land. Another dimension to the historical legacy is the sale of family and community lands, which is always decided by men. Women are generally neither consulted nor compensated.

For centuries, indigenous communities' struggles to protect their land and ways of life have established a culture of resistance and reciprocity that has enabled them to survive and persistently work to demand rights, recognition, and resources in Guatemala. The country's approximately 3.5 million indigenous women have played and continue to play a critical role in protecting and defending indigenous cultures, territories, and knowledge. Women at the forefront of these struggles have risked their own lives on behalf of entire communities. Military and security forces use gendered tactics



It was hard for me to understand that I was a Mayan because, growing up, people said that I was just a little Indian savage from the rural mountains. Those derogatory concepts were ground into us so deeply that it has been hard for us to recreate our identities. We have to pull out the oppressor that we have inside of us. This begins with process of healing with women. We speak not only about the autonomy of peoples but also about autonomy within autonomy. The patriarchy within my nation can be even worse than other forms of oppression because it is very intimate."

AURA LOLITA CHÁVEZ IXCAQUIC, COUNCIL OF QUICHÉ PEOPLE, GUATEMALA



to repress and silence communities, such as rape and harassment. At the same time, indigenous women must contend with discrimination and fight for equality within their own families and communities.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

Between 2005 and the first half of 2012, networks of indigenous communities from around the country conducted 58 community plebiscites called 'consultations of good faith' to consult the population on mining, hydroelectric dams, and other projects in their territories. According to María

Guadalupe García of the women's organization, Mamá Maquín, communities see these consultations as opportunities to gain information and analysis within a space for reflection, discussion, dialogue, and consensus-building among all members of a community. She explained it this way in January 2012:

"To defend our territory is to defend every aspect of life. So our community consultations have been a strategic struggle in the face of the neoliberal economic model. The consultations function as mechanisms that allow us to identify other threats to our lives. To speak of autonomy for indigenous peoples is to speak of autonomy for women."

In the vision that indigenous women leaders hold for the collective wellbeing of their communities, the defense of land as territory cannot be separated from the defense of women's bodies. Women are developing their own power to act, by building on ancestral inspiration and gaining new capacities. They create opportunities for gathering and participation within their communities and at regional, national, and international levels as well. In a speech at the 2012 AWID International Forum, Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic, spokesperson of the Council of Quiché People, explained further:

"We see the participation of women and youth as a priority because it is our job to counter non-inclusive ways. For us, as women, it is important to participate in horizontal, inclusive spaces. Another one of our stances in defense of our territory is the need for men and women to join our voices to declare our territories free from violence against women."

"In my community, 27,000 people participated in community 'consultations of good faith'. We had no money or NGOs to impose their own indicators, so that the result could show what we really want."

"We are very clear that the main opposition we face is a strong one, made up not only of state oligarchies and militarism, but also transnational corporations. And the backlash is even stronger against women because we stand firm on our decisions. When we say no, it means no! This has generated a lot of repression against us. Sisters have been jailed, threatened, and murdered."

ALTERNATIVE TO 'DEVELOPMENT'

Mayan communities, like other indigenous peoples around the world, are fighting unregulated resource extraction and mega-projects (agriculture, dams, tourism) as governments and corporations race to secure and privatize access to the natural resources that fuel unsustainable levels of consumption. The 2008 financial crisis, along with energy and food crises have created

shortages and have inflated the price of commodities such as gold, sugar cane, and palm oil, accelerating large-scale industrial, mining, and agricultural projects that extract and harvest raw materials for profits. Local and national governments, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, and corporate actors often work hand-in-hand to exploit resources in the name of job creation and 'development.'



We have a different way of thinking from what has been called 'development' as the accumulation of wealth or imposing other people's idea of what is 'better.' Rather, we talk about a harmonic way of life, of being with nature."

AURA LOLITA CHÁVEZ IXCAQUIC, GUATEMALA

Indigenous women are exerting their influence as mothers, daughters, wives, and leaders to demand an equal voice as they strive with their communities to have a say over their land. They are creating women's councils, using community radio and internet technologies, leveraging human rights instruments and protection mechanisms, and finding safety and power in numbers. Their struggles rely considerably on the solidarity of international networks to challenge the local-to-global actors that drive land and resource grabs and inequality.

Mayan women and women of other ethnic groups look to ancestors and spiritual leaders for inspiration and knowledge. The heart of this vision concerns the interrelation of all living things with nature. Although the context is extremely adverse, the women draw from the historical role that women have played in protecting the environment.



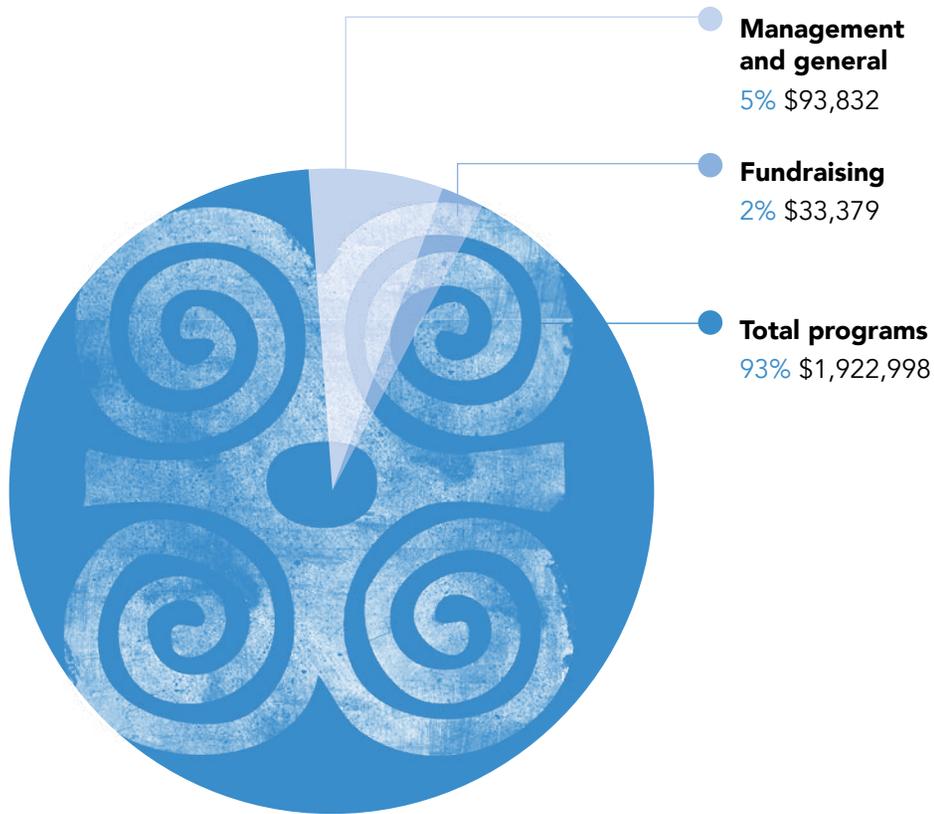
If our lands continue to be occupied, our lives as women continue to be occupied. To speak of autonomy for indigenous peoples is to speak of autonomy for women. Liberation of our lands is the liberation of our bodies and our minds. We have energy, we have courage, we have warmth, we have strength, we have life."

MARÍA GUADALUPE GARCÍA, MAMÁ MAQUÍN, GUATEMALA

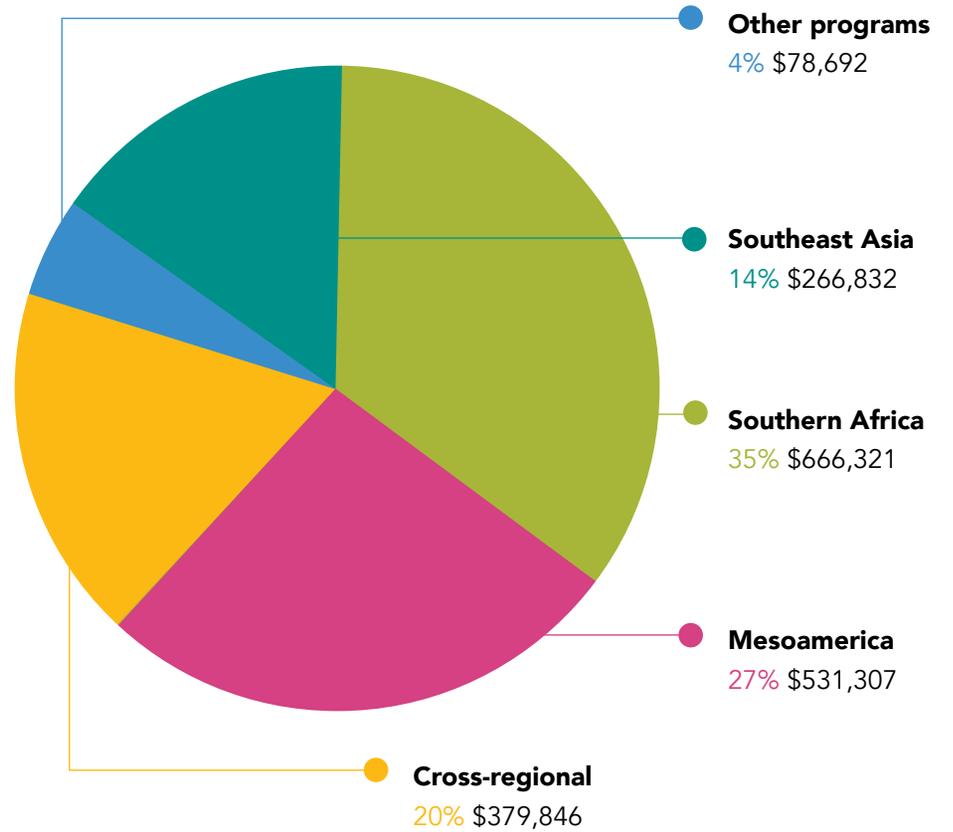
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The cover photograph shows women activist leaders at the launch of the 'Our Bodies, Our Lives: The Fight for Better ARVs' campaign in Lilongwe, Malawi.

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