

Just Associates: Highlights of 2002

Just Associates (JASS) is an international strategic support and learning network committed to strengthening the impact of organizations that promote equity, human rights and economic justice. Through training, technical assistance, strategic planning, action research, participatory evaluation and other kinds of support, we facilitate linkages and learning among activists and organizations from the South and North. Our work is informed by a rights-based approach to organizing, development and citizen action. As a bridge between groups, we promote critical reflection, new knowledge, strong organization, democratic leadership and better practice at community, national and global levels.

While the organization is relatively new, many of our associates have worked together in different capacities through social movements and advocacy efforts, primarily on women's rights, over the last 10 to 20 years. Our network includes educators, lawyers, researchers, organizers, advocates, trainers, gender specialists, journalists, and organizational development specialists—each with practical knowledge and solid relationships with local leaders, NGOs, academics and grassroots groups. These longstanding relationships are one of the most valuable resources we bring to our work.

We are pleased to offer below some of the highlights of our work during 2002. They are grouped in four core themes: Developing new knowledge & better strategies for change; Promoting women's rights; Building global to US bridges; and Making economics accessible to people.

JASS is committed to the following five core principles:

- 1. combining learning and action so that action tests learning and informs sharper analysis and planning, just as learning feeds into more effective action.*
- 2. building linkages between change efforts in the global South and in the US to consolidate advocacy networks, encourage mutual learning and facilitate greater responsiveness and accountability among organizations in the North to their partners in the South.*
- 3. bridging theory and practice so that research and academia is not isolated from on-the-ground activities, but both complement and feed each other.*
- 4. supporting organizations to work towards new forms of leadership, decisionmaking and structures that are consistent with the values they promote through their projects because external change is not possible without being accompanied by internal, organizational change*
- 5. engaging our partners in critical analysis of power relations and strategies for building alternative forms of power for social and economic justice and women's equality.*

Developing New Knowledge & Better Strategies for Change

JASS works with counterparts to create a joint learning agenda so that each initiative provides useful analysis and lessons to a wider range of activists and practitioners. Collaborative analysis and documentation allow groups to deepen their practical and theoretical knowledge about rights, political action and social change so they can better address structural and other causes of poverty and discrimination.

A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation by JASS co-founders Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller was published in August of this year. This new field manual is the result of the authors' more than 40 combined years of experience. The response to the book has been overwhelmingly positive, with close to 700 copies already sold. In 2003, we expect to implement a variety of events around the book. Several organizations have already expressed interest in advocacy training and preparations are currently underway for the book to be

translated into Spanish and Bahasa Indonesian. Since it has been published, we have received enthusiastic feedback from around the world:

Amazing. It is just what I have been searching for! An integration of all of the various philosophies and schools of thoughts regarding social justice and how to carry those through an advocacy process.
Ruthie-Marie Beckwith, Ph.D., Tennessee Microboards Association, Inc.

I find myself in an everlasting and frustrating search for appropriate materials to use with our students and in my work in general, but every once in a while a gem appears unexpectedly and your book is one of them ... It arrived last week and I have been using it and recommending it to people ever since ... I am also thrilled by your incorporation of gender and other social variables throughout the book.
Jonathan Dain, Tropical Conservation and Development Program, Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida

... It is very clear to me that [the book] is going to be of tremendous use in our advocacy work here in Kenya especially as we continue to struggle for a new constitutional dispensation. I will share it extensively with the other partners ... Once again thanks for a job well-done.
Opiata Odindo, Legal Advice Center (Kituo Cha Sheria) - Kenya

Congratulations for A New Weave ... The book will be enormously valuable to us and activists everywhere.
Kathy Bond-Stewart and Talent Nyathi, Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust - Zimbabwe



A major highlight for Just Associates during 2002 was the launching of our partnership with the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK. This is a group of well-known scholars who have been actively involved in and writing about innovative strategies for citizen participation around the world. Together we're carrying out an action research project called **Linking Rights and Participation**. We are working with teams of activists and educators, including four of our Associates, who are intimately tied to social movements, women's rights and citizen efforts in Brazil, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. This project seeks to learn about and support an emerging trend that can be seen around the world—groups concerned with worsening poverty and inequality are increasingly framing their demands as *rights*. These efforts are expanding the parameters of human rights from a focus on political and civil rights to economic, social and cultural rights. The analysis and documentation from this project will help to give practical meaning to the work of Amartya Sen, the nobel prize-winning economist, on “development as freedom” and will further strengthen rights-based approaches to development.



Over the last several years, our associates have conducted groundbreaking research and analysis on evaluating and assessing advocacy impact. Evaluation is crucial to build more effective strategies for advancing rights, equality and justice; yet evaluating advocacy and organizing is a relatively new area of thinking and practice. JASS looks at evaluation as the flipside of planning. By pushing ourselves to define what success looks like in the arena of social and political change and how we will measure it, we are able to develop more effective strategies. JASS is currently advising and supporting ActionAid, a leader among international development NGOs, to explore **innovations in impact evaluations and learning**. This initiative is focused on designing flexible, participatory tools for advocacy program evaluation and organizational learning that build on the concrete experiences and visions for change of citizens groups around the world.

Promoting Women's Rights

Building on our extensive involvement in women's rights, JASS has consolidated strategic partnerships with international women's rights organizations that are interested in our flexible and strategic approaches to rights and political change. Through these partnerships, we hope to encourage greater linkages among the women's rights movement and others such as the fair trade, peace and environmental movements that could potentially be strong allies for common causes.

One such partnership is with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), an international membership organization, based in Canada, that conducts research and facilitates learning exchanges on cutting edge issues impacting women's rights. Every 3 years, AWID organizes an international Forum that regularly attracts more than 1,000 women and men from around the world to develop strategies, share ideas, build skills and provide support to advance gender equality and social justice. Just Associates participated in AWID's 9th International Forum held in October this year in Guadalajara Mexico by organizing a workshop on *Power and Negotiation: Advocating and Advancing Women's Rights*.

In addition, JASS is collaborating with AWID to explore fundraising strategies that can sustain international women's rights organizations through the future. We have initiated joint networking with individuals to explore the possibilities and challenges of building an individual donor base for international feminism. In addition, AWID commissioned JASS to conduct research on ***funding trends for women's rights organizing***. Based on findings from interviews with 16 representatives of international women's organizations and 17 representatives of funding or philanthropic agencies, the study both confirmed standard wisdom on fundraising strategies, and highlighted key challenges and potential future directions for women's rights organizations trying to raise funds from donor institutions and individuals. The final report on the study will be available on the AWID website by early 2003.



JASS is also working with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) in New York. Founded by prominent American feminist, Bella Abzug, WEDO plays a critical leadership role on UN-focused advocacy to fight for and safeguard commitments to women's rights in UN agreements. Since Bella's death in 1998, WEDO has faced a challenging transition. As they navigate the complexities of the changing global environment, WEDO has established an on-going relationship with Just Associates for support to staff and board on political analysis and strategic planning. JASS is currently helping program staff develop their areas of focus beyond the UN, to cutting edge issues such as water—a resource increasingly reported as “the new gold” of the 21st century.

Building Global, Local and U.S. Bridges

One of the driving forces behind the creation of Just Associates was a mandate from many of our colleagues around the world who wanted to find ways to effectively connect with their U.S. counterparts—other organizers and activists working in local communities for rights, equality and economic justice. We believe that by building these connections, we can also build a stronger force for shaping the impact that U.S. policies have on people, particularly poor and marginalized groups, in the global South.

In early 2002, members of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) approached JASS to share their ideas for developing an advocacy department to integrate throughout the organization the kinds of analysis and organizing required for addressing the systemic injustices that are the root causes of poverty. Based on an initial learning and needs assessment, JASS is providing technical support and guidance to a range of departments at all levels of CRS within the U.S. and worldwide to develop a variety of tools and processes to **integrate advocacy into their development work**. Advocacy has evolved as a way to operationalize CRS' commitment to "Making Justice and Solidarity Real", and provides an opportunity for us to work with CRS staff in local U.S. diocese as well as to build on successful international advocacy campaigns conducted by CRS around such contentious issues as conflict diamonds, HIV/AIDS and trafficking.



JASS is also collaborating with the Grassroots Policy Project (GPP), a U.S.-based educational and research organization. During 2002 we supported GPP by co-facilitating workshops with one of their partners, the Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee. We also developed a concept paper for a joint project building on our shared analysis of some of the most pressing challenges for social movement organizing in the U.S. While social change groups have succeeded in bringing about real improvements in people's lives, organizers often find that the gains they have made over the last 30 years are easily unraveled by events that they don't control—in part because social change organizing has tended to focus on work that is short-term and tactical, with weak linkages to longer-term vision and a broader movement. We are proposing a project with GPP that will allow us to bring together our tools for strategic planning and organizational development to **help groups tie their day-to-day work and organizational practices to their long-term goals and mission**. This joint program will build on our existing work to address the organizational practices and trends that make it difficult for groups to devote sufficient time to analysis, reflection and organizational change.

Making Economics Accessible to People

As globalization advances and the evolving economic and global structures worsen poverty, citizens groups are scrambling to understand and influence the economic policy processes that are impacting people's lives—free trade, privatization, intellectual property rights, and other economic policies promoted by international financial and policy institutions and the U.S. government. Just Associates is dedicated to empowering citizens and communities to participate meaningfully in fiscal and economic decisionmaking processes, and to explore the intersections between macro-economic policy, budgets, and the impact they have on people's everyday lives.

Citizen budget advocacy is an increasingly popular initiative in many countries. This year, Just Associates continued its ongoing partnership with Debbie Budlender, the South African gender economist known for her work in gender budgets, to work closely with diverse Indonesian NGO partners involved in budget advocacy to combine gender analysis of budgets with political organization and citizen participation strategies. Through periodic collective analysis, technical assistance and training, the project seeks to develop the capacity of groups to understand and influence budget policy in order to give some teeth and specificity to general demands about equality, corruption, and transparency. One collaborating Indonesian partner, the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) whose members include hundreds of urban slum dwellers, pedicab drivers and street vendors, sunk their teeth into the Jakarta mayor with a lawsuit over non-disclosure of information about where funds intended for flood victims had been spent. And they won! Like the UPC, the other collaborating groups are working on a range of budget issues at different levels of government, including public housing in slums, daycare and transparency at local government level.

Helping Mixed Groups Make the Connections with Gender

Bringing together women's groups and NGOs without a gender focus has helped to strengthen the political impact and outreach of the women's groups as well as significantly improve the effectiveness of the other NGOs by encouraging them to adopt a more systematic approach to inclusion, representation and participation. The non-gender specific NGO partners have found the tools so useful that they have all highlighted gender and women in their projects. For example, PATTIRO, whose mission is to organize citizen fora around issues of public interest, became aware through this project that there were few women among their citizens participating, and thus the strategy was not adequately promoting democracy. Subsequent gender training, which they requested, has shifted their organizing strategies so that they are now constructing women's fora to give women the space necessary to have the confidence to articulate their interests separately before coming together with the broader community.



JASS is currently working with a wide variety of European development organizations through the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD) to help them design support strategies that **empower people to be involved in the economic decisionmaking processes**. JASS was invited to collaborate with Economic Policy Empowerment Program (EPEP) staff in shaping the economic policy empowerment stream of EURODAD's annual conference in November 2002. At this conference, staff from these agencies critiqued the poverty reduction strategy process of the World Bank and explored the different issues and entry points that mobilize groups for better economic opportunities and choice. They also developed guidelines and principles for north-south collaborations. EPEP has requested JASS' support throughout the coming year in an action learning program, which will involve bringing together diverse actors around a common set of priorities in the field of economic policy empowerment.

Building our Organization

During the past year, JASS has managed to put into place the basic infrastructure required to support our work. We have a small permanent office in Washington, DC and we continue to refine our ever-evolving communication systems to most effectively tap into the on-the-ground political knowledge and global to local relationships of our Associates that make JASS so powerful. We have established a Global Learning Advisory Group to support us in our strategic thinking and planning, and which we hope to transform into our formal Advisory Board. This group includes some of the best-known leaders and thinkers in women's rights, citizen justice, and participation. We are committed to further developing as a learning network in 2003 and finding a sustainable balance between program implementation, learning, and organizational development. As the demand for JASS' strategic support from global, regional and local advocates grows, and ideas for our own learning and action initiatives are consolidated, we are planning for our future consolidation as a Justice Resource Center to be a place of learning and strategizing.