

Building the Case for South-South Movements

This issue of *Women in Action* on exploring the nuances of South-South movements or alliances was inspired by the coming together of women from the South around the issues of race, gender, and ethnicity during the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR). This conference, which was held in Durban, South Africa, served as a window for women from three Southern regions—Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean to identify the issues common to them and the approaches that they, as a group, can take to address issues of race, gender, class, caste, and ethnicity. The result was the formation of a South-South Initiative (SSI).

Questions have been raised, of course, on the wisdom of a group such as SSI. At first glance, they might seem divisive for being too inward looking, thus threatening the solidarity of the global women's movement. In order to understand the emergence of a formation like SSI, one has to understand the changes taking place within social movements in general, the women's movement included.

At one level, there has been an expanding base of unity between social justice actors in response to the forces of globalisation, increased militarisation, and the concentration of political and economic power in a handful of countries. South-South alliances have come to being through the popularisation of analyses that point out the common fate of countries in the South as a result of the skewed global political economy. The strong partnership of anti-globalisation activists from the North and South that has evolved in recent years is in part due to the strengthening of South-South alliances and the

clarity of their analyses of the issues surrounding globalisation.

The women's movement has been affected as much by the development of this broader social justice movement. Although there is universal acknowledgment of the subordination and discrimination against women *across borders*, there is also increased consciousness of how the convergence of gender with race, religion, class, culture and location might shape the realities of women (and men!) from the South differently from those in the North.

But just what are the realities of Southern women that are different from those of women in the North, including sisters in the North with Southern heritage? To what extent has the global women's movement recognised and integrated the understanding of these differences even as it has been able to identify the commonalities in women's realities? How do Northern women address the increasing clamour for diversity within the women's movement, including those protracted discussions made by women of colour and/or women of the South in relation to race, class and gender? Are initiatives like SSI veering away from a universal response to women's human rights? These were a few of the questions highlighted by the recent anti-racism conference.

Our ever-constant search for answers (and more questions) prompted us to invite feminist leaders at the forefront of (women and other social) movement-building, both in the South and in the North. Devaki Jain of India elaborates on the important question of South-South movements vis-à-vis the current debate on diversity versus specificity, intersectionality and multiple identities, and within the quest for equity and social justice. Ana Elena

Obando of Costa Rica urges readers to move beyond what she called "one-size-fits-all" answers to North-South distinctions by negotiating over power and resources, and by taking responsibility for the actions of the various women's formations in this movement.

The benefits and lessons derived from another collaboration of 16 Southern countries, Partners in Population and Development, are studied in a separate article. We hear the voice of a Southern woman now based in Germany, Yvonne Underhill-Sem, reflect on her situation of being physically in one place and emotionally in another. Finally an activist for indigenous peoples' rights, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz from the Philippines, tries to locate the issue of women's rights and sovereignty within the ethnic communities' struggle for ancestral rights and domain which, she notes, is basically a struggle for their survival.

This issue also features Isis' first attempt to break distances in real time through an online chat participated in by eight women leaders from different regions of the world. These women discussed the contentious questions of the legitimacy and value of an SSI, and who qualifies to join such a group.

Through this issue, we hope to contribute towards rekindling a discussion we believe is one that the global women's movement can benefit from and ultimately be strengthened by. The conversation regarding the universality and specificities of women's experiences has been going on for some time now in some feminist circles, particularly among women of colour in the North. We hope that from working through the various spaces, new thinking can emerge from this process.

