

### Climate Change and Women in Agriculture

*In April 2006, around 2,000 members of the Teduray Lambangian tribe marched for seven days in Maguindanao, in what they called "Lakbay Tribu para sa Gubat at Lupaing Ninuno." It was an expression of their desire to defend their forests; a peaceful protest against logging, mining, agribusiness plantations, and other forms of encroachment into their ancestral domains. But more than that, the seven-day march signified their intention to reclaim the land of their ancestors, and pursue a life of security and dignity.*

*Indigenous women took part in the seven-day march, ensuring that food, water and medicines were ready to sustain the marchers. The women are recognized for the important role they play in sustaining the daily needs of their families, undertaking farming activities, fetching water, foraging for food, gathering wood for fuel, and growing herbal medicines.*

*The women of the Teduray Lambangian tribe set the cadence of the march by beating their gongs (traditional musical instruments). They called on their goddesses (especially on Minaden, the highest deity who they believe created the universe) for the protection of their livelihood, herbal plants, and raw weaving materials. And they struck their gongs to uphold "kefiyo fedew" – the state of being peaceful, where justice prevails, where all rights are respected and where emotional, mental and physical problems are resolved.*

*But the provinces of Maguindanao and Cotabato were recently ravaged by typhoon Frank (2008), which brought rampaging floodwaters which were never before experienced by the tribes. Their whole crop was devastated and they were left to rely on food relief for sustenance. This experience has left the indigenous women worried. And they have this sinking feeling that the worst is yet to come.*

The experience above is not limited to the Teduray women but is suffered by millions of women who live in the rural areas and who depend on agriculture. Climatic disruptions seem to worsen each passing year, wreaking havoc on production systems that pretty soon, the stories of bountiful harvests may become myths.

The Philippines is pummeled by an average of 20 typhoons each year. In addition, nature inflicts earthquakes and volcanic eruptions almost every year. And more environmental problems are emerging: droughts, soil degradation, plant diseases and pest/insect infestations, deforestation and landslides, and chemical pollution. All these impact negatively on the country's agriculture and food self-sufficiency.

Invariably, it is the women and their young, who suffer the most from nature's wrath. Most affected are the women in agriculture.

- Women farmers play a central role in feeding the country.
  - Women comprise 25% of those employed in agriculture<sup>1</sup> The majority of these women also form part of unpaid family labor
  - Women non-agricultural operators who were engaged in agricultural activity<sup>2</sup> outnumber the men by 1.1 million<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) 2006

<sup>2</sup> There were around 3.2 million female non-operators engaged in agricultural activity. The Census of Agriculture recorded 5.5 million household members engaged in agricultural activities, 79.7 percent (4.4 million) were working in own holding, 13.9percent were working simultaneously in own holding and in the holding of others, and 6.4percent were employed in other agricultural holdings.

- Centro Saka's survey on women in agriculture<sup>4</sup> shows that:
  - Women dominate the planting and harvesting activities, especially in the production of staple crops (rice and corn);
  - Women also participate in land clearing and harrowing activities, often spending longer periods of time than the men
  - Despite the unpaid character of their labor, they are left in charge of finance-related activities, i.e. the accessing production capital and marketing the farm's produce
  - At the household level, women's reproductive activities span an average of 1 to 3 hours each for the following activities: preparation of food and tools for the farm workers, foraging for food, gathering of wood for fuel, raising livestock and poultry, fetching water and engaging in non-farm income generating activities
  - Despite all these roles, women have lesser control of the land, with only 18% as title holders among land owners<sup>5</sup>
  - While women have high participation in decision making, these are being made under conditions of scarce resources and with little access to services, i.e. only around 33% of women in agriculture have access to farm animals, only 19% have access to seeds, only 13% have access to calamity assistance and pest management, 17% have access to social services, and less than half have access to water and electricity.
  - Few rural women have access to capacity-building services, i.e. only 45% have access to communication, 29% have access to women's organizations, and only 18% have access to training and calamity insurance.

The women in agriculture also have to contend with farming technologies that are heavily dependent on chemical-based inputs to reach optimum yields. The promotion of high-yielding crop varieties has often been justified by increasing food demand; however, the long-term effects may prove to be more disastrous to food security:

- Increasing dependence on seed companies displaces women's traditional roles in seed storage, and engenders disdain for indigenous farming practices and knowledge;
- Reliance on chemical-based farm inputs is harmful to the environment (creates more hazardous and poisonous substances that further contaminate the land, water and air) and to the community (studies show that women have higher health risks to pesticides);

In the context of trade liberalization policies, agricultural production is mainly export-driven and cash-oriented. Agribusiness plantations employs monocropping system of agriculture, which easily depletes soil nutrients and threaten the bio-diversity in our communities.

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<sup>3</sup> There were 2.1 million male non-operators but engaged in the agricultural activity.

<sup>4</sup> The Women in Agriculture Survey covered 1,194 women respondents across six major crops: rice, corn, coconut, sugar, vegetables and onion.

<sup>5</sup> In a separate survey on agrarian reform program validation, the Centro Saka study showed that women comprised only about 3% of the 1200 agrarian reform beneficiaries-respondents.

With social and structural problems that already burden the women in agriculture, adverse climate changes could only worsen their situation:

- With lesser resources available, women tend to allocate more time for their farm-based and home-based activities, spending as much as eight work hours during ordinary days, and eleven hours during harvesting and planting seasons;
- Droughts have adversely affected household food provisioning—it is now becoming more difficult for women to look for food, fuel and water which were previously quite available within the community. In remote areas, women and girls are forced to walk for hours to fetch water. This makes them more vulnerable to accidents and incidences of VAW (violence against women).
- Disasters such as floods and landslides exacerbated women's lack of access to food and control over the quality of food and conditions of its production
- Few rural women have access to mechanisms, such as training and calamity insurance, which could help them become more resilient and responsive to the impact of disasters

But just like the indigenous women of the Teduray-Lambangian tribe, rural women are beating their proverbial gongs to renewed rhythms of hope.

The women themselves are taking initiatives to address areas of vulnerabilities and are developing strategies for effective responses to disasters and to better adapt to adverse climate changes.

- Organizing – capacity building through women's organizations both at the community and national level, e.g. National Rural Women Coalition (Pambansang Koalisyon ng kababaihan sa Kanayunan)
- Engaging local governments in policy dialogues on issues of environment, food self-sufficiency and sustainable agriculture, e.g. pushing programs and local ordinances for Organic Rice Production
- Campaigns for forest and watershed protection, e.g. legislative proposal on the protection of watersheds
- Securing rights to ancestral domains, e.g. Teduray-Lambangian Women's Organization are spearheading activities that would secure their ancestral domain from extractive industries and sustain environment-friendly indigenous farming systems.
- Promoting Sustainable Agriculture (SusAg) practices which help women secure control over the seeds and promote diversified farming among others, e.g. Sarilaya (Kasarian-Kalayaan) is a women's organization that organizes model eco-farms
- Sustainable agriculture promote farming practices that are ecologically sound, economically feasible, socially just and humane, culturally appropriate and grounded on holistic development.

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