

Communicating for Change: Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality Summary & Highlights

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Telling "Herstories" Inside stories of empowerment from MDG3 Fund

These days, the development community talks loud and long about opportunities to 'invest in women'.

At a recent meeting in Washington World Bank President Bob Zoellick spoke eloquently about empowering 50% of humanity as part of the 'business' case for gender equality. But what about women's rights as human rights? Are these rights to be forgotten in today's stressed financial climate? Does making the business case mean cutting funds for health, for education and paying women minimum wages as they keep the fabric of life going? How can the core message of women's rights be put into the economic agenda without falling back on rhetoric about 'smart economics'?

Supporting gender equality and women's empowerment has to go beyond 'making the business case' if it is to make a real difference. Funding for gender and development needs to be based on women's autonomy and freedom from violence along with fair and equal access to resources and assets, so that women are able to enjoy their rights as both national and global citizens. The Dutch funded MDG3 Fund starts from such a gender and rights perspective. Putting into practice the Millennium Development Goals commitment to gender equality, the Fund has granted

key women's rights organisations sizeable grants in order to help catalyse progress towards achievement of the 2015 MDG3 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

This publication tracks the impact of the MDG3 Fund as illustrated by various initiatives that have used their grants creatively to create and open up spaces for women to advocate for their rights, to demand their seats at decision making tables and to seek economic and social empowerment. It is divided into two parts. The first part, looks at how Inter Press Service (IPS) through its project - Communicating for Change: Getting Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality, uses the media to unearth and tell stories of women's struggles and empowerment that were never heard before.

The second part is a series of 10 short reports, by award winning feminist researcher Wendy Harcourt, that chronicles how the MDG3 Fund has helped women's organisations fight to overcome violence against women, gain political and economic independence, fight for land rights and become more involved in decision making. The 10 inside stories show how women around the world are helping to end social discrimination and rights injustices and to catalyze transformative changes in women's and communities lives worldwide.



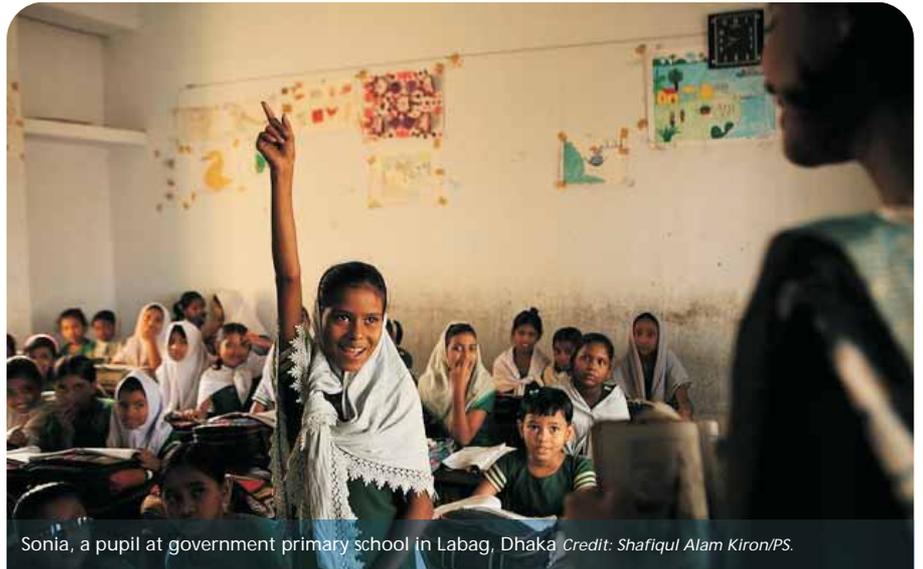
Women in the forefront of protests in Tahrir Square Credit: Mohammed Omer/IPS

IPS MDG3 Project

Communicating for Change: Getting Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality

In 2009, Inter Press Service (IPS) embarked on an ambitious and groundbreaking project that brought women's voices from the margins to the core of the discourse around ending violence against women, women's empowerment, land and labour rights. This formed IPS' critical strategy to contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals broadly through coverage of the MDG3 goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The IPS MDG3 project, *Communicating for Change: Getting Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality*, told stories that gave audiences around the world front row seats to the struggles of women in the Muslim world refusing to be silenced because of religion. It told stories of ordinary women doing extraordinary work in many African communities and the



Sonia, a pupil at government primary school in Labag, Dhaka. Credit: Shafiqul Alam Kiron/IPS.

work that women's organisations are doing to transform the development space within which women operate.

The project went around the world seeking unsung heroines and told 'herstories' to inspire other women and inform the development agenda. In so doing, it enabled the rest of the world to bear witness to these invisible stories of reasonable people taking on unreasonable adversaries and - against all odds - emerging as powerful players in their own worlds.

The IPS MDG3 project builds on similar initiatives by IPS that have provided a platform and voice for women to celebrate the achievements of women across political, national, race and socio-economic divides.

The project was made possible through funding from the Dutch MDG3 fund, a resource that has enabled gender equality and women's rights activities to stay alive especially in an environment where financing for gender equality and women's empowerment is dwindling due to shifting global priorities.

The project strengthened the organisation's own gender performance dramatically: a baseline survey at the beginning of the project revealed that only 22 percent of the sources in IPS stories were women. However, by the end of 2009, content analysis showed that female sources had increased significantly to about 77 percent as a result of the project's interventions.

Females dominated as newsmakers in the MDG3 project news content, rising to peaks of 94 percent and 73 percent in 2009 and 2010 respectively.



Strengthening media and civil society linkages

The project began by assessing how effectively journalists and editors in the regions could cover MDG3 issues and the extent to which NGOs interacted with the media.

These assessments conducted in Africa, Asia and Latin America informed the project's strategy for capacity building of editors and journalists in order to produce informed reports.

IPS' work also led to a number of partnership building opportunities. By acknowledging that there was much to be gained from forming strategic partnerships with likeminded organisations as well as others with the potential to feed into the project's vision, IPS partnered with organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America.

These partnerships enabled IPS to access unique knowledge and information gained through rigorous research by partners to feed into IPS' design and production of its editorial products and content as well as building capacity of the agency's network of journalists. IPS and partners co-organised seminars and training workshops on gender and media in Nairobi, Johannesburg, Rome, Chiang Mai, Lima and Managua.

NGOs found these partnerships mutually beneficial and reinforcing. Through their engagement with IPS, six of the partners developed customized Media and Communication Plans. Their partnerships with IPS opened up opportunities for



Ferial Haffajee speaking at IPS seminar in Johannesburg Credit: IPS.

stronger media engagement, as well as strengthening organisational skills to navigate the media terrain with more confidence. The overall result was increased impact and visibility of their media efforts.

Partnerships with organisations such as the Nobel Women's Initiative provided a unique platform to explore further and engage with

"You have no idea how much we owe you. For you this might have been just [a] small, short training - but for us it opened our minds, and we are putting in practice the things we learned." CLADEM workshop organiser

female visionaries and activists such as the late Wangari Mathaai of Kenya and others like her who have made a huge impact in their communities. Although these women are luminaries, their voices are often not heard and their lives and achievements not adequately celebrated.

These partnerships provided a springboard for a host of other initiatives and partner-

ships. A number of training materials and resources were produced by the project to support the work of partners and as well editors and journalists. In Latin America, IPS partnered with CLADEM, a partnership that has seen IPS staff actively participating in activities aimed at raising awareness on issues of gender, media and communication. In the last phase of the project, IPS extended and reinforced the alliances with women's organisations in the Mediterranean region. In collaboration with MDG3 grantee organisation Karama, and Foundation for the Future, the IPS Gender and Development Glossary was trans-edited into Arabic and distributed in the Arabic speaking countries.



Seminar in Lima, Peru Credit: IPS.

Other indirect impacts of the project were observed in countries such as Kenya where gender-based violence was reported to have declined in 2010 compared to the violence which marked the period in the run-up to, and after the 2007 elections. Such positive impact could be linked to increased media engagement by organisations such as FIDA-Kenya, a gender human rights organisation that partnered with IPS in 2009. By partnering with IPS, FIDA is now feeding Kenya media with information on gender and transformative justice through press conferences and press statements, and by actively participating in TV and radio talk shows.



IPS Gender and Development Glossary launched in Bangkok, Thailand Credit: IPS.

A multimedia platform to reach multiple audiences

The information produced by the project was made available to audiences through a diversity of media platforms that catered directly for people's preferences in content, tone, and delivery.

Platforms included stories published on project-specific websites in various languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Swahili); a dedicated blog called Gender Masala; and Women's Voices, a radio platform.

Stories were also circulated through a subscriber only newsletter (Gender Wire), IPS' global wire service and awareness raising and social discussion services such as Facebook and Twitter. Stories from the project are used in a variety of ways - students read the Gender Wire as background reading for assignments while others use it to inform their advocacy and lobbying efforts.

The Gender Wire

<http://ipsnews.net/genderwire> is updated on a daily basis with stories from IPS journalists around the world and a selection of stories are distributed to 10,950 subscribers as an e-newsletter. The site receives an average of more than 270,000 visitors each month.

The project knowledge hub is the IPS MDG3 site <http://www.ips.org/mdg3/>, which caters for a diverse audience ranging from NGOs, researchers and journalists, to the general public. This site is an immense knowledge repository that links to a multitude of other useful resources. An average of 1,500-3,000 visitors use this site every month.

A survey of subscribers of the Gender Wire newsletter indicated high levels of satisfaction with both content and form. One quarter of the respondents rated the newsletter as 'excellent' with most subscribers valuing female voices and sources in news coverage most and providing information that audiences could not find in other news sources.

The Gender Masala

<http://www.ips.org/blog/mdg3/> is a creative space that has given both audiences and bloggers a platform for women to think, write and dialogue about issues affecting them in their different contexts. Award-winning journalists such Mercedes Sayagues, a Knight Fellow in Mozambique, Kudzai Makombe in Zimbabwe and Suvendrini Kakuchi in Japan have anchored the blog, spiced by guest bloggers from around the world. Feedback from readers indicates that that this blog has provided a wonderful space for critical thinking and analysis of women's issues through new lenses.

The Gender Masala Blog was set up in June 2009 as a platform for drawing attention to, and creating engagement around, gender issues and development. It links to the IPS MDG3 project through the 'about' section of the site. It is intended as a space for reflection on gender issues beyond daily news gathering. Bloggers ask, provoke and argue on issues using short pieces that are no longer than 500 words. The blog is laid out in a simple manner which makes it easy to access archives and link to other resources. Its style is lively, chatty and jargon-less in a way that weaves opinion, comment and analysis. While not all visitors comment on the stories, the site is quite popular receiving an average of 10-14,000 views a month.

Speaking your language

The project gave audiences the power to access content in their own languages. Project content was translated into Spanish, English, Arabic, Dutch, Portuguese, Swahili, French, Thai, Tamil, Hindi, Indonesian, Nepali, Bahasa, Quecha (Peru), Aymara and Kagchiquel (Bolivia)

Giving media what they want

The clipping service set up by IPS to track pick-up clearly demonstrates that mainstream media thirsts for gender-related coverage that is well written, nuanced and resonates with national issues. Interest in gender stories transcended geographical boundaries indicating how the different issues the countries were struggling with were often mirrored across countries and regions and continents. Tanzanian newspapers, for example, picked up many stories on women and politics from Asia.

Stories produced by the project were picked in more than 50 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway,

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'WOMEN IN THE NEWS The Gender Wire' by IPS. The page features a navigation menu with 'Home page', 'Latest news', 'Search', 'Language', 'Contact us', and 'About us'. The date is 'Tuesday, December 26, 2012 14:24 GMT'. There are several news articles listed, including 'CLIMATE CHANGE: Waiting for the "Heavens to Weep"', 'WOMEN: A Shelter for Safe Delivery', 'WOMEN: "Rape" Stands in the Way of Love', and 'WOMEN: Women's Education the Path to the Presidency'. A newsletter sign-up form is also visible, titled 'The Gender Wire' and 'Do you see the world from the perspective of women and girls?'. The form includes a 'SIGN UP' button and a 'Subscribe to our free weekly newsletter' link.



From Our Mailbox: Advancing MDG3
 Posted on November 1, 2011



Advancing gender equality means a shift in thinking – from seeing boys and men as part of the problem, to including boys and men as part of the solution. (Credit: Sajit Dhar/IPS)

This blog brings out the flavour of gender issues, from the network of IPS writers and friends. Gender Masala is part of the Inter Press Service project Communicating for Change: Getting Voice, Visibility and Impact for Gender Equality. Check it at www.ips.org/mdg3/

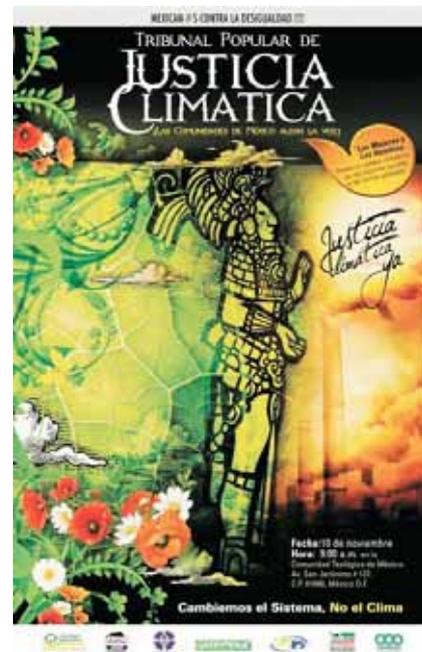
rights media
 girls women health education reproductive health
 Gender equality tradition inequality
 reproductive health
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Newsletters
The Gender Wire
 Do you see the world from the perspective of women and girls? Only about 22% of the voices you hear and read in the news are women's. Change your viewpoint. Read the IPS Gender Wire.

your email

Subscribe to our free weekly newsletter

Follow @thegenderwire 3,476 followers



Marking the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, IPS contacted women's organisations and activists to plan joint social media efforts.

Following exchanges by email, conference call and during training and strategy sessions hosted by IPS, the informal network staged a multi-hour, multi-lingual global "tweetathon" on the 25th November.

More than 15 civil society organisations from some 10 countries planned the event together and hundreds more joined in on the day.

The hashtag #16days trended in cities throughout Asia, Africa, MENA and Europe, including in Johannesburg, Cairo, Singapore, Rome, Mumbai, Amsterdam, Karachi, Yerevan and Kampala.

Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Rwanda, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey, Uganda, UK, UAE, US, Uruguay, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zimbabwe).

Examples of mainstream newspapers carrying stories from the project includes - Mail and Guardian (South Africa), The Daily News (Tanzania), Algemeen Dagblad (Holland), Helsingin Sanomat (Finland), Al Mada Daily (Iraq), Costa Rica Hoy, La Jornada (Mexico), Ottawa Citizen (Canada), The Jakarta Post (Indonesia) and Philippines Graphic. The following websites, some of them with a gender-focus, consistently carried stories from the project - Huffington Post, Egalite, MS magazine, AllAfrica, AWID weekly news, iKNOW politics, Rebellion, One-World, Women's Rights- TrustLaw with thousands more picking up individual stories.

Who else is looking at and linking to IPS

The project content is available on more than 30 websites belonging to women's organisations. These sites include a combination of blogs such as Vital Voices Blog, sites of women's organisations such as International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics and women's news sites such Womensphere.

As social media has transformed the way that people find news, IPS made special

efforts to share MDG3 stories on new platforms, and to work with partners to build capacity jointly. In the fall of 2011, two special initiatives built on the growing following the Gender Wire is attracting on Twitter and Facebook.

The Feminist Task Force of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) requested and then hosted a two-hour virtual social media training for partners led by IPS. The webinar helped organisers of women's climate tribunals in Africa, Asia and Latin America to amplify the gender and climate justice message by sharing and cross-posting each other's social media posts about the tribunals, thereby linking and multiplying audiences.



Global map of the #16days tweetathon

Telling women's stories

From building capacity...

One of the core objectives of the project was to produce news content for distribution through diverse multi-media platforms. Gender studies have revealed that one of the reasons why women's voices are absent in the media is as a result of the lack of female reporters with sufficient knowledge, exposure and training on gender issues, especially at senior level. The project succeeded in addressing these gaps in some ways through awareness raising activities in the regions supported by intensive and constant mentoring by editors. Coverage by female reporters increased to 62 percent compared to 2008 when the majority of writers were male.

"The glossaries have always been useful as they make IPS reporting what it is", George Kebaso, Kenya.

To provide reference and learning tools, the project produced initial editorial guidelines, and two handbooks to guide journalists on specific aspects of gender reporting within the framework of MDG3 - on gender based violence and on gender relations in productive and reproductive work. The handbooks contained a set of editorial guidelines that set out the framework and standards in reporting gender issues in general and these MDG3 issues in particular. In addition, the project produced the 3rd edition of the IPS gender and development glossary of terms to assist editors and



Michelle Bachelet, head of U.N. Women, speaks to the press Credit: Sriyantha Walpola/IPS

journalists to avoid perpetuating ignorance and stereotypes through language. Editions were published in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Adhering to these guidelines enabled the project to produce high quality reporting throughout.

.....To telling stories

More than 500 stories from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America were produced. Reports looked at a cross-section of themes including social and legal issues affecting women, science and health, women's economic empowerment, violence against women, activism and movement building, gender, democracy and governance, human rights, gender relations, women in politics, environment and many others.

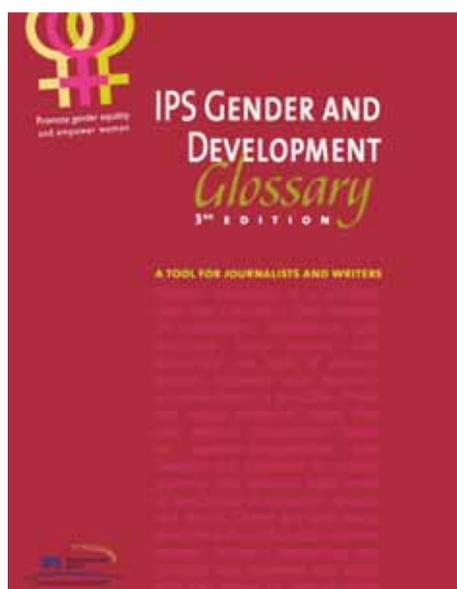
The stories often reflected national and regional issues and priorities. The majority

of coverage out of Africa looked at issues of violence against women as well as economic empowerment of women. Stories from Asia included critical analysis of the rights of women living in Islamic regimes as well as the impact of migration. Interestingly, coverage from this region also focused on the feisty nature of activism in a region where women are actively seeking space in politics and governance against boundaries that are imposed primarily by religion.

"These guidelines are easy to understand, they demystify reporting on gender for me..." , Chris Arnold Msipa, Zimbabwe

A high percentage of news coverage in Asia, around 85 percent in both 2009 and 2010, looked at issues of inequality, which spoke directly to the ambitions of the project. As well as flagging the issues of equality, a significant amount of coverage (47 percent and 43 percent in 2009 and 2010 respectively) directly challenged gender stereotypes.

In Latin America, coverage highlighted the inequalities in labour laws and domestic violence as well as rights of indigenous women. Notably, the project followed and profiled the work of Michelle Bachelet as president of Chile and continues to highlight her achievements as she took over management of the newly constituted UN Women. Profiling work of such trailblazers through the media plays a critical role in inspiring current and future generations.





Award winning feminist researcher,
Wendy Harcourt

Women Empowering Women

Why has 'gender' emerged as a key area of development funding in these days of reduced funds for development? How has the MDG3 Fund helped catalyze progress towards achievement of the 2015 MDG3 on gender equality and women's empowerment? How are women overcoming violence against women, gaining economic independence, fighting for land rights and becoming more

involved in decision making?

The following 10 inside stories on ten projects reveal how the MDG3 Fund has helped women to help end social discrimination and rights injustices and to catalyze transformative changes in women's and communities lives worldwide.

Wendy Harcourt

Breaking the Silence

AWID Tells Stories from Fiji and South Africa

How do sex workers speak out in an increasingly violent island state where authoritarian decrees make their work illegal? How do women who have been violated find the courage to speak out when deep control of women's sexuality and femininity is emblazoned as part of a nation's culture?

The fact that we can even ask these questions points to the undoubted successes of the transnational women's movement to raise awareness of violence against women. From an invisible and unspoken reality of so many women in the home, the streets, in peace and in war, violence against women (VAW) has become a recognized crime and violation of human rights. Women have worked hard, even in very dangerous situations to break the silence and protest. When women, girls or any gender identity is understood as 'different', are violated and attacked, there can be no true democracy.

Marginalized women who are discriminated as 'other' such as sex workers or members of the gay community are now at the centre of courageous human rights campaigns. But too often, well meaning supporters, professionals and writers outside the situation become the interpreters, the 'translators' of others' pain or discrimination. They listen and tell the stories while at the same time channelling them into good policy, academic thesis and newspaper articles. All such channels are needed and have ensured that campaigns to end violence against women, support sex workers rights and end discrimination against gays are now part of the general struggle for human rights.

But, what about the stories behind those polished pieces, learned debates and policy goals? What about the voices of the women

themselves? How can women get the courage to speak out, learn the skills to share and change their lives through their own narratives?

Handing women the ability to speak about their own situation is precisely the goal of the MDG3 funded Association for Women's Rights (AWID) project, which has granted women's groups from around the world the chance to tell their stories and to broadcast them widely.

AWID is one of those rare organisations that reinvented itself to remain in tune with the times. The current AWID was shaped precisely at the time when women's right activists were jaded with the big jamborees of the UN conferences of the early 1990s and were looking for alternative and dynamic ways of organising that moved beyond the traditional 'add women and stir' formula of development cooperation. AWID, in providing an inclusive platform for women's movements around the world, has become a major transnational feminist forum, which has promoted southern-led ways to empower women from all walks of life.

AWID's creative support for the new and marginal voices of women's groups working on the ground was given a huge boost by the MDG3 Fund. This grant enabled AWID to give 24 innovation seed grants for 2009-2010 (chosen from 250 applicants who attended the AWID Power of Movements Forum in 2008). Two of the grantees stand out.

The Rainbow Network of Fiji implemented the "Sound of Silence" project involving 15 participants of the women's marginalized community, sex workers and the gay community. The narratives were told in a visual and verbal format with women learning to use digital technology in order to reach out to all levels of the public.

The project was not without its dangers. During the process a decree was passed by the military government stating that sex

work was illegal. Sex workers experienced physical intimidation from both the police and the military. Anonymity and security of the participants had to be ensured. The courage to speak out, knowing that they risk being jailed if their identity was found out, puts these digital stories on the cutting edge of 'body politics' ending the 'sound of silence'.

At the Saartjie Baartman Centre, Cape Town, South Africa eight women used film to assist in healing their experience of gender based violence in a four-day digital filmmaking training course. Working with a professional filmmaker, participants recorded their stories in DVD film that was then shared with women's rights organisations throughout South Africa. The resulting digital book with the striking and beautiful images of the women goes beyond the victim image of VAW to empowerment. These testimonies to strength of women and the power of bearing witness are significant especially in South Africa where complex social issues, racial and gender form a difficult background to speaking out.

The culture of rape is rife in South Africa. The world reeled when South African President Jacob Zuma was acquitted of rape in 2005 using Zulu custom as his defence. Captain of a South African football team Eudy Simelane was gang-raped, beaten and stabbed. Simelane a politically active lesbian was, according to activists, the victim of so-called "corrective rape", a practice where men feel they have the right to punish or "cure" a lesbian's sexual orientation.

In standing up and refusing to take part in the culture of consent women are challenging deep and dangerous patriarchal practices. "Storytelling is a cathartic process... By sharing the stories, these women are offering a lifeline to other victims of abuse. They're showing them a way out," says Synnov Skorge, Director of the Saartjie Baartman Centre.

www.awid.org

War Survivors

Body Politics and Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange

It is hard to recall that just a couple of decades ago, rape, as a weapon of war was an unspeakable subject. The appalling violations of women and children during wartime were hidden from view. Millions of women bore the brutality, humiliation, pain, debilitating physical and psychological scars with no support and too often complete rejection of their community.

Unfortunately, rape in war continues but it is no longer silenced. It is upfront as one of the gravest rights abuses now punishable by criminal courts. In 2008 the UN Resolution 1820 (2008), states that 'rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.' The resolution calls not only for monitoring and prosecution of warring factions, but also for a crackdown on peacekeepers who exploit women and children during times of conflict.

Resolution 1820 is the result of the hard work of women's movements around the world. Now there is a global justice system in place that recognizes rape as a war crime, and puts women's rights to bodily integrity and security during and after war upfront with tribunals and human rights mechanisms such as CEDAW.

Analysed from a gender perspective, in post conflict situations, it is not the economy but the body where the first attempts at healing and building community has to start. The horrendous sexual and physical abuse of women and girls, even preadolescent girls, requires medical and psychological support as well as economic resources. Most of all, there is a need for change in social attitudes towards women's rights and urgency in rehabilitating the lives of sexual violence war survivors. While the levels of violence are far-reaching and deeply disturbing, most



The fight against rape a brutal wait Credit: Rebecca Murray/IPS

organisations on the ground only focus on provision of basic counselling and medical services.

The MDG3 Fund recognises this crucial work and is providing funds to a Ugandan based organisation, Isis- Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) to support women war survivors. The project supports in particular the work to heal the women and girls of Liberia and Sudan many of whom experienced sexual violence in the form of gang rape and insertion of objects in their vaginas. Isis-WICCE found that nearly 70% of the survivors had continuing gynaecological problems that required medical intervention.

Isis-WICCE is a feminist action oriented organisation, which promotes women's human rights and self-determination through cross-cultural exchange of skills and information. Since 1984 Isis-WICCE has been on the vanguard of women's rights work in armed and post-conflict settings, building women's capacity to participate in shaping policies that address women's human rights, peace and human security.

The unique quality of the work of Isis-WICCE is to bring war survivors from different areas together to learn from each others' stories of survival of rape and other forms of sexual violations during war. Using face to face meetings, videos, documentaries and online presence, Isis-WICCE is leading in dealing with the profoundly disturbing consequences of war on women's bodies.

Along with the healing, Isis-WICCE through the MDG3 Fund also provides access to specialised medical attention. Many women had no access to any medical treatment even though in some cases the women required surgery. In some instances the victim's internal organs were ruptured and displaced outside their bodies. Sadly, some of these women are rejected by their families and are forced to live with the disability not only in pain but deeply depressed. Isis-WICCE workshops and clinics provide not only immediate medical help but also counselling and information about reproductive health.

Isis-WICCE works on several levels, with the war survivors at the grassroots, as well as at the national and international level. At the national level, their work over the last decades in Eastern and Southern Africa has been to train medical personnel to analyse the various ailments and give direct treatment. Support is given to people in the camps as well as training of health workers to consider the psychological implications and physical problems when diagnosing patients.

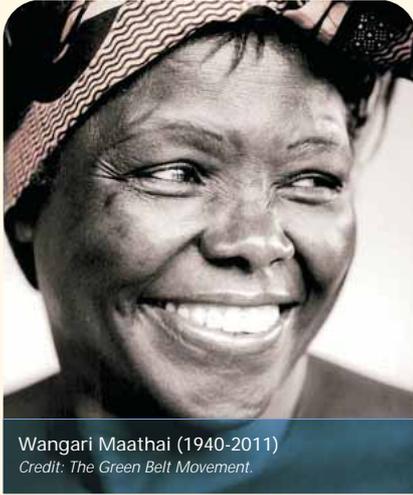
Internationally Isis-WICCE joins other women's organisations to lobby governments so that they understand that reconstruction cannot happen until you have reconstructed women's broken bodies.

Their message is loud and clear: 'that women's bodily integrity has to be a priority for any peace building plan.'

www.isis.or.ug

Nobel Women's Initiative Celebrating Women's Leadership and Vision

In Memory of Wangari Maathai



The loss of Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize on Sunday 25 September was felt around the world.

Feminists, environmentalists, Presidents, spiritual and UN leaders, peace activists, women and men, mourn for the passing of the Nobel Laureate. As a leader and fighter, and founder of the Greenbelt Movement in 1977, she connected African vision, knowledge and action to end environmental degradation and human rights violations of women.

As well as her great work for Kenya and women worldwide through the Greenbelt Movement, another initiative that Wangari Maathai led with vision and wisdom was the Nobel Women's Initiative.

Her fellow women Laureate remember her with the words:

'Wangari was a true visionary whose work and life served as a powerful example to women everywhere. She showed us that the eradication of poverty, the empowerment of women, and a sustainable future for our planet are all essential building blocks of a more just and peaceful world...'

'Her passion and commitment have moved countless people to take action to improve their communities. We will miss her great shining smile and her indomitable spirit but all those she has inspired will keep her vision alive through each small action we take toward a better world.'

The Nobel Women's Initiative funded by the MDG3 Fund will undoubtedly continue in the spirit of Wangari Maathai to inspire and make a difference to women's lives worldwide. The MDG3 Fund supports the Initiative's groundbreaking work on raising women's voices for peace, equality and justice. The unique work of the Initiative is to connect the grassroots to power at the top through the selfless example and hard work and daily example of the Nobel Laureates.

As Wangari's active and passionate engagement with women from all walks of life attests, the initiative knows how crucial it is to listen to women and find the leadership within. The Nobel Women's Initiative illustrates how women's leadership can be about a different type of power, not domineering, not hierarchical top down power but horizontal power. Leadership is about building networks that are supportive and connecting. These women leaders are not ordering change but collaborating with women and men and making the difference together.

In the Nobel Women's Initiative Wangari worked with six other Nobel Peace Prize winning women: **Jody Williams, Aung San Suu Kyi, Mairead Maguire, Shirin Ebadi, Rigoberta Menchu and Betty Williams** to support women leaders building peace, demanding justice and achieving equality and rights in **Burma, Iran, Sudan, Israel and Palestine, Mexico and Central America.**

The Nobel Women's Initiative illustrates how women's leadership can be about a different type of power, not domineering, not hierarchical top down power but horizontal power

The Laureates work to raise public awareness of women's issues in some of the world's most difficult 'hot spots' courageously undertaking advocacy. They build power alliances to end violence against women in conflict situations. They work hard with media, with governments and with civil society networks to encourage women's engagement in political decision-making.

Their work is about getting women heard in public fora and exposing the root causes of sexism, conflict and inequality. Most of all these women are inspiring political leaders and encouraging the participation of women and women's perspectives in decision-making processes.

Perhaps the most complex of those aims is ensuring women's perspectives are heard in decision-making processes. It is not about getting women into the room, but making sure men in power listen to their perspectives, learn from their stories and therefore ensure change happens based on women's knowledge and vision. The first-ever International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women of Burma and a Review Conference of the International Criminal Court (ICC) held in Uganda ensured that the messages of grassroots' women activist were brought to the media's attention and to the governments to make sure that violence against women can be stamped out.

Their advocacy for peace, justice, equality and human rights is achieved through their tremendous convening power as well as ability to shape new conversations, build networks and create new forms of collaboration for a non-violent equal world. With their own fame they are able to bring media attention to the work of women activists particularly those engaged in ending war and militarism, and in support of women in peace negotiations and other peace building efforts.

The Nobel Women's Initiative puts the media spotlight on how rape is a weapon of war. They have put their full weight behind the implementation of comprehensive national action plans as called for in UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820. The International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict, spearheaded by the Nobel Women's Initiative calls for justice, resources and immediate support for the survivors. Even as Wangari Maathai was fighting for her own health, she was at the Review Conference of the International Criminal Court in Uganda in 2010 with Shirin Ebadi joining Sudanese women activists to call for an end to impunity for crimes against women and girls.

Mobilizing Poor Working Women for Economic Equality

Women in Informal Employment: Globalisation and Organising (WIEGO)

In sharp contrast to the message of the 2011 World Bank Report on Gender and Equality that gender equality is 'smart economics'; *Women in Informal Employment Globalisation and Organising (WIEGO)* makes no bones about it -women's economic equality is the **ONLY** fair and just economics.

WIEGO is not about 'corrective development policy' but about organising and doing. Unlike the Bank, WIEGO does not see women as an investment but recognises that women are the backbone of the 'informal' work force, the real economic work on the ground that sustains the livelihoods of millions of poor families and communities.

Regardless of the development trends, and right now it seems gender is 'in' as the Bank's flagship report attests, domestic workers, small producers, home-based workers, street vendors are keeping themselves and their families alive.

WIEGO aims to support poor women's work by ensuring they have the information and can mobilise around their rights to security and safety and a fair level of earnings.

Most of all, WIEGO does not look to provide or impose an agenda with specific 'priority areas' measured and calculated as recommended by the World Bank Report. Instead it recognises that poor working women have their own ways of organising. If policy is to work it has to be listening to how these working women articulate their own needs. It is the donors who need to learn from women's informal organisations if appropriate policy agendas are to be set.

With the grant from the MDG3 Fund, WIEGO provides specific knowledge and awareness to women in the informal sector on how to have access to markets, how



Uganda getting the common market to benefit the common woman Credit: Evelyn Matsamura KJAPI/IPS

Women are the backbone of the 'informal' work force, the real economic work on the ground that sustains the livelihoods of millions of poor families and communities

to mobilise and take up their rights and make their own agenda in the policy arena. WIEGO works on many levels with a variety of different occupation groups of poor working women to ensure that they participate directly in policy and planning processes.

WIEGO's long-term vision is for poor working women to have in place strong, democratic organisations in all sectors of the informal economy, and through these organisations to acquire visibility, voice and power.

Such efforts are particularly important given today's hostile environment. WIEGO's long history in this field can count many successes from the Home Nets of home based workers to StreetNet International bringing together street and market vendor associations around the world and to Waste Picker Networks in Latin America. Their website carries daily news of successes of their members gaining visibility voice and power in demanding their rights despite the global recession.





Bangladesh Offers Lessons in Microcredit Management Credit: Naimul Haq/IPS

Women's economic equality is the ONLY fair and just economics.

The MDG3 Fund has helped WIEGO improve the working lives of women informal workers in **Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe** to mobilise around international labour laws. WIEGO's projects work from the ground up, with a rights based and holistic approach to economic equality projects that involve domestic workers, street vendors, waste pickers, construction workers, garment workers, smallholder farmers and transport workers. They are the women who are working at the very bottom of the supply chain, with little social or legal recognition and among the most hit in today's growing economic crisis.

One of the major successes of WIEGO in 2010 and 2011 has been to support domestic workers to form their own network and mobilisation by providing technical support, advising on strategy, providing research and capacity building and assisting in fund raising. Such practical

support allowed domestic women to represent themselves in major policy fora and to fight for their rights to be part of the decent work initiatives.

A huge success was scored on June 16, 2011 when governments, employers and workers from around the world adopted the Convention and accompanying Recommendation on Decent Work for Domestic Workers at the 100th International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, Switzerland. 'Convention 189' was approved by 396 votes in favour, 16 against and 63 abstentions. The accompanying Recommendation was even more overwhelmingly approved with 434 votes in favour, 8 against and 42 abstentions.

As Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO, stated at the adoption of the Convention, " We are moving the standards system of the ILO into the informal economy for the first time, and this is a breakthrough of great significance. History has been made."

The adoption of the Convention 189 impacts the lives of 50-100 million people

Practical support allowed domestic women to represent themselves in major policy fora and to fight for their rights to be part of the decent work initiatives

worldwide who work in the homes of their employers. The Convention recognizes the " significant contribution of domestic workers to the global economy ... mainly carried out by women and girls, many of whom are migrants or members of disadvantaged communities." It aims to reverse the undervalued and invisible nature of this crucial women's work.

This victory however is just beginning. There is now an ongoing campaign for domestic workers' rights in order to push governments to ratify the Convention and to incorporate it into national laws in order to ensure that domestic workers enjoy fundamental rights and effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence. Domestic workers are now, together with WIEGO, organizing to advocate for this ratification, and review of national laws and implementation of the laws.

www.wiego.org



INDIA: Developing Self-sufficiency For Poorest Women Credit: Manipadma Jena/IPS

Completing the Revolutions for Arab Women

Coalition Building by Karama

The world continues to watch the Arab Spring as we head for 2011/12 winter, with some trepidation. Although one woman, Tawakkul Karman of Yemen, from the region has been honoured with a Noble Peace Prize, all those women who took to the streets, blogged, tweeted, risked their lives and made the revolution happen may well find themselves struggling against a backlash.

During the revolution activists such as Esraa Abdel Fatah (known as "Facebook Girl" after organising a nation-wide strike through her page in 2008) commented on how women were not violated during

the protests. But now there are stories of women harassed and attacked. Once more post revolution, the fight to end violence against women has to be an ever-vigilant demand.

Arab women are well placed to continue the struggle to be heard and counted politically and to end violence against women. Karama is one regional network responding to those needs through alliance building and strategic advocacy with grass-roots and professional women. Launched in 2005, Karama, which means dignity in Arabic, has formed a network for collaboration and advocacy against violence against women in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Palestine.

In each country and across the region, Karama has undertaken advocacy campaigns to urge policymakers to change discriminatory laws and build the capacity and leadership of women activists. From

promoting local campaigns, demanding legal reform to using international conventions and multilateral bodies to monitor and pressure national governments, Karama and its partners are working to create a new legal framework that will carry forward the promise of the Arab Spring as they promote equal human rights for all in the Arab Region

The MDG3 Fund in a timely fashion has supported Karama's efforts to reduce violence against women and to increase the participation of women in the public sphere through a regional Arab women's movement in eleven countries across the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Taking a holistic approach to ending violence against women Karama looks at how to change all aspects of daily life that lead to violations of women's rights: economics, politics, law, health, media, education, and art/culture. Using the international instruments such as the



On a Damascus street Credit: Rebecca Murray/IPS



Carrying drinking water in a low-income Cairo district Credit: Victoria Hazou/IPS

Arab women are well placed to continue the struggle to be heard and counted politically and to end violence against women

International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Karama has helped the fight for women's rights in the Arab region. Karama has witnessed important successes, for example, compliance with CEDAW in Lebanon and parliamentary support to end domestic violence in Jordan.

In the wake of the Arab revolutions, Karama is being called upon to play a key role in raising the profile and expand the influence of Arab women as leaders in regional and international contexts. Though the Arab Spring seemed to hold the key to bringing women's freedoms to the forefront of a new political agenda it is proving a difficult Autumn/Winter for the women in the Arab region who fought the revolution. Women were ready for the Arab Spring, but as events in Egypt and Tunisia indicate the transition to gender equality is not proving so easy.

For example, when the Tunisian moderate Islamist party al-Nahda claimed victory in October 2011, many observers wondered what this victory would mean for Tunisia's historical legacy of women's rights. Is this

an opportunity to redefine the roles of both women and men? Will the citizens of Tunisia, and elsewhere in the region, have women's rights and feminism on their agenda? Before the election there were some positive signs when with the help of groups such as Karama's advocacy and lobbying in September, Tunisia became the first country in the region to withdraw all its specific reservations to CEDAW opening the door for a more liberal family code. But, as United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)'s analyst Kristine Goulding suggests, the challenge will be to confirm a collective belief in women's capacity to help rebuild the country's social fabric and economy.*

Karama is working to ensure women's advocates take up the opportunities offered by the Arab Spring. In September 2011 the network hosted with the Swedish Institute of Alexandria, a workshop on 'Electoral Processes to Incomplete Revolutions: Women and the Arab Revolts, Eight Months On'.

In Egypt, Tunis, and Jordan the focus is on how to rebuild the political landscape, hold elections, and reform existing constitutions. In other areas of the region, Syria, and Yemen,

Ensuring women's political participation, guarantees to protect women and ensure their safety in areas of conflict, while reforming laws that enshrine women's equal status with men in all areas of life

the violent clash between state and anti-government protesters continues. As next steps are taken to reform old regimes, the future of the region requires groups like Karama to ensure that civil society engages in recommending strategies to end economic injustice, poverty, unemployment, political stagnation and human rights abuses.

Most of all it is crucial that women's rights are not left off the agenda. This requires ensuring women's political participation, guarantees to protect women and ensure their safety in areas of conflict, while reforming laws that enshrine women's equal status with men in all areas of life.

* See Arab Spring, Islamist Summer ... Feminist Fall? (Posted on 28 Oct 2011) <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/kristine-goulding/tunisia-womens-winter-of-discontent>

www.el-karama.org



Building Feminist Resistance and Hope in Iraq

OWFI

Whereas the world in 2011 has heard of the Arab Spring and the thousands who gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo, very few have heard of the Day of Anger - 25 February 2011 in Tahrir Square in Baghdad.

Nor do people follow the weekly gathering of Iraqi women and men every Friday in Tahrir Square, Baghdad, to demand their rights to work, water and electricity along with the end to corruption and the establishment of true democracy and an end to the occupation. The Organisation of Women's Freedom (OWFI) has been among those meeting at high risk to their own security. On June 10, 100 days after the government promised to meet the prodemocracy demands activists gathered in Baghdad's Tahrir Square were brutally attacked by plainclothes forces. Women meeting under the OWFI banner were sexually assaulted.

It is time for a political system of equal wealth for all, in other words, a socialist system, where free market rules cannot starve billions while filling the pockets of a few

Fighting for women's rights in Iraq means putting your own safety on the line. The tragedy of the Iraq war where one million people were killed and 750,000 women were left widows continues in the violence and corruption that leaves women and girls vulnerable and oppressed.

Under an occupied and heavily militarized Iraq, OWFI was formed in 2004 to put a stop to violence against women. First, by trying to understand the depth of the phenomenon, something they themselves did not think existed in Iraq until they started their investigations. Second, by providing shelter for those women and girls seeking to escape so-called honour killings and sexual slavery. In a country devastated by war and

deepening poverty and social dysfunctioning, women turn to work that provides livelihoods and families are forced by economic circumstances to sell girls as young as 12 into the sex industry.

OWFI Anti-Trafficking programme helps to educate the public on the large numbers of women forced into sex work as a result of Iraq's instability. They put pressure on the Iraqi government to strengthen its laws against the traffickers of women, girls, and children. OWFI also advocates for an end to tribal violence and for women's human rights inside prisons and detention centres through Women's Prison Watch including freeing 12 women in 2009 detained for crimes committed by their male family members.

Empower women with a new sense of hope that will spread to all Iraqis

The MDG3 Fund has provided funds and solidarity to OWFI to continue their work, to build more shelters and safe houses for women to help women leave trafficking and 'pleasure marriages' and to set up Al Mousawat (equality) Radio that is now operating from 8 am to 6 pm every day bringing the message of feminism, democracy and freedom to seven million listeners.

Al Mousawat Radio uses transmitters from Italy and installed in Al Ferdawse Square where Saddam Hussein's statue fell. The 18 meter high antenna takes OWFI voices of freedom to millions of households.

Al Mousawat is heralded by OWFI as a new kind of media for Iraq that does not compromise freedom, equality and secularism. The Radio is the space for young secular feminists and women friendly youth from cities throughout Iraq (Sadre city, Baghdad, Basra and Mosul) to express their creativity and vision of the future against the prevailing fundamentalist (Islamist) and military culture. It runs programmes by women university graduates who are obliged to be fully

covered in black in their own neighbourhoods, but on Al Mousawat their unveiled voices fuel the urge for freedom in millions of Iraqi women and men. They are joined in support and solidarity by anti-militia secular young men.

Building feminist resistance in Iraq is at the heart of OWFI's efforts against tribal, fundamentalist and wartime violence. With the support of the MDG3 Fund, OWFI aims to empower women with a new sense of hope that will spread to all Iraqis.

OWFI sees itself as a feminist and revolutionary organisation in solidarity with political and economic struggles of all poor people. They see their work as part of all peoples' struggles against oppressive economic, military and social forces, extraordinarily reaching out even to the people of the US. Their Director, the softly spoken but passionate speaker Director Yanar Mohammed and Editor-in-Chief of Al-Mousawat wrote an open letter that reaches out beyond Iraq to the occupation movement in a message of solidarity to the occupiers of Wall Street:

'While the 99% of Iraqis seethe with anger waiting for the right conditions to claim what is theirs, they eagerly follow your progress in occupying Wall Street, as our enemy is one whether they are American or Iraqi. That enemy is the 1% of ruthless exploiters ... It is time for a political system of equal wealth for all, in other words, a socialist system, where free market rules cannot starve billions while filling the pockets of a few.

Connecting such a movement globally was beyond even the wildest dreams of most visionaries, but has proven to be within reach in 2011.

*And your Occupy movement has played a leading role in igniting it. ...We stand behind you and carry on our continuous resistance to the rule of the 1% in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and the entire world.' **

**(<http://www.equalityiniraq.com/home>).*

Women's Learning Partnership

The Arab Spring Feminist Style

The Arab Spring has taken the global imagination.

The Arab Spring is about the democratic uprisings in the Arab world that have ignited fires of resistance and agitation for change. Where they have taken place, the Arab Spring has brought about political changes in post-revolution countries (Tunisia and Egypt), in countries currently undergoing popular, and often armed revolts (Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, and Libya) and in countries where some type of reform movement is taking place (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and to a lesser extent, Lebanon).

But how did the use of social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook reach youth and in particular women in the MENA region? How did young people and women find the tools and spaces to speak about democracy and women's rights, in cultures that barely recognize their social and political rights? How did they find the courage to go onto the streets in defiance of autocratic and repressive regimes?

The role of MDG3 Funded Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) is part of the answer. WLP is a network of 18 partners working in Muslim majority countries. It is dedicated to women's leadership with its overall goal being to empower women to transform their families, communities, and societies and to improve the effectiveness of feminist movements.

Feminism is too often misunderstood as a western concept that imposes western values of individualism that leads to family and social breakdown as women defy traditional roles of wife and mother. The reality is that each region has evolved its own type of feminism reflecting and responding to the reality of the societies. Fears of feminism continue to be hard to understand when it is now evident that when women engage in economic and social public life, their lives and that of their families and communities improve considerably. In the MENA region, there continues to be deep prejudices against women's full rights to citizenship that makes the promise of the Arab Spring even more heartening.

With the support of the MDG3 Fund, WLP provided viable knowledge and learning frameworks for girls and women in the MENA region. WLP workshops provided the technical knowledge and practical skills for girls and women to participate in the region's emerging dialogue about rights, development, and peace. By building the capacity

of women and girls to access online 'public' spaces, WLP enables them participate in mobilisation and advocacy and to diminish the marginalization and isolation of women whose mobility is restricted.

As the Arab Spring showed to the whole world, ICTs can be harnessed for collective mobilization and advocacy. WLP technology trainer's manual called *Making IT Our Own: Information & Communication Technology Training of Trainers Manual* was a catalyzing tool for gender justice and human rights advocacy.

The dynamic work of WLP illustrates how building women's leadership and knowledge and skills from the ground and through ICTs can build up feminist campaigns that can lead to real and needed political and social change.

In the MENA region, WLP have reached out to youth and young women giving them hands on skills using new communication technologies. The first Annual Youth Tech Fest in 2009 in Amman brought together 110 young men and women from all over Jordan to use ICTs for social change. The nine-woman technology training team coached the young adults in creating their own engines of social change - YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, website creation and blogging. The Tech Festival participants addressed social issues such as eliminating violence against women, increasing youth volunteering, stopping drug and child abuse, fighting sexual harassment, eradicating early marriages, preventing traffic accidents, and ending domestic violence. A second Tech Fest with the Sisterhood is Global Institute in Jordan brought together 175 young adults to use new media outlets to educate themselves and others on the upcoming elections, focusing on women's political participation.

WLP led campaigns for women's leadership and rights in MENA equally illustrate just why the Arab Spring could happen. Leading to Choices is at the heart of regional campaigns for women to form egalitarian, democratic, and pluralistic societies based on collaborative decision-making, coalition-building, and gender equality. In the MENA region (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman) the manual in Shamy Arabic catalyzed a campaign led by local

women against discriminatory laws denying women equal nationality rights. In many countries in the region women do not enjoy a direct relationship with the state, but must access their citizenship rights through mediation of a male family member, such as a father or a husband. The campaign advocates for women to participate fully in public life and to claim all rights to which they are entitled as equal members of their societies.

In villages such as Ta'alabaya in Lebanon, WLP workshops with the local Najdeh Association helped build women's skills to struggle for their citizenship and rights as Lebanese women married to Palestinian men. Such local campaigns for legal reform and recognition of women as equal citizens in all areas of life are strengthened by networking throughout the region. Similar Leading to Choices workshops were held in Beirut, Sayda, Tyre, and Bekaa in 2010.

Claiming Equal Citizenship Campaign is part and parcel of the Arab Spring. In June 2011 in Beirut feminist organisations from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, and Lebanon as part of the Campaign reviewed the possibilities of the Arab Spring.

As a result of skills training by organisations like WLP throughout the Arab Spring women have been equal, and in some cases leading, participants in the revolutions. The emergence of young women's leadership in the region, as well as the effectiveness of social media in helping to mobilize young activists has been noted by many.

But as the Beirut meeting noted with alarm, there is also the occurrence of retaliatory - and often violent - acts against women, including numerous incidents of rape and sexual harassment, reports of virginity tests (performed by the armed forces in Egypt), and a call by fundamentalist groups for women to return home and leave the public spaces for men.

Current and upcoming constitutional reforms present a golden opportunity for women's advocacy for upholding women's rights and entitlements as well as equality and social justice. The dynamic work of WLP illustrates how building women's leadership and knowledge and skills from the ground and through ICTs can build up feminist campaigns that can lead to real and needed political and social change. In the wake of the Arab Spring feminist solidarity in the region helped by WLP is more imperative than ever.

www.learningpartnership.org

Building Feminist Democracy in Mesoamerica

Just Associates (JASS)

Latin America is a region where the global community is increasingly looking for leadership in the search for alternatives to neoliberal capitalism.

The term *buen vivir* 'good living' is at the heart of efforts in the region to create more democratic and just development that rejects the violence of modern economic and military development. The region has suffered a violent, racist and sexist past in the name of modernity. But now, there is the experience of Ecuador and Bolivia where governments are trying to balance indigenous ways of living and nature with local and global notions of economic progress. Throughout the region governments are learning, painfully at times, that it is crucial to work not just with powerful international forces but also with their own civil society, listening to the voices of the poor men and women.

In this struggle for democracy and justice it is vital that women find their voice and place to defend their political space, territory and also their bodies. Just Associates (JASS) works globally to strengthen women's voice, visibility and collective organising power throughout the world. They support women taking leadership to fight for their rights whether it is women forging economic democracy or women putting an end to gender-based violence and political repression.

The work of JASS acknowledges that it is vital to build cross-country alliances, document and make known the gendered nature of violations faced by women's rights defenders. They ensure that women's voices are heard so that human rights and development institutions and governments are able to respond more appropriately to the demands of women on the margins.

The MDG3 Fund supports JASS to strengthen the participation of women in three regions and 24 countries. In Mesoamerica (in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama), JASS has worked with strategic alliances to create safe spaces for women to deepen collective analysis, to build solidarity, and to help end violence and to



Mexican Women Say "We Are Not Spoils Of War" Credit: Daniela Pastrana/IPS

fight for their collective rights.

JASS has adopted a mix of face-to-face support in capacity building programmes and networking; solidarity outreach through immediate responses to emergency situations and longer term support: and consciousness raising through radio and on line social media. JASS has worked with old and new feminists in the region to build innovative strategic approaches to strengthen feminist strategizing.

The Observatorio/Women Crossing the Line is a unique feminist political organising and media strategy that works with Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE) to spotlight and reinforce women's transformative roles and local actions in struggles across Mesoamerica. This is enhanced by the newsletter and radio programme *La Petatera* that documents what is happening in the

In this struggle for democracy and justice it is vital that women find their voice and place to defend their political space, territory and also their bodies

region, tapping into the powerful tool of radio as well as social networking to ensure women's voices are heard and to link women across the region.

The face to face work of JASS in the region is carried out by the Sea Change Feminist Leadership schools grounded in feminist theory, and artistic expression. The schools build the capacity of young and old community women leaders and organisations to respond to the risks and dangers faced in the region. In continuing the work of building networks that ensure collective

Ending violence against women is a vital human rights and political strategy in the region

action in the region, the Feminist Transformation Watch (FTW) mobilizes women from Mesoamerica and beyond to become eye-witnesses and on-line champions to their efforts, lending their voices and credibility in defence of women crossing the line. FTW strengthens and publicizes women's social change efforts.

A critical focus in all of these activities is the fight to end femicide and violence against women at all levels. As the JASS website documents, women human rights defenders in Mesoamerica are facing many dangers and threats, whether they are promoting their work, civil and political, indigenous, sexual or reproductive rights. Ending violence against women is a vital human rights and political strategy in the region as threats against women are occurring with increasing

It is crucial to work not just with powerful international forces but also with their own civil society, listening to the voices of the poor men and women

and disturbing frequency in the region. In building a just and more democratic society bodily integrity and autonomy for women cannot be separated from other political and rights demands. Through its different strategic actions, JASS promotes connections among grassroots and local to global organisation that respond to women's immediate demands to be free from violence.

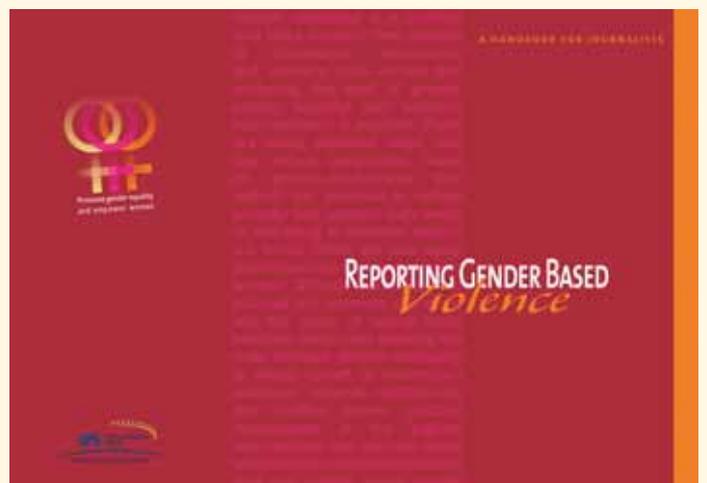


In Mexico, for example, 12 land rights activists were unjustly imprisoned for protesting government efforts to force them from their homes in order to build a new airport in 2006. Support from JASS and the Nobel Women's Initiative supported an advocacy campaign to free them after more than four years in prison.

The Mexican Supreme Court liberated the 'Atenco 12' in July 2010. The success of this effort affirms JASS' approach: commitment to stand with partners for the long-term, using a strategic combination of organizing on the ground and international solidarity and advocacy.

In 2010 JASS held workshops to support women human rights defenders in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico to build a cross movement coalition fighting for the rights of women defenders to defeat armed factions, the state as well as intimate-partner, family and community violence.

The workshops and activities gave young women leaders, poor urban and rural community women the confidence, information and skills to navigate the risky contexts they are living in and fight for justice and gender equality grounded in true democratic change.



Creating a Counter Culture to Violence Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)

Acid sprayed on two Afghan school girls on their way to school. A 15 year old Pakistani girl found dead, killed by her brother. A son kills his mother for a suspected affair in Uttar Pradesh.

These are just a few of the 'honour killings' reported by Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) in 2011. 'Violence is Not Our Culture' campaign coordinated by Women Living Under Muslim Laws seeks to put an end to violence perpetrated in the name of religion and culture in Muslim countries.

The battle is to break down the claim of conservative forces ownership over an 'authentic' interpretation of culture, tradition and/or religion that deny women's freedoms and facilitate harmful acts against women for alleged sexual and moral transgressions

With the support of the MDG3 Fund, WLUML strengthens women's individual and collective struggles for equality and their rights, in Muslim contexts where women's lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to be derived from Islam. The MDG3 Fund is supporting their work specifically in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and Sudan.

The project rejects the notion that violence is part of Muslim culture, religion, or traditions. The campaign reports and exposes Culturally Justified Violence Against Women (CJVAW) where it occurs in order to defeat the widespread mis-use of religion and culture against women. The campaign aims to end all forms of violence be it stoning, whipping/lashing, and 'honour' killings, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and acid attacks.

As well as providing advocacy and support WLUML courageously tackles the deeper

level of reclaiming and refining Muslim culture in order to enable women to repossess and reconstruct cultural resources including within 'religion' and 'tradition'. The campaign is in defiance of the cultural/religious discourse which denies women's rights. As well as running an active and informative website documenting cases of abuse and violence, the campaign is building skills of the women in the countries. From boxing training for young lesbians in Jakarta, Indonesia to providing information on shelters for women who are experiencing violence in the home.

Going to the root causes means recognizing that culture and religion is often central to women's individual and collective identities. But it is the misuse of culture and religion that exercises control over women and girls, their bodies, their sexuality, their choice of expression and love, denying them freedom. What WLUML fights against is the disturbing trend that State and non-state actors are increasingly using culture to 'justify' carrying out violence against women. The battle is to break down the claim of conservative forces ownership over an

Ending violence against women is a vital human rights and political strategy in the region

'authentic' interpretation of culture, tradition and/or religion that deny women's freedoms and facilitate harmful acts against women for alleged sexual and moral transgressions.

This requires exposing the gender based discrimination in deeply held patriarchal interpretations of traditions and norms and religious texts which present women's bodies and sexuality as the prerogative of male members of her family and community. These cultural beliefs lead to women's ostracisation, brutality and sadistic treatment by her family.

The Campaign sees its work as helping communities evolve towards more gender-equitable, rights-based value systems. It is a multifaceted and long term task.

The MDG3 Fund supports the work done through a network of sister campaigns in the countries. In these countries, WLUML works not only with gender advocates



Mourning at a funeral for violence victims Credit: Fahim Siddiqi/IPS



Children at the Kausar Darul Uloom near the University of Peshawar Credit: Ashfaq Yusufzai/IPS

Courageously tackles the deeper level of reclaiming and refining Muslim culture in order to enable women to repossess and reconstruct cultural resources including within 'religion' and 'tradition'

and women's rights organisations but also with local authorities and women's groups through bottom up participatory activities. The ability to respond and intervene at the local level is assisted through media campaigns and a system of rapid responses using international social networking and digital technologies.

At the highest level of authority, the campaign also works closely with the UN human rights system to foster solidarity at the international level. This is greatly helped by the recent appointment of Farida Shaheed, UN Independent Expert on Cultural Rights and founder of the Pakistan based women's rights organisation Shirkat Gah.

As she recently stated in support of WLUML's work: 'All harmful practices, regardless of provenance and justification, must be eliminated. All human rights are universal, indivisible and inter-related.

In strategizing for long-term women's empowerment the Campaign is creating a counter culture to the forces that are denying women's human rights. Through creative actions such as documentary film making, grassroots workshops, community radio campaigns, national lobbying, dialogues with policy makers and religious gatekeepers, petitioning officials, online networking and campaigning through the UN human rights arena, WLUML activities have provided important cross-context solidarity.

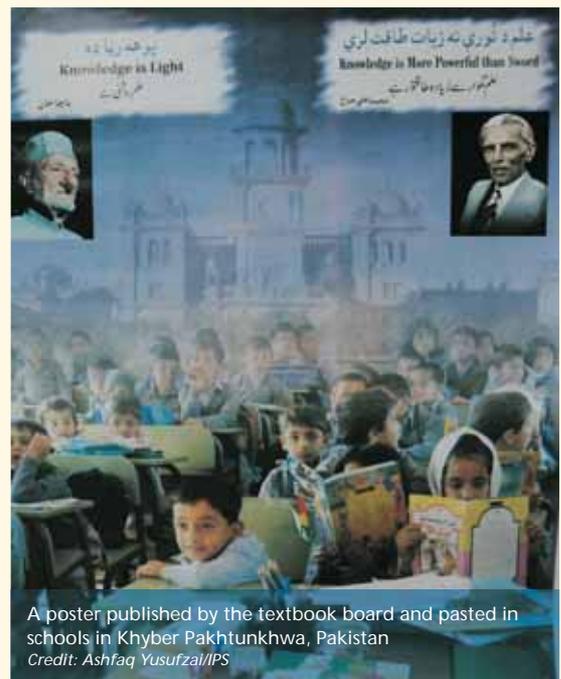
The Campaign provides a vital space for women from the local level to speak and act in areas which were for some women, too taboo even to discuss. Slowly results are emerging as women find their voices. There is evidence of some improvement, even if the project reports shows there continue to be many ups and downs with the coming and going of different regimes. The recent UN Report on Progress of the World's Women: In the Pursuit of Justice 2010, for example now records the achievements of women's rights movements in Muslim countries.

As one project partner stated the

work of WLUML in fighting VAW is not only about legal and policy change but also about ways to create new forms of citizenship: 'the work itself of pushing for policy (or other change) is itself constitutive of citizenship- and rights-construction'.

It is this sense of breaking new barriers, creating safe spaces and reshaping culture itself that makes the Campaign such an important and inspiring project.

www.wluml.org/



A poster published by the textbook board and pasted in schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Credit: Ashfaq Yusufzai/IPS

Using Law for Rural Women's Empowerment in West Africa

WILD AF-AO

Agriculture is the key to women's livelihoods in rural West Africa and to the survival of the national economies. But despite women's crucial work on the farms, women's rights to land ownership, control and access to land continues to be neglected.

The importance of African women farmers has been long recognised in international development since the famous study by Ester Boserup in 1970 and more recently in major reports such 2010-2011 UN State of Food and Agriculture Report on 'Women and Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development'. Rural women will be the subject of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2012. Numerous protocols and international agreements including The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and The African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa ("Women's Protocol"), underscore the significance of rural women.

But how to translate these rights and legal entitlements into reality for many rural women who do not know about these rights, how to claim their rights nor how to seek redress over unfair treatment?

There are many impediments due to patriarchal customs and laws that mean that poor women are left vulnerable.

Widows whose husbands die intestate and wives from polygamous unions who are not recognised as legally married are most vulnerable. These women are easily exploited and lose access to land they work and depend on for survival. Uneducated rural women in West Africa are often not well informed about their legal rights nor have the business acumen about how to purchase or lease land using processes that involve complex economic and social negotiations, often dominated by men. Studies in the region reveal that women mostly enter into oral land transactions and fail to register their land. The majority of women do not inherit land but gain access through marriage. The study also revealed that violence against women by in-laws often prevented women from taking up their rights.

Women in Development and Law (WILD AF-AO) in West Africa reaches out to women

farmers to promote the access of women to full ownership of land and to work on the land in safe and secure conditions. WILD AF-AO recognizes that this requires women being educated on their rights including participating in decision-making within the communities and in farmer organisations. It also means supporting women's rights in the settlement of family disputes and community of inheritance claims and tackling violence against women in rural areas.

The MDG3 Fund has provided WILD AF-AO with the funds to support women members of farmers' organisations and rural women in 5 West African countries to know and claim their rights. Through the support of the Fund WILD AF-AO is training 250 women in farmers' organisations on how to change gender inequalities experienced by rural women in West Africa particularly around land inheritance and access to resources and economic opportunities and access to power and decision-making.

WILD AF-AO is presently working with farmers' organisations in **Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo**. In these countries, WILD AF-AO trains paralegals to work with the women farmers to understand the law to help them in their homes, communities and economic activities. They also support women to combat violence against rural women involving the community, including men in the fight to end violence.

Apart from training, education, sensitization and legal advice, WILD AF-AO also supports advocacy activities at community and national levels for rural women to lobby for legal changes to ensure their access to inheritance, and to support women's agricultural and commercial activities.

At the core of WILD AF-AO activities is to ensure awareness by rural women of their rights and their actions to make them known and ensure their application in their families, communities and in their professional lives. It also takes up cases of violence and family disputes, namely those related to inheritance issues and tries to encourage local authorities to allocate plots of land to be allocated to rural women with full ownership. With the aim to ensure that there is a working legal framework to promote gender equal access to land WILD AF-AO undertakes legal education to support the ratification and implementation of the Protocol to the African

Charter on Human and Peoples Rights relating to women's rights in African countries.

For example in Benin, a paralegal trained by WILD AF was able to support a woman who was beaten by her husband after a dispute with her co-wife. She underwent three weeks hospitalisation and was forced by relatives to return back to the maize farm that she cultivated with her husband and co-wife. The paralegal helped the woman to report to the police even though she feared being punished further. The paralegal worked with both the husband and wife in order to convince the husband to sign an agreement in front of the police to not beat his wife again.

Another example of WILD AF-AO's work is in Yotocopé in Togo. A paralegal helped a widow to recover farmland confiscated by her in-laws. The widow had been sent off the land she had worked with her husband. With assistance of the paralegal she appealed to the village chief who intervened on her behalf and she was given back her rights to work the land after three years of deprivation.

The work that WILD AF-AO is doing is complex and painstaking, it requires not only understanding the law but also how to ensure conditions change so that a woman gains her rights and maintains her respect in the community. Often these changes are not so much economic but social. These examples show how important it is to work with women over time to assert their rights to land, while fully aware of the difficulties a rural woman has to overcome if she is to claim her full rights to land that provides for her livelihood, safety and sustainable future.

www.wildaf-ao.org

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