



JASS

Strengthening & sustaining
women's organizing power

www.justassociates.org

Paths are Made by Walking

JASS Crossregional Gathering
*Building Women's Collective Organizing Power:
Learning and Action*
Brighton, England, February 14–18, 2011



Report

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| REVIEW | 3 |
| JASS Overview | 4 |
| JASS Southeast Asia | 12 |
| JASS Southern Africa | 17 |
| JASS Mesoamerica | 23 |
| PLAN | 31 |
| JASS Vision | 31 |
| Organizational Development | 33 |
| Organizational Principles | 36 |
| Future Trends | 36 |
| CONTRIBUTIONS ON KEY JASS THEMES | 37 |
| Citizenship, Participation and Accountability | 37 |
| Women’s Human Rights | 41 |
| Violence against Women | 42 |
| The Body, Sex and Sexuality | 43 |
| Violence and the Body | 45 |
| The Donor Perspective | 47 |
| KNOWLEDGE | 47 |
| MELK: Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Knowledge | 47 |
| Strengthening M&E in Women’s Rights Work | 54 |
| The Loom and the Weave | 55 |

Introduction

This report shares experiences and insights from JASS' February 2011 Crossregional gathering at the Institute of Development Studies. Bringing together twenty-five JASS colleagues and six IDS scholars, we reviewed the past five years of JASS' work, mapped out a strategic plan for the next four years, reflected on JASS monitoring and learning processes to maximize the knowledge gained across each region; and defined principles and processes for the organization as a whole.¹

In a corner of the Institute teeming with activist-scholars eager to learn about and contribute to our cutting-edge approaches, JASS discussed the best ways to measure our work and to harvest learning from the wealth of knowledge and experiences in movement-building, women's empowerment and citizen engagement. In addition to laying the foundation for JASS' next phase, this meeting continued JASS' long-time mutually energizing and enlightening relationship with IDS. Their research and analysis and our joint collaborations on power, participation, women's empowerment and citizen engagement enrich our work, pushing us further. And learning is reciprocal. Our IDS counterpart, the Participation, Power and Social Change team, draws upon JASS' materials and on-the-ground organizing experience in the team's own teaching and analysis.

REVIEW

Focusing on the question: *What have we been doing over the past five years?* regional teams shared in-depth overviews of the work, how it has changed, and what shifts have transformed our analysis. These reflections allowed the regions to learn in detail about the work happening throughout the organization. To frame the review, we referred back to our mission statement:

JASS strengthens and leverages the voice and collective organizing power of women in order to change the norms, institutions, policies and practices that perpetuate inequality and violence

¹ The gathering opened with a tribute to specific women and girls who have inspired us – with a special tribute to Christina Taylor-Green, 9 years old, who was killed in a shooting while attending a town meeting with US Congresswoman Gabby Giffords of Tucson Arizona on January 8th 2011. The Congresswoman, the target of the shooting, was seriously wounded and is presently in rehabilitation from a brain injury. The woman who accompanied Christina, Suzy Hileman, is also recovering. Christina had just been elected to Student Council. loved ballet, and was the only girl on the local junior baseball team.

JASS Overview

Lisa Veneklasen

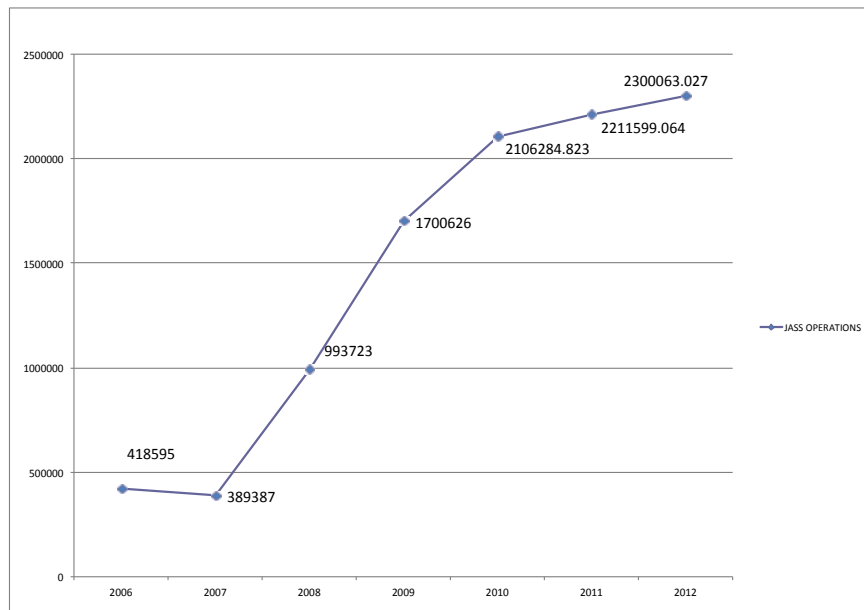


“Being part of JASS is a little bit like building a helicopter while flying at 20,000 feet.”

From late 2005 through 2010, JASS has worked to build and leverage the collective organizing power of women. A great deal has happened in those five plus years.

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005-2006 | 2010 |
| Allies: 22 | Allies: 265 |
| F + P/T staff: 4 | F + P/T Staff: 21 |
| Countries: 16 | Countries: 30 |
| Budget: \$350,000 | Budget: \$2.2 million |

JASS growth 2006 – 2010: budget



Sometimes, the power and energy unleashed by the work has exceeded JASS' capacity to keep pace. As Hope Chigudu says about the process in Southern Africa: "At JASS when we sing, women everywhere jump to their feet and cheer – *More, more, more!* – and then we don't know what to do next." There are so many possibilities. How do we build on this enormous energy and excitement most effectively?

How did JASS begin? How did we get here? Today, we are an international, multiregional organization made up of fairly independent regional entities. But JASS started out as a loose community of associates inspired by political and professional relationships going back to the early 1980s and shaped by struggles for women's rights. The idea for the organization itself took form throughout the 1990s and an event called Making Change Happen in October 2001 launched JASS as a political capacity-building organization. However, we were not legally incorporated until early 2002.

In 2005, some members of the wider JASS community met to review what we had done since our launch – working with big development and human rights organizations, academic institutions and small groups and alliances usually on a fee-for-service basis. We felt we had become recognized as a political capacity-builder and social-change innovator, producing tools such as *A New Weave of People, Politics and Power*, and the first in the *Making Change Happen* series. But, looking at the world around us, that was not enough. We had to be greater than sum of our parts.

As an organization we also wanted to tap into and build on the extraordinary experiences, knowledge, and commitment of our community and its roots in women's movements, recognizing the enormous creativity and critical perspectives that feminists were providing to social justice efforts around the world. For years many of us had been part of these processes, helping to shape some of the holistic analysis and approaches to power and change emerging from women's rights struggles. By refocusing JASS from more general development and rights work to women's organizing and movement-building, we could operate within dynamic supportive spaces with colleagues committed to innovation and the need to integrate mind, body and spirit into creative change strategies. The challenges and crises of the time made this organizational shift even more compelling and urgent.

We saw how ever-weaker electoral processes, legal structures, and the state itself had failed to protect women. The backlash against women and women's rights demanded JASS' urgent attention and focus. As Srilatha Batliwala, the co-chair of JASS' Board, explained in her address to the UN General Assembly

(New York; March 6, 2007), the focus on magic bullets and quick fixes had led to mechanical and depoliticized strategies, shifting even greater responsibility and burden for economic survival and political change onto women themselves. “Of great urgency today,” she concluded, “are strategies that address the invisible, informal and traditional systems, the arenas in which the majority of the world’s women negotiate their lives.” In our next phase – initially titled *Imagining and Building Women’s Movements of the Future* – JASS set out to do precisely that.

“The profound crisis of democratic institutions, a growing gap between the people and political institutions that claim to represent them, can be addressed by recognizing the new sources of power in society.” (Alejandro Bendaña) How, then, were we to identify and strengthen these new sources of power? JASS’ analysis concluded that we needed to:

- re-tool, rethink, rejuvenate;
- provide safe creative spaces for reflection and innovation;
- learn from past;
- think ‘outside the box’;
- cross the line;
- integrate mind, body, spirit with creativity and artistic expression;
- use more nuanced power analyses to strategize;
- bridge interests, identities, issues, perspectives – break out of silos.

Collectively, we needed to slow down and trace history in order to draw lessons from the past and find ways to push back against the inevitable censure and reaction unleashed by our efforts – an approach we soon named “crossing the line.” Rather than a supposedly rational step-by-step process that ignores backlash, we would frame agile strategies based on continuously refined and revisited political analysis. At JASS’ first regional movement-building institute (held in Panama in 2006), Mesoamerican activists and thinkers used the metaphor of the *petate* (woven mat) to generate a new vision to guide the work.

Given the challenges of the current context, we needed more than just ‘networks’, which are too loose, have too many holes and are only connected at a few specific points. In contrast, the *petate* is a weave that takes shape in a smoother, yet more diverse way because it combines threads coming from multiple directions (horizontal, vertical, etc.). This articulation of diversity – various strands that come together around a common objective – is what builds strength, resistance and also flexibility.

What did JASS bring to this process of building women’s collective power? Primarily, we brought people who trusted each other as a result of diverse,

but shared histories and political experience, both in theory and practice. We assumed that the diversity that we represented and would continue to seek out would be a vital resource but also a source of conflict. From day one, JASS has been a relationship-based entity, with individuals rather than institutions as our starting point. We bring together women activists with a feminist perspective who want to draw on their experiences and institutional identities in order to enrich our collective work in ways that promote synergy as opposed to struggles over turf. Another key assumption has been the primary role of power at all levels of our work. JASS focuses on power not only 'out there' in the world, but power within us and between us. Our overarching strategy is to be attuned and responsive to contexts, so that issues emerge from organizing rather than issues driving organizing as is often the case. We mobilize and negotiate individual and institutional relationships as the context and our strategy demand.

We lacked a logical framework, along with money, organizational structures and staff, and perfect agreement about feminist politics.

What did we do? We brought women together and kept those groups together over time. In each region, we started with regional institutes to design road maps for future. From 2006 through 2010, JASS has been doing that work, following those road maps, generating organizing and impact in the regions and countries shown on the map.



Where JASS is, 2010

Drawing on Srilatha Batliwala's work, we found it useful to distinguish between *feminist movement-building* (bringing feminist values and methods to the building of diverse movements) and *building feminist movements*. In Southern Africa, JASS focuses on women (many of them young) who organize around HIV/AIDS, while in JASS Southeast Asia's focal point is on young women grassroots activists. Alongside this emphasis on leadership development and capacity-building, JASS in both these regions draws women into multi-generational dialogue to redefine and reclaim feminism. In Mesoamerica, JASS has concentrated more on catalyzing feminist movements and feminist organizing and creating safe spaces for experienced women leaders to develop innovative strategies. Over the past year and a half, JASS Mesoamerica has also begun to engage with indigenous women and women human rights defenders. Alongside all of this, the cross-regional office and team play a varied role, co-leading with regions, fundraising, and providing support with strategies, knowledge and communications.

What are we changing? There are many answers to this question. In a generalized sense one can say that JASS is:

- catalyzing and supporting women's roles as activists, leaders and defenders of human rights
- emboldening, bridging and mobilizing constituencies;
- building alliances and spotlighting ideas in order to sustain pressure and demand for women's rights and needs;
- engaging and challenging power and interests;
- addressing policies, institutions and public debate;
- creating fresh worldviews and alternatives as we reclaim feminism;
- changing hearts and minds;
- caring for women's spirits.

A critical issue in all our work and in every region is that of women's safety and security. The fast-shifting context we are confronting is violent, dangerous and volatile. Women face violence in multiple forms: backlash, gangs and shadow 'armies,' scarcity, poverty, vulnerability, sexual violence, natural disasters, fundamentalisms, hate and misogyny. Violence has increased so much that it is affecting the security of our movements. Governments lack the capacity and political will to protect and promote our rights. While we continue old strategies of advocacy, much of our work is about resisting and pushing back against the tide and championing all forms of women's resistance.

Today, JASS faces a number of creative tensions and dilemmas. The more we do the work, the greater the demand for our processes. How are we to respond to that momentum while deepening the work already begun? Sometimes, we have to say no to requests and desires that would widen our

reach. We also have to weigh priorities: how can we balance the need to engage with formal power to stop the violence and to educate/activate policymakers with the need to continue to deepen and consolidate women's organizing capacity? In Mexico and other Mesoamerican countries, the crisis of democracy is so deep that the work with the state is not enough to advance women's rights and other rights. Real power operates in other places, in other groups. How can the organizations and networks we facilitate and support mobilize to protect and defend women as well as pressure formal power to respond?

Recognizing our multiple identities and affiliations, we wear our JASS hat strategically. Sometimes we define ourselves clearly as JASS and in some moments, other affiliations are highlighted, depending on the circumstances. At certain moments we are facilitators and organizers, in others, we are advocates. Not surprisingly, confusion can arise: what is our role as JASS? It is simpler to choose a single identity but we are not one dimensional. JASS is both North and South, activist and facilitator, frontline and rearguard, reactive and proactive, ally and (on occasions) funder. This diversity gives us strength yet presents unanticipated challenges that can take their toll, if not recognized and acknowledged.

Success creates resentment and conflict, complicated by the risks that our political work in a particular country might cause. Finding the right balance between seeking visibility and taking a background approach is tricky.

Another challenge is that we have been so busy *doing* that we haven't done enough documenting and reflecting. JASS is sitting on gold mine of knowledge and experience that needs to be processed and shared.

While JASS is proud of the non-NGO, alternative entity we have consciously tried to build, our unconventional make-up does pose organizational challenges. How do we grow in decentralized responsive ways without losing the thread of political cohesion that makes us strong? How do we achieve mutual accountability between us?

“Living among tensions means permanently juggling possibility and uncertainty. How to achieve a balance between nurturing love and respect, while also working efficiently? Resist dichotomies ... it's always a bit of this now and some of that later.”

Mariela Arce

Next Steps and Related Challenges

Going forward, we recognize the need to emphasize knowledge, documentation and learning. What are the factors, micro and macro, that drive and inhibit our work? What difference are we making, and how can we measure this? We also see the need to focus on developing JASS coherence and coordination, internally and externally. Right now, everyone describes JASS differently – we love that, but there’s a limit! Greater coherence, clarity and creativity will go into re-vamping our outreach and media, and into creating virtual urgent-action platforms to serve on-the-ground organizing. While the following Oscar Wilde quote captures the essence of the JASS spirit, we also recognize that rebellion requires a creative game plan, one that provides direction while allowing for the flexibility and innovation so necessary for effective social change.

“Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is woman’s virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.”

Oscar Wilde

JASS’ strengths include the multiple identities we bring to the work, but as we have seen this can also lead to conflict. How do we take advantage of the diversity of our organizational identities as we negotiate organizational interests and political dynamics? For example, in Mesoamerica, many JASS allies are also Petateras, members of the alliance formed in 2006 out of this process. Everyone involved in JASS Mesoamerica is also part of other organizations (such as CEASPA, Sinergia, Consorcio), just as those in JASS Southeast Asia are part of PEKKA, PESADA and so on. In some spaces, all these organizational hats are in play – but who gets the credit, the acknowledgement? Weaving together associations makes perfect sense as a movement-building process but it gets complicated in terms of visibility and representation aspects. Conflicts emerge sometimes after the fact; and the pace and rhythm of our work often make addressing these in a timely fashion difficult.

Working with HIV+ women means an additional degree of urgency. In these early stages in Southern Africa, we have created hope but that is not enough. We cannot stop there. How do we get to the next phase in addressing the urgent issues that these women face? In a privileged space for reflection such as this one, we need to challenge ourselves to bring the priorities of the women we are working with into the room and the debate. The constituents of our movements are, of course, perfectly capable of grasping complexity.

Their demands go beyond immediate needs – livelihood opportunities, health services, housing. The challenge for us is that complexity cannot be an excuse for inaction or paralysis. We cannot substitute documentation, reflection and analysis for going out there and doing something. Is it enough to build capacity to organize? How can women organize if they don't have enough to eat? This question goes back to JASS' commitment to addressing both needs and rights, through the umbrella initiative of "economic democracy."

This economic initiative is the focus of much of the work and partners in Southeast Asia. Here, JASS addresses economic instability and poverty which requires that we name and address the elephant in the room: corporate globalization and the neoliberal ideas and policies that have accompanied its spread. The associated liberalization of many of our economies deeply affects women's lives.

JASS Southeast Asia

*Nani Zulminarni*²

“Training young women to rebel”

Building Capacity of Young Women Activists

In our region, there is a definite generation gap in terms of experience, knowledge and opportunities. This intensifies the challenging power relations between generations, between rural and urban activists, and between role models and what we call the diva syndrome.

JASS SEA can celebrate over 38,000 young women who are being trained at country levels. An estimated 25% of the young women we have trained are taking power in their organizations, moving into leadership roles. Others start new initiatives, and several are engaged within their own countries on policies at a regional level. JASS SEA’s cadre of young activists is having an effect on elections and land rights, for instance. Young SEA feminists are documenting their organizing stories, creating written and video case studies.

Strengthening young women activists requires a dual strategy, on one side developing the individual and, on the other, focusing on group and collective strategies. To address what might have become a tension between these two aspects, JASS Mesoamerica’s strategy has been to try to recognize and work with young people’s movements. But youth movements are not common in Southeast Asia, and few of those that do exist recognize women or women’s role and rights.

JASS SEA’s strategy, by contrast, is to identify and engage with young women already active in organizing processes, whether in women’s or other social organizations. We invest in individual young activist leaders, because we believe they can play bigger roles in their organizations and widen their own

² Nani is JASS Southeast Asia Regional Coordinator and founding director of PEKKA, a network of women headed households and JASS’ Indonesian partner. Recently PEKKA was honored for its innovative work by the Japanese Social Development Fund and the World Bank. PEKKA’s honor is the result of a rigorous assessment process. First, the JSDF selected 20 of their 250 grantees to feature and honor for best practices. Then experts from The World Bank spent months assessing all of the 20 projects through field visits and in-depth study. They used several criteria—impact, reach, innovation, sustainability—and PEKKA received the highest scores in all categories.

focuses. Our aim is to bring a feminist perspective to the organizing and strategizing that these women are doing.

JASS SEA can now reach young women in Cambodia through the newly formed CYWEN (Cambodian young women's empowerment network), comprising 22 members from women's organizations. The network has a newsletter, a network and a country strategic plan. Meanwhile in East Timor, several women's organizations come together under the umbrella of Rado Feto, which reaches out to rural women and is headed by a young JASS-trained director. However, we are freezing the process in Vietnam, where we lost our key organizer. We have also frozen Thailand work because our friends there are very involved in the political situation at the moment.

"If JASS is like a helicopter, we in Southeast Asia train the pilots before we build the helicopter. We try to get as many passengers as possible in our vehicle."

Nani Zulminarni

Intergenerational Dialogue

Most positive outcomes bring some new tensions. How do these young women negotiate with the older leaders back in their organizations? Are they able to step forward without overshadowing the existing leadership? These are delicate areas of negotiation. In Indonesia, young women often encounter problems, so as JASS SEA we accompany them, keeping up a conversation as the young women go back into their organizations. Some of their seniors call us to say, "What have you done? These young women have become rebels!" We get calls from many directors, complaining about our process. We keep talking, trying to redefine what "leader" means. It's a dialogue between generations.

One result has been that more organizations now recognize that they actually have young women in their ranks. Women's movements that have for a long time been dominated by women over 40 are now aware of and working with younger women. This means a step forward for JASS SEA: we now know where to find and network with young women in all these places. We no longer rely only on the "senior generation." This means there is a base to count on. We find these younger women beginning to hold older, more powerful women, accountable.

As some of the young women have moved up to become leaders of networks or directors of their organizations, their former directors become part of JASS, serving as multigenerational resources. This is important for questions

of succession: who will take over and sustain women's organizations as the older generation move on?

Overall, progress is possible along this potentially fraught line of difference because of the principle of building trust and creative, safe spaces. In our processes, especially in our series of strategic and facilitated intergenerational dialogues, all of these fears and tensions can be named and discussed.

Bridging Organizational Divides and Multiple Differences

Another area of learning and achievement in the region has been JASS SEA's record of gathering different organizations with diverse origins and principles, across differences of issues, ethnicities, nationalities, levels (from grassroots to global) and political ideologies. Bridging gaps that divide the region is significant given that regional elites exploit identity divisions for political advantage.

Feminist analysis has long been missing from most countries in our region, so bringing that perspective back into our work is important. We use the JASS power analysis – the three faces of power – to demonstrate that there are power relations between women that need to be confronted within the movement. People were sick of gender analysis. They had written it off. So this is new. We share the JASS vision. We want to change people's lives through this process.

In all regions, JASS women wear different hats at different points. In our own organizations, we work with leadership training, land rights, sexuality and so on, but we combine across fields in JASS. We work with academics, politicians, NGOs, very poor women. What brings us together across different sectors – agriculture, HIV, land rights – is that we all face the three dimensions of power. All our organizations have their own organizing strategy – microeconomic empowerment, sexual rights, land rights, indigenous rights – but we come together to strengthen how we analyze the context, and then go back to build collective power to make meaningful change. The ground work, the process, the alliances with other organizations working in different communities on different issues, generating knowledge, analysis and inspiration from those experience and grassroots organizing all bridge the work we've been doing for many years.

To clarify further -- JASS does the *how*, the issue is the *what*. By making space to examine the *how* – power, feminist analysis, a platform to think and talk together – the *what*, such as LGBTI or economic rights, becomes easier to integrate.

Trust is key here. We need to be alive to the potential this opens up for contestation and subversion of our mission and focus. Even one new person can cause disruption, saying they believe in the same thing, but actually working from a different belief system or agenda.

A Feminist Conversation

JASS provides a safe space for women from different organizations with diverse origins and principles to explore and discuss women's rights and issues. For example two conveners of JASS Philippines come from the two main political blocs that ordinarily do not speak to one another, so that's a huge achievement in itself. Together, they have engaged on the women's agenda of the new president. The first JASS Philippines feminist conversation last year was on three themes: militarization, globalization, and sexuality. This year, two other points have been added. The president is reducing funding for health and other social services by one third, and instead bringing in *conditional cash transfers*. In March 2011, JASS Philippines will dramatize our protest against this latest quick fix, magic bullet approach to reduce poverty.

“Sometimes we underestimate how important it is to use an institution as an umbrella, a vehicle to create a space for real diversity, grounded in diverse communities and sectors. This is such a break from the pattern of NGO-ization. And yet we don't even count it as an outcome. How do we constantly replenish this diversity and keep the political conversation going so it isn't derailed when new people come in?”

Lisa Veneklasen

Outreach, Impact and Discussion

In summary, JASS Southeast Asia has reached and engaged with:

- 138 organizations,
- 224 activists,
- more than 38,000 grassroots women.

Given the recent uprising of fundamentalism especially in Indonesia, do young women's agendas include any focus on defending pluralism? How does the pressure on educated young SEA women for careers and consumerism intersect with the radical JASS agenda? For now, JASS engages primarily with young women from NGOs and other structures we are already working with, but we want to reach out to young women in the mainstream, on campuses for example, who are already reached by conservative groups.

We need to develop our strategy for this arena, as well as build our connections with other groups working on pluralism issues.

Visibility and recognition: we need to specify among whom, and at what cost. In the context of Mexico and Central America, the cost of visibility has been high: attacks and violence against women human rights defenders and women in general. Changing the world involves risks of course, but we don't want to take unnecessary ones. In some places and times we decide to keep a low profile for strategic reasons, and at certain moments, combine it with visibility on JASS website. Yet this question of visibility and recognition is relevant for JASS in all regions. In SEA, these choices have been made within each country depending on the contexts and issues. JASS East Timor wanted to be high profile, with radio and press from the beginning, seizing the opportunity of the moment. But in Indonesia, we maintained a low profile at first on our work on LGBTI issues waiting to invite the press until our third gathering. . Civil society is not strong in Malaysia, so we work with the indigenous land rights movement there which involves weighing other factors. In other words, visibility varies. So far, our context has not been as dangerous for visible activists as it has been in Mesoamerica. By contrast, to be visible is an opportunity in many cases. But we have to be aware of the threats involved. We are known as a group strongly supporting homosexual issues, which are under attack in Indonesia now.

In addition to work and activism, it is very important to acknowledge how young women confront dynamics in their households and personal lives – fathers, mothers, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends. As feminists, they come to know how to exercise their rights – as women, as lesbians, as human beings. In Indonesia, a big gap existed between women's rights organizations and the LGBTI community, a divide that JASS helps bridge. In our spaces, everyone comes together. JASS has been instrumental in helping LGBTI activists organize, for example.

We look at impact in terms of our mission. How can we track and demonstrate how all these young women are making changes in their households, families, churches, and other relationships? We know it is exponential (compared for example with conventional policy advocacy that may involve changing four words in the national development plan). Right-wing religious organizations are having conversations and building their base. They build connections and actions around their common ideology. They aren't asking for policy outcomes!

JASS Southern Africa

Shamillah Wilson³

“Personal transformation is fundamental to real social change.”

Understanding the Context

Women represent nearly 60% of HIV+ adults in sub-Saharan Africa, with young women three times more likely to be HIV-positive than young men. The epidemic unmasks extreme inequality and has unleashed deep sexism and racism as well as deepening the rural-urban imbalance. Misguided policies and programs, particularly ABC (“abstain, be faithful, use condoms”), failed to factor in the intimate dynamic of gender inequality and women’s lack of negotiating power when it comes to sex. Thus – not surprisingly – the highest infection rate today is among African women in steady partnerships. Home-based care programs have exploited women’s traditional care-giving role while letting governments and the international aid community off the hook for providing even the most basic healthcare. The result has been a disastrous overburdening of women, increasing their health risks while decreasing their productive capacity to generate income and food for their families.



JASS' HIV/AIDS activism framework analyzes how power operates through stigma, technology, money and sex.

African women (such as those who founded TASO-Uganda) were pioneers in the AIDS fight, but African women’s rights groups went missing in action as

³ Shamillah, a South African feminist based in Cape Town, has recently served as interim coordinator of JASS-Southern Africa. A former manager of AWID’s Young Women and Leadership Program (2001 to 2007), she is founding Board Member of the Youth Against AIDS Network, a regional network of youth leaders in Africa and acts as a member of the Advisory Council for the Africa Region for the Global Fund for Women. She has also been part of the Sonke Gender Justice Network board, Future Generation and DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) and has co-edited the book ‘Defending our Dreams: Global Feminist Voices for New Generation,

powerful gender-blind rights and service NGOs competed for vast aid sums for HIV/AIDS interventions. While women's organizing has been fragmented, under-resourced and often suppressed (Zimbabwean activists face particular hardship and harassment), massive, informal, community-based networks (market women, burial societies and savings clubs) engage poor women in large numbers, but are disconnected from institutionalized gender work. Leaving grandmothers and children to head families, HIV/AIDS also sparks new forms of organizing and mobilization particularly by young women. Transactional sex and sexual orientation, long taboo, now generate intense and creative activism. However, despite shared needs and interests, women are often divided into separate "sectors" that diminish the possibilities of joint action.

While notable progress has been made on legal and policy reform, these rights and resources have not become real for most women. Organizing to hold governments accountable to basic rights and freedoms such as schools, reproductive health services or access to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention,– Southern African women must challenge the powerful traditions and backlash (current and anticipated) that frame women as the problem. Whether pressing government for access to decent jobs, credit, resources and clean water or police and justice systems that protect women from violence on the street and in their homes, these organizing efforts require a departure from urban-based NGO business-as-usual approaches. Instead, community and political organizing skills need to be emphasized as does the promotion of alternative models of leadership that are judged by the numbers of women empowered to speak out and sustain pressure to ensure long-term accountability. Southern African women have a lot riding for themselves and their children on whether governments respond to their voices and protect their basic rights and freedoms.

The evolving regional context demands attention. Large amounts of HIV/AIDS funding now go to countries such as Zambia and Malawi for HIV/AIDS, but poverty and hunger often make it impossible for women to take ARV drugs. Laws in place to address sexual and gender-based violence go unenforced. Such violence used as a political weapon in the ongoing Zimbabwean crisis has been well documented, drawing worldwide focus, but the political will to take action remains illusive. Homophobia in everyday life in Malawi and in draft legislation in Uganda has been attracting attention from the media and from African and international human rights bodies. In Zimbabwe activists' efforts to ensure LGBTI rights in the country's new constitution drew negative responses from leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties. The powerful international fundamentalist Christians' provocations and financial support have helped incite this wave of

stigmatization and need to be unmasked, at the same time that discussions on all sexual rights need to be opened up.

Entry point

Given this context, when JASS initiated its process in the region in 2007, we chose to work with women living with HIV/AIDS and active on the issue as the entry point for feminist movement building. Women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS offers a clear lens into the multidimensional nature of women's inequality in Southern Africa: economic insecurity (from pressures for transactional sex to limited access to land and credit); social oppression (stigma, being blamed for HIV); and political marginalization (from the inability to negotiate condom use to the lack of voice on the allocation of HIV-related and other resources). Positive women's experiences demonstrate both the inadequacy of single-issue interventions (from medicines to income-generation) and the untapped potential for women to lead the organizations of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA--even though women make up more than 70% of their membership) as well as the vibrancy of women's organizing on the margins of NGO structures and formal women's rights agendas.

To address these dynamics and opportunities, JASS Southern Africa's initiatives in the region and in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe in particular seek to:

- strengthen grassroots, young, activist leadership with the necessary political skills, strategies and visions to organize women to leverage the power of their numbers to influence decisionmaking and public discourse about women and HIV/AIDS at all levels;
- build bridges and mutually respectful alliances between grassroots women's groups, and urban-based NGOs around a common agenda that addresses the web of factors around HIV/AIDS and integrates different types of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights;
- enhance the public visibility and recognition of women's experiences with HIV/AIDS in a way that helps shift policies and programs and that enables women living with HIV/AIDS to feel empowered and connected to a larger cause;
- challenge the stigma and taboos about sex and sexuality that lie at the heart of the AIDS pandemic
- confront gender violence and women's inequality fed by international fundamentalist churches in all aspects of our training and leadership support;
- increase positive women's access to and use of public resources – ranging from local government development funds to resources held by big

international NGOs – for livelihoods, improved healthcare and political participation;

- amplify public outcry against gender violence and improve women's ability to create and access mechanisms for safety, protection and justice;
- generate practical, how-to knowledge about building grassroots movements among HIV+ women and about influencing the ways in which international donor agencies support women and social change.

Southern Africa “What is JASS?” Video

The JASS Southern Africa team shared a video that represents the diversity and convergences of JASS as a community. Participants from JASS' Southern Africa Thinkshop, held in September 2010, shared their insights on JASS, on feminism, and what it means to be a woman. Their perspectives were provocative and witty – emblematic of JASS' innate sense of humor and our commitment to making the circle bigger, inviting the richness of diversity and commonalities amongst us.

Learning from Malawi

In first phase in Malawi, JASS has been catalyst on the ground, unlike in Mesoamerica and Southeast Asia where partners and allies undertake the direct organizing. JASS has contributed to enormous changes in Malawi – women who have participated in JASS initiatives are demanding land from chiefs, and have demanded and got ARV delivery vans and seed allocations. Yet, the challenge is how to evaluate this work. Most changes took place at the individual level. For example, a woman was empowered to leave an abusive husband. How do we support and sustain this and other individual, spiritual and emotional impacts?

A movement implies a direction. How do we bring a wider swathe of people on board to demand change? In the first phase, we concentrated on the personal being political, power within. For the next phase, we need to refine our strategy, learning from the action so far on small issues, and broadening from there. How, precisely, do we translate and move from the personal to collective organizing?

For many social movements that are different from feminist movements, personal transformation is not important. That's why many patriarchal practices are reproduced. Women from other regions were shocked to learn that the current president of Mandela's party in South Africa was accused of rape. It is important to consider the personal changes that trigger big changes. We must understand that personal transformation is fundamental to real social change.

A crucial shift, particularly in Malawi, is to identify groups to actually do the frontline work of community organizing, as in Zambia and in other regions, rather than have the JASS team engage on this level (much as we have learned from our engagement with community-based organizations – CBOs.) Instead, JASS will be collaborating with groups that are already responsible for community organizing to develop and strengthen skills. This relates to a fundamental question of how we position ourselves in Southern Africa. In this context, we seem to be faced by a choice: engage with big, institutionalised, well-resourced, national NGOs – whose agendas are often donor-driven – or with individual-based CBOs?

Unlike Southeast Asia, where JASS is taking off from the history of work embedded in each of the people involved and their organizations, the challenge in Southern Africa (SNA) has been of JASS coming in without this same level of organizational connection. In Zambia, our entry point was through relationships such as with Youth Vision and NGOCC via Shamillah. But in Malawi, we came in cold, as our original points of connection did not work out. Women in SNA are organized in different forms and spaces; there is lots of disconnect, exacerbated by multiple funders and their agendas. People compete to focus energy on where the money is, rather than on their needs. In Malawi, we tried going to the big NGOs but only got traction with small, local, volunteer-based organizations.

Shaping Regional Agendas

Donor-dictated agendas mean that women's sexual and reproductive rights work, for example, has disappeared, because in order to get funding, groups have had to shift to an HIV focus. It's almost a form of Stockholm Syndrome amongst Southern African organizers: we begin to identify with donor visions -- having to change our shape and identity to respond to demands of donor or government. Our assertiveness and autonomy is dissipated in those shifts. In the end, we end up forgetting who we really are and no longer speak with a sense of authority. That's how NGOs lose the people on whose behalf they claim to be acting.

In addition, women's rights groups, like much of civil society, experience a sense of futility because of the impossibility of influencing government policies and international agencies. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stipulated that countries must change the drug regimen that they provide. How can a struggling under-resourced government such as Malawi do that?

A knowledge task in the region is to investigate what has happened to the history of feminist organizing, for example in Zimbabwe. Has it left no traces?

For the benefit of other regions as well as donors and international audiences, it is useful to clarify how political instability and growing fundamentalism manifest in Southern Africa. Here, repression comes mostly from states and churches. Patriarchal, conservative, misogynist values are filtering down in terms of who is a citizen and who is not, even within progressive movements, which play the game in slippery ways.

What's very clear is that we are working in a region that is beleaguered in terms of engaging in radical transformative politics. JASS offers a radicalizing possibility of helping people see the real roots of their problems and exercise alternative forms of power to overcome them. By providing a free space to imagine and push a truly transformative agenda, substantive change can be advanced.

JASS Mesoamerica

JASS Mesoamerica Team

“Feminist resistance emerges from the desire to rebuild the social fabric”

Context and Dynamics

The regional context is characterized by:

- sexism and structural inequality;
- growing gaps between the rich and the poor, forced migration, the breakdown of the social fabric, and the rise of organized crime with its threat to the state and human rights;
- increasing numbers of women who generate income and are head of households, but are overburdened and live and work under discriminatory conditions;
- the reversal and undermining of democratic institutions and the rule of law – particularly worrisome being the coup d'état in Honduras, the new conservative and authoritarian governments in Panama and Costa Rica, and the continued acts of state repression and discrimination facing women throughout the region

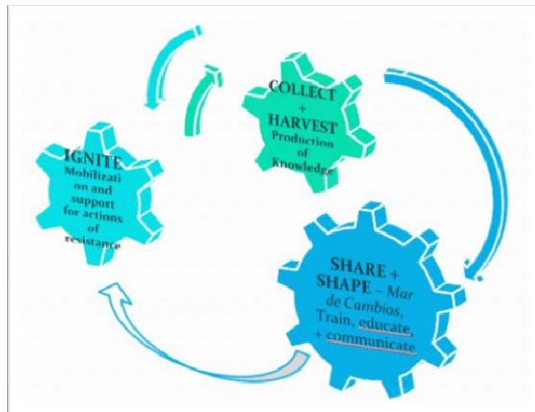
The Mesoamerican region has become one of the most violent and insecure areas on the continent. Cruelty and alarming levels of femicide and violence against women are caused by the increased power of organized crime, drug cartels and militarization. Women human rights defenders and journalists are constantly threatened and harassed; some have been assassinated. Conservative groups and parties have gained significant control in the region. Women who seek abortions are criminalized as are their doctors, even in cases where the women's life is in danger. Similarly, there are attempts to penalize the right to choose one's sexual preference. Struggles to guarantee the separation of church and state and ensure sexual and reproductive rights have become a priority for Mesoamerican women. . However, there is still very little support from other social movements for our struggles even though increasingly we work across sectors in support of broader social agendas, recognizing the interconnections and relationships between our struggles. .

Women in Mesoamerica continue to resist and create alternatives, including:

- protesting in the streets,
- using art as strategy of resistance, inspiration and solidarity ;
- denouncing the violation of our rights;

- defending women who face violence;
- training and educating women on their rights;
- weaving support, protection and solidarity networks;
- promoting a solidarity economy (see <http://solidarity-economy.net/>);
- creating and constructing alternatives to patriarchy;
- defending democracy at every level, from our homes to our states;
- insisting on the implementation of policies and laws for equality;
- incorporating cultural and artistic expression and body work into education and analysis ;
- seeking and building closer relationships between women and diverse movements;
- utilizing communications to share and promote our rights in public opinion.

Strategies



Share + Shape: Mar de Cambios, train, educate, + communicate

Ignite + Catalyze: Mobilization and support for actions of resistance and transformation

Collect + Harvest: Production of Knowledge

Mesoamerican feminists active in resistance efforts work for social change that contributes to the

elimination of inequalities and to the creation of a new social fabric based on solidarity, dignity, human rights and the health of our planet.

1. Through Mar de Cambios/Sea Change schools, we engage in training and reflection activities , generating and sharing knowledge through feminist learning processes. At the same time, we aim to maximize the use of ICTs for increasing our collective power and reach. A key element is our strategy of solidarity with women human rights defenders as we develop and undertake strategies to ensure their/our protection and security.

Mar de Cambios was launched formally in 2010 with Las Petateras in Panama although it has been a strategy that has guided our activities since it was first conceptualized in 2007. At the Panama gathering, we analyzed the paradigm of patriarchy and related dynamics and forms of power. We used and critiqued various educational and action methodologies. We experimented with an exercise called the Mural of Ancestors,



first in fabric and later in virtual and interactive forms, The mural gives people the opportunity to pay tribute to and reflect on the ancestors and mentors who have motivated their activism and shaped their lives. Next came Rios de Cambio in El Salvador, a process launched by the Association of Salvadoran Women (AMS) with support from Wings of the Butterfly and JASS that featured theatre performances and reflection and dialogue between the new director of the Salvadorian Institute of Women and women's and feminist movements.. Our ongoing activities take further advantage of new media as we continue the passionate discussions from Mar de Cambios gatherings online through Virtual Feminist Debates.

2. JASS Mesoamerica has supported, strengthened, activated and documented the actions of feminist resistance efforts.

The *Observatorio de Transgresión Feminista* (OTF)-Honduras/Journey for Women's Rights collected evidence of violations of women's human rights in Honduras by the coup. This included interviews, discussions among feminists, participation in protests and a report presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). These and other actions by Las Petateras and the Honduran group FER (Feminists in Resistance), were supported by JASS and other organizations.

JASS facilitated and promoted the involvement of NWI and Nobel Laureate Jody Williams in support for the women of Atenco, Mexico for the release of political prisoners. Coordinated with Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad and other local organizations, this process included women from different social movements and contributed to a great success: the release of the political prisoners.

3. JASS Mesoamerica is taking action to maximize the political use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), for example through a workshop in Honduras entitled Utilizing ICTs for Feminist Activism. A regional workshop in Guatemala in 2010 – Communications Workshop with Indigenous and Rural Women – created a campaign called “Indigenous and Rural Women MATTER” and produced radio spots, videos, a press release and a blog.

Contributions

In summary, our work in the region helps to:

- develop creative and safe spaces for training, dialogue, political analysis, personal renewal, and alliance-building with women from diverse social movements;
- mobilize various resources in critical moments through urgent actions and support for the *Observatorios*; amplify women’s voices and access to media;
- generate debates and dialogue about relevant subjects to strengthen feminist activists, and movements and deepen feminisms in the region;
- encourage an understanding of feminism, which promotes equality and justice, as an alternative paradigm to patriarchy;
- build alliances with diverse organizations that accompany JASS’ work and support various collaborative initiatives.

Challenges

The violence in our region requires responses that go beyond urgent action strategies. Our context demands a profound analysis of the forces and dynamics of power in the region. Therefore, we:

- analyze how other social movements are working to resist power and work to influence them so that they too assume the feminist agenda and help eradicate *machista* practices;
- be careful to not let our actions generate high levels of tension or wear us down;
- share the analysis and documentation of our actions where possible;
- clarify the limits and the potential of our relationships with our regional allies;
- analyze and monitor to ensure that JASS’ contribution to regional initiatives favors the autonomy and development of these processes;
- define the conditions and possibilities for monitoring and follow-up of the processes we initiate.
- combat stereotypes generated by having a cross-regional office in the United States;
- strengthen the structure and capacity of the team in order to increase and deepen the initiatives launched and developed in the region;

- understand the conflicts within regional organizations so we can prevent contributing to them and support solutions;
- deepen efforts to define our identity, political perspectives and specific work and communicate the results to regional actors.

Case Study: Women Human Rights Defenders All over the world, women human rights defenders (WHRD) face growing rates of targeted violence. Defending the defenders – as this case study from JASS Mesoamerica illustrates – will become a key initiative across all of JASS. The term women human rights defenders has been coined recently to legitimize and highlight the often unrecognized but crucial human rights work done by women and the particular risks it implies for them given the pervasive dangers of sexism. Defenders can range from community activists who organize to protect themselves and their children from violence or ensure their economic and social rights to NGO staff who provide women’s groups support to academics and researchers who provide valuable analysis and insights that strengthen their efforts. At the national and international levels they can include advocates, activists, and lawyers who defend women’s rights through legal systems and press for policies and conventions that guarantee and advance those rights. Whether peasant or professional, urban or rural, student or scholar, women of all walks of life are now considered human rights defenders by bodies such as the United Nations and Amnesty International if they work in some way to protect and defend women’s rights and adhere to principles of non-violence. Such a categorization legitimizes WHR Defenders’ ability to access broader rights and international protection mechanisms afforded them due to the nature of their work and pursuits.

From urgent action to strategic initiative

Why is JASS Mesoamerica involved in this work? Violence has increased in the region, putting women at risk, constraining women’s work, and their struggles for justice and equality. From the *Petateras* and other spaces in which we as JASS Mesoamerica participate, we became aware of this growing reality, responding to urgent cases of threats, torture, and even assassinations of women defenders in various social movements. We agreed that, while women’s and feminist movements have a history of developing protective measures in the face of violence, we did not have shared set of strategies to recognize, denounce, protect ourselves, and confront the aggression and brutality. This concern led to a coordinated effort among national, regional, and international organizations – JASS, AWID, La Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos (UDEFEQUA), Consorcio Oaxaca, and Central American Women's Fund (FCAM) – which in turn gave rise to this initiative.

Context

What is the state of violence against women defenders in Mesoamerica? WHR Defenders face the same repressive policies and lack of security as their male counterparts do in carrying out their work but in addition they suffer specific forms of aggression as a result of their gender. Women are particularly susceptible to attacks by non-state actors, de facto powers, and even their own organizations, particularly when they confront patriarchal norms. Many WHR Defenders face discrimination and isolation, left without the social networks necessary to protect their safety. To a much greater degree than men, women activists are victims of sexual violence, acts or campaigns to discredit them, and threats against their families.

Many women and organizations actively working in the name of human rights are not recognized, nor do they recognize themselves, as human rights defenders, even within their own movements and organizations. As a result, many WHRD are excluded from whatever protective measures and networks that exist. The violence they confront tends to be downplayed or minimized both by the women defenders themselves and by their organizations, especially when the violence is not carried out by state actors.

The WHRD who face greater risks and vulnerability in the region are:

- Those who work against domestic violence and femicide;
- Those who work within conflict situations;
- Indigenous women defenders, particularly those who oppose the violation of indigenous peoples' rights and those who denounce the abuses of the army; and
- Those who fight for sexual and reproductive rights, particularly those who seek the decriminalization of abortion and those who belong to the LGBT community.

Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala are the countries with the highest rates of violence against WHR Defenders. Nicaragua has more cases of violence specifically against women defenders in the feminist movement. In El Salvador, WHR Defenders who work on abortion cases, those within the LGBT movement, and those who work in zones controlled by the gangs run the greatest risk. In Costa Rica and Panama, the increase in authoritarian, conservative policies has meant a parallel increase in the cases and risks of violence against defenders. Despite the rising incidence of this form of violence, their specific situation is still not adequately recognized or addressed. This in turn deepens their vulnerability and isolation.

Actions

What does this initiative involve in practice?

- Regional dialogue between women human rights defenders from various social movements;
- Regional and national analysis of the situation of violence against defenders;
- Integrated communication and action networks against regional and national violence;
- Training processes for WHR Defenders;
- Communications actions – videos, messages, publications – to win greater respect for defenders and therefore to strengthen measures to ensure their safety;
- Responses to urgent situations.

Our current resources and strategies are insufficient, given the gravity of the violence. Neither the general public nor social movements recognize the work and contributions of WHR Defenders or the specific forms of violence they confront. We must therefore take greater advantage of our own emerging networks and the diversity of resources, strategies, and knowledge that they bring together. At the same time, we try to overcome our limitations by drawing from the means at our disposal to monitor and follow up on the actions of this initiative, generating new methods as we go.

Challenges

A collective analysis and understanding are needed, in order to recognize and organize WHR Defenders from a great diversity of social movements: indigenous, labor, peasant, feminist, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI). Then, we must create safe spaces and relationships of trust, at regional level and in each country, to enable the generation and deepening of strategies in reaction to the violence, as well as supporting the solidarity and legitimacy of the WHRD's work. What is needed is a specifically feminist approach, identifying forms of violence that are commonly invisible or ignored. The challenge is to increase women's capacity to speak out articulately at regional levels, to denounce cases of violence against WHR Defenders in order to have greater impact on public opinion.

All of this requires the confluence of diverse experiences, strategies, knowledge, and resources (political, economic, and communications-related) to be utilized for the protection, security, and recognition of the work of WHR Defenders. Such a comprehensive strategy will enable not only their protection, but also the strengthening of their leadership.

PLAN

JASS Vision

JASS' strategic vision provides the threads and connective tissue that define our work, encompassing the shared principles that guide our actions, approaches and our complex relationships. JASS' overarching goal is to change power relations and dismantle patriarchy and other oppressive systems so that all people can live in peace and dignity and our threatened planet can flourish. We do that in ways that are political, strategic and contextual.

We build different spaces that are secure, diverse, accessible and challenging – spaces that catalyze and give potential to women and their actions. In these spaces of experimentation, we're trying to change the logic and practice of power. By changing the logic of power, we are working towards the ultimate goal of our work.

Marusia Lopez

What is it that JASS does and what do our interventions or actions lead to? We constantly revisit such questions, in light of our evolving practice. With the multiple roles JASS embodies, honing in on what are the most important aspects of our work can be challenging. Is JASS' primary function to organize and facilitate these safe creative spaces for transformative feminist experimentation? Is our over-arching role to address violence in its multiple forms? Is it to explore and deepen women's political activism as well as promote their psychological and physical wellbeing? Do we act as an ally and political actor in our own right or as a facilitator, coach and popular educator in support of others? Given our power analysis, how do we respond in a comprehensive way that avoids dichotomies and one dimensional strategies?

Avoiding jargon and stale language is no mean feat. We went into smaller group discussions to tease out some of the crucial threads of our work – these reflections provided the basis for the next draft of the strategic vision analyzed below. The discussions generated three words that seemed to characterize 'the what' of JASS' work, although we recognized that this characterization would need more reflection and fine-tuning. The three words were:

- Security – economic, political, social and personal;

- Safety – largely in a physical sense, embodying all the work around violence but also protecting safe spaces whether physical or democratic;
- Well-being – as a highly political concept that encompasses the domain of sex, sexuality and sexual and physical well-being and dignity

“When we talk of secure spaces, we are not just talking about safe spaces in relation to the context of violence in which we are living, but we are also talking about the violence that we exercise amongst ourselves”

Mariela Arce

If JASS is about changing the very logic of power then the act of creating spaces becomes a political and strategic one. In this political moment, JASS introduces another way of doing politics, one that springs from sisterhood and solidarity and allows for different approaches for dealing with external violence. In addition, this approach allows us to be more efficient and effective in our work.

A constant struggle for JASS is finding ways to reclaim the meaning of terms such as “well-being” that have been co-opted and depoliticized by mainstream society or donors and their interests. One evocative image that arose was that of oxygen, with its positive connotations. JASS was defined as putting the oxygen (back) into feminist movements in order to improve women’s safety and well-being. The discussion underscored the importance of clarity on a variety of fronts. The oxygen metaphor itself generated a serious debate and some discomfort and caution about whether it really represented our added value since it could convey a certain arrogance. “Well-being” was another term that needed clarification. In JASS practice, it is both a means and an end. As we describe what this looks like in our work, we need to clarify and specify our terms: safety, security and well-being in what contexts and for whom?

“The *how* is the *what* and the *what* is the *how*. JASS strengthens and enables women to participate and establish feminist movements that transform power at different levels to impact positively on women’s safety, security and well-being.”

Sally Shackleton

Other groups may address these same goals (safety, security and well-being), but with JASS the analysis of power underscores the work, as we challenge

power dynamics and foster different kinds of power, outside of patriarchal and oppressive norms.

“There is a step on the path to building movements that is self-empowerment, recognizing the power within and so on. But you can stop there and that could be community organizing, not necessarily a movement. At certain points in time, something will take off. As JASS, do we see ourselves supporting what takes off, the spark? Or is it a horizontal agenda where we are doing that beginning work and not narrowing ourselves?”

Lori Heise

Organizational Development

Crossregional

Before 2005, JASS was a constellation of different points and connections across the globe. The initial full-time team consisted of two paid staff – Lisa Veneklasen and Cindy Clark--with Valerie providing back up support when needed. At that time, JASS work was more opportunistic than it was collective or strategic. Working on the basis of contracts, we were able to begin building the organization while strengthening some of our key connections and developing our own program agenda. Many of our learning processes and tools were built in collaboration with scholars, allies and friends such as long time colleagues at IDS who provided opportunities for us to tap and deepen our own networks and analysis through joint action research initiatives with the IDS Participation, Power and Social Change group.

In 2005, JASS shifted from being Washington centered with a general human rights and development focus based on contracts to a regional focus on women’s empowerment and movement-building from a feminist perspective. This change better reflected and responded to the interests of the wider JASS community of activists and scholars and the vision of the founders. Grants from donors and alliances with groups like AWID and IDS helped make this transition possible albeit financially precarious for a time. Staff in Washington took on a coordination and facilitation role as it became the hub for support to the evolving regional structures and activities. In that process, the crossregional team worked to develop a co-leadership approach that would reflect a more dynamic and flexible style and structure of collaboration. Challenges were (and are) never-ending --sometimes we have been too much in the center of things, and at other times not enough. We were deeply involved in the training, strategizing, planning, staffing,

fundraising, reporting and writing, always with the hope of stepping back at some point so that the regions could share more of the leadership roles. Over that period, JASS grew in monetary terms from an annual budget of around \$350,000 in 2005 to over \$2 million in 2010. Responsibilities for reporting, communication, proposal writing and budgeting were and remain enormous and often invisible.

The present transitional moment raises questions about the priorities and roles of the crossregional team. How do we support the work across the regions without becoming a pseudo-headquarters or center of all decision-making? Advances have been made in terms of shared leadership. The Core Facilitation Team (CFT), made up of a leader from each region, is now in place to lead the overall coherence and work of JASS. Moving into 2011, the crossregional team will focus on coordinating a knowledge-production agenda in conjunction with the regions, including a revamp of the website and an external evaluation with donor partner, Hivos.

"There are always tensions – regional, national and global. But we could not be JASS without the crossregional team (CRT) because it is the CRT that communicates the perspectives that integrate and unify us. At some point, JASS will be as strong as the weakest part – that's why we have to practice equity. We have to build a relationship between the CRT and each region that is not linear or one-way but shapes itself in relation to the present needs."

Mariela Arce

Each of the regions provided their perspectives on the roles that the cross-regional team should play going forward.

JASS Southeast Asia

Strategic Action

Crossregional team should play a role in building international solidarity, supporting and building capacity where needed, and interfacing between the regional and international levels in the way the relationship has unfolded with Mesoamerica.

Activist Leadership

Crossregional team should support and contribute to cross-learning among the regions, with a focus on feminist popular education as the cross-cutting element to share and improve our tools.

Communications

Crossregional team may act as the hub for cross-region communication. Direct communication between regions is emerging and will grow, with the CRT facilitating and organizing some of those conversations.

Knowledge Generation

As each region builds their own communications and knowledge generation teams, with Southern Africa and Mesoamerica already in place, the CRT can facilitate collection and exchange.

Organizational Process

There is a lot of potential for conflicts in the regions and individual countries, the CRT can play a mediator role when needed.

Fundraising

CRT can continue to offer support and suggestions as the regions build the capacity needed.

JASS Southern Africa

As the region is in the midst of a huge transition with the addition of Shereen Essof and Azola Goqwana to the permanent staff, careful thought must be given on how to organize and redefine relationships, decisionmaking and core processes going forward. The CRT provides critical and strategic feedback, but decisionmaking and degrees of autonomy – and is accountable to funders from now on, for example – are subjects for discussion.

JASS Mesoamerica

One key question for Mesoamerica going forward is establishing who decides on regional allies.

Urgent Action

Crossregional team provides support to urgent actions in all regions and between regions. The reach it possesses for global action and advocacy, are vital to the work but as a region it is necessary to build regional capacity on these functions. The very existence of the CRT is a form of protection, a safe space in light of intra-regional tensions.

Communications

CRT plays an important role in shifting the North–South dialogue and in sharing information through the regions.

Knowledge

CRT continues the coordination and follow-up of MELK.

Organizational processes

CRT identifies commonalities among JASS community, but also responds to particular conditions for example one region might need more of fundraising or training etc.

Organizational Principles

Traditional organizational cultures are built on bureaucracy but this is not and never has been JASS' approach. Many groups in Southern Africa, for example, are stuck in a traditional formalistic human-rights mode, an approach that will not take us very far in the current context. But responding to a rapidly changing context means that different forces are coming at us from every direction. The challenge is to manage all of the moving parts in the ever-changing, shifting circumstances that shape our work and lives. To navigate this hologram requires a clear set of political principles that we apply when we confront this inevitable complexity and must make choices in the moment.

Small groups performed their understanding of JASS' core values in presentations that were hilarious, insightful and moving.

How do we internalize and live the values of the organization, and bring our heads, hearts, and hands to the work we do? How does power play out in different ways to subvert our best efforts? In general, the default setting for many is to fall back on mainstream ways of doing things – efficiency and expediency. A key task for JASS going forward is to surface and share the political principles and values that unite us. We need to be sure of them when we move from reflection and analysis into action. To return to the helicopter metaphor, these principles are the radar that guides us in flight.

Future Trends

Facilitator and Board member Ellen Sprenger⁴ and Executive Director Lisa Veneklasen projected current trends forward twenty years. Their presentation imagined the world in 2020, in terms of nation states, the

⁴ Ellen Sprenger is the founder of Spring Strategies. Spring Strategies works to strengthen social justice and human rights organizations, movements and foundations by helping them grow, thrive and manage change. Ellen has 20 years of working experience with non-profit organizations and foundations in different parts of the world. In addition to working with groups and individuals she also conducts research and develops tools and frameworks for accelerated learning, organizational development, resource mobilization, strategy development and evaluation. Earlier, Ellen was the executive director of Mama Cash, a dynamic feminist foundation based in Amsterdam.

environment, the global economy, development and women. Even within this grim picture, opportunities exist for push-back.

There is a marked push from the aid world for concrete indicators, desperation to have very linear measurements for impact using clear cause-and-effect models. This speaks to a sense of a loss of control, an inability to understand our world in all its complexities. It also presents an opportunity for organizations like JASS to challenge these narrow models that can be so crippling and counterproductive to the work we do.

CONTRIBUTIONS ON KEY JASS THEMES

Citizenship, Participation and Accountability

John Gaventa

A long-time friend and colleague of JASS, John Gaventa shared insights from a 10-year Citizenship, Participation and Accountability action-research project conducted by the IDS' Participation, Power and Social Change team. The first phase focused on the dynamics of state–society relationships while the second phase examined how citizens mobilize and empower themselves, often outside of state machinery. With a research network that reaches as far and wide as Mexico and Brazil, South Africa and Nigeria, the project generated 150 case studies, 450 knowledge products and a vast store of material for policymakers, practitioners and scholars.

Most development analyses start at the level of the market, democracy, state or NGO-led organizations and initiatives. This research turned this approach on its head and put citizens at the very heart of social change. Citizens in this case are defined as people who have rights not because they are citizens of a particular state necessarily, but because of the broader vision of human rights which applies to every human being whether refugee or legally recognized resident of a country.

The Changing Context

At a global level, the democracy deficit leads to two competing trends – increasing weakness of the state in favor of market systems, and deepening democracy in favor of the citizens. Globalization is shifting territories of power from the local to the global so that mobilization has become more territorial and often restricts our ability to navigate across issue silos. Non-state actors and youth militias, many of whom we don't hear about are on the

rise of. These complicated contexts challenge us to break down dichotomies. How do we cross the line when the line itself keeps shifting and blurring? Violence and insecurity increasingly define spaces as well as our capacity to participate as citizens. Women working on violence have known this for a long time whereas academia strictly delineates categories of violence. A strong relationship exists between violence and insecure states. In order to re-legitimize themselves, states must create “others”, an opposition, to justify the use of violence. Framing women fighting for their rights as a problem is a way to prop up the state. At the same time, non-state actors use violence to establish their own power. Patriarchal power is re-shaping itself in an era of crises – economic, climate, land, and water – and this challenges citizens in turn to be shape-shifters.

Politics have pushed the shift in the donor world from rights-based approaches to a results-based era. Two competing paradigms have shifted the way development strategies are built towards addressing effects instead of causes. Pressure is increasing to measure results the ‘quick-and-easy’ way and exclude rights. With predictable results: an evaluation of the Mosquito Net Campaign in India revealed zero impact. Donors who look at maternal mortality as a measure ignore the underlying gender justice implications, looking instead for simple solutions to sell to the British public, “a mosquito-net solution to patch the problem of gender inequality.”

What Difference Does Citizen-Engagement Make?

The one hundred case studies conducted in twenty countries generated four broad outcomes that align with JASS in interesting ways. One challenge is measuring and understanding negative outcomes, which in many contexts go hand-in-hand with the work, and how this impacts our theory of change.

- Better more aware confident citizens

The positives include increased civic and political knowledge and a greater sense of empowerment and agency. In examples specific to JASS, women in Southeast Asia “learn to exercise their rights.” A common theme in Malawi is grassroots women’s recognition of the power within to transform their personal lives and their communities. Possible negatives: increased knowledge dependencies, and disempowerment and a reduced sense of agency.

- More effective participation and collective action

This means increased capacities for collective action, new forms of participation and the deepening of networks and solidarities. On the negative side, these new capacities may be used for ‘negative’ purposes, one might see tokenistic or ‘captured’ forms of participation, and a lack of accountability to

networks might result. In JASS, we see new organizational forms and networks in Southeast Asia, organizing power and collective action in Southern Africa and the rise of rights defenders in Mesoamerica.

- Responsive and accountable states

Positives here would be greater access to state services and resources, greater realization of rights, and enhanced state responsiveness and accountability. On the negatives would be denial of state services and resources; social, economic and political reprisals; and violent or coercive state response. In JASS, we see young women holding others to account in Southeast Asia; impact on health, HIV and land practices at local levels in Malawi; and UN Human Rights advocacy in Mesoamerica.

- Inclusive and cohesive societies

New actors and issues are included in public spaces and there is greater cohesion across social groups. On the negative side, social hierarchies and social exclusion are reinforced, while horizontal conflict and violence increase. Within JASS, you speak of “buses full of young women” in Southeast Asia along with LGBT issues in public spaces. In Southern Africa, you speak of challenging stigma and demystifying AIDS. In Mesoamerica, you are charting new coalitions of rights defenders across issues and identities.

Strikingly, one major insight from the research is that often the most effective organizing and learning about democracy happens in fragile states. Many NGOs and donors assume that in conflict situations there is no civil society or organizing but in Angola for example questions of agency and the construction of citizenship proved to be vital. There are many examples of the failure of citizen participation manifest in the spheres of accountable states and/or policies such as India, Brazil and South Africa.

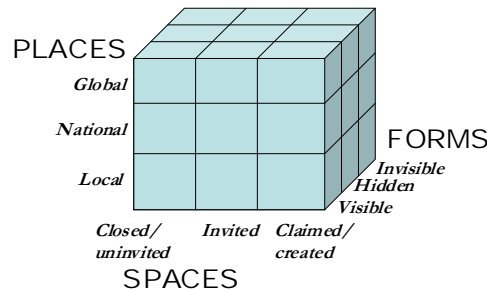
Implications

Citizen engagement makes a difference – but not always. There is a need to understand more about the factors that lead to positive and negative change. Gains do not emerge automatically but from empowerment as a component of other actions. Only through empowered citizens are broader policy and normative changes likely to occur. Top-down solutions and policy quick-fixes are less likely to bring about lasting and effective change to systemic problems. Citizen engagement makes a difference across regimes not merely in more democratic settings. Furthermore, the nature and style of mobilizing makes a difference, particularly for women. Local associations and other citizen- or grassroots-driven spaces are especially important. Citizen engagement is often met by reprisals, so it is critical to protect the democratic or safe spaces for engagement if developmental outcomes are to

be achieved. The research shows that when you combine local associations and social movements, the impact is far greater than in governance spaces alone.

It's interesting to note that none of the donors who supported the IDS research still support rights-based or participation approaches. The most important and effective spaces for change in every regime type were grassroots and community organizing and yet most funding support is directed at formal governance spaces.

How does change happen?
Building power across levels, spaces and forms



www.powercube.net

Change rarely happens from the demand side alone or through civil society alone. In an era of blurred boundaries, bridgers are critical, actors who can wear many hats and cross many lines, communicating across the cube's boxes, aligning global, national, and local strategies. In other words, change happens when you build a movement that can mediate across these spaces simultaneously and that gains legitimacy from trust and values, not from force or procedural power.

Finally, one must ask, "Where is your staying power?" Measuring the success of movements is a long-term process, particularly when building policies and institutions that last. The deeper the movement, the more sustained the gain.

Applying these Findings to JASS

Defining characteristics of JASS are the organization's agility and fluidity, enabling the organization to work across levels based on an approach that listens to people, respects them and resists replicating forms of organizational power that do not work.

In Southern Africa, the conversation about trafficking creates a “simple” problem and frames women as sex slaves. This ignores the larger labor implications and the reliance of states and industry on “trafficked workers.” Some actors in the women’s movement have been co-opted into seeing trafficking in simple dimensions, with sex workers framed as voiceless victims, rather than looking at the complex factors that really drive sex work. It’s an easy thing for the state to introduce legislation to take care of these mysterious “trafficked” women.

To build citizenship power in post-conflict situations such as in Panama is hard. We don’t have time to build democratic institutions before the mafia infiltrate those institutions. In addition to the three spaces defined in the cube – invited, claimed, and excluded – we would add a comfort space. It’s in these comfort spaces that we can build citizenship among women, as in the Women and Development Forum in Panama. Such processes are not generally straightforward: we have been suffering backlash and must start again. We have to think about a more dialectic form as this is not a straightforward process. We have backlashes and must start again.

Women’s Human Rights

Alda Facio

Before 1993, women’s rights were not considered human rights. Women organized to get recognized as human. The human rights approach is not a legal approach. Everyone is born with rights – you don’t have to do anything else but be born.

Why should we use a human rights framework? What are the advantages? In such a framework, the state is held as duty-bearer, accountable for delivering rights. Today, we must broaden the definitions beyond that of the public sphere and violence perpetuated and enacted by the state. It is vital to include violence that is physical, sexual, emotional, economic, political, intimate and community-based, as well as the violence condoned by the state.

Some of the outcomes of that struggle included greater clarity on what violence against women (VAW) is and its consequences in real terms; better organizing at all levels; engagement with formal structures; and changing perceptions and ideas. The UN Declaration on VAW linked violence against women to historical power imbalances between men and women. CEDAW became a human rights document instead of standing as a development treaty and led to other institutional and policy changes listed below.

SOME OUTCOMES

- BELEM DO PARA
- AFRICAN PROTOCOL
- ROME STATUTE
- IN DEPTH STUDY ON VAW
- OP CASES ON VAW
- EUROPEAN AND INTERAMERICAN COURT CASES ON VAW
- NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES AND MECHANISMS

Today, the link between inequality and violence against women is being increasingly lost; women defenders are increasingly subjected to violence; gender-based violence is increasing across the board, whether carried out by state or citizens; and lastly, organized crime has become the primary abuser in many countries.

Upon reflection, working against VAW has provided and continues to provide a lot of possible bases for organizing and engagement with formal power.

Violence against Women

Lori Heise

Women's bodies are the battleground for many struggles. The next phase of JASS will be informed by our focus on violence. We need to look at our work through the lens of violence, weave different perspectives on violence against women into our analysis and our strategies, and unearth the commonalities within these perspectives.

In framing VAW as a human rights violation in the 1970s, the space was open to challenge the way human rights were constructed, for example the notion that only states commit abuses. Framing VAW as a health tool allows access to different tools and spaces but after 25 years of working on this issue, there is a need to rethink strategies.



Strategies in that period placed great emphasis on the availability of services and on awareness/perception programs (numbers 5 and 1 on the diagram), with very little investigation or action on the other factors between them. A research process involving 28,000 case studies in 15 countries revealed that in at least 13 of those countries, 50% to 66% of interviewees had never told people about partner violence. Also, 55% to 95% of abused women had not reported physical abuse to any form of authority. Participants also pointed out the need to reflect deeply on how we frame violence and its multiple forms, including economic, physical, sexual, and political.

The Body, Sex and Sexuality

Shereen Essof⁵

Working with cleaning workers, unemployed and young women in the Western Cape presented me with particular challenges regarding questions surrounding body, sex and sexuality. The starting point was economics –

⁵Shereen Essof is a well-known Zimbabwean feminist, activist, popular educator and academic. As regional coordinator of JASS Southern Africa, Shereen works with the team to guide JASS women's rights, empowerment and movement-building programs in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and at the regional level. A sociologist by training, her work combines activism and theory, a union central to JASS strategies and approaches. Co-founder of Feminist Alternatives (FemAl), Shereen has published widely in the fields of feminism, women's movements and social movement organizing, and recently co-edited *My Dream is To Be Bold: Our work to end patriarchy* (FemAl/Pambazuka Press: 2010) to end patriarchy.

cleaning workers felt their bodies were erased, outsourced. When the bin or wastebasket isn't emptied or something is amiss, then they are noticed but otherwise their body and their work are invisible. We talk about the body as a battleground, as the site of many different struggles. Contextually, it is important to see body and the construction of identity as reinforcing the brotherhood – nationalism, patriarchy and militarism – woven through Southern African history.

From there, we need to deal with the issue of biological sex. With increasing homophobia and LGBTI issues written entirely out of the equation, how do we shift categories from the very fixed male/female binary to something more inclusive? We have to start challenging ourselves around language – *sexing* and *gendering* rather than sex and gender. The women we worked with felt this to be a challenging undertaking. When you go to the union representative, you begin asserting a certain kind of gendered power.

A lot of the activism has revolved around laws and frameworks but unless we can find new language to think through and deal with taboos about sex and sexuality we can only go so far. The region is beset by issues of trafficking women's bodies; borders are porous and women cross them for a range of different reasons. So we've begun to make safe spaces unpack some of those taboos. Moralistic approaches pose particular challenges, given the rise and predominance of Pentecostalism and other forms of fundamentalisms. We explore how nationalism, militarism and capitalism play across the body in violent ways.

We need to think about the trauma of the ways in which sexualized violence is beginning to play out in countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Uganda. On a recent visit to Zimbabwe, I received a call from GALZ in Zimbabwe telling me not to come to the office because of rape threats. What does it mean to work in that context, what kind of fear is sitting in the body? Take the case of someone who has suffered sexual violence in a conflict situation. Her sense of herself has been dislocated. All she wants is for things to go back to how they were before. But how things were before *is* the context that got her raped. How can we be gendered and sexed in a transformative way? How do we dream of a way of being in our bodies, of alternative sexualities? How do we integrate self-care as a targeted political strategy?

Violence and the Body

Akshay Khanna, IDS Fellow

Many experiences are painful, difficult, and human rights is one idiom or language in which to discuss these experiences. Violence is another idiom. Meanwhile, we also develop local idioms such as ringing bells or banging pans or blowing whistles (as in the video screened in this session.)

The languages of human rights and violence try to make our experiences understandable, so that these experiences and issues can circulate at international levels, but so often local idioms, through which people have been fighting all along, are excluded or lost.

The human rights framework is international and there's a disjunction between this and various experiences and languages. Vernacularization or the translation between the human rights framework and local idioms is a question of power, and of political economy and funding. You have to be able to perform your language skills. But the most interesting activisms are those that translate from local idiom.

Now we move to the body, whose languages are most difficult to bring into the human rights framework. The experience of being beaten is very particular. So many different connections – this same person is a source of erotic desire and of pleasure but also the source of your pain, physical, emotional, psychological.



Rosalind Eyben of IDS shared insights The Big Push-Back, an initiative to confront donors with the research and arguments against the current inappropriate, unhelpful and irresponsible approach to funding.

Responses

“A piece called “When Rights go Wrong” raises the question, Who is framing what rights are? What is it that women are struggling for? Why did the women I was working with in India not like the word “rights”? They preferred “justice”. What are the different idioms that women use to frame notions of security, safety, pleasure and well-being and the three concepts on the table: violence; the body, sex and sexuality; and economic security? Understanding how women define their “rights” is the key to getting to their strategies.”

Srilatha Batliwala

“For me, there’s no either/or between human rights approach and local idioms. The great challenge is how to articulate and frame together these two approaches to confront violence. It’s important to analyse cases in the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights because here we can see how women have been able bring up their issues of violence without changing their language. Their experiences and idioms have shifted the perceptions of the Commission and of international human rights spheres. In Mesoamerica, the focus is on the economic exploitation of sexualities and bodies as forms that patriarchy takes.”

Marusia Lopez

“Visibility and invisibility – when you speak out about VAW, you lose autonomy; you can’t frame your own experience; you are subsumed by systems where you have no control over your own life. Sexualities visibilise or invisibilise people – transgender and gay are so much more visible than heterosexuals. You have no privacy – people don’t think about your whole life, they think only about sex.”

Sally Shackleton

“For many years, the systems of conditional cash transfers around sexual health, at least in Panama, required that women get pap smears, principally in rural areas. A massive program without proper systems, it was administered by untrained and unprepared health workers who ended up violating the rights of and raping women massively throughout this region. To be able to get the cash transfers, instead of getting it once a year, many women had to get pap smears four times per year. And if they did not submit they would not receive any cash. Now we have a protocol developed for how to do this and to get rid of untrained personnel and we’re carrying out public audit processes done by young women to ensure women-friendly services.”

Mariela Arce

“We are under serious pressure as a collective to explain our outcomes for example, what IS the impact of our safe spaces to unleash new energies? How do we project ourselves, as the funding environment becomes more results-and-gadget-driven? We need to communicate amongst ourselves to protect our space for politics and rebellion, and figure out how to communicate to the broader donor community. Talking about rights doesn’t cut it anymore.”

Lisa Veneklasen

The Donor Perspective

Ireen Dubel, Hivos

Ireen provided some of her perspectives on the current challenges in the donor world affecting support for women’s organizing and gender-based work. This opened up a general discussion on both funding issues and the political climate affecting international support, especially in Europe. Currently, the debate in the Netherlands does not look good for NGOs and women’ rights work because of severe cuts in funding. This is even more serious since the Netherlands provides 25% of the funding for women’s rights initiatives worldwide. Gender-based work is suffering some of the most significant cuts because the general perception is that the position of women is rooted in local social culture and dynamics – and, as a consequence, cannot be changed from the outside. The wider foreign policy shift in Europe is based on narrow self-interest, no longer even enlightened self-interest. A long political history of generosity and progressive development is under threat. What does that imply for international cooperation and donor support? Current trends include a greater focus on World Bank economics, regime change, “smart” economics and technological fixes. Given this picture, women’s organizing and empowerment will be facing significant financial challenges going forward.

KNOWLEDGE

MELK: Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Knowledge

“Looking for indicators with soul...”

Outcomes

To refine JASS’ new MELK framework, regional groups discussed the proposed overall outcomes which were summarized as follows:

1. Stronger activists and change agents, in number and quality;

2. More effective organizing and action -- ever more powerful women's organizations and movements with a feminist perspective;
3. Changes in ideas, perceptions, norms and framing (for example, can be seen when land rights activists and women fighting for their families' safety now call themselves women human rights defenders (WHRD); grassroots organizers in Southeast Asia are talking about LGBT issues as their own; grassroots women in Malawi talk of "disrupting" their church);
4. Engagement with formal power (for example, Marusia presenting the WHRD report to the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights; Malawian woman taking on the local seed bank);
5. More responsive accountable formal institutions and structures (meaning changes in political culture and behavior WHR Defenders being treated with respect rather than violence) Sometimes reprisal, repression, or pushback is an indicator of our impact as well. We need to count that and recognize that "success" creates all kinds of costs.

We agreed that demands for attribution made by donors are a sticky point that can cause conflict, tension and inaccurate reporting. We walk a fine line between attributing change to JASS versus identifying JASS' contributions to change, all the while celebrating the individuals and groups of women who are on the frontlines making that change happen.

All the elements are interrelated and need to be seen in a comprehensive way. What difference does it make that JASS organizes creative safe spaces among diverse actors for deep interaction in difficult times? To break our work into separate pieces or categories without seeing the interactions and relationships is to risk losing the deep richness of what's happening.

The fifth outcome is just like any donor asks – more responsive public institutions. Answer: Absolutely no impact, Look at Mexico. How are we going to create responsive institutions in that situation? However, that is not to say that we don't build towards that possibility or prepare for opening up cracks in the system. It might be like Sudan when an opening suddenly comes. But if the ground is not prepared, the opening will be co-opted by someone else. This fifth category will work for some regions. For example, in India, women are looking at reducing the climate of impunity. Keeping resistance going is an outcome in a particular context – holding the line, keeping some space.

In Southern Africa, change happens when you engage with people on the margin. They get tools to re-imagine and rebuild their lives – resilience, solidarity, support – and to renew themselves and their community organizations.

“In capacity development, I worked with LGBTI people. In midst of a meeting, we were invaded by police. We jumped the fence and hid in people’s houses. They were willing to hide us – ‘those people are innocent.’ We had built trust, social capital. This is not a simple process to capture, not in these questions. I’m looking for indicators with a soul.”

Hope Chigudu

JASS Southern Africa

Before connecting with JASS, women often saw themselves as victims subject to forces beyond her control and believing other people’s stories about their value and worth. After JASS, women see themselves differently – as change agents, with language and voice to engage in the struggle, increasingly recognizing their personal and collective power. The hands of women now link with other women and other people. There is solidarity at community, household, and regional levels. The heart is important along with the mind and body. By creating and maintaining spaces, we see change -- methodologies informed by principles and politics; a feminism that fuels hope and drive; recognizes choice and action; and opens up questions of sex and sexuality.

The group summarized some of their concrete outcomes:

1. Stronger activists

In Malawi and Zambia, activists have developed stronger voice on a range of issues and survive multiple forms of adversity with a redefinition of purpose.

2. Effective organizing

The agenda defined by Malawian women has yielded real impact on the ground as they organize around ARVs, land, and violence. In Zambia, women are creating spaces of their own to sustain organizing, with Basadi Amoho in Zambia as an example.

3. Changing ideas

There are clear shifts in the women’s perceptions, some of which are trackable but some which cannot be quantified.

4. Engagement with formal power

Women are applying for funding; redefining power relations. For example, a woman was rejected by a chief because of her HIV status, but he returned to the women because he tested positive himself and now engages with them as an ally.

JASS Southeast Asia

1. Stronger activists

Young women do feel more empowered especially in Indonesia, Malaysia, East Timor and Cambodia where JASS provides a safe creative space to talk about themselves and issues, find a voice. In the Philippines, JASS works with strong women's groups and creates space to reopen the discussion about feminism and what it means, along with conversations on sexuality, militarization, and globalization.

2. More effective organizing

JASS equips young women with tools, analyses, methods and understanding. So when they return to their community, they reach out to more grassroots women. We have counted 38,000 young women organized by this multi-level work.

3. Engagement with formal power

JASS acted as the honest broker among different women's groups and feminist factions in the country, succeeding in helping them reach consensus. This work didn't get much publicity but it was a powerful step towards building strength and solidarity. From there, JASS feminists from the Philippines engaged with the new president on some key issues.

JASS Indonesia has managed to broker dialogue between LGBTI and women's groups and to put pressure on the government. In Aceh, women who went through the JASS process developed a gendered lens that they could apply to the post-Tsunami context and, as a result, leveraged their influence to attain shelter for themselves and their families.

Something that starts at level 1 ends up at level 4 or 5. For example, a lesbian who came to the very first Movement-Building Institute workshop was defensive, used to being dismissed, and didn't trust straight women or women's groups. But the workshop participants had a very deep discussion about sexuality and she felt heard by everyone, even fairly conservative women's groups. This transformed her willingness to engage with others. She now works full time for JASS as a coordinator in Indonesia to address tensions between LGBTI and women's groups and deal with stigma. Later, in an instance when an LGBTI meeting was closed down by fundamentalists, the government provided no protection. Because of the broader solidarity established through the JASS process, activists came together to send a petition and work toward expanding support from broader audiences down the line.

Organizations we are working with are already active – so, what is the value added? We talked about value of pluralist space – a diversity of ideas and streams of thought – coming together for conversations, to reach consensus, rethink ideas and strategies, and to build numbers. We want to create political pluralism. All of these efforts can be defined as or traced back to approaches of feminist popular education.

JASS Mesoamerica

We see our work in JASS as part of the existing dynamics in the region. From our political and ethical position, we play different roles: organizing safe spaces, catalyzing actions and connections, and collaborating with others

1. Stronger activists

JASS' contributes significantly to strengthening women's voice through art and spaces for political analysis and creativity. JASS helps deepen, legitimate and position women's organizing efforts for example, working with others to highlight the identity and position of activists as Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), facilitating access to tools usually only available to human rights experts, etc.

2. Organizing

JASS shares communication tools with indigenous women throughout the region – not just technical tools but the concept and implications of communications as a human right. JASS generates frameworks for training, analysis and political action, and identifies the following among our contributions:

- Support to the Petateras on documenting and learning from the Women's Transformation Watch process/ Observatorios;
- Conceptual papers and tools on power, conflict, feminist popular education;
- Virtual dialogues and debates;
- Confluences --the coming together of different voices both vertically and horizontally; -- (we reject the term network and prefer confluence which reflects the different streams and flows of our connections
- Flexible, safe, creative and renewing spaces for WHR Defenders and Petateras;
- Feminism and ideas in public arena in some countries (for example, in Nicaragua, JASS has brought out other allies to support feminists under threat);
- Contributions to the understanding and use of feminism by diverse groups (demystifying what feminism is and what it means to be a feminist);

- Contributions to the legitimacy and support of feminists and community activists in Atenco, in collaboration with the Nobel Women's Initiative.

3. JASS has worked to shift perceptions of:

- women as WHR Defenders,
- the CEDAW committee,
- the Honduras coup d'état.

4. Engage with power

As women prepare to engage with states, JASS provides space for discussion and tools for analysis and planning. Some of our allies interact with governments, which we support.

“JASS has been important in raising resources in times of crisis – not only money but political resources. In the region, there is a long tradition of human rights work but in the reports on the violations and attacks against women, defenders have not been visible. When we make these dynamics visible, we also uncover the misogyny of the state and other actors as well as the violence exercised against women within social movements themselves.”

Marusia Lopez

Similarities and Differences

Across countries, regions and internationally, JASS creates platforms or links that extend grassroots impacts to national and/or international levels. Examples are publicizing the coup in Honduras and generating an international solidarity petition for the Philippines. Analytical tools – power frameworks, feminist popular education methodologies – lead to new and more profound platforms built on trust and negotiation between those often divided by personal conflicts, partisan politics, historic baggage, and polarized societies. In all regions, JASS grounds its strategies in the local context and works and collaborates with people from the countries themselves. JASS' work inevitably hinges on methodology and politics, which are, in turn, are informed by the way we understand feminism.

“Local spaces are burdened with history and politics, relational dynamics and tensions that have made them too rigid, unchanging. JASS space is not laden with history right now – liberated from weight, these new spaces are not as fraught with earlier politics.”

Srilatha Batliwala

What Makes JASS Unique?

Four specific threads ran through the discussion – amplifying, strengthening, positioning/repositioning (the slipperiness of moving between the international and the local); and the agility that JASS possesses. Often people envision the agility of a network but since that image doesn't quite reflect our idea, we look to what Mesoamerican colleagues, the Petateras, (of which JASS is a part) for inspiration. They have called themselves– a confluence – a coming together of different currents to create a greater and more fluid force. One key question: How do these attributes make JASS unique?

“When I think about feminist work in Zimbabwe or Uganda, we started with the other women – “the women” – but the JASS process starts with me, with us, with our own issues of power. Another unique aspect is that we have been courageous in talking about issues of health – the mind, the body, the spirit. In the women's movement, people start saying “we are not religious” but we redefined that. We bring ourselves in our totality to the work. This is the key difference.”

Hope Chigudu

JASS is an institution with a different logic from organizations like Oxfam or ActionAid or even AWID. Grounded in local organizing and multiple institutional identities, we start with the organizations that women in JASS are a part of. We build country and regional work from those relationships, and use institutions and partnerships strategically, rather than being bound by unyielding and rigid institutional bonds and partnerships.

“We wear many hats, we blur many lines, and we work through relationships. That seems different from many organizations.”

Ellen Sprenger

“I don't care whether JASS is unique or not, but what makes it a special space. I've seen a huge spectrum of women's activism over past 10 or 15 years. What JASS offers is a real space for experimentation – the construction of a new feminist ideology, set of frameworks, analysis, tools, and a new pedagogy, not driven by projects and deliverables and the party line. JASS never laid down the line for everyone to follow. ‘Diversity’ is inadequate to describe this. What JASS allows us to do in the three sites is to come at the very deepest roots of patriarchy, and this is very rare. What we're doing is fundamental research. The bad news: nobody is going to fund this. The guardians of patriarchy – including those in donor agencies – let

this slip through. How will we protect this new space? How will we sell it?"

Srilatha Batliwala

Strengthening M&E in Women's Rights Work

Srilatha Batliwala

30 out of 45 organizations responded to AWID's research on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in women's organizations. Findings reveal that M&E is more useful and relevant when it is approached as a learning enterprise and as a critical expression of our accountability to our constituency, and to our mission of building a gender just world. We engage in this learning process spontaneously in our work; but when we have to place this in a more structured M&E framework, our attitude shifts. There is a need to examine our resistance to this aspect of the work.

Fundraising has become one of the greatest challenges to our work. The urgent need is to generate more rigorous and convincing data about the effectiveness and impact of our strategies to counter the impression that our work does not lend itself to "hard" analysis. M&E should be a central and integral part of our operations, supplied with the necessary time, staffing and budgeting where possible.

However, rigid approaches to reporting on targets, indicators, outputs and outcomes are not useful in women's rights and empowerment work. We need to be ready to adapt and shift in response to the contexts in which we work. There are no infallible certainties in our work, so M&E indicators may need to be revised on short notice to reflect what the organization was able to do in response to a given situation.

If we make the time, effort, and resources available to design and implement the best M&E system possible for tracking and assessing our work, chances are that it will also serve the needs of other stakeholders to whom we may be accountable – be they our donors or the women, communities or cause that we seek to serve.

As JASS develops our M&E framework, there are several factors to keep in mind:

One size does not fit all

No single M&E framework can capture *all aspects* of the change, impact, or results of a women's rights / empowerment project or strategy. Any one M&E instrument – whether it is the logical framework, theory of change,

outcome mapping, or gender impact analysis – only assesses a particular set of dimensions, but not all. Consequently, a comprehensive assessment process requires the application of multiple frameworks, methods, and tools, working together in a complementary fashion.

Balance quantitative and qualitative data

The experience of most women’s rights activists and organizations is that donors prefer quantitative – or “hard” – evidence of results, rather than “soft” data like stories of change, which are treated as anecdotal and hence not rigorous. There is also a tendency, among many women’s groups, to believe that our work can *only* be assessed qualitatively, and that our processes of change are too complex or subtle to be measured in numbers. In reality, the most complete picture of change – whether it is positive, or includes backlash, reversals or just successfully “holding the line” – emerges when both quantitative *and* qualitative tools of assessment are used.

Claim a contribution to change, not credit

We are often tempted to claim credit for all the changes that occur in a women’s rights or empowerment process, or are pushed to do so by the struggle to secure funding for our work. “Attribution-seeking” approaches are not designed to capture the *interim* steps that must be achieved in order to reach the final intended outcomes. Rather, they force us to jump to measuring the overall goal of a program or intervention – which we know can only be achieved in the longer-term – and in making exaggerated claims of attribution that can rarely be supported.

The Loom and the Weave

Valerie Miller

Over the past year, JASS has been in the process of reviewing and reshaping our own Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Knowledge (MELK) framework. In some ways we are searching for a new language to fully understand and appreciate our work. As we consider different evaluation and learning approaches, a US feminist poet from the early 20th century, Edna St. Vincent Millay, provides words to inspire and challenge us, especially in this time of darkness and shadow that seems to be threatening women’s lives and well-being more and more, despite technological and other advances.

*Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower
Of facts...they lie unquestioned, uncombined
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill
Is daily spun, but there exists no loom*

To weave it into fabric.

In JASS, we are showered with stories and information – unquestioned, uncombined, not yet spun into fabric. What do they mean? How do we make sense out of them and weave them into wisdom? How do we share our stories, questions and insights so our efforts multiply?

In our evaluation, learning and knowledge efforts, we are trying to bring together the insights of our hearts and souls, our bodies and minds to show the wonders that are possible and the wisdom and questions that will help us make our many dreams a reality. Now all we need is our loom.

In creating this loom we draw on a variety of components and ideas.

Guiding Principles:

- Knowledge – generated from a variety of sources – is a key component of feminist movement-building and making change happen.
- MELK should be a powerful tool for change, addressing the lived challenges of JASS and its allies, contributing to a deeper understanding of why and how feminist organizing promotes social and political transformation, and the problems it encounters.
- MELK should be an accessible and flexible tool that can be adapted to the needs of different contexts and contribute to strengthening the knowledge and learning in those contexts.
- MELK should be built around the JASS' power framework and other key concepts, JASS' theory of change and long, medium and short-term outcomes of JASS' core strategies.

MELK should draw on and nurture the full diversity of JASS' experience (personal, community, national, regional, global), and should respect and capitalize on different learning styles and approaches.

Our Theory of Change

If we provide safe creative spaces for women, spaces imbued with feminist values and perspectives, so they can:

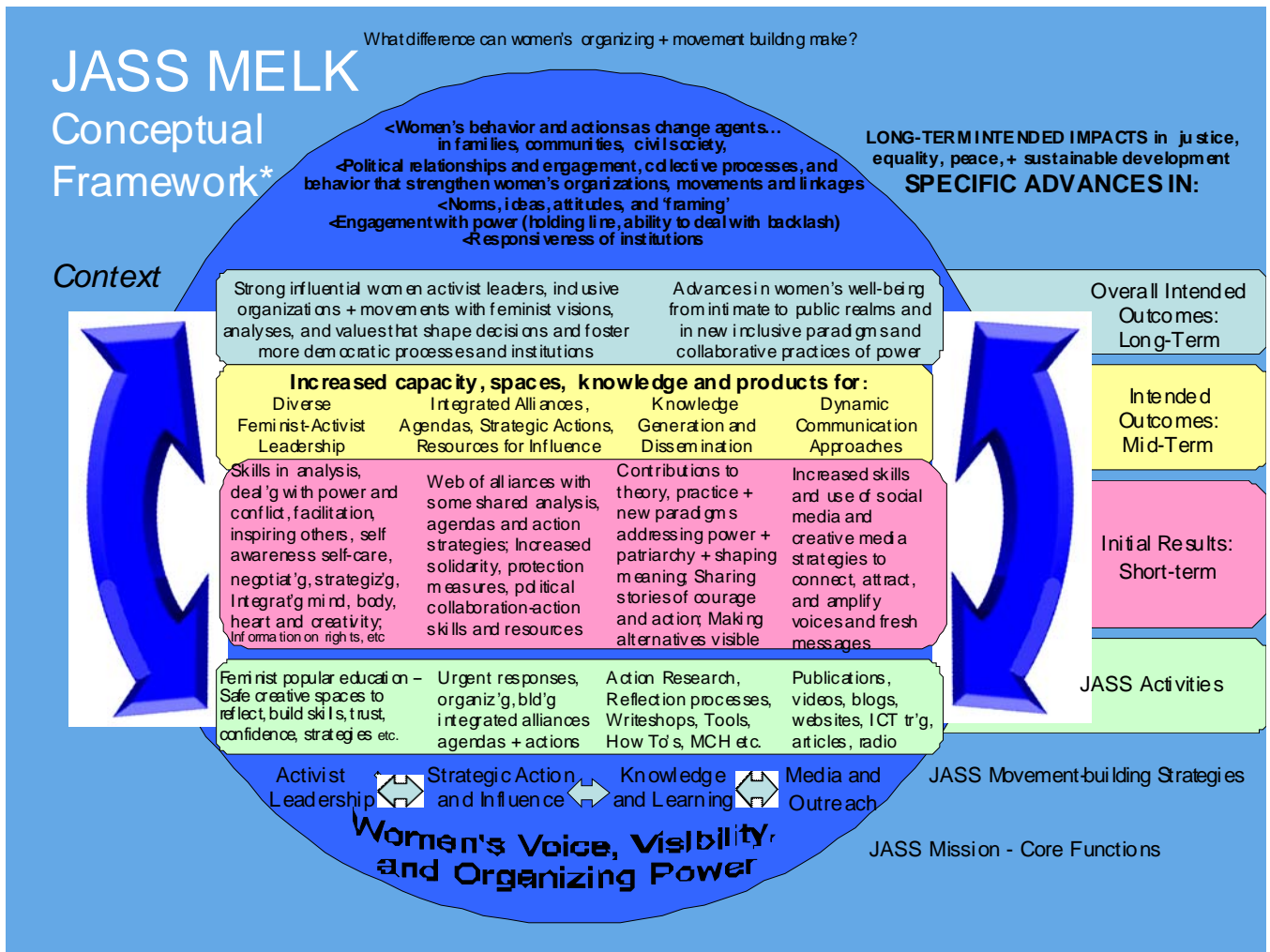
- practice and innovate new forms of power and leadership,
- generate strategic knowledge,
- renew their energy, creativity, solidarity and spirit,
- catalyze and strengthen women's organizing and action strategies,
- build vertical and horizontal linkages across sectors and locations including movements, and formal and informal institutions

Then women are better able to:

- mobilize and amplify their demands for responsive and accountable structures and institutions,
- confront the crises of our times, respond to urgent situations and problems, protect frontline activists, and
- ultimately resist and transform power – in all its relations, structures, forms, spaces, and places.

Our Loom

The following diagram represents key elements of our loom presented in a circular format. The circle with its different interactive dimensions is set within an overall context – a context that needs to be taken into account when spinning our threads of learning and knowledge together. The ever-changing contextual forces need to be named when we undertake our evaluation and reflection processes as they affect what can be accomplished and shape the insights and questions that emerge from the weave.



Feminist leaders as organizers

What makes an activist leader different?
What are the qualities of a **feminist organizer**?
She is:

A political thinker and actor



Inspires and catalyzes action Self aware and respectful of others

A bridge builder Walks the talk

A pragmatic motivator A popular educator

A conflict mediator Able to get through "oh shit" moments

A good listener Disturbs the status quo

Open to challenge

Spiritual, sexual, fun Sustains herself Learns from others

This slide provoked a strong reaction. Is this a definition of Activist Barbie, a perfect being who makes us all feel inadequate?

JASS is finding creative ways to report, reflect, and record our work for a diverse range of audiences on a day-to-day basis. Three primary tools will guide the organization into the next phase of systematic monitoring and learning:

- the monthly reporting format,
- the after-event Review,
- yearly stock-takes in the regions

All three feed information into a deepened learning process, within and across regions, on outcomes, core strategies and change theories. Each tool will be adapted to fit the shifting contexts of each region and the work; reflect outcomes developed by the regional offices; and amplify the voices of the women with whom we work.