

# YOU ADD, WE MULTIPLY!



ANNUAL REPORT 2013



JASS (Just Associates) is a global network of activists, popular educators and scholars in 26 countries working to strengthen and amplify the voice, visibility and collective power of women for a just and sustainable world for all. We put women's leadership and rights at the heart of cutting edge economic, environmental and human rights strategies while promoting women's freedom of expression, health, sexual rights and the protection of women human rights defenders. Our priorities and programs are defined and driven by the women and organizations we work with and supported by regional teams and partners in Mesoamerica, Southern Africa and Southeast Asia. Our strategies train diverse local leaders, strengthen community organizing, build broad alliances, and link grassroots solutions to global advocacy. Using creative communications and documentation strategies, we publicize the innovative ways women are making change happen, building inclusive communities and deepening democracy.

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.



# CONTENTS



<b>FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>JASS IN NUMBERS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>JASS AROUND THE WORLD</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CONTINUUM OF MOVEMENT-BUILDING</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. THE CHANGING TERRAIN FOR WOMEN AND RIGHTS</b>	<b>7</b>
View From Southern Africa: "Women's Participation for What?"	8
View From Mexico and Central America: Violence Against Women Human Rights Defenders	9
View From Southeast Asia: The Scramble for Resources	10
<b>2. YOUNG WOMEN SPEAK OUT</b>	<b>11</b>
Zimbabwe: Unleashing Voices, Unleashing Change	12
Indonesia: Challenging Official "Morality"	13
<b>3. DEFENDING OUR TERRITORIES, DEFENDING OURSELVES</b>	<b>15</b>
Honduras: Indigenous Women and Communities Defend Their Territories	16
Mesoamerica: Movement-Building Approaches to Activist Protection	17
Liberia: Women on the Frontlines of Building Peace	20
<b>4. EQUIPPING ACTIVISTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5. NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICIES AND REALITY</b>	<b>24</b>
Malawi: Collective Power Essential to Ensuring Quality Medicine	25
LGBTI Rights in Zambia and Zimbabwe: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back	27
<b>6. ELECTIONS ≠ DEMOCRACY</b>	<b>28</b>
Zimbabwe: Elections Heighten Safety Concerns for Activists	29
Honduras: Questionable Election Outcomes for Women	30
Cambodia: Young Women Activists Protest Post-Election Violence	31
<b>FINANCES AND DONOR PARTNERS</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>ALLIES AND NETWORKS</b>	<b>35</b>



## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



“We need to know that we have power within ourselves, that we have rights, and we have to advocate for change that is right for us. Women have power within themselves, but alone, we can’t make big changes. We can come together to do something great.”

**DORICA MAGUBA, OUR BODIES, OUR LIVES CAMPAIGN, MALAWI**

Dear friends,

This year’s many highpoints and turning points for JASS began in January with a trip to Liberia with the Nobel Women’s Initiative to learn from renowned women peace-builders, and concluded in December with a joint action for a UN resolution to protect **women human rights defenders**.

Linking these two pivotal moments is the extraordinary courage and ingenuity of women most affected by deepening inequality and violence who are mobilizing for peace, justice and a better life for all, often with minimal resources and at great risk. With new challenges and crises reverberating across the globe, fed by militarization and global resource extraction, women have never been more active or more creative in defending their own rights and those of their communities.

This report brings you stories and insights from across the JASS network. Here, you’ll read how different women see their world and the innovative ways they are challenging abuses of power and building deeply democratic alternatives. Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Cambodia: these are some of the places where the JASS network of activists and allies are tackling HIV, teen pregnancy, sexual violence,

public safety, impunity, economic exclusion, violence against women human rights defenders, land grabs and the depletion of natural resources.

Here are a few highlights that vividly demonstrate how women-led local solutions hold the key to global solutions:

- In Malawi, after winning a commitment from the Ministry of Health to replace outdated toxic medicines with better antiretrovirals (ARVs) in 2012, the HIV positive women mobilizing **Our Bodies, Our Lives**—an 8,000-strong grassroots campaign—embarked on an ambitious treatment literacy effort. Their goal: ensure that all women (and men) in every community understood how to stay healthy living with HIV and to demand quality medicines and respect! By the end of 2013, they had educated thousands of women covering 26 of 28 districts who had, in turn, pressured local governments and clinics to deliver on the promise made to them by the Minister of Health. Today, more women living with HIV are not only healthy, they’ve upended stigma, lifted taboos about sex and sexuality, and remain unstoppable citizen leaders taking on other issues such as inheritance and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)



people. One of the leaders in this process wrote to me in early 2013 to ask if we could arrange a meeting directly with GlaxoKlein or one of the other pharmaceutical companies. Unstoppable.

- The Honduran Defenders Network played a critical role in protecting the life of an indigenous woman activist leading the Lenca community fighting to protect their farmland from the construction of a dam and hydroelectric plant—the product of a corrupt deal between the government and a transnational company. The network activated a call list—phones rang from Tegucigalpa to Washington DC—to secure her release. JASS Mesoamerica has helped to build the regional and national Defenders Networks, agile alliances of women activists and leaders from different communities and social movements, that leverage this local and yet global network to ensure their safety and visibility.
- JASS Southern Africa, building on the insights learned from conversations with colleagues in Mesoamerica, piloted a security and wellbeing training in Zimbabwe with young and LBT activists, kicking off a region-to-region peer-exchange that is improving activist protection across oceans.

- After years of groundwork in Myanmar, JASS and its partners, Urgent Action Fund and Women’s League of Burma, launched the first step in a long-term initiative to strengthen grassroots women’s leadership and organizing to better influence the process of peace-building and reconstruction while addressing violence and poverty in their communities.

What have we learned? We see more clearly than ever that our core mission—**building women’s collective leadership and organizational power**—is not just about being louder and more effective in holding governments and others to account. It’s also about creating networks for mutual support and protection in the face of backlash and violence. We call this a **movement-building approach** to protection and security—we are weaving relationships of trust among diverse women, building our capacities and leading the change we need.

The touchstone for all our work continues to be the lives, experiences and dreams of women. A woman’s **heart, mind and body** absorb the grim reality of discrimination. For deep and lasting change, women’s whole selves must be at the center of leadership and organizing, a principle that gives meaning to the phrase **from survivors to defenders**. From this starting point, social change and

empowerment is neither linear nor a simple technical equation. But when women are at the forefront of change, they don’t just address issues, they transform communities and systems.

Thank you to all our extraordinary partners and to all of you who accompany and support us in this journey to unleash and defend women’s dreams and innovations for a better world.

Onward and forward,

**Lisa VeneKlasen**

Executive Director and Co-Founder

# JASS IN NUMBERS

## BUILDING NETWORKS

**450+** local and national organizations in Mexico, Central America, Southern Africa and Southeast Asia

**100+** regional and international human rights organizations

**10** organizations and alliances formed through JASS' movement-building work

## EQUIPPING LEADERS

**1,500** women activists and grassroots leaders from 26 countries trained

**400** women human rights defenders from across Mexico and Central America supported and accompanied through the JASS-coordinated Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative

**30** at-risk women activists supported during emergencies in Mexico and Central America

## PERSUADING DECISION MAKERS

**76** Village Chiefs, Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, Heads of State, Ambassadors, UN Rapporteurs, Human Rights bodies, and the General Assembly

**67** strategic and urgent actions to demand safety, protection and justice for women defenders

**1,000+** community-based activists helped gather evidence on human rights violations to inform advocacy

## BEING HEARD

**504** activist women's stories and testimonies documented

**390** mainstream media features and "hits"

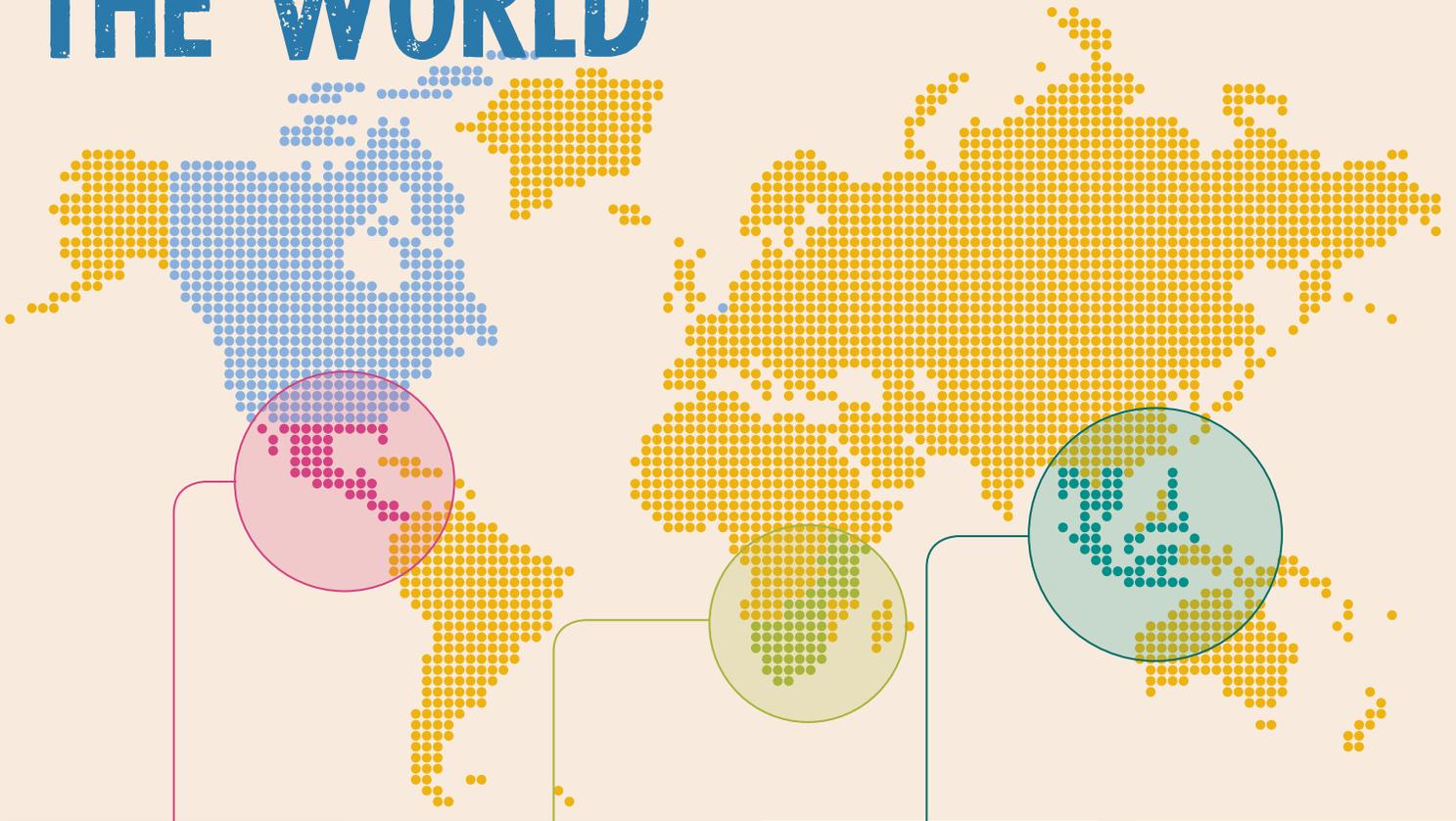
## SHARING WOMEN'S INSIGHTS

**250** articles, activist training tools, videos and analysis pieces published to influence policy and practice

**54** dialogues, public events and exchanges organized with donor and academic institutions, civil society and policy makers



# JASS AROUND THE WORLD



## MESOAMERICA

Costa Rica  
El Salvador  
Guatemala  
Honduras  
Mexico  
Nicaragua  
Panama

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

Malawi  
Namibia  
South Africa  
Swaziland  
Zambia  
Zimbabwe

## EAST AFRICA

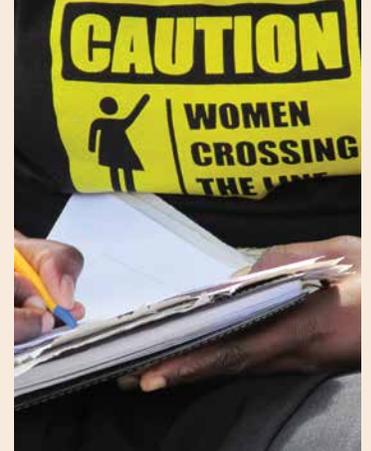
Kenya  
Tanzania  
Uganda

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

Cambodia  
Indonesia  
Malaysia  
Myanmar  
Philippines  
Thailand  
Timor L'Este

## GLOBAL NORTH

Canada  
The Netherlands  
United States





# CONTINUUM OF MOVEMENT-BUILDING

## CROSSING THE LINE FROM 'ME' TO 'WE' TO 'ALL OF US'

### SCALING UP AND PUSHING OUT

Influencing and reframing global discourse, politics, policies, structures and media, donor trends, change theory and practice.

### BUILDING AND SHAKING UP: AMPLIFYING AND HAVING IMPACT

Strategic engagement; urgent actions; knowledge-building and sharing; linking local to regional and global solidarity; forming larger alliances, influencing agendas and discourses, media, governments, multilaterals bodies, other relevant forces/actors.

### LINKING UP

Building collective structures; surfacing/defining and framing common agendas for change; bridge-building and weaving alliances, movements and 'meshworks'.

### RISING UP (SPARK)

Critical awareness; questioning; freeing individuals to imagine changes; hope; making links; moving from 'me' to 'we' to systems and power analysis.



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# 1. THE CHANGING TERRAIN FOR WOMEN AND RIGHTS

Women have never been more active in the fight for women's rights and human rights in the world. They are leading many citizen-driven social justice efforts while single-handedly defending their own rights and freedoms. Yet, there is a collective sense across the JASS network that the terrain shaping gender equality and human rights has fundamentally changed and keeps changing. Women's lives and rights are heavily impacted by the shifting power and interests of governments relative to transnational corporations and financial institutions, for example.

All human rights advocates and especially women rely on governments to uphold labor rights, land rights, and public and personal safety, but their political capacity and will to serve citizens is compromised by many factors. Nonetheless, citizens have never been bolder in confronting abuses of power. The internet is a game-changer in exposing abuse, reaching out to those who care, and mobilizing joint action. Despite and because of all these changes, gender inequality—along with other forms of inequality—remain the unfinished business of our time. The battle is the same but the players, arenas, dynamics and strategies have changed.

While the shifting power dynamics affecting rights are global, ultimately all change is fundamentally local and context defines what we do and how we do it. This is why understanding power and interests in each context and in women's lives specifically is the starting point and ultimate measure of our work. Structured dialogues to analyze contexts and lives are a permanent feature of our leadership schools. As we invite more and more visitors into those processes, we realize the value of sharing that analysis more widely. The following are excerpts from contextual analyses in the context of our work that reflect the perspectives of many.



## VIEW FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA: “WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION FOR WHAT?”<sup>1</sup>

The key question that has emerged over the last decade on women’s political participation is—what do these numbers translate to or for women’s human rights? Progress has been made: current struggles are about ensuring that the women who get elected have a feminist agenda and are well linked with feminist movements, while questions around the elected women’s values, principles and their leadership styles are also becoming critical. However, there is an even bigger set of questions. Are we being sold a dud? Are we focusing on getting women into the right places where decisions are really made? Who makes decisions in each of the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) countries today—decisions that have major impacts on the lives of excluded women of various kinds?

Various scholars have pointed out how the locus of power has shifted from national/local structures to more distant centers or actors—in Washington DC, Beijing or the headquarters of mining companies based in Australia—while others are oftentimes invisible, for example multinational companies, banks, investment bankers, and shadowy business cartels. All these have been identified as the power brokers and power holders. It is also

increasingly clear that in countries such as Zimbabwe, the military is playing a very big role in national politics. So while they are not sitting at the table, they do sit behind the curtains and under the tables, or even remove only their uniforms but keep the titles which they bring to the decision making tables—just to make sure you know they can take out the guns at any time. It should always be remembered that the armed liberation movements are still literally—ARMED.

On the bright side, feminists have become more adept at recognizing, and naming these forces. And on even on brighter note women from different walks of life are self-organizing in new and exciting ways that the present day NGOs have yet to fully grasp. Young women, sex workers, sexual minorities, traders, migrants—all these women are finding innovative ways of linking with each other and challenging these power dynamics.



1. Excerpt from *Between Jesus, the Generals and the Invisibles*, Everjoyce Win, JASS Southern Africa.

## VIEW FROM MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS<sup>2</sup>

Understanding the criminalization of activists from a gender perspective reveals a cycle of violence that includes but extends beyond state repression and the ways that governments paint activists as *terrorists* in the media. These state actions fuel the kind of sexism and stigma that women face within their social movements, communities and even their own families. Non-state actors (like corporations, religious fundamentalist, etc.) also play a defining role in demeaning women activists and encouraging attacks against them for stepping out of prescribed gender roles and speaking out. This has negative impacts on the most vulnerable defenders—including indigenous peoples, women, and human rights defenders who speak

out to defend their territories and natural resources.

The Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative—a collaborative effort between JASS and five partners<sup>3</sup>—has pioneered an innovative approach for documenting and analyzing the unique forms of violence against women human rights defenders, gained increased recognition of the problem and the need for gender-specific strategies by a wide range of human rights actors and governments. It has created a comprehensive, regionally-relevant set of strategies and networks that respond immediately to urgent cases, prevent and reduce risk, and create a shield of self-defense and support to sustain women defenders in the long term.



2. *Amplifying and Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders and Activists*, JASS, 2014.

3. AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad-Oaxaca (Mexico), Colectiva Feminista de El Salvador, Central

American Women's Fund (FCAM), and Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala (UDEFEQUA).

## VIEW FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE SCRAMBLE FOR RESOURCES<sup>4</sup>

Governments are serving as enablers of destructive corporate strategies often through the seemingly innocuous “public-private partnerships”. In the Philippines, for example, the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) policy sanctioned housing demolitions in so-called “danger zones”, e.g. along riverbanks or railroad tracks, displacing vast, long-established poor urban communities. When these areas are cleared, local governments are quick to offer the same location to big businesses offering proper publicly-funded infrastructure to make the location safe. In Cambodia, thousands of rural communities have been displaced to open the way to agro-industry. Cambodia’s economic land concession (ELC) scheme serves as the “legal” basis for granting land to these corporations.

Land grabbing is widespread and well-documented from Malaysia and Indonesia to Myanmar and the Philippines. Governments—eager for economic growth—favor huge mining companies to the detriment of indigenous peoples’ livelihoods and cultures. In 2010, for instance, 7,800 acres (3,156 hectares) of farmland were confiscated by the government of Myanmar to expand the Letpadaung mining operation. Protests against the mine in 2012 were met with a brutal police crackdown on peaceful protesters who opposed the project’s environmental and social impact, including the loss of their land. In

4. From *The Changing Context for Women’s Rights in Southeast Asia*, Report from Strategic Conversation hosted by JASS, July 17–18, 2013 with 25 Southeast Asian researchers, human rights advocates, and grassroots leaders.



these communities displaced by development schemes that do not take people into account, women face human rights violations on many fronts—compounded by their already tenuous access to land ownership and user rights—including the loss of land and livelihood, limited access to income generating opportunities, exclusion from decision-making, violence, etc.

Though many civil society organizations are struggling to respond to the changing dynamics, new and powerful forms of organizing

and activism are pushing back and mobilizing hope and alternatives. Against many odds, women’s organizations are co-leading efforts to promote the Human Rights Commission with the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) processes. Women are among the leaders in broad coalitions of rural and indigenous peoples fighting land grabs and demanding a say in economic development. Women activists are using cyber-activism to amplify their voices and build new kinds of virtual alliances.



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## 2. YOUNG WOMEN SPEAK OUT

“There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

ARUNDHATI ROY

Young women activists are among the many women on the frontlines of crises and change—organizing independently to ensure that their voices are included in the heart of the broader struggles and agendas for justice. They are using social media and creative arts as strategies to access information, debate feminist ideas and mobilize action for change. In Zimbabwe, young women are using theater and dance to unleash women’s voices and courage to resist traditional roles, break the silence and challenge taboos. In Indonesia, young women are leading street actions to challenge policy initiatives to control women’s freedoms. Their presence, in itself, is disrupting social expectations that young women *should be seen and not heard*.

## ZIMBABWE: UNLEASHING VOICES, UNLEASHING CHANGE

We are standing in the garden of Katswe Sistahood's office in Harare, Zimbabwe. The sun beats on our foreheads until we are shiny with sweat and our clothes are soaked through. There is a group of young women performing a series of exercises, breathing heavily as they jump in place. And then shift into seamless choreography, high kicks slice the air, swan-like arms rise to the sky with sturdy legs as unmovable as mountains. Then they are laughing, breaking into a chorus of ululating greetings, they weave amongst each other in predetermined order before they freeze, and the first speaker begins her monologue, her gaze laser-focused on a point we can't see—making us want to look, to look with her.

“There's an act of defiance in going onstage... Because everything about our stories is private, there's something in saying, I'm sick and tired of pretending that my life is private when there's nothing private about it and the privacy is actually killing me. This private space is where I'm violated most and I can't be silent about that anymore.”

**RUDO CHIGUDU, KATSWE SISTAHOOD**

The nine young women who hail from low income housing settlements have spent weeks preparing a collection



of monologues and dramatic presentations inspired in part by Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. Each woman crafted a monologue through an intense process of theatrical training and sculpting life stories into war cries, songs and dances—all for a performance at the 7 Arts Theatre, Harare's biggest theatrical venue.

### BREAKING THE SILENCE

The celebration and creative activism happens against a backdrop of grim realities for young women and girls in Zimbabwe—violence against women and the LGBT community, rape, early pregnancy and the spread of HIV are all serious problems across the nation. Taboos, fear and stigma prevent women from speaking openly about their experiences or seeking support. Brutal government repression is used to silence critical voices, especially those of activists that challenge its authority and question its policies. And powerful conservative religious and cultural groups work to further limit women's freedoms and heighten shame about bodies.

According to a report by Gender Links Zimbabwe,<sup>5</sup> 26 percent of women experienced some form of violence (psychological, emotional, economic, physical or sexual) perpetrated by an intimate partner in the period 2011–

2012. And 13 percent of men in the country admit to perpetrating some form of violence against their intimate partners during the same period.

Such a hostile climate requires creative, careful, and sometimes covert approaches for raising important but contentious issues, such as sex education and gender-based violence, in public spaces. It requires young women to be bold but strategic about their activism and community education efforts, and work together to ensure their safety.

Katswe Sistahood uses theater, music and film to raise awareness and educate young women about HIV, sexual and reproductive rights, contraception, rape, and LGBT issues. JASS has been working closely with Katswe to help train these young activist leaders and transform them into powerful community-based change agents.

“How do we transform silence into voice? How do we transform the horrific into something that reclaims a sense of beauty that can catalyze other people in their journeys?”

**SHEREEN ESSOF, JASS SOUTHERN AFRICA**

5. Peace Begins @ Home: Violence against Women (VAW) Baseline Study (2013).

## WHAT IS H-M-B?

Heart-Mind-Body (H-M-B), an initiative led by JASS Southern Africa puts women's health, feelings and bodies at the center of human rights organizing, especially in contexts fraught with violence. JASS trains and equips young political facilitators to gently open up discussions about sex, bodies, health, and well-being—something seldom encouraged within their homes or communities. The process dispels myths and helps women gain confidence and information. Learning from one another's stories builds understanding and solidarity between them across differences, groundwork for the collective action needed to change attitudes and policies to benefit women. Through this initiative, JASS is supporting Zimbabwean women activists to strengthen and rebuild their own communities of solidarity, report and monitor women's human rights abuses, and develop collective solutions to violence and other threats that they experience daily.

Katswe utilizes a H-M-B approach in creating safe spaces called *Pachoto*—a Shona word for fireside story-telling—where women in low-income housing and informal settlements can share stories, find their voice and organize circles of mutual support and self-defense. Just speaking openly before a small group of understanding peers can be liberating, validating, and empowering for many Zimbabwean women, but—when infused with useful information and strategy—it leads to much more. Through publications, short films, and plays that recast these stories, including an annual adaptation and road-show of the *Vagina Monologues* and planned documentary, Katswe is able to inspire and educate hundreds of others, provoking important public discussions about reproductive and sexual rights, violence against women and other critical social issues. Through this work Katswe is building a critical mass of young women ending the silence around women's bodies, sexual health, and violence against women in Zimbabwe. To date, Katswe has mobilized more than 2,000 young Zimbabwean women into small mutual support circles to help them navigate healthcare services, legal protection, and the inevitable backlash from conservative families and communities.



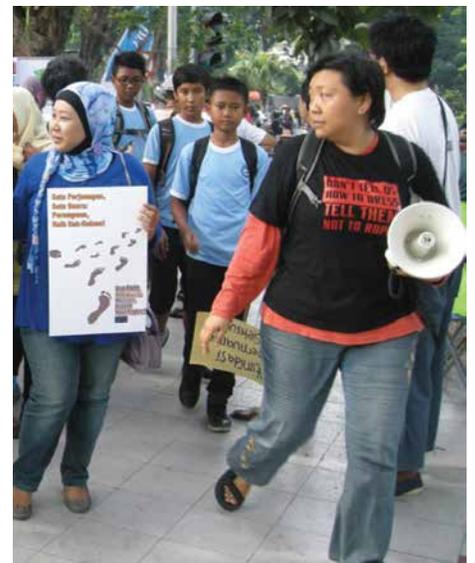
## INDONESIA: CHALLENGING OFFICIAL "MORALITY"

As heavy rain poured down, the young women activists of FAMM-Indonesia (Forum Aktivist Perempuan Muda Indonesia or Young Indonesian Women Activists' Forum) stood side by side, wrists roped together, mouths taped, to express their

strong opposition to the Ormas Bill. This bill would require civil society organizations to "uphold morality and ethics and nurture the country's religious and cultural norms." The tape covering the women's mouths carried a message about Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono or SBY: "ORMAS = SBY Gagal" (The Ormas Bill equals disaster for SBY).<sup>6</sup>

The bill, formally known as the Law on Mass Organizations, in this new version grants the government new powers to disband organizations

6. In 2014, a new President was elected with the promise of a new, more democratic era to come.





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and monitor foreign associations more closely. It also stipulates that all organizations must conform to Pancasila ideology, the official philosophy of the Indonesian state from 1945. Purportedly, this law is intended to limit the actions of fundamentalist religious organizations, particularly Islamic groups, however, over time it has evolved to encompass, activists say, “anyone trying to speak up against the government.” Human rights activists fear that the law grants the government excessive authority to control civil society groups and threatens to destroy Indonesia’s otherwise thriving democratic culture. Additionally, well-financed fundamentalist interests wield growing influence over social norms and public policy—from dictating women’s roles in society and feeding taboos around sex and sexuality to legislating women’s attire and criminalizing homosexuality—these groups are increasingly using their power to preach intolerance and limit women’s basic freedoms and rights.

Although the Ormas Bill eventually passed, the young and LBT women leading JASS’ efforts in Indonesia—over 350 of them organized in FAMM—are not deterred and continue to pushback, joining the growing coalitions of groups demanding democracy.

### MAKING NOISE

In the last two years, FAMM has been an incubator for innovative activist leadership, face-to-face organizing and nimble alliances to promote democratic alternatives, engaging at the grassroots as well as through formal political institutions and policy processes.

“JASS women of Southeast Asia are always right at the heart of protests against repressive legislation or any move by governments to shrink democratic space.”

**KUNTHEA CHAN, JASS SOUTHEAST ASIA**

FAMM’s growing network of young Indonesian women has grown since 2007 through on-going leadership training and organizing processes led by JASS – Southeast Asia. Women involved in these processes learn to use JASS’ power framework, other tools and facilitation methods to analyze their contexts, build their base and develop effective strategies that minimize risk while building strength. JASS continues to accompany FAMM, supporting both strategy and training, and ensuring their regional and international visibility and recognition. In 2014

### WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALISM?

Fundamentalism is a global phenomenon based on strict adherence to a specific ideology—religious, political, economic, or otherwise—that is acted out through concerted efforts to impose this ideology on all social, political, and economic arrangements and structures. Fundamentalist tendencies are present across all religions, including Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and localized religious traditions. Fundamentalisms are largely associated with religion, but there are also economic fundamentalisms (e.g. market fundamentalism) and political fundamentalism (libertarian fundamentalism).

**JASS FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDERS’  
DICTIONARY, 2013, 2ND EDITION**

and 2015, JASS and FAMM will work together in developing their political influence strategy on a set of issues that are common among the diverse organizers and groups that are coming together under the FAMM umbrella.



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### 3. DEFENDING OUR TERRITORIES, DEFENDING OURSELVES

Indigenous peoples are only about six percent of the world's population but their territories hold around 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. It is no surprise that indigenous territories are the frontline of the scramble for resource extraction. Despite the promise of jobs and money, mega-projects, mining and oil exploration among other resource-extraction strategies often have devastating impacts on indigenous and rural communities, destroying basic livelihoods and the cultural foundation of their communities. The good news is that indigenous communities are pushing back and are on the forefront of many important environmental justice efforts. Women are taking on key leadership roles, courageously standing up and mobilizing communities against these threats and at the same time, creating alternatives that improve lives and promote community, resilience and wellbeing for people and the planet.<sup>7</sup>

7. Excerpt from *Making Change Happen 5: Indigenous and Rural Women in Defense of Land, Territories and Women's Rights*.

## HONDURAS: INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES DEFEND THEIR TERRITORIES

Indigenous and rural communities that defend their territories and demand a voice in their development are the target of repression and violence. In many regions, the human rights defenders most at risk are indigenous peoples working in defense of natural resources, including many women leaders. Given their critical role and the risks they face, JASS Mesoamerica dedicated its **Feminist Leadership School (Alquimia)** to indigenous and rural women in 2011, and in 2013 launched a crossregional initiative to bring together women from Mesoamerica and Southeast Asia in the lead up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014.

“When they see green, all they see is money.”

GRACIELA ARIAS, NATIONAL COORDINATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF PANAMA (CONAMUIP)

“Today, the ferocious scramble to control and exploit resources—from land, forests and water to technology and human DNA—is a scramble for power, including whose voice counts and what matters most ...”

LISA VENEKLASSEN, MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN 4: POWER-MOVEMENTS-CHANGE – MALAWI

### THE STORY OF BERTA CACERES AND COPINH<sup>8</sup>

by Daysi Flores, JASS Mesoamerica

One evening in May 2013, after a hard day in the community of Rio Blanco, Berta Cáceres—a mother of four and indigenous leader—was in her car making her way back home. She drove the road over the beautiful mountains full of trees and rivers that she and her people protect with love. Suddenly, a military patrol asked her to stop. They asked her and her traveling companion to get out and stand away from the car while they searched it. A few minutes later, they “found” a gun in the trunk. Berta knew she had been framed and she knew why. The soldiers put her in their patrol car, took all her belongings and confiscated the vehicle; she was arrested without following any legal procedure.

During the 60-minute drive Berta wondered what would happen to her. She feared the worst—that she would disappear like many others human rights defenders and never be found. She knew that the military patrol car was from the same battalion guarding the Chinese transnational corporation: SYNOHIDRO/DESA that was trying



to build a dam on the Rio Blanco in indigenous people’s territory—a dam that was under construction against the will of the Lenca community who have the legal right to consultation regarding their territories. To block the company and to demand their right to be consulted, the community occupied the access road to the river. Berta, along with Tomás Gómez, and Aureliano Molina from COPINH are all leaders involved in organizing and supporting this human rights struggle.



8. Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras

Once we received the call from Berta we knew that she was in danger of being killed or disappeared while in the hands of the military forces. We had to act fast so we started to mobilize our networks inside and outside of Honduras. We asked them to make phone calls to all government offices demanding that if she was arrested, she had to be handed over to the proper authorities. We knew that if our team and allies in the US called with their gringo accents, the government would pay attention.

Once we knew she was going to be legally charged—just like more than 360 women prosecuted for defending their territory and their rights—we started an urgent action to demand her immediate release. Along with COPINH, we made a call on our allies to help us in denouncing what was happening to her in social media all over the world.

### COPINH and the criminalization of indigenous activists

On September 12, 2013, Berta, Tomás, and Aureliano were charged with illegal seizure of land, coercion and damage to the DESA Corporation that was building a dam on Lenca land. As with similar events in Guatemala and Mexico, the government's goal is to "decapitate the movement, putting its leaders in jail so that the corporations can continue their extractions unimpeded," said Beverly Bell, of Other Worlds. Activists like Berta, Tomás, and Aureliano are targeted for their leadership in organizing against the dam, and for the Lenca people to have a say—their right by law (provision 169 of the ILO Convention)—in the development and use of their land. As the community continued to protest, federal military forces were sent in to "protect" the hydroelectric plant, following a regional pattern of using police and military to protect private interests.

Their case is a vivid example of the "criminalization" of citizen activists and human rights defenders across



Mexico and Central America. The story describes how local and local-to-global networks go into high gear to respond to urgent situations and mobilize global action when needed. Many organizations connected to Honduras and to COPINH in particular were activated and coordinated closely to keep pressure coming from all angles. Among over 150 international and Latin American organizations, were stalwart groups like Other Worlds, Grassroots International, Sisters of Mercy, Rights Action, and Economic Policy Institute and others that JASS leans on for pressure on global and United States policymakers.

### Safety in networks

The scale and unpredictability of violence against activists and women activists in particular is what led JASS to reach out to close partners<sup>9</sup> to explore how to create regionally relevant strategies for the protection of women defenders. In 2010 the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative was born. This unique cross-sectoral effort brings together women across many divides, including journalists, indigenous women defending territories, trade unionists, LGBT activists, mothers pursuing justice for family members and others. Today many grassroots

women leaders see themselves as **human rights defenders** for the first time—which enables them to better strategize around risk while also claiming the right to defend rights and be protected.

"I wouldn't be here, alive, without the support from the national network and the Initiative...the collectivity that surrounds me, gives me security."

**BERTA CÁCERES, COPINH, HONDURAS**

As a co-coordinator of this regional Initiative and of national networks<sup>10</sup> in Honduras and Mexico, JASS Mesoamerica accompanies and supports women defenders like Berta Cáceres through dangerous situations that result from their human rights work. Likewise, through these networks, JASS fosters coordination, solidarity and joint advocacy among activists within countries, across borders, and internationally to strengthen their demand for justice and community control in development decisions.

## MESOAMERICA: MOVEMENT-BUILDING APPROACHES TO ACTIVIST PROTECTION

Since 2006 when JASS dedicated itself to building collective power, our motivation was both to amplify women's impact and to protect women from backlash and violence for stepping out of traditional roles or *crossing the line*. Through the Mesoamerican Women Human

9. See page 9 for the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative partners.

10. See page 35 for full list of JASS Mesoamerica's allies.



Rights Defenders Initiative and in other regions, JASS works with allies to incubate and promote a feminist and a movement-building approach to human rights protection that combines individual and collective strategies to sustain and strengthen activism, while reducing risk. This approach takes into account the economic, social and political forces

at play, examines gender relations and other forms of discrimination such as class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, location, ability, etc., in order to improve the effectiveness of strategies to deal with violence and inequality.

A critical component of this movement-building process from

a feminist perspective is to engage women defenders in protecting themselves and each other through networks of mutual support and solidarity. National networks from the Initiative enable women activists to better understand and confront sexism and violence, feel strong enough to push for more inclusive social justice movements, be

“A movement-building approach does much more than create webs and systems for self-protection. It also equips women defenders with the collective power they need to amplify their voice and engage more loudly and effectively with governments to change the norms, institutions and policies that impact human rights defenders”

MARUSIA LOPEZ CRUZ, JASS Mesoamerica



## CHANGING POLICY: UN ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON WOMEN DEFENDERS

On November 27, 2013 the first-ever resolution for the protection of women human rights defenders was passed by the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee. JASS Mesoamerica joined with the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative and global partners such as Amnesty International and International Service for Human Rights to push for this resolution—an invaluable new instrument for activists facing daily risks for the cause of justice in places like Honduras, Mexico and Zimbabwe.

While the resolution does not address all risks and protection needs of women human rights defenders, it is an important and historic resolution in that it makes explicit that gender discrimination affects the lives and work of women defenders and states have committed themselves to taking concrete steps to protect them. Moving forward, JASS will work with partners to monitor and build upon its impact, and ensure it makes a difference in the lives of women activists around the world.

"One of the greatest contributions is self-care, which means putting your body as a women defender at the center of the debate. Your body is political territory. It is one of the first spaces for constructing freedom... for defining how you exist as a woman, human being and a citizen in this struggle"

GILDA RIVERA, WOMEN'S RIGHTS CENTER, HONDURAS

recognized for their contribution in all aspects of life, and improve governments' capacity to guarantee rights. In the Initiative, the national networks provide a sense of belonging and a shared understanding of violence and risk, that enables women to feel stronger and less alone.

Traditional activist protection tends to narrowly focus on the physical protection of the individual through security measures such as bodyguards and bullet-proof vests. In many cases, these measures separate the defender from her community and family, and fail to address both their physical and mental wellbeing. A holistic approach to protection takes into account the public and the private sphere and includes the need to feel safe at home, at work and in the streets. It encompasses a concept of personal security that includes support for the physical and psychological well-being of women defenders and of collective security that includes that of their families and colleagues.



## LIBERIA: WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES OF BUILDING PEACE

Launching 2013 on an exciting note, JASS' Executive Director, Lisa VeneKlasen, traveled to Liberia from January 19–24 as part of the Nobel Women's Initiative's 18-women delegation: Women Forging Peace. Led by Liberian activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Leymah Gbowee, and sister Laureates Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi and Mairead Maguire, the delegation met with the grassroots women leaders from across the country, some of whom have been the driving force behind the peace and reconciliation movement following years of brutal civil war. Lisa recounts her experience:

### IN THE PEACE HUT

Twenty-six women—Liberian and their visitors—several small children and a few men are pressed into the round, mud-walled hut. The Liberians wear

matching bright yellow *lapas* (cloth wrap) and white T-shirts with various slogans: "No more corruption!" "Say NO to rape!" "Peace, no more violence!" "Women Oh Women!" Ma Anni shouts, and the women shout back "Women!" Then a short prayer thanking God for the visit. A crowd of children and men fill the doorway to gape at the visitors from far away. I sit on a white plastic chair beside four Nobel Peace laureates. We've driven three hours from the Liberian capital, Monrovia, to learn from the women in Totota village in this Women's Peace Hut.

One of the world's most powerful stories of women's organizing and activism comes from Liberia. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace mobilized hundreds of Muslim and Christian women. With prayer, extraordinary courage, and even a sex boycott, the women forced feuding warlords and factions to end a brutal 14-year civil war in 2003. The story is known everywhere, thanks to the moving film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* and the inspiring memoir *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer and Sex changed a Nation at War* by the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Leymah Gbowee. But what has happened since? How are women faring in the reconstruction process,

and how are they working to build sustainable peace? That's what we've come to find out.

Our delegation of mostly American women is led by Leymah Gbowee and other Nobel Peace laureates, Jody Williams, Mairead Maguire, and Shirin Ebadi, and organized by the Nobel Women's Initiative and Leymah's foundation. As we spend time in three different villages, I get the chance to speak with women grassroots activists who are organizing against other forms of violence, the violence waged against the bodies of women and girls in families, in homes, on the way to the market or fetching water, in schools and at work.

In Totota and in another village, Weala, we gather inside the Women's Peace Hut. These small round constructions stand in the center of the two villages, visible and respected as women's justice centers, the product and powerful symbol of the tireless organizing and awareness-raising continued since the war. The Women for Peace Network (WIPNET) to which these women belong traces its roots to the Mass Action during the war that pressured the warlords to sign the peace agreement in 2003. Inside each hut, cases of rape, domestic violence and everyday disputes are brought to light and either mediated or referred to the police.

In Totota, the women talk about working closely with the police, located nearby, to find the perpetrators. In the midst of reconstruction, Liberia's police lack the basics – from transport to money for photocopies – to carry out their duties. The police chief in Totota says, "We rely on these women to do our job. In some cases, they can get confessions or evidence that we are unable to find. People trust them."

In Weala, the local commissioner praises the peace hut and the local women's peace network. "These women are not only bringing peace and fighting violence, they are building democracy and justice in our community." The police chief in Totota describes the partnership with WIPNET



and its grassroots leaders as a perfect example of “community policing to fight rape and violence together.”

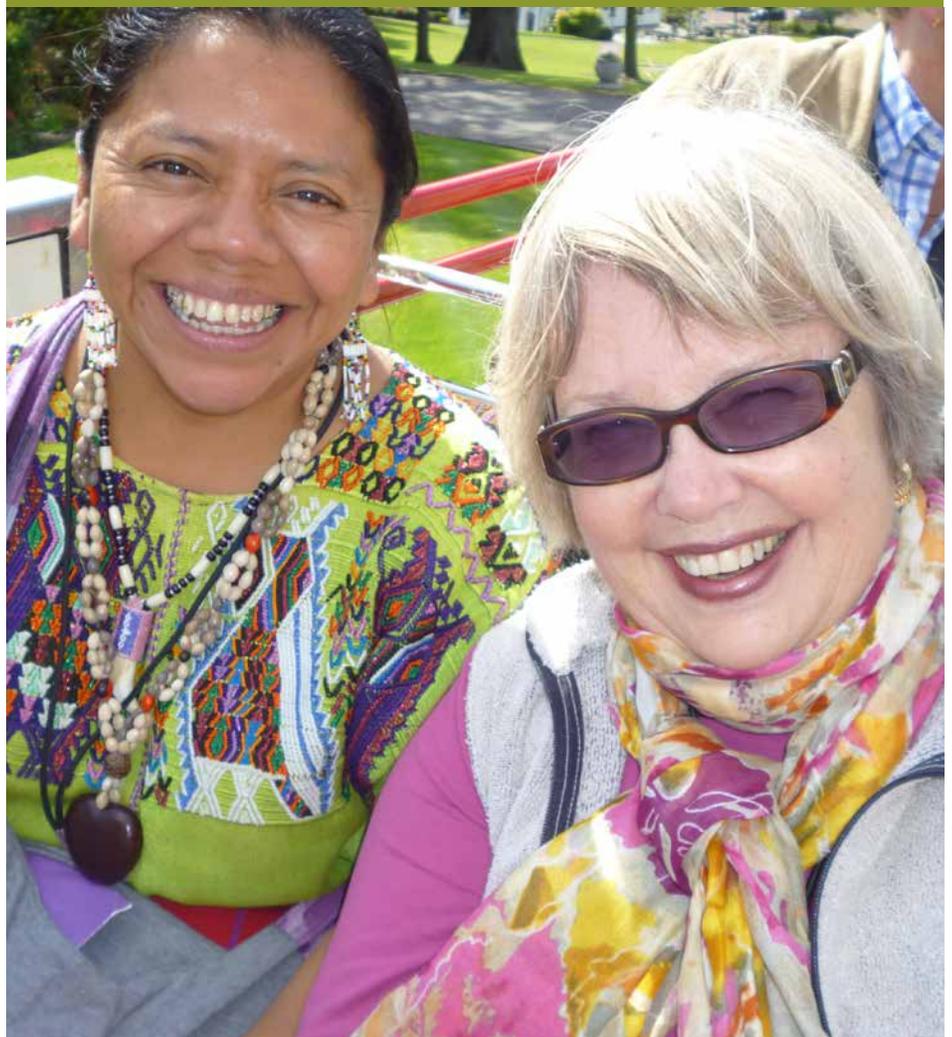
Speaking in characteristically bold language to the journalists who followed us to Weala, Leymah says, “...the women’s peace huts are up-ending our Liberian tradition of the Palaver Hut (a traditional community dispute resolution structure promoted by the Truth and Reconciliation process). Men run the Palaver Hut. Women observe from the outside and participate when asked by saying No or Yes. Men are welcome into the Women’s Peace Hut but it’s a women’s space run by women where all voices count. It’s in this way that women are deconstructing patriarchy and the violence it breeds.”

Our delegation asks the women what makes them brave enough to confront rape and sexual abuse, problems hidden by silence and stigma in any culture. The women point to each other. “We are powerful together,” one explains. As Leymah says, “Collective power is built on individual power. Women are empowered by coming together, and the organizing awakens the inner activist lying deep inside every woman.”

After more than a decade, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Liberia is preparing to wind down while a different form of violence—particularly sexual and gender-based violence—rages on. Yet there is no doubt that Liberian women, especially grassroots women building their networks, changing mindsets, and taking on violence one day at a time, are the new peacekeepers, building the Liberia of the future.

## WOMEN STRATEGIZING FOR PEACE

From May 28–31, JASS attended Nobel Women’s Initiative annual conference, *Moving Beyond Militarism and War: Women-driven Solutions for a Non-Violent War in Belfast* (a city with a long history of peace-making against all odds). This was a gathering of over 100 diverse women’s rights leaders, prominent environmentalists, activists, journalists, and philanthropist in which JASS’ work has become widely visible and recognized. JASS Executive Director, Lisa VeneKlasen moderated a panel on women human rights defenders in which JASS Mesoamerica Regional Director, Marusia Lopez presented the latest research on violence against women defenders and discussed security strategies for protection. This conference provided JASS with the opportunity to learn from and forge new relationships with other organizations and activists—helping to form a network of new allies to advance our work on the protection and safety of women defenders.





# 4. EQUIPPING ACTIVISTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

"I've been working with JASS since 2008. They have really empowered me with skills and knowledge. [the] women only spaces [they convene] make us strong, we come together and become friends. We understand the problems in our lives. We see how power works, those with power over us and the power within ourselves. We see together that we have the collective power to make change in our lives"

LINNAH MATANYA, WOMEN FOR FAIR DEVELOPMENT, MALAWI



"JASS did something so rare by bringing together diverse grassroots activists to speak about their experiences. For me, that was powerful..."

SATTARA HATTIRAT, TOGETHERNESS FOR EQUALITY AND ACTION (TEA), THAILAND



“The ability to recognize ourselves as women defenders, to care for ourselves and each other and to generate new collective security strategies ... have become indispensable in order to observe human rights in Mesoamerica...”

WOMEN DEFENDER, MESOAMERICA





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## 5. NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICIES AND REALITY

Better laws and policies are critical to ensuring women's rights and access to resources. But history tells us time and again that laws are just part of the story. For good policies and laws to fully translate into rights, takes a lot more: financial resources and structures for implementation, political will and a high-level commitment to change, fully capable bureaucracies, and last but not least, the public—all citizens—need to know and believe in their rights.

The last two decades of women's rights advocacy vividly illustrate how critical legal change is and yet, how fragile and uncertain the promise of change becomes without all the other pieces to ensure implementation.

Many important achievements in women's reproductive health, prosecuting sexual violence and even, women's political participation are under threat today and many reversed, due to inadequate mechanisms for implementation and a well-financed effort to reverse support for gender equality in all its forms. For example, even good rape laws aren't enforced across the world because of a combination of lack of public awareness, continued social stigma, and the failure of police and judges to understand sexual violence. The headline story about the multi-year backlog in the processing of hundreds of rape kits—used for evidence to take cases to trial—in the United States gave the world another vivid example of the vast gulf between policies and reality.

From a JASS perspective, the supply of good laws and policies must be matched by the sustained demand by citizens for their implementation—governments must be held to account. This is precisely why JASS mobilizes women's collective power—to provide the sustained energy to change social attitudes that undermine women's rights while also pressuring governments to enforce laws and policies that uphold rights and justice.

In Malawi, where good laws nevertheless failed to protect HIV positive women from stigma and ensure access to quality medicines, **Our Bodies, Our Lives**—the grassroots campaign JASS has helped to build—has managed to phase out older toxic antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) while ensuring that HIV positive women's voices and knowledge count. Recognizing the gap between the announcement of a new ARV and its provision, Malawian activists keep organizing. So do sexual minorities in Zambia and Zimbabwe. They welcome the public statement of the Zambian president's wife on ending discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. But they understand that it is only one moment in a much longer road, a much fiercer struggle.

## MALAWI: COLLECTIVE POWER ESSENTIAL TO ENSURING QUALITY MEDICINE

“Our governments are good in signing declarations, policies and treaties, good on papers but not implementation, for how long have we been struggling for access to [resources]...?”

**TIWONGE GONDWE, MALAWI ACTIVIST,  
(OUR BODIES, OUR LIVES)**

Even with women-friendly laws such as the Malawi's Gender Equality Bill (2012) and others—guaranteeing HIV positive women access to much needed resources—HIV positive

women still have limited access to quality ARVs. **Our Bodies, Our Lives**—a nation-wide grassroots organizing effort for better ARVs led by HIV-positive women offers great lessons on mobilizing to close the gaps between rhetoric and implementation. JASS has helped to build this campaign with our partner, Malawi Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Affected by HIV and AIDS (MANERELA+). A diverse group of women—including HIV positive women, rural/urban women, sex-workers, LBT organizations, and religious communities—have been organizing since 2007 to demand safe, affordable antiretroviral therapy (ART) along with resources that save and improve the quality of women's lives, such as land, seeds, fertilizer, mobile health clinics, and nutrition. In the process, they have overcome social isolation, shame and desperate poverty.

While the treatment of HIV has benefited from expertise of all kinds, the knowledge of HIV positive women has not been taken into account. This is one of many reasons why prevalence rates continue to climb among women and access to ART is poor. That is where an alternative approach is needed and feminist leadership strategies are critical.



JASS' approach to feminist leadership puts women's hearts, minds and bodies at the center of organizing agendas. Personal stories anchor dialogues in which women analyze power, identify problems, and begin to shape common agendas. These deep change processes combined with skill-building and strategy workshops have enabled 30 women leaders to mobilize over 500 women in their communities to campaign for better ARVs and lives.

In response to the advocacy led by the JASS Southern Africa team and campaign—**Our Bodies, Our Lives**—the government had begun to roll out an alternative to the outdated stavodin ARV, which had deformed women's bodies in addition to other side effects. But some districts had not yet received the new drugs. There is no guarantee that this change in treatment will be sustained beyond a

year, because of budget constraints. But women activists are not deterred because they have come to realize that without continuous pressure on policymakers, a gap persists between official rhetoric and implementation.

From putting pressure on their local councilors and former President Joyce Banda, to publicizing their perspectives and experiences through the media, HIV positive women joined forces with religious leaders, healthcare professionals and researchers to demand quality ARV treatment and healthcare. On the national public broadcaster, women activists host three regular nationwide shows to tackle taboos and expose some of the serious issues affecting positive people, including access to quality ART, and the stigma and discrimination experienced in communities and at local hospitals.

Through community dialogues with local authorities and religious leaders, and healthcare literacy and awareness workshops that draw hundreds, these women have mobilized to demand accountability and improve services for HIV positive people. At the same time, this campaign is building a demand for the process of real democracy.

Supported by JASS, MANERELA+, and a wide range of organizations including Malawi Women's Forum and COWLHA (Coalition of Women Living with and affected by HIV/AIDS), women activist leaders are committed to carrying this fight forward, in their communities and nationally. Real transformation, they realize, is possible only when women in communities mobilize collectively to ensure that their problems and needs are addressed, and their rights secured and protected.



## LGBTI RIGHTS IN ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE: ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

Zambia's First Lady, Dr. Christine Kaseba-Sata surprised her own country and the international community when she called for an end to discrimination against sexual minorities. Speaking at a UNAIDS event in Lusaka on 5 November 2013, the president's wife, herself a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, said, "*Silence around issues of men who have sex with men should be stopped and no one should be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation.*" Her statement marked a welcome shift away from the homophobic rhetoric of some African politicians that fuels stigma and violent attacks including "corrective" rape. Her words prompted activists and JASS allies in the Southern African region to wonder if the rights of LGBTI people might begin to feature positively on the political and social agenda in Zambia and beyond.

In 38 countries across Africa, including Zambia, LGBTI sexuality is prohibited by laws, some in place since colonial times, others enacted in the current wave of intensified conservatism. Increasingly, LGBTI people and other activists who advocate for LGBTI rights are being prosecuted under these laws. For example, Zambian activist Paul Kasonkomona was on trial for speaking on television about the rights of gay people as part of his advocacy against HIV and AIDS, while two other men, Philip Mubiana and James Mwape, faced sodomy

 "Who one has sex with, how you have sex, who you marry, how you marry, and how that marriage/relationship is validated, and entrenched is based on the exercise of male power over women, their bodies, the children that are born from these bodies, and who feels they OWN who."

**EVERJOICE J. WIN, JASS SOUTHERN AFRICA**

charges. "It's a really tough situation," said one LGBTI activist, "*People are afraid to come out and be linked to our network. They are afraid of being imprisoned.*"

In Zimbabwe, long-time activist and JASS partner Martha Tholanah was charged with running an "unregistered" organization, GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe). For several years, JASS has been speaking out in support of GALZ members who have experienced harassment and violence at the hands of police because of their work. Martha welcomed Dr. Kaseba-Sata's statements. "*It is important that a high-level leader has spoken out to initiate dialogue and break the taboos,*" she said.

 "Our different sexual orientation and gender identity do not take away our Africanness nor do they take away our citizenship. As GALZ, we are part of civil society seeking social justice for marginalized people and groups."

**FADZAI MANDISHONA, GAYS AND LESBIANS OF ZIMBABWE (GALZ)**

Some leaders have tried to portray LGBTI as being against African culture to justify strident anti-homosexuality laws, going so far as to propose the death penalty as in the case of Uganda's infamous anti-gay bill. Meanwhile, conservative religious and traditional leaders manipulate culture and tradition to fuel misunderstanding, stigma and even violence against members of the LGBTI community and activists. In this context, Dr Kaseba-Sata's statement came at an opportune moment. She is well-positioned to shift the national and regional discourse on the rights of sexual minorities, with potential influence across the continent.

While Dr. Kaseba-Sata's stance has been met with praise around the world, frontline activists see limits to its impact. "There's a difference between a statement and action," said one Zambian LGBTI campaigner. "*She hit the nail on the head—and yet some of my comrades are being arrested for speaking on [LGBTI] rights.*"

Despite threats, harassment, imprisonment and violence, LGBTI activists are continuing to speak out and make their voices heard in innovative ways. LGBTI groups and activists are central to all of JASS Southern Africa's agendas and partnerships. For example, Youth Vision Zambia works with JASS to carve out safe spaces—called *insaka* dialogues—which allow women of all sexualities to tackle taboos through personal reflection and open discussion. Women share experiences on a range of themes from coping with family rejection to security, safety, and healing. These dialogues—also offered in Zimbabwe and Malawi—are part of JASS Southern Africa's Heart-Mind-Body (HMB) Initiative, which puts the wellbeing and safety of activists at the center of women's political organizing strategies.



## 6. ELECTIONS ≠ DEMOCRACY

“Democracy is not a commodity that can be exported. It’s a culture that is nurtured and built.”

SHIRIN EBADI, IRANIAN PEACE LAUREATE, NOBEL WOMEN’S INITIATIVE

In recent years, the frequent failure of elections to reliably produce an uncontested, legitimate government has generated inevitable skepticism about democracy. In so many places—Mexico, Iraq, Egypt, Honduras and the United States, to name a few—Presidents have won by such slim margins that raised questions about their legitimacy and exacerbated social conflict.

Many JASS activists and allies have struggled to gain and make the most of the right for all citizens to vote in their countries. Above all, they have used the electoral process as a critical moment in time to bring new ideas into public debate, to call to account failed leaders and parties, and to educate and organize other citizens to work together to pursue alternatives. Participating in the electoral process can also be risky and requires creative security strategies alongside political organizing strategies.

Elections often expose underlying tensions and may trigger repression and violence. For women activists, the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe, Honduras and Cambodia intensified tensions and concerns about safety and security. Ordinary citizens in these and many other countries are skeptical about the value and benefits of the hard-won right to participate in elections. Opposition groups and voices are silenced, activists are attacked and results are rigged – can this be democracy?

For JASS, true democracy is a work in progress and goes much deeper. Maybe elections don't equal democracy but they can be a moment to promote and try out democratic principles—often with risks.

“Indeed, voting is only one way—though certainly a very important way—of making public discussions effective, when the opportunity to vote is combined with the opportunity to speak, and to listen, without fear... Balloting alone can be woefully inadequate, as is abundantly illustrated by the astounding electoral victories of ruling tyrannies in authoritarian regimes, from Stalin's Soviet Union to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The problem in these cases lies not just in the pressure that is brought to bear on voters in the act of balloting itself, but in the way public discussion of failures and transgressions is thwarted by censorship, suppression of political opposition, and violations of basic civil rights and political freedoms.”<sup>11</sup>

11. Amartya Sen, Democracy and Its Global Roots. Why Democratization is Not the Same as Westernization, *The New Republic*, Oct. 2003.

## ZIMBABWE: ELECTIONS HEIGHTEN SAFETY CONCERNS FOR ACTIVISTS

By Maggie Mapondera,  
JASS Southern Africa

Walking through the city streets, even stepping into airport arrivals, you could sense the tension in the air. People were waiting for something to happen, waiting with a strange mix of cynicism and fear for what would come after the vote on July 31, 2013. What did come, of course, was Robert Mugabe's eighth presidential re-election, amid serious suspicions of widespread vote-rigging.

Debate followed, over whether the harmonized elections were in fact free and fair. One member of Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission resigned, citing irregularities in the voting process. Many feared that the country would disintegrate into chaos as the re-election of ZANU PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) reignited political animosities. The memory of the 2008 election scared people: would that horrific history repeat itself if political parties contested the election results? Some people prepared for the worst, withdrawing their money from banks and buying up food supplies. Although few instances of violence were reported, both repression and the memory of violence were real.

In times of political and economic instability, women carry the burden of the struggle to survive—searching for food, water, and medicines. It took nearly six years for the country to stabilize to some degree. The space to dream, let alone organize for change, continues to shrink as repression, surveillance, arrests, and fear dominate women's lives. Safety and security are not merely crucial

“We do not want another violent engagement. We can't imagine another 2008. We knew that it would be hard for the opposition to rule this country. It will never happen. The regime has a tight grip over the governance of the country and they know all the tricks to rig votes. Rather rule than let us face another 2008.”

MARKET WOMAN SELLING  
VEGETABLES IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE



“So where do women go from here? Safety and security will be ongoing issues for women for a long time to come. ZANU PF has always been subtle in its limitations of freedoms. Now we see a growing conservatism, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and the space provided for hate speech. Ultimately the biggest impact is on women and women's rights.”

SIAN MASEKO, SEXUAL RIGHTS  
CENTER, ZIMBABWE

concerns for women activists during election time, but are daily realities.

### TOOLS FOR SAFETY AND SECURITY

Recognizing the importance of building strategies to ensure safety and security, leading up to the elections, JASS Southern Africa and partner Musasa Project hosted a two-day training of facilitators in Heart-Mind-Body (H-M-B) strategies, May 21–22, 2013. Ten Zimbabwean women activist-facilitators took part. JASS' H-M-B strategy puts women's feelings, fears and bodies at the center of human rights organizing, especially in contexts fraught with violence. Participants are equipped to identify and analyze the risks they face, recognize the importance of their voices and activism, appreciate why their work for justice is perceived as a threat, and recognize the unique sets of power and interests at play during each political moment.

Some activists grappled with the *why* of safety and security work in Zimbabwe. Women face violence on multiple fronts, whether it's an arrest on charges of loitering and soliciting as a means to police women's appearance and mobility, or state-sponsored violence against LGBT activists and women's rights organizers. Together, the group generated an analysis of their context, formulating joint strategies to deal with an established pattern of political violence against women activists and exchanged critical tools for survival to continue organizing for and exercising their rights. These tools remain useful even long after the election.

"The basic assumptions that lie behind efforts to increase the numbers of women in political office are that the inclusion of women leads to better, fairer and more responsive government. But in contexts in which women continue to have tenuous purchase on basic citizenship rights, and where masculine political cultures mediate participation in the public sphere, 'democratizing democracy' raises complex challenges." **ANDREA CORNWALL AND ANNE MARIE GOETZ, 2005**

## HONDURAS: QUESTIONABLE ELECTION OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN

By **Laura Carlsen,**  
JASS Mesoamerica

Tensions before Honduras' November 24 election only increased once voting concluded. A lot was at stake. No truly democratic presidential election had been held since that of Manuel Zelaya in 2005. Since Zelaya was kidnapped in a coup d'état on June 28, 2009, the coup regime has governed the nation with an iron hand, first under a *de facto* regime and later after a one-sided election organized by coup leaders and boycotted by democratic forces. As a result of four and a half years of coup rule, political polarization meets economic inequality in the nation to form a volatile mix of desperation and repression.

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal reported the final count in Honduras' presidential race at 36.89 percent for ruling National Party candidate Juan Orlando Hernandez and 28.78 percent for Xiomara Castro of the recently formed Liberty and New Foundations Party (LIBRE). This was a major upset; most polls showed Castro in the lead just weeks before the vote.



"The elections were held [but] have no political, cultural or socio-economic meaning in terms of progress in respecting overall women's rights. Actually, it's quite the opposite because there's been regression as economic and political plans are being made for women to work as cheap labor in a modern form of slavery. There has been a pronounced retrenchment of fundamentalism as conservative actors continue to push forward policies that go against women's historic and immediate demands, such as, the right to food. This is one of the most hidden forms of power because it's the hardest to analyze, or even identify. And even though women ran for office, it's not sufficient in really advancing women's demands."

**BERTA CÁCERES, COPINH,  
HONDURAS**

“The results of the elections create a military and transnational dictatorship that leaves us with a negative outlook for the defense of human rights and greater vulnerability for women human rights defenders.”

**DAYSI FLORES, JASS MESOAMERICA**

At play in these elections was not just the individual and the party that will govern for the next four years, but the future of one of the most violent and impoverished nations in the world. For women activists, who must try to feed families while standing against violence and corruption, the scenario did not look bright.

Do elections work to achieve democratic aspirations? Within Honduran women’s organizations, opinions were divided. Many were skeptical going into the elections—both about the political parties and about the process itself—but today, cynicism about the formal democratic process is even more common. While some saw the elections as a viable way to break the power of the right and to advance a human rights agenda, the Honduran party system has a long history of negotiating interests from above.

Social movements were weakened and disappointed, at least in the short term. President-elect Juan Orlando Hernandez proposed to reinforce the use of the army on the streets and in police tasks, to weaken labor rights, and to cede territory and resources without any regulations to transnational investment, all of which spells more trouble and violence for human rights defenders. His religious fundamentalism will mean more attacks on women’s rights and the LGBT community, and the continued power of the church in a state that is rapidly losing its secular standing.

Women human rights defenders see heightened risks in this new phase in Honduras’ tragic yet inspiring history. But they clearly have no intention of quitting.

## CAMBODIA: YOUNG WOMEN ACTIVISTS PROTEST POST- ELECTION VIOLENCE

**By Osang Langara,  
JASS Southeast Asia**

Following post-election political tension between the two main political parties after the July 2013 elections in Cambodia, young women activists from the CYWEN (Cambodian Young Women’s Empowerment Network) and other women’s and social justice groups took to the streets to appeal for peace. Using Facebook, Twitter, and other online platforms, CWYEN led intense online debates among a wide range of young people, and mobilized hundreds for street protests to prevent violence from erupting. JASS staff in Cambodia was at the center of this strategizing.

For JASS allies in Southeast Asia, the internet has become an essential tool and political space to broaden debate, keep women connected and informed, while mobilizing allies and action. Women activists around the world are finding strategic and creative ways of using social media to engage and organize others on issues ranging from corruption to religious fundamentalism to sexual rights and reproductive health. In Southeast Asia, activism on Facebook and Twitter fed into the protests in Cambodia.

Claims of widespread irregularities and fraud in the July 28 election fueled political tensions between the

“The Internet reminds us that there are always new forms of power and that power is dynamic and constantly changing.”

**CHAT GARCIA, ASSOCIATION FOR  
PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION (APC)**

ruling party, Cambodia People’s Party (CCP), and the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). CNRP held massive actions to boycott CCP’s victory; CCP went ahead to form a government without them. Originally peaceful, the protests turned violent when police threw grenades and used water cannons against protesters, leaving one dead and many injured.



Still living in the shadow of the brutal totalitarian Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodian women feared an increase in political repression and violence.

CYWEN—a network formed in 2010 following a national-level leadership training process carried out by JASS in 2009—was active in a series of peace protests, including the publicized August 14 Rally of Peace organized by the Working Group for Peace. Along with thousands of others, CWYEN activists assembled in Phnom Penh to appeal for peace. The women carried placards saying: “Cambodian People Need Peace!” “No to Violence!” and “We Need Justice and Freedom!”

CYWEN used Facebook and Twitter to urge people to join in the protests denouncing electoral violence. Thousands flooded the streets of Phnom Penh every week. These successful organizing efforts provide a vivid example of how online activism can fluidly link disparate efforts into

more powerful action. Facebook and Twitter can be important vehicles for sharing and spotlighting women’s perspectives and leadership when mainstream media fails or refuses to do so.

### LINKING FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE ACTIVISM

JASS is committed to bridging the gender digital divide by training women activists—especially grassroots and young women—to use internet communications technology (ICT) to broadcast their extraordinary stories, make connections, inform, reach out, and mobilize support. Since 2011, JASS has conducted several dialogues and trainings in ICTs in Indonesia, Cambodia and the Philippines as well as regionally, all of which has exponentially multiplied the presence and voice of women activists, with creative visuals overcoming language differences.

Online activism has many advantages, but activists need to be strategic in its use. Many opportunities exist to

build connections online, but the most effective organizing often still involves a combination of “face-to-face” and “virtual” engagement. In addition, digital security is an increasingly urgent concern, as governments employ virtual surveillance to track, censor and prosecute activists. The internet, activists realize, hosts competing players, interests and agendas, so it is important to balance potential impact against issues of protection. This is where JASS’ alliances with the Association of Progressive Communications, a leader in digital security, matters.

“The best organizing work manages to combine online and offline ‘appearances’ and actions. We are still trying to get the combination right.”

SMITA SHARMA, FIESTA FEMINISTA, MALAYSIA





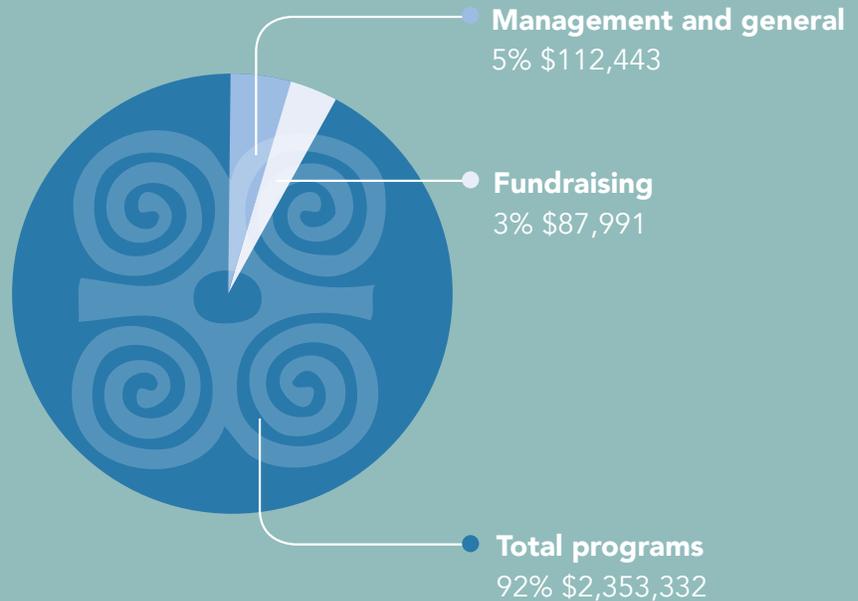
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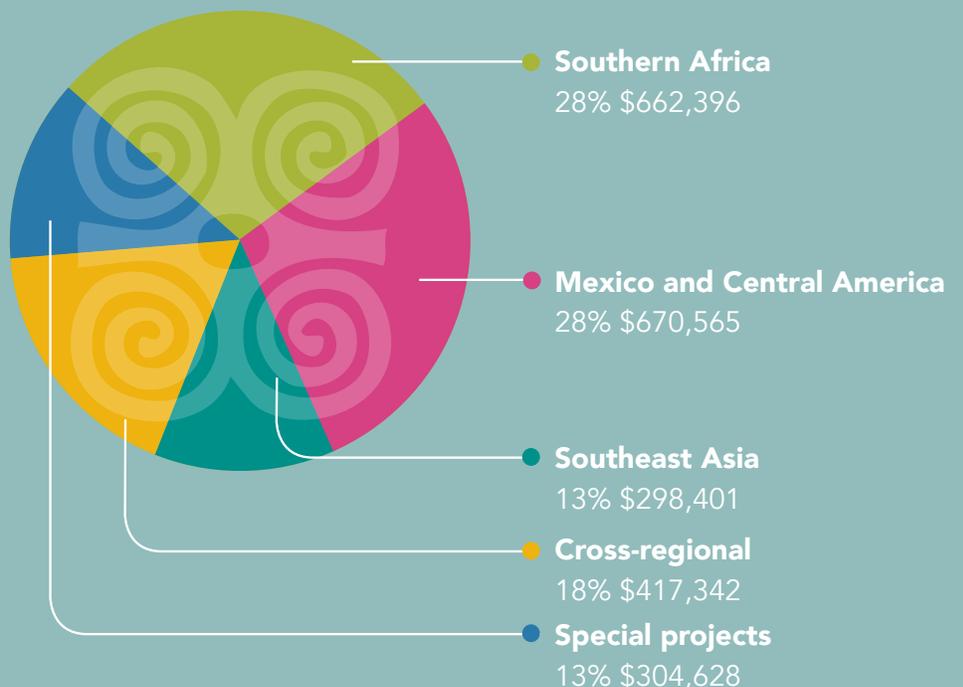
We would also like to thank many other friends and supporters who generously give donations and share their time and connections.

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## ALLIES AND NETWORKS

For JASS, organizing is a continuous and empowering process that brings different women and organizations together to identify critical injustices and act collectively to solve them. The participatory learning process that builds and sustains networks is co-led by our close partners and the women we train and accompany. We would like to thank the following organizations and networks around the world for their work, connections and trust, which are key to the success of JASS' initiatives and programs:

### JASS GLOBAL

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)\*\* • Nobel Women's Initiative • Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)\* • Institute for Development Studies • Institute for Policy Studies • Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition • Mesoamerican Working Group (MAWG) • Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)\* • Amnesty International\* • Coady Institute • Women's Human Rights Education Institute\*

\* also a close partner of JASS Mesoamerica

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### JASS SOUTHEAST ASIA

Women Headed Household Empowerment (PEKKA), Indonesia • Perkumpulan Sada Ahmo (PESADA), Indonesia • Indonesian Young Women Activists' Forum (FAMM) • Cambodian Young Women's Empowerment Network (CYWEN) • Center for Women's Resources (CWR), Philippines • National Rural Women Coalition (PKKK), Philippines • GABRIELA, Philippines • Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (WLB), Philippines • Equality Myanmar • Women's League of Burma • Mon Women's Organization, Myanmar • Women's Equality Association (WEA), Malaysia • Togetherness for Equality and Action (TEA) Group, Thailand

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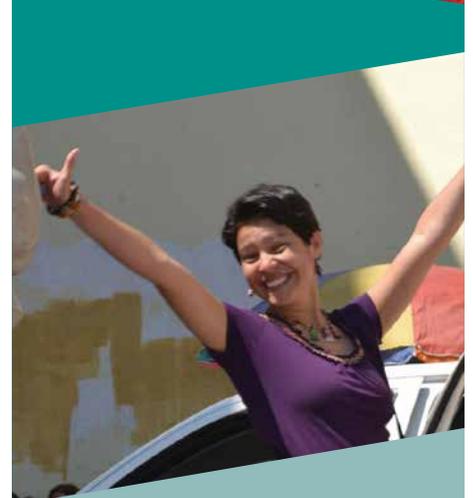
Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) • International Service for Human Rights • Central American Women's Fund (FCAM) • Alianza de Mujeres Indígenas de Centroamérica y México

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- Center for Popular Education and Communication (CANTERA)

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### Building Women's Collective Power Partnership

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### Our Bodies, Our Lives campaign partners and allies, Malawi

- MANERELA+ • Paradiso TB Care Trust • Lilongwe Urban Women Forum • Women for Fair Development (WOFAD) • Northern Region Women Forum • Coalition of Malawian Women Living with HIV/AIDS (COWLHA) • Society for Women and AIDS in Malawi (SWAM) • National Association of People Living with HIV and AIDS (NAPHAM) • Malawi Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (MANET+) • Teachers Living with HIV (T'LIPO) • Health Workers Living with HIV (HECAWLP) • Activists working with Action AID International–Malawi

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