

2020 JASS ANNUAL REPORT



FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING IN PANDEMIC TIMES



Who

JASS is a feminist movement support organisation

dedicated to building the voice, visibility, and collective power of women for a just and sustainable world for all.

What

We equip and strengthen the leadership and organising capacity of **women leaders and their organisations** in Mesoamerica, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa.

Why

We strengthen women's organising strategies to transform the systems, structures and beliefs that perpetuate inequality and violence in four areas of their lives: **Bodies, Voice, Resources and Safety.**



What's Inside

- 2** Message from Shereen Essof | **4** Tribute to Lisa VeneKlasen
- 5** Feminist Movement Building in Pandemic Times
- 10** The Personal is Political | **13** Voice, Influence and Safety
- 17** Growing Solidarity, Cultivating Joy
- 19** You Add, We Multiply | **20** Financials
- 21** Thank You | **22** Teams

Message from Shereen Essof JASS Executive Director




“ The word for breath and the impulse to create is the same:
Inspiration.

In 2020 the pandemic took our breath away, it stole our lives as we knew them. It was catastrophic and unprecedented in its rapid spread and reach. It rewrote the medical books and how we understand public health. The pandemic exposed what was hidden in plain sight: black and people of colour communities, especially women most impacted by inequities, are suffocating and rendered invisible. We felt the depths of the grave ills of neoliberalism, and under the guise of Covid-19, we witnessed governments break social contracts and use a familiar playbook for repression and control. We grieved. We still grieve. 2020 was a year of loss of a magnitude we could never have imagined.

It was also a year when we were buoyed up by inspiration. We found creativity in unlikely places, allowing me and us to survive and continue to make change happen in small and big ways. After all, crises are a mobiliser for transformation. They invite us to think, see, feel differently, and create the new. And that is what happened. At the height of the pandemic, women and communities took to the streets in a surge of uprisings driven by rage over those very things, now writ large, that make our world ugly: poor social services and economic safety nets, police brutality, corruption, violence, misogyny, authoritarianism, profit over people.

In the United States, the brutal death of George Floyd (underpinned by the deaths of countless other black and brown women and men at the hands of the police) became the signature that exposed institutionalised racism's ugly belly. At that moment, the Movement for Black Lives' deep and long term investments in organising catalysed Freedom Summer 2020 – sustaining mass protests over three months by an estimated 26 million people. This movement fueled inspiration and ignited similar demonstrations that swept across borders connecting people in a global conversation about racism and police brutality. At this moment, we witnessed the beautiful truth of who we are and who we can be, connected in solidarity in



“ We need to both make the means, and dream the destination of a feminist future that is more just and equitable, more beautiful and joyful, and more whole.”

a transnational struggle: where our inspiration, women's visions of a world rooted in equity, freedom, and care, became that much more possible and real.

Both these aspects of 2020 weave some important lessons. Start with where women are at; radical transformation will require a reimagining and remaking of our world; and we cannot do it alone. We need each other, we are connected in our humanity and in our experience: Be it protests against authoritarianism in Hong Kong or Brazil, police brutality in Nigeria, femicide in Mexico, climate change and environmental damage in Kenya, corruption in Guatemala, or the anti-farmer Bill in India. We draw our breath from liberatory decolonial feminisms that we believe can, and are already, providing the answers to the broken system we are living in. We draw our breath from each other, when they say, “divide and conquer”, we say, “united we stand”.

We are at a critical juncture. A juncture that requires both inspiration and boldness. We are not going to wait for a new world to be offered to us, we are going to make it together by continuing to breathe life into our visions. This annual report demonstrates this. It captures our Inspiration – both the struggle for breath and the creative impulse to survive and thrive.

Stepping into the role of new Executive Director at a time that coincided with the pandemic outbreak, propelled us to find answers in the roots of who we are and what we do. In 2020, JASS went back to the basics of feminist movement building to anchor and guide our movement support work in rapidly shifting and challenging pandemic times. Women showed us the way, mobilising and holding their communities together while offering economic, social, and political alternatives and solutions that center care, solidarity, and the sustainability of our planet.

As always, thank you for your continued support and investment in women's organising for a better world for us all.

Shereen Essof
JASS Executive Director



Tribute to Lisa VeneKlasen

A Visionary Leader

In 2020, we celebrated a successful leadership transition, welcoming our new Executive Director, Shereen Essof, and honoring the legacy of Founding Executive Director, Lisa VeneKlasen. In the words of some of JASS' founding members:



“ Movement building is a lonely journey if we don't have a comrade. Someone to show the direction when we thought we are at the dead end, to challenge us with creative and crazy ideas so that we can think out of the box – all with a great sense of humor. That's Lisa Veneklasen for me; comrade, sister in crime, coach and mentor. I look forward to the next journey of building a 'just' future together.”

Nani Zulminarni, Regional Advisor and co-founder, JASS Southeast Asia

“ Her vision, shared by many of us, was the glue that united us to build JASS and that continues to unite us in that common dream of transforming power. We are grateful and love Lisa for all she has given us. For her laugh, her trust and the necessary dose of irreverence to build this very special community that we belong to: JASS.”

Patricia Ardon, Regional Co-Director and co-founder, JASS Mesoamerica

“ Lisa is a visionary with the capacity to think big and the courage to act bold. It took guts to start an organisation, and move it in a bold direction, standing on the seemingly lunatic fringe where new ideas are given birth and innovations are fueled. Lisa stood by her conviction and lived her values out loud, leading JASS to places few organisations would have the audacity to go.”

Hope Chigudu, Regional Advisor and co-founder, JASS Southern Africa

Feminist Movement Building in Pandemic Times: Some Basics

*Watch our
video 2020:
a year
in review.*

**Cultivate
Joy, Grow
Solidarity**

**Start With
Where Women
Are At**

**The
Personal is
Political**

**Create
Safe Spaces
for Voice and
Influence**

**Together
We are
Stronger**

**Power
and Gender
Matter**

Amid unprecedented crisis, some of the fundamentals of JASS' feminist movement building stood the test of time.

In a year like no other, we knew "business as usual" responses would fail us. We asked, "What does this pandemic moment demand of a movement support organisation like JASS?". We found our answer in going back to some of the basics of Feminist Movement Building (FMB).

“Adaptation involved readjusting our work with creativity, boldness, and agility, it meant taking risks and learning from them.





We started with *where women were at*. Regional teams who hold deep relationships with partners and local movements conducted assessments that centered their priorities and informed our approach. Informed by what we heard, JASS:

- **activated our Mobilisation Fund** to support our partners' immediate needs, organising, and safety;
- **reimagined digital space** as a site for political debate;
- **used creative communications strategies** to reach those who do not have sustained access to the internet and to amplify women's voices regionally and globally;
- **created community and showed solidarity** while keeping the spark of joy alive to ensure we were sustaining each other in our organising through tough and demanding times.

SPOTLIGHT

What adaptation looked like in Mesoamerica

Following an in-depth virtual assessment with indigenous and rural women, JASS Mesoamerica launched the *Alquimia* Feminist Leadership School online. The *Alquimia* curriculum was revised as a set of virtual dialogues around topics identified by women as most relevant to their everyday life and organising. JASS supported women with training on use and access to the internet and other digital communications technologies. Women cited the connections cultivated through the school as key to breaking the isolation caused by physical distancing.

The pandemic according to women

Across contexts, women activists spoke of escalations in violence:

- » **Structural violence:** The pandemic exposed deep structural gaps and inequities in access to fundamental rights and public services. In some instances, governments issued blanket lockdown measures that did not consider existing barriers for vulnerable communities. Social distancing and hygiene were impossible to implement for some communities given informal housing or limited access to public services like water. Differential access to healthcare and untreated underlying conditions meant that some communities, including HIV+ women and LGBTQ communities, were more vulnerable to the pandemic.
- » **Political violence:** There was a sharp rise in violence and human rights abuses as physical spaces where communities would typically come together to organise were prohibited and even criminalised. Using stay-at-home measures and curfews as a pretext for repression, some governments cracked down on protests and freedom of speech, increased surveillance, and militarised streets and neighbourhoods.
- » **Economic violence:** Prolonged lockdowns impoverished informal women workers and amplified existing economic hardship and precarity and the burden of unpaid care work. Our local partners shared stories of women street vendors in Zimbabwe who, apart from risking detention, had their produce confiscated by the police, and factory owners in Myanmar abandoning garment manufacturing plants as their sales dropped, leaving women workers jobless and without any savings.

“ Covid-19 has made our [indigenous women] struggles visible and made us realise that Honduras is a collapsed country. The government authorities’ indifference for many decades and especially now is taking a toll on us. We have no choice but to demand our rights. We cannot allow them to marginalise us in this way through a system that has totally failed.”

– Indigenous woman activist, Honduras



- » **Environmental violence:** Threats against land and environmental defenders increased during the pandemic. Women defenders in Indonesia, Guatemala and Zimbabwe noted that companies embroiled in land disputes with rural communities used lockdown measures to continue production unabated.
- » **Interpersonal violence:** Stay at home orders meant that many women were trapped with abusive people – be it partners or family members. Across all JASS regions, isolation from critical networks of care and support had devastating impacts on women's mental health, self-determination, safety and autonomy.



“ The Covid-19 pandemic is highlighting the impact of gender and class inequality in society as we witness its impacts on different people – especially women. The lockdown restrictions imposed by many countries have increased domestic violence and the burden of care on women. The move from public to private space is problematic because there are differential power relations at home.”

– Woman activist, Indonesia

“ Social distancing is a luxury for people who live in crowded areas like ours... Even washing hands is a privilege for people with money as we have no running water and we have to depend on community boreholes for water, which are extremely overcrowded. We cannot even afford the soap to wash our hands because our markets are closed and we do not have vending spaces to sell our vegetables.”

– Woman activist living in an informal settlement, Zimbabwe

The Personal is Political

JASS has long understood that essential needs often propel people into action that can fuel long-term organising.

JASS Mobilisation Fund

A feminist response to crisis

In response to the crisis and growing economic precarity, JASS activated our Mobilisation Fund as a means to quickly provide money to our allies and partners for immediate needs that ensure a greater sense of community, stability and survival.

“ The ‘personal is political’ is not only a feminist slogan from the 60s. It’s about understanding and connecting the struggles, pain, and power dynamics we face in our private lives to injustice in the society as a whole.

– JASS Toolkit, We Rise Movement Building Reimagined

“ It’s about solidarity and trust with our partners in a very political way. With physical places closed – including usual gatherings shut down -, we faced the challenge and opportunity of how to create virtual spaces that ensure women’s voices are visible, louder, and influential on the issues that affect them.

– Kunthea Chan, JASS Southeast Asia



Four distinctive elements of the Fund

1. Built on relationships of trust between JASS and long term partners, assuring women most affected define needs and support;
2. Movement oriented, emphasising collective needs and strategies and linked to JASS' ongoing accompaniment work;
3. Disburses cash within 24 hours, and in some cases in untraditional ways when banks are closed, or deposits make activists unsafe;
4. No application, no reporting.

In 2020, the Fund disbursed **\$169,177.54** to over 100 groups and individuals across our regions

What the Fund supported

- » **Practical needs** such as food, soap, protection wear, medicines, transportation, reliable information, and internet vouchers. These helped partners survive and stay protected in the short-term while activating long-term organising around food security.
- » **Activist safety:** After authorities arrested 20 LGBTQ+ activists and advocates in the *Philippines*, JASS sent funds within 12 hours to support an urgent action solidarity response. Our allies used the money to cover bail fees, lawyer costs, Covid testing, and post-detention quarantine expenses.
- » **Community recovery and solidarity:** Following Hurricane Eta in Guatemala, JASS disbursed funds to support indigenous and rural women from our Alquimia Leadership School organising for relief and reconstruction in their communities. Similarly, we provided support to communities in Zimbabwe and the Philippines to recover from climate change-induced disasters complicated even further by the pandemic.
- » **Advocacy and urgent action:** In Cambodia, JASS supported women garment workers to meet food and rental needs, and to demand reinstatement or compensation for job terminations because of factory closures due to Covid-19.



SPOTLIGHT

HIV+ women work towards food security for survival and economic freedom

In Malawi, the Covid-19 pandemic propelled Our Bodies, Our Lives (OBOL) – an 8,000 women-strong campaign for equal treatment and healthcare – to activate a food security organising agenda. With resources from the JASS Mobilisation Fund and technical assistance from the Malawian Ministry of Agriculture, OBOL women established cooperative vegetable gardens in 15 communities. These gardens feed their families and lay the groundwork for further organising on alternative economic strategies for secure livelihoods, nutrition, and health.

“ It’s my dream to see women’s livelihoods change. The gardens have helped women to cope with the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19. Women can sell food and feed their families.

– OBOL woman leader, Malawi

To bolster this agenda, JASS organised a virtual learning exchange between OBOL and longtime JASS partner, PEKKA, a movement organisation of over 40,000 Indonesian women. Over several months, JASS trained women on using the meeting app and provided internet allowances to prepare for their participation in the gathering. Conducted in the indigenous languages of

Chichewa and Bahasa spoken in Malawi and Indonesia respectively, the exchange gathered 45 indigenous and rural activists in an exchange for the very first time.

“ I found so many similarities in the stories of PEKKA and OBOL related to women’s prosperity and health, and engagements with the government. I am excited by OBOL women’s spirit and determination to learn best practices from PEKKA and change their conditions for a better future.

– Woman leader, PEKKA

Both organisations bring extraordinary organising and movement building histories led by women stigmatised and excluded from equal rights, economic and political participation, and social inclusion whether because of their ‘status’ as HIV+ or as ‘janda’ – widowed, divorced, single, or abandoned women. After this first exchange, women from OBOL are eager to learn more about PEKKA’s award-winning women’s savings and loan cooperatives – an alternative to micro-credit that enables women to generate and control their income and take action against discrimination and exclusion.

Voice, Influence and Safety

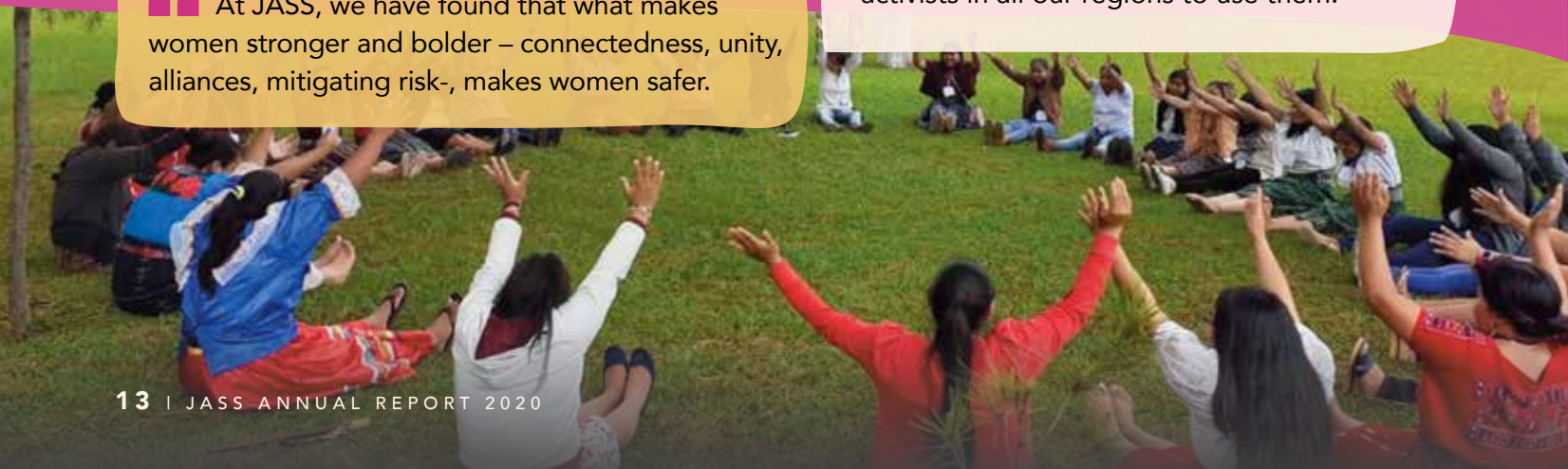
Creating safe political spaces to build community and amplify women's voices.

Political spaces are integral for building women's collective power. They bring diverse women together to find common ground and build strategies for action around shared needs. With no possibility of meeting face to face, we were presented with a challenge and opportunity: how do we create *virtual* spaces that ensure women's voices are louder and influential on the issues that affect them? How do you do this when women have differential access to technology? We got creative and *invented* a myriad of virtual spaces that built community and kept women's demands in the public conversation.

“ At JASS, we have found that what makes women stronger and bolder – connectedness, unity, alliances, mitigating risk-, makes women safer.

Maintaining connection and bridging the digital divide

Many of the women activists JASS accompanies live in remote areas with limited access to reliable or affordable internet connectivity or telephone service. To meet these challenges, JASS regional teams provided "internet per diems" to partners, funds for data, and equipment to facilitate their participation in virtual processes and political spaces. We also increased our use of technologies women already use, like WhatsApp and bulk SMS, to share information with relative ease and on a larger scale while centring digital security. This allowed us to continue to stay connected, share information, support ongoing organising and hold regular virtual meetings. We used complimentary apps like Jamboard and Mural to make virtual feminist popular education spaces more engaging and interactive, and trained women activists in all our regions to use them.



Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis

In March, JASS held its first-ever virtual dialogue, launching what would become the year-long series “Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis”. Inspired by the bold feminist agenda created to inform the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, we envisioned the monthly series as a political space for women to come together powerfully, engage in political discussion and analysis, and imagine radical solutions.

We wanted to create space for the most vital political conversations done in a way that would build community, solidarity and sustenance across regions, languages and movements. The learning curve was steep. But we kept experimenting and learning, holding ourselves to a high standard of **language justice, digital security, and the integration of art and culture**. With each dialogue, we disrupted the idea of “the expert” by **centering frontline activists’ perspectives** on topics including black women’s leadership globally, indigenous and peasant women’s resistance to extractivism, activist safety, elections and their implications for movements, and global south feminism as an antidote to rising authoritarianism.

Remarkably, the dialogue series surpassed the reach of the usual face-to-face advocacy gatherings

by engaging new sets of people and their networks, and by amplifying the conversations through community radio, podcasts, webinars, and social media.

*Learn more
and catch up
on all dialogues
from the
series.*

Each dialogue typically engaged
300+ people directly and 1000+ indirectly, from over 25 countries.



Women's Community Radio Programmes

One of the tendencies triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic was a 'return' and 'recovery' of traditional modes of communication. Radio remains one of the most universal and accessible media. We enthusiastically embraced a greater use of radio to keep connected and safe, whilst continuing to build community among women living in rural and hard to reach communities by sharing feminist news and analysis.

Honduras: Breaking isolation and building community

In Honduras, JASS has long hosted Tercas con la Esperanza (Stubborn with Hope) – a feminist radio programme that centers indigenous and rural women's voices and leadership. The programme broadcasts nationally and rebroadcasts regionally (Mexico City), including in areas with limited signal.

Despite the challenges of broadcasting from home, the radio programme expanded its role. JASS shared accurate information on Covid-19 safety protocols, podcasted radio segments via Whatsapp to hundreds of women across Mesoamerica, and spotlighted and mobilised support for women's needs after hurricanes Eta and Iota swept across the region.

Zimbabwe: Elevating women's demand for access to water

Inspired by the Honduras radio programme, women in Zimbabwe used community radio to foreground the urgent demand for access to clean water and sanitation as part of their What Women Want advocacy agenda. Using radio, women highlighted the increased burden of care and demanded their local government to provide water, necessary for hygiene to mitigate the community spread of Covid-19. The persistent advocacy pushed local authorities and other agencies to provide tanks of water and to rehabilitate some non-functional boreholes in communities.



“Listening to myself in a national broadcasting radio station has been empowering and makes me feel like my life matters.

– Indigenous woman, Honduras”

SPOTLIGHT

Southeast Asia: Amplifying women's agendas and solutions

JASS Southeast Asia celebrated the 10th year of JASS' annual regional campaign One Day, One Voice (ODOV), which unites the initiatives of women across Southeast Asia around the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. The campaign is a vibrant testament to the power of sustained grassroots and local-to-regional organising.

For 16 days, thousands of women from Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma/Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Timor-Leste joined JASS in centering women-led responses to address the pandemic, natural disasters, as well as gender-based violence and state-sponsored violence in communities. Despite Covid-19 restrictions, our regional partners' found creative ways to celebrate the campaign through peace marches, online dialogues, panel discussions, Facebook live chats, Twitter rallies, and media events.

“ [ODOV] is a movement platform that joins diverse networks together across the region. It is a space to strengthen our power, to collect our voice, and to solve injustice and all kinds of violence against women. We are one. We stand together for our rights.

– Woman activist from Cambodia ”

Watch the campaign's powerful animation video "People are the Solution".



Growing Solidarity, Cultivating Joy

Cultivating joy is a necessity. Solidarity and liberatory culture including popular culture are vital as part of sustaining ourselves in struggles of resistance. Prolonged, devastating, and challenging times can test us and drain our spirits, but they also remind us of what we need to continue. In 2020, we both discovered and created such conditions that saw us through the obstacle course of pandemic life and the demanding zig zag journey of making change happen.

Culture sparks Imagination

The arts are the sweet medicine that get us through hard times and ignites our creativity and imagination for transforming the world. Recognising this balm and revolutionary power, we centered cultural production in our work and organisational practice in different ways. We deliberately built relationships with a diverse set of artists and cultural workers who now form part of our community of practice. We created playlists, poetry, art. We shared these offerings with the world, through our dialogues and virtual processes, and through our publications and social media communications in 2020. We felt the resonance and appreciation, when people lingered long after a dialogue to listen to music and be together, and when we received feedback of how our artistic expressions were sustaining.

“ I believe that in the midst of all that despair, we need to nurture hope in ourselves as women, to believe that we are capable, that it's possible to do something on behalf of our people.”

– Berta Cáceres, 1971–2016



SPOTLIGHT

Radical Healing Concert

In August 2020, JASS teamed up with multimedia and funk-rock artist Nona Hendryx from Nubian Queenx to bring together indigenous, black, latinx and queer artists from around the world in a virtual concert dedicated to Radical Healing. The event lifted the long invisible role of black and indigenous women in mending and transforming the world and centered the healing power of their art in leading us towards wholeness.

Radical Healing: A Poem

Radical healing awakens our creativity and dreams.
Radical healing is revolutionary.
Radical healing is collective.
Radical healing liberates our hearts, minds and bodies
Radical healing honors ancient wisdom while radically reimagining the future.
Radical healing allows us to be fully human and together.
Radical healing is essential for feminist movement-building.

Watch and relive the powerful moments from the concert.

Performing artists:



Nona Hendryx
USA



Monique Wilson
Philippines



Be Steadwell
USA



Sara Curruchich
Guatemala



Divinity Roxx
USA



Sophia Ramos
USA



Cyndi Lauper
USA



Liza Jessie Peterson
USA



Rosa Chávez
Guatemala



Hope Masike
Zimbabwe



Lebogang Mashile
South Africa



iskwē
Canada



Angela Davis
USA



Joy Harjo
USA

You Add, We Multiply

EQUIPPED 5,255 **community and frontline** **activists' leadership**

...through 149 virtual schools, workshops, participatory research processes, and learning and strategy exchanges

AMPLIFIED women's ideas, **agendas, and action**

.... through 28 regional and crossregional dialogues, 8 radio shows, and 5 podcasts.

STRENGTHENED 483 **cross-movement networks**

...by creating new virtual space and opportunities for joint strategising for greater power and safety.

ENGAGED 1,301 decision **makers to hear women's** **demands**

...through advocacy with a range of actors from village chiefs and religious leaders to government representatives and UN officials.



Financials

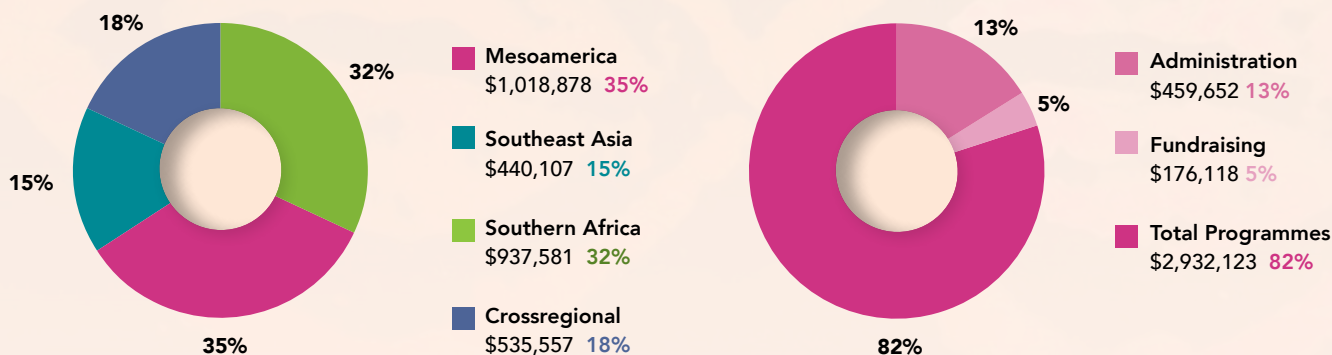
INCOME*

US \$25,474,513

EXPENSES

US \$3,567,893

PROGRAMMES



*Financials are based on JASS' 2020 audit. Income is higher because our audit records the full amount of multi-year grants in the year they are signed. In 2020, JASS secured multi-year funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Ford Foundation, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thank you



- Africa Groups of Sweden
- Angelica Fund of Tides Foundation
- Channel Foundation
- Collective Future Fund
- Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ford Foundation
- Foundation for a Just Society
- Fund for Global Human Rights
- Global Affairs Canada
- Global Fund for Women
- IM Sweden
- International Development Research Centre
- Novo Foundation
- Oak Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Overbrook Foundation
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- United Nations Trust Fund



We would also like to thank many other friends and supporters who generously give donations and share their time and connections, including our growing circles of solidarity in Santa Fe, New York, and around the US.

Teams

Board of Directors

Joanne Sandler,

Board Co-chair

Awino Okech,

Board Co-chair

Natasha Barker,

Treasurer

Mary Jane Real

Miguel Pulido

Everjoice Win

Sangeeta Chowdhry

Lisa VeneKlasen

Shereen Essof

JASS Mesoamerica

Carme Clavel Arcas,

Regional Co-Director

Patricia Ardón,

Regional Co-Director

Rosa Chávez

Nelly Moreno

Daysi Flores

Thalia Vega

Laura Velázquez de León

Orfe Castillo Osorio

Valentín Ermita

Verónica Delgado

María Mercedes Sueiras

Alda Facio

Malena De Montis

JASS Southern Africa

Phumi Mtetwa,

Regional Co-Director

Lucy Mazingi,

Regional Co-Director

Sibongile Chibwe Singini

Winnet

Shamuyarira

Esperance Ayinkamiye

Charity Mudzamiri

Everjoice Win

Hope Chigudu

JASS Southeast Asia

Chan Kunthea,

Regional Co-Director

Zephania Repollo,

Regional Co-Director

Paula Elina



Osang Langara

Amoy Sulastri

Desti Murdijana

Nani Zulminarni

Dina Lumbantobing

JASS Crossregional

Shereen Essof,

Executive Director

Lisa VeneKlasen, *Outgoing*

Executive Director

Carrie Wilson

Alexa Bradley

Long Nguyen

Elena Sheidu

Anna Davies-van Es

Adelaide Mazwarira

Lindsee Gregory

Theresa Cleveland

Marusia Lopez Cruz

Sultana Mapker



Invest in women's organising for a just and equitable future.

Make a monthly contribution at
<https://justassociates.org/donate>

www.justassociates.org

