

Inter Pares

**The Significance of Feminist Analysis in North-South Relations:
exploring the links among organizational principles,
international partnerships and program results**

**Final Report to the
International Development Research Centre**

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an organization engaged in the pursuit of social justice and equality around the world and in Canada, Inter Pares has also considered itself a feminist organization throughout the majority of its 35 year existence. Feminist analysis and principles have played a central, if not defining, role in the development of the organization's internal practices, program priorities, and long-term collaborations. But this rich history had never been documented or explored until now. With an interest in unearthing the links between a feminist analysis and methodology, and the results yielded by our work, Inter Pares embarked on a two-year participatory research project supported by the International Development Research Centre. We sought to answer the following questions through this research:

- How does Inter Pares integrate its feminist analysis into its practice?
- What is the relationship between the internal daily feminist practice of Inter Pares and the ways in which it works externally with counterparts?
- How does the way Inter Pares works relate to the results that have been noted by counterparts and documented in evaluations?

Inter Pares staff developed a participatory research methodology that involved former colleagues, collaborators from around the world, funders and Board members. Through participatory workshops, interviews, an extensive review of organizational documents, and a thorough validation process, Inter Pares staff documented and critically analyzed the views and experiences of those with whom we have collaborated with over many years.

In this final report, we describe the implementation of activities, and the achievement of objectives over the entire project period. Methodology and research findings are presented in the annexes and accompanying documents.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

2.1 Year one (September 2008 – September 30, 2009)

The first year of the project was dedicated to data gathering and analysis. Data was collected through multiple methods: interviews, focus groups, workshops, document review, and annotated bibliography. Summary and analysis reports were prepared and shared with all staff, and a collective analysis process was facilitated with staff members to identify preliminary findings. These activities are detailed in the interim report presented to IDRC in September 2009, and described and discussed in Gouin, Cocq, and McGavin, an article that accompanies this report (see annex A).

2.2 Years two and three (October 2009 – March 31 2011)

In the past year and a half, the research team has facilitated validation processes to test key findings. A workshop was organized for Inter Pares Board members, who were asked to discuss findings and propose ways in which these findings could be shared. A thorough validation process was organized with a long-standing colleague and collaborator of Inter Pares, Ms. Diana Avila, former Executive Director of Project Counselling Service. Ms. Avila was asked to read through the data and preliminary answers to the research questions, and offer her perspective on whether or not we were drawing the right conclusions from the data. She was also asked to provide her own analysis of the data and suggestions on what elements were missing. The research team and Ms. Avila met with Loredana Marchetti from IDRC in October 2009 to discuss the process, and our preliminary findings.

Following these validation processes with Ms. Avila and the Board of Directors of Inter Pares, the research team prepared a written document that was circulated to all staff members, answering the research questions. All staff members read this document and offered feedback. A small editorial committee was struck to accompany the research team in the preparation of a final version of the research document. This document entitled, *Does it work? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares*, has been published as part of Inter Pares' Occasional Paper series and accompanies this report.

3. FULFILLMENT OF OBJECTIVES

3.1 General objective

The general objective of this research is to document the management system, internal processes and program methodologies that flow from Inter Pares' feminist analysis, and how these relate to and interact with its international program and policy action and its conceptualization and practice of North-South relationship-building.

3.2 Specific Objectives

- To make explicit Inter Pares' underlying feminist principles and the ways in which this analysis informs internal processes, relationship-building, and programming methodology.
- To contribute to practice in the sector, particularly in regard to documenting the link between feminist analysis and practice, and sharing lessons learned on relationship-building and programming methodology.
- To explore and document the ways in which the qualities that such analysis, practice and counterpart relationships contribute to the outcomes and results that have been noted by counterparts and documented in evaluations.

3.3 Fulfilment of Objectives – Year one (September 2008 – September 30, 2009)

The first year of the project was dedicated to knowledge-consolidation, document review and data collection. Data gathering and analysis provided multiple opportunities for discussing the history of Inter Pares, and the analysis and practice that have made the organization what it is today. This collective knowledge production has strengthened the organization's networks, and staff's historical understanding of Inter Pares.

As described in the interim report prepared for IDRC, Inter Pares shared preliminary information about our research methodology with the South-Africa based Community Development Resource Association, and information related to Inter Pares' management structure with the Montreal-based Community of Practice on Democratic Organizations.

3.4 Fulfilment of Objectives – Years two and three (October 2009 – March 31 2011)

Data, analysis, and validation activities in the first year of the research were fruitful. In the second and third years of the project, staff members wrote five case studies, providing examples of Inter Pares' work in coalition, and results achieved through these collective efforts.

Since our first report to IDRC, Inter Pares staff have done a considerable amount of writing, illustrating the links between feminist analysis, practice and results. A special edition of

our regular bulletin entitled *Women at the heart of change*, was dedicated to Inter Pares' work with women, including an article sharing findings from this research (a copy accompanies this report). The document, *Does it work? Feminist analysis and practice at Inter Pares*, published as part of Inter Pares' Occasional Paper series, is a comprehensive presentation of research results and includes two case studies. The three remaining case studies will be posted on the Inter Pares website. In addition, papers have been submitted for peer review and publication:

- Faucher, N. & Gouin, R. (in review). Les ONG: pour un nouveau partenariat – un partenariat « entre égaux ». Dans *Efficacité et légitimité de l'aide. Les presses de l'Université de Montréal* (to be confirmed).
- Gouin, R. (in review). Learning has everything to do with it: Popular education and feminist consciousness-raising in a social justice organization. *Atlantis Women's Studies Journal*.
- Gouin, R., Cocq, K & S. McGavin (in press). Feminist participatory action research in a social justice organization. *Action Research Journal*.

Findings from the research project have been presented at conferences:

- Faucher, N. (2010) Les ONG: pour un nouveau partenariat – un partenariat «entre égaux». Presented at l'Association francophone pour le savoir. Montreal. May 2010.
- Gouin, R. (2001). De l'interne à l'externe : Les méthodologies féministes dans les relations Nord-Sud. Presented at l'*Université féministe d'été*. Laval. May-June 2010.

Details about the organizational structure of Inter Pares, the influence of feminism, and results achieved were shared broadly:

- The Tatamagouche Centre requested information about Inter Pares' structure to help them in their restructuring process.
- The Organization Development Network of Ottawa-Outaouais invited Inter Pares to speak to its members about democratic and egalitarian management.
- The University of Ottawa's Political, International, and Development Studies Student Association invited Inter Pares to speak during events on international cooperation.
- The methodology-focused article, *Feminist participatory research in a social justice organization*, is being used by three researchers working on the *City for all Women* initiative.

Further dissemination of research results will include:

- Presentation of results and distribution of the occasional paper, *Does it work?* to IDRC

staff

- Presentation of results and distribution of the occasional paper, *Does it work?* to CIDA staff
- Distribution of printed copies of *Does it work?* (in French and English) to Inter Pares supporters, counterparts, and collaborators, including other civil society organizations in Canada and internationally.
- Copies of *Does it work?* will be available for download on the Inter Pares website.

4. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In our interim report to IDRC, we shared lessons related to conducting participatory research in a non-hierarchical organization. These lessons have since been shared in an article that was accepted for publication in the *Action Research Journal*. In this final report, we share some broader lessons learned, which are also included in *Does it work? Feminist analysis and practice at Inter Pares*.

The research Inter Pares conducted with the support of IDRC attempted to understand the role that feminism has played in the organization's analysis and practice. In papers and presentations, we have argued that feminism has profoundly influenced our work, and that it is because of this that Inter Pares, as a modest-sized social justice organization, has been able to achieve the impressive outcomes that have been noted by our counterparts, collaborators, and funders. Feminism has not only strengthened our analysis and our practice, but has been an essential factor in our achievements and our effectiveness.

Over the course of this research project, we were able to establish some important distinctions between feminist process and gender work that are key to tracing the legacy of feminism within Inter Pares. The documentation of our practices and program outcomes, through conversations and workshops with counterparts, collaborators, funders, and former and current staff, clarified key areas where we could identify the role of feminist analysis and practice: the focus of our work, process, and organizational structure.

4.1 Focus of work

A feminist analysis at an institutional level has strengthened our work on gender and women's rights, bringing an understanding of the complex and structural barriers to women's equality and the need for systemic change. The influence of feminism has broadened the focus of our work,

bringing a feminist perspective to issues not traditionally considered ‘women’s issues’ – we always look for the gendered dynamics of any issue, be it food sovereignty or migration, and seek to highlight women’s agency and leadership in these areas. Adopting a structural feminist analysis has shaped our understanding of social change – we see our work as long-term, and encompassing the personal, the collective, the social, and the political.

4.2 Process

Our methodology has been profoundly influenced by feminism. We value the processes by which decisions are made and program priorities established, where those affected are engaged as lead actors in shaping the work. We have historically placed a great importance on listening to stories, particularly women’s stories, and starting from people’s experiences as the basis of knowledge and action. We have adopted an open-ended approach to setting priorities and developing plans of action, with a focus on collaboration and mutual learning. The result is a practice that has allowed us to develop innovative and responsive programs that are flexible and dynamic, and that reflect the needs and aspirations of those we work with.

4.3 Organizational structure

Feminism inspired an important change in the structure of Inter Pares, prompting us to move to a non-hierarchical co-management structure with pay parity. Under a co-management structure, staff express their commitment to equality in practice, to sharing administrative, programmatic, and fundraising responsibilities and to taking decisions by consensus. This structure not only reflects staff member’s values, it has allowed us to build a strong and efficient organization that is well-managed. Staff members have attained a high level of competence in their respective program areas and have built skills in institutional development. This has imparted skills that are central to our work with counterparts and collaborators.

The collaborative everyday management has allowed us to develop skills in consensus building, facilitation, and convening, bolstered by an ethic of collaboration that has made coalition-building a key methodology for our work in Canada. The importance we have placed on acting politically in our own context has made this coalition methodology highly effective in achieving concrete policy results in Canada, informed by the work of our counterparts and contributing to their ability to engage in their own struggles locally.

Our co-management structure has also given us institution-building skills that have

allowed us to contribute to building strong organizations in the South. Inter Pares has played a key role in major institutional transition processes that created strong independent and Southern-led organizations that are able to be actors in their own context and be leaders in local and regional processes of social change.

The feminist ethic in our work has strengthened our political commitment to building relationships of solidarity, reciprocity and mutual respect – both internally, with each other, and externally, especially with our counterparts. Our political commitment to long-term solidarity and accompaniment has yielded strong and lasting relationships with counterparts that are based on mutual respect, reciprocity, and equality. These are relationships of solidarity and cooperation that survive staff turnover, changing political contexts, evolving local needs, and unstable funding dynamics, while allowing space for disagreement, learning, and growth.

4.4 Tensions we are still grappling with

The practice of equality and parity is challenged by the daily realities in which our work as an organization and our experiences as individuals are embedded. This is the case at a personal level, in relationships between staff, and at a global level in our relationship to counterparts around the world.

At an internal level, staff members at Inter Pares are diverse in their experiences of various oppressions and in the privileges they bring with them. The reality of these inequalities cannot be simply erased by the mechanisms we have in place for building structural equality between us.

Consensus-building is central to our functioning as an organization based on parity. But consensus can be difficult to achieve in groups with diverse backgrounds and experiences. In as much as staff at Inter Pares develop proficient skills in consensus-building, unofficial power imbalances among staff – particularly if they go unnamed and unaddressed – can impair consensus, preventing some people's active participation or privileging the participation of others. Our strong political commitment to our work and our personal investment in it as activists and feminists makes it difficult for us to be challenged when our practice does not reflect our ideals. Our flat structure and the processes associated with it can sometimes mask the inequalities in power that exist among individuals, and leave us with few mechanisms for addressing them.

In addition, building an organization based on equality and parity is difficult in a world

where the majority of individuals and organizations do not operate on this basis. We are often challenged by the expectations and assumptions of hierarchy and authority from others that can sometimes be difficult for us to contest.

Over the course of the research, many participants raised another tension in the everyday practice of our feminism at Inter Pares. Women reflected on the struggles they have faced in balancing their work life at Inter Pares with their personal life, and specifically, their desire to raise and parent children. The intensive time commitment required by our co-management structure has often resulted in little accommodation for the demands of child-rearing through mechanisms such as part-time work, particularly as they related to other societal demands of women. For many, this raised a contradiction with feminist principles that Inter Pares continues to grapple with.

We pride ourselves on building long-term relationships of solidarity with our counterparts, relationships that are based on mutual respect, reciprocity, and equality. We aim to subvert traditional North-South relations, based as they are on charity and a paternalistic donor-beneficiary model that reinforce global economic and political inequalities. This research has shown that we have succeeded in developing these kinds of relationships with many of our counterparts. However, we have had and continue to have counterpart relationships in which our role is primarily that of funder, with the power imbalances that this represents. In addition, even with some of our closest counterparts there is a financial transaction that underlies our relationship, and our political location as a donor in the North means that this transaction generates a structural inequality. Because of our political commitment to building different kinds of relationships, it can be difficult for us to engage this reality honestly.

5. OPEN QUESTIONS

Inter Pares' co-management structure is a direct result of the influence of feminism in our history and a fundamental building block of the methodologies we have applied to our work. How do other cooperative management models compare to our own, and what differences can be attributed to our feminist legacy? What can be learned from other cooperative management models and what of our own experience can be taken up by others?

We have identified important challenges we face in dealing with conflict and addressing power imbalances within the organization. Our very structure – which yields so much in terms of our practice of equality on a daily basis – is also an impediment to confronting these inequalities

and addressing them. What mechanisms and strategies can we develop to begin overcoming these hurdles? How do we better embrace practices of honesty and accountability when it comes to our relationships with each other?

The results we've been able to achieve have been possible because we are process oriented. Yet the growing interest in short-term, concrete results in the industry of international cooperation is at odds with a more long-term, iterative, and organic approach to achieving results that are systemic and transformative. What space is there for this methodology of long-term social change in the current climate of international cooperation?

Working in coalition has been key to achieving important and lasting changes in Canadian policy, working with other Canadian organizations to share the lessons we learn from our counterparts and amplify our impact domestically. Some of the coalition work highlighted in this research was among the most innovative and impacting work Inter Pares has engaged in. What lessons can we learn from these experiences, and how do we ensure we continue to advance civil society organization and advocacy in Canada in these ways?

6. WHAT NEXT?

This research has confirmed what Inter Pares staff and Board members suspected – that feminism has been fundamental to who we are as an organization and to the work we do, and that it can be linked to many of our achievements. In the coming months, we will disseminate the occasional paper detailing research results, and hope that peer reviewed articles produced as part of this research will contribute to the practice of participatory action research and to strengthening relations between Northern and Southern civil society organizations. We also anticipate this research will generate discussion about the role of feminist analysis and practice in social movement organizations.

As in all research, we are left with many unanswered questions. However, the research process has been highly reflective and involved looking back at the organization's history. The work ahead requires learning from the past to navigate the current political context for international cooperation and social justice organizations in order to continue to be social change agents into the future.

ANNEX A

FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN A SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The three authors of this paper are staff members of *Inter Pares* (Latin for ‘among equals’) a not-for-profit Canadian social justice organization. As members of a co-management team, we were mandated by our colleagues to lead research on *Inter Pares*’ practice. In this article, we share our experience of conducting feminist participatory action research within a non-hierarchical environment that functions by consensus. We begin by providing an overview of *Inter Pares*’ work and structure, and explain the impetus for this research. We then outline how the research process unfolded, and discuss the complementarity of the organizational structure and research, that is, how staff members’ practice and commitment to process and consensus facilitated and strengthened the research. Finally, we share research findings related to the importance of process for building alliances, learning, and collective action. Our intentions are to illustrate the relationship between research processes and organizational practices, to share some of *Inter Pares*’ experience related to social-movement building, and stimulate discussion on conducting research from within organizations.

2. OVERVIEW OF *INTER PARES* AND IMPETUS FOR THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Inter Pares was founded in 1975 by people who wanted to change the way Canada engaged in international development. From its inception, it has offered financial and political support to organizations in the global South acting on issues of common concern: reproductive rights and women’s health, violence against women, civil liberties, migration, human rights, resource extraction, and food sovereignty. In contrast with other Canadian international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the time, *Inter Pares* also developed an active Canadian program. It worked, and continues to work, in coalition with other organizations, engaging the Canadian government on its foreign policy, and connecting domestic work to like-minded international actors. *Inter Pares* has a well-established reputation among Canadian international organizations for its egalitarian and participatory practice, its knowledge-building activities – learning circles, dialogues, and exchanges – and for its role in developing relationships of common cause with counterparts.¹

¹ “Authentic relations among those working for change will be based on shared goals and interests and by extension, will be based on a commitment to a common and shared future. *Inter Pares* does not see our relationship with our donors and funders as partnership, but as collaboration. Similarly, we do not see those with whom we work as partners, but as co-protagonists and colleagues. To make this distinction, *Inter Pares* uses the (still imperfect) term

One of the important ways in which egalitarian principles manifest themselves in *Inter Pares*' practice is through the structures and processes used internally for making decisions and managing the organization. The organization began modestly, with a few staff members and a 'two-tier' wage structure differentiating between program and administrative personnel. In the early 80s *Inter Pares* began to discuss the transformation of its organizational structure in light of internal debates about "ethics of pay in an anti-poverty organization, wage discrepancies, value of work, parity and commitment [which] set the stage for our later staff agreement and management structure" (Christie, 1991, p. 4). Staff discussed the need to re-organize themselves to better reflect our parity ethos – which we espoused with counterparts. The transition toward egalitarian management was the result of staff's strong conviction that not only would such a structure better reflect the organization's values, it was also a "much more sane and more effective way to work" (staff/former staff workshop). Eventually, a proposal was taken to the Board of Directors in 1984-85 to transform the organization from a hierarchical structure to "more of a staff-led organization, more of a values-based organization" with a co-management structure. This included the integration of the principle of parity – parity of salary and responsibility, where, based on the idea that all work is equally valued, staff would be paid the same base salary, share responsibility for the organization, and be accountable to each other, the Board of Directors, donors, and counterparts. Consensus was adopted as the process for decision-making. Committees are responsible for various tasks, and clusters of staff members work together on geographic and/or thematic programming areas. Committees report back to the monthly staff and program meetings, where issues are discussed with perspectives and contributions from everyone and decisions are made. The principles that motivated and continue to motivate the internal structure and organizing processes of *Inter Pares* are feminist in their essence: equality, consensus, and focus on process. These have been translated into practice through the co-management structure, parity, and the collective development of open-ended and consensus-based processes for learning and decision-making. New staff are integrated into the organization over a one-year period during which they are supported in learning about their program responsibilities and how the institution functions. The non-hierarchical structure of *Inter Pares* is often cited as especially rare in international NGOs. This is not to say that it is a desirable model for other organizations. Such a structure would require too much time in a large

'counterpart' to try to capture the sense of common cause, *Inter Pares*" (*Inter Pares* 2004, p. 12-13).

organization, for instance, making it ineffective.

2.1 Engaging in research

Staff had often discussed documenting the ways in which our practice is grounded in our feminist analysis. In 2004 external evaluators recommended *Inter Pares* document its gender work. Staff members discussed a proposal to engage an external evaluation of our gender work, but we were already preparing for an external evaluation of our current program. More importantly, because the organization's gender work is not isolated from our overall feminist approach and organizational structure, we decided to seek research funding for an internally-led study. This study would look at how *Inter Pares*' feminism informs its day-to-day functioning and programming, and how it relates to results achieved. Feminist participatory action research was found to be coherent with our way of working, and favoured praxis – what Maria Mies (1993) calls “conscious partiality” over “outsider objectivity.” Such research would allow us to collaboratively understand the history of our organizational structure, the struggles that exist around creating and working in such a structure, and the relationship between internal processes and external relationships we build with counterparts and colleagues. This would not only document the organization's past, it would enable current staff and Board members to learn, affirm, and question: Where is the organization now? How did it get here? Where is it going?

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) provided *Inter Pares* with funds for a two-year project to document the management system, internal processes and program methodologies that flow from *Inter Pares*' feminist analysis and illustrate how these relate to its international program and policy action. We feel strongly that this research can also contribute to the theory and practice of feminist participatory action research.

3. HOW THE RESEARCH FUNCTIONED WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

3.1 Methodology

In keeping with a feminist analysis and approach, and consistent with *Inter Pares*' established egalitarian way of working, the methodology for this project is participatory and collective. We realize that this research does not fit neatly into the categories established in the literature on participatory research, but we attempt to situate it as best we can. It is generally agreed upon that there exists a continuum of participatory approaches to social research – often referred to as

participatory action research (PAR) – that emerge out of two distinct traditions: *Action Research* and *Participatory Research* (Hick 1997; Jordan 2003). These traditions embrace similar values such as knowledge creation and change, but they define problems differently (Brown and Tandon 1983). Action Research (AR) arose within industrialized countries and is most often defined in terms of participation and organizational improvement, emphasizing collaborations between the researcher and some of the participants (Whyte 1995). “Action researchers ... share ideological perspectives that emphasize *individual, interpersonal, and group levels of analysis* in solving problems” (Brown & Tandon, 1983, p. 281). Social psychologist Kurt Lewin is often cited as the first person to adopt a practice that would link social research and action (Adelman, 2010). AR shares many of the values associated with Participatory Research, but there are significant ideological differences. For instance, “Lewin’s ideas on democratic participation in the workplace did not include any critique of the wide society, particularly the range of economic relations between worker and employer, capital and labour” (Adelman, 2010, p.10).

Authors using the term Participatory Research (PR) often emphasize the perspectives of marginalized people, taking into consideration social structures, oppression and change (Brown & Tandon, 1983). PR was “originally designed to resist the intellectual colonialism of western social research into the third world development process” (Sohng 1996, p. 80). The central concern in PR is the production and ownership of knowledge by oppressed groups with the intention of defining their own realities and mobilizing for action (Brown and Tandon 1983; Hall 1993; Park 1993; Sohng 1996; Smith 1997; Mulenga 1999). This approach to research embraces an explicit political agenda.

Despite both traditions’ emphasis on participation, there continued to be barriers to women’s full and active participation in research (Maguire 1987; Mulenga 1999). While feminist research did “not figure prominently in PR approaches and theoretical debate” (Joyappa & Miartin, 1996, p. 10), it had much in common with these approaches to social research. “Participatory research, feminist research, and feminist participatory research ... seek to empower individuals and communities in ways that lead to social change” (*ibid*, p. 2). Starting from women’s experiences of oppression, it placed women’s political struggles at the centre and advocated for shared power in the research process (Gatenby and Humphries 2000; Joyappa & Miartin, 1996). A feminist approach often includes an explicit focus on learning, transformation and action, what Lather (1991) described as “a reciprocally educative focus” to research, that

“breaks down the distinction between emancipatory research and pedagogy by producing a collaborative analysis” (p. 92).

The challenge in conducting participatory research within an NGO is that it does not fit neatly into either Action Research, or Participatory Research theory and practice. Our research is not merely a management exercise to improve the organization, nor does it seek to work with those who are marginalized in order to transform social relations. This research is connected to the AR tradition in that it seeks consensus, highlights common values, and is open to incremental reform – *Inter Pares* staff are open to improving our practice. On the other hand, the research is also grounded in the participatory research tradition. Staff are nurturing a critical praxis, whereby activists can research their own actions and relationships, and create their own knowledge of organizing. In a broader sense, we are also seeking to document our aspiration to work in more egalitarian ways – thus, the research has an underlying social movement goal. Considering the awkward fit within the AR and PR traditions, we found Lykes and Coquillon’s (2007) term *feminist infused participatory and action research* (feminist PAR) to be useful. This wording captures widely recognized principles of this type of research, which we have embraced, such as the importance of participant’s knowledge as a basis for action, their power over the process, and the goal of transforming people and society (McTaggart, 1991).

3.2 Methods

A small group of staff members volunteered to implement the research, including data collection, analysis, and most of the writing. They occupied various positions within the organization, ranging from fundraising, to managing programs, to communications. This ad-hoc group, known as the research cluster, outlined questions, objectives, methodology, expected outputs, and prepared the proposal and reports, liaising with the funder. The research cluster had a rotating chair and minute taker. Minutes of meetings describe not only the decisions taken, but the process of arriving at consensus, and were shared with all *Inter Pares* staff. Decisions about the research were made by consensus at the cluster level and then presented as recommendations to the full *Inter Pares* staff team for discussion and final decision making.

Data was gathered through multiple methods: interviews, focus groups, and workshops carried out with current and former staff, current and former Board members, counterparts in Canada, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, funders, and other collaborators. All staff have had the

opportunity to participate in research workshops, contributing to the data. Some staff members outside the cluster have also taken on specific tasks – interviewing or conducting research workshops with counterparts and collaborators, for which they prepared written reports with preliminary analysis, and writing case studies to illustrate the research findings. The use of multiple methods is synergetic with feminist research. It allowed us to be more flexible and responsive – a useful feature in a project of this duration (Reinharz 1992, in Gatenby and Humphries 2000). A lengthy document analysis has been conducted, whereby a historical selection of the organization’s reports, publications and even minutes to meetings were analyzed. Interviews were open-ended and began with a few predetermined questions: How would you describe Inter Pares’ way of working? What examples do you feel best illustrate the way Inter Pares works? What examples do you feel best illustrate Inter Pares’ relationships with its counterparts? Interviews were semi-conversational to ensure informants had the power to shape what was being documented and that, as the research progressed, the researchers had some level of flexibility to explore certain issues or programs in more depth. Workshops invited people to provide examples that illustrated Inter Pares’ values and approach, to describe any weaknesses they perceived, and to speak about their own connection to the organization. The use of workshops and focus groups also fit well within feminist PAR approaches as they both fostered collective storytelling, and allowed for disagreement and the reformulation of ideas in light of other participants’ contributions (Madriz 2000). Finally, we drew on past evaluations of the organization conducted by consultants, rich sources of information about our programming results as they relate to our practice.

The process was iterative. Our methods were adapted to meet research needs and be responsive to the data being produced, while making it possible for participants to shape the direction of the research.

3.3 Analysis

The research cluster made no absolute distinction between data gathering and analysis (Patton 2002). We identified themes and preliminary results as we were gathering data (Kirby, Greaves et al. 2006, p. 221), making the process more responsive and allowing for new ideas and sub-questions to be explored. Brief analysis reports were prepared after each data gathering exercise and sent to participants for validation (not everyone replied). We approached analysis as an

iterative process in the tradition of constructivist grounded theory, meaning that data were considered a narrative construction, analysis began with data collection and was shaped by the researchers' interpretations, and analysis proceeded into writing (Charmaz 2000, p. 515, 526). In analysing the information collected, the research cluster and all staff looked for confirmation of what we already knew – what had been documented in evaluations, and common ways we and others speak about the work of *Inter Pares*. We were also attentive to what challenged our assumptions and surprised us – what threw our explanatory notions and predictive assumptions into confusion (Enloe 2004, p. 13). These incremental analysis pieces served as building blocks for a broader, more comprehensive cross-analysis.

The research cluster read all the data and preliminary analysis, coding and arranging it into categories and subcategories, ordering themes into an overarching thematic framework that could be presented to the rest of staff. We identified relationships as the overarching theme with the following subcategories: the role of *Inter Pares* in relationships; characteristics of relationships; tools, techniques, methods of relationship building. A workshop was held to develop a collective analysis with all fourteen members of staff. The literature on participatory action research is mostly silent on the mechanisms that enable such group analysis to happen. Rather, discussion is focussed on the challenges of such an endeavour.

The interpretation and analysis of data are not easy, straightforward processes, often demanding both art and science. The processes are also fraught with the issue of difference – in perspective, beliefs, politics, experience, and culture – and can become a very contentious stage in collaborative teams. Traversing this stage in collaborative research demands reflexivity and often pushes researchers into difficult terrain (Kirby, Greaves et al. 2006, p. 51).

This trepidation around collective analysis may be a reflection of the dynamics of participatory action research conducted through universities, and that most articles published in scholarly journals on the subject are authored from the perspective of academic researchers working with communities. We therefore thought it relevant to outline, in detail, how this group analysis unfolded.

In preparation for the workshop, staff were asked to read through all the data (interview and workshop transcripts, annotated bibliography of reviewed documents) and preliminary analysis and to jot down any thoughts they had. The group analysis began with a welcome and introduction, outlining expectations for the day. The research cluster presented its thematic

framework and divided people into small groups tasked with populating a particular thematic category with quotes and references from the data. Small groups reported back to all staff, identifying what they had found and sharing any dilemmas they had encountered. This exercise was followed by a large group discussion on the overall validity of the themes and some preliminary observations. Examples had been found to populate the categories – some proving more intuitive than others for participants – adding concrete examples to themes, and identifying some themes the research cluster had missed. The fact that people struggled with some categories pointed to weaknesses in our framework.

While the research cluster had identified relationships as the main thematic thread, staff saw relationships as a modality rather than a central tenet. The goal of *Inter Pares*' work is social justice and structural change, not relationship-building, they argued. The all-staff analysis workshop was a turning point in the research. While we were left with a somewhat unravelled thematic framework, the research cluster was later able to develop a more coherent understanding of the data, based on our colleagues' feedback. Our collective achievements were significant. Everyone on staff was familiar with the data, people were beginning to put the pieces together, and examples were identified that could be drafted as specific cases of *Inter Pares*' work. We had begun to co-create knowledge and bring the analytic voice of staff members to the forefront.

Rather than spend time elaborating another thematic framework that would have to be discussed, the research cluster decided, with the support of our colleagues, to focus on writing the answers to our research questions. Analysis continued in the form of writing and co-editing of these answers and this methodology article, allowing the cluster to describe and share our findings and their relevance with all staff. Writing was used as a method of inquiry, "a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis" (Richardson 2000, p. 923). And as Harry F. Wolcott (1990) notes, writing also helped us "discover gaps in our thinking" (p. 21). *Inter Pares*' practice of co-editing publications – whereby a lead author circulates their work to all staff two to three times for editorial comments – served as an established mechanism to continue co-creating knowledge through writing, deepening our personal and collective analysis of the data and answering our research questions. Co-editing was also a wonderful way to validate findings, as we discuss in the following section.

3.4 Validation

Research findings were compared to past evaluations conducted by external consultants between 1995 and 2009. There were considerable thematic convergences – counterparts and collaborators shared very similar sentiments and observations, thereby validating our findings and illustrating a documented history of *Inter Pares*' practice. Importantly, participants in the research spoke not only about achievements; they were able to articulate *how* results had been achieved. They described the processes in place that allowed for our collective realisations. Validating our research findings against external evaluations is important, but we also agree that the criterion for judging the success of participatory action research “is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situation in which they practice” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 595). Issues of validity were addressed throughout the research, relying on the following three articulations as outlined by Lather (1991): construct validity, face validity, and catalytic validity.

3.4.1 Construct validity

The research is evaluated based on the flexibility and responsiveness of its design (Lather, 1991). For instance, changes to the workshops were made following feedback from participants. An additional data gathering workshop was organized, more documents were reviewed, and interviews were added when staff observed gaps in the data. Furthermore, in discussing *Inter Pares*' role in coalitions, we realized how central this method was to our programming, and decided to focus our case studies on key coalitions in which we had been involved over the years. Our iterative methodology was intended to ensure construct validity.

3.4.2 Face validity

The research is evaluated based on whether or not it ‘makes sense’ to those who participated in the process (Lather, 1991). This involves a constant checking of assumptions and findings throughout the research. Process and analysis were validated internally by staff members and other participants. An all-staff analysis workshop initially validated themes and findings that were further explored through writing and co-editing. Writing by the research cluster was circulated to all staff, discussed and edited. The research cluster held validation sessions with

Board members, former staff members, collaborators, and counterparts, with whom we shared preliminary findings and posed key questions: Does this resonate with you? What is missing? What contribution do you think this research makes? How do you see *Inter Pares* sharing this research with others? One such validation session took place mid-way through the research. A long-standing colleague from Latin America agreed to read through all the data collected along with notes from the all-staff analysis workshop. She then read through draft answers to our research questions and provided the research cluster with her impressions. Together, we spent time discussing the findings we had identified in light of the data we had collected, identifying areas that needed to be further studied and developed.

We have also had to face our own confirmation bias and that of our colleagues and counterparts. The research cluster identified overly positive data gathering exercises as ‘love-ins’ – thus naming the tendency to only discuss *Inter Pares*’ highlights and successes. This is perhaps due to a reluctance of counterparts to be critical. As researchers, and people intimately involved in the work, we considered it to be our responsibility to seek out a more critical perspective – although we did not go as far as inviting the participation of counterparts with whom we no longer have relationships. Staff contributed their own critical perspectives on their work, and met to discuss the following question: What are the situations that most challenge our feminist analysis and practice, where the reality that we are confronted with is dissonant with our political intentions and aspirations? This discussion helped us identify the dilemmas we face in our work that were not always raised during interviews and focus groups.

3.4.3 Catalytic validity

The research is evaluated based on how useful it is to people’s practice and for its strategic implications and relevance for action (Lather, 1991). The research has created opportunities for those closely connected to *Inter Pares* to reflect on the organization’s practice. The study’s catalytic validity has yet to be fully actualized, although it is expected to help shape future practice. We expect that written documents, presentations and workshops will help catalyze action both within *Inter Pares*, with our counterparts, and within the NGO sector. This potential was echoed in a validation session:

It would be useful to share some of the overall reflections from the research with counterparts: “Based on your experience and knowledge of *Inter Pares*, do you agree with these observations?” Such a request and exercise asks counterparts to reflect on their

own institutions as well, which is useful. (colleague, validation session)

The highly participatory nature of this research has made validation an ongoing process over the duration of the research and we suspect that it will continue not only as we translate our findings into text, but organizationally, as the research process is integrated into our institutional history and stories.

4. FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN A NON-HIERARCHY

The organizational structure of *Inter Pares* supported our research project in two ways. Staff members' role as co-managers of *Inter Pares* ensured that we were mutually accountable, and equally responsible, to one another and to the organization in our temporary role as co-researchers. Secondly, our experience of building consensus and trust amongst ourselves and with counterparts has honed skills central to participatory action research.

4.1 A commitment to process

Within a hierarchical organization, as in research, a process may be initiated by one person and participation sought from the group. At *Inter Pares*, everyone was part of the discussion that led to the decision to pursue research, and all were committed to ensuring its success. As researchers, we relied on the workplace culture of *Inter Pares*, one that fosters a high level of commitment to process and to the whole of the institution's work.

When someone is hired and integrated into the co-management team, they are asked to share responsibility for *Inter Pares* in its entirety. While they are hired for a specific regional program or to take on fundraising, administrative, or financial responsibilities, they also take part in all major organizational decisions. They are encouraged to take their own power within the organization, and support each other in doing the same. Our role as colleagues and managers ensured we were collectively responsible to each other, our counterparts, and the institution over the course of this research.

Participatory action research requires a high level of commitment both from the lead researchers and from participants. This is especially the case as more people are brought into the process. It often requires that participants read material, provide critical feedback, participate in meetings, and even conduct interviews, surveys or gather data in other ways. Time requirements

can become stumbling blocks when expectations are not explicit at the beginning of the research. *Inter Pares* staff members have extensive experience of actively participating in collective endeavours – research or otherwise – that require a high level of preparation. Such a pace is one that staff are accustomed to as it is a necessary part of working by consensus.

4.2 The centrality of consensus

Inter Pares has developed a practice whereby each person who sits around the co-management table is expected to actively contribute to consensus-building. Because this is integrated into our daily work, it took less time to reach consensus on issues relating to the research than might have been expected in a group of people who were less experienced in this practice, and who had not developed a trusting relationship.

When Ospina et al. (2004), housed in a university, conducted research with front-line social change practitioners, they faced a number of challenges in identifying and clarifying tasks, boundaries, authority, and roles. It took them time to iron out these contentions, although some were never entirely clarified. Such issues have not surfaced in our research at *Inter Pares* because clear accountability lines exist, defining the function of smaller groups and their relation to the whole of staff. These lines did not need to be developed for the research project – they were not an exception, they were the rule. The research project plugged into well-honed and established processes, at the centre of which are practiced systems of accountability, parity of responsibility and consensus decision-making. As Ospina et al. note, “for groups to function both effectively *and* democratically each member must feel authorized by the group and they must take up their own authority in the service of the group” (p. 65). This closely resembles the ethos of consensus-building at *Inter Pares*. Whereas these issues generate tensions in participatory action research in which multiple actors from various sectors collaborate, it did not in our case.

Coming to collective decisions is often a question of knowledge, and ultimately about power. Building consensus involves developing a shared, albeit diverse, understanding of a situation and agreeing on a decision that everyone feels comfortable acting upon. In an ideal process, dissenting voices are also heard, and everyone works to find common ground. Consensus has not been flawless at *Inter Pares* – we have experienced difficulties and conflict in our many years of non-hierarchical organizing. The very nature of the organization’s identity, or *raison d’être* – the pursuit of social justice – means that raising issues of power within the

institution is all the more difficult because it may challenge deeply held beliefs about who we are as activists. As Srivastava writes:

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of social movement organizations ... is that most contemporary social movements have focused not only on changing society “out there” but also on developing practices for looking inward, with the aim of shaping community and self. ... In other words, social movements require a vision not only of a community of individuals but also of shared ideas, morals, and ethics. (Srivastava 2005, p. 34)

This vision of social movement organizations as ‘good’ and progressive makes it challenging to identify and name power relations. “This political and ethical climate means that there is a great deal at stake – not only one’s sense of goodness and sense of self but also one’s political identity, one’s career as activist or worker in a feminist organization” (*ibid*, p. 41). At *Inter Pares*, as in other social justice and feminist organizations, there is both an institutional and a personal imperative to maintain the assumption of innocence. During a workshop, a staff member expressed it in these words:

I wonder when you have an organization that is aspirational in its form, in trying to have that coherence, that people can feel it is difficult to challenge each other and feel it is difficult being challenged because of the gap between motivations, values, morality and behaviour. If you are in some way implicated in abusing power, or not seeing power [...] there is an unwillingness to recognize our own privilege. There is a real attachment to being oppressed [...] and you get called on oppressing someone else in a situation, and that is devastating. I am not going to say it, because I don’t want to devastate you. When you get fifteen people, it is so intimate [...] the intensity of working together raises the stakes so much.²

We raise this to signal that non-hierarchy and consensus are not perfect, and while such issues were not an obstacle in the research per se, they do shape how we work together.

Finally, the long-term consensus-based relationships that *Inter Pares* has developed with most of our counterparts have strengthened our attempt to document and learn about our own practice. The collaborations we have established, and continue to maintain, allowed people to be honest and candid, although there is no guarantee they were completely transparent – and as mentioned previously, those with whom *Inter Pares* no longer has connections were not invited to contribute. Nevertheless, counterparts involved understood that *Inter Pares* was documenting its way of working and they were pleased to support us in these efforts. Years spent building and

² All primary data cited in this research was collected as part of this research process, unless otherwise noted. Data from external evaluations are cited and referenced in the bibliography.

maintaining relationships have nurtured a trust that is central to the feminist PAR we are conducting. As McIntyre & Lykes point out (in Lykes & Coquillon 2007), “feminist infused participatory and action research is ... built on the development of relationships; it is through relationships that participants are transformed...human beings undergoing a shared process of personal and collective change through feminist-infused participatory and action research naturally form bonds and attachments” (p. 315). In the case of *Inter Pares*, those bonds already exist and are being nurtured through collective inquiry.

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PROCESS FOR ACTION

Thus far we have discussed the research process in detail. In this section, we share some findings on how process informs our institutional practice and how it translates to our practice with counterparts within and outside Canada. The importance of process for *Inter Pares* stems from a key feminist principle that social change cannot be shaped around pre-determined outcomes, but rather that the process itself is an important part of re-making social relations, an important aspect of building political consciousness. This understanding underpins everything that *Inter Pares* does: how we relate to counterparts, and how we work collectively to achieve common objectives.

5.1 Building relationships of common cause and solidarity, based on shared politics

One of the most important means by which *Inter Pares* puts feminist principles into practice at the level of process – other than our non-hierarchical structure – is in how we relate to counterparts in Canada and overseas. The influence of feminist thought can be seen in how *Inter Pares* seeks to understand and challenge power dynamics in North-South relationships by building relationships of common cause and solidarity, based on shared politics and in which we recognize our own subjectivity.

Inter Pares has embraced reciprocity and mutuality, contributing to a relationship while learning from that relationship as well. Counterparts spoke of how *Inter Pares* works to build mutual trust, making it “a genuine relationship of solidarity” (counterpart interview, Philippines). In *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Chandra T. Mohanty (2003) emphasized the need for a political, rather than a biological or cultural, basis upon which to build alliances. International alliances, she argues, must be grounded in the “political links we choose to make among and between struggles” (p. 46). Political alliances are central to action

and underline the importance of recognizing and asserting our subjectivity as a Canadian organization and as activists.

And we have benefitted as much as our counterparts have – they have contributed so much to our thinking and our work in Canada. It’s often the ‘beneficiaries’ language that implies that people ‘over there’ benefit. So we try to break down that us/them dichotomy – we have shared interests and shared goals and we collaborate to bring about change. (staff interview)

Since its inception, *Inter Pares* has rejected project logics in favour of processes that are flexible, adaptable, and responsive to changing needs and realities in the contexts in which our counterparts work.

We are looking for people who will engage with us in a political project; we talk about who we are in our own context, what we are doing in Canada to bring about change, what our interest is, what we want to get out of the relationship, how we feel that our counterparts could help us, how we could help them. (staff interview)

Building these alliances has required that *Inter Pares* recognize what we are able to bring to a relationship, as well as the limits of what we know and what we can offer. This is a recognition of our own subjectivity, an awareness of the importance of raising our voice in our own backyards, while counterparts take up the political space that is rightfully theirs. Institutional evaluations of *Inter Pares* have found that the relationships we build with counterparts as allies in a shared political project are evidenced by the degree to which we share objectives and vision:

The organizational mission or goal of the counterpart organizations that were reviewed during this evaluation show that there is coherence and considerable convergence between their institutional mission and goals and *Inter Pares*’ program objectives. (Seydegart and Turcot 2004, p. 45)

Being allies requires flexibility and adaptability, also leaving room for disagreement, for discussion and dissent, where *Inter Pares* and counterparts can challenge each other on questions of program strategy or direction in the spirit of solidarity, confident that the political foundations of the relationship are strong. Some long-term counterparts pointed to such moments over the history of their relationship with *Inter Pares* – moments that tested the strength of the relationship but from which both parties learned a great deal and that ultimately made the relationship stronger. In one instance, a counterpart shared the story of debating with *Inter Pares* the benefits and drawbacks of longer-term institutional funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, which was *Inter Pares*’ proposal, versus continuing with existing short-

term project funding. Ultimately, the move to longer-term and larger-scale funding proved to be a very positive one (counterpart interview, Thai-Burma border). With this same counterpart, *Inter Pares* was able to have a debate about other issues, such as the potential for health-care related work to be an entry point for political change. With a political basis of solidarity and a practice of mutual respect and equality, there can be room for disagreement and debate.

Although we aspire to egalitarian relationships, we do encounter challenges – some counterparts may experience themselves to be at a power disadvantage relative to *Inter Pares* staff members, or through our greater ability to access financial resources. Some relationships never reach a level of complete trust and mutuality. Current and former staff members were very candid about power dynamics and the challenges they experience. They said such things as: “Sometimes people don’t think of us as co-conspirators and colleagues. We are a funder and we are a meddling funder,” and “If somebody insists on seeing you as a funder, there is nothing that we can do about it. Our work is to ensure that we are as empowering as possible. We are in a relationship with our own funders” (staff members, workshop). Such challenges exist even within long standing collaborations, as this quote from a Latin American counterpart illustrates.

[*Inter Pares*] internal commitment to consensus, horizontality, equality, democracy, to being self-reflective, to dialogue – sometimes it is apparent that there is incoherence in the practice versus the idea, and that relationships of power exist between people ... The closeness of the relationship between *Inter Pares* and [counterpart] raises a tension around the autonomy of both organizations, but especially [counterpart], in that relationship; that there is a difference between knowing internal issues and honesty and transparency – *Inter Pares* has always known the internal issues in [counterpart], but never the other way around. (counterpart workshop, Latin America)

There have been other instances when the very foundations of relationships have been tested, and what has prevailed is *Inter Pares*' commitment to political ideals, even when this commitment has necessitated the end of a long-standing relationship. In one particularly challenging case, *Inter Pares* and an important ally parted ways because of a disagreement on a profound issue of principle. The decision to part ways with collaborators with whom we share a considerable amount of experiences – institutional and personal – was taken after much deliberation both internally, and with the counterpart in question. The process and final decision had a profound effect on the organization.

5.2 Working collectively to achieve common objectives

One of the key programming methodologies that surfaced again and again in the research data is

Inter Pares' work in coalitions. *Inter Pares* has played a central role in forming, building, and sustaining many influential coalitions of Canadian NGOs on a variety of issues – solidarity work with the Philippines under the Marcos dictatorship, Canadian policy work on food sovereignty and biotechnology, solidarity work with Central America during the “dirty wars”, and women’s health and reproductive rights in Canada and overseas.

Our reliance on coalitions as an essential programming methodology is linked to the importance we have historically placed on collaboration and collective process. These elemental feminist values have been incorporated into the everyday workings at *Inter Pares*, and have developed into an ethos of collaboration that has influenced all of our programming. This spirit of collaboration is a recognition of the limits of our knowledge and capacity to affect change in isolation. When confronting root causes of poverty or injustice, and when working toward structural change, more is learned and processes are made richer and more effective when there are many actors implicated that can pool their expertise and resources.

[In the past], you saw coalitions across various issues...for me it's a manifestation of feminist practice...at the root [of which] was a common analysis...of factors of oppression and disempowerment, and that we needed to come together to oppose them. You don't see that today – things are more stove-piped, separate. At *Inter Pares* I see the strength that this earlier tradition [of coalition building] manifested – I don't see that separation. (interview, funding agency)

Coalition work also necessitates that collaborators be willing to forego individuality and share responsibilities:

I see collaborative relationships fostered in what is often a competitive environment, where organizations have basically one trough to source government funds – it fosters competition, unfortunately. Seeing *Inter Pares* work against this, with a collaborative approach, is perhaps feminist. (interview, funding agency)

Canadian and international political alliances allow us to learn and act collectively on common interests and issues. *Inter Pares* has generated opportunities for knowledge-creation and learning – necessary elements in building alliances with a political basis. We have organized learning circles, roundtable discussions, kitchen table meetings, and international exchanges, laying a foundation for trust, mutual confidence, and knowledge among activists engaged in similar struggles. A staff member provides an example:

We've been supporting this health clinic started by a refugee doctor, who trains medics and backpack workers [...] We've worked with a women's health organization in the Philippines that has a very clear feminist analysis [...] We invited them to come and meet

with our counterparts on the Thai-Burma border: women's organizations that are based in refugee camps, migrant women's groups, teachers, paramedics, etc., because the women on the border had identified a need to develop some skills around trauma counselling [...] The whole approach was a feminist approach, starting with women's oppression in linking domestic violence and state violence and sharing principles and approaches to counselling. (staff interview)

Similarly, in the 1990s, *Inter Pares* brought an activist from the Philippine women's movement to speak at the Annual General Meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), and later, took the president of NAC to the Philippines to meet with the women's movement there, in an effort to build international solidarity: "That way women could inform each other's analysis but also work together jointly in other ways... So that's part of our strategy – to internationalize Canadian work and get Canadians more involved internationally" (staff interview).

Inter Pares situates itself within these learning processes, and participates in the co-creation of subjective and inter-subjective knowledge with others. Many counterparts named the openness to learning as an identifying characteristic of *Inter Pares'* approach, and pointed to the theoretical or analytical rigour behind our work as a valued contribution to social justice efforts. Several participants in the research even named this research project as an example of our commitment to feminist process: "This process in itself reflects this feminist political commitment and analysis. It's a way of being complicit in the work" (counterpart workshop, Central America).

The development of *Inter Pares'* work on women's health and reproductive rights, pharmaceuticals, and population control is an illustrative example of this methodology of linking women together. In the 1980s, *Inter Pares* brought Bangladeshi women to Canada and toured across the country to share stories and experiences on women's health concerns. This ultimately led to the creation of Women's Health Interaction, a women's health collective, and the idea for a popular theatre piece on women's health called *Side Effects*. It also laid the groundwork for the creation of the Canadian Women's Health Network. The Bangladeshi women who had toured Canada returned to their country to share learning with other women, forming a feminist organization, *Nari Phoko*, that worked on women's rights in health (staff interview).

Inter Pares' understanding of our role and responsibility, our subjectivity, in global processes of social change played an important part in shaping this work.

We were challenged to look in our own backyard in a sense. We knew a lot about what women were fighting for here and so on, but when we got involved with population

issues and reproductive rights issues, we did some research and found out that drugs like Depo-Provera were being given in Canada to immigrant women, native women, women of colour and...there was sterilization and population control happening in Canada too. So we worked with women's groups here to advocate for women's control over their own bodies, just as our overseas counterparts were doing, and we fed each other's analysis, and campaigns and advocacy work. (staff interview)

When *Inter Pares* learned about the damage being done by population control measures, we began to challenge the assumption of population control as an anti-poverty strategy. Major funding bodies in Canada, including the Canadian government, were funding population control measures under this assumption. *Inter Pares*, along with counterparts, used popular media (an article published in the *Canadian Forum*, a CBC Ideas program), set up meetings with funding agencies, and even staged a few public protests to denounce Canada's role in population control measures. An independent women's brief was also prepared and presented at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development that took place in September 1994 in Cairo, Egypt. During an institutional evaluation of *Inter Pares*, Stuart, McLaren & Beauregard (1995) identified some key outcomes as a result of this coalition work, including, persuading "a major donor to cancel support for use of Norplant technology" and a shift in the Canadian International Development Agency's policy favouring low-dose birth control pills.

The Cairo Conference reflected a new rhetoric by large actors in the population debate, moving away from prophecies of demographic disasters toward the end for women's empowerment and reproductive health. [...] The Ford Foundation has completely re-oriented its approach from support for family planning to support for women's reproductive health and empowerment in the last five years. There has been donor pressure to lower coercive fertility control practices and curtail incentive systems in Bangladesh Family Planning. The pressure for change which has been gradually working its way through the population establishment and the large donor community stems from small groups like *Inter Pares* and *Development Alternatives* and others around the world which have been able to claim public attention for their concerns. (p. 18)

Inter Pares' feminist and participatory methodology does not exist simply as a matter of principle – it has been shown to be a meaningful way to achieve collaborative and lasting results. By building a foundation of mutual confidence and knowledge, and by fostering a non-hierarchical work environment that extends beyond office doors, *Inter Pares* has effectively strengthened social movements through learning and knowledge-building, brought women's voices to the forefront to feed into coalitions able to shape social movements, Canadian policy, and NGO practice.

6. CONCLUSION

Our research experience has been extremely positive, but participatory research requires a lot of time and adding it on to an already heavy workload is a challenge. In a hierarchical workplace, adding research could be perceived as a way to extract more work from already stretched workers. This could arguably be the case in a non-hierarchical organization such as *Inter Pares*, but it was mediated by the fact that we made a collective decision to conduct the research, that we all make an equal base salary, and that we regularly engage in such research-like activities as part of our work. Nevertheless, a few colleagues have had to step away from the research cluster due to workload issues. It is also important to be flexible around people's involvement in recognition that not everyone is passionately interested in research.

We have found it valuable to explore our organizational practices and their connection to our programs. In conducting this research, we fostered a critical praxis – gathering information about our work, analysing it collectively, and identifying successes, gaps, and limitations. A participatory approach to social research was especially supportive of this process, given *Inter Pares'* egalitarian ways of working. As researchers, as staff members, and colleagues, we have found synergy between *Inter Pares'* organizational structure, its practice, and feminist PAR. Staff members' commitment to thorough processes, to the organization as a whole, and their experience of working by consensus, facilitated the research. Practiced systems of accountability and parity of responsibility within the organization provided entry points for the research cluster to conduct the study.

Those conducting participatory research have often identified challenges related to building trust and accountability, and ensuring shared ownership of process and findings. We suggest that a careful study of organizations' or groups' ways of functioning – decision making, accountability mechanisms, collective processes – are relevant when engaging in participatory research. Such knowledge and understanding of organizations would enable researchers to better situate themselves, their research, and its relevance for those involved, while allowing people to participate in meaningful ways.

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ANNEX B

LEARNING HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH IT:

**POPULAR EDUCATION AND FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING IN A SOCIAL JUSTICE
ORGANIZATION**

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Inter Pares was building broad-based coalitions to mobilize the public, gathering women's experiences from the North and South ... it was truly the most remarkable experience of my life.
(Member of *Inter Pares* Board of Directors, 2008)

Some of the most transformational learning happens as people organize to bring about social change. Pedagogues such as Paulo Freire (1970) have written extensively about the power of bringing people together to share experiences and act collectively. The feminist movement and its consciousness-raising is also a tribute to the significance of learning and informal pedagogies. In this article, I describe the work of *Inter Pares*, a Canadian social justice organization that has drawn on such pedagogies in its programs. I begin by describing the organization and the research methodology. I then share what I, as a staff member, have found to be an inspiring piece of the organization's history, illustrating the central role of feminist consciousness-raising and popular education in *Inter Pares'* work.

ABOUT *INTER PARES*

Inter Pares was founded in 1975 by people who wanted to change the way Canadians engaged in international development. From its inception, it has offered financial and political support to organizations in the South acting on issues of common concern: reproductive rights and women's health, violence against women, civil liberties, migration, human rights, resource extraction, and food sovereignty. *Inter Pares* also developed an active Canadian program, working in coalition with other Canadian organizations, engaging the government on its foreign policy, and connecting domestic work to like-minded international actors. *Inter Pares* has a well-established reputation among its peers for its egalitarian and participatory practice, and for the knowledge-building activities it facilitates – learning circles, dialogues, and exchanges. It is also recognized for its role in developing working relationships between organizations linked by a common cause.

One of the important ways in which egalitarian principles manifest themselves in *Inter Pares*' practice is through the structures and processes used internally for making decisions and managing the organization. *Inter Pares*' egalitarian and consensus-based management structure is the result of staff's strong conviction that not only does such a structure better reflect the organization's values, it is also a "much more sane and more effective way to work" (Staff/former staff workshop, 2009). Parity of salary and responsibility is a central tenet of the organization. Based on the idea that all work is equally valued, staff are paid the same base salary, share responsibility for the organization, and are accountable to each other, the Board of Directors, donors, and counterparts (a word we use in lieu of 'partner' to reflect our belief in egalitarian relationships). The principles that motivated and continue to motivate the internal structure and activities of *Inter Pares* are feminist in their essence: equality, consensus, and attention to process. While a non-hierarchical management structure has worked for us, we understand that it may not be a viable or desirable option for other organizations. I mention it here because it is often cited as especially rare in international NGOs.

CONDUCTING FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

In August 2008, *Inter Pares* undertook a study on the role of feminism in the organization. The research aimed to document the management system, internal processes, and program methodologies that flow from *Inter Pares*' feminist analysis and to examine how these relate to its program and policy action. A few staff members volunteered to be part of a team that took the lead on the research that would engage the remainder of staff in the process. I am part of that research team.

The study began with a review of the organizations writing – a sample of 80 historical documents (reports, newsletters, funding proposals, memos, minutes of meetings, etc). We then

conducted 13 open-ended, semi-structured interviews and six workshops with funders, current and former Board members, current and former staff, close collaborators within the international cooperation sector, and counterparts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Canada. Data gathering, analysis and validation overlapped. Transcripts and summary reports were provided for participants to review and an overall analysis was presented to staff members for discussion. An all-staff analysis workshop was held to validate the data and findings, and to identify gaps. A further validation session was organized with a long standing colleague from Latin America, who read through all of the data and the preliminary answers to our research questions, providing critical feedback.

When engaging in participatory feminist research, the issue of validity often rears its head. We addressed questions of validity by relying on Patti Lather's (1991) three articulations. *Catalytic validity* – we ensured that the research was flexible and responsive in its design. *Face validity* – we ensured the research made sense to those who participated and those who know the organization, by constantly checking assumptions and findings. *Catalytic validity* – the research will be evaluated based on how useful it is to people's practice and for its strategic implications and relevance to action. More conventionally, we conducted cross-data analysis and compared our themes and findings with those of external consultants who had evaluated the institution on various occasions between 1995 and 2009. In doing so, we found consistency and coherence. A detailed description of the methodology and how it relates to the non-hierarchical structure of *Inter Pares* is currently in press (Gouin, Cocq, McGavin).

As a way to illustrate how our feminist analysis and practice come together, *Inter Pares* staff have written short descriptions of our work in coalition. *Inter Pares'* work on women's health and reproductive rights was repeatedly mentioned by research participants as a

quintessential example of the organization's feminist practice. In the section that follows, I share how this work came about, how relationships were nurtured and how concerted actions were taken to improve women's health and reproductive rights in Canada and internationally. I have written the description of this work based on an interview with an *Inter Pares* staff member who was very active in building the Women's Health Interaction collective (WHI) and in shaping its actions. It also draws on interviews conducted with women who were closely involved in WHI and external CIDA institutional evaluations of *Inter Pares*' programs.

LISTENING TO WOMEN'S STORIES: FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

In the early 80s, building on relationships we had established in Canada and in Bangladesh, *Inter Pares* organized a women's solidarity tour. Two women health activists from Bangladesh were invited to tour Canadian cities and communities to meet women, learn about their concerns, and see how they were organizing. In preparation for the tour, a staff member travelled across Canada to talk about *Inter Pares* and our work overseas, and to learn about how women were organizing in their communities. We wanted to see if there would be any interest among these Canadian groups in learning more about the realities of women overseas.

In preparation for the tour, I went to all these communities, and just sat down and talked to people. It was very open-ended. I described the work of Inter Pares and our work in different countries and shared what women were working on in Bangladesh. There was lots of interest from people. In those days that kind of an exchange was unusual. (Staff interview, 2010)

A report was prepared on each visit, outlining people's concerns, interests, and actions they felt the government should be taking. These reports were shared and discussed with groups in Canada and Bangladesh, and informed planning for the tour.

Women's health was shaping up to be a major issue for women and disenfranchised people in Bangladesh, who were fighting to have a drug policy introduced in the country that

would allow for generic drug manufacturing and low-cost medicines. *Inter Pares* had heard stories about how contraceptives were being imposed on women in Bangladesh without their informed consent and how women were forcibly sterilised as a result of population control measures. But we didn't start out knowing how this situation might link to women in Canada.

The two women activists invited to tour across Canada were highly educated, middle-class Bangladeshi women, and while not representative of all women in Bangladesh, Khushi and Shireen worked with grassroots women and were involved in policy work, something *Inter Pares* saw as a strength.

You can't do strong policy work without linking it to what's happening at the local level. Inter Pares was always reluctant just to fund policy groups or just fund grassroots organizations. It was important for us to work with organizations that resembled our own. Inter Pares never claimed to be a grassroots organisation. We supported community development work in Canada, we spoke with people, we supported and learned from their work, and tried to connect it to the work overseas, and vice versa, building policy on that. (Staff interview, 2010)

When the tour began, our guests from Bangladesh were very curious to know what the situation was like for women in Canada, and how they were organizing.

The three of us would arrive, we'd introduce ourselves. I'd say a little spiel about Inter Pares, our relationship to these organizations the women worked for, and show the slides, and then open it up and we'd have discussions. We didn't try to direct or steer the discussion in any way. I mean, Khushi and Shireen were so knowledgeable and so interesting and so funny and engaging, they just took over. And everybody loved them, just loved them. It was great. I loved them. (...) It was a real dialogue. And that's how we'd get to a point where there seemed to be some commonalities there, things that maybe we could pick up and build on later. (Staff interview, 2010)

The methodology *Inter Pares* used was geared towards breaking down separations among women. While some workshops were facilitated, many meetings happened informally, across people's kitchen tables, or in communities.

When we developed relationships, we would do so on the basis of mutuality – not only asking if we were interested in their work, but asking if they were interested in the work that Inter Pares was doing domestically. ... It's also important to know people on a more

personal level. I think it was also part of becoming a feminist, and part of what I learned from other feminists. ... Some of the tour get-togethers, when we went to people's homes, or when we went to community centres or churches, we talked about our own experiences. That was so important, that's where you started. And then made links to the wider world. It wasn't that linear, but you know what I mean. It was always, always our own stories, and our own experiences. (Staff interview, 2010)

The tour in Canada was eye opening. It was open-ended – this is important in our process. It's not that we don't have an agenda. Our agenda is to find out what the real situation is for women and people who are living in poverty. (Staff/former staff workshop, 2009)

Inter Pares and our Bangladeshi counterparts were hosted by native people in different places, by the National Farmers' Union, the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, and BC Council for International Cooperation, and many others. When the tour ended, *Inter Pares* had discussions with our colleagues from Bangladesh about the links that were made. There was a lot of mutual learning.

We were so excited at the end, exhausted but excited about the possibilities for linking to some of the groups that they'd met. One of the themes that came out of the tour, the one that was talked about most, was women and health. Khushi and Shireen, were shocked to learn that Canadian women didn't always have access to birth control, or safe and effective forms of birth control. ...

They were surprised at the situation for women in Canada, the poverty that they saw, the violence against women that they saw. They were surprised by the lack of agricultural policies. There were some parallels that they could see, particularly around women's health and also around pharmaceuticals, as they were actively involved in a campaign in Bangladesh to promote the adoption of a drug policy. They found out that the Canadian government was thinking of changing the patent legislation in ways that would assist the pharmaceutical industry to the detriment of the generic drug industry. When they went home, they created their own feminist organization with like-minded women that worked for many years on women in health, pharmaceuticals, and violence against women. (Staff interview, 2010)

Feminist consciousness-raising emphasises the communal aspects of learning. It assumes learning as a social relation that integrates thoughts and emotions (Morrish & Buchanan, 2001). Consciousness-raising groups were an important part of the feminist movement in the 60s and 70s. "Participants met in informal settings to reflect on their experiences, to examine common

struggles and to analyze their concerns related to power relations and institutions” (Morrish & Buchanan, 2001, p. 265). As this tour and its preparation attest, such practices continued to inspire well into the 80s and 90s.

Consciousness-raising happens when women realize they are not alone in their struggle against oppression. They connect their personal experiences to the experiences of other women, thereby identifying systemic inequalities and exposing previously hidden power dynamics. More than just a feminist slogan, ‘the personal is political’ describes the consciousness-raising process itself (Butterwick, 1998, p. 112).

Inter Pares’ practice of listening to women’s stories and of bringing people together without imposing a pre-conceived agenda was inspired by feminist consciousness-raising. I say this because it links seamlessly with the literature and history of the practice, and because I know that staff members associated with the work on women and health believed in the power of feminist consciousness-raising to effect lasting social change.

Feminist consciousness-raising relies on the experiences of a group of people who are assumed to have something in common – in this case their gender as the basis for their oppression in matters related to health. In this solidarity tour, an educator was not central to the learning process. Rather, learning happened as people came together to relate their personal experiences to a broader social context in a non-hierarchical environment. The catalyst was the collective presence of women rather than the facilitative role of a single educator. In feminist consciousness-raising, participants themselves are leaders, and the only agenda is to engage in dialogue about what is usually understood as an individual or personal issue. It is the interaction of “content (analysis of women’s oppression), interactive structure (reciprocity and equality), and epistemological premise (to start from subjective experience)” (Hart, 1991, p. 58), as well as

an orientation toward action, that makes consciousness-raising a pedagogical approach in its own right.

In consciousness-raising groups, when women spoke about what they really felt rather than what they were supposed to feel, they collectively tried to discover what they *could* want and also what they *should* want. To find out what they could want was a process of resurrecting and reconstructing the past. To find out what they should want was a process of discovering and shaping common interests. (Hart, 1991, p. 52-53, emphasis in original)

WOMEN'S STORIES AS THE STARTING POINT FOR POPULAR EDUCATION

As a follow up to the solidarity tour, *Inter Pares* organized a workshop in Aylmer, Quebec called 'Women and Pharmaceuticals'. There were participants from many organizations present – women's groups, immigrant service organizations, NGOs – many of which had met with our Bangladeshi counterparts. The Great Canadian Theatre Company, nurses, medical doctors, the Medical Reform Group, and a Health Canada official attended, among others. The workshop solidified a common desire to connect people working on women's rights and health. The idea of a network came up, as did the idea of a play, both of which generated a lot of excitement. Out of that workshop was born WHI, with core groups based in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Kingston that would act on women's health issues with input from women across the country.

Collecting women's stories was an important methodology for WHI and *Inter Pares*, and it was used in developing the script for a play about women and pharmaceuticals. With the support of *Inter Pares*, two Canadian women travelled to Bangladesh to document women's stories related to this issue. They were hosted by our Bangladesh counterparts, who introduced them to a variety of women's organizations and health organizations. One of the researchers described her experience in this way.

When I was sent to Bangladesh to gather women's stories, we originally set out to do a project on pharmaceuticals and drug dumping. But when we were in the field, we got a lot of stories on forced sterilization – Inter Pares took on these issues because it was part of women's issues. It was a constant process of gathering info, validating all kinds of

information – not just the written word, the intellectual word, but the lived experience of women, the lived experience of poor women, marginalized women. Taking that as real knowledge that needed to be thought about and analyzed, and then going back and checking with the women ... asking: Did we get this right? (Staff/former staff workshop, 2009)

Our counterparts had described the population control measures in Bangladesh, but during this trip we were able to talk to women and document their stories in a more systematic way. Some women had been given high risk contraceptive drugs with no follow-up care. Inter-uterine devices that were taken off the market in Canada were still being promoted in Bangladesh. High risk contraceptive drugs were also being prescribed to women in Canada, particularly aboriginal women, immigrant women and women with disabilities. These stories were also included in the script for the play.

We sent out letters to all the groups we'd met across the country, saying, if you had one or two ideas, one or two points you'd like to make, through this play, about women and pharmaceuticals, what would it be? We got lots of ideas back, great ideas, including: we have to link what's happening in Canada with what's happening in Bangladesh and internationally. (Staff interview, 2010)

When the script was ready, workshops were held and people were invited to provide feedback. The script was also sent to Bangladesh and to the people *Inter Pares* and our Bangladeshi colleagues had met in Canada. *Side Effects*, as the play was called, linked women's stories across borders and with support from government and foundations, it went on tour, building on and nurturing women's community organizing.

Each performance of *Side Effects* was followed by a discussion with audience members. WHI and *Inter Pares* prepared packages for community groups, including media packages, posters, and a *Side Effects* 'kit' with background information and questions for discussion. It included everything organizers might like to know about hosting the tour in their own community. No single organization had the capacity of hosting on its own – an endeavour that

involved hosting the play, organizing accommodation, and media outreach. Groups were encouraged to work in collaboration.

Some of the groups knew each other already, and some didn't at all. So you had a range of community groups in different places who got together and formed their own planning committees. They talked about the goals that they wanted to achieve. It was a shared project. (Staff interview, 2010)

The play was a raging success by all accounts. It was staged 45 times in 37 communities. It garnered positive reviews from the media and led to many new opportunities.

People had a real stake in it. They could see that this was going to support their public outreach and their collaborations. ... The script was translated into French and there was a French tour that our sisters in Quebec organized. We had a lot of requests for the script from around the world as people heard about it. At the same time, we were pushing policy change using the tour. And these local organizations or national organizations we met used it as well. It generated interest in policy change. The process was important. It wasn't just the play. (Staff interview, 2010)

A women's health clinic in Winnipeg, together with the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, linked with other groups in Canada to act on drug policies, legislation of pharmaceuticals and the pharmaceutical industry, and patent protections. The connections they made through the play allowed them to strengthen their advocacy efforts. *Side Effects* was an impetus for groups to come together to create a women's health network, an idea that had been percolating for some time. Part of *Inter Pares* and WHI's strategy was to support the effort to build the Canadian Women's Health Network.

I think the one big gift that Inter Pares gave to WHI ... was my time. When we started working more dedicatedly on women and health issues, women and pharmaceuticals, reproductive rights, particular drugs, all of it was connected to WHI. My time was basically seconded. I was seconded by Inter Pares to do work that would strengthen WHI. (Staff interview, 2010)

WHI began writing and distributing newsletters to all the people who had been on the tour. There were articles on drug legislation here in Canada and in Bangladesh, and ideas for actions were provided to readers. WHI also produced a booklet entitled *For Health or For Profit*,

an exposé on the pharmaceutical industry in Canada and in the South. There was a lot of enthusiasm and commitment for these initiatives.

Popular education based on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) has been adopted in many contexts worldwide including in literacy education, union and community-based education (GATT-Fly, 1983; Greason, 1998). Groups around the world have been inspired by this practice and have defined it in their own way. The definition that I found to be closest to the intention behind *Inter Pares*' work on women's health and reproductive rights is one put forward in 1978 by the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec:

Éducation populaire autonome [autonomous popular education] covers a variety of learning activities and critical reflections by which citizens collectively take action. These activities further lead citizens, individually and collectively, to a "prise de conscience" [heightened understanding] of their working and living conditions, which they will use to effect short and long term social, economic, cultural and political changes in their milieu. (Cited in Greason, 1998, p. 98)

Feminist consciousness-raising and popular education have some common characteristics. Both rely on dialogue and are oriented toward social action initiated by participants, using their own experience as a starting point. There are significant differences however. As Hart (1991) explains, "consciousness-raising was not derived from an identifiable, coherent body of theory, but from the experience of oppression" (p. 50). Freire's popular education on the other hand, was influenced by Marxist and Christian ideals (Mayo, 1999). Freire wanted to develop an educational practice that would support the realization of a 'Kingdom of God on earth' – a world free of oppression.

Feminist consciousness-raising is distinct from popular education in another important way: while the educator may be acting in solidarity with the learners, she plays a directive role in the process (Mayo, 1999). Drawing on a base of trust and common cause established through

feminist consciousness-raising, *Inter Pares* and WHI produced a play that served to initiate discussion and future action on women's health. The organizations that hosted *Side Effects* took on a directive and facilitative role in women's learning and mobilization. While more formalized than feminist consciousness-raising, their popular education pedagogies still used women's experiences as the starting point.

Through a long career of working with the disenfranchised, Freire became known for critiquing the dominant banking model of education – a hierarchical approach in which the learner is assumed to be an empty vessel ready to be filled with the teacher's knowledge. In contrast, Freire favoured critical dialogue and mutually beneficial learning exchanges between teacher and learner. He conceived of emancipatory learning as *conscientisation* – a process whereby people learn about themselves, the world and their place within it. *Conscientisation* is thus “an act of freedom ... an act of knowing, a critical approach to reality” (Mayo, 1999, p. 63). Popular education thus begins with the lives of the dispossessed, engages them in liberating dialogue, and leads to liberatory action; it is “the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation” (Freire, 1998, p. 53).

The groundwork that had been laid through the women's solidarity tour using feminist consciousness-raising later led to a facilitated workshop on women and pharmaceuticals and the *Side Effects* tour, which relied on the strength of popular education. These pedagogies eventually led to the creation of WHI and the Canadian Women's Health Network, allowing women to have a powerful voice in proposing and advocating for policies that would secure women's control over their health and reproduction.

SPEAKING OUT ON WOMEN'S HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Research was an important part of what *Inter Pares* and WHI were doing in Canada, and it

complemented the work of *Inter Pares*' counterparts in Bangladesh, that were producing research on population control measures. *Inter Pares* and WHI were challenging the dominant medical model, making links between women's own experiences of health and the medical system.

Advocacy and policy work drew on women's experiences. It was a feminist approach.

Inter Pares and WHI changed the population discourse in Canada. We built relationships in the Philippines, in Indonesia, in Latin America, in Africa, with women's groups and health groups. We helped build a network in South-East Asia of women's groups, people who were campaigning against Depo Provera, Norplant and forced sterilizations in their own countries. (Staff interview, 2010)

WHI and *Inter Pares* drafted a policy brief on population control in Canada and overseas. In it they challenged population control policies, the tactic of using incentives and disincentives to encourage women to be sterilized, and the unsafe contraceptive drugs that were being distributed to women.

We were challenged to look in our own backyard in a sense. We knew a lot about what women were fighting for here and so on, but when we got involved with population issues and reproductive rights issues, we did some research and found out that drugs like Depo-Provera were being given in Canada to immigrant women, native women, women of colour and...there was sterilization and population control happening in Canada too. So we worked with women's groups here to advocate for women's control over their own bodies, just as our overseas counterparts were doing, and we fed each other's analysis, and campaigns and advocacy work. (Staff interview, 2001)

Inter Pares, WHI, the Canadian Women's Health Network, the Disabled Women's Action Network, aboriginal women's groups, and immigrant women's groups – almost a dozen groups in all – met with government officials at Health Canada. The groups informed officials that they knew the Canadian government was dumping high dosage birth control pills in Bangladesh through the World Bank population control program, and that Canada was facilitating access to unsafe and banned drugs. While the United States had made it illegal for a company to supply pharmaceuticals that had been taken off the market or that were restricted for use in the U.S., Canada was sending these drugs to Bangladesh. The women who gathered at Health Canada

called on the government to stop sending drugs deemed to be unsafe for women in the North to women in the South. As a result of their advocacy efforts, the Canadian government significantly lowered the dosage of the birth control pills that were distributed as Canada's contribution to the World Bank population control program in Bangladesh.

This kind of work by *Inter Pares* and its partners, along with that of other like-minded groups is having an effect on thinking and practice among population programmers. This effect can be seen at several levels. At the level of project/program design and implementation, it is easier to identify links as a result of *Inter Pares*' advocacy activities. *Inter Pares* and *Development Alternatives* [Bangladesh counterpart] reports have helped to persuade a major donor to cancel support for use of Norplant technology. CIDA's shift to low-dose pills may have been influenced by *Inter Pares*' representations on this issue. (Stuart, McLaren & Beauregard, 1995, p. 18)

Inter Pares, along with our Canadian and international counterparts, challenged the assumption of population control as an anti-poverty strategy. Major funding bodies in Canada, including the Canadian government, were funding population control measures under this assumption.

In Canada *Inter Pares* mounted a number of advocacy and educational activities, including the preparation of an independent brief ... to the Cairo Conference [United Nations International Conference on Population and Development]. They established a committee of women activists from across the country to develop the brief, which was subsequently endorsed at a meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and by a number of other women's/health groups across the country. The brief was aimed at urging Canadian government delegates to the Cairo Conference to adopt a pro-woman stance that does not separate population from other aspects of development. (Stuart, McLaren & Beauregard, 1995, p. 18)

This led to some astounding results.

The Cairo Conference reflected a new rhetoric by large actors in the population debate, moving away from prophecies of demographic disasters toward the end for women's empowerment and reproductive health. ... The Ford Foundation has completely re-oriented its approach from support for family planning to support for women's reproductive health and empowerment in the last five years. There has been donor pressure to lower coercive fertility control practices and curtail incentive systems in Bangladesh Family Planning. The pressure for change which has been gradually working its way through the population establishment and the large donor community stems from small groups like *Inter Pares* and *Development Alternatives* and others around the world

which have been able to claim public attention for their concerns. (*Ibid*, p. 18)

Pedagogical practices, both feminist consciousness-raising and popular education, were at the heart of *Inter Pares*' work on women's health and reproductive rights. They allowed women to construct knowledge together, from their own experiences, and to use these to work for social change. Women's stories, shared in informal settings in Canada and in Bangladesh, later led to a more facilitated process of popular education through the *Side Effects* play. From this collective mobilizing, policy and advocacy initiatives were born that ensured women's voices were heard on health and reproductive issues.

In *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Chandra T. Mohanty (2003) emphasized the need for a political, rather than a biological or cultural, basis upon which to build alliances. International alliances, she argues, must be grounded in the "political links we choose to make among and between struggles" (p. 46). Learning has played a key part in *Inter Pares*' work, supporting the organization in developing a solid political basis for North-South and South-South solidarity and forming a basis upon which we have been able to act in common cause. Feminist consciousness-raising and popular education have given us the tools to gather people together, share experiences, and strengthen our work in our own contexts.

Building alliances and coalitions requires flexibility and adaptability, also leaving room for disagreement, discussion and dissent. When there is respect and equality, there can be room for these. Participants in the women's solidarity tour, the *Side Effects* play and those involved in policy and advocacy actions were not homogenous – they did not necessarily share the same sexual orientation, race, class, ability, or status as indigenous people, for instance. But by listening to each other, women in Canada and in Bangladesh were able to hear and identify common concerns. They discovered a shared struggle and were able to coordinate their actions in

their own milieu, and on the international stage. In order to build such alliances, the staff of *Inter Pares* had to assert our own subjectivity and our responsibility to raise our voices in our own context, just as our counterparts are raising theirs in the political spaces that are rightfully theirs.

CONCLUSION

In writing this article I have shared some of *Inter Pares'* history and what I see to be the role of learning in its programs. But learning is not limited to organized pedagogical activities. There is one form of learning that I have not touched upon – social movement learning. I have no doubt that in mobilizing their community around the *Side Effects* play, in drafting policies and alternative briefings, the women involved were learning a great deal about the world and their place within it. Unfortunately, the research was not conceived to study social movement learning, leaving me with little data on this form of learning. It is however an area worth studying further because as Foley (1999) explains, “the most interesting and significant learning occurs informally and incidentally, in people’s everyday lives. And some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it” (p. 1-2).

Through feminist consciousness-raising and popular education, *Inter Pares* has generated opportunities for knowledge-creation and learning – necessary elements in building alliances with a political basis. We have organized learning circles, roundtable discussions, kitchen table meetings, and international exchanges, thus laying a foundation of trust, confidence, and shared knowledge among activists engaged in similar struggles. *Inter Pares* situates itself within these learning processes, and participates in the co-creation of subjective knowledge with others. Many participants in this research named the openness to learning as an identifying characteristic of *Inter Pares'* approach, and pointed to the theoretical or analytical rigour behind our work as a

valued contribution to social justice efforts. As one Board member exclaimed when remembering her participation in a learning circle, “It was so old fashioned to sit and discuss! I felt like I had come home” (Board workshop, 2008). While it may appear old fashioned to sit around and speak to women about their realities before embarking on a project, it is a significant way to establish common ground and to build the trust and knowledge necessary for acting together.

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ANNEX C

LES ONG: POUR UN NOUVEAU PARTENARIAT – UN PARTENARIAT « ENTRE ÉGAUX »

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1. INTRODUCTION

En mai 2009, la ministre de la Coopération internationale, Mme Bev Oda, a annoncé de nouvelles mesures « prises par le gouvernement pour cibler davantage l'aide internationale du Canada »³. Ces mesures prises par l'Agence canadienne de coopération internationale (ACDI) ont la prétention d'« accroître le plus possible l'efficacité de notre aide, pour venir en aide réellement aux personnes démunies dans le monde »⁴. Le gouvernement canadien n'a pas annoncé une augmentation du budget d'aide au développement, mais bien de nouvelles mesures visant à s'assurer que celle-ci produira le plus de résultats possibles en concentrant une grande partie de l'aide dans un petit nombre de pays, et sur des thématiques très restreintes. À priori, l'objectif de ces nouvelles mesures semble relever du « gros bon sens », et les mesures difficiles à contester. La présentation de ces nouvelles mesures peut aussi facilement tromper un profane qui sera surpris qu'elles n'aient pas été mises en œuvre plus tôt. Comme le souligne Brown (sous presse), le besoin de rendre l'aide au développement plus efficace fut évoqué par plusieurs gouvernements successifs pour expliquer les changements introduits à la politique de l'aide au développement. Le discours de l'efficacité de l'aide n'est pas nouveau pour les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) canadiennes. Il fut introduit dans un premier temps avec la gestion axée sur les résultats il y a près de quinze ans. Néanmoins, la signature de la Déclaration de Paris en 2005 et l'agenda d'action d'Accra en 2008 marquent une nouvelle ère de l'efficacité de l'aide. Celle-ci est maintenant évaluée selon le niveau de coordination parmi les donateurs et selon la cohérence entre les politiques de l'aide et les autres politiques (par exemple les politiques de sécurité nationale) (ibid). Tous – gouvernements, société civile, communautés, individus – s'entendent pour dire que l'aide au développement devrait être efficace et permettre d'obtenir des résultats. Là où le bât blesse, c'est au moment de définir les termes, les moyens, les objectifs, les

³ ACDI, 2009b

critères. Des visions opposées du développement et des causes de la pauvreté mèneront forcément à des approches différentes de l'efficacité de l'aide.

Dans cet article, nous nous intéressons à l'efficacité de l'aide du point de vue d'une ONG canadienne – Inter Pares. Nous informerons notre propos à l'aide des résultats d'une étude effectuée par Inter Pares ayant comme objectif d'explorer les liens entre ses pratiques féministes et les résultats obtenus dans ses programmes en Afrique, en Asie, en Amérique latine et au Canada. De nombreux résultats probants ont été identifiés par des évaluateurs externes, notamment en ce qui a trait aux activités et aux programmes d'Inter Pares et de ses homologues visant à réduire les inégalités entre les hommes et les femmes (gender work). En réponse à une recommandation d'une des évaluations, Inter Pares a fait des démarches pour obtenir un financement de recherche pour documenter ses pratiques et identifier les facteurs lui permettant d'être « efficace » et d'obtenir les résultats voulus.

2. INTER PARES

Inter Pares, une organisation canadienne de justice sociale basée à Ottawa, fut fondée en 1975 par d'anciens coopérants qui remettaient en question l'approche au développement international utilisée à cette époque et dont ils avaient été témoin en Afrique. Dès ses débuts, Inter Pares a choisi d'appuyer financièrement et politiquement des organisations de la société civile en Asie, en Afrique, en Amérique latine, et au Canada, qui s'intéressaient à des problématiques telles que les droits sexuels et génésiques, la santé des femmes, la violence contre les femmes, les libertés civiles, la migration, les droits de la personne, l'extraction des ressources naturelles et la souveraineté alimentaire. La philosophie exprimée par le nom Inter Pares, qui signifie « entre égaux », guide les relations de partenariat avec les homologues depuis le début. Ce sujet sera développé plus en profondeur dans la section Résultats de cet article.

⁴ ACIDI, 2009a

Contrairement à la plupart des organisations de coopération internationale, Inter Pares a rapidement développé une composante canadienne à son programme et s'est efforcée⁵ d'établir des liens entre ses actions au Canada et celles de ses homologues dans divers pays. L'organisation s'est aussi rapidement associée à d'autres groupes aux vues similaires pour mettre sur pied des coalitions pour dialoguer avec le gouvernement en ce qui a trait à sa politique étrangère et certains dossiers nationaux. La programmation et les objectifs de l'organisation furent basés sur le principe que le rôle politique d'une organisation de coopération internationale canadienne est au Canada.

Quelques années après sa création, l'équipe d'Inter Pares a entamé une réflexion sur les principes guidant la structure interne de l'organisation – hiérarchique à l'époque. Cette réflexion a mené Inter Pares à adopter une structure de gestion horizontale afin de mettre en œuvre au sein de son équipe les principes utilisés avec ses homologues. À l'instar d'autres organisations fondées à la même période, Inter Pares a débuté modestement, avec une petite équipe et une échelle salariale différente pour le personnel administratif et le personnel de programme. Au début des années 80, Inter Pares a amorcé une discussion interne remettant en question l'écart entre les salaires des membres de l'équipe en fonction de la valeur de leur travail et du principe de parité. Cette discussion, largement influencée par les débats féministes de l'heure et par les transformations personnelles chez les membres de l'équipe, a introduit les notions qui allaient par la suite être à la base de la Convention du personnel⁶ et de la structure de cogestion (Christie, 1991). Cette structure repose sur le principe de parité où chaque membre du personnel partage la

⁵ Le nom Inter Pares est féminin

⁶ La Convention du personnel est un document contenant les principes de l'organisation du travail à Inter Pares (principes de la cogestion, vacances, congé sans solde, fonctions des comités, listes de tâches associées à certains postes, politiques d'harcèlement au travail et gestion de conflit, etc.).

responsabilité de la gestion et reçoit le même salaire de base⁷. L'équipe d'Inter Pares a jugé que la contribution de chacun – indépendamment de ses tâches – avait la même « valeur » et méritait un même salaire. La structure horizontale signifie aussi que les décisions sont prises par consensus et que tous les membres de l'équipe doivent rendre des comptes à leurs collègues au sujet de leur travail, de leur programme et de leurs décisions.

Les principes qui sous-tendent maintenant la structure interne et l'organisation du travail à Inter Pares sont des principes féministes : égalité, prise de décision par consensus, et importance du processus au-delà des résultats. La structure de cogestion est composée de plusieurs comités ayant des fonctions et responsabilités précises. Toutes les décisions affectant l'ensemble de l'organisation sont prises par consensus par l'ensemble du personnel lors de réunions bimensuelles. D'autres comités (thématiques, pour les programmes régionaux, comités du site Internet, etc.) peuvent prendre des décisions se rapportant à leurs programmes ou thèmes particuliers, mais vont rendre compte de leurs décisions lors des rencontres bimensuelles du personnel.

En ce qui a trait à sa programmation, Inter Pares propose une analyse féministe qui soutient que les inégalités structurelles entre personnes, groupes et nations sont les causes de la pauvreté dans le monde. De plus, elle porte un regard critique sur le rôle des ONG canadiennes, ainsi que sur les possibilités et les limites de l'aide au développement.

3. GENÈSE ET CONCEPTUALISATION DU PROJET DE RECHERCHE

De nombreux travaux de recherche ont documenté les différentes formules de l'aide au développement, les résultats obtenus, et la question de l'efficacité de l'aide (Audet, Desrosiers et Roussel, 2008; Bratt et Kukucha, sous presse). D'autres travaux s'interrogent sur les causes de la pauvreté, et les modèles économiques permettant de réduire cette dernière. On se questionne peu,

⁷ Ceux et celles qui ont des personnes à charge reçoivent un montant additionnel.

probablement faute de temps, sur le fonctionnement interne des organisations de la société civile qui jouent un rôle central dans l'aide canadienne au développement. Caouette (2008) souligne le besoin de combler cette lacune en se questionnant sur le fonctionnement interne des ONG canadiennes et en explorant de manière empirique la façon dont elles développent des relations avec leurs homologues du Sud. Il souligne qu'il importe de se questionner sur les dynamiques de pouvoir qui se tissent, sur qui décide, qui élabore les programmes, mais aussi sur qui parle au nom de qui.

Les principes qui guident les actions d'Inter Pares se traduisent par une ouverture à questionner constamment les façons de faire en raison de l'accent mis sur les processus. De plus, la culture organisationnelle favorise la création de connaissances ancrées dans la pratique. Ces prédispositions ont permis de facilement obtenir un consensus sur l'importance de réaliser une étude sur les pratiques féministes d'Inter Pares et leurs liens avec les résultats obtenus. La transition vers une structure horizontale et une structure de gestion égalitaire précédemment décrite est fondée sur la conviction que cette structure reflète les valeurs de l'organisation, mais l'hypothèse posée à l'époque était aussi que la nouvelle structure permettrait de travailler dans un environnement plus sain et d'être plus efficace.

C'est l'hypothèse qu'Inter Pares a explorée dans une recherche participative financée par le Centre de recherches pour le développement international (CRDI), intitulée « L'importance de l'analyse féministe dans les relations Nord-Sud : explorer les liens entre les principes organisationnels, les partenariats et les résultats obtenus ». Plusieurs évaluations externes au cours des dix dernières années ont confirmé qu'Inter Pares obtenait les résultats de développement escomptés, en particulier en ce qui a trait aux résultats obtenus pour transformer les relations de pouvoir entre les hommes et les femmes. Ces évaluations n'ont par contre pas

identifié les éléments de la méthodologie d'Inter Pares qui lui permet d'obtenir ces résultats probants. Le financement du CRDI a permis à Inter Pares d'identifier comment les principes féministes qu'elle prône sont intégrés dans son fonctionnement quotidien et à sa programmation, et de quelles façons ils sont liés aux résultats obtenus. La recherche utilisant une méthodologie participative s'est intéressée à trois questions :

- *Comment Inter Pares intègre-t-elle une analyse féministe à même sa pratique?*
- *Quelle est la relation entre le fonctionnement interne de l'organisation et sa façon d'interagir avec ses homologues?*
- *Quel est le rapport entre l'analyse, la pratique et les résultats observés par les homologues d'Inter Pares et lors d'évaluations de programme?*

La collecte de données et l'analyse se sont déroulées de septembre 2008 à mars 2010.

Afin de rester cohérent avec l'analyse féministe de l'organisation, la méthodologie de recherche fut participative et collective. Un petit groupe de l'équipe du personnel s'est porté volontaire pour coordonner le projet et le mettre en œuvre, y compris la collecte de données, l'analyse et pour rédiger les rapports et articles émanant de l'étude. Les données furent recueillies à l'aide de diverses méthodes : entrevues, groupe de discussion (focus group), atelier de recherche (workshop), avec d'anciens membres du personnel, l'équipe actuelle du personnel, des membres du conseil d'administration actuels et passés, des homologues d'Amérique latine, du Canada, de l'Asie et de l'Afrique, et d'autres collaborateurs. Tous les membres de l'équipe d'Inter Pares ont pris part aux ateliers de recherche et ainsi participé à la collecte de données et à l'analyse. De plus, une revue de la littérature et une analyse de documents clés d'Inter Pares (bulletins, compte-rendu de réunions, publications) ont permis de documenter les processus féministes d'Inter Pares.⁸

4. NOS RÉSULTATS

Cette étude a cherché à illustrer les analyses et pratiques qui sous-tendent les résultats et l'

« efficacité » notés dans les évaluations externes du travail d'Inter Pares. La section suivante présente ces pratiques identifiées par les répondants dans le cadre de l'étude. Celles-ci concernent la façon dont Inter Pares développe ses partenariats, l'importance du travail en coalition, et les effets positifs des pratiques internes sur les interventions à l'externe.

4.1 PARTENARIAT AVEC LES HOMOLOGUES

Remettre en question les dynamiques de pouvoir dans les relations avec les homologues du Sud

La façon dont Inter Pares établit sa relation avec ses homologues contribue à son efficacité. Dans sa construction de partenariat, Inter Pares remet constamment en question les dynamiques de pouvoir typiques entre donateurs et récipiendaires de l'aide. Au début, il s'agissait de remettre en question les relations de type colonialiste, entre autres, qui existaient entre le Nord et le Sud. Cette remise en question, maintenant considérée comme la mise en pratique d'une analyse féministe, signifie que les membres de l'équipe sont conscients des éléments qui leur donnent du pouvoir et des attitudes et pratiques à favoriser pour en arriver à un partenariat « entre égaux ». Une des attitudes consiste à envisager différemment le rôle du donateur (Inter Pares). L'étude a démontré que les membres de l'équipe remettent en question une vision unique du « développement » et du « progrès » typiquement conçue par les acteurs du Nord et souvent associée à une croissance économique. L'organisation rejette aussi la perception que les choix de développement des pays du Nord soient supérieurs à ceux que les gens du Sud conçoivent pour eux-mêmes. Ce questionnement sur les éléments qui octroient le pouvoir à un des partenaires demande que l'équipe du personnel d'Inter Pares renonce à l'autorité et au pouvoir attribués aux donateurs du Nord, tout en préservant son pouvoir d'agir dans son propre milieu (voir la section 4.2 sur le travail de coalition). Évidemment, le questionnement des dynamiques de pouvoir entre Inter Pares et ses homologues est une tâche de tous les instants.

⁸ Une pleine description de la méthodologie utilisée est disponible dans Gouin et al, (sous presse).

Les homologues ayant participé à la recherche ont souligné qu'Inter Pares réussi à instaurer une confiance mutuelle au sein de ses relations et liens avec ses homologues créant ainsi des « liens de solidarité authentiques » (Homologue, Philippines, atelier, 2008, traduction libre). Malgré ces bonnes relations, le lien de base avec la majorité des homologues demeure financier, et celui-ci est un facteur de pouvoir. Les liens de solidarité authentiques ne peuvent être développés en niant le lien financier ou les mesures de reddition de compte obligatoires. Tout en tenant compte de ces facteurs, Inter Pares s'efforce d'établir une imputabilité mutuelle pour que les homologues puissent aussi demander des comptes sur l'appui politique et financier qui leur est offert.

Nous nous percevons plus comme des collègues. Nous ne nous considérons pas comme des donateurs et récipiendaires de l'aide. Notre relation ne porte pas beaucoup sur le financement, elle porte beaucoup plus sur les programmes et l'analyse... IP⁹ est un partenaire parce que nous partageons une analyse similaire et une approche programme. IP n'est pas un partenaire en tant que donateur... les donateurs ont une approche beaucoup plus hiérarchique, ce n'est pas le cas avec IP. (Homologue, Afrique, entrevue, 2009, traduction libre)

Les relations ainsi développées sont des relations de solidarité, de causes communes, basées sur la réciprocité. Elles ont contribué à ce que la pensée d'Inter Pares soit influencée par celles de ses homologues. En effet, c'est entre autres l'influence des homologues du Bangladesh qui a mené l'organisation vers la fin des années 70 et au début des années 80 à intégrer des éléments de l'approche féministe.

Nous sommes très privilégiés par notre choix de partenaires au Bangladesh. La plupart d'entre eux étaient en avance sur leur temps pour leur travail sur les questions de genre. ... ça nous a donné une compréhension, un aperçu de la réalité que nous n'avions pas. Ça nous a menés à développer notre pensée dans cette direction. (Ancien membre du personnel, atelier, 2009, traduction libre)

Des liens de solidarité « entre égaux » requièrent aussi que les partenaires puissent avoir des discussions franches et parfois des opinions divergentes. Inter Pares et ses homologues

peuvent faire un examen critique des stratégies ou orientations programmatiques respectives tout en sachant que les fondements de la relation sont solides. Les membres de l'équipe d'Inter Pares sont aussi conscients de la limite de leurs connaissances, de leur rôle, de ce qu'ils et elles peuvent offrir. Cela ne signifie pas qu'il y ait absence de conflits ou de relations de pouvoir. Un homologue a mentionné qu'au-delà de l'engagement d'Inter Pares envers le consensus, l'horizontalité, l'égalité et la démocratie, certaines incohérences sont parfois visibles; « des relations de pouvoir existent entre les membres du personnel d'Inter Pares » (Homologue, Amérique latine, atelier, 2009, traduction libre). De plus, la réciprocité entre les homologues et Inter Pares n'est pas toujours parfaite, comme le souligne encore le même homologue.

La proximité de la relation entre Inter Pares et [homologue] soulève une tension en ce qui concerne l'autonomie des deux organisations, mais surtout celle de [homologue]. Dans cette relation, il existe une différence entre ce qui est connu sur le fonctionnement interne, entre le niveau de transparence et d'honnêteté. Inter Pares a toujours connu les problématiques internes de [homologue], mais ce n'est pas réciproque. (ibid)

Les relations de pouvoir continuent d'exister et doivent être mitigées. De plus, certaines relations n'atteignent jamais un niveau de pleine confiance et de réciprocité, malgré des efforts de toutes parts.

Appuyer le développement des capacités des homologues à diriger leurs processus

Les partenariats « entre égaux » développés entre Inter Pares et ses homologues mettent l'accent sur le leadership dans le Sud mondialisé et sur l'autonomie des organisations. L'appui financier et politique d'Inter Pares est pensé de façon à permettre aux homologues du Sud de maintenir leur travail et faire progresser leurs actions pour le changement social dans leur pays. Il s'agit entre autres d'être à l'écoute des partenaires du Sud et flexibles devant leur demande de financement, de leur laisser la plus grande marge de manœuvre possible pour définir leur agenda et leur programmation. Le rôle des ONG canadiennes n'est pas d'occuper l'espace politique des

⁹ IP signifie Inter Pares

homologues, ou de parler en leur nom.

Les homologues d'Inter Pares reconnaissent que l'approche d'Inter Pares leur permet de renforcer leurs organisations. Selon ses principes féministes, Inter Pares croit que le travail administratif a la même valeur que le travail programmatique, et qu'il faut aussi l'appuyer pour assurer la longévité d'une organisation. Par ailleurs, les homologues ont souligné que l'appui de base (core funding) offert par Inter Pares est assez flexible pour leur permettre d'ajuster les priorités de programme en fonction du contexte local.

Ils comprennent la problématique, et le démontrent à travers le financement de base qu'ils nous offrent. Celui-ci nous permet d'offrir des salaires aux travailleurs de la santé qui sont des gens pauvres. Tous (les donateurs) nous disent qu'ils veulent aider les pauvres, mais leur donner un salaire est différent. C'est une manière d'aider les pauvres. (Homologue, Philippines, atelier, 2008, traduction libre)

Inter Pares a priorisé les relations avec les homologues; des relations qui aspirent d'être égalitaires et réciproques et qui mettent l'accent sur le leadership dans le Sud. Comme la section suivante le démontre, Inter Pares a favorisé cette approche dans la mise en place de coalitions et dans le travail collectif au Canada.

4.2 TRAVAIL DE COALITION ET CRÉATION DE LIENS ENTRE LES GROUPES

Inter Pares considère que son rôle principal au sein du partenariat avec ses homologues est d'influencer les politiques du gouvernement canadien afin qu'elles n'aient pas de conséquences néfastes sur le Sud. Dès ses débuts, Inter Pares a contribué à la création et au travail de multiples coalitions d'organisations canadiennes sur des problématiques variées telles que la solidarité avec les Philippines sous la dictature de Marcos, la souveraineté alimentaire et la biotechnologie, le travail de solidarité avec l'Amérique centrale, et la question des droits sexuels et génésiques des femmes au Canada. Récemment, au sein de coalitions, Inter Pares s'est penché sur des dossiers tels que les investissements du régime de pension du Canada dans les compagnies minières, la multiplication des accords de libre-échange et la responsabilité sociale des

entreprises.

Favoriser le travail en coalition reflète bien les principes féministes de collaboration et de processus collectif. Ces valeurs à la base du féminisme furent non seulement incorporées dans la pratique quotidienne d'Inter Pares, mais aussi dans ses façons de gérer ses relations avec les autres organisations de la société civile. Encore une fois, le désir de travailler en collaboration et en coalition s'inspire du fait que les membres du personnel d'Inter Pares reconnaissent les limites de leurs connaissances et leurs capacités à influencer le changement social de façon isolée. Lorsque l'objectif est d'adresser les causes de la pauvreté et des injustices et contribuer à des changements structureaux, il est très efficace et enrichissant d'avoir une multitude d'acteurs sociaux impliqués en collaboration. De cette manière, tous les acteurs mettent en commun leur expertise et leurs ressources. Par contre, le travail de coalition exige que chaque participant soit disposé à partager la scène, et à mettre la main à la pâte.

Je vois des relations de collaboration favorisées/encouragées dans un contexte souvent compétitif, où des organisations ont accès à une seule et même source de financement du gouvernement. C'est un contexte qui favorise la compétition, malheureusement. Voir comment Inter Pares essaie de contrer cette tendance est peut-être féministe. (Agence de financement, entrevue, 2009, traduction libre)

Toutefois, comme l'ont observé des évaluateurs externes, des tensions peuvent parfois exister.

Le principe et la structure de cogestion ont souvent été identifiés comme étant des facteurs importants soutenant Inter Pares dans son rôle de leader au sein de nombreux débats sur les politiques dans la communauté des ONG et dans son habileté à présenter des positions bien renseignées et bien étoffées sur diverses problématiques... son efficacité est renforcée par la méthodologie de travail de cogestion... De nombreux collègues des ONG canadiennes ont observé que le personnel d'Inter Pares consacre plus de temps au développement de politiques et à l'analyse conjointe que certaines autres organisations hiérarchiques ou celles qui sont plus opérationnelles. Ils sont alors mieux préparés et plus percutants dans leurs interventions. Au fil du temps, cela a généré un certain sentiment d'amertume et mené certaines personnes à éviter de débattre avec le personnel d'Inter Pares. (Stuart, McLaren et Beauregard, 1995, p. 35, traduction libre)

Il ne faut toutefois pas surévaluer cette tension; la contribution d'Inter Pares est la plupart du temps reconnue et recherchée.

Nous avons trouvé qu'Inter Pares maximise son influence en offrant sa propre expérience, sa réputation, et son analyse afin d'assurer la viabilité financière et opérationnelle des coalitions dans lesquelles elle s'engage. (Seydegart et Turcot, 2004, p. 16, traduction libre)

D'ailleurs, l'esprit de collaboration qui anime Inter Pares amène aussi l'organisation à convoquer des gens et des organisations pour débattre, discuter, apprendre et développer des stratégies. Inter Pares s'efforce de créer des liens entre ses homologues de plusieurs pays, y compris du Canada. Plusieurs homologues ont noté ce trait de l'approche d'Inter Pares et en sont reconnaissants. Plusieurs échanges furent organisés jusqu'à présent : entre des organisations de la santé travaillant à la frontière entre la Thaïlande et la Birmanie et des organisations des Philippines; entre des homologues d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique latine qui accompagnent des femmes survivantes de violence sexuelle dans des contextes de conflit armé; entre des femmes guatémaltèques réfugiées au Mexique et des femmes birmanes réfugiées en Thaïlande. Ce dernier échange eut un impact particulièrement important des deux côtés. Les femmes du Guatemala ayant participé à l'échange ont compris, après leur discussion avec les femmes birmanes, l'importance de briser le silence au sujet de la violence sexuelle. Cet échange a contribué à bâtir un intérêt chez les femmes guatémaltèques qui a mené à la création du programme de Project Counselling Service (PCS) (homologue d'Inter Pares en Amérique latine) sur la violence sexuelle (Homologue, Amérique Latine, entrevue, 2009, traduction libre).

Inter Pares est une organisation qui a les moyens d'agir en son propre nom et qui convoque d'autres acteurs afin d'agir en collectivité sur des sujets d'intérêt commun. L'organisation bénéficie d'une confiance à la fois de ses homologues et des ONG canadiennes. Le travail de coalition représente pour Inter Pares une stratégie privilégiée qui va de concert avec son approche de cogestion.

4.3 LES PRATIQUES INTERNES ONT DES IMPACTS POSITIFS À L'EXTERNE

Le haut degré de cohésion interne à Inter Pares créée par le processus de sélection du personnel et les nombreuses rencontres de l'ensemble de l'équipe contribue à ce que les relations institutionnelles transcendent les changements de personnel, tout en respectant et favorisant la diversité d'opinion et de voix. Les homologues savent que des collègues aux vues similaires prendront la relève et créeront rapidement de nouveaux liens basés sur une vision commune. La Directrice générale d'un homologue explique que ce n'est pas le cas avec d'autres donateurs.

Lorsqu'il y a un changement de personnel, par exemple lorsqu'un nouvel agent de projet nous est assigné, et qu'il/elle ne partage pas la même vision, a une expérience complètement différente, et ne comprend pas ce qui se passe. ... Nous voyons de plus en plus de personnes qui ne sont pas dévouées. (Homologue, Bangladesh, entrevue, 2009, traduction libre)

Les homologues ont aussi noté que l'expérience de la prise de décision par consensus des membres d'Inter Pares les amène à être diplomates et respectueux lors de discussions difficiles, ou lorsqu'il y a divergence d'opinion. Un homologue décrit ainsi une de ces discussions :

Nous sentons qu'ils nous connaissent très bien, ils respectent ce que nous faisons. ... ce sont de bonnes discussions. Nous ne sommes pas toujours d'accord... mais ces discussions sont nécessaires, dans un contexte où nous sommes égaux. (Homologue, Thaïlande, entrevue, 2009, traduction libre)

La structure de cogestion à Inter Pares amène tous les membres du personnel à être en contact avec un ensemble de tâches administratives et de gestion de l'organisation. Chaque membre de l'équipe développe une connaissance et des habiletés approfondies de ce qui est nécessaire pour bâtir une organisation solide.

Deux facteurs ont renforcé la capacité d'Inter Pares à accompagner et comprendre ses homologues, et à contribuer à leur renforcement institutionnel. Premièrement, toutes les organisations ont grandement bénéficié d'une base de confiance mutuelle et de connaissances qu'elles ont établie au fil des ans. Deuxièmement, la structure de cogestion d'Inter Pares a favorisé l'échange d'information à l'interne, ce qui a permis à différents membres du personnel de contribuer au développement organisationnel des homologues. (Saxby, 2010, p. 35, traduction libre)

Les connaissances et habiletés acquises à Inter Pares sont utilisées régulièrement pour

appuyer les homologues qui cherchent à renforcer leur propre organisation. Ces habiletés sont aussi très recherchées par les collaborateurs d'Inter Pares au Canada et par les coalitions auxquelles Inter Pares participe.

5. L'INFLUENCE DU FÉMINISME SUR LA PROGRAMMATION ET LES RÉSULTATS

Inter Pares cherche à comprendre et à agir sur les causes de la pauvreté dans le monde la menant ainsi à définir son l'efficacité d'une façon bien différente de celle du gouvernement canadien.

Les pratiques féministes, par exemple, ne seraient pas souvent identifiées comme étant au cœur de l'efficacité de l'aide. Lors de cette étude, l'approche d'Inter Pares a été identifiée par plusieurs des répondants comme étant participative, féministe, orientée envers la justice sociale, égalitaire, collective et anticolonialiste. Les mots utilisés pour décrire la façon dont travaille Inter Pares varient selon la personne qui en parle et son historique avec l'organisation. Il serait révisionniste de définir toutes les pratiques d'Inter Pares comme étant féministes. L'organisation a toutefois été profondément marquée par le féminisme et à l'interne, une analyse et une pratique féministe sont prédominantes.

Le féminisme a nettement influencé la pratique externe d'Inter Pares : les méthodologies favorisées, les sujets abordés et l'appui offert aux femmes et aux organisations avec une analyse féministe dans divers pays y compris le Canada. La pratique de conscientisation féministe, par exemple, a eu une grande influence sur la programmation d'Inter Pares en matière de santé des femmes dans les années 80 et 90. Cette pratique favorisant l'analyse de l'oppression des femmes selon leurs propres expériences, la réciprocité et l'égalité (Hart, 1991) a souvent été mise en œuvre dans les programmes. Inter Pares a priorisé l'apprentissage qui a lieu lorsque l'on se rassemble dans un environnement non hiérarchique, avec des intentions flexibles et ouvertes (open agenda) favorisant ainsi l'échange, le dialogue et l'action commune.

L'orientation féministe qui s'est développé au fil des ans a mené l'équipe d'Inter Pares à

promouvoir le changement au sein même de ses relations humaines au quotidien, mais aussi à soutenir le changement social à plus grande échelle. Une grande partie du travail d'Inter Pares vient appuyer les organisations de femmes, souvent celles qui sont le plus marginalisées, qui abordent les questions de santé sexuelle et génésique, violence contre les femmes, droits des femmes et les organisations qui aident les femmes à exercer leurs droits politiques, économiques et sociaux. Inter Pares a priorisé les luttes des femmes, leurs besoins, leur travail et leur leadership.

Presque toute la programmation d'Inter Pares adresse les problématiques qui préoccupent fondamentalement les femmes : leur viabilité civile, politique, économique, sociale et culturelle à long terme... tous les programmes outremer ont une composante importante sur le genre, si ce n'est l'orientation principale du travail. (Seydegart et Turcot, 2004, p. 30, traduction libre)

Toutefois, comme le note une homologue, le féminisme d'Inter Pares, malgré qu'il ne soit pas toujours explicite, s'étend au-delà des « problématiques de femmes ».

Inter Pares offre une certaine forme de féminisme qui n'est pas seulement à propos du genre, mais qui comporte aussi une analyse de classe, de race et d'autres systèmes d'oppression. À travers son féminisme, Inter Pares peut voir comment cela est en lien avec le développement et les pratiques de développement. Inter Pares travaille sur le genre, mais d'autres aspects de son travail sont aussi influencés par son féminisme. (Homologue, Philippines, atelier, 2008, traduction libre)

Inter Pares a aussi su encourager une analyse de genre, voire féministe, au sein des organisations homologues. Elle a joué un rôle important dans la création d'une politique sur le genre au sein de son principal homologue en Amérique latine (Gander, 2000). Un homologue africain a également souligné l'influence d'Inter Pares sur son analyse du rôle et de la place des femmes.

À l'intérieur de Tiniguena, Inter Pares a beaucoup encouragé notre capacité de réflexion, et notre analyse sur le rôle des femmes. Ceci était clair depuis la première planification stratégique où Inter Pares nous avait posé la question quant à la place octroyée aux jeunes dans l'organisation, et plus particulièrement comment intégrer les jeunes femmes. (Homologue, Guinée-Bissau, entrevue, 2009)

Les répondants qui ont participé à cette étude ne s'entendent pas tous sur l'application des principes féministes dans la programmation d'Inter Pares, mais tous sont d'accord que le mouvement des femmes au Canada et à l'international a profondément marqué Inter Pares et les gens qui y travaillent.

6. LA POLITIQUE D'AIDE AU DÉVELOPPEMENT DU CANADA ET LE FUTUR DES ONG CANADIENNES

Inter Pares, comme plusieurs autres ONG canadiennes, s'est adaptée au changement de politique et du financement du gouvernement canadien en essayant de minimiser les conséquences sur ses homologues, et en leur offrant un financement continu et prévisible. Les nouvelles mesures de l'ACDI pour cibler l'aide au développement annoncées en mai 2009, qui furent d'abord appliquées aux programmes bilatéraux, furent étendues récemment à la branche du partenariat¹⁰. Tomlinson (2010a, 2010b) souligne que la branche du partenariat de l'ACDI a offert un financement flexible et prévisible crucial pour les ONG canadiennes, et ce, pour plus de 40 ans. Il note aussi qu'il existe peu d'autres possibilités de financement à cette échelle pour les ONG canadiennes au Canada, et que le financement de l'ACDI à travers le partenariat est efficace parce que sa flexibilité lui permet de répondre aux besoins et priorités exprimés par les ONG et leurs homologues. Cette approche est au cœur de l'action d'Inter Pares et de l'inspiration qui a mené à sa fondation il y a de cela 35 ans. C'est aussi, comme le démontre cette étude, cette flexibilité qui a permis à l'organisation d'obtenir des résultats significatifs et d'être « efficace » dans sa gestion, dans ses relations avec les homologues et dans son action collective sur les politiques canadiennes. Cette flexibilité est grandement compromise par l'annonce en juillet 2010 de changement de politique drastique au sein de la branche de partenariat (Tomlinson, 2010a, 2010b). Même si les lignes directrices ne sont pas encore disponibles, il semblerait que la branche du partenariat cessera d'appuyer les partenariats entre institutions, ce qu'elle fait depuis près de 40 ans, pour favoriser une approche projet du développement.

Cette annonce risque de restreindre la capacité d'organisations telles qu'Inter Pares à maintenir les éléments décrits ci-haut et que cette étude et des évaluations externes ont révélées comme étant au centre de l'« efficacité » et des résultats obtenus par Inter Pares. L'annonce

représente aussi une version très restreinte du consensus sur l'efficacité de l'aide au niveau international; la question se pose à savoir pour qui et dans quel but cette aide est efficace (Brown, sous presse). La perspective des bénéficiaires est trop peu considérée, et c'est sur cela que repose la programmation d'Inter Pares et de plusieurs autres ONG canadiennes.

Il faut aussi s'inquiéter du fait que le rôle de la société civile comme partenaire à part entière est de moins en moins reconnu par le gouvernement canadien. Le contexte actuel exige une réflexion de la part des ONG canadiennes sur leur rôle non seulement à l'international, mais ici au Canada. L'échange d'idées et la collaboration qui était auparavant une des forces du secteur sont maintenant menacés par un gouvernement qui ne saurait écouter les voix dissidentes. Et que dire du féminisme et des droits des femmes, qui semblent de plus en plus attaqués, voire ignorés?

Le changement social, celui qui permettra aux personnes marginalisées du monde de participer pleinement à développer un avenir qui leur est favorable, s'effectue sur plusieurs années et se doit de poursuivre une vision au-delà des politiques partisans d'un gouvernement au pouvoir. La vision du développement et de l'efficacité d'Inter Pares est certes différente de celle de la croissance économique, des rafistolages et des désirs de plusieurs pays donateurs. Inter Pares et ses homologues résistent aux monocultures des idées – aux façons uniques de faire – et proposent à la fois une diversité de solutions et un contrôle de ces solutions par les acteurs locaux.

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¹⁰ACDI, 2010

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