
The Asian Indigenous Women's Network has been engaged, last year in facilitating building capacities of indigenous women to hold government's accountable using CEDAW, with support from the UNIFEM CEDAW South East Asia Programme. From the activities held in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia, the following situation of indigenous women were surfaced:

1. Indigenous women suffer disproportionately from the impacts of development aggression including the current initiatives to curb climate change. Oil palm plantations displaced women in Indonesia and the Philippines. In West Kalimantan, the doyo, a significant material in indigenous women's traditional livelihoods have become scarce because of oil palm monocrops. Displacement of indigenous communities by extractive industries has increased women's economic dependence on men who are equally compelled to find other income sources. In Cambodia, such situation resulting from land grabbing and appropriation through economic land concessions and infrastructure development has precipitated increase in domestic violence in indigenous peoples' communities. In one instance, a man reportedly forced his wife to sign the deed of sale of their land just to make sure that they get a little amount instead of totally losing it through land grabbing or state appropriation.

2. As women stand up against these violence, their human rights and freedoms are threatened. Mama Aleta Baun who lead the community resistance against a marble mining company in Mollo, West Timor, cannot go back home to her village due to threats on her and her family's life.

Strategic lawsuits against public participation have been used to silence indigenous women and community leaders by mining companies in the Philippines.

3. Intolerance prevails. A lot of indigenous women and men in Thailand do not have the security of citizenship, thus no access to basic services like health and education. Corruption is rampant where, indigenous women lacking the skills and capacity to engage the complicated and difficult system and process of filing for citizenship, have to contend with bribery and sexual harassment among others. Citizenship cards, however, does not guarantee equality. Indigenous women in Thailand have poor health seeking behavior first because they do not have confidence in public health providers who are prone to errors and wrong diagnosis due to language gap which is likewise not being addressed as a strategy for their effective discharge of their duties as public servants.

4. Gender discrimination, persists inhibiting women from asserting their full development as human beings. Factors predisposing this includes inheritance practices, arranged and early marriages and gender stereotypes among others. This is further complicated by women's complacency and internalized discrimination resulting from the lack of opportunities and capacities for women to address or challenge their situations. These includes the lack of information on basic human rights. As one participant in a women's rights workshop from Thailand expressed: "We have always been active; we participate in all development initiatives in our communities but we never had the space to talk about gender and ourselves". Knowledge of basic human rights and standards including CEDAW and the UNDRIP imparted during these activities has somehow given indigenous women confidence to discuss their situations and organize to address their issues and concerns including inheritance and violence in the name of tradition. In Thailand, for example, most Hmong women attain a sort of self and identity...
only when they are attached to men partly because all religious rites, including burial rites are done by the husband's family. Widowers and divorced women are not entitled to burial rites unless they remarry.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
1. We recommend continuing support to fully enable indigenous women's organizations to strengthen present capacities to monitor the implementation of the CEDAW at the national level as an enabling process for indigenous women to effectively engage with national, regional and international machineries for women, the CEDAW mechanisms and other human rights bodies. (CEDAW Report, 4th session para 114). To this, we further recommend for the States Members, UN agencies and NGO's concerned on gender equality and women's rights to:
   • strengthen current initiatives to inform indigenous women of their human rights as women and as indigenous peoples including CEDAW, the UNDRIP, the ICESCR and ICCPR among others;
   • mobilize technical, logistical and expert resources to equip and enable indigenous women to be able to use the different human rights mechanisms, tools and procedures towards the fulfillment of their rights to equality and non-discrimination;
   • ensure effective information and communication of national CEDAW implementation plans and programmes including consultations with indigenous women's organizations to define specific approaches and strategies that would be most appropriate in their context;
2. We call for the different women related processes at the UN, i.e., the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, funding mechanisms, i.e., the UNIFEM through its subregional offices to strengthen their work on the particular situations of the rights and freedoms indigenous women through institutionalized adaption of the UNDRIP as a minimum standard in the fulfillment and enjoyment of rights by indigenous women.
3. Finally, we call for the UNPFII's support to the 3rd Asian Indigenous Women's Conference in October 2009 which will discuss among other things domestic violence and violence in the name of culture and tradition, trafficking and prostitution and climate change vis-a-vis indigenous women.

THANK YOU MADAM CHAIRPERSON!

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