



JASS (Just Associates) @ AWID 2012 In-Depth Strategy Session, April 21-22

Access and Control of Resources: Organizing for Women's EmPOWERment

"Empowerment... is the process by which those who've been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire that ability."
– Naila Kabeer

"...empowerment refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge ...power relations ...Empowerment...is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces that marginalize women..."
– Srilatha Batliwala

Overview: Access to and control over resources is about power. Today, the ferocious scramble to control and exploit resources—from land and forests to technology and human DNA—is a scramble for power. This session will explore women's access and control of resources from a feminist movement-builder's perspective. Using concrete examples Indonesia, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Malaysia, we will:

1. Explore how women's seemingly **micro-struggles for access and control of resources are shaped by "macro" dynamics at national and global levels** – and identify how power operates and impacts women's bodies, lives and communities;
2. Challenge common perceptions and develop a broader understanding of **access and control of resources** from an analysis of power and rights; and
3. Identify and learn from **women's strategies that tap into and build upon many kinds of resources** to create alternatives that improve lives and promote reciprocity, justice and wellbeing for people and the planet.

DAY ONE, April 21 - 14:30 – 18:00

Introduction and key concepts

Srilatha Batliwala, India, Scholar Associate AWID, Co-Chair Board of JASS
Lisa VeneKlasen, USA, Co-Founder & Executive Director JASS

Resources 1: Women's access to cash and micro-credit

The microcredit tsunami: critical feminist reflections and dilemmas
Malena de Montis, Nicaragua, Founding Director FODEM

An Alternative: Women's Economic and Political Organizing in Indonesia
Nani Zulminarni, Indonesia, Founder PEKKA, Women Headed Households
Empowerment & JASS South East Asia Coordinator

Group discussion

Break

Resources 2: Women's access to healthcare and medicine – the case of HIV/AIDS

The Power and Interests Defining HIV/AIDS treatment
Alia Khan, USA, JASS Crossregional Learning

Women, HIV/AIDS and struggles for wellbeing in Malawi
Shereen Essof, Zimbabwe, JASS Southern Africa Coordinator, formerly African Gender Institute

Group discussion

DAY TWO, April 22
11 – 12:30, 14:00 – 15:30

Re-introduction and review of day one, Lisa Veneklasen

Resources 3: Land and natural resources

Indigenous communities' struggles for recognition, rights, and resources

Patricia Ardón, Guatemala, Director, Sinergia N'oj

Aura Lolita Chavez, Guatemala, Maya K'iche' community leader

Tijah Yok Chopil, Malaysia, Kampung Chang's Women's Group, Sinui Pal Nanuk Sngik, JASS Southeast Asia Core Team

Group discussion

Lunch

What's power got to do with it?

Lisa VeneKlasen

Srilatha Batliwala

Wrap-Up



Defining Our Concepts (from a feminist movement-builder's perspective)

What do we mean by resources?

“...not only material resources in the most conventional economic sense, but also the various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice.” (Naila Kabeer)

There's a tendency to think resources are about money or economic goods. We understand resources to mean a full range of tangible and intangible assets that are essential for translating access into choices and change. These resources include **concrete economic and political stuff**: money, funding, credit, jobs, land, property, tools, equipment, fertilizer, healthcare, water and other natural resources, technology, education, information, food, housing, police protection, legal services, healthcare, political representation; and it includes **intangible stuff like**: time, safety, wellbeing, political networks and social capital, credibility, self-confidence, creativity, organization, friends, fun, love, etc.

What do we mean by access and control¹?

Access: the opportunity to make use of something/resources for a larger gain. Access will reflect the rules and norms which govern distribution and exchange in different institutional arenas.

Control: the ability to choose or define how and for what purpose it will be used, and even to impose that definition on others—in other words, another word for “control” might be **power**, and power can be positive or negative depending on its purpose.

Common myths about access: many efforts and policies to **improve women's access to resources** focus on making a resource available and improving so-called “equality of opportunity.” Such approaches usually fail to rectify discrimination because people are not in the same position to be able to take advantage of the opportunity due to historical disadvantages and social norms.

What do we mean by power?

Behind questions of inequality, exploitation and oppression are the dynamics of power and privilege. We define power as the degree of control over material, human, intellectual, and financial resources

¹ Adapted from Making Change Happen 3: Revisioning Power for Justice, Just Associates, 2006

exercised by different sections of society. Power is dynamic, exercised in the social, economic, and political relations between individuals and groups, and can be used for both positive and negative ends.

Most people associate power with “**power over**”—that is, the ability to control and make decisions for others, with or without their consent. Power over can take on oppressive and destructive forms, perpetuated by the threat or use of violence. But there are other positive forms of power too. **Power within** is one’s own sense of self and agency; **power with** is collective power, the power of numbers built through common cause and solidarity.

Many advocacy strategies focus on shaping **visible** forms of *power over*—for example, laws, policies, and elections. However, *power over* operates in less tangible ways that, if left unaddressed, make any policy victory tenuous. **Hidden power** operates in the unspoken rules, behind-the-scenes negotiations, and agendas of influential actors and institutions. **Invisible power** includes cultural and/or religious beliefs, norms, values, many of which are internalized through the process of socialization.

What do we mean by feminist movement-building?

Movement building is a process of organizing and mobilizing a broad constituency around a particular social, economic or political change developed over time through joint analysis, education and building connections. It is important to distinguish between the ideas of **building feminist movements** and **feminist movement building** (adapted from Srilatha Batliwala).

Building feminist movements is a process that mobilizes women, women’s organizations (and their allies or supporters) for struggles whose goals are specific to gender equality outcomes—for instance, for eradicating practices like female genital mutilation, bride-burning and female foeticide, or violence against women, or for expanding equality of access to citizenship (e.g. franchise), land or inheritance rights, education, employment, health, or reproductive and sexual rights.

Feminist movement building, on the other hand, could be defined as the attempt to bring feminist analysis and gender-equality perspectives into other agendas and movements—classic examples are the efforts of many feminists to engender the analyses, goals and strategies of the environment, peace, human rights, and peasant and labour movements around the world. Feminist movement-building can also involve building movements among women from different movements or agendas



Adapting the ideas of Naila Kabeer, Martha Nussbaum and others, resources are essential for realizing rights and equality. Women need power to translate **access** into real improvements in their lives and world. Challenging the institutional and social barriers that prevent women’s access to resources is political and risky, and demands individual and collective empowerment and organizing strategies as the case studies demonstrate. Put simply:

