RESISTers Dialogue

ITS PUSH BACK AGAINST CLIMATE FALSE SOLUTIONS
AND ITS PUSH FOR WOMEN-LED SOLUTIONS





BURMA



CAMBODIA



INDO







NESIA PHILIPPINES THAILAND

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Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders alongside Women-Led Initiatives Crafting Gender-Responsive Climate Solutions in Myanmar
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Challenges and Response of Cambodian Women in Agriculture
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How Indonesian Women Reject Small Island Destruction and False Climate Change Solutions
By TKPT Indonesia in collaboration with Jatam East Kalimantan, Save Sangihe Island, and SVD

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About RESISTers Dialogue

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RESISTers Dialogue is a collective of women human rights defenders from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Burma, and India that works together to highlight women's stories and campaigns of sisters in resistance against violence, discrimination, and marginalization of rural and indigenous women. We are bonded by our shared experiences of social inequalities, authoritarian and militarized governments, violence against women, corporate violence against rural and indigenous women, and the many facets of discrimination.

RESISTers Dialogue are women of different languages bound together by the same vision of a life of freedom from violence, fear, and hunger. We are united by the same dream of societies free from discrimination and inequalities. We are joined by our love for what is beautiful – truth, justice, freedom.

RESISTers Dialogue serves as a platform for discussions on the situation of the rural and indigenous women human rights defenders, and especially in relation to their relationship, and access to natural resources, and their ongoing struggles; sharing strategies, and support to ongoing local struggles. After the 2019 RESISTers Dialogue in Thailand, several activities have been identified which are regionally coordinated – e.g. identifying, and developing regional platforms for a more systematic support for indigenous and rural women human rights defenders.

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DHAATRI RESOURCE CENTRE

Dhaatri is a Resource Centre for women and children's rights. It is a small platform to support the everyday struggles of rural and indigenous women. Registered in 2007 under the Indian Trusts Act, the Centre is an initiative to represent the voices, perspectives and campaigns of rural, adivasi and marginalized women in India and for the protection of the rights of their children. Through our work, we help women access information, research, capacity building and exchange of skills and strategies. We work with women in communities and women's rights defenders to promote gender equality and ecological justice.

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We are a collective of women rights advocates, activists, feminists, and indigenous women, putting our hearts, minds, and energies together to support and act in solidarity with the struggle of the indigenous women.

We believe that indigenous women are among the least heard but mostly affected by the increasing poverty, hunger, devastation of the environment, and depletion of natural resources. We are part of the struggles against all and different forms of discrimination, violence, and marginalization of indigenous women. We aspire for a nation of societies where women with multiple identities are able to exercise their rights and enjoy their freedoms from poverty, violence, powerlessness, and injustices. We work for transformative changes in indigenous women's lives within social movements and peoples' struggles; and towards indigenous women's economic, political, social, and cultural empowerment. Our energies are devoted to amplifying their voices, recognizing and profiling their leaderships, providing platforms for their actions and advocacies, and linking solidarity work among other women, among peoples, and among societies.

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Protection International (PI) supports human rights defenders (HRDs) in developing preventive security and protection strategies, ensuring they can continue their critical work. We believe the right to defend human rights is fundamental and advocate for an enabling environment that protects this right, along with stronger laws and policies to safeguard all defenders.

We proudly stand with diverse defenders, including the Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) Collective of Thailand, youth leaders, defenders with disabilities, land rights activists, indigenous communities, environmental and climate justice defenders, LGBTQI+ advocates, human rights lawyers, and social justice leaders. PI also works alongside defenders from Burma to ensure their safety and protection. Together, we strive for a world where defending human rights is recognized, respected, and fully protected.

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Perkumpulan TKPT was founded in Samarinda City, East Kalimantan Province on December 8, 2015, by women including activists, lecturers, and housewives. This organization transformed from an ad-hoc team formed by JATAM in 2000 for advocating the cases of violence against women around the gold mine owned by Rio Tinto (Australia) in East Kalimantan to become an independent organization that has been advocating for women's rights and environmental justice. TKPT has researched, organized, and campaigned for ecological and gender justice. In East Kalimantan, TKPT worked with women whose children died in abandoned coal mining pits in Samarinda, helping them build the solidarity and healing program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, TKPT has held special education on ecofeminism for young Indonesians since 2020 in the form of an Ecofeminist School.

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RESISTers from Burma: Pippa Curwen & Aung Ja



BURMA

Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders alongside Women-Led Initiatives Crafting Gender-Responsive Climate Solutions in Myanmar

Written by Esther Wah and Cindy Aung

Introduction

At the end of 2019, the Covid-19 virus began spreading from China, rapidly evolving into a global epidemic. By March 23, 2020, the epidemic had reached Myanmar. At the time, Myanmar had been experiencing political stability following its transition to democracy in 2010. Just as the country was making progress toward economic development, it was hit by the covid epidemic. The civilian government mobilized all available resources to control the spread of the virus in the country. Under the leadership of State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar was recognized by the World Health Organization for its people's generous donations and participation in combating the pandemic. It was a rare moment in history when the collective power of the people was seen. By the end of 2020, Myanmar became the third country in Southeast Asia to receive the Covid-19 vaccines, after Singapore and Indonesia.

However, all those conditions drastically changed in early 2021. On February 1, 2021, while the people were struggling with the COVID 19 pandemic, the Myanmar military seized power from the civilian government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The people across the country, whose unity and solidarity emerged in fighting the Covid-19 epidemic, felt angry at the military that had robbed the country for the sake of power, showing a total lack of empathy for their plight. Doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers initiated the "Spring Revolution," which began as peaceful protests but later escalated into an unprecedented armed struggle against the military.

Myanmar soon descended into widespread civil war, and international organizations began labeling the country a "failed state." The rule of law had been broken for over a year and a half by the time of writing this research paper. During this period, Myanmar, rich in natural resources, became vulnerable to exploitation as opportunists took advantage of the lack of rule of law.

Civil society organizations, once working together in fighting the Covid-19 epidemic, found themselves in an extremely difficult position as they tried to protect people from physical and mental abuses inflicted by the brutal arrests and tortures carried out by the Myanmar military regime. Taking advantage of the lawless situation, businessmen seeking quick wealth capitalized on the military's repression, collaborating with local authorities to extract resources without accountability.

The local communities, experiencing such a brutal and helpless situation, began reaching out to local civil society organizations (CSOs). Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) faced challenges and risks in many different ways. Many were forced to keep a low profile, keep silent, flee to neighboring countries, or get arrested and receive threats. This paper examines the situation of these women defenders to raise their voices. However, due to various limitations, gathering evidence and data on all of the women's experiences and the looting of natural resources across the country in the aftermath of the military coup proved impossible.

Background and Objectives

The main objective of this report is to highlight the creative efforts of women-led initiatives and actions in Myanmar that address gender-based vulnerabilities and climate change. It aims to examine the historical and contemporary environmental initiatives led by women in Myanmar, both before and after the political coup, to better understand their roles and contributions in addressing environmental challenges. Additionally, it seeks to identify and analyze the multifaceted challenges faced by WEHRDs in Myanmar, including the various barriers they face in expressing their environmental concerns.

Prior to the military coup, a growing movement of WEHRDs was actively engaged in environmental protection and human rights advocacy, embodying a story of resilience and tenacity. However, the coup brought major changes, intensifying the challenges and reshaping the landscape for these defenders. Understanding the dynamics of their work, both before and after the coup, is crucial to grasping Myanmar's evolving sociopolitical context. This report seeks to illuminate these challenges, the adaptive strategies developed in response to the coup, and the resilience of WEHRDs in pursuing gender-responsive climate solutions.

The report aspires to provide a holistic understanding of the unique challenges faced by women in Myanmar by documenting their narratives and initiatives, with a focus on their critical role in shaping environmental sustainability and defending human rights. The insights gained will contribute to a broader discourse on the importance of supporting and empowering WEHRDs in their efforts to address the complex intersection of gender, environment, politics, culture, and human rights in Myanmar.

Methodology

This case study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the roles of WEHRDs in Myanmar, both before and after the military coup. This methodology combines a thorough desk review with individual interviews to offer a nuanced exploration of their roles and experiences. The findings presented in this report are informed not only by the author's personal encounters, informal discussions, and formal engagements with a diverse spectrum of women but also draws insights from conversations with women actively participating in community-based programs.

Understanding the context of women and the environment in Myanmar

Myanmar, a country blessed with diverse natural landscapes ranging from lush rainforests to pristine coastal areas, faces several urgent environmental challenges. Its rich forests are under threat from logging, land encroachment, mining, political instability and even bombings. These challenges put not only its rich and diverse landscape at risk, but also the well-being of its people. After the military seized power in February 2021, Myanmar experienced a degree of freedom, prosperity to ordinary citizens, and environmental degradation. The country faced a series of environmental challenges exacerbated by political instability and conflict. Environmental defenders and environmental organizations faced challenges in enforcing regulations and carrying out their conservation efforts. The disruption in communities and the displacement of indigenous and local populations led to a loss of traditional knowledge related to sustainable land and resource management. Myanmar's ability to access international funding and support for environmental conservation and climate change mitigation projects was also hampered by the coup, limiting the country's capacity to address environmental challenges.

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The importance of women's participation in addressing environmental challenges cannot be underestimated. Women play a crucial role in tackling environmental issues, bringing unique perspectives, experiences, and skills to the table. Their direct interaction with the environment – through agricultural practices, water resource management, and traditional knowledge – gives them deep insights and understanding of environmental issues. Their contributions are essential to promoting social well-being and sustainability. Furthermore, women play pivotal roles in advocating for the role of women in protecting and defending biodiversity.

Environmental issues have a far-reaching impact on women, affecting them through social and cultural stereotypes, emotional abuse, and issues of justice. Patriarchal norms embedded within organizational and societal frameworks exacerbate challenges, leading to the underestimation of women's contributions, lack of recognition, and limited opportunities for advancement. Gender stereotypes and women's involvement in environmental conflicts not only seek environmental justice, but also challenge local masculine dominance. Women's participation in addressing environmental issues, natural resources, and ecosystem services is critical due to their diverse perspectives, which support community livelihoods, preserving cultural identities, and upholding the right to life.

WEHRDs in Myanmar are at the forefront of addressing climate change, gender inequality, and environmental defense. Despite the challenges posed by the military coup, they remain adaptable and resilient, employing flexible strategies and support. Continuous advocacy is crucial in the face of these shifting disadvantages, emphasizing the significance of women's participation in promoting equal opportunity, environmental rights, and cultural preservation for more inclusive societies. Women have historically led communities through adversity, even while facing societal marginalization. They played pivotal roles in civic spaces during Myanmar's democratization. Women have led grassroots movements against military control after the coup, guiding communities out of the shadows. Women in all professions show leadership by organizing demonstrations and providing support, highlighting their critical role in shaping Myanmar's future.

In Myanmar, where climate patterns have become increasingly erratic, environmental degradation disproportionately affects women, who rely on the environment for sustenance. Those responsible for environmental destruction also perpetrate various forms of violence against women.

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Recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental issues and women's rights, women actively engage in addressing these concerns Deforestation, changing weather patterns, and the destruction of natural resources have a direct impact on women's well-being. As primarily responsible for household waste management, women play a crucial role in fostering sustainable practices, starting with small and simple actions. In developing countries, women frequently juggle multiple responsibilities, including household chores, income generation, and childcare, which can lead to stress and violence. Women activists advocate for the fundamental principles of "small, start, simple," recognizing the unique perspectives women bring to environmental issues.

Women play an important role in environmental management in Myanmar, a responsibility deeply rooted in societal traditions. From a young age, girls from local communities – especially Indigenous young girls – are taught the value of environmental stewardship, instilling in them a sense of responsibility for their surroundings. It is common to see these young girls actively involved in tasks such as caring for their siblings and gathering essential resources like water and firewood, particularly during school holidays.

Women in rural areas possess traditional knowledge regarding the proper use of fuelwood, methods for obtaining and storing safe drinking water, and the identification of medicinal plants. This cultural heritage highlights the significant role of women in promoting sustainable practices and environmental care in Myanmar society. Women have long contributed to reducing resource use, reusing, and recycling resources in order to reduce waste and excessive consumption.

Governments around the world are grappling with how to respond to escalating environmental challenges, including climate change, biological resource depletion, deforestation, and the impacts of desertification. The increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, coupled with the potential for environmental degradation driven by population growth, highlight the need to protect the environment. Managing the environment effectively and sustainably has emerged as a critical global challenge. In many countries, women are taking active roles in environmental management, significantly contributing to the achievement of Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which focuses on ensuring environmental sustainability.

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Population growth and economic progress are driving up demand for basic necessities and consumer goods, posing a threat to environmental sustainability. As household incomes and purchasing power rise, this demand intensifies, placing additional strain on natural resources and exacerbating environmental concerns. Women, as pivotal agents, play a vital role in promoting sustainable development aligned with MDGs, particularly in environmental protection. An examination of international dialogues surrounding women's participation in environmental management reveals a consistent emphasis on encouraging female participation. Various Agenda 21 program areas highlight the significant role women play, aligning with Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration, which states that "women have a vital role in environmental management and development, and their full participation is essential for achieving sustainable development." This article examines these issues in the context of Myanmar, emphasizing the importance of developing tailored policies to protect the country's natural resources.

In Myanmar, where agriculture accounts for 64% of GDP, the country's economic growth is tightly linked with the development of its agricultural sector, a crucial component for ensuring food security in the face of a growing population.

Rural women, who are actively involved in agricultural pursuits, have a greater degree of environmental exposure compared to their urban counterparts. These women not only manage food preparation and childcare, but also play vital roles in various agricultural tasks, as men frequently migrate to urban centers in search of work. Rural women's reliance on local resources to meet familial responsibilities highlights a unique and complex relationship with the environment.

Despite numerous documented cases of women effectively addressing environmental challenges, scholarly attention to the specific role of rural women in environmental management in Myanmar has been limited. This gap in research has sparked a growing agenda focused on unraveling the intricate links between women and environmental management, an area increasingly recognized in research and development policy and practice. While existing studies have investigated women's empowerment and gender equality in Myanmar, a more nuanced examination of rural women's role in environmental management remains a relatively unexplored terrain in academic discourse.

Women who actively engage in managing and protecting their environment and natural resources are often referred to as Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). These dedicated individuals play an important role in advocating for sustainable practices, biodiversity conservation, and the overall well-being of their communities. WHRDs contribute to the development and implementation of environmental strategies, ensuring responsible use of resources while navigating societal norms and cultural contexts. Their efforts extend beyond traditional roles to encompass defending land rights, protecting ecosystems, and promoting environmental justice.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) are individuals and groups actively working to peacefully protect and promote human rights related to the environment. Often, these defenders are strong-willed women who fight for rights linked to human dignity and environmental well-being. WEHRDs address gender-specific aspects by engaging in community mobilization, policy advocacy, and awareness campaigns. They recognize the complex interconnectedness between environmental challenges and human rights, making them essential contributors to climate action in Myanmar. By using a gender-focused approach, WEHRDs ensure more equitable and effective climate responses.

Despite obstacles such as threats to their safety and scarce resources, their resilience plays a key role in shaping a more just and sustainable future. In Myanmar, the significance of their work is evident in stopping environmental deterioration, protecting vulnerable populations, and supporting social justice in the face of climate change. WHRDs and EHRDs are globally recognized for their vital role in safeguarding the environment and advocating for communities disproportionately affected by environmental harm. EHRDs are crucial partners in tackling the triple global crisis of biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change, working to uphold the universally recognized right to a healthy environment.

United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres highlights how women are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change, primarily due to their vital role in agriculture and as primary protectors of natural resources. He also highlights their global leadership in promoting environmental human rights. To develop effective policies for the governance of natural resources, environmental preservation, and the advancement of a green economy, Guterres advocates for a greater representation of women in decision-making roles.

Environmental Landscape in Myanmar

Natural resources are a critical component of Myanmar's economy, but the conflict that surrounds them affects a sizable portion of the population. Control over these resources, contested by government forces and separatist groups, weakens an already fragile national unity, while poor working conditions and human rights violations at and near extraction sites deepen divisions between the state and its people. The extraction and transportation of Myanmar's primary natural resources – jade, gold, copper, oil, gas, and hydropower – has worsened the situation in conflict-affected states such as Shan and Kachin. The construction of resource infrastructure, such as mines, pipelines, and dams, has not also caused environmental degradation, large-scale land acquisitions, and human rights violations, but also often intensified existing conflicts.

Myanmar's natural resources, particularly jade, gold, copper, and hydropower, are essential to the country's economy but also serve as sources of conflict. The jade trade, dominated by military elites, fuels conflict in Kachin State while copper mining in Monywa has been linked to human rights violations and environmental degradation.

Hydropower projects, such as the Myitsone dam, have sparked protests from local communities, and oil and gas exploration with Chinese involvement has introduced strategic and social challenges. Myanmar's regulatory framework remains inadequate, and its land laws favor foreign investors and business sectors, encouraging cronyism.

Despite having a limited focus on the environment in its economic transformation, Myanmar has made significant strides in improving its environmental regulatory framework since 2011. One of the most significant advancements has been the implementation of environmental laws, rules, and guidelines. In 2019, Myanmar outlined its vision for national environmental and climate change policies, aligning them with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the country faces economic challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic, building long-term resilience and stability require a sustainable recovery.

Before the military coup, Myanmar showed positive trends toward achieving its SDG targets as part of its commitment under the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (MSDP), where . sustainability was treated as cross-cutting and “to be mainstreamed into all aspects of its implementation”(Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2018). Despite this progress, Myanmar still faced significant challenges in reaching its SDG targets.

However, Myanmar has made international commitments to tackle climate change under the Paris Agreement through its nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which were developed before the military coup but published only in July 2021. Additionally, Myanmar has made commitments related to biodiversity conservation under the Convention on Biological Diversity through its Aichi Biodiversity targets. These commitments highlight the country's ambitions but also underscore the competing demands for resources.

During its decade of democratic transition, the pre-coup government in Myanmar tried to improve environmental management by strengthening the legal framework. While questions of environmental protection and climate change were often contested and debated, they remained a key part of the legitimate government's policy agenda. Throughout this period, laws and plans were developed with unprecedented openness in the fields of biodiversity, forestry, agriculture, and environmental management. Any future democratic government in Myanmar will need to consider how to ensure that the country can meet or even improve its international commitments, including by building on parts of the pre-coup legal framework.

Deforestation and deterioration of forest are major concerns faced by developing nations. Myanmar is the seventh-most deforested country globally, as indicated in the FRA-2020 report, signaling an urgent to address these environmental challenges.

Women and human rights defenders in Myanmar have demonstrated incredible resilience and fortitude in the face of these obstacles. They were significant in bringing attention to and advancing sustainable development strategies that consider the special needs of women by organizing communities, exposing environmental violations, and advocating for change.

They have been actively involved in diverse efforts aimed at environmental protection and addressing ecological challenges. Their comprehensive initiatives range from monitoring logging and advocating for sustainable forestry practices to promoting biodiversity conservation.

They have participated in community-based conservation projects focused on preserving natural habitats, protecting endangered species, and promoting sustainable land use practices within communities.

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In addition to conservation efforts, WEHRDs have championed resilient practices, leading community-level adaptation strategies to raise awareness and address the impacts of climate change in their communities. Advocating for land rights, particularly for Indigenous communities, entailed defending ancestral lands, opposing land confiscation, and advocating for community participation in land use management decisions and community governance system. WEHRDs also took on the task of educating their communities about environmental issues by organizing workshops, as well as leading awareness campaigns and educational programs. These environmental defenders sought to influence national and international environmental conservation and sustainable development policies through advocacy and policy initiatives.

Water and natural resource management have been another priority for WEHRDs, as they work to ensure access to clean water, address water scarcity, and combat pollution. Recognizing the interdependence of environmental issues and community well-being, women worked to increase resilience to environmental challenges and natural disasters. Their efforts are reflected in Myanmar's diverse environmental landscape.

However, the post-coup period in Myanmar intensified challenges to these WEHRDs. Increased political instability and military regime actions undermined the efforts made prolonged political, cultural, and legal obstacles restricted efforts even after the transition to partial democracy in 2015. Protecting communities and the environment was severely hampered by legal obstacles. Myanmar's 2014 Environmental Conservation Law, as well as other laws, failed to offer protection to environmental activists. There were also no opportunities for public engagement. Additionally, discriminatory policies restricted women's rights, including their ability to own and inherit land, which is important for environmental advocacy.

However, the coup of 2021 significantly increased these existing issues. Many WEHRDs were silenced, and others were forced into hiding by the junta's brutal crackdown. The fluctuation of environmental and human rights activity in Myanmar highlights the urgent need for worldwide solidarity and support for these courageous women who are continuing to fight for a better future.

Environmental Complexities in Post-coup Myanmar

Since the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the country has experienced significant turmoil and upheaval. The political crisis, marked by widespread protests and a brutal crackdown by the military junta, has given rise to a concerning phenomenon known as the "conflict economy." This conflict economy is intricately linked to resource extraction, involving various actors, and has had profound and often devastating impacts on the nation and its people.

The conflict economy in Myanmar is driven by the junta's need for financial resources to sustain its grip on power, purchase arms, and maintain control. This has resulted in a thriving underground economy that exploits the country's natural resources. Key aspects of this conflict economy related to resource extraction include pearl production, logging, gold, grade, Gemstones, rare-earth elements, and tin.

According to Myanmar Natural Resource Watch, the mining industry in Myanmar has experienced significant activity and impact following the military coup in 2021. Gold mining, along with jade and gemstone extraction, rare-earth mining, and tin mining, has all contributed to this rapidly evolving landscape.



Gold mining, particularly along the Irrawaddy River in Waing Maw and Myitkyina townships, has led to environmental shifts, including altered water conditions and tides, which have adversely affected river-dependent communities. In some cases, communities have taken matters into their own hands, confiscating equipment from illegal gold miners due to damage to agricultural land.

In Tanai Township, Kachin State, intensified gold mining has not only damaged farmland but also displaced residents, leading to disputes between the military and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) over resource mining permits. Military operations against illegal gold mining have been conducted in various locations, including Mohnyin and Shwegu townships, resulting in seizures of machinery and, in some instances, violence.

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Resource extraction in Myanmar has faced numerous challenges, including environmental degradation, conflict, and allegations of human rights abuses. Additionally, the affiliations of the mining industry with various political groups and actors further complicate the situation. Overall, the resource extraction sector is evolving rapidly, influenced by a complex interplay of political, economic, and environmental factors that shape its trajectory.

Many states and regions in Myanmar, rich int natural resources and diverse ecosystems, are in danger due to large-scale projects, both legal and illegal. As these vital ecological areas face increasing militarization and criminalization in the post-coup landscape, the future of both local communities and the vulnerable ecosystems they protect remain uncertain.

In southern Myanmar, the Tanintharyi Region is a biodiverse area that is home to wild tigers and elephants, serving as a crucial resource indigenous inhabitants who rely on it for food and healing. Despite numerous obstacles, indigenous tribes remain committed to managing these resources and protecting the environment.

However, large scale initiatives jeopardize forests and biodiversity, compounded by discriminatory land policies like the VFV Law. In Myanmar, military assaults on environmental activists are becoming more frequent, and protecting the environment is now a criminal crime. Communities face an uncertain future as environmental defenders work to prevent military entities from stealing and destroying land and resources.

In northern Myanmar as of March 2022, there are 2,700 rare earth mining sites in Kachin State, covering an area comparable to to the size of Singapore. Military-associated militias, benefiting from these mines, have resorted to threatening local community members with violence if they resist surrendering their land for new mining ventures. Gemstone mining is also concentrated in conflict zones, particularly in Kachin State and in Sagaing Region, where ethnic minority groups are engaged in armed struggles against the Myanmar government.

The challenges faced by environmental defenders have reached a critical level, with the coup regime specifically targeting activists and their families. Restrictions on internet and mobile phone usage, along with soaring commodity prices, further imperil their work and livelihoods.

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Many defenders affiliated with environmental networks have been arrested, forcing others to either go into hiding or fight for their lives and futures. In Myanmar, environmental defenders often find themselves simultaneously advocating for human rights, environmental issues, indigenous rights, land rights, and gender equality.

Paradoxically, the escalating global demand for rare earths in clean energy has generated substantial wealth for militia and military figures, often at the expense of local ecosystems, livelihoods, and the availability of land, forests, and safe drinking water. The consequences of illicit business practices and the exploitation of natural resources in border areas have far-reaching implications for human security. These issues contribute to heightened social inequality, fragmentation, and vulnerability, overall affecting the country's dynamics of peace and conflict.

Furthermore, despite the sanctions imposed after the February 2021 coup, Myanmar managed to export timber worth over $190 million, including to countries that had imposed sanctions on the nation's state-controlled timber monopoly.

Experts express concerns that poorly enforced sanctions may pave the way for illegal logging, cronyism, and the misappropriation of public funds, reminiscent of previous periods of military rule. European Union (EU) member states, including Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Poland, imported $22 million in timber, reflecting an increase from the previous year. In the United States, while the number of importing companies decreased significantly, overall trade slightly increased, primarily involving sawn teak for luxury yachts. Additionally, the remaining $154 million in timber was imported by countries without sanctions, such as India, Thailand, and China, where imports grew by 35%, amounting to to $29 million, compared to the previous year. This situation poses a direct threat to environmental defenders through tangible actions rather than mere sanctions. It reflects a prioritization of self-interest by countries worldwide, over a genuine commitment to justice.

The environmental landscape of Myanmar is marred by significant challenges related to the trade in lumber, rare earth minerals, and gemstones, resulting in environmental degradation, human rights abuses, and unstable economic conditions.

The difficulties faced by environmental defenders in the post-coup context underscore the urgent need for global awareness and action to prevent irrevocable harm to the ecosystem and affected communities. Sustained international solidarity and the strict enforcement of sanctions are essential to promote environmental justice and long-term peace, providing crucial support to these defenders and combating exploitative activities.

Women-led Environmental Enitiatives in Myanmar



Prior to the military coup, all activities were conducted in person, fostering a space for sharing opinions and strengthening unity among participants. They engaged in studying laws and various initiatives, focusing on defending the environment, natural resources and land affected by mining projects, monoculture plantations and dam constructions. In response to these challenges, WEHRDs undertook extensive capacity-building efforts, empowerment training, advocacy, and campaigns.



Many women were able to speak up more after undergoing training. Women who previously felt unable to speak up began to assert themselves, recognizing the importance of their voices in the movement. Their approach often begins with simple actions aimed at preserving the environment they live in. Even small efforts can spark change, starting with one person can lead to two, then three, four, and eventually hundreds or thousands. This shows that collective action can turn modest beginnings into significant environmental preservation. When investment projects emerge in the area, it is crucial for community members to remain vigilant about the associated issues so they can harness their powers to advocate for their needs. However, a breakdown in unity could lead to fragmentation and disruption within the community. Despite these challenges, they were able to stop the Myit Sone dam project in recent years, showcasing the power of the people. On the other hand, they are now grappling with an influx of gold mining in Myit Sone areas in Kachin State.

Amidst this crisis, environmental defenders from Kachin state pointed out that while community members can deal with small-scale gold mining operations, larger operations often evade scrutiny from authorities. These problems have led to breakdown in trust and unity within the community. Despite these challenges, they remain committed to conducting outreach programs and capacity-building activities. They actively participate in tree-planting initiatives and support various environmental observances. Additionally, they also recognize the roles and challenges faced by women, seeking ways to address these issues too.

They are deeply aware that environmental issues cannot be separated from broader human rights concerns. Women, often on the frontlines of environmental degradation, face unique challenges that highlight the intersectionality of their roles. This context requires an understanding of the complex web of socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that shape the experiences of WEHRDs. These defenders often emerge from local communities and bear witness to the immediate and long-term consequences of environmental harm. Their work is informed by a commitment to justice, equity, and the belief that the right to a healthy environment is intertwined with the broader spectrum of human rights.

BURMA

WEHRDs in Myanmar play a significant role in environmental protection and human rights advocacy by challenging destructive practices, advocating for policy changes, and empowering local communities. Their contributions range from sustainable resource management initiatives to legal battles for land rights. However, they face considerable challenges, including threats to personal safety, harassment, and limited resources. Despite these challenges, WEHRDs act as crucial safeguards against environmental degradation and human rights violations, defending the rights of marginalized communities. Their advocacy is essential for fostering a society that prioritizes environmental protection and upholds the rights of all citizens.

They were active on multiple levels, contributing to climate solutions. Local grassroots efforts focused on sustainable practices and natural resource protection, bolstering resilience. Women's rights activists across the country engaged in policy dialogue to influence environmentally conscious regulations and promote gender equality in decision-making processes. Collaborations on a global scale aimed to share knowledge and garner support for Myanmar's environmental challenges.

These initiatives, led by women's rights activists, were critical in promoting ecological sustainability and climate resilience. During the pre-coup period, Myanmar's women environmental leaders emphasized the importance of local, national, and international collaboration in effectively addressing climate issues.

WEHRDs play a critical role at the intersection of environmental protection and human rights advocacy. They actively engage in promoting, protecting, and defending the rights associated with environmental well-being and human dignity. WEHRDs work towards ensuring that the impact of environmental degradation does not disproportionately affect marginalized communities, while also addressing the gender-specific dimensions of these challenges. Their roles encompass a wide array of activities, including community mobilization, legal advocacy, awareness campaigns, and direct action. WEHRDs act as champions for environmental justice, often challenging powerful interests that contribute to ecological harm and human rights violations.

Challenges women environmental and human rights defenders face in Myanmar

The sociopolitical landscape in Myanmar poses significant challenges for WEHRDs. This paper features interviews with several women who fled from their country and stayed in the neighboring country of Thailand, and many expressed feelings of emotional distress due to the political situation in Myanmar and the issues that come with living in another country, including challenges related to the future and finances.

While WEHRDs are critical for the protection of nature and its resources, they face gender-based threats that seek to silence their important work.They face a multitude of challenges in their efforts to protect and conserve the environment. These challenges include gender-based discrimination, lack of recognition, inadequate support,and threats. Societal norms and stereotypes often hinder their ability to fully participate in environmental activism. They face barriers such as limited decision-making power, exclusion from important conversations, and threats of physical harm or harassment.

The new policy and framework recognize women human rights defenders as a protected category. This inclusion is fundamental because women activists in the region encounter specific challenges to their mobilization, particularly when advocating for women's rights, environmental protection, and community rights.

Unfortunately, their efforts are often overlooked or marginalized, receiving little acknowledgement despite the valuable contributions they make to environmental sustainability. This lack of recognition not only discourages WEHRDs but also restricts their access to funding, resources, and networks that could significantly enhance their work and impact.

WEHRDs in Myanmar encounter numerous obstacles in their activism for environmental issues. Legal obstacles, such as unequal property ownership and inheritance laws, coupled with insufficient protection under the 2014 Environmental Conservation Law, significantly hinder their efforts. The political landscape is marred with tension, as the Myanmar military, various ethnic armed revolutionary groups, and companies wield considerable power over resource extraction, leading to increased anxiety, silenced scholars, and weakened environmental accountability.

Deeply rooted stereotypes and gender constraints further complicate the implementation of gender-responsive climate solutions, preventing women from assuming leadership and decision-making roles. Despite these challenges, pre-coup WEHRDs showed tenacity by uniting communities, engaging in local initiatives in the community, drawing attention to environmental infractions, and advocating for sustainable development. The coup of 2021, however, exacerbated the problems, stifling criticism and altering the roles of activists, while bringing forward environmental issues.

"There is little access to funding for the grassroots. I think that is the biggest challenge for us. I have faced many challenges since becoming a defender. As a woman and a youth leader in my community, we have difficulty with transportation and the area does not seem safe as there are many gates and investigations by the authorities. And there are many parties and groups that we have to take care of. Sometimes it is really difficult to organize youth because it is a big problem for youth to get involved during the coup. This poses such a blockage and threat to those of us who work to protect the environment."

"I got prosecuted and imprisoned for seven months, not for natural resources issues but due to my involvement in addressing the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The conflict arose when we attempted to free people trapped in the forest in Tanai, Awng Lawt village, rich in gold and amber. The State Administrative Council (SAC) targeted the area, leading residents to flee. Although the court trial focused on IDPs, the underlying cause was linked to the region's abundant natural resources, triggering the conflict. During the trial, I faced four cases, highlighting Tatmadaw's alleged arrests, torture, killings, and threats to civilians. Concerns mounted about additional charges, compelling me to study Myanmar's laws and the Army's tactics against political activists. My prior involvement in Myitsone protests marked me in the media. Despite imprisonment before the coup, threats persisted post-coup, pushing me to flee abroad amid online threats and fears for my safety."

Social Norms

"When it comes to land and environmental rights, there are women defenders who have neither excellent training nor financial resources. They just want to defend themselves against the injustices that have occurred in their regions."

In the context of Myanmar, prevailing social norms limit women's self-efficacy, influencing both their internal perceptions and external evaluations by male counterparts. Traditional gender dynamics in environmental or development initiatives often feature male instructors leading awareness programs, which are primarily attended by female participants. This dynamic reinforces stereotypes of male leadership and female followership. Such religious practices in Christian, Buddhist, or Animist communities favor male participants, exacerbating barriers to women's active participation in leadership roles. Even when women occupy leadership positions, they may prioritize issues in health and education over environmental concerns, such as forests.

Despite women's routine utilization and management of forest resources, forests are often perceived as distinctly male-oriented spaces, which leads to a pervasive oversight of women's involvement. Increasing the visibility of women's roles in utilizing forest products could help bolster their confidence in taking on leadership roles in forest management. Gendered assumptions are institutionalized in local governance mechanisms, as reflected in household lists that designate males as heads. This perpetuates socio-cultural expectations that restricts women's prospects for leadership across various domains.

The influence of patriarchy on women within the community, civil society organizations and NGOs cannot be ignored. It is imperative that these organizations adopt gender-responsive practices, foster an inclusive culture, and provide equal opportunities for women to lead and contribute effectively.

"In the intricate journey of crafting a policy addressing natural resource access and land ownership for Kachin women, the Kachin Women Environmental Defenders reflect, 'This journey takes us deep into the intricacies.' Despite our commitment to international rights principles, especially enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and alignment with Myanmar's legal framework granting land inheritance rights to both genders, we faced significant resistance within the Kachin community. An influential elder, donning the hats of a lawyer and a leader in Kachin affairs, argued that Kachin tradition opposes women inheriting land. This clash between established legal provisions and deeply rooted traditional beliefs posed a considerable challenge, requiring detailed explanations for those unfamiliar with legal frameworks. This narrative underscores the emotional and intellectual strength necessary to navigate such cultural obstacles, emphasizing the advocacy for recognizing the rightful land entitlements of Kachin women in the face of entrenched resistance."

Women's Workload in Myanmar

Women in Myanmar face an additional impediment in the gendered allocation of labor within households, where they bear the primary responsibility for domestic and reproductive obligations alongside subsistence farming or other sources of income. This significant workload limits women's availability for participation in community-based discussions on forest management, reducing their influence in decision-making processes. Traditional expectations regarding women's roles in managing domestic and reproductive responsibilities have long hindered girls' access to education. This has been exacerbated by disruptions to schooling caused by conflict, particularly pronounced in ethnic enclaves within conflict-affected rural domains.

Moreover, disparities in participation between urban and rural women arise from the mobilization challenges faced in rural communities. Despite the latent potential for knowledge diffusion from participating women to their non-participating counterparts, male leaders often exhibit an unwillingness to assimilate insights from trained women. This resistance obstructs knowledge acquisition and undermines household sustainability initiatives. This, in turn, jeopardizes the long-term economic viability of families who rely on forest resources.

"In our society and workspace, we still see and face the men who have a mindset of Patriarch. Actually, they are educated and knowledgeable people, they know the term women rights and they know how women are important in different levels and decision-making processes. They talk smoothly and they can make a good impression. On the other hand, it is difficult for them to respect women and the rights of women. Even if they are educated and knowledgeable people, if they could not respect women in their society, home and workspace, it's worthless. Therefore, our women need to be stronger and keep fighting for the challenges that we are facing."

In the workspace, women in Myanmar are often relegated to roles such as administration, logistics, cooking, and cleaning. The patriarchal values deeply embedded in many facets of society, contribute to the underestimation of women's abilities and potential. As a result, women frequently experience a lack of recognition and appreciation from male colleagues, who may unconsciously undervalue their contributions due to prevailing societal norms and stereotypes. This undervaluation not only diminishes women's accomplishments but also undermines their professional growth and development. The stereotypes surrounding women's roles in the workforce can significantly impact their confidence, emotional well-being, and aspirations.

Moreover, women working in civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and communities often face unique challenges in achieving work-life balance. Societal expectations frequently impose traditional gender roles on them, including caregiving and household responsibilities. As a result, balancing those roles with their professional commitments can become overwhelming, leading to feelings of guilt and stress.

Respecting women defenders' expressions

WEHRDs have been facing challenges in asserting our voices, yet they remain resilient and share struggles with our female colleagues and friends. Despite WEHRD's significant contributions and leadership roles within communities, CSOs ,and NGOs, they often confront patriarchal disrespect and discrimination. This manifests an underestimation of women's professional expertise. Such treatment limits opportunities to influence decision-making and shape organizational strategies.

In some organizations, women have experienced tokenism, where they are included merely to fulfill diversity quotas without receiving meaningful recognition and responsibilities. This practice undermines their confidence and reinforces gender stereotypes. These are witnessed in many places and within organizations where patriarchal norms perpetuate a culture of gossip about and between women.

Gossip often targets women in leadership roles and the women who are active in their work and stand for gender perspectives. This creates an environment that discourages other women from stepping forward. This culture of gossiping about women erodes their professional reputation and undermines their contributions.

Gossip takes a significant emotional toll on women, leading to stress, anxiety and a sense of isolation. This hostile environment negatively impacts their overall well-being, hindering their ability to contribute effectively to the organization's mission.

A workplace culture that tolerates gossip fosters a toxic and unprofessional atmosphere that leads to reduced collaboration, low morale, and a loss of trust among colleagues, ultimately impacting the organization's effectiveness.

Threats against defenders



Due to the political climate, EHRDs in Myanmar face significant challenges in operating clandestinely. They endure persecution from the military (SAC) and mining operators for advocating against environmental degradation, particularly in areas such as Myit Sone. Armed groups also target them in efforts to address natural resource issues, further complicating their situation. The SAC's control over laws and checkpoints raises the stakes, while new gathering restrictions stymie their activities. Environmental crises and human rights violations continue, compounded by the lack of reporting mechanisms and legal protection.

EHRDs operate in the shadows, subject to monitoring, surveillance, and threats that adversely affect their mental health and family life. They receive a barrage of threats, including messages through platforms like Messenger and phone calls that involve vulgar and demeaning content, causing emotional distress. WEHRDs working on natural resources encounter increased threats, with some receiving threatening letters and being forced to flee, unable to return even for family events.

In response to online harassment, they often resort to blocking offenders and seeking support from trusted individuals. However, post-coup challenges restrict in-person participation, pushing many activities online. These WEHRDs must contend with the exploitation of natural resources by cronies, which limits their impact. Providing substantial support to threatened activists is crucial, as some feel compelled to compromise their advocacy for their family's safety. This situation emphasizes the need for collective responsibility and safety measures to sustain their resilience and commitment to environmental causes.

"There are threats from Messenger which are threats by phone call and mocking me with the disgusting thing of using the name of human private parts. There is no dignity and shame and it also causes emotional damage. Although it is not physical abuse, I am facing all kinds of mentally abuse and also cyber bullies. I block the slanderous comments on Facebook and Messenger. In fact, I should have taken the screen shot but I didn't. Instead, I block it because if I see it again on my phone, it will make me sad. When I face those kinds of challenges then I tell someone who I trust. When there are challenges like that, and in order to reduce such challenges. I have seen this happening with more women activists or defenders who work on natural resources and they are receiving more threats. They were receiving more threat letters and some were fleeing. They can't stay safe in their home even if their parents die, they don't have a chance to go back home. When their family member dies, they aren't able to go home to attend the funeral. The difficulties and challenges of not being able to stay with the family are the really big things too."

Women's transformative roles in organizations and communities through gender-responsive climate solutions

The resilience and adaptability of an unnamed partner organization that was once part of the Shared Resources, Joint Solutions (SRJS) project (2016–2020) in Myanmar's Tanintharyi region are noteworthy in the context of the ongoing crisis. Since the military coup, the organization has faced security challenges, including office closure and team division. Some staff members remain in the region, grappling with travel constraints while assisting communities in areas bordering military-controlled regions.

Despite these hurdles, the organization remains committed to community and environmental activities, staying vigilant for potential changes in the conflict landscape. Operating under the governance of the Karen National Union (KNU), the organization collaborates closely with local defense forces and supports the 2021 opposition. Ongoing efforts include a wide range of initiatives, including community forest establishment, youth empowerment, livelihood improvement, wildlife monitoring, and online environmental conservation conferences with the KNU Forest Department.

Unexpected positive outcomes have emerged from these challenges, fostering enhanced independence among village organizations and facilitating effective collaboration among leaders through internet connections. The organization, despite reduced women's involvement due to security concerns, persists in empowering youth, as exemplified by a December 2022 camp focused on skills development.

In many organizations and community settings, women are often perceived as speaking less in public, yet their contributions and hard work are undeniable. Women frequently exhibit exceptional listening skills, allowing them to gather insights and understand various perspectives before voicing their thoughts. The silent strength enables them to make informed decisions and contribute meaningfully to discussions.

Rather than seeking the spotlight, some women lead by example, prioritizing action and results over recognition. Their dedication and commitment to their work inspire others and foster a positive work culture within the organization and communities. Their quiet resilience in navigating complexities ensures the smooth functioning of teams and projects. This is a testament to their dedication, resilience, and impactful work.

Organizations must recognize and appreciate the silent strength of women. Celebrating their accomplishments and acknowledging their contributions helps create a supportive and empowering work environment. Recognizing the value of diverse perspectives fosters innovation and creativity within both the organization and the community.

To empower women, organizations should actively encourage them to take on leadership roles and participate in decision-making processes. This does not only create opportunities for professional development but also facilitates mentorship, helping women feel more confident in sharing their voices.

Therefore, colleagues, leaders and organizations must actively value and recognize this silent strength, providing opportunities for women to contribute their perspectives and ideas.



Women in Myanmar have played a significant and positive role in environmental conservation efforts in the country. Their contributions span various aspects of environmental protection and sustainability, leading to several noteworthy impacts. They have been actively involved in community-based environmental conservation initiatives and have played a crucial role in promoting sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming, crop rotation, and reduced pesticide use. Through sustainable income-generating activities linked to environmental conservation, they not only improve the economic well-being of their families but also foster environmental stewardship. In addition to these efforts, women have been strong advocates for environmental conservation, engaging in awareness campaigns and education initiatives. They have also played a key role in promoting access to clean water and sanitation in rural areas. Access to clean water is not only crucial for health but also for preserving ecosystems and deducing water-related conflicts.

The efforts of these women benefit not only the environment but also enhance the well-being of local communities,contributing to the overall sustainable development of the country. Their work underscores the importance of gender equality and social inclusion in environmental conservation efforts.

Resilience and Adaptation

The resilience of WEHRDs in Myanmar shines through despite the myriad challenges and oppressive circumstances they face. These defenders grapple with severe restrictions on their freedom to defend, voice their concerns, and implement movements. The State Administration Council's (SAC) has exacerbated these difficulties by imposing a new Organizational Registration Law, which further restricts the work of movements on the ground. Many of these civil society organizations choose not to register, making them vulnerable to arrest. In addition to these legal hurdles, WEHRDs face a host of personal threats and abuses. They endure mental abuse, cyberbullying, arrest warrants, and inquiries. Many are prosecuted, imprisoned, and targeted by those involved in natural resource extraction, such as businessmen.

WEHRDs in Myanmar find their safety compromised not only within their own villages but across broader regions and the entire country. Many have been forced to flee to different locations, both within Myanmar and neighboring countries, in search of safety. In these new areas, they encounter difficulties in ensuring their survival and efforts to secure a stable income.



One of WEHRDs from Kachin State said that: *"It wasn't really easy as we had to fight against the rich and elite and empower our women at the same time. As I have lived with fear, we are also afraid of what could happen to us. In our region, when it comes to the environment, indigenous rights and human rights, I felt a lot of pressure. I was prosecuted, beaten and so on. However, I don't feel weakened. I have said time and time again that women need a lot of support and courage. Then, the glass that I wear isn't about something fancy, it's about my health. So, aside from my health and safety, I have been very worried about my family since I moved due to security concerns. But I still have the bravery that I could bring my community together for our rights. However, we need to continue on this path and move forward, not only empowering women, but we also need other communities to support us."*

Community unity is crucial for effective advocacy against environmental threats with both informal and formal sectors playing pivotal roles in advancing gender equality. There is a collective call for continued empowerment, resilience in overcoming challenges, and unified action, with an emphasis on the courage to confront environmental crises. For emphasizing the need for long-term impact, WEHRDs underscore the importance of supporting activists and defenders facing threats. Their dedication stems from a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of nature, the environment, and the well-being of future generations.

Despite living in constant fear, WEHRDs recognize courage as essential, particularly for women who face societal pressures. Empowering women becomes a pivotal strategy, not only in advancing environmental causes but also in addressing the broader challenges posed by the climate crisis. By emphasizing shared humanity, highlighting the sacrifices women make, and fostering collaboration, these defenders envision a collective effort to tackle environmental challenges and advocate for a sustainable future.

"A lot of support is needed in response to this crisis. But we are doing our best in terms of things like data collection and community empowerment. These are the things we can do in the movement. And we will not stop what we have been doing, but will actively address the issues ahead."

Building international networks for advocacy in natural resource management and female solidarity

Building a network is crucial for WEHRDs – connecting with organizations and individuals that share their beliefs, both locally and internationally. Advocacy, especially around natural resource management, is at the heart of our work. Our country is rich in resources like gas, coal, jade, gold, forest and development projects, making collaboration essential. Finding like-minded individuals with shared goals, vision, and interest in diverse fields is vital for meaningful partnerships. Starting from scratch with someone who shares the same passion, resources, and strategic vision is a great way to help build solid foundations for long-term relationships. Trust-building with women in these networks requires significant investment – not just financially but in dedicating their minds, strength, time, and even making personal sacrifices. It's not merely about securing funds for a project; it's also about genuinely connecting, talking, and, in today's context, reaching out online to build relationships gradually. This slow, inclusive approach remains key to WEHRDs networking strategy.

It's incredibly important for women to support each other. In a world where gender biases persist, women can build strong support systems that break down obstacles and create equal opportunities. When women lift each other up, it leads to a positive and inclusive space, boosting confidence and toughness. This solidarity not only empowers us individually, but also amplifies their collective voice, bringing about bigger changes in society, fostering female solidarity towards gender equality.



Recommendations

To donors:

- Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) who stand against the exploitation of natural resources require protections and consistent support from donors to ensure their safety and to enable them to continue safeguarding natural resources.

- Encourage civil society organizations (CSOs) , non-governmental organizations (NGOs) , and ethnic armed organizations to adopt gender-responsive practices.
- Recognize the emotional toll on WEHRDs who have been forced to flee Myanmar due to the political situation.
- Implement support mechanisms, including counseling and mental health resources, to address emotional challenges faced by these women.

To CSOs and NGOs:

- Women's concerns must be prioritized within CSOs and NGOs ensuring inclusivity at every level. Meeting women where they are, not just at the top but on the ground, is essential for real change.
- Male colleagues should not only understand gender issues intellectually but also empathize with them emotionally. Recognize and appreciate contributions women make to their organizations. An inclusive supportive environment is vital to collective success.
- Create an inclusive culture within organizations that provides equal opportunities for women to lead and contribute effectively.
- Advocate for the recognition of women's roles in environmental protection and human rights within policies and frameworks.
- Develop and implement strategies to combat gender-based discrimination faced by WEHRDs.
- Ensure that resources are distributed equitably to support the initiatives of women environmental defenders.
- Acknowledge and address the unique work-life balance challenges faced by women working in CSOs and NGOs.
- Implement policies that support work-life balance and provide flexibility to accommodate societal expectations of caregiving and household responsibilities.

To Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs):

- Ensure that new policies and frameworks explicitly acknowledge and protect women human rights defenders, especially those advocating for women's and environmental rights.
- Foster an inclusive culture that offers women equal opportunities to lead and contribute meaningfully.
- Prioritize the careful, sustainable extraction of natural resources avoiding destructive or disorderly practices for environmental conservation and sustainability.

- Avoid engaging in actions that contradict or violate human rights principles, fostering a commitment to uphold and respect human rights in all activities and interactions.
- Prioritize environmental protection alongside the pursuit of revolutionary goals, recognizing the integral connection between the two for sustainable and responsible development.
- Implement sustainable management practices for natural resources that acknowledge and honor the rights of indigenous peoples and their contributions
- Protect, support and encourage environmental human rights defenders engaged in environmental conservation and protection efforts.

Conclusion

Women environmental defenders and activists often face a painful dilemma: the desire to stay with their families versus the need to flee imminent threats. Many choose to remain silent and stay hidden, unable to utilize their abilities for environmental causes due to the risks and threats they face. It is crucial to provide comprehensive support to ensure their safety and well-being, particularly for those bravely defending their environment, natural resources and human rights.

For those who courageously defend the environment, natural resources, and human rights, empowering and supporting them is vital to sustaining lasting impact. Offering substantial assistance and implementing safety measures, particularly for those with exceptional abilities, becomes paramount in safeguarding these activists and enabling them to continue their vital work.

"To be successful as an environmental defender, we need strong technical and financial support. I could say that I made such movements in the environmental field and networked with grassroots communities. There are similar challenges around us. Not only us, the entire country is currently in crisis."

Myanmar faces severe environmental challenges, worsened by the military coup in February 2021, which has intensified issues such as deforestation, land encroachment, and mining. This report highlights women-led initiatives, emphasizing the evolving role of WEHRDs in shaping.

Myanmar's environmental and human rights landscape amidst adversity. In the post-coup period, the rise of a conflict economy driven by resource extraction has severely threatened biodiversity, human rights, and community well-being.

This report underscores the importance of international recognition and action to support women-led initiatives, enforce sanctions against exploitative practices, and protect Myanmar's natural resources. Strengthening women's roles in decision-making, promoting sustainable environmental policies, and encouraging global solidarity are imperative for Myanmar's future. Urgent global support is needed to protect environmental defenders, ensuring justice, peace, and sustainability in the country.

The contributions of women environmental and human rights defenders in Myanmar are clearly reflected in their pre-coup achievements, which encompass community mobilization, campaign, advocacy, and global collaborations. These women have been pivotal in various environmental conservation efforts, promoting sustainability through community-based initiatives, sustainable agriculture, and advocating for access to clean water. Despite facing challenges – such as gender-based discrimination, limited recognition, and threats to personal safety – WEHRDs have demonstrated resilience.

Societal norms deeply ingrained in Myanmar further complicate their efforts, often undervaluing women's contributions in the workforce and hindering the impactful work of these defenders. Nevertheless, the silent strength of women within these organizations has been instrumental in overcoming challenges and ensuring a positive work culture.

The post-coup period has brought heightened threats for WEHRDs, who now face persecution, online harassment, and difficulties in securing sustained international assistance. The narratives shared by these defenders highlight the emotional toll and sacrifices they endure in their commitment to environmental and human rights causes. Their stories emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive support, recognition, and collaborative efforts aimed at creating a society that prioritizes environmental protection and upholds the rights of all citizens.

In conclusion, the stories of women defenders in Myanmar highlight not only the challenges but also their unwavering commitment, adaptability, and resilience in the pursuit of environmental justice and human rights. Recognizing and valuing the contributions of women, fostering collaboration, and providing essential support are crucial steps toward ensuring a sustainable and just future in Myanmar.

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CAMBODIA

Challenges and Response of Cambodian Women in Agriculture

Written by Ros Sokunthy

Introduction

Land use and conversion for agro-industry, along with ongoing exploitation, extraction, and encroachment on natural resources driven by the current economic model, continue to exert severe pressure on the Earth. Major investment initiatives such as satellite city projects, deep-sea port construction, and the establishment of special economic zone construction, as well as beautification and smart city projects, contribute to the modification and alteration of land and forests. These activities not only exacerbate climate change but also lead to human rights abuses on local and indigenous communities.

Globally, communities are grappling with the profound effects of climate change and Cambodia is no exception. The 2019 draft coincides with a decade marked by rising global warming, severe ice melts, and rising sea levels driven by greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, thirty percent of the world's population faces the consequences of global warming, with heat waves lasting more than 20 days a year.

In Cambodia, climate change has resulted in erratic weather patterns, such as unpredictable rainfall and prolonged droughts, which directly impact agriculture crop production.

Women play a critical role in household food security and often bear the brunt of changes brought about by climate fluctuations. As primary contributors to agriculture and managers of household resources, they face unique challenges. During disasters, women are at higher risks due to factors such as limited mobility, cultural roles, and responsibilities related to childcare and elderly care.

This paper aims to highlight the experiences of women-led actions at the local community level, amplifying women's voices and showcasing how they can advocate for land rights and build their livelihood. The first case study presents the experiences of women fighting for their land rights and demonstrating their livelihood through agroecology practice. The second case study illustrates the perceptions of a fishery community and highlights their response to water management in relation to agriculture.

Case Study 1

"Due to the influence of the land grabbers, they are so powerful that no authority can help solve it, so some of our women, including some representatives, have been arrested and charged with trespassing on the company's land. My sister and I were imprisoned for about four to five months." Samol, a representative of land issue, said.

Phnom Krich village is situated in Strengtrong Commune, Sala Krav District, Pailin Province, located in western Cambodia near the border of Thailand. Pailin is well-known for its prosperity, largely due to the extensive gen deposits found in the surrounding countryside. Despite its relatively small population of 17,850 (World Population Review 2024), the area is marked by numerous land conflicts.

When the land was taken

After the post-1999 integration of Pailin, the former governor introduced a new policy from the Royal Government of Cambodia, encouraging local residents to clear forest land for farming and family use.High-ranking officers personally distributed tools such as knives, axes, mosquito nets, and blankets to assist people in clearing land, building homes, and cultivating crops.

However, less than a few years later, in 2006, joint forces began dismantling and setting fire to many of these homes, with such actions being carried out multiple times. Following the demolitions and burning of people's houses, a company began to use bulldozers to clear the disputed land with the intention of planting cassava. In 2009, strong protests from the villagers forced the company to temporarily halt its operations and withdraw the machinery, allowing villagers to resume using the land. Notably, the company owner was the wife of the former provincial governor.

A few years later, on June 6, 2012, renewed protests erupted when the company once again used bulldozers to clear farmland. A former deputy district governor stepped in to mediate, assuring the people that there was no need to protest further. He asked them to allow the company to continue its operations while promising that provincial authorities would find alternative land for the displaced villagers. This response was deeply unfair to the local community, as the authorities seemed to prolong the resolution while favoring the company. Eventually, the land was leased to a Vietnamese company. The authorities then promised the people that once the company harvested the cassava, the land would be returned to them.



Photo in 2016

After the Vietnamese company harvested the cassava, the authorities still failed to provide a solution for the people. Frustrated and losing faith and confidence in the authorities, the villagers decided to reclaim their old land by building new homes. After only 6 houses had been built, on February 25, 2014, 14 police cars arrived, stopping the construction. The former district governor, along with the district team, intervened and offered each family a plot of land measuring 20m x 50m. However, the villagers refused, tas many had significantly larger plots affected by the disputes – some owning 2 or 3 hectares, while a few families have up to 10 hectares. The district governor promised to reconvene with villagers on March 15, 2014 to talk about the land swap solution. But when the time arrived, neither the district governor nor his team did not come to meet the people as promised. Instead, the former deputy district governor filed a lawsuit to arrest and imprison five villager's representatives.

Different impacts of climate change on the community

The local community has observed numerous impacts of climate change on their lives, which became more apparent as they reflected in their history. Before the company's investment and development in the area, the land was covered in dense forests, offering a rich source of non-timber forest products that sustained the people. These forests provided peaches, various types of mushrooms, cow dung, honey, squirrels, and wieldable vegetables. The community food sovereignty, allowing people to gather food whenever needed for their families.

In the past, people could harvest fish traditionally by dragging them along the streams, and fishing provided a sustainable living without the need to engage in outside business. However, the fish have disappeared. The use of chemicals in agriculture has contaminated natural streams in the area, destroying aquatic life, animals, and the broader ecosystem. While modern agricultural equipment offers convenience, speed, and reduced physical effort, its negative impact outweighs the benefits.

When the company arrived in June 2006, they began clearing the forest and encroaching on the people's land. As a result, the community began to lose its land. Some families began to disintegrate, and some gradually migrated.

The forest and other resources have been lost, forcing people to sell their labor or work for others. In the village, some can find jobs, such as spraying crops on other plantations, earning daily or weekly pay. Meanwhile, others, unable to access natural resources as they once did, have lost control over their livelihoods and some have migrated to work in Thailand. Those left behind are mostly older individuals who wait for their children's remittance, but they sometimes face food shortages. The community is now facing health issues, suffering from diseases such as itching, blindness, stomach aches, and intestinal pain. Additionally, some older people are also dealing with diabetes and high blood pressure.

The weather has changed significantly in recent years, with 2023 bringing particular challenges. At the beginning of the year, people in this area faced drought,, and by the end of the harvest, there was very little rainfall, leading to low agricultural productivity.

Many have resorted to borrowing money from lenders, shop owners, and microfinance institutions to support their agriculture activities. However, the yields from their crops are often insufficient to cover these debts. As a result, they need extra work to pay off the loan, but finding it difficult to look for jobs near the village.

Samart, a woman representative who practices agroecology, said: *"My rice crop, like everyone else, even get very little rain during the growing season, and not much at the end of the season. But because I use natural compost that I learned from food sovereignty and agroecology practice training from the past years, my rice grew tall and strong, even though there was no water, but it survived. If people changed and used natural compost, it would help them not to leave the village to earn money."*

Another woman community member said: *"People could gather mushrooms and other non-timber forest resources for food before the forest was established. At the age of fifty-eight, I am ancient, and nothing is left for us to access. During these hard times, all ten of my children—a husband and wife as well as teenagers—left me to watch over the home and look for my little grandchildren, so I dare not go. I only purchase food at the grocery store because I don't have enough to eat."*

From another consultation, one villager said: *"Today's children like to go to towns and cities, and even though they do not like to grow crops, they like to buy from others, they do not want to be difficult, they are not as impatient as before."*

Apart from rice, people also grow corn and cassava, which they sell to Sailo (local stores) that then resell to Thailand. Most participants in the consultation expressed concerns that cassava is the most harmful crop to human health. Growing cassava involves a long and resource-intensive process: buying seeds, plowing the land twice, spraying chemicals on the roots, cutting down leaves and trees, renting equipment for harvesting, and paying for transportation. This process requires manpower and machinery. Additionally, if it rains continuously for two or three nights,, the cassava crop may not survive and will rot.

The villagers are aware that chemical spraying not only affects land users but also pollutes water, contaminating ponds, canals, and streams, while also releasing harmful substances into the air. As a result, people no longer use water for drinking, and even the rainwater is now a health concern. One woman community member said: *"We are citizens living in the same society, but why is it harder to get clean water for daily use compared to people in cities or towns, they get more clean water than us?"*

Women-led Actions

Pailin is a small province in the northwest of Cambodia, located near the border corridor with Thailand, specifically Phsar Prom. The province is marked by various challenges, including land issues, agricultural prices, casinos, labor concerns, and drug-related activities. Currently, there are about 40 land disputes, with local residents actively taking steps to expose land violations. These actions range from confronting the perpetrators to marching and petitioning. As a result, some communities have successfully reclaimed land, while others have erupted in protest or continue to seek justice through the court system.

A small producer and farmer realized and said that people like them are not valued by anyone. Even national policies started to encourage only large private traders/investors, not them. When people like them speak, they become opponents of the state.

Samol, a land representative, said: *"While we are suffering from land disputes, poverty is constantly harassing us. After our crops were destroyed, my community and I fell into debt and were left without a specific job as a source of income. We seem to be living a destiny, working hard to satisfy our hunger from time to time and be able to continue our work as activists."*



Ms. Om Somorl, a representative of land conflict in Pailin in 2023
Photo by Phearun

"However, these pressures do not make us afraid and despair. Why has the greed of the same people made my community so vulnerable to this day? The experience of the land struggle, which is life for me and the community in the past, has turned all my pain into a motivation to continue building the path to justice. People are screaming for justice, but we must know that we are the ones who have to demand justice for ourselves. As long as we maintain our values and uphold the truth, the light of justice and hope remain for us."

Despite the deteriorating situation, women in the community refuse to remain silent.hey have bravely stepped forward to stop the company's encroachment on their land and confront the authorities.

While some representatives were arrested, one woman led a group of locals to collect thumbprints of villagers, which they sent to the provincial hall to seek intervention. The petition was also sent to various government institutions, requesting support from different groups and legal assistance from human rights organizations.

Men, on the other hand, are often less inclined to confront authorities due to concerns of violence. They tend to be less resilient in the face of threats. In contrast, when women take the lead, there is a notable reduction in violence. Women possess strong negotiation skills and have a long-term vision, coupled with a high sense of responsibility. If a solution is not good, they don't accept it. Women are more concerned about issues surrounding their children, including education, food, water, and housing.



In front of Pailin Provincial Court in 2017



Photo in 2019

The strategy in place ensures that no community member feels hopeless; they care for one another and constantly hold meetings to update about the land issue situation and household conditions. This approach fosters both spiritual strength and a sense of sharing community.

After a long struggle and conflict, in 2019, the community accepted an allocation of 5 hectares of land for 14 families. Each family received a plot measuring 16 meters wide by 55 meters long, along with 1 hectare designated for plantation use. While the locals were dissatisfied with the land distribution, they felt they had no choice.

Recently, the village chief urged community representatives to engage with the ruling party and showcase their involvement in the media. However, a Samol representative said that she doesn't care about any party today as her heart is more important than the party, and that she is willing to work for better community members.

Women and Debts

Most community members are burdened by debt due to agricultural activities. When families owe significant amount of money to various microfinance institutions and money lenders, the only solution often involves asking their children to stop studying, selling labor or working for a company to help pay off the debts. Some families even resort to selling land and property. Samol said: *"In this location, only my family has children who studied more than others, but I remember one day, I told my child not go to school for two or three days because I have no money. I feel frustrated when talking about my child's education because I do not have a penny. Everyone competes to survive, everyone competes for work".*

Women who stay at home to take care of their children have no income, relying on their husbands to send money for family support. husbands struggle to find work and fail to send money, women face hardships and some even fall into depression. Moreover, if everyone's life is poor or very poor, they rarely gain new knowledge unlike in the past.

"In my community, the villagers depend on agricultural crops. My family borrowed money from the bank to farm and went to buy agricultural products from other villagers to sell at the market. Due to the drought in 2023, there were not many agricultural products and the self-made agricultural products had lost a lot of money. Debts can't be repaid," Villager 4 said.

In September 2021, the United Nations secretary-general issued a warning regarding the predictable loss of land as a result of Cambodia's high average microloan repayment amounts and the usage of land as collateral. Despite a 2022 case study by human rights organization Licadho, revealing that 167,000 Cambodians sold their lands to repay microloans between 2017 and 2022 The Cambodian government has yet to take any significant steps towards change.

What the community has learned

Rural community women in Phnom Krich village are spearheading efforts to advocate for gender equality and women's rights within their communities. They take the lead in organizing women's forums, engaging in policy advocacy, and raising awareness about gender-based discrimination and violence. Their community-led actions play a crucial role in challenging societal norms and promoting gender equality at the grassroots level.

Unity and solidarity are essential in solving problems. If villagers do not unite and exert pressure on powerful officials to address their land issues, those officials will fail to fulfill their responsibilities. In today's society, people face challenges in making a living, leading many to withdraw from social work and struggles against social injustice. When individuals experience self-inflicted pain, they begin to understand the magnitude. However, leaders who cannot serve as role models, hinder progress toward a modern era.

Nevertheless, some families do not appreciate the local activities led by women. Some members have expressed concerns about the pressures women face from authorities and fear that increased activity could lead women to form new relationships outside the home. Fortunately, since the community's decisions are rooted in common sense, the pressure has had less of an impact than anticipated.

In the past, community members learned how to make some natural fertilizers and pesticides to reduce the dependence on costly commercial products. By cultivating crops and raising animals around their house, they improved their family's livelihood, initially ensuring that they had enough food to eat. This shift has changed the customs that previously relied on buying all agricultural inputs, food, fish, and meat from the market.

After recognizing the challenges posed by farming, a few villagers returned to using natural means of subsistence. To combat the effects of climate change, the community educated itself on food sovereignty, learning how to raise livestock and cultivate crops that are necessary for the family. They also produced fertilizers, compost, and hard compost. They also continued to preserve seeds, sharing them with other communities and future generations.

Through learning agroecology and food sovereignty, community members began growing mixed crops around their homes, with surplus food sold at markets, earning them between 2,000 to 5,000 riel (approximately $0.50 to $1.25). Sometimes people come to buy at home.

One of the representatives remarked, "What we try to do is worth it." In her family, a small plot of land floods annually, making it impossible to cultivate any crops. However, she purchased a truck to fill the flooded space, allowing other villagers to collect water from a nearby well to help their crops grow healthily. Her husband chastised her for attending classes and failing to complete them, but after she succeeded and demonstrated results, she became a role model in the village, teaching around ten other families to follow her example. Some began cultivating medium-sized crops to sell.

Now, district officials and other authorities frequently visit her home because of her supply of natural vegetables and food. Meanwhile, teachers at the primary school have asked for her assistance in finding natural fertilizers. When her son attends school, he proudly shares that his mother farms naturally and has everything they need. This farming style has become a reflection of their traditions.

How to keep the issue alive

Women in the community have taken the initiative to organize International Women's Day and other events, highlighting solidarity among women and showcasing their values within households and the community through social media.



During cultural ceremonies, community members contribute to the events in various ways. Each participant might bring one chicken or two chickens or other items. These activities have been ongoing for over two years. In addition, when the community faced difficulties, a group of representatives worked hard to find other sources of support for the community. For instance, rice donations provided crucial assistance to the entire community during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the authorities' dissatisfaction within the community activities, representatives remained committed to helping their impoverished members, even in the face of threats.

Seeds are exchanged between communities. When they visit different areas and encounter unique seeds, they ask to share them for planting.

An agroecology practitioner said: *"A small egg-plant seed, when she was young, her mother used to grow it and cook for them to eat, it disappeared because they did not store them properly but now luckily she has to get them back from Kampong Cham Province."*

Samol said: *"I did not grow much, but the villagers often sent me something to eat. " Community members have recognized my dedication and efforts to educate everyone, from learning about land tenure, climate change, agroecology, natural farming and other fundraising in the past. Some of them gave back their love, care, and shared grown vegetables and animals to me."*

Case Study 2: The Impact of the Dam Project

The Tonle Sap is the heart of the Mekong River, its lake swells more than four times during the rainy season, providing a critical spawning ground for fish that provide food for an estimated millions people living in surrounding areas.

Battambang City lies approximately 10 kilometers from villages such as Daun Inn, Bak Roteh, Rohal Suong, Sdey Krom, and Prek Khpob. Most of these settlements are fishing communities situated along the banks of the Tonle Sap River, which meets the Sangke River. The Sangke River meets the Tonle Sap River, the majority of these settlements are fishing communities.

Sala Ta On Dam Development Project

Cambodia's government development agendas often reflect a broader trend seen in many regions. The $37 million Sala Ta On Dam project, funded by the Republic of Korea, aims to provide water to 4,000 hectares of agricultural land during the dry season and over 11,000 hectares during the rainy season. Located along the Stung Sangke River, which flows into Tonle Sap lake, the project has significantly transformed the landscape between 2022–2023. Although a draft working paper from the UCRSEA project showed that the benefits will outweigh the impacts, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) highlights that fish populations will be affected. Instead of natural fish, the project would retain and maintain more water to support the growth of our cities and food production.

In March, water levels rose slightly compared to the previous year when there was still no dam. This increase allowed locals to go fishing and progressively capture tiny fish for their families.

However, they raised concerns on the project's implementation without sufficient notification or involvement of local communities. This phenomenon raises questions about the transparency, inclusivity, and effectiveness of such agendas. Understanding the reasons behind this lack of notification is crucial for fostering meaningful engagement and empowering local populations in the development process.

One deputy fishery community said: *"The construction of a dam is called an art of dam or an art of irrigation system. This is done for the sole purpose of controlling water management. Water managers have the power to turn on, off, supply and distribute, while the local people are consumers, have no rights. Unlike the water flows naturally, everyone has equal access to it and is the owner of the water flow to their respective areas. Now local people do not know what to do, because the water no longer flows the same as before, and the weather has changed too."*

Learning from definitions, development is described as *"... the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger."* (Oxford Learners Dictionary 2000: 363) According to the UNDP: *"Human development is about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value... Fundamental to enlarging human choices is building human capabilities: the range of things that people can do or be"*. (UNDP HDR 2002: 13)

However, development often benefits those in the private sector, developers, and the state itself, rather than empowering local people. One villager from Bak Rotes said that *"those affected by the development agenda are the poor people like us."*

There are two views on farming: some villagers want natural water flow without the need to build a dam. This allows people to farm twice a year, with mid-season rice and deep water rice. In later times, the villagers made early maturing rice two to three times a year, generating cash for their families.

However, the construction of the dam has led to the expansion of agricultural land, driving up the cost of land. Many locals have sold off their land to pay off debts and migrate to live in other areas. As a result, new landowners often come from outside the community.

Water as the lifeblood of local communities

In the past, natural rivers, streams and canals provided ample water for irrigation, facilitated boat passage, and supported fishing activities. However, the construction of the dam across the Sangke River has significantly disrupted the natural system. The sluice gates now block water flow, making it difficult for local residents to access the water they need for agriculture and daily living. The promise of an artificial water dam to supply water for agricultural purposes has yet to materialize, leaving both upstream and downstream communities with no the water source for agriculture.

Consultation notes indicate that seasonable weather patterns have also changed. Calm rain or wind has been replaced by variable conditions, with win direction shifting from east to north. Normal rainfall typically begins in the southwest at the start of the rainy season. In November, the wind starts to blow after the rains, making it possible for farmers to catch waterfowl, larvae, river shrimps, small fish, and other birds for cooking. Historically, the geography of the Sengke river has demonstrated that the Tonle Sap River experiences frequent flooding from June to October, with the highest frequency of flooding occurring in 1978, 2000, 2011, and 2020.

As early as April, fishermen begin to travel to the Tonle Sap to catch fish. By May and June, the Tonle Sap starts to rise, and the Sangke River begins to flow into it, creating good conditions for fishing. Fishermen used a variety of fishing gear or caught fish in the bush. Flooding begins gradually in July and August, peaking around September 5 or 6, when the Tonle Sap River meets the Sangker River. By mid-September, the water remains stagnant, and in October, after the rains, the water levels start to recede. October often experiences the heaviest rainfall, continuing to rain until early November.

Villagers living along the river primarily cultivate paddy rice, including both flooding paddy and seasonal paddy. They have developed a deep understanding of seasonal changes, raising questions: What has changed, and why are these transformations occurring?

"Tonle Sap Lake is one of Cambodia's well-known large lakes, producing tons of fish each year. Over the past 20 years, I have observed a plentiful supply of fish in the river, allowing fishermen to harvest fish to eat, prepare, ferment, smoke, and sell for their daily needs. However, the situation has drastically changed due to the use of illegal fishing gear and large-scale or influential private groups conducting illegal fishing during banned seasons, adversely affecting the livelihoods of the local people."

"While my Kpomb Orl Kambot fishing community, along with other fishery communities, has organized efforts to protect these natural resources, the law and authorities do not grant us the power to do so. Instead, they only allow us to report problems to request action from the appropriate competent authorities. In some cases, fishery administrators were aware of the illegal fishermen and even knew the locations where illegal fishing gear was being used—across the river or next to the fisheries post—but they took no action."



Vanna, who is 60 years old, has taken a leadership role for about 15 years to the present. She supports many women in her fishery community through fish processing work and mobilizes other fisherfolk to conserve the fishery community and fight for water irrigation in agriculture. She said, *"Being a woman leader is not easy, especially when communicating with male members. Sometimes, they agree and show support in front of us but act differently behind our backs."*



"Work in the community is one thing, but work within the family is something completely different. In the household, women are responsible for a great deal of labor, including taking care of children, providing food, water, and fuel for cooking. They must be very cautious during the high water season, as there is a lot of concern, particularly regarding the possibility of children drowning. Moreover, when the family faces financial shortages, it is often the women who must navigate borrowing money from private businesses or microfinance institutions, and they are also tasked with managing the incurred debts." Ms. Kim Sokha is a deputy of Daun Inn fishery community.

Key Challenges of Fishery Community

- In early 2023, the fishing community in Bak Roteh struggled with a lack of access to water for cooking and drinking. They asked authorities to turn it on, but they did not respond to requests.
- Various crimes began to emerge as water levels dropped to dangerously shallow conditions Fearing the loss of fish resources, a woman representative from the Daun Ind fishing community took it upon herself to call on the chief of the Prek Luong commune, urging him to open the water gate to save fish resources. About two days later, the water began to flow again.
- Authorities typically would release water when flooding occurred upstream on the Sangker River, allowing it to rise and drown farmland.
- Locals are worried about the future costs of irrigation water for agriculture similar to the Kampong Chhnang province.
- Modern agriculture is beginning to be practiced by people, requiring large capital expenditures, intensive agricultural inputs, and labor. In order to remain alive, a significant portion of small and medium-sized farmers shifted to using bulldozers or other new agricultural equipment. It's simple for people to trust vendors and companies who advertise agricultural supplies and varieties.
- Farms or rice fields are getting flooded, losing all energy and money, affecting health and continuing to be indebted to many people and microfinance institutions.
- Few farmers in the village continue to practice traditional agriculture. Many have no resources and are of old age, leaving farming as their only option for feeding their families.
- The construction of the dam has led to conflict and disintegration within the community. Locals are jealous of each other and quarrel over water usage and agricultural supplies. In reality, people want the river to flow naturally as it once did, believing that development has only worsened people's lives.
- When it comes to accessing water, women bear heavier burdens than men. Every day, women need water for personal hygiene and household necessities.

- Wealthier households can access clean water for their daily needs through pipes, while impoverished must rely on water from dams, canals or streams for use in the kitchen, laundry, or for daily use. This is despite the fact that development has not yet resulted in equality for all people.
- A case in the fishery community in Preaek Khpob Ou-kambot where patrols discovered four illegal pumps operating the lake, encouraging representatives to report squatter pumping to the Battambang Fisheries Administration in the Dai Probuy Conservation Area and Dai Ta Kong Fish Sanctuary. As this pumping occurs at night, it is challenging for women to intervene. Water shortages for agriculture and consumption are more severe and complex for the fishery community and especially women representatives due to their roles, responsibilities, and socio-cultural contexts. These factors influence their roles and responsibilities within their communities. These measures are not effective.

The Roles of Fishing Communities

The fishery community was established based on three main principles:

1. Community criteria
2. Community planning
3. Community dissemination

To uphold these principles, the community regularly engages in discussions with village and commune chiefs, encouraging other farmers not to use chemical fertilizer near fishery conservation areas and illegal fishing equipment.

It is crucial for representatives of the fishery community to understand the situations of all members, especially those who are impoverished and in need of food or assistance By gaining a clearer understanding of the living conditions of these members, representatives can more effectively advocate for their needs when engaging with the local authorities or at the national level.

Knowledge Building and Emergency Response Actions

- Strengthening community members' understanding of fishery laws, assisting elderly residents with their livelihoods, patrolling fishery conservation areas, and rebuilding these vital ecosystems.

- Invitations were extended to local authorities, village chiefs, commune chiefs, and fishery members to participate in protective programs. These initiatives include patrolling against illegal fishery, maintaining records and documentation, conducting fish release ceremonies, and organizing village festivals.
- Tree planting ceremonies are organized to grow flooded forests along the river, providing shelter for birds and fish. The programs also offer opportunities for students to engage in social activities and receive support from the community.
- Collaborate closely with the fisheries administration to gather resources for rehabilitating and restoring the conservation lake. This effort aims to protect fish, water, and the local population throughout the closed fishing season and spawning season.
- Work with other civil society organizations to conduct fundraising activities that assist elderly or poor families in the village. Additionally, support for fishery members in participating in public work activities and public events.
- Disseminate information about the benefits of protecting fishermen in the village as well as students in both primary and high school.
- Organize activities to celebrate the anniversary of the fishery community, promoting achievements and mainstreaming the care and conservation of natural resources to the next generation.
- Recording activities to get public attention and mobilize women to participate in tree planting and community work.

Action Responses

In Prek Luong commune, which consists of several villages including Prek Kpom village, Sdey Krom village, Daun Inn village and Bak Rotes, water distribution has become a major issue for fishers. Some areas experience flooding, while others suffer from a lack of irrigation water. Approximately 300 fishing households in Bak Rotes and Prek Kpom villages have been impacted by the opening of certain sluice gates, while most of these areas do not have gates. Sdei Krom and Doun-Ent villages are less affected in terms of farming, but paddy growing has become less dependent on the season.

Villagers, despite collecting fingerprints to support their cause, continue to urge authorities to address the negative impacts of water management and distribution.

Additionally, they have requested the reclamation of agricultural land in flooded forest areas. However, from local consultation, it was observed that local authorities, including the commune chief, remain biased and sometimes delay resolving these issues.

In addition, local issues often remain unresolved for extended periods. When villagers discussed concerns about fishery, livelihood, violence, and irrigation with local authorities, they were told that the information would be forwarded to district and provincial levels for assistance. Before the National Election in July 2023, a meeting was held in the local community and other district forums. People living downstream of the dam suggested draining water to support their agricultural activities. However, the authorities refused, stating that releasing the water would cause it to flow into the Tonle Sap and be wasted.

A presentative from Bak Rotes said that *"I remember, when the dam was built, officials promised that it would store water for everyone and be released when needed. The majority of the people living in Bak Rotes and Prek Kpob villages were severely impacted by the water crisis in 2023."* But now it is different.

The commune chief mentioned that if they receive 2,000 thumbprints from local residents, the issue would be resolved, but only after the election.

After local people mobilized other fishery communities to voice out concerns about water shortages in some areas and flooding in others, government officials from all levels of government, together with officials from the ruling party, arrived before the national election in July 2023 to promote the benefits of the dam project.. They emphasized the advantages of utilizing the dam and pledged to bring up the problem of the flood that occurred in the upper Sangker River A few days later, they opened the water gate, allowing downstream communities to have access to water for their regular use.. However, despite the fact that people have been protesting for months, the water at the upstream communities continues to flood, ruining the rice fields and threatening people. Now, villagers are doing early maturing rice while some villagers are affected and some are not not. For fruit crops or plantations, although some are good, they pose issues against health because villagers put in a lot of agricultural inputs.

Suggestions and Conclusions

The absence of local notification in government development agendas reflects systemic challenges in governance and decision-making processes. To improve the situation, it is crucial to address the underlying issues by promoting and embracing transparency, inclusivity, and participatory approaches. By doing so, governments can not only enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of their development initiatives but also empower local communities, enabling them to actively participate in shaping their own development.

We cannot separate people's relationships with land and environment. Therefore, the struggle for land rights and ecological justice requires hard work to support effective community organizing that involves all sectors of society. The two case studies show how women are actively initiating and leading actions aimed at improving living conditions, promoting gender equality, and addressing local challenges. These women-led initiatives are instrumental in driving positive change and addressing various social issues, including climate solutions. In addition, these efforts can also include local research on the local economy development issue, as well as how to promote women's participation in decision-making processes related to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The communities have proposed possible actions or approaches in dealing with the issues:

- Strengthen general knowledge, cultural skills, and technical work on cultivating social and living issues for women.
- Create a network of women that include those outside villages and provinces. This can give women the confidence to speak up and bring up challenges that their respective community faces.
- Share the impact of dam projects in communities to find common solutions, especially on threats against opinions.
- Provide a public forum for citizens where they can discuss the impact of issues and solutions for the common good. These should not be used as a tool for propaganda by political parties.
- Gender-sensitive strategies are needed to address water shortages, taking into account these differences and reducing unequal responsibilities placed on women.

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INDONESIA

How Indonesian Women Reject Small Island Destruction and False Climate Change Solutions

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Resistance to mining in Indonesia has persisted since the colonial period, when the Dutch opened coal and tin mines on the islands. Just as the anti-colonial sentiments fueled resistance in the past, today the struggle is similarly driven by opposition to oppressive forces, now represented by corporations and the state, which often cloak their actions using the narrative of development and climate solutions.

In the past two decades, women's resistance to mining has gained momentum in Indonesia. However, unlike men, women face additional challenges due to the patriarchal structures within their families and communities. This makes it more difficult for women to emerge as leaders of resistance. TKPT Indonesia shares the following three stories of women's resistance against mining: coal mining in East Kalimantan, gold mining on the island of Sangihe in North Sulawesi and geothermal mining in Flores. These stories prove that the climate crisis does not necessarily make corporations and the state reduce coal extraction, but instead they use the pretext of providing a solution to the climate crisis to expand the exploitation of nature on small islands in Indonesia.

Story 1: Sanga-sanga Women's Everyday Resistance to Coal Mining in East Kalimantan

The city of Sanga-sanga in East Kalimantan is rich in petroleum, natural gas, and coal, which initially attracted the Dutch colonial establishment. Petroleum mining began in 1887 under Dutch control. In the past, the city's hills and dense forests served as hiding places for Indonesian fighters against colonial rule. One of the significant historical events is the Battle of Merah Putih (Red and White, the colors of Indonesian flag) on January 27, 1947, a major confrontation against the Dutch, which is commemorated every year.

Since 2012, this historical site and memory has been promoted as a tourist destination to commemorate the struggle and to add to historical education. However, alongside this initiative, the area has been subject to coal mining. Around 65 percent of Sanga-sanga is now under concession to 34 coal companies. This mining activity has led to increased environmental pollution, conflict, and more frequent flooding in the city.

One of the companies operating in this region is PT ABN (Adimitra Baratama Nusantara), owned by an oligarch's family. The company's commissioner is the son of Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment. Established in 2008, the company manages an area of 2,990 hectares and produces 3.5 million tons of coal per year. This coal is used for power generation for various industries, including cement factories, both in Indonesia and internationally, supplying markets in Japan, Taiwan, Hongkong, Malaysia, Korea, China, India, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

This mine operates alarmingly close to residential areas, located just 300 meters from the village. The nearest settlement, RT 03 in Kampung Jawa, Sanga-sanga, is experiencing groundwater pollution from mining operations.The mine's elevated position causes acid mine drainage, which contaminates the groundwater system and residents' wells, resulting in acidic water.

Similarly, the water in the 2.6-kilometer drainage channel in the residential area has become a dumping ground for coal tailings. This situation has led to flooding around the settlement, as the drainage channel is unable to withstand the volume of water and muds.

As a result, wastewater mixed with mud hit residents' houses before entering the Sanga-sanga River and affecting agricultural lands. JATAM East Kalimantan alleged that the company illegally disposed of wastewater into the river from twelve coal settling ponds.

Layered Burdens and Rising Cost of Living

Coal mining in the area has caused residents' water wells to dry up, while the remaining wells contain water with acidic substances, far exceeding drinking water quality standards set by the government. Acid mine drainage is formed when sulfide minerals and heavy metals, exposed due to excavation and overburden activities, react with oxygen in a water-saturated environment. This reaction leads to the formation of acidic tailings, which can cause a decrease in groundwater quality, including turbid well water, odor, and taste change. These conditions pose serious health risks to residents if the water is consumed continuously.



Figure 1. Mud floods submerge the Javanese village, Sanga-sanga in 2021, due to coal mining.
Photo Source: Citizens and JATAM East Kalimantan, 2021

Due to damaged or dried-up wells, residents are forced to rely on water from the state-owned company (PDAM) for daily washing and bathing. Suhartini, a 47-years-old resident, admitted that she had to pay a subscription fee of Rp. 1.3 million in 2010 and Rp. 300,000 monthly for water usage. This does not include the additional cost of purchasing gallons of water for drinking and cooking, which amounts to about 90 liters of water at Rp 10,000 per gallon.

Suhartini also shared a video recording that circulated in early October 2023, showing blackened water. She recounted an incident where she reported to PDAM officials that her water tap had become clogged with coal. Grains of coal often entered the bathtub through the PDAM pipeline. *"The water turns black and cannot be consumed,"* she said.

"*I bathe using rainwater,*" said Suhartini. Every day, she has to let the PDAM water sit in a drum overnight to allow sediments to settle. She explained that after heavy rains, water flows down from the mine, carrying coal particles, which are then discharged into the river and then drawn up by the PDAM. Following floods, residents experienced skin itching. Suhartini herself had to spend extra money to treat her itchy skin, buying anti-itch powder to apply after bathing to reduce the irritation.

Protesting and Fighting Stigma

Women in Sanga-sanga are among the most severely impacted by coal mining, bearing double burden. They not only expend extra time and energy dealing with flooding but also face additional financial strainsJaniah, a 51-year-old resident of Sungai Bogem RT 01, shared her experience of her house being submerged up to knee-deep flooding, ruining her furniture, including mattresses and cabinets. Each flood forces her to spend additional time and energy to clean the mud that enters her house.

Her neighbor in RT 03, 50-year-old Sampirmi, faces similar challenges. Along with the flooding, her well water, her source of clean water, has depleted over the past five months. This has forced her to use rainwater for bathing and washing. However, for her infant grandchildren, she uses bottled gallon water to ensure their safety. Sampirmi also had to adapt by converting a hole that was usually used as a garbage collection site into a makeshift rainwater collection pond.

Despite facing challenges, women in Sanga-sanga are at the forefront of fighting for the safety of their communities and families.



Figure 2. One of PT ABN's mining pits which sends coal to Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong,Malaysia, Korea, China and India, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Suhartini, along with dozens of other mothers and other women, led a protest on February 25, 2021, demanding the closure of the sewage valve operated by PT ABN. This action was broadcasted through a 14-minute video that was shared in the Facebook group "Bubuhan Samarinda." This demonstration, primarily led by women from Kampung Jawa Village, was widely circulated. They walked together from their village to the sluice gate and tap of PT ABN's 17 settling ponds.

The pond in question discharges water containing waste and mining sludge, characterized by a brownish, murky color. The women accused PT ABN of deliberately channeling its waste into drainage systems or ditches that flow into residential areas, causing flooding and pollution.

During their protests, the villagers confronted mining employees near the location, voicing their grievances. The protest ended with the women actually closing the tailing tap themselves. Despite this, PT ABN still ignored such action of shutting the outlet tap of the waste storage pond and continued its operations as usual.

On April 8, 2021, residents staged a mud bath in front of the East Kalimantan Governor's Office in Samarinda. The company PT ABN did not accept this, branding Suharti as a provocateur. This stigma served as a form of intimidation and psychological attack against Suharti and her family. The company even went so far as to deliberately take her picture and display it at PT ABN's office. In addition to being labeled a provocateur, Suhartini was also called an ungrateful person for protesting against the very company where her husband works as a miner. They warned Suhartini not to take action again.

"*This is the business of many people, not the business of my husband. If only I knew who posted it, I would have met him even now,*" she refuted. "*From then until now I have been called a provocateur*," she added.

Suhartini's active participation in protesting mining is her way of carrying out daily resistance and refusing to bow to threats from companies and pro-mining parties. She has also refused compensation for noise pollution, realizing that accepting such payments softens community resistance and builds a misleading image of a responsible company. In reality, the compensation offer has consistently decreased over time, dropping from Rp 400,000 per family to Rp 250,000 and most recently to just Rp 150,000.

"This is selling off the village," she argued. *"Until now, I am the only one who doesn't even want to come to the company, whining about taking the noise money,"* Suhartini added.

The company has resorted to sending security forces to intimidate Suhartini and her family into surrendering their 33 hectares of land located within the mining concession area.

"*Later, if you don't give it up right away, we will call the Satpol PP (Police Unit under Municipal or District Authority) and Brimob (armed Police Brigade),*" Suhartini recounted, imitating the company's threats.

The company dispatched officers from the Tenggarong City Agriculture Office to help persuade Suhartini to accept compensation for the greenery in her garden. "*It benefits the company, it's theirs and they set their own standards,*" Suhartini protested these unilateral tactics. The sale and purchase of land only serve the company's interests, as the selling value was determined solely by them.

Keeping the Family Will

Suhartini's commitment to maintaining the family garden reflects her late father's wish to preserve their agricultural heritage. Before mining operations began, the majority of residents relied on agriculture, particularly fruit gardens and rubber plantations. This was also the primary source of income for Suhartini's family. The rubber plantation can provide an income of up to Rp 2 million per month. Additionally, harvesting bananas contributes Rp 100,000 every three days, while oOther fruits such as rambutan, pineapple, and salak could yield Rp 800,000. Suhartini also sells mashed coffee at Samarinda's Segiri Market, reaching sales of 50 kilograms every month, with prices ranging from Rp 15,000 to Rp 32,000 per kilogram.

But the company has a surefire way of forcing Suhartini's siblings to give up their land. Over time, the flood of coal sludge made most of the family's land inundated with waste and infertile. *"It was deliberately drowned,"* said Suhartini. The difficulty of earning income from the communal land began to create rifts within the family, with some siblings wanting to sell the damaged land. This situation took a toll on their father, making him sad and sick. Just three days after they surrendered the garden, Suhartini's father died. *"I was really hurt by mine when it was destroyed. My plants were destroyed,"* were her father's final words to Suhartini.

While Suhartini's siblings may have given up, Suhartini remains resolute in her fight. To this day, she is active in discussions in Java and Samarinda, where she debunks the welfare myths promoted by mining companies.

"I ordered my son, who was just about to graduate in Samarinda with an automotive degree, on't work in the mine, son. It's better to open a workshop repairing vehicles to earn money, we will find the capital later," she said.



Figure 3. Protest by residents of Sungai Bogem RT 01 whose houses were hit by coal floods.

RT 24's Show of Resistance

Not only the villagers of Kampung Jawa are fighting back, residents of Sanga-sanga Village, particularly those in RT 24, are also resisting coal mining operations that have left a gaping hole filled with water contaminated with heavy metals and toxins. The distance between the mine pit and the nearest settlement is only about 50 meters, with the pit's.depth reaching between 50 and 60 meters. According to Muhammad Zaenuri, the head of RT 24 Sangasanga Dalam Village, the area comprises 200 households and around 400 people, most of whom work as farmers or raise livestock. Some women in the community produce leaf-wrapped Tempeh to be sold in the market.

RT is acronym for Rukun Tetangga, the smallest type of neighborhood association commonly found in Indonesia.

Residents have protested against the government for neglecting to protect the environment. Coal companies operate in this area without reclamation. *"This ex-mining pit was abandoned just like that,"* said Zainuri. In fact, the presence of such a mining pit is very dangerous for children. Based on experience, 40 children have died in mining pits throughout East Kalimantan.

Despite residents' pleas to have the company fence off the ex-mining pit, their requests have been ignored. *"They don't even put up danger signs,"* lamented Dasi, another RT 24 resident. With 58 children living in the neighborhood, aged between 2 and 14 years old, the children of RT 24 can no longer freely play in their own village, causing anxiety among mothers and other women in the community.



Figure 4. Mud bathing protest in front of the East Kalimantan Governor's Office in Samarinda on April 8 2021.

Residents of RT 24 took a stand by commemorating the 74th Indonesian Independence Day Ceremony in 2019 at the edge of a former coal mine pit in Sangasanga Dalam Village. They symbolically placed soil and stones onto a 2×5 meter flag, later throwing the stones and soil into the pond as a demonstration of their love for the land and water in the surrounding area. This act was also a rejection of the re-operation of coal mining companies near their settlements.

According to Zaenuri, mining activities by CV Sangasanga Perkasa (SSP) had previously occurred in their area from 2004 to 2014. He said mining activities in the 42.5-hectare area ended due to depleted coal deposits. However, in 2018, the company resumed operations, allegedly with new management.

"For decades we have suffered from mining activities, and now the mine will be revived, frankly the residents refuse, because the water sources of local residents are already difficult to find due to mining activities," said Zainuri.

Mini, a 57-year-old woman who makes traditional leaf tempeh, also complained about the condition of the water source. According to her, producing quality leaf tempeh is impossible if the water used is polluted by mining. *"Our income will drop,"* said the woman who also lives in RT 24.

Dasi, another resident, noted that many in RT 24 used to work at CV SSP in various roles, including being mechanics and operators. He himself held the position of public relations once. "*But now, no resident would work there anymore, because we reject our neighborhood being mined again,*" said Dasi.

Over time the community has begun to realize that relying on mining for their livelihood is only temporary and not worth the environmental damage it causes. *"When we got flooded, our gardens were damaged, our fish ponds were damaged, our water sources were damaged, the government was nowhere to help. Even though the government gave the permit,"* said Dasi.

Story 2: Pocoleok Women Confront Geothermal in Flores

As the island of Kalimantan continues to be dismantled for coal extraction, other small islands are also threatened by mining in the push to reduce the dependence on coal and other fossil energy. One such islandis Flores, which was declared as a geothermal energy island by the government in 2017, with claims that geothermal is a clean energy and new renewable energy.



Figure 5. Pocoleok women plant unused land for the farming economy and to strengthen ties with the land and mother earth (ende dading).

Flores Island boasts a unique wealth of tectonic and volcanic landscapes or hotspots that hold geothermal potential. Since its designation in 2017, the island has become a main target for geothermal mining projects, leading to an expansion and increase in these initiatives. The government claims that Flores Island has a geothermal potential of 902 Megawatts (MW), accounting to 65% of the geothermal potential in East Nusa Tenggara province. This potential is spread across 16 prospects, including in Waesano, Ulumbu, Wai Pesi, Gou-Inelika, Mengeruda, Mataloko, Komandaru, Ndetusoko, Sokoria, Jopu, Lesugolo, Oka Ile Ange, Atedai, Bukapiting, Roma-Ujelewung and Oyang Barang. These areas are vital landscapes and life-spaces for communities, now threatened by planned geothermal projects.

One of them is Poncoleok, derived from the word "*poco*," which means hill, and "*leok*," which means winding. Pocoleok is located in the southern part of the Manggarai district, adjacent to the Ulumbu Geothermal Management Area (WKP) which has been operating since 2011. The Pocoleok area is inhabited by 14 *gendang*, or customary indigenous social-ecological entities that spread over a steep topography surrounded by hills with high rainfall. The majority of Pocoleok residents are farmers who work the land to produce agricultural goods such as coffee, cocoa, and cloves, in addition to tapping tuak (sopi, palm wine). Before the establishment of the Ulumbu PLTP, Pocoleok residents could harvest tens of tons of coffee, selling it at Rp 25,000 per kilogram.

Thaddeus Sukardin, a 40-year-old resident, says that each family in Pocoleok can harvest 250-1000 kilograms of coffee beans per year. Meanwhile, the annual clove harvest reaches 200 kilograms, with selling prices ranging from Rp 70,000 to Rp 100,000 per kilogram. In the mornings and evenings, the men make sopi to sell during traditional events and also in Ruteng city. He said he can produce 4 liters a day with a selling price of Rp 50,000 a liter.

However, since the operation of the Ulumbu geothermal power plant began in 2011, harvests have steadily decreased. "*Pocoleok used to be a famous coffee producer for the Manggarai region, but since 2011 the production has started to decrease and worse, in 2023 we bought coffee in Ruteng city to drink,*" said Thaddeus. Currently, the residents of Pocoleok depend on palm nectar tapping and vegetable farming.

The relationship maintained between the community and the surrounding nature and ancestors began to crack in 2020 when the State Electricity Company (PLN) expanded the well pad drilling area for the Ulumbu Geothermal Power Plant (PLTPB) to nearly 20 sites in the Pocoleok area, including the villages of Lungar, Mocok, and Golo Muntas. Ten *rumah gendang* (drum houses) rejected the geothermal exploitation plan. They do not want their fate to be the same as the Ulumbu project.

Women are at the forefront of this resistance against geothermal mining. Maria Teme,a 56-year-old resident, called for the rejection of the geothermal projects directly in front of the Manggarai District Head who visited Pocoleok village. *"We reject geothermal in Pocoleok land. We don't need geothermal. We don't want to sell our land to be destroyed, we don't want to move to other villages. Just move the geothermal project to Todo village,"* Maria said. Todo is the home village of the Manggarai District Head.

Learning from Ulumbu and Mataloko

The rejection of geothermal mining in Pocoleok is inseparable from the impact of the Ulumbu geothermal power plant, which started operation 12 years ago. The residents of Pocoleok, located only a few hundred meters away from Ulumbu, have been grappling for the past ten years with impoverishment and a food crisis due to the geothermal project Their coffee, clove, and vanilla plantations, which ranked among the top three producers in Flores, have yielded no harvests since 2015. With no rice fields in the area, residents relied on the income from their gardens to buy rice from other places. Now, due to the geothermal impact, they find themselves depending on making tuak drinks from palm trees. This coffee-producing region even has to buy coffee from other regions.

The failure of fruit harvests and garden crops has been the direct consequences of the drilling activities at the Ulumbu PLTP. The women of Pocoleok, responsible for maintaining their families' food and water needs, have found that several springs have either dried up or become polluted. The information they obtained from the socialization and public consultations held by the government said that such changes were not caused by the Ulumbu geothermal plant.

However, the residents believe that their springs have been contaminated due to the geothermal project, a situation that will worsen as the plant continues to operate. Their springs are allegedly exposed to hydrothermal solutions containing Arsenic (As), Antimony (Sb) and Boron (B) contaminants. This water-guzzling geothermal mining has led to the drying up of several springs, exacerbated by the low rainfall in the region.



Figure 6. Demonstration of Pocoleok Women carrying land and agricultural products affected by Geothermal at the Manggarai Regent's Office. Photo Source; JPIC SVD Ruteng

Another geothermal hazard is the occurrence of landslides, which lead to erosion and sedimentation affecting community-owned gardens, farms, and villages. The residents have memories and records of such events particularly in Mesir village. According to 42-year-old community leader Thaddeus Sukardin, the soil condition in Pocoleok is very unstable. He recalled a landslide in 1961 followed by another one in 2009 that forced some residents to move their homes. There is also a growing concern that this will happen again.

In addition to the damage to the landscape, water, and food sources, community participation has proven to be ineffective. The Pocoleok community did not receive sufficient explanations regarding the geothermal expansion plan, including the potential impacts and risks associated with the project. There has been a lack of transparency; socialization and public consultations conducted by PT PLN and the government have not included the community. Furthermore, no valid and accountable evidence has been provided to assure the residents of the project's safety.

For instance, surveys and sampling conducted in the villages of Lungar, Mocok and Golo Muntas were carried out secretly, without the community's knowledge. This is despite the fact that the majority of survey and sampling locations fall on the customary land of indigenous communities, or gendang. Approval for such actions must go through *lonto leok* or customary deliberations involving all drum residents, rather than being unilaterally agreed upon by the *tua gendang* (customary head). The Regent of Manggarai's policy was executed unilaterally, issuing a decree designating drill points on 8.43 hectares of Pocoleok community through a letter numbered HK/417/2022, which will impact 6,000 residents.

The impact of geothermal projects in Mataloko can also be seen in Ulumbu. Many zinc roofs of houses and schools in Ulumbu have rusted and been damaged, forcing residents and schools to replace them independently each year. Surrounding plants no longer bear fruit such as coffee, cloves, and vanilla. Villagers' rice fields in Ulumbu have been buried under mudflow, yet no compensation has been provided by the company. The government, meanwhile, has washed its hands of the matter on the grounds that it is a natural phenomenon. A recent comparative study revealed that instead of improving the welfare of local residents, the geothermal projects have made life more difficult, stripping people of their productive land.

This comparative study resulted in the formation of a learning alliance among fellow victims of geothermal projects and people who resist them, spanning from Pocoleok to Waesano in Flores. They have united in their belief that geothermal energy, which is promoted as clean energy, is a false solution to climate change. This supposed "clean energy" comes at the cost of blood, water, land, history, and culture.

Geothermal mining has also changed the microclimate around the mining areas. These changes have led to colder temperatures, causing plants such as cloves, coffee, chocolate, and food crops to not die without producing any harvest. The erratic weather patterns – either torrential rains of short duration or prolonged droughts – have become completely unpredictable. The result is a decrease in people's income, due to a lack of income sources. If there is no or reduced income, many other needs cannot be met properly. Other social impacts also become widespread.

Women and children suffer the most from localized climate shifts. Women now need to invest more time and effort in finding additional sources of income by working in other sectors. In some cases, climate change has forced many Poco Leok women to migrate to other regions like Kalimantan to find work. In addition, Flores and other islands in East Nusa Tenggara are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In April 2021, the region was struck by flash floods caused by tropical cyclone Seroja, resulting in the deaths of around 69 people died and 19 others declared missing. One-third of the death toll from the Seroja storm were in Flores.

Ende Dading and Golo Lonto

Initially, the resistance against geothermal development was dominated by men, perhaps because they traditionally held more control over information as the head of the family. However, after hearing from the men about the geothermal projects the women began to take care, ultimately becoming at the forement of the resistance movement. These women were driven by an understanding that the earth of Pocoleok is the mother who has been giving life to them, therefore they are obliged to protect and care for mother earth or *ende dading*. They persistently fought against the expansion of the Ulumbu Geothermal Power Plant development and campaigned for the spirit of loving the land and preserving living space. In Manggarai custom, life is built around an intact unity of cultural elements: hometown or *golo lonto*, *mbaru kaeng*, *natas labar*; livelihood garden or *uma duat*; water source or *wae teku*; customary life center or *compang takung*, *mbaru adat*; house of worship, namely church, graveyard of ancestors or *boak*; and forest or *puar*. If any of these disappear, their living space will perish. These are Pocoleok cultural entities that must be maintained and cared for the same way as residents care for mother earth.

"We believe the land of Pocoleok is the ende/mother that gives us life. If this land is drilled and destroyed, Pocoleok's mother will get sick and we will all die," said 58-year-old Wihelmina Sesam, one of the Pocoleok women.

Pocoleok women have taken a leading role in a wave of actions against the Regent of Manggarai for granting drilling permits to geothermal companies. They were involved in demonstrations against the Regent in Lungar village, at the Manggarai Regent's office and the Manggarai DPRD office, demanding that the Regent revoke the decree stipulating the drilling location in Pocoleok. They carried stickers and billboards that read "Revoke the Regent's Decree, Stop Criminalization, Reject Geothermal." During the action, they also brought local food products such as yams, bananas, corn, and coffee, as an expression of caring for life, preserving the nature of Pocoleok, and rejecting geothermal projects.

Facing Physical and Sexual Violence

In their frontline resistance, the women of Pocoleok received threats, criminalization, and various forms of violence, including physical, psychological and even sexual.

During the protest against drilling on June 19-21, 2023, as documented byJPIC SVD, several Pocoleok women bravely blocked the activities of the company and the Manggarai National Land Agency (BPN) who wanted to measure customary land without the permission of Pocoleok leaders and indigenous people. The protest was met by dozens of police and SatPol PP officers. Two Pocoleok women experienced violence and sexual harassment during the confrontation. Amidst the shoving and chaos, police and SatPol PP officers groped the women's breasts. Both victims were in pain and deeply traumatized.

Despite this trauma, Wilhelmina Sesam, one of the victims, said, "*We are willing to give up work and leave the farm every day to wait for the arrival of the company, the police and the government. We give up family matters, we don't cook for our husbands and children, because we don't want our land, our mothers to be seized and destroyed by the company forever. Even though we don't get money and are treated indecently by the police, we don't back down, we don't want our land to be taken for geothermal, we will keep guarding and blocking it forever and ever.*"

In addition to the violence, most of the women are also grappling with food shortages, due to the stagnant economic income caused by damaged, polluted or unmendable gardens. This situation has led to efforts to utilize critical land for communal gardens.

Making Communal Gardens and Establishing Cooperatives

To meet their various needs and strengthen their resistance, in 2016, Pocoleok women, with the assistance of church-based JPIC SVD, established a two-hectare horticultural communal garden. They elevated their resistance efforts by forming the Soverdia cooperative, comprising four women's groups. The communal garden is planted with vegetables such as corn and secondary crops. In addition to increasing income during this period of resistance, the garden also addresses the family's food needs when they have to keep their spirit up against the onslaught of the geothermal company. The garden is also part of a campaign to maintain and strengthen ties with the land as *ende dading*.

The Soverdia Cooperative's service strategy is effective in bridging the interests of residents' economic needs with community organizing. The cooperative not only serves a way to meet the community's financial needs but also is a shared space for learning and community organizing. Through regular monthly meetings, cooperative members share stories and strategies against geothermal projects. Currently, about 163 families in the Pocoleok area, mostly women, have joined the cooperative.

Elisabet Lahus, a 60-year-old member, said that Soverdia Cooperative helped them a lot when facing the geothermal project: "*We don't work and give up our gardens. But there is Soverdia Cooperative that helps us with seed capital through loans. Every month we gather for savings and loan transactions at the Soverdia cooperative, and we also use the meeting to talk about how to block the Geothermal Company because we reject it.*" Elizabeth is one of the drivers of the cooperative.

Ronda and Comparative Study

In addition to strengthening their economy, members of the Soverdia Cooperative also focus on security and vigilance by conducting ronda (community night watch) to prevent companies and government officials from entering the Pocoleok area. This strategy is very important due to the large distances between villages, so the women from different villages have agreed to signal each other when there are signs of intrusion by the company into their customary territory. If there are signs that there is an intrusion, they will hit an electricity pole with a distinct sound. This serves as a call to immediately be on alert, gather at a designated spot, or take action. This strategy is proven to be very effective in safeguarding their life-space against the tactics of companies that often come sneakily or unexpectedly.

Given the community's limited access to information, particularly the women's lack of understanding of the real impacts of geothermal projects – often marked as friendly and safe – the women's group decided to conduct a comparative study to the Mataloko geothermal area which is 147 kilometers away, or almost 4 hours by car from Pocoleok.



Figure 7. Horticultural Development of the Pocoleok Women Farming Group and Potato Harvesting. Photo Source: JPIC SVD

During a comparative study at the Daratei-Mataloko location, Maria Teme, one of the participants, revealed the neglected and deserted conditions of the geothermal project. The land around the drilling area has been damaged. The community's rice fields can no longer be used due to the hot mud that created a lake over the former rice fields, rendering the land impossible to till at all as the mud flow continues.

According to residents' testimonies, since the drilling and the mud overflow started, crops such as avocado and coffee have stopped bearing fruit. Rice field owners have been forced to evacuate and relocate to other places, while houses have sustained damages. Tin roofs, in particular, had to be replaced every year or even after less than a year. The company responsible for the project has not taken any accountability for the damage. In addition, the location has been closed and all drilling facilities are no longer functioning. In a video recorded during the visit, Maria Teme conveyed her wish that all Pocoleok residents reject the geothermal project.

"*I hope all Pocoleok residents reject geothermal because now, I have seen the damage in Mataloko, nearly two hectares of rice fields covered in mud, crops bear no produce and the distance of the impact site is only 500 meters from the surrounding residential area,*" said Maria Teme said in the video.

Story 3: Sangihe Island Women's Legal Victory against Gold Mining

As many as 2,000 small islands are predicted to be submerged by mining activities and the climate crisis by 2050.

There are currently 164 mining licenses on 55 small islands in Indonesia that have been and are being ravaged by various mining operations. Not only larger islands like Flores are under threat, but smaller, outer islands such as Sangihe island in North Sulawesi are also being targeted.

Sangihe Island is renowned for its variety of beauties, featuring pristine abundant marine resources, the beauty of mountain contours, and protected forests. It is also home to several endemic species, such as the endangered Niu Seriwang Sangihe bird. The Sahendaruman forest serves as the headwater for 70 rivers that provide water to the island's entire population, including areas of consecrated ancient forest. The ecological richness of Sangihe island connects culture and custom with forests, mountains, and coasts, forming a maritime culture connected to the history and ancestral relations of the origin of the Sangihe people. Most of the residents' livelihoods are fishing and farming. Statistical data shows that there are more than 10,000fisherfolks in Sangihe, ranking them among the top five largest fishing populations in North Sulawesi. However, it is common for fisherfolk not to rely on sea products, many also engage in farming.

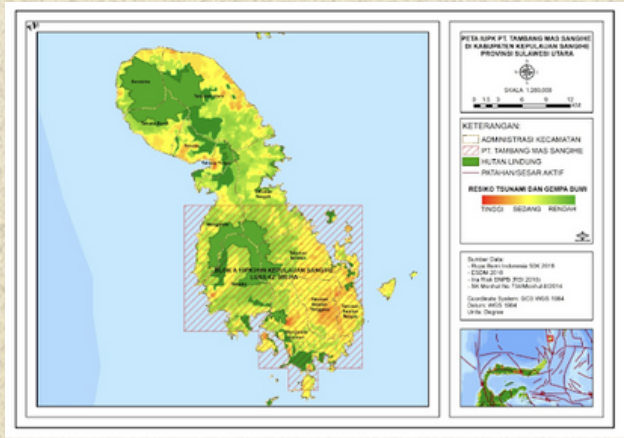


Figure 8. Map of gold mine control that covers half of the small island of Sangihe.
Source: JATAM, 2021.

The family of Adice and Waldus Pitere are one of those whose needs are met by nature in Sangihe by working as fisherfolk and farmers. Their staple diet consists of sago and tubers. Waldus works in his garden which has coconuts, cloves, and nutmeg, among others. Adice, meanwhile, often helps her husband produce copra after finishing her chores. They usually get Rp 300,000 to 500,000 from every coconut harvest.

"Often, the harvest is shared with the owner of the garden. Sometimes once a month working as a fisherman. The catch is used alone for the needs of the house and the shrimp will be sold." Adice said.

However, this self-sustaining way of life has been disrupted since the government reactivated the mining Contract of Work license that was originally issued in 1997, frozen until 2009, until it was finally bought by PT Baru Gold, a Canadian company, in 2021. This mining company, PT Tambang Emas Sangihe (TMS), now controls 42,000 hectares out of 73,000 hectares of the total island area, which means that more than half of the island will be demolished.

PT TMS is a foreign capital investment (PMA) company, with 70 percent of its shares controlled by Sangihe Gold Corporation (SGC) from Canada. This corporation is also connected to Laarenim Holding BV, a Netherlands-based company owned by Bre-X Minerals Ltd. The remaining 30 percent is controlled by Indonesian entrepreneurs and mining business companies PT Sungai Belayan Sejati, PT Sangihe Prima Mineral and PT Sangihe Pratama Mineral. One of the Indonesian directors is Todotua Pasaribu, a politician associated with the political party of the President-elect from the 2019 elections.

The Sangihe Spatial Plan (RTRW) is indeed designed to prioritize conservation and fisheries development, making mining illegal in accordance with the Small and Coastal Islands Law number 1 of 2014 which states:

"In the utilization of Coastal Areas and Small Islands, every person is directly or indirectly prohibited: In the utilization of Coastal Areas and Small Islands, every person is directly or indirectly prohibited from: conducting mineral mining in areas that, if technically and/or ecologically and/or socially and/or culturally, cause environmental damage and/or environmental pollution and/or harm the surrounding community."

These prohibitions have been violated both by the government and mining companies. They changed the designations in the RTRW, violated regulations on changes in forest area use, and hid public information about published licenses. The company's actions are worrying, especially since Sangihe is a disaster-prone area. According to Elbi Piter, a woman from Bowone village, mining has the potential to trigger natural disasters. This is because Sangihe is flanked by two underwater volcanoes, as well as an active volcano on the northern part of the island.

Furthermore, there is the collision of two large plates and two small tectonic plates under the Sangihe sea. So it will be very dangerous if there are mining activities there, she said.



Figure 9. Elby Pieter and the Sangihe People's Protest Poster Rejecting and Prohibiting Mine Operations. Photo Source: Save Sangihe Island (SSI) Coalition

The destructiveness of the f mining operations is now being felt by residents of Bawone village, one of several villages in Tabukan sub-district. Conflicts among residents have increased since the mine's arrival.

"*People who used to greet each other and care about each other are now indifferent and don't even greet each other anymore, due to the emergence of the pros and cons division,*" said Adice. Another impact is the contamination of sea water. "*Now we are afraid to fish because the sea has been polluted and the water is no longer clear,*" she added.

Half of the island is subjected to mining

Elbi Pieter, a woman who lives in Bowone village, could not hide her anger upon hearing the company stated that residents would be relocated. The area designated for relocation will be 65.48 hectares. Many questions remain unanswered, such as where to relocate, when to relocate, and how? The company could not answer them.

This situation became even more infuriating when PT.TMS socialization officers said that residents would only receive Rp 50 million per hectare for their land. Elbi's forehead wrinkled, she seriously calculated, then after a while concluded that should her land get sold, it would only be valued at Rp 5000 per sqm.

"*This is an insult. The price of one bunch of kale that we buy in the market is more expensive than the value of our land per meter. I don't want to, so I choose to do gardening, keep harvesting the coconut, nutmeg and banana plants in our garden. I refuse. I don't want my children and grandchildren to live in a destroyed environment full of mining waste. I will fight to save our land and lives on Sangihe Island,*" she said angrily.

Adice and Elbi Pieter represent a portrait of Sangihe women. They often have to sacrifice their time and bear the multiple burdens of caregiving while leaving their children behind. Elbi lives separately from her husband, who works as a construction worker in Manado. She has to coordinate all her activities to be able to take care of her two grandchildren, when she has to go to the Sangihe capital in Tahuna or attend meetings of the Save Sangihe Movement, which are often held outside Bowone village. Adice and Elbi also risked putting themselves at risk of being targeted by pro-mining parties.

Founding Save Sangihe Island (SSI)

Together with the men, the women of Sangihe Island have developed a number of strategies to fight and protect their life-space. They forged alliances with NGOs based in Manado, the provincial and national capital. They approached Yayasan Suara Nurani, LBH Manado and Walhi North Sulawesi and asked for support to free Sangihe from the gold mine. On April 3, 2021, the people and women of Sangihe, together with around 30 NGOs, declared the Save Sangihe Island Movement (SSI) at the Old Port of Tahuna, the capital of the Sangihe island district.

Since setting up the SSI, the women have had to work harder to block the increasingly aggressive mining activities. SSI members had to meet with various agencies at the local level in Tahuna, Manado, and Jakarta. Women like Els Paususeke and Venetzia Andemoratook turned away from their homes and families for long periods of time. They visited relevant agencies to convey their protests and demands.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Elbi and Els Paususeke along with eight other people departed to Jakarta to meet the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) and the Director General of Mineral and Coal to demand the cancellation of PT TMS's license. They also went to other agencies, such as the Indonesian Police in Jakarta and even to the Canadian Embassy. While at the mine site, residents carried out protest actions and blockaded vehicles and heavy equipment belonging to the mining companies that arrived through the port. Despite the Sangihe community's rejection of the mining project, PT TMS continued its efforts so that it can immediately commence operations. Elbi, Adice and the Save Sangihe Movement repeatedly blocked the mobilization of PT TMS drilling equipment, both at the port of Pananaru and on the streets.

Elbi had a sad and painful experience from December 21 to 24, 2021. Although a church elder, he could not celebrate Christmas in church with the congregation and family because she had to stay at the Pananaru port to ensure that the tronton that had just arrived loaded with drilling equipment was returned to Bitung port and did not enter the company's base camp in Bowone. Elbi sacrificed the special sacred moment, a merry Christmas eve, to evict PT TMS.

Challenging theine in court: Mining permit canceled

The Save Sangihe Island movement decided to pursue legal action as a strategic advocacy option, with women playing crucial roles in these lawsuits. The first lawsuit sought to revoke the mining permit of PT TMS and was initiated on June 23, 2021. Elbi and six other residents filed a suit at the Jakarta State Administrative Court. Elbi's lawsuit movement was then followed by 30 other residents, who were community representatives from villages within the mining concession. This lawsuit is referred to in Indonesian law as an intervention lawsuit. Two of the 30 plaintiffs are women, namely Elsye Paususeke from Lesabe village and Venetzia Andemora from Bentung village.



Figure 10. Oma Sintje carrying a hammer and her daughter during a protest against the mobilization of PT mining drilling equipment. TMS on 14 - 16 June 2022 in Channelg Village. Photo Source: Save Sangihe Island (SSI) Coalition

The second lawsuit aimed to challenge PT TMS's Environmental Permit, which violates the law because it does not involve the communities that will be affected. The company mobilized people who they claimed represented the community to attend the Environmental Impact Assessment (AMDAL) public consultation. This time, the plaintiffs are 56 women from Bowone village. They are driven by concerns about the loss of clean water, the transformation of their gardens into mining areas, the destruction of their sago trees that could no longer be processed due to water scarcity, and the loss of cultural roots and customs if they are later evicted from Bowone. On October 22, 2021, this lawsuit concerning PT TMS's environmental permit was registered at the State Administrative Court in Manado, North Sulawesi.

After a long struggle, the legal process surrounding the two citizen lawsuits ended at the Supreme Court. On December 22, 2022, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of PT TMS in the second lawsuit, but sided with the Sangihe residents in the first lawsuit on January 12, 2023. The first court ruling canceled PT TMS's Mining Operation License. Despite winning the second case, the company must cease operations no later than three months after the verdict because it does not have a mining license.

"The best New Year's gift from God," Elbi said gratefully.

However, it wasn't until September 8, 2023 – or about nine months later – that the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources finally revoked PT TMS's license. This action came only after residents applied pressure through the The Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (Kemenko Polhukam). The government's delay has provided room for illegal gold mining practices that operate brutally and threaten the coast of Sangihe. Meanwhile, the community remains divided, with factions supporting and opposing the mining activities, including illegal mining perpetrators who are deliberately untouched by the police.

Soon after, residents heard news that the company was applying for a new mining license in the same area. Despite this setback,, the resistance of the women and their families who are members of SSI continues.

Conclusion of the three stories

The three stories above highlight several crucial aspects about the relationship between women, mining, and climate change.

First, the character of mining in Indonesia, which thrives within a corrupt political system, has led to policies and laws that are replete with the interests of miners, while neglecting the need to address the impacts of climate change. This intertwining of interests facilitates mining companies' exploitation for maximum profit, allowing them to evade law enforcement efforts, and expand into new areas. The political connections to natural resources, seen through Presidential and Regional Elections, often involves direct links between candidates and the mining business, with campaign funds sourced from the mining industry, as revealed in the TMS case. One of the company's directors, Todotua Pasaribu, is part of the informal team that helpedPresident Jokowi win his second term.

This corrupt political system has created legal products that benefit corporations and oligarchs. One of them is through the passing of the controversial Mining Law No 3 of 2020 and Law No 11 of 2020 on job creation. This new law weakens environmental, community and labor protections.

Second, in areas designated for mining, the impacts of climate change compounded the stress already inflicted by mining projects. Residents must survive in the face of such multiple crises. They now grappler with social ecological crisis and climate crisis at the same time.

Third, women experience the heaviest burden from being labeled, double work burden, as well as subordination and violence. As primary caregivers and providers, they become vulnerable during social and ecological crises. The experience of each woman is even different from one another, especially when they face complex layers of power and violence at mining sites, even so there are still common threads through the same pattern. In Sanga-sanga, Flores and Sangihe, they face the same pattern, from stigma and double burden to physical and sexual violence.

Fourth, despite these challenges, women are not passive victims; they have the agency of struggle and resistance. This publication documented how women on small islands of Indonesia have agency in the struggle against extractivism. They are at the forefront and have came up with a rich spectrum of tactics and strategies of resistance, from daily protests, engaging in blockades, ronda-guarding the village, acting as legal plaintiffs in court, initiating comparative studies between resistance areas, all the way to getting involved in recovery movements such as cooperatives and planting on idle land. All of these are important notes and experiences that can be exchanged in order to continue to strengthen common imagination and solidarity.

Fifth, in Indonesia, extractivism – particularly through coal and gold mining – continues to be a standard business practice in order to meet unlimited market demand. Furthermore, the Indonesian government, for instance, has developed a long-term plan towards net zero emissions by 2060, through an ambition in the form of Indonesia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). The target is to reduce emissions by 29% from business as usual (BAU) conditions by 2030 with its own efforts and reach 41% when supported by international support.

Therefore, various policies have begun to be developed in these sectors, especially energy, to encourage energy transition towards New Renewable Energy (EBT) and encourage the downstream mining industry by mining more critical minerals. This includes the development of the electric vehicle battery industry and increased geothermal mining, which is claimed to be clean and green, skyrocketing to meet the ambitions of the world's energy transition under the guise of providing climate change solutions.

However, the global demand for climate change solutions not only fails to address the root causes of the crisis, but also disregards the voices and suffering of women and small-islanders who are being sacrificed for the sake of these false solutions.

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PHILIPPINES

Traditional Farming Practices of Indigenous Women in the Philippines

Written by Catherine Basallote based on the research of LILAK Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights



Context in the Philippines

The worsening global climate crisis has led to unequal consequences and responsibilities among and within countries, disproportionately impacting indigenous peoples, particularly women and girls. In the Philippines, the government collaborates with the private sector to implement corporate-driven and profit-oriented development, often disregarding its adverse effects on the environment and marginalized communities. The lack of public participation in decision-making makes policies and programs little more than dole outs, or worse, violations of human rights. Indigenous women and girls, being the most vulnerable groups in the context of the climate crisis, bear the brunt of these breaches.

PHILIPPINES

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2023), the population of indigenous peoples in the Philippines is estimated to be 9.84 million, accounting to 9.1 percent of the total household population of 108.67 million. However, there is still a lack of disaggregated data on the number of indigenous women and children. Many indigenous women living in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) have limited to no access to social services, even in times of crisis (LILAK, 2022).

Indigenous peoples have a profound connection to the land and the environment. The land is the source of their food, medicines, means of livelihood, and serves as a site for cultural practices and a link to their indigenous identity. They advocate for the protection of ancestral lands and natural resources. Indigenous women, often socially assigned caregiving roles, are crucial as food producers, land and natural resources managers, and human rights defenders.

As land becomes a critical resource for the community, indigenous women are vulnerable to a variety of forms of violence stemming from land and resource conflicts (LILAK, 2023b).

Despite the enactment of Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) (RA 8371), which recognizes their rights to ancestral domain and a free, prior, and informed consent, indigenous peoples are still forcibly displaced and pressured to to sell their lands to mining corporations, industrial plantations, and mega dams, among others. Over the years, indigenous women human rights defenders have reported instances of red-tagging, harassment, and threats as they assert their rights to land (LILAK, 2023b).

Food Crisis in the Philippines

An estimated 2.7 million Filipinos experience hunger (Social Weather Station, 2023), with many suffering from "involuntary hunger" due to a lack of access to food. Closer examination of the data reveals that Mindanao has the highest rates of involuntary hunger and is also home to numerous indigenous communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2022, LILAK and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR)'s Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights Center (2022) found that indigenous women and girls in food-insecure households experienced greater hunger than other family members. Their caregiving roles instill in them a belief in prioritizing their families' health and well-being, often at their own expense.

This commitment extends to providing support during crises like typhoons, earthquakes, pandemics, and armed conflicts, further increasing the vulnerability of indigenous women and girls in terms of health and security (LILAK, 2023).

Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines

Attempts to protect ancestral lands and domains under IPRA remain largely ineffective, as corporations continue to acquire and operate within these lands. Those who defend their land and the environment often face violent repression by the government. The Philippines has been deemed the most dangerous country in Asia for land and environmental defenders. A 2022 Global Witness report, Standing Firm: The Land and Environmental Defenders on the Frontlines of Climate Crisis, documented 16 killings in Asia, 11 of which occurred in the Philippines. A third of these 11 killings can be linked to defenders speaking out against mining companies and protecting the rights of the indigenous peoples. Since 2012, the Philippines has seen a total of 281 killings, consistently ranking number 1.

Despite these dangers, resistance and solutions from marginalized communities continue to emerge and persist, with indigenous women leading the fight against these oppressive systems. Their contributions and significance in the resistance against climate change and false climate solutions must be emphasized and supported. Unlike the capitalist and false development promoted by corporations and the neoliberal state, the indigenous peoples offer a model of development that is centered on their knowledge, systems, and values as managers of their biodiverse ancestral domains.

The way indigenous women live reflects the existence and persistence of an alternative system. The indigenous peoples in the Philippines are known for their agroforestry practices, which are tailored to the needs of their communities and guided by a deliberate consciousness that resources must be used to meet the needs of both the current and future generations. They show how the resources could be collectively owned and managed.

Relevance of the Documentation / The Role of Indigenous Women in Food Production and Land and Natural Resources Management

Data and lived experiences clearly show that indigenous communities, led by women, offer models of ways for achieving food sovereignty and contributing real solutions to the climate crisis. Indigenous peoples prioritize sustainability, preservation, and spiritual connection – values that are the complete opposite of the exploitative, extractive, and profit-oriented values practiced in the current neoliberal system.

The invisibility of women and women-led practices mirrors the broader vulnerability of indigenous peoples' to climate change, worsened by impacts that are further exacerbated by big corporations and the state. Indigenous women tend to be more invisible and overlooked in data, putting their traditions and knowledge on sustainable practices at risk of being erased. By amplifying support for women-led practices, their capacity to lead and face the unequal gendered impact of climate issues can be strengthened.



According to UN Women (2011), "women are less likely to survive and more likely to be injured due to long standing gender inequalities that have created disparities in information, mobility, decision-making, and access to resources and training." It is not difficult to imagine the added burden on indigenous women. The intersection between climate change and gender inequality and its effect on indigenous women has been established by a study entitled Exploring the Nexus of Indigenous Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Climate Change. It investigates how pressing climate change impacts either delay or prevent indigenous women from accessing and exercising their right to health (LILAK, 2023).

This paper seeks to place indigenous women-led stories at front and center, highlighting their indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices.

Gathering the Stories

LILAK Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights gathered stories from 4 partner indigenous communities in the provinces of Oriental Mindoro, Bukidnon, and North Cotabato, working closely with the indigenous women organizations of Erumenen ne Menuvu Women's Organizations (EMWO) and the Bukidnon Tribal Youth Ambassadors (BYTA) in interviews and documentation. From the data collection, LILAK gathered traditional agricultural knowledge and practices and discussed food sovereignty and climate change.

Together with EMWO, focus group discussions (FGDs) and workshops were conducted with Erumanen ne Menuvu women from the barangays of Kiaring, Banisilan, and Milaya in Midsayap. Meanwhile, in New Visayas, Don Carlos, Bukidnon, Manobo and Talaandig women participated in the FGDs co-facilitated with BTYA.

In Oriental Mindoro, data were gathered from Sitio Banti, Brgy. San Roque, Bulalacao, San Jose, in partnership with the Pinagkausahan Hanunuo sa Dagag Ginuran (PHADAG), a people's organization for Hanunuo Mangyan. Learning sessions and workshops were also conducted to orient and guide the community documenters for the FGDs and interviews.

The storytelling was led by indigenous women, who also took on the roles of facilitators and documenters. This ensured that the data collected was accurate, grounded in their lived experiences, and shared with consent.

The "Suragad" of Erumanen ne Menuvu from North Cotabato

The Erumanen ne Menuvu are part of the larger Menuvu or Manobo people, one of the indigenous groups in Mindanao. They inhabit the uplands of various municipalities in the province of North Cotabato, a region rich in forest areas and natural resources.

According to Global Forest Watch, the municipalities of Banisilan and Midsayap contain 8.46 and 6.09 thousand hectares of natural forest, respectively. However, large-scale deforestation, mining, and other harmful corporate operations have resulted in the loss of over 26 hectares of land.

As migrants from Cebu and nearby islands began settling in the region, the Erumanen ne Menuvu had to find ways to assert their rights to their ancestral lands.

Despite the land conflicts arising from migrant claims over these ancestral domains, the Erumanen ne Menuvu, known for their peace-loving nature, do not regret sharing their land with those in need.

Indigenous Food System

In the pre-colonial era, the Erumenan ne Menuvu sustained themselves by hunting boars and fishing. Men typically led the hunting expeditions, or *panganop*, while both women and men fished. They also planted vegetables and recalled when corn was purple and free from chemicals, unlike today's white and yellow varieties.

At the time, they had no pots or pans; instead, they used a bamboo makeshift container called *tinalumbo*. Food was often wrapped in banana leaves before cooking, a method called *binuogan*.

The introduction of chemicals and non-organic inputs into their farming practices can be traced back to the "Green Revolution" during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. This government program aimed to end hunger and food insecurity by promoting high-yielding varieties of produce developed in laboratories. While these varieties often produce more harvests than traditional seeds, they require chemical fertilizers and pesticides sold by transnational corporations.

Over the years, the diet of the Erumenan ne Menuvu changed dramatically. Chickens injected with harmful chemicals, processed meat, and soft drinks became staples, lacking the nutritional value of the organic vegetables they once grew. Even their rice now needed fertilizer, adding to the already high costs of farming inputs. These fertilizers, like the seeds, are sold by the same large agribusinesses. This leaves indigenous farmers dependent on them due to the lack of state support, trapping them in a cycle of debt.

Suragad

The Erumanen ne Menuvu strive to maintain their traditional farming practice known as *Sulagad* or *Suragad*. This practice is often led by indigenous women, who plant crops that can be eaten immediately, such as *talong* (eggplant), *gabi* (taro), *kamoteng kahoy* (cassava), and string beans.

Before planting, they seek guidance from Apo te Kelayag, the god of agriculture, through a ritual called *Peruveni-an*. In this ritual, a yellow cloth (*pandi*) is positioned in the West, where the sunset is located, and a white cloth is placed in the East, representing the sunrise. The seeds and *bolo* (a kind of machete used for land preparation) are blessed.

In addition to the ritual, the Erumanen ne Menuvu select the highest quality seeds and store them in a woven basket called *baruyot*, crafted by the mothers of their community. These seeds are sewn into the basket to protect them from insects and pests, then placed in a small house called *Kamalig* or *Sabung* where no one is allowed to sleep inside. They also use the stars for guidance – many stars are visible in the sky, they plant root crops and legumes.

The Erumenan ne Menuvu women play a key role in Suragad, managing the budgeting, crop selection, and task delegation. They also take charge of clearing the land, planting, and caring for the crops. For these women, caring for the crops has become as they can escape from their household chores, offering opportunities to gather, converse, and enjoy each other's company.

Suragad is primarily focused on the community's consumption and sustenance. The crops are meant to feed the family and not sold in the market for profit. The Erumanen ne Menuvu can tell when a household has nothing to eat when no smoke is coming from their houses, and the children are crying. In times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, Suragad harvests were shared among families signifying the strong community bond and bayanihan of the Erumanen ne Menuvu.

The "Kaugayan" of Manobo and Talaandig Women from Bukidnon

According to a 2015 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 24% of Bukidnon's population consists of eight indigenous communities, including theTalaandig and Manobo peoples. Known as the food basket of Mindanao, Bukidnon is one of the major producers of rice, corn, and sugarcane. Additionally, its plantations in the province also produce other fruits, such as pineapples and bananas. The mountains and forests of Bukidnon provide a home for different flora and fauna with their lush mountainous landscape.

Bukidnon once had over 451,000 hectares of natural forest, covering more than 53% of its land area. However, by 2022, 721 hectares of this forest had been lost. A special report by MindaNews attributed this destruction to timber smuggling, illegal occupation, and expansion of industrial agricultural activities, in addition to the increase of multinational agribusiness and industrial plantations owned by local landed elites throughout the years (Mordeno, 2011). Additionally, industrial agribusiness, including piggeries, have reduced the quantity and quality of water sources,affecting the lives of the provinces' population, particularly indigenous communities.

Indigenous Food System

Ube (purple yam), taro, banana, *kamote* or cassava, *kasila*, *suli*, *binaki*, and corn are some of the major components of the diet of the Talaandig and Manobo indigenous peoples, alongside coconut oil. Traditionally, their crops did not rely on fertilizer, and their meals were free from preservatives. They ate wild boars, deer, chicken, fish, and monkeys – everything provided for them in the forests.

However, things have changed. Today, most vegetables and fruits are grown with chemical fertilizer, and may contain chemical preservatives. Instead of the healthier coconut oil, palm oil has become a common substitute for daily cooking. The community has also started to consume canned goods and instant noodles, which are among the cheapest and easiest meals to prepare. Additionally, most ingredients available at the market are no longer organic or fresh.

Previously, the Talaandig and Manobo used to source nearly all f of their food from their ancestral lands. Now, they have to purchase from the market or sari-sari stores. With soaring commodity prices, some indigenous women are left with no choice but to incur debts just to put food on the table, often incurring multiple debts to buy rice.

Kaugayan

Kauyagan, also known as *Pinamula*, meaning "planting for a living," is a traditional farming practice among the Manobo and Talaandig indigenous peoples. In this method, they plant vegetables and root crops in their yards. Historically, they collectively owned their land, but as more big corporations moved into the province, they have lost much of it to private plantations due to dishonest leasing agreements and false hope of economic prosperity as wage-earning farmworkers.

Despite reduced access to land, their traditional farming method continues. To ensure a plentiful crop, rituals are performed to honor Evevasuk, their god of agriculture. For the Talaandig group, this ritual is called *Panalagbugta*. Some practices also include splashing ash on the crops to deter pests. They also make sure to use top soil which they spray with the soap they used for laundry.

Indigenous women play a primary role and experience in these traditional farming practices. Elder women provide guidance to the younger generations on how to carry out these methods. Women make key decisions regarding what, where, and when they will plant, as well as delegation of tasks within the farming group.

Men assist with clearing the land, but most of the harvests are primarily for the sustenance of their family and others in the community. Any extra harvests are then sold to other farmers in the plantations or to the barangay officials. However, because farming is done in small plots, harvests are often insufficient foreven basic subsistence.

Adding to their challenges is the high cost of various goods and services. Many community members frequently search for alternate sources of income as a result. Most men take on multiple jobs to supplement their family's income. They work as harvesters of different raw materials such as banana, *lubi*, and *tapas*, earning Php 500-700 per day. Due to increasing prices of goods, women are now also looking for other sources of income, typically earning just around Php 200 per day to contribute to their husband's earnings. Some indigenous women have shared that they work on private plantations,cleaning the plastic packaging used for bananas.

The "Kaingin" of Hanunuo Mangyan from Oriental Mindoro

Oriental Mindoro is another province that is recognized as one of the most biodiverse places in the Philippines, located in the eastern section of Mindoro Island.
The island's rich and arable lands make it suitable for agriculture producing large quantities of rice, corn, coconut, vegetables, and various fruits such as calamansi, banana, rambutan, and marang or uloy. Additionally, Mindoro is a popular tourist destination for its beaches. However, the community is vulnerable to typhoons, which frequently bring strong winds and heavy rainfall. Despite these, they residents are also often victims of state neglect when it comes to disaster response and relief and media coverage.

The Hanunuo Mangyan make a modest living through shifting cultivation, known as *Kaingin*, where they harvest rice, corn, and vegetables, as well as gather tubers and wild plants. However, reports indicate that these indigenous communities are at risk of losing their culture and traditions due to the impacts of deforestation and other environmental issues. Large-scale private logging companies continue to operate in the province despite resistance from the people.

Recently, there have been recent reports of a devastating oil spill in the waters off Oriental Mindoro, threatening numerous coastal areas in CALABARZON, MIMAROPA, and Western Visayas, as well as impacting thousands of hectares of underwater natural resources.

Despite being known as peace-loving people, the Mangyan people actively defend their rights to their land and resist the exploitation of their national resources. They have a history of peaceful protests against logging companies and persist in continuing their traditional farming practices while advocating for its importance.

Kaingin

Kaingin is a traditional farming system that involves the shifting or the slash-and-burn clearing of forest for planting of agricultural and agroforestry crops. Unfortunately, non-indigenous peoples continue to discriminate against this practice due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. For the indigenous leaders, the destruction of land and natural resources is unthinkable, because this would mean loss of their livelihood and their life. When executed properly and ethically, kaingin can provide more benefits than harm to nature and the environment. Kaingin could improve the quality of the crops.

The Kaingin system consists of seven steps:

Step 1: *Gamas*
This initial step involves weeding the area designated for planting. Unwanted grass and plants are removed using an ax (*itak*).

Step 2: *Gamason*
In this step, the gathered unwanted plants and grass are rolled into one place in preparation of the next step.

Step 3: *Kahigo Kayig*
The surrounding area is cleaned to avoid unnecessarily setting them on fire. These surrounding areas are often planted with coconut, jackfruit, avocado, and banana.

Step 4: *Tutod* or *Sunog*
This step involves the burning of the gathered unwanted plants.

Step 5: *Durok*
The cleaning of the planting area that was set on fire to be used for replanting. This is also where they classify which plants and woods were not burned for it to be used again as firewood. In this phase, it is mostly women who conduct the *durok*.

Step 6: Kaingin

This process entails weeding out unwanted grass around healthy and growing crops until its harvest. Most Mangyan use this for corn and *balinghoy* or cassava.

Step 7: Garo

The post-kaingin process where farmers plant another seed in the soil that has been slashed and burned. This regenerative process allows them to grow additional crops for their livelihood and food resources.

In the Mangyan tribe, the Babaylan plays a crucial role in determining the optimal times for sowing, planting, and harvesting, which has helped the community maintain its way of life. The Mangyan also perform a ritual called *Pagdadaniw*, aimed at communicating with the gods for a beautiful and lush harvest, the cessation of calamities, and the growth of natural resources.he person who leads and performs this ritual is known as the *magdadaniw*.

The energy required for the *Pagdadaniw* is sourced from the forest itself, and the community fears that if the recent trend on deforestation continues, their spiritual ties to these resources might get severed as well. There have been instances of environmental destruction that have affected their places of worship.

Currently, there is no female *magdadaniw*, although the role can be passed down through generations and to women who choose to acquire such spiritual powers. Traditionally, women were well-regarded as interpreters of remarkable environmental changes due to their knowledge in the science of astronomy.

Challenges of Indigenous Women Farmers



It is clear that the common challenges and issues faced by these different indigenous women stem from a neoliberal system that aggravates their vulnerabilities to climate change and promotes false solutions that contradict indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices. They encounter threats related to gender inequality, climate change, political unrest, discrimination, and limited access to resources. Many identified poor access to resources, education, and income sources as the most significant obstacles in their efforts to protect the forests and maintain their indigenous practices.

On the intersection of climate crisis and corporate-led development and for-profit economic agenda

Climate change poses significant threats to the natural resource practices identified by the Erumanen ne Menuvu. The unpredictability of the rainy and dry seasons often leads to crops being planted at the wrong times, resulting in destruction from strong typhoon winds or scorching heat. Additionally, the changing landscape and declining soil quality have left them with a lack of knowledge about the organic way of eradicating pest infestations, such as worms, since this has never happened to them before.

Maintaining indigenous practices that traditionally helped combat natural climate changes has become increasingly difficult to the rapid changes brought by modernity and industrialization pushed by a neoliberal paradigm. In the past, the Erumanen ne Menuvu could predict when the rains would arrive; ow, the climate has become increasingly erratic. The land available for them to utilize is also affected by rising privatization and corporatization of land and agriculture. They once could plant freely on unowned land.

The quality of the land has also been affected, especially if there is a plantation nearby. They used to not need fertilizer, and their produce would still be bountiful and healthy. Now, they have to deal with frequent rat and insect infestations. Some community members have resorted to rituals involving offerings of rice and eggs to deter rats from eating their crops. Although certain groups remain committed to avoiding fertilizers, this choice often results in smaller crops. Additionally, they also used to not need a plow or an *araro*; instead, they just used *arek*, a makeshift sharp wood.

For the Manobo-Talaandig people, access to their lands continues to diminish as they become surrounded by private plantations, such as Kennember Plantation. These plantations use commercial pesticides, which affect the quality of the surrounding land. This usually forces the farmers to employ the same means because otherwise, their crops would be destroyed. The quality of their soil has already been affected. Despite these challenges, one of the interviewers maintains that they still try to make use of organic fertilizer as much as possible.

The presence of large private plantations not only degrades the soil but also causes divisions within the communities. The indigenous people's limited financial capacity in developing the land and the lack of support from the government often leave them vulnerable to being lured into promised economic prosperity offered by these plantations and other large businesses. Unfortunately, these promises can lead to the loss of land ownership through deceptive leasing agreements. When they attempt to defend their land, conflicts can arise – not only between corporations and communities but also within communities, especially when some members fall victim to the corporations' false promises.

This lack of access to land discourages community members from farming and learning traditional farming methods. Many younger members no longer inherit these practices, with some leaving the community to find other sources of income or pursue formal education. This threatens the erasure of indigenous practices and values that are significant in their identity.

For Hanunuo Mangyan, the situation is even more alarming. The next generation has developed a different outlook on the consumption and care of natural resources. Instead of learning and practicing their ancestral traditions, most children just want to work for "*damuong*" (*patag* or lowlands) rather than plant and harvest the lands entrusted to them by their parents. Worse, there have also been concerns on land grabbing. Some community members are anxious about their ancestral land's ownership in the future. They worry that their children may be tempted to sell their ancestral lands to private companies or public agencies in exchange for immediate financial gain.

Water access is also becoming increasingly problematic. The Hanunuo Mangyan typically get their water supply from a *bukal* (spring), but illegal logging companies are now constructing shelters near these vital sources. The community often receives threats from the staff of these companies, urging them away from their operations.

Moreover, the recent oil spill in Mindoro, caused by a private and corporate-owned ship, is one of the biggest issues faced by the Mangyan. They recognize the spill as a serious threat to their agri-fishery livelihoods, water resources, and biodiversity. Local and small-scale fishermen have been forced to stop their fishing operations in the meantime.

Compounding crises in soaring prices of commodities and the lack of basic social support and services from the state

The Erumanen ne Menuvu are also heavily impacted by the rising prices of rice. Suragad offers alternatives like cassava and banana; however, the current economic system necessitates selling some of their harvests. They typically sell their crops to buyers who purchase in bulk, but the buyers often come to them, as it is not part of their culture to sell. Their husbands' meager income as farmworkers in corn and banana plantations is also usually not enough to support their families.

Most community members do not receive any form of assistance. Government interventions often bypass them due to local politics, where officials are selective to people they provide assistance. On the rare occasions that assistance does reach them, it often consists of items they do not need. For example, the Department of Agriculture gave them soil fertilizers and pesticides that are not organic, so they were not able to use them.

The situation is also comparable to the experience of the Manobo-Talaandig people. When household income falls short, they often resort to microfinance lending mechanisms, such as the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, Inc., which provides loans in rural areas. They request capital that must be repaid weekly.

These lending mechanisms can lead to problems, as some struggle to replay what they had loaned, which may force them to sell a portion of their land in order to just cover their debts. To pay off these loans, they have to sell bananas, copra, and other crops grown on their small plots instead of keeping them for food. Additionally, many resort to weaving *banig* (sleeping mats), hats, and baskets made from materials like *romblon* and nito to generate extra income.

Meanwhile, the Hanunuo Mangyan also face a lack of support from their local government, which prioritizes ecotourism. This focus on profit and tourism has led to the development of numerous resorts, further affecting their already minimal and difficult access to water. There are also many misconceptions surrounding their Kaingin system, which could lead to it being banned by local authorities. Kaingin is often perceived as harmful to the environment and causes deforestation, leading to criminalization and penalties. However, when compared to the massive destruction that other extractive activities that the government allows, the environmental impact of kaingin is miniscule.

On the role of men and women

Primarily, Mangyan men continue to serve as leaders within the tribe, presiding over meetings. Traditionally, Mangyan women are not allowed to hold leadership roles;. Their participation in meetings typically requires the presence of men to guide them in their decision-making. IN some tribes, women are even restricted from sitting in chairs alongside men, and are only allowed to sit on the ground.

However, during a focus group discussion with Hanunuo Mangyan women, they recognize the significant role women play within their tribe, particularly in the context of their homes and the Kaingin process. First and foremost, women are entrusted with the allocated portion of their family's ancestral land, and they are also responsible for allocating land to their children. They also initiate and lead the kaingin process, making critical decisions regarding the location and size of the areas to be cleared. They also choose which crops to plant in specific farming locations and seasons, considering their household's food supply and livelihood. In maintaining crop areas, women are also taking the lead. In general, women of Hanunuo Mangyan community are both at an advantage and disadvantage. They play a critical role in the preservation of the culture, popular growth, household management, and community development.

The interactions of rural and indigenous women with their natural resources are closely related to the social responsibilities historically assigned to them.. Women primarily rely on natural resources for food, water, fuel, and medicine, among other things, while men use them to generate economic revenue for their families. Having access to land and water means being able to feed their families and kids. Despite prevalent gender prejudices that may restrict women to domestic roles, they still play a variety of significant roles in the economy, in communal life, in indigenous traditional governing institutions, and in the management of natural resources. Their roles are proven and they persist through time.

Importance of the narratives of indigenous women's climate solutions

For the Erumanen ne Menuvu women, Suragad remains intrinsically important because it provides them with daily sustenance. Their children enjoy better health due to the vegetables they eat. The Arumenen from Banisilan are specifically proud that there is little report on the issue of malnourishment in their area. The Erumanen ne Menuvu's continuous practice of small-scale organic farming, led by women, shows that there exists an alternative way of production and living that is much more beneficial to marginalized people rather than the imposed measures of development.



In the story of the Manobo-Talaandig people, *kauyagan* helps indigenous women provide nutritious food for their families. For them, these are traditions that should not disappear, believing that failure to adhere to them could result in illness. Clearly, many of them still wish to preserve their traditions and customs as they are forced to navigate the current changes in the world.

Moreover, the importance of the Mangyan women-led solution is clearer than ever in the story of Anas Lubeng. During the pandemic, Anas Lubeng, one of the Mangyan women LILAK has worked with, relied heavily on farming and planting in their kaingin area, as well as going to the forest to get supplies for home renovation to prepare for the typhoon season. Shifting priorities in farming from cash crops and exportation to subsistence proves to be more effective.

The value the Mangyan people place on communal cooperation is also a significant lesson. They even have a term for communal cooperation – "Saknong," Which promotes the practice of helping one another and ensuring their families' survival. This practice within their tribal community helped Anas Lubeng and her children survive. The difficulties societies experience in managing their diminishing or dwindling resources are most acutely felt by women, as they have to supply the food and water that their family and neighbors need.

These three narratives from different indigenous communities illustrate an existing way of living that contrasts against the norms dictated by a system that prioritizes profit and economic progress over people-centered development. The Erumanen ne Menuvu's long-standing practice of Suragad, led by Erumanen women as main caretakers of the land, reflects their commitment to sustainable living. The Manobo-Talaandig people's Kauyagan continue to manifest their spiritual connection to their land. The Mangyan people of Mindoro emphasize the need for nuanced discussions around their practice of Kaingin,showing how their indigenous practices on agriculture actually provide more care for the environment.

These women-led practices are sustainable, responsive to the needs of the community, and help take care of the land and the environment. These are antithetical to a corporatized industrial agriculture that benefits only the few and aggravates the climate issues.



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Rural and indigenous women's interactions with their natural resources are deeply intertwined with the social responsibilities historically bestowed upon them. Their inherited spirituality, which sees lands as sacred, also pushes them to ensure that no harm will be done. Indigenous women rely on natural resources as sources of food, water, fuel, and medicine, livelihood, and spiritual connection, among other things. Access to land, water, and food enables them to fulfill their duties to their family and the kids. They value their connection to the land, believing that its preservation ensures the life and development of the next generation as well.

Women play significant roles in the economy, communal life, indigenous traditional governing institutions, and in the management of natural resources. Their inclusion in all forms of decision-making is important.



Supporting the active participation of indigenous women in traditional practices of caring for the environment has the potential to: (1) make visible and propagate indigenous peoples' concept of community-based practices of caring for their environment, (2) open opportunities for the adaptation of a framework that has an indigenous lens in mainstream agricultural and forest management systems, (3) recognize the role of indigenous women's leadership in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and (4) allow indigenous women to learn from each and build solidarity across indigenous communities. Elevating the discourse around indigenous women's human rights and culturally-responsive environmental and climate action is crucial in achieving social transformation.

As the climate crisis escalates and negatively impacts people's food systems, the shared narratives of the Erumanen ne Menuvu, Manobo-Talaandig, and the Mangyan people highlight the urgent need to defend indigenous peoples' right to ancestral domains and recognize indigenous women's role in this advocacy. Their indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices and right to self-determination must be supported and protected.

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THAILAND

Women-Led Actions and Initiatives on Gender-Justice Climate Solutions in Thailand: Unveiling Resilience in the Face of Adversity

Written by Pranom Somwong, Protection International Thailand, on behalf of Community-based Women Human Rights Defenders in Thailand

Introduction

Amidst political uncertainty, economic distress, and environmental challenges, Thailand is home to a group of unsung climate justice defenders — The Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective. This Collective, formed by networks of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) across the country, includes women affected by 19 issues. Comprising mothers, caregivers, indigenous women, landless farmers, urban and rural poor, garment workers, sex workers, and young activists, they stand united, leading initiatives to combat climate change, and champion gender-based solutions.

The strength of diversity

Nestled in the heart of Thailand, the Collective represents 19 sectors and emerges as a beacon of strength. They fight for community land title, resist dam and mining projects, and challenge mega-development initiatives.

Their activism extends to organizing urban poor movements, advocating for migrants and refugees, supporting conflict-ridden regions, and demanding justice for women with disabilities. As part of the Global Women's Strike these unrecognized leaders also campaign for a CARE income – a testament to their dedication to preserving life, land, and livelihoods.

Climate challenges and gender injustice

Thriving despite a capitalist dictatorship, these women rise against economic inequality, advocating for the rights of economically marginalized communities. In rural areas, where 79% of the poor reside, land ownership remains concentrated among a few, perpetuating inequality. The Collective challenges the status quo by confronting issues ranging from land occupancy to natural resource management and climate justice.

A call for change

In the intricate tapestry of Thailand's political landscape, the Collective's message is crystal clear: the May 14, 2023 election shapes their path, but their resolve remains unshaken. They persist in the fight against injustice and inequality, advocating for inclusive democracy. Their mission extends beyond resistance; it ignites the flames of transformation, empowering women at the grassroots level, and envisioning alternative possibilities.

Nurturing change

Grassroots Initiatives: These women are not merely resisting; they are transforming communities. With a focus on ecological well-being, they celebrate the potential that arises from collective efforts, nurturing winds of change. Supporting women-led actions and initiatives on gender-based climate solutions and a call for A Care Income for mothers and caregivers is not just a demand; it represents a plot of land, a step towards ensuring food security, and a cornerstone in building a healthier ecological tomorrow.

Realities of Resistance

The Collective faces numerous challenges, with many women confronting multiple charges. Judicial harassment has become a weapon wielded by the government and corporations, consuming lives and resources. Yet, their commitment to caring for family and land persists – a testament to their unwavering dedication to a sustainable future.

Rural Indigenous, mothers, and carers have been organizing and fighting for inclusion in public consultations and the decision-making process, especially regarding issues of land occupancy and management of natural resources, and climate justice.

Indigenous women in our WHRDs Collective express that activities such as collecting firewood, honey, or mushrooms from their forests – which was their way of life – are now being treated as serious crimes. Indigenous communities who have resisted are severely punished, whether by intimidation, judicial harassment, enforced disappearance, or extrajudicial killings.

Attacks and death threats against communities who are resisting the devastation and poisoning caused by mining operations are far too common. According to "For Those Who Died Trying," Protection International in Thailand's documentation records 62 grassroots men and women have been killed in the last 30 years while trying to protect the planet.

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Many women in WHRDs Collective are facing a staggering 570 charges over the last eight years, as the government and companies wield judicial harassment as a weapon. Women under charges find their lives consumed by the need to prepare for and travel for court appearances. They lose what little income they had and struggle to find time to continue their work in the movement. Nevertheless, the work of caring for family and land cannot stop.

Those who care for people and the land prioritize human health and collective well-being, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Healthy soils lead to healthy, safe, and nutritious food, but women need access to land before they can implement natural farming practices. Most women human rights defenders in the Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective are dedicated to caring for land, the environment, and the people. They fight to get access to land first and foremost to ensure food security to their families and communities. Mother and caregivers of both people and the planet are leading the way toward a healthy ecological tomorrow.

A Care Income for those who nurture people and the natural world would allow women in the Collective the extra time needed to care for everyone. A Care Income could also represent a plot of land. Investing in women increases the amount of food in the world.

Women and caregivers performing care work play a crucial role in improving lives in low-carbon ways. They are leaders in the resistance to fossil capital enterprises, land rights, environmental justice, and can help build bridges between women, mother/carers, and farmers in rich and poor countries through the international grassroots movement like Global Women's Strike and Resister.

There is a wealth of good practice on the ground and the winning story, as seen in this paper.

The community of women human rights defenders of Khao Lao Yai-Pha Jun Dai Forest Conservation Group

The Dongmafai Group's 27-year struggle against quarry mining resulted in the reclamation of a mining zone, transforming it into a community forest.

The declaration of their victory and reclamation of justice came after the expiration of the company's forest utilization permit for quarry mining on September 3, 2020. After this date, the company no longer held valid legal permission to utilize the mining zone, forcing a halt to all operations.

The affected mining operations occupied 175 Rai (28 hectares) of reserve forest on Huak Cliff, located in Dong Mafai Sub District, Suwannakuha District, within the Nong Bua Lampu Province of Northeast Thailand.

The community performed various rituals to mark this significant moment, including the ordination of forestry – a traditional ritual aimed at protecting the forest from invaders – a declaration of the community's determination to safeguard all the cliffs and forest from mining, a tribute to those who lost their lives defending the community and its resources They also held a Bai Sri Suu Kwan, a traditional Thai blessing ceremony.



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For over two decades, the community women human rights defenders (W/HRDs) of Khao Lao Yai-Pha Jun Dai Forest Conservation Group have actively opposed mining operations due to the negative impacts on locals' access to food sources in the forest, the damage to buildings due to debris caused by explosions at the mine, and its consequential pollution. Between 1995 and 1999, four environmental W/HRDs within the conservation group were killed for their activism work, yet no perpetrators have been held responsible for the crimes, further feeding the vicious cycle of impunity. This historical moment signifies a new chapter of the Dong Mafai.



The community have the grand dream: to protectall the cliffs and mountains in Khao Lao Yai-Pha Jun Dai from mining forever, while establishing a strong foundation for sustainable development in Dong Mafai. Following the complete closure of the mine, they have an important mission to fulfill: full rehabilitation of the forest and to revive the prosperity of the Huak Cliff, which was once destroyed. They envision developingDong Mafai into an an important ecological and archaeological attraction site.



This mission is a legacy they intend to pass on to future generations who will carry the flags of victory into a brighter future.

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Situation of Women Landless Farmers Thailand



Agriculture accounts for a significant portion of Thailand's economy, yet a quarter of the 5.9 million farming households do not own land. The Southern Peasants' Federation of Thailand (SPFT), formed in 2008, fights for community land rights. Women like Choosri Olakig, endure unwaged farming work and face challenges accessing support. This struggle is underscored by tragic events, such as the murders of women leading the fight, including Ms. Monta Chukaew and Ms. Pranee Boonrak in 2012.

Despite these challenges, the SPFT achieved a groundbreaking victory by revoking title deeds unlawfully issued to oil palm plantations. These triumphs showcase the power of collective action led by resilient women.

SPFT's demands and organic farming: The SPFT occupies public land and advocates for land reform and self-determination over natural resources. Once occupied by a palm oil company, SPFT transformed the land through organic farming. Their demands include a ban on toxic agricultural chemicals, guaranteed fair prices for organic produce, and support for local seeds. Solar energy initiatives highlight their commitment to sustainable practices.





Khon Rak Ban Kerd

The Khon Rak Ban Kerd (KRBK) is a grassroots movement that emerged in Loei, Thailand, in response to a proposed gold mining project by Akara Resources Public Company Limited. The Ani gold mine project, which was expected to impact local communities and the environment, faced strong opposition. Formed in 2009, the KRBK movement, comprising villagers, farmers, and activists, organized protests, blockades, and lawsuits, ultimately forcing the abandonment of the project in 2016.





Since successfully closing the mines, the KRBK now focused on rehabilitating the environment, health, diversity, and well-being of the affected communities. They continue to demand adequate remedies from both the company and state for all villagers in the six areas affected by mining activities. Evidence has already shown that these communities have suffered from the adverse effects of mining activities for the past 15 years.

The KRBK group believes that to solve the problem, solutions must start at the root causes – namely, the gold mining activities and the concession given to the mining company.



To bring back the happiness of the people of the affected villages, they assert that solutions should be based on the principle of respecting community rights and the people's legitimate right to preserve and manage natural resources and the environment. This approach must align with their traditions, ways of life, and the principles of a sufficient economy and sustainable conservation of the environment.

The process must be fair, transparent, and accountable. It can only be fair when the rights and opinions of the people are respected, and people's participation is ensured. The KRBK will not stop fighting for justice and will continue to use peaceful and nonviolent action to achieve its objectives.

Demand for Relocation of Sugar and Biomass Power Plants: Protecting Thung Kula's Rice Development and Ensuring Public Participation

Mothers, women, and HRDs from the Hak Thung Kula People's Network demand the relocation of sugar and biomass power plants to protect Thung Kula's rice development. Their opposition to these projects is rooted in concerns about environmental impacts and the potential conversion of prime agricultural land. The public hearing process has been criticized for its bias, raising questions about transparency and public participation.







The Ongoing Struggle: Protecting Land and People

Indigenous communities in Thailand face threats from mining and environmental degradation. The Collective stands as a bulwark, advocating for access to land and protecting indigenous rights. However, this resistance comes at a cost, with documented records of grassroots individuals paying the ultimate price for defending the planet.

In the Omkoi community, indigenous members are actively resisting a proposed dangerous coal mine. This demonstrates the threats faced by frontline communities around the world resisting fossil fuels and other forms of climate destruction. Plaintiffs representing more than 600 villagers have filed a lawsuit to revoke an environmental impact assessment (EIA) conducted and approved more than ten years ago. In September last year, the court issued a temporary injunction against this EIA, marking a legal victory, although many young indigenous women and HRDs still face threats.

Members of the Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective exemplify the power of collective action, successfully managing to grow healthy food, and sustain their community.

The Urgency of Care Income

The Collective's call for a Care Income resonates through their experiences. As these women Face legal charges and sacrifice their personal well-being, they demand recognition for their invaluable contributions. A Care Income is not just financial support; it represents acknowledgment of the critical role played by women and caregivers in shaping a sustainable future.

The WHRDs Collective continues to demand that the Thailand government respect community rights and grant access to land. The government must also protect and support the struggle for the environment and livelihood, rehabilitate soil contaminated by toxic substances and salinized by potash mining, protect water supplies, mountains, seas, and ensure that the air in which we breathe does not endanger future generations.

Conclusion

As Thailand faces various challenges, the Community Women Human Rights Defenders Collective emerges as a force for change. Their resilience, determination, and transformative initiatives showcase the power of women-led actions in combating climate change and advocating for gender-based solutions.

In their unwavering commitment, they illuminate a path towards a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future. The group's call is for the public to invest directly in mothers and carers, grassroots environmental human rights Defenders and their movement through women-led actions and initiatives on gender-justice climate solutions and Care Income.

Not only are they best placed to provide the care for people and defense of their communities and environment, they are also key to building the systems and structures that will safeguard human rights and climate justice through this crisis and the next. In these uncertain times, we must remain persistent in our commitment to democracy, justice and human rights. This will not be possible without wWomen-lLed aActions and iInitiatives on Gender-Justice Climate Solutions and Care Income.

It is critical to recognize the cost of living crisis as an integral part of the climate crisis and stand in solidarity with mothers, carers, and others at the forefront of these struggles understanding that our challenges are interconnected. Those who wield power will put spokes in the wheels of democracy, of justice, of fairness. In addition, these days, their voices are growing louder. Times of insecurity and crisis are also the times that can strengthen solidarity and create a new human rights culture that values care work in the name of dignity and equity for all.

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