



Climate Justice Briefs: Rural Women's Adaptation Strategies

Philippines

Lack of government adaptation measures among indigenous women and the need for participation of local communities



About the project

This 2011 participatory action research was conducted to document the impact of climate change in our communities, discuss how climate change exacerbates gender inequalities, and present our policy demands to promote meaningful change for women in our community.

Research was conducted through three communities in Abra province in the Cordillera region.

Impact of climate change on indigenous women

Indigenous women in the mountainous Cordillera region are largely peasants engaged in subsistence agriculture. They are highly dependent on natural resources and therefore acutely vulnerable to climate change.

As subsistence peasants, rural men and women traditionally carry out physically difficult labour, from clearing and land preparation, to planting, harvesting, and seed selection and storage. Most households are involved in rice farming. Other important food sources include fishing, hunting, gathering, and swidden farming, a traditional occupation of indigenous women. A variety of fruits and vegetables are planted, and serve as an important source of food for families.

Climate change and the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather have led to flooding, both prolonged and shortened seasons, soil erosion, and intense heat. These have contributed to reduced harvest, increased pests and disease, food insecurity, poverty, and water shortage. Reduced yields have been reported in rice harvest, swidden farms, and wild food sources.

Typhoons destroy rice paddies and swidden farms, and women fear the impacts of such events will only worsen with time as storm frequency and intensity increase.

Extreme weather has also been blamed for health issues, including increased coughs and colds among children and the elderly, and an increase in diseases in farmers.

In times of food shortage or economic crisis, women usually shoulder the burden of ensuring food for their family. They turn to various forms of remedial measures, including migrating outside the community to work as daily wage labourers. Further, as the economic situation worsens, women sell their swidden produce rather than keep it for family consumption.

Community adaptation practices

Local adaptation practices acknowledge the subsistent nature of these communities, and seek to protect area resources in the wake of climate change. Principles of sharing, respect, reciprocity, cooperation, and sustainability guide community responses to climate change.

Corporate mining: Compounding the threat of climate change

While representing only 6% of the total land area of the Philippines, the Cordillera region accounts for 25% of the country's gold-bearing ore reserves, and 39% of the copper-bearing reserves. More than 60% of the region is covered by ongoing mining operations. All three research communities are threatened by mining projects, and areas with long-standing mining operations are particularly vulnerable to soil erosion and earth movement caused by mining activities, including road-widening and removal of forest cover.



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Weather events & local effects of climate change

The Asian Development Bank estimates if no measures are taken to counter climate change, rice yields in the Philippines could drop by 50% relative to 1990 levels.

The Cordillera region is vulnerable to climate change on multiple fronts. The region's topography makes it vulnerable to landslides and erosion, which are especially acute during typhoons and periods of prolonged rain. The region has experienced increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather, including strong winds and rains, irregular temperatures, and erratic weather patterns, including prolonged or shortened seasons.

For example, one community has passed a resolution to prevent the use of destructive fishing practices, and requires individuals to adhere to strict fishing and hunting schedules. Meanwhile, women in all three communities have mobilised to call for the regulation of local logging and implementation of reforestation measures.

Women's unique knowledge about food and agriculture has enabled community survival during climate change, including their contribution to community-level adjustments of farming techniques. Women farmers report crop diversification, inter-cropping, and multi-cropping as locally-developed and tested practices that ensure crop diversity and availability of food resources. Crop diversification also reduces the impact of pest infestation and improves soil fertility and viability.

Traditional community support systems continue to serve an important role for communities facing impacts of climate change. Community pooling of labour is especially valuable in times of hardship, and women report that the community is easily mobilised for endeavours such as clearing landslides, rescuing crops, and repairing canals and damaged homes.



However, not all adaptations have been positive. Food shortages have pushed some farmers to use damaging practices, such as chemical pesticides and destructive fishing methods.

Women in all three communities currently participate in organisations that are forums to discuss pressing issues, network with other organisations, and mobilise collective action to address food insecurity. The presence of these organisations bolsters women's ability to meaningfully participate in community adaptation measures.

Policy implications

There is an urgent need for the local and national government to formulate and implement adaptation and mitigation plans and ensure the participation of peasant and indigenous women in the development of local climate action plans. Adaptation measures should embrace principles of sustainability and employ practices suitable to the needs of these women and their communities.

The government should intervene to reduce the impact of extractive and polluting activities such as commercial mining and agriculture, particularly when resisted by local communities.

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