

Behind the Scenes at Inter Pares



SAMANTHA MCGAVIN

COPAGEN delegates Aissatta Yattara and Fatou Sow (left and centre) meet Samamma Begari, a DDS farmer, leader, and filmmaker (second from left), and Millet Network of India coordinator Krishna Veni (at right).

Rural Women-to-Women exCHANGES

BY ERIC CHAURETTE, PROGRAM MANAGER

Inter Pares works with farmers' and rural women's organizations that practice agroecology (agriculture that respects ecological principles) that build local and sustainable food systems. To bolster these grassroots efforts, from 2012 to 2017 Inter Pares organized a series of four exchanges that brought together farmers and rural women leaders from Canada, the West African biodiversity coalition COPAGEN, and the Deccan Development Society (DDS) in India. In February 2017, staff members Samantha McGavin and Eric Chaurrette travelled to Telangana State in India for the latest of these exchanges.

We are greeted by the fragrance of freshly cut mint as we enter the room. In a large circle, women are carefully bundling and weighing fresh vegetables and herbs and placing these into woven baskets, soon to be whisked off to Zaheerabad and Hyderabad. As the sunlight pours through the windows, the collection of tomatoes, fresh greens, and a not-so-surprisingly large

amount of chili peppers are a delight to the eye. These baskets will be distributed to 250 families, all part of DDS's popular *Sangham Vegetables* initiative. We learn that another 350 families are on a waiting list.

Only three years before, Inter Pares facilitated an exchange that brought farmers from Senegal and Burkina Faso and a Canadian farmer, Maude-Hélène

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Building Solidarity One Conversation at a Time

BY MARIÉTOU DIALLO, COMMUNICATIONS CO-DIRECTOR

Raising awareness of other realities, learning from others' experiences, deepening our solidarity...this is what Inter Pares seeks to do through its public engagement.

Organizing conversations between Canadians and our international counterparts is one way we help Canadians to be in solidarity with struggles around the world, and to build horizontal relationships among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Whether it's with donors, fellow activists, government officials, or curious members of the public, every conversation with national and international counterparts helps to build bridges that contribute to globalizing equality.

That's why this year, among other events, we worked with director Jessica Ruano to organize the Ottawa premiere of the documentary play *Seven*, which traces the lives of seven women who struggle against

Inter Pares' 2017 Ottawa premiere of the documentary women's rights play *Seven*.



SUSANNE DURE

We Are All Fundraisers

BY KATHRYN DINGLE,
FUNDRAISING PROGRAM MANAGER

Inter Pares staff are co-managers, but we also all consider ourselves fundraisers. While that is a role that makes many people cringe, it's one we embrace! We know that our counterparts' crucial work costs money – so generating financial support in Canada is an important role we can all play in creating change worldwide. We take pride in raising funds for our counterparts.

Jack and I take the lead on fundraising with individuals. We love our job: it allows us to be connected to 6,000+ marvellous people who share Inter Pares' values. We build relationships. We thank people. We answer questions. And yes, we ask for money. In turn, we often get thanked by our donors for giving them a way to support change-making organizations in Canada and around the world.

Fundraising from the Canadian government pulls in the whole team. This makes sense considering the scale of support: in 2016, Inter Pares raised more than \$4 million from

patriarchy in different parts of the world. Over 250 people attended the event and joined the discussion afterwards on human rights abuses facing women worldwide. The play's glimpses into the seven characters' lives were sometimes enraging, sometimes tragic, but represented universal struggles for women's rights, and vividly illustrated women's courage and tireless determination.

Sharing stories inspires us to rethink our efforts and refocus our contribution to these long-term struggles.

Later in the spring, we toured Ontario and Quebec with two staff members from the Likhaan Centre for Women's Health in the Philippines. In public meetings and events at libraries, health centres, women's legal centres, bakeries and more, the tour helped raise many people's awareness about the realities facing youth, women, and members of the LGBTQ


community in the Philippines, and gave all of us the chance to express our solidarity with one another. As well, our two guests were able to speak with local organizations addressing similar issues, and to share their daily realities and challenges with officials at Global Affairs Canada.

All of these conversations were rich and intense, because they were based on shared



David Bruer, Inter Pares staff member, and Bibiana Seaborn, former staff member, during the Likhaan Tour in Ottawa.

commonalities of women's experiences worldwide. As we know too well, around the world women continue to face violence, a lack of access to healthcare, and often precarious sexual autonomy and reproductive rights. However, though the challenges are widespread, so are the responses and resistance: grassroots organizing, support, and advocacy. Sharing stories inspires us to rethink our efforts and refocus our contribution to these long-term struggles.

We believe that we have a lot to learn from one another, and that is why Inter Pares connects people and lived experience. It's an honour to share stories of the global struggle for social justice, and to use them as bridges to connect us all. 


Global Affairs Canada. We deeply believe that it is part of our mandate to help ensure that taxpayer-funded foreign aid dollars are going to organizations driving social change around the world.

We are also fortunate to have the generous support of ongoing annual grants from over a dozen foundations, unions, and religious organizations. Relationships with these allies are deep and strong, and some date back decades. We are honoured to be able, through our programs, to help these groups to fulfill their mission for social change.

Our fundraising work would all be for nothing if it weren't for the people who choose



Inter Pares fundraisers Jack Hui Litster and Kathryn Dingle.

to say 'yes' when we ask for support. For this we are truly grateful to all our supporters and allies. 

Rural Women-to-Women exCHANGES

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Desroches, to India to share and learn with DDS. It was during this exchange that Maude-Hélène shared how her farm, Les Jardins de la Grelinette, grows enough vegetables on 1.5 acres of land to feed 250 families via weekly basket delivery. Her presentation obviously made an impression, as the Quebec-pioneered model of Community-Supported Agriculture has now taken root in Telangana.

The sharing of knowledge was not unidirectional, however. Maude-Hélène was deeply impressed by the diversity of seeds the DDS women had at their fingertips, and left India with the conviction to start saving her own vegetable seeds.

Sam and I are here to lead an exchange focused on what can be described as “women-led agroecology.” Joining us are

four inspiring women from COPAGEN: Fatou Sow from Senegal, Sábado Vaz from Guinea-Bissau, Kadidja Koné from Côte d’Ivoire, and Aïssatta Yattara from Guinea. For more than three decades, DDS, working with mostly *Dalit* women, has transformed a region of hunger and drought into a region

of biodiversity and bounty. The DDS approach is straightforward: establish strong women’s groups (*sanghams*), build agricultural systems that rely on local biodiversity and knowledge, and link rural production to local and regional markets to foster greater access to nutritious foods. COPAGEN has replicated the DDS model of women-led agroecology in West Africa, where women’s collectives are cultivating and


transforming local crops such as *fonio*, millets, *niébé* (cowpea), sorghum and yams – and where market demand for these local foods is growing.

We are led out of the room and to a courtyard, where *sangham* women give us a demonstration of how they make decisions

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on what crops to plant and why. Through a participatory exercise, the women debate the respective qualities of different crops, and their multiple uses. We are seeing cost/benefit analysis, risk mitigation, climate adaptation, and nutrition planning, all being discussed in real-time. As the conversations unfold, the knowledge behind these decisions is shared among the group, increasing collective

knowledge and passing this knowledge from generation to generation. The display of their expertise is mesmerizing as we consider that these women, once marginalized by caste, are now leaders in their community, and farmer role models globally.

At the end of the exchange, we share some final thoughts on all the things we witnessed during the week. Fatou sums it up for us: “Beyond the friendships and solidarity that has been created here among us, this exchange has convinced us that a person, whether she is a man or a woman, who becomes conscious of her capacities, can be a true agent of change.” 

To view a photo gallery of this exchange: interpares.ca/2017exchange



ERIC CHARBETTE

Inter Pares staff member Samantha McGavin displays a vegetable basket from the *Sangham Vegetable* initiative.

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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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