

WOMEN NAVIGATE POWER

Stories of Rights Work



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see
www.actionaid.org
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The story of women's rights within ActionAid International.

"Ideas don't take root within an organization purely on their merit. Bringing in women's rights is often politically and emotionally charged – how was it done in ActionAid? How are the organization's vision, values and culture aligned?"

Hope Chigudu



As activists work to make women's rights a reality in our communities and countries, each shift, each victory generates new challenges. In *Women Navigate Power*, activists reflect on experiences across a fascinating range of movements and campaigns. Each story situates specific detailed strategies within the bigger political picture, reaching beyond the orthodoxies of organizing to raise key questions and contradictions. Developed by ActionAid International and Just Associates through a unique 'writeshop' process, the collection is being published as a resource for women's rights activists everywhere. The path to real change emerges in these vivid accounts as a spiral rather than a linear road: at every step, activists must re-read their political compasses, gauging all levels of power from local to global, personal to organizational.

Commercial sex work and women's rights: the impressive gains of a Kolkata sex-workers' movement and the challenges it poses for other feminists.

"Who were these ladies of the night? Immoral, depraved creatures, wallowing in decadence and waiting in the shadows to break up happy homes? Or objects of pity, victims of sordid male violence, waiting passively to be rescued by Prince Charming or a Fairy Godmother who waves her wand and conjures up a grand rehabilitation scheme that guarantees employment with a decent wage to all the sex workers of India? The laughing, joking, singing, slogan-shouting sex workers obviously didn't fit these stereotypes." **Anchita Ghatak**



Staging *The Vagina Monologues* in Kampala: challenging the public on violence against women.

"Little did we realize that our plan would unleash a wave of protests that would end in the banning of the performance and a serious threat to the women's movement in Uganda. Women's sexuality is a means of control that few societies are comfortable to discuss, yet full emancipation cannot happen when women are still subjected to horrible forms of violence, when women's sexuality is swept under the carpet and when men control sexuality. If we are operating in the same framework that promotes women's oppression in the name of culture, then our activism is designed in the same patriarchal framework."

Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe

Women Navigate Power at the AWID Forum

Fri 11AM-12:30

Claiming Space for Women's Rights in Mixed Organizations and Movements

What changes and challenges spring from the election of a million women to panchayats?

“Since India passed a quota amendment in 1993, new women leaders have had to negotiate between narrow cultural and traditional boundaries to step into these newly opened political spaces.”

Meenu Vadera



The Babassu nut breakers: how rural women workers organize for access to the trees that represent their own identities as well as their livelihoods.

“The challenge is to integrate sustainable rural development and women’s rights in Brazil. A pro-active strategy is needed on domestic violence and sexuality, to transfer the collective empowerment built during the fight for free access to babassu palm trees inside fences, to individual empowerment inside the home.”

Marta Antunes



A long-time activist pits struggle learning against post-apartheid realities in a highly personal angle on current challenges for women’s rights.

“In the place of pre-1994 dreams, the dominant ideas in South Africa today are framed by the view that there is no alternative to the might of global capital. For states and IFIs, despite lip service to human development, community participation, and ending poverty, the priority remains profit at the expense of redistribution. Feminist voices of earlier years have been stifled by increasingly technicised gender speak and by calls for men to solve the problems of women. How can we, how do we, reclaim our space as feminists?” **Shamim Meer**

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A sexual harassment campaign re-examines definitions of the workplace – and women’s rights within it.

“Since 1979, even the constitutional provision granting complete equality to women has been suspended. This has taken away whatever remedy women enjoyed through legal process, even in theory. Working women in Pakistan have to struggle to get permission from their immediate family to maintain a job.” **Aqsa Khan**

An activist-academic reviews the troubled history of women’s role and rights within HIV/AIDS organizations and activism.

“South Africa’s catastrophic AIDS epidemic is deeply driven and shaped by sexism. Despite the country’s tradition of influential AIDS activism, particularly by gay rights activists, women describe resistance to discussions of sexism and to the specific gendered experiences of women infected and affected by HIV. Some women experience sexual harassment in their organizations. One called for ‘a different kind of revolution, in which our brothers, husbands, sons, fathers and lovers change nappies, sweep floors and hold the dying as they weep.’” **Mandisa Mbali**



After conflict and tsunami, women-headed households emerge from silence and stigma to rename themselves and claim an active social role.

“‘Did you say that you are a divorced woman?’ he asked me. ‘So, how can you be a leader, a national coordinator of these women if you aren’t even capable of taking care of your own husband?’ In the Indonesian language, any woman who lives outside of marriage, for whatever reason, is called ‘Janda’ or widow, a term that stigmatizes her in society. The man is the legal household head and the main breadwinner, while the woman is defined as the spouse, household manager, child educator, additional breadwinner, social worker, and member of society. Generally, a woman has double the responsibility but lacks authority even over her own body.’

Nani Zulminarni