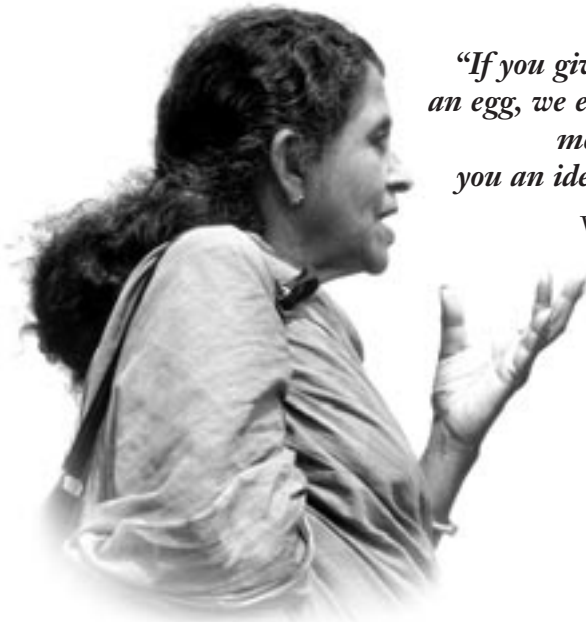


# Inter Pares

B U L L E T I N

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*“If you give me an egg and I give you an egg, we each have one egg. If you give me an idea and I give you an idea, we each have two ideas.”*

West African proverb



Photo: David Barbour CIDA

## Learning to Share, Sharing to Learn

The learning that takes place when people share the most significant questions and struggles of their lives is much more than a technical exchange – it is more than a transfer of knowledge or skills. It is empowering and transformative, and such learning is at the heart of any lasting social change.

Each of us can remember times in our lives when we have been extraordinarily ready to learn, to hear something new, and to see the world from a fresh perspective. These are powerful moments. For it is not simply information that we seek, but insight and understanding. And in some instances this new understanding can be so powerful that we are moved to act on what we have learned to make fundamental changes in our lives.

Inter Pares has sought from its earliest days to create and sustain opportunities for people in the South and in Canada to share their experience to generate new knowledge in ways that are enduring and mutually supportive. Linkages among activists and organizations have taken a variety of forms over the years, including tours, exchanges,

training sessions, and extended visits. Agricultural cooperative leaders from El Salvador have learned with peasant leaders from the Philippines. Working alongside health workers on the Burma-Thai border, health workers from the Philippines have shared their experience in war-time health care. And leaders of indigenous communities in Bangladesh have come to Canada to discuss the issue of land rights with aboriginal leaders here.

Linkages are also created and sustained over time through collaboration on a common goal. We have worked with organizations in Canada and in Africa to confront the negative impact of mining on communities and the environment. Research done in South Asia on the destructive effects of commercial shrimp farming has informed community activism in coastal communities in Canada. We have learned together with Latin Americans, Asians and Africans about the use of micro-credit and savings in poor communities. And women from Bangladesh and the Philippines have informed and inspired Canadian women in their promotion of

women's health issues.

By exploring innovative ways of working and new strategies for action, the quality of our actions improves and people find better ways to make a difference through their own efforts. This sharing also provides an opportunity to see our experience through the eyes of others. We are encouraged to discover that while our experience may be quite local and particular, there is much to be gained from sharing with others who are confronting similar issues.

And, perhaps most importantly, by sharing in a common struggle, we create bonds of mutual support that transcend the differences and the distances between us. These bonds link us in an intricate and widening web of relationships of groups of citizens around the world who are affirming their solidarity and their aspiration to promote dignity and hope, in their own lives and in the lives of others.

In this *Bulletin* we describe some of these international relationships of sustained common cause that Inter Pares continues to support, and from which we continue to learn – among equals.

## A Web of Relationships

Inter Pares rarely works alone. We prefer to work with colleagues and counterparts in other organizations, engaging them in processes of common cause that reinforce and sustain our work for change.

Inter Pares' work related to Burma is an example of this collaborative approach. Since the mid-1990s, Inter Pares has worked closely with a variety of Canadian organizations to promote a progressive Canadian response to the Burmese crisis. Inter Pares has collaborated with other actors to develop the Canadian Friends of Burma, a Canadian organization dedicated to education and solidarity activities in support of a democratic Burma. Canadian Friends of Burma has played a key role in educating Canadians about the crisis in Burma, and in promoting trade and economic sanctions against the military regime.

Inter Pares also works in coalition with Canadian church organizations and the Montreal-based Rights & Democracy (formerly the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) to promote action by the Canadian government in support of Burma's democracy movement. As a coalition, we have met on several occasions with Canadian political leaders and officials to discuss Burma. We prompted the Canadian government to hold a seminar on the problem of heroin production in Burma. And we have secured a commitment from CIDA to a multi-year program of support to exiled Burmese democracy organizations.

Inter Pares has also helped to enlarge the circle of actors working on Burma by facilitating new relationships between Canadian and Burmese organizations, and between Burmese groups and other international organizations.

For example, Inter Pares has facilitated relationships between Burmese health workers and women's health organizations working in the Philippines, as described elsewhere in this Bulletin. We have helped bring Burmese activists to Canada, most recently a Burmese youth representative to the Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg last September. And our Burmese colleagues have been very involved in the development of strategies and positions we have taken with the Canadian government.

By enlarging the circle of people and organizations working on Burma, we are amplifying the impact of our collective work for change. And by bringing new resources and skills to Burmese democracy activists, we are contributing to their struggle to restore democracy and human rights in Burma.

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## Dynamic Interactions

Inter Pares is honoured by the relationships we develop with our colleagues in the South, relationships characterized by mutuality and reciprocity, and by practical contributions by our Southern colleagues to our public education, coalition-building, and policy development in Canada.

Such a relationship exists with Inter Pares' long-time Bangladeshi counterpart, UBINIG. UBINIG has helped deepen our knowledge and analysis of development theory and practice. They frequently engage with Inter Pares and our Canadian counterparts in generating debate and community action on issues important to all of us – be it agricultural production and food security, bio-diversity, indigenous people's rights, or health issues, such as women and AIDS.

Our relationship with UBINIG began in the early 1980s. It was UBINIG that helped us understand the abuses that poor women in Bangladesh suffer through the imposition of coercive population control programs. At the same time, Inter Pares was collaborating with Women's Health Interaction (WHI), based in Ottawa. We were working together to

mount a popular theatre production on women's health, entitled *Side Effects*, to challenge the "pill for every ill" approach to illness, and to provide women with an opportunity to voice their own health needs. The play was a vehicle that brought together women in health, human rights and community development groups in 40 communities across Canada.

As a result of research and documentation shared with us by Farida Akhter of UBINIG, WHI and Inter Pares used *Side Effects* to highlight issues of drug dumping in the Third World, the distribution of dangerous contraceptive devices, and forced sterilization practices used in many population control programs. The project drew wide-spread media attention, helped galvanize action that led to the creation of new women's health organizations and networks across Canada, and provided a framework for action and policy advocacy for many.

In this way, women's reproductive rights became a central component of WHI and Inter Pares' research, education and advocacy. WHI exposed practices of forced sterilization

imposed on Native, immigrant and disabled women in Canada. WHI submitted briefs to Health Canada on the misuse of long-acting hormonal contraceptives among vulnerable communities, and eventually animated the creation – with 20 other organizations and individuals, including Inter Pares – of a *Bill of Rights* for contraceptive research, development and use. UBINIG's input to all of these processes was crucial. Together we called for access to safe and effective methods of birth control, as well as health strategies that address the root causes of poverty and women's subordination.

Throughout the years, UBINIG has never hesitated to participate with Inter Pares in strategic meetings with Canadian government officials and policy makers, or in public events on issues that concern us both.

The trust and synergy developed over two decades among UBINIG, Inter Pares and Women's Health Interaction continues today, as we all continue to learn and act together. As Farida said to us so many years ago, "The world belongs to all of us, and we must change it together."

## Children's Voices



Photo: Christine Harmston

Under the leadership of Dr. Beth Marcelino of the Program on Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights at the University of the Philippines, Teresa de la Cruz and Dr. Ernie Cloma visited the Mae Sot clinic to conduct a week-long child-counseling course with 32 participants. The trainees were from various ethnic groups along the border, and included medics, backpack health workers, teachers in refugee camps and in migrant schools, and

representatives of women's organizations.

The Filipinos analyzed case studies of children living in stressful settings, discussed the key stages of child development and basic principles in child psychology. They complemented theory with participatory counseling methods engaging a group of 100 children in games, poetry, painting, singing, and acting. Participants were taught new ways of relating to children – as agents of change and active members of the community.

As long as Burma's military regime continues to make war on its own people, children and their families will continue to experience the instability and fear generated by the violence. The health exchanges are important steps towards building better support systems to help them through the many challenges they must face. They are also a concrete expression of solidarity and support by Filipino health workers, eager to enable children's voices of Burma.

In April 1999, Inter Pares sponsored a psychological health training exchange with three Filipino doctors from *Likhaan*, a long-term Inter Pares counterpart, at Dr. Cynthia Maung's health clinic in Mae Sot, Thailand. In the course of the training, health workers identified trauma and stress experienced by children, and the need to develop special approaches to help them.

Children are witnessing and experiencing terrible human rights abuses inside Burma, including seeing their parents tortured or killed by army troops. Making their way to border areas, many children have hidden out in the jungle, where landmines are a constant threat, and food is scarce. Children are growing up in refugee camps, sometimes as orphans, with little access to education, and little hope for their future. They are living in towns and cities throughout Thailand and other neighbouring countries, either alone or with parents who are subject to arbitrary arrest by local police as they try to find work in low-paying

and exploitative factories and construction sites.

Doctors on the border say that children often express their anxiety, fear and post-traumatic stress through physical symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches and general pain and discomfort. Teachers are finding increasingly younger students becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol as they live out their years in restrictive and tension-filled refugee camps. Family breakups and domestic violence aggravate these children's psychological instabilities in what is already a threatening social environment for them.

At Dr. Cynthia's request, and with assistance from the Burma Relief Center in Thailand, Inter Pares supported a second Philippine-Burma exchange on the border in October 2000, this one specifically focussed on child trauma. *Likhaan* helped engage a team of child psychologists with long experience working with children who suffered under Philippine military oppression, as well as in other war-torn areas.

## The Summer Program: *linking activists in the North*

Many of our friends and supporters write to share their strategies and ideas for social action in their own communities. Some are full of hope, interested in learning more about ways to help organize to improve their communities. Others write us feeling isolated and burnt-out from so many challenges. Either way, one of our recommendations is always the Summer Program in Community Development at Concordia University.

Last June, over 1,200 community development leaders from 29 countries gathered in Montreal at the 7th annual Summer Program hosted by the Institute of Management and Community Development. Activists, academics, volunteers, and professionals came together to share strategies and approaches for the social and economic

transformation of their communities.

The Institute was established in 1993 by the Centre for Continuing Education at Concordia University, along with activists and leaders from social justice organizations such as Inter Pares, with the goal of addressing social and economic inequities facing their communities.

For the Institute and its partners, the long-term solutions to poverty and exclusion are found within low-income communities, and the lived experiences of community members. Rather than seeing marginalized neighbourhoods as places of need and deficiencies, the Institute is committed to working with people within these communities to identify ways of changing the social and economic conditions that cause their poverty.



Photo: Martin Morrissette

For community development leaders feeling isolated in their struggles for social change, the Institute helps by meeting with community leaders to identify and define the issues that concern them. The Institute “acts as a sort of listening post, always talking with community organizers and activists, learning more about what they define as their needs, and then mirroring back, through our programs, what they have imagined,” says Lance Evoy, the Institute Coordinator.

The annual Summer Program is the culmination of these conversations with community leaders. It is a unique opportunity for participants to reflect, share, learn and teach, to gain insight and understanding. And it is no mistake that the Program is held in the summer. As Lance says, “It is that time of year when in our lives as activists we give ourselves permission to step out and gather with others.” In the warm sun and gentle breezes of June, people open themselves to asking questions and bringing forward new ideas. Together participants create new strategies for social change and develop relationships upon which to build local, national, and international links for local development and global change. People leave hopeful and energized, and eager to share their learning with others.

As part of the network of activists who originally promoted its creation, Inter Pares has supported the Summer Program providing resources and ideas, including raising funds so that the Program can be affordable and accessible to all. However, according to Lance Evoy, Inter Pares’ most valuable contribution is “the constant focus on strategic vision, always asking who are we and where are we going.” Inter Pares is committed to working with the Institute to create opportunities for community leaders and activists to make real their visions of the world as a better place.

## Remaking the world, step by step: *The World March of Women 2000*

The idea arose almost as a crazy dream, out of the success of the Bread and Roses March organized by the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* in 1995, which had surpassed all expectations. This dream began to blossom into reality at the United Nations World Women’s Conference in Beijing. It culminated five years later, in October 2000, when women were present in their thousands from Africa, Asia and the Americas. In a crowd of splendid diversity, they took their demands to end poverty and violence against women to their governments, and to the doors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington, then to the United Nations headquarters in New York. So many women converging on these symbols of power marked the culmination of a long journey in each of the participating countries. Around the world, women’s organizations combined their efforts to educate and mobilize.

In the Philippines, our long-standing partner, Likhaan, took on

the challenge by initiating a national network of more than thirty women’s organizations. Under the auspices of this new coalition, Kilos-Kabaro, they organized campaigns against poverty and violence, conferences, cultural events and rallies to promote women’s rights.

In Mexico, the national network, *Género y Economía*, worked closely with other organizations and networks to organize a national consultation on women’s rights. The broad participation was the crowning achievement of efforts to raise awareness among the most marginal populations, while networking and consolidating women’s organizations.

Inter Pares endorsed the World March of Women and supported our counterparts in the Philippines and Mexico in their efforts to mobilize and work together. We congratulate all the women who have combined their efforts to march, one step at a time, to a better future that they have helped to fashion.

