Movement building can seem like it’s two steps forward and one step back. Just this spring, Mayan activists won a 30-year court battle punishing those responsible for crimes against humanity in Guatemala’s civil war. It was the first time a sexual slavery case was heard in a national court.

It seemed like a good time to ask the question: what grounds your actions to shape a better future for women and girls? At The MATCH Fund, we didn’t have to search very hard for the answer. It’s the people. It’s the girls who pledge to end child marriage in their Nepali village. It’s the young filmmaker who exposes violence in India’s public toilets. It’s the 500,000 people who stood with us (virtually) this International Women’s Day, and it’s the former Board members who have shaped The MATCH Fund over the years. It’s you.

More than ever, we need to ground each other in this marathon. We need to celebrate our wins. And we need to fight like hell in the face of our losses.

It is in this spirit that we present the Spring edition of The MATCH Fund’s newsletter.
Young Delhi filmmaker, photographer, and feminist, Deepika laughs when she describes the way she used to think about photography. “I thought, what’s the big deal about cameras? It’s just a click and then the photo is done.” That was four years ago. Deepika has since completed nearly all four levels of Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT)’s Young Women’s Leadership Program. “I came to FAT to learn computers and maybe get a job somewhere after that,” she says. “But now my dream is to be a photographer.”

As far as we are concerned, dream accomplished.

In 2013, Deepika used her photography and videography skills to highlight issues facing Indian girls. Collaborating with three other young women, Deepika wanted to make a film about violence against women. But the subject just seemed too big. Then one of her co-creators pointed out that she fears violence every time she goes to the community toilets. And that was the spark for the 27-minute film Apna Haq, or “Our Rights.” Deepika says, “We just started writing down our issues, and it became the script.”

The film follows four girls who live in a Delhi slum where 100 households share four toilets. With Deepika behind the video camera and snapping stills of the girls’ day-to-day lives, the film takes the audience inside and around the toilets by the railroad tracks. The girls talk about how they are scared to go to the toilet at night. There are no lights. No doors. The girls fear harassment and rape. Hygiene during their periods is practically impossible.

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Feminist Approach to Technology, a partner of The MATCH Fund, recently published Apna Haq and an accompanying book of Deepika’s photographs to raise awareness about this issue. And Deepika? She has since completed a second short film about early forced marriage in India. Nothing will stop her from achieving her dreams. Not even the fact that she may have already achieved them.
DON’T WISH THESE GIRLS A HAPPY MOTHER’S DAY

Here’s why you can’t wish these girls in Dhuskun a Happy Mother’s Day.
They are not mothers. They are not wives.
And they plan on keeping it that way. They are, after all, only in middle school.

Sadly, 41% of Nepali girls are married before their 18th birthday. In rural areas like Dhuskun, the percentage is even higher. Rural Nepali girls are at a much greater risk for trafficking, and practices like chhaupadi* still cloak menstruation in shame.

The good news: Girls like Amita are adamant. These practices stop with them.

When we visited Dhuskun Primary School in March, Amita and her classmates had just completed a four-week workshop with The MATCH Fund’s partner, Her Turn. A member of Dhuskun’s newly-formed Girl Support Committee, Amita told us, “The workshop taught me the many consequences of child marriage—things I didn’t know before. I think that knowing these things will make my life better and happier than that of my mother.”
And that is a true Mother’s Day wish.

“I learned to have self-esteem and confidence. In the Girl Support Committee, I will tell girls that they are not ready physically to get married and that pregnancy could negatively affect their health.”

“I learned not to get married when I am young. If a girl gets pregnant at a young age, there is a chance that she and her child could die.”

“Before the workshop, I didn’t know much about hygiene during menstruation. I learned about what happens during my period and how to keep myself clean.”

“The Girl Support Committee is about helping each other when a girl is in trouble.”

*Chhaupadi is the practice of banishing a girl to a cow shed during her period. During these times, she is thought to be impure and to spread bad luck to all she touches.

MEET OUR THREE NEWEST PARTNERS

In January 2016, The MATCH Fund announced three new Holding Ground and Breaking Ground partners: Feminist Approach to Technology (India), Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (South Africa), and Women’s Awareness Centre Nepal (Nepal). These partners are hosting tech hubs for girls (see Deepika’s story), engaging the government and the private sector in a dialogue about gender-based violence, and creating savings cooperatives for rural women. Read more about these partners on The MATCH Fund’s blog.
WOMEN’S RIGHTS GO VIRAL
Covering Ground, One Broken Law at a Time.

When two women in Morocco were arrested last year for wearing dresses, five hundred lawyers registered to defend them. In Saudi Arabia, women finally got the vote. (But there’s still no progress on Saudi women being able to drive a car. Maybe that’s for 2017?) And in Malawi and Guatemala, child marriage was finally taken seriously when the two countries raised the minimum marriage age to 18.

There were certainly triumphs this year in the midst of defeats. And the triumphs are slowly getting bigger, the voices are growing louder, and the solidarity between countries is becoming stronger.

How do we know? We launched an online quiz on International Women’s Day 2016 based upon the state of women’s rights around the world. The quiz produced a score to tell women how many laws they would have broken by just going about their daily lives if they were living elsewhere in the world.

Within hours, it went viral. 500,000 people in over 100 countries took the quiz, collectively breaking 4,000,000 laws. That’s half a million people who stopped their day to talk about what it is like to be a woman living in the global South.

The result? People were angry. People were fired up. People were shocked that in 2016, women are still being arrested, beaten, or killed for doing things that many people in countries like Canada do every day without a second thought.

So, how many laws did you break today? Visit our website to take the quiz and then share your results on social media to join the conversation.

CATCHING UP WITH CETA

“I am very proud of what The MATCH Fund has been able to accomplish,” Ceta Ramkhalawansingh told us at a recent meeting in Toronto. Ceta, a 2014 Toronto City Councillor, is known for her advocacy on gender, diversity, and human rights, and she implemented many pioneering policies and programs at Toronto City Hall. Recently, she was in the news for co-founding the Campaign for Gender Equality in the Senate of Canada.

Recruited to The MATCH Fund’s board in 1988 by Rosemary Brown, Ceta served over a 13 year span as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Board member. During Ceta’s tenure, The MATCH Fund strengthened its work on international movement building. “What was significant was that, in addition to supporting individual projects, The MATCH Fund expanded support to networks,” she noted. Ceta referenced women’s legal initiatives across South Asia and Africa, where women were collaborating, researching, and advocating for changes to laws about rape and domestic abuse. “The shift to movement building transformed the conversation about women and development in Canada and around the world,” Ceta observed. Today, thanks to trailblazers like Ceta, The MATCH Fund invests in movement building initiatives led by women across the globe.