

Building Momentum



LIKHAAN CENTER FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

In late 2019, Inter Pares gathered with counterparts in Manila, the Philippines to discuss the new cross-geographic program, *Building Momentum for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Across Borders

Likhaan Center for Women's Health. La Colectiva Feminista. Nijera Kori. Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD). These four organizations are from four different countries, each with its own language and history, unique culture, and particular social and religious traditions. But within diverse contexts they are all struggling for social justice and women's rights.

Drawing on years of collaboration with these organizations, Inter Pares successfully

applied to the Canadian government to fund our new *Building Momentum for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* program. Leveraging Global Affairs Canada support allows these organizations to expand their programming with significant additional resources over four and a half years.

What brings these seemingly disparate organizations together? All are based in socially and religiously conservative countries that rob women and girls of their full

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WHAT'S INSIDE

REPRESENTATIVES
FROM LIKHAAN,
LA COLECTIVA
FEMINISTA, NIJERA
KORI AND SORD
REFLECT ON *BUILDING
MOMENTUM*

Likhaan Center for Women's Health



Dr. Junice Melgar
Director, Likhaan Center for Women's Health

RITAMORRIS

“We are a group of strong feminist organizations. This project allows us to concretize how we apply our feminist principles to development. We need to spread this as an example to others so that this way of doing things becomes the norm.”

Despite having one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Asia, adolescents in the Philippines receive virtually no sex education and are denied access to contraception. Through *Building Momentum*, Likhaan Center for Women's Health will provide both, as well as carry out advocacy at the local and national level on policies to support sexual and reproductive health. Since 1995, Likhaan has provided reproductive health services in the slum areas of Metro Manila and in Eastern Samar. Their non-profit clinics offer free services and carry out extensive outreach and education through a network of community health workers and volunteers.

La Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local



Alina Menjivar
Regional Coordinator, La Colectiva Feminista

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“Our hope is that this new program will prevent violence against women, especially sexual violence. This is part of a larger struggle in El Salvador – we must reduce the inequalities between women and men, and ensure that women are safe, healthy, and that their rights are respected.”

In 2018 in El Salvador, there were 383 femicides and over 4,000 reported cases of gender violence. In *Building Momentum*, La Colectiva Feminista will strengthen spaces where police officers, health workers, government representatives and women's groups come together to address violence against women and promote women's rights. La Colectiva Feminista is a grassroots feminist organization founded in 2004 to defend women's rights and address deep gender inequalities in the country. The organization uses education as a tool to create greater physical autonomy for women, and in turn, establish women's complete political and economic autonomy in El Salvador.

Nijera Kori



Khushi Kabir
Coordinator, Nijera Kori

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“Having the chance to meet and learn from these other feminist organizations has helped us to reflect on our own programs and see the common elements in the struggle we face as four different organizations working in such different contexts.”

In Bangladesh, where more than half of women suffered physical violence from intimate partners in the last year, *Building Momentum* will strengthen Nijera Kori's efforts to address violence against women. Nijera Kori will assist women and men in holding local authorities accountable for reproductive health services for women, and making community justice systems fairer in cases of violence against women. Through cultural activities, they will raise awareness of gender issues amongst adolescents. Since 1980, Nijera Kori has accompanied marginalized people in rural Bangladesh, assisting women and men in learning about their rights and how to mobilize to exercise and defend them.

Sudanese Organization for Research and Development



Ilham Ibrahim
Executive Director, SORD

RITA MORBIA

"Child marriage is one of the biggest challenges in Sudan related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. We have been advocating against child marriage for years. Now, we have a big opportunity to adopt an alternative law related to child marriage."

For over 30 years, Sudan was ruled by an autocratic government that legally enshrined social and religion-based discrimination against women and girls. For example, women have few rights within marriage and girls can be married as young as ten years of age. Through *Building Momentum*, the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD) will take advantage of opportunities with the new transitional government to advocate for new laws and for broader reforms to include sexual and reproductive health and rights. SORD will also provide legal representation and psychosocial accompaniment for women who have experienced violence and discrimination.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Across Borders

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potential. They all recognize patriarchy as the root cause of the barriers that their work addresses. Each organization works directly with the grassroots while also doing policy advocacy to catalyze systemic change. All identify staunchly as feminist and are key actors in their own domestic women's rights movements.

The work of each organization within *Building Momentum* is designed to defend the physical autonomy of women and particularly adolescent girls; to give them choices regarding their health and security; to help them realize their rights and fulfill their aspirations.



Counterparts collaborated together to develop a plan for *Building Momentum*.

La Colectiva Feminista, in El Salvador, has a special focus on reproductive rights in a country that jails women who have had illegal, unsafe abortions, or even miscarriages that are wrongly labelled as abortions. They also confront the broader issues of violence against women. Nijera Kori, in Bangladesh, accompanies marginalized rural women and men as they organize, learn their rights and mobilize to defend them. They also

address issues of child marriage and dowry, women's access to health services, and domestic violence. Likhaan, in the Philippines, addresses the high adolescent pregnancy

Each of these incredible organizations has a long relationship with Inter Pares, sometimes more than 30 years. We have a bond based on mutual trust, accountability, and shared values.

rate – a leading cause of maternal mortality – through education and reproductive health services for adolescents. Finally, SORD, in Sudan, works to change legally enshrined discrimination that promotes a culture of violence against women and girls and that criminalizes basic rights, such as walking unaccompanied in public.

Each of these incredible organizations has a long relationship with Inter Pares, sometimes more than 30 years. We have a bond based on mutual trust, accountability, and shared values. When we came together from around the world to plan *Building Momentum*, though some of the groups hadn't met each other before, there was an immediate connection. There was warmth and laughter. There was vibrant discussion and respectful disagreement. There were conversations about feminism, solidarity and how we could learn from one another to make individual programs better. We shared ideas and began to build and strengthen our relationships with each other, and we looked to a future where women and girls are full and equal members of society. 

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequalities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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