



ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT FOUNDATION

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Indigenous Women and Climate Change

Out of the approximate 370 million of the total indigenous peoples in the world, 185 million are estimated to be women. Indigenous peoples are disproportionately suffering from a multi-fold of discrimination and oppression based on their ethnicity, location and economic status; rendering them part of the poorest of the poor, most politically disempowered and culturally and socially discriminated. In addition to this, indigenous women are suffering from triple discrimination; for being women, being indigenous and as indigenous women and are, subsequently, obstructed from exercising their individual and collective rights.

Roles and Contributions of Indigenous Women

Indigenous women play a critical role in sustainable resource management and food security using their traditional knowledge and multitude of skills, as well as in the transfer of knowledge, cultural practices and indigenous values to indigenous children and the future generations. As custodians of mother earth, indigenous women are the first to notice changes in their natural environment, in weather patterns, as well as the impacts of such changes to their livelihoods, food security and wellbeing. With their intrinsic relationship, and dependence, to their natural environment, they also take initiatives and innovations to cope and adapt to these changes in the course of their regular activities in their territories.

Climate change impacts are disruptive when structures of collective organization can absorb the ecological changes, only by changing key components of the structures themselves. For example, rising sea-levels may force a community to relocate and adopt a new economy. In ongoing conversations on climate change, some indigenous women are articulating their concerns relating to their their specific responsibilities within their communities. Such responsibilities can range from acting as custodians and teachers of local ecological knowledge, to acting as conveners of political movements aimed at respectful coexistence with neighbors. Indigenous women have a fundamental relationship with their land, sustained out of their dependence for livelihood and survival and the utmost care in selecting seeds to ensure food availability in the changing climate situation. Indigenous women take their responsibilities seriously, which consequently exposes them to more dangers and harm from the adverse impacts of climate change (i.e. becoming direct victims of floods and other changes in the environment, including illness from new pests). Because of their unique roles and experiences, indigenous women are committed to protecting their environment, which, in turn, motivates them to lead initiatives and actions to adapt and mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change.

Challenges and Concerns of Indigenous Women

Despite being one of the least contributors to carbon emission, indigenous women are most affected by climate change impacts and its uncertainties due to their impoverished and marginalized state. Indigenous women and children are the most affected by disaster and hazards, as they mostly inhabit remote marginal and fragile ecosystem such as the tropical and temperate forest zones, high mountainous areas, low-lying coastlines, flood plains and riverbanks. Indigenous women suffer disproportionately from the exploitation and destruction of the lands, territories, resources and culture of indigenous peoples, and from displacements, due to their critical role in the overall wellbeing of indigenous peoples.



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cycles - such as cases of prolonged rainy seasons or draught - indigenous women are the first to worry about the food security of their families and communities as their food production is severely affected. The quality and availability of seeds has become unbalanced due to climate change and the Indigenous Peoples are suddenly displaced due to climate disasters. At the same time, their traditional knowledge is challenged, as they struggle to respond appropriately to the drastic weather changes and its impacts to their environment and wellbeing. They are also the first to notice the occurrence of new insects or pests that are affecting their crops, as well as lesser growth/ availability and or disappearance of certain plants, animals and insects. They are also the first to notice changes in the health condition of their children, due to changes in their food security or diet and changes in the environment due to climate change. Likewise, indigenous women who are forced to leave their village to look for food, and livelihood activities as a consequence of low productivity of their lands due to drought, then become more vulnerable to external acts of violence.

Indigenous women face consequences in the implementation of programme, policies and measures for climate change adaptation and mitigation, especially when these are not gender-sensitive. For example, in the cases of relocation of climate change refugees (i.e. due to severe flooding) moving into the territories of indigenous peoples without their consent, the indigenous women's vulnerability to sexual abuse, rape and other forms of violence by the climate refugees, has increased .

The adverse impacts of climate change, especially on the livelihoods and food security of indigenous peoples, aggravates the already existing difficulties of marginalization that face indigenous peoples and the worsening destruction of their lands and resources. Furthermore, indigenous women face multi-layered discrimination and violence not only as indigenous peoples but also as women. Their invaluable contributions to sustainable resource management, including in climate change adaptation and mitigation, are not fully recognized, acknowledged or promoted. Indigenous women are thus invisible in terms of addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, of which they have invaluable contributions to make.

The biggest challenge facing indigenous peoples - indigenous women in particular - is the lack of recognition of their collective rights to their lands, territories and resources, including the sustainable management and governance of their resources. This is worsened by false solutions to climate change, such as the narrow concept of conservation as mitigation measures and the construction of large dams, massive conversion of agricultural lands and forests to palm oil plantations as sources of renewable energy, among others. These so-called solutions are being undertaken in indigenous territories in violation of their collective rights. For example in Thailand, indigenous peoples are evicted from conservation areas; they are treated as forest-destroyers, and are prohibited to do their sustainable traditional livelihood practices, such as shifting cultivation. This has resulted in food insecurity and loss of biodiversity. Displaced indigenous women have become more vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of violence as they seek alternative options for livelihood. Facing the loss of traditional crop diversity as a result of climate change and commercial farming, the seven hill tribes in Thailand have collected, documented and promote the ex-situ conservation like in the home garden and the indigenous women are taking the lead on this. Palm oil plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia are largely in indigenous territories, which is causing many conflicts. It has led to an increase in the violence and sexual abuse of women by plantation workers who are largely non-indigenous.

Indigenous women are barely visible in the formulation of policies, programmes and measures to combat



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are hardly provided at all levels. The lack of access to financial and technical resources and support for indigenous women in their initiatives to combat the adverse impacts of climate change creates another challenge. There is hardly any support to capacity building initiatives of indigenous communities and women to impart their experiences and skills to adapt to climate change. While there are some positive gains at the international level, the effective participation of indigenous peoples at the local and national levels is scarcely taking place. Furthermore, indigenous women continue to be excluded and their views, concerns and perspectives are unaccounted for.

Case Study

Restoration of drinking water and reproduction of water sources by the women in Den Village, Vietnam: Den village is located in Mai Dich commune, Mai Chau district, Hoa Binh province. Thai ethnic people account for over 90% of the village's population. It is a purely agriculture-based-economic village with its main sources of income coming from rice, cassava, soy-beans, and "luong" – a species of bamboo. There are 88 households living together in the two main areas including Den village center and Na Po area.

In recent years, water sources for daily use, and agricultural production in Den village, has been very erratic. In the rainy season, water flowing from mountain ravines form flash floods causing soil erosion, landslides and damage of irrigation works in coastal streams. Farms are left with sand and gravel sediment, leading to low productivity and raising production costs to restore the fields. In contrast, in dry season, winter crop production lacks sufficient water. The water sources for daily use are barely enough for people in Den village's Center, while the water shortage is so serious in Na Po area that many households have had to start taking water from further away. The changes began to occur when people were allocated protection forests and they were allowed to exploit young bamboo and other under-canopy-plants. Furthermore, the shortage of water has becoming more and more serious, leading to rapidly diminishing income from the forests.

With the help of local organization, Centre for Sustainable Development of Mountainous Area (CSDM), the village's women are leading efforts address the issue of water shortage and winter cultivation in the dry season. The women have visited other villages to learn from other management models, mapped their forests to identify boundaries and to point out the most vulnerable areas and to build a realistic forest development plan. In the spring, as a way to enrich the dwindling forest resources, the women mobilized the villagers to plant seedlings, under-canopy-trees and bamboos in forests. In the dry season, the women's union assigned groups to collect dry branches and clear shrubs to prevent forest fire. As a collective action, the village women's union built and monitored a convention on forest protection and development for the village.

In 2013, the shortage of drinking water in dry season in Na Po area was completely solved. Some households had even enough water for their winter vegetable crop. This had never happened before. In the near future, protected trees will grow, preventing flash floods and sedimentation in rainy season, alleviating the worry of diminishing water in the dry season. Thanks to the activities of the women in Den Village, villagers have gradually applied traditional cultivation techniques, ensuring the balance between economic development and environmental benefits.



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Recommendations:

1. To ensure the recognition, respect and protection of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and indigenous women in measures, policies and programmes to combat climate change
2. To fully acknowledge, promote and enhance the contributions and roles of indigenous women in addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, including the enhancement of their traditional knowledge, livelihoods and wellbeing.
3. To ensure the effective participation of indigenous women in all matters relating to climate change including provisions such as interpretation/ translations to enable them to understand and express their views, concerns and aspirations.
4. To fully address and end the disproportionate discrimination of indigenous women particularly in terms of health, education, employment and sexual and other forms of violence among others, in order to lessen their vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change
5. To provide for the necessary technical, material, financial and capacity building needs of indigenous women to enhance their roles and contributions in climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as to their over-all wellbeing.

AIPP Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Materials:

1. [Video](#) on Forest Conservation: A message from Indigenous Women
2. Research on the roles and contributions of Indigenous Women in sustainable forest management in Mekong countries (available in [English](#), [Khmer](#), [Vietnamese](#) and [Burmese](#) languages)
3. Comic book on “Forest is Life: Knowledge for Communities” (available in [English](#), [Bahasa-Indonesia](#), [Dayak Ngaju Kapuas](#), [Lao](#) and [Thai](#) languages)
4. Climate Change, Trees and Livelihood: A Case Study on the Carbon Footprint of a Karen Community in Northern Thailand (available in [English](#) and [Thai](#) languages)
5. [Briefing Paper](#) on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change Adaptation in Asia
6. Briefing Paper on ASEAN, Climate Change, REDD+ and Indigenous Peoples (available in [English](#) and [Khmer](#) languages)
7. [Briefing Paper](#) on Shifting Cultivation and Climate Change
8. Info Poster on Climate Change, REDD+ and Indigenous Peoples (available in [English](#), [Nepali](#), [Limbu](#), [Vietnamese](#), [Bengali](#) and [Khmer](#) languages)