



# JASS

*Strengthening and sustaining women's organizing power*

## JASS Southeast Asia Feminist Movement Building



*An international community of activists, scholars, and popular educators, JASS strengthens activist leadership to build alliances and take strategic action to address inequality. To capture public attention and mobilize the power of women's numbers, JASS combines face-to-face organizing with new communications and media. Grounded in local action amplified by regional and global connections, JASS teams and tools are hard at work in 27 countries in Mesoamerica, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa, building collective power across boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality and location to make a just world for all.*

### Organizing for Political Change

Organizing skills, often under-valued in political work, are a critical element of JASS' approach to movement-building. Participants from initial regional workshop have gone on to organize and co-host national processes in Indonesia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. Here, groups learn to use innovative political frameworks, such as the three dimensions of power to integrate creativity in activism.

*Young women in Cambodia, gathered for JASS' November 2009 workshop in Cambodia*



### A Regional Agenda

In Southeast Asia (SEA), JASS' strategy is to strengthen and diversify women's activist leadership through intergenerational learning and action. JASS-SEA is grounded in the path-breaking work of its two co-directors and in partnership with local organizations, particularly PESADA and PEKKA, which link massive grassroots organizing strategies with advocacy at local and national government levels.

Conditions within Southeast Asian countries vary enormously, but throughout the region social conflict around class, ethnicity, gender and religion has intensified as corporate-led globalization transforms traditional, communal social systems into more individualistic, consumer oriented economies. Powerful religious fundamentalist forces are mobilizing to limit women's basic freedoms and rights, while increased mobility and labor migration have generated new cross-border forms of exploitation, such as sex trafficking.

The gap between urban-based elite NGOs and thriving mass-based grassroots organizations has weakened the influence of regional processes and trans-border collaborative efforts. As first steps towards building a regional agenda and alliances, JASS SEA gathered groups of mainly younger women to explore the history of their own women's movements, map the current context, and examine feminist perspectives on poverty, labor, and sexuality.

Before Indonesia's 2009 elections, JASS SEA and ally PESADA held workshops on Nias Island, to encourage votes for women and to emphasize political rights. One woman told JASS, "Our custom restricts us tightly. Men are considered more important in Nias society." JASS' Niken Lestari targeted young women voters through a blog in Indonesian and her involvement in a Vote Women! campaign, which included a TV talk show.

A Burmese participant left the regional workshop inspired to focus on women's rights in her Thailand-based organization. She identified two urgent topics: women's participation in decision-making and reducing trafficking in women in the border areas. Her organization ran a month-long Training of Trainers for 50 participants, facilitating discussions about gender and women's rights, leadership skills, violence against women, sexual harassment and domestic violence, and teaching advocacy, documentation, and community organizing skills.



In southern Thailand, they held a number of three-day workshops with Burmese migrant women, covering women's rights and ways to prevent trafficking and sexual violence.

## Multigenerational Activism

In addition to the gap in cross-border alliances and the urban-rural divide, there has been little effort to prepare the younger generation for leadership, leaving young people to self-organize with few of the resources, skills and connections that they need in order to make an impact. JASS SEA has taken concrete steps to bridge the gap between high-profile national-level feminist leaders and younger activists. "Our generation could read about feminism in our cozy beds without being afraid that Soeharto's military would drag us to prison," acknowledged one young activist. However, "not being trusted to take the movement forward because of my age made me feel hopeless. I had to wait for their instructions; initiative would be not tolerated." JASS addresses age as one aspect of power, along with class, race, location (urban/rural) and sexuality, to build stronger, deeper alliances among women.

## New Leaders

Ordinarily, JASS sees our role as contributing to change; we don't claim to cause it. But in certain moments, someone's life can be transformed by a timely intervention. Yasinta, a young activist from Timor Leste, met JASS' movement-building framework at a workshop in June, 2007. After the JASS workshops, Yasinta became deeply involved in the women's network and then, in January, 2009, took up a new opportunity as Director of Rede Fete Timor Leste – an umbrella group supporting 18 women's organizations from across the country to advance the status of women and their participation in development. "What impresses me about the activities organized by JASS is the space available for us to tell each other the stories of the lives that we live as individuals, workers, society members, and so on. JASS is very important in supporting my personal life and my work." Yasinta is especially enthusiastic about engaging with young feminists in rural areas, "the potential for our movement."

## Beijing +15



A JASS SEA team attended the Asia Pacific NGO Forum marking the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. Here, JASS SEA expanded relationships with organizations working on women's rights and worked on building common regional agendas. "Despite all claims that the gender gap in the Philippines is lessening, the realities experienced by grassroots women tell otherwise," wrote JASS member Mikas Matsuzawa, a Filipina activist and blogger, reporting on the Forum on the JASS blog. "In this modern age, the notion that a woman's place is in the kitchen and the bedroom still lingers. And I have learned to recognize that there is indeed double oppression of women not only due to gender but also class."

