



Sustainable Development Goals: Indigenous Women Must Not Be Left Behind

**Asia Regional Report to the
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1. Background and Context:

There are approximately 411 million¹ Indigenous Peoples living in Asia, and more than half of this population is estimated to be Indigenous Women. Non-recognition of Indigenous Peoples' existence and rights remains a major challenge in this region. Indigenous Peoples, due to their subordination to and distinctiveness from mainstream cultures and politics, have historically been, and continue to be, subjected to gross human rights violations, systemic racism, discrimination, and dispossession of their lands.² Indigenous Women in particular face multiple layers of discrimination, and their challenges are compounded by the intersectionality of their status as women, Indigenous, as well as impoverished and sometimes disability. This often leads to lack of access to their basic rights to education, health, information and subjects them to vulnerability and marginalization. They further face patriarchal oppression and disempowerment externally imposed by the State.

The influence of Indigenous Women's intersectionality on their experiences, as compared to women in general or to Indigenous men, has yet to be sufficiently addressed in international mechanisms. While the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provides globally ratified standards and, for the first time, a standard by which Indigenous Peoples' collective rights can be addressed in international law, it fails to acknowledge the specific experiences of Indigenous Women. Likewise, women-centered frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, focus on gender equality and gender discrimination but fail to recognize Indigenous Women's unique context of compounded marginalization. Similarly, Indigenous Women with disabilities face further unique exclusions and discrimination in the availability and quality of services and other dimensions as compared with persons who identify with only one marginalized group,³ and their intersectionality is not addressed specifically in UNDRIP, CEDAW or UNCRPD.

Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women are often excluded from consultation and decision-making processes, particularly regarding global development agendas. This often means that programs, projects, and funding never reach them, and, even if they do, they are lacking in the cultural sensitivity or relevance needed to be effective. Adopted in 2015, the SDGs are designed to bring the world to several life-changing "ZEROS", including zero poverty, hunger, and discrimination against women and girls. The 17 SDGs, with 169 targets and 244 Global Indicators, constitute a significant improvement over the MDGs because SDGs include Indigenous Communities (referred to 6 times, especially as part of Goal 2 related to hunger & food security and Goal 4 related to education); also, the SDGs specifically recognize Indigenous Peoples as one of the Major Groups.

¹ Luithui-Erni, S., 2019. Status of Indigenous Peoples' Lands, Territories and Resources in Asia. Chiang Mai: AIPP Printing Press Co., Ltd, p.6.

² Submission of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and its member organizations for the report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on "Right to Land under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Human Rights Focus", 2020.

³ UN Women Fact Sheet on Indigenous Women with Disabilities, 2020, available in https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020_fact-sheet-on-indigenous-women-with-disabilities-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5640.



The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda provides some hope for inclusion of Indigenous Women's rights into the international forum as the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the rights of women have been brought under one umbrella framework. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also presents a holistic approach to sustainable development, and the success of the Agenda will depend on effective and inclusive coordination between different mechanisms and levels of the state machinery and the CSOs.

However, once again, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) show gaps in clear mechanisms for accountability and equity for marginalized groups, including Indigenous Women. The 2030 Agenda does not recognize the collective rights of Indigenous communities as one of the indicators, which may lead to potential conflict among the goals; also, they offer false or only partial solutions, according to community leaders. It also depends solely on solving the problems of sustainability and inequality (poverty eradication) through economic growth and contains less consideration of the latter's adverse impact on environment, culture, traditional lifestyle, and biodiversity.

Incorporating the views of Indigenous Women in the protection of human rights, including in processes of implementation, planning and monitoring, to ensure that they are not left behind, presents a number of challenges. Nonetheless, the new development agenda provides opportunities as the scope of objectives reflects many of those that hold true for the development of Indigenous Women and the advancement of their rights. Indigenous Women have much to contribute to the new development agenda, and their participation is crucial at all levels.

As reported by Indigenous Women's organizations, Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities generally have a minimal level of understanding and knowledge of SDGs and their implementation process. There is a lack of meaningful and effective participation and representation of Indigenous Women including young women and Women with Disabilities, in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of SDGs at the local and country levels. In addition, awareness of the SDGs at the local level has been framed from limited perspectives that discount or omit indigeneity and the intersectional lens. In most of the countries in Asia, the various levels of government (local, provincial, and national) are not aware of Indigenous Women's specific issues, concerns, and needs. Hence, all women are categorized as a homogenous group, ignoring the distinct characteristics and needs of Indigenous Women. For example, SDG 16.9 (Provide legal identity for all, including birth registration) has only one indicator—the proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority. However, millions of Indigenous Women face the challenges of not having legal identity in their own countries, resulting in violence and deprivation of rights. When it comes to Indigenous Women with disabilities, disability and poverty are interlinked and interconnected, which makes their lives more vulnerable and at risk.

Warning signs have already begun to emerge in the SDG process, as indicated by Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019, which describes the widening inequality gaps due to insufficient attention to social, economic, and cultural rights, among other human rights, along with an adherence to technocratic measures of poverty. Moreover, the lack of disaggregated data based on ethnicity, gender and disability often results in ambiguities in the



planning and implementation processes. There is also a lack of systematic coordination, collaboration, and communication mechanisms for the monitoring of the implementation of SDGs, including preparation and follow-up of Voluntary National Reviews prepared by Governments and CSOs.

2. Indigenous Women and Sustainable Development Goals:⁴

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (Gro Harlem Brundtland, PM of Norway) defined Sustainable Development as, “. . . that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition sets out the two fundamental principles of intra-generational and intergenerational equity and contains the two “key concepts” of needs and limits for achieving sustainable development. Indigenous Peoples, for their part, have defined Sustainable Development as “the growth or progress of an indigenous community in their originality or within the context of their ethnic identity, in a holistic way.” By this definition, indigenous identity and development visions are bound together and are inseparable.

Indigenous Women want sustainable development, not an imposed top-down approach of development that does not take into account their collective rights and the values of their customary practices, Indigenous Knowledge and their connection to the land and natural resources, along with their identity and dignity in general. This means considering both the imperatives of the present and those of the future, such as the preservation of the environment and natural resources or social and economic equity. Development that considers the benefit of present and future generations while respecting human rights and nature allows them to assess the realizable value of the forest and resources more accurately, leading to sustainable income generation and the ongoing stability of their Indigenous Knowledge structures. The development agenda must reflect Indigenous Peoples’ and Indigenous Women’s priorities for development predicated on the rights to lands, territories, and resources, as well as on their rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in the development process.

For Indigenous Women, Sustainable Development is all about prioritizing the smallest to the largest elements of society so that its results are reflected in every part of society or in the community in a balanced way. It is not always limited to the environment, but mostly comprised of social inclusion and economic growth, and goals constitute the results or an end that peoples/communities expect to achieve.

The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021⁵ states that the region’s progress towards gender equality (Goal 5) is very slow, along with progress on clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and life on land (Goal 15). Furthermore, sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16), are the goals that have registered the least progress since 2000. The report also presents a regressive trend in South Asia on Goals 5, 11, 13 and 16, followed by Southeast Asia on all

⁴ Input provided by Indigenous Peoples’ and Indigenous Women’s organizations through survey questionnaires and interviews.

⁵ The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021 was prepared by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).



measurable targets under Goal 16. The report further says that, out of 104 measurable targets, the region is on track to reach only nine by 2030 at the current pace of progress, as well as the lack of data disaggregation by ethnicity, gender, and disability.

This clearly indicates that achieving SDGs by 2030 is almost impossible. This is also an indication that Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Women, and Indigenous Women with Disabilities lag far behind when it comes to achievement of development goals.

Implementation of the SDGs process has not been inclusive and has ignored the Indigenous Peoples' aspirations in development interventions. Although Indigenous Peoples' organizations have started to engage in the process to influence the implementation of the SDGs processes, their involvement is still negligible and ineffective,⁶ while the situation is even worse in the case of organizations of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities in Asia.

Despite this, Indigenous Women are still hopeful for their effective and meaningful engagement in the implementation and monitoring process of SDGs.

In 2021, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is going to be held from Tuesday, 6 July, to Thursday, 15 July, 2021, in New York with the theme, "*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*". This global process will review the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on prioritized SDGs and the contemporary issues under the broader theme. Each state submits a Voluntary National Review (VNR) reflecting upon the progress made based on the prioritized or selected SDGs and on national priority.

In this context the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) took the initiative to prepare three Regional Reports, one each from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, to deliberate during the High-Level Political Forum, 2021. The Asia Regional Report, "**Sustainable Development Goals: Indigenous Women Must Not Be Left Behind**", is prepared based on the inputs and feedback provided through survey questionnaires and interviews by FIMI's partners, including local, national, and regional Indigenous Peoples' and Indigenous Women's networks across Asia.⁷

Based on the inputs and feedback provided, the following SDGs are considered to be priority goals:

⁶ Participation for Empowerment: How are Indigenous Peoples faring in the SDGs?, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2019.

⁷ Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN), Bangladesh Centre for Human Rights and Development (BCHRD), Bangladesh Indigenous Women Network (BIWN), Cambodia Indigenous Women Working Group (CIWWG), Center for Indigenous Peoples' Research and Development (CIPRED), Faith Foundation, Gender Development Association (GDA), Indigenous Women League (IWL), Indigenous Women Network of Thailand (IWNT), Jaringan Orang Asal Semalaysia (JOAS), Kapaeeng Foundation (KF), Kurason I'sengsong Island Girl Power, Naga Women's Union (NWU), National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal (NIDWAN), National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF), Nepal, Indigenous Nationalities Women Youth Network (INWYN), PEREMPUAN AMAN Maluku, Rural Women Upliftment Society, Social Agriculture Children Education and Women Development Trust (SACEWD), South Bihar Welfare Society for Tribal (Ashray).



Goal 1: No Poverty

Indigenous Peoples in Asia practice traditional agricultural techniques, such as shifting cultivation (or rotational agriculture), which underpin their economic, social and cultural integrity. However, these subsistence activities are continuously threatened by infrastructure, industrialization, and so-called conservation projects;⁸ they are often even criminalized by many Asian governments; and all of these factors contribute to the high level of poverty found within Indigenous communities. For Indigenous Women, the situation is amplified. Lack of access to land, education and credit, as well as limited participation in decision-making processes at all levels, “denotes the so-called feminization of poverty”.⁹

Furthermore, the loss of land, water and forest on indigenous territories intensifies the poverty of Indigenous Women, as their domestic and subsistence responsibilities increase. Due to low levels of education and lack of formal identification papers, Indigenous Women are often excluded from job opportunities to supplement their livelihoods. Furthermore, the introduction of cash as a form of economy has contributed to the erosion of Indigenous Women as independent food producers, healers, artisans, and spiritualists.¹⁰

Poverty due to loss of land and resources has forced Indigenous Women to migrate out of their communities in search of work. This form of migration has fostered increases in human trafficking, which Indigenous Women are particularly vulnerable to as a result of their limited education and often stateless status. Many of these women are misled by brokers or middlemen who promise them secure working conditions. The reality is that they are often made to work long hours for minimal or no payment with little chance of leaving. In extreme cases they are held captive by their employers and suffer physical and sexual violence. When it comes to Indigenous Women with Disabilities, disability and poverty are interlinked, which makes their lives more vulnerable and at risk.

Prostitution is another result of the poverty inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples at the hands of multinational corporations, colonization, and militarization. There are accounts of rising prostitution in areas where there is a sudden influx of male workers on indigenous territories. When multinational corporations invade indigenous territories, they bring with them entire workforces, which are mostly male, who have left behind their wives and families and thus look to Indigenous Women to fulfill their sexual needs.¹¹

Indigenous Women are vulnerable to poverty from many different angles. However, access to land and security of tenure can significantly reduce this poverty while providing sustainable livelihood security, facilitating more opportunities for income generation and the preservation of indigenous traditional and cultural knowledge systems. By securing Indigenous Women’s access to land, their critical role in the management of their communities would be validated, transforming their lives. These women will likely also improve their self-esteem, contributing

⁸ UN Department of Public Information, 2014, Indigenous Peoples in the Asian Region, retrieved 1 September 2016, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/2014/press/asia.pdf>.

⁹ Vanda Altarelli, N.D., Enhancing the Role of Indigenous Women in Sustainable Development, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

¹⁰ Vanda Altarelli, N.D.

¹¹ Jill Carino, N.D., *Putting Together a Picture of Asian Indigenous Women*, Tebtebba, retrieved 1 September 2016, <[file:///Users/tanyalutvey/Downloads/pictureofasianwomen%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/tanyalutvey/Downloads/pictureofasianwomen%20(1).pdf)>.



to happier family dynamics and a corresponding shift in responsibilities and decision-making at the household and community levels. Over the long term, securing land titles for Indigenous Women can change asset holding patterns and reverse power dynamics in patriarchal societies in favor of the women, in turn reducing their overall poverty.¹²

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

The indigenous way of life is intrinsically linked to nature and Mother Earth, and the food security of indigenous communities goes hand in hand with traditional knowledge. Maintaining food sovereignty and the promotion of sustainable agriculture are the primary roles of Indigenous Women, who are considered the “stewards” of natural resources, ensuring that their families and communities do not go hungry. However, as a result of globalization policies, and increases in development aggression and dispossession, the stewardship of Indigenous Women is getting harder and harder to maintain. The finite nature of natural resources in the once resource-rich indigenous territories, significantly depleted by multinational corporations and harmful development policies, has led to food shortages for entire communities. The Indigenous Women of these communities are the first to suffer, as not only do these changes negatively impact their workloads, the women also no longer have the means to provide nutritious meals for their family. Furthermore, as the primary caregivers to the elderly and children in indigenous communities, as well as to Women with Disabilities, their personal attendants and family members who support them and others, women are often the ones who will go without food in order to make sure everyone else has been fed first. Studies support the fact that many Indigenous Peoples with disabilities are not able to get enough food, and particularly healthy food, on a regular basis.¹³

Indigenous Women are the custodians of Indigenous Knowledge and have a crucial role in the promotion, protection and preservation of biodiversity and natural resources that have been kept sustainable for generations. While their livelihoods and traditional roles are on the brink of collapse, recognition of their contribution towards sustainable development is increasing. The sustainable development agenda presents an opportunity in this regard, as sustainable agriculture and natural resources management are recognized as being integral to the longevity of our planet.

It is important that the losses experienced by Indigenous Women in terms of food sovereignty, nutrition and sustainable agricultural techniques, along with, on the other hand, their historical and potential future contributions in these areas, be acknowledged in policies at all levels to ensure that nuanced programs are tailored with these factors in mind.

Goal 3: Good health and well-being

Indigenous Women possess Indigenous knowledge and practices that reflect their perspective and depth of understanding on health and on causes of disease, which are not purely based on metaphysical beliefs, but rather on a holistic outlook. They are aware that health is an interrelated condition, involving not just the physical, but also the mental, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of an individual.

¹² Vanda Altarelli, N.D.

¹³ Presentation shared in the 20th session of the UNPFII side event, “WFP and Indigenous Peoples: generating evidence for action” (2021), A Study on Access to Food of Indigenous Peoples with Disabilities in Nepal (Draft report), WFP, Nepal.



Indigenous Women continue to hold on to the Indigenous beliefs, knowledge and practices associated with reproductive health that have been passed down to them by their ancestors, and this Indigenous Knowledge continues to govern all related aspects of their lives, including courtship, marriage, sexual relations, family life, gender relations, pregnancy, birth, post-natal care, childcare, child rearing, healing and divorce.

The continued transmission and carrying out of traditional health practices is threatened and being lost as new medical knowledge and practices are introduced. The loss of plants, animals and forests where herbal medicines are found, and the dying out of elders who possess such knowledge, are additional factors that have hindered the transmission of invaluable Indigenous Knowledge.

Furthermore, there is persistent discrimination against and exclusion of Indigenous Women on the part of mainstream health facilities and, at the same time, criminalization of traditional health practitioners in indigenous cultures. These combined barriers make adequate access to health, including sexual and reproductive health, impossible for many Indigenous Women.

Indigenous Women have the right to all social and health services without discrimination. They should have standards of physical and mental health that are equal to those of their mainstream counterparts. They have the right to cultivate and use their traditional medicines. Indigenous Women should be able to access adequate nutrition and healthcare services, including family planning, pregnancy and birth care, and states should take all necessary steps towards achieving equality in health care.

The combined region of Asia and the Pacific has made very good progress on good health and well-being overall. However, while the region can expect to reach three of the targets of Goal 3 by 2030 if the current trends are maintained,¹⁴ The report does not reflect the unique situation of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities, nor does it address recognition of their traditional and cultural practices. In addition to the lack of disaggregated data based on ethnicity, obtaining reliable information related to disability remains a challenge regarding Goal 3, as well as for the other remaining SDGs.

Thus, there is a need to promote intercultural health models that are sensitive to traditional knowledge and health practices maintained by Indigenous Peoples, and which do not criminalize or penalize their practitioners. Likewise, mainstream medical practitioners must be sensitized on cultural practices that hinder an Indigenous Woman's access to healthcare and must take steps to reduce the specific forms of discrimination faced by Indigenous Women when they access the healthcare system. In addition, equal access to healthcare services, traditional medical systems, and nutrition must be provided to Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities.

Goal 5: Gender Equality

Gender inequality within indigenous communities is often evident through increased occurrences of gender-based violence, including violence in the name of culture and tradition, such as female genital mutilation, child marriage and forced marriage. The persistence of such

¹⁴ The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021 was prepared by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)



practices requires that Indigenous Women themselves take the lead in transforming them so that they are in line with human rights, Indigenous women's rights and Indigenous rights obligations. The participation of Indigenous Women in these cases is critical to ensure that the transformation is not harmful to the community or to the women who seek to change it.

Disproportionately high levels of extractive industries and development aggression on indigenous territories affect Indigenous Women in a specific way. Such activities lead to increases in militarization, the use of pesticides and chemicals, and incidences of sexual violations. Indeed, there have been parallels drawn between the presence of extractive industries and Indigenous Women's sexual and reproductive health. Often, this is a result of limited access to information on the negative consequences of the extractive industries and the use of chemicals.

The deterioration of traditional livelihoods and values, the dispossession of land and territories, disproportionate poverty, militarization, and climate disasters, all contribute to increased levels of migration among Indigenous Women.

Indigenous Women are free and equal to all other peoples. They have the right to be free from violence and any kind of discrimination in exercising their rights, particularly those based on their indigenous origin or identity.

The report published by ADB and UN Women states that the combined region of Asia and the Pacific has made progress in some areas of gender equality; available data against the SDG indicators highlight significant inequality for women and girls.¹⁵ Again, the lack of data based on ethnicity and disability means that there is no tracking of where and how Indigenous Women and the other intersectional groups factor into the overall picture. So it is crucial that States must ensure that all women, regardless of ethnic background, with diversity must enjoy the same human rights and fundamental freedoms as men do in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres by passing and enforcing laws that end discriminatory practices against women.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

With the increasing instances of land grabbing in the Indigenous lands and territories, perpetrated either by States or by multinational corporations, often in the name of conservation and economic growth, Indigenous communities are losing their lands. This has heavily impacted Indigenous Women, who are also affected by violation of their right to work, due to the situation of poverty in which they live. There is now an increasing number of Indigenous Women migrating to urban centers in search of formal and informal sectors, leaving them vulnerable to a new array of exploitative factors.

When they arrive in these cities, Indigenous Women have difficulties finding employment because of the prevailing discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in general and Indigenous Women in particular, the inherent lack of employment opportunities, and education and language barriers in underdeveloped countries in Asia. Some are able to find unskilled jobs in the formal economy as workers on plantations, or in factories, hotels or other establishments.

¹⁵ Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific Baseline and pathways for transformative change by 2030, published by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).



Others survive mainly through the informal economy, making do with odd jobs when they can find them, working as domestic workers, waitresses, salesgirls, laundry women, sex workers and/or construction workers, etc. Many of these migrating Indigenous Women end up underemployed or unemployed, living below the national poverty line. As workers, Indigenous Women are exploited in terms of wages, benefits and working conditions. In addition, they experience discrimination in the workplace based on the fact that they are women and indigenous.

For Indigenous Women who remain in their communities, access to financial credit is limited due to insufficient collateral, since many still do not engage with the cash based economy. Furthermore, lack of education and the cycle of poverty leads to families getting themselves further and further into debt just to cope with the external challenges facing their livelihoods, including climate change and extractive industries.

Indigenous Women should have equal employment opportunities and benefits, including social security and equal pay, as well as the right to practice traditional occupations such as small-scale farming, pastoralism, handicraft production and shifting cultivation.

Goal 13: Climate Action

The effects of climate change on Indigenous Women in Asia are already being felt. Excessive and unpredictable rainfall resulting in failed crops, long periods of drought reducing access to clean water supplies, and the subsequent instability of household economics, is being felt across the region. For Indigenous Women, who are responsible for the natural resources management in the communities, this adds to their existing burden of having to provide for their families. Crop yields that once underpinned the household income now barely cover a fraction of daily needs. Indigenous Women have to walk further each day to collect clean water, often across treacherous landscapes prone to landslides. The existing poverty of indigenous communities is projected to worsen substantially as global temperatures continue to rise, and Indigenous Women of the largely agrarian Mekong region will be forced to pursue alternative sources of income.¹⁶

Indigenous Women are the first to face the consequences of climate change due to their dependence on and relation to the environment and its resources. Climate change aggravates existing difficulties, such as political and economic marginalization, the loss of lands and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment. Climate change adaptation requires additional financial resources, as well as the transfer of technical knowledge that most indigenous communities do not have. Although short-term adaptation activities have been implemented, lack of resources and limited capacity limits the implementation of long-term strategies. Indigenous practices for adaptation and mitigations are not- or limitedly recognized, community-based local and Indigenous solutions that are efficient and effective are fading away irreversibly.

Participation of Indigenous Peoples, particularly Indigenous Women, in climate policies and strategies, including NDCs and NAPs, is limited. Some mitigation measures may have direct or indirect undesirable consequences for Indigenous communities, and thus they must be

¹⁶ For more information, refer to AIPP Publication: *Indigenous Women and Human Trafficking in the Mekong Region*.



implemented with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, and especially of Indigenous Women, to ensure that such measures do not negatively affect communities. When mitigation has failed, Indigenous Peoples are suddenly displaced due to climate disasters. They have limited options for legal migration and scarce opportunities to make informed decisions, which makes them more vulnerable during disasters.

Moreover, in the case of Indigenous Women and girls with disabilities, the impact of climate change is even more adverse, as the extreme weather events and their effects on agriculture, forest and water availability affect them and their families significantly. The primary caregivers of a disabled child have to spend additional time and energy managing water, farm, food and energy resources. The hardening of soil due to long spells of dry weather requires more labor to till and prepare the farms. The increase of new and aggressive pests both on farms and in storage not only takes their time and energy, but also causes losses related to their food and income. These disabled individuals and their caretakers are too busy to be actively involved in community groups and local committees, and thus do not receive local-level information and resources as easily as other families do,¹⁷ a situation that impacts them in various ways.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Indigenous Women are often excluded from the justice system, both the customary justice system and the formal, national systems. The formal justice system often requires use of the national language, which many Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous Women, are not literate in. And even if they manage to access these systems, their cases may not be fairly adjudicated because of preconceived prejudices towards Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous Women in particular.

Internally, many Indigenous communities have a customary institution that is responsible for ensuring justice within the community. However, these systems are often patriarchal in nature, where the participation of the Indigenous Women is limited or non-existent. Neither the formal nor the informal justice systems are designed to ensure access to justice for Indigenous Women.

The formal justice system and the traditional justice systems rarely operate in a pluralistic way, nor does the formal justice system recognize customary legal systems. Yet, given the difficulties in accessing formal justice systems, Indigenous Women have nowhere to turn except to the customary informal justice systems, even when these same systems may be biased against them. Without the necessary safeguards, Indigenous Women remain extremely vulnerable, and in many areas in Asia, they face little prospect of receiving justice for their human rights violations. One major cause of this vulnerability is the non-recognition of Indigenous Peoples as peoples with collective rights, coupled with the limited political representation of and participation by Indigenous Peoples in general and Indigenous Women in particular.¹⁸

¹⁷ NIDWAN, 2021. Impacts of Climate Change on Indigenous Women with Disabilities: A Rapid Assessment in Nepal, NIDWAN and PAWANKA Fund.

¹⁸ For more information, refer to AIPP Briefing Paper: *Indigenous Women in Southeast Asia, Challenges in their Access to Justice*.



In Asia the imposition of national development plans based on resource extraction are causing conflicts in Indigenous territories. Indigenous Women suffer related violence due to existing inequalities as well as to their active participation in defending collective land rights. The strengthening of Indigenous Women's power and leadership is stressed as a key factor in achieving presence, participation, and decision-making at every level. Indigenous Women demand capacity building, reform of political institutions and electoral laws and policies that respond to democracy. Indigenous Women need quality education that can lead to the articulation of traditional and Indigenous knowledge.

Most importantly, in the Asia region, the issue of statelessness and lack of identity cards has resulted in many human rights violations related to Sustainable Development Goal 16, and the report noted that the issue has disproportionately affected both Indigenous Women, who have little or no access to basic health care, including maternity services, and Indigenous children, who are often unable to attend school owing to a lack of registration documents.¹⁹ It is therefore the duty of the State to recognize Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women so that they can enjoy and exercise their rights equally as citizens. The report also emphasized the need to conduct a study of the impacts of national security laws, including anti-terrorism laws, and the criminalization of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the need to align with Sustainable Development Goal 16 in terms of strengthening relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in developing countries in particular, to prevent violence and to combat terrorism and crime.

3. Impact of Covid-19 pandemic in achieving SDGs:

The global COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed severe health risks, but has also disproportionately increased the vulnerability of Indigenous communities, particularly Indigenous Women, elders and persons with Disabilities. Moreover, Governments have used COVID-19 as a pretext to intensify militarization and target Indigenous activists, advocates, and defenders for struggling for their rights in many Asian countries,²⁰ as well as to introduce detrimental laws and policies that violate the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Women and Girls. Red tagging, criminalization, threatening and repressions of Indigenous Women Human Rights Defenders (IWHRDs) by security forces is rampant in the Philippines. For example, Gloria Tomalon, an Indigenous Woman leader from the Philippines, was arrested and detained over trumped-up charges.²¹

According to the report²² submitted by AIPP to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (SRIP), a number of military-linked abuses have occurred in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh, including the arbitrary detention and harassment of 34 individuals, the physical torture of 17 of these, the killing of three Jhum cultivators, and

¹⁹ International expert group meeting on the theme, "Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16", Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2020.

²⁰ COVID-19: A Special Volume on Indigenous Women and Indigenous Persons with Disabilities, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact and Network of Indigenous Women, September 2020.

²¹ 2 Weaponizing Pandemic Against Indigenous Peoples: Continuing Plunder and Rights Violations; and Initial Report on Indigenous Peoples' Situation During the Covid-19 Pandemic, IPMSDL | May 2020.

²² Submission by Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and its member organizations and networks in partial response to the "Call for inputs Report" of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the General Assembly Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples in Asia.



the death of a pregnant Jumma Indigenous woman, who was prevented from reaching the hospital (by boat) on time to deliver her child during the COVID-19 period. Additionally, a total of 13 cases of violence against Indigenous Women, including rape, abduction, murder and physical attacks, were reported from January to June 2020.²³

Furthermore, as detailed in the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened progress in achieving no poverty (Goal 1) and zero hunger (Goal 2), and it has had a devastating impact on millions of workers and enterprises in Asia and the Pacific, which poses a major risk to the achievement of decent work and economic growth (Goal 8) as well.

Systematic exclusion and bureaucratic barriers also prevent Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous Women and Indigenous Persons with Disabilities, from being included in relief efforts and health services. Approximately half of the 50,000 Indigenous Persons with Disabilities do not possess disability registration in Manipur, India, and therefore cannot access benefits, which aggravates their health situation during COVID-19.²⁴

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only exposed the systemic weaknesses of the current global neoliberal development paradigm, but it has also worsened the current socio-economic and environmental crises in Asia and the Pacific and has unleashed its worst impacts on working people and other marginalized sectors²⁵. The lack of proactive initiatives and efficient mechanisms of Governments in Asia to address the crisis has worsened the situation and has led to significant adverse impacts on Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities.

4. Recommendations:

Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities' Organisations and Networks in Asia would like to make the following recommendations to Governments, UN Agencies, and Indigenous Peoples and Women's Organisations/Networks to:

Governments

- Recognize Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women, including their political, social, economic, and cultural rights to live a life with dignity and justice.
- Take initiatives towards the ratification of, and compliance with, international instruments such as ILO 169 and the UNDRIP, including through the harmonization of national legal frameworks accordingly.
- Recognize the deep-rooted relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their ancestral lands and establish specific and coherent legal frameworks concerning their access, use, ownership and control over their lands, territories and resources, with the active and meaningful participation and consent of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women.

²³ A Rapid Assessment Report on the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Bangladesh, Kapaeng Foundation, 2020.

²⁴ AIPP 2020. A Report on the "Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples in Asia", submitted to UNSRIP, p.9.

²⁵ Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCEM), Position Paper to the Theme of HLPF 2020.



- Ensure full and effective participation and equitable representation and engagement of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities in decision-making bodies and processes that affect their rights as Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women, as well as the implementation of appropriate measures to ensure their equal rights to participate and represent their communities and countries.
- Ensure access to effective grievance mechanisms at the local and national levels, including the creation of appropriate forums and justice mechanisms for Indigenous Women to file cases of discrimination and human rights violations.
- Recognize customary justice systems, in coordination with formal justice systems, for Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women to exercise their rights to self-determination.
- Recognize and respect the rights to property of Indigenous Women, and their equal rights to employment opportunities, benefits, and social security.
- Incorporate Indigenous Women's perspectives on climate change and disaster risk reduction, to develop a policy framework that enhances the resilience of Indigenous Peoples and their right to lands, territories and resources in the national policies.
- Develop effective planning and measures in consultation with Indigenous communities, and adopt inclusive recovery policies and programs integrating the needs and priorities of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities, for a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Develop and disseminate culturally sensitive Information, Education and Communication Materials in Indigenous languages for creating awareness in the Indigenous Communities in rural areas.
- Increase collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women's organizations and networks to prepare a National Plan of Action (NAP) of SDGs and ensure its effective implementation, benefitting the most marginalized and vulnerable Indigenous communities.
- Ensure the access to resources for Indigenous Women's organizations to be able to engage in the process of localizing SDGs.
- Ensure that all of the line ministries, UN agencies, private sectors and NGOs develop integrated and comprehensive social protection systems from available existing programs to offer timely support to Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities.
- Ensure integration of disaggregated data based on ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and economic status.
- Allocate resources and empower Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities organizations to access those resources at the local, state/province, and national levels.

UN Agencies

- Strengthen UN Country Teams (CT) to ensure compliance with international human rights standards, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of



Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO 169, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and other Human Rights instruments.

- Play a proactive role in bridging the gaps between the Indigenous Communities, the Governments and other actors in the implementation of SDGs.
- Take necessary steps to monitor the situation of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities in each country, and provide required support.
- Raise awareness of SDGs among Indigenous Women's organizations and networks, and prioritize the localization of SDGs.
- Develop and ensure implementation of effective monitoring mechanisms, with the consultation and participation of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities, to monitor the progress made by the Government in relation to the implementation of SDGs, and create pressure as needed.
- Ensure the social and gender just responses to the Covid-19 pandemic as we brace for recovery from economic crisis, power grabs, militarization, discrimination, and racism.
- Engage with and provide funding directly to Indigenous Women's organizations and networks in addressing the agenda of leaving no one behind.
- Prepare reports with factual data and information prioritizing Indigenous Peoples and their communities.

Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Women's Organizations/Networks

- Strengthen engagement and collaboration with local and national government agencies, and with other concerned stakeholders, to influence the results of SDGs' implementation.
- Prioritize and increase capacities and leadership skills of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities to assert their rights.
- Prioritize and focus on providing protection of Indigenous Women and girls, elders and Indigenous persons with disabilities who are in conflict zones and militarized regions.
- Adopt an integrated, inclusive, and human rights-based approach where intersectional groups within the Indigenous Communities are part of the decision-making processes in the planning, implementation and monitoring of SDGs.
- Support and strengthen the organizations and networks of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities at the local, national, and regional levels to enhance the consolidation of their work.
- Develop shared positions of Indigenous Peoples/Women for collective advocacy and campaign on SDGs.
- Develop simplified versions of information and educational materials, and make them accessible in local and Indigenous languages.
- Develop and prepare evidence-based Indigenous data and information through research and documentation.



- Develop an inclusive monitoring mechanism to monitor the implementation and progress of SDGs, with the effective and meaningful engagement and participation of Indigenous Women and Indigenous Women with Disabilities.
- Ensure that the data are disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and economic status.

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