

TELLING OUR STORIES: WOMEN MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. This one begins with the need to bring experience and analysis together in order to share effective women's rights strategies. Why do we endlessly reinvent the wheel? One reason is that busy activists seldom have the 'luxury' to pause, reflect, analyze, and write up their experiences. So Everjoice Win, Action Aid's International Head of Women's Rights, joined forces with women's rights allies at Just Associates for an initiative on *Women's Rights Organizing: Navigating, Transforming, and Building Power*.

In a context that is characterized by growing militarization; economic, political and religious fundamentalisms; and backlash against women's freedoms, this initiative draws out stories of how women are making a difference by making rights a reality in their communities and countries.



Our story gathers momentum – from a call for proposals; through the formation of an advisory group which then makes the first selection of 13 possible case studies from almost as many countries; into the writeshop itself: 10 writers, 4 facilitators, and 5 days of energy, creativity, and exchange, July 25–29, 2005, at the Institute for Development Studies outside Brighton in the UK.

In a lovely 'room with a view,' a small team of experienced facilitators guides the writers through sessions ranging from analyzing globalization to constructing dramatic narratives. Each writer is challenged to encapsulate her story in a summarized, 'elevator

speech' version for the whole group. Later, a small group engages in a supportive critique of her full story.

From a plenary session on identifying hidden power to a one-on-one editing consultation, the agenda moulds itself around the writers' needs, knitting in-depth political analysis with creative story-telling.



Our narrative divides up at this point, into 10 separate but interwoven threads, as the writers head back to their lives and work in cities and villages in Pakistan, Uganda, Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, India, and South Africa – fuelled, fired up, and focused on the next deadline. At the writeshop, fellow writer-activists and facilitators have helped each woman to dig deeply into the fabric of her case study, to reveal the turning points that will drive the story just as they illuminate strategic choices (whether in the moment or recollected in hindsight). So, each writer sets off on her writing path with a route map of the next stage.

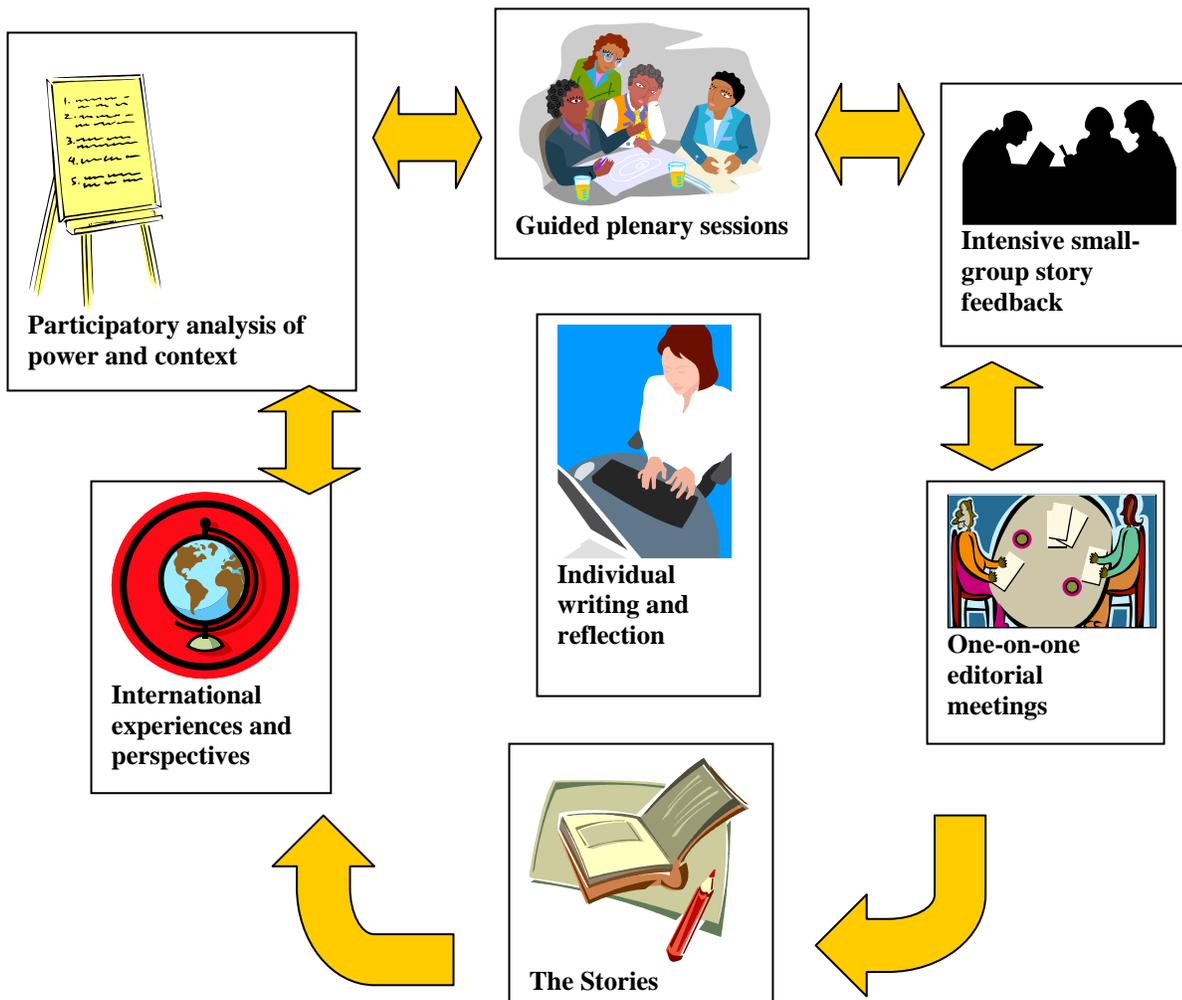
Looking ahead, the advisory group will select a number of writers from among these ten to go on to craft a close-to-final draft, with editorial input, to present at the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Forum in Bangkok in October 2005.

And like all good stories, what seems to be the end – the publication of a collection of powerful and empowering accounts – will in fact be a new beginning, as creative distribution propels these case stories out to inspire, provoke, and challenge activists and practitioners everywhere.

FACILITATORS

<p>Everjoice Win: Action Aid International, Head – Women’s Rights</p>	<p>Lisa VeneKlasen: Facilitator, Just Associates</p>	
<p>Cindy Clark: Facilitator/ Organizer, Just Associates</p>	<p>Annie Holmes: Editor/ Writing Coach, Just Associates</p>	

ELEMENTS





WRITERS AND STORIES

Anchita Gachak, India	Prostitution and women's rights: the impressive gains of a Kolkata sex-workers' movement and the challenges it poses for other feminists.
Aqsa Khan, Pakistan	A sexual harassment campaign re-examines definitions of the workplace – and women's rights within it – in an Islamic society.
Meenu Vadera, India	What changes and challenges spring from the election of over a million women to panchayats, India's local government structures?
Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe, Uganda	Staging <i>The Vagina Monologues</i> in Kampala: challenging the media and culture to recast a debacle as a step forward for women's rights.
Nani Zulminarni, Indonesia	After conflict and tsunami, women-headed households emerge from silence and stigma to rename themselves and claim an active social role.
Mandisa Mbali, South Africa	An activist-academic reviews the history of women's role and rights within the powerful HIV/AIDS 'industry' and raises difficult questions.
Joyce Asekenye, Uganda	A women's peace initiative spans bitter boundaries amid complex border conflicts, raising questions about the forces at work in cattle rustling.
Shamim Meer, South Africa	A long-time activist pits struggle learning against post-apartheid realities in a highly personal angle on current challenges for women's rights.
Marta Antunes, Brazil	The Babassu nut breakers: how rural women workers organize for access to the trees that represent their own identities as well as their livelihoods.
Carolyn Angir, Kenya	A Kenyan diary of 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, a vital global campaign for over a decade.
AAI team and writer	Women's rights in Action Aid International – an historical account.

