Confronting the Climate Crisis

People-Powered Climate Actions from the Global South

- The Riam Tinggi’s Response to Climate Change: The Hill Above the Clouds
- Anecdotes on Indigenous Knowledge: Zawan and Vom Climate Actions in Nigeria
- Women’s Voices in North Macedonia: Protecting the Environment and Advancing Women’s Rights
- Climate Actions of Women of the South: Community Care and Defense of the Territory in Latin America
- Rural Vulnerability and Resistance: Climate Initiatives by Grassroots Organizations in the Philippines
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IBON International initiates and implements international programs, develops and hosts international networks, initiates and participates in international advocacy campaigns and establishes regional and country offices where necessary and appropriate.

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Confronting the Climate Crisis

People-Powered Climate Actions from the Global South

IBON International
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Message from the Executive Director

The pursuit of climate justice has always been at the core of what IBON International has been advocating for. We give particular attention to people-powered climate action highlighting the primacy of people’s initiative to assert their rights in a context of closing civic spaces and business-as-usual approaches to climate issues. In fact, our mandate to contribute to the capacity development of people’s movements for rights and democracy necessitates the development of people-powered climate actions in the Global South.

As much as we strive to promote people-powered initiatives, we also hold governments accountable for their responsibility to address the impacts of climate change – especially rich industrialized countries that are the biggest polluters and therefore bear the biggest responsibility to address the climate crisis.

This compendium of people-powered climate actions is a step towards this direction – documenting community-based actions rooted in the experience of people’s organizations and their continuing struggle for climate justice. We wish to thank all of our partner organizations who made this publication possible, not only for their unique insights key to unlocking people-powered climate solutions, but also for their unrelenting efforts to conserve and deploy indigenous knowledge and continue asserting for their rights. We hope this compendium helps communities and people’s organizations struggling against corporate encroachment of their land and resources or suffering from anti-people government policies detrimental to the environment and people’s rights.

In this context, the need to advance calls for climate justice becomes ever more urgent especially as climate harms and ecological destruction intensify and become more frequent. This research offers alternative climate response approaches rooted in the practice of frontline communities and their organizations. Supporting and strengthening people-powered climate initiatives such as those described in this compendium can help us unlock viable rights-based solutions to the climate crisis towards an environmentally sound and sustainable world.

Jennifer del Rosario-Malonzo
Executive Director, IBON International
Climate change is a global problem but its impact disproportionately affects the peoples of the Global South. Frontline communities in developing economies may have the smallest carbon footprint but they already face the most extreme of consequences caused by global warming. Meanwhile, rich industrialized countries most responsible for polluting the planet continue to be captured by big business interests, promoting false market-based solutions to the climate crisis.

But frontline communities facing these worsening challenges are not helpless. Various communities from the Global South are taking matters to their own hands while at the same time demanding accountability from their respective national governments. Developing and taking ownership of policies and development efforts is necessary for communities, individuals, and even social movements to safeguard their rights and way of life while also fostering collective resilience to address the climate crisis. They use indigenous and local practices as well as rights-based approaches offering viable and genuine alternatives to the false market-based solutions peddled by corporate and state actors.

The struggle for climate justice is the struggle for rights

The examples of people-powered climate actions documented in this research demonstrates the inextricable link between the struggle for climate justice and the struggle for rights. Many of the stories in this publication present the need for deep systemic changes to combat climate change and allow resilient community-based climate responses to thrive.

In Indonesia, an indigenous community struggles against corporate land encroachment. The Riam Tinggi community has turned down significant investments that have encroached on nearby settlements, and they are now pursuing formal legal recognition from the State to guarantee their right to manage their indigenous territory. The community started its own economic growth initiatives, such as ecotourism and the production of local goods, as a symbolic act of self-determination and to prevent further incursion by corporations.

Nigerian indigenous communities continue their practice and application of customary knowledge as a means to adapt to the worsening effects of global temperature rise and changing weather patterns. Conserving these indigenous practices allow their traditional farming activities to thrive despite the threat of a warming world on agriculture and food sovereignty.
In North Macedonia, the full realization of women’s rights continues to be sidelined, particularly rural women’s access to land and agricultural extension services on top of basic social services. Social protection is also limited. Rural women’s organizations and civil society organizations are highlighting much-needed reforms to guarantee basic rights and civil liberties for women in farming communities. In order to improve the lives of rural women, protect their rights to assemble and speak out, and advance gender equality and economic empowerment for women, legal reforms in the rural labor market must be supported.

Latin American and Caribbean women’s testimony, based on their own experiences, supports the premise that land, territory, and daily life are intrinsically linked. They underline that extractive operations violate territorial rights, causing the most physical, economic, and psychological harm to women. The lessons learned from the life experiences of women defenders and their organizations show the interconnections between community care and work. Their experiences demonstrate how women define and experience this connection and how their battles, anchored in their cosmology and sense of self-determination, challenge the hegemonic economic model to construct economies and cultures that prioritize people and nature.

The case story of the Philippines demonstrates how the Southeast Asian archipelagic country is caught in a web of topographical, political, and socioeconomic conditions that have made it highly vulnerable to climate change. Despite this, sectoral groups have kept up their calls to halt policies and development projects that violate peasant and Indigenous Peoples’ rights. Rights defenders also note that local risks like development aggression increase rural climate vulnerability and hamper climate adaptation. People’s organizations have empowered Filipino peasants and Indigenous People during the climate crisis by raising awareness and rallying communities to demand climate justice.

**State-sponsored attacks, corporate interests abound**

The case studies illustrate the role of state and corporate actors in repressing people-powered climate responses. The report describes a number of community-led climate initiatives that are vulnerable to institutional threats and repression. The report cites state-sponsored attacks on climate justice organizations and environmental defenders and state aid for corporate encroachment on indigenous lands and territories.

Access to resources is a crucial but often disregarded component of climate response and adaptation discussions. Global South communities suffer from inadequate government response and a lack of enabling laws to protect basic rights and livelihoods.

The publication narrates the structural issues that hinder the expansion of people-powered climate actions and are part of a global trend in which corporate interests trump government ambitions.
Recommendations

These issues require multi-layered climate policy and governance improvements as follows:

1. Ramp up public finance flows towards adaptation.

2. Enhance direct access of frontline communities to climate finance.


While people-powered climate actions featured in this research remain in their very early stages, their potential for upscaling based on their respective country and cultural contexts make them viable alternatives to market-based solutions to climate change. It is therefore necessary to set up measures in support of these initiatives including the following recommendations to national governments:

- Support people-powered climate actions as genuine alternatives to false, market-based solutions to climate change.

- Stop state-sponsored attacks against land and environmental defenders. Land and environmental defenders, especially indigenous community leaders, have long faced threats, harassment, and murder while protecting their lands from commercial exploitation.

- Put gender equality and women’s rights front and center in climate solutions.

People-powered climate actions can only develop with support from various development actors and requires a move away from neoliberal and extractive development models, the highest levels of transparency and accountability, and the full implementation and protection of people’s rights, including the rights of women and Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and control over community resources.
Introduction

The impacts of climate change are intensifying – from accelerated sea-level rise, increased temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods. For instance, the last eight years have seen the highest temperatures on record. The catastrophic effects of the climate crisis are most visible in the current state of global poverty, hunger, and displacement in the Global South.

The 2021 Global Climate Risk Index shows that poor countries with low industrial pollution are more vulnerable to floods, droughts, and other natural disasters (Ritchie, 2021). As of this writing, nearly a billion people in India and Pakistan are experiencing a record-breaking heatwave. Extreme heat is damaging wheat harvests, preventing workers from working outdoors, and causing health problems and deaths. In 2021, floods engulfed a quarter of Bangladesh and destroyed millions of homes (Ellis-Petersen & Baloch, 2022).

Continued sea level rise poses a serious threat to Pacific atoll countries such as Kiribati and the Marshall Islands. Likewise, archipelagic countries like the Philippines have observed sea levels rising three times faster than the world average, threatening the lives and livelihoods of coastal communities. Meanwhile, southwest Africa is already suffering from extreme drought; heavy rainfall and flooding are projected to get worse at 1.5°C of warming (UN, 2021).

At the same time, vast areas of forestlands are being cut down at an unprecedented rate to make way for aggressive urban development, agribusiness, and the extractive industry. Over 300 million hectares of tree cover were lost between 2001 and 2005, according to the London-based think tank Global Witness, and 8% of the world’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions account for this severe deforestation.

Extractive industry operations across the world continue to expand including fossil fuel development which is responsible for 90% of all carbon emissions and more than 75% of global GHG emissions (UN ESCAP, 2021). The unabated construction of new coal, oil and fossil gas power plants across the globe are exacting a heavy toll on affected communities - from health-related impacts, premature deaths due to air and water pollution as well as the decimation of their sources of income.

Apart from destroying livelihoods, driving poverty and hunger, the climate crisis has also triggered a wave of attacks against human rights. Global Witness says at least 200 environmentalists and land rights activists were killed in 2021 many of whom are leaders from indigenous communities.
Indigenous environmental defenders, who are actively protecting natural habitats, face violent attacks for defending their homes and the planet from harmful state-enabled and corporate-led activities that further exacerbate impacts of climate change and global warming.

In addition, the fossil fuel industry generates toxic waste that contaminates land and water resources. In Nigeria, oil production has caused significant environmental harms including damages to protected areas and biodiversity hotspots. Health, life, and safety are in danger from tailing dam disasters; mining was the third-most violent industry with more than half of all attacks against human rights occurring in three nations such as Colombia, Mexico, and the Philippines (UNEP, 2017).

The global elite and the profit-driven world order have been historically responsible for the climate crisis, which poses a threat to both human and environmental survival. A proactive response to the crisis implies building climate-resilient communities but at the same time exacting the accountability of governments as well as rich industrialized states in ensuring reparations and sufficient support is provided to develop community-based responses to climate change. In contrast to passive coping with the effects of climate change, building collective resilience as an active response involves communities and individuals defending their rights and way of life, as well as creating and taking ownership of development policies and initiatives. It entails lowering and managing disaster risks, offering assistance and rehabilitation, attending to humanitarian needs, and engaging residents in posing challenges to, and changing exploitative systems.

In this context, communities especially in the Global South are increasingly taking matters into their own hands in responding to the climate emergency. These community-based initiatives use innovative rights-based approaches and indigenous practices that offer a viable alternative to false market-based solutions peddled by corporations.

This research aims to document these nascent forms of community responses, featuring case stories from four countries and one global region that demonstrate the potential of people-powered climate actions. The report also outlines the support communities need for upscaling of their practices and further capacity development. In addition, it also seeks to identify systemic barriers to the development of these people-powered climate actions, towards developing viable and genuine climate solutions as opposed to prevalent, market-based proposals.
Stories of
People-Powered Climate Action
The Riam Tinggi’s Response to Climate Change: The Hill Above the Clouds

by WALHI Central Kalimantan

I. Introduction

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) annual reports, the pace and severity of climate change have increased over the past few years. However, the vast majority of world leaders continue to be reluctant to take radical steps to prevent or delay disastrous outcomes. Indonesia’s current government however continues to foot-drag on its climate commitments and has stated that economic development remains its top priority.

The development path it promotes is primarily based on the exploitation of the environment and the eviction of whole communities from their lands. In Indonesia, one of the world’s major agricultural producers, land is essential to people’s ability to live normal lives. The total area of one of the provinces, Central Kalimantan Province, is 15,356,450 hectares.
Riam Tinggi Village is inhabited by Dayak Tomun indigenous people, one of the Dayak sub-tribes on the island of Kalimantan (Borneo). The Village is located in Delang District, Lamandau Regency, the border of Central Kalimantan Province and West Kalimantan Province. Even when the surrounding villages were encroached by large-scale investments, the community of Riam Tinggi resisted. They now seek a formal protection of their land from the law.

Since 2019, the community has been making ways to get their people-based management forest a village forest status through the State's Social Forestry Program. This process has not been easy since a part of the area has already been relegated to a timber company, PT Sari Bumi Kusuma. To resist further encroachment of any investments, the community began economic development initiatives on their own by building ecotourism spots and creating local products. This research intends to document and analyze the struggles and initiatives of the Riam Tinggi Community in preserving and conserving their lands despite the threat of displacement and big business encroachment. The result is important for the community to understand the value of their efforts and its potential future.

Meanwhile, the research is also a reflective story for other communities who are going through similar situations. To achieve its stated objectives, the research consisted of desk studies of existing literature and documents as well as on-site interviews with affected people. However, due to limited time, the research should be treated as an initial study to campaign on Riam Tinggi's case.
**About Riam Tinggi**

Hundreds of meters above sea level, a protruding wooden platform barely shows itself amid a sea of clouds. The place is known as the “hill above the clouds.” Lubang Kilat Hill, in Riam Tinggi Village, Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan Province, Indonesia.

As the sun rises higher in the sky, the clouds start to dissipate. The view changes to a palette of green. Among the groves of trees, a lively small village can be seen. It is Riam Tinggi Village, one of a small number of villages in Central Kalimantan where the beautiful singing voices of forest birds, such as Pumpuru, can still be heard every morning. But from the corner of the horizon, surrounding villages are starting to disappear as land use practices change and big businesses begin to encroach on Riam Tinggi.

“**We (Indigenous People) live in the customary forest. Automatically, if there is no customary forest, we do not have anywhere to live.**”

- Riam Tinggi Indigenous Leader
Riam Tinggi is a village in Delang District, Lamandau Regency, Central Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. The village, along with the other 10 Delang’s villages and sub-districts, was legally established in 1917. Riam Tinggi Village encompasses a total area of 2,972 hectares which is bordered by Landau Kantu Village in the north side, Kubung Village and Landau Kantu Village in the west side, and Sepoyu Village in the east and south side. The village experiences a tropical rainforest climate with high rainfall throughout the year with daily temperature averaging from 27°-30°C in a wavy topography at an altitude of about 150-300 meters above sea level.

Located 172 kilometers from Nanga Bulik, the capital city of Lamandau Regency, Riam Tinggi Village is inhabited by 155 people composed of 51 households. The majority of villagers in Riam Tinggi are Indigenous Dayak Tomun tribe, one of the Dayak sub-tribes on Kalimantan (Borneo) island. Most of them still cultivate the land and do traditional agricultural practices, such as farming, fishing, and harvesting forest products. They cultivate rice and other cash crops, such as rubber (Hevea Brasiliensis), jengkol (Archidendron Pauciflorum), elephant ginger (Zingiber Officinale Rosc.), petai (Parkia Speciosa), areca palm (Areca Catechu), cassava (Manihot Esculenta), and fruit trees, such as durian (Durio) and cempedak (Artocarpus Integer). Meanwhile, their forests are rich with endemic flora, such as Meranti (Shorea), Ulin (Eusideroxylon Zwageri), Ketapang (Terminalia Catappa), Medang (Phoebe), and Sungkai (Peronema Canescens).
Dayak Tomun Indigenous Community

The name of Dayak Tomun is derived from the local word “tomun” which means “to meet here.” The phrase is based on the history of Patih Nan Sebatang, a merchant from Pagaruyung Kingdom in West Sumatra Province, Indonesia. He was the first merchant who sailed to Sarang Paruya Kingdom which later became known as Lamandau Province. The kingdom was established in around 1522 AD. In his voyage, Patih Nan Sebatang had a team consisting of Minangkabau and Malay tribes. They stayed in the kingdom for years. Patih Nan Sebatang also got married before he returned to his hometown in West Sumatra. Until today, the influence of Minangkabau culture can be found in the Dayak Tomun community, such as Riam Tinggi. For example, the roof shape of juruk’ng (a small wooden storehouse to keep the harvested rice) resembles the roof of Rumah Gadang (The Big House) the Minangkabau (West Sumatra) traditional house.

“Way before Indonesia existed, our tribe and customary law had already existed.”

- Riam Tinggi Indigenous Leader

A juruk’ng, a small wooden storehouse to keep the harvested rice.
The Living Law on the Land of Dayak Tomun

As an indigenous community, Riam Tinggi also recognizes indigenous leaders known as Mantir Adat. However, they are now institutionalized in a structured indigenous institution. According to the provincial regulation, Mantir Adat consists of the Indigenous Head, Deputy of Indigenous Head, and the Secretary of the Indigenous Head. Their duties are to regulate adat law (customary law) at the village level. Meanwhile, a similar structure exists at the district level called the Damang. Both Damang and Mantir Adat enforces community policies and regulations based on Dayak customary law.

Customary law helps the Dayak Tomun people solve internal conflicts among them regardless of their faith or religion. Even though the native religion of Dayak Tomun tribe is Kaharingan, many of them have converted to other foreign religions, such as Christianity and Islam. The previously oral customary law of the Dayak Tomun tribe in Delang District has been made into a written form. In 2019, Damang and Mantir Adat in Delang District held a forum which resulted in an official written customary law of Dayak Tomun in Delang District. The book consists of thirteen chapters that regulate the rules of the living and the dead or “adat hidup bicaro banyak” and “mati hilang insam lobuh”. Any violation of the customary law is punished or sanctioned in kamuh (compensation unit). Kamuh can take the form of balanga or tajau (a traditional ceramic of Dayak tribe). Balanga in Central Kalimantan Dayak tribe has a sacred value and is considered as a symbol of social status.

Traditional Practices and Rituals

For Dayak Tomun people who converted to another religion, they are no longer obliged to practice traditional rituals of their native religion, Kaharingan. However, as a part of the Dayak Tomun tribe, all of them still practice their tradition to some extent.

Since their way of life is formed by their relationship with the forest, all of their rituals are also closely related to the forest. For example, the tumbal pudas ritual is held when their surrounding natural environment is destroyed, such as due to a forest fire for example. If the culprit cannot be found, the community has an obligation to hold the ritual as an apology to their surroundings. They will sacrifice pigs and chickens to the ‘owners’ of the forest. It is because the community never sees the forest as private property, but something protected by their ancestors and powerful spirits. Thus, they should always ask permission to take advantage of the forest, and also do their best to protect and preserve its sustainability.

1 “adat hidup bicaro banyak” means the implementation of living customs, for example marriage and violations or mistakes during someone’s life. Meanwhile “mati hilang insam lobuh” means the implementation of the death customs, for example a custom to avoid misfortune for the village.
Traditional Farming

One tradition that is still preserved as a common practice in Riam Tinggi Village is traditional farming. They have been practicing a slash-and-burn farming system. The system is often referred to as rotating cultivation or shifting cultivation since it follows a cycle of short cultivating periods (about 1-3 years) and long resting (low fallow cultivation) period (up to 20 years). This cultivation system is an adaptive strategy for the tropical soil typology, environmental condition, and challenging climate in Kalimantan region since they convert a natural forest into harvestable forest.

In traditional farming, there are several rituals they have to carry out. The first ritual is led by a supernatural leader, called 'bolin tanah', who will dig in a sasuyak (cut bamboo stick) on the land as a marking sign to prevent others from working on the land. Then, they will dig in panggulan (long bamboo trees) in every corner of the land that will be cultivated. It is to show their hope for the land to be fruitful and produce good rice or what they call as padah arah (telling their intention). After they are sure it is safe to do the farming, they will do manggul (to clear the land from grasses and small plants). The next ritual is called mantu’i which is carried out before nyokat (cutting the big trees and bamboo).

The next step is burning, which is an important process in traditional farming, before they could plant the paddy seeds (manugal). Controlled fire is needed to clear the small trees and bushes. The ashes produced from the fire will also be used as natural fertilizer since traditional farming does not use any chemical substances. However, officials frequently use this custom to attribute responsibility for forest fires in Central Kalimantan to the locals. The Central Kalimantan governor’s policy, which overturned the regulation regarding standards for community land clearing in Central Kalimantan, supports this narrative. The regulation has denied the Dayak people in Central Kalimantan the ability to engage in traditional farming on a legal basis.
Blaming the Indigenous People’s farming tradition is a logical fallacy precisely because the practice is strictly regulated based on customary law and therefore rarely causes unintended forest fires. There are also certain rules in burning to prevent any accident, such as preparing five-meter firebreaks or double tracks, water supply, and weather check. The people believe that their commitment in following good practice prevents any harm in its implementation. Even though the people of Riam Tinggi have been farming for decades, no forest fire accident has ever been associated with their community.

In addition to burning rules and farming rituals, the farmers also grow other vegetable plants in their farm lands. After the paddy is harvested, they will hold mengunjakan timbukan - a ritual to give thanks to the ‘owners’ of the forest for providing them with a good harvest. The series of rituals during their farming process is crucial for the community. It shows their selfless attitude in managing the land and gratitude for what nature provides. The community acknowledges the soul of nature, the spirits, and their ancestors. Such an attitude has hindered them from acting exploitatively towards the environment.

### Riam Tinggi Community and The Forest

The existence of the forest is fundamental for the community since they depend their living needs on the forest. The forest provides materials for building their houses, the rivers provide fish and other aquatic resources, while the fruit trees, such as papang, pakit, bulai, sawang, and bekanjat provide fruits for the people and food for the bees. They also take medicinal herbs from the forest. Hence, from their perspective, the forest takes care of people’s needs for food and supplement.

As an indigenous community who have been living in their area for more than one century, the people of Riam Tinggi gained extensive knowledge about their environment. They manage their area according to this knowledge base and their lived experiences. All of the current rituals they practice are the ones considered most effective in preserving the sustainability of the environment, especially the forest. In managing their area, the community divides the area into at least four categories, namely residential area, farming land, accessible forest, and sacred forest. Areas considered as sacred forests were once farming areas that have been planted with fruit trees by their ancestors after a cycle of cultivation. It is located about nine kilometers from their residential area. Now, the area has become a forest full of fruit-bearing trees, such as varieties of Durian. In the area they consider as sacred forest, no member of the community can cut the trees nor open an area for farming within its vicinity. They are only allowed to take the fruits for their own consumption.
II. Riam Tinggi Community Against Climate Injustice

The climate crisis is getting worse with the expansion of natural resource-based exploitative industries. Deforestation, along with agriculture and land use changes has become the second main contributor of significant increase of global carbon emission from 1970 to 2011. Despite the need for urgent action to tackle climate change, business permits are endlessly granted to industries that exploit natural resources. Specifically in Central Kalimantan Province, 72% or 11,099,176.52 hectares of its total land area is already occupied by plantations, mining sites, and industrial forestry operations. Meanwhile, only 10.42% or 1,156,904.48 hectares is granted for people based management.

The most recent IPCC report in 2022 highlighted that human-induced climate change has been causing dangerous and widespread disruption in nature which is also affecting the lives of billions of people around the world. IPCC also warns that even with a 1.5°C increase in global temperature, the earth will face an unavoidable climate catastrophe. People in various regions of the world have already been facing the impacts of the climate crisis, such as extreme weather, drought, and floods. The impacts are even affecting the people who have spent their lives preserving the sustainability of their surrounding environment, like the community in Riam Tinggi.

Climate crisis causes injustice for the most vulnerable groups, like Indigenous Peoples in Riam Tinggi who have been noticing the impact of weather changes in their farming traditions. Their rice production for instance has begun to decrease which also impacts their capacity to provide for their own needs. Some local rice seeds, like kepalang and bangkal, have also started to disappear due to unpredictable and ever changing weather. Therefore, they adapt by planting less to minimize the risk. In the past, the community could plant up to 4 rice varieties in 1 hectare of land, but now only 2 varieties since they can only plant in a quarter of a hectare. The seeds need to be planted constantly or they will die. If no real and urgent action is taken to protect the seeds, the community will likely lose more diversity which threatens their food sovereignty and nutrition source.

PT Sari Bumi Kusuma’s Operation in Riam Tinggi Forest

PT Sari Bumi Kusuma (SBK) is a company that operates in the forestry business sector, specifically in plywood production, sawn timber, and molding commodities. The company was initially granted a concession area of 84,000 hectares in the Delang River Forest Group in 1978. The concession area was granted an additional 186,000 hectares in the Seruyan River Forest Group in 1979. Thus, the total of PT SBK’s concession area in Central Kalimantan now reaches 270,000 hectares.

After the first twenty-year concession period ended, PT SBK was granted a permit extension. The company’s total concession area is 208,300 hectares, where the 147,600 hectares is in Seruyan River Forest Group while the 60,700 hectares is in Jelai River-Delang River Forest Group. The total area is slightly lower due to the exclusion of protected forests and other management area designations.
At first, no one in Riam Tinggi knew that PT SBK existed. They finally noticed the company’s operation inside the forest after the technical verification process in regards to their Social Forestry proposal in 2019. For the community, what PT SBK did was highly improper and disrespectful. According to the community, the company should have sought permission first and followed customary rituals before entering the forest, moreover cutting off the trees. By asking for permission, the community could bind them in an agreement to ensure the company acts responsibly throughout their operations. Such an agreement would also have been important for the community to hold PT SBK accountable for any environmental damages or destruction they may cause.

In 2019, the community began to pursue legal recognition from the state in the form of Village Forest. Initially, they wanted the status of Customary Forest which is considered more suitable for them as an indigenous community. However, the process is more complicated.

Even though the Indonesian Constitution recognizes the existence of Indigenous Peoples and their customary law and rights, the absence of more specific law that grants them the right to manage their own forest or agricultural land requires them to get legal recognition from their local government prior to applying for a customary forest. According to the national regulation, the legal recognition for indigenous communities is issued by regional heads which are the bupati or mayor of the regency. This regulation poses a great challenge for Indigenous Peoples, especially in Central Kalimantan Province. Thus far, there have been only four villages or 0.28% of the total 1,432 villages in Central Kalimantan Province who have got a recognition decree as Indigenous People community from their bupati.
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| **Village forest**             | Forest area that has not yet been granted a permit, which is managed by the village and utilized for the welfare of the village.                                                                      | 35 years (extendable) ≤ 5,000 hectares per management unit | Protected Forest and Production Forest        | 1) Formation of the working group for the acceleration of social forestry  
2) Application  
3) Administrative Verification  
4) Technical/Field Verification  
5) Approval/ Rejection  
6) Utilization |
| **Community Forest**           | Forest area which main use is to empower the community.                                                                                                                                                   | 35 years (extendable) ≤ 15 hectares per household and ≤ 5,000 hectares per management unit | Protected Forest and Production Forest        | 1) Formation of the working group for the acceleration of social forestry  
2) Application  
3) Administrative Verification  
4) Technical/Field Verification  
5) Approval/ Rejection  
6) Utilization |
| **Community Plantation Forest**| Plantation forest located in production forests which are built by community groups to increase the forest's potential and quality by implementing a silvicultural system in order to ensure the sustainability of forest resources. | 35 years (extendable) ≤ 15 hectares per household and ≤ 5,000 hectares per management unit | Not specified                                | 1) Formation of the working group for the acceleration of social forestry  
2) Application  
3) Administrative Verification  
4) Technical/Field Verification  
5) Approval/ Rejection  
6) Utilization |
| **Customary Forest**           | Forests located within the territory of the Indigenous Peoples and managed by them.                                                                                                                     | No limitation                                    | State Forest (Conservation Forest, Protected Forest, Production Forests) and Non-State Forest (ulayat land) | 1) Application  
2) Administrative Verification  
3) Technical/Field Verification  
4) Approval/ Rejection  
5) Utilization |
| **Forestry Partnership Forest**| Partnership approval given to the holder of a business permit for forest utilization or an approval for the use of forest area with partners/communities to utilize the forest in the protected forest area or production forest area. | Adjusted to the validity period of the permit for forest utilization and the validity period of the approval for the use of forest area/ a. In the permit area for forest use or the holder of the approval for the use of forest area, the approved area is ≤ 5 hectares for each household. b. In a local community partnership for collecting non-timber forest products or forest environmental services, the area size is given according to the ability and mutual agreement of the parties with attached zoning maps. | Production forest area and/or protected forest area that has been granted a forest utilization permit, production forest area and/or protected forest area that has been granted an approval for the use of forest area, and conservation forest area | 1) Formation of partner group facilitated by the permit holder forest forest utilization, approval holder for the use of forest area, they who manage a conservation forest, the working group for the acceleration of social forestry, and the assistant  
2) Application  
3) Administrative Verification  
4) Technical/Field Verification  
5) Approval/ Rejection  
6) Utilization |
III. The Community Fights for the Village Forest Status

Worries started dwelling up inside their minds after the community realized that PT SBK's permit covers their village area. In the battle between the company and the community, the company who is granted a permit by the government tends to win. Currently, there is no physical conflict going on between the two contesting parties since there is no company operation going on at the moment, but if a conflict happens in the future, it will be challenging especially for the Riam Tinggi community who have no capable means to defend themselves against PT SBK. Moreover, as the forest area previously cultivated by the company began to recover, the community could go back hunting and fishing. In order to prevent future conflict, as well as to save their future generation, the community began their effort for a legitimate status to protect the forest. Getting the forest trees cut down for the forestry industry is already bad enough for the community, they could not imagine if companies from another sector, such as plantation or mining came. That is why it is crucial for the community to own the sole right to manage their area.

The People’s Struggle

In April 2019, the community under the name of Riam Tinggi Village decided to register their area for social forestry with a village forest scheme. From the beginning of the process, the community was assisted by WALHI Central Kalimantan, a non-governmental organization. WALHI supported them in doing participatory mapping and filing the application. WALHI also joined community discussions for the matter, but rather than being a consultant, WALHI acted as the facilitator who shared the information about social forestry schemes. WALHI gave the support needed by the community, but at the end of the day the community made their own decision.

Before establishing a management institution for the village forest, they conducted participatory mapping in their local area. The committee was subsequently chosen by the institution to assist with the registration of the village forest. The committee’s initial objective was to put up a document in response to the request from the village forest.

WALHI Central Kalimantan held a dialogue with representatives of the Central Kalimantan Province Forest Service, Central Kalimantan Social Forestry Pokja, and PT SBK on the issue of Climate Change.
The requested area is about 2,275 hectares. The registration documents were received by the General Directorate of Social Forestry and Environmental Partnership of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in June 2019.

The General Directorate responded to the request through the Center for Social Forestry and Environmental Partnership in Kalimantan. They informed that as per the request, the verification of the document was processed. However, the technical verification in June 2019 found out that the majority of the requested area in total 2,207 hectares in Delang River Forest Group overlapped with the Permit for Timber Forest Product Utilization in Natural Forest (IUPHHK-HA) of PT SBK. As a result, the village committee had to withdraw the request. Before re-submitting another registration, the village committee has to request to remove the overlapping area (enclave) from their claim.

After that, WALHI Central Kalimantan helped facilitate a discussion between the community and the company (PT SBK) during which issues and concerns were discussed. In order to forward the conversation, WALHI ultimately advised the community leaders to send a letter of request to their main office in Pontianak, West Kalimantan.

The Village Committee sent the letter to the company’s main office. In October 2019, the committee received feedback saying the company did not object to the community’s request, but instead passed the enclave process to the local government, either at village or regency level. On the other hand, referring to the national regulation, the only parties that could submit the request for a change on the permit area are the right holder or permit grantee (PT SBK), the local government (Governor), and the permit granter (Ministry of Environment and Forestry).

In the same year, the community requested for an audit of PT SBK’s permit to the General Directorate of Sustainable Production Forest. The letter was not responded to, yet there was a visit from an officer from the General Directorate of Social Forestry and Environmental Partnership in Banjarbaru City, South Kalimantan, in December 2019. The officer informed the community to consider another social forestry scheme, that is partnership scheme.

In 2020, the community also reached out to other government agencies, but the process has been difficult. The community held a meeting with the Environmental Agency as per the Governor’s recommendation. As recommended from the meeting, the community sent a letter to the Forestry Agency but no response was received. The lack of responses was claimed due to the COVID-19 limitations.

“We have been living here for a long time, but now we are told that we live inside other people’s rightful property. We are struggling to protect this (forest), so that our future generation will not suffer from conflict.”

- Head of Riam Tinggi Village
The People’s Initiatives

Tourism. The first strategy that the Riam Tinggi community worked on was to maximize their own tourism potential. The process began with a partnership between the village and with a tourist agency in Lamandau Regency.

The initiative adopts the ecotourism concept, which refers to all nature-based forms of tourism which focus more on giving experience and education in nature according to The World Tourism Organization. This facilitated the learning exchange between the village and tourists. Ecotourism initiatives in the village involve immersion and sharing of indigenous knowledge and culture. By developing the ecotourism concept, the village allows the tourists to enter the community and interact with the locals. The tourists will live in their houses and join them in their daily activities attracting both local and international tourists.

This initiative is beneficial for the people who have been seeking ways to protect their forest as well as to develop a sustainable community economic foundation. They began to learn and gain creative strategies to attract the tourists, such as building facilities around the tourist area.

Ecotourism initiatives of the village involve immersion and sharing of indigenous knowledge and culture.
“We offer eco-tourism. We do not change anything in nature. If there is an old tree, we will leave it standing because we want to share its history to the tourists, and more importantly, to the future generation.”

- Head of Riam Tinggi Village
**Natural Attractions.** Lubang Kilat Hill and Batu Rajo Cascade are popular in Riam Tinggi Village. Lubang Kilat Hill is the most famous of Riam Tinggi’s hills. Local government officials and the bupati have climbed the hill. Multiple tourism videos feature the location. The hill near the residential area is only 120 metres above sea level and easy to climb. Soil stairs with handrails lead to the top. In the middle of the route are three benches. On top of the hill, tourists can enjoy the view of clouds covering the horizon.

Batu Rajo Cascade offers rafting as an outdoor sport activity that can be experienced by tourists. The flow of the cascade in the village is suitable for rafting. It is said that the river in Riam Tinggi is the only one suitable for rafting in Kalimantan (Borneo) island which includes Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The rafting sport was previously nominated as a top water tourism destination in Wisata Air Anugerah Pesona Indonesia held by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. Other natural tourist attractions in the village are waterfalls and farming lands.

**Cultural Attractions.** The cultural attractions are all related to the ceremony and ritual to welcome the guests, namely Potong Garung Pantan, Ponjorahan, Bonoik-Bonaki, and Bagondang (party to welcome the guests). Since the village started opening up to tourists, they have been visited by hundreds of local and international tourists.

**Educational Attractions.** The village also provides educational attractions. Since they are still practicing some of their traditions, the community members could give short training sessions to the tourists. Some of them are moanyam (weaving), nyumpit (blowgun), and bolakau (traditional farming).

**Culinary Attractions.** The village also provides cooking classes for traditional cuisine, such as Pulut Lomang, Putut Rice, and Wadai Sango. However, it is still very limited to requests from tourists.

**Local Products.** Along with producing locally sourced products, Riam Tinggi Village also makes Matir coffee, which translates to ”community leader,” and other handcrafted bamboo mugs and trinkets. The only local coffee brand in Lamandau is Mantir Coffee. The bupati gave them vacuum sealers and coffee grinders as a result.

**Forest Management Group.** A farming-based group for forest management has just been established in Riam Tinggi Village. One of the reasons is to use farming to protect their land and forest. Each participant will work in pairs as a group to cultivate a minimum of one hectare of land. Recently, they have plans to plant jengkol (Archidendron Pauciflorum), a pea species that is high in protein and frequently prepared as a meat substitute.
IV. Challenges and Opportunities

Riam Tinggi encounters some difficulties as they create their own initiatives. For instance, the community faces a significant challenge with product promotion. Despite their partnership with a travel agency, their tourism has not yet advanced to the point where it can support itself. They only have enough money coming in from their local produce to support the growth and upkeep of the tourist sites so far. In connection with this, they also encounter difficulties with product packaging, which despite its apparent simplicity is essential for marketing their goods, such as coffee. Additionally, they can only produce enough to meet the demands of a small percentage of tourists.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant effect on the village’s tourism industry and local industry as well. For two years, there were no tourists, which had a significant negative impact on the rate at which local goods were sold.

Riam Tinggi’s current permits also endanger the neighborhood. 2,757.58, or 92.7% of the village’s land, has been allocated for permits, including 141 hectares for PT Landen Rosalia, 200 hectares for PT Sinar Kusuma Kalimantan, and 2,416.58 hectares for PT Sari Bumi Kusuma (timber) (palm oil).

Despite the current state of their initiatives, the community manages to maintain a positive attitude, in part because their initiatives were developed primarily to protect their forest and environment rather than for financial gain. They want to preserve the forest while maximizing their tourism potential, and they have no plans to alter their surroundings. Both men and women synergistically as a community pursue this same goal. The woman’s role in the struggle is huge as the head of the village is also a strong-willed woman. Even the struggle has been persistent because of her commitment to preserve the village community area since the political will of the leader is important in every community struggle.

The community is faced with yet another obstacle as they struggle against development plans for the expansion of palm oil plantations. Several enterprises have already established presence in nearby villages, including Sepoyu, Nyalang, and Lopus. They are likely to be the next village on the plan. This plan emphasizes a great urgency for the community to protect their forest with the Village Forest status. It is challenging because there is still no support from the government on their struggle. Instead, they are recommended to pursue another scheme of Social Forestry, that is forestry partnership. However, this scheme holds different levels of protection and access security for the community towards the forest.

The community might not explicitly show their objection about the plantation plan, but they are certainly not happy with the idea. They worry about the exploitative character of palm oil plantations and how it threatens their demand for a truly sustainable environment. A sustainable environment will preserve their history and tradition for the future generations. The old people in the community understand that they will not live forever. Therefore, they need a sustained environment for the future generations to experience and nurture. Community members attested that,
Map showing areas of Riam Tinggi that were given permits for industrial use.
their environment is sufficient to support their lives. They could get whatever they needed from the farm and the forest.

Regardless of the challenges in their struggle of preserving the forest in the Village Forest scheme and developing initiatives, the community still holds a high hope for the future. All they want is a peaceful life together as a community in their land. They never wanted to destroy the environment because they know that nature has always been enough to support their needs. Nature has been providing for them while they preserve its sustainability.

Even though the sun sets in the west and the darkness of the night starts to consume the light, the tired hands of the community keep chanting a solemn prayer. Their eyes are shining with hopes for the future. They will protect their land for the next generations to see.

“We feel secure in our modest way of living. For us, this way of living is priceless. We will not trade it away for money.”

- Head of Riam Tinggi Village
Anecdotes on Indigenous knowledge:
Zawan and Vom Climate Actions in Nigeria

by Lucky Abeng, Climate & Sustainable Development Network of Nigeria

I. Country Context

Millions of people are suffering as a result of unfavorable climate conditions in Nigeria exacerbated by extreme weather events such as droughts and flooding. This has affected agricultural practices of farmers especially as growing seasons have been thrown out of alignment in a nation heavily reliant on rainfall due to persistent droughts, off-season rains and dry spells. As a country within the African continent, Nigeria will be one of the most affected by the impacts of climate change. By 2050, the continuous upward trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and global temperatures will accelerate sea level rise to 0.3m from 1990 levels. In a high climate change scenario, temperatures could rise to 3.2°C by 2050 (DFID, 2009). All of these have severe environmental and economic consequences for the people of Nigeria and require urgent and targeted action.

Nigeria’s socioeconomic and environmental development faces many challenges. Climate change continues to threaten the country’s trajectory to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Due to its fragile economy, low resilience and low adaptive capacity, Nigeria is highly vulnerable to climate change as it relies heavily on climate-sensitive ecosystems and natural resources. The rain-fed agriculture sector, which contributes 24% to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), will be the first hit by climate change-induced floods and droughts. The 2017 Climate Change Vulnerability Index for instance now classifies Nigeria as a high-risk region and one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to climate change.
DFID (2009) estimates indicate that climate change could cost $100 to $460 billion to the country’s economy by 2050. Kompas et al. (2018) suggests that a 3 °C rise in global temperature will reduce Nigeria’s GDP by 16% after 2067. Climate projections for the coming decades show a significant rise in city temperatures across all ecozones. Adaptation and mitigation measures are needed to reduce climate change vulnerability (FGoN, 2017). To address climate change’s threat to national development sustainably, Nigeria must accelerate the greening of its economy.

The Nigeria National Policy on the Environment of 2016 states that if the environment is properly managed, it can meet the country’s socio-economic needs for today and future generations. Relentless pursuit of extractive industries in Nigeria can cause economic loss and social stress while poor environmental management could endanger the country’s survival. In the 1990s, a World Bank report estimated that Nigeria lost US$5.1 billion per year to environmental degradation due to poor mitigation measures. Human and natural activities threaten Nigeria’s environment. Already, the destruction of the natural resource base (land, water, air) on which all life depends has left visible scars. Nigeria’s 200 million people and 3.9% growth rate contribute to environmental degradation (NPC, 2019).

However, land has been taken to make way for commercial uses due to deforestation, pollution, and rapid urban development, which has resulted in land degradation. Future access to rural land for agriculture will be unstable if unchecked. It is evident that rural land is in peril, which lowers the productivity of its arable land. Additionally, deforestation results in land degradation, which exacerbates flooding and displacement.

As of this writing, Nigeria has experienced the worst flooding in a decade. The torrential rain that began in July 2022 and will last until November 2022 caused massive flooding in Ghana’s Maradi, Zinder, Tillaberi, and Tahoua regions and Nigeria’s Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. Home, crop, and livestock losses have affected over 150,000 people, half of whom are children. Additionally, half a million people have been affected by floods in 27 of Nigeria’s 36 states and the capital, according to the National Emergency Management Agency. The disaster destroyed thousands of hectares of farmland, making people in Africa’s most populous country fearful of starvation.

CSDevNet launched “sustaining advocacy” in 2020 amid the pandemic. Young environmental activists were organized to raise environmental issues and offer government solutions. The 20 young digital activists on CSDevNet’s climate change advocacy are from across the country’s six geopolitical zones; five are female. In the same year, 20 climate justice community resource persons (CRPs) reported 12 outreaches in Nasarawa, Niger, Kaduna, and Cross River states. The outreach included building community capacity and training on briquette production, waste management, and sensitization.
Nigeria’s climate change space has witnessed increased youth participation between the ages of 20–35 years, using every tool and platform to exchange ideas and solutions to the global climate crisis while also boldly demanding climate justice in the context of Africa’s lowest emissions of less than 4% of the global GHG emissions (Environews, 2021). Meanwhile, Nigeria has the largest population of youth both on the African continent and in the world, with 70% of its population being under the age of 30 years old.

Indigenous People and other grassroots stakeholders’ role in implementing the Nationally Determined Contribution to reduce GHG emissions is unclear. Participation is mostly through civil society programmes and activities. Young climate justice advocates use Twitter and Facebook to learn about and discuss climate change.

Indigenous youth act as custodians and advocates, practicing sustainable use of wild species as part of their identity and well-being. Indigenous youth today are cut off from technological advancement. Their voices are excluded from conservation dialogues, decisions, research, and programs. This research highlights indigenous knowledge for frontline mitigation and adaptation. The link between improved technology and indigenous youth lessons in adopting and amplifying solutions for sustainable nature use will also be highlighted. Indigenous People, who are mostly rural, rely on urbanites for climate change information. Young people from cities dominate protest, lobbying, and advocacy campaigns. With a rich tribe and a large youth population, Nigeria still has low climate change awareness and communication.
II. Zawan and Vom Communities’ Climate Action

In Jos, central Nigeria, there are more than forty indigenous groups, including Zawan and Vom. Numerous indigenous tribes can be found in the state, including the Berom, Afizere, Amo, Anaguta, Aten, Bogghom, Buji, Challa, Chip, Fier, Gashish, Goemai, Irigwe, Jarawa, Jukun, Kofyar (which includes the Doemak, Kwalla, and Mernyang), Montol, Mushere, Mupun, Mwaghavul, Ngas, and Piapung.

The majority of the members of these indigenous groups are farmers, and they share many cultural and traditional practises. Women farmers are utilising their in-depth knowledge of the land that has provided their means of subsistence for generations in the Zawan and Vom communities of Plateau State. Understanding how to deal with and adjust to environmental trends and variability is part and parcel of this indigenous practice. Restoration of the ecosystem, organic farming, regional instruction, and the yabanya visiting system. Non-biodegradable product reduction, reuse, recycling, and repackaging, soil preservation, water harvesting and storage, irrigation, etc.

Women processing root crops from the community’s organic farm.
Indigenous farmers in Nigeria have long used their traditional knowledge for practical application to 1) recognize weather trends (this knowledge teaches them when the planting season should start by seeing the appearance of certain insects at a particular time of the season); 2) food and seed storage practices 3) erosion and flood prevention; 4) customary laws governing conservation and wildlife protection among others. Additionally, during the rainy season, the community collects rainwater in an underground clay chamber for household and irrigation purposes building a reservoir for the dry season.

They have long been aware of the links between land, agriculture, and the natural environment. They have a thorough understanding of how soil texture and color relate to moisture levels in rivers, sediment deposition, and soil “feel.” They are also knowledgeable about agricultural strategies that minimize soil erosion caused by monoculture, such as mixed and intercropping.

In addition, indigenous communities in Nigeria are also involved in the protection of riverbank trees and vegetation to prevent soil erosion and flooding while safeguarding water catchments. Indigenous conservation knowledge has an impact on every aspect of the environment. “Shrine forests” or otherwise known as protected forest areas can be found in many communities in a pursuit to maintain biodiversity, conserve forest-based resources and support animal and plant growth and reproduction.

III. Conclusion

Indigenous Peoples and local communities hold deep, intricate knowledge of climate, biodiversity, and ecosystems that often spans generations due to their sustained connection to nature through livelihoods such as hunting, fishing, herding, gathering, and spirituality. Indigenous Peoples own, manage, use, or occupy 35% of the global land and 45% of all remaining terrestrial areas with low human intervention in the country. This story however is eroding quickly (IPBES, 2019).

Indigenous and local knowledge, a key enabler for sustainable conservation, is yet to be fully integrated into the 21st-century development agenda. Climate justice and environmental activists are still learning this rich indigenous knowledge and its place in the struggle for climate justice. The lack of awareness of indigenous and local knowledge is due to communities being displaced from indigenous territories, lack of documentation, lack of peer connections, and a decline in transmission to younger generations. While some of these innovations are unique to their environments and cannot be replicated elsewhere, preserving indigenous practices of farming will go a long way in helping Nigerian farmers adapt to climate change impacts.

Indigenous knowledge sustains community and culture. Valuing such knowledge could strengthen cultural identity and the use of such knowledge to achieve social and developmental goals like sustainable agriculture, affordable public health, and biodiversity conservation. Indigenous knowledge is intrinsically linked to environmental conservation, which protects natural features like flora, fauna, and geology. It refers to local people’s existing or acquired knowledge.
I. Country Context

Since North Macedonia’s independence in 1991, the country has set about establishing a parliamentary democracy and a market economy and plotting a course to membership with the European Union (EU). Despite substantial advancement in meeting the requirements for accession, this ambition has been foiled by a long-running dispute over the country’s name. The European Commission (EC) has recommended opening accession negotiations for six years running, with a seventh recommendation extended conditionally in 2015, but the crucial green light has always been withheld. While public support for European integration is still strong, the prolonged impasse threatens to slow the pace of EU-mandated reforms.

Article 43 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia provides the human right to a healthy environment. It also establishes an obligation for every human to promote and protect the environment and nature, and for the Republic to provide the conditions for exercising the right to a healthy environment by its citizens. The Constitution though does not contain the term “sustainable development” however contains articles that point to environmental sustainability. The right to a healthy environment, as one of the fundamental freedoms and rights of the citizen, in the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia is prescribed as a social right, which guarantees the right to citizens of a healthy environment. At the same time, it is an obligation for the citizens to promote it and protect the environment, and the Republic is obliged to provide conditions for the realization of this right of citizens.

The Constitution of North Macedonia stipulates that, for the sake of preserving nature, the environment and human health can mean limitations on market freedom and entrepreneurship as one of the fundamental values of the Constitution of North Macedonia (Article 55). In reality the
implementation of the legislation regarding environment sustainability is lacking and most of the actions remain on papers. Weak institutions, unclear accountability, poor transparency and a lack of public access and participation further exacerbate the situation. North Macedonia has ratified the Aarhus Convention (1999), but it exists only on paper. The state has been avoiding submitting its progress report to the Aarhus Convention secretariat, and has been repeatedly warned several times.

The lack of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and national laws that protect the rights of citizens impacted by infrastructure, natural resource extraction and pollution has not been able to address negative impacts on affected groups. Plans for another 86 gold and copper mines concessions in the territory of North Macedonia, as well as for 11 small hydro dams within protected areas in Mavrovo national park and Shara Mountain will increasingly impact local rural farmer communities. These investments are often near and in nature areas that are important for water supply and affect approximately 300,000 rural, often marginalized, women and men.

On the other hand, from the environmental perspective, various institutions and organizations are involved in activities for biodiversity conservation and nature protection. A key institution is the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP), which is responsible for nature protection, protection of biological and landscape diversity and protection of natural heritage, management of biological and landscape diversity and the implementation of the provisions of the Law on Nature Protection.

North Macedonia has established a sound specific legal framework for nature protection that is aligned with the EU legislation. As a candidate for accession to the EU, the country has ratified all relevant international agreements, participates in the meetings of multilateral environmental agreements and complies with the relevant international reporting obligations.


The question is how to achieve all this when a large number of laws regarding a healthy environment and the right of assembly of women fighters for a healthy environment are not respected and implemented.
II. Women environmental defenders in North Macedonia

"I was born here, and I have lived here for more than 60 years. The last few years have been hell. Someone wants to destroy this beauty, destroy our lives, abandon our village. Who came up with the idea of destroying fresh spring water and building small hydropower plants for personal enrichment?"

- Baba Lena

Baba Lena talks about the usurpation of state land in the village of Vratnica where the local authorities want to build small hydropower plants. The Vratnica nature region situated in the upper part of the Polog plain, at the foothills of the northern part of Šar Mountain. For local villagers, the Vratnica region is a plentiful source of medicinal herbs, mushrooms, teas and is a vital source of their livelihoods. In 2015, the residents of Vratnica, with great difficulty, managed to stop the construction of the two mini hydropower plants that were then supposed to be built on the upper reaches of the Vratnica River. With protests, and human blockades, they were able to stop the construction of the power plants. However, 8 years since then, the government issued a permit for the construction of a new, third mini hydropower plant, now scheduled for construction below the village. The concession for the construction of the small hydro power plant, called Orasje 1, was awarded to the company Eurovia DOOEL from Želino.

Private businessmen are now on the move to construct the mini hydro power plant threatening people’s access to the river and its resources. According to Baba Lena: “This river means a lot to us, it is a part of our life, of our history. We have existed here for centuries and now someone, through such constructions, simply wants to evict us from here. It’s as if someone is doing this consciously because here, you can see how much water there is now in Vratnička Reka, is it possible to build a power plant with so little water? We, the women from Vratnica, raise our voices again and want to convince the authorities in the state that this is doing something bad for Vratnica, and the state or someone there who will build the power plant will not benefit from this. It is not worth someone’s kilowatt of electricity to destroy such a natural beauty, someone must finally realize that and cancel the building permits. In the past two years, 7 new houses have been built in Vratnica, which started the return of the population, but if the power stations are built, those people who remained in Vratnica will flee. It would be a great pity if the state does not listen to us.”
This is just one of the many voices of rural women in North Macedonia. Rural women in the country play a key role in food production – they form a large proportion of the agricultural work, and are key agents for development and change. This is true in Macedonia, Albania and the rest of the Balkans. They play a catalytic role towards the achievement of the transformational economic, environmental and social changes that are required for sustainable development. But, limited access to credit, health care and education present challenges. Empowering women is essential, not only for the well-being of rural individuals, as well as their families and communities, but also for improving overall economic productivity in the agriculture sector and the national economy.

On the other hand, women registered as farmers do not have the right to paid maternity leave. They have been facing the problem for years and say that they feel discriminated against by other Macedonian citizens. Because of this, some of these women are thinking of giving up farming.

"I don't know why; they didn't give it to me. I was not entitled to maternity leave, because I am a farmer," says Bilijana Biljanovska, one of few women who decided to talk about their fight for rights of women defenders in North Macedonia. Biljana is just one of many thousands of women who are registered as farmers. They work on their family farms, take care of their families, pay for health insurance, but they are not entitled to the statutory nine months of paid maternity leave.

“I was not entitled to maternity leave, because I am a farmer.”

- Bilijana Biljanovska

Street blockade in Strumica City to protest the construction of hydroelectric powerplants that would adversely affect communities and the surrounding environment.
From the Federation of Farmers, they indicate that that category of women is unjustifiably left out of the Law on Health Insurance and that the problem has persisted for years. “We are constantly pushing for change to this law. This law should be stopped and carefully reviewed. To see which mechanism would be used and those citizens, as an omitted category, to return within the framework of Articles 14 and 15 of the Law on Health Insurance”, says Biljana Petrovska Mitrevska from the National Federation of Farmers.

Although she is discriminated against, her work is not paid for, Biljana Biljanovska tells the authorities and international organizations that a female farmer can be a mother, a housewife and a worker. And in the land, and in the field, and with a tractor. She says:

“From sun, earth and water, we produce food. It means that we are able to take care of our own children. But the fact that we do not have the right to maternity leave in the law affects us and acts discriminatory, definitely. We have to fight for our rights, for our children, for their future. The voice of the rural woman must be heard.”

Despite an established legal framework and mechanisms for gender equality, there is a considerable gap between the declared legal equality and the actual position of rural women in society. Rural women remain at a disadvantage compared to men in many spheres: for example, women face difficulty in accessing credit, land and education, and are more likely to face discrimination in the labor market.

Domestic and gender-based violence remains a crucial issue in North Macedonia, wherein 82% of domestic violence survivors are women. Last few years a lot of studies have shown persistent gaps that impact the lives of rural women in Macedonia. The gap can be shown in date that exist gender disparities in land holdings; only 7% of women are land owners; Less than 5percent of agricultural extension services are provided for women farmer women hold less than 10percent of the credit that is available to smallholder agriculture; Rural women face more difficulty than men in accessing public services, social protection, employment and markets, due to cultural norms, security issues and lack of property documentation The proportion of female elected representatives in rural councils ranges from 0.6% to 17%, which is very low.
The Macedonian Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was particularly concerned that, in 2006, the country began to lose step in improving the situation of rural women and women from ethnic minorities, especially Roma and Albanians. It concluded that they are still vulnerable and marginalized, especially in relation to their access to education, health, employment and participation in political and public life.

Two Macedonian studies related to women in the rural sector have shown that: (a) almost all rural women under 30 years of age prefer to move to cities; and (b) whilst about 30% of older women want to stay in the countryside, they do not want to work in agriculture or the rural economy. Unemployment, poor utility infrastructure and the uncertainty of the agricultural market have been identified as major problems for women living in the countryside. Citizens in North Macedonia, especially women, faced many problems related to environmental protection and how to fight against this injustice.

The construction of small hydro power plants, even in protected areas (such as Mavrovo National Park), as a strategy of diversifying the energy mix and divesting from fossil fuels, has impacted to certain extent the right to the environment and water of some local communities in the region. The lack of control over the illegal logging has resulted with environmental degradation in many areas throughout the country, loss of habitats and decline of the landscape and biological diversity, hence it affected the enjoyment of the right to environment and the traditional ecosystem services use of local population.

Lake Prespa, surrounded by 2 national parks, Galicica and Pelister, divided by North Macedonia, Greece and Albania is also target of uncontrolled pollution, degradation of nature and biodiversity improper wastewater collection and treatment, as well as illegal fishing of the Prespa carp, has caused degradation of this biodiversity hotspot. This has affected the human right to the environment and culture of the local community, as well as the general population.
III. Conclusion and Recommendations

The field research prepared for this topic shows that there is no continuous cooperation between gender mechanisms and different sectors related to climate change (environment, spatial planning, etc.) in the field of climate change policy making.

Starting from all above it is necessary to promote legal reforms in the rural labor market to achieve a better life for rural women, rights to assembly and rights to women defenders for gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. The action will address the development of capacities, knowledge and monitoring the implementation of the implementation of Aarhus Convention, Law on whistleblowers in North Macedonia as well as drafting and implementing/intervening in the National Actions Plans for North Macedonia seen from the perspective of rural women’s rights, gender equality and women’s economic empowerment.

Without a proper legal framework and continuous monitoring of implementation of existing laws, it is not possible to realize EU mainstreaming policy on sustainable development and defense of democracy or the Principles on Business and Human Rights. It is also important to monitor the violation of human rights in the rural working environment, (which is often accompanied by discrimination of women, abuse of power, payment inequality between men and women, and business-related human rights abuse). Such monitoring requires cooperation between civil society, the general public and public institutions.

We need to promote the infrastructure for new, efficient and strategic employment policies that will improve the economic empowerment of rural women and achieve a better situation for rural women’s human rights. It will create better networking between CSOs, rural women and the state. Demands need to be elicited in a participatory manner from local rural populations.

To have positive impacts on women, all activities related to women defender rights must be relevant and of interest to women. In-depth preliminary poverty and livelihood analyses will be undertaken before determining the activities to be used to support the needs of rural women. A rigorous analysis of the capacity to deliver such goods and services and follow-up on implementation is frequently lacking, and the relationship between institutions and women within the rural sector is weak. This leads to a large amount of unacceptably low-quality work, and lack of respect for women overall. Effective participation and a degree of economic empowerment are required to improve living conditions and raise incomes, as well as protect rural women and their worker rights. To address these inequalities, a 50-50 quota should be introduced in the decision-making processes on all political levels to provide women with equal chances in involving them in political debates and represent intersectional perspectives.
We live in a time in which every day the harmful effects and irreversible changes that human activity has on the biological and geophysical systems that sustain our life on the planet become more evident. The climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity, social injustices and a capitalist, extractive and patriarchal economic system have pushed nature and the ways of life of thousands of people from indigenous, rural and peasant communities to the limit, putting their sustainability for future generations - and in some cases their very survival - at risk. This is underpinned by a set of social and cultural norms that assign certain roles to women and men, which results in greater burdens of reproductive work and unpaid care for women, as well as their exclusion from political participation and employment. Gender inequality intersects with its social, economic and cultural characteristics, to disproportionately affect women - especially indigenous, rural, young and elderly women - and make their fundamental contributions to the sustainment of life invisible.
The voices of indigenous, rural and peasant women are precisely the least heard at the cores of political and business decision making, even when their territories are at the center of a fierce dispute between a model of economic growth that promotes the exploitation of natural resources without limits, and the resistance exerted from the ancestral cultures that defend them. Women also face situations of machismo (male chauvinism), discrimination and a diversity of forms of gender-based violence - physical, sexual, psychological, political and symbolic - exercised from both the hegemonic and ancestral patriarchal systems. This violence frequently has serious and irreversible impacts on the lives of women and their families, even putting their lives at risk in extreme cases.

The testimonies and experiences of women land and community defenders that are presented in this study illustrate different ways in which women, from different parts of Latin America, experience exploitation and violence in their territories and on their own bodies. Their strategies are an example of self-determination and leadership from frontline defenders, and their communities, in the struggle against climate change. Their common denominator is that they are shaped from deep respect for their ancestral cultures, their spirituality and cosmogonic beliefs, from a solidarity with the beings that inhabit their territories and a full awareness of the urgency of protecting the natural resources they host.

The women featured in this paper come from different parts of the Latin American region, who invite us to a tour that begins in the Sierra Norte of Puebla, in the municipality of Cuetzalan (Mexico), where Rufina Edith Villa Hernández, one of the founders of the Masehual Siuamej Mosenylchikauanij collective - which in Spanish means “indigenous women who support each other.” Then the route descends towards the Lenca territory of La Paz, in Honduras, where we reach María Felicita López, coordinator of the municipal indigenous councils and representative of the Lenca Indigenous Independent Movement (MILPAH). From the Mesoamerican territory we fly to the Andean region of Peru, where we meet Melania Canales, leader of the Rukanas Quechua people of the Lucanas district in the Ayacucho region, current president of the National Organization of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women of Peru (ONAMIAP). The tour ends in La Guajira, in the north of Colombia, with Jakeline Romero, a tireless defender of the rights of the Wayúu people.

A dialogue recently organized by Oxfam between women from Africa and Latin America, aimed at exchanging experiences and learning, yielded valuable reflections regarding the impacts of extractive industries and the climate crisis on women’s bodies and lives. Despite the variety of settings and local circumstances, the women of Latin America emphasized the scarcity of food, the decrease in land productivity and the loss of biodiversity as a result of the expansion of
The agricultural frontier, as well as the obstacles in access and inequitable distribution of water resources and deforestation, as a result of extractive activities and climate variability. This creates negative impacts on women’s health and their families’, either due to the presence of heavy metals in the soil and water sources, or due to the overload of unpaid domestic and care work -such as water collection, caring for the sick or feeding their families. The problem is aggravated by the corporatization of governments, the closure of civic spaces and the criminalization of land defenders.

I. The link between land and territory care and care of women’s bodies

Rufina, Felícita, Melania and Jakeline agree on the understanding of the body as a comprehensive and sacred part of Mother Earth or Pachamama. They see a clear interdependence between the health and well-being of the body and of the territory.

“Our first territory is our body and we relate it to the land-body because that is where we live; we get food, water, air through trees and plants. If we don’t have the air in our body and the fire of our spirit, we don’t live. That is how we see the relation. It is not possible to exploit the territory and plunder common resources (water, air, forest, minerals) because they are our source of life.”

- Felícita López

“As indigenous women, we are always proposing protection strategies from an integral perspective. The territory is integral, and so is the human body.”

- Melania Canales

“The body-territory link exists tacitly; it is something that is lived and felt from the worldview (cosmovision) and the cultural expressions of the ancestral peoples.”

- Jakeline Romero Epiayu

“We are part of the land, part of the territory, it is not that we own the land.”

- Rufina Villa Hernandez
Melania adds that from the worldview of Indigenous Peoples, the land is something collective. The main struggle of indigenous women is, therefore, to defend the collective territory. Land ownership seems to them an individualistic position; they reject that Mother Earth is the property of humans. From a cultural standpoint, they defend all forms of life: that of trees, rivers, water. Social processes such as emancipation, for instance, happen within a territory - not only at an abstract level - therefore its protection is a central part of such social processes.

“We are part of Mother Earth. We are not "guardians" or "employees" who take care of an object. This is essential to recreate our knowledge, our ways of life, our ways of organizing ourselves, with self-determination. Without the territory these things do not occur, autonomy and self-determination.”

- Melanie Canales

The link between body and land is thus manifested and materialized, through reciprocal care. That is, the earth takes care of people by providing water, air, and food necessary for a healthy life. Consequently, people must take care of the land by protecting and preserving every resource and expression of life that it harbors.

“If we love our body, we take care of it to keep it healthy. Similarly, we take care of the earth because it (she) feeds us. As women we work hard to have food, we prepare it for ourselves and our families, we take care of ourselves, we heal ourselves, we use medicinal plants that the earth gives us, to make some natural product that helps us to be healthy. We know that it is important to live in an environment of peace, where we can live our spirituality and be calm in our hearts, to have physical, emotional and spiritual health.”

- Rufina Villa Hernandez
Due to the sexual division of labor, women in Latin America and the Caribbean play a fundamental role in the care and reproduction of life. But they also act as the repositories of ancestral knowledge that must be transmitted to the new generations. Rufina highlights:

“As defenders of life and land, it is important that we can work on this in our communities, that we are able to spread the mission to our daughters and granddaughters about the importance of preserving the place where we are, the place that has been given to us; borrowed, because it is not really ours. This beautiful nature has been given to us to take care of for the time we are on this Earth and later it will remain for those who follow. It is important that it is kept clean, with all its nutrients. Just as our body must be healthy, the earth must be unharmed, undamaged.”

Melania explains that, in part, the struggle of indigenous women is focused on protecting and reproducing ancestral science and technology, for cultivation of food and medicinal plants, but also for the application of their own mitigation strategies and adaptation. Their contribution has not been limited to their communities or territories, since they have traditionally attempted to share their knowledge beyond borders. She tells further that,

“Our role as indigenous women has always been to transmit science and technology from generation to generation, recreating knowledge between different cultures, between the Andean and Amazonian peoples, and also between countries.”
II. Land exploitation practices and increase of violence against women

The aforementioned testimonies largely reflect the concerns of ecofeminism and community feminism, particularly regarding the subordination of land and territory to the logic of extractive exploitation, as well as the questioning of the capitalist, racist and patriarchal system, and the rejection of the violence they entail. Reflections on their own experiences reinforce the idea of the existence of an intrinsic relationship between land, territory, and daily life.

Therefore, they understand the practices of land exploitation as the trigger for all types of violence exerted on women’s bodies. The defenders emphasize that when territories are violated due to extractive activities, it is the women’s bodies that suffer the greatest physical, economic and psychological effects. Gender-based violence is, according to their testimonies, an almost automatic consequence of the exploitation practices exercised against the land. They also confirm that the violence exerted on the territory and on women’s bodies mutually reinforce each other to increase and reproduce poverty and the exclusion of women, as can be seen in the following examples (see Boxes 1 and 2).

Box 1: Militarization and extractive industries as drivers of violence against Lenca women in Honduras

Maria Felícita López is an activist and human rights defender of the Lenca ethnic group in Honduras. Currently part of MILPAH, an indigenous organization that decided to self-organize since 2010 in order to defend its natural resources. Felícita represents 24 indigenous councils of the organization and works on the axis of women’s human rights. Since 2011, she has been struggling against hydroelectric and mining companies that seek to establish themselves in her territory. Such is the case of the Encinos hydroelectric company, owned by a congresswoman and her husband, whose operation was stopped thanks to the actions of Felícita and her community. This earned her the Carlos Escaleras National Prize, awarded each year to outstanding environmentalists.

Since her beginnings as a defender of the territory, Felícita has accompanied women who have been victims of various types of violence by companies and military forces. She explains that the livelihoods of the women in her locality have been seriously affected, and they have also been victims of harassment and sexual exploitation by the personnel of the extractive companies. Indigenous organizations such as MILPAH denounce the contamination of water and the impacts on the means of food production. However, complaints made to the authorities by indigenous organizations often go unanswered, due to the institutional weakness and corruption with which the country’s justice system operates. Furthermore, mobilization from Lenca indigenous leaders has been repressed through increased military presence and violence.
on behalf of military forces in their territories. Human rights organizations, like Front Line Defenders and Amnesty International, have documented the extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, torture and mistreatment, judicial harassment, threats and stigmatization suffered by MILPAH and other indigenous organizations. “Thank God, we fought against hydroelectric exploitation, and we succeeded in stopping its construction, because we know that the negative effects are greater for women,” says Felícita. The processes of repairing environmental damage to the communities are not taking place, she explains. In addition, unlike men, women have greater difficulties in confronting aggressors or fleeing the territory, since they must take care of their children. “When mining companies enter, we know that the environmental and human destruction they leave behind,” says Felícita.

The modus operandi of the extractive industries in the Lenca region of Honduras exemplifies the way in which companies co-opt state forces to protect economic interests, even when they are clearly detrimental to local communities. Felícita explains how the militarization of the territory has resulted in the restriction of the mobility of community members - that is, the taking over of the physical space - and in physical violence against women’s bodies.

“Women have been victims of torture, sexual harassment, and psychological violence by police and military in active duty who work on behalf of companies. As they enter the territory, they use women as shooting targets” according to her. These processes are accompanied by strategies of persecution, political harassment and criminalization of women land defenders, of which Felícita herself is continuously subjected. This physical violence is also combined with forms of structural violence such as the lack of health services in rural communities- thus perpetuating women's conditions of poverty and exclusion of women, as Felícita relates:

“We experienced it in October 2015. They militarized all the houses...a pregnant girl was beaten. Another girl fell into depression, lost her baby and both died, because there was no medical care. Her five children were orphaned, and her husband was imprisoned. It was very painful, we experienced it firsthand.”

However, despite the risks and difficulties, Felícita and her partners continue to fight and are willing to denounce the violations against their bodies and their territories. “There is nothing left to do but to keep doing it, because defending the territory is not a crime,” she says.
Box 2: **Cultural, economic and political violence in the territories of the Wayuu communities of La Guajira, Colombia**

Jakeline Romero Epiayu, a defender of the Wayúu indigenous community in the department of La Guajira, in northeastern Colombia, has witnessed for years the destruction and contamination caused by the expansion of mining activity in El Cerrejón, the world’s largest open-air coal mine. Mining activities have caused the diversion of water sources in an already untamed territory, such as the desert that covers more than half of the department. The mining activities have taken place for decades with support from the government and throughout Colombia’s armed conflict, which has made the Wayúu communities a blank of paramilitary and criminal organizations. This situation has not only caused hunger, thirst and illness in the communities, but has also unleashed processes of internal displacement and the desecration of the sacred sites of the Wayúu culture. Indigenous communities around the Cerrejón mine continue, to this date, to demand the suspension of operations.

“In a territory like La Guajira, the biggest problem is water fragility,” says Jakeline. She adds that proposing alternatives for the guarantee of food sovereignty is extremely difficult in a territory where the day-to-day life of the people consists in struggling to obtain the vital liquid:

“We are finding quite dispersed territories where mere survival is a miracle in itself and children continue to die every day from malnutrition and associated pathologies. And this only has one reason: hunger and lack of water.”

In this complex context, Jakeline states that new companies -such as wind farms- continue to enter the territory, promoting new forms of colonization but generating the same alod forms of violence, which have a disproportionate impact on indigenous women and girls. Regarding the issue of violence, indigenous women have always faced those barriers that derive from poverty, being indigenous, and being women, she comments. For example, women who are forced to leave Wayúu territory in search of new means of subsistence, frequently end up as domestic worker and facing forms of slavery in urban contexts -as can be seen from the internal migration flows from Uriбia to the South of La Guajira. These women, characterized by low levels of education, are forced to work in abusive conditions and unfair wages.
As we can see, the use of State force is a common denominator in these examples of violence against women, resulting from land exploitation practices - whether through police forces, the military in the case of Honduras, or illegal armed groups in the case of Colombia - in favor of extractive economic interests. These actors are characterized by incurring serious violations of the rule of law - such as territorial control measures - as well as of the most fundamental human rights, by attacking the economic autonomy, physical and psychological integrity of women.

However, it is important to keep in mind that violence against women does not only come from external agents; it is exacerbated to the extent that it intersects with other structural barriers that women face, such as machismo and the discrimination experienced within their own communities.

Jakeline finds that women face a first line of violence “from within”, from those patriarchal practices of colonial heritage but that have been internalized in some cultural practices of indigenous communities, in which decisions are made from a male voice, without taking into account the female voice. The first barrier to overcome is the one imposed by our own cultures, she says.

On the other hand, Felícita agrees in pointing out that the violence deriving from the patriarchal system is reinforced through certain ancestral practices, which she also attributes to a colonial heritage:

“When women defenders begin to exercise leadership, from a gender perspective, indigenous women face a double master, a sexist and racist neoliberal master and one represented by the patriarchal culture within their own organizations. When we [women] identify ourselves as defenders, indigenous, feminists, and also denounce violence, they [men] identify us as enemies.; They don’t see us as partners, they see us as if we were surpassing the power of men. But that is not it, what we seek is equality.”
Melania points out that similar processes take place in the Andean communities of Peru, where women have difficulties accessing decision-making positions. This is made even more complex by the fact that, from her perspective, there is less willingness on the part of men to defend the territory. She explains that frequently, men, politicians, and others lend themselves to granting resources in concession -such as land rent, the sale of wood, etc.

Rufina shares that in her municipality, to this date, men find it difficult to accept that a woman can hold a municipal position, because she is indigenous, poor or simply because she is a woman: It is still believed that it has to be a well-prepared man, well dressed to accept the he is an authority, even if he does nothing or does things opposite to what he should do, to serve the people.

It is clear that all these forms of violence -whether deriving from the patriarchal system of their own ancestral cultures or from a colonial heritage - affect the lives of women in both the private and public spheres. Nonetheless, women’s experiences of resistance and perseverance are a driver for the gradual transformation of social norms. Although the women defenders recognize that at the household level gender roles have not changed significantly, at the community level, they have achieved a level of participation in various decision-making and political spaces -at the local, national and international levels-.
III. Women defenders from the South: champions of climate action from a community approach

Despite the adverse context described above, from their various forms of struggle and resistance, women defenders intertwine daily experiences of collective empowerment with innovative actions at the territorial and community level, which contribute to the restoration and rehabilitation of ecosystems, help develop economic models that place people and their environments at the center, generate collective resilience and claim their rights to a good life. The actions carried out by the women and their organizations are numerous and cover a wide spectrum. Below are some examples of their current strategies and demands.

Innovative proposals for sustainable development

*Sustainable development and tourism in Cuetzalan, Puebla.* The Masehual Siamej Mosenyl-chikauanij collective was founded in 1987, with the aim of marketing the handcrafts made by women of Cuetzalan at fair prices and promoting education and literacy processes for women. Rufina recounts that after a few years they managed to strengthen their organization and expanded their activities to include food production in small vegetable gardens, backyard animals, as well as training on women’s rights. They adopted the indigenous normative system for decision-making, of which the Community General Assembly is the highest authority.

Their proposal for sustainable local development foresees practices aimed at environmental care and resilience development, such as not using agrochemicals, the use of natural utensils (such as clay pots), ecological latrines, firewood-saving stoves, among other. After almost a decade of gradually strengthening their organizational processes, the women decided to start a hotel in order to generate income for their organization. Today, Masehual is widely known for the Hotel Tazelotzin, (place of “little plants” in nahual), which seeks to generate employment and incentives to remain in the rural communities, bring benefits for the families of the women members and preserve the community’s way of life.

The hotel functions as a marketing channel for local crafts and foods and herbal workshops. Beyond the tourist attraction of the municipality of Cuetzalan and its surroundings, the hotel offers visitors the opportunity to learn about the culture of indigenous communities and even to board with local families and learn about their daily life. Additionally, the hotel is managed with sustainable practices, such as solar panels and rainwater harvesting cisterns. It is worth mentioning that the women implemented the hotel project through the management of two soft loans; one from the former National Indigenous Institute and another from the National Support Fund for Companies in Solidarity (FONAES).

*Agroecological practices in Lenca territory.* Felicita shares that MILPAH in Honduras promotes agroecological practices that “avoids causing damages to Mother Earth” and thus contribute to the fight against climate change. They avoid the use of agrochemicals and seek to preserve their original seeds. “Only in our
municipality there are 14 varieties of corn and beans; there is a diversity of native and medicinal plants that are being rescued as part of the conservation of our ancestral practices,” she said. Additionally, in the communities they are working to recycle plastic waste and reuse household waste as organic fertilizer.

According to Felicita, now our target is for people to avoid burning as a land clearing practice like before. When I was a child, land burning was the main practice. Now farmers go down the mountain, chop it up and plant on top, or use live barriers.

By promoting sustainable agricultural practices, MILPAH seeks to address repeated droughts and land conflicts in the La Paz region, which threaten the livelihoods and security of indigenous Lenca communities. The organization also works to train young leaders and strengthen indigenous community councils. This type of climate action is of vital importance in the Central American context, also in view of the phenomenon of irregular migration.

**Climate change adaptation and mitigation practices**

**Water sowing and harvesting in the Andean and Amazonian communities.** Climate action from their own cultural identity is one of ONAMIAP strategic working axes. To this end, they promote the ancestral practice of planting and harvesting water, which consists of the collection of rainstorm-generated water from a catchment, which is then stored in a reservoir, to be used for irrigation or human consumption. It is part of the culture, which is considered as a solution based on nature to face climate change, in particular the decrease in the quantity and quality of water both for human consumption and for the productive activities of the Andean indigenous communities and Amazon. This practice was instrumental in recovering from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Melania states that climate variability has always existed, but currently global warming has been accelerated by human activity and extractive industries, especially by developed countries, which results in the destruction of the lives of Indigenous Peoples. These adaptation and mitigation practices, she argues, are implemented at the community level since they contribute to a certain extent, but above all they serve to demonstrate that there are ways of life that do not destroy nature. However, she recognizes that it is not enough: it is necessary that these practices translate into public policies.

**Organizational processes and political training for advocacy.** Women defenders emphasize that the organizational and training processes on women’s rights, as well as political training, have been fundamental elements for the advancement of their advocacy proposals.

One of the forms of violence exercised against the territory, but that particularly affects women, is the lack of guarantees for participation. Faced with this situation, Jakeline's organization, Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu, has promoted the training of between 2,000-3,000 indigenous, peasant and Afro women in the region, to strengthen their leadership. “The efforts that are made from the community and collective level, to generate spaces for reflection and training, help to resist against the onslaught, constancy and systematic nature of institutional and cultural violence,” says Jakeline.
Rufina remembers that in 2007 they began to identify the first threats involving massive tourism projects in the northeastern highlands of Puebla. Then came the threats from hydroelectric and mining projects. The communities began to notice the amount of land granted to companies. For this reason, in 2010 they managed to get the municipality to approve the Land Management Plan (Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial), whose formulation process lasted a year. This initiative was made possible with the support of the local municipality, the BUAP University (Benemerita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla), and the participation of civil society organizations. It is considered a distinctive process, in which the consulting team established a participatory dynamic with local actors, which promoted the management of natural resources through local knowledge systems. Rufina assures that it was the existence of such plan that has helped them reject various projects that threaten the ways of life of indigenous communities. The cancellation of a Wal-Mart and the construction of an electrical substation in the municipality of Cuetzalan are just a couple of the projects stopped by the Masehual collective, amongst various mega-mining, hydroelectric and hydrocarbon extraction projects at the regional level.

Melania, on the other hand, explains that ONAMIAP has played a leading role in drafting and supporting of the Law on the Rights of Nature (Ley de Derechos de la Naturaleza), which proposes to recognize the “rights of Mother Nature, its ecosystems and species”, in order to increase protection measures for them “as they are living beings, with intrinsic and universal value, which have the right to exist, develop naturally, regenerate and evolve”. This bill already received a Favorable Report last April and awaits its debate in the plenary session of Congress. The bill proposes the principles of prevention; caution; guarantee of restoration and regeneration; social and climate justice; and, finally, interdependence, compatibility and complementarity of rights, obligations and duties. Melania is also active in international advocacy spaces such as the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference, also known as the Conference of Parties (COP), and the Escazú Agreement, the regional agreement on access to information, public participation, and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.
IV. Challenges to advance the struggles of women defenders

From a feminist and intersectional perspective, the lessons learnt from the life experiences of women defenders and their organizations allow to demonstrate the interconnections between community care work -mainly carried out by women- and climate actions defending the right to land, territory and preservation of the ways of life of indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural communities, and therefore the systemic gender-based violence used to inhibit and oppress their movements. Their testimonies illustrate the way in which women define and experience this bond, as well as the way in which their struggles -rooted in their cosmogony and their self-determination- resist the hegemonic economic model to shape economies and ways of life that place people and nature at the center.

However, women are also aware that the obstacles to advancing their demands are numerous. Among the main challenges they mentioned the need for greater articulation, especially at the Latin American level, in order to exchange experiences, document cases of successful strategies, improve communication tools and promote intergenerational and interethnic dialogue. Likewise, the training and consolidation of women's leadership continue to occupy a central place in their defense strategies.

But possibly the greatest challenge is to ensure that their advocacy proposals are translated into specific public policies or into national and international agreements whose compliance by States is binding. In the field of international and regional agreements, the Escazú Agreement offers a viable route forward, although women defenders stress that there is still much to be done regarding knowledge and ownership on behalf of communities and women, as well as ratification by more States in Latin America. In many countries of the region, resistance or processes of judicialization and strategic litigation are the only viable strategies, in the context of the weakening of democratic institutions.
Rural Vulnerability and Resistance:
Climate Initiatives by Grassroots Organizations in the Philippines

by Camille Rosas (Rural Women Advocates),
and Climate Change Network for Community-based Initiatives (CCNCI)

I. Country Context

The Philippines’ profile as a densely populated developing country with a high climate hazard index is fundamental to understanding the full extent of its vulnerability. Like many other countries in the global South, the archipelago is entangled in a web of geographic, political, and socioeconomic factors that have led to its enduring the brunt of the climate crisis.
The country is surrounded by naturally warm waters affected by a continuing rise in sea temperature. Storms are fuelled by warm tropical waters and as a result, the country faces the full force of an average of 20 typhoons each year, in addition to other extreme weather events and natural hazards such as droughts, landslides, and floods. More damning than this, however, is the severe government neglect that has enabled an alarming lack of instituted disaster preparedness and resiliency in a country so often plagued by natural disasters (IBON, 2020). There remain significant knowledge and capacity gaps in disaster management, preparedness, and resiliency building across different regions (Bollettino et al., 2020). As a consequence, Filipinos have been left to suffer stronger and more frequent calamities unmitigated. The rural population, who comprise 52.32% of the country’s total population (World Bank, n.d.) and live in the thick of a rapidly changing natural landscape, is especially at risk during ecological disasters.

Furthermore, persistent development aggression by the state, local corporations, and foreign investors contributes significantly to rural climate vulnerability. The leveling of forests, mountains, ancestral domains, and farmlands for the sake of development projects erases what once were rural communities’ natural safeguards against calamity. In a community visit prompted by this research, fishing community leaders in Manila Bay attested that in 2009, mangrove patches helped their houses withstand intense storms. When the mangrove patches were removed to make way for the construction of the New Manila International Airport a decade later, their community experienced such severe flooding that their homes were completely submerged in saltwater due to the sudden rise in sea level. This also displaced over 200 fisherfolk families. Monica Anastacio, a 61-year-old grandmother from a fishing community along Manila Bay, said that in 2009, her house on stilts could withstand intense storms because it was protected by a patch of mangroves. A decade later, their community became completely submerged in saltwater due to an annual rise in sea level. The mangrove patch that once saved them gave way to the construction of the New Manila International Airport, which forced more than 200 fisherfolk families to relocate and give up their livelihood.

Pia Malayao, secretary-general of the Kalipunan ng mga Katutubo sa Pilipinas (Society of Indigenous People in the Philippines) or KATRIBU, emphasized the fact that Indigenous People, who are bonded with their land and are familiar with the characteristics of rivers and landscapes, would under normal circumstances know how to adapt and avoid the path of disasters such as landslides. Indigenous knowledge related to disaster management, such as interpreting the wailing of goats as a signal for an oncoming landslide, has been passed down through generations (Quilo et al., 2015). However, they have been driven out of their lands and can no longer return to the
relative protection that this way of life granted them. Non-recognition of their right to ancestral lands forces them to vacate their homes to give way to development projects such as large dams and mining operations. In 2018, killer landslides claimed the lives of dozens in Cebu and Benguet, the latter of which is a province predominantly populated by Indigenous People (Mayuga, 2018). Environmentalist groups identified the operations of mining and quarrying firms as the prime culprit; aerial photos of the landslide in Naga even showed that the debris came from limestone deposits of a quarrying project conducting earth-moving operations.

Most, if not all forms of rural livelihood rely heavily on climate-sensitive factors and resources such as the arability of land, seasonal changes in weather, and the availability of water sources. Climate change and the extreme conditions that come with it disrupt livelihoods that depend on the natural environment. Rural communities and economies are threatened by higher poverty rates and limited institutional capacity to respond to or anticipate climate change impacts (National Climate Assessment, 2014). Poverty, in turn, prevents households from investing in long-term climate-preparedness, as more immediate everyday needs take priority (Enano, 2019).

The Philippines experienced one of, if not the longest COVID-19 lockdowns in the world, as well as one of the worst outbreaks (Cahiles, 2021). On record, it counted an estimated total of 3.96 million COVID-19 cases, with 63,042 deaths. Enabled by the government’s militaristic pandemic response, violence against rights defenders intensified during the lockdown. KALIKASAN People’s Network for the Environment (KPNE) has documented 260 cases of human rights abuse committed against environmental defenders, including two killings, 173 arrests, detentions, and 25 physical assaults during the first few months of the pandemic alone. Rampant red-tagging has led to the deaths and illegal arrests of countless organizations, individuals, and members of vulnerable rural communities. Militarization and state-sanctioned attacks against activists and environmental defenders have aggravated conditions that breed rural vulnerabilities. Among many victims of red-tagging, there is a clear common thread of opposing projects and policies ‘that harm nature and the communities who rely on it (Beltran, 2021).’ When indigenous tribes and peasants protest government projects, the state accuses them of being anti-development or, at worst, terrorists.

In spite of this, sectoral groups have continued to vocally assert their demands to end policies and development projects that violate the rights of peasants and Indigenous People. Climate change is a transnational issue; the political assertion that the Philippines has a ‘disproportionate’ experience of the climate crisis underlines the fact that it contributes nowhere near the amount of CO2 emissions that major carbon polluting countries do, yet suffers climate change devastation earlier, more severely, and more frequently. At the same time, rights defenders also emphasize that local threats such as development aggression exacerbate rural climate vulnerability, and at the same time hinder rural communities’ efforts at climate adaptation.
Meet three grassroots organizations on the frontlines of environmental protection:

AMIHAN is a nationwide federation of peasant women organizations asserting the calls for genuine agrarian reform, national industrialization, and an end to all forms of exploitation and discrimination against women in the countryside. It was established to give a collective voice to peasant women, the largest yet also the most discriminated sector of women in the Philippines.

PAMALAKAYA is an alliance of small fisherfolk that was established in 1987 to unite and empower the Filipino fisherfolk. With 9 regional chapters, 43 provincial chapters, and over 80,000 individual members nationwide, it is the biggest federation of small fisherfolk in the country, championing the interests of the fisheries sector.
The Save Our Schools (SOS) Network is a network of child rights advocates, organizations, and various stakeholders working together to act against the ongoing violation of children’s right to education, particularly those in the context of militarization and state attacks on Lumad schools. SOS was organized to assert the existence and advocacies of schools for indigenous children.
People’s organizations have played a key role in empowering Filipino peasants and Indigenous People amid the climate crisis by addressing the need for climate awareness at the grassroots level and mobilizing communities to collectively assert the demand for climate justice. This study discusses Philippine rural communities’ particular vulnerability to climate change while highlighting specific climate initiatives, campaign work, and sustainable alternatives forwarded by the following organizations: the Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women (AMIHAN), the National Federation of Small Fisherfolk Organizations in the Philippines (PAMALAKAYA), and the Save Our Schools Network (SOS).

Rural communities, whose cultures and livelihoods are intimately and inextricably linked to the natural environment, are the demographic currently facing the worst of climate change’s impact. The study emphasizes the role that organized peasants and Indigenous People play as frontline environmental defenders by mapping the relationship between their struggle for land and sea rights, the urgent defense of natural ecosystems against the manmade perils of capitalist plunder and pollution, and the climate change devastation emanating from both. Aside from teaching rural grassroots communities how to scientifically understand and articulate changes in their surroundings that they likely have already noticed, climate education has also paved the way for peasants and Indigenous People to embrace the position they hold as key environmental defenders.

II. Rural women’s response: campaigns against hunger amidst climate extremes

Climate change’s impact on food security is perhaps among its most glaring effects; at the same time, today’s dominant global food systems contribute a third of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions (Tandon, 2021). In the Philippines, calamities such as typhoons and droughts have exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in a food production paradigm continually weakened by farmers’ landlessness, the rising prices of farm inputs, as well as decades of manufactured dependence on foreign imports (WTO in PH Agriculture, Undermining National Food Security, 2020). The country’s underdeveloped agricultural system is annually exposed to the damage of storms and drought without adequate infrastructures for rehabilitation.

In early 2019, several months of prolonged drought brought about by El Niño forced 10 provinces in Bicol Region, Southern Luzon to officially declare a state of calamity. Farmers had not yet recovered from the onslaught of the typhoon in December, when they were hit by a sudden drought that caused P7.96 billion in damage to the agricultural sector, affecting an estimated 247,610 farmers and fishers across the country, according to local farmer organisations Kilusang Magbubukid ng Bikol (Peasant Movement - Bicol, KMB) and Amihan Bicol.

Bicol farmers lost 80% of their rice crops during this time. They could harvest 120 bundles before the drought. The drought cut their harvest in half. The palay also became brittle and smaller. Most farmers interviewed lacked irrigation and paid to use a water pump. Even without the drought, Filipino farmers have long lacked
irrigation services. Only 30% (2.93 million hectares) of the country's farmland is irrigated, and only 27% is government-provided (IBON Foundation, 2014).

Peasant women who planted ampalaya and beans couldn't harvest either. The barren land and money spent on farming inputs like seeds pushed peasant women and farming communities into debt and poverty. Peasant women, who provide food and other essentials for their families, suffer during food crises. Due to financial burdens, some spouses verbally abused their partners. Many were forced to become domestic helpers, market vendors, and laundry women to increase their household income. Many of their children had to quit school to help out.

Following the aftermath of successive typhoons Rolly, Quinta, and Ulysses in late 2020, farmers in the Philippines struggled to recover from the devastation of their land, homes, and vital farming tools. Cagayan Valley, particularly the provinces of Isabela and Cagayan, faced serious flooding due to heavy rains and the opening of Magat Dam's floodgates. The province of Cagayan is the catch basin of rainwater from Cagayan Valley and the Cordillera Administrative (3 Issues That Need to Be Addressed in Cagayan Flooding, 2020). Authorities released water from Magat Dam, the largest dam in the country, to prevent it from reaching critical spilling levels but ended up submerging as many as 67,000 homes in the area. High-value commodities such as abaca and rice were destroyed, with the Department of Agriculture estimating a total of Php12.3 billion loss for the agricultural sector.

The typhoons were a devastating blow to farmers already suffering the socioeconomic backlash of the COVID-19 health crisis and months of lockdown. Quarantine restrictions disrupted global food supply chains by cutting means to transport raw materials and manufactured products, jeopardizing farmers’ means of income. Members of the peasantry slid further into debt and, faced with the skyrocketing market price of food, were unable to feed their families despite being food producers themselves.

Amihan and its local chapter AMBI-Isabela (Asosasyon Dagiti Mannalon ti Babbai ti Isabela) officially launched the Kampanya Kontra Gutom (Campaign Against Hunger) in early 2021 to rouse affected peasant communities in Isabela to action against worsening hunger and the COVID-19 pandemic. The participating communities received climate education from the Climate Change Network for Community-based Initiatives (CCNCI) in conjunction with vital information about the COVID-19 pandemic, human rights, and community action. The campaign encouraged local communities to plan and implement community actions in response to climate change and the pandemic. With support from the Agroecology Fund the peasant women organization's sustained relief efforts, complemented by the setting up of communal vegetable farms and backyard gardens, were able to answer the need for food security at the community level.

Months later in June, however, the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) issued a freeze order on Amihan's bank account based on accusations of
terrorist financing by two alleged rebel returnees. The organization was cut off from its already limited financial resources, despite the Court of Appeal’s lifting of the freeze order for lack of probable cause in November 2021. The state’s continuous persecution of Amihan through red-tagging and digital censorship remains a looming threat and hindrance to its campaigns on climate justice and food security.

Amihan’s work in addressing food security and community organizing towards climate resilience and sustainable production, which pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic, was able to mitigate widespread hunger brought about by the global health crisis. The community garden set up by their local chapter in Isabela was able to provide their area with vegetables while food supply chains were disrupted and farmers were restricted from going to the fields due to the lockdown.

The promotion of agroecology in community efforts to address food security is significant in both climate change resiliency and the encouragement of sustainable production. Agroecology is the practical application of ecological concepts and principles in farming (What Is Agroecology? | Soil Association, n.d.). It forwards
farming practices that respond and mitigate climate change, considers and works with wildlife ecosystems, and puts small farming communities at the forefront of food production. Amihan stresses agroecology as key to ‘liberation from the clutches of foreign monopoly agro-corporations that control seeds and their corresponding agrochemical inputs.’ Nenita Apricio, Chairperson of AMBI Amihan Isabela, said that the peasant women in her local chapter saw firsthand how bringing ecological principles to agroecosystems created novel management approaches, and how agroecology engendered cultural, social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Amihan’s campaign against hunger highlights the role of small farmers and peasant women within a food production system that is not only climate adaptive but also provides a viable, sustainable alternative to the corporate food regime. Such an alternative would shift the locus of food systems away from the global market and back to addressing national food security through food sovereignty. Amihan, alongside farmers and peasant women, emphasizes the protection and strengthening of local food production, especially in response to the ongoing climate-induced food crisis.
III. Fisherfolk’s response: the fight for climate justice and national sovereignty

The Philippines has 2.2 million square kilometers of among the richest fishing grounds in the world, and yet at the same time has the poorest fisherfolk. Small fisherfolk remain the primary producers of two-thirds of the fish for human consumption, making significant contributions to food security while at the same time engaging in more environmentally sustainable fishing practices than commercial fisheries. However, the sector remains largely neglected in terms of social services and laws that would protect their livelihood from climate change and development aggression. The Philippine fishing industry is largely a monopoly of both local and foreign large businesses, which leaves barely anything for small fisherfolk who are only allowed to fish in municipal waters. Even these areas have dwindled due to amendments to local and national ordinances.

As an archipelagic country with many low-lying coastal communities, the country is among those most vulnerable to sea-level rise. Coastal flooding, coastal erosion, and salinization of aquifers are already happening, compounded by other local factors such as compaction due to excessive groundwater withdrawal and subsidence due to aquaculture ponds (Philippines Raises Alarm on Impacts of Sea-Level Rise, n.d.). Meteorologist and climatologist Lourdes Tibig has forwarded the possibility that sea levels in the Philippines may be rising faster than the global average (Guerrero, n.d.). While the global average is at 3.7 millimeters per year, studies have found that a coastal island in Visayas experiences an annual sea level rise of four times that much. Ocean acidification has also resulted in fish kills, as well as increased flooding and storms. The destruction of mangroves and reefs to clear space for development projects has made coastal communities alarmingly more vulnerable to tidal waves and storm surges.

For years, PAMALAKAYA has carried the demand for climate justice within its campaigns, stressing its ties with its calls for the protection of marine ecosystems, coastal communities, and the small fisheries sector. The organization actively immerses in climate change education, gathering and sharing small fisherfolk’s experiences in the face of ecological crisis. In 2020, PAMALAKAYA led the world’s first fishers’ climate strike. Fishers Rise Up! was an initiative that included mass protests and educational campaigns in coastal communities that culminated in a massive climate strike in the capital city of Manila (Kapfinger, 2020). The protests demanded immediate climate action from the previous administration, raising alarm over studies predicting that 8 million residents in Metro Manila would likely be submerged by the projected sea rise of at least 2-7 feet (Pamalakayaweb, 2020). PAMALAKAYA Secretary General Salvador France warned, “There is no need to wait for 3 decades for the ‘great flood’ to happen because land reclamation projects across Manila Bay would expedite the submersion of its communities.”

The fisherfolk group recently raised alarm over the 187 proposed and ongoing reclamation projects threatening the Philippines’ marine ecosystem as well as the livelihood of small fishers (Cabico, 2022). Among these are the Navotas City
Coastal Bay Reclamation and Development Project, the Manila Waterfront City Reclamation Project, and the Bacoor Reclamation and Development Project. PAMALAKAYA National Spokesperson Ronnel Arambulo said, “This isn’t just figures; these are actual productive marine and aquatic ecosystems to be destroyed and a significant number of the coastal population to be forcibly displaced to pave way for these profit-driven and environmentally-destructive projects.” Both scientists and fishers have long emphasized the threat of reclamation impacts such as decreases in fish populations, the destruction of wetlands and mangroves, and flooding as a result of large-scale dump-and-fill projects.

PAMALAKAYA has also been at the forefront of collective protests by fisherfolk against China’s aggression in the West Philippine Sea. Their protest against Chinese aggression during World Fisheries Day last November 24, 2021 was attended by a hundred fisherfolks, members of the youth, and other allies. On July 12, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) made a historic arbitral tribunal ruling in favor of the Philippines’ assertions of sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea according to UNCLOS (Medina, 2017). The PCA notably concluded that there was no legal basis for China’s claim to resources falling within the so-called ‘9-dash line,’ and that China’s activities in the Philippines’ territory breached the provisions of UNCLOS. The purported 9-dash line spans most of the South China Sea, overlapping with the exclusive economic zones of not only the Philippines, but also Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The ruling’s rejection of the 9-dash line was a monumental step forward for countries engaged in territorial disputes with China. It also ruled that China failed to prevent its fishermen from conducting large-scale harvests of endangered species, which destroyed the area’s coral reef ecosystem. It also noted that its land reclamation and construction of artificial islands in the Spratly Islands had also engendered ‘irreparable harm’ to the coral reef ecosystem.

However, the Hague ruling has done little to deter China, which has repeatedly refused to recognize the ruling and instead continues to expand its presence. In 2021, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson called the ruling “nothing more than a piece of waste paper (Viray, 2021).” According to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, 20% of the country’s total fish production comes from the West Philippine Sea (Rivera, 2022). Harassment from Chinese vessels and military personnel has limited fishing activities and hindered the transport of products to local markets, worsening fisherfolk’s already high poverty vulnerability (Gutierrez & Aznar, 2021).

Reclamation by both private corporations and foreign nations such as China has rendered extreme ecological damage to marine ecosystems in the Philippines. Scientists have warned that China’s continued activities would bring further destruction to the environment and fisherfolk sector, causing major harm to the country’s food security (INQUIRER.net, 2021). PAMALAKAYA, standing firm with small fisherfolk, continues to assert its anti-reclamation campaign, emphasizing its aggravation of coastal communities’ vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Filipino fisherfolk are the first casualties of rising sea levels, and protest actions by the fisheries sector are potent expressions of justified outrage against threats to their lives and livelihood.
IV. Indigenous children’s response: climate justice and the right to the future

Policy debates on climate change, which is an existential human crisis as much as it is an ecological one, generally pay very little attention to children’s rights. However, children are among the most at-risk to climate hazards and effects such as worsened malnutrition and disease. For Lumad children in the Philippines, their experience of the climate crisis lies at the intersection of geographical injustice, socio-political injustice, cultural injustice, epistemic injustice, and intergenerational injustice.

The Lumad are the largest indigenous group in the country-- they make up 18% of the country’s population, and of the 14-17 million Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, they comprise 61% (INFOGRAPHIC: Who Are the Lumad?, 2017). More than half of them reside in the mountainous, mineral-rich regions of Mindanao. However, large-scale mining operations and intensifying militarization have ripped them from their ancestral domains. Former President Rodrigo Duterte, who declared martial law in Mindanao in May 2017 purportedly as a response to insurgents, said that he welcomed investors and mining companies to tap into the island group’s rich deposits of gold, nickel, and copper (Chandran, 2018). Duphing Ogan, secretary general of the Indigenous Peoples’ alliance KALUMARAN, described these actions as “waging war against defenseless Indigenous People in Mindanao.”

“They are targeting our lands, destroying our mountains and our forests, and selling out to corporations. This is an all-out war against minority people, not against terror.”

- Duphing Ogan

The range of state attacks against indigenous communities in the Philippines includes the violent and widespread closure of dozens of Lumad schools as a result of state accusations of being recruiting grounds for rebels. Duterte himself threatened to unleash airstrikes on Lumad schools, accusing them of teaching subversion and communism. However, rights defenders have asserted that the true purpose of the militarization of Mindanao is to displace indigenous communities from their ancestral lands, so that they may be sold to mining and logging companies. Conditions of state brutality and displacement continue to stand in the way of Lumad children’s education.

According to the Save Our Schools (SOS) Network, 9 out of 10 Lumad children have no access to education. 233 alternative schools geared towards Lumad communities were established to address this gap. Lumad schools such as The ALCADEV (Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood
Development) provide indigenous children with an alternative, culturally-apt learning system that highlights sustainable agriculture and environmental protection along with traditional subjects such as Math, Science, History, and English (Katona, 2019). Their education is oriented towards preparing students for their future positions as community leaders endowed with the responsibility of their community’s livelihood.

SOS documented over 500 cases of military violence against Lumad schools from May 2017 to July 2019 alone (Kennedy, 2021). These operations were legalized via the Department of Education Memorandum Order 221, signed in 2013 to allow the Armed Forces of the Philippines to use schools in military and counterinsurgency operations (DepEd Memo 221, n.d.). The overwhelming brutality inflicted by soldiers forced students, teachers, and their families to evacuate and seek refuge in churches and other institutions. This was the catalyst for the opening of “bakwit” or mobile schools for Lumad children, scattered across different institutions such as universities. However, many other children retreated to other communities for their safety, completely deprived of education.

Lumad children from the Pantaron Mountain Range have expressed a deep desire to return to their ancestral lands, which they describe as a source of ‘abundance, peace, and happiness.’ The schools they once attended that were built to blend into this ecosystem gave way to four mining concessions, currently cordoned and heavily guarded by soldiers from members of indigenous communities voicing their opposition. In addition to mining operations, the continuous construction of massive dams disrupting natural river flow and wreaking havoc on ecosystems has not only contributed to Philippine Indigenous People’s increasing vulnerability to disaster but has also displaced them from their ancestral domains.

The students, teachers, and allies of Lumad Bakwit (Evacuate) Schools continue to engage in climate education and calls for climate justice, highlighting indigenous communities’ central role in environmental defense and preservation. In observance of the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, over Lumad 500 children and youth advocates formed a human tree using their bodies, artworks, and placards calling for climate justice, while at the same time stressing the government’s failure to uphold children’s right to development, education, and protection from the disastrous effects of climate change.

Aside from the Lumad, other indigenous communities are also under threat due to ongoing development aggression. The New Centennial Water Source Project (NCWSP), funded by loans from China, is a multi-billion hydroelectric project that will destroy 28,000 hectares of land and forests, including 291 hectares of environmentally critical areas as well as the farms and homes of the Dumagat and Remontado tribes in the Southern Luzon Tagalog area. The project consists of building three dams in phases: Laiban Dam, Kaliwa Dam, and Kanan Dam. The project threatens the area’s natural water source and is likely to cause irreversible damage to the Sierra Madre Mountain Range, which has long acted as a barrier protecting inlanders from the brunt of strong typhoons. 10,000 Dumagat and Remontado people, who are among the poorest and most vulnerable highland
dwellers, will be displaced by this project. Dumagats who have protested the construction of the dams have been tortured and killed since the regime of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

The conceptualization of climate change as a children’s rights issue is an acknowledgment that its harms are spread unequally across generations. For indigenous cultures who harbor a deep relationship with their ancestral domains, the destruction of these lands and their deprivation from future generations of indigenous children is an act of cultural violence; one of many inflicted by the Philippine government on Lumad children. The SOS Network continues to educate and act for children and climate justice, and lobby for Lumad communities’ safe and just return to their ancestral lands.
V. Summary and Recommendations

Regressive social and economic development in the Philippines has condemned Filipinos, especially those in the countryside, to the perils of climate-induced catastrophes. Sectoral groups have underlined systemic deprivation of social services and protection from rural communities as a major hurdle in climate adaptation efforts. Climate-sensitive industries such as agriculture and fisheries have insufficient infrastructures for support and rehabilitation even without taking climate hazards into account.

Red-tagging has also proved to be a consistent threat and hurdle to organizations’ climate campaigns and organizing work. Such baseless accusations that serve anti-people development projects are protected by the government’s counterinsurgency programs and policies such as the Anti-Terrorism Act, passed in 2020. The law authorizes the warrantless arrest and detainment of groups and individuals suspected of involvement in ‘acts of terrorism;’ this includes ‘[inciting] others to commit terrorism through ‘speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems, banners (Philippines | Anti-Terrorism Law Further Threatens the Safety of Human Rights Defenders, 2020).’ Aside from the freezing of bank accounts as experienced by Amihan, digital attacks are another major roadblock to rural grassroots organizations forwarding campaigns for climate justice; in June 2022, the websites of Amihan, PAMALAKAYA, and SOS were among several progressive groups and media outlets whose websites were blocked, as per orders of National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. to the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) (Ramirez, 2022).

Despite these, the campaign efforts of Amihan, PAMALAKAYA, and SOS have achieved more widespread climate awareness. Their work in climate organizing has helped strengthen rural communities’ ability to adapt to the various forms of ecological crises brought about by climate change. Grassroots organizations’ climate initiatives, actions, and community organizing efforts are all rooted in the need for major systemic change with regard to land rights, food systems, and socioeconomic and political policies. To do this, the current administration must finally listen to the demands laid out and reiterated time and time again by sectoral organizations. Among the most urgent is putting harmful development projects to an immediate halt; rather, development projects must first achieve the genuine approval of peasant and indigenous communities likely to be affected before they are pursued. Addressing food security is also key to effective climate action. This entails strengthening and protecting local food production on the fronts of the agriculture and fisheries sectors. Rather than be among the biggest roadblocks to climate adaptation, the Philippine government must recognize and act on its mandate to protect its citizens who are perhaps the most vulnerable stakeholders of the climate crisis.
The case studies described in this research point to several interrelated themes concerning local communities’ response and struggles to protect and conserve their environment within their own means. Overall, people’s responses to climate-related catastrophes and market-based solutions are rooted in the struggle for their rights. The examples of people-powered climate actions covered in this study are anchored on the need for major systemic change regarding access to resources, food systems, socioeconomic and government policies, and ultimately human rights, especially Indigenous Peoples’ and women’s rights.

This section explores these themes to demonstrate common lines of struggle across communities in the South and offer insights on how people’s rights and community initiatives can be integrated at the center of climate response. Moreover, it identifies key barriers that would have to be overcome for these community-based practices to thrive into fully developed, alternative climate solutions.
I. People-powered climate actions and the struggle for rights

Access to resources. An important but often neglected aspect in discussions surrounding climate response and adaptation is the issue of people’s access to resources. Inept government response and the lack of enabling laws to protect basic rights and livelihoods exacerbate the impacts faced by local communities in the Global South. The case of Philippine fisherfolk organization PAMALAKAYA demonstrates people’s opposition to active reclamation projects that threaten their access to the sea, marine resources, and fishing grounds. In the country, policies currently in place allow foreign investors to reclaim coastal areas for so-called ‘development projects’ that will displace communities from their homes. The case study also pointed out efforts of fishing communities to immerse in climate justice issues, particularly on rising sea levels which poses a palpable threat to ecosystems. Local community organizations have been launching their own awareness and internal education campaigns to better understand factors affecting their access to marine resources. This allows them to better formulate science- and rights-based demands to protect their lives and livelihoods.

Another example can be seen in the case of North Macedonia where fossil-free alternatives such as small hydropower plants, despite being touted as a viable renewable energy solution, can violate people’s rights resulting in the displacement of communities and disabling access to marine resources. The case demonstrates the impact of how the relentless pursuit of business and for-profit interests, regardless of whether such initiatives finance alternative climate solutions, can still fall short as a real solution that puts people’s rights at risk. Without strengthening community involvement and democratic ownership over energy alternatives, any renewable energy transition still faces the risk of resource plunder. And while in some cases small hydropower can indeed offer an alternative solution to energy access in rural areas, these solutions can still potentially result in human rights violations if not implemented properly.

Similarly, the people of Riam Tinggi village in Indonesia suffer from the continuing threat of a logging corporation further encroaching their forest areas. In response, affected communities initiated their own community-based forest management system as a form of reclaiming their right to land and access to forest resources. By pursuing this form of resistance, community members gain the basis to fight for protected village forest status that will give them the right to manage the forest area without external actors seeking to exploit resources.

These examples shed light on how climate change is rapidly pushing communities out of their lands and sources of livelihood – from the impacts of rising sea levels to fishing communities in the Philippines, to the consequences of poorly implemented fossil-free energy sources in North Macedonia, and the people of Riam Tinggi in Indonesia who resist displacement due to timber companies. At the same time, inept government response and policies favouring corporations further exacerbate the growing climate conflict faced by communities.
**Asserting women's rights amid the climate emergency.** Women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. The adverse effects of drought, floods, typhoons, extreme rainfall and sea level rise are often felt more keenly by women than men as a result of systemic discrimination and societal expectations related to gender roles.

The gendered impacts are exemplified in the case of rural women in the Philippines who suffered from successive typhoons in late 2020. The situation has placed these women under severe distress due to the destruction of their vegetable harvests and the lack of access to aid and financing, combined with the burden to provide for the basic needs of their families. The case study points to some women facing verbal abuse from their spouses as a result of financial pressures in the family. The situation would change when AMIHAN, a local peasant women’s organization, launched a campaign to help women plan and initiate actions in response to climate change. Specifically, they underwent agroecology training to learn about climate-resilient methods of farming. They set up backyard and communal farm areas to ensure food security at the community level. This community-sustained initiative helps resolve some of the issues faced by women in typhoon-affected, rural areas, such as the need for sustainable production practices as well as ways to feed their community amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the destruction of their crops.

The case of North Macedonia reveals serious gaps between policy and practice regarding the situation of rural women and their access to basic rights and liberties. Their lack of access to land, credit, and education makes rural women in the country more likely to face discrimination in the labor market and gender-based violence at home. Rural women who registered as farmers under state regulations are deprived of maternity leaves despite being required to pay for their own health insurance. In response, the National Federation of Farmers in North Macedonia is pushing for the review of relevant labor laws, including other state regulations, to address discriminatory practices against rural women.

On the other hand, the Latin American experience offers an alternative indigenous worldview that focuses on the interdependence between the health of a woman’s body and the well-being of their territories. Within this worldview, land is collectively owned and therefore collectively cared for by the community. It also presupposes that the community must defend all forms of life within their territories from external actors that threaten to exploit their resources. It also ties an intrinsic relationship between land exploitation and the violence on women’s bodies.

**Conserving indigenous knowledge as a form of climate action.** Many of the case studies explored in this research point to the potential of indigenous knowledge and traditional practices as viable forms of adaptation and mitigation measures that can be scaled up depending on the country context. This is clearly exemplified by the case of Indigenous Zawan and Vom communities in Nigeria who practice organic farming as part of their
culture. Their local knowledge also teaches them to accurately recognize weather trends to understand when the planting season must start and allows them to adjust to the changing weather patterns due to climate change. Their local practices also include traditional food and seed storage practices that allow them to save seeds and sustain crop biodiversity within their communities, making their farming practice more resilient to climate change.

The case of Indigenous Lumad communities in the Philippines also demonstrates the need to conserve and protect indigenous knowledge as a form of climate action. Lumad communities explored in the case study highlights how a local and community-initiated school Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) provide indigenous children with an alternative and culturally apt learning system based on sustainable agriculture and environmental protection alongside traditional subjects such as Mathematics, Science and History. This form of indigenous schooling prepares children to take up positions as community leaders in the future and is a form of resistance itself meant to sustain the community’s efforts to conserve the environment and protect their territories from land grabbing as well as mining and logging companies.

Box 3. WAHENGA Youth in Kenya - Youth taking action on climate

A group of young activists in Kayole-Soweto informal settlement in Kenya made the decision to take matters into their own hands after becoming increasingly concerned about the problem of plastic pollution, issues with waste and sanitation management, and limited access to safe and healthy water in their community. They established WAHENGA Youth - in Swahili, the word “Wahengya,” which means “ancestor,” is a nod to the revolutionary heritage of the country. Since its founding in 2018, the activist group has been working on issues like the climate crisis, social justice, and human rights that affect their neighborhood and Africa as a whole.

WAHENGA Youth is the umbrella organization for 20 different youth organizations in Nairobi. In a focused group discussion last October 2022, WAHENGA Youth activists noted the intersections between the climate crisis, socio-economic ills, and injustice in the form of human rights violations. Under its wing, WAHENGA Youth can mobilize 100–300 warm bodies to assert their demands on the pressing issues of their community, like access to clean and safe water, for example.

Ironically, their dreadlocks, while being part of their cultural identity, have been weaponized by state forces to tag them as criminals to discredit their work and weaken their organization. Apart from this, some group members have attested that they have experienced surveillance and harassment, while some have been jailed due to their participation in protests. Apart from militant marches, WAHENGA Youth maximizes arts, music, and sports not only to express their stands and analyses on issues but also as a form to expand and consolidate their ranks. In 2020, the group used graffiti to spread health and safety awareness in line with the COVID-19 pandemic. The group also collaborates with like-minded organizations such as the Public Space Network (PSN), which, together with 50 volunteers, was able to reclaim green spaces in the Dandora landfill (Muli, 2022). Currently, the group is currently gearing for a more extensive climate justice campaign with IBON Africa.

II. The role of state and corporate actors

The continuing repression of environmental and climate defenders is a worrying global trend that also emerges from the case studies. Many of the people-powered climate actions identified in this study are in their nascent stages and therefore vulnerable to systemic threats and repression. Instead of protecting and conserving such practices, the study shows examples of state-sponsored attacks on people’s organizations advocating for climate justice, with the same states facilitating corporate encroachment on indigenous lands and territories.

**State-sponsored attacks and systematic neglect of people’s rights.** The lack of legal mechanisms to protect the communities’ rights and ensure basic needs is a threat to people’s climate actions. The case of North Macedonia’s women farmers and the policy gaps identified in their existing legal framework presents a problematic picture of systemic inequalities reinforcing discrimination against women. Rampant cases of gender-based violence and the inability of registered women farmers to access maternity leaves adds multiple layers of oppression in addition to facing the impacts of climate change. The exploitation and discrimination women face in North Macedonia immerse them in a culture and political system of subjugation that creates concrete conditions for political action but at the same time suppresses women-led initiatives.

State-sponsored attacks also seek to silence environmental defenders, including Indigenous Peoples. In the Philippines, ‘red-tagging’ has become a tactic used by government forces to intimidate, defame, and vilify activists, including environmental and indigenous leaders and their work. State rhetoric against activists is often used as a pretense for arrest and increases the likelihood of attacks. In addition, with the passage of the Anti-Terror Law in 2020, environmental defenders increasingly find themselves as the target of red-tagging tirades by government officials. Usually following incidents of public red-tagging against environmental leaders are threats, harassments and even political killings, all of which instill fear among community members. In the case of Lumad in southern Philippines, concerted state attacks later led to the closure of more than 80 of their indigenous schools which were previously sustained by the communities without much government support. Overall, this strategy to silence activists and community leaders has far-reaching consequences to the work and safety of environmental and human rights defenders, including the people-powered climate initiatives they built at the community level.

**Corporate encroachment of land and resources.** Another alarming trend is the continued encroachment of big businesses onto people’s lands and resources. The case in Indonesia demonstrates this challenge: PT Sari Bumi Kusuma – one of the biggest logging and timber corporations in the country – has occupied a portion of the forest land the Riam Tinggi community seeks to protect and manage.

Governments facilitate corporate activities in indigenous lands and take part in the repression of communities standing up to these corporations. The case of the Lenca ethnic group in Honduras speaks about state-sponsored violence against women through the deployment of military forces meant to facilitate the entry of extractive industries in Indigenous territories. The story of Maria Felicita Lopez in the same case study indicates the serious harms caused by harassment and sexual
exploitation of military personnel. Increased military presence in the area has also undermined community-based initiatives meant to defend their territories from the encroachment of mining companies and the construction of a large hydroelectric dam. This exemplifies how corporations utilize and benefit from state violence to promote and protect their own economic interests, despite clear environmental costs and violation of people’s rights.

People’s responses to the climate emergency vary, depending on the level of organization within the community, the economic and social conditions within which these struggles exist, and the degree of state repression. The dynamic link between these various aspects of community action is a determining factor that either hinders or supports people-powered climate actions on the ground. Nonetheless, these stories present critical insights as to how governments are responding to the climate crisis and community-based alternatives that put people’s rights at the center of climate response. People-powered climate actions are alternative, rights-based solutions to climate change.
Conclusion and Recommendations: Support and Strengthen People-Powered Climate Actions

The systemic issues discussed above prevent the further development of people-powered climate actions on a wider scale, and form part of a larger global trend where government priorities are subjugated under corporate interests. This grossly undermines efforts to combat climate change.

Addressing these challenges requires fundamental shifts in various levels of climate policy and governance. At the global level, policymakers must:

1. **Ramp up public finance flows towards adaptation.** Climate finance flows particularly addressing adaptation needs are nowhere near the expected need. Developing countries have received an average of $29 billion in recent years. Filling this financing gap is crucial to achieve climate resilience for communities in the Global South. To address the present and future threats posed by climate change, public institutions must rapidly and significantly scale up their financial support for adaptation. Additionally, information on adaptation investment has to be improved. The Glasgow Climate Pact’s crucial goal of increasing adaptation support for emerging and developing economies, particularly those that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, are difficult to track due to the lack of transparency in adaptation finance, particularly for private sector finance.

2. **Enhance direct access of frontline communities to climate finance.** Climate finance commitments also need to translate into action in the real economy and on the ground, requiring all public and private actors to align their operations with global climate objectives and sustainable pathways moving forward. In this context, public financing is primarily important to deliver on both climate and development objectives. Private financing on the other hand would have to be subject to stringent performance standards in line with the need to protect people’s rights and the environment. Direct financing mechanisms must be provided to support frontline communities struggling with the impacts of climate change. People-powered climate actions such as those identified in this research, can be further supported by ensuring they gain direct access to a portion of global climate finance flows without compromising community leadership in developing these initiatives.
3. **Promote people-powered climate actions in global climate policy and governance regime.** It is necessary for policymakers at the global level to recognize and promote the importance of rights-based and community-initiated climate responses. The potential to upscale these alternative solutions are enormous and must be supported by a robust policy infrastructure at the global level. The recently announced Loss and Damage Fund is a welcome if narrow opportunity to achieve this, but will require advanced economies to deliver on their commitments. History has shown such initiatives to be insufficient and contingent on the political will of rich industrialized countries most responsible for the damages caused by climate change in the global South. Peoples organizations and the global civil society community must therefore hold governments accountable to their commitments and ensure the delivery of much needed financing to support frontline communities facing the challenges of climate change adaptation in their respective contexts. Such climate financing measures must also ensure people-powered climate actions are protected at the local level by mandating governments to provide an enabling environment for community-based and local organizations. An enabling environment for people-powered climate actions entail a shift away from neoliberal and extractive models of development, the highest standards of transparency and accountability as well as the full implementation and protection of people’s rights including the respect and promotion of women’s right as well as Indigenous People’s right to self-determination and control over community resources.

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**Box 4. Farmers teaching farmers in China: An effective way of learning from each other’s struggles**

A case study from China offers an alternative way to support the learning and development of people-powered climate actions. In this example, H&E staff facilitated a learning exchange program between villagers of Heyuan in Guangdong Province and Gusheng in Guizhou Province. Both villages have similar topographies and share the same concerns on the impacts of climate change and how it threatens their access to potable water despite being close to a river source. In Gusheng village however, the situation is much more dire where people are already suffering from severe drinking water shortage due to desertification of river systems. Gusheng farmers however were able to adapt to this challenge by collectively managing natural resources within their village. Through the exchange program, Gusheng village farmers shared their experiences and lessons learned to farmers from Heyuan. According to the author of the case study, the exchange program worked effectively by teaching Heyuan farmers to implement a similar program in their village addressing similar issues of resource management in response to climate change.

The case studies featured in this work provide a cross-cutting framework based on the protection and assertion of people’s rights in the face of the climate emergency. At the same time, these initiatives serve as a response of frontline communities both to the real impacts of climate change and inadequate government policies. While these practices remain in their very early stages, their potential for upscaling based on their respective country and cultural contexts make them viable alternatives to market-based solutions to climate change. It is therefore necessary to set up measures in support of these initiatives including the following recommendations to national governments:

1. **Support people-powered climate actions as genuine alternatives to false, market-based solutions to climate change.** Case studies described in this research demonstrate peoples from the Global South taking action and creating solutions to face the challenges confronting their communities due to climate change. These actions include measures to ensure food systems are resilient to climate change, and the protection of lands from extractive industry interests such as mining and logging corporations. Governments must ensure people’s rights are protected from corporate interests that threaten their efforts, lives and livelihoods. Specifically, the case studies point to the following demands:

   a. The Indonesian government should provide full village forest status to the people of Riam Tinggi and allow them to autonomously manage the forest lands without the involvement of PT Sari Bumi Kusuma. Further, concession rights given to PT Sari Bumi Kusuma must be reviewed and repealed immediately to prevent further expansion of excessive logging operations in the area.

   b. The Philippine government should reverse their prior order for the closure of Lumad schools in Mindanao, and remove military personnel deployed in indigenous communities amid the continuing record of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Moreover, the Philippine government must be held accountable for the killings and other human rights abuses across the country.

   c. The Nigerian government to ensure meaningful consultation with communities including marginalised groups such as Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth voices in terms of decision-making particularly on the formulation of climate solutions.

2. **Stop state-sponsored attacks against land and environmental defenders.** Land and environmental defenders, especially indigenous community leaders, have long faced threats, harassment, and murder while protecting their lands from commercial exploitation. The case studies described in this research demonstrate a similar trend and must be stopped. Contributors to this research provide the following recommendations:

   a. Stop the red-tagging, harassment, intimidation, and the killings of environmental defenders, including indigenous leaders in the Philippines.
Local organisations in the Philippines call on the junking of the Anti-Terror Law which provides enabling policy for state forces to continue repressing organizations they deem as ‘terrorists’ and dangerously criminalises all forms of dissent including environmental groups. Further, local organisations also call for the abolition of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) which functions as the state’s primary instrument for red-tagging.

b. Stop the militarisation of communities in Honduras and Colombia. The case studies from Latin America outline the atrocities committed by military personnel, which ultimately undermine community struggles to protect their environment, their rights, and access to resources.

3. Put gender equality and women’s rights front and center in climate solutions.

The case studies point to the need to integrate women’s rights in the formulation of solutions to climate change. Those who are most affected by climate change - women, girls and marginalized communities - must be involved in the design and implementation of climate response to ensure the equitable sharing of benefits. Specifically, the stories featured in this report highlight the following asks:

a. Address widespread hunger and the combined impacts of Covid-19 and climate change on rural women in the Philippines. This includes supporting women-led agroecology farming practices that aim to transform food systems to climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture.

b. Ensure all women in North Macedonia, including registered farmers in rural communities, are provided the right to maternity leave while addressing structural issues that perpetuate gender inequality and gender-based violence. By addressing these issues and policy gaps, rural women are better situated to confront the challenges of climate change in their communities.

c. Support women-led sustainable development and agricultural initiatives in Latin America including agroecological practices meant to avoid the use of toxic fertilizers and agricultural inputs and preserve the diversity of indigenous seeds.

The nexus between people’s rights and the broader demand for alternative solutions to climate change strikes at the core of what people-powered climate actions aim to achieve: a climate response that puts people’s rights and the planet front and center. Effective and collective action against climate change will require fundamental shifts in worldview and the way governments support local initiatives that provide genuine and viable solutions. Transitioning away from extractivist development models and fossil fuel economies will only be possible by ensuring people’s rights are protected and community-based initiatives are supported.


The impacts of climate change are intensifying. The range of impacts include sea-level rise, increased temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts or floods. For instance, the last eight years have seen the highest temperatures on record. The catastrophic effects of the climate crisis are most visible in the current state of global poverty, hunger, and displacement in the Global South.

Featuring case stories from four countries and one global region, this work provides a cross-cutting framework based on the protection and assertion of people’s rights in the face of the climate emergency, and outlines the support communities need for upscaling their practices and further capacity development. The stories also identified the systemic barriers to the development of people-powered climate actions, towards developing viable and genuine climate solutions as opposed to prevalent, market-based proposals.