



# ADVANCING SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS



In Rajasthan, India, AJWS grantee AMIED is supporting hundreds of girls to continue their educations and expand their aspirations.  
*Photo by Deepak Sharma*

## THE CHALLENGES

Across the globe, women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people face discrimination and alarming rates of violence. Patriarchal values fuel discriminatory laws and practices that prevent these populations from enjoying the freedom to make their own decisions over their health, education, professions and futures.

The statistics are staggering: An estimated one in three women today will experience sexual violence or some other form of abuse in her lifetime. Every year, about 12 million girls get married before age 18—many by force. And in nearly 70 countries, being gay is a criminal offense, often punishable by prison and, in some cases, death.

### WE'RE BUILDING A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO:

- Pursue equal opportunities in society without limitations based on gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation
- Make their own decisions about their body and live free from violence
- Access healthcare that enhances their sexual and reproductive rights

AJWS works on these issues because we believe no one should be forced to live in fear or denied the ability to make their own decisions about their lives and bodies. These basic rights are essential to enable all human beings to live as equals, love whom they love, and be protected under the law.

## HOW WE MAKE CHANGE

AJWS supports social change organizations in Asia, Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean working to advance sexual health and rights, promote gender equality, and combat discrimination, violence and hate crimes. The activists we support work tirelessly to build powerful, inclusive social movements that aim to shift how their families and society value their full humanity. They pursue sustainable change, from mobilizing girls in India fighting back against child marriage and gender-based violence, to organizing a national movement in Kenya to overturn the country's egregious anti-homosexuality law.

We believe that activists within these communities understand their needs and challenges best—that's why AJWS follows their lead in developing strategies to grow strong social movements and bring about a brighter future for everyone.

## OUR IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

The activists, organizations and movements we support are making progress in their communities and around the globe:

- In September 2018 in **India**, the country's Supreme Court made history by striking down Section 377 of the Constitution, which made consensual sex between same-sex adults illegal. **Solidarity and Action Against HIV Infection in India (SAATHI)** and other AJWS grantees helped lead this charge for equality in India. And in 2021, SAATHI was instrumental in influencing a prominent judge to issue a watershed order on behalf of the Madras High Court, demanding sweeping changes to eliminate illegal discrimination against members of the LGBTQI+ community.
- For years in **Senegal**, the crime of rape was dismissed as the equivalent of a misdemeanor—and convictions were rare. But AJWS grantee **Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (AJS)** refused to let the past dictate the future. In January 2020, this group of women lawyers led a massive movement to change the legal code. AJS worked closely with members of parliament and applied public pressure to criminalize rape definitively—and

In 2023, AJWS invested in 180 social change organizations in 8 countries to promote sexual health and rights.

Dominican Republic • El Salvador  
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Thailand • Uganda

they won. Now, rape convictions carry a minimum of a 10-year sentence—a serious punishment befitting the horrendous crime.

- In Karnataka, **India**, young women face intense social pressure from their families and communities to drop out of school and marry. Families view education as a poor investment on girls, as they are expected to bear children and maintain a household, rather than pursue careers. But AJWS grantee **Sakhi Trust** assists adolescent girls with school fees and housing, so they can keep studying and have a safe place to live without the pressure to marry. One of more than 70 organizations pursuing gender equality in India with support from AJWS, Sakhi helps young people unearth their own courage, voices and dreams.



Activists from AJWS grantee Estrellas del Golfo march proudly for LGBTQI+ rights in El Salvador. Photo by Andrea Padilla Moreno

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