**CONCEPT NOTE**

***Feminist Participatory Action Research for Change!***

**“Women Interrogating Trade & Corporate Hegemony -**

**Strengthening Feminist Movements for Trade & Economic Justice”**

**Background**

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After 30 years of neoliberal globalisation, it has been increasingly acknowledged that austerity, privatisation, deregulation of finance, markets and corporations, and trade and investment liberalisation have had a devastating and discriminatory impact on women. This is not just because women are disproportionately vulnerable to the human rights impacts of food insecurity, and degradation of land and natural resources. It is because the prevailing economic model perpetuates, and often relies on, the systematic discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women in order to generate economic ‘growth’. Corporations participating in the global value chains rely on the exploitation and devaluation of women’s labour as a source of competitive advantage. The rationalisation of cutting social safety nets and privatising essential public services is made possible by the availability of women’s unpaid labour to fill the gaps in care work. And the very way in which economic activity is defined requires the complete devaluation, or gross undervaluation, of women’s unpaid work, whether in the home or in family businesses.[[1]](#footnote-0) Work that is considered ‘women’s work’ is not given any economic value, even though without it economies could not function.[[2]](#footnote-1)

Central to the current neoliberal development models are the trade and investments rules and regimes which impact every aspect of people’s lives while simultaneously empower corporations at the expense of the people’s human rights and the environment. Globally, there are more than 3000 bilateral or multilateral agreements in addition to the agreements under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that govern global trade and investment. The WTO agreements had forced countries to open up their markets to allow for transnational corporations to sell goods and services in their country. Public services, whether they were water, health, education or energy were subject to commercialisation, putting the public’s human rights subordinate to the interests of transnational corporations as well as wealthy countries where many of these corporations came from. A continuously expanding interpretation of the Investor State-Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions are allowing foreign corporations to sue governments in secret tribunals over any rules and policies that infringes of their ‘expected’ profits and investments, even when these rules are made in the interests of the people or the environment.

Globally, 157 of the richest 200 entities are multinational corporations, with Walmart, Apple and Shell accruing more wealth than some fairly rich countries such as Russia, Belgium and Sweden.[[3]](#footnote-2) The recent billion dollar mergers of large agribusinesses have left 60 per cent of the world’s seeds and pesticides market in the hands of just three multinational corporations. Many corporations also makes their profits at the expense of women receiving low wages and working in precarious conditions at the end of their global value chain. This level of inequality, and the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of multinational corporations continue to drive the violations of women’s human rights.

And yet trade negotiations, whether at the WTO or outside are bereft of the active, systematic and meaningful participation of women, communities and people’s movements. The proliferation of trade agreements being negotiated in total secrecy over the last decades or so have ensured that not only women, but also parliamentarians and general public are all being kept out of the room as trade rules with broad ranging implications on our lives are being crafted. Civil societies measured the negotiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) currently being negotiated between 16 countries in the Asia Pacific region has failed the transparency and public participation tests.[[4]](#footnote-3) This follows the similar pattern of the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to name a few. In contrast, big business lobby groups have had semi-official role inside many of these talks.[[5]](#footnote-4) This patriarchal economic and trade system and governance also relies on the use of power and violence in order to negotiate, carry out and implement **neoliberal trade rules and regimes against** the resistance and struggle of women and men in local communities in defending their public commons, their livelihood and their environment.

APWLD believes that ‘development’ is supposed to benefit poor, marginalised women of the global south. They are best able to identify both the problems and solutions. Since 2013, APWLD together with rural, indigenous, migrant, women workers and urban poor women 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 on which they engage with social and economic structures – including over trade and investment regimes. They must be supported to build their capacity to document the impact of loss of seeds, decent work, local livelihoods and public commons such as water, health, energy, education; have meaningful engagement in decision making process of trade and other economic policies; able to form strong local feminist movement that work with other movements to demand accountability from state and corporations, and able to push government in tackling systemic barriers to women’s economic, development and democratic rights.

To address the need to increase the evidence-based advocacy and the need to have women as vocal and effective organisers, advocates and campaigners in human rights, APWLD will support 6-8 local organisations to conduct Feminist Participatory Action Research for Change “Women Interrogating Trade & Corporate Hegemony”.

## Why Feminist Participatory Action Research?

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 violation 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.

**Our FPAR Principles:**

* **Purpose is structural changes**: the purpose of our research is to bring about structural changes that women identify as critical to their enjoyment of human rights
* **Amplifies women’s voices:** the research gives voice to women as the experts and authors of their own lives and policy decisions. It strategically places them as researchers and experts and promotes them into policy dialogue.
* **Owned by the community:** research decisions are made by the community of women who are stakeholders of the research project;
* **Takes an intersectional approach** to identify experiences of discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation**;** recognising the diversity of women’s experiences, identities and power.
* **Aims to shift power:** the research seek to reconstruct traditional power imbalances such as researchers / subject and also aims to challenge and shift gendered source of personal, political and structural power;
* **Fosters movement building / collective action:** the research process itself should be seen as a collective process that strengthens solidarity and empowers women to work collectively for long term structural changes;
* **Build capacity of all:** FPAR always involves capacity building but also recognises that capacity building and learning is a collective, political action of all the actors involved.
* **Free Prior Informed Consent** of all participants is prioritised in FPAR
* **Safety, care and solidarity with participants** is essential.

The feminist participatory action research methodology has been used across several APWLD programmes and thematic areas since 2013. It aims to facilitates democratic, non-hierarchical mutual learning processes situated in 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 globalization, 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 area for the research**

For the WITCH FPAR programme 2019-2020, the selection committee of APWLD will select a maximum of 8 (eight) organisations that together with the community will conduct action research on their chosen topics on the following:

1. The impact of trade and investment regimes and corporate hegemony on women’s human rights **at the local or country level, specifically in** three focus areas that’s illustrative of the systemic barriers to women's rights to land, water, productive resources and democratic participation:
   1. **Women Defending the Commons** - includes the acquisition of water, energy, education and health services by foreign and domestic investors and its impact on women and community access to it;
   2. **Trade and Investment Agreement** - includes the impact of land, crop, seed and water monopoly by big agribusiness; unsustainable agriculture with the use of GMO and pesticide; and privatisation of public services such as water, education, health and energy, and
   3. **Women’s Democratic, Free, Prior and Informed Participation and Decision Making over social and economic structures -**  includes genuine and meaningful participations of women and communities in economic and trade rules decision-making at all levels.
2. Community-owned solutions and demand for economic rights, alternative trade models and systems and development justice.

APWLD will provide eight 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 USD 12,000. Sub-grant partners will need to appoint a mentor to assist this young women researcher throughout this research programme.

APWLD will also support the young women researcher 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 on 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 by end of 2020 will have developed and commenced a community-based research plan.

**Overall objective:**

To ensure that trade and investment agreements in the region adhere to human rights obligations and incorporate the voice and demands of Asia-Pacific women on development justice.

**Specific objectives:**

* Develop the capacity of women and their organisations in 6-8 communities to research and document evidence to use in promoting human rights, women’s human rights and development justice in trade and investment policies and challenging corporate hegemony;
* Foster knowledge, campaign and advocacy resources on the impact of trade and investment policies, practices and projects on women at the local level, national and regional levels;
* Establish strategic advocacy plans and opportunities to support women’s own position and solutions for policy change at national, regional and international levels;
* Propose and develop a trade and investment frameworks that protect, respect and fulfil human rights, women’s rights and promote development justice; and
* Strengthen institutional development of sub-grant partner organizations through leadership development and movement building.

**Participants**

Training participants will be a group of 12-16 women working from grassroots organizations in the region representing indigenous, rural, migrant and urban poor and other marginalised women.

1. Two participants from each organisation/country will form a team to conduct FPAR on evidence-based advocacy using the skill they learn from the trainings.
2. The team should consist of 1 (one) young woman researcher (below 35) and 1 (one) mentor from the same organization or APWLD member organization - **one of them must be from the community involved in the research**.
3. Organization participants should have experience in organizational work and advocacy for women’s human rights and commitment to women’s movement.

## Programme Activities

1. **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, trade and investments related issues and feminist participatory action research. The training particularly encourages young women researcher to build their leadership and foster a generation of women rights advocates. The training will use a simple, clear and participatory methodologies, to ensure that participants to be comfortable in new concepts and issues.

**Expected Outputs**

* Participants understand about the objective, approach, and time frame of Feminist Participatory Action Research 2019-2020.
* Training participants gain skills and capacity on the key concepts on framework feminist participatory approach, human rights based approach, and international HRs framework - particularly on the issue of trade, investments and economic policies.
* Participating organizations have a 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.

1. **Pre-Research Consultation to the Communities**

After the 1st regional training workshop, appointed young women research coordinator will go to their communities for consultation. All FPAR projects 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 project
* 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 coordinators are expected to prepare the draft Research Design and submit to APWLD before the 2nd training.

1. **2nd Regional Training on FPAR Framework and Methodology**

Young women coordinators 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 skill building and capacity on the framework and methodology on Feminist Participatory Action Research, data analysis and reporting. The training will also build the skill 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.

1. **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 analysing, identifying the gaps and challenges, and further improving their research report. The training will reflect the impact of the research, starting from the personal, organisational, and community level. The reflection will discuss on the success stories, best practices, the lesson learnt, the threat and challenges and ways to address these challenges.

Furthermore, the 3rd training will an important venue to discuss the ways forward, including advocacy and campaign strategy, 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 skill 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 report and gain concrete recommendations for the improvement of their research report.
* Participants are able to refine their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategy, in particular to work with the community to advocates their rights in the local and national level; and also have a concrete plan with APWLD for advocacy in the regional and international level.

1. **Research and Reporting**

The team 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.

The final country report will need to be submitted by October 2020. The country report can be written in any language but English version is expected to be sent to the APWLD secretariat. Guidelines for the final country research report will be discussed and finalised at the training.

The final programme narrative and financial report along with financial receipts will need to be submitted at the latest 3 months after the programme ends in December 2020.

1. **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 research result, and also to reflect, self-assess, evaluate and appreciate our 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 research, be it in the personal, organisational, community level.
* Participants able to share their progress of implementing their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategy in the local, regional and international

1. M Waring (1988*) If Women Counted—A New Feminist Economics* (HarperCollins). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. D Elson (1993) ‘Gender Relations and Economic Issues’ Gender and Development 1(3): 6-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/news/2018/oct/17/69-richest-100-entities-planet-are-corporations-not-governments-figures-show [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Friends of the Earth International, the Transnational Institute (TNI), Indonesia for Global Justice, Focus on the Global South, and Paung Ku ‘RCEP: A secret deal’ (2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Civil societies groups following the negotiations of the TPP were able to compile a list of 600 corporate advisors who were provided access to the TPP texts while the above mentioned research on the ‘RCEP: A secret deal’ details the institutionalized role for business in the RCEP negotiation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)