**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) 2020-2022**

**“Amplifying Marginalised Women’s Voices and Strengthening Movements**

**for Women’s Rights to Peace and Democratic Participation”**

**Background**

In Asia and the Pacific region, the rise of authoritarian and fascist regimes, fueled by patriarchy and fundamentalisms exacerbate human rights violations of women, including their rights to peace and democratic participation. Women’s voices have been historically ignored in decision and policy-making structures. More recently, women’s rights to peace and democratic participation are severely violated as a result of states’ failure to protect and uphold their human rights to the outright state -sponsored and -sanctioned military violence.

Across the region, the march of neoliberal globalisation intensifies as multinational corporations and their domestic cohorts consolidate their monopoly and control of lands, resources, markets, and cheap labour in pursuit of their never-ending greed and profits. In turn, states are more aggressively wielding the tools of militarism to take over territories, enable massive land- and resource-grabs, and to quell unrest and dissent by women and their communities.

States use military (and paramilitary) power, police and security forces to protect and advance the interests of the ruling political and economic elites, often in collusion with foreign investors’ interests over peoples’ human rights. In many countries across the region, states are increasingly using open military violence against women, their communities, and entire peoples on behalf of these interests. This includes such practices as the militarisation of territories, forced evictions and displacement, harassment and persecution, and extrajudicial killings, especially when women and their communities resist these forms of oppression and defend their rights.

Militarism paves the way for corporate plunder, depriving women, especially in rural communities including indigenous, migrant and urban poor (RIMUP) women of their rights to land and food sovereignty; denying indigenous peoples’ rights to their territories; and devastating traditional livelihoods which force many women to migrate and engage in low-paying, informal, and often degrading forms of work elsewhere. In urban areas, communities are forcibly evicted to make way for “development projects” and resettled in areas of even poorer living conditions.

The utter reliance by states on militarism is laid bare even during the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across the world. Instead of addressing the urgent needs for food, livelihood and services by RIMUP women and their communities suffering from the unprecedented health and economic crisis, states have resorted to militaristic responses driven more by the motivation of social control rather than social protection. In many places, women and men are harassed, beaten, or otherwise maltreated for such infractions as breaking curfew or quarantine in order to obtain food, revealing an unabashed zeal for abuse of power among the perpetrators bred by patriarchal and fundamentalist beliefs. Strict home quarantines have also led to rising cases of domestic violence and abuse (a less documented aspect of the societal effects of the pandemic). Through it all, states only turn to greater repression instead of instituting the necessary structural reforms to be able to effectively deal with the crisis.

Fascist and authoritarian regimes also use military violence with even greater impunity. These regimes rise to and maintain power by fueling racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts in various parts of the region.[[1]](#footnote-0) These conflicts are tacitly sanctioned, if not outright supported, by these regimes in order to pander to political bases and justify military expansion. Worst, ultra-nationalist and military governments commit mass persecution of ethnic and religious minorities violating their rights to ethnicity, distinct identity and self-determination. Authoritarian governments have also increasingly used digital technology, such as electronic surveillance and internet shutdowns, to intimidate, prosecute, or silence critics, and drown out political dissent undermining communities’ freedom of expression.

Of all these rights violations, women and children invariably bear the impacts most heavily. Driven by patriarchal worldviews, the suppression of justified resistance to these threats and the persecution of entire peoples lead to the worst atrocities against women: women and girls experience systematic rape and sexual abuse, among other forms of gender-based violence, on top of the heavier overall impacts of such displacement and destitution. Altogether, the denial and deprivation of these rights all serve as barriers to the fulfillment and enjoyment of women’s right to peace.

Territorial grabbing for (foreign) military bases severely impacts women and girls in Asia and the Pacific as they experience enormous cases of rape, abductions and murders all by military personnels. On the other hand, the legacy of civil wars and armed conflicts has left women who still continue to demand government accountability and remedies to the injustices and wartime violations they experienced. The legacy of war continues to cause hardships, particularly on conflict-affected women. This is worsened when women are excluded in peace processes, shaping transitional justice policies and national reconciliation efforts.

As states increasingly employ military violence, so do civilian governments become increasingly dominated by their militaries, further entrenching the neoliberal and militarist policies that deny women’s human rights. Larger and larger portions of national budgets are also allocated to military spending at the expense of funding for basic social services, including health, education, and housing. Within a span of 10 years, military spending in Asia and the Pacific region has increased by 52 percent to 392 billion USD in 2018[[2]](#footnote-1) . As a percentage of GDP, aggregated military spending by Asia-Pacific nations has risen from 2000 to 2018 and projects to be nearly at par with North American military spending in 2020; meanwhile, on average, Asia-Pacific countries spend less than one-third of the global average of 11.2 percent of GDP on social protection.[[3]](#footnote-2)

States are accountable to put an end to this violence and conflict under international human rights [laws](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.3/71/L.29) through the just resolution of grievances and enforcement of women’s human rights. Ironically, however, women’s resistance and dissent to these injustices is not only violently suppressed but also persecuted by governments in the name of development, national interest and sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic growth, to name a few. Military force is often used to deny legitimate claims to sovereignty and self-determination of peoples in many parts of the region. This is compounded by more recent measures including laws and judicial systems geared towards the increasing repression of women’s civil and political rights. For instance, the denial of citizenship rights of minorities and various “anti-terrorism” laws are aimed at suppressing women human rights defenders, advocates and organisations. Women Human Rights Defenders and their communities are systematically targeted for harassment, intimidation, disinformation, fabricated and malicious charges and open violence to undermine their freedom of speech, organising, and assembly. As a result, women’s democratic spaces are shrinking, if not completely lost.

Despite all of these challenges, growing resistance is evident among women in rural communities and indigenous, migrant, and urban poor (RIMUP) women across the region. They continue to speak out against rights violations, development aggression, and curtailment of civil liberties, and challenge existing political and governance systems that suppress women’s voices, both within and outside of these formal structures. It is critical to amplify women’s voices, strengthen grassroots feminist movements and build solidarity to collectively assert women’s rights to peace and democratic participation.

**The power of grassroots feminist movements**

APWLD believes that ‘development’ is supposed to benefit the poor and marginalised women of the region, who are best able to identify both the problems and solutions. Since 2013, APWLD together with RIMUP women’s organisations and other movements in the region has made a unified call for **Development Justice**. Development Justice promotes peoples’ rights, dignity, wellbeing and solidarity while addressing the inequalities of wealth, power, and resources between countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women.

APWLD believes that in order to challenge the current development model and to claim women’s human rights, a strong and autonomous feminist women’s movement is needed. It must extend to strengthening women’s capacity to exercise real power and control over their own lives and the terms by which they engage with social, political, and economic structures. They must be supported to build their capacity to document the impacts of lack of access to land and resources, decent work, and basic social services; have meaningful engagement in the decision-making processes governing these issues; form strong local feminist movements that work with other movements to demand accountability from states and corporations; and push governments in tackling the systemic barriers to women’s economic, development, and democratic rights.

**FPAR as tool for movement building**

APWLD firmly believes that feminist movements, grounded in local struggle and experiences, are the key to making real changes. Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) is rooted in **movement building**. Through FPAR women collect evidence about what is happening in their communities and collectively take action. FPAR is conducted by and for women. With strong, locally produced research and documented evidence, women challenge rights violations and gendered power imbalances. FPAR is a potent tool for enabling women to take control of development agendas and programmes that are affecting their lives.

Through FPAR, women are capacitated to assess the laws and policies, norms and traditions, and power structures through which the forces of globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarism, and patriarchy dominate their lives, and to identify and utilise platforms for engagement on challenging these structures and advancing their rights. Grassroots partners and co-researchers should be able to demonstrate that the strategies and solutions that they are working on amplify collective voices, strengthen political activism and solidarity of movements, and pursue state and corporate accountability on women’s access to and control over land and resources, food sovereignty, democratic participation, and a just peace for women and their communities.

The FPAR methodology has been used across several APWLD programmes and thematic areas since 2013. Guided by its nine (9) [FPAR principles,](https://apwld.org/feminist-participatory-action-research-fpar/) it aims to facilitate democratic, non-hierarchical mutual learning processes situated in the struggle for social transformation. It emphasises local knowledge, shares and develops knowledge and skills based on experiences of participants. It looks at the power relations in our daily lives and society and challenges the gendered power asymmetry which intersects women’s socially/culturally constructed locations and multiple identities.

Our principal purpose of doing FPAR is to change systems and structures to improve the lives of women. We interpret ‘Change’ as ‘Structural Change’ or change to structures and systems of oppression particularly patriarchy and the fusion of patriarchy with globalisation, fundamentalisms and militarism. The participants are not objects on whom research is conducted but rather the subjects of the inquiry who set the agenda, participate in the data collection and analysis, and control the use of the outcomes, including deciding what future actions to take or directions to go in.

**Focus areas of the FPAR**

APWLD will support local organisations and their communities to conduct FPAR on **“Amplifying Marginalised Women’s Voices and Strengthening Movements for Women’s Rights to Peace and Democratic Participation.”** This collaborative work aims to increase evidence-based advocacy, amplify women’s voices and build the capacity to be effective organisers, advocates, and campaigners for women’s human rights.

For 2020-2022, the FPAR will focus on the **impacts of militarism and the suppression of democratic spaces on women’s right to peace and democratic participation, as well as the actions and strategies that women are taking to defend and advance their rights.** The FPAR notes that, per the UN General Assembly Resolution on the “[Declaration on the Right to Peace,](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.3/71/L.29) “everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realised,” and that the “cause of peace require(s) the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.”

**RIMUP Women in Post-War and Conflict Situations**

The FPAR shall document and investigate the various ***human rights violations and abuses arising from open and state-sponsored military violence*** by state forces against communities of RIMUP women, communities, and peoples, particularly land- and resource-grabs. This includes, but is not limited to, such practices as the militarisation of indigenous territories and communities, forced evictions and displacement, harassment and state persecution of religious and ethnic minority communities and peoples, extrajudicial gender-based violence during and post conflict particularly rape as well as attacks and killings of women human rights defenders. This also includes violence arising from racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts tacitly sanctioned if not outright supported by authoritarian and fascist regimes, which lead to the worst atrocities among women. The FPAR shall also highlight how RIMUP women take leadership roles in defending their communities and asserting their rights in the face of conflicts and violence.

**Suppression of democratic spaces**

The FPAR shall also document and investigate the ***ways by which women’s voices are marginalised and silenced in the decision- and policy-making structures that affect their lives***, from patriarchal laws and customs that limit women’s spaces and capacities for democratic participation, to authoritarian and fundamentalist regimes that institute measures to repress civil and political rights and use judicial systems to suppress critics and put women’s lives and security in danger. This includes how the presence of foreign military bases props up these regimes and violates peoples’ rights to sovereignty, identities, and self-determination. It also includes how civilian governments become increasingly dominated by military elements, allocating larger and larger portions of national budgets to military spending at the expense of funding for social services. The FPAR shall document how women, despite all of the threats and challenges, continue to speak out and challenge these realities both within and outside these structures.

**Overall objective**

To support RIMUP women to become powerful advocates and build their movements to assert their rights to peace and democratic participation in pursuit of development justice.

**Specific objectives**

* Develop the capacity of 8-10 organisations and women in the communities to document, investigate, and analyse the situations of RIMUP women on the various forms of deprivation and violation of women’s rights to peace and democratic rights, and the ways by which women defend and advance their rights;
* Foster knowledge and resources on the impacts of globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarisation, and patriarchy on RIMUP women in the region in the context of their right to peace and democratic participation for learning exchanges and support to movements;
* Establish strategic advocacy plans and opportunities to advance women’s rights to peace and democratic participation at the national, regional and international levels; and
* Strengthen institutional development of partner organisations through leadership development and movement building.

**Participants**

The 8-10 participating organisations are expected to be directly representing RIMUP women or working with grassroots women's organisations with experience in advocating on the issues discussed in the selected focus area.

* Two participants from each organisation will form a team to conduct FPAR and evidence-based advocacy using the skills they learned from APWLD-organised trainings;
* The team shall consist of one (1) young woman researcher (below 35) and one (1) mentor from the same organisation – **one of whom must be from the community involved in the research;**
* Participating organisations should have experience in organisational work and advocacy for women’s human rights and commitment to women’s movement.

**Management**

APWLD will provide the partner organisations with a small sub-grant to employ a young woman researcher and carry out the research including salary and on-costs with the approximate amount of **US$ 13,000.** Sub-grant partners will need to appoint a mentor to assist the young woman researcher throughout the FPAR process.

APWLD will also support the young women researchers and their mentors to participate in capacity building workshops and provide advocacy or network opportunities. They will access training in International Human Rights standards and rights-based approach in their area of research. Through a combination of face-to-face and online modules, they will share the frameworks within their communities, learn practical research skills, and develop a community-based research plan.

## The FPAR Journey

**A.** **1st Regional Feminist Participatory Action Research Training**

**Methodology and Approach**

Through the training, participants will gain skills and knowledge on the framework of feminist development justice, particularly in relation to women’s rights to peace and democratic participation, and FPAR. The training particularly encourages young women researchers to build their leadership and foster a generation of women rights advocates. The training will use simple, clear and participatory methodologies, to ensure that participants are comfortable in new concepts and issues.

**Expected Outputs’**

● Participants understand about the objectives, framework, approach, and time frame of Feminist Participatory Action Research 2020-2022.

● Training participants gain skills and capacity on the key concepts and framework on feminist participatory approach, human rights-based approach, and international human rights framework - particularly in relation to women’s rights to peace and democratic participation.

● Participating organisations have more detailed research plans for research in their respective communities.

● Training participants gain skills and capacity on the tools of Theory of Change, Power Mapping and Critical Pathway to be used together with the community to plan the research and the impact objectives.

**B.** **Pre-Research Consultation with the Communities**

After the 1st regional training workshop, appointed young women researchers will go to their communities for consultation. All FPAR processes should start with community consultations before the research has been designed and commences. There may need to be a series of consultations with various stakeholders. FPAR almost always includes consultations with women in women only space to ensure that discussions of gendered power relations and of issues that may not be easy to speak about in front of men are explored.

The objectives of pre-research community consultations should include:

● Gaining the support, collaboration and ownership of the community / stakeholders

● Forming a research team with community researchers

● Identifying the problem to be the focus of the FPAR

● Designing methods for the research, questions and objectives

● Developing advocacy plans for long-term change (on-going throughout research process)

Based on the consultations, the young women researchers are expected to prepare the draft Research Design and submit to APWLD before the 2nd training.

**C.** **2nd Regional Training on FPAR Framework and Methodology**

Young women researchers will present the Research Design and advocacy plan formulated together with the community and will gain inputs from facilitators and other participants. This training will provide skills- building and capacity on the framework and methodology on Feminist Participatory Action Research, data analysis and reporting. The training will also build skills on participatory monitoring and evaluation with the community.

**Expected Outputs**

● Participants gain their capacity on feminism and feminist framework – as a core concept to practise and analyse the research in their respective community.

● Training participants gain skills and capacity on the framework and methodology on feminist participatory action research – including research designs, methods and feminist analysis.

● Participants able to self-reflect and refine their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategy, in particular to work with the community to advocates their rights on access to and control over public commons, resisting corporate capture of their public commons, agriculture inputs, and policy-making and ensuring women’s voice and democratic participation in development agenda.

**D.** **3rd Regional Training on Advocacy and Ways Forward**

The 3rd regional training will be a mutual learning process where participants can share their understanding and experiences on qualitative data analysis, identifying the gaps and challenges, and further improving their research. The training will reflect the impact of the research process, from the personal to organisational and community levels. The training will also discuss the success stories, best practices, the lesson learnt, the threat and challenges and ways to address these challenges.

Furthermore, the 3rd training will be an important venue to discuss the ways forward, including advocacy and campaign strategies, be it in local, national, regional and international level; and also identifying ways to work together sustainably – cross issues, cross countries – to strengthen feminist movement building in the region.

**Expected Outputs**

● Participants gain their capacity and skills on data analysis, particularly qualitative data analysis and able to share their experience on analysing the data, identifying the challenges and ways to address the challenges;

● Participants are able to identify the gaps in their research and build on concrete recommendations for the improvement of their research;

● Participants are able to refine their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategy, in particular to work with the community to advocate for their rights in the local and national level; and also have a concrete plan with APWLD for advocacy in the regional and international levels.

**E.** **Research and Reporting**

The team (young women researchers and mentors) will conduct research on their specific focus. Based on the data and information collected, the team will make an interim report and submit to APWLD for review.

Each team will also need to submit a final FPAR story by **February 2022**. The FPAR reports can be written in any language but English version is expected to be sent to the APWLD secretariat. Guidelines for the final FPAR research will be discussed and finalised at the training.

The final programme financial report along with financial receipts will also need to be submitted by **February 2022.**

**F.** **4th Regional Meeting on FPAR: From Personal to Structural Change**

This meeting will provide a chance for young women researchers and mentors to showcase their FPAR results, and also to reflect, self-assess, evaluate and appreciate the journey of FPAR, documenting the changes they have experienced and seen, be it in the personal, organisational, community or structural level.

**Expected Outputs**

● Participants are able to self-reflect on the impact of the FPAR, from the personal to organisational and community levels.

● Participants are able to share their progress of implementing their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategies in the local, regional and international levels.

**Timeline**

**FPAR on Right to Peace and Democratic Participation - Timeline and process**

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| **2020** | |
| Call for applications | Aug 2020 |
| Selection process | Sept - Oct 2020 |
| Announcement of selected partners. Confirmation with the selected partners and appointment of young women researchers | Oct - Nov 2020 |
| Agreements with selected partners, first payment | Dec 2020 - Jan 2021 |
| **2021** | |
| **1st Regional Peace FPAR Training** | Feb 2021 |
| Pre-research community consultation | Feb - Apr 2021 |
| Submission of draft research design | May 2021 |
| **2nd Regional Peace FPAR Training** | May 2021 |
| Final research Designs | June 2021 |
| 2nd payment | June - July 2021 |
| Submission of Interim Reports (narrative and finance report) | September 2021 |
| Conducting FPAR in communities | Jun - Nov 2021 |
| Submission of 1st Draft FPAR Story | Nov 2021 |
| **3rd Regional Peace FPAR Training** | Dec 2021 |
| **2022** | |
| Community Validation and Finalisation of FPAR Story | Dec 2021 - Feb 2022 |
| Submission of Final FPAR Story and financial report | Feb 2022 |
| Finalisation of the Final FPAR Story and financial report | March 2022 |
| Final payment | Mar - Apr 2022 |
| **Advocacy phase**  **2022** | |
| Submission of Advocacy plans proposal and budget | Mar 2022 |
| Agreement on Advocacy Phase | Apr 2022 |
| Advocacy Phase (6 months) | Apr - September 2022 |
| Submission of Advocacy narrative and financial reports | Oct 2022 |
| Reflection Meeting | Nov 2022 |

1. A good overview may be had in the New York Times article where the authors note the "weakening secularism" in the region "amid the growing appeal of a politics based on ethnic and sectarian identity: "[Religious Minorities Across Asia Suffer Amid Surge in Sectarian Politics](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/21/world/asia/sri-lanka-religion-christians.html)" [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. See more data on arms and military expenditure by [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](https://www.sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/arms-and-military-expenditure/military-expenditure) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. See data of [World Bank](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=Z4), [UNESCAP](https://www.unescap.org/publications/social-outlook-asia-and-pacific-2018), and the [European Commission](https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/foresight/topic/changing-security-paradigm/world-military-expenditure_en) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)