



## Imagining and Rebuilding Feminist Movements

### methodology: a work in progress

The Just Associates' *Rebuilding Feminist Movements Initiative* is designed to rebuild, re-energize and re-tool women's movements through leadership training and political education; coordinated advocacy actions; knowledge creation (research, documentation, curriculum development, assessments); and popular communications activities. This initiative is:

- Strengthening and diversifying women's leadership by deepening women's political skills and analysis to better engage communities, to respond to fast-shifting power dynamics, and to negotiate agile alliances.
- Reconnecting effective grassroots organizing strategies with policy advocacy and broader systemic change strategies at national and global levels.
- Increasing the visibility and legitimacy of women's critical, transformative role in communities, families and society and broaden the appeal of gender equality.
- Contributing to the substance of women's rights agendas and strategies integrate different types of rights (economic, social, cultural, civil and political) at regional and global levels with inspiring long-term visions of hope and change.
- Generating fresh knowledge about the *what* and the *how* of women's citizenship, women's rights and movement-building from an intersectional perspective across differences.

The Movement-building process is organized in two phases. **Phase I** focuses on planning and conducting regional movement building institutes. Preparations require strengthening relationships between key players and gathering important insights about women's rights advocacy, movement-building needs and training experiences in each region.

The four-day movement-building institute brings together a diverse range of 30-40 women leaders and activists from each region to analyze, reflect and strategize. Careful effort is made to identify leaders and activists outside women's NGOs, from rural as well as urban settings and young women. The gatherings reinforce solidarity and connections between women and generate an historical assessment of what's worked and what has not for women's rights in their region, and a common vision of a way forward.

## What is a movement?

- Clusters of NGOs do not make movements.
- A movement has:
  - A political vision and broad agenda
  - Broad membership & active constituency base
  - Some degree of organization; formal and informal linkages
  - Proactive and reactive joint actions in pursuit of common goals;
  - Continuity over time adjusting to moment/ context
  - Activities that combine *extra-institutional* (marches, protests, organizing, gatherings) and *institutional* (advocacy & lobbying) forms.

– Srilatha Battliwala



While the exact focus and contours of each regional institute respond to specific needs and contexts, the basic methodology and content for the 4-day program covers six elements:

1. **Who are we?** personal stories, hopes and dreams, and why a learning process of this kind is needed at this particular moment;<sup>1</sup> also, who are we as women collectively? – what are our key differences and how does this shape our distinct experiences with power, our concrete lives, our priorities, and our ability to relate to one another and come together?
2. **Where have we come from?** a collective historical assessment of gender equality and social justice strategies in the region (and on a particular set of problems in some cases) over the last few decades to define gains and challenges, and explore how political trends and organizational patterns have helped / hindered movement-building and impact;
3. **Where are we now?** an in-depth contextual analysis of current trends, obstacles and opportunities for addressing women's needs and rights; an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of current agendas, organizations and strategies where women's concerns are represented or not; this can include the sharing and or production of select case examples offering promising innovations, alternatives and visions;
4. **Where are we going?** visions, core values, long-term goals and deepening understanding of key concepts like power, oppression, intersectionality, feminisms, democracy, human rights, justice, and movements that help define visions, agendas and strategic choices;
5. **How do we get there?** defining forward-looking agendas that respond to women's realities and draw upon human rights and strategies that strengthen women's leadership, democratic and accountable organization and collective power from the ground up;

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<sup>1</sup> This project combines feminist epistemology and popular education theory/methodologies reflecting the assumption that women learn, think and act through the lens of their lived personal experience and that daily life is also be a critical site of struggle and oppression for women. JASS' experience suggests that empowerment is a negotiated and circular process that requires new skills and information but is unlikely to happen without making women's lived realities, hopes and dreams central to the new knowledge, new consciousness and new forms of action.

6. **What do we need to get there?** In the spirit of building capacity through action, “learning moments” (reflection, analysis, skills) provide an opportunity to self-reflect, gain confidence and information, analyze, plan and choose strategies and applying “base building” strategies that include a recovery and development of methodologies, concepts and tools for grassroots empowerment, use of existing human rights conventions, frameworks and protocols, as well as better skills in economic analysis (for the follow-up.)

The learning and action follows a spiraling process where each moment often requires returning to and sharpening understanding generated by each of the above elements. In keeping with the core objective of strengthening participants’ political analysis skills, most of the analysis begins with a participatory process drawing on participants’ knowledge and assumptions about power from the most personal level to the public realm. To draw upon and bridge theory and practice, the process draws upon closely aligned researchers and scholars to complement and challenge the collective analysis and sharpen understanding as the basis for visioning, agendas, and strategic choices.



From *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, VeneKlasen and Miller, Practical Action Publishing, 2002/2006.

From these discussions, specific proposals are produced to guide **Phase II**. This process is ongoing in MesoAmerica, Southern Africa, South East Asia and the United States. While the movement- and capacity-building strategies defined and launched by each of the regional institutes vary significantly, they generally address some combination of the following key skills, content and processes. Where needed, JASS serves as an incubator for the further development, testing and multiplication of these innovative strategies<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Such as the *Observatorio de Transgresion Feminista/ Women Crossing the Line* strategy that has taken off with partners in Mesoamerica, described in Annex 2. This exciting mobilizing strategy was shared during a global

- The creation of spaces for cross-generational, cross-boundary<sup>3</sup> collective and personal and political reflection and creative expression
- Political analysis and strategy development that responds to the interaction between multiple forms of discrimination and the dynamics of inequality from household to global levels: capacity to design and carry out integrated strategies for change that combine personal-collective empowerment and action
- In-depth learning of popular education and communications that promote critical awareness of power, self-expression, and capacity to shape ‘messages’ for different aims, audiences and organizing
- Exploration of the meaning of power, oppression, intersectionality, movements, feminism, democracy and human rights and their implications for new visions, agendas, forms of leadership and strategies
- Collective visioning and iterative agenda-setting, linking personal experience, local struggles and opportunities to regional and global human rights instruments and relevant policy opportunities; popularizing information about relevant human rights conventions;
- Exploration and practice of transformative leadership skills and attitudes, including emphasis on negotiation skills, alliance and team-building, facilitation and support for participatory processes, collective decision-making

And, down the road....

- Development of basic administrative skills for the effective management of democratic organizations that define their success based on the ability to promote and be accountable to ever-broadening constituencies
- Demystification of money – including fundraising and donors, government budgets and macro-economic policy – and links to economic rights: integrating money and movements.

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meeting hosted by AWID in Mexico in November 2006 and inspired young women in Eastern Europe to use similar language in framing the Young European Feminists’ Exchange, May 10<sup>th</sup>, called *Gender Sabotage*.

<sup>3</sup> By cross-boundary, we refer to multiple discrimination that defines boundaries among women and defines different experiences of inequality based on race, class, age, location, sexuality, ability and more.

## What is Movement-Building?

- Organizing and nurturing the collective power of people united across many differences by a common cause for social and political change;
- Movement linkages require a common vision and core principles with mechanisms for internal negotiation, political agility and accountability.
- Multiracial, multi-class, crossgenerational and multi-country alliances place the voices and leadership of the most affected by injustice (the majority) at the heart of the movement.

