



Strengthening Feminist Movements for Trade & Economic Justice

Women Interrogating Trade and Corporate Hegemony (WITCH)
Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Regional Report

Strengthening Feminist Movements for Trade & Economic Justice

WITCH FPAR REGIONAL REPORT



Table of Contents

List of Acronyms	3
Preface	4
Acknowledgements	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION TO THE FPAR PARTNERS	8
Section 1. WOMEN'S LIVES UNDER NEOLIBERAL TRADE AND CORPORATE POWER	10
1.1. Overview of Neoliberal Trade, Investments and Corporate Power in the FPAR Case Study Countries	15
1.2 Emerging Issues Across the WITCH FPAR Studies	16
1.2.1. Trade, corporate capture and its threats to food sovereignty	16
1.2.2. Neoliberal policies threaten women's livelihoods and their rights to adequate housing	19
1.2.3. Agricultural liberalisation and foreign investment worsen the exploitation of women's occupational health and safety and increase their unpaid care work	20
1.2.4 Missing women's voices in decision-making processes cement women's disempowerment and discrimination	21
1.2.5. COVID-19 worsened job insecurity, poverty and hunger for women	22
Section 2. RESISTANCE - GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION THROUGH THE FPAR JOURNEY	24
2.1. Sustaining the Resistance Through Political Education and Cross Movement Collaboration	25
2.2. Strengthening Solidarity and Sharing Local Wisdom	26
2.3. Amplifying Women's Voices in National, Regional and International Spaces	27
Section 3. RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD	29
3.1. Ensure Democratic and Meaningful Participation of Women and Other Marginalised Groups in Decision-making Processes	30
3.2. Protect Human Rights From the Impacts of Trade and Investment Agreements	30
3.3. Governments Must Uphold their Extraterritorial Human Rights Obligations and Regulate Corporations	31
3.4. A Paradigm Shift to Development Justice is Needed	31

List of Acronyms

A SEED	Action of Solidarity, Equality, and Environment and Development
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AoA	Agreement on Agriculture
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
AUSAID	Australian Aid
AVAs	Agribusiness Venture Agreements
BBB	Build Build Build programme
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHR	Commission of Human Rights
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
DRDF	Dairy and Rural Development Foundation
EU	European Union
FJS	Foundation for Just Society
FoE	Friends of the Earth
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action Research
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FTAs	Free Trade Agreements
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GY	Gabriela Youth
IDEVAW	International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

ISDS	Investor-State Dispute Settlement
IWWD	International Working Women's Day
JACSES	Japan Center for a Sustainable Environment and Society
JASS	Just Associates
KMU	Kilusang Mayo Uno
NAFLU	National Federation of Labour Unions
NAMASUFA	Nagkahiusang Mamumuo sa Suyapa Farm
NHA	National Housing Authority
NLRC	National Labour Relations Commission
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OBR	One Billion Rising
PACER Plus	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus
PARC	Pacific Asia Resource Center
PFA	Punjab Food Authority
PKMT	Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek
PNP	Philippine National Police
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PPPs	Public - Private Partnerships
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SG	Sisters Garden
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
TISA	Trade in Services Agreement
TNC	Transnational Corporations
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UCCP	United Church of Christ in the Philippines
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom



USAID

United States Agency for International Development

VAW

Violence Against Women

WB

World Bank

WHRDs

Women Human Rights Defenders

WITCH

Women Interrogating Trade and Corporate Hegemony

WSRC

Women Studies and Resource Center

WTO

World Trade Organisation



Preface

After nearly four decades of neoliberal globalisation, it has been increasingly acknowledged that austerity, privatisation, deregulation of finance, markets and corporations, and trade and investment liberalisation have had a devastating and discriminatory impact on women. This is not just because women are disproportionately vulnerable to the human rights impacts of food insecurity, and degradation of land and natural resources. It is because the prevailing economic model perpetuates, and often relies on, the systematic discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women in order to generate economic 'growth'. Central to the current neoliberal development models are the trade and investments rules and regimes which impact every aspect of people's lives while simultaneously empowering corporations at the expense of the people's human rights and the environment.

The **Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)** believes that 'development' is supposed to benefit poor, marginalised women of the global south. They are best able to identify both the problems and solutions.

This regional report record the solidarity journey of APWLD and four grassroots organisations for strengthening feminist movements for trade & economic justice. The **Women Interrogating Trade and Corporate Hegemony Feminist Participatory Action Research (WITCH FPAR)** was designed to build and strengthen the organising power of grassroots women that generates positive changes and challenges the systems that oppress and take advantage of women and their communities.

This FPAR journey has been implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic together with multiple crises which unravel the failures of neoliberalism. In this report, we highlight not only women's oppression but the struggles and initiatives of women in various sectors across the WITCH FPAR partners' countries. We hope that this report will inspire peoples, especially grassroots women who are struggling in their daily life to continue our fight for a just and equitable future for women.

The peoples united, will never be defeated.

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of the collective work and collaboration of four grassroots organisations from three countries in Asia: Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT), Pakistan; Women Studies and Resource Center (WSRC), Philippines; Gabriela Youth (GY), Philippines; and Sisters Garden (SG), South Korea. We thank them for their hard work and dedication to advancing feminist movements for trade and economic justice in the region.

We thank our the WITCH programme organising committee members Azra Talat Sayeed (Roots for Equity, Pakistan), Fatima Burnard (Society for Rural Education and Development, India), Joan Savaldor (Gabriela Philippines, the Philippines), and Arie Kurniawaity (SP, Indonesia), our other facilitators, for sharing their knowledge and experiences, especially during the WITCH FPAR training, and for their valuable advice and comments in completing this report.

This work would not have been possible without the generous support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Foundation for Just Society (FJS) which shares our vision and goal of empowering women workers in the region.

We also thank our colleagues and staff at APWLD for sharing their insights which enriched this report.

Executive Summary

Neoliberal globalisation continues to wreak havoc on people's lives and the environment. Policies of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation, pushed by developed countries and driven by the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), have transferred the control of economies and public services from governments and the people, into the hands of the private sector, particularly corporations. Across global regions, trade tariffs are being lowered, investments are being liberalised, the financial sector is being deregulated, and public services such as health and utilities such as water and electricity are being handed over to corporations in the name of economic growth. As a new form of colonialism, these policies control how economies work, usher in cheap imports to the detriment of local producers and extract cheap labour and natural resources from developing countries for the benefit of developed countries. 'Enabling environments' for foreign investments were created at the expense of marginalised groups, particularly women.

Bilateral and multilateral trade and investment agreements cement neoliberal policies and constrain governments from revisiting and revising economic policies in ways that might prioritise local development and public interest. Negotiated behind closed doors, these agreements often lack scrutiny by women's rights and other human rights movements. In Asia and the Pacific, two of the world's largest agreements, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP),

together with the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus), the global Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) and several bilateral agreements threaten to eliminate space for more just and equitable economic models, undermine democracy and human rights and threaten the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Neoliberal globalisation delivers enormous economic and political power to multinational corporations and a tiny, elite minority. It has exacerbated inequalities and rendered hundreds of thousands of people in the region landless and resource-deprived. Without the policy space to regulate land and resource acquisitions, collect taxes and regulate the economy, governments would fail to protect and advance women's human rights.

In the face of multiple challenges, the WITCH programme of APWLD launched its WITCH FPAR for 2019-2021. The WITCH FPAR partners were four grassroots women's groups from East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia. The partners focused on the following issues: exploitation of women's labour in a foreign agribusiness venture in the Philippines, the corporate capture of the dairy sector in Pakistan, the loss of traditional seeds and farming practices because of trade liberalisation in South Korea and the violation of the right to adequate housing because of privatisation and prioritisation of massive infrastructure projects in the Philippines.

The first section of this report introduces the FPAR participants and gives an overview of how

liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation policies have strengthened corporate power and impacted women's human rights. It discusses how the interlinked neoliberal globalisation policies, corporate power, militarism, patriarchy and fundamentalisms mutually reinforce each other and negatively affect communities, especially how women access services, decent work and living wages. The impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of women, as well as its indirect contribution to the expansion of neoliberal globalisation are also touched upon.

The overview is followed by the subsection that summarises the key findings of the four FPAR reports under the following key themes:

- Trade and the corporate capture of agriculture endanger food sovereignty, women's livelihoods and the right to health;
- Neoliberal policies threaten women's livelihoods and adequate housing;
- Foreign businesses worsen the exploitation of women's labour and unpaid care work;

- COVID-19 worsened job insecurity, poverty and hunger for women; and
- Missing women's voices in decision-making processes cement gender discrimination and disempowerment.

This is then followed by Section 2 of the report which outlines the resistance of the women and their communities against pro-corporate trade and investment policies and projects. Forms of resistance ranged from mobilisation, house-to-house discussions, community assemblies, collaborative work and the formation of solidarity networks with other communities and sectors and engaging both local and international spaces to get their voices heard.

Finally, Section 3 concludes the report with the FPAR communities' identified recommendations and ways forward that will help them fulfil and protect their human rights and promote the need for a paradigm shift to Development Justice.



Introduction to the FPAR Participants

In August 2019, the WITCH programme launched its WITCH-FPAR for 2019-2021. The 18-month programme aimed to develop capacity, tools and resources for women's movements and strengthen women's movements to demand their rights and justice against neoliberal trade and investment regimes that empower corporations at the expense of the people and the planet.

Feminist Participatory Action Research is rooted in movement building. Through FPAR, women collect evidence about what is happening in their communities and take collective action and it is conducted by and for women. With strong, locally produced research and documented evidence, women challenge human rights violations and gendered power imbalances. FPAR is a potent tool for enabling women to take control of development agendas and programmes that affect their lives.

Four grassroots organisations took part in the FPAR training and conducted the actual research in their communities. This cohort's WITCH-FPAR focused on the theme '**Strengthening Feminist Movements for Trade & Economic Justice**'. It provided support to build women's organisations' capacity to document the impact of trade and investment agreements in their communities. The WITCH-FPAR also enabled these grassroots organisations to develop their capacity in engaging different levels of decision-making processes related to trade and other economic policies, form strong local feminist movements that work with other movements to demand accountability from states and corporations and push governments to tackle systemic barriers to women's economic and development rights.



This report synthesises the FPAR reports of the following organisations:

1. Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT), Pakistan

Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek (PKMT) is an alliance of small and landless farmers including women farmers. It has been a strong proponent of food sovereignty and believes that this framework is the most powerful collective response by small producers in pushing back against the impacts of free trade and a cohesive alternative to globalisation. The organisation has taken the lead in collecting and regenerating local and traditional seeds. Members of PKMT from 16 districts across three provinces in Pakistan are now maintaining seed banks and ensuring that wheat, rice, corn and vegetable seeds are grown not only for their own seed use but for exchange among farmers in the community and the wider PKMT community. Through FPAR, PKMT explored the creeping corporatisation of the milk industry in Pakistan, particularly in the Punjab province and its impact on women as livestock farmers for milk production.

2. Women Studies and Resource Center (WSRC), Philippines

The Women Studies and Resource Center (WSRC) started out primarily as a research centre in 1982 and focused on organising women from the academe and other professions. It shifted focus from main research into organising and capacitating women to be directly involved in movements for women's rights, social change and peace. The organisation envisions a progressive and egalitarian society free from discrimination and exploitation where women's right to participate and lead meaningfully in all political, socio-cultural and economic undertakings are upheld; shaping a peaceful, socially just and sustainable future. Through FPAR, WSRC documented the labour situation of women workers in the packing plants of Sumifru, a transnational corporation involved in producing and exporting fruits from Davao de Oro, Mindanao.

3. GABRIELA Youth, Philippines

GABRIELA Youth is a mass organisation for young women in universities, colleges, schools and communities that seeks to further women's rights. Gabriela Youth takes an active stance on the issues of human rights, poverty, globalisation, militarism, violence, health, education, labour and trade and other salient issues affecting women. The organisation conducts awareness campaigns in schools and communities in order to strengthen the linkages between local and national issues. Gabriela Youth conducted their WITCH-FPAR in the Aroma housing compound, one of the most neglected urban poor communities in Tondo in the City of Manila. The women and their families face displacement from the impending demolition of their communities. For years, residents of Aroma have been demanding decent and affordable housing. However, their demands are being ignored as the city and national government have set their priorities on various beautification and massive infrastructure projects. Through the FPAR, Gabriela Youth worked with the women of the Aroma community to collect evidence and assisted in building their capacity to help develop a movement demanding decent and affordable housing.

4. Sisters Garden (Women Farmers' Production Cooperative), South Korea

Sisters Garden started in 2009 as a food sovereignty group of the Korea Women Farmers' Association (KWFA). Sisters Garden together with Korean Women's Solidarity and the Seoul Federation for Environment, have carried out campaigns and activities to protect local seeds. Their FPAR focuses on understanding, documenting and investigating the impact of the dominant neoliberal trade system and control of Transnational Corporations (TNCs) on the food production and distribution system of women, particularly peasant women. Sisters Garden's FPAR also explored alternative solutions such as agroecology and the cultivation of traditional seeds in rural communities.

Section 1

**WOMEN'S LIVES UNDER NEOLIBERAL
TRADE AND CORPORATE POWER**



Neoliberal globalisation continues to wreak havoc on people's lives and the planet. Policies of liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation, pushed by developed countries and driven by the WB, IMF, and the WTO have transferred the control of economies and basic services from the states and the peoples, into the hands of elites and corporations. Across the globe, more than 900 bilateral or multilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are in force in addition to the agreements under the WTO. These agreements cement neoliberal policies and constrain developing countries' capacity to revisit and revise economic policies in ways that prioritise public interest and are in favour of human rights.

The promises of prosperity have become true for developed countries and their elites. In the last few decades, the liberalisation of trade and investments, coupled with strict intellectual property rules have enabled a few technologies and big pharmaceutical companies to accumulate more wealth than developing countries, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple have market capitalisations ranging from USD 900 billion to USD 2 trillion.¹ On the other hand, developing countries such as Nepal, Mongolia, and Cambodia for example have gross domestic products (GDPs) of less than USD 40 billion. The Pacific Islands Small States on the other hand have a combined GDP of USD 8.8 billion.

The resulting prosperity from globalisation, as indicated by the global GDP which quadrupled from 1990 to 2020² is not enjoyed by many as this growth is dependent on precarious jobs, women's unpaid care work, land grabbing from peasants and Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and destructive extraction of natural resources especially from developing countries. Wealth concentration has

worsened. According to the World Social Report 2020, 'the share of income going to the richest one per cent of the population increased in 59 out of 100 countries with data from 1990 to 2015. Meanwhile, the poorest 40 per cent earned less than 25 per cent of income in all 92 countries with data'.³ In Asia, which is considered the world's engine of economic growth, income inequality increased by five GINI percentage points over the last two decades, which stood at an average of 0.38 per cent in 2014.⁴ The region's richest five per cent controls around 70 per cent of the region's combined wealth.⁵ China, which is praised for lifting millions out of poverty has a serious inequality problem. The share of the country's wealth of the top 10 per cent increased to 67.4 per cent in 2019 from 41.4 per cent in 1978. Meanwhile, the share of the wealth of the bottom 50 per cent shrank to 6.4 per cent in 2019 from 15.8 per cent in 1978.⁶ This inequality also translates to the share of the burden of climate change as a consequence of massive resource extraction and the use of fossil fuels. While developed countries have enjoyed economic growth as the direct beneficiary of colonial and neoliberal globalisation policies, it is the developing countries that bear the brunt of disastrous weather disturbances and their impacts on health and livelihoods.

Women suffer the worst of the impacts of neoliberal trade. In agriculture, women are worse placed compared to men in terms of coping with the concentration and mechanisation of agricultural production because of structural barriers to access to land, financing and technology. Women find jobs in precarious segments of the global value chains of manufacturing products such as electronics and garments where they experience flexible employment schemes with little to no health and

¹ Wallach, O. (2021, July 7). The World's Tech Giants, Compared to the Size of Economies. Visual Capitalist. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-tech-giants-worth-compared-economies-countries/>

² Global GDP in 1990 is USD 29.38 trillion, and USD 132.99 trillion in 2020 (down from USD 134.83 trillion in 2019). Source: The World Bank. (n.d.). *GDP, PPP (current international \$)*. The World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTR.PP.CD>

³ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). (2020). *World Social Report 2020*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/02/World-Social-Report2020-ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

⁴ UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2018). *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unescap.org/publications/inequality-asia-and-pacific-era-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>

⁵ UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (2018). *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.unescap.org/publications/inequality-asia-and-pacific-era-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>

⁶ World Inequality Database. (n. d.). *China*. <https://wid.world/country/china/>

social benefits, long hours of work, low wages, sexual harassment and discrimination. The digital gig economy continues to extract women's 'cheap' labour as it glorifies women's supposed access to jobs. Digital jobs are often flexible and informal and do not lessen the burden of unpaid care work. Women in Asia do 4.1 times more unpaid care work than men,⁷ often while working full-time jobs. Services and investment liberalisation led to the lack of women's access to healthcare and education, which was worsened during COVID-19, as these were turned into for-profit businesses rather than public services. The rise of mega trade and investment agreements, together with investment protection/enforcement measures in the form of Investor-State Dispute Settlement and militarisation will further put women at a disadvantage in accessing their rights.

Rise of mega trade and investment agreements

Bilateral and multilateral agreements that contain commitments beyond the WTO cement and widen the scope of existing liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation policies. Examples of such deals are the CPTPP and the RCEP.⁸ While the two agreements represent a geopolitical competition in writing the rules of trade and investments in the region, together, these will not only further lower tariffs in trading goods and remove barriers in investments. Both agreements will also widen corporate reach into local markets as they intend to end preferences for local companies and state-owned enterprises in government procurement. Furthermore, CPTPP also has intellectual property provisions that can raise the prices of farm inputs, medicines and educational materials, which can make these inaccessible to poor populations.

Like the WTO agreements, CPTPP, RCEP and other multilateral trade agreements 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. On the other hand, business lobby groups have been given more privileged access to the negotiations, which resulted in the pro-corporate provisions of the trade and investment deals.

Systemic protection of corporate interests

Investment protection in the form of ISDS is present in the CPTPP. While ISDS is not present in the current RCEP agreement, future negotiations are still open to the inclusion of this provision should state parties decide to do so.

The ISDS amplifies corporate power as it gives corporations the right to sue governments in international and secretive tribunals to claim compensation for actual and even 'possible' reductions in their profits as a result of government regulatory action. This can impede governments from exercising their role in implementing laws that will enhance human rights, such as laws that will enforce living wages, reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions or protect people's health. The ISDS clauses can hinder governments from introducing new laws intended to lessen the gender gap in wage payments. Governments have been sued under ISDS for introducing new laws for raising minimum wages in the country. In 2012, for example, French TNC Veolia sued Egypt for raising the minimum wage under its new labour laws since this will hurt the company's profits. While the case was dismissed, Egypt still lost millions in arbitration and legal fees during the six years of the case. This money could have been used to fund social services, including universal health care, social protection and access to education. When Pakistan lost to Tethyan in 2019, the company won a USD 8.5 billion award, which is more than double the amount of Pakistan's entire public spending on health care for 200 million people.⁹

⁷ Mercado, L., Naciri, M., & Mishra, Y. (2020, June 1). Women's unpaid and underpaid work in the times of COVID-19. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/06/womens-unpaid-and-underpaid-work-in-the-times-of-covid-19>

⁸ CPTPP has Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam while RCEP has the ASEAN countries plus Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.

⁹ Bilaterals (2021) Tethyan Copper vs. Pakistan: Investor cashes in on the back of the crisis-stricken country. <https://www.isds.bilaterals.org/?tethyan-copper-vs-pakistan-needs>

Militarism, on the other hand, strengthens the enforcement and protection of corporate investments on the ground. In countries such as the Philippines, Cambodia and Indonesia, military and paramilitary forces are deployed on the ground to protect corporate investments and drive away communities to make way for mining, palm oil plantations and other extractive projects. Women in these communities are subject to loss of access to land and natural resources and violations of their human rights. Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are subjected to Gender-based Violence (GBV) such as sexual harassment and violent sexual assault as they are perceived as threats not only to the corporate investment but also to the existing power structures and the patriarchal social order that concentrates wealth among a few and discriminates against women.

COVID-19, militarism and the expansion of neoliberal globalisation

COVID-19 exacerbated the social crises and inequalities that are already put in place by neoliberal globalisation, militarism, fundamentalisms and patriarchy even before the pandemic hit. Threats of ISDS claims are looming against countries that implemented emergency measures during the pandemic that might have hurt corporate profits.¹⁰ These may exacerbate the economic crises that countries and their citizens face and lock in liberalisation and privatisation measures.

Restrictive intellectual property rules embodied in the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the WTO are preventing developing countries from effectively containing COVID-19. In 2020, India and South Africa proposed a temporary waiver of the TRIPs to

facilitate wider access to vaccines, therapeutics and other medical products and know-how that are needed to prevent the virus from further spreading and causing deaths.¹¹ Two years into the pandemic, developed countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), Norway, Switzerland and the European Union (EU) continue blocking the TRIPS waiver. The results of the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference (2022)¹² on the TRIPS waiver did not produce an agreement that will guarantee developing countries' access to life products and know-how to fight COVID-19. Blocking the TRIPS waiver fuels the vaccine inequity between developed and developing countries. In low-income countries, women are less likely than men to have access to vaccines because of structural inequalities that deny them access to information on how to get the vaccines, the lack of means to get to vaccination centres and in some cases, lack of permission from their husbands and other male relatives.¹³ Vaccine inequity can worsen other inequalities, including gender inequality, as the prospect of the economic recovery of developing countries dims due to future possible waves of infections which can lead to more lockdowns and collapse of their health systems.

Privatised healthcare meant millions were subjected to a lack of access to COVID-19 treatment as well as treatments for other health conditions. Women in particular lost access to sexual and reproductive health services wherein there were increases in stillbirth, maternal death and maternal depression.¹⁴ Violence Against Women (VAW) increased as a result of confinement with their abusers. Unpaid care work done by women also increased. Patriarchal gender roles assign women to care work and are relied upon to look after sick family members and attend to the needs of family members who stay at home due to movement restrictions.

¹⁰ Nikiéma, H. S., & Maina, N. (2020). The Risk of ISDS Claims Through National Investment Laws.

¹¹ Hindustan (2021) TRIPS waiver will facilitate wider access to technologies needed for Covid-19 vaccine production: South Africa. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/trips-waiver-will-facilitate-wider-access-to-technologies-needed-for-covid-19-vaccines-production-south-africa-101622551593114.html>

¹² Deborah James (2022), The World Trade Organisation after the 12th Ministerial Conference.. <https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/the-world-trade-organization-after-the-12th-ministerial-conference>

¹³ CARE International. (2011). Women in low-income countries denied access to COVID vaccines, new research reveals. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/women-low-income-countries-denied-access-covid-vaccines-new-research-reveals>

¹⁴ Ghouaibi, A. (2021). The pandemic has hurt women's health. This is why that's bad for everyone. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/09/lessons-must-be-learned-from-covid-19-s-impact-on-women-s-health-and-rights/>

COVID-19 brought massive disruptions to the highly interconnected global production networks that were previously enabled by trade and investment liberalisation and deregulation. Lockdowns reduced consumption from the West and led to work stoppages and even closures of factories located in Asia that produce goods such as garments and electronics. This meant job losses for millions of women workers in these industries. In Bangladesh, garment workers were reportedly retrenched arbitrarily without the prescribed notice period and without receiving proper wages and overtime allowances.¹⁵

While restricting trade in some sectors, COVID-19 is set to expand neoliberal globalisation in the digital trade sector. Due to lockdowns and distancing measures, digital technologies are increasingly relied upon to access services as well as jobs. The digital economy in Southeast Asia alone is forecasted to expand to USD one trillion by the year 2030.¹⁶ However, the rules being proposed at the WTO will enable digital companies to secure higher profits while avoiding taxes. This can erode a country's revenue base which governments need to deliver services to their people, including those that fulfil women's human rights and aim to eliminate gender gaps. The proposed digital trade rules will also not even out the playing field for women in e-commerce. The 40 per cent commission charged by e-commerce platforms for sales, product packaging

and stock replenishment conditionalities is too steep for women-owned businesses which are often small and generate lesser revenues and profit margins than their male counterparts.¹⁷ Moreover, due to the rural-urban and gender dimensions of the digital divide that exists in Asia and the Pacific,¹⁸ it is likely that women who are able to take advantage of e-commerce come from urban areas and from relatively better economic backgrounds. Currently, the design of IPEF gives large power to the US digital tech companies in the name of women's economic empowerment¹⁹.

COVID-19 was also used by some governments to legislate more neoliberal policies. The Philippines, for example, signed three laws that relaxed rules on foreign investment and foreign participation in public services and retail markets. Militarism during COVID-19, on the other hand, was not only used to implement repressive lockdown measures, surveillance of the population and suppress criticisms of governments' pandemic response. Militarism was also used to enforce corporate resource grabs during the pandemic. During COVID-19 lockdowns, military, paramilitary and private security forces were deployed in countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia to clear lands occupied by farming communities to make way for projects such as palm oil plantations and real estate development.

¹⁵ Human Right Watch Report (2015) *Whoever Raises Their Head Suffers the Most*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/04/22/whoever-raises-their-head-suffers-most/workers-rights-bangladeshs-garment>

¹⁶ Asian Development Bank (ADB) – Southeast Asia Development Solutions (SEADS). (2021, November 19). *Google-Led Study Sees a \$1-Trillion Digital Economy in Southeast Asia by 2030*. ADB SEADS. <https://seads.adb.org/news/google-led-study-sees-1-trillion-digital-economy-southeast-asia-2030>

¹⁷ Gurumurthy, A. & Chami, N. (2021). *Building Back Better with E-Commerce: A Feminist Roadmap*. IT for Change. https://ourworldisnotforsale.net/2021/Build_back_better.pdf

¹⁸ According to the International Telecommunication Union in 2019, around 46.6 per cent of households and 54.5% per cent of individuals did not have access to the internet. 37 per cent of rural households had access to the Internet compared to 70.4 per cent of urban households. Men are also more likely to have access (48.3 per cent) compared to women (41.3 per cent).

¹⁹ <https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/add/The%20IPEF%20Upskilling%20Initiative%20for%20Women%20and%20Girls.pdf>

1.1. Overview of Neoliberal Trade, Investments and Corporate power in the FPAR Case Study Countries

This cycle's WITCH-FPAR country case studies are from the Philippines, Pakistan and South Korea. All countries are members of the WTO and are signatories of various trade and investment agreements.

Pakistan and South Korea's agriculture sectors have been liberalised through the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), as well as signing bilateral and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with other countries. Pakistan has nine signed and in-effect FTAs, one signed but not yet in force and is negotiating 22 others. South Korea, on the other hand, has 18 signed and in-effect FTAs, five that were signed but not yet in force and is negotiating 11 other FTAs.

Agricultural liberalisation is endangering food sovereignty in South Korea as well as Pakistan. South Korean and Pakistani peasant women experience hardships as they face stiff competition from cheap imports which pushes down local prices as well as farmers' incomes. As the pressure to compete with cheaper foreign agricultural products intensified, governments implemented policies that aim to stimulate large-scale commercial food production. Measures to create economies of scale in agriculture threaten to push out local, environmentally sustainable forms of food production and the peasants that employ these practices in favour of chemical-based agriculture and large corporate farms since these are considered more 'efficient' and 'competitive'. For example, in the smart agriculture policy in South Korea, Agribusiness Venture Agreements (AVAs) which are originated from the demands of the industry and favours large scale agribusiness. For the peasant women majority of whom are small farmers, this means the loss of local seeds and traditional sustainable practices of agriculture;

and the perpetuation of patriarchal attitudes against women in farming. Similarly, for the Pakistani women cattle growers, Pure Food Law means loss of access to income, nutrition and increased economic dependence on men.

Meanwhile, the Philippines' membership in the WTO and other trade and investment agreements, as well as unilateral trade and investment promotion measures, have led to the welcoming of large agricultural corporations in the country. In order to attract investors to the Philippines, the government amended its Labour Code through the Republic Act 6715 or the Herrera Law which was passed in 1989. The Herrera Law paved the way for contractualisation and other forms of flexible employment, further exploiting Filipino workers, especially women workers. The country also allowed foreign agribusiness ventures to operate to connect local production to regional and global agricultural value chains. One of the corporations that set up agribusiness ventures in the Philippines is Sumifru, a Japanese conglomerate in fruit exportation based in Davao de Oro in Mindanao where it has banana plantations and banana packing plants. Sumifru's refusal to recognise the workers, including women workers, as its employees led *Nagkahiusang Mamumuo sa Suyapa Farm* (United Workers of Suyapa Farm) (NAMASUFA), National Federation of Labour Unions (NAFLU), *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (May One Movement) (KMU) to launch a strike on 1 October 2018. The fight for regularisation of the Sumifru workers was brought to the capital City of Manila after the violent dispersal of their strike camp in October 2018. Sumifru still refuses to implement the Writ of Execution on Return-to-Work Order issued by the National Labour Relations Commission (NLRC) in 2019.

In the City of Manila in the Philippines, the national and city governments aim to rehaul the city's decaying infrastructure to facilitate trade, investments and tourism. Under the Duterte presidency, the Philippine government is implementing the Build Build Build (BBB) programme which aims to attract investments, including public-private partnerships and joint ventures, for Philippine infrastructure, including dams, roads, bridges, airports and seaports, energy facilities, etc. For Manila, several projects are set to reclaim land from the sea of the Manila Bay area to build artificial islands that will be used for industrial, commercial, tourism and residential purposes. These 'development' projects exclude the urban poor living in Manila's slums. Urban poor women and their families are being threatened with demolition and relocation to faraway housing projects that have little to no access to jobs and

services. Meanwhile, the country's privatised housing scheme failed to secure the right to decent housing for Filipino families, especially urban poor communities. The Philippines' 'socialised' housing is managed through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) which have allowed private developers and construction firms such as Ayala Land, Inc. and Phinma Property Holding Corp., to secure lucrative government contracts while failing to provide quality and affordable housing to the urban poor.²⁰

The following sections will discuss in detail how these liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation schemes have increased corporate power on the one hand while violating women's human rights on the other.

1.2 Emerging Issues Across the WITCH FPAR Studies

1.2.1. Trade, corporate capture and its threats to food sovereignty

Corporate control of the dairy industry in Pakistan are harming women's economic rights and right to health

In Pakistan, 90 per cent of consumers still buy fresh, unpasteurised milk from the informal milk sector. This sector is largely in the hands of small and landless farmers (as producers) and a very wide network of milk collectors spread across the country both in rural and urban areas. Rural women in PKMT's FPAR raise livestock to help them secure food for their families by keeping a portion of their production for their own consumption. They also sell the milk to other households in their communities as well as to milk collectors. The milk collectors supply milk to shops in the villages and the city, individual households in the city, tea stalls/hotels and also to middlemen

that in turn, supply dairy companies. Women farmers get the highest price for their milk when they sell directly to neighbouring households (PKR 70/litre or around 0.40 USD). Selling to the middlemen is a last resort because they pay at a low rate of PKR 35-50/litre.

However, Pakistan's dairy sector is in the process of being corporatised as the country implements the WTO's Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the 'Codex Alimentarius' or 'Food Code', as adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Codex standards, a set of internationally approved and adopted rules pertaining to the safety and quality of food products, were conceived in 1963 and have come to be recognised as a credible determinant for ensuring safety and quality standards for food products, particularly those meant for international trade. Adherence to the Codex and

²⁰ IBON Foundation. (2017, March 22). While poor remain homeless, private business gains from "socialized" housing. <http://ibon.org/2017/03/while-poor-remainhomeless-private-business-gains-from-socialized-housing/>

WTO rules has led to Pakistan signing several laws that harm small dairy women farmers on the one hand while consolidating the dairy sector's production and value chain to the benefit of big dairy corporations on the other.

The Punjab Pure Food Authority Act 2011 and the Pakistan Pure Foods Law 2011 form the basis of the existing trade-related food quality and safety legislative framework. These laws cover more than 400 items including milk and milk products. As part of the Punjab Pure Food Authority Act 2011, the province of Punjab has created the Punjab Food Authority (PFA) whose basic purpose is to lay out standards for food articles and regulate their manufacturing, storage, distribution, sale and import. Since May 2019, the PFA has been campaigning to ban the sale of fresh milk and intends to pass legislation prohibiting the sale of fresh milk in Lahore, the second-largest city in the country in terms of population and also the capital of the province of Punjab. The Minimum Pasteurisation Law which will be implemented by 2022 will criminalise the sale of raw milk. The small and landless farmers including the women who produce most of the fresh milk in Pakistan will lose the market for their products since they cannot afford pasteurisation plants.

'Instead of creating mechanisms that prevent the alleged adulteration of milk while safeguarding the interests of dairy farmers, the government is allowing the corporate sector a free hand in the decision-making of the dairy sector while portraying it as a fight to end the substandard production of milk.'

- Azra Sayeed Talat, at the webinar 'Hungry for Change' to mark World Food Day in 2022

While farmers may still provide the supply of fresh milk for pasteurisation, companies often pay rates that do not cover farmers' production costs. They also often forego acquiring fresh, locally produced milk for cheap imports of dry milk under the false pretext that farmer-produced milk does not meet

quality criteria and safety requirements e.g. acceptable level of toxins.²¹ This will cause indescribable damage to the women's livelihoods once fresh milk is completely banned because farmers will be left with no markets for their produce, and they will be criminalised if they tried to sustain their livelihoods by selling fresh milk.

These policy changes have encouraged an influx of foreign investments in the dairy industry. Nestlé and Engro (now owned by majority shareholder Friesland Campina, Netherlands) hold a monopoly in packaged milk products in Pakistan. The Australian Aid (AUSAID) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have also pledged their guidance and support for various programmes on dairy development, breed improvement and livestock management. USAID's Dairy and Rural Development Foundation (DRDF) was responsible for initiating a dairy project in South Punjab, with one of its sponsors/partners being Nestlé. The project targeted smallholder producers who were described as inefficient and unskilled dairy producers by milk corporations. The project included the creation of model dairy farms, the installation of biogas units and the training of selected people from rural communities as Artificial Insemination Technicians. Corporate control in milk production has expanded to related farm inputs such as fodder, seed, genetic material as well as farm equipment. In a bid to improve the quantity and quality of milk (i.e. the percentage of fat content) produced, dairy companies are in the process of introducing silage (green fodder preserved, branded and packaged in airtight containers) and specialised seeds for fodder.

Small women farmers and cattle growers stand to lose their livelihoods and source of nutrition for their families with the corporatisation of the dairy sector. By introducing expensive, high-tech equipment in the sector and attracting sizable foreign and local investments, dairy corporations are starting to oust small producers from the dairy market. Breed improvement programmes target

²¹ Sheikh, S. S. (2017, February 1). *Cash cows*. Herald Magazine. <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153231>

increasing milk yields through cross-breeding between local and foreign breeds of cows and buffaloes. However, these programmes tend to exclude small women farmers as they could not afford the price of acquiring foreign breeds. Corporatising the milk sector will also further reinforce and worsen the inequalities between those with and without access to land as the requirements of large-scale milk production and mandatory pasteurisation can only be met by those with enough land and other resources. Those without access to land and dependent on milk sales and seasonal agricultural work, who are mostly women, will be left without the incomes that they used to rely on.

'The ban on the sale of fresh milk and the dominance of corporations in the dairy sector will be particularly damaging for rural women who are landless since livestock management and milk sales are crucial for their livelihood. Milk sales were very important for their survival. Women manage household expenses and pay for their children's education from the money earned by selling milk and women will fight for control of the livestock and dairy sector if laws threatening their survival are passed'

- Pathani (young researcher of PKMT) at the 12th Annual Conference of PKMT

The loss of livelihoods and sources of nutrition will not only result in financial distress, hunger and malnutrition for the women and their families but also reinforce women's economic dependence on their male relatives as well as directly threatens their fundamental right to life. Revenues from milk sales offset some of the gendered economic disparities that are common in feudal and patriarchal agricultural societies that devalue women's work. Peasant women have limited avenues for alternative jobs and the majority of their work in agriculture and inside the house goes

undocumented and is considered unpaid care work. Through the income from milk sales, women are able to contribute financially and have some control over decision-making inside the household. Taking away this income can result in further weaken their role in decision-making.

Trade liberalisation and the rise of commercial agriculture in South Korea are undermining women's livelihoods and agroecological farming.

Since joining the WTO in 1995, the Korean agricultural sector has been liberalised. The opening of agricultural markets has led to a steady increase in agricultural imports, dampening Korean agriculture particularly small farms. Until 2017, small family farms made up 71 per cent of farms in South Korea.²² Historical data, however, shows that the number of farms with farmlands larger than three hectares has more than doubled from 1970 to 2017 (from 37, 000 to 81,000). In other words, there is a tendency to reduce the number of medium and small-sized farms but large-scale farms.²³

The government's smart agriculture programme that started in 2008 aimed to improve agricultural yields through facility modernisation and precision farming. However, this programme was criticised for promoting the corporatisation of agriculture because of its focus on industrial food production. The programme also introduces technological solutions that are inaccessible to small farmers, especially peasant women, because these are expensive to install, operate and maintain. Meanwhile, multinational seed companies have started to occupy the seed market while native seeds that have long been used by Korean farmers are disappearing.²⁴ Moreover, food self-insufficiency is further worsened by the climate crisis. In 2019, the country's food self-sufficiency dropped from 30.9 per cent in 2000 to 19.3 per cent in 2020.²⁵

²² Im, J. (2019). *Structural change of Korean agriculture and recent major policy reform*. <https://ap.fttc.org.tw/article/1587>

²³ Im, Jeong-bin. (2019). *Structural change of Korean agriculture and recent major policy reform*. <https://ap.fttc.org.tw/article/1587>

²⁴ Nongchonyeoseongsinmun (Rural Women's Newspaper). (2020, December 18). *In FTA era, female farmers lead successful agriculture*. <http://www.rwn.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=58140>

²⁵ Nieuwsbericht (2022). *South Korea's grain self-sufficiency rate dropped below 20%, creating serious concerns for the country's food security*. <https://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/07/08/south-koreas-grain-self-sufficiency-rate-dropped-below-20-creating-serious-concerns-for-the-countrys-food-security>

Peasant women from the Uiseong community in Sister's Garden's FPAR have become more vulnerable under the structural difficulties caused by the liberalised agricultural market, the patriarchal rural social structure that supports the subordination of women in agricultural roles and the continued shouldering of the burden of unpaid care work by women.

'The problem can be derived from the over-workload of farming for women. The issues of a system [policy] improvement and recognition should be connected. Especially in rural areas, the division of household labour is unrealistic. Conservative and patriarchal culture in a rural community has become normal and rampant.'

- A Sisters Garden's member,
Uiseong community

Amid neoliberal globalisation, small farmers face competition and are not properly guaranteed agricultural prices. The peasant women and their families saw their incomes fall and debts balloon as they struggled to produce more. According to the women, without proper support from the government, the more they farm, the larger their debt. Transitioning to agroecological farming as an alternative is not an easy option as it requires a lot of time and effort.

1.2.2. Neoliberal policies threaten women's livelihoods and their rights to adequate housing

With its aim of attracting foreign investments and stimulating economic growth, the Duterte government launched its BBB which will supposedly usher in the golden age of infrastructure in the Philippines. The programme intends to enhance mobility and connectivity to increase economic growth. The BBB programme consists of several infrastructure projects, ranging from roads, airports and seaports, bridges, railways and bus systems and dams. Also included in the BBB are several reclamation projects along the

stretch of Manila Bay that aim to transform what is now referred to as 'Manila's toilet bowl' into a modern port and a central business district. Well-organised industrial, residential, commercial and tourist spaces will also be built, some of which resemble Dubai's reclaimed islands. Most of these projects are proposed by private entities such as San Miguel Corporation, SM Prime Holdings Inc. and Manila Gold Coast Development Corporation. One project, the New Manila Bay City of Pearl is funded under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) between China and the Philippines.

Aside from the planned reclamation projects in Manila Bay, the City Government of Manila also has infrastructure projects that will replace urban slum areas with new business and residential areas. Together with the reclamation projects, these urban infrastructure projects are supposed to beautify the city and attract investments and businesses, which will then supposedly boost jobs and lower poverty rates. However, these projects are opposed by the city's urban poor because of the looming displacement of their communities which will leave them homeless and jobless.

One such urban poor community that is set to be evicted is the Aroma compound in Vitas, Tondo. The residents are being told to self-demolish and leave the community to relocate to a housing project in Naic, Cavite, around 52 kilometres south of Manila. The residents of Aroma acknowledge the dismal and dangerous living conditions of their community—the dilapidated houses shared by multiple families, unsanitary conditions of the buildings and streets, damaged roads, no sewage and drainage systems and poor supply of electricity and water. However, they refuse to be relocated outside Manila because most of the relocation sites are too far away from their livelihoods and do not have access to schools, hospitals and other services. In fact, some of the residents who did relocate to Naic have returned to Aroma due to the lack of employment opportunities and low access to social services at the relocation site. According to the women of

Aroma, the commercial and business establishments are not intended to help them get out of poverty. They will not be able to afford the rent on the planned modern multi-level condominium housing project that will replace their community.

'The government gave us no assurance as to where we are going now, especially [since] the Naic relocation is now being claimed and being land-grabbed by a private entity.'

- A member of the Aroma community

Furthermore, jobs in the new commercial areas are also uncertain as their skills might not match what the new business will need. Most are involved in informal work such as vendors, scavengers, construction workers, sewers and hairdressers. Instead of being evicted, the women and the community want on-site relocation and renovation of their existing homes to ensure they still have access to their jobs and services in the city.

1.2.3. Agricultural liberalisation and foreign investment worsen the exploitation of women's occupational health and safety and increase their unpaid care work

AVAs²⁶ and their foreign investments are being aggressively pursued by the Philippine government in order to transform the agricultural sector 'from traditional farming to a globally-competitive agribusiness sector'.²⁷ This plan aims to increase the productivity of high-value crops and deepen the Philippine agricultural sector's participation in the global value chains and regional production networks. AVAs are being criticised for 'putting farmers at the mercy of unscrupulous lenders and forcing them into unequal and unfair agreements with companies and exporters'.²⁸ Moreover, workers for these AVAs often suffer from unfair and unsafe working conditions. One of the foreign corporations that invested in AVAs and practise

labour contractualisation is Sumifru, a Japanese multinational company engaged in sourcing, production, shipment and marketing of various fresh fruits. While women seemingly have an opportunity to earn income to provide for themselves and their families, they often suffer from precarity in their jobs, characterised by contractualisation, long working hours, low wages and hazardous working conditions.

Women working for Sumifru typically spend 12-20 hours a day in the banana packing plant with only about one hour and 41 minutes for a break. The quota system adds a burden to their work. During peak season, they cannot leave their work premises until their quotas are filled even if they have already been working for more than 8 hours. In some cases, they finish work at 2 AM and have to report the next day at 6 AM. They also find it hard to refuse to work on Sundays lest they be sent home the next time they report to work. The workers receive an average of PHP 586.2 (around USD 11) per day, which could only afford their family unhealthy food such as dried fish, noodles and canned goods.

Sumifru's 'no work, no pay' policy is even applied during maternity, which forces pregnant women to work until they are very near their due date and get back to work as soon as possible. They avoid calling in sick to increase their chances of getting their contracts renewed during the biannual evaluation. Some have already worked for Sumifru for 18 years but are still not yet regularised.

'The bananas [we] process is better-off, they are recognised by Sumifru as they have Sumifru stickers on them, but [us] workers are still not recognised as Sumifru employees.'

- FPAR participants, Sumifru workers

²⁶ Agribusiness Venture Agreements (AVAs) 'allow the private sector to share in providing farmers and farmer organisations with support services and access to capital'. Source: Oxfam. (2018). *Land but no freedom*. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620492/cs-land-but-no-freedom-philippine-bananas-210618-en.pdf;jsessionid=27E5EAA9C0933543F246159759A57709?sequence=1>

²⁷ Rabé, F. (2018). *Agribusiness pushed for Mindanao's inclusive development*. <https://nro11.neda.gov.ph/agribusiness-pushed-for-mindanaos-inclusive-development/>

²⁸ Oxfam International. (2018). *Land but no freedom*. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620492/cs-land-but-no-freedom-philippine-bananas-210618-en.pdf;jsessionid=27E5EAA9C0933543F246159759A57709?sequence=1>

Working conditions are also unsafe. The workers multitask, can only sit down during their breaks, are only allowed five minutes to use the bathroom and would often feel nauseous and difficulty in breathing due to the pesticides used on the bananas. Workers assigned in the wash tank are issued Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (mask, gloves, hairnet, apron and rubber boots). However, the workers say these are uncomfortable due to the work area's poor ventilation. Around 40 per cent of the cost of the PPE is also deducted from their wages. The workers would shoulder the replacement if the PPE gets worn out before the scheduled re-issuance.

Women still carry the burden of care work even while working full-time jobs. Even if the women workers at Sumifru wanted to rest for the weekend, they would do household chores that they could not finish on workdays like laundry and cleaning their homes. The women workers admitted that they are often too exhausted to attend union meetings and activities and would rather sleep during their vacant times than mingle. The women of the Uiseong Community in South Korea and women agricultural workers in Pakistan also experience similar shouldering of household work even while working full-time jobs. In the Uiseong Community, women are expected to play more diverse social roles than male farmers. The women take care of agricultural product order reception, courier packaging and consumer response and are expected to participate in village events. On top of these tasks, they are also expected to cook, clean and care for the children and the elderly.

'The issue of a system (policy) improvement and recognition should be connected. Especially in rural areas, the division of household labour is unrealistic. Conservative and patriarchal culture in a rural community has become normal and rampant'.

- Participant from Uiseong Community

In Pakistan, women in agriculture are responsible for a major portion of agricultural labour and are involved in each part of the process, including sowing seeds, spraying pesticides, harvesting and dehusking and livestock management. They are also responsible for household chores. However, the majority of their work in agriculture and inside the house goes undocumented and is considered unpaid care work.

1.2.4 Missing women's voices in decision-making processes cement women's disempowerment and discrimination

Trade and investment deals are negotiated in high-level processes, without the participation of those who will be most affected, including women. Similarly, this lack of meaningful participation in decision-making of matters that will affect their lives is also translated into the everyday lives of women in the FPAR journey across countries.

In the Philippines, the Sumifru women workers expressed that it is their supervisors/managers in Sumifru that decide if the reasons for their refusal to work on a Sunday are valid or not. Often, they are forced to work long shifts even on Sundays to prevent a situation where they are not given work on the next working day or given less work during the low season. Their efforts to unionise and demand better working conditions were met with dismissal from work and violence. Their strike camp was attacked by combined personnel from Sumifru, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Meaningful participation in the decision-making process on the housing situation in the Aroma community is virtually non-existent. According to the women of the Aroma community, despite their lobbying of the local government and protests to stop the impending demolition, the National Housing Authority (NHA) still became persistent in convincing the residents to demolish their own

houses and be relocated to the government housing projects. According to one of the women:

'The NHA goes to our community neither to consult us nor to hear our pleas. They just want to convince us to accept the housing units in Naic.'

-Participant in the women's FGD
in the Aroma community

In Pakistan, due to strong patriarchal values and practices in communities, women are mostly removed from any discussions and decision-making processes that happen in the wider community. Patriarchal values lead to disbelief in the abilities of women not only as change-makers but also in their abilities to perform their everyday work. In one community, while women clean, manage and feed the livestock, they do not milk them as there seems to be a perception that 'when men milk the livestock, the milk yield is higher'.

In South Korea, the patriarchal practice in farming villages where men are the farm owners and women hold the position of assistants still remains. Although female farmers account for half of the country's population and are the ones mainly in charge of more than half of the agricultural labour, female farmers have been perceived as being subservient to their male counterparts and their social status and rights were very low. At the household level, male farmers mainly have the decision-making power over farm management. They also tend to own farms, house(s) and the income generated from farming activities. Male farmers and village adults often take the lead in making important decisions in villages.

'When there is a village meeting, the agenda and decisions of the meeting are determined by men, while women go into the kitchen and prepare food.'

-Participant from Uiseong Community

1.2.5. COVID-19 worsened job insecurity, poverty and hunger for women

Neoliberal trade and investment rules and corporate power have worsened the vulnerability of women to labour exploitation, increased unpaid care work, loss of livelihoods, hunger and increasing dependence on men. COVID-19 acted as an amplifier of these vulnerabilities that women have been suffering from even before the pandemic.

In the Philippines, workers were retrenched. Contractual workers were hit the hardest since they do not have job security. Working hours were also reduced in Sumifru during the pandemic which corresponded to cuts in their wages. The women workers also had to shoulder the requirements to be able to continue working. Registering for travel passes, acquiring helmets and motorcycle barriers, as well as buying masks and PPEs chipped away at the already meagre wages that the women workers received. In Aroma, informal workers lost opportunities to earn because of lockdown measures. In Pakistan, women who were dependent on informal seasonal agricultural workers lost their incomes during lockdowns. Those who sell milk saw their earnings dip because of the reduced demand and movement restriction.

The lack of social protection meant that the women from Sumifru and Aroma had little to no access to assistance during the pandemic apart from the irregular and inadequate relief goods and cash aid distributed by the government. The government's militarised pandemic response also instilled fear in the women's communities. According to the Sumifru women, police did house-to-house visits without warrants, asking if the residents have any symptoms. This resembled the tactic used by the police and military during the drug war to arrest and kill suspected drug dealers. In the Aroma community, checkpoints were set up and curfews were implemented

throughout the city to limit the population's movement.

During the pandemic, women's care work in the Philippines, South Korea and Pakistan increased because family members now need to stay at home. In the Philippines, distance learning was implemented in an effort to continue children's education despite the pandemic. According to the women from Sumifru, supervising their children

occupied a considerable portion of their time at home. Some of them cannot adequately help their children because they themselves did not finish their schooling.

'My son is already in the 12th Grade. Me? I only reached 6th Grade! What do I know about their lessons? I don't understand them!'

-Participant from Sumifru women workers



Section 2

**RESISTANCE:
GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS
AND COLLECTIVE ACTION
THROUGH THE FPAR JOURNEY**



2.1. Sustaining the Resistance Through Political Education and Cross Movement Collaboration

Across the FPAR journeys, political education and collaboration across movements have helped the organisations sustain their resistance against neoliberal policies and patriarchal oppression, especially amidst the challenges caused by COVID-19.

In Pakistan, PKMT organised several meetings and seminars for women to discuss trade liberalisation and its contribution to the changing landscape of the milk sector. PKMT's national and provincial assemblies were also used as venues for these discussions. The women were alerted to the plan to ban the sale of unpasteurised milk throughout Punjab and better understood this ban in the context of the emerging policies on food standards as well as trade rules that shape them. As a result of the discussions and politicisation carried out during the FPAR, the women eventually viewed themselves as changemakers who are capable of fighting for food sovereignty, fair terms and conditions of work and women's human rights.

'We are farmers and we are workers. We are suffering because companies and the government are snatching away our rights to food sovereignty and fair terms and conditions of work. They are stealing our food and they are stealing our livelihoods and now, we will not stay quiet. We will go anywhere to fight and we will fight until we get our rights.'

-PKMT women, FPAR participants

In the Philippines, the workshops and educational discussions helped the women workers of Sumifru and the women of the Aroma community understand their rights and situate their experience within the wider framework of neoliberal trade and investment policies, corporate power and patriarchy.

The Sumifru women workers were able to design plans and activities to strengthen their organisation and to show the Sumifru management that the workers are still fighting. They also want to remind the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)-NLRC that they are still waiting for their order to demand Sumifru on the implementation of the Writ of Execution which was a victory from workers' campaign in 2017. The WSRC and the community researchers also initiated discussions on COVID-19 and provided copies of educational materials about the pandemic and the related government actions and plans. Women leaders expressed their worry when Sumifru took advantage of the union members' economic distress during the pandemic as they offered payment in exchange that they waive their membership from the workers' union. To resist, women leaders from the packing plant visited their members' households. They discussed the national situation during the pandemic and provided updates on their legal battle against Sumifru and the consequences of accepting Sumifru's quit claim. State repression of rights defenders and activists added to the myriad challenges that the women and their organisations faced. For some of the Sumifru women workers, red-tagging and the negative campaigning of the Sumifru with the state forces made workers question their decision of conducting and joining the strike. The discussions helped them renew their commitment to the struggle.

In the Aroma community, the series of discussions on the government's infrastructure programmes and COVID-19 were also used to collectively draft a petition calling on the government to conduct COVID-19 mass testing, provide timely and adequate aid and respect human rights during community lockdowns. Their FPAR journey included capacity-building opportunities for

women in the community. Young women participated in training and workshops that tackled social issues, youth leadership, public speaking and advocacy writing. Discussions and participatory workshops on the political and economic situation of the Philippines, including trade and housing issues, were also conducted. As a result, young women became involved in the local struggle for adequate housing, the broadening of the alliance and the empowerment of women leaders.

Cross-movement collaboration also strengthened the women's struggles for their rights against neoliberalism and patriarchy. In South Korea, the Uiseong and Sangju Bonggang communities developed cooperation activities. Among these are selling of the soybeans grown in Uiseong to Sangju Bonggang. This helped the communities support each other in securing livelihoods, spreading the use of native seeds and securing local food sovereignty. In Pakistan, one of the strategies identified by PKMT to strengthen the local women's struggle against neoliberal food policies is organising and mobilising milk sellers. Throughout the FPAR, local milk sellers were consulted on their situation and political discussions were held with them about the effects of banning the sale of raw milk. PKMT suggested to the milk sellers to form a union and eventually,

a cooperative of milk sellers to protect their rights and economic interests in the face of increasing regulation and corporate control. They talked about the possibility of joining milk shops that already have an association at the district level. PKMT also sought the support of other rights-based organisations, journalists and consumers (especially from urban areas) to raise the issue on larger platforms.

In the Philippines, the Sumifru women workers plan to form alliances with other labour groups to collectively fight against neoliberal policies, especially contractualisation. According to the workers, labour organisations should unite to repeal the Herrera Law which galvanised contractualisation in Philippine labour laws. Sumifru women workers shared that the support from alliances and linkages with other sectors have been helpful in their fight for regularisation. They now want to consolidate the individual contacts that the members have made since the strike to maximise the organisation's resources. The women in the Aroma community, on the other hand, also cooperate with organisations from other housing tenements in Vitas, such as Katuparan, that is also up for demolition. Together, they conduct mobilisations and dialogues with local officials.

2.2. Strengthening Solidarity and Sharing Local Wisdom

Collective action to solve immediate and long-term problems has strengthened the women's organisations in the FPAR communities.

Lack of social protection and inadequate assistance from the government during the pandemic left many urban poor communities in hunger during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In Aroma and the rest of Tondo in the Philippines, the strict enforcement of community quarantine protocols limited the mobility of people, including those who earn daily

wages doing informal work. In response to this crisis, communities in Tondo organised weekly community kitchens and community pantries to help feed families. Resources from the communities themselves were shared with the kitchens and pantries, along with donations from individuals and non-government organisations. The community kitchens helped strengthen solidarity within the community, as well as between the community and researchers. These were also used as venues to invite people for the May 1 protest and gather

signatures for the petition calling on the government to implement mass testing for COVID-19, provide adequate pandemic assistance and respect human rights during community quarantines. When the nearby Katuparan housing was sent a demolition notice, members of the Aroma community attended mobilisations to stop the demolition in solidarity.

In the Uiseong community in South Korea, the space that the Sister's Garden provided enabled

the rural women to conduct several deep discussions on their experiences and the opportunities that can be used to solve their problems in ecological agriculture. These discussions lead to planting native soybeans and planning work-sharing activities. Collective planning, production and sales have strengthened solidarity among community members as well as strengthening the economic and social capabilities of the community.

2.3 Amplifying Women's Voices in National, Regional and International Spaces

Engaging advocacy spaces at different levels and collaborating with other organisations helped the women amplify their voices against neoliberal policies, corporate power and patriarchy.

The Sumifru women workers established links with local supporters in their fight against contractualisation. Among the list are the NAMASUFA and KMU. Progressive political parties are also listed as allies of women workers. They include the *Makabayan Bloc*, specifically *Bayan Muna*, *Kabataan Partylist*, *Anak Pawis Partylist*, and the *Gabriela Women's Party*. Religious institutions like the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), the Commission of Human Rights (CHR), and alternative media were also identified as national actors that support their cause.

The women workers also formed contact alliances with international organisations and platforms. Before the quarantine lockdown, the women workers' leaders participated in International Working Women's Day (IWWD) in 2020 and shared the workers' issues. Community researchers attended and participated in the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (IDEVAW) forum, and One Billion Rising (OBR) discussions. Several regional and international

organisations such as APWLD, Just Associates (JASS), People Over Profit, and Mama Cash have thrown in their support for the workers in different ways. Japanese organisations such as Fair Finance Guide Japan, Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC), Friends of the Earth (FoE) Japan, Ethical Banana Campaign Committee, Japan Center for a Sustainable Environment and Society (JACSES), and Action of Solidarity, Equality, and Environment and Development (A SEED) Japan contributed to the research of the worker's situation and campaigned for the accountability of Sumifru in Japan.

In Pakistan, PKMT gathers its members and allies in its local village assemblies and national conferences. These venues are used to discuss neoliberal trade policies that are negatively affecting food sovereignty, worsening farmers' working conditions, and promoting patriarchy and violations of women's human rights. In one such assembly, the FPAR mentor and researcher shared the results of the research on the implementation of the standardisation and quality control laws by authorities such as the Punjab Food Authority. They also discussed how the Pure Food Law is paving the path for fast-paced trade liberalisation

in the milk sector. The assembly also explored how rural women and women in general, are disproportionately impacted by the interacting forces of neoliberal policies, feudal and patriarchal power structures, and increasing environmental degradation, all of which contribute to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), systemic discrimination, lack of control over productive resources and loss of livelihoods.

PKMT also engages in international spaces. PKMT members as well as women from the FPAR communities joined the protest on International Day of Rural Women on 15 October 2020. They held placards opposing existing and increasing corporate hegemony that is threatening their

livelihoods. They protested the importation and popularisation of foreign livestock breeds which will be disastrous for small farmers and agricultural workers. Ayman, the FPAR mentor, participated in the South Asia Peoples' Forum 2020 wherein she spoke about gender justice during COVID-19 from a climate crisis and food sovereignty standpoint. She reported that the pandemic has only proven that food insecurity during disasters and as a result of climate change disproportionately impacts women in the agriculture sector. She shared the recommendation in the forum that in formulating policies for crisis management, the government should adopt an intersectional approach and specifically address issues faced by women.



Section 3

**RECOMMENDATIONS
AND WAYS FORWARD**



The FPAR partners identified key measures that will promote women's human rights against economic liberalisation and the increasing power of corporations.

3.1. Ensure Democratic and Meaningful Participation of Women and Other Marginalised Groups in Decision-making Processes

Trade and investment agreements and policy frameworks are more often than not developed behind closed doors, without the participation and consent of sectors whose rights and livelihoods will be impacted. Much worse, these decision-making processes are often captured by corporate actors who wish to protect their profit interests.

Mechanisms for transparency and democratic participation in trade and investment policy formulation and implementation should be made available by governments and intergovernmental organisations to ensure the participation of women's groups and other sectors, such as indigenous, workers and their unions, farmers, and migrants,

affected by trade and investment agreements in decision-making. These mechanisms must put the interests of marginalised sectors and affected communities at the forefront, while at the same time should not allow undue influence from corporations.

One such mechanism that can be put in place is parliamentary oversight, wherein parliamentary scrutiny should be allowed in every stage of the development and implementation of trade and investment agreements and policies. These must be accompanied by public engagements and debates wherein spaces for marginalised sectors are available and accessible to influence these policies and processes.

3.2. Protect Human Rights From the Impacts of Trade and Investment Agreements

Economic models used to simulate the overall 'welfare' effects of trade and investment agreements signed by governments often do not factor in the impacts on human rights. The numerical results of these models do not consider the misery and suffering of displacement from lands because of resource grabs, the displacement from jobs because of flexibilisation and transferring of production sites to cheaper countries, and the displacements from livelihoods of farmers, fisherfolk, dairy produces, etc, because of the influx of cheaper food imports. Neither do these formulas factor in the militarism, SGBV and silencing of people's voices that are often needed to implement these trade and investment agreements in the Global South. This situation must change.

Ex-ante and ex-post human rights, environmental and gender-impact assessments of trade and investment agreements should be conducted in order to consider the possible and actual effects of trade and investment agreements, which will help develop human-rights enhancing agreements as well as in deciding whether a particular agreement should be signed/implemented or not. These assessments should be participatory and include information on access to decent employment and living wages, impacts on domestic producers including small businesses, access to essential public services and whether the agreement will increase the burden of unpaid care work by women to name a few. The compliance of trade and investment agreements and policies with ILO conventions and international human rights instruments such as the Convention on

the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) should also be checked. The assessments should assist in the crafting of trade and

investment agreements that support national and international commitments to achieving women's human rights and gender justice.

3.3. Governments must Uphold Their Extraterritorial Human Rights Obligations and Regulate Corporations

Human rights violations by TNCs enabled by trade and investment agreements and policies are often ignored by their home country governments because many governments interpret their human rights obligations as applicable only within their own borders despite the universality of human rights. This is contrary to international law, which makes it clear that governments are responsible for fulfilling their human rights obligations wherever they act if their actions (or lack of action) can be predicted to affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. As a result of their extraterritorial obligations, governments are also required to ensure that trade, investment, finance and development cooperation agreements do not undermine the fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms anywhere. Likewise, the 'home state' of a TNC, i.e. the country where the TNC is registered or does most of its business, is likely to be responsible for the actions of that TNC in other countries, including human rights abuses that the company commits. The extraterritorial obligations of governments require that governments that are in

a position to do so must provide international assistance to contribute to the fulfilment of human rights in other countries. This reflects the principle of international solidarity that was first articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).²⁹

Key to the implementation of extra-territorial obligations of governments is the push for a legally binding instrument to regulate TNCs. A legally binding instrument that emphasises the primacy of human rights obligations over trade and investments agreements; upholds the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of IPs and communities; recognises the gendered impacts of corporate abuse, and the role of WHRDs; prevents corporate capture of decision-making processes; provides redress for all human rights instruments and obligations; and is underpinned by the principle of international solidarity is a critical element towards strengthening corporate accountability for human rights violations and ensuring access to justice for victims/survivors.

3.4. A Paradigm Shift to Development Justice is Needed

There is a dire need to tackle and put an end to the exploitation, the deepening and widening inequalities, and environmental destruction that the current neoliberal trade and investment regime have inflicted on people and the planet. A trade and investment regime that is feminist and pro-

people and planet, would be oriented towards building economies that prevent the exploitation of both people and the planet and instead, enhance their well-being. Ultimately, a paradigm shift is needed as part of an overall agenda that seeks development justice, to transform the existing,

²⁹ Khan, T. (2014, December 21). *Extraterritorial Human Rights Obligations*. APWLD. <https://apwld.org/extraterritorial-human-rights-obligations/>

unsustainable, environmentally destructive and human rights violating neoliberal trade and investment regime, into one that protects women's human rights.

Development Justice aims to: redistribute resources, wealth and power equitably; develop economies for dignified lives; eliminate patriarchal systems and all forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion; reorient extractive and destructive production and consumption systems towards systems that protect both human rights and the environment; demand accountability to peoples by governments and corporations; and empower people to be part of democratic decision-making.

Key reforms in the WTO, including those that will make it transparent, accessible, inclusive and democratic in its decision-making, as well as those that demand the removal of non-trade issues such as intellectual property and investment from its

mandate, are of strategic importance for achieving Development Justice. However, building an equitable trade regime, and more so, an equitable global economy, will require more than reforms in the WTO. Alternative forms of international exchange based on solidarity and complementarity, respect for peoples' sovereignty, strict regulation of corporations and the financial sector and the promotion of national economies and human rights will not be achieved through the WTO. There is a need for fundamental changes and rebalancing of power relations between the Global North and South, between governments and corporations, between governments and their people, and between genders and social classes. As such, strengthening civil society and social movements, and protecting people's democratic freedoms are important as they continue demanding governments and corporations be accountable, while building economies that put people and the planet at the front and centre.





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.

This publication was produced with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), Foundation for a Just Society (FJS) and Wellspring.

Written by: Marjorie Pamintuan

Edited and Reviewed by: Hien Nguyen Thi, Sanila Gurung (APWLD Programme Leads) and APWLD Secretariat

Designed by: A. Zarate

Year of Publication: 2023

 apwld.org  apwld@apwld.org  [apwld.ngo](https://www.facebook.com/apwld.ngo)  [@apwld](https://twitter.com/apwld)  [apwld_](https://www.instagram.com/apwld_)

 [Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development](https://www.youtube.com/AsiaPacificForumonWomenLawandDevelopment)