

# ROOTED in SOLIDARITY

Reflecting on 50 years





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# INTRODUCTION

In 1975, a small group of people came together around a kitchen table with a shared goal: build a more just and equal world, differently. Disenchanted with the status quo of *international development*, this group envisioned an organization rooted in solidarity—not charity—as an approach to international cooperation. An organization that addresses the root causes of social injustices and inequalities, that is guided by the knowledge and practices of communities, that connects struggles in the Global South and Global North. An organization that embodies these principles from the inside out.

**Inter Pares. Among Equals.**

- These founding principles **hold true today.**
- As we celebrate 50 years of Inter Pares, we invite you to look back on our shared history. *Rooted in Solidarity: Reflecting on 50 years* is a collection of memories celebrating our counterparts and allies and the struggles we wage together. The voices within these pages are many. **Brian Murphy**, former staff member, opens the collection with a reflection that reminds us there is “possibility in process”—meaningful change becomes possible through a shared practice of learning, listening and sustained accompaniment.

Inside you will find **three articles** detailing how this ethos has taken shape over the last fifty years: linking people through collective action, across movements and in different contexts. Reflect on how Inter Pares has worked to promote more inclusive access to health care; organized with farmers to protect their right to land, seed biodiversity and self-determination; and, supported justice and community participation in contexts of repression and conflict.

- Complementing these articles are **four profiles** of counterparts and allies who have been part of our journey towards a more just and equal world: **Esperanza Moreno, Dr. Sylvia “Guy” Estrada Claudio, Mariamé Ouattara and Jamie Kneen.** Their decades-long complicity with Inter Pares illustrates what we can accomplish together through shared leadership, community-led programming and a commitment to long-term relationships as key to building meaningful international solidarity.

Together, these reflections and stories highlight the multifaceted ways we work towards social justice and the many spaces in which this work happens. Most of all, *Rooted in Solidarity* highlights the different world that we are building.

Our dedication to our mission—to work *among equals*—remains fiercely alive. The work you will read about in this collection is ongoing. As we reflect on our past, we also look towards the future. The next chapter is ours to shape, together. May we continue to come together under common cause towards a more just and equal world.



# Inter Pares at 50

by Brian Murphy, former Inter Pares staff member as shared in May 2025 at 50 Years of Social Justice Action.

I suspect that no one would be more surprised that we're sitting here today, than a few folks who 50 years ago stared at each other across a kitchen table on MacLaren Street in downtown Ottawa.

They were imagining a homegrown Canadian NGO, with a difference. And they were wondering what to do to start one. I doubt that they would have predicted its trajectory, or what it is today. They were focused on the present, and what could be done in the moment.

And what they imagined—as I understand it—was ‘open-ended.’ And certainly they could not have imagined, let alone predicted, the world as we are experiencing it in these times. Nor could they have anticipated many of the momentous world events and transformative changes that have unfolded in the long road that brings us to this point.

Now, the folks who came later did not *inherit* Inter Pares from these pioneers, or from the earnest stragglers such as me and a few others in this room, who joined the journey early. In the spirit of open-endedness, newer generations *engaged* with the organization as they found it when they arrived, in its ongoing life and historical process. They honoured it by that engagement and by continuing that process. This is true of those who joined the staff in the 80s and 90s, and those later. And it's true of the current staff.

Today we recognize and acknowledge this great tradition, the founding generation and the folks that contributed to it over the years. At the same time, it is the current team of Inter Pares I would like to especially honour—along with Inter Pares' counterparts and friends around the world. It is these folks—current staff and Board, and their colleagues in Canada and internationally—who sustain Inter Pares. These folks represent Inter Pares' mission in the world, and make it what is today, a half century down the road.

**In my remarks this evening,** I'm going to try to capture in broad strokes some of the elements that make Inter Pares what it is. Not its history (there are *many* histories). And certainly



Photo courtesy of Brian Murphy

not a linear narrative. That would be flat and sterile, and the story is impossible to capture in any case.

But, here we are. Inter Pares **at 50**. How might we describe its enduring qualities? What are its durable principles and practices? What are the qualities that capture the *it-ness* of Inter Pares?

Inter Pares was conceived as an organization rooted in Canada and Canadian communities and realities. And it was conceived as internationalist. It aspired to relationships and action by Canadians in Canada, and in the wider world, in international solidarity and common cause. Not merely giving but sharing and receiving. Not merely helping others but engaging in joint action, in mutuality of interest. Connecting issues far away to issues in our own places and lives. Recognizing our fundamental interdependence with others on the planet. Relationship-based and always with an eye to incipient movements with which to engage, deepening and broadening action and advocacy, at the local level and internationally.

From its founding, of course, Inter Pares had some very ambitious projects in mind. But, as I said, it was conceived as open-ended, based in action and exploration. This open-endedness was rooted in its very conception, and name, *Inter Pares. Among Equals*. It was a mission conceived as a dialogue, in mutuality, in shared experience and shared *learning*. Iterative and unfolding—as I’ve described it elsewhere, a ‘possibility in process.’

**From my perspective**, this is a thread that has weaved through Inter Pares from its very beginnings and that endures today. Inter Pares is a *learning* organization. Intentionally. Bred in the bone from its very conception by those who created

and developed the organization. Inter Pares’ core modality has been as a learning organization engaged in change processes with counterpart organizations—learning with them, learning from them. This modality has been emphasized, elaborated and enhanced over all these many decades by those that followed. If there is a founders’ legacy, I believe that *this* is it. We can be grateful for their insight, as we are grateful for the courage of their leap of faith in launching this journey in the first place, on such uncertain waters.

Now, I could also describe Inter Pares as **‘knowledge-based’**, which is the more conventional formulation. I emphasize *learning* because useful knowledge is rooted in learning, learning as a continuous, active principle. Even as current knowledge is applied, we understand that action will *transform* our knowledge. And that learning is inherent in our action. I also emphasize *learning* because from the outset Inter Pares was intensely committed to promoting learning—to public education and to action-research—committed to the process of creating knowledge and sharing that knowledge systematically.

From the earliest days, Inter Pares launched risk-taking ventures such as the syndicated radio program, *Sounds Different*, with Elizabeth Gray as host; and, the schools publications project, *Common Heritage*, which produced innovative global studies materials that ultimately won official Ministry of Education approval for use in the Ontario primary school curriculum. A farmer-to-farmer exchange among small family farmers in Eastern Canada and the Eastern Caribbean was a classic early venture in shared, common-cause international action-research. Its preoccupation with rural development and appropriate agriculture continues in Inter Pares programming today.

I came across an example of this element of sharing learning and knowledge internationally very recently, related to work done in Bangladesh. If there is any country that comes to mind from very early days, it is Bangladesh. Inter Pares' long association with that country, begun from day one by Ian, has been maintained uninterrupted for 50 years. And of course, I am talking here of Ian Smillie, co-founder of Inter Pares, in whose kitchen on Maclaren Street those very early conversations I spoke about occurred.

A few weeks ago a friend, Jai Sen, sent me a note to tell me that he had found a document related to Inter Pares' early program in Bangladesh. He was going through material related to his years as a member of a social action organization in Kolkata and found a report related to the struggles of rickshaw pullers in the city. It was dated January 1992. The organization had been unable to find documentation in India on the design and engineering of rickshaws, nor a comprehensive analysis of the rickshaw trade in the prevailing socio-economic conditions.

#### I quote from the report Jai shared:

“The nearest thing we could get was an excellent study of cycle rickshaws in Dacca, done by Inter Pares, a Canadian based non-governmental organization working in Bangladesh; and later, an equally-excellent report on a new vehicle design developed at Camila Bangladesh, by Fred Wilkie.”

The Inter Pares study referred to is dated, Bangladesh, April 1983. Fred Wilkie was a brilliant Ottawa-based bicycle wizard, hired by Inter Pares as a consultant to work with Camila to help untangle the rickshaw

design-problematic that had been identified in the original Inter Pares report. The results of that work ultimately made its way to India a decade later. **What goes around, comes around.**

I think that the light really went on for me the extent that knowledge-creation could, and should, be at the forefront of our work was when the first box arrived on Authur Street of copies of a small paperback, its yellow cover with two iconic stalks of golden wheat waving across the title. That book, *Seeds of the Earth*, by Pat Mooney, was published in 1983 by Inter Pares, in cooperation with the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (now Cooperation Canada), shepherded by Tim Brodhead—as Tim quietly shepherded so many things back in those early days. Tim, of course, is a co-founder of Inter Pares. *Seeds of the Earth* launched a movement whose incredibly rich history of international solidarity and activism continues today. As does the work of RAFI, now ETC Group.

#### And all these years later,

Inter Pares remains central to that movement internationally, and in Canada, under the rubric of food sovereignty and agroecology.

And not surprisingly, Inter Pares has maintained its strong relationship with ETC Group itself, begun all those many decades ago. That durability of relationship; that commitment to joint learning and action; and, that loyalty in times of triumph and trouble—is the signpost of Inter Pares, acknowledged throughout the sector, in Canada and internationally.

Now, rather than get trapped in a litany of references to long-past programs, actions, products, events, people, I am going to take a stab at defining Inter Pares' work as it has evolved. What it is that Inter Pares colleagues actually *do*, and have done

for a very long time, to carry on as a learning organization, doing very useful things, with very interesting people.

Inevitably such a description will be subjective. This is a personal perspective, based on experience, I hope not too far off track.

**In the time I was part of the team**—and my observation is that this remains the case—we thought of and referred to our work as ‘programming’. This implied a fluid, iterative process of learning and doing with others. Rather than focus on program as noun, we focused on its character as verb—and an intransitive verb at that. Rather than conceiving a ‘program’ in the abstract and then implementing ‘it’ in the world, we considered that our work was to program with others, acting together to *make* the world.

It is an inventive and collaborative process—continually inventive. And if the program was *anything*, it was that relationship of working together. It took on concrete form in local organizing, in community actions and formations—and often, as well, in international advocacy—which unfolded and transformed over time.

In all of this, the mutuality and reciprocity of our relationships was the core element. What Inter Pares colleagues *do*, is seek out such relationships, build on them and sustain them, with the prospect that the relationships will be durable and lasting. That they will be open-ended, flowing and evolving. That they will be continuously transformed with events and the lessons of time.

This process begins with paying attention. It begins with learning. With listening. We are the students of our counterparts, learning on the ground. This process follows an inductive rather than deductive logic, starting

with experience. In a keynote address that I made in 2000 at an OECD DAC consultative conference on poverty alleviation, I called it “thinking in the active voice.” I quoted a poem that began,

“The poor don’t know much about praxis / reflection and action / but they sure can think on their feet.”



Inter Pares programming relies on an inclination, and a *capacity*, to think on our feet.

I think of this process not as simply moving forward, over time, but **cyclical**. Not a *circle*, which is closed, but a *spiral* that often cuts back on itself, revising, but progressing all the same. An image of the double helix comes to mind. This may be too grand an image in this context; I think it comes to my mind because of its association with the processes of life. And the goal is to build *living* relationships. We build such relationships by living them.

It is a process both personal and political. This is **not an empty slogan**. Our relationships with counterparts very often develop in deeply personal ways and over time. There is a natural variability in the depth and quality of the relationships. But certainly, those that have been most durable have had a quality of political and personal reciprocity that is treasured. And the best of these relationships, become relationships with Inter Pares itself, as an organization and as a community.

So, **summarizing**: Inter Pares’ work is rooted in relationship, shared action and learning. The action in which it engages with others is not a deductive process of think, then do; it is process of thinking-*while*-doing.

And especially it is a process of thinking-while-doing-with-others. It is a process that is not only *seated* in community, but that *produces* community. Not only rooted in social relations, but that produces and nurtures such relations. It is in a real sense a *reproductive* process, a life process—life-giving, life-sustaining, life-promoting.

What of modalities, then? What tricks has Inter Pares developed over these years to abet its work and relationships?

I have to say at the outset that money, cold hard cash, was *not* the main currency that Inter Pares brought to relationships. Inter Pares never had the financial resources that its counterparts could often find from other international sources. And we had other instincts than to grow in that direction in any case, even if there had been the prospect to do so.

### What did Inter Pares bring then?

Well, when it came to money, while there was not a lot of it, it was still a treasure because, as a rule, Inter Pares' approach was to ask: 'if you had the resources, what would you most want to do that you can't do now?' And then put heads together to figure out how to get the resources required: the money, talent, information, fellow-travellers, whatever.

In that way we became **collaborators and learners**—about the organizations; about the realities within which they worked, and with which they interacted; their analysis and their real aspirations. The idea was to be a strategic collaborator—a co-conspirator, as we perhaps would say now.

This creative and flexible approach is ever-so-much-more difficult to achieve in today's reductionist funding regime, but my impression is that Inter Pares still manages to do it pretty well.

Beyond these relationships with counterparts in various countries, nothing I think has characterized Inter Pares' programming strategy more than an emphasis on the building of coalitions. Strengthening and amplifying actions through collaborative structures. Building out in concentric circles from the local, to the national, regional and global level. The focus moves beyond supporting community development, to contributing to processes of community *organizing*. Collaborate, connect, collect, convene, build alliances. I have always thought of this as Inter Pares '**spinning and weaving**', after a poem I love.

For Inter Pares, this implies thinking constantly in terms of *leverage*. Seeking ways of leveraging its few resources—not just money, usually not *mainly* money—to start a ball rolling. Then quietly nurturing the process as it rolls along.

**The principle?** Never do anything alone that we can do better with others. Guided by the conviction that there are precious few things that *anyone* can do better alone, and on their own.

Inter Pares' history has been collaborating in the support of local, national, regional and international formations, nurturing ones that already existed, and the creation of new ones where necessary. And if Inter Pares has a reputation for anything, it is for its quiet *leadership* within these structures: low-key, collaborative, putting aside institutional ego and profile to accentuate the collective.

An element in this, I think, is that Inter Pares from very early-on saw its role working in and through cultural action and seeing social and political action *as* cultural action. What do I mean by this? I mean that the situations and dilemmas that people face, that communities face, are rooted in society and in culture,

and that their authentic responses are social and cultural. Wherever we work, and whatever the issue that has been joined, the social and cultural fabric is under threat. And the responses of people and communities are social and cultural responses. This very fact is their strength. This strength needs to be acknowledged and accentuated in all our actions as they unfold if they are to be effective and durable.

Finally, then, a word about Inter Pares as a feminist organization. **Feminism** isn't an ideology. Much less a brand, or a label. For Inter Pares, feminism has been an analysis, specifically an analysis of power relations—gender, race and class—and their necessary transformation. Feminism is also, importantly, a *practice*. Inter Pares does not engage in this practice because it is feminist; it is feminist because it engages in feminist structural analysis and practice.

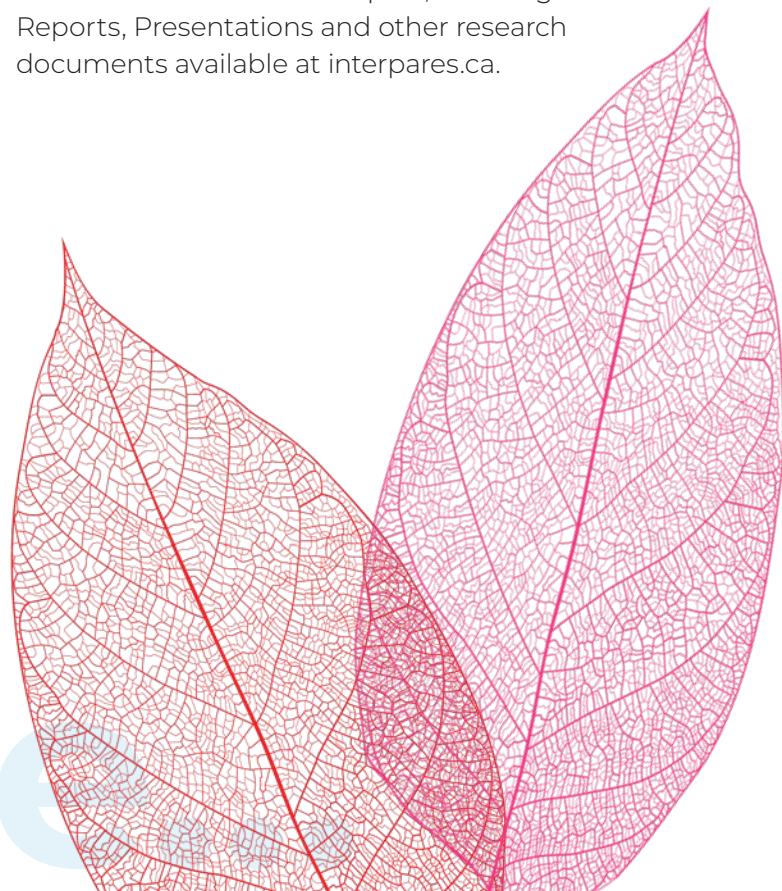
Inter Pares is feminist because it prioritizes the subjectivity and agency of women, among other marginalized groups. Attention to women's agency, sensibility and subjectivity guides Inter Pares in its engagements and its actions, regardless of the issue, the goal

or the unique qualities of the diverse communities and organizations with whom it works and shares common cause.

Now to be clear, Inter Pares was not *born* feminist, or within a feminist analysis and practice, and did not describe itself in this way at the outset. But it certainly was created and founded on those instincts. And among the early pioneers within Inter Pares—staff and Board—were leaders in the development of feminism as an axis of **social and political action** in Canada and internationally. This process was reinforced as Inter Pares formed common cause with dynamic feminist pioneers from the Global South, as collaborators and fellow-travellers.

Let me just say **in closing** that Inter Pares has made a conscious decision over the years to devote time and resources to internal reflection and documentation on its experience and methodology, including, among many other elements, the feminist character of its work. A treasure from this commitment can be found in a series of Occasional Papers, Learning Circle Reports, Presentations and other research documents available at [interpares.ca](http://interpares.ca).

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# Esperanza Moreno on coalition, community and commitment

A thirty-year relationship with Inter Pares has underscored the importance of collaboration and coalition work for Esperanza Moreno.

For those working in Canada's international cooperation sector, Esperanza is known as a powerhouse. Over the course of her career, she has been an ally and an anchor for the community, holding several senior leadership positions, including as Deputy Director General of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (now Cooperation Canada) for twelve years. Later, as a consultant, she supported several human rights coalitions and civil society organizations, particularly in Latin America, in developing their strategic frameworks. Through these roles, she has worked to bridge organizations, deepen collaboration and bring a feminist approach into institutional practice. She is a thoughtful yet principled person whose leadership has helped shape organizations and strengthen the ecosystems in which they operate.

Esperanza's first impression of Inter Pares was while serving on the Board of Cooperation Canada. Uniting over a hundred diverse member organizations of Canada's civil society can be challenging as each come with different expectations of what Cooperation Canada should be, whether a representative of the sector, a space for dialogue or a platform to bring civil society together to influence policy. As a member, Inter Pares has always worked to use the network to bolster the sector's collective voice.

"When Inter Pares was asked to speak on behalf of the sector, they never approached it with branding in mind; it wasn't about recognition. They spoke on behalf of the sector, sharing what unites us. They were one of the few organizations truly trusted to do so. And their work at the council table was about building the coalition, pooling efforts and advancing public policy."



Photo: Maryn Devine

Esperanza eventually joined Inter Pares' Board of Directors where she served as a **valued member for nine years**. She was inspired by Inter Pares' methodology rooted in feminist analysis and collective process that aligned with her own views, always working in solidarity with counterparts, rejecting charity and the coloniality embedded in traditional development models. On the Board, she experienced first-hand Inter Pares' distinctive form of consensus-based governance. All major decisions are made collectively, with staff and Board working in tandem to set objectives, allocate resources and manage operations without hierarchy. This co-management approach aims to ensure that every voice matters and to create a culture of accountability, shared responsibility and equity.



“One of the most important aspects of working at Inter Pares is arriving at consensus. It takes time, but it leads to stronger and more thoughtful decisions. We sometimes need to set aside individual particularities to reach a collective agreement, but the outcome is always better for it.”

The commitment to consensus-building reflects a core belief at Inter Pares that power is shared, every voice matters and that the equality that we advocate for externally must be upheld internally.

Esperanza was also moved by how Inter Pares' collaboration shaped its programming, with coalition-building being central to the organization's work.

“Coalition work is part of Inter Pares' DNA. We take horizontality very seriously, equal relationships with Southern partners and with allies across Canada. Everyone has a voice, even if our resources differ. Leadership is quiet but powerful...we strengthen partnerships and networks to advance collective action, rather than seeking recognition for ourselves.”

By **pooling expertise, knowledge and resources** across networks, Inter Pares and counterparts believe that we can tackle structural issues more effectively than we could as single organizations acting alone. This has been true of Inter Pares' support of campaigns during internal conflicts in Latin America, for example, and continues



power is  
shared...

in today's advocacy for sexual and reproductive health, food sovereignty, corporate accountability, civil liberties and human rights.

As Inter Pares Board Vice-Chair, Esperanza brought her own thoughtful, detail-oriented and participatory approach to this **collective work**. She has a knack for seeing clearly how ideas, people and processes intertwine. Under her stewardship, the Board navigated moments of challenge with clarity and care. Esperanza describes this time as both demanding and fulfilling. Demanding, because to accompany and uphold Inter Pares' mission requires deep commitment—mobilizing resources and defending the rights of people facing injustice amid humanitarian crises, shrinking civic space and the rise of populism. But fulfilling too,

because Inter Pares engages in meaningful work from a position of integrity.

**“The work of our counterparts is remarkable. Inter Pares was able to move forward promising initiatives: advocating for strong Canadian foreign policy, supporting sexual and reproductive rights and defending 2SLGBTQI+ rights. I want to honour the quality and engagement of Inter Pares' staff and Board, a group of people with diverse experiences who demonstrate commitment and solidarity.”**

Esperanza draws inspiration from the words of French philosopher Edgar Morin who wrote *“la connaissance est une navigation dans un océan d'incertitudes à travers des archipels de*

*certitudes,*” “knowledge is navigation in an ocean of uncertainties through archipelagos of certainties.” Knowledge develops as we navigate uncertainty and pause occasionally on islands of understanding. Esperanza extends this metaphor to coalition work, **with her own twist:**

**“Life is an ocean of uncertainty. We navigate this ocean by stopping from time to time on islands or archipelagos of certainty, where we can rest and replenish ourselves... I was fortunate to have several of these islands, one was Inter Pares. I came to nourish myself, meet remarkable colleagues and leave motivated, part of a community. It's organizations like Inter Pares that continue to resist, it's what we do best.”**

**collective  
action...**

# Advocating for bodily autonomy

Over the past 50 years, the scope and scale of Inter Pares' work on bodily autonomy—the freedom and power to control one's own body—has been deeply and profoundly rooted in feminist principles and practice. A commitment to learning and collaboration, trust and solidarity, and agency and freedom underscore who we are, and why this issue matters to us.


We advocate, fundraise, engage with the public and build coalitions, aspiring that everyone, everywhere has access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). While the issues we work on have evolved and expanded, our foundation remains constant. Feminist principles and practice are as true of our past, as they are of **our present and future.**

## >>> LOOKING BACK

In the early days of Inter Pares, we supported Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK), *The People's Health Centre*, a then-relatively new organization, whose goal was to provide quality health care to impoverished rural women and men in Bangladesh. In the 1980s, international aid organizations and pharmaceutical companies funded coercive, violent and forced population control measures that largely targeted women in the country. These programs were implemented by the Bangladeshi government. GK **challenged both the logic and humanity of these programs** with the support of Inter Pares—an unorthodox stance at the time—but one that was based in a deep-rooted understanding of their own context. GK also challenged health care legislation in their country, successfully advocating for a national generic drug policy to make essential drugs more accessible to the poor.

At the same time, Inter Pares worked with Canadian women's and health groups to promote safe contraception and generic drug policies in Canada. From this experience, we co-created a play called *Side Effects* with input from GK and women's groups in Bangladesh and Canada, interrogating the medicalization of women's health. *Side Effects* toured across Canada, bringing together the public with health care and women's rights activists **sparking rich conversation.** From these connections the Canadian Women's Health Network was born, a feminist hub for health research and action.





“Wherever we worked, Inter Pares placed women’s oppression and exploitation at the centre of our analysis and activism. We connected North-South women’s and other organizations through programs of solidarity and a mutuality of interest in order to learn from and support each other. Many of these programs had a profound effect on people’s lives, laws and on public education.”

**Karen Seabrooke, former Inter Pares staff member**

Our focus on addressing the oppression of women expanded through the 1990s. In Burma, the junta was subjugating thousands to brutality and violence, resulting in waves of displacement on the basis of race. Women’s sexual and reproductive health services were extremely difficult to access. Inter Pares supported local medical leaders from Burma who trained trusted health workers from affected regions to support women’s health needs. **We were the first Canadian organization** to raise significant funds for the training of hundreds of Indigenous birth attendants and mobile medical teams who helped stem the tide of maternal mortality in Burma’s conflict zones.



Dr. Cynthia Maung, founder of the Mae Tao Clinic, with Peter Gillespie, long-time staff member of Inter Pares, in the 1990’s. Photo: Inter Pares

## >>> WHERE WE ARE, TODAY

Inter Pares’ activism on bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) today continues in collaboration with a range of long-term counterparts around the world. The work is diverse, it is effective and it is implemented by national feminist movements. In El Salvador, La Colectiva Feminista para el desarrollo local is taking a moment to bask in their successful

battle at the Inter American Court for Human Rights (IACHR) for legal recognition of abortion rights, otherwise known as the Beatriz case. In the Philippines, Likhaan Center for Women’s Health is a central actor in advocating for the implementation of the right to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for young people in the face of powerful fundamentalist opposition. In Latin America, Colombia Diversa is making ground-breaking progress in public and political awareness to overcome stigma and discrimination on LGBTQ+ rights, not just in Colombia but in the region. On the Thai-Burma border, the Mae Tao Clinic is implementing a holistic program related to safe birthing that has carried on decade after decade through waves of political turmoil to serve women from Burma who would otherwise go through their pregnancies and deliveries with little-to-no skilled accompaniment or pre- and post-natal care.

“It is truly magical that what began as a chance meeting between my late colleague, Peter Gillespie, and a young medical doctor, Dr. Cynthia Maung, on the Thai-Burma border has blossomed into a profound institutional relationship of many decades, significantly amplifying and expanding the work of the Mae Tao Clinic along the way. This is emblematic of the way Inter Pares works.”

**Samantha McGavin, Inter Pares’ Executive Director and program manager**





Sharaban Tohura, Wendy Barrera Rivas and Estephanie Brigatay traveled across Eastern Canada in 2024 speaking to audiences about their work to promote SRHR in Bangladesh, the Philippines and El Salvador. Photo: Rita Morbia / Inter Pares



Throughout our history, the SRHR issues we have worked on have evolved and expanded: access to safe contraception and abortion, adoption of feminist-driven health policies, challenging coerced and forced sterilization in addition to the overall medicalization of women's health, funding for SRHR and support to local feminist SRHR organizations. In a testament to Inter Pares' early SRHR activism and political analysis, **there are strong parallels** between what we used to do and what we continue to do, based on the ethos that women and marginalized people have the right and should have the power to control their own bodies.

We still work on forced sterilization, but current efforts also focus on survivors in Peru who suffered from the policies of the Fujimori dictatorship. Facilitated by our Peruvian counterpart, SISAY, a few years ago they found solidarity in connections with Indigenous activists in Canada who are challenging our own country's shameful history of forced sterilization.

Inter Pares has also developed a stronger focus on accompanying LGBTQI+ organizations—in Sudan through the Sudanese Agency for Gender Inclusion and Advocacy (SAGIA), in Colombia through Fondo Lunaria and

Colombia Diversa, in Peru through DEMUS, and in Guatemala through Asociación Lambda. Domestically, we are a member of the Canadian Health Coalition and continue to support the goal of a national pharmacare program, which includes free access to contraception as well as other medicines.

With our support, our overseas counterparts have developed stronger programs focused on adolescent sexual health—in Bangladesh with Nijera Kori and in El Salvador with La Colectiva—even though the political and social environment they work in is often politically fraught and their work can be dangerous when it runs counter to right-wing and fundamentalist forces.

## »»» HOW WE DO THIS WORK

While the injustices we tackle evolve and change, the way we work hasn't. Inter Pares maintains a consistency in the tools and methodologies deployed to reach our SRHR goals. It is about **feminist process**.

In the 1980s, our domestic political advocacy focused on preventing the funding of coercive and forced sterilization programming, supported by Canada through the World Bank<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Does it Work? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares. Inter Pares, 2011. p 36.

Today, one of our political advocacy goals is ensuring that Global Affairs Canada prioritizes the four neglected areas of SRHR: safe abortion, adolescent health including CSE, contraception and advocacy.

In the 1990s, we raised funds from the Canadian government to support the expansion of Likhaan's SRHR community organizing, clinical services and government advocacy. In the decades that followed, we would continue to seek and secure funding to support Likhaan's work and, in early 2025, we signed another agreement with the government of Canada to fund Likhaan's work through a 7-year commitment, with SRHR financing as an added thematic.

Our 1980s feminist public engagement project, the *Side Effects* play, has a parallel in the 2024 photo exhibit *daughters, mothers, grandmothers and other sexual outlaws* which, by its conclusion, will have appeared in at least eight Canadian cities, including Victoria, Whitehorse, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Gatineau, Kitchener-Waterloo and Fredericton.



Inter Pares' current involvement in **coalition work** with the Future Planning Initiative (FPI) has its roots in the early Inter Pares coalition efforts to ensure our own government rolled out feminist SRHR policies. The FPI was critical in ensuring a ten-year commitment by the Government of Canada in 2019 to spend \$1.4 billion annually on women and children's health, with half of that amount exclusively targeting SRHR.

“Coalition work is the beating heart of Inter Pares—a powerful way to amplify and connect seemingly disparate voices to reach feminist objectives.”

Rita Morbia, Inter Pares program manager and member of the FPI

Issues of SRHR hold so much stigma and are so often weaponized to further regressive and autocratic political ideologies. An important tactic throughout Inter Pares' history to build feminist solidarity, while also sharing knowledge has been **learning exchanges**.

Nathalia Santos Ocasio, Inter Pares program manager, participated in a public engagement tour in the Canadian Maritimes in late 2024 with counterparts from Bangladesh, the Philippines and El Salvador. She highlights the continuing value of South-North knowledge exchanges as a key praxis of reciprocity that will help us carry on SRHR work into the future. “As threats to reproductive rights and bodily autonomy are magnified within the current political landscape, cross-geographic dialogue with counterparts helps us develop strong strategies to challenge societal norms and structural injustices exposing queer people and marginalized women in Canada and around the world to injustices, violence and premature death.”

## »»» CONTINUING ONWARDS

With the energy and dynamism that each new generation brings to Inter Pares, we are determined to build on our 50-year legacy of activism around bodily autonomy. We will learn from the past, aspire to meet the present moment and boldly aim to co-create an inclusive future. Together with courageous counterparts, committed supporters and persistent allies, we will keep finding ways to support the people and movements leading the fight for bodily autonomy—**just as we always have**.

# Dr. Sylvia “Guy” Estrada Claudio on building a **feminist health movement**

Dr. Sylvia Estrada Claudio—better known as Guy—is Chair of the Board of Directors at Likhaan Center for Women’s Health in the Philippines.

Inter Pares has worked in solidarity with Likhaan since its inception in 1995. However, Guy knew Inter Pares long before that, when the Philippines was still under the control of the Marcos dictatorship. At that time, Inter Pares supported human rights groups resisting the regime, many of them working underground. Guy remembers the support:

“The international support that was given to us during the darkest period of our own history was crucial to overthrowing the dictatorship. And I know this of Inter Pares: they come in moments of great vulnerability to help, but they stay on, and on, and on...”

And we have certainly *stayed on*, accompanying Guy and Dr. Junice Melgar as they founded Likhaan together with other women who became disenchanted by the emerging revolutionary health movement’s gender blindness. In a country that Guy describes as “muscularly Roman Catholic,” sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is a taboo topic. When even the radical left neglect SRHR, they sideline the most marginalized women who they claim to defend. The creation of Likhaan started an alternative, women-led, health movement—one that continues to demystify SRHR and fight for a truly inclusive health system.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Sylvia “Guy” Estrada Claudio

Over the last three decades, Likhaan has grown **from two to ten clinics.**

These clinics cover large swaths of Metro Manila's most impoverished neighbourhoods, nearby urban provinces and remote areas in Eastern Samar that were ravaged by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 and continue to face hardships. The clinics address key public health concerns that languish due to structural inequities and cultural barriers, including maternal mortality, unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

True to its revolutionary roots, Likhaan strives to challenge the dominant model in which health professionals deliver services in a transactional way that ultimately reproduces power inequities and oppressions.

**"We know this: that long waiting lines and mean personnel and richer doctors who look down on the poor might give you the health service, but it is not going to be empowering for anyone."**



Instead, Likhaan is in true solidarity with the communities it serves—ensuring community members participate in, mobilize around and take ownership of their health care experience. They train community members—or community health promoters and mobilizers, primarily women—to share health information in their neighbourhoods. Beyond providing services, the clinics are spaces where communities gather, learn and organize politically, **giving people the tools** to raise their voices and advocate for themselves. Likhaan brings these concerns to decision makers and advocates for a publicly funded health care system that appropriately addresses the needs of women and marginalized peoples.

Although the circumstances that led to the creation of Likhaan have changed, the landscape that restricts sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Philippines persists. More recently, former President Rodrigo Duterte's so-called

"war on drugs" resulted in the state-sanctioned extrajudicial killing of tens of thousands of alleged drug traffickers and users. This campaign disproportionately targeted the poor, effectively waging a war against them, including in areas where Likhaan operates.

While Duterte is currently detained at The Hague on charges of crimes against humanity, the effects of this period continue to reverberate in communities, impacting women in unique and enduring ways. Women not only faced heightened gender-based violence and criminalization during the "war on drugs," but now carry the emotional and economic burdens left in its wake. Guy is acutely aware of how this gender dimension remains a blind spot in the judicial system:

**"I am yet to meet a criminal against humanity who isn't also very sexist. I wish they had a section in the Hague for crimes against woman-ity, because our president was awful [to women] as well."**



State-sponsored violence and its uneven impact on women's lives in the Philippines is what Guy describes as the "whack-a-mole" quality of patriarchy: even after addressing one manifestation, it appears again in another form, in a seemingly never-ending cycle. These are the circumstances under which Likhaan continues to organize.

Since 1995, Likhaan has brought together generations of women—Baby Boomers, Millennials, Gen Z and now Generation Alpha—to fight back against the patriarchy. Together, they keep swinging the proverbial mallet, aiming to deliver a definitive blow. Guy—a self-declared Boomer mother—asserts that this **multigenerational effort** has been a central feature of the organization, helping to embrace emerging priorities while ensuring the preservation of historical memory and wisdom. This two-sided dialogue is a learning process for everyone involved.

"Our first generation of Boomer mothers were already organizing their children when they were adolescents and that is how issues like LGBTQ issues came to Likhaan... [At the same time,] we keep telling our young people that there is identity but please, don't forget class."

Decades later, the co-conspiratorial work between Inter Pares and Likhaan continues. Reflecting on our collective journey, Guy remembers the late Peter Gillespie, as well as Karen Seabrooke, Rita Morbia, David Bruer and other former and current Inter Pares staff members she has collaborated with over the years. She shares that Inter Pares' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary **is also a reunion for her**: she was present at our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, as well as for many other learning exchanges and visits to Canada. After all, it is not only Inter Pares that has stayed on, and on, and on.



they stay  
on, and on...

# 50 years of **solidarity** with **farmers** and **food movements**

For 50 years, food has been at the heart of Inter Pares' work with counterparts. Food is a basic human need, yet hunger persists. And this is due mostly to socio-economic and political reasons. Reasons that can be addressed through social justice.

Over time, we have called this work by many names—ecological agriculture, food security, food justice, food sovereignty and agroecology—but our values have stayed consistent. We are in solidarity with the people who grow our food. We recognize that **diversity**—cultural, biological—**enriches food systems**. We honour the ancestral agricultural knowledge of rural women and farming communities. We also confront the power of corporations that seek to control seeds, land and markets. And we work alongside movements in Canada and globally to resist exploitation and build food systems and policies for the common good, not corporate greed.

## >>> LOOKING BACK

### THE 1970s: THE START OF A FOOD MOVEMENT

In 1977, Inter Pares joined allies to launch the People's Food Commission. The Commission travelled across Canada, posing pressing questions to thousands of community members like Why are family farms disappearing? And, why do countries export food when they cannot feed their own populations? Why do we need so many chemicals in our food?

“The Commission gave ordinary people a voice in shaping the national conversation on food. It showed that food was political, and that communities could organize to change the system.”

The late Cathleen Kneen, one of the Commission's early organizers



The result was *The Land of Milk and Money*, a landmark report exposing how corporations are gaining control over our food and influencing government policies to favour large companies over family farms and local businesses. Just as vital as the report was the process: it knit together rural and urban communities, growers and eaters, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities—building critical awareness and politicizing food for a generation. A food movement was born.

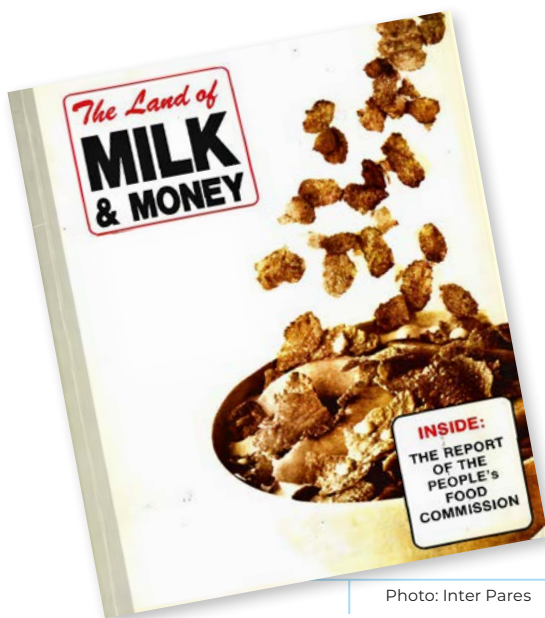


Photo: Inter Pares

Around the same time, Inter Pares published a book that was to have a profound effect on our work: *Seeds of the Earth: A Private or Public Resource?*, written by activist Pat Mooney. The book sounded one of the first alarms about the corporate takeover of the world's seeds and the rapid decline of genetic diversity in food crops due to the expansion of chemical intensive monocultures. It helped spark international organizing and laid the foundation for groups like the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group), then Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) and GRAIN—organizations we continue to collaborate with today.

## THE 1980s: MAKING INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Inter Pares began to support ACORD in the Sahel region of West Africa in the early 1980s. The organization grew to eventually operate in 17 countries across Africa, supporting agricultural development, farmers' organizing, women's rights and association building. In India, Inter Pares started working with ASSEFA to strengthen farmers' cooperatives and associations. These organizations also helped thousands of landless people **access land, training and tools for farming**. We also worked alongside the National Farmers Union in Canada to defend family farms.

## THE 1990s: SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVES

In the 1990s, Inter Pares became a vocal critic of conventional food aid, advocating for the untying of food aid from donor countries to avoid creating further dependency on imported food and avoid undermining local farming livelihoods and economies. The critique was informed by practice, where in Mali, working with ACORD, we supported the procurement of food from local food secure Dogon communities to displaced peoples. Or along the Thai-Burma border where we provided funding for the purchase of locally grown rice and vegetables for refugees.

In collaboration with ETC Group (RAFI), Inter Pares published practical booklets on community seed saving which were distributed far and wide and supported policy work to protect agrobiodiversity. A key argument was that farmers save seeds and should be **the custodians of this common heritage**. Inter Pares furthered this work by supporting farmers' own seed systems and the development of community seed banks.



Members of an International Rural Women's Exchange Telangana, India (2014). From left to right: Maude-Hélène Desroches (QC), Aline Zongo (Burkina Faso), a farmer and collaborator of the Deccan Development Society, Fatou Diouf (Senegal), and Tiné N'doye. Photo: Eric Charette / Inter Pares



With support from the Canadian International Development Agency (now Global Affairs Canada) and international donors, we were later able to help leverage more funds and deepen our support to farmers across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Inter Pares also began working with leading organizations in sustainable agriculture to increase community **food security in South Asia**. In Bangladesh, we worked with local organizations to promote ecological farming practices that improved soil health, reduced reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides and restored biodiversity. In India, we began a long-term collaboration with the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a women-led movement of mostly Dalit caste farmers who reclaimed land and created resilient, autonomous community food systems relying on a large diversity of local varieties of crops.

### **THE 2000s: RESISTING CORPORATE CONTROL**

As genetically modified crops spread in the early 2000s, Inter Pares joined allies to push back against Northern governments—

including the US and Canada—promoting genetically modified organisms (GMOs). We co-convened policy dialogues that amplified the voices of farmers, Indigenous leaders and scientists warning of the risks GMOs posed to biodiversity and farmer livelihoods. The message was clear: GMOs and the intellectual property rights they come with are a direct threat to farmers' livelihoods, seed-saving and agricultural biodiversity.

When Canada attempted to lift a global moratorium on Terminator seed technology—a technology that renders seeds sterile after first harvest—we supported the launch of the international Ban Terminator campaign. The moratorium was not only preserved but strengthened, a major **victory for civil society and farmers worldwide**.

The campaign revealed the influence multinational agrochemical companies have on the Canadian government. With this in mind, Inter Pares helped gather activists working against GMOs in 2006 and we pooled resources to eventually create the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN). CBAN continues to challenge the corporate capture

of food and agriculture with its sister and member organization in Quebec, Vigilance OGM, another counterpart of Inter Pares.

In 2007, Inter Pares joined Nyéléni, a global food sovereignty gathering in Mali. Organized by La Via Campesina and allies, the international forum articulated food sovereignty as *“the right of peoples to define their own food systems and agriculture systems, ensuring healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound methods”* (source: Nyéléni Declaration). At the core of food sovereignty is a call for people to reclaim power over food systems: for countries, communities, families, to be able to make food choices without these being dictated by markets or corporations.

The experience was transformative. It made clear that food security alone could not address the root causes of hunger. Inspired by Nyéléni and building on the legacy of the People’s Food Commission, Inter Pares helped launch the **People’s Food Policy Project** in Canada. The premise was that rather than react to bad policy, or the absence of policy, citizens would generate their own food sovereignty policy. From 2008 to 2011, more than 3,500 people contributed their vision of a food system rooted in justice, sustainability and Indigenous knowledge. The process culminated in *Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada*, which shaped Food Secure Canada’s advocacy and directly contributed to

the federal government’s creation of a National Food Policy in 2019 and more recently, its National School Food Program.

### **THE 2010s: CONNECTING FARMERS ACROSS BORDERS**

Building on decades of relationships, Inter Pares coordinated a series of farmer-to-farmer exchanges between rural women in West Africa, India and Canada. Farmers **learned directly from each other’s struggles and innovations**—from millet-based agroecology in India to the devastating impacts of genetically modified cotton in Burkina Faso. These exchanges sparked critical farmer-led research, and eventually led Inter Pares to secure funding from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to deepen and expand our work with counterparts to support our women-led agroecology work in West Africa.

At the same time, Inter Pares worked with COPAGEN and the Université de Montréal to research large-scale land acquisitions in West Africa. Spurred by the 2008 financial crisis, investors were buying land in West Africa as a safe investment, often in secret and without communities’ consent. With support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), we studied this landgrabbing in Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire to understand its drivers and strengthen resistance so land remains in the hands of local communities.

# food for a generation

## >>> WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Today, Inter Pares continues to work hand in hand with farmers' movements, rural women and community organizations in Canada and internationally to defend control over land, seeds, water and food.

In Canada, Inter Pares is an active member of several coalitions. As a **founding member of Food Secure Canada**, we provide institutional support and funding and participate in key initiatives such as Eat, Think, Vote. In an effort to influence how international development assistance is given, Inter Pares brings our feminist analysis to the Canadian Food Security Policy Group to support agricultural approaches that build autonomy (over land, seeds, knowledge and markets). We also continue to challenge corporate influence over biotechnology together with CBAN.

Internationally, we continue to support organizations like DDS in India and more than a dozen other organizations in Latin America, Asia and Africa to build resilient local food systems

and promote food sovereignty and agroecology. In recent years, we have successfully leveraged over \$20 million dollars from GAC to deepen counterparts' work in West Africa, inspired by decades of farmer-to-farmer learning exchanges and rooted in feminist practice, local knowledge and solidarity.

## >>> HOW WE DO THIS WORK

Our work is rooted in long-term relationships of trust and solidarity with feminist organizations, farmers' movements and rural women. Their expertise guides us. We accompany farmer-led research, agroecology training and seed security assessments and bring rural women's voices to decision makers. Farmer-to-farmer exchanges remain one of our most powerful tools for building solidarity, fostering bonds of trust and sparking new programming initiatives. We work in coalition to **amplify collective power**. Together with allies, we participate in campaigns to raise the alarm on urgent threats to food sovereignty. And we raise funds from the Canadian public to ensure this work can continue and grow over the next 50 years.

## >>> CONTINUING ONWARDS

The fight for food sovereignty is far from over. Corporate concentration in food and agriculture is intensifying and climate change is putting enormous pressure on ecosystems and communities. Yet the knowledge, resilience and creativity of farmers, especially women farmers, offer hope and direction.

As we look ahead, Inter Pares remains committed to working alongside counterparts who are reimagining and rebuilding food systems that nourish both people and the planet. Together, we will continue the **struggle for food sovereignty**—just as we have for the past 50 years.



Colleen Ross and Mamadou Goïta at the 2007 Nyéléni food sovereignty forum in Mali, where Inter Pares joined global movements shaping the vision of food sovereignty. Photo: Eric Charette / Inter Pares



# Mariamé Ouattara on centering women's voices in food justice

Mariamé Ouattara is a feminist activist from Burkina Faso.



"It is [women] who carry the torch to ensure equality in our country."

Her country is on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) list of "least developed countries" and receives significant international aid amounting to nearly \$1.4 billion in 2022.

For more than 30 years, Mariamé has worked to promote gender equality and women farmers' rights in Burkina Faso and the rest of West Africa. Over that time, she has encountered numerous international non-governmental organizations—and has experienced firsthand the colonial dynamics and paternalism that are perpetuated in the name of development and aid.

"What I take away from these 30 years is that these projects were funded in a directive manner. In other words, we were beneficiaries and it was aid that was being given to us... They give but they don't try to understand, [as if] we have nothing to say."

**Nothing could be further from the truth.** Mariamé has much to say—and has used her powerful voice to speak up for women who, like her, wish to contribute to a different kind of "development" in West Africa.



Photo: Inter Pares

Mariamé shares with us that her experience with Inter Pares is different, showing her that there are other ways of doing development, or rather international solidarity. Inter Pares' relationship with Mariamé dates back to 2006, during a regional assembly in Khartoum, Sudan in which a small delegation from the Inter Pares team also participated. While exchanging information, she came across an Inter Pares flyer that caught her attention. "This is **an organization I would like to work with,**" she told herself as she examined the document.


Since then, Inter Pares and Mariamé have been working together as part of a partnership with the Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Heritage (COPAGEN), a West African network working to promote biodiversity. Now active in nine countries, COPAGEN brings together 200 communities to protect their own genetic resources and oppose the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into agriculture and food systems.

Bringing together so many groups to tackle **these challenges is a challenge in itself.**

Yet Mariamé's unique ability to unite people was a key factor in founding the coalition in 2004, so much so that she is affectionately known as "Maman COPAGEN." While Inter Pares' relationship with Mariamé has evolved over the years, her capacity to foster dialogue among diverse perspectives remains a defining strength. This skill is all the more vital in her role as a gender expert, navigating a context that can often be hostile to questions of gender equality.

Women play a fundamental role in community agriculture and agroecology in West Africa: they represent the majority of the workforce in family farming, which is an extension of their household tasks. To promote sustainable agricultural practices, communities must therefore commit to a more equitable organization of work, guarantee women's rights to land and value the knowledge they hold.

But this is not a given in countries such as Burkina Faso, where patriarchy is the prevailing principle of socialization among all 60 ethnic groups, enshrining the supremacy of men over women.



"When we talk about patriarchy, we mean that there are norms, values, prohibitions and beliefs that maintain the domination of women by men..."

Mariamé and all the women farmers in the movement fight to free themselves from this oppressive system. But, Mariamé questions, "How can we fight when the whole of society is organized in this way?"

Instead of simply replicating Western strategies to deconstruct the patriarchal system and promote women's participation and leadership, the starting point must be from the **experiences of women**—like Mariamé—who have borne the brunt of patriarchy in Burkina Faso in every facet of their lives. International development does not traditionally take

this into account: there is no interest in the experiences of the people involved, and the belief is that those with power have the best solutions. In her relationship with Inter Pares, Mariamé found something different.

“Inter Pares did not come with a program saying, “Do it this way, do it that way, this is what we want.” No. We start from the reality of women and men and we act together.”



A teacher at heart, Mariamé’s feminist approach is based on education: “First, women need to understand what patriarchy is and its impact.” Mariamé’s work therefore begins with raising awareness and sharing information, as well as coordinating training workshops that **encourage women to organize.**

Mariamé knows that by organizing collectively, we move forward; a woman alone in her family cannot achieve everything. When women

come together, they can influence the community and push for change. Mariamé summarizes it best with an African proverb: **“One hand alone cannot collect flour.”**

As experts in their own context, women also develop strategies to overcome obstacles and move forward. For example, Mariamé shares that to avoid undermining their efforts, women in Burkina Faso often avoid using **the word “feminism”** to describe their vision at the outset, knowing that this term **can evoke negative stereotypes and even fear.** Instead, women try to influence community and religious leaders, who are guardians of tradition and often resistant to change. They make them understand that their goal is to strengthen the family, the community and the entire country by bringing men and women together.

In doing so, they have gradually introduced feminist concepts and, along the way, identified

“male feminist champions”, whom Mariamé describes as men who, instead of using their privilege to dominate women, use it to create greater equality. Their complicity enables women to advance in their struggles.

The approach taken by Inter Pares, Mariamé and the movement of women farmers that she supports does not yield immediate or easily quantifiable results according to traditional criteria used to measure success in international development work. Instead, we aim to build lasting relationships, actions and programs.

Mariamé emphasizes:

“We’re not looking to sprinkle things around, to have scattered effects... we want change.”

For 20 years, Inter Pares, COPAGEN and Mariamé have taken on the challenge of promoting real, comprehensive and sustainable change. Mariamé confirms that the situation is beginning to change: **“it’s caught on.”**

# women's participation

# Jamie Kneen on linking struggles across borders

When Jamie Kneen talks activism, he starts by talking about relationships—the connections between communities and movements, learning across generations and borders.

He talks about approaching the work with **humility rather than authority**. Jamie also talks about the importance of listening, about trust that takes years to build. His presence in the stories he recounts is constant but understated, reminding us that change begins with listening. For Jamie, it has never been about one person's actions, but about what people can build together.

Jamie's connection to Inter Pares stretches back more than three decades and is tied to a **lifelong commitment to social and environmental justice**. He first met Inter Pares as a young biology student finishing his undergraduate degree. Preparing for travel to the Eastern Caribbean, he met with Jean Christie, former staff member at Inter Pares, who connected him with the Eastern Caribbean Natural Areas Management Program. The experience in the region was formative for Jamie. He saw firsthand the stark contrast between our counterpart's project, which was locally driven, thriving on community participation and local knowledge, and another failing, top-down externally managed initiative.

"This [experience] reinforced everything I was already programmed to suspect about the world and set me up for a lifetime of activism."



Today, Jamie is known for his work with MiningWatch Canada, which marked its 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025. The story of MiningWatch started with a question that many groups were asking in the 1990s: how could Canadians respond to the harm caused by the Canadian mining industry abroad? At the time, reports were multiplying



Photo courtesy of Jamie Kneen

of human rights abuses linked to Canadian mining interests. Communities in Latin America, Africa and Asia were **raising alarms** about the damage left behind, including polluted rivers, displaced communities and poisoned soil.

“People we worked with on the ground were having a problem with Canadian mining companies, and we didn’t have the expertise or the background to engage with that. So how were we going to do that?”

The answer emerged through long conversations within networks like the Americas Policy Group and the Africa-Canada Forum. An idea began to take shape of an organization that would help communities share knowledge and strategies across borders, **“it was about creating a common response to a common problem.”**

Inter Pares became MiningWatch’s first formal backer.

“[Inter Pares] said **“no, this has to happen.”** They put a modest but significant amount of money on the table, enough to help us bring in other funders and build something that, incredibly, has lasted 26 years.”

Since then, MiningWatch and Inter Pares’ work together has remained grounded in coalition building and networks. Whether working with local community groups, civil society or international allies, the approach is one of accompaniment, bringing resources and expertise when needed, **but not being the protagonist of the story.** The aim has always been to build trust, foster relationships and support conditions for communities to lead in their own struggles.

Much of this work has taken place in Central America, where Canadian mining companies moved aggressively into Guatemala and Honduras in the 1990s and early 2000s, the consequences of which were **devastating for communities.**

“People were getting killed. People were getting poisoned. Communities were forcibly displaced. The mining company would bulldoze a cemetery to expand the mine.”

Working alongside church networks and community organizations, MiningWatch connected affected communities with allies across the region and supported complaints to the International Finance Corporation and the Canadian government.

foster  
relationships



“They had no idea what we were talking about, and still don't, even though we've been telling them for a really long time, extremely clearly and quite loudly at times and they still don't hear that message.”



The regional activist networks later proved essential in El Salvador. When Canadian-owned Pacific Rim Mining Corporation officially entered the country in 2002, civil society organizations reached out to groups in Guatemala and Honduras to learn from their experiences of resistance. These lessons helped them organize and resist. The result was remarkable: from 2017 to 2024, El Salvador had a national ban on metal mining, becoming the first country in the world to do so.

“Because water is more precious than gold... Seventy percent of [El Salvador] depends on one watershed. Giving that up for someone else's profit makes no sense, not to the rural people, or the city people either.”



For Jamie, these victories show the importance of lasting relationships.

“The thread through all of this is building relationships and connections so that they're there when you need them.”



Many of these struggles take years and unfold against very powerful interests, so “success” can rarely be measured in immediate or sustained wins. What endures however are the networks and **bonds of solidarity** built in the struggle, the relationships that make it possible to respond collectively when the next challenge presents itself. Jamie looks to Dene artist and anarchist-activist C. Ali's track “Accomplices, Not Allies” for inspiration, that captures this approach to solidarity—showing up not as a helper, but as someone implicated in the same struggle. This is the same spirit of shared purpose that has shaped the relationship between MiningWatch and Inter Pares over the years.

After decades of organizing, Jamie's guiding philosophy is simple but profound: **preparation matters, but humility matters more.** He recalls a trip to Costa Rica, where he worked with Indigenous youth organizing against new mining concessions. Their group of lawyers, anthropologists and environmental scientists would prepare with all the mapping claims, environmental law and tools that would be useful.

“We'd fill the blackboard with plans and information, and then I'd tell them, ‘Okay, now we're going to forget that. We're going to go and listen’. The most powerful moments came when we set the tools aside and just listened.”



When you “put the expert aside and approach with open hands and an open heart,” listening becomes an act of solidarity. This way of working models a different kind of leadership that walks in step beside others, connecting, accompanying and strengthening collective voices.

# organize and resist..

# Building locally led peace and democracy

At Inter Pares, peace has never been a product to deliver. It's a process—slow and generational. And the people for whom it matters most must drive that process. Peace building must be locally led.

- This belief has been a thread through **our solidarity work** for five decades.

- As threats to democracy grow around the world, this lesson **matters more than ever**. To mark our 50th anniversary, we're looking back, not just at what we've done, but at how we've done it: through long-term, feminist, solidarity-driven partnerships.

## >>> OUR ROOTS

Peace and democracy have been in our DNA from the start.

We know real change requires working together. So, since our earliest days, we've worked alongside people confronting structural inequality, armed conflict and repression.

- In 1976, Inter Pares joined a consortium of European civil society organizations to form the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD). ACORD rejected colonial, top-down models of aid, partnering instead with communities **on their own terms** to exercise their rights and improve livelihoods.

- By the late 1990s, ACORD was working on becoming a more African-led network, a transition we supported.

- Now focused on reconciliation and gender justice in conflict zones including Rwanda, Sudan, Angola and Mali, ACORD combined immediate relief with long-term capacity-building. Inter Pares worked alongside ACORD for 42 years, until its closure in 2018.

“We were part of an international coalition to democratize the aid relationship; to support people to determine their own lives, and to express solidarity, as effectively as we could. We didn't always get it right, but we've always been a learning organization. Our values are constant: learning, changing, working with others and exploring new avenues.”

Molly Kane, former Inter Pares staff and former chair of ACORD's Board





Bill Fairbairn, former Inter Pares co-manager, provides testimony to a member of Colombia's Truth Commission in 2019. Photo: Inter Pares



In 1979, Inter Pares and other international agencies launched Project Counselling Service (PCS) in Latin America. For four decades, PCS supported local organizations working with **people uprooted by violence**.

From Mexico to Chile, PCS centred women in its work with conflict-displaced communities and ensured their voices fed into transitional justice processes. In 2007, PCS became a locally run organization.

PCS's "counselling" approach with local organizations was rooted in solidarity, combining material support with close accompaniment. It fostered horizontal partnerships built on trust, flexibility and dialogue, recognizing that communities—especially the victims of conflict—had the right to lead their own justice processes. This approach helped partners gain legitimacy in politically polarized and high-risk environments.

In Mexico, we worked with Alianza Cívica, a coalition formed by seven Mexican election monitoring groups in the lead up to the country's 1994 presidential election. Inter Pares

contributed to its organizing across the country, supporting the mobilization of more than 20,000 election observers—including international volunteers like Inter Pares' Roch Tassé. Those efforts strengthened public confidence in electoral administration and helped legitimize Mexico's elections during a critical democratic transition.

"From the start, we didn't arrive with ready-made answers. We listened to, learned from and partnered with people taking on enormous risks for change. We made—and continue to make—connections with counterparts and between our counterparts so people can achieve together what they could not do alone. Such connections bring mutual support, learning, shared resources and collective power, while promoting diversity of experience and ideas, and genuine momentum and durability to our collective action globally."

Jean Symes, Inter Pares program manager



That ethos—solidarity, not charity—has anchored our work ever since.

## >>> EXPANDING OUR REACH

In the mid-1990s, we started collaborating with the Burma Relief Centre (BRC), supporting Indigenous-led grassroots groups resisting a violent dictatorship in Burma.

Through BRC, we partnered with the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), which provides health services to displaced people on the Thailand-Burma border. In 2002, MTC's founder, Dr. Cynthia Maung, received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of her integrity, leadership and humanitarian work.

In the early 2000s, we ramped up support for women- and youth-led grassroots organizations in conflict areas—**many operating from exile**. These organizations documented horrific human rights abuses under the military regime and challenged the narrative that Burma's crisis was solely about political repression. They published reports on the military's use of rape as a weapon of war, forcing international recognition of systematic, targeted violence against Indigenous women and girls.

“Working with civil society organizations from Indigenous-majority areas in Burma, especially women's groups, is about amplifying voices that are deliberately silenced.”

Nikki Richard, Inter Pares program manager

Civil war has gripped Burma since the military seized power in 2021. Today, our counterparts fill huge gaps in health care, livelihoods and

governance—all while building the foundations of a future federal democracy rooted in Indigenous leadership and human rights.

Those foundations include a health care system. In 2025, we brought Dr. Cynthia and nine other Indigenous health leaders from Burma to Canada for a study tour on our federal health care system, to help inform their own transition to democratic federalism during a future peacetime.

Their struggle continues, as does our solidarity.

## EXCHANGES

We have always connected people across borders through **South-South and South-North exchanges**—spaces where movements share strategies and solidarity.

In 2003, we brought together women activists from counterpart organizations in Burma and Guatemala. Both groups had built strong movements in exile in Thailand and Mexico, respectively.

“The Burma-Guatemala women's exchange was based on the idea that refugee women from Guatemala and Burma have parallel experiences. They fled state-sanctioned violence, struggled to survive in exile with access to few supports and recognized the need to organize as women. All women also faced the challenge of finding an autonomous voice and resisting male hostility and discrimination. The main goals of the exchange were to analyse the Guatemalan women's experience of return and relevant lessons for Burmese refugees, and to build solidarity among the women's movements.”

Rita Morbia, Inter Pares program manager and one of the exchange's coordinators



In 2008, we joined with PCS to organize an exchange between women from Guatemala, Peru and Colombia to share their struggles for recognition as survivors of sexual violence in conflict. The exchange helped victims' organizations feel **more confident** and able to press their governments for justice and reparation on their own terms.

In 2023, we facilitated an exchange in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, between members of Haida Nation and Indigenous leaders from Burma. Conversations spanned land stewardship and cultural survival under colonization.

"We had similar experiences under colonization, including the banning of cultural practices and Indigenous identity."

Paul Sein Twa of the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), one of our Burma counterparts

These exchanges have shown us that when struggles are shared across borders, so too are the strategies, courage and hope needed to sustain them.

## >>> TODAY

Today, our partners are **pushing for peace** in places where whole communities—Indigenous groups, women and LGBTQI+ people—have been excluded from decision-making.

But in Sudan, decades of dictatorship, war and revolution haven't stopped women's organizations from leading the call for peace and equality.

Asha El-Karib, an activist from our counterpart the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORAD), dreams of "breaking down the many boundaries and barriers—gender, ethnic, class, religious, geographic—that stand in the way of women's unity and the transformation of society."

Women have been on the **front lines of every major moment** in Sudan, from the 2005 peace agreement to the breakout of war in 2023. Since the early 2000s, we've been with them through every turn—amplifying advocacy in peace talks, buttressing transitional justice efforts and today, supporting community-led responses to the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Our adaptive solidarity with Sudanese women exemplifies our approach: feminist partnerships that endure and evolve through every phase of the struggle.

In Latin America, many organizations we supported through PCS became our direct counterparts when PCS closed in 2018.

In Guatemala, our partners helped **break the silence** on the use of sexual violence during the genocide against Indigenous peoples in the 1980s. Their work contributed to the historic 2013 conviction of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, where the court recognized sexual violence as a deliberate tool of genocide.

In Colombia, PCS helped lay the groundwork for the country's 2016 **peace accords**, after more than 50 years of armed conflict. Today, our partner Colombia Diversa documents how armed groups targeted LGBTQI+ people during the conflict and has made significant contributions to the country's truth and reconciliation process.

# solidarity,



For decades, Inter Pares counterpart DEMUS has advocated for justice for victims of Peru's program of forced sterilization—including through demonstrations like this one. Photo: DEMUS



In Peru, we've supported Indigenous women survivors of political violence—especially those targeted by the Fujimori dictatorship's campaign of forced sterilization in the 1990s. Through our longstanding partnership with DEMUS, we've helped rural, Indigenous women pursue justice, reparations and collective healing.

These are not short-term projects. They're the result of decades of mutual trust and shared analysis.

## JUSTICE AT HOME

Here in Canada, we also work in partnership and coalition **to ensure our government lives up to the values** we champion abroad: human rights, democracy and peace.

We've urged parliamentarians to press for Canadian leadership in Burma and Sudan. We've pushed the government to align Canada's foreign policy with the priorities of communities most affected by war and repression. We've advocated for coordinated and strategic sanctions that hold perpetrators accountable without harming civilians.

Sometimes solidarity means mobilizing the public to hold our government accountable. When a Burmese military general on Canada's sanctions list hired a Montreal-based lobbying firm, we mobilized thousands of Canadians to complain to the RCMP and demand an investigation into this violation of Canadian law. As a result, the contract was cancelled—a clear example of how collective action here can have tangible impacts on global struggles for justice.

In 2024, we brought together NGOs, activists and academics to form the **Canadian Civil Society Working Group on Sudan**.

"We need to keep Sudan, and the ongoing war there, on the political docket. Together, we press the Canadian government to increase humanitarian and development support, expand pathways for resettlement of Sudanese refugees, and listen to Sudanese civil society leaders about what meaningful international solidarity should look like."

Amani Khalfan, Inter Pares program manager and co-chair of the Working Group on Sudan



# not charity...



Dr. Cynthia Maung founded the Mae Tao Clinic in 1989, five months after fleeing a brutal military crackdown in Burma. Photo: Mae Tao Clinic



Advocacy at home is not separate from our international solidarity—it is an essential part of it. Whether mobilizing citizens, building coalitions or pressing for principled foreign policy, we know that the fight for justice abroad is inseparable from the struggle for democracy and human rights here at home.

### >>> STAYING TRUE TO OUR ROOTS

#### Peacebuilding doesn't end

when the fighting stops. It is the daily work of sustaining hope in war zones, fragile democracies and the slow rebuilding of communities.

In a world where democracy is increasingly under threat, our counterparts remind us what's possible. Together, we're not just supporting peace processes—we're **co-creating a future rooted in dignity, agency and justice.**

Over 50 years, we have learned peace is cultivated through local feminist movements, global solidarity and long-term partnerships. From Indigenous resistance in Burma to bold women-led organizing in Sudan, our partners show us that peace isn't a moment. It's a practice.



matters  
more  
than ever.

# Acknowledgements

## >>> WITH GRATITUDE

Inter Pares is located in Ottawa, on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabe territory, part of the Indigenous lands currently known as Canada. Our staff and Board are spread across these lands. We honour Indigenous peoples' enduring presence and contributions to this land. By acknowledging the past and honoring the present, we work towards a future where every voice is heard and every experience is valued.

Inter Pares was founded in 1975 by a small group of people coming together to make the world a more just, equal place. Since then, the **Inter Pares community has grown** and been sustained and strengthened by the financial, political and hands-on contributions of many. **We are immensely grateful to everyone** who has been there alongside us.

To our allies and counterparts that welcomed their words being included in this publication, thank you for sharing your reflections and experiences with us. Moreover, thank you for being alongside us these past many decades.

To our counterparts, who inspire us and show us what true determination looks like. Thank you for trusting us to be there with you for the long haul and collaborating with us through thick and thin.

To the coalitions in which we co-conspire for a more just world: thank you for being reliable spaces of learning, reflection and action in an ever-changing landscape.

To our donors and supporters, who even in the most challenging and uncertain times, respond with kindness, generosity and solidarity. Thank you for sustaining our work.

To our volunteer Board of Directors, we extend our deep appreciation for your time and expertise. Thank you for accompanying staff to stay true to our mission and values.

And finally, to our staff, who show up every day with a deep commitment to our counterparts and the belief that we **can** build a better world. **Thank you for your collaboration, courage and heart.**



