

bulletin

Advancing bodily autonomy

In 2025, we celebrate 50 years of Inter Pares and many *Bulletin* editions—decades of stories and analysis about our work with counterparts to promote social justice. We are deeply grateful to you for reading and sharing these stories.

In this *Bulletin*, discover how our new photo exhibit showcases the strength of activists confronting deeply entrenched barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Revisit pivotal moments in the movement for bodily autonomy. Explore how we strengthen the existing work of counterparts to promote SRHR. Together, we are building a world where everyone has control over their bodies and futures.



A youth activist covers her face during the Women's March on March 8th, 2023 in San Salvador, El Salvador. | Photo: Jessica Xiomara Orellana Ventura

daughters, mothers, grandmothers and other sexual outlaws

Last Fall, Inter Pares launched [daughters, mothers, grandmothers and other sexual outlaws](#), a photo exhibition in collaboration with Gallery 101 in Ottawa. The exhibit is co-curated with counterparts Nijera Kori in Bangladesh, La Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local in El Salvador and Likhaan Center for Women's Health in the Philippines. >>>



The exhibit features this photo of Maya Rani (left) and her mother-in-law (right) in Dinajpur, Bangladesh. With training from Nijera Kori, Maya advocates against child marriage and sexual harassment, sharing these values with her children and mother-in-law to inspire change across generations. | Photo: Taslima Akhter

◀◀◀ The exhibit documents sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) activism in contexts that are hostile towards bodily autonomy for girls, women and gender-diverse people.

It features the talent of local photographers, showcasing the strength of activists confronting deeply entrenched barriers to sexual health and rights. The photographs spark a conversation on how intergenerational knowledge flows from many directions—older generations are challenged, changed and informed by younger ones and vice versa. From young girls challenging child marriage to women asserting their rights to contraception and legal, safe abortion, the exhibit celebrates generations working together.

Art reaches people in ways traditional advocacy can't. We recently sat with counterparts to learn how art can facilitate conversations that are often silenced.

"A picture says more than a thousand words," said Wendy Barrera Rivas, an activist working with La Colectiva in El Salvador. "Through feminist journalism, we show what we Salvadoran women are living and we aspire for individual freedom."

Art reaches people in ways traditional advocacy can't.

Youth cycle to raise awareness about the dangers of child marriage and sexual harassment in Bangladesh. | Photo: Taslima Akhter

Art can also break through silences around sexuality. "Most adolescents are hesitant to talk about these issues because they're seen as taboo," shared Sharaban Tohura, who works with our counterpart Nijera Kori in Bangladesh. "Using creative outlets like songs, plays, or photos helps us talk about SRHR with young people." Creativity helps young people understand SRHR and share it with their peers, building solidarity through collective action.

daughters, mothers, grandmothers and other sexual outlaws is a testament to the universality of the struggle for sexual and reproductive health and rights across geographic and cultural differences. When the exhibit launched, Inter Pares Latin America Program Manager Nathalia Santos Ocasio stated, "This exhibit deepens our understanding of what SRHR activism looks like around the world. It's a call to action for us all."

Although the exhibit in Ottawa has concluded, the photos and their stories are available online and will be travelling to select cities across Canada in the coming months. ● ● ● ●



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Bodily autonomy at the heart of reproductive health and justice



Celebrating 50 years of social justice activism

Morningstar Mercredi (left) and Victoria Saccsara (right). | Photo: Larry Wong/Edmonton Journal and Bill Fairbairn/Inter Pares

At Inter Pares, we accompany and support global struggles for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Over the past 50 years, our SRHR activism has taken many forms but underlying it all is the struggle for bodily autonomy. Here's a glimpse of what it has meant to build a world where every person can exercise control over their own bodies.

● Preventing unsafe contraceptives from harming women

In the 1980s, multinational corporations and northern aid programs, including Canada's¹,

promoted contraceptives to poor women in Bangladesh that had been taken off the market domestically. Inter Pares' overseas counterparts were actively campaigning against this injustice. Following their lead, we joined forces with nearly a dozen Canadian allies and advocated successfully to CIDA (now Global Affairs Canada) to stop sending drugs deemed unsafe for women in the North to women in the South. We advocated for bodily autonomy, just as our counterparts were doing, feeding each other's analysis, campaigns and activism.

● Connecting survivors of forced sterilization

In 2019, Inter Pares supported our counterpart SISAY to bring Victoria Saccsara, a victim-survivor of forced sterilization from Peru to a human rights forum in Ecuador. There, Victoria heard about other experiences, including those of Morningstar Mercredi, an Indigenous woman from Canada. Their connection sparked a strong bond of solidarity to demand justice for all survivors. In 2022, Morningstar released [Sacred Bundles Unborn](#), a book about the ongoing global practice of forced sterilization of Indigenous women, which included an essay by Victoria.

Victoria reflected, "Being organized as victims of forced sterilizations and the solidarity and support of human rights institutions as allies gives us strength and makes us see that we are not alone."

● Expanding SRHR work in Bangladesh, El Salvador, the Philippines and Sudan

Inter Pares has accompanied counterparts for decades to implement their own SRHR programming. Between 2019 and 2024, we supported long-term counterparts, Nijera Kori (Bangladesh), Colectiva Feminista (El Salvador), Likhaan Center for Women's Health (Philippines) and the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development, to scale up their own SRHR work, thanks to our successful fundraising from the Canadian government. These efforts focused on defending the bodily autonomy of women, especially adolescent girls. ● ● ● ●

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at interpares.ca/50years

We advocated for bodily autonomy, just as our counterparts were doing.



Inter Pares counterpart La Colectiva Feminista and allies brought women together during an IACHR hearing on Beatriz's case in El Salvador in March 2023. For decades, La Colectiva Feminista has advocated for the decriminalization of, and access to, abortion. This work was scaled up through increased funding from Global Affairs Canada. | Photo: Jessica Xiomara Orellana Ventura.



Courtesy of Morningstar Mercredi

¹ [Does it Work? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares](#). Inter Pares, 2011. p 36.

Sustaining SRHR activism for the long term

“[W]hen we come together—sharing knowledge, strategies and support—we build a movement that can’t be ignored,” reflected Sharaban Tohura of Nijera Kori. Last fall, Sharaban travelled across eastern Canada alongside Estephanie Brigatay and Wendy Barreras Rivas, representatives from two other long-term Inter Pares counterparts. Together, they shared stories about their decades of work promoting SRHR in Bangladesh, the Philippines and El Salvador. Their work has been underway for decades.

At Inter Pares, we look for ways to strengthen what our counterparts are already doing. This enables them to build networks, increase services and reach more and diverse people. It is also an act of trust in our counterparts—that they know best how to meet the needs of their communities.

In 2019, we secured five years of funding from Global Affairs Canada to do just this: scale-up the work of four long-term counterparts through *Building Momentum for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*. With this funding, they were able to:

- Expand access to free contraception for marginalized women and girls in the Philippines;
- Create spaces for youth to rally against child marriage and harassment in Bangladesh;
- Amplify efforts to promote abortion rights and provide comprehensive sexuality education to youth in El Salvador; and,
- Deepen supports to survivors of gender-based violence and promote SRHR education amongst young people in Sudan.

Counterparts also learned from each other and built solidarity across borders.

While the funding from Global Affairs Canada to our counterparts comes to an end in February, our commitment to our counterparts does not. The scope of their work may change in the absence of large-scale funding, but with the support of generous supporters



Last fall, Sharaban Tohura, Wendy Barrera Rivas and Estephanie Brigatay travelled across eastern Canada speaking to audiences about their work to promote SRHR in Bangladesh, the Philippines and El Salvador. | Photo: Rita Morbia/Inter Pares

like you, we can hold the line and continue moving towards a more just, equal future. Advancing SRHR is not defined by the duration of a single project, but by the interconnected social justice movements we build together over the long term.

We look forward to building on this momentum to advance SRHR for years to come.

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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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