

## CONCEPT NOTE

### Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) 2023-2025

#### Feminist Food Sovereignty: Women reclaiming control and fighting back against the corporatisation of food

##### A. Focus of the Food Sovereignty FPAR

Recognising the immense value of food in Asia and the Pacific, and the crucial role that women play in food production, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) will launch the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) on Food Sovereignty this 2023. The two-year FPAR will highlight women's knowledge, capacity and voice in ensuring food security, health and nutrition and local economic development through sustainable food production.

For the Food Sovereignty FPAR 2023-2025, six to eight organisations in Asia and the Pacific will be selected to work together with the community to conduct FPAR and document evidence from October 2023 to March 2025. Their FPAR will focus on:

1. **Exposing and unmasking the powers behind the corporatisation and control of the various components of food and agriculture such as**
  - a. **Crops and livestock** – how neoliberal policies are enabling giant corporations to privatise and commodify seeds and other production inputs, and enacting unfair trading standards, seizing control of food production from peasants, pastoralists, herders, food and dairy producers, indigenous peoples and other small-scale producers from subsistence agriculture and local development towards capitalist food production systems;
  - b. **Fisheries and aquaculture** – how trade liberalisation is taking away the sovereignty of fisherfolks over coastal and marine resources, enabling a skewed playing ground between large-scale fishing companies and small-scale subsistence fishers;
  - c. **Health and nutrition** – how liberalisation and privatisation has saturated the domestic market with imported and mostly heavily processed food products and restricted the access to basic necessities such as safe and potable drinking water and destroying traditional and indigenous food systems with the introduction of genetically modified crops and food biofortification.
2. **Demonstrating feminist solutions, alternatives, and strategies in asserting their role in agriculture and reclaiming food sovereignty.** All over Asia and the Pacific, women's groups and their communities are pushing back against the corporatisation of food and agriculture through land occupation, agroecology and peasant-led

sustainable farming, fishing and livestock growing systems, as well as challenging local policies to advance development justice.

APWLD will provide each of the FPAR partners with a small sub-grant to employ a young woman researcher to carry out the research, which includes a monthly salary during this FPAR journey. The partners will propose a budget of up to USD 14,000 which should also support advocacy, capacity building and research of the selected partners. The sub-grant however, **does not include any other costs related to institutional sustainability or maintenance.**

APWLD will also support the young women researchers and mentors to participate in capacity building workshops, provide advocacy and networking opportunities. FPAR partners will be able to gain knowledge in International Human Rights standards and rights-based approaches 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.

## **B. Background**

The privatisation and commodification of seeds and other inputs in agricultural food production can be traced back to the Green Revolution in the 1960s, a chemically-driven agricultural production system disguised as a programme to increase food production, but in fact was an attempt to subdue the rise of communism in Asia. Pushed by the International Monetary Fund-World Bank (IMF-WB), the Green Revolution introduced an expensive package of technologies that small-scale farmers can barely afford: high-yielding rice varieties, synthetic fertilisers and toxic pesticides that are produced and sold by agricultural corporations.

Meanwhile, the Blue Revolution, promoted about two decades after, was an attempt to adopt the same "monocropping of high-value species" to the fisheries sector. The World Bank and other multilateral aid agencies flooded China, India and developing countries with hundreds of millions of loans to finance the intensification and industrialisation of fishing to supply international markets. As with the Green Revolution, the Blue Revolution brought a surge of socio-economic and environmental problems that greatly impacted on the control and access of small-scale fisherfolks to coastal natural resources.

Agriculture has become agri-business, perpetrated further by the neoliberal policies starting from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), particularly, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) which has seized control of food production from peasants and indigenous peoples over to a few multinational companies such as Bayer, Monsanto and Syngenta. With trade liberalisation and the withdrawal of various forms of support to local agriculture and fisheries, small farmers and fisherfolk find themselves being squeezed between high input costs and low selling prices, as well as decreasing access and control over lands and fishing grounds. In agriculture and fisheries, women are worse placed compared to men in coping with the concentration and industrialisation of processes because of patriarchal values that aggravate structural barriers on access to land, financing, and technology. Women's labour in both sectors is often unrecognised and unpaid. With the increasing mechanisation of agricultural and fishing processes, women stand to lose their livelihoods.

The import dependence created by this neoliberal food regime has driven the people, particularly the women in Asia and the Pacific further into hunger and malnutrition. Skewed free trade agreements which alienate the people from their land along with the multiple crises – economic, COVID-19, environmental and climate crisis – hinder the communities from growing and producing their own traditional foods that are safer and healthier. They are left with no choice but to buy and consume imported food products that are cheaper but lack the proper nutrients such as white rice, flour, processed foods, canned meats and soft drinks, resulting in alarming health problems. The pandemic and with the eruption of the Russia-Ukraine war skyrocketed the food prices and families were forced to reduce the portion and frequency of meals, putting vulnerable sectors such as the women, elderly and the children into greater risk.

Neoliberalism also greatly exacerbates the condition of women with disabilities by further excluding and marginalising them from accessing safe, sufficient and affordable food that is important for their health and nutrition. Disability is more than just illness and impairment, but it is also largely magnified by an exclusionary and repressive system that discounts their contribution and role in food production and societal development.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Women reclaiming food sovereignty***

Women are a central and crucial part of the agriculture economy and food production. They play important roles as seed keepers and seed savers; they are responsible for animal husbandry and vegetable growing. Their inherent knowledge and skills are significant in conserving and improving seed and livestock varieties, as well inland fishing. Women, with their meticulous and organised nature are also more adept in post-harvest activities such as processing food products and local marketing that enable them to earn additional income for the family livelihood.

But while rural and indigenous women are the mainstay of small-scale agriculture and fishing, farm labour force and day-to-day family subsistence, they remain marginalised, or worse, invisible, unrecognised and neglected in development strategies. Various social, cultural or religious norms restrict their mobility, activities and capacity. Their rights to education, access to information, and participation in decision-making are not recognised or least prioritised. Due to persistent patriarchal gender norms practised in their communities and families, rural and indigenous women continue to struggle with multiple work responsibilities in food crop production, family agricultural activities, household and non-market work. Women's roles and much of those women's work are not valued within the current neoliberal economic system which places primary value on paid labour.

Food sovereignty can only be achieved when there is a genuine recognition of women's pivotal role in food and agriculture. Food sovereignty recognises the rights of women, their responsibilities and needs in production and preparation of food for the family. The struggle towards food sovereignty must include breaking down patriarchal norms, values, practices

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<sup>1</sup> Hiranandani, V. (n.d.) Disability, Poverty and Food Sovereignty: Advancing the Human Security Agenda. Dalhousie University, Canada.  
<https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/2f4dcb3f-3bfd-4201-9f58-30dd43675160/content>

and structures in our communities and fully upholding women's human rights to Development Justice.

### **C. The power of grassroots feminist movements**

APWLD believes that 'development' is supposed to benefit women in the region, who are best able to identify both their problems and solutions. Since 2013, APWLD together with feminists and grassroots organisations and other social movements in Asia and the Pacific 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<sup>2</sup>.

APWLD believes that in order to challenge the current development model and to reclaim women's human rights, strong and autonomous feminists and grassroots women movements are 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 ecological crisis, 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 social movements to demand accountability from states and corporations; and push governments in tackling the systemic barriers to women's economic, development, and right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all.

### **D. FPAR as a tool for movement building**

APWLD firmly believes that feminist movements, grounded in grassroots, collective struggles and experiences, are the key to bring about real changes. Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) is rooted in **movement building**. Through FPAR, feminists and grassroots women collect evidence about what is happening in their communities, showcase their initiatives, solutions, and collectively take action. FPAR is conducted by and for women. With strong, locally produced research and documented evidence, women challenge violations of their human rights 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 human 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 among movements, and pursue state and corporate accountability on the violations of women's human rights.

The FPAR methodology has been used across many APWLD programmes and thematic areas since 2012. Guided by its nine (9) [FPAR principles](#), it aims to facilitate democratic,

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<sup>2</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development: [Development Justice Briefer](#). 2016.

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 diverse 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.<sup>3</sup>

## **E. Objectives**

### **1. Overall Objective**

To strengthen women-led food sovereignty movement in Asia and the Pacific by supporting capacity development in asserting their rights and reclaiming control over resources and movement building to resist the corporatisation of food and agriculture.

### **2. Specific objectives**

- Develop the capacity of grassroots women and feminists to document the conditions and lived experiences of rural and indigenous women, including women with disability, in reclaiming food sovereignty and investigate, analyse and challenge the existing laws, policies and agreements that impact on women's rights to food;
- Foster knowledge and resources on the impacts of globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarisation, and patriarchy on grassroots and indigenous women, including women with disability in asserting their right to food and utilising these resources for learning exchanges and support to movements;
- Establish strategic advocacy plans and opportunities to advance women's rights to food and local economic development at the national, regional and international levels; and
- Strengthen institutional development of partner organisations through leadership development and movement building.

## **F. Food Sovereignty FPAR Partners**

Food Sovereignty FPAR will support six to eight national and/or grassroots organisations led by women across Asia and the Pacific region with experience in working in attaining food sovereignty as described in the focus of this FPAR. Organisations from Central Asia, East

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<sup>3</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development: [Feminist Participatory Action Research, Our FPAR Principles](#).

Asia and the Pacific sub-regions are highly encouraged to apply. Please note that APWLD is also prioritising sub-regional balance.

Each of the selected partners will implement the FPAR for the duration of 16 months and shall identify two women respectively as a mentor and a young woman researcher (below 35 years of age) to work together and lead the FPAR process. At least one of the women must come from the community/constituency be it grassroots or women environmental rights defenders and the women must be committed to community organising and feminist movement building for food sovereignty.

## **G. Our Food Sovereignty FPAR Journey**

### **1. First Regional Feminist Participatory Action Research Training: Why do we do FPAR?**

#### **Methodology and Approach**

Through the training, participants or FPAR partners will gain skills and knowledge on the framework of feminist development justice, particularly in relation to feminist food sovereignty 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**

- FPAR partners understand the objectives, framework, approach, and time frame of Feminist Participatory Action Research 2023-2025.
- FPAR partners 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 feminist food sovereignty.
- FPAR partner organisations have more detailed research plans for research in their respective communities.
- FPAR partners 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.

### **2. Pre-Research Consultation with the Communities**

After the 1<sup>st</sup> 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, which may require a series of consultations with various stakeholders. FPAR almost always includes consultations with women in women-only spaces 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 second training.

### **3. Second Regional Training on FPAR Framework and Methodology: How do we do FPAR?**

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**

- FPAR partners gain their capacity on feminism and feminist framework – as a core concept to practise and analyse the research in their respective community.
- FPAR partners gain skills and capacity on the framework and methodology on feminist participatory action research – including research designs, methods and feminist analysis.

### **4. Third Regional Training on Advocacy and Ways Forward: Sharpening our analyses and collective actions**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> training will be an important venue to discuss the ways forward, including advocacy and campaign strategies, be it at the local, national, regional and

international level; and also identify ways to work together sustainably – cross issues, cross countries – to strengthen feminist movement building in the region.

### **Expected Outputs**

- FPAR partners 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;
- FPAR partners are able to identify the gaps in their research and build on concrete recommendations for the improvement of their research;
- FPAR partners 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.

## **5. 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 it to APWLD for review.

Each team will also need to submit a final FPAR story by **February 2025**. The FPAR reports can be written in any language but the 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 2025**.

## **6. Fourth 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**

- FPAR partners are able to self-reflect on the impact of the FPAR, from the personal to organisational and community levels.
- FPAR partners are able to share their progress of implementing their evidence-based advocacy plans and strategies in the local, regional and international levels.

## **H. Timeline and processes**



Processes	
Call for applications	19 June – 19 July 2023
Selection process	20 July – 20 August
Communication to selected organisations Official announcement of the selected partners in APWLD social media	September
<b>1st Regional Training</b>	<b>4th week of October 2023</b>
Pre-research community consultation	November - January 2024
Submission of draft research design	2nd week of February 2024
<b>2nd Regional Training</b>	<b>Late February 2024</b>
Submission of final research design	3rd week of March 2024
Data collection, research and analysis in the communities	April – September 2024
Submission of interim financial report	Early April 2024
Submission of interim activity report	July 2024
Submission of draft FPAR story	September

<b>3rd Regional Training</b>	<b>2nd half of October 2024</b>
Validation of initial findings and collection of additional data	November – December 2024
Submission of Final FPAR Story and financial report	February 2025
Development of FPAR country briefers	January – March 2025
Development of FPAR Regional Report	April – July 2025
Submission of advocacy proposal and budget	March – April 2025
Advocacy phase	April – September 2025
Submission of advocacy narrative and financial reports	October 2025
<b>4th Regional meeting (Reflection meeting)</b>	<b>November 2025</b>