



Women's Rights and Other Social Movements: Situating Ourselves in History

Overview: The activity leads a group through the development of a timeline that reflects an overall history and our place in it and focuses a discussion on the impact on our lives and issues of concern. The activity is useful for many things. It can track the interconnections between economic, political, social and cultural trends and it also brings to life the story of movement building within that context.

Purpose:

- Understand history of key events, movements and trends affecting women's rights struggles and how we have been influenced by them over time.
- Place ourselves within the current moment, gaining a sense of where some of the challenges and opportunities we face are coming from.
- Demystify and make concrete how change happens over time, illustrating the dynamics of power, resistance, co-optation, backlash.
- Bring to light how certain ideologies and trends have emerged and morphed over time, (both positive and negative) as a product of struggles for power, and how those have impacted women in our different contexts.

Time: 2+ hours

Credit: Adapted by Valerie Miller from multiple JASS versions

Materials:

- Colored paper/stickers
- Power point or handout with instructions and key questions
- Tape, markers
- JASS Making Change Happen 3
- Timeline chart
- Handouts: Timeline Chart (note: only goes to year 2000)



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Facilitator Note: The activity is useful for many things. It can track the interconnections between economic, political, social and cultural trends, tracing for example economic trends from social welfare through structural adjustment, neoliberalism and austerity; political trends from post-colonial to dictatorships, revolutions through the fall of the Berlin wall and the “democratization” trend through the dismantling of the state, militarization and the war on terror; fundamentalisms as a reaction to economic trends and earlier gains. It also seeks to bring to life the story of movement building – of women’s organizing and feminist and social movement contributions, including in relation to global trends.

Because of the amount of information, we propose it done in four different rounds. We have had success by layering this over 4-5 days starting with personal experiences and moving to broader historic and contextual forces. It helps connect personal and political events to the development and roles of social movements over time.

Process:

- Prepare basic timeline prior to session (See below for instructions), placing 10 – 20 critical moments on it that the group will add to in the process.

Facilitator Notes: Construct a physical timeline on one wall; it should cover the whole wall from reachable ceiling to floor with 6 bands down (depending on number of countries you are including) and 6 decades/blocks across: Before 1960s; 1960s, 1970s; 1980s; 1990s; 2000 – 2012. There is a timeline and fact sheet attached to help.

Place major historical moments and turning points on the timeline - key events in:

- 1) Feminism and women’s rights struggles
- 2) Other social movements (e.g. organizing, uprising and key events);
- 3) Major wars and militarized conflicts;
- 4) UN conferences and conventions;
- 5) Economic, social and development trends;
- 6) Also include dates for key technological breakthroughs like the internet, mobile phone, Facebook, etc.

You can add or change categories as fits your context.

See timeline chart for ideas – color code events –e.g. purple for women’s rights struggles and feminism, orange for global events and movements– see color coded timeline chart)

- Introduce overall exercise, explaining that it consists of four different rounds, each one adding more information to the timeline and giving us a more complete picture of how events over time have affected our lives and struggles today.



ROUND ONE: Overview and personal moment

- *One entry point:* Ask people to think about an important personal turning point in their lives that led them to become an activist; write it on particular color or shaped card and place it on blank timeline.
- Affirm the experiences, then explain: we will look at some of the other trends and events that influenced that moment both past and present. Let's look now at what has happened to help shape us and women's struggles? As we place events on the timeline, think about how these may have shaped you, your organizations, and others in your country --- We will come back and ask ourselves how these have influenced us.
- Review select key moments already on timeline re women's rights and social movement struggles, key international events.
- Pose questions to group:
 - What ideas come to mind as you look at this long history of struggle?
 - Anything surprises you? Any one thing you think needs to be added?
 - If time: What do you see as some key forces that have affected our struggles over time – both positively and negatively?
- Discuss in plenary.
- Synthesize key points.
- *An alternative entry point after basic timeline is constructed:* Where are you in this overall history? What particular moment or event helped lead you to become an activist and care about women's rights? National or international?
 - Write down on bright colored or heart shaped piece of paper:
 - Your name and an approximate date of a major turning point in your life or an event that inspired your activism.
 - Place on timeline and briefly explain its significance.
- How do you see these wider events and movements on the timeline affecting this moment in your life? (*Note: Depending on time, you could eliminate this question.*)
- Facilitator synthesizes key points, affirming people's stories of change.

ROUND TWO: Country perspectives

- What historical events or trends are important to include that have affected women and other marginalized groups in your country, either positively or negatively?



- Groups form at tables according to country; provided colored cards/stickers that are color-coded for each country.
- Select a group facilitator who helps group keep to time and ensures even participation;
 - Discuss and name 4 pivotal events or trends– could be national or beyond -- that have affected women’s movements and struggles for rights in your country either pro or con. (Any group that is not country-based can identify global events.)
 - Analyze: How have these affected women’s movements and struggles and how have they interacted with other global forces?
 - For each moment/event/movement, use a separate sticky.
- Place on timeline in designated band and appropriate decade and report back briefly.
- Discuss questions in plenary.
- Synthesize.

ROUND THREE: State and economic events/trends and regional women’s movements

- Places stickers on timeline and reviews significance.
- Discussion questions: Buzz groups of 2.
 - What surprised you?
 - How do you see global economic and political forces influencing women’s movements and struggles over the last 30 years?
 - What have regional women’s movements and feminism meant to you and your work?
- Discuss in plenary.

ROUND FOUR: Situating ourselves in History

This session aims to analyse and draw key insights about key concepts critical for the whole workshop, including power, feminism(s), movements, human rights, neoliberalism, globalization, democracy and NGO-ization from the timeline [depending on when this round is introduced, you will be able to refer back to and deepen the power analysis – power over, power to, with, within].

- **In buzz groups of 3.**
 - In looking at this sweep of history, what can you say about power and change?
 - How have powerful interests and institutions used power to protect their interests? What key shifts in the context have they generated that affect our struggles for rights and possibilities for real change?
 - How have we created change and how have we used different kinds of power to do this?
 - What does all this say to us about how change happens?
- **In plenary:**
 - Groups present and discuss.



- Final wrap-up: Facilitator should highlight the following:
 - Power/dynamics of power, the push and pull; co-optation and backlash; and that change comes from different directions, not just violence or control; See Appendix 4; JASS Making Change Happen 3, page 4.
 - Collective power and movements have made a difference and backlash/push back comes in different forms but are as a result of something shifting, or being felt. Specific highlights about feminism and the changing understanding of what it means in theory and practice over time;
 - How the timeline explains the economic situation and our sense of deepening poverty and insecurity;
 - Shrinking and shifting capacity of the state and rise of non-state actors change how we think about our organizing and movement-building.



Added Discussion Questions from a Feminist Perspective

Developed by the JASS Southern Africa for a Feminist Movement Builders' School

These questions can be useful for those who have already done thinking about feminism. They were used with groups operating with specific feminist analysis. If appropriate, you may want to adapt them to timeline activity.

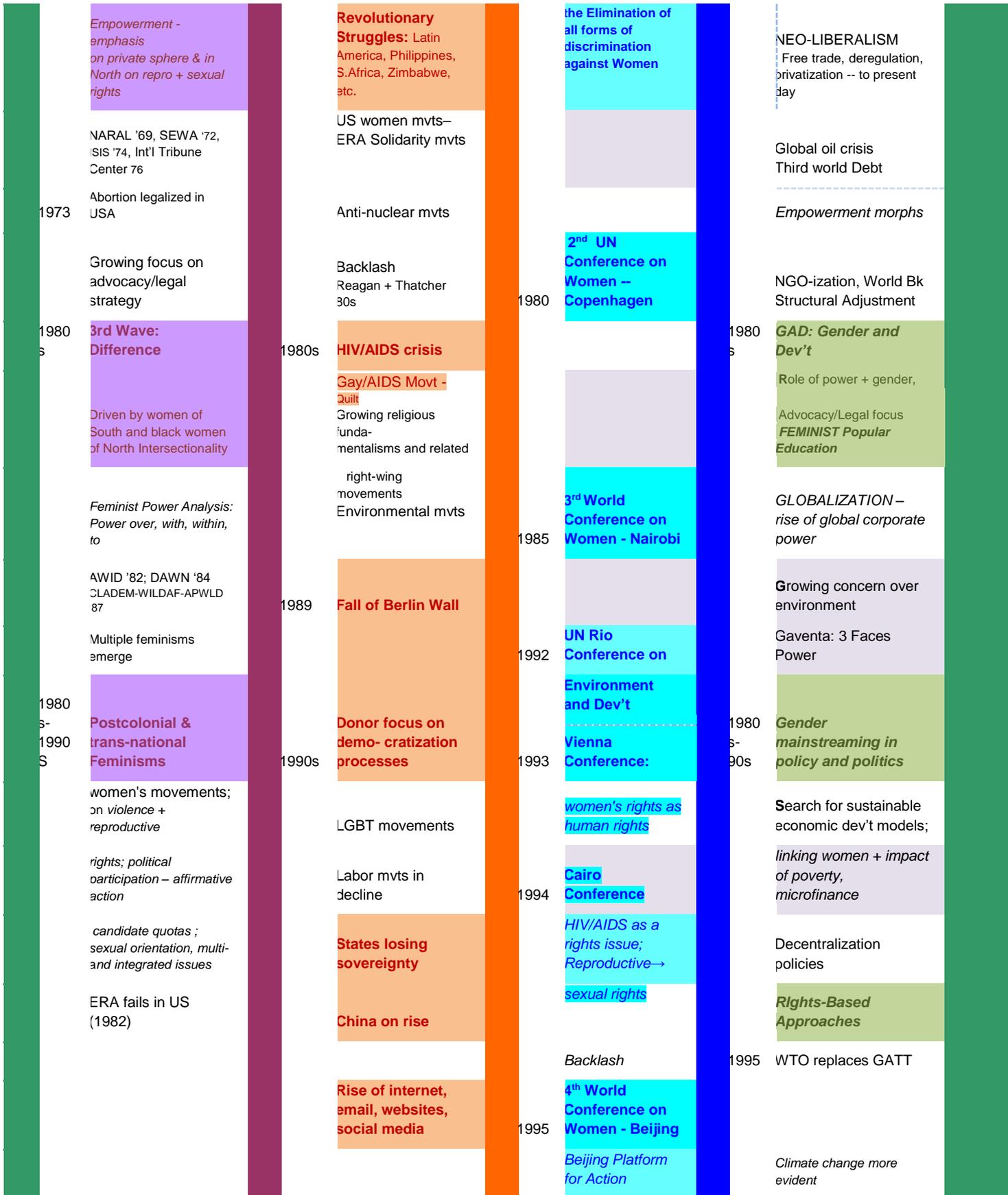
1. The personal turning point: Why are we feminists? Why do we even actively do feminist work? Where/when/why and how did our activism begin as individuals? What does it mean to politically name ourselves as feminists?
2. Country-specific profiles: What is the shape of feminism in the different countries? What has changed and when? What policies and laws are in place regarding women and other marginalised groups? What do those policies and laws mean for the future of feminism and women's rights?
3. The state and the global economic context: How have global economic politics shaped feminism? What is the relationship between economics and women's struggles for rights and equality?
4. Women's movements, feminist movements and women's rights: How have events in the First World informed or changed the shape of feminism in other contexts? What is the role of global power relations in the subjugation and/or oppression of women across the world?
5. The regional story: What are some of the key moments in feminism in our region and what do those moments mean to us as feminists in the continent?

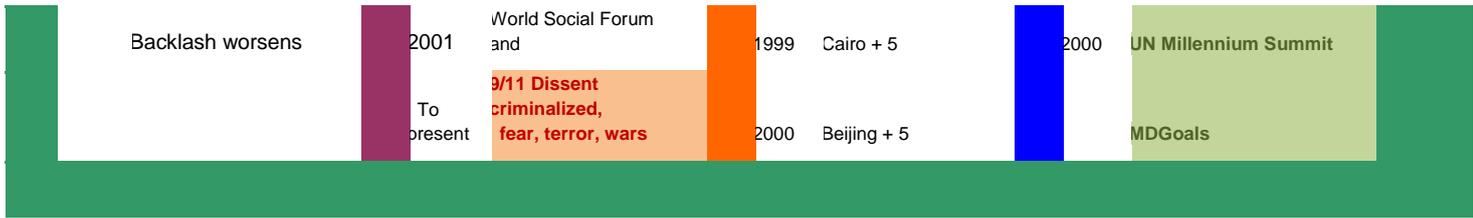


INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A ONE CENTURY + TIMELINE

Compiled by JASS – Just Associates

Women's Rights Struggles/Feminism Thinking and Practice	International Events and Movements	Human Rights – Conventions, Declarations, and Conferences	NGOs, Economic & Development Trends Frameworks re Women
<p>Pre-1900s</p> <p>Abolitionists agst slavery/ women's oppression UK US. Women in resistance mvt's across globe -- India, Peru, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, etc.</p>	<p>1500s Colonialism up to 1900s</p> <p>1760s Industrial revolution</p> <p>1780s French Revolution</p> <p>1800s Rise of Labor & Anti-slavery movements</p>	<p>1789 Magna Carta (1215)</p> <p>French Rights of Man/Citizen</p> <p>1791 <i>Declaration of Rights of Women</i> author, Olympia de Gouges beheaded</p> <p>1793</p>	<p>Late Roman women protest (125 BC)</p> <p>1700- Decline of Feudalism</p> <p>1800 Rise of Capitalism</p> <p>Marxist critique</p>
<p>1900s</p> <p>1st Wave: Suffrage</p> <p><i>Focus on right to vote, education, emphasis on public sphere, labor, peace, First US birth control clinic</i></p>	<p>Resistance to colonialism</p> <p>1910 Mexican Revolution</p> <p>1914 World War I</p> <p>1917 Russian Revolution</p> <p>1927- Chinese Revolution</p>	<p>WWI Peace Conference</p> <p>League of Nations + ILO</p> <p>1919</p>	<p>Rise of communism and socialism as alternatives to capitalism</p>
<p>To 1940s</p> <p>ERA proposed in US</p> <p>WWI and WWII, women join formal labor force, lose jobs at war's end</p>	<p>1929-40s Market collapse: depression; World War II</p> <p>COLD WAR, Atom bomb</p> <p>1940s-90s Anti-communism</p>	<p>United Nations founded</p> <p>1945 CSW formed</p> <p>1946</p> <p>UN Declaration of Human Rights</p> <p>1948</p>	<p>1940 World Bank/IMF.... Marshal Plan for rebuilding Europe</p> <p>1947 GATT formed to regulate international trade/tariffs</p>
<p>1950s -60s</p> <p>The birth control pill developed/adopted</p> <p>Second Sex <u>Feminine Mystique</u></p>	<p>1920s Anti-colonial and independence struggles -- new nations formed</p>	<p>UN Declaration of Human Rights</p> <p>1948</p>	<p>1950s Welfare/charity approach</p> <p>Welfare states – Europe Social contract</p>
<p>1960s - 70s</p> <p>Consciousness-raising groups leading to organizing of women's movements - NOW '66</p>	<p>1960s Social mvt's – Civil rights, women Theology of Liberation</p> <p>Vietnam war</p> <p>Peace movements</p>	<p>1st UN Conference on Women – Mexico City</p> <p>1975</p>	<p>Rise of consumerism; manufactured obsolescence</p> <p>1960 Freire – Popular Education</p>
<p>2nd Wave: All sisters</p> <p><i>Personal = political</i></p>	<p>1970s Post-colonialism</p> <p>Dictatorships –</p>	<p>UN DECADE of WOMEN</p> <p>CEDAW: Convention on</p> <p>1979</p>	<p>1970s WID: Women in Dev't</p> <p>1980s <i>Expand services</i></p>





KEY GLOBAL TRENDS SHAPING WOMEN'S RIGHTS*

This paper attempts to summarize some current worldwide trends. Please jot down a few ideas about a) what other trends or events –pro and con—since 2001 are also affecting women’s rights and activism and b) what opportunities or obstacles these might offer us going forward for making women’s rights real.

The following trends, while presented separately, interact to maintain women’s subordination and, in many instances, keep both men and women marginalized on the basis of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, etc.

- **Neo-liberal Economic Reform and Worldwide Financial Crisis:** For over three decades, a fixed set of economic reform measures have been implemented from New York to Nairobi. These Reaganomic-type reforms include privatization of essential services, reduction of labor and environmental standards, deregulation, ‘open’ markets and ‘free’ trade. The resulting increases in inequality, unemployment, land grabs, and the gap between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ have exacerbated conflict worldwide. The terrain of economic policy has shifted in terms of key actors and institutions, their power, and what is considered *acceptable* economic policy. As people struggle for greater equality and shared prosperity, they confront a mix of dominant forces: The World Trade Organization, multinational conglomerates, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

To ensure their economic rights, women must now “... engage with supra-national actors including these international financial institutions and private sector corporations whereas in the past, the primary sites of struggle for women’s movements were the household, the workplace, and the state.” (Kerr) The 2008 Wall Street driven financial crisis has further impoverished families worldwide and raised profound questions about the neoliberal model of economics. China’s policies pose additional questions about respect for women’s rights and the dangers of unchecked economic and political expansion.

- **The Shrinking Role and Capacity of National Governments:** These changes with their underlying contempt for government have implications for advocates of equality and justice. In many places, Ideological polarization and money in politics close off spaces for debate and compromise. Worldwide public budgets and delivery mechanisms for social

policy have been gutted, and with them, the possibilities for enforcing and protecting rights. The rollback of social protections means increased care and reproductive burdens on women. This has been seen clearly in HIV/AIDS struggles. Government strategies based on low wage growth are built on the exploitation of women's labor, further burdening them. Part of this trend, decentralization has in some instances been a blow to women's equality as authority is devolved to oppressive local elites. The inability of some governments to respond effectively to the global financial collapse is increasing cynicism and alienation. Since women have to work harder to survive, it is more difficult for them to engage in their communities and in any form of public life.

- **Fundamentalisms:** The growth of religious, cultural and ethnic fundamentalisms with the accompanying explosion of related organized mass-based groups has fueled a worldwide backlash against women's equality. Political religious movements are resulting in the loss of women's lives and in the denial or undermining of women's education, decision-making, ownership of resources, and mobility as well as the control of women's sexuality.

- **Conflict, Militarization and a Focus on Security as a Means for Control:** This trend has obvious implications for women's rights, freedoms and public budgets as do the realities of the 'military-industrial complex'.

Private sector actors and corporate interests are increasingly tied to military interventions as well as to fueling local rebel and armed factions. In many places, private armies are on the rise. Male-dominated, militaristic cultures utilize women in conflicts for power. This includes the reliance on women's labor to maintain fatherless families and rebuild war-torn nations. It can mean: the loss of public services and economic and social rights when resources are diverted, the exploitation of prostitutes around military bases, the abuse of women within the military, and the rape of women as a weapon of war. Women may also take on fighting roles that contribute to conflicts or may be active and leaders in peace movements and negotiations, although usually with a considerable lesser voice than male counterparts.

The growing influence of shadow forces, such as organized crime, drug cartels, and armed political opposition groups, have infiltrated and targeted governments, thus encouraging militarization, corruption and further violence. Often police cannot be relied on for protection; fear becomes the greatest obstacle to women's democratic participation. And in the post 9/11 world, the threat of terrorism, while real and dangerous, is used to justify repression, criminalize dissent and silence outspoken community leaders. Government-dominated media and the concentration of commercial media outlets limit alternative voices and perspectives, thus controlling debate and manipulating outcomes.

- **Hopeful trends** are also emerging that offer opportunities for women's rights advocates. For example, the evolving crisis of "the Washington Consensus" and 'Occupy Wall Street' movement have created opportunities to explore and build support for economic



alternatives. The increased linkages between organized labor, NGOs, feminists, and social movements are promising signs of louder voices and more leverage. Organizations like JASS (*Just Associates*) and AWID complement these efforts with their training, organizing and action initiatives to strengthen women's leadership and movement-building and protect activists.

The growing convergence between human rights, ecological and development agendas has created opportunities for stronger coalitions around economic, social, environmental and cultural rights. This convergence is becoming a key element of a new agenda for justice. Increasing awareness around climate change is further reinforcing this trend. In addition, many (non-gender focused) NGOs and social movements are placing more emphasis on gender equality in their agendas. Despite backlash, women's leadership and voices in the Arab Spring provided an opening for increasing awareness and new alliances. The group, *Women Living Under Muslim Law*, is one example. Finally, technologies such as the web and social media expand organizing and action; international efforts like *One Billion Rising* inspire and engage activists young and old.

*Lisa Veneklasen and Valerie Miller, Just Associates -- Drawn in part from the JASS Annual Report, 2010 and Joanna. Kerr "From 'opposing' to 'proposing': finding proactive global strategies for feminist futures" in *The Future of Women's Rights: Global Visions & Strategies*. Joanna Kerr, Ellen Sprenger, Alison Symington (eds.) New York: Zed Books, 2004. Also from Lisa VeneKlasen, "Old Lessons, Fresh Insights, New Strategies: Notes on Mapping Gender Equality and Economic Justice Strategies", background paper for AWID Gender, Justice & Globalization Strategy Meeting, 2004; this current paper has been edited by Valerie Miller for Osher at Dartmouth, 2015 and Olli at University of Arizona, 2016