



**JASS**  
Southern Africa

## Feminist Movement Building

### JASS Southern Africa

JASS Southern Africa, the regional network of the international feminist organization, JASS (Just Associates), strengthens and mobilizes women's voice, visibility and collective organizing power to change norms, institutions and policies that perpetuate inequality and violence, in order to create a just world for all. Through training, organizing, social media, documentation and strategic action in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and at regional level with women across the region, JASS Southern Africa retools and rebuilds women's movements from the grassroots to the policy level.

### A Regional Agenda

For too long, others have spoken on behalf of African women living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. As a result, policies and programs have failed to meet their needs or advance their rights. But the women involved in JASS' movement-building efforts in rural and urban areas in seven countries have been speaking up and speaking out about women's agendas at the core of HIV/AIDS politics. From grassroots organizing in Malawi to the International AIDS Conference, JASS Southern Africa equips women and organizations to change attitudes, demand rights, and improve lives.

JASS Southern Africa's web of diverse activists and partnerships are engaged in political skill-building, organizing and advocacy at local, national and regional levels. This community brings together frontline HIV activists, young women, LGBTI organizers, sex-workers, faith-based leaders and feminists, with a common agenda of mobilizing women's collective power to address practical needs and deepen democracy at all levels.

### HIV + Women in Southern Africa



### From the Ground Up

Since 2007, JASS' movement-building processes have been strengthening the leadership and organizational capacity of grassroots women activists and their networks to:

- define common women's agendas to address the deeply felt economic, social and political problems that women face;
- gain the confidence and information needed to influence formal and informal power structures to better promote women's rights and access to resources;
- question and up-end the prejudices and taboos that prevent healthy living, stigmatize positive women, lesbians and sex workers, and prevent women from joining forces.

To build the power of women's numbers for effective change, JASS has departed from urban-based NGO business-as-usual. Fragmented and over-stretched, women's rights organizations in the region are struggling to respond to a changing context. With an overwhelming focus on laws and institutions, many have lost any connection to grassroots women. And yet the difficult context has sparked new forms of organizing by grandmothers and young women, by HIV-positive women, lesbians and sex workers. At the same time, informal, community-based networks – through churches, mosques, burial societies and savings clubs – engage poor women in large numbers, often disconnected from institutionalized gender equality work. Through innovative alliances and partnerships, JASS seeks to build bridges and common agendas among women working in different locations and on different issues to maximize their collective influence to change attitudes, politics and policies as well as provide for their own development and safety as activists.

## Heart-Mind-Body Initiative in Zimbabwe

In the context of extreme repression and decades of dictatorship in Zimbabwe of which women bear the brunt, the need intensifies for safe spaces to deal with both the aftermath and the threat of violence. To meet this need and to enable women activists to recover and rebuild their organizing efforts, JASS and the Musasa Project are carrying out a Heart–Mind–Body initiative that places self-care at the center of sustained women’s movements. The process, involving a series of workshops, meetings and strong connections between individual women, links heart–mind–body healing with political analysis and strategic thinking in an environment where women must rely on one another for political safety and power.



## Women’s Movement Building in Malawi

Since 2008, women CBO organizers in all regions of Malawi have been involved in an ongoing leadership and organizing process to enhance their capacity for strategic action at local level. While key victories include mobile ARV clinics to reduce women’s travel time and costs, a piece of land from a local chief, access to credit and seed coupons for positive women and a local campaign to stop violence against women, the process has also transformed how women face their personal lives. Victoria, a teacher by profession, has been using the JASS training to ‘disorganize’ her church, demanding to talk about HIV and AIDS, and ending the culture of silence and stigma.

## Generation Alive

Zambian women involved in the JASS Southern Africa leadership training since 2009 formed Generation Alive – GAL – to increase the number of young women in leadership positions both in civil society and politics. “Things may change around me because of what I have learnt, says GAL member Chanda Katongo. “The outstanding thing is that we are now taking action.” GAL members, some of whom live with HIV, work and share JASS skills within various Zambian NGOs.

These are early steps in JASS’ sustained process of building the leadership and organizing capacity of Malawian women to pressure local and national government to make development resources accessible and deliver on laws that support women and HIV- positive people.

## Path-breaking Strategic Partnerships

In 2010, JASS Southern Africa launched an innovative regional alliance. The partners represent an unusual and strategic spectrum of differences and complimentary strengths, each bringing to the process valuable experience and an established constituency.

- MANERELA+, the Malawi Network of Religious Leaders living with HIV/AIDS, has 1,500 members and extensive reach through Christian, Muslim and other faith communities, and boldly supports women and LGBT rights;
- GALZ, the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, a long-time JASS ally, continues to raise awareness and fight for inclusive democracy and the rights of LGBTI people in a hostile environment;
- Youth Vision Zambia, formed by young Zambians to organize for sexual and reproductive technologies and rights, includes a young women’s leadership academy;
- Women’sNet, a feminist organization for IT skills and social media activism, works from its South Africa base with women and girls throughout region;

Together, this partnership aims to maximize the reach and impact of our combined experiences in organizing and activism to overcome denial, stigma and institutionalized prejudice and promote rights and justice for women.

