



# Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

APWLD NGO on the Roster in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

---

**World Environment Day**  
**June 5, 2009**

## **Rural and Indigenous Women's Environment Day: Defend Our Land and Natural Resources!**



For rural and indigenous women, land and the environment are inseparable entities. We derive our life, livelihood and survival from the land and the resources within. As farmers, fisherfolk, herders and farm workers, we produce more than half of all the food that is grown all over the world. Women have a critical role in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound management system for environment and natural resources. For us, the environment and the rich base of natural resources within it are not sources of profit or capital but are shared for the common good. We engage with the environment for subsistence living, preserving and nurturing it for our use as well as for future generations.

In contrast, aggressive "development" pursued by transnational corporations (TNCs), international financial institutions (IFIs) and governments in the framework of free trade and markets have grabbed and exploited our land, stolen natural resources and destroyed biodiversity. Natural resources on indigenous land, which had been preserved for many millennia are now depleted, with water and agricultural sources poisoned by large corporate mining and agro-chemical based agriculture. Small lands of subsistence farmers have been converted into corporate monoculture plantations. Forests have been destroyed and transformed into industrial timber plantations to produce pulp and other cash crops such as palm oil for biofuel, which is a major reason for the massive food price increase in the past few years. Coastal areas which are home to small scale fisherfolk are being developed for the tourism industry or have been replaced by big harbours to accommodate foreign vessels, polluting the rich marine life.

Peoples' resistance to reclaim their sovereignty over their land and natural resources is often suppressed violently by the governments and the TNCs. While the world's powerful few continue to accumulate and monopolise super profits by plundering the environment and natural resources, majority of the poor in the Asia Pacific region face increasing levels of hunger, poverty and abysmal misery: 950 million in the region live below the international absolute poverty line (2008). This destruction of lives and of the environment is further exacerbated by regressive neoliberal policies of globalisation,

We are now facing the global problem of climate change. Imperialist governments, inter-government bodies, IFIs and their corporations refuse to acknowledge their big role in the plunder of the environment and natural resources. They rally the whole world in reducing the emission of gases yet they do not command their own to reduce their consumption and emissions.

Climate change is a result of the unparalleled greed of imperialist governments and their TNCs in their aggressive pursuit for profits. The benefit of open-market policy of globalisation has allowed them to access and exploit human and natural resources. The increasing push for opening up the markets for free trade by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has led to the intensification of international marketing and thus to more carbon emission. The role of the WTO in exacerbating global warming has to be scrutinised. It has been causing vast destruction of the environment in third world countries, which have accelerated global warming. Solutions to climate change and the global food and economic crisis offered by imperialist governments, TNCs, IFIs, the WTO and the UN are guided by and are enhancing policies of neoliberal globalisation.

Global warming and climate change and the inter-related impacts that they bring about have taken a heavy toll on the lives and livelihoods of rural and indigenous women. Rural and indigenous women engaging with

small-scale agriculture, fishery and herding have been experiencing greater incidence of insect infestation, diminishing fish catch, devastation of crops caused by climatic events such as changing patterns of rainfall and drought, unpredictable cyclones and flooding. Rural and indigenous women are also being affected more severely and are more at risk during all phases of natural disasters and extreme weather events due to existing gender discrimination, inequality and inhibiting gender roles which vary across class, caste, religion, ethnicity, culture, education, and other social economic factors.

The viable and sustainable systems of rural and indigenous women on food production and environment management are systematically being eradicated by the impositions of modern commercial agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Conflict situation, including the prolonged war in Sri Lanka, military regime in Burma and other militaristic exercise of the power by the governments and TNCs is magnifying the devastating impacts on women. These conditions often force rural and indigenous women to leave their community as they migrate internally or internationally in search of shelter and livelihood exposing them to various forms of violence. Majority of these women are forced to imbibe a foreign culture and are often not prepared to cope with a highly exploitative system based on industrial production.

Rural and indigenous women suffer the most during disasters and economic or conflict induced displacement caused by imperialist plunder of natural resources and the environment. This makes us even more resolved in asserting our positions against neoliberal globalisation policies and heightens our collective efforts in pushing these to governments, inter-government bodies, IFIs and corporations.

Rural and indigenous women assert our human rights and the collective rights of our peoples that must prevail over pursuits of private profits and power. Social justice must be the guiding principle of development policies on environment, natural resources management and climate change. People's sovereignty and self-determination over natural resources must be honoured and restored to ensure genuine democratic principles in policy making.

Rural and indigenous women challenge unequal power relations and discrimination which have historically and disproportionately marginalised women; these must be remedied through affirmative measures by women themselves and by governments and their institutions. For societies to exist under social justice and lasting peace, our critical role as rural and indigenous women in managing the environment and natural resources must be recognised and integrated in policy making at all levels.

#### **On World Environment Day, we, the women of Asia Pacific:**

- **Emphasise the on-going injustice of imperialist control over our land and natural resources;**
- **Call attention to adverse impacts of environmental degradation and climate change which is disproportionately affecting rural and indigenous women;**
- **Reject market-based mechanism being used to address climate change, natural resource management and other environmental issues;**
- **Demand that governments encourage local production and local marketing of agriculture and other products and thus ensure food security and environmental security to the people. Governments should withdraw from trade policies that are aggravating the effects of global warming;**
- **Assert the importance of our roles as rural and indigenous women in the protection of the environment and natural resource preservation; and**
- **Declare our commitment and involvement in the global initiative to work on climate change by asserting our principles and rights.**

#### **Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)**