

**Feminist Rapid Response Research on COVID-19:
Our Voices, Our Stories, Our Demands for Development Justice**

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing structural inequalities in Asia and Pacific countries and beyond. APWLD members, partners, and the communities we work with, have been facing unprecedented challenges during this crisis. At the same time, the feminist movement has demonstrated how the power of solidarity can unleash incredible energy in times of crisis and inspire transformative changes.

From APWLD's survey on impacts of COVID-19 on our members, we learned that across the whole region, livelihood was the number one pressing concern for the most marginalised groups, especially people depending on daily income who have been going through the hardest times. They are street vendors, sex workers, labourers, domestic workers, small business owners, among others, for whom having to stay at home with no work nor access to markets means no food on the table. In fact, it is predicted by the World Food Programme that, by the end of this year, the number of people living in acute hunger can double from the pre-COVID estimate to reach 265 million globally¹.

At the same time, as public services shut down, our members have witnessed women and girls facing increasing burdens of unpaid care work, including home schooling, housework, elderly care, and so on. This is on top of the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work they were already doing before the crisis; according to ILO's report in 2018, the time women in Asia Pacific spend on unpaid care work is 4.1 times more than their male counterparts². Yet, this increasing amounts of unpaid care work have largely not been taken in to account in the COVID stimulus packages rolled out, especially in South Asia³.

Additionally, the rapid rise of domestic violence under movement restrictions has created a further crisis for women and girls at home across the region, due to increasing pressure on livelihoods, difficulties to report, as well as closure of the shelters and police functions, according to our members who have continued providing hotlines, shelters, and legal services to their local communities. Apart from people facing intimate partner violence, migrant domestic workers have also been experiencing increasing violence from employers, which creates an even harder situation for them.

However, in such a challenging context, many government policy responses in the region have been forcibly taking away people's livelihoods without providing safety nets, and

¹ <https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>

² https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

³ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/06/womens-unpaid-and-underpaid-work-in-the-times-of-covid-19>

enforcing them through militaristic means⁴, while public health systems have been struggling with little support. Many of these policy enforcements have ended up punishing the most marginalized people, who were left to choose between starvation and police brutality punishing those violating lockdown rules.

International Financial Institutions (IFI) and corporations continue to promote neoliberal responses as a way to gain profit from the crisis. Some governments are prioritising protecting corporations through corporate bailouts, corporate bonds and stimulus packages for businesses. Massive amounts of emergency loans provided by IMF and World Bank to deal with the impacts of COVID-19 will only increase debt burdens of low income countries. A considerable amount of the COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support loan programme by ADB is being used to amend labour codes and promote labour flexibilisation.⁵ Also, Public Private Partnership to “Build Back Better” has been a mantra repeatedly promoted in UN forums, ignoring the facts that the privatisation of basic services and lack of social protection for workers have been the main causes of the prolonged crises.

In stark contrast to this is the power peoples' movements have been able to mobilise and unleash. APWLD members and partners have been providing vital support to their communities, with efforts ranging from information dissemination, to direct relief packages delivery, to assisting migrants on their journeys home, to setting up innovative solutions such as neighbourhood resource exchange systems. That said, it is undeniable that there are unprecedented challenges we are facing, with limited mobility pushing us to find new ways of organising, and the difficulties in securing funding in the face of a looming recession.

In light of this, APWLD has formed a COVID-19 response team convening members' and partners' inputs on feminist response to the pandemic, including on developing COVID-19 policy analysis using globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarism and patriarchy (GFMP) analysis, gathering stories of impacts and women's resistances in the local level, as well as providing direct support to women in local communities.

We are at a historical turning point which requires global-level collective action and coordinated response to overturn the current dominant rules, and rewrite one that is feminist, based on the principles of human rights, historical responsibility, accountability, international cooperation and solidarity. Feminist and peoples' movements must be at the centre and lead this pathway. We need to not only document the human rights violations happening during COVID-19, but also continue adapting ourselves to create transformative changes challenging structural barriers in this new context. Crises are devastating, but they are also windows for change. We will seize the opportunity to rebuild a world where Feminist Development Justice becomes reality.

⁴ Our survey results suggest that such authoritarian and militaristic measures are most prevalent in countries including India and the Philippines.

⁵ <https://data.adb.org/story/key-responses-covid-19-asia-pacific-economies-update-adb-covid-19-policy-database>

Methodology: Feminist Rapid Response Research (FRRR)

Why FRRR on COVID-19?

Since 2012, we have been using Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) and developing it as an organising tool to build and strengthen local feminist movements. Through FPAR, women collect evidence about what is happening in their communities and collectively take actions. It is conducted by and for women. With strong, locally produced research and documented evidence, women challenge rights violations and gendered power imbalances and take control of development agendas and programmes that are affecting their lives. Typically, one FPAR cycle would last for two years, allowing sufficient time for local organising, documentation, and advocacy.

In the context of COVID-19, with the guidance from ReC in May 2020, APWLD has decided to conduct a **Feminist Rapid Response Research (FRRR)** which better suited the need for a more targeted and urgent support.

The purpose of FRRR is to document women's stories for policy advocacy and explore ways to provide much-needed rapid direct support to women and their communities. The programme will be conducted within the timeframe of six months, allowing women to document their realities during the COVID-19 crisis and collectively strategise for new ways of feminist organising.

Objectives

- *Overall:* To advance women's human rights and realise Development Justice in light of the COVID-19 crisis by documenting grassroots resistance and solutions for human rights and Development Justice advocacy through powerful storytelling.
- *Specific:*
 - Develop the capacity of women to analyse the impacts of COVID-19 policies on women's lives using Development Justice perspectives, and their capacity to document evidence and stories for advocacy;
 - Foster knowledge and resources on the impacts of COVID-19 response policies and projects on women at the local level, national and regional level, as well as grassroots resistance and solutions and various new ways of organising and mobilising;
 - Prepare for strategic advocacy plans and opportunities to support women's own position and solutions for policy change at national, regional and international levels;
 - Strengthen feminist networks through cross-movement collaboration and organising.

What is FRRR? The Power of Storytelling

Research is political. It can prioritise or ignore women's voices and stories. Our FRRR not only prioritises women's voices, it is made up almost entirely of women's voices. It is led by women, validated by women and used by women for the changes women want. Our 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 have full ownership of the research on their communities as well as what is to be done with the outcomes, i.e. how their stories are told, and for what purpose.

In FRRR, storytelling will be used as the main research tool. We believe in the power of storytelling comes from the agency of the women who decide to voice out, organise, and resist in order to challenge and change systems of oppression, particularly how globalisation, fundamentalisms and militarism reinforce patriarchy. Therefore, the researchers' journals documenting their experiences in the communities, noting quotes and feelings will be considered valuable data that reflect lived realities. At the same time, women and their communities will tell their stories in their own chosen ways, not limited to report-writing. Creative methods such as handicraft making, music, theatre, poems, drawing, and photo diary will all be encouraged.

For COVID-19 FRRR programme 2020-2021, APWLD will provide six organisations with a small grant of \$5,000. These organisations, together with the communities they work with, will conduct action research on their chosen topics on the following:

- The impact of human rights violations on women at the local or country level during COVID-19, with potential focus areas including livelihood and decent work, gender-based violence, food security, digital security, freedom of assembly and association, accountability in response measures, among others.
- Community-owned solutions and demand for development justice and how they have been adapting to the COVID-19 crisis to keep on resisting and organising.

Participants

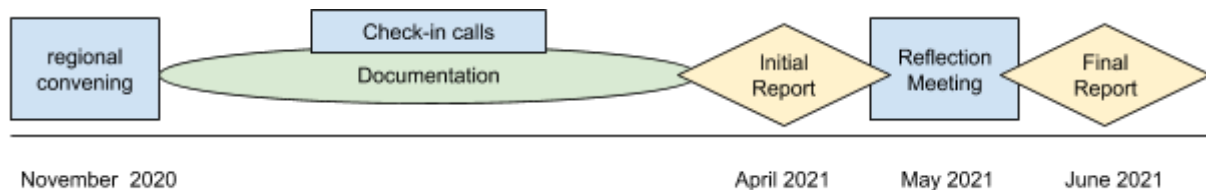
APWLD is looking to partner with member organisations who will embark on a collective journey documenting feminist realities in times of COVID-19, and advocating for our communities' rights at local, national, regional, and international levels.

Participants will be a group of women from six APWLD member organisations in the region; they will conduct FRRR based on extensive consultation with the women and communities they work with using various and creative participatory methods in the COVID-19 context. Participating organisations should have experience in organisational work and advocacy for women's rights and commitment to women's movement, and they need to be currently or

have been working on frontline COVID-19 response initiatives with grassroots women groups and communities.

Programme Activities

Overall Timeline



1. Regional Convening: Conceptual Framework, Methodology, and Planning

The programme will start with an online regional convening of all participants in November 2020. Through this meeting, participants will affirm the political framing of the FRRR, including the framework of Globalisation, Fundamentalisms, Militarism, and Patriarchy (GFMP), feminist Development Justice, and feminist rapid response research, and adapt them to the context of COVID-19. The training will use simple, clear and participatory methodologies to ensure that participants are comfortable with new concepts and issues.

They will present their FRRR plan and will gain inputs from facilitators and other participants. There will also be capacity building on feminist participatory documentation, storytelling methods (e.g. theatre, drawing, oral storytelling, digital storytelling, community radio, etc.), and skills on participatory monitoring and evaluation with the community. Most importantly, this regional convening will also be the space for our members to share their organising and mobilising approach during this era of pandemic.

Expected Outputs

- Participants understand about the objective, approach, and time frame of Feminist Rapid Response Research 2020-2021.
- Participants gain skills and capacity on applying key frameworks and concepts, including feminist participatory approach, human rights-based approach, the Globalisation, Fundamentalisms, Militarism, and Patriarchy (GFMP) Framework, and feminist development justice, to the context of COVID-19.
- Participating organisations have more detailed documentation and community engagement plans for research in their respective communities.
- Participants gain skills and capacity on the participatory 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.

- Participants gain their capacity on feminism and feminist framework – as a core concept to practise and analyse the research in their respective community.
- Participants gain skills and capacity on the framework and methodology on feminist participatory documentation as well as storytelling methods (e.g. theatre, drawing, handicraft, oral storytelling, community radio, digital storytelling, etc.)
- Participants are able to self-reflect and refine their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategies, in particular to work with the community to advocate for their rights violated during the COVID-19 crisis.

2. Documentation and Story Narration with Communities

The team will conduct FRRR on their specific focus. Researchers will use journals to document their journeys of organising, the impacts of COVID-19 on women, the stories of solutions, quotes, impressions, and their feelings. This will accompany the final stories weaved together with the communities, which can be presented in any chosen creative form amplifying women's voices to advocate for their rights. A final short activity report will be submitted with these two pieces as the initial report at the end of April 2021.

3. Reflection Meeting on Lessons Learned and Ways Forward

This meeting will take place in May 2021, providing a chance for researchers to showcase their research result, and also to reflect, self-assess, evaluate and appreciate our journey of FRRR, documenting the changes they have experienced and seen, be it in the personal, organisational, community or structural level. After this, participants will finalise their reports and submit in June 2021.

Expected Outputs

- Participants are able to self-reflect on the experience and impacts of the research, be it at the personal, organisational and/or community level.
- Participants are able to share their progress of implementing their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategy at the local, regional and international levels.