

Stories of Rural, Indigenous, Migrant, Urban Poor Women:

Our Struggles.

Our Resistance.

Our Solidarity!



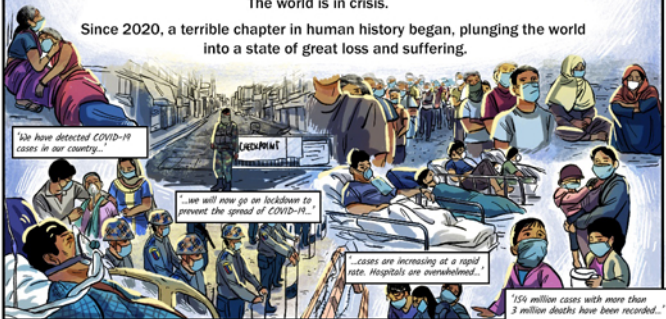
As the world continues to reel from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that we learn all the lessons that this terrible chapter in human history shall leave us. We have been witnessing how decades of neoliberal globalisation worsened a global health crisis, and how governments and corporations exploited the crisis for more power and profit; but also how, despite the odds, communities are still able to overcome great loss and suffering to help one another and rebuild their lives. The story of COVID-19 is an unmasking of a global economic and political system designed to protect and advance elite interests, no matter the cost in human lives. It is also a story of communities' resilience, solidarity and defiance in the face of tragedy and repression.

In Asia and the Pacific, Rural, Indigenous, Migrant and Urban Poor (RIMUP) women are among those most heavily impacted by the pandemic and the socio-economic crisis that it brought about. They are farmers and small food producers who are unable to sell their produce; they are wage workers who lost jobs and small business owners who lost their livelihoods. Many belong to indigenous communities who are refused aid and face discrimination in the delivery of health and social services. They are dealing with states' highly militaristic responses to the pandemic, including enforced lockdowns and travel restrictions, which in many cases are put to abuse women and violate their rights. Finally, women are enduring all these amid additional burdens that came with stay-at-home orders, including the home-based education of children and a marked increase in the instances of domestic violence. The deeply fundamentalist and patriarchal societies in which they live further limit their opportunities in finding other ways of making a living.

These are RIMUP women's stories so that we may never forget their struggles during the time of COVID-19, and how they have shown resolve and courage in spite of these challenges. The hope is that by telling and learning from these stories, we shall continue to seek justice and accountability for what they have been enduring, while being inspired by and celebrating their triumphs, for us to continue strengthening our movements for women and peoples' rights and Development Justice.

The world is in crisis.

Since 2020, a terrible chapter in human history began, plunging the world into a state of great loss and suffering.



The Covid-19 pandemic unmasked a rotting economic and political system that only ever served the interests of the ruling class.



Among those severely affected are the rural, indigenous, migrant and urban poor (RIMUP) women of Asia and the Pacific.

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Governments' highly militaristic response to the pandemic has only revealed and made worse women's vulnerabilities, lack of access to quality health services, protection and sanitation.

Movement was restricted...

'COVID-19 is a public health emergency of international concern...'



...as needs were not met, and burdens became heavier.

'Millions have lost their jobs, and precarious workers face starvation and homelessness.'



Those in power took advantage of the health crisis to intensify militarism.



'Cities across the globe remain on lockdown, leaving millions of peoples further isolated and vulnerable...'

But the voices of women cannot be restricted nor silenced.



These are their stories.

It is especially difficult for women who are menstruating, pregnant or lactating. Some girls and women are shy to have their period, especially when there's a lack of menstrual pads.



Irilyn and her family are Lumads, an indigenous group in the Philippines, who have been internally displaced since 2015. They have been living in an evacuation center because of the intense militarisation of their ancestral land in Pantaron.



Lumads have been red-tagged, attacked and harassed by the government and the military because of their fight for their ancestral land. Living in Pantaron, where they could have had fruits, vegetables and herbal medicines to rely on during the pandemic, remain a distant memory.



Still, Mayor Duterte insisted that evacuees return home to Pantaron, even while their needs remain unanswered.



*Nanay is an endearing term for mothers in the Philippines

The pandemic lockdowns have forced women out of their livelihoods, and locked them in their homes, without food to eat.



Lilima,
Bangladesh



Lilima, who had lost her job at a hotel, had no way to support herself, especially because her children can no longer support her financially.

So many families in my village are facing financial problems, and the women have become more involved with family quarrel, and argue with their husbands because of this...



But we must continue to take action! If I see my neighbours quarreling, I give them advice for stopping these arguments and try to find a peaceful solution.



It's not like we can find work as easily as men can... I can't drive a rickshaw or a van to earn a living.



Patriarchal norms make it even more difficult for women to recover from loss of livelihoods during the pandemic. There are less options for them, and more factors that hold them back, such as safety in the workplace and the needs of their children.



The government's support as a response to the pandemic is insufficient and not easily accessible to us.

Chandana's husband lost his job at a restaurant, while she had to shut down her poultry farm.



In Nagaland, Northeast India, 70% of the population depended solely on agriculture and selling their produce. With the restrictions on movement, transportation and the closing down of markets, Naga women suffered terribly.



In Indonesia, peasant women were isolated in large plantations and forced to continue working in poor working conditions, low wages and risk of exposure to the virus, making it difficult for women to access food necessities and sustain the added expenses due to the lockdown.



Mom? I need internet credit for online class...



Burdens on women continued to pile up...



This isn't even enough for the day...



Good morning, class!
Today, we will be...



...especially at home.



Domestic violence increased during the lockdown and women bore the brunt of it.

Meanwhile in India...



...a young man who lost his job grew so frustrated that he brought out his dao (machete) and threatened to kill his mother and siblings.

And then there are women like Takhmina...



...married off at the
age of 16...



...contracted HIV/AIDS from
her own husband...



...then thrown out
and shunned.



And to all this suffering in the midst of a global crisis...



Violence in Burma/ Myanmar escalates as military coup seized the power.



Governments responded with intensified militarisation, outright repression and violence

Women and their families were forced to evacuate and make do with what they have.



No work. No aid. No voice.

The Tatmadaw bombings have killed our husbands, and we have lost our rights to live with our children, because of the patriarchal customary law.



The government is manipulating the pandemic to further their agenda for stealing and plundering the natural resources across the Philippines.

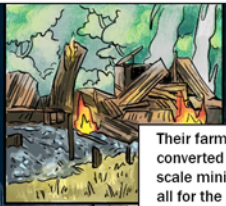


But this violence has been going on for decades.

The COVID-19 pandemic only made it much, much worse.

Globalisation, fundamentalisms, patriarchal norms, and militarism aimed at silencing dissent, systems that have become deeply engrained in peoples' everyday lives, have been laid bare for all to see in the face of the pandemic.

Neoliberal policies, such as trade liberalisation of agriculture, have paved ways for land and resource-grabbing by corporations, displacing rural and indigenous communities, and disrupting their livelihoods.



Their farmlands are taken away and converted to massive plantations, large scale mining and extractive industries, all for the sake of profit.



Profit, at the expense of the food security and food sovereignty of the peoples and entire countries.

Forced to look for other sources of livelihoods, women migrate and engage in informal, low-paying forms of work... but as soon as the pandemic hit, they lost these jobs as well.



But under fundamentalist and patriarchal norms, women found it even more difficult to find new jobs.



Their rights to care for their needs, their health and well-being, and even their own children are not prioritised.



Now, hunger is even more widespread. Millions remain vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus, with no protection from infection.

Governments have privatised health services. They claimed this was in the name of efficiency and the growth of the economy.



But instead, health services have only been made highly inaccessible, and public health facilities were left under-equipped and under-staffed.

As people grew hungrier, more vulnerable, their cries for help grew louder. And yet, governments responded with militarisation, harassment and violence.



National Indigenous Women Forum (NIWF) has distributed relief support to indigenous women who lost their jobs due to the lockdown.



In these cases, they helped the women to receive compensation for their termination.



Hi Takhmina! Will you please help me? I have run out of stock of my *ARV drugs...

*ARV drugs are very important drugs used to treat HIV/AIDS



Yes, we can help you!

Takhmina, Positive Teens and other partner organisations continued to provide for the needs of women living with HIV/ AIDS in Nookat.



Oh, that must be the peer counselor for the relief goods!

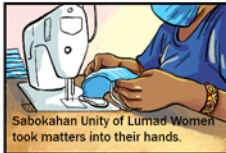
KNOCK!
KNOCK!

Nor will they stop.

Sisterhood Network (SN) intervened and helped women in cases of domestic violence.



SN also endorsed and advocated for a draft of National Policy for Single-Women.



Sabokahan Unity of Lumad Women took matters into their hands.



SERUNI women continued to organise to strengthen the struggle against oppression.

This is not the end of their stories..
This is only the beginning.



The government must give our communities the relief and assistance that they are obligated to give us!



The government must provide us with food, medicine, free testing and access to healthcare!



Policies must adapt to the needs and demands of women! Government must recognise that justice is vital in cases of domestic violence.



Governments must make a non-biased list of people and their needs, so that everyone can get their essentials equally.



Adopt a national policy for single women so that they have a distinct identity from men, and allow them to rise above the marginalisation they experience!



Women will continue to fight and demand for system change, for justice and for accountability, especially amidst the global health and interconnected crises.



Their resolve will be stronger.

Militarisation and violence
is not the answer to our calls!

Include representatives of indigenous
women in emergency and health
entities in their communities!

The government must develop and
fully implement policies to overcome
discrimination and stigma against
women living with HIV in rural areas!

We urge the government to ensure
proper implementation of the existing laws
on HIV/AIDS!

We demand for the government
to give us our living wage and provide
us with public quality health services!

What we need is a system that is just,
equitable and free of globalisation,
fundamentalisms, militarism
and patriarchy!

And their voices will be heard, louder and louder.

The answer to dismantling this current exploitative system and injustices is in the hands of strong and autonomous grassroots feminist movements.

Feminist movements that will triumph over oppression, discrimination, violence and exploitation.

Feminist movements that will create a new, post-pandemic world - brighter, just and hopeful, once and for all.



This feminist COVID-19 Storybook is produced based on the stories from APWLD partners, members and their communities, including:



Sisterhood Network
"Helping One Another"



बादाबन संघ
Badabon Sangho
(a social development organization)



Sabokahan
UNITY OF LUMAD WOMEN



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