

Submission to UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Papuan Women's Working Group

The Papuan Women's Working Group (PWG)¹ conducted participatory action research, over a period of four years (2013-2017), involving a cumulative total of 170 indigenous women from Papua. The research was a qualitative inquiry, using participatory tools to document the experiences and voices of Papuan women who are seldom heard. Our research focused on violence against women, but included a wider approach to capture key issues that women raised. We created a process for "listening-in" to women who are speaking candidly about their own lives. Both a narrative report and a video report were produced based on this process.² The research focused on civil political, as well as social economic and cultural rights of Papuan women. The research made key findings around violence against women, trauma and discrimination. However, a key issue raised included the **loss of sources of livelihood and food resilience** for Papuan women.

For the indigenous people of Papua, land and forest provide a strong bond in their lives, not only as a source of food, but also giving meaning to their lives. When forests are converted to plantations or other "productive" functions, women must adapt food, as their access to traditional sources diminish. In some cases, a new dependence on "instant" food is formed.

"The forest is where we eat, but now that its been dismantled finding food is difficult. Maybe we can still find some firewood, but there are no more animals. My parents could find fowl and pigs easily. Now there are none." Indigenous woman in Keerom

A village called Kampung Ivimia-had in Merauke has an important role in the rites of the Marind people. But when this area was converted into rice fields and housing for migrants, the Marind could no longer access a sacred area because of the new houses erected there.

Women play a key role in taking care of their forest and gardens, however traditionally their rights to these natural resources are not recognized. At the same time, the responsibility to produce food lay on their shoulders. Women in Merauke remarked:

"Women now do all the work in the home as well as outside, going to the forest, harvesting sago, carrying wood from the forest. We all do this ourselves. Before, our husbands tended the land, but our husbands sold it all. There is no more land. Handedover to the government to be given to new comers, to open rice fields. The menfolk now leave to find work, sometimes 3-6 months. Some leave for years... This has created a heavy burden for us women, we work on our own without our husbands."

"Where we used to gather food, is now rice fields owned by other people. Before, we found food near our villages. Now we must walk very far, taking a long time. We leave early in the morning and return late afternoon or at night time. Not like before. We can just go for a short period and we bring something back. We can come home and do other things in one day."

Changes in their diet has also affected women's health. The women in Ivima-had say that they feel sick when they eat the vegetables planted by the transmigrants because they use chemical fertilizers. Despite this, many indigenous women stop planting their gardens and become

¹ PWG members include SKP Merauke Diocese /El-Addper, Merauke; KPKC GKI, Jayapura; ELSHAM Papua, Jayapura; Humi Inane, Wamena; Belantara Papua, Sorong; Asia Justice and Rights. Indonesia has created two administrative provinces for governing this region, namely Papua and West Papua. This submission refers to the two provinces as Papua.

² The full report (in Indonesian) "I am Here: Voices of Papuan Women in the face of Unrelenting Violence" can be downloaded from <http://asia-ajar.org/2017/11/sa-ada-di-sini-participatory-action-research-report/> The video (with English sub-titles) can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HHE5lfuNOA>

dependent on food produced by transmigrants. As women in Merauke have said:

"My legs hurt when I eat vegetables (grown with) fertilizers. When I eat vegetables I grow myself, they don't hurt. But I cannot plant regularly because I have so much work to do."

"In the old days, we ate sago and cassava leaves that we planted ourselves. When I eat vegetables that I buy, I feel sick because they use fertilizers. Now I eat rice because there is not enough sago."

Women in Maibo, Sorong remembered when a logging company called PT Intim Pura took over land owned by the Klaibin and Moi people in 1989. They were forced to move the village of Maibo. The company brought in workers from outside of Papua, increasing the population there. The company left in 2010, after destroying the river that is the source of water for the people.

"The water disappeared, became dirty when trees were felled into the river. Before the river was deep. Now the water is very shallow. We can cross from one side to another."
Indigenous woman in Sorong

Not only did the company pollute the river, it also created a new dependency on new seeds and chemical fertilizers. Before the company was there, the people hunted and gathered food in the forest, while tending to small gardens in their village. When the company took their land, it also opened village gardens using imported seeds and fertilizers. When the company left, the community no longer knew how to garden. The pesticides have also decreased the number of fish.

"We don't eat fish anymore because there is no more abundance of fish, since the company brought pesticides." Indigenous woman in Sorong

After the forest was logged, the land became barren. There was no attempt to reforest the land. The women spoke about the difficulties they face having to walk 3 kilometers to reach their gardens and find food. Women involved in our research in Sorong stated:

"Now we must go far when we plant our gardens. I plant cassava, banana.. when it is the season, I plant long beans to pay for the children's school fees."

"Now because we have to walk far to get sago, if we want to eat papeda we just buy it at the market."

Deforestation has also resulted in the disappearance of the materials to make our traditional bag, *toware*. Many women in Sota, Merauke can no longer make their own *toware*. Instead, they buy it from women from PNG where the materials are still available. Women in Merauke reflected:

"Before the village was opened, there were a lot of forests, rope to make toware are also available abundantly. Now, if we want to get it, we have to walk far away to the forest on the way to Muting... a place to search red fruit and anthill, we must walk far to PNG forest."

"When we get sick here, we use herbal medicines, although we have to search it far away to the distant forest. It is no longer like in the past, only needed to take it from the edges of the village."

Key Finding: Lack of security of tenure for natural resources and traditional lands impede women's empowerment, and make indigenous women vulnerable to continued violence and discrimination. An urgent issue raised by Papuan women in this research was their right and access to natural resources. Consistently, women spoke out about the loss of natural resources in all the locations of our research.

Eighty-five women out of 170 involved in this research experienced loss to their land, gardens, or forest due to reallocation by government policy or as an impact of a violent conflict. The loss of natural resource has a direct impact on their survival.

Key Recommendations:

Our participatory research process affirmed four critical elements that must be present to strengthen the survival and recovery of indigenous Papuan women, including victims of violence, to ensure that they, their family and communities can become agents of change, forging a life free from violence. There must be a genuine effort to strengthen the foundations of life in a sustainable way. This may include programs that look livelihood, ownership of land, gardens, forest and water; adequate housing with access to health care when needed.

Advocate for the Protection of Natural Resources and Indigenous Knowledge

- ⇒ Allocate land and grant land ownership certificates to women who have settled permanently in new districts to enable them to qualify for assistance, build a home, and develop their livelihoods.
- ⇒ Support an initiative around indigenous Papuan's land rights, including a better understanding of land use, a mapping of issues, and how women are impacted by the changes in land use.
- ⇒ Strengthen women's access to and control over their gardens by advocating for women's right to land ownership. Support projects that provide garden plots/land for indigenous women. Promote learning for indigenous women through exchanges and studies with other indigenous groups on the issue of indigenous women's land rights.
- ⇒ Advocate for protection of the rights of Papuans and sustainable use of natural resources.
- ⇒ Promote and support improved knowledge of local plants for food, medicines and other products.
- ⇒ Explore appropriate and alternative energy sources and initiatives; e.g., fuel-efficient cookstoves, solar lighting, and water filters.

Work with Customary Systems and Leaders

- ⇒ Work with customary cultural leaders to review systems and structures so they include women as key stakeholders and decision makers.
- ⇒ Strengthen the resilience and power of women inside traditional (*adat*) structures.

Review Discriminatory Policies and Ensure Legal Protection for Women

- ⇒ Support a review of formal legislation in areas affecting indigenous Papuan women's rights such as access to land, property, and inheritance. Special attention should be paid to women-headed households, widows, and single mothers.
- ⇒ Advocate for the establishment and implementation of local laws that protect the rights of indigenous Papuan women.