



Strengthening
Women's Resistance
to Systemic Barriers
and Demanding
Development Justice
Amidst
the COVID-19
Pandemic

acknowledgements

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) sends its heartfelt congratulations to its seven (7) partners – Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group from China, Beyond Beijing Committee from Nepal, Center for Sustainable Community Development from Vietnam, HomeNet from Pakistan, Initiative for Right View from Bangladesh, Shyrak from Kazakhstan, and Perempuan Aman-Maluku from Indonesia, who have concluded their programme on National Monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Development Justice for the year 2020-2021. They have published their Peoples’ Development Justice (PDJ) Reports (see Annex 1), which contain their 18-month journey of monitoring issues and situations of grassroots women in relation to the localisation, implementation and achievement of the SDGs in their contexts.

The monitoring programme allowed them to not only dive deeper into the grassroots women’s realities in different issues of the SDGs, but also to analyse and interrogate further the structural impediments in achieving sustainable development. This process has allowed partners to reflect and strengthen their organising, advocacy and campaign work at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Using the Development Justice lens, the programme also offers a critical perspective on the 2030 Agenda. In the past years of the SDG processes, the lack of emphasis on systemic issues, lack of financing, the lack of data and even the process itself being voluntary shows the dwindling or lack of commitments of the member states, particularly those from the Global North. In the past two years, the pandemic has also exposed the already dire situations of the most marginalised, particularly in accessing quality public services such as health care and education, social protection, as well as gender equality and women human rights. In this context, we look at the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a tool for the peoples to hold governments accountable for these inactions.

We also acknowledge the work of our networks – the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM), the Women’s Major Group (WMG) and the Major Group and Other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism (MGoS CM) for facilitating grassroots voices in the 2030 Agenda process from the regional to the global level. This is crucial in amplifying the voices and creating noise regarding grassroots women’s realities and making the governments and other stakeholders accountable in the process.

Coordination among APWLD programmes has also provided the partners with a more comprehensive understanding of different processes such as those in the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The partners were able to deepen their understanding not just of the mechanisms but also the intersectionalities of the issues we are collectively bringing in these processes.

And lastly, APWLD sends its heartfelt thanks to the Feminist Development Justice (FDJ) partners for their unwavering commitment in the journey. The 2020-2021 PDJ Reports of our partners share their journeys and stories of resistance and movement building in the pursuit of Development Justice in the region.

acronyms

APRCM	Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
BBC	Beyond Beijing Committee
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
COP	Conference of Parties
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DSSI	Debt Services Suspension Initiative
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FDIs	Foreign Direct Investments
FDJ	Feminist Development Justice
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G20	Group of Twenty
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GED	General Economics Division
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HBWs	Home-based Workers
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HNWI	High-Net Worth Individuals
ICDP	International Conference on Population and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPs	Indigenous Peoples
IPPC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPR	Intellectual Property Rules
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IRV	Initiative for Right View
ISDS	Investor-state Dispute Settlements
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual +
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MGOS CM	Major Group and Other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism

MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NPC	National Planning Commission
OCA	Our Common Agenda
PDJ	People's Development Justice
PWDs	Person with Disabilities
RUDA	Ravi Urban Development Authority
SCODE	Center for Sustainable Community Development
SD	Sustainable Development
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHRC	UN Human Rights Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
US	United States
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWC	Violence Against Women and Children
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WALHI	Wahana Alingkungan Hidup Indonesia
WB	World Bank Group
WMG	Women's Major Group
WWDs	Women with Disabilities

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I. *introduction*

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the leading network of feminist organisations and individual activists in Asia and the Pacific. Its membership consists of diverse women from 30 countries and territories in the region, who provide strength and expertise to guide and execute its programmes. APWLD has been empowering women to use the law as an instrument of change for equality, justice, peace and development for over 35 years.

Since 2013, APWLD has been promoting a Development Justice framework to advance the transformation of economies, systems of governance and societies in order to achieve peoples' right to development and guarantee human rights. APWLD, along with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), notes that existing mainstream development models have reinforced structural injustices, such as unjust financial, trade and investment agreements, corporate capture, land and resource grabbing, militarism and conflicts, as well as patriarchal authoritarian governance, which perpetuate the marginalisation of historically oppressed peoples, particularly women. In consultation with its membership and wider peoples movements, APWLD has promoted the Development Justice framework as an alternative development model that seeks to address inequalities in wealth, power and resources between countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women and other marginalised social groups.

Development Justice is a new model of development that aims to address inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women – a model that asserts the right to development for all peoples over private profit.

The Development Justice model is framed by five transformative shifts:

1. **Redistributive Justice** aims to redistribute resources, wealth, power and opportunities from a selected few to all human beings equitably. It compels us to dismantle the existing systems that channel resources and wealth from developing countries to wealthy countries, and from people to corporations and elites. It recognises the people as sovereigns of our local and global commons.
2. **Economic Justice** aims to develop economies that enable dignified lives, accommodate needs, and facilitate capabilities, employment and livelihoods available to all, and is not based on exploitation of people or natural resources or environmental destruction. It is a model that makes economies work for people, rather than compelling people to work for economies.
3. **Social and Gender Justice** aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion that pervade our communities. It recognises the need to eliminate patriarchal systems and fundamentalisms, challenge existing social structures, deliver gender justice, ensure sexual and reproductive justice, and guarantee human rights of all peoples.
4. **Environmental Justice** recognises the historical responsibility of countries, and elites within countries whose production, consumption, and extraction patterns have led to human rights violations, climate crisis and environmental disasters. Environmental Justice compels those responsible to alleviate and compensate those with the least culpability but who suffer the most: farmers, fisherfolk, women and other marginalised groups of the Global South.
5. **Accountability to Peoples** requires democratic and just governance that enables people to make informed decisions over their own lives, communities and futures. It necessitates empowering all people, particularly Indigenous Peoples and the most marginalised, to be part of continuous free, prior and informed decision making in all stages of development processes at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Notably, in order to achieve Development Justice, the intersections of the systems of oppression of fundamentalisms, globalisation, militarism and patriarchy must be dismantled. APWLD believes that marginalised women must lead the policy and legal debates that determine the solutions to their community's problems. In particular, APWLD seeks to empower feminist movements and activists to influence laws, policies and practices at the local, national, regional and international levels. At the United Nations (UN), for instance, where international financial institutions and the private sector have expanded their influence, APWLD aims to amplify the voices of grassroots women's organisations to bolster social movements seeking reforms on global governance.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has improved in terms of the universality of its scope and issues relative to its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, it is still missing three key global equity pillars, namely: reform of the global financial systems, financial commitments and means of implementation and accountability mechanisms. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is also a non-binding agreement, which means that there are no official accountability platforms to investigate failures in targets and implementation by states and other actors. The first eight years of SDGs implementation have demonstrated that the UN has failed to effectively hold states accountable to their SDGs commitments. The coming years will be crucial as heightening cases of human rights violations, the escalation of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), deepening poverty and worsening climate change will compound the already precarious living conditions of the most marginalised peoples.

In this light, APWLD saw the need to engage in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs through a Feminist Development Justice (FDJ) lens. In 2016, APWLD launched the FDJ Monitoring Sub-granting Programme, which aims to support national, local and grassroots feminist organisations to conduct an assessment of the SDGs in their respective countries during an 18-month cycle. In 2020, nine partners were selected for its new cycle. Amidst a backdrop of a raging pandemic that saw a global decline in democracy as well as a worsening climate crisis that affected the most vulnerable groups of society, feminists in this programme found the impetus to hold governments accountable for the failures in the progress of the SDGs and targets. Critically, the programme also aims to ensure that the people's transformative development agenda is not relegated within the expansive work of monitoring the SDGs.

Through a combination of fieldwork and desk research, online surveys and local government consultations, women's organisations from Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam critically assessed the implementation of the SDGs in their respective countries. Through an FDJ framework, these organisations found that the pandemic had eroded progress in the SDGs, which has resulted in the worsening of living conditions and human rights situations of women across Asia. Mainstream programmes such as 'Build Back Better' as a pandemic recovery response have largely failed to address the material needs of marginalised peoples in Asia. Further, SDGs monitoring continues to suffer from a lack of data and reporting across the region which means that official government reports may not be providing the full extent of the problems besetting the region. Thus, better data gathering within countries must also be pursued.

This report aims to utilise the experiences of grassroots communities as a starting point to critically assess and interpret regional trends and developments under the SDGs agenda from a Development Justice framework. From these, APWLD has drawn conclusions and recommendations for governments and multilateral institutions alike which could be used as a basis for policy shifts needed to move the SDGs forward. But more importantly, we hope that the stories of grassroots women's struggles against neoliberal globalisation, fundamentalisms, militarism and patriarchy, and their movements, inspire civil society and cross-movements to join and sustain the rallying demand for Development Justice.

The 2020-2021 FDJ Programme Partners

The FDJ Programme in 2020-2021 worked with seven organisations across four sub-regions in Asia. These organisations work with different grassroots communities of women, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), People with Disabilities (PWDs), informal workers, farmers and survivors of SGBV.

1. Beijing-SDG Facilitating Group, China

Beijing-SDG Facilitating Group was formed by Chinese feminists in 2020 with the goal of advancing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the SDGs. The facilitating group is composed of feminists from different generations and backgrounds who exchange information, foster knowledge and build solidarity among women at the local, national and international levels of policy advocacy.

The group's research programme aimed to draw from women's experiences of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to push for the defence of women's rights in China (SDG 5 and 16). They identified mechanisms to increase access to justice for women GBV survivors as well as to demand state accountability.

2. Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), Nepal

Since the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China in 1995, BBC Nepal has been working consistently on the BPfA to promote the civic, political, economic and social empowerment of women and girls in Nepal. BBC Nepal aims to achieve substantive progress in gender equality, the promotion of women's human rights and sustainable development.

BBC Nepal undertook a study on the impact of unequal pay and non-recognition of unpaid care work of women in the informal work sectors (SDG 5 and 8). Through in-depth interviews with 37 women workers informally employed in brick and carpet factories in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, the programme investigated the progress on pay equality for women in the sector as well as the value of unpaid care work by women against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and heightened migrant and gender discrimination. The programme aimed to empower these women to collectively demand equal pay and social support infrastructure to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women.

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3. Center for Sustainable Community Development (SCODE), Vietnam

Since 2005, SCODE has been working on sustainable development in Vietnam. It works to reduce poverty and improve living conditions through integrated community development programmes and environmental protection initiatives. SCODE also pushes for policy advocacy on land rights for ethnic women and climate change resilience.

SCODE tackled the missing role of women in climate action and the Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) in Vietnam (SDG 5 and 13). The programme was conducted in the Quang Tri Province, one of the hardest hit provinces in Vietnam by climate change-induced weather events. Women were invited to participate in capacity building training on the basics of climate change and the differentiated impacts of the climate crisis on women as a way to encourage rural women to demand their governments include them in climate adaptation policy making.

4. HomeNet, Pakistan

HomeNet is a network of 360 organisations with over 50,000 women members across Pakistan that was formed to raise awareness about the working conditions of Home-Based Workers (HBWs). It has been working to harness institutional support for women in the home-based informal economy since 2005. HomeNet fights for the legal

recognition of home-based workers as legally recognised labourers so that they may be eligible for social, economic and legislative benefits and protection. HomeNet believes that in order to reach this goal, governments must adopt fair trade practices that would benefit the working and living conditions of home-based women workers.

HomeNet worked on the conditions of women working in the informal economy (SDG 5 and 8). For this programme, the organisation worked with women home-based workers from Karachi and Lahore on the state of their working conditions as well as the pervading problem of GBV, which had worsened during the pandemic. HomeNet focused on influencing government institutions to include home-based and domestic workers in the social protection programme.

5. Initiative for Right View (IRV), Bangladesh

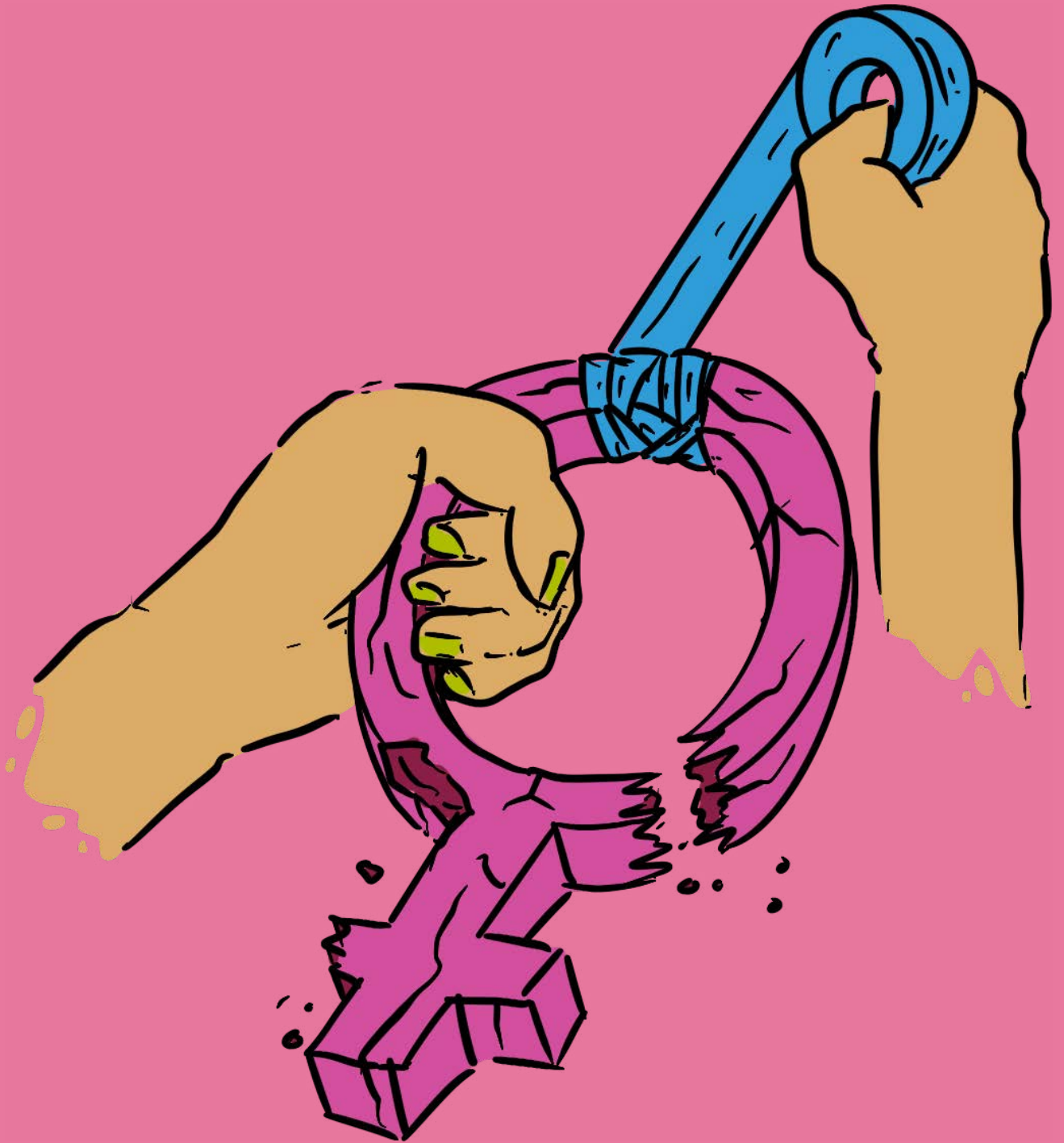
IRV is a rights-based research and campaigning organisation established in 2008. It aims to bring about transformative social change by promoting economic justice, climate justice and biodiversity conservation, disaster risk mitigation, and women's human rights.

IRV worked on the impact of climate change on the IP women's livelihood and food security (SDG 5 and 13). Through this programme, IRV aimed to build the capacities of IP feminist movements and women's organisations so that they would be able to advance gender-responsive sustainable development policies that address the consequences of climate change within their governments.

6. Perempuan AMAN-Maluku, Indonesia

Perempuan AMAN-Maluku is an organisation founded on the experiences of Indigenous women in the North Maluku province in Indonesia. Perempuan AMAN was established to facilitate a forum for indigenous women to learn about their rights, bolster their agency and organise themselves for political action.

Shyrak worked on the issue of gender equality and decent work (SDG 5 and 8). In particular, the organisation held a series of in-depth interviews, community workshops and consultations with 45 Women with Disabilities (WWDs) in Almaty and Almaty Oblast to discuss their labour conditions during the pandemic. The programme sought to empower these women amidst a culture of deep patriarchal repression to demand an end to discrimination on the basis of gender and disability in the labour force by pushing for more inclusive state policies that provide safeguards against discrimination and basic social protection.



II. regional context

Despite its vast natural resources and proficient workforce, Asia and the Pacific region is beset by uneven economic development owing to the nexus of neoliberal capitalism, militarism, fundamentalisms and patriarchy. Multiple systemic barriers hinder genuine economic and societal progress in the region, which are burdened acutely by historically marginalised groups, such as women, children and IPs. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated these cyclical inequities and existing social injustices. Consequently, these systemic barriers as well as the economic and health crises induced by the pandemic have translated into widening inequalities.

While the region has some of the world's fastest growing economies, it is also home to some of the most impoverished countries on the planet. Bold claims of having lifted 1.1 billion people out of extreme poverty¹ obscure the fact that 1.2 billion still live under 3.2 USD per day² — a questionable metric in itself as it does not accurately reflect the prerequisites that sustain poverty upliftment. This figure, which already has the largest share of the world's poor, is expected to rise, as 2020 saw the first time in decades that poverty did not drop in the region.³ Around 32 million people⁴ and possibly more, remain entrenched in extreme poverty with women bearing the worst socio-economic consequences of the multi-dimensional crisis.

The pandemic has exposed further the already dire situations of communities. It has added setbacks in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia Pacific region, especially in the areas of poverty reduction and the right to development.⁵ Many countries in the region are still reeling from the effects of vaccine access inequity, which has been identified as a key factor in the efficiency of economic rebound in the region.⁶ Thus, prospects of economic growth in the region are largely hinged on the ability of governments to control current and emerging variants of COVID-19 as well as provide longer term healthcare strategies.

Many countries in the region also saw their fiscal positions downgraded as soaring pandemic-related spending and falling revenues increased the fiscal deficit among developing countries in the Asia Pacific, from 1.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 to 8.85 per cent in 2021.⁷ Similarly, the majority of countries in the region have incurred unprecedented levels of sovereign debt⁸ as well as increased illicit financial flows that threaten to undermine any headway in economic recovery. As per the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), 11 countries in the region were at high risk of debt distress by the end of 2021.⁹ The average public debt-to-GDP ratio also rose from 51 per cent prior to the pandemic to 63 per cent in 2021.¹⁰ This puts the fulfilment of SDGs at greater risk of failure because governments will

¹United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2019, July 5). *Why can't dynamic Asia-Pacific beat poverty?*. <https://www.unescap.org/blog/why-cant-dynamic-asia-pacific-beat-poverty#:~:text=High%20economic%20growth%20has%20not,threshold%20of%20%241.90%20a%20day>

²The World Bank Group. (2021, March 25). *Uneven Recovery Drives Growing Inequality Across East Asia and the Pacific*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/03/25/uneven-recovery-drives-growing-inequality-across-east-asia-and-the-pacific#:~:text=An%20estimated%2032%20million%20people,Pacific%20at%20the%20World%20Bank>

³At a poverty line of USD 5.50 per day.

⁴The World Bank Group. (2021, March 25). *Uneven Recovery Drives Growing Inequality Across East Asia and the Pacific*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/03/25/uneven-recovery-drives-growing-inequality-across-east-asia-and-the-pacific#:~:text=An%20estimated%2032%20million%20people,Pacific%20at%20the%20World%20Bank>

⁵United Nations Development Programme – Asia and the Pacific. (2022, March 28). *Uneven COVID-19 recovery and widening inequalities risk 'leaving behind' poor and vulnerable across Asia Pacific: Report*. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/press-releases/uneven-covid-19-recovery-and-widening-inequalities-risk-%E2%80%98leaving-behind%E2%80%99-poor-and-vulnerable-across-asia-pacific-report>

⁶United Nations Development Programme – Asia and the Pacific. (2022, March 28). *Uneven COVID-19 recovery and widening inequalities risk 'leaving behind' poor and vulnerable across Asia Pacific: Report*. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/press-releases/uneven-covid-19-recovery-and-widening-inequalities-risk-%E2%80%98leaving-behind%E2%80%99-poor-and-vulnerable-across-asia-pacific-report>

⁷United Nations, Asian Development Bank & United Nations Development Programme. *Building Forward Together: Towards an inclusive and resilient Asia and the Pacific*. <https://www.undp.org/publications/building-forward-together-towards-inclusive-and-resilient-asia-and-pacific>

⁸United Nations, Asian Development Bank & United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Building Forward Together: Towards an inclusive and resilient Asia and the Pacific*. <https://www.undp.org/publications/building-forward-together-towards-inclusive-and-resilient-asia-and-pacific>

⁹The 11 countries are Afghanistan, Lao PDR, Maldives, Marshall Island, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan, Tonga and Tuvalu.

¹⁰The World Bank Group. (2022, March 10). *Debt Service Suspension Initiative*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative#:~:text=Forty%2Deight%20out%20of%2073,according%20to%20the%20latest%20estimates>

struggle to sustain essential spending and investment¹¹ if debt repayments are prioritised. Likewise, debt servicing and the conditionalities imposed by lending institutions force fiscal policies to adopt austerity measures, which will send already fragile social services such as healthcare and social protection into further deterioration. As the pandemic has demonstrated, weak social services not only imperil lives but also embed hindrances to socio-economic resilience.

Figure 1.1 Estimated year to achieve the SDGs at the current pace in Asia and the Pacific, 2017–2021



Source: *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress 2022*, page 2, Figure 1.1

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 SDGs and will only be able to do so by 2065.¹² The odds of meeting any of the SDGs pre-pandemic were already low because of ongoing financial shocks and intensifying consequences of climate change, but the pandemic has virtually made the 2030 targets out of reach.¹³ ‘The gap further widens with each passing year’, the UNESCAP adds.

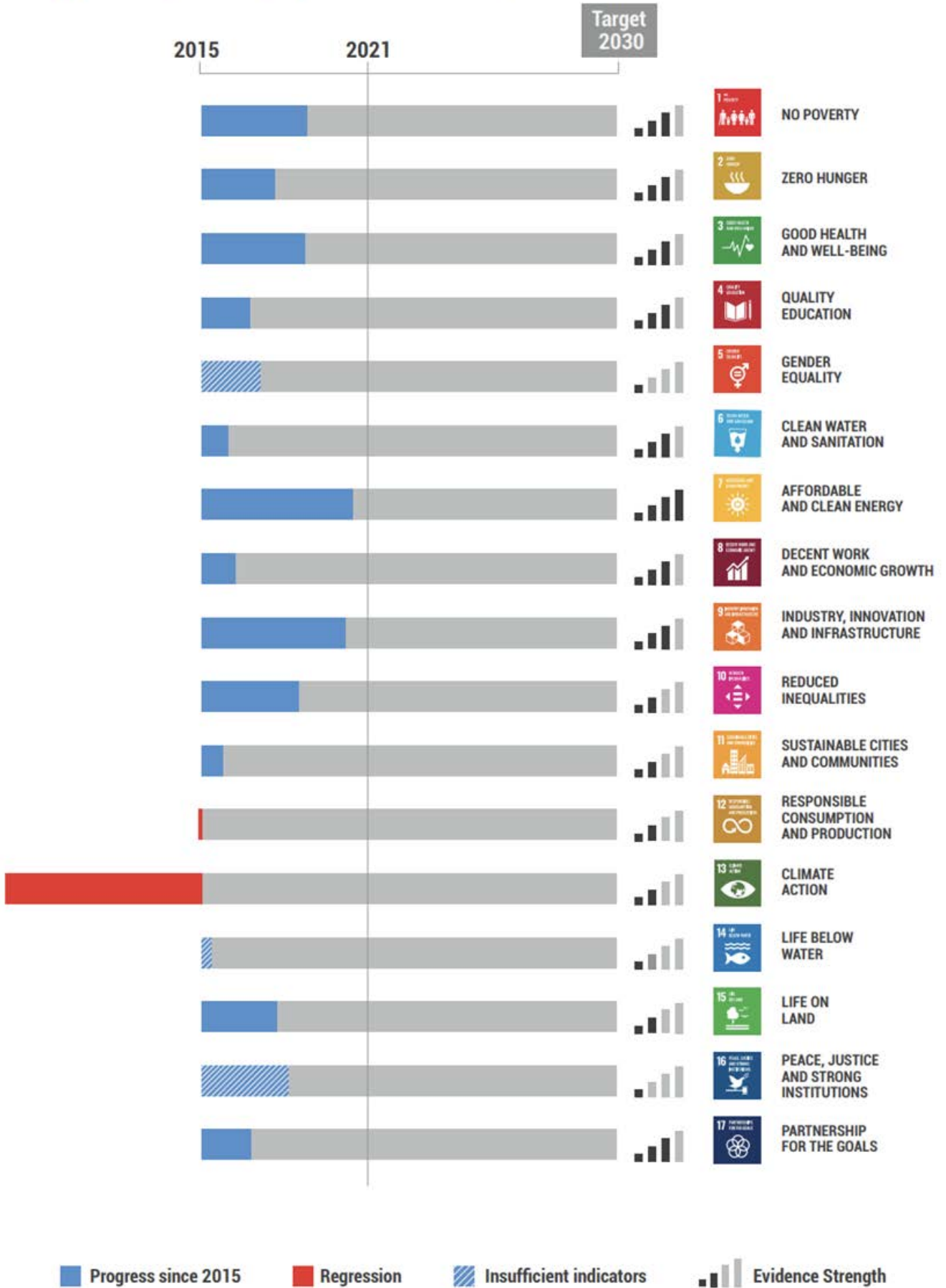
Progress on the SDGs remains stagnant and uneven. While there has been significant advancement on two goals, namely on industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), and affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), progress has been far too slow to meet the other 2030 targets. Relatedly, the region has regressed on climate action (SDG 13)—which encompasses mitigation as well as the more critical front on adaptation—even as the region faces worse heatwaves, droughts, storms and sea-level rise. It should be noted, though, that while SDG 9 and 7 broadly touch upon improving access to energy, production and distribution are still mainly in the hands of private corporations in Asia and the Pacific, which undermines genuine progress on energy democracy in the region. Finally, Asia-Pacific has been a laggard on SDG 4, 5, 6, 8, 11 and 14.

¹¹The World Bank Group. (2022, March 10). *Debt Service Suspension Initiative*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative#:~:text=Forty%2Deight%20out%20of%2073,according%20to%20the%20latest%20estimates>

¹²United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

¹³United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

Figure 1.2 Snapshot of SDG progress in Asia and the Pacific, 2021



Source: Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022, page 4, Figure 1.2

The view on the advancement of gender equality (SDG 5) has been equally dismal. Pre-pandemic data already suggested that Asia-Pacific was slower to advance in this goal than the rest of the world.¹⁴ In the pandemic era, however, gender equality targets seem to have been derailed. Additionally, the SDG 2022 Gender Index shows that there is a dramatic gap between the high and low performers in the region¹⁵, which is also indicative of the way that class standing affects a woman's capacity for financial and societal mobility in the region. For instance, while women in Asia have made strides in terms of assuming leadership and decision-making roles, the gender gap in access to employment and education is widening. This is apparent in how women workers are treated in the region. For example, in Southeast Asia where women comprise the majority of labourers in the manufacturing sector, pregnant women and those with care responsibilities and/or disabilities are routinely discriminated against in the workplace. When corporations cut jobs in the last two years, women were the first to be pushed out. Even women with jobs have had to contend with decreased working hours because they were more likely to be forced out of work than men. Unpaid care work also increased during the ensuing lockdowns, which magnified the double burden on women of contributing financially to their families while also shouldering most of household duties. This has had serious consequences for women's human rights, especially for those already living in precarious circumstances.

GBV also worsened during the pandemic. The UN Women reported that one in two women in 2021 admitted having experienced or known someone who has experienced GBV in their lifetime. In particular, Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) rose sharply during the extended lockdowns that trapped many victims at home living with their abusers.¹⁶ On a broader level, the UNESCAP reports that there are considerable gaps in addressing VAWC, early marriage, unpaid care and domestic work, reproductive health access and rights, equal economic rights, technology for women empowerment, and gender equality policies. Governments throughout the region have failed to institutionalise reliable reporting mechanisms and first responders to GBV.

Data and current pace of governments show that the SDGs are not achievable by 2030. The pandemic has exposed this dire reality, and at the same time worsened conditions. The High Level Political Forum (HLPF), now in its seventh year, aims to address recovery and the gaps in the SDGs implementation. However, the process remains insignificant as it does not bind any commitments and does not hold any stakeholders accountable. The voluntary process is weak and does not address systemic issues at the local and national levels. The goals also fall far short of what is needed to challenge the growth-focused, extractivist model of development, and lack commitment that will shift inequalities of wealth, power and resources and bind governments to meet their human rights obligations. And lastly, the process also fails to make any single financial commitment and have instead further expanded the role of the private sector paving the way for more unaccountable partnerships.

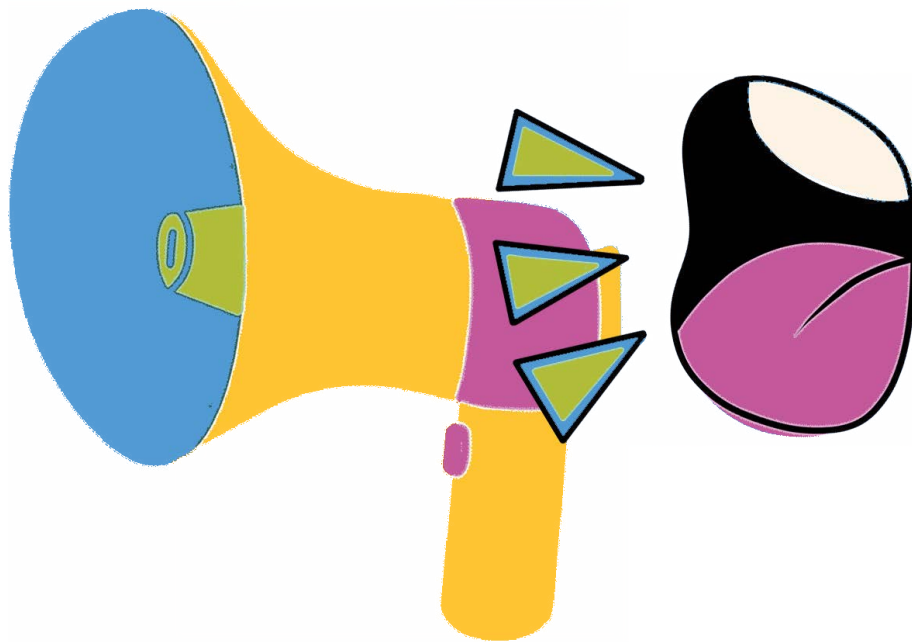
It is evident that business-as-usual politics has endured at the HLPF, even at a time when bold, transformative policy shifts are required to address the unprecedented setbacks the pandemic induced onto the SDGs. There is growing demand among civil society to specify language regarding systemic barriers such as unjust trade and investment agreements, corporate capture, land and resource grabbing, the climate crisis, patriarchy and fundamentalisms, militarism and conflict, and patriarchal authoritarian governance in the outcomes of this forum. We reiterate that addressing these systemic barriers is non-negotiable in

¹⁴The UNESCAP notes that there is not enough data on the indicators for Goal 5.

¹⁵Equal Measures 2030. (2022). *Back to Normal is Not Enough: the 2022 SDG Gender Index*. https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SDG-index-report_FINAL_EN.pdf

¹⁶United Nations Women. (2021, November 24). *Covid-19 and violence against women: What the data tells us*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

any pandemic recovery effort as genuine improvement of people's lives cannot be done through half-baked economic programs built on the same exploitative and extractive systems that propagate multiple crises hounding the world today. Moreover, human rights obligations as well as accountability and transparency mechanisms must be spotlighted in the policy recommendations of the HLPF. Genuine recovery from the pandemic and multiple crises cannot be done by simply adhering to the same policy proposals and interventions that have been exposed as fraudulent and disastrous for the most vulnerable women and their communities. The world risks deepening inequalities in a post-pandemic world if the root causes of systemic barriers and structural inequities are not addressed.





III. systemic barriers to development justice in asia and the pacific

1. Unjust Trade, Investment Agreements and Unsustainable Financing

In the Global South, decades of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have deepened social inequalities, curtailed peoples' rights and freedoms, and diminished the sovereignty and regulatory capacity of the states to act as duty bearers. Grassroots women, unsurprisingly, bore a disproportionate burden of these inequities. Conditionalities and austerity measures have been detrimental to women as fragile social services such as healthcare and social protection dive into further deterioration.

Multinational institutions such as the IMF and WB have long argued that FTAs would usher in mutual prosperity for trading countries. Trade and investment regimes have oftentimes sidelined peoples' recommendations and reinforced States' role in the violation of fundamental rights. FTAs are also often signed in secrecy, away from public scrutiny and oftentimes railroaded. They have been negotiated and decided with virtually no democratic consultation with the larger populations that will be affected, especially women's groups, farmers, fisherfolk, IPs, and workers.

China's Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

China has been building economic allies for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, which is expected to invest in about 70 countries across Asia, Africa and Europe. In November 2020, China signed the (Asia-Pacific) Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is believed to generate significant gains, and improve access of Southeast Asia to BRI funds. But there have been concerns around its neglect¹⁷ and possibly undermining of the situation of rule of law and human rights in partner countries,¹⁸ negative impact on environment, labour rights, and local communities, and lack of gender sensitivity.¹⁹ According to an investigation in 2020 of four especially conflict-prone BRI member countries including Pakistan, Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan and Uganda, these countries were able to get significant Chinese infrastructure investments through the BRI, but certain violations of human rights, environmental and labour standards were reported. There are also rising resistances to the BRI projects due to these violations, which also highlights the lack of transparency and consultation with grassroots and affected communities.²⁰

¹⁷The Central Government of China. (2021, July 14). *In the first half of the year, the total import and export value of trade in goods exceeded 18 trillion yuan.* http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-07/14/content_5624763.htm

¹⁸Faiz, A. (2019, June 7). *Is China's Belt and Road Initiative undermining human rights?* The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/is-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-undermining-human-rights>

¹⁹Haina, L. (2019). Adding a Gender Perspective to China's Belt and Road Initiative as an International Human Rights Obligation. *Frontiers of Law in China*. 14 (4): 455-77. <https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/adding-gender-perspective-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-international>

²⁰Abb, P., Swaine, R. & Jones, I. (2021). Road to Peace or Bone of Contention?. *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*. <https://www.hsfk.de/fileadmin/HSEK/hsfk/publikationen/Report0121.pdf>

In the current trade regime, developing countries were told to liberalise foreign trade, privatise public utilities and social services, and commodify nature under the guise of development. But, the inherent power imbalance between trading countries tilts any potential gains in these agreements to those with more power and wealth. Hence, rich nations extract wealth from impoverished nations by plundering a poor country's resources and pressuring their governments to shape their economic policies with conditionalities in favour of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). The introduction of Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses in trade agreements has undermined the regulatory capacity of states, particularly those from the Global South.

What is an Investor-State Dispute Settlement?

An ISDS allows investors to sue governments and demand financial compensation for any actions, laws, regulations and policies that threaten their investments—real or perceived, as well as current and future profits. The ISDS clause has enabled corporations to sue governments in international and often secretive tribunals for passing critical laws and policies that are supposed to safeguard human rights and provide environmental protection.

In 2021, the APWLD tallied 272 ISDS cases in the Asia Pacific region which have had a significant impact on the sovereignty and governing capacities of developing nations. In 2017, the Pakistan government was ordered to pay USD 11.5 billion in damages²¹ for potential earnings, after the Balochistan provincial government refused the application of Tethyan Copper Company's local subsidiary for a mining lease. The unbalanced, expensive and often secretive process of ISDS cases can derail Global South nations from channelling their resources into social services such as healthcare and education that would critically benefit women.

The ensuing economic hardship triggered by FTAs has consequently forced developing nations to borrow money on onerous terms from multilateral institutions such as the IMF and WB. As a result, decades of FTAs and debt servicing have shrunk fiscal space in the Asia Pacific region. This has severely diminished the capacity of governments to provide life-saving public health and economic interventions to its citizens amidst a public health crisis, as well as initiate rebuilding their respective economies. Specifically, a country's fiscal standing largely determines its ability to mitigate the economic and social costs of the pandemic.²²

FTAs have worsened unequal access to crucial medicines and vaccines that could have cushioned the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the refusal of Global North entities such as the European Union (EU), United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Switzerland to endorse a temporary waiver of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) at a critical juncture hindered Global South nations from mitigating the consequences of a massive public health crisis. When COVID-19 cases spiked amidst the mutation of the virus into several variants, women bore the brunt of the consequences of vaccine inequity, both in the home and the workplace.



²¹Investment Policy Hub. (2022, July 31). *Investment Dispute Settlement Navigator*. <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/investment-dispute-settlement/cases/463/tethyan-copper-v-pakistan>

²²United Nations, Asian Development Bank & United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Building Forward Together: Towards an inclusive and resilient Asia and the Pacific*. <https://www.undp.org/publications/building-forward-together-towards-inclusive-and-resilient-asia-and-pacific>

Women more exposed to precarious working conditions

In Nepal and Pakistan, the pandemic has worsened unpaid care work also resulting in more informal and precarious working conditions for the women. BBC Nepal has reported that women workers in carpet factories in the country lack enforcement of health protocols and are more exposed to hazards at the workplace. Their findings also indicate that workers are not provided with health insurance and are not included in the social security schemes and many workers seek loans to make payments for their medical bills which has further exacerbated their situation and made them more vulnerable and pushed them into a vicious circle of poverty. A participant shared that when a health related emergency occurs, there is no provision or facility provided to them in the factory. However, during an emergency they ask for a loan which they use for the hospital expenses. The provided loan is paid off through their earnings on next month's work.

Similarly, HomeNet in Pakistan reported that Pakistan had a power crisis recently, with blackouts of up to 20 hours in some areas due to the sharp increase in energy demand amidst the hot weather which has immensely affected the women home-based workers and domestic workers. With lack of proper transportation mechanisms, women travelling on two wheelers complain about the high heat and high prices in fares with no social protection coverage. Women in the home-based sector faced issues while working at home. A few of them from Karachi reported that, 'with high temperatures and no electricity, life becomes miserable and we are unable to complete orders in time'. Another home worker from Lahore added, 'We face unscheduled power and gas load shedding in Lahore and yet the bills are higher than our usage. It is becoming difficult for me to work and complete orders sitting at home. My time is wasted and so is my weekly income'.

The region's total share of debt has also increased significantly during the pandemic. As pandemic-related spending rose and revenues fell, the fiscal deficit in developing countries in the region spiked from 1.5 per cent of GDP in 2019 to 6.8 per cent in 2021.²³ The IMF also noted that the region's debt share has increased from its pre-pandemic level of 25 per cent to 38 per cent in 2022.²⁴

Impacts of debt and austerity on women

The current situation in Sri Lanka has also exposed the detrimental impacts of debts, especially to women. In July 2022, the Sri Lankan government declared bankruptcy. The grave mismanagement of financial resources has led to an unprecedented financial and economic crisis. Alongside poor implementation of programs, the country relied heavily on external debt and the usable foreign reserves has become too low to cover their needs from the international market. Hunger and poverty has worsened with inflation already rising to 64.3 per cent in August 2022, and skyrocketing food inflation at 90 per cent.²⁵ As public institutions continue to deteriorate, as well as public funding for basic social services continues to decrease and inflation rises, grassroots women experience multiple burdens as they struggle with increasing unpaid care work and informal and precarious working conditions. It was also reported that the situation of pregnant and nursing mothers are worse than ever, and gender-based and domestic violence increasing.²⁶

²³Reuters. (2020, September 7). *Japan government exposed to 40% of \$6.7 billion Nissan loans*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nissan-funding-idUSKBN25Y0IS>

²⁴Buddhavarapu, R. (2022, July 27). *IMF warns rising debt in Asia puts region at risk*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/28/rising-debt-in-asia-puts-region-at-risk-says-imf-expert.html>

²⁵WFP Staff. (2022, August 4). *Sri Lanka: Rising prices reduce access to food for millions*. World Food Programme: <https://www.wfp.org/stories/sri-lanka-rising-prices-reduce-access-food-millions>

²⁶World Health Organization. (2022, November 25). *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/srilanka/news/detail/25-11-2022-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women>

The Group of Twenty (G20) has been offering temporary debt relief to countries such as the Debt Services Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and other forms of debt restructuring that, according to them, will halt some of the economic implications of the debt crisis. With DSSI, a country can request its bilateral lender to delay debt service repayment for up to three years as a form of debt relief. In 2021, 11 countries from Asia-Pacific joined the G20 led Debt Services Suspension Initiative (DSSI).²⁷ However, at only 1.9 per cent of their combined GDP and providing debt relief for less than one-fifth of their obligations between 2020 and 2021, the total potential savings from this initiative for these 11 countries is miniscule. The measure is severely insufficient in the face of the enormous losses suffered by the poorest nations of the world.

Recommendations:

- Cancel debts, particularly those incurred under onerous terms, and ensure debt-free support to education, health, and social protection in the post-pandemic recovery period. Debt is a shackle to maintain the colonial and imperialist power structures.
- Establish a sovereign debt restructuring mechanism that is a necessary alternative to the fragmented, ad hoc and often inequitable legal approach that currently exists for restructuring debt— a problem exacerbated by the growing number of creditors as debt has moved from banks to capital markets and by the role of so-called vulture funds.
- Re-orient trade policy towards transparent, participatory and redistributive global trade rules that are people-oriented and infuse grassroots perspective.
- Conduct ex-ante and periodic human rights and gender impact assessments of trade and investment agreements as a way to prevent the implementation of harmful trade and investment agreements.
- Large-scale investments in the public sector such as infrastructure, transportation, energy and education can also cushion the effects of the economic downturn in the interim while also reversing the effects of decades-old austerity measures, thus preparing developing nations for future economic shocks.



²⁷World Bank. (2022, March 10). *Debt Service Suspension Initiative*. The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative>

2. Corporate Capture

Massive accumulation of wealth by the elite coincided with the corporate capture of governments. This has been exacerbated during the pandemic as large companies took advantage of tax bailouts that were designed to cushion the economic costs of extended lockdowns and health restrictions. For instance, 22 companies in the US generated USD 1.5 trillion in shareholder profits during the first 22 months of the pandemic, while workers' benefits got less than two per cent of shares.²⁸ Over USD 800 billion in shareholder profits went to the richest five per cent of Americans or only 6 million families as 22 CEOs earned a combined sum of USD 500 million in compensation.²⁹ This happened against a backdrop of 400 million job losses globally.³⁰

The last decade was already the most profitable time in history for the world's largest corporations, with Global Fortune 500 firms seeing their profits increase by 156 per cent, from USD 820 billion in 2009 to USD 2.1 trillion in 2019.³¹ During the pandemic, however, capitalists amassed fortunes beyond imagination. For instance, four of the six biggest earners are Big Tech CEOs – Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and Microsoft's Bill Gates with \$165 billion and \$130 billion, respectively, and Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin claim ranks five and six with \$114 billion and \$109 billion respectively.³²

In the Asia-Pacific region, the economic crisis is also surprisingly the most profitable time for corporations as they benefit from pandemic-related government bailouts. In Japan, the government approved a stimulus package that primarily benefited corporations, such as Nissan Motor which secured a USD 6.7 billion bailout loan.³³ In India, companies that wanted to buy back their shares from investors in a bid to inspire shareholder confidence amidst the economic downturn lobbied to suspend taxes for at least a year.³⁴ Mining corporations also pushed for tax holidays in many countries even as their operations continued despite public health restrictions.

Omnibus Law in Indonesia

In Indonesia, President Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi) railroaded the passage of a controversial 'jobs creation' Omnibus Law that diminished workers' rights and environmental regulations in order to accommodate foreign investors.³⁵ The Omnibus Law is created as a way to amend 79 existing laws in Indonesia,³⁶ which poses a threat to grassroots and women workers as it further opens the country to foreign and corporate investments. As the country loosens its labour and economic protection policies, women will be further trapped into low-wage, precarious, and flexible labour conditions, subsequently weakening their collective labour-power. Over time, these situations trigger women to move to the informal sector and migrate to work without any labour and social protections. Due to the lack of clarity in the regulatory framework on the labour inspection and the licence of Indonesian migrant workers placement agency, women migrant workers will be more vulnerable to violence and other forms of human rights violations.

²⁸Kinder, M., Bach, K. & Stateler, L. (2022). *Profits and the pandemic: As shareholder wealth soared, workers were left behind*. Brookings Metro. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Pandemic_Profits_report.pdf

²⁹Kinder, M., Bach, K. & Stateler, L. (2022). *Profits and the pandemic: As shareholder wealth soared, workers were left behind*. Brookings Metro. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Pandemic_Profits_report.pdf

³⁰OXFAM. (2020, September 9). *Pandemic profits for companies soar by billions more as poorest pay price*. <https://www.oxfam.org/es/node/14171>

³¹OXFAM. (2020, September 9). *Pandemic profits for companies soar by billions more as poorest pay price*. <https://www.oxfam.org/es/node/14171>

³²Zandt, F. (2022, March 15). *The U.S. Billionaires Profiting the Most from the Pandemic*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/chart/22068/change-in-wealth-of-billionaires-during-pandemic/>

³³Reuters. (2020, September 7). *Japan government exposed to 40% of \$6.7 billion Nissan loans: sources*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nissan-funding-idUSKBN25Y0IS>

³⁴Mascarenhas, R. (2020, March 19). *Companies flush with cash propose buybacks to lift falling stocks*. Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/stocks/news/companies-flush-with-cash-propose-buybacks-to-lift-falling-stocks/articleshow/74702686.cms>

³⁵Reuters. (2021, June 17). *Indonesia's government defends legal challenge to job creation law*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesias-government-defends-legal-challenge-job-creation-law-2021-06-17/>

³⁶Hosen, N., Kingsley, J. J., & Lindsey, T. (2020, June 17). *Indonesia's omnibus bill: typo or 'mistaken instruction'?*. The University of Melbourne. <https://indonesiatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/indonesias-omnibus-bill-typo-or-mistaken-instruction/>

A wave of tax exemptions for large corporations, incentives and the rollback on labour and environmental safeguards in the region is further proof of the vulnerability of governments to corporate influence.

The consolidation of corporate power in the world has worsened wealth disparity. In the Asia-Pacific, the number of High Net Worth Individuals (HNWI)³⁷ increased from 4.7 million in 2014 to 6.91 million in 2019.³⁸ In 2018, HNWIs controlled USD 20.6 trillion of the wealth in the region, which translated to less than one per cent of the region's population possessing wealth that is 54 times more than the combined GDPs of Asia-Pacific's Least Developed Countries (LDCs).³⁹ Meanwhile, in Nepal, women workers in the informal sector earn an average of USD 67 per month, an amount that is certainly below any poverty threshold. In Pakistan, minimum wage earners get an average of USD 130 per month and worse during the pandemic is the disparity between wages and high inflation, and the transition of most women workers from formal to informal economy.⁴⁰ The staggering disparity in incomes in the region also manifests in the sustained deterioration of democratic institutions. The enormous gulf between the wealthiest and ordinary citizens has consolidated political power among a few elites in the region, eroding democracy and catapulting authoritarian regimes in the process.

Digital innovation has also altered production and consumption patterns with far-reaching implications for the world of work and has led to the rise of 'big data' as a valuable material that is mined to support new forms of capitalist accumulation. Facilitating this digital revolution is the construction of massive e-infrastructures and



production of millions of digital tools anchored on the global supply chain. The Global South struggles with fairness and inclusion in this digital transformation, data privacy and autonomy over the management and utilisation of our own data, as well as accountability and transparency of actors who are driving and controlling the 'digital revolution'. As we see the rise of big tech companies, there is also a growing demand to ensure data protection legislation based on international human rights standards and guided by the 7 principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). To secure our data against corporate ownership and weaponisation against certain groups, tech companies must be held accountable for their role in privacy breaches and digital surveillance with implications on local communities and governments in the Asia Pacific region.

Alongside this, multilateralism appears to have also been influenced and captured by corporations. For instance, the 2030 Agenda continues to push for the increase of FDI inflows to developing countries as a development framework. Developing countries are encouraged to attract foreign investors by introducing tax exemptions and incentives as well as loosen labour and environmental regulations. However, these measures deprive countries of much needed revenues that do not advance the goal of genuine economic development as elaborated in the SDGs. Moreover, the derailed approval of the TRIPS waiver of the COVID-19 vaccine was a prominent example of the stronghold corporations had on the multilateral processes. At the UNFCCC's recent COPs, fossil fuel industry representatives were discovered to outnumber party delegations, raising questions on the undue influence the industry wields on climate negotiations.⁴¹

In September 2021, the UN Secretary General introduced Our Common Agenda (OCA) – a 12-point commitment from the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The OCA is a response to the request of member states to report back on recommendations to address the current challenges. However, civil society groups have been expressing concerns on the OCA and its implications. According to the WMG, the OCA diverts multilateralism from being rights-based and is instead going towards a multistakeholder approach, which means opening up space and giving corporations a role. This is concerning and will further cement neoliberal policies even at the UN by surrendering development and economic policies to profit-making.

³⁷O'Connell, B. (2022, July 26). *HNWI: High-Net-Worth Individuals*. Forbes Advisor. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/investing/financial-advisor/high-net-worth-individual-hwni/>

³⁸Statista. (2022, May 3). *Number of high-net individuals in the Asia Pacific region from 2011 to 2020*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1039014/apac-number-of-hnwi/#:~:text=There%20were%20about%206.91%20million,U.S.%20dollars%20in%20that%20year>

³⁹Capgemini. (2018). *World Wealth Report 2018*. <https://www.capgemini.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Capgemini-World-Wealth-Report.pdf>

⁴⁰NMW Pakistan. (2022). *The minimum wage goes up in Pakistan*. [countryeconomy.com. https://countryeconomy.com/national-minimum-wage/pakistan](https://countryeconomy.com/national-minimum-wage/pakistan)

⁴¹McGrath, M. (2021, November 8). *COP 26: Fossil fuel industry has largest delegation at climate summit*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-59199484>

Recommendations:

- Finance and support the implementation of the UN resolution on establishing a UN Intergovernmental Tax Commission and a UN Tax Convention. A global tax body housed in the UN would be a critical step towards a coherent global system of tax rules that is in the interests of all countries, including the poorest countries who stand to lose the most from the loss of tax revenue. Further, it would be a step towards putting an end to the dangerous 'race to the bottom' in tax incentives.
- Create a binding, regulatory framework for business based on international human rights law. There is a need for robust regulation of businesses to ensure they act consistently with human rights standards and are held accountable for human rights violations.
- Policy emphasis on digitisation and technological advancements must ensure a thorough review of the potential adverse effects on livelihoods, the economy, environment, society, culture, and civil and political rights of the people.
- Strengthen the UN technology facilitation mechanism established in the 2030 Agenda to provide policy guidance in participatory assessment of actual and potential impacts of new technologies including digital technologies introduced and developed by big transnational corporations.
- Strategic sectors like health, education, social protection, food systems, disaster preparedness, among many others, must not be converted into sources of profit for the private sector. Stronger partnership between the people and democratic government based on mutual trust, solidarity and recognition of each other's contributions is a far more strategic and bottom-up approach to investment and financing.
- Delivery of the SDGs should be based on a strengthened, more inclusive and cooperative multilateralism rather than dependency on private sector investments.

⁴²Women's Major Group. (2022, March). *A Feminist Analysis of Our Common Agenda: The Women's Major Group's Response to the UN Secretary General's Report*. https://womensmajorgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/WMG-Analysis-on-Our-Common-Agenda_.pdf

3. Land and Resource Grabbing

Owing to having 34 per cent of the world's agricultural lands,⁴³ the Asia region is a fertile ground for the incursion of agribusinesses, hedge funds and private equity funds into its land market. Soaring food prices globally, owing to multiple reasons, has made buying farmlands highly profitable. This is done through a process called 'foreign land deals' wherein productive agricultural lands in the Global South countries are purchased or leased for long-term by big corporations from Global North countries for large-scale production sites of food crops and feedstock for biofuels.⁴⁴ This, in effect, gradually legitimised land and resource grabbing in many parts of the Asia-Pacific region where foreign land ownership was constitutionally prohibited.

A huge portion of these agricultural lands are home to some 26 million IPs⁴⁵ who constantly face attacks against their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The convergence of militarism and authoritarian governance in the region has intensified direct attacks on environment and indigenous women human rights defenders by state and private security forces. In some cases, such as in Pakistan, the military itself is involved in seizing lands from people to build military housing units.⁴⁶



Case Study: Land Grabbing by Government for Development Projects Under Urbanisation - River Ravi Development Authority Project

Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) is an approved urban development mega project in Lahore District, Punjab, Pakistan that runs along the Ravi River in a northeast to southwest direction. It includes the construction of a 40,000-hectare (100,000-acre) planned city and the rehabilitation of the Ravi River into a perennial freshwater body. The project is expected to be completed in three phases, and will be the largest riverfront project in the world after completion. The project was inaugurated on 7 August 2020 by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and began in December 2020. As of January 2021, it has attracted US\$8 billion in foreign investment.

Local farmers have been protesting against the RUDA project, firstly because the government is purchasing land from small farmers at cheap rates and secondly, the project itself is a danger to the city habitat. The project is likely to cause adverse environmental impacts. Civil society groups believe that the ecosystem of the River Ravi Basin is irreparably damaged by the construction of storage dams in India and by the untreated discharge of polluted water into it by the cities of Lahore, Sialkot, Gujranwala, and Faisalabad. Thus, any project along the banks of the Ravi should seek to revitalise its ecosystem rather than causing adverse damages on the environment and local landowners.

⁴³Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020, May 7). *Land use in agriculture by the numbers*.

<https://www.fao.org/sustainability/news/detail/en/c/1274219>

⁴⁴Ibon Foundation. (2011, June 16). *Foreign land deals: global land grabbing?*.

<https://www.ibon.org/foreign-land-deals-global-land-grabbing/>

⁴⁵Errico, S. (2017). *The Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Asia*. International Labour Organisation.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dgreports/-/gender/documents/publication/wcms_545484.pdf

⁴⁶Land Portal. (2021, May 3). *Pakistan's Biggest Land Grabber*.

<https://landportal.org/node/99561>

Similarly, in Nepal, the conflict of Newar of Khokhana against the government is also related to land and resource grabbing. The government wants to build a 76-km road, which will be the shortest linking Kathmandu and the Nijgadh-Tarai, and is estimated to take four years to complete at the cost of Rs 110 billion. Whereas, the local Newar are against the expansion saying it will destroy the rich Newari heritage and culture.⁴⁷ Governments are leading such development projects by adopting a top-to-bottom approach, which lacks prior consultation and has mostly failed to address the demands of the community peoples.

Displacement among farmers and indigenous communities continues to rise and has reinforced cyclical poverty, especially for women. In Bangladesh, the indigenous Mahato and Munda women are constantly being displaced through land grabbing, especially in the face of intensifying climate impacts and rapid land-use change induced by corporations. For many marginalised women in Asia and the Pacific, the right to land is tantamount to the right to life itself.

In China, it is estimated that conflict over land accounted for 65 per cent of the 187,000 mass conflicts in 2010, and approximately 4 million rural people's lands are taken by the government every year.⁴⁸ In December 2017, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers were forced to move out of Beijing in a campaign to 'clear out the low-end population'.⁴⁹ Severe cases that lead to loss of lives happen from time to time. For example, in 2009, a woman in Chengdu City set herself on fire when trying to stop the government agency from violently demolishing her house.⁵⁰ In 2016, a man in Zhengzhou City killed three people and then was shot dead by the police after being forced to evict from his home to make room for development. Across the region, there is a fundamental disregard for the recognition of the rights of IPs in national and local laws. Even in existing formal bureaucratic spaces, such as in the negotiations for their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), IPs are denied democratic participation through systematic harassment and intimidation. In the case of land tenure, women are also disenfranchised through discriminatory land ownership laws. The UN Working Group on discrimination against women and law and practices confirmed that, 'women are more harshly affected by land tenure insecurity due to direct and indirect customary laws and practices at the national, community and family levels'.⁵¹

Land and resource grabbing in the region did not abate during the pandemic despite public health restrictions on mobility. On the contrary, lockdown and movement regulations prevented environmental defenders and communities from guarding their land or attending public hearings which made the encroachment by corporations easier.⁵² Under the banner of economic recovery, governments across the region have passed laws and provisions that will speed up programme approvals by easing environmental protections and disregarding IP rights.⁵³ In Indonesia, a law has been passed that makes it easier to annex community land and forests, including ancestral domains, to be cleared for industrial purposes.⁵⁴ India has allowed the private sector into coal mining in forest land while also setting up a new Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification that speeds up programme approvals with less compliance.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the Cook Islands, a tourism-dependent country with a fragile ecosystem, will officially allow seabed mining licences.⁵⁶

⁴⁷Bhattarai, K. D. (2020, July 11). *Khokana epitomises how Nepal gets its development wrong*. Annapurna Express. <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/news/khokana-epitomizes-how-nepal-gets-its-development-wrong-2636>

⁴⁸Landesa. (2012, February 6). *Findings from Landesa's survey of rural China published*. <https://www.landesa.org/press-and-media/6th-china-survey/>

⁴⁹Rivers, M. & Wang, S. (2017, December 9). *Migrant workers evicted from homes in Beijing*. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/08/asia/china-migrant-workers-evictions-beijing/index.html>

⁵⁰Sina News. (2019). *The self-immolation incident of demolition households in Chengdu*. <http://news.sina.com.cn/z/cdqhzhf/62>

⁵¹United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, Special Rapporteurs & Independent Experts and Working Groups (2017). *Insecure land rights for women threaten progress on gender equality and sustainable development*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/insecure-land-rights-women-threat-progress-gender-equality-and-sustainable-development>

⁵²Chandran, R. (2020, August 12). *Land, environment laws diluted as Asia-Pacific nations eye growth*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asiapac-landrights-lawmaking-idUSKCN258003>

⁵³Chandran, R. (2020, August 12). *Land, environment laws diluted as Asia-Pacific nations eye growth*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asiapac-landrights-lawmaking-idUSKCN258003>

⁵⁴Chandran, R. (2020, August 12). *Land, environment laws diluted as Asia-Pacific nations eye growth*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asiapac-landrights-lawmaking-idUSKCN258003>

⁵⁵Chandran, R. (2020, August 12). *Land, environment laws diluted as Asia-Pacific nations eye growth*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asiapac-landrights-lawmaking-idUSKCN258003>

⁵⁶Chandran, R. (2020, August 12). *Land, environment laws diluted as Asia-Pacific nations eye growth*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asiapac-landrights-lawmaking-idUSKCN258003>

Aside from the assault on human rights, corporate takeover of agricultural lands also poses a threat to global food security, which is detrimental to women. Despite agribusiness occupying land that could feed 1 billion people, the same number of people suffer from hunger globally. In many countries, local communities have rarely benefitted from agribusiness as foreign land investors often grow crops for export. As the multiple crises resulting from the pandemic, the climate crisis and wars drive food prices up, land will become an even more high-value asset for the global elite. Women, who are left in the household to tend to their children for nutrition and well-being have become more vulnerable as they face the forefront of large-scale land grabbing and displacement.

Recommendations:

- Enshrine principles of land distribution and concretise them into law and policies at the national level, to uphold rights of indigenous communities and grassroots women in ensuring food sovereignty and land rights.
- Impose protection policies to ensure stricter and more transparent processes on EIAs. It should also be non-negotiable that the communities are engaged in these processes.
- Strengthen local food systems. Governments must adopt agricultural value chain development guidelines that promote transformational partnerships with small-scale producers. These guidelines must reflect core values of food sovereignty, human rights, resilience, and sustainability.
- Governments should fund cooperatives and social enterprises engaged in local sustainable economic development initiatives must also be funded and provided resources by governments.
- Promote people-led agroecology as an alternative to large-scale corporatised farming.



⁵⁷Geary, K. (2012). *Our Land, Our Lives: Time out on the Global Land Rush*. Oxfam International. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/our-land-our-lives-time-out-on-the-global-land-rush-246731/>

⁵⁸Geary, K. (2012). *Our Land, Our Lives: Time out on the Global Land Rush*. Oxfam International. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/our-land-our-lives-time-out-on-the-global-land-rush-246731/>

4. Climate Crisis

The Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. In South Asia alone, 750 million people were affected by one or more climate-induced disasters in the last two decades.⁵⁹ Every year, the Philippines is hit by more intense and frequent typhoons, while parts of Tuvalu are on the verge of disappearing due to rising sea-levels.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Asia-Pacific region is contending with the worst impacts of climate change. Five of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate devastation are in Asia.⁶¹

Case Story:

Ethnic Minority Communities in Bangladesh Bear the Brunt of Climate Change the Most

Dhires Mahato, a leader of the community at village Hariharpur under Uttar Bedkashi, Kayra in Bangladesh where 54 families of the ethnic minority community live, said that the community people were the worst sufferers of the disasters because most of them live on the Khas lands by the side of the rivers.

'Many of our community people were displaced during cyclone Amphan and are living by the roadside since cyclone Amphan hit the areas,' he said. He added that the male members of his community left houses for distant districts for almost six months a year but, in 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 did not allow them to go outside. The people are suffering and need income and food. 'We cannot afford adequate food for our family, and the education of our children has been hampered seriously,' he said. He added that many in their community have to go to the Sundarbans braving fear of tiger attacks as they have no work or employment opportunity in their areas.

Similarly, natural disasters and the recent COVID-19 outbreak have aggravated the situation. Today, many parents in their community marry off their daughters early so that they can be relieved of the burden of providing food, as explained by Urmila Munda, village Majher Ait, Upazila Koyra, District Khulna.

The vulnerability of the community to disasters also widens vulnerability of women and girls to further exploitation and inequalities.

Source: Peoples' Development Justice Report, FDJ monitoring programme 2020-2021, National monitoring and review of sustainable development goals and Development Justice in Bangladesh, Initiative for Right View (IRV), page 30

Structural inequities in the region are compounding the consequences of climate change for marginalised sectors. In particular, rural women in Asia-Pacific who play a large role in rural economies, disproportionately bear the brunt of climate impacts.⁶² In Nepal and Bangladesh, for instance, women account for 60 per cent and 50 per cent of agriculture workers, respectively.⁶³ Women in agriculture, fisheries and forestry are also more likely to be informal workers.⁶⁴ As fluctuating weather patterns disrupt agricultural production, incomes and working conditions of women

⁵⁹The World Bank Group. (2021, November 30). *What You Need to Know about the World Bank Group's South Asia Climate Roadmap*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/11/17/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-world-bank-group-s-south-asia-climate-roadmap>

⁶⁰Roy, E. A. (2019, May 16). *One day we'll disappear: Tuvalu's sinking islands*. The Guardian. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

⁶¹Amin, M. A. (2021, January 25). *Bangladesh remains 7th most vulnerable to climate change*. <https://www.tbsnews.net/environment/climate-change/bangladesh-remains-7th-most-vulnerable-climate-change-191044>

⁶²United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

⁶³United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

⁶⁴United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

agricultural workers will be affected. Climate change will also deplete water supply and limit access to firewood for cooking. In Vietnam, women and girls in 67 per cent of households are tasked with water collection.⁶⁵ Likewise, many women live in households that rely on firewood for cooking, with up to 72 per cent in Cambodia and 59 per cent in Burma/Myanmar.⁶⁶ Climate impacts could potentially raise the burden of unpaid care work on women. Relatedly, the continued reliance on fossil fuels in Pakistan is causing more power outages in the country, which has severe health consequences for women home-based workers during heatwaves, according to HomeNet Pakistan.

Women in the home-based sector in Pakistan face issues while working at home. 'With high temperatures and no electricity, life becomes miserable and we are unable to complete tasks in time,' report women home workers from Karachi. 'We face unscheduled power and gas load shedding in Lahore yet the bills are higher than our usage. It is becoming difficult for me to work and complete orders sitting at home. My time is wasted and so is my weekly income,' shared a home-based worker from Lahore.

The intersection of poverty, climate change and patriarchal impositions worsen the living conditions and status of women in many Asia Pacific societies.

Despite the urgency of climate change in the region, little progress has been made in climate action, particularly on adaptation. In fact, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report found that adaptation efforts are 'unevenly distributed' as well as being 'fragmented, small in scale [and] incremental'.⁶⁷ Moreover, the world's leading scientists have warned that current levels of adaptation are far from the levels needed to adequately respond to climate impacts and reduce climate risks.⁶⁸

In addition to this, women who are at the end of the climate crisis are further left behind in decision-making. In Kazakhstan, Shyrak said, 'Women are not able to control environmental goods and services; they have a low level of participation in decision-making, and are not involved in the distribution of environmental management benefits. Consequently, in this regard, women are becoming less able to confront climate change.'

Sub-regions in Asia have done little to tackle transboundary risks of climate change, despite the region becoming more integrated in trade, mobility and natural resource dependence. For example, Asia has 57 transboundary river basins that are under excessive development and climate change related pressures but are not governed by any treaty or basin agreement.⁶⁹ Trade across sub-regions has also increased by 20 per cent in the last decade, with Southeast Asia accounting for the biggest share of regional trade at 31 per cent.⁷⁰ Additionally, migration across the region has been on the rise due to climate-related disasters, economic opportunities and security issues.⁷¹ Vietnam, being a disaster-vulnerable country, has more than 74 per cent of its population affected by climate change, especially grassroots and marginalised communities who lack the ability to recover from major damage after natural disasters, while urbanisation has increased the distance of migrant families with limited access to social services.

⁶⁵United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

⁶⁶United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/ESCAP-2022-FG_SDG-Progress-Report.pdf

⁶⁷Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2021). *The Sixth Assessment Report*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

⁶⁸Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2021). *The Sixth Assessment Report*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/>

⁶⁹Prabhakar, S. V. R. K., Shivakoti, B.R. & Corral, A.F. (2018). *Transboundary Impacts of Climate Change in Asia: Making a Case for Regional Adaptation Planning and Cooperation: IGES Discussion Paper (Ver 1.0)*. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies and Global Development Network. https://isap.iges.or.jp/2018/pdf/P4_Discussion_Paper.pdf

⁷⁰Prabhakar, S. V. R. K., Shivakoti, B.R. & Corral, A.F. (2018). *Transboundary Impacts of Climate Change in Asia: Making a Case for Regional Adaptation Planning and Cooperation: IGES Discussion Paper (Ver 1.0)*. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies and Global Development Network. https://isap.iges.or.jp/2018/pdf/P4_Discussion_Paper.pdf

⁷¹Prabhakar, S. V. R. K., Shivakoti, B.R. & Corral, A.F. (2018). *Transboundary Impacts of Climate Change in Asia: Making a Case for Regional Adaptation Planning and Cooperation: IGES Discussion Paper (Ver 1.0)*. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies and Global Development Network. https://isap.iges.or.jp/2018/pdf/P4_Discussion_Paper.pdf

Because of the increasing interconnectedness and subsequent shared fragilities, climate impacts that are felt in one region will have direct and indirect effects on another.⁷² However, despite the rapid increase of globalisation and interconnectedness, burden sharing on climate adaptation is not advancing fast enough.

Amidst the Global North-led narratives on climate governance, governments in the region have focused mostly on false solutions that not only set back climate action but also commodify nature. For instance, many countries in Asia-Pacific, notably India and China, continue to promote carbon markets as a solution to curbing emissions. As has already been proven, 'buying and trading' carbon credits do not deliver real emission cuts because this mechanism is highly susceptible to manipulation.⁷³ Additionally, Global North countries are yet to fulfil their pledge to the USD 100 billion climate finance goal in 2020, a significant portion of which must be directed to climate vulnerable countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Recommendations:

- Governments to lay out an economic recovery plan that works towards decarbonisation through the framework of a just and equitable transition.
- Governments to create good jobs by heavily investing in public sector services that improve access to renewable energy and clean water, provide reliable and safe transportation, quality education and deliver a stable healthcare system, that will not only revitalise the economy in the short run but also comprehensively prepares society for the long-term challenges of climate change.
- Equally important, governments must install adaptation systems that prepare vulnerable communities for climate-related weather events as well as reduce transboundary climate risks.
- Women, especially the grassroots and most marginalised should be consulted and involved in policy decision-making on climate change.



⁷²Prabhakar, S. V. R. K., Shivakoti, B.R. & Corral, A.F. (2018). *Transboundary Impacts of Climate Change in Asia: Making a Case for Regional Adaptation Planning and Cooperation: IGES Discussion Paper (Ver 1.0)*. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies and Global Development Network. https://isap.iges.or.jp/2018/pdf/P4_Discussion_Paper.pdf

⁷³Griscom, B. (2021, November 9). *A scientist's view: Critics of carbon markets miss the mark*. Conservation.org. <https://www.conservation.org/blog/a-scientists-view-critics-of-carbon-markets-miss-the-mark>

5. Patriarchy and Fundamentalisms



Patriarchal values continue to shape policies governing women's lives and futures in the Asia-Pacific. It influences — if not, forms — the basis of laws, systems and practices that continually erode women's status in society so that they are confined to child-bearing and caregiving roles.⁷⁴ Especially in agrarian economies, even when women participate in the workforce, they are paid subsistence wages that are still consumed by the family, leaving them with little to no financial power.⁷⁵ Worse still, owing to patriarchal expectations, women are expected to assume most of the care and household responsibilities in the family.

Unpaid care work increased during the pandemic, as lockdowns and mobility restrictions restricted family members' activities to the home. According to BBC Nepal, mobility restrictions compounded housework load for women workers already working 10-12 hours per day. Women, who had already been doing most of the care work pre-pandemic, had to take on more domestic duties that might have been previously supported by the state (i.e. through schools and daycares). In the Asia-Pacific region, women are overwhelmingly spending more time on unpaid domestic chores and care work than men. In China, according to Beijing SDG Facilitating group, women spend at least 15 per cent of their day on household duties, versus men who spend an average of only 6 per cent.⁷⁶ In deeply patriarchal societies, this disparity affects a woman's ability to lift herself out of precarious circumstances. Moreover, it propagates a cycle of oppression as women who are ill-equipped to negotiate the division of care responsibilities lose their autonomy and agency and might pass on this attitude to younger generations.⁷⁷

GBV also surged during the pandemic, especially VAW. In the Asia-Pacific, the percentage of women who experienced IPV in 2020 ranged from 4.9 per cent to 47.6 per cent.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the percentage who have experienced IPV in their lifetime ranged from 14.8 per cent to 64.1 per cent,⁷⁹ which could mean that either more women are experiencing violence or more women have reported these cases recently. It should be noted that collecting data on GBV can be difficult for a number of reasons such as the stigma associated with being a victim of VAW, cultural norms that dictate IPV to be private disputes, and fear of retaliation from the abuser.⁸⁰ In spite of this, the current data is still alarming because in some countries at least 50 per cent of women are reporting harm caused by their partners. Likewise, the percentage of women who reported non-partner violence is also concerning. In 2020, between 0.9 to 7.95 per cent of women reported having experienced non-partner violence. Meanwhile, those who experienced non-partner violence over their lifetime were between 5.1 to 67.8 per cent.⁸¹ In China, for instance, a 2020 survey concluded that 28 per cent of cisgender women and non-binary folk experienced different forms of sexual harassment and violence, according to the Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group. This number is presumably higher given that reporting mechanisms for GBV in China are inadequate in creating a safe environment for survivors.

In Pakistan, VAW also increased significantly during the pandemic. This is manifested in physical, psychological and sexual violence. A home-based worker in Pakistan said, 'Physical abuse is bearable rather than psychological violence because it takes away the peace of my life'. Domestic violence is a persistent problem in Kazakhstan and was already happening even before the pandemic. However, during the pandemic, the situation with domestic violence worsened, because of the prolonged

⁷⁴Nainar, V. (2013). *Patriarchy in South Asia – Structures and Relations*. Analyse and Kritik. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2317080>

⁷⁵Nainar, V. (2013). *Patriarchy in South Asia – Structures and Relations*. Analyse and Kritik. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2317080>

⁷⁶United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022>

⁷⁷Marphatia, A. & Moussie, R. (2013). *A question of gender justice: Exploring the linkages between women's unpaid care work, education, and gender equality*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2013.05.005>

⁷⁸United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022>

⁷⁹United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022>

⁸⁰United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid Covid-19*. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022>

⁸¹Data on non-partner violence in the last 12 months are only available for 12 countries in the region, and over the lifetime are from 17 countries. Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2020, November 23). *The Covid-19 Pandemic and Violence Against Women in Asia and the Pacific*. <https://www.unescap.org/resources/covid-19-pandemic-and-violence-against-women-asia-and-pacific>

lockdowns so victims and their abusers were forced to stay together'. The crisis centres of Kazakhstan, based on the orders of the chief sanitary doctor of Kazakhstan, could not accept victims of domestic violence worsened, because of the prolonged lockdowns so victims and their abusers were forced to stay together'. The crisis centres of Kazakhstan, based on the orders of the chief sanitary doctor of Kazakhstan, could not accept victims of domestic violence without undergoing COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests. This requirement worsened the situation, and a lot of women, not having permits to move around the city or between regions, were left alone with their abusers. This was explained by the Chairperson of the Board of the Union of Crisis Centers, Zulfiya Bayzakova during an online briefing at the multimedia press centre Sputnik Kazakhstan.

Patriarchal attitudes in society are also perpetuated by the state through the imposition of discriminatory laws that not only serve to diminish women's status but also incite harm. For instance, marital rape remains legal in India.⁸² In Afghanistan, child marriage and charging rape victims with adultery are sanctioned by the law. According to BBC Nepal, the Nepali government recently endorsed a proposal to require women under 40 years of age to acquire consent from a guardian or the local government when travelling to the Gulf of Africa.⁸³ Clearly, the dominance of patriarchy extends into the formal bureaucratic spaces and influences both private and public spheres.

Recommendations:

Global efforts towards genuine recovery from the pandemic must include a plan to emancipate women from the duress of patriarchal violence.

- Governments need to devise more accessible reporting mechanisms for GBV by coordinating with local women's organisations who know best how to reach and support the most vulnerable women in their communities.
- Stricter implementation of existing laws against GBV must become a priority of governments, as well as the creation of laws where gaps on combating VAW exist. Legal redress must be strengthened in order to break the culture of impunity because it not only makes perpetrators unbothered in their criminal ways, but also reminds women of the daily fragility of their safety.
- Governments must provide state interventions on unpaid/ underpaid care work such as state-sponsored daycare, feeding programmes and awareness-raising programmes that would involve men participating in housework.
- Overburdened by care work, women must be provided with incentives and/or options to earn an income from home-based industries, as well as be provided with social protection mechanisms.

⁸²It is only illegal if the wife is below 15-years old.

⁸³Khadka, U. (2021, February 11). *History of female (im)mobility in Nepal*. Nepali Times. <https://www.nepalitimes.com/here-now/history-of-female-immobility-in-nepal/>

6. Militarism and Conflict

The COVID-19 crisis intensified military take-over of democracies in the Asia Pacific region. The continuing display of military and economic dominance of super powers such as the US and China, the border issues in Pakistan and India, the military take-over of governments such as in Myanmar, and the unannounced military leadership in the Philippines and Indonesia, have worsened human rights situations in many of our communities. Militarisation of many communities due to wars and resource conflict has oftentimes led to gender-based violence, sexual assaults and other forms of violations against women and girls, due to the normalisation of patriarchal norms, masculinities and violence.⁸⁴

In the Asia Pacific region, dominant superpowers have been showing-off their military capabilities through deployment to other nations and territories. China is leading in the race to boost its military power in the region. Presumably in a bid to protect its newfound status as a global superpower, China has been quietly but rapidly modernising its military.⁸⁵ China's People's Liberation Army now boasts of having the world's largest navy, most technologically advanced stealth fighter jets and an arsenal of nuclear weapons.⁸⁶ Experts say China's military modernisation program is only in its infancy. Likewise, Japan and South Korea are modernising their militaries in anticipation of possible aggression from China and North Korea.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, India has also been investing more in its military after clashes with China over disputed Himalayan borders, a move that may inflame tensions with its intense rival, Pakistan.⁸⁸

US military influence persists in the region as well. Further, Australia recently signed onto a new security alliance with the US and the UK in the Indo-Pacific region that would entail sharing information as well as technology.⁸⁹ This could indicate Australia's intention to acquire its own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, extending the country's reach into the disputed Southeast Asian seas while pledging loyalty to London and Washington. The US, on the other hand, continues to implement joint military exercises with the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, among others,⁹⁰ as well as display of economic and political power through machinery and equipment.

Increased militarism, both from China and US-aligned countries in the region, are also increasing exposure to violence, state surveillance and counter-insurgency actions of many grassroots communities, mostly affecting women and girls. According to the report of the Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group, border conflicts have intensified in recent years. One is with India during a fatal clash in June 2020 that led to 20 deaths on the Indian side and 4 deaths on the Chinese side. Another major concern is China's border conflict between Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea. This is also coupled with the US' continuing military exercises in the region.

Militarisation due to resource conflict at the local level has also intensified and has been negatively impacting and has posed several human rights violations among indigenous communities such as in Chimbuk Range in Bandarban district in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in rural Bangladesh. According to IRV's report, indigenous communities in the area are being displaced by the construction of a five-star hotel. This is accompanied by intense militarisation of the area and use of force to evict the communities. Indigenous women in the area have experienced multiple burdens and layers of violence.

⁸⁴Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*. PeaceWomen. <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf>

⁸⁵Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*. PeaceWomen. <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf>

⁸⁶Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*. PeaceWomen. <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf>

⁸⁷Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*. PeaceWomen. <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf>

⁸⁸Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*. PeaceWomen. <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf>

⁸⁹Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*. PeaceWomen. <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet%20Militarism.pdf>

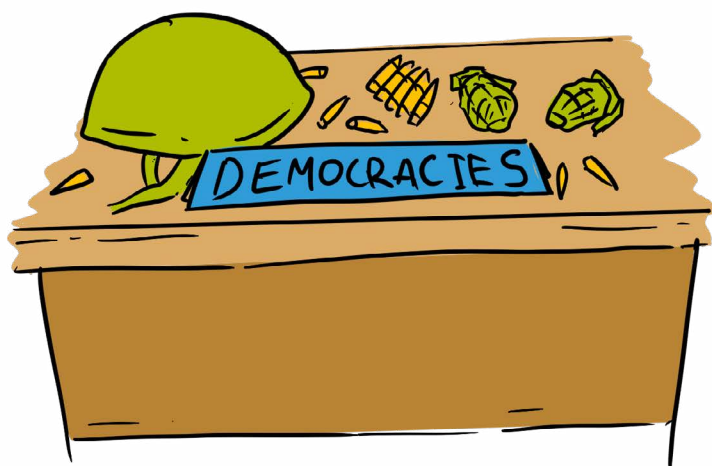
⁹⁰The Diplomat. (n.d.). *US military exercises in the Asia-Pacific*. <https://thediplomat.com/tag/us-military-exercises-in-the-asia-pacific/>

Budget allocation to the military has also increased over the years. In Pakistan, according to HomeNet, 65 per cent of the national budget goes to the military or national defence. This has been impacting the state of the country's social protection as it further cuts back on social services including health, education and also services specifically for women. In fact, according to the data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), there is a glaring increase in military spending of most countries in the region from 2016 to 2021. For example, in India, military spending increased from USD 59,833 million in 2016 to USD 73,574 million in 2021. In China, it went up from USD 225,558 million in 2016 to USD 270,016 million in 2021.⁹¹

For context, US military spending was USD 801 billion in 2021, while the total global expenditure on the military amounted to USD 2113 billion.⁹² Meanwhile, the SDGs require USD 265 billion to end world poverty, a drop in the bucket compared to the world's military budget. In Asia and the Pacific, governments spent a collective USD 586 million in 2021,⁹³ an increase from the previous year despite a raging pandemic that hampered economic development and worsened socio-political situations. In contrast, in developing Asia Pacific, a mere additional USD 41-50 per capita healthcare spending and USD 83 billion investment in water and sanitation through 2030⁹⁴ could vastly improve the lives of women and other marginalised groups. Clearly, expenditure in social services is dwarfed by military allocations regionally and globally.

Recommendations:

- Rechannel budgets from the military to public services such as universal social protection to address a range of women's issues and challenges. This also includes ensuring implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- Strengthen national human rights commissions and independent judiciary to ensure accountability of states and the fulfilment of their obligations with regards to military violence and violation of fundamental freedoms.
- Adopt national legislation that will ensure upholding of human rights and will not allow military industrial complexes around the region that incite war and conflict. Ban foreign bases and any forms of military occupation.
- Reject militarism and redirect funds to rights-based and people-centred development programmes. The 2030 Agenda should lead this by prioritising the goal of establishing lasting peace in the region in its primary agenda.



⁹¹Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (n.d.). *Military Expenditure Database*. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

⁹²Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2022, April 25). *World military expenditure passes \$2 trillion for first time*. <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time#:~:text=United%20States%20focuses%20on%20military.3.5%20per%20cent%20in%202021>

⁹³Silva, D. L., Tian, N., Beraud-Sudreau, L. et al. (2022). *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2021*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2022/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2021#:~:text=In%202021%20world%20military%20expenditure,cent%20higher%20than%20in%202012.>

⁹⁴United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2019). *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific: Ambitions beyond Growth*. <https://www.unescap.org/publications/economic-and-social-survey-asia-and-pacific-2019-ambitions-beyond-growth>

7. Patriarchal Authoritarian Governance

Patriarchal attitudes are ingrained within the systems of governance across the Asia Pacific region. Owing to a confluence of factors such as the widening income gap, fundamentalism and institutionalised patriarchy, authoritarianism also rose in the region. Unsurprisingly, the pandemic saw an unprecedented rise in militaristic approaches to public health. Governments all over the world chose the military and police as first responders to the emerging humanitarian, health and pandemic emergencies.⁹⁵ In Asia-Pacific, the militaristic approach to pandemic governance was prevalent. In some cases, such as in Indonesia and the Philippines, the military led the entire country's COVID-19 action plan.⁹⁶

For many countries in the region, this patriarchal authoritarian mode of governance was ineffective in quelling the transmission of the virus and instead, spurred a myriad of human rights violations against women. The Philippines, for instance, which has been described as having had some of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the world, fared poorly in curbing COVID-19 cases during the height of the pandemic. Instead, reports of inhumane treatment by the police proliferated, such as – officials putting curfew violators in dog cages, LGBTQIA+ people who violated lockdown regulations being forced to dance and kiss each other and children arrested after curfew hours being put inside a coffin.⁹⁷ In India, during the first months of lockdown, police beat violators who were trying to obtain essential supplies.⁹⁸ In 2020, the country's National Human Rights Commission tallied 77 deaths in police custody and 1,388 deaths in judicial custody.⁹⁹ Indonesia deployed military personnel to conduct public health interventions, including enforcing mask mandates through raids.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, harassment and abuse of women over digital spaces increased during the pandemic.¹⁰¹ This also extended into digital surveillance, as attested by Shyrak Association of Women with Disabilities from Kazakhstan.

According to the women's group, the country's patriarchal and authoritarian government targeted activists by accusing them of spreading misinformation regarding the pandemic as well as using surveillance technology to track the activities of quarantined individuals, raising concerns on the basic right to privacy of Kazakhstan citizens. At a time of unprecedented hardships, the addition of state repression and violence during a global pandemic inevitably worsened women's standing in society and struggles for equality.

Similarly in Pakistan, state force was used against peaceful protesters during the 2021 Aurat March (Women's March) as fake pictures were circulated to demonise the organisers of the march. They received multiple death threats from extremist groups. Aside from this, most protests were not covered and the media was unable to report. Religious bigotry and stigmatisation was observed and manifested using media against the organisers. Most of the time protests of human rights face state-led allegations upon violation of civil rights.

Whilst the pandemic has worsened situations for women, patriarchal authoritarian governance, including restrictive laws and policies, have been already proliferating in the region even before the health crisis. In Nepal, according to the BBC, the government did not reform constitutional provisions that were supposed to address women's equal citizenship rights such as access to basic social services, employment among others. According to the Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group in China, the government has installed more than 200 million cameras in 2018 including high powered cameras that can detect faces and even identities further intensifying state surveillance. Also in China, in June 2020, the recent national security law passed, specifically for Hong Kong, which led to massive arrests, illegal detention and even disappearances of activists.

Patriarchal mindset has continued to influence national policies and laws that govern society including women's bodies and actions. This has translated to different institutions that until now promote and popularise patriarchal cultures. Moreover, political elites in many countries come from families of big businesses. They influence policy-making to serve their own interests. They also support the ruling parties to take their side and further monopolise legislation.

⁹⁵Gibson-Fall, F. (2021). *Military responses to Covid-19, emerging trends in global civil-military engagements*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000048>

⁹⁶Gibson-Fall, F. (2021). *Military responses to Covid-19, emerging trends in global civil-military engagements*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000048>

⁹⁷Human Rights Watch. (2021). *World Report 2021: Philippines, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/philippines#12ffb1>

⁹⁸Human Rights Watch. (2021). *World Report 2021: Philippines, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/philippines#12ffb1>

⁹⁹Human Rights Watch. (2021). *World Report 2021: Philippines, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/philippines#12ffb1>

¹⁰⁰Human Rights Watch. (2021). *World Report 2021: Philippines, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/philippines#12ffb1>

¹⁰¹UN Women. (n.d.). *Facts and figures: ending violence against women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

Case Story:**Rise of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence in China During the Height of COVID-19**

Courts issued 283 decisions regarding protective orders between 1 January and 31 May 2020. By early October 2020, the judgement materials for these decisions were available on the China Judgements Online website. Comparing the current period to the same time last year, there was little change in the overall number of protection orders.

At the height of the pandemic, however, there were three to five times fewer protection orders issued by courts than during the same time period the year before. Between 23 January and 21 February 2020, while the nation was subject to the toughest travel bans and lockdown, only 13 decisions were made. No protection order was issued from 24 January to 6 February, when the COVID-19 outbreak coincided with the Spring Festival. After the holiday, courts were not open as normal. Some cases related to domestic violence were not handled in a timely fashion, and court hearings and protection-order judgements were suspended or delayed for approximately 20 days from late January to March. Domestic violence was far from being a priority for the judiciary and was generally considered non-urgent or unexceptional once the pandemic broke out.

Digital technology, which some courts used, worked to some degree to support some domestic violence cases being registered. In the later stages of the pandemic, more local courts adopted such measures by providing alternatives in the form of a virtual platform for survivors to apply for protection orders. More information is needed to analyse the readiness of local courts to provide remote services for protection orders and the problems these may cause, including reinforcing the gender divide in the use of digital media and how women and other disadvantaged groups coped with digitised court services during the pandemic.

— A digest of research findings by Feng Yuan and Hao Yang, 2021

Source: *China: Women demand stronger political will and real actions to stop gender based violence*, Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group, page 47

Recommendations:

- Governments should provide a more holistic and people-centred approach to the COVID-19 recovery. The government should be held accountable and should compensate all victims and survivors, most specially women who have experienced trauma and abuse in all contexts.
- State accountability must be demanded. Governments must bring perpetrators, including police and military, to account while protecting women's human rights defenders and their organisations.
- State should provide necessary resources for women to be able to influence and change policies that have long been attacking and depriving women's human rights.

RESPECT AND
UPHOLD !
! WOMEN'S
HUMAN RIGHTS
!!!

FEM
REC
!



MINIST
EVERY
NOW!



DEVELOPMENT
JUSTICE
NOW!!

IV. women's priorities at the national level

The pandemic did not just worsen but also exposed the societal ills and systemic oppressions in many of our communities. The FDJ partners prepared their monitoring work for the period of 2020-2021 which was the height of the pandemic including repressive lockdown measures and ill-equipped healthcare systems. This section presents the country situations where the partners conducted their monitoring of the SDGs implementation of their governments, including the specific issues and sectors they are working with and their analysis and recommendations.

1. Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group, China

Country Profile

With a population of 1.4 billion people, China is the world's most populous country and the fastest growing economy since 1978. Over the past years, China has been prioritising the reduction of poverty in the country. In December 2020, 10 years ahead of the 2030 Agenda, China announced that its rural residents from all of its 'impoverished countries', including ethnic minorities, had been lifted out of poverty based on the country's official poverty line of USD 2.3 per day.¹⁰² With this development, however, China's wealth gap widens with the country having around 698 billionaires while 40 per cent of its population had an annual income of USD 2,048 in 2021.¹⁰³ China's huge income disparity has perpetuated not just long standing socio-economic injustices but gender injustices as well such as gender pay gaps with women earning less than 70 per cent of men today. In addition to women's low income, women also spend double the amount of time in household chores than men pushing them to carry multiple burdens.¹⁰⁴

Gender injustices also extend into national policies. Officially, gender discrimination is not defined in their laws, even after the repeated requests of the CEDAW Committee. The government even pursued more conservative policies in 2021 that led to a regression on the advancement of women's rights.¹⁰⁵ China's government under the helm of Xi Jinping has become increasingly repressive especially during the pandemic. Under the guise of a 'zero-tolerance' on COVID-19, it clamped down on dissenting voices and imposed harsher policies that undermine human rights in the name of public health.¹⁰⁶ For instance, the courts handed an 18-year sentence to agricultural tycoon Sun Dwu for being supportive of human rights activists on the basis of vague crimes.¹⁰⁷ Despite the shrinking spaces for dissenting voices, feminist organisations have persisted and continued to make human rights issues, especially on GBV, increasingly visible in the public.

The Chinese Government's Strategies in Addressing Gender-Based Violence

The Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group tackled the experience of Chinese women in voicing their opinions about GBV and asserting gender equality rights (SDG Goal 5). Their research programme was carried out via an internet survey of over 20,000 participants regarding their views on the living status of Chinese women in 2020. It was supplemented with in-depth interviews with 10 GBV survivors of various geographical and socio-economic backgrounds.

¹⁰²Adjusted for inflation. China's poverty line is higher than the 1.9 USD a day poverty line used by the World Bank.

¹⁰³1CNY=0.1527 USD as of 8 April 2021. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China. (n.d.). *China Statistical Yearbook 2020*. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2020/indexch.htm>.

¹⁰⁴All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2011, October 21). *Report on major results of the third survey on the social status of women in China*. http://www.china.com.cn/zhibo/zhuanti/chinwen/2011-10/21/content_23687810.htm.

¹⁰⁵Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). *World Report 2021: China, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>

¹⁰⁶Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). *World Report 2021: China, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>

¹⁰⁷Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). *World Report 2021: China, Events of 2020*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>

Since the launch of the SDGs in 2016, the Chinese government has put greater focus on GBV by substantiating policy strategies in the Human Rights Action Plan (2016), the National Program of Women's Development (2021) and implementing the China National Plan of Action on Combating Human Trafficking and the Anti-Domestic Violence Law. Legal aid programs also increased, while the Ministry of Education and other departments began including information campaigns on GBV in schools.

However, there is a general consensus among gender justice activists and feminist organisations that the current legal framework for tackling GBV in the country is weak. Major gaps exist in laws, policy interventions and support infrastructure in the comprehensive plan to end GBV in China.

Legislative Gaps in Addressing GBV and VAW

China still has not codified a law on discrimination against women that complies with the requirements of the CEDAW. In particular, the Anti-Domestic Violence Law does not explicitly identify major types of domestic abuse. It also does not specify mandatory punishments and corrective measures for abusers. Similarly, Article 1010 of the Civil Code which covers sexual harassment, only recognises an illegal act if the harasser is proven to have 'overpowered' the victim. Sexual harassment is also narrowly defined through the criminal standard of receiving overtures 'against the will,' which requires proof of force imposed by the perpetrator and resolute resistance on the part of the victim, rather than the internationally accepted qualitative term 'unwelcome'. Likewise, the terms of liability in the law emphasises 'preventing and stopping sexual harassment where powers, subordination etc. are utilised,' ignoring the fact that sexual harassment happens in all forms and can also come from peers, colleagues, strangers and acquaintances. Certain forms of GBV are also not recognised officially by the law, such as leaking private photos and videos over the internet without the consent of the other party.

When victims report their cases to law enforcers, the experience is said to be prone to double victimisation. Filing a case in China can be difficult for victims because the process is not streamlined and systematised by procedural tools. In a way, the declining rape cases yearly is a reflection of the increasing inaccessibility of the reporting mechanisms in law enforcement and not necessarily a reliable indicator of declining rates of rape. On domestic violence, there have been allegations of victims dying due to police inaction. For example, there have been reports of police neglecting their duties to send police officers to a domestic disturbance upon receiving a complaint via the Hotline 110. Relatedly, even in provinces where legislative remedies are available, poor implementation betrays the intention of these laws. For example, in 2018, in Ma'anshan City in the Anhui province, five agencies took the lead in issuing the Implementation Measures on Domestic Violence Written Warning Mechanism and developed a standardised domestic violence warning letter. However, weak implementation by the local police has produced only two domestic violence letters by 2020.

Legal services for victims are also often inadequate to attend to the volume of victims. This has resulted in many victims not availing of the services of competent lawyers, even discontinuing pursuing legal action out of frustration. Hence, this has contributed to the low rates of convictions and protection orders which crystallises the culture of impunity among GBV perpetrators in the country. Eventually, this desensitises the public on VAW in Chinese society.

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The judicial system is also seemingly biased against victims of VAW. For instance, protection orders are difficult to obtain, with only 63 per cent of applications reviewed and only 14 per cent to 22 per cent approved nationally.^{108 109} Claiming domestic abuse as a reason for divorce has also been found to be difficult, despite it being constitutionally protected grounds for the dissolution of a marriage. Among the reasons stated by the courts for not recognising domestic violence as a valid reason for divorce cited were disbelief of domestic violence claims and assigning blame to the victim for the abuse. If the total number of cases in which

¹⁰⁸Equality - Beijing. (2019). *Monitoring report on the third anniversary of the implementation of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law China*. <http://www.equality-beijing.org/newinfo.aspx?id=73>

¹⁰⁹Equality - Beijing. (2021). *Five Years Anniversary of Anti-Domestic Violence Law - Evaluation Report on the Issuance of Protection Orders in Shanghai*. http://www.equality-beijing.org/editor/attached/file/20210401/20210401180309_9431.pdf

domestic violence claims are submitted for grounds for divorce is used as a benchmark, the rate of recognition by the courts is merely 9.7 per cent.¹¹⁰ Hence, it is much easier to cite other reasons as motivation for divorce than domestic violence.

Similarly, there are flaws in the architecture for redress and support for victims in the country. Reporting systems on GBV are not accessible for most women, as there is a lack of 24-hour hotline systems as a first recourse for victims. It has also been reported that many operators in said hotlines were ill-equipped with the skills and lack the sensitivity required to handle conversations with GBV victims. Many government shelter facilities for VAW victims remain unused because numerous are inaccessible to women. In addition, long-term support for GBV and VAW victims in terms of livelihood training, relocation options and identity protection are inadequate.

The practice of 'bride price,' a custom wherein suitors pay pre-wedding gifts to their future brides' parents, is still commonplace. Soaring bride prices in recent years has not only become a deterrent for many Chinese couples looking to get married but has also reinforced gender stereotypes and norms. Under the guise of regulating this practice, the courts have endorsed bride price refunds, despite the law itself prohibiting 'exaction of money by way of marriage'.¹¹¹ While this judicial remedy of awarding repayment in cases of disputes may benefit a man financially, it has done nothing to curb escalating bride prices. Instead, it has bolstered the practice by legally recognising it. Moreover, this only reinforces the notion that women's sexual lives can be commodified via marriage or cohabitation.^{112 113}

Shrinking Spaces for Women's Organisations

The shrinking space for CSOs is also hindering the quantity and quality of services for GBV victims. Currently, there are 73 NGOs working on domestic violence in China,¹¹⁴ and many have not raised sufficient funds to continue their operations. Many are also dependent on government funding, as 58.88 per cent of funding is directly sourced from the government.¹¹⁵ Increasing government repression could lead to dwindling funds and the potential closure of these vital women's support organisations.

A general insufficiency in official data is also affecting the effective monitoring of GBV in the country. Official statistics, for instance, are fragmented and often not gender-disaggregated. Protection orders are only reported in a lump sum, and no information is available on the number of orders filed in a given period and location. Additionally, data is unavailable regarding the number of prosecuted cases and number of convictions by courts on sexual crimes. Moreover, a stifled media environment is also perpetuating a culture of silence on GBV. Media attention on these cases has been diminishing since 2016, as influential platforms run by feminist groups have been taken down between 2016 to 2020; meanwhile, digital media coverage of GBV is experiencing more restrictions.

Given these legislative gaps, weak implementation and diminishing media attention, progress on SDG 5 and its specific targets has been slow and even regressive in some points. VAW and GBV rates continue to rise in the country. According to a survey, 24.7 per cent of Chinese married women have experienced domestic violence, while 96.65 per cent of the victims of child rape are girls. The pandemic also saw an alarming

¹¹⁰Yuanzhong Family & Community Development Service Center. (2021, March 1). *Big Data Analysis Report on Beijing Municipal Domestic Violence Case*. <http://download.caixin.com/upload/fjtblfbg.pdf>

¹¹¹The Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China. (2020, December 29). *Interpretation on Application of the Marriage and Family Chapter of the Civil Code of the People's Republic of China (effective from Jan. 1, 2021)*. <http://www.court.gov.cn/fabu-xiangqing-282071.html>

¹¹²The Paper. (2021, May 8). *Jiangxi woman sued her biological parents for returning the dowry, and the court ruled that it should be returned*. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_7300184

¹¹³Ningxia Daily. (2021, May 26). *Man breaks contract after living together for months after engagement. The court orders the woman to return the dowry at her discretion*.

¹¹⁴Shibao, G. (2019, May 7). *Anti-Domestic Violence Social Organizations Status and Needs Report*. China Philanthropy Times. <http://www.gongyishibao.com/html/gongyizixun/16457.html>

¹¹⁵Qing, L. (2019, December 9). *Report on Fundraising Status and Development of Anti-domestic Violence Social Organizations*. China Philanthropy Times. <http://www.gongyishibao.com/html/gongyizixun/17836.html>

number of VAW cases as the internet survey conducted by Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group indicated that 27.35 per cent of cis-gender identifying and non-binary gender groups experienced a form of domestic violence, sexual harassment and violence. This was confirmed by a media report that showed domestic violence cases nearly doubled in the beginning of 2020.¹¹⁷ However, the rate of prosecution for GBV remains low. Moreover, non-government initiated efforts to combat GBV have been met with bureaucratic obstacles.¹¹⁸

Recommendations:

- Examine and update laws and policies governing SDG 5. For example, there is an urgent need to define and codify ‘discrimination against women’ as well as modify domestic violence laws in line with the General Recommendation No. 35/ 19 to train judicial and law enforcement professionals on how to better safeguard women’s rights.
- Enhance transparency in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; as well as improve data collection by disaggregating statistics based on gender, age, disabilities, etc.
- Integrate goals, targets and indicators related to women’s empowerment and gender equality into all plans and activities of SDG experimental zones.
- Increase the transparency of the implementation mechanism of the 2030 Agenda. Monitor and reveal the status of each goal with more data and concrete information. In 2016, China established 189 SDG experimental zones in 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) around the country. Goals, targets and indicators related to women’s empowerment and gender equality should be integrated into all plans and practice of these SDG experimental zones.
- Enhance participation of independent women’s groups, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, rural women, WWGs, women living with HIV/AIDS, by easing access into monitoring and implementation processes of the 2030 Agenda.
- Increase ambition by aiming to eliminate all forms of violence and not just domestic violence. The government must heed the call of the UN to stop the practice of ‘bride price’ and forced marriages in the country.
- Sign and ratify the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190. Contextualise indicators and strengthen measures that are related to the elimination of VAWG.
- Establish a mechanism for civil participation in monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Besides the Women’s Federation, other independent women’s groups, particularly those from and for disadvantaged women, such as women living in remote areas, migrant women, women with disabilities and women living with HIV/AIDS, should have access to participate and represent themselves in the whole process at all levels. Encourage both mainstream and new media to cover more activities conducted by civil society.

¹¹⁶China News Network. (2021, March 2). *Girls Protection report on child sexual assault in 2020: acquaintances commit over 70%*. <http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2021/03-02/9422755.shtml>

¹¹⁷Wanqing, Z. (2020, March 2). *Domestic violence Cases Surge During Covid-19 Epidemic*. Sixth Tone. <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005253/domestic-violence-cases-surge-during-covid-19-epidemic>

¹¹⁸Equality - Beijing. (2021, March 1). *Monitoring Report on the Fifth Anniversary of the Implementation of the Anti-domestic Violence Law*. <http://www.equality-beijing.org/newinfo.aspx?id=83>

- Aim to eliminate all forms of VAW, not only domestic violence. Follow the recommendation of the UN on issuing legislation to stop harmful practices such as bride price and forced marriage.
- Sign and ratify ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190. Contextualise indicators and strengthen measures especially those related to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, which include not only targets and means under SDG 5 such as 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 5.a, 5.b, 5.c, but also those under the targets of health (such as 3.4, 3.7), education (4.7, 4.a), economic growth and decent labour (8.7, 8.8), cities and communities (11.7), as well as peace, justice and strong institutions (16.1, 16.2, 16.3, 16.6, 16.7, 16.a, 16.b).

Women's Resistance and Alternatives

The Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group led initiatives to monitor the implementation of SDG 5 in China, with a special focus on the Anti-Domestic Violence Law and other related laws. It also engaged institutes, service providers, NGOs and CSOs on capacity building activities for the better understanding and implementation of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law. Through its internet survey of over 20,000 citizens, the organisation generated data on the current state of women's lives in the country, where data and policy attention are scant.



2. Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), Nepal

Country Profile

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, linguistically-diverse country that transitioned into a Federal Democratic Republic in 2015. However, despite the constitutional gains, the roles and responsibilities of the federal, provincial and local levels of government remain unclear, which poses a risk to its effective functioning in service to its citizens. The country is home to 30.5 million people.¹¹⁹ Women comprise 52.1 per cent of the population, while young people represent 29.4 per cent.¹²⁰ Even with women making up half the population, there are huge disparities between men and women's literacy and employment rates and income among others. In 2021, men's literacy rate was 78.6 per cent while women's was 59.7 per cent.¹²¹ Further, Nepal's 2017/2018 Labour Force Survey¹²² reveals that more men are formally employed than women with a ratio of 100:59 even though the ratio of working-age women is higher than men at 100:125. There is also a 30 per cent gender pay gap in Nepal which can be attributed to the fact that more women are employed in the informal sector than men.¹²³ Patriarchy, together with neoliberalism, continue to govern and influence laws and policies in the country that subjugate women and ethnic minorities.

Nepal suffered massive losses due to COVID-19 because its healthcare system was unprepared for a massive public health crisis. The economy contracted severely, with losses akin to the impacts of the Mega Earthquake in 2015.¹²⁴ Existing gender inequalities especially in terms of work were exacerbated with the loss of jobs of at least 830,000 people in the country and 80,000 overseas workers who had to return to Nepal because of job cuts abroad.¹²⁵

The Impact of Unpaid Care Work and Unequal Pay on Women Carpet Weavers in Nepal

The Beyond Beijing Committee focused on SDG 5 and 8, particularly on Targets 5.4 and 8.5, the impact of unpaid care work and unequal pay for women working in informal sectors. Thirty-seven (37) women working in carpet factories in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Bagmati were engaged in this programme. These women come from different age groups and ethnic backgrounds, with 92 per cent from the indigenous communities of Tamang and Rai.

In a labour force survey conducted from 2017 to 2018, it was found that more than 62 per cent of Nepal's 7.1 million workers were employed in the informal sector. Despite their numbers, informal sector workers are largely excluded from local and national labour regulating instruments as well as social protection systems. Women, especially those from lower castes and of migrant backgrounds, suffer worse discriminatory practices owing to a combination of the non-recognition of their status by the state, low awareness of rights and laws and deep patriarchal attitudes in the family and society.

In the case of the carpet workers interviewed by BBC, the marginalisation is multi-fold. While there is no pay gap between male and female carpet weavers, there is a fundamental chasm between the rights and wages afforded to formal and informal sector workers that is acutely felt by women.

¹¹⁹Knoema. (2022). *Nepal - Total Population*. Knoema:

<https://knoema.com/atlas/Nepal/Population#:~:text=Nepal%20%2D%20Total%20population&text=In%202022%2C%20population%20for%20Nepal.average%20annual%20rate%20of%201.71%2>

¹²⁰Knoema. (2021). *Nepal - Employment as a share of population aged 15 years and above*. Knoema:

<https://knoema.com/atlas/Nepal/Employment-to-population-ratio#:~:text=Nepal%20%2D%20Employment%20as%20a%20share%20of%20population%20aged%2015%20years%20and%20above&text=In%202021%2C%20employment%20to%20population.2002%20to%2075.6%20%25%20in%202021>

¹²¹USA Central Intelligence Agency. (2023, February 14). *The World Factbook: Nepal*. CIA.

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nepal/>

¹²²Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics. (2019). *Report on the Nepal Labour Force Survey*. Nepal: Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics.

https://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Nepal-Labour-Force-Survey-2017_18-Report.pdf

¹²³Dhungana, S. (2019, June 20). *CBS report brings to fore huge gender pay gap*. The Himalayan Times.

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/central-bureau-of-statistics-report-brings-to-fore-huge-gender-pay-gap>

¹²⁴Ministry of Finance. (2021, November 24). *Ministry of Finance*.

<https://mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3105>

¹²⁵Interview with Hon. Dr. Ram K. Phuyal, Member, National Planning Commission on 15 May 2021

'The carpet is exported in the international market, however, with agony I have to say that we the workers are not getting paid off with the facilities and earnings as we deserve. There is no difference in payment for male workers to women. But there are varieties of workers, some work on price rate and some work on salary basis.'

The Case of Women Workers In the Informal Sector: Carpet Weavers in Nepal

Carpet workers in Nepal are paid a flat rate based on their outputs and not on their working hours. Depending on the complexity of the design, workers are paid NPR 5,500-8,000 (USD 46-67.5) per square metre. According to the women, a simple design takes one to two months to make, while a complex design can take up to three months. A worker who typically finishes one carpet in two months earns NPR 16,000 (USD 135), or NPR 8,000 (USD 67.5) per month. This amount is not only insufficient to provide the basic needs of a typical Nepali family, it is also well below the government-mandated minimum wage of NPR 13,450 (USD 113.5) –already an inadequate amount to cover essential needs. The government also recently raised the minimum wage to NPR 15,000 (USD 127), but many workers find that this is still too low. A participant shares:

'Today the cost of education is high, groceries are high too. So, it is difficult to raise a family from the earnings of only one person. All family members need to work and earn their livelihood. When the government makes laws and policies to increase the salary of workers, they also need to lay down the rights and boundaries for the workers.'

Many carpet weavers, who have emigrated from farther places, belong to lower castes, unmarried or without partners, are subjected to the worst kinds of discrimination and violence. Owing to their severe financial needs, women workers often do not retaliate or report abuse out of fear of losing their jobs. Because they are not recognised as formal employees, reporting abuse can be difficult. A trade union representative and former carpet worker says:

'Working in the carpet factory is difficult. Many of these women come from different backgrounds. Some are single women; some have husbands who are abroad. These women are forced to work to pay for room rent and the education of their children while suffering the abuses of their employers. [Because they need the job] Many women who have faced such violence dare not talk about this. Many factory owners also look down on women as merely sexual beings. And if they [women workers] do not comply with the owner's orders, they are fired from the job.'

The women carpet workers routinely faced physical, verbal and sexual abuse in the workplace. When they demanded to be paid on time or be paid the right wages, employers typically responded with degrading words. A participant shares her story of verbal abuse:

'When we ask the owner for payment in an emergency, we get scolded with abusive slang words...I don't think it is appropriate. We are workers, not slaves. We work so that he is able to eat. We are here to work and earn some money because we are poor. We are not here because our parents told us to go and work here. I don't like it when the boss uses slang words against my parents...We work here like an ox day and night but we don't get paid on time. We are disrespected. We work hard but when it's time for payment, it is delayed...'

These women also work long hours inside factories that do not adhere to workplace safety standards which has caused health problems such as back pains, eyesight strain and respiratory illnesses for the workers. Because no health insurance is provided, the women must take out loans from their employers in the event of a medical emergency. A participant shares:

'When a health-related emergency occurs, there is no provision or facility provided to us in the factory. We ask for a loan that we use to pay for hospital expenses, which is then paid off through the earnings of the next month.'

Additionally, child labour is commonplace in the carpet factory industry. Factory owners usually employ indigent women who are often unaware of the labour laws or lack the agency to assert their rights, which is why using children for cheap labour goes unchecked.

Lack of a Just COVID-19 Response to Address Needs of Women Workers

During the lockdowns, the women workers barely received aid from their employers or the local government. In some cases, as in the case of migrant women workers, local governments excluded them from aid distribution during the first lockdown. Requirements such as written endorsements from employers or proof of citizenship deprived many women carpet weavers from relief packages during some of the worst times of the pandemic. Some employers provided rations to their workers but workers said that these were insufficient for the needs and size of their families. A participant said:

'Last year due to COVID-19, our owner said he was no longer going to provide regular support for our children's education. We fought with the owner saying that our children are taking classes online so we need it. Later we asked for support from the trade union's representative to lobby the issue with the employer. At last, we were able to get the payment that we have been asking for for years.'

When the workers were allowed to work again, they found that minimum health requirements, such as social distancing and mask-wearing, were not followed. No masks were provided by their employers. The women feared contracting COVID-19 in the workplace and infecting their families because the absence of a reliable public healthcare system and non-provision of health insurance at work meant that they would have to shoulder medical expenses should they get sick.

Women Workers' Multiple Burdens

For many women, these abuses and unfair practices do not stop when they go home. After working 10-12 hours at the carpet factory, women carpet weavers are expected to perform most, if not all, of household chores and care tasks. On average, the women reported having to work an additional five to seven hours of unpaid care work at home, leaving very little room for rest or time for professional training. Because of patriarchal impositions in Nepal, women carpet workers are expected to take care of all domestic responsibilities, from washing clothes, preparing meals to pacifying children. Husbands, who usually work as day labourers, often lash out when asked to contribute to household chores. One participant shares:

'He gets angry if I ask him to help me in cooking. If I am cooking, I ask him to help prepare vegetables or wash the dishes. But he gets angry if he has to cook food. So I feel bad and I don't ask him any more to cook or help. Instead, I cook by myself even though I am tired.'

Patriarchal values and traditional gender roles remain ingrained among these women as they believe that housework is a decidedly female responsibility. Deferring to their husbands as well as assuming the role of family caretaker are behaviours that go unquestioned. A participant relates:

'My husband does not even wash his own clothes, not even his underwear. Even when he has free time, he does not help in the kitchen and does not like to do household chores...They say the husband is above us. Maybe that's why.'

Another adds:

'If not us [women], who will do it? It's been habitual for us to work at home doing all the household chores. So, we don't feel like it's work. No one else does it beside ourselves. Who else will do it?'

Recommendations:

The following recommendations have been offered for the better implementation of SDG Targets 5.4 and 8.5:

1. Ensure implementation of a living wage for women.
2. Prioritise the engagement of women workers in the social security system; there is a need to craft specific campaigns and awareness-raising programs for communities with low literacy rates to let them know of their options regarding social security.
3. Gather data on informal women workers.
4. Recognise unpaid care work as work and discuss the issues in a technical and formal manner at the National Accounting System at the national and international levels.
5. Hold local and federal governments accountable for the data on informal labour spaces.
6. Provide subsidies and programs that will reduce unpaid care work for women.
7. Educate men on their duty to share household chores through partnerships, awareness-raising campaigns using creative media platforms and products.
8. Establish effective grievance mechanisms that focus on the issues of women workers in the informal sector.
9. Conduct regular monitoring of workplace safety.
10. Provide easy access to complaint registration instruments and helplines that cater to women workers' needs.

Women's Resistance and Alternatives

The combination of deeply ingrained patriarchal mindsets in the family, an abusive workplace and a lack of government oversight on labour violations has aggravated the burden of unpaid care work on Nepali women, especially those working in precarious industries. Non-recognition of care work as valid labour is part of the problem. For many, household chores are merely tasks understood to be done by female members of the family. This leaves them with no time to rest nor to attend professional improvement initiatives in their communities. While the federal and local governments have schemes targeting poor women for employment-oriented skills development and entrepreneurship, many women are unable to attend because they lack the time. The unfair burden of domestic responsibilities are preventing women from participating in these initiatives and improving their lives.

Bimala Wagle, Women Development Officer, Women and Children Department of Tokha Municipality says:

'..women are engaged in household work from early in the morning including opening the main gate in the morning and closing it at night. Household work is not valued; women are overburdened with it. When we called them to participate in training, they told us they woke up earlier than the usual time in the morning so that they could perform household chores before attending the training. They can only come to training if they've finished their household chores. This is the scenario for women workers'

The stress of negotiating familial power relations, state neglect and systemic barriers is a specific kind of hardship that prevents Nepali women in the informal sector from gaining socio-economic mobility. Finally, it is important to address the problems of women in the informal labour sector in a holistic manner. While recognition of their

status as workers and the provision of social protection are the foremost concerns, the need to reduce hours spent on unpaid care work is equally important as well as the provision of state-financed social protection schemes. In order to break the cyclical trajectory of marginalised women's lives, it is imperative to enable them to meaningfully participate in society.



3. Center for Sustainable Community Development (SCODE), Vietnam

Country Profile

Vietnam is a resource rich country with a population of 97.47 million.¹²⁶ Despite being one of the region's success stories after propelling itself into becoming a middle-income nation in one generation,¹²⁷ the country continues to be plagued with natural disasters such as typhoons and tropical cyclones at least three times a year.¹²⁸ Because of its extreme vulnerability to the climate crisis, Vietnam's agriculture, which generates one-fifth of the country's GDP and employs 53.9 per cent of the workforce, is directly affected.¹²⁹ In turn, people's livelihoods, especially that of poor and marginalised groups who lack the ability to recover from major damages after visits from natural phenomena,¹³⁰ continue to be threatened by the crisis alongside existing systemic barriers within the country which were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Patriarchy continues to dominate both the public and private spaces in Vietnam resulting in women having little representation in decision-making processes both in political spaces and in the family. Despite a solid legal framework on gender equality, Vietnamese women continue to experience systemic discrimination that often result in restricted economic and political opportunities in the family, community and national levels.¹³¹ Domestic violence cases continue to rise in the country, with more than half of married women reporting having experienced physical, emotional and domestic abuse.¹³² During the lockdown period due to COVID-19, Peace House of the Vietnam Women's Union received twice as many calls to the violence hotline each month. Further, the bulk of unpaid care work is traditionally expected to be performed by the women in the family. This culture of unquestioned patriarchal impositions has resulted in the exclusion of women from meaningfully leading and participating in society.

Rural Vietnamese Women in Climate Action

SCODE focused on the lack of women's participation in climate action and the SEDP of Vietnam (SDG 5 and 13). As women, in particular, rural women, are mostly left at home while their husbands work, they experience multiple burdens of taking care of their household and children's nutrition, as well as disaster mitigation in most cases. Sometimes, as they face economic struggles, the women also need to work but mostly in precarious and informal settings thus are less empowered and unable to contribute to decision making. SCODE implemented a series of capacity building workshops in Quang Tri province with 100 local women. The women were engaged in discussions and training on basic climate change adaptation and empower them to participate in the SEDP and demand locally effective climate adaptation mechanisms based on their recommendations.

The lack of data on topics related to SDG 5, specifically on GBV, in Vietnam is a pertinent barrier for the effective assessment and implementation of government interventions on this goal. Relatedly, gender equality in the country remains protracted as evidenced in the rising rates of domestic violence and low representation of women in government. The extended lockdowns due to pandemic restrictions increased the incidence of VAW in the country. While national figures are lacking, an independent study by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung with a sample of 303 Vietnamese women found that 80.9 per cent of the women reported having suffered from controlling behaviours of their partner, while 87.8 per cent and 59 per cent experienced psychological and physical abuses, respectively.

¹²⁶World Data. (n.d.). *Population growth in Vietnam*. <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/vietnam/populationgrowth.php>

¹²⁷The World Bank Group. (n.d.). *The World Bank in Vietnam*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview#1>

¹²⁸The World Bank Group. (n.d.). *The World Bank in Vietnam*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview#1>

¹²⁹United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). *Climate Change Adaptation: Vietnam*. <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/south-eastern-asia/viet-nam>

¹³⁰Centre for Sustainable Community Development. (2022). *People's Development Justice: National Monitoring and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals and Development Justice in Vietnam 2020-2021*. SCODE. <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Monitoring-and-Review-of-SDGs-and-Development-Justice-in-Vietnam.pdf>

¹³¹Oxfam International. (n.d.). *Gender Equality and Women's Agency*. <https://vietnam.oxfam.org/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-women%E2%80%99s-agency>

¹³²Oxfam International. (n.d.). *Gender Equality and Women's Agency*. <https://vietnam.oxfam.org/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-women%E2%80%99s-agency>

These issues pose consequences for the participation of women in climate action, a critical component in community engagement on climate adaptation.

Climate Action in Vietnam

Climate change mainly affects the agricultural sector in Vietnam. Climate impacts such as sea-level rise, floods, droughts and saline intrusion are worsening in the country and are acutely felt by marginalised communities. As an agriculture-based country, the loss of arable lands and decline in crop yields pose risks to the livelihoods of farmers as well as to national food security.

Vietnam ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 as a response to the worsening impacts of climate change to the country. To achieve its commitments under the treaty, the national government has passed several laws which include the National Climate Change Action Plan, National Strategy on Green Growth, Resolution 120/NQ-CP on Sustainable Development of the Mekong Delta. In addition to local resources, Vietnam was able to raise USD 146.5 million from the Green Climate Fund between 2017 and 2019. The country has also mobilised financial and technical support from international organisations for its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP). In order to advance in its NDC targets, Vietnam must not only mobilise international funds but also incorporate community-generated adaptation strategies to address growing concerns on the impacts of climate change to the country's key industries.

Central to planning climate action strategies is the country's five-year SEDP, a planning instrument with a multi-sectoral approach that aims to progressively grow the economy in the next five years. Climate action targets are included within the SEDP such as the NAP, a tool for identifying medium and long-term adaptation needs and developing as well as implementing strategies and programmes to address these needs. Provincial level adaptation plans, which are prepared independently by local governments, are also included in the NAP.

However, there is a lack of technical and policy expertise among many provincial governments to efficiently include climate adaptation plans within the SEDP. For instance, only 52 out of the 63 provinces of Vietnam are planning to integrate climate change adaptation into their local SEDP. Moreover, grassroots communities at the frontlines of pertinent adaptation issues are hardly engaged to participate at the SEDP for a variety of reasons. Mainly, local communities, especially women, are not actively invited to local SEDP stakeholder consultations. In addition, many of the women interviewed for this programme said that they lack the confidence to engage in these processes because they do not have the basic knowledge and skills for these types of activities.

Recommendations:

1. Provide capacity-building activities to women community leaders and stakeholders to empower them to be involved in the SEDP process.
2. Encourage and provide spaces for women to take part in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs.
3. Improve disaster risk reduction and response mechanisms that provide emergency food, water and sanitation for remote and impoverished places.
4. Strengthen public social services, including disaster housing assistance, to enhance the adaptive capacities of women in all their diversities.
5. Ensure early warning systems especially for rural women.
6. Collect reliable data that will be disaggregated according to gender, age and vulnerabilities to ensure that adaptation plans consider the requirements of children, PWDs, pregnant women, etc.
7. Promote quality climate education by including sustainable consumption and production into the national curriculum.
8. Promote renewable energy use and suspend the operation of coal power plants.

Women's Resistance and Alternatives

SCODE engaged women from the Quang Tri province, which is one of the hardest hit provinces in the country by typhoons, floods and droughts.

Quang Tri prepared a climate change adaptation for 2021, based on findings from 2020. Under this document, the Quang Tri local government has framed the climate change response as a call for more investments on mineral exploration, agricultural development and protection and development of coastal forests. Aside from the potential dangers that these industries might pose to the community, prominently missing in the Quang Tri provincial plan are measures that would address the concerns of women and girls on the worsening impacts of climate change.



4. HomeNet, Pakistan

Country Profile

Pakistan has a population of 220 million people and a growth rate of 1.95 per cent or 5.28 million more people per year. With 60 per cent of its population below the age of 25 and not enough jobs for its rapidly growing labour force, a laggard economy is causing social friction and preventing many Pakistanis, including women, from participating meaningfully in society. According to the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan continues to rank among the worst countries in terms of gender parity ranking above only Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan. Moreover, deep patriarchal values govern the social and political lives of women in Pakistan affecting their access to opportunities, resources and justice.

Majority of Pakistan's poor belong to the informal economy, which include home-based workers, domestic workers, sanitary labourers and care workers with no formal arrangements. Women make up 74 per cent of this population. Further, the female literacy rate in Pakistan is only 50 per cent compared to that of males which is 68 per cent. This disparity, paired with poor quality education, hinders marginalised sectors, especially women, from finding good quality jobs and opportunities and binds them to informal work and to poverty. Their irregular status as informal workers impedes on their right to participate in critical social protection systems such as social security or labour regulatory boards paving the way for unreported and unpunished exploitative labour practices especially during the pandemic. Moreover, women are also systematically barred from resources through discriminatory land ownership laws, discriminated in labour markets because of their gender and have restricted access to health facilities, skills training and education.

Gender-Based Violence: the Other 'Epidemic' in Pakistan

HomeNet monitored SDG 5 and 8, with a particular focus on Target 5.2.2. They spoke to women from Karachi and Lahore regarding their working conditions as home-based workers and their experiences of GBV during the pandemic.

Pakistan recorded a surge in VAW during the lockdowns of 2020. Some 2,297 cases of VAW in the 25 districts of the four provinces were recorded in 2020, while domestic violence increased by 200 per cent from January to March 2020. Cases of rape doubled during the last half of the year when stricter lockdowns were enforced. Punjab, where 57 per cent of cases were tallied, had the highest incidence of murder, rape, suicide, acid burning, kidnapping as well as child marriages. It was surmised that Punjab recorded the highest number only because law enforcement is easily accessible in the area. Simply put, the number could be much higher given that cases of domestic violence usually go unreported because of a culture of secrecy and shame.

The lockdowns that were intended to control the spread of COVID-19 had unintended consequences for Pakistani women as well. For many, lockdowns meant being forced to live with their abusers while being cut off from normal support services. As family members remained in the home, domestic workload also increased for women. At first hesitant to discuss their experiences, the participants confirmed that incidents of physical and verbal abuse increased during the lockdowns. Violence against children also increased, the women said. A participant also mentioned that, *'Physical abuse may be bearable compared to psychological violence it entails because it takes away peace from my life'*.

All of the women confirmed that they had experienced at least one form of GBV in their lifetime. From extreme forms of physical violence to emotional abuse, the women enlisted harrowing incidences of violence that they experienced in the hands of their partners and family members during the pandemic. For example, one participant shared that her husband would lock her up whenever he left the house. Another participant said that because she bore five daughters and no son, her husband would consistently threaten that he would marry someone else because of the premium that society puts on having a son in the family. One woman told of her story of emotional abuse via threats of online humiliation, *'My husband cropped a photo of my sister and my maternal uncle and placed them together. He sent it to me on Whatsapp and said he will circulate it in the family to humiliate me'*.

Another participant shared, *'My own family was one of the major reasons for the violence. Despite knowing about my infertility, they kept it hidden from prospective proposals as a result of which I was married and divorced thrice'*.

Despite the severity of abuses, the women said that they feared reporting their abusers because they were afraid of the economic and physical repercussions of involving the authorities. Even when they experienced harassment in public such as randomly being touched by men in public transport, the women did not report these cases because of fear of retaliation and a lack of access to law enforcers. Experienced harassment in public such as randomly being touched by men in public transport, the women did not report these cases because of fear of retaliation and a lack of access to law enforcers.

Some of the women interviewed also mentioned that they also faced economic abuse where they face denial of daily expenses for themselves and their children. A report on GBV launched in 2020 affirmed the reasons mentioned by the women on why they were hesitant to report incidents of violence.¹³³ Firstly, the element of respectability is associated with women. Secondly, women felt helpless because of their children. Thirdly, the women faced financial constraints thus hesitant to report it and lastly, there was no available or accessible support from any agency.

Decent Work for All: Women Informal Workers in Pakistan

The pandemic flattened job creation in Pakistan. As a result, many women turned to home-based jobs and domestic work. However, because of their informal nature and the low regard for women workers, these temporary and contractual work arrangements left them vulnerable to economic, physical and verbal abuse. They were also left out of pandemic relief programs because they could not prove their employment or provide basic government identification.

Sadaf, a home-based worker (HBWs) leader from Karachi during an advocacy meeting said, 'We don't have any protection from the government of Sindh after the law is passed. HBWs work day and night, and yet the government policies are not covering their health benefits. Bringing HBWs in social security through existing laws of labour would discriminate against their right to receive social security and protection. HBWs should be covered in exclusive schemes designed and developed for HBWs'.

There was also a preference afforded to men, even when both men and women did the same work. For instance, one participant reported that as a temporary worker in a factory, she was not paid overtime wages, despite her male colleagues receiving extra income. HBWs such as tailors said that their work was severely underpriced during the pandemic. Many in the garment industry also reported having experienced not getting paid by a contractor and not being able to report it to the authorities because they do not have formal contracts as proof. Meanwhile, female domestic workers also said that their wages were delayed for two to three months.

HBWs reported that wages on offer have also declined by as much as half of pre-pandemic rates, even when working hours have increased. For example, one participant shared that she earns between PKR 1500-2000 per

month (USD 7.6-10.11) but is likely to work up to 12 hours a day. Despite the inhumane rates and working hours, the women said they would still take these jobs as they desperately needed the income. The absence of alternative jobs and lack of financing mechanisms for micro-entrepreneurship has deepened the economic oppression of women who are also burdened by increased unpaid care work in their families as well as the constant threat of domestic violence from their partners and family members.

Furthermore, the economic crisis and continuing neoliberal policies has further eroded away basic services from the people. With increased and reported inflation in Pakistan up to 11 per cent in 2020, utilities and food items prices keep increasing. For example, there is a lot of water shortage in Karachi because of water mafias who steal and sell water tankers at a high price. Rich people can afford to purchase such tankers but poor HBWs in slums like Baldia Town and Orangi Town from Karachi have no other options. Moreover, the increase in the heat and severe climate related calamities over the past two years have added to the daily struggles of women across Sindh including Karachi. Water is the main crisis in Sindh province and no substantial solution is seen so far either in preservation of

¹³³Sustainable Social Development Organisation. (2020). *Tracking Numbers: State of Violence Against Women and Children in Pakistan*. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/801343-report-on-violence-against-women-statistics-in-2020-launched>

of water, saving rainwater or provision of safe drinking water at the doorstep.

During the pandemic, micro entrepreneurs such as HBWs also reported having to halt operations because of a lack of financing for purchasing supplies and raw materials. The women reported that support from the government in the form of interest-free loans would have helped them in finding alternative sources of income. Domestic workers who had been laid off from their jobs agreed that these small loans would have enabled them an alternative way of livelihood during the lockdowns.

Recommendations:

1. All women informal workers in all kinds of informal employment including home-based workers should be recognised as workers with legal rights and benefits. This is concretised by incorporating data collection mechanisms and ensuring resources are allocated to monitor and implement social protection policies for the benefit of women workers in the informal economy.
2. The government should ensure social safety net measures are implemented including provision of emergency cash transfers, food relief and as moratoriums on rent and utilities, especially in times of calamities, pandemic and other human-induced disasters.
3. The government should develop a comprehensive social protection system that recognises, includes and consults informal women workers and ensures a progressive gender based policy analysis of the fiscal policies and results in comprehensive health coverage and insurance schemes, fair pensions, unemployment benefits, psychosocial support and SGBV desks and response mechanisms.
4. Collective rights to organise, unionise and bargain of informal women workers and their organisations should be recognised and fulfilled.

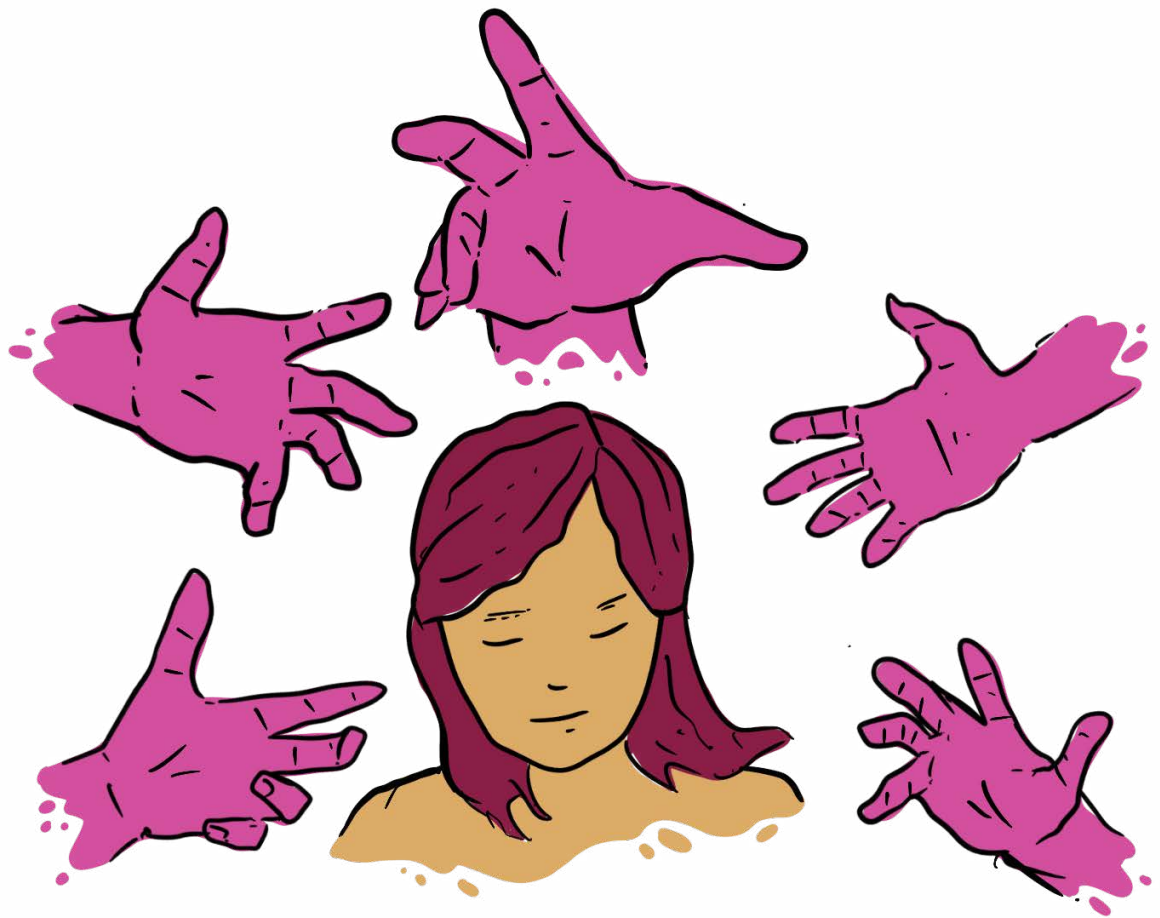
Women's Resistance and Alternatives

It is clear that Pakistan did not just stagnate in terms of its SDGs but it also significantly regressed on its targets, particularly on the elimination of GBV, promoting gender equality and decent work. While Pakistan has been instrumental internationally in ensuring that the SDGs have a balance among its three pillars—economy, society and the environment – its work domestically remains inadequate.

To hold the government accountable, CSOs and women's organisations in Pakistan have been stepping in to jointly monitor the SDGs with local governments. In Punjab, for instance, thematic groups have been formed for planning and collating advice across the province. This strategy facilitated the localisation of indicators, strategies and roadmaps for activation of the first phase of the SDGs implementation. Likewise in Sindh, CSOs and women's organisations have also engaged with the local government despite an initial delay induced by the pandemic.

Furthermore, CSOs and women's organisations have also been taking SDGs implementation to the grassroots level through local government systems. Education, health, water and unemployment have been identified as key concerns for many local governments.

In this light, CSOs have been able to intervene and participate in SDGs implementation at the provincial level. Crucially, CSOs have taken the initiative of collecting evidence that is presented to policymakers and local leaders that would convince them of the actions required to close gaps in the 2030 Agenda implementation.



5. Initiative for Right View (IRV), Bangladesh

Country Profile

Bangladesh, a country of 170 million people, is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Despite producing only 0.56 per cent of global emissions, it ranks seventh among the countries being battered by extreme weather events.¹³⁴ By 2050, one in seven Bangladeshis is projected to be displaced by climate change.¹³⁵ The country has taken steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change, conspicuously through the SDGs by launching its Five Year Plan for 2016-2020 in 2015. The indigenous communities in Bangladesh, especially the Munda and Mahato, are among the most affected by the climate crisis. Primarily reliant on agriculture and livestock raising, extreme weather events such as typhoons and droughts can destroy these communities' main sources of income. Likewise, ensuring food security has become difficult in these areas due to the frequent loss of crops and the intrusion of saline water into farmlands. While the entire community unjustly suffers the consequences of climate change, the climate crisis disproportionately burdens the women and girls of the Munda and Mahato communities.

While government and multilateral banks like the World Bank have claimed that the Bangladesh economy has been able to survive pandemic-induced economic shocks,¹³⁶ the country's poverty rates tell a different story. Bangladesh registered 24.5 million, or 14.7 per cent of the population, as new poor people during the pandemic. As corporations in the country increased their net worth multifold, so did the wealth disparity. Bangladesh is also in a weak position to implement 12 out of 16 indicators of the SDGs such as eradicating poverty, combating climate impacts and ensuring decent work and economic growth. Goals on zero hunger, good health and well-being, sustainable cities and communities and clean water and sanitation have seen moderate progress but not enough to fulfil the goals by 2030. Compounded by the looming threat of more frequent and intense climate devastation, the country's progress in the SDGs is at risk of being derailed.

How the Munda and Mahato Communities Face the Climate Crisis

IRV focused on poverty reduction (SDG 1), gender equality (SDG 5) and climate action (SDG 13) in the report. In particular, the organisation spoke with Munda and Mahato women to draw upon their experiences for policy recommendations on adaptation and social safety net programmes. IRV also aimed to build the capacities of IP feminist movements and women's organisations so that they could actively participate in the planning and implementation of programmes related to the SDGs.

The indigenous communities of Munda and Mahato living on the edge of the southwest coastal region are at the frontlines of the climate crisis as they are directly affected by cyclones, typhoons and sea-level rise. In particular, the intrusion of seawater into farmlands is causing massive losses of income for IP communities reliant on agriculture. More frequent storm surges and floods are also destroying infrastructure such as embankments, water wells, roads and houses that are critical for the effective functioning of their economic systems.

Munda and Mahato women and girls are affected differently by climate change than the men in their communities. For instance, when agricultural jobs become unavailable due to extreme weather events, men in the communities emigrate for jobs elsewhere, leaving the women to fend for themselves and their children. Often, this means that they must provide food and water to their families while also dealing with security issues. A participant shares:

¹³⁴Al Amin, M. (2021, January 25). *Bangladesh remains 7th most vulnerable to climate change*. The Business Standard. <https://www.tbsnews.net/environment/climate-change/bangladesh-remains-7th-most-vulnerable-climate-change-191044>

¹³⁵Md. Chowdhury, A., Md. Hasa, K. & Md. Hasan, R. (2020). *Climate change impacts and adaptations on health of Internally Displaced People: An exploratory study on coastal areas of Bangladesh*. ScienceDirect. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844020318612>

¹³⁶Sharma, V. B. (2021, July 18). *Bangladesh's Economy: What Did It Do Differently To Ride Out the Pandemic?*. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/south-asia/bangladesh-economy-pandemic-gdp>

'Male members of the community usually go to districts in search of work during rice harvesting season. We have to spend days with children in utter hardship because there is no money to buy food and other necessities... It is even harder for ethnic minority mothers when they try to collect food because they cannot get help from anyone. We cannot ensure education for our children.'

In addition, when healthcare systems are destroyed by cyclones, childbirth becomes more dangerous for pregnant women as medical access becomes restricted. In the aftermath of climate-induced disasters, for instance, economic hardships force families to find other sources of income. Unfortunately, arranging early marriage of girls is a common recourse in these communities. A participant shares:

'Natural disasters and the recent COVID-19 outbreak have aggravated poverty. Now many of our community parents marry off their daughters early to be relieved of bearing the costs of feeding one family member.'

Moreover, when disasters disrupt the schooling of children, it is often the girls that do not return to school. This is reflected in low adult literacy rates among women. Women and girls also have limited access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities because they are discriminated against on the basis of language, gender and culture. Thus, the consequences of climate change will intensify these inequities if policy interventions are not introduced.

IPs are also largely excluded from policymaking processes in government. In particular, IP women are not represented and have no access to the deliberations surrounding the passage of local and national budgets, where disaster risk reduction management financing and social protection mechanisms could be advocated.

Mahato and Munda women are normally not given leadership roles in their communities, compounding the difficulty of having their voices heard in official bureaucratic spaces. For example, they are not invited to official development meetings organised by the Upazila Executive Officer where they could offer what types of aid and assistance their sector needs during disasters. Hence, they rarely get the relief response and economic assistance that they regularly require.

Recommendations:

1. Disaggregate data collected according to gender as well as ethnic background to better respond to the needs of vulnerable communities during disasters.
2. Provide and ensure rural women's access to social services especially for those who might not have the literacy to negotiate these requirements.
3. Strengthen Social Safety Net programs because these measures have been proven to have the greatest impact on community resilience.
4. Ensure seats for indigenous women in parliament and at all levels of local government.
5. Address the following key development needs of the Munda and Mahato communities in line with the SDGs: employment, access to basic social services, inclusive women's development and climate resilient livelihoods.
6. Acknowledge and promote indigenous knowledge and ongoing adaptation efforts of IP communities.
7. Recognise IP land ownership and protect IP communities from land grabbing.
8. Realign and refocus SDGs implementation to spotlight climate vulnerable communities such as the Dalits and ethnic minorities.
9. Implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts accord, which recognises the IPs of the region and ends the decades-long insurgency between the Shanti Bahini and state forces.
10. Develop a framework of engagement with CSOs for genuine SDGs implementation at all state levels.

Women's Resistance and Alternatives

Because of the multiple layers of oppression that the Mahato and Munda women experience, they are especially vulnerable to the climate crisis. As such, taking a holistic approach to climate action, which must include the active participation and engagement of marginalised groups such as IP women, needs to be prioritised by the Bangladesh government. This must encompass the provision of systematised disaster response units in these communities, strengthening of healthcare and other basic social services, as well as programs that would empower IP women to become more independent and able to take on leadership and advocacy roles in their communities.

6. Perempuan AMAN Maluku, Indonesia

Country Profile

Indonesia, the largest archipelago in the world, is a country teeming with natural resources. Owing to its geography and diverse ecosystems, Indonesia is also one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change. The country also has some of the worst income inequality despite its 5.44 per cent increase in GDP growth in 2022. The country's four richest men hold more wealth than the poorest 100 million combined.¹³⁷ Women comprise the poorest citizens of the country. Because of uneven development, women in rural areas have limited access to vital basic social services such as road infrastructure, electricity, healthcare and education, a critically underfunded sector in Indonesia. The inability to acquire an education negatively affects Indonesian women's capacity for economic mobility making them more susceptible to physical and psychological violence. Cases of GBV in offline and online spaces increased during the COVID-19 lockdowns. According to Indonesian authorities and CSOs, domestic violence cases doubled during the pandemic compared to 2019.¹³⁸ Perempuan Aman reports that it tallied over 6,480 cases in violence within the private sphere, while 1,731 cases recorded in the public sphere.

The rise of religious fundamentalism in Indonesia has also been detrimental to the advancement of women's human rights in the country. In particular, Indonesian women and other non-binary genders face discrimination, violence and limitations in both the domestic and public spheres of life. Indonesian police, authorities and even politicians tolerate and even perpetuate the harassment and discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ and are therefore unreliable in accessing justice against attacks and in recognising human rights.¹³⁹ Despite ratifying the CEDAW in 1984, the Indonesian government has been ineffective at implementing mechanisms to protect women from institutional discrimination as evidenced by its at least 421 discriminatory laws against women and other genders. A patriarchal culture remains enmeshed in Indonesian society partly because government institutions have legitimised the ideology in laws and policies. Hence, the oppression of women and other genders continues to be tolerated in Indonesia, even in cases where Indonesian women hold important positions in society and the state.

In the past two decades, the gap between the rich and poor in Indonesia has widened further than in any other country in Southeast Asia. It is now the sixth country with the greatest wealth inequality in the world. At present, the four richest men in Indonesia have more wealth than the combined total of the poorest 100 million people.¹⁴⁰ Growing inequality is undermining the fight against poverty, putting a brake on economic growth and threatening social cohesion.

Structural Barriers to Genuine Climate Action in Indonesia

Perempuan AMAN focused on SDG 2, 5 and 13 as well as Indicators 5.a and 5.c and Targets 13.1, 13.2, 2.4 for this programme. More broadly, Perempuan AMAN's monitoring programme centres access and control over resources in Indonesia in relation to the structural barriers for genuine climate action, reduction of hunger and gender justice. Perempuan was able to analyse the state of implementation in Indonesia of the SDGs by engaging with official data and validating findings through interviews with stakeholders in Maluku, southern Indonesia.

The findings show that climate change has a very negative impact on women and that they are not well-informed of these challenges. At the same time, they are very rich in knowledge but also carrying multiple burdens in taking care of their households. Indigenous women in Haruku and Sameth are showing that their knowledge in managing existing natural resources is extraordinary and them being the house managers can ensure the availability of food for their families. So, it is important for them to be involved in the process and implementation of SDGs at the grassroots level as well as the international level.

¹³⁷Oxfam International. (n.d.). *Inequality in Indonesia: millions kept in poverty*. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/inequality-indonesia-millions-kept-poverty>

¹³⁸The Conversation. (2020, August 6). *Indonesia's rise in domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: why it happens and how to seek help*. <https://theconversation.com/indonesias-rise-in-domestic-violence-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-why-it-happens-and-how-to-seek-help-142032>

¹³⁹Human Rights Watch. (2016). *These Political Games Ruin Our Lives: Indonesia's LGBT Community Under Threat*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/08/10/these-political-games-ruin-our-lives/indonesias-lgbt-community-under-threat#3867>

¹⁴⁰Oxfam International. (n.d.). *Inequality in Indonesia: millions kept in poverty*. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/inequality-indonesia-millions-kept-poverty>

Elisabeth Kissya (Perempuan Adat Haruku) said, 'From the past, we have experienced seasons that change unclearly, sometimes it rains to landslides, sometimes it's hot, tidal floods, but we don't understand that this is due to climate change, we only understand that dry food must be prepared if there is no food available'.

Utilising various methods of data gathering, the monitoring programme was done through interviews and FGDs with women farmers, fisherfolk, youth and leaders in Maluku, southern Indonesia. Maluku, which is surrounded by several bodies of water such as the Seram Sea in the north, the Indian Ocean and Arafura Sea in the south, the province is rich with aquatic resources and biodiversity.

Resource Management and Climate Impacts in Indonesia

Land grabbing continues to be prevalent in Indonesia, even during the pandemic. According to Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI) / Friends of the Earth Indonesia, the country's oldest environmental organisation, 18 cases of conflict in 12 provinces across the country were recorded in 2020 alone. In addition, the Indonesian government has also promoted the loosening of environmental protection laws in the country as a strategy to invite foreign investors into the country. For instance, the government through the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan) has officially determined the direction of marine and fisheries development to increase the rate of Non-Tax State Revenue (PNBP) for permits to use sea sand. The determination of the PNBP Tariff of Sea Sand for the benefit of the sea sand business is a form of open exploitation of marine resources and in the long term will have a negative impact on marine sustainability.¹⁴¹

Specifically, the extractive industry in Indonesia has been the most destructive both for the environment and communities in the periphery of mining sites. Among environmental conflicts, for example in the Java archipelago, 52 per cent of cases are related to environmental defenders clashing with mining corporations, according to WALHI.

Hairul Sobri, Director of WALHI South Sumatra, said that as long as there is corporate interest for the land and resources, there will always be human rights violations and threats to environment rights defenders will increase along with the increase in corporate investments. He further added that the government has not been able to carry out good governance for licensing as the big investments are not transparent and participatory, rather, the law enforcement is blunt at those large corporations. For example, according to the data, the case of forest and land fires in South Sumatra took place due to the hundreds of such mega companies. However, only minimal administrative sanctions were imposed on them.¹⁴²

The destruction of the mining industry also extends into climate adaptation programmes in the country. For instance, mangrove forests are also being threatened by the expansion of mining business permits. When the scope of mining areas is expanded, mangrove forests are inevitably included. To illustrate, approved mining areas in Indonesia have reached over 48,000 hectares of mangrove forests. This is in stark contrast to Jokowi's announcement of rehabilitating 600,000 mangrove forests by 2024. At present, only 31.44 per cent of Indonesia's more than 2.5 million hectares of mangrove forests are in good condition. Moreover, in North Maluku and Sulawesi, nickel mining expansion will worsen the conditions of already degraded mangrove forests. Based on 2019 data from network advocacy organisation, JATAM, 55 small islands in the country have 165 mining concessions, with nickel as the largest commodity. The continued approval and expansion of extractive programmes in the country, and in climate vulnerable provinces such as Maluku, cast doubts on the Indonesian government's seriousness in pursuing this wide scale climate adaptation programme.

¹⁴¹Ridwanuddin, P. (2022, February 17). *Is the Indonesian Government Really Working to Create a Healthy Sea?*. WALHI. <https://www.walhi.or.id/benarkah-pemerintah-indonesia-bekerja-untuk-mewujudkan-laut-yang-sehat>

¹⁴²Hariandja, R. & Syani, D. (2020, May 26). *Environmental and human rights fighters are still prone to criminalization and violence*. Mongabay. <https://www.mongabay.co.id/2020/05/26/pejuang-lingkungan-dan-ham-masih-rawan-kriminalisasi-dan-kekerasan/>

Climate Action in Indonesia

Indonesia has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 29 per cent below business-as-usual levels by 2030. It has also ratified the Paris Agreement and has been active in the international climate policy making stage. The country also regularly reports its mitigation efforts via its Biennial Update and National Communication documents.

However, adaptation programmes in the country are not currently being prioritised. As a disaster-prone country, where a four-fold increase in hydro-meteorological disasters has been recorded between 2005 and 2020, building climate resilience is paramount if the country is to minimise the economic impacts of climate change. Currently, mitigation efforts have been the focus of the government, where profit-making is viable through increased investments in renewable energy programmes.

State of Environmental Defenders and Development Aggression in Indonesia

The proliferation of anti-labour and anti-environment policies by the Jokowi administration has been met with fierce resistance from Indonesian environmental defenders and community leaders. In response, the government has amplified its militaristic approach to governance. CSOs have decried this governance approach as human rights violations against environmental defenders have risen sharply since 2019. And just recently, a new criminal code that is more likely to weaken environmental protection policies was developed and used by the government to further persecute environmental defenders — especially those in resource-disputed areas.¹⁴³

Indonesia's state policy of building roads and infrastructure in the countryside without proper consultation with stakeholders has led to the displacement of communities and infliction of violence in various forms. For instance, according to the Institute for Community Studies and Advocacy (Elsam), of the 27 cases of violence against human rights defenders it recorded in 2019, 17 were due to agrarian conflicts, while six were mining related. Many activists have been arrested, physically attacked, intimidated, illegally detained and in some cases, killed. In spite of the aggressive pursuit of development, the government is still far from meeting its targets as laid out in its National Strategic Program.

¹⁴³Gokkon, B. (2022, December 6). *New criminal code rings alarms for environmental protection in Indonesia*. Mongabay. <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/12/new-criminal-code-rings-alarms-for-environmental-protection-in-indonesia/>

Recommendations:

1. Ensure protection of ancestral domains of indigenous communities against land and resource grabbing.
2. Enforce strict environmental regulations to protect biodiversity and ecosystems.
3. Recognise indigenous knowledge as instrumental in managing ecosystems and territories.
4. Provide political space and economic opportunities for Indigenous women.
5. Ensure political representation of Indigenous women at all levels of government.
6. Enforce CEDAW implementation.
7. Create and promote policies that respect and empower women.
8. Ensure accountability mechanisms in climate action goals set by the government.
9. Ensure the participation of Indigenous leaders in climate change action programmes.
10. Ensure equal participation among key stakeholders, especially from marginalised groups, in climate action plans.

Women's Resistance and Alternatives

Despite the glowing SDG accomplishment reports of Indonesia, it is clear that the lives of ordinary Indonesians have not materially improved even during this supposed era of economic prosperity. The growing gap between rich and poor in the country is also causing fractures in social cohesion, and women are bearing the brunt of the consequences. In its push to attract more FDIs, Jokowi's government also passed various regressive laws that have been met with fierce resistance by women's movements, trade unions and IPs.

A participant shared that while we continue to demand for genuine sustainable development, we see that we are still far from its achievement without addressing the root causes of issues, especially those at the grassroots level. ***'We also demand that the Indonesian government address these systemic challenges and implement the SDGs in an inclusive and transparent way'***, she added.

7. SHYRAK Association of Women with Disabilities Public Association, Kazakhstan

Country Profile

Kazakhstan, the world's largest landlocked country is home to 19 million people of more than 100 ethnicities and 18 religions. The country ensures intercultural and interfaith cooperation among its diverse ethnic population through consistent economic and social reforms and a solid national planning system. However, its authoritarian regime¹⁴⁴ systematically silences dissenting voices through its legal and state apparatuses putting their state of human rights at risk. For instance, WWDs are confronted with high levels of discrimination and abuse and are not accorded basic human rights.¹⁴⁵ The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are heavily restricted in the country, while human rights organisations and trade unions are unable to freely operate.¹⁴⁶ These restrictions were exacerbated during the global pandemic when legislators took advantage of the imposition of strict public health measures and passed laws on the prohibition of peaceful assemblies, political parties and elections.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a spike in the hours women spend on unpaid care work. According to government statistics, a Kazakhstani woman typically engages in 21 hours of unpaid care work in a week more than a man. In Kazakhstan, women spend on average four hours and 20 minutes on housework in a day; meanwhile, men only spend one hour and 25 minutes. This translates into lesser time for rest and personal development for women, impeding their potential for career advancement and economic mobility which is made even more difficult especially in 2020 when Kazakhstan's economy contracted by 3.4 per cent.¹⁴⁷ As a result, unemployment rates spiked and the value of real wages depreciated. The poverty rates increased in 2020, from a previous programme of 8.3 per cent to 12.7 per cent, which in absolute terms meant an increase of 800,000 people.¹⁴⁸

Decent Work and Women's Human Rights of WWDs

Patriarchal views continue to dominate social and political life in Kazakhstan. Many Kazakhstani women assume traditional gender roles in the family and broader society, which has extended into a wide gender pay gap and a lack of women's representation in leadership roles. State policy has also been lacking in addressing rising domestic violence rates and the enduring issue of child marriages in the southern part of the country. While Kazakhstan has a law on the prevention of domestic violence that has been in effect for 10 years, GBV rates did not decrease over this period. On the contrary, GBV and VAW rates continue to rise in the country.

PWDs, on the other hand, face a fundamental disregard of their basic human rights. People with mental disabilities, for example, are deprived of legal capacity by the courts to access rights to education, privacy, voting and running for public office.¹⁴⁹ SHYRAK worked on gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work (SDG 8) for this programme. The organisation held a series of in-depth interviews, community workshops and consultations with 45 WWDs in Almaty and Almaty Oblast to discuss labour conditions among their sector during the pandemic in an effort to collate policy recommendations to advance better laws to combat discrimination in all its forms, especially on the basis of gender and disabilities.

¹⁴⁴The Global State of Democracy Indices. (n.d.). *Kazakhstan*.
<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/countries-regions-profile?rsc=%5B705%5D&covid19=1>

¹⁴⁵Amnesty International. (2021). *Kazakhstan 2021*.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/kazakhstan/report-kazakhstan/>

¹⁴⁶Amnesty International. (2021). *Kazakhstan 2021*.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/kazakhstan/report-kazakhstan/>

¹⁴⁷The World Bank Group. (n.d.). *The World Bank in Kazakhstan*.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan>

¹⁴⁸The World Bank Group. (n.d.). *The World Bank in Kazakhstan*.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan>

¹⁴⁹The World Bank Group. (n.d.). *The World Bank in Kazakhstan*.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan>

Rising poverty incidence and a lack of employment opportunities are more acutely felt by rural women, especially WWDs, because of the architecture of policies that add to their societal oppression. There are currently more than 705,000 PWDs in the country, of which 430,000 are of working age. However, only 25 per cent of PWDs of working age are employed, according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Even when PWDs are employed, they are most likely paid two to four times less than an employee without disabilities. Moreover, employers rarely accommodate the specific infrastructure needs of PWDs in the workplace. As a result, these logistical difficulties might affect their health and well-being and force them to resign. A participant shares:

'We have to hide from our employers that we have any kind of disability because they might kick us out... We do this because we need these jobs desperately for our families to survive...'

WWDs have to contend with negative stereotypes on two fronts in Kazakhstan: gender and disability. Women in Kazakhstan, for instance, are banned from being employed in at least 20 industries. Article 26 of the Labor Code prohibits women from being employed in ‘heavily physical’ jobs, claiming that these measures are done to ‘ensure maternity protection and safeguard women’s health’— an indication of how deeply embedded patriarchal values are in the country’s labour policies. This severely limits opportunities for women as the list of prohibited jobs include those in agriculture, shipping and transportation — key industries that provide stable employment in the country. There have also been reports of mothers with small children experiencing discrimination in the workplace.

PWDs, on the other hand, have to grapple with the absence of inclusivity in basic social services such as healthcare and public transportation. This creates an environment that dissuades WWDs from participating in the labour market, forcing them to be financially reliant on family members. This can disempower WWDs and expose their vulnerabilities to GBV and labour exploitation.

Moreover, WWDs are faced with the double burden of unpaid care work. Because of deeply-rooted patriarchal views in the family, WWDs are expected to perform most, if not all, of household chores and domestic tasks. A participant relates:

‘It requires me to double the effort and money to strike a balance between family and work. For ordinary women, certain household chores might take them 30 minutes but for me it can take up to two hours. In my family, I am expected to do all of these chores’.

Kazakhstan society remains hostile to the aspirations of WWDs for equal treatment and social integration. Many WWDs feel that the option to join the labour market is unavailable to them because they do not believe that they have the qualifications for these jobs. For many WWDs, working for local NGOs has become a default option. However, these jobs are usually temporary and low-paying.

The surveyed women indicated that empowering WWDs to run independent businesses from home is an option that the government can offer as an alternative. The respondents share:

‘For rural women with disabilities, it is more difficult to find a job and go to work because of transport accessibility issues. And the lack of elevators in buildings. The only option is to work remotely’.

‘Working remotely is good for our families. I don’t waste time travelling to my workplace. My children are happy when their mother is at home’.

‘The majority of women with disabilities have to work in informal sectors of the economy. They are not provided with social security measures. We don’t have the right to complain because we are not formally registered labourers.’

¹⁵⁰There is a lack of gender disaggregation on the national statistics for PWDs.

Recommendations:

1. Develop economic support programs specific to the needs of WWDs.
2. Allow provisions for WWDs to participate in the social security fund.
3. Include national statistical data on informal WWDs.
4. Provide economic stimulus to widen the scope of social protection schemes that would safeguard the livelihood and well-being of WWDs.
5. Provide adequate financial, educational and infrastructural resources to aid WWDs to apply for decent jobs.
6. Conduct regular monitoring of women workers' safety and security at the workplace.
7. Ensure inclusive education systems for children with disabilities in the entire country.
8. Strictly implement minimum wage and eliminate the gender pay gap.
9. Pass legislation to combat discrimination against gender and disabilities and to criminalise GBV in the country.
10. Establish effective and accessible reporting channels and protection measures and ensure appropriate criminal sanctions for perpetrators of domestic violence.
11. Codify the right to unionise and collective bargaining in the country's body of laws to ensure inclusive work environments.
12. Establish grievance mechanisms for WWDs that can also cater to informal sector workers along with helpline numbers.

Women's Resistance and Alternatives

WWDs in Kazakhstan are hindered by multiple layers of marginalisation, beginning with policies that do not recognise PWDs as equal members of society to patriarchal views on women in the family and society. Thus, it is imperative for the government to craft and implement policies that carefully consider how to integrate WWDs into society, in a way that recognises their specific needs and historical disadvantages. The international community also has a role to play in holding the national government accountable to its commitments.





V. assessment of SDG commitments

A. Architecture of SDGs Monitoring in the Region

While the bureaucratic structures of SDGs monitoring may vary from country to country, the paradigm primarily consists of a nationally coordinated process that collects data from local governments and relevant agencies which are then streamlined into a report. Ideally throughout this process, CSOs, NGOs, experts and key stakeholders are invited for consultations. The resulting document is called a Voluntary National Review (VNR), which forms the basis of the reviews at the HLPF. This multilateral process seeks to facilitate open dialogue among governments on the national implementation of SDGs and share best practices in an effort to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁵¹

In general, VNRs have been executed through a top-down approach in the region. The structure often follows a centrally operated process helmed by the national government, in many cases through economic agencies and advisers under the executive branch, that directs how and which data are collected as well as which actors are targeted and engaged. This approach, however, tends to overlook certain stakeholders. In some countries, critical CSOs are deliberately excluded from consultations. VNRs, which are supposed to be a platform for a rigid assessment of the efficiency of the 2030 Agenda at the local and national levels, can benefit greatly from an inclusive and genuine engagement as CSOs and NGOs, especially those working at the community level, can impart valuable, evidence-based insights to augment the implementation of SDGs.

Based on the recommendations of the CSOs engagement for this programme as well as APWLD's independent assessment of trends within the region's overall SDGs implementation, we have observed the following:

In 2021, countries that reported on stakeholder engagement increased, with 67 per cent mentioning formal processes for stakeholder engagement, compared to 47 per cent in 2020 and 60 per cent in 2019.¹⁵² However, the quality of engagement remains unclear as governments generally do not mention which organisations participated in these platforms nor do they elaborate on the consultation process. Likewise, the terms of selection for CSO participation are vague in many countries and can be subject to arbitrary requirements that might isolate critical CSOs and individuals.

The availability of reliable, disaggregated data continues to hamper rigorous analysis of the progress of SDGs in the region. For instance, most countries disclosed that their methodology to the 2030 Agenda implementation was informed by a baseline assessment of policies, data or both, but were unclear about progress tracking mechanisms. Hence, CSOs, particularly those engaged in APWLD's programme, were unanimous in calling for better collection of data on a variety of implementation avenues. Foremost among this is the inadequate data surrounding GBV, VAW and gender equality. In some cases, such as in China, CSOs have had to commission their own studies on the state of GBV during the pandemic. In cases where there might be data, for example, data disaggregated to account for important metrics such as gender and disability, as in the case of Kazakhstan, are lacking or even absent.

¹⁵¹Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. (n.d.). *HLPF Voluntary National Reviews*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

¹⁵²Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (n.d.). *OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ocsd-recommendation-on-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development.htm>

In many countries, systemic barriers to the attainment of SDGs are still unacknowledged and therefore not addressed in the VNR. None of the VNR submitted by Asia Pacific countries to the HLPF 2022 mentioned sweeping, systemic reforms as a response to the theme of 'Building Back Better'. Structural obstacles to development, such as institutional discrimination, local conflicts, corporate meddling and corruption, are not included in the critical analysis of the reasons behind the regression of SDGs implementation. Moreover, the VNR is devoid of self-reflection on the actual benefits brought about by trade agreements, military pacts and special tax incentives for foreign investors. This can only be done if critical CSOs are allowed to participate without restrictions in the VNR processes.

Most countries are not advancing policy shifts required to enforce the 2030 Agenda. In particular, countries are citing the supposed disconnect between pursuing climate targets and economic development as a major challenge for the implementation of the SDGs.¹⁵³ Governments in Asia Pacific point to the difficulties of reducing poverty while also curbing emissions, but have failed to understand that these goals are in fact not contradictory to each other. In fact, mitigating climate change and prioritising adaptation are crucial strategies in poverty alleviation in Asia Pacific. Aside from pursuing policy shifts, governments must adapt their economic programs to the current political landscape. That is, prioritising renewable energy, promoting sustainable production and consumption as well as pursuing climate adaptation programmes must be understood as standards of economic progress. Pursuing these goals can provide quality employment and revitalise economies if done with a people-centred and just and equitable transition framework in mind.

Policy incoherence is still prevalent in the legal architecture governing women's rights in Asia Pacific. For instance in China, 'discrimination against women' remains undefined within its constitution, despite having already enacted an Anti-Domestic Violence Law. Many other instances of policy incoherence can be seen in the region, often diminishing legal recourse for women. Whenever the government fails to codify discrimination on the basis of gender as a precursor to the larger problems of VAW and GBV, women's human rights are regressed in general. There is an urgent need to streamline policies protecting women's human rights, safety and resource access in Asia Pacific.

¹⁵³Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (n.d.). *OECD Recommendation on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/oecd-recommendation-on-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development.htm>

B. The Role of CSOs in the SDGs process

Nominally, as the UN claims it, there has been improvement in CSO participation in the SDGs process. But realities and challenges of civil society, especially those from the grassroots, have worsened as democratic participation is further curtailed by the pandemic. The shrinking space for civil society in Asia Pacific, made more perilous by the authoritarian responses to COVID-19 disguised as public health interventions and increasing influence of corporations in the development process, has further narrowed the role of CSOs in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

VNRs Processes in Each Country

1. China's SDGs implementation and monitoring strategy remains shrouded in secrecy. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads the publication of official documents on matters surrounding the 2030 Agenda, the division of responsibilities as well as inter-ministry coordination mechanisms are unclear. For instance, the Bureau of Forestry has published a national plan for implementing SDGs in forestry action, while the State Council has issued the 'Health China 2030 Planning Outline' albeit with targets and focus areas that do not coincide with SDGs targets and indicators. It remains unclear which agency is coordinating these policy responses, which is reflected in the fragmentation of planning and progress reports. This is especially true for SDG 5, where data on the progress of specific indicators are lacking. Comprehensive data and statistics on GBV are also severely lacking, while some measures related to SDG 5 are too general to assess real progress. Meanwhile, civil society has made significant contributions for the progress of the 2030 Agenda in China as independent CSOs have conducted research where data might be missing, publicised SDGs, employed separate review processes and so on. However, there is very little official support or recognition extended to these independent actors. Official reports on the implementation of SDGs in China do not mention the role of CSOs, with the exception of the Women's Federation and other party-state sponsored mass organisations working in environmental protection, poverty alleviation, rural education and women's human rights. Critical CSOs and NGOs are deliberately excluded, ignored or harassed from participating in the SDGs processes.
2. Nepal employs a centrally-controlled strategy for the implementation of the SDGs through a steering committee under the prime minister. The National Planning Commission (NPC) is in charge of overseeing the implementation, review and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda at the national level. The commission led a VNR consultation process in 2020 which included more participation from CSOs, a marked improvement from the previous VNR in 2018. CSOs have remarked that the 2020 VNR has been inclusive and dynamic in accepting submissions from key stakeholders. However, the government is still called upon to recognise more women-led organisations into VNR consultations.
3. For Vietnam, monitoring and evaluation of SDGs implementation are helmed by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), which is subsumed within the office of the prime minister. Every year, ministries, related agencies and People's Committees in provinces and cities send a report based on their assessment of the state of the SDGs in their respective localities. The 2030 Agenda is monitored through a monitoring tool composed of 158 indicators based on a roadmap of implementation created by the MPI. While the MPI invited local CSOs to participate in the VNR process, officials from the Ministry of Security branded a few groups to be 'hostile forces'. This is concerning because it might discourage organisations from participating in these events. Additionally, CSO recommendations are not always guaranteed to be included in the final report.
4. In Pakistan, the SDGs have been adopted into the national development agenda by the parliament. As such, its Planning Commission has established SDGs units to mainstream SDGs objectives at the provincial level. Likewise, 27 ministries at the federal level and planning development boards at the provincial level have formed a committee to advance policy coherence and reforms. It has been reported, though, that the coordination council does not meet frequently enough to make significant progress. Also, CSOs have noted a major concern on the lack of gender considerations in the economic growth strategies being pushed by the commission.
5. Bangladesh's strategy for the 2030 Agenda implementation and monitoring is executed by the Principal Coordinator on SDGs Affairs, which is under the office of the prime minister. The General Economics Division (GED), the secretariat of the committee, coordinates the implementation of policies surrounding the monitoring and reporting of the SDGs. The GED has acknowledged the crucial role that CSOs play in the

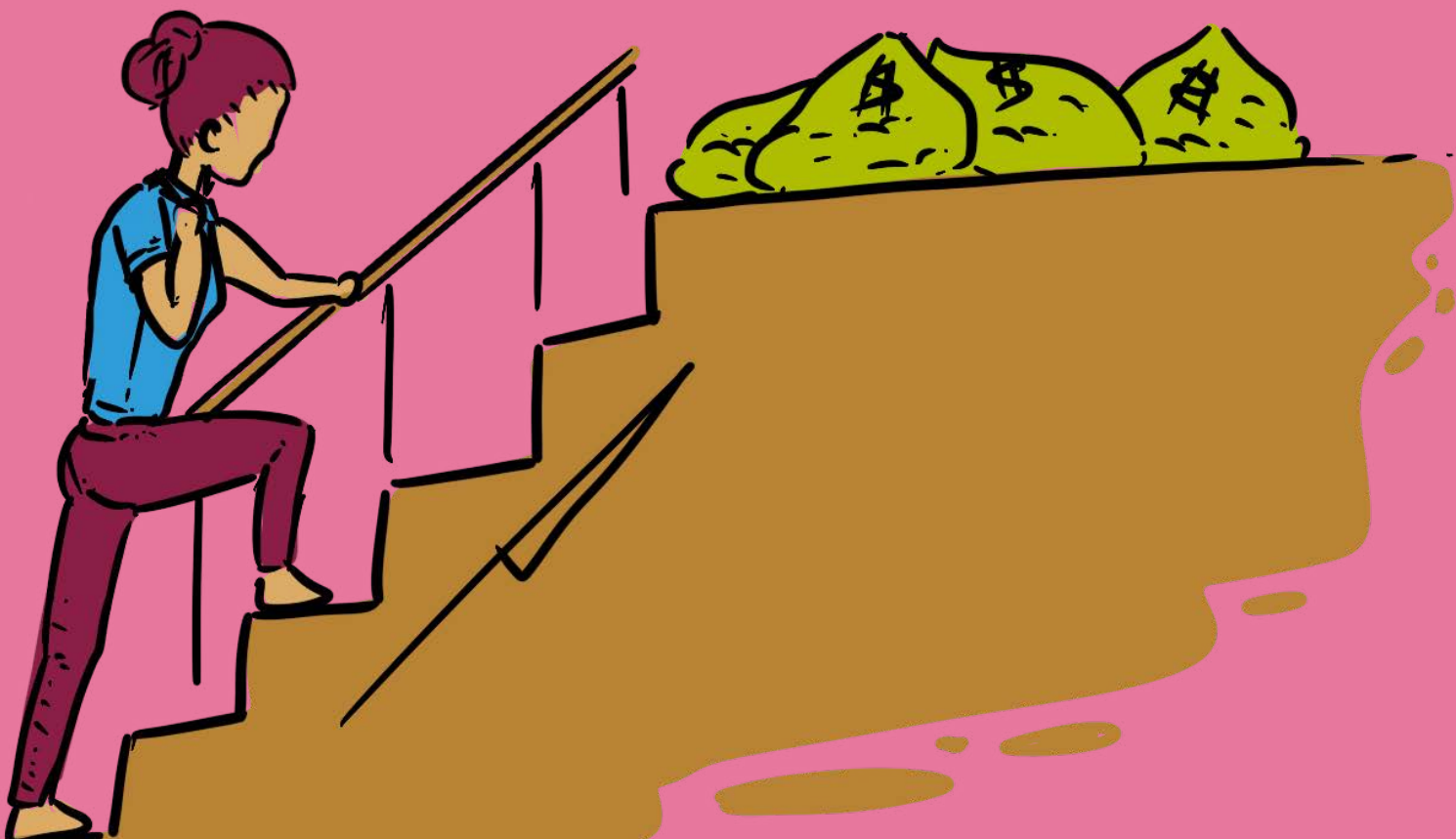
progress of SDGs, as CSOs can assist in grant management. However, there is no constitutional provision or legal framework to support the participation of CSOs in the development, planning and implementation of policies and programs on the 2030 Agenda. This prevents meaningful collaboration of key stakeholders in the SDGs processes because of the inaccessibility and unavailability of institutional support.

6. In Indonesia, the implementation of the SDGs is under presidential regulation. In 2017, Jokowi signed Presidential Regulation Number 59, which is supposed to signal the Indonesian government's commitment to implementing the SDGs in a participatory manner. Through this mechanism, Indonesian CSOs have been able to voice their criticisms of the implementation of the SDGs such as advocating the principles of leaving no one behind, solidarity, cooperation and mutual accountability. However, these demands have not been reflected in official regulation documents. This means that SDGs implementation is still state-centred and top-down. The Indonesian government has also ignored key principles of the 2030 Agenda, namely: inclusion, participation and equal partnership among stakeholders.
7. In Kazakhstan, the government publicly invites NGOs to join a seminar in finalising the country's VNR. However, the NGOs involved in these seminars do not necessarily represent the breadth of concerns of civil society. Critical NGOs and CSOs, especially those that push for more progressive and democratic reforms, are conveniently disregarded in these events. CSOs in Kazakhstan have also led the way in calling for transparency in the deployment of COVID-19 funds. But during the pandemic, local NGOs and CSOs that had the technical and logistical expertise on crisis response were left out of the national coordination during the state of emergency. As a result, CSOs had to adjust their operations to focus primarily on filling the gaps in the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised citizens.

In conclusion, there is a consensus among the countries in this programme of a need for better engagement of CSOs in the region. In particular, while there has been broad progress in the engagement of CSOs in the SDGs processes, the fact remains that the shrinking space for civil society and direct attacks on women's human rights organisations have affected the sector's ability to meaningfully participate and advocate for their constituencies within governments because of a hostile attitude towards civil society actors. In addition, inefficient data collection is a serious issue that continues to be ignored, especially on data disaggregation for gender. CSOs rely on official government data to effectively assess the gaps in implementation for their constituencies and localities. The absence of data contributes to difficulties in critical engagement and rigorous analysis of SDGs implementation.



EQUALITY



VI. *conclusion and recommendations*

Three years since the first lockdowns of 2020, the world is still reeling from the massive impacts that the pandemic induced on the global economy and our ways of life. The tragedies we witnessed have been massive, profound and enduring. There is no doubt that the quality of life of the impoverished and disempowered is worse than before. As the global economy continues to languish, so do the lives of the historically oppressed.

Policy interventions, both at the international and national levels, such as the 2030 Agenda have suffered a regression. The UN ESCAP has reported that SDGs in Asia Pacific are virtually impossible to achieve by 2030, given the economic shocks that the region is sustaining. The situation on the ground, however, might paint an even more dire picture than what government statistics and official data say.

In particular, grassroots women in the Asia Pacific region have suffered terrible injustices throughout the pandemic. Cases of GBV and VAW have spiked in the region, while extended lockdowns have engendered an increase in unpaid care work for female family members. Resources that could improve the lives of marginalised women have become even more scarce and inaccessible due to the authoritarian responses disguised as public health interventions. Not to mention that healthcare workers responding to the pandemic are overwhelmingly women, who have had to face the double burden of deteriorating healthcare systems as well as caring for their own families. Climate change impacts have also become more intense and frequent. Wherever climate change wreaks destruction, women and children are sure to bear a disproportionate share of consequences. Meanwhile, women's organisations working to fill the gaps left in government responses have experienced increased harassment by state forces as well as logistical hardships in carrying out their duties.

In 2020, APWLD launched the SDG Monitoring Programme in response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. It identified nine women's organisations, where seven have concluded the programme, to build their capacities and critically assess the progress of SDGs implementation in their localities. Likewise, the program aimed to make a significant impact among disenfranchised women such as victims of GBV, informal sector workers, WWDs and IP women. Through this programme, local and national women's human rights organisations across Asia Pacific designed their own approaches, identified key stakeholders and engaged government actors on their own terms regarding SDGs implementation in the pandemic era. The programme sought to enable CSOs and grassroots women's communities to meaningfully engage with the SDGs process.

In the end, the programme was able to collate national-level specific recommendations for the better implementation of the SDGs in the context of the impetus of a post-pandemic recovery. Relatedly, APWLD, along with other CSOs across the region, believes that it is vital to address the systemic barriers to development justice, as discussed above, in any economic recovery drive, but especially in the implementation of the SDGs. Policy reforms, economic reorganisation and other government interventions must take these into account to achieve Development Justice that benefits everyone and leaves no one behind.

Now, more than ever, governments and multilateral institutions are called upon to confront the systemic barriers that are hampering the upliftment of human conditions. The pandemic confirmed the futility of sticking to business-as-usual practices in implementing the SDGs. In particular, the current period of socio-economic turmoil has exposed neoliberalism, the dominant ideology underpinning global economies, to be a fraud. It has continually failed to deliver its promise of 'prosperity for all' – prescribed through the mandate of eschewing collective welfare by liberalising trade, extracting profits by cheapening labour, cutting social services and exploiting natural resources. Instead, decades of neoliberalism have resulted in the enrichment of a few as whole communities were stripped off their agency and autonomy.

The work to reverse the effects of neoliberalism on every facet of society is a colossal undertaking and it must begin with the overhaul of our economic systems. More specifically, governments are called upon to adopt the Development Justice framework, which encompasses a holistic transformation of society by addressing the systemic failures of the dominant economic system. At its core, Development Justice proposes the redistribution of wealth through government-led programs that address the core needs of communities. It is also a framework that envisions global equity, social justice, intersectionality, human dignity and climate justice to be at the centre of socio-economic policies.

APWLD offers key recommendations on the urgent actions governments can take to not only remedy the intensifying pandemic-generated economic crisis in the present but also rectify structural injustices for the long-term.

1. Absolute cancellation of all standing principal, interest and charges on sovereign external debts. International financial institutions and multilateral development banks should create new financing mechanisms that guarantee no new debts are created. This means that the discourse on reparations, specifically climate finance as reparations, must be mainstreamed into formal multilateral negotiation spaces as soon as possible.
2. Cease every FTA regime in the region, as well as abrogate any emerging trade pact. This must also include the dissolution of all ISDS cases filed within the last two decades and a repeal of tax incentive schemes for FDIs.
3. Establish oversight committees and accountability mechanisms to ensure checks and balances in governments. Independent bodies that monitor the state of human rights in the country must be given more power to carry out their mandates effectively.
4. De-prioritise military and police spending and shift budgets to fund the restoration of public service sectors such as healthcare, public transportation, infrastructures and social protection systems.
5. Enshrine the right to ancestral lands of Indigenous Peoples in every constitution in the region, which must also codify the state's obligation to safeguard IP communities' self-initiated development programs, particularly those pertaining to climate adaptation and agroecology.
6. Abolish Intellectual Property Rules (IPR) on technologies whose research and development were funded by public funds in the first place. Instead, promote open source technologies and knowledge sharing among scientists and people-initiated social enterprises, particularly on medicine and renewable energy technologies.
7. Officially recognise the value of women's unpaid care work as valid labour and introduce government interventions to democratise care work in the family by reimagining domestic duties as a community responsibility.
8. Ensure a just transition for all by establishing a universal living wage for every type of worker as well as social security programs that would cover the families of workers affected by energy transition programmes.
9. Democratisation of policy-making spaces to prioritise participation of grassroots communities, especially those from the most marginalised sectors of society.

People's movements across the Asia Pacific region initiated economic relief programs during the pandemic, where governments failed to act. From neighbourhood urban farms, community pantries and kitchens, volunteer-led awareness raising activities regarding COVID-19 to policy influencing, we saw how locally generated solutions can be impactful on people's lives. It is evident that civil society and people's movements already have the answers to the question of how the post-pandemic recovery should be led. That is, responding to the needs of people by centering the tenets of Development Justice in the efforts to revitalise the economy and build a better society.

But, in order to have long-lasting effects, these efforts must be scaled up and sustained by governments. The urgency to reorganise our societies through the framework of Development Justice has never been more imperative and necessary. We call on all governments to prioritise the aspirations of people over profits this time because for many women in Asia and the Pacific, it is already a matter of survival.

Annex

List of 2020-2021 Peoples' Development Justice (PDJ) Reports

The Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group. (2022). *People's Development Justice Report: China - Women Demand Stronger Political Will and Real Actions to Stop Gender-Based Violence 2020-2021*. Beijing-SDG 5 Facilitating Group.
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About APWLD

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist and women's rights organisations and individual activists. For over 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice.

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