



Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

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RECOGNIZING WOMENS' RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS TOWARDS GENUINE DEVELOPMENT: GOING BEYOND MAINSTREAMING GENDER

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ASIA PACIFIC FORUM ON WOMEN, LAW AND DEVELOPMENT (APWLD)

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Global economic trends and policies in the Asia Pacific region have severely negatively impacted on the situation and status of women and girls, particularly those from ethnic, national, and religious minorities, Dalit and indigenous groups, by increasing feminisation of poverty and environmental destruction.

Globalization of state economies continues to exacerbate inequalities between women and men in employment opportunities. Globalization relies heavily on the exploitation of cheap labor which is generally the labor of women and girls. Women continue to be pushed into the informal sector of the economy and exposed to increasing levels of poverty.

The vulnerability of women and girls, particularly those from marginalized, indigenous, ethnic and caste groups, is increased when, in the name of economic development, states and MNCs divest local communities of their lands and resources, threatening their rights to self determination, food security and livelihood. This impacts particularly on women in their role as food producers for their families and communities. The resulting decreased rural employment opportunities has also led to increased migration and trafficking of women.

Most countries in Asia Pacific follow the development path of addressing poverty through generation of employment and instigating projects that attract foreign investment. Many States claim there is employment in large-scale mining, industrial plantations, industrial farming of shrimps, tuna; mega dams, and mega energy projects, i.e. coal, geothermal. On this basis our national governments have systematically allowed the entry of transnational companies and international finance companies, with the passage of national laws, rendering our natural resources almost free for their exploitation.

Experiences of such exploitations in the region have proven that they directly contribute to the increasing destruction of local environments and incidences of natural disaster which have a disproportionate impact on women.

Consequently, there is a lot of talk on how to *mainstream gender perspectives into*, or how to *engender*, the processes of environmental management. A lot of projects are being conceptualized and put in the pipeline for investigating the different impacts of natural disasters on, and coping mechanisms of, women and men. All of these efforts are laudable.

However, the women of Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), believe that there should be a more progressive action that has to be taken. The causes of natural disasters should be seriously investigated.

While *human activities* have been identified as contributing significantly to and exacerbating natural disasters, and worsening the vulnerabilities of rural poor and indigenous communities, we have to be more specific in identifying what types of *human activities* and who are at the helm of these activities. This will make our responses more direct and more effective.

The life stories of women from the Asia Pacific region show that increasingly over the years, disasters occur in areas where large-scale, commercial and development projects are

implemented. Most often than not, these are projects of transnational companies and international finance institutions.

For example, in the Philippines, large-scale mining by Marcopper, a Canadian mining company, has severely affected the fishing livelihood of Marinduque province. The collapse of their tailings dam has rendered the major rivers ecologically dead. Similarly, large-scale dams in the Mekong region and in South Asia have contributed to widespread flooding, land degradation and landslides in local areas.

But we are told: this is the trade-off of development.

Such projects, purported to be development projects, are situated in areas mostly populated by rural poor and indigenous communities. Employment and progress have always been the promise in exchange for their lands and community lives. But, as documented cases in the Asia Pacific region would show, these promises have never been fulfilled.

Worse than these unfulfilled promises are the realities of disaster. One happening after the other— floods, soil erosion, fish kills, water pollution. The disaster that has not been given enough attention – the *disaster* of community disintegration and the associated violence.

We all know for a fact, that in situations like this, it is the women who are made more vulnerable than ever before – financially, physically, emotionally and psychologically. They are increasingly exposed to risks of violence. They continue to bear the responsibility of taking care of the family. For example, in the Philippines, some women have been forced to take on *isang putok-isang salop* (one orgasm-one cup of rice), as a survival mechanism for their families, where they offer sex to men in charge of the distribution of relief goods. There is inequitable access to relief resources between women and men, and between women of differing ethnicities classes and castes. Such impacts serve to perpetuate inequitable development and cycles of poverty in effected areas.

So we ask - are these still part of the trade-offs of development? We believe not.

As we aim for genuine development, that is based on the principles of equity and sustainability, and gives full recognition to women's human rights, we urge the states to:

- ***address the disproportionate impact of poverty on women and their enjoyment of human rights by recognizing women's rights to an adequate standard of living, food, housing, education, health care and the right to work within just and favorable conditions, as articulated in ICESCR and CEDAW;***
- ***focus on alternative development frameworks that prioritise the principles of sustainability, equity and gender sensitivity and that aim at benefiting local communities;***
- ***ensure adequate measures are taken to prevent and redress violence against women occurring during and after natural disasters;***
- ***ensure that women, particularly women from marginalized groups are included in all decision-making bodies and processes related to natural resource management, disaster management, development programs and poverty reduction programs;***
- ***recognize the intersectionality of vulnerabilities women face in poverty and natural disasters by disaggregating data according to gender, ethnicity, caste, age and other factors; and***
- ***translate the CSW outcomes into national levels laws and polices, and into national languages for local dissemination.***

For further information contact APWLD at apwld@apwld.org or at <http://www.apwld.org>