

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of geometric shapes and patterns. A white rectangular border frames the central text area. The background features a mix of solid colors (yellow, pink, blue, orange) and patterns (diagonal stripes in orange and blue, and light blue and white stripes).

SDGs AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN

CASE STUDIES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM CAMBODIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

Gender Equality in Access to Education and Political Participation for Indigenous Women in Cambodia

In Cambodia, Indigenous Women have been facing several intertwined issues, including lack of access to education and exclusion from political participation. These factors are interrelated – lack of access to education means Indigenous Women have higher rates of illiteracy in Khmer language (often their second language), and illiteracy in Khmer leads government officials and others in Khmer society to dismiss them as unqualified for leadership.¹

The lack of access to education is one of the factors that puts Indigenous girls in a subordinate position in society, while local and mainstream attitudes can themselves be a barrier to education for indigenous girls.

Discrimination in government schools due to their indigeneity and gender combine to discourage Indigenous Girls from continuing with their education.² Poverty, long distances to schools, low quality of available education and at times cultural attitudes toward gender roles combine to lead many families to keep their children, especially girls, at home.³ Education inequality impacts girls, especially indigenous ones, more than boys because their families may need them to stay home and help with chores rather than going to school, and some communities are hesitant to allow girls to travel long distances to schools.⁴

Furthermore, the high rate of early marriage is one factor that prevents girls from continuing their higher education. The rate of married indigenous girls in Cambodia whose age are 15 or under is 10.5%.⁵



1 Maffii, M., Sineath, H. (2009). Promoting Political Participation of Indigenous Women in Cambodia. Heinrich Boll Stiftung Cambodia, p. 37. https://kh.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2010/06/hbf_indigenous_report_-_english_final.pdf.

2 Sreyneang Loek and Raymond Hyma, "Indigenous Identity and Gender", Cambodia Indigenous Women's Working Group and Women Peace Makers (2020), <https://wpmcambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Indigenous-identity-and-gender.pdf>

3 Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance, Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pacts. (2019). Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia. https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/cambodia/session_32_-_january_2019/js1_upr32_khm_e_main.pdf.

4 Frawley, J. (September 2019). Strategic Evaluation Report Education for Ethnic Minorities Program: Cambodia. Care International, p. 2. <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Cambodia-EEM-strategic-evaluation-report-FINAL-20191114.pdf>.

5 Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance, Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pacts. (2019). Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia. https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/cambodia/session_32_-_january_2019/js1_upr32_khm_e_main.pdf.

Lack of formal education and Khmer literacy also impact recognition of Indigenous Women's capacities and skills within their community and in Khmer society.⁶ Many indigenous communities carry on traditional norms related to gender roles, so their participation in the political sphere may be hindered by gender discrimination and male domination.⁷ Women's responsibilities for household chores and family care work also prevent them from participating in politics and local decision-making, and from participating in literacy or other educational opportunities as adults.⁸ Both local and mainstream perspectives further marginalize Indigenous Women not just in decision-making process, it also leads to continual education inequality as girls' education is not seen as an important investment.

In order to address the interconnection between education and political participation, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations applied different methods to engage within Indigenous communities and with government and other outside actors. With the application of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) on Gender Equality into their work with Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia, Highlanders Association (HA), the Cambodian Indigenous Women's Working Group (CIWWG) and other Indigenous People's Organizations were able to help improve Indigenous Girls and Women's livelihoods, participation, and access to education.

Through workshops convened by HA, members of CIWWG provided their inputs on Indigenous Women's issues and barriers to participation to local government officials. CIWWG also held a sharing session on women's roles and how to engage with decision makers and relevant stakeholders. With this, Indigenous Women's collective action was strengthened and local engagement was promoted.

"Women are the key important actors to involve in decision-making, and in the family as to maintain the family economy as well as in good connection in the whole community." – a member of CIWWG

HA also engaged different stakeholders within Indigenous communities to promote gender equality. To mainstreaming gender roles at community level, HA used a tool on Gender Action and Learning (GAL); this tool is bringing all parties to analyze and learning on gender perspective in indigenous community context. Furthermore, HA used Gender Impacts Assessment tool to evaluation on the impacts of gender in development activities process especially in mining project. HA conducted family forums where they invited community members of all ages and genders to participate. They were encouraged to discuss customs and rules that were imposed differently on boys and girls as well as how those could be changed to create more opportunities for girls. Local authorities were also involved to learn about women's rights and gender mainstreaming. HA also contributed their financial support to rent a venue for students from remote areas to stay, so they could continue their higher education. HA reported seeing a positive change in that the numbers of girls and boys who came to stay are roughly the same comparing to the past where there were only boys.

6 Maffii, M., Sineath, H. (2009). Promoting Political Participation of Indigenous Women in Cambodia. Heinrich Boll Stiftung Cambodia, p. 37. https://kh.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2010/06/hbf_indigenous_report_-_english_final.pdf; Sreyneang Loek and Raymond Hyma, "Indigenous Identity and Gender", Cambodia Indigenous Women's Working Group and Women Peace Makers (2020), <https://wpmcambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Indigenous-identity-and-gender.pdf>.

7 Sreyneang Loek and Raymond Hyma, "Indigenous Identity and Gender", Cambodia Indigenous Women's Working Group and Women Peace Makers (2020), <https://wpmcambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Indigenous-identity-and-gender.pdf>

8 Maffii, M., Sineath, H. (2009). Promoting Political Participation of Indigenous Women in Cambodia. Heinrich Boll Stiftung Cambodia, p. 37. https://kh.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2010/06/hbf_indigenous_report_-_english_final.pdf.

A perspective shared by an Indigenous Woman who participated in one of these forums illustrates that in the past, her community did not understand and was not aware of how to address gender inequalities whereas now, she feels comfortable making decisions in the family and joining community gatherings. A more understanding perspective within her community on Indigenous Women also led to better education access.

Lessons Learned

- The integration of SDG5 is relevant in increasing Indigenous Women's participation and access to education. However, not only women should be included in the process, men, youth, and elders are also important to provide their perspectives and find common solutions.
- Participatory approach should be applied when conducting a project or writing a report to increase Indigenous Women's self-esteem and collective demands.

Increasing Indigenous Women's Confidence to Negotiate with Government and Stand Against Development Aggression.

Extractive industries and infrastructure projects, labeled “Development Aggression” by many in the Philippines, threaten Indigenous Peoples’ ancestral territories and livelihoods. The Build-Build-Build policy of the Duterte administration has led to the expansion of large-scale development projects including dams, mining, and plantation agriculture including palm oil.⁹ These projects often involve land grabbing and other serious violations of IPs’ rights, as well as contributing to food insecurity in Indigenous Communities.¹⁰ For example, the Kaliwa Dam project, strongly supported by President Duterte, displaced over 1,400 Indigenous Dumagat families in 2020.¹¹

Indigenous women often bear the brunt of many impacts of development aggression, including because they are often the ones responsible to gather food and other necessities for the household using traditional forest products.¹²

Indigenous women are often at the forefront of resistance against these policies, despite facing intersectional discrimination. Repression of and threats against Indigenous Women prevent them from participating in decision-making, slowing the Philippines’ progress toward SDGs 5 and 16 by excluding women from political participation and access to justice.

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- ⁹ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, “Indigenous World 2020: Philippines” (11 May 2020), <https://www.iwgia.org/en/philippines/3608-iw-2020-philippines.html>.
 - ¹⁰ Asian Indigenous Women’s Network and Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education, “Shadow Report: Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)”, 64th Session, 4-22 July 2016, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/PHL/INT_CEDAW_NGO_PHL_24244_E.pdf.
 - ¹¹ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, “Indigenous World 2020: Philippines” (11 May 2020), <https://www.iwgia.org/en/philippines/3608-iw-2020-philippines.html>.
 - ¹² Indigenous Peoples Major Group. (2020). Special Report: Continuing Discrimination and Disempowerment of Indigenous Women. <https://fimi-iiwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Special-Report-Continuing-Discrimination-and-Disempowerment-of-Indigenous-Women.pdf>; Farah Sevilla, “Mining and Indigenous Women in the Philippines”, 167 World Rainforest Movement Bulletin (6 June 2011), <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/mining-and-indigenous-women-in-the-philippines/>

Indigenous Women leading resistance to development aggression are “red-tagged” and targeted as terrorists, and many face trumped-up charges against as a result of their involvement in the protest against development aggression in their lands.¹³ Some Indigenous cultural practices have been found to discriminate against women, including traditional political structures which exclude women, and customary land systems that exclude women from owning land.¹⁴ This further restricts women’s ability to resist harmful development projects, though women are starting to gain recognition as leaders in their traditional systems.¹⁵



Facing these challenges, many Indigenous Women at community level face barriers to speak up for their rights and their communities, including lack of access to education and low confidence. However, BAI Indigenous Women’s Network aims to work with Indigenous Women and assist them in this regard, aiming to broaden and deepen Indigenous Women’s leadership while building networks to support their movements.



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- 13 Indigenous Peoples Major Group. (2020). Special Report: Continuing Discrimination and Disempowerment of Indigenous Women. <https://fimi-iiwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Special-Report-Continuing-Discrimination-and-Disempowerment-of-Indigenous-Women.pdf>; International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, “Philippines: False Accusations, Persecution and Imprisonment of Indigenous Women” (11 May 2021), <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/4376-philippines-false-accusations,-persecution-and-imprisonment-of-indigenous-women.html>.
- 14 Myra Flor A. Rafal, “Indigenous Women in the Philippines and its Combat to Injustice”, 5 International Conference on Social Science and Humanity (Singapore, 2011), <http://www.ipedr.com/vol5/no2/71-H10189.pdf>.
- 15 Franciscans International, Franciscan Solidarity Movement for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, LILAK and Alyansa Tigil Mina, “Philippines Shadow Report: CEDAW” 64th Session, 4-22 July 2016, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/PHL/INT_CEDAW_NGO_PHL_24230_E.pdf

Figure 2: Indigenous Women showed their collective demand for the stop of state violence of economic and socio-cultural rights of indigenous peoples, supported by BAI Indigenous Women's Network

(Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/BAIindigenouswomen/photos/3585708194797528>)

BAI played an important role by conducting trainings on public speaking for Indigenous Women for them to be able to speak out. BAI themselves were very active in showing their collective demands on rights and speaking out. Supported by AIPP, BAI built many networks and their members became spokeswomen in national and regional levels. Correspondingly, BAI disseminated knowledge on public speaking by working with local communities to carry out capacity building targeting Indigenous Women, especially the leaders, to speak out for their own people. The public speaking training includes the leadership discussion and how to become a good speaker in the public. The information was then contextualized for each Indigenous Community they worked in. This empowerment allowed Indigenous Women to be more confident in expressing their issues and discussing with the government.

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Since BAI believed in the power of the community that local people should be the ones who take action, they always supported them with the space to call for their rights. BAI tried to maximize the venue as a space for Indigenous Women to share their issues. They encouraged this group of women to join them when there were provincial, regional, and national dialogues and lobbying where the government officials were present.



BAI also maximized the use of technology to provide virtual space for Indigenous Women such as holding online forums, webinars, and Zoom meetings. With this being done, Indigenous Women were more visible and credible in the wider public. Despite COVID-19 and lockdowns, Indigenous Women could still amplify their situations, issues, and struggles against the mining company, dam construction, and human rights violations.

Lessons Learned

- Public speaking is one of the most important skills to increase Indigenous Women's confidence when voicing out their demands with the government.
- Both physical and virtual spaces should be provided as much as possible to let Indigenous Peoples express their struggles and raise public attention.

