

# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

## RISE UP & KEEP ON KEEPING ON



# JASS: WHO, WHAT & WHY



JASS is a feminist movement support organization that equips and strengthens the leadership and organizing capacity of community-based women activist leaders and their organizations in Mesoamerica, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa. We bring over 15 years' experience supporting women leaders (including indigenous and rural communities threatened by extractives, land defenders, sex workers, garment workers, LBTQI, HIV+, and young activists) to transform institutions, policies and beliefs that perpetuate violence and inequality. We have directly equipped and accompanied over 3,000 community-based women (who have mobilized thousands more) to be stronger and more effective leaders and catalyzed six feminist and cross-movement alliances. Leveraging JASS' hybrid structure as a multi-regional and global organization, we ensure that these women have a seat at the decision-making table and that their perspectives influence broader social, environmental, political, and economic justice efforts. Our tools and publications have influenced how other organizations and donors think about and respond to critical social change issues of our time.

## Our feminist movement building approach enables the conditions for women to organize, mobilize and transform power in four interconnected areas of their lives:

**VOICE:** Women gain freedom of expression and the right to participate, and have a voice and power

**SAFETY & PROTECTION:** (collective strategies – alliances, collaborations, and protection networks – that offer the power of numbers for impact and safety): Women feel safe to be who they are in all aspects of their lives, in their homes, workplaces, organizations and the streets, and can exercise their rights and participate politically without facing violence



**RESOURCES:** (access to land, water and public services, and the recognition of formal, informal and care work): Women sustain livelihoods and labor rights, access to public services and the ability to sustainably use and protect their land, forests & water

**BODIES:** (Gender justice, health, sexual and reproductive rights, identity, and wellbeing): Women have bodily integrity and autonomy, including on sex and sexuality, reproductive and sexual rights, gender identity, health, and wellbeing, and are free from violence.



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# < 2019 > A YEAR OF TRANSITION

In 2019, JASS underwent our biggest leadership transition from founding Executive Director (ED) Lisa VeneKlasen. We sought a recruitment and transition process that stayed true to our feminist principles of shared leadership and transparency. We created an internal recruitment process co-led by the Board and JASS Leadership Team (JLT), which resulted in the appointment of new ED Shereen Essof. The words of our board co-chairs Awino Okech and Joanne Sandler captures our sentiments:

**“ We are thrilled to announce that Shereen Essof will become the next Executive Director of JASS. Shereen has been a leading light of JASS for many years, first as the Regional Director of JASS Southern Africa and more recently, as JASS Crossregional Program Director. Shereen brings a robust understanding of the institution, global feminist politics and a deep commitment to movement building which is the heart of JASS’ work ... We want to simultaneously honor Lisa’s enormous contributions and very intentionally support Shereen’s leadership ... in making this transition a success, especially in a way that strengthens the work and partnerships that JASS can offer. ”**

# FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

As we look back on 2019, we draw inspiration from JASS partners, allies and community-based women leaders, who rise up, and **keep on keeping on**. They are creating long-term solutions, advocating for leadership approaches that are more transparent and caring, building greater capacity for the sustainable and accountable management of resources (including natural resources) while building critical allies across movements, issues, and borders to ensure solidarity and safety. This vision, imagination, and resolve are essential in our struggles for a better future given the rapidly shifting global socio-economic and political landscape.

In 2019, JASS continued to advance women's ability to lead, organize, mobilize, and transform power in four areas of their lives: VOICE, RESOURCES, BODIES, & SAFETY. While the issues and contexts vary across our regions, JASS surfaced these four cross-cutting issues as entry points from which women are organizing and shaping solutions to the systemic problems of violence and inequality.



# ...keep on keeping on

## Some highlights from the work we accompanied this year include:

- Women in Zimbabwe who ignited a public conversation around the erosion of public services especially water and electricity as part the *2018 What Women Want* Manifesto.
- Women workers in Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar who influenced the International Labor Organization (ILO) to adopt a new convention on violence and harassment.
- Indigenous women including participants in our JASS Mesoamerica Alquimia School who paved the way for a “General Recommendation on Indigenous Women” within the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- The 8000-strong movement *Our Bodies, Our Lives* who launched the first-ever women-centered treatment literacy manual that is transforming public health around HIV/AIDS in Malawi.

2019 was a year when JASS invested in organizational leadership too. We saw a leadership transition from founding Executive Director (ED) Lisa Veneklasen, who built JASS from the ground up over 18+ years. Movements show us that change must be embraced rather than resisted and that transitions are part of the cycles of life. JASS did just that, embrace and celebrate change. We are proud that the outgoing ED and the senior leadership team and board planned and executed a process that genuinely modeled how to do a feminist leadership transition. Over several months, this transition leadership team conducted an internal recruitment with regular and transparent communication with staff, resulting in my appointment as the new ED.

JASS has a tremendous opportunity to build on the carefully laid foundations and legacy of Lisa. She nurtured, grew, and served the organization with care, led by a depth of commitment to a movement politics rooted in the global south, fed by a deep analysis of power and grounded in fierce love. As we prepare to move into the next evolution of JASS, we will build upon these foundations, to allow us to continue to stretch and grow as an organization making us stronger, bolder, smarter and even more relevant.

I step into the role of ED with love and appreciation for the trust and support JASS has in me in this role. I am confident in who we are and the values we embody in our work as an organization. With the depth of experience of our board and the dynamism and wisdom of our community of practice, JASS will continue to support feminist movement building to make change happen.

As we move forward, we celebrate the resolve and ingenuity of visionary leaders all over the world who are daring to create local solutions for a more just and sustainable world for us all!

**Onward!**  
**Shereen Essof**



## *Section 1:* **VOICE**

The ability to speak out and be heard is never a given. When women speak out, they often experience backlash and violence. 2019 saw escalated attacks on freedom of expression, including harsh reprisals of women who raised their voices on pressing issues in their communities from governments, conservative groups, and within their organizations and families. JASS builds and bolsters women's voices for stronger leadership, participation, and influence.





## ZIMBABWE

Voice = Women's  
Safety and Survival

# WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF REPRESSIVE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRENDS.

**In this context, organizing requires careful strategies that respond to the hostile context and fulfill basic needs while reducing risk.**

Women in Zimbabwe have been organizing to transform conditions that severely threaten their safety, freedoms, and survival through the What Women Want (WWW) manifesto created in 2018. The manifesto is a set of seven demands formulated by women from across the country most affected by the socio-economic and political impacts as an organizing framework to push for meaningful changes to women. WWW puts a women's agenda on the table and strengthens women's organizing while building their organizing power to leverage change.



“ We need to think differently about organizing for change. We need to root our organizing in women’s lived realities and needs, focusing on the root of the problems rather than dealing with the symptoms. Let us listen and really hear what the women want and not what we want for them.

– Woman activist, Zimbabwe

”

JASS supported women to activate the demands for good public services through community advocacy. Two feminist movement-builders’ schools and six tactical dialogues with 120 women surfaced ongoing water and electricity cuts as a key issue. In four cities (Harare, Mutare, Masvingo, and Shamva), women used art and radio to create a public conversation on the erosion of public services and engaged local decision-makers to make their demands heard.

“ My day has drastically changed since we started experiencing prolonged water and electricity cuts. I now sleep for two hours. Electricity comes on at 10 pm and I start cooking meals for the next day and ironing clothes whilst waiting for midnight when our water comes back. Then I start filling up buckets and doing my laundry, and normally finish around 3am.

– Woman Activist from Masvingo

”

**What Women Want**  
lays the groundwork  
for collective  
agendas that advance  
economic livelihoods  
and democratic  
practice at community  
level.





## CEDAW

Voice = Institutional  
recognition and  
protection of  
indigenous women's  
rights

# AFTER YEARS OF LEARNING, ANALYSIS ADVOCACY, CONSULTATION, AND PUBLIC

education the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women (CEDAW) is poised to approve a "General  
Recommendation on Indigenous Women."

As members of the Ixpop Collective<sup>1</sup>, and through its ongoing Alquimia Feminist Leadership and Learning School, JASS Mesoamerica collaborated with allies in support of indigenous women's demands to create a General Recommendation for CEDAW to explicitly recognize and protect their rights, historically denied due to colonization, and racial and gender-based discrimination..

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<sup>1</sup> The Ixpop Collective is comprised of JASS Mesoamerica, Tik Naoj, ECAP (Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team), Mayan Association Uk'u'x B'e, and the Women's Human Rights Institute.

**“ If the CEDAW committee emits a recommendation for indigenous women, what it’s doing is to say to the state ‘Look, in this way you can make visible the needs of indigenous women.’ We can grab hold of this instrument to demand that the state comply with guaranteeing our individual and collective rights as indigenous women.”**  
– Debora Yancoba, ECAP-Guatemala, Colectivo IxPop ”

JASS accompanied indigenous allies from Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, and Ecuador in an indigenous women-led global consultation on the CEDAW recommendation. If adopted, this will be the first UN recommendation of its kind developed by the people directly affected, rather than solely initiated by legal experts.

Indigenous women have identified recognition in the UN system and among other global human rights mechanisms as a powerful tool for defense of their rights, communities and territories, and a strong basis for building and broadening alliances to advance gender and racial justice and equality.

**“ CEDAW is the Magna Carta of women. Women all over the world should appropriate it and use it, not only to demand legal rights, but also to organize, raise awareness, and empower ourselves to know that we have rights and a language with which to communicate with women and a growing number of allies in other parts of the world.**  
– Alda Facio, UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls/JASS longtime Advisor ”





# AS WE MARK THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEIJING WORLD CONFERENCE,

a lot is at stake. In preparation, JASS joined other activists to create a bold feminist document that we could use as a rallying point.

Twenty-five years ago, some 30,000 women from around the world convened in Beijing at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Fast forward to 2019, and women activists face an intensified attack on their rights and safety fueled by political violence, economic insecurity, and environmental damage in the name of economic “growth.” These trends are accompanied by an anti-feminist backlash that continues to stall or reverse decades of gains on rights related to gender, sexuality, and sexual identity and increase violence directed at women activists.

Preparations for the historic anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action: reflections, achievements, setbacks, and pending tasks dominated 2019. JASS participated in a gathering with over 70 feminists from diverse regions and social movements in August 22-24 that produced the Mexico City Framework (Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis). Initiated by the Mexican government, the Mexico City Framework is a radical and urgent feminist reflection and vision spotlighting what had shifted since the Beijing Platform of Action was adopted and the urgency of addressing the structural obstacles to gender justice and women’s human rights based on the current context. The document will feed into the UN “Generation Equality Forums” in Mexico City in May 2020 and Paris in July 2020.

## BEIJING+25 ANNIVERSARY

Voice = putting  
forward demands  
and proposals for  
transforming a world  
in crisis



## *Section 2:* **RESOURCES**

In 2019, extractive industries and other foreign and domestic interests, supported by governments, continued to pose a permanent threat to women's communities, families, and lives. JASS supports and accompanies women and organizations defending land, water, and the environment who are demanding their fair share of the economic resources needed to not just survive but also thrive



## ALQUIMIA

Resources =  
indigenous women  
leading the defense  
of land and territory

# ALQUIMIA FEMINIST LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING SCHOOL.

**Land grabs and environmental destruction threaten not only the homes and resources that rural and indigenous women depend on to survive and sustain their families, but also a deep-rooted way of life.**

JASS' Alquimia Feminist Leadership and Learning School strengthens indigenous and rural women's collective capacity to resist the corrupt large-scale energy and agribusiness projects that are displacing their communities and destroying livelihoods. In 2019, JASS ran courses in Honduras and Guatemala. In Honduras, JASS worked with the Center for Women's Rights (CDM) and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH) to train a new group of women activists following a successful first round in 2018. The thirty women who participate in the school are human rights defenders of land, water, economic, and community rights, and include trans, indigenous, Afro-American, and mestiza women from diverse groups and movements. The first Alquimia School in Guatemala brought together 35 mostly Mayan indigenous women. The School was co-designed with a consultative council that includes the Latin



American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLASCO), Incide Joven, Resistencia La Puya, Mama Maquin, PopNoj, U'k ux B'e, and the participants.

The School uses feminist popular education techniques and content that JASS has developed since its inception in order to deepen contextual critiques and to envision and apply feminist models in their organizations and movements as well as ensuring safety given rising levels of repression and violence.

“ The school has a different philosophy of teaching that encourages the whole group to participate, and it's based on our experience and that's a good way to do it.

– Alquimia-Guatemala participant

Participants in both countries report that their experience in Alquimia significantly shaped their analysis and provided them with concrete tools for organizing more effectively. Through Alquimia, JASS facilitating women's participation and influence in key advocacy spaces to center their perspectives on environmental, economic, and political justice, including CEDAW.

“ We have a double struggle: to defend the rights of women and to defend the land. I am grateful to JASS because it has taught me ways to cope. When I entered the Alquimia School, I cried with emotion. My daughter also wanted to learn the same tactics and so I taught her.

– María Felicitas López, Movimiento Independiente de la Paz Lenca Honduras (MILPAH)





**ILO**

**Resources = Garment  
workers ending  
violence in the  
workplace**

## **ILO ADOPTS NEW CONVENTION ON VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT**

**In 2019, JASS supported women garment workers in Indonesia, Cambodia, and Myanmar to analyze and understand their contexts, formulate responsive and safer organizing strategies, and bring their demands to broader debates and policies on labor rights.**

In partnership with the Solidarity Center, JASS helped make history by contributing to the adoption of the groundbreaking International Labor Organization convention that recognizes “the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment... [that] disproportionately affects women and girls.” JASS went into factories in Cambodia and Indonesia to collect cases of gender-based violence (GBV), training women workers themselves to document the cases. The workers then took their cases to the June 2019 ILO conference in Geneva, where the convention was adopted.



This process had the double impact of promoting the ILO Convention and providing women garment workers with skills in research, presentation, and organizing that increased their power and confidence. JASS was able to build on relationships established over many years of accompaniment in developing a feminist and holistic analysis of the issues that the women face in the workplace. We helped factor in women workers' gendered experience by bringing in perspectives that are often left out by male-dominated unions and worker rights organizations and centering on the empowerment of women workers.

Through the documentation of evidence of rampant GBV in garment factories, women workers presented a strong case to the ILO convention, resulting in the historic win. The process also led to a critical examination of GBV in unions and in labor policy and practice and leaves in place new networks and lasting structures of solidarity. The School uses feminist popular education techniques

and content that JASS has developed since its inception in order to deepen contextual critiques and to envision and apply feminist models in their organizations and movements as well as ensuring safety given rising levels of repression and violence.

**“ For me, the big achievement of this project is to empower the workers – they felt proud that they can really do it by themselves, because usually workers don’t feel they have the expertise to do research. So, we’re breaking those stereotypes and breaking the dynamic of inequality and the way a worker looks to the expert, to the researcher. This also strengthens their capacity to analyze the issue and the roots causes of gender-based violence, and what they can do about it.**

– Kunthea Chan, JASS Southeast Asia

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## Section 3: **BODIES**

Making decisions about our own bodies is at the heart of gender equality and freedom. For this reason, in all societies, women's bodies are "the battleground" for struggles over political and social control. During 2019, we witnessed increased fundamentalisms and conservative backlash target our gains and especially threaten members of the LGBTQI+ community, poor women and women who dare to speak out. JASS places women's bodies – their health, safety, freedom and pleasure – at the center of our work, creating safe spaces for questioning taboos and healing from physical and emotional wounds; affirming gender and sexual identities and expression; and working toward a just future in which all bodies are free and valued.



## OUR BODIES, OUR LIVES

Bodies = Healthcare  
and education that  
addresses HIV+  
women's needs

## BY CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN TO ANALYZE HOW POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND

shame are at the heart of HIV, we can unlock their knowledge, voice, and catalyze the connective tissue that energizes their organizing.

A watershed year, 2019 saw the official launch of the first-ever community-based feminist treatment literacy manual and educational initiative by the Our Bodies, Our Lives Campaign, an extraordinary movement of more than 8,000 HIV+ women organized in 30 community hubs, located primarily in rural areas. Since 2007, OBOL has successfully advocated to replace outdated, harmful HIV treatment regimens and continue to educate and advocate at local clinics and among traditional leaders.

The manual and accompanying popular educational efforts were developed from the ground up, beginning in 2016, and address women's specific needs while demanding improved and accessible



healthcare for everyone. Content includes women centered and Malawi specific comprehensive HIV/AIDS management steps, and how to change the societal narrative on HIV-AIDS by honoring all bodies, sexualities, and gender identities. The manual has been adopted by clinics, OBOL movement hubs, and the Malawi Ministry of Health to teach patients how to be proactive in managing HIV and to encourage treatment. Sixty-five opinion leaders, journalists and policymakers attended the event that marked a breakthrough in the ability of women's informal networks to set policies and frame the issues that directly affect their lives and bodies.

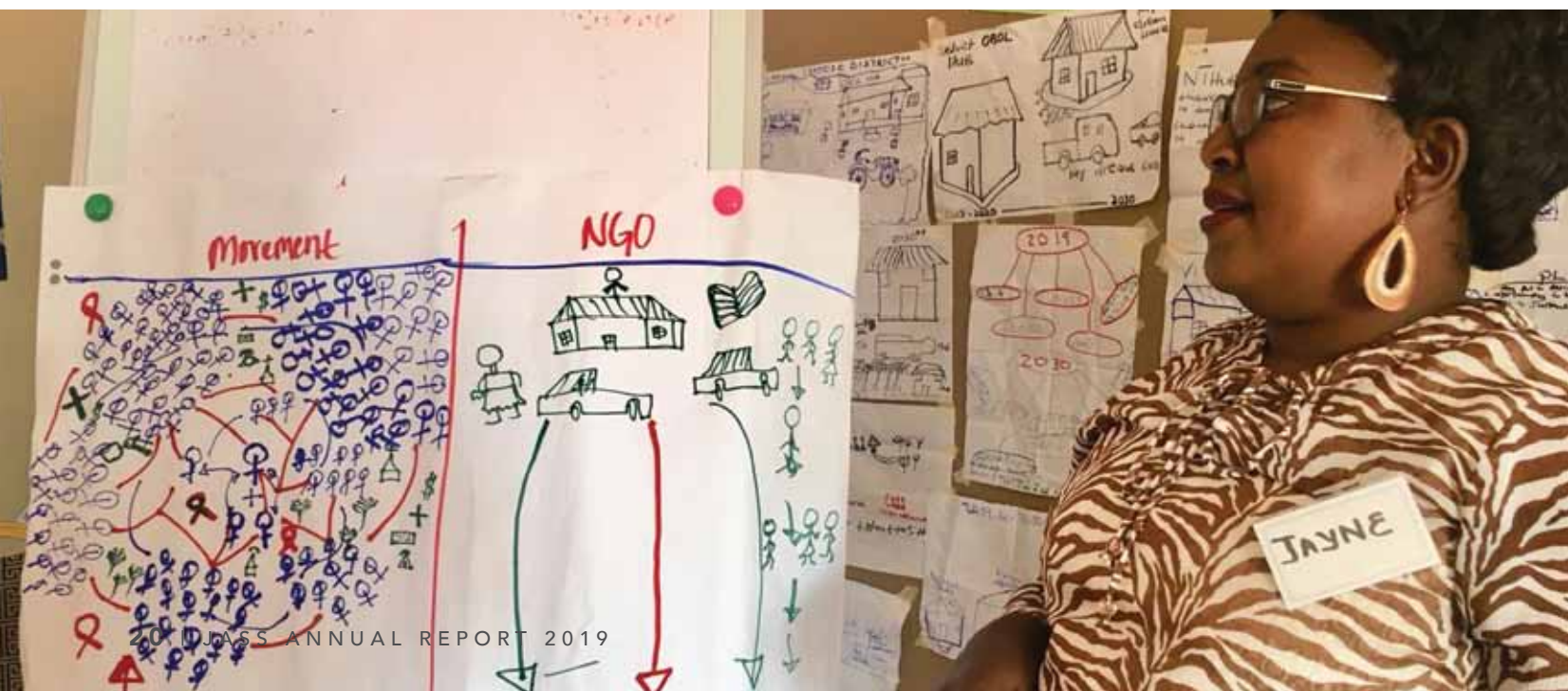
On World Aids Day, OBOL women shared the manual with broader communities in their districts. Some produced videos sharing how the manual is

changing their lives – a powerful counter narrative to shape broader conversations on HIV on a global day that still looks at HIV+ people as *victims*.

**“ We always say, ‘Nothing for us, without us,’ so we developed this Treatment Literacy Manual to address challenges we have faced. This manual teaches us about our bodies and the different types of drugs we are taking. Sometimes health workers unknowingly switch drugs. But when you know your drugs, you are able to demand them.**

– Kwangu Tembo Makhwira, OBOL and COWHLA, Malawi

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# SPOTLIGHT:

## Reducing Stigma and Discrimination

Stepping into their power, OBOL activists have been educating clinic and hospital staff as well as traditional leaders. Now, even local chiefs, who called these women “walking corpses” a decade ago, respect their knowledge, consulting with them on community-based issues. For example, in Nkhotakota district, healthcare workers denied medication to a woman who attended clinic on a different day from the one originally scheduled (when it was too dangerous to travel as the rivers were overflowing). She raised this issue at the district OBOL community hub and together they devised a strategy to ensure she receive her medication, while also educating health officials on better treatment that recognizes the barriers rural women face. OBOL women took this issue to their antiretroviral treatment (ART) coordinator who agreed not only to give this woman her medication, but also to ensure that this mistreatment does not happen in the future. In steps like these, the women of OBOL are changing health officials’ practices and treatment of HIV+ positive people.





## Section 4: **SAFETY**

Women cannot effectively defend basic rights and fight for a just future if they are not safe. In 2019, threats and attacks on women human rights defenders intensified in all the JASS regions. Powerful forces including authoritarian governments, extractivist industries, fundamentalisms, racism, and the growth of a misogynist far right spearhead these attacks and have created hostile contexts for the exercise and defense of rights. JASS works closely with women activists, particularly those in risky political contexts, to build networks for safety and solidarity and to construct the collective power needed to create holistic security and wellbeing for all.



A photograph of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a green shirt, speaking into a white megaphone with a red handle. She is outdoors at what appears to be a protest or rally. In the background, a yellow banner features a black and white illustration of a man's face and the word 'Mujeres' in green. Other people are visible in the background, some wearing green shirts.

## DEFENDING RIGHTS IN HOSTILE CONTEXTS

Safety = collective strategies for safety and bigger impact

## AS CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (WHRD) WORSEN,

many organizations, including JASS, have questioned the underlying assumptions guiding traditional, individual-focused strategies for activist protection.

JASS' focus is on building and strengthening collective and community strategies to protection. We convene groups of people to learn directly from WHRDs, sharing their analysis and centering collective strategies to keep women safe while shifting donors' and INGOs' practices, policies, and resource flows to be more responsive to women's needs.

Building on our "Defending Rights in Hostile Contexts" initiative with the Fund for Global Human Rights, which began in 2017, JASS Southern Africa and JASS Southeast Asia each held regional convenings in 2019 to continue these vital conversations and alliance-building efforts at a regional level. Both convenings



centered a deeper analysis of power (the rising influence of corporate and fundamentalist groups, for instance), the resulting risk for activism, and the importance of emerging strategies for collective safety for sustained organizing and advocacy. Participants came away with new strategies and tools to shift their protection focus, as a direct result of JASS' advocacy.

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

In June 2019, thanks to Ford Foundation support, JASS Southern Africa with Amnesty International and Oxfam South Africa gathered 40 leading activists, community leaders, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, faith leaders, donors, and NGOs in a regional convening in South Africa. JASS worked behind the scenes over many months, engaging carefully with new and existing allies to ensure representation of all the diverse voices concerned with the problem of closing democratic space. The result was an enriched analysis of the drivers behind political violence, along with ways to strengthen both the power and safety of organizing and movements.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

In November 2019, JASS Southeast Asia organized a similar regional convening with our partners FGHR, Forum Asia, and Urgent Action Fund Asia-Pacific in Thailand. The event brought together participants from three of the region's most risky organizing contexts: Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines, including activists from indigenous, women's rights, LGBTQ, environmental and land defense, labor rights, and grassroots organizations, human rights organizations, and allied donors. The nature and drivers of political repression and violence, the roles of the U.S. and China in the region in escalating militarism and extractivism, and the creative community-level strategies that activists and networks employ to protect themselves and their work and shift political narratives within constrained and risky political conditions were explored.

We documented the rich insights from both dialogues. These will be uploaded on our Power and Protection platform to continue discussions, exchange resources, and learn together as contexts change.



# HIGHLIGHTS



- **A two-year power analysis collaboration in Kenya with 21 activists and journalists from six organizations:** National Gay Lesbian Human Rights, UHA! – an indigenous activist fund, Kenya Sex Workers' Alliance, World March of Women, MUHURI, and African Uncensored. This project, launched in 2019 with Fund for Global Human Rights and American Jewish World Service, introduced participants (to JASS' power analysis and became a space for building cross-movement agendas among people who are seldom in the same room.
- **New content and feminist popular education tools and analyses** on organizing in hostile contexts with the purpose of influencing the field of power and protection, particularly the need for INGOs and donors to integrate feminist, collective approaches to activist protection: these tools and analyses include JASS and FGHR's joint Power and Protection learning platform. Developed in English and Spanish following the "Defending Rights in Hostile Contexts" global convening in 2017, the platform collects and shares our learnings on the issues in a single, user-friendly location.



# 2019 FINANCIALS



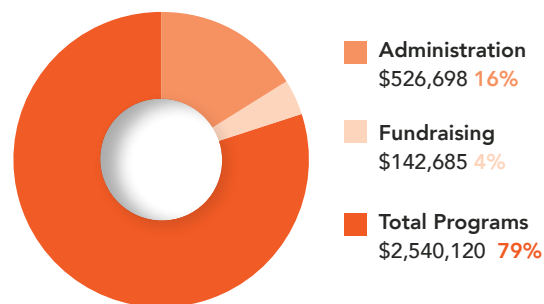
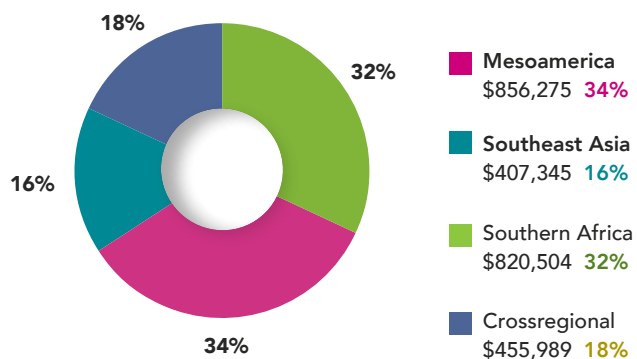
## INCOME\*

**US \$3,518,499**

## EXPENSES

**US \$3,209,503**

## PROGRAMS



\*JASS' 2019 audit reports higher revenue that includes multi-year funding.



# THANK YOU

- Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Dialogue & Dissent)
- Global Affairs Canada
- Ford Foundation
- Novo Foundation
- Oak Foundation
- Foundation for a Just Society
- Open Society Foundations
- Comic Relief
- Channel Foundation
- Africa Groups of Sweden
- Swedish IM
- Global Fund for Women
- Fund for Global Human Rights
- General Service Foundation
- Overbrook Foundation
- Angelica Fund of Tides Foundation
- Urgent Action Fund
- Calala Fondo de Mujeres (ACCD)
- Fundación Fondo Centroamericana de Mujeres (FCAM)
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Freedom House
- Forum Asia

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.



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