

ISSUE 7, FEBRUARY 2022

**OUR WORK, OUR LIVES**

*Women Workers & the Climate Crisis*



**Our Work, Our Lives**  
**Issue 7, February 2022**

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**Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**

# Our Work, Our Lives

Many members and partners of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) work closely with women workers to support and strengthen their organising. The women earn their living from domestic work, sex work, agriculture, weaving, entertainment work, garment sector work, home-based work, and any available daily wage work. Except those who are working away from home, all women also carry out much of the care work in their families. While some workers are affiliated with trade unions, others are part of informal collectives or community groups linked to local NGOs.

Since March 2021, some GAATW members and partners have been part of an online initiative called *Women Workers for Change*. The group has held discussions to understand what women workers who engage in unpaid and paid labour define as 'change' in their lives, how do they want to participate in creating change and what the CSOs can do to improve their accountability towards women workers.

*Our Work, Our Lives*, a monthly E-Magazine, is born out of those discussions. Published on the last day of the month, each issue will take up a simple theme that resonates with the everyday lives of low-wage women workers, their joys, sorrows, struggles and most importantly, their agendas for change.

While this English language E-Magazine will act as a bridge among CSO colleagues (and the few workers who can communicate in English) in different countries, each group will create publications in their own language. Where the workers have no formal literacy, they will use other innovative techniques. GAATW Secretariat will do all it can to democratise digital technology and facilitate knowledge building and sharing from ground up.

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# Issue 7, Women Workers and the Climate Crisis

Dear friends,

The February 2022 issue of **Our Work, Our Lives** focuses on the climate crisis. In preparation for this issue, some self-organised groups of women workers within our alliance and our colleagues working with them held group discussions on the topic of climate change and its impacts on lives and livelihoods. We wanted to know what kind of changes women workers have observed over the years, how it impacts them, and what steps they take to address the challenges.

Interestingly, the topic of climate triggered memories of natural disasters among many groups. Kala aur Katha's group discussion focussed on the super cyclones in Odisha in 1999 and 2019. Malati Behera remembered that fateful day when she lost her husband and 6-year-old daughter to the cyclone. Reminiscing about cyclone Fani that hit the state two decades later, women artisans from the Dom community in Odisha pointed out how even during a cyclone the horrible practice of untouchability was not forgotten.

Jannath Ferdous, a Bangladeshi migrant worker in the garment sector in Jordan, recalled how the frequent floods and cyclones in her village displaced her family and eventually resulted in her overseas labour migration. Jane Nungari Njoroge, a Kenyan migrant domestic worker in Jordan noted that state support often does

not reach to the people in need. The women's group that Shramajivi Mahila Samity works with shared that the weather pattern has changed: "Summers are longer and harsher than before. The time of sowing of paddy has also changed, forests are no longer dense. The variety of forest produce is also slowly going down", they said. Badabon Sangho has highlighted the link between the climate crisis, land rights and violence against women.

The community group in Mabarie village in Sierra Leone where DoWan is working are aware that large scale charcoal burning contributes to environmental degradation. But they are also caught in the vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment and do not know how they can care for the environment without employment creation by the state. Women farmers from the Surabhi Collective in Andhra Pradesh, India shares the steps that they have taken to address the negative impacts of climate change in their lives. Colleagues from OKUP have shared their research in the coastal belt of Bangladesh and from Seruni, Indonesia we have a statement issued during COP26.

The climate crisis is worsening and needs urgent action at every level. As we tried to find out the understanding of these issues and resistance action among low wage women workers and working-class communities, we realised that much work is going on at the local level. Some of these actions may not have been framed as movements for climate justice. But our colleagues have been raising their voices against corporate capture of the commons and for their rights to land, forest and water for a very long time. They have also been working towards sustainable agriculture and environment friendly living practices for years. It is

time for policy makers to do their work. We will try our best to ensure that these community conversations continue, and local actions are supported.

We thank our colleagues who made time to write for this issue. We are thankful to Tanuja Sethi from Kala aur Katha for the beautiful cover design. The cover page is reminiscent of the [Chipko movement in India in 1973](#) when thousands of women mobilized to maintain the ecological balance and hugged the trees to protest their felling.

We hope you enjoy reading the simple stories in this issue. Do write to us with your comments, suggestions, or stories for upcoming issues at [bandana@gaatw.org](mailto:bandana@gaatw.org)

Warmly,

GAATW-IS team



# Women Workers and the Climate Crisis

# Climate Crisis and Violence Against Women

BADABON SANGHO

The southwestern part of Bangladesh, where Badabon Sangho works, is severely affected by the climate crisis. Based on our work in the communities in Rampal and Mongla, we have seen how water and soil quality has reached a level where people cannot grow food nor find drinkable water easily. These areas are very near the Sundarbans – one of the biggest mangrove forests at the belt of the Bay of Bengal. In addition, a few years ago, the government has started to set up a thermal power plant (called Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Limited). Excessive and commercial fishing and tourism impacts negatively on the mangrove forest and people's livelihoods.

Environmental degradation has caused displacement for people. Many men have left to other parts of the country and the number of women-headed households has increased. Domestic violence and community violence against women have increased. So has early marriages for girls. Due to climate change, women are losing their traditional occupations like fishing and cropping. They are being forced to take up whatever job is available.

Violence can be seen as a cause and consequence of displacement. With loss of livelihood and escalation of poverty, people's level of frustration goes up and many women become subjected to harassment by family members and communities. Marriage break-ups are becoming common. As a result, many

women are moving elsewhere to be able to earn and support their children. On the other hand, when husbands are away, women also face violence from their in-laws and community members. Land-related conflicts and not allowing women to have ownership of land are also causes of violence against women. While some women leave abusive relationships, many can't do it due to lack of education and lack of a place to go. Lack of access to property is also a major reason for women to put up with violence.

**Badabon Sangho's Economic Justice Programme:**

Noting the link between gender-based violence and economic justice, Badabon Sangho tries to ensure that women have control over their income and resources. Our members receive some income from their land and water bodies. If any member decides to sell their land, we support them to get the right price for it. Having property and income may not stop violence; fundamental attitudinal changes are needed. But at least if women have some assets in their own name and some source of income that they have control over, they will not put up with violence. Land and assets also give them some decision-making power within the family.

*Written by Lipi Rahman, Badabon Sangho*

# My Experience and Reflections on Climate Change

CHONA NICER CASTROVERDE



My name is Chona and I'm a member of the Domestic Workers Solidarity Network in Jordan.

Back in 1990, when I was only 19 years old, I used to see some of my neighbours who were working abroad. I was impressed by them and wanted to do the same but my father was against my decision. Persuaded by my aunt, my father finally allowed me to work abroad but with the condition that I would stay abroad only for two years. We thought that my earnings would help me complete my studies. But 22 years have passed and I'm still here in Jordan. I decided to stay on

because I was earning more in Jordan and with my hard work, I was able to support the education of my siblings.

My family is from Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao, Philippines. We owned a piece of land which was our main source of livelihood. We relied on rice harvests and we also earned some money by allowing government projects to use our land for quarrying. At that time, we just had enough for our daily needs. Money was needed to pay for the education of my siblings so I offered to work abroad.

During my early years in Jordan, my salary as a cook and caregiver was not that high, so I did other jobs on the side for additional income. For example, I sold cosmetic products from the Philippines, I also cooked and sold our special delicacies for Filipino communities.

We have experienced many natural calamities. Floods are frequent since our land is near a big river. We have also experienced drought. These calamities affect our income. My family tries to adapt by planting crops that would sustain harsh weather such as green gram or corn instead of rice, fruits and/or rubber.



The most recent flood happened in 2020, where our rice field was totally submerged in the flood and all crops were washed away due to the strong currents. A lot of houses in our village were washed away or got submerged

underwater because they are made of light materials and the nearby river had overflowed. Instead of receiving support from the government, I opted to help my community by sending financial support to those in need. Our farm had been severely affected because it is near the river, so we started planting trees and bamboos to lessen the impact of flooding in the future.

I migrated abroad to support my family, but I have observed that more people migrate following a natural calamity. For example, many people in our community who lost their homes during the flooding, have now migrated to Saudi Arabia. Our community is composed of Muslim families, so it is easier for us to apply for work in the Middle East. Many women from our village have migrated to help their families.



When there is warning of a strong typhoon or cyclone, the local government steps in. For example, if heavy rain continues, the local officials start the evacuation of families near the riverside. The government also has a plan to remove a small

bridge near our village because it causes clogging when logs are transported by water. In our province logging and mining operate openly because they are given permits by the government.

Right now, many farms in our community use tractors for harvesting. Some families, like mine, are able to invest in farm equipment, but many people are also losing jobs because of this modernisation in farming.



My family is now financially stable, and my siblings have got jobs that are appropriate for their education. I continue to support my family whenever there is a special need. I am still working here in Jordan out of my choice. I have plans of investing more back in the Philippines. I would like to focus now on myself and my future.

*Translated from Filipino by Alfie Gordo, GAATW-IS*

# Climate Change in Sierra Leone

DOMESTIC WORKERS ADVOCACY NETWORK (DOWAN)

Sierra Leone has an area of 72,325 km<sup>2</sup> between latitude 6°55' and 10°00' North and between longitudes 10°14' and 13°17' west. The coastal zone of Sierra Leone extends for about 465 km. The configuration of the coastline and international boundaries encloses a very compact country. Sierra Leone is bordered in the northeast by the republic of Guinea, in the south and southeast by the Republic of Liberia and in the west by the North Atlantic Ocean.

Sierra Leone has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons. The dry season (December to April) is dominated by winds from the northeast, and the rainy season (May to November). Both seasons may have some variations in the commencement and duration. The temperature is, on average, between 26-28°C from June to October with a maximum of 32°C. Temperatures of up to 36°C have been recorded during the month of March. A minimum temperature of 20°C has also been recorded with high solar radiation and long sunshine hours throughout the year. Air humidity as high as 80-90% is observed during the dry season and decreased to 70-80% during the rest of the year. The Harmattan season usually occurs during the months of December to February. For most of the year, the evaporation is high except during the months of July, August, and September.

## **How Climate Change Impacts the Lives of People in Rural Areas**

DoWan held some discussions on the topic of climate change in Mabarie village. It is a remote community that has 55 houses with a maximum population of 600. 70% percent of the young people are away from the village to look for better

livelihood options. The main occupation of the villagers is farming. They grow cassava, rice and some vegetables like okra, groundnut, peas, tomatoes, peppers, and sweet potatoes.

Charcoal burning is very high in the community. This practice started around ten years ago and it is a source of income for people in the community. Most of the trees around the community have been cut for charcoal burning. Deforestation has led to lots of negative effects such as change in temperature and extreme weather conditions. This change in the climate pattern has affected agriculture by reducing food production.

During the dry season (December to April), many women farmers experience losses due to high temperature of 36°C during the month of March. Vegetable crops like okra, tomatoes, and peppers do not do well, and they end up getting a poor harvest. Cutting and burning trees then becomes their only way to earn some money to feed themselves. Animals do not have enough grazing areas. Over time, heat stress increases vulnerability to disease among people and animals. People destroy nature and nature destroys them.

During **rainy season** (May to November), flooding is frequent. Older people in the community tell us that flooding is more frequent than before. The wet season brings water-borne diseases like dysentery, cholera, and diarrhoea. Because of lack of safe drinking water, people use water from pits to drink and to prepare food. The month of May is critical for farmers. If they plant too soon, there is the risk of a dry period and seedling like groundnuts and rice may die. If they wait for too long, weeds can become established, and newly emerged seedling can be

damaged by heavy rain. During the months of August and September, if there are heavy rains and flooding, it destroys vegetables planted on lowlands. Heavy rains also destroy houses as 90% percent of the houses in the village are mud houses.

The community made some recommendations for themselves to reduce the effects of climate change.

There should be proper sensitisation in both rural and urban communities to minimise the use of cars and motor bikes to reduce release of carbon-monoxide. By-laws should be set in the different communities to stop indiscriminate bush burning.

Deforestation should be restricted, and the people should be encouraged to plant fast-growing trees in their different communities.

It is true that human behaviour causes a lot of environmental damage. But then the government also should create jobs for people and support them to take care of their lives and livelihoods as well as the environment.

*Lucy Turay for DoWan*

# Climate Change and Migration

JANE NUNGARI NJOROGE

My name is Jane. I am Kenyan, currently working in Jordan. I am a member of the Domestic Workers Solidarity Network-Jordan (DWSN).

I do not have personal experience of being affected by climate change, but I know that it impacts everyone, including migrant workers. If we talk about Africa, we know that we are affected by drought and famine. Land remains dry after the rainy season. As a result, many people are forced to leave their own country and look for opportunities elsewhere to support their families. Women migrate out of their villages or communities

to escape famine or scarcity of food and water and to find food or livelihood elsewhere.

In the villages, when there is flooding, people need medical attention because they are affected by various diseases. Some get cholera and others typhoid fever because of dirty water. Their living conditions are not hygienic, so infectious



diseases spread fast. Often the only option left to some people is to leave for another city or country.



Most of the time people rely on themselves and their families because the governments tend not to do anything during a calamity. Sometimes the support from governments does not meet the needs of people. Sadly, many times the development plans of our governments destroy the environment and create climate crisis.

# Why Do Natural Calamities Always Follow Us?

JANNATH FERDAUS

*I am from Bhola district in Bangladesh, which is located at the confluence of the Meghna river and the Bay of Bengal. Floods and cyclones have always been part of our lives. Loss of livelihood led me to migrate internally and then overseas. I am one of the members of the Women Migrant Workers Forum in Jordan. We had a discussion about climate change in our group and I wanted to share some of my experiences.*

Bhola district is close to the Bay of Bengal, and it has the river Meghna on the other side. When I was a child, we were living in a small hut on the bank of the river. Storms, flooding, and riverbank erosion were part of people's lives in our area. The first time our family was affected was when the Meghna river swallowed up our house and all our possessions. Somehow my father managed to build us a new cottage, a bit further away from the river.

After a couple of years or so, our area was hit by a strong cyclone and flooding, which are quite common in our area. But this one was really strong and again we lost everything. We had to live in a shelter for some time. I saw many people dying and losing all they had, including their cattle.

We felt helpless and were wondering, why is this thing happening to us over and over again?

After this disaster, one of our relatives showed us some sympathy and let us stay at his place for some time. They were also poor, and we never had enough to eat. On some days there was nothing to eat. At this point, my father decided to move to the city to look for work.

After a few months, we lost contact with him. Acquaintances in the city could not tell us anything about him. My mother was devastated. Her whole world had collapsed. She decided to move to the city to look for my father. There was nothing to keep her in the village, no hope and no way to survive.

We moved into a slum area and my mother started working in other people's houses. She did all she could to look for my father. After a few months, my father reappeared. When we asked him where he had been and how he had managed to find us, he told us that he had been abducted and held hostage in an area close to the border. When he managed to escape and returned to the village, he was told that we had moved to the city. So, he came to us.

We continued living together in the slum for some time, and my parents had two more children. With so many mouths to feed and living in a very small room in a slum, life in the city soon became unmanageable. So, my father thought of going back to the village. He thought that in the village we had our own house and a small piece of land. So, we could stay there and he would be back in the city to work and earn to support us.

But upon return, we found that our land had been taken by someone else. We did not have the means to fight against the person, so we returned to the city and

settled in a different slum area on the outskirts of Dhaka on the banks of a river. I don't remember the name of the area.

Soon there was a flood in that area, and we again lost everything we had. At this point, my father decided to move us to Mirpur, which is considered a safer area of Dhaka.

Ironically, after a few more years, there was a nationwide flood. I was already grown-up by then and married. I was expecting a child and my husband had left me because my family was unable to give him any dowry.

I remember that terrible night when we were woken up suddenly by water rushing into our slum. We did not even have time to gather any of our belongings. We simply ran for our lives. We found temporary accommodation in the five-story building of our landlord. The flood waters stayed in the city and in people's homes for weeks.

So whenever we tried to get back on our feet we got knocked down by yet another disaster. I have seen many disasters in my life. It has not been easy.

Now I work in Jordan. I'm away from my family, away from my son. I am the only earning member in my family, since my father can't work anymore. I have tried desperately for the last seven years to build a durable house in a safe place where my family will not be affected by disasters.

I used to wonder what sin we had committed to suffer so much, on top of our other hardships.

But Nadia Apu, when you shared about the climate crisis with us, I was really struck by how humans have been contributing to this problem for many years, and I realised that we all have to play a role in improving the situation and saving our world.

Still, I wonder why we poor people are always the first ones to be affected by the crises in the world? But if we don't take responsibility and don't take action now, soon there will be a time when even rich people will not be able to escape the consequences.

*Translated from Bangla by Nadia Afrin*

# Memories of Two Cyclones; the Mahabhatya of 1999 and Fani in 2019

KALA AUR KATHA

When we initiated a discussion on climate change in the communities where we work, the first thing people talked about were natural disasters. The eastern state of Odisha in India is considered a cyclone prone state. People from coastal Odisha have experienced major cyclones in 1967, 1971 and 1999, 2013 and 2019. So, our first discussion was all about memories of cyclones. There was some reference to the slow but steady environmental degradation, rise of temperature, untimely rain, and drying of water bodies. But we will need to talk about it more in future. For this issue of **Our Work, Our Lives**, we would like to share memories of two cyclones which happened in 1999 and in 2019, two decades apart from each other.

## **The Mahabhatya of 1999**

The super cyclone of 1999 is the most intense recorded tropical cyclone in the country and one of the most destructive in the region. Strong wind combined with heavy rains led to widespread damages. Around 1.6 million houses were destroyed. Mud houses vanished, electric poles were damaged, and trees were uprooted. Approximately 10,000 lives were lost in the disaster and innumerable animals were swept away in the floods that followed the cyclone. The people of Kujang and Erasama block of Jagatsingpur district were severely affected.

Bangladeshi refugees who had settled in Erasama block since the 1970s, suffered huge losses during this cyclone.

Many families including women, children, and infants went missing. When the cyclone receded, people looked for the dead bodies of their family members but many could not recognise their relatives because the bodies were swollen and rotting. For days people had no cooked food to eat. They survived on dry food provided by the government and NGOs. A senior doctor recalls that as medical students he and his friends had collected relief materials to distribute in Mahakalapada block of Kendrapada district in 1967 and 1971. People affected by cyclone were in such a desperate condition that they snatched the food from the rescue and relief team and started attacking them. He remembered similar situations in 1999 too. When people came to know that cooked rice was being distributed in Erasama block, they walked miles just to get some rice to eat.

Memories of that devastating cyclone on 29 October are still fresh in Malati Behera's mind. She recalls that she had heard the cyclone warning from the government weather department. But she thought that it would be just a regular cyclone. The government did not make any prior arrangement to evacuate people. There were no shelters. No one took the warning seriously, neither the government nor the people. People had experienced cyclones earlier. They did not think this one was going to be very different. Malati had just told her husband not to go fishing. They knew that there would not be any electricity for some days, so they had kept lanterns, kerosene, match boxes and warm clothes. She and her husband were confident that their house was strong enough to withstand the cyclone. The house had thick mud walls and heavy wooden beams on the walls.

But when wind speed increased steadily, Malati started getting nervous. Her four-year-old daughter was terrified and held on to her. Then before she knew what was happening a strong gush of wind entered the house and snatched away her daughter from her. The little girl was thrown to the other end of the house. The walls started falling and soon her daughter was buried under it. Her husband Tapan rushed to rescue their daughter and a heavy wooden beam fell on his head and crushed it. The roof fell too. Somehow Malati found a little corner and sat there keeping a cooking pot over her head. When the wind speed reduced, a neighbour of theirs who had a concrete house rescued her. Today she sustains herself by selling fish.

Hundreds of weavers in Tirtol and Jagatsingpur block suffered a huge loss during the Mahabatya. Meneka Behera from Maland village said people were warned about the super cyclone. But no one anticipated the speed of cyclone and the disaster it could cause. "I was very young; my son and daughter were very small. The Mahabatya started with a strong wind, then it stopped and everything fell quiet. People thought it was over. It started raining. Then the wind suddenly gathered speed again and blew people, cattle, trees, and houses. My mud house fell down. My loom was broken into pieces. Threads on the loom were completely soiled and disintegrated.

After the cyclone the number of weavers reduced. The government did a survey and made some assessment of the loss. We received some compensation. But it reached us very late. Some of us are still weaving. But the Mahabatya also forced many people to migrate to other parts of the country for work."

After the super cyclone of 1999, several measures towards disaster preparedness have been taken by the state. Several cyclone shelters have been built in coastal areas. Most of the people in the coastal belt have been advised to build concrete houses with the help of State and Central Government.

### **A Dom woman artisan's memory of Cyclone Fani**



*“When Fani came, it blew away all small huts including ours. My house was in pieces. All thirty families from our community lost everything. We had nowhere to go. It was raining, we were shivering and completely drenched. Strong wind was blowing and there was no roof over our head. To save ourselves we went to the nearby shelter run by the Government. We did not know that even during such an emergency people will treat us so badly. We asked them to let us in; we had small children and old family members with us. People in the shelter chased us out. We cried for help*

*but no one listened to us. We had no food to eat. My child was hungry; all the families were hungry and desperate. We were homeless. We had nothing. I had some money tucked in my saree but I was completely wet and I don't know where I lost the money. Rain continued for a long time. Relief food and material reached us after a few days. For days we women slept under the fallen trees because we had nowhere to go. Later some of us received plastic sheets to make temporary sheds to live. What is my fault? To be born as a Dom? Are we not human beings?"*

Most of the bamboo craft artisans in Biripadiya village of Puri district of Odisha belong to the Dom caste. They are considered untouchables by the mainstream society. They are landless and live in small huts made of wood and bamboo. The roof is often thatched with straw or covered with sheets of tarpaulin. Both female and male artisans make traditional bamboo crafts. They also do jobs which are considered lowly by others. Some of them are folk singers and are part of music bands who perform at weddings. Women and children from Dom families carry the festive lights on their heads during the marriage procession. In addition to a small amount of money they get leftover food after the ceremony.

Dom people are excellent bamboo artisans. They sell their products locally either in their own village or in nearby towns. People use their products as household items, but they are frequently discriminated and humiliated by upper caste groups. Their caste becomes a life-threatening obstacle during natural disasters.

*Pankaja Sethi for Kala aur Katha, Odisha, India*

# Climate Change and Migration: Voices from the Community

OVIBASHI KARMI UNNAYAN PROGRAM (OKUP)



Over the last twenty years, 37% of the coastal population lost agricultural land, production and yields; 45% lost fishery productivity; and 41% suffered from a loss in livestock farming.

The coastal belt of Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone areas of the country, frequently experiencing both slow and sudden onset of disasters. The region is inhabited by roughly 9% of the country's total population who are highly vulnerable due to their socio-economic situation and when faced with increasing frequency and intensity of cyclones, storms, floods, and salinity intrusion. They are often forced from their homes which is increasingly linked to changes in

climate patterns. To listen to these people's stories about the impacts of climate change on local livelihoods and migration patterns, Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) recently conducted action research in two disaster-prone districts, Khulna and Bagerhat, in the coastal belt of Bangladesh.

Firstly, we conducted a survey with 480 households from the coastal communities following multiple-stratified sampling. To understand the individual struggles of climate-affected people, we also collected 20 in-depth case studies. The research shows that over the last twenty years (2000-2019), the changing climate has reduced agricultural yields and narrowed the scope for land and water-based economic activities in the coastal areas. Over the years, cyclones Sidr (2007), Nargis (2008), and Aila (2009) critically damaged two thirds of people's homes, crops, and livestock, while also compromising their food security and ability to generate income even for the present day. In fact, 90% of the surveyed households were seriously affected by cyclones while 77% were affected by the problems of soil salinity. Salinity intrusion in soil, water, and sea spray destroys houses by rusting tins or damaging walls. The altered quality of the water has a long-lasting impact on human health. It also impacts erosion rates, and congests drainage systems which often contributes to the prolonged waterlogging and disruptive infrastructure of the coastal communities. The research finds that all these consequences of wellbeing, asset and income losses due to these slow and sudden onset disasters have forced people to constantly adapt their livelihoods. Certainly, internal migration is now one of their coping mechanisms.



## Community strategies for coping in a changing climate

The increase in frequency and intensity of climate-related hazards has led the people from the coastal areas to a generalised state of stress and coping—absorption, adaptation, and transformation.

In most cases, it is like a basic instinct of people to try to **absorb** in the changing situation, the majority seem to prefer working and living in their ancestral communities. Women engage in different kinds of irregular work, like cleaning algae from fish-ponds or collecting dry paddy roots, which are then sold as fuel, or as agricultural laborers. To **adapt** to the situation, they often take loans from local moneylenders or NGOs to rebuild their livelihoods or their houses damaged by extreme events or slow-onset disasters. Life often becomes very expensive after disastrous climate events like cyclones and floods. As the soil and water quality further worsens, farmers' production costs increase, leading them to spend more and more on the expected yield. However, even after taking loans, continuing the same livelihoods sometimes becomes impossible because of the recurrence of climate hazards. Sometimes rebuilt houses are destroyed even before the loans are paid. Prolonged waterlogging and cyclones also render local economic activities. Thus, people from the coastal areas are forced to **change** their traditional occupations. However, the prospects for transitioning from one local job to another and

sustaining is quite difficult for most of the coastal population. And because of the extreme climate events, they just end up looking for livelihood opportunities outside their villages.

Over the years, we have found that the internal and seasonal migration from the coastal communities has become the only or one of the least bad options for coping. Today 82% of the HH have at least one family member who migrates for livelihoods. The peak time for seasonal migration is mainly during the winter or rainy season when the local opportunities stall because of the increased salinity intrusion or waterlogging problems. Strikingly, 85% of them migrate several times a year due to limited local economic opportunities caused by the extreme climate events or slow onset disasters. They migrate to other districts to work in the brick kilns, or in the harvesting or fishing sector. A significant proportion migrate to Dhaka or other urban centres to look for jobs in the garment or construction sectors. However, being involved in informal and 3D jobs, they often increase the risk and vulnerabilities for themselves and their families. For instance, the employment or recruitment process often makes them vulnerable to deceit, fraud, or labour exploitation. Women workers experience the most negative consequences. Due to a lack of childcare, women—particularly those who work in the brick kilns—need to bring their children to work or leave them at home unattended. They are often subjected to sexual harassment, so among the women, there has been a tendency to migrate with their husbands. On the other hand, the women who don't migrate often lack the protection and social acceptance from their communities as temporary heads of household. Access to information on available jobs, support programmes or subsidies is also more difficult for women to obtain when their husband is working elsewhere.

Prolonged absences of husbands often lead to their land being occupied and other resources seized. We have also observed that these husbands often file for divorce or otherwise abandon their families when they are away, leaving women in even more precarious situations.

Without a social safety net, many coastal community members find it difficult to reintegrate in a sustainable way and thus struggle with their livelihoods. Temporary migration, thus, has become the only or one of the least bad options for coping with the greater number of households in the coastal areas of Bangladesh.

## **Recommendations**

1. The government must strengthen skills/vocational training and career counselling on a priority basis for climate change-affected communities to increase their resilience and livelihood adaptation strategies. Also, the government should work on improving skills/vocational training quality, building knowledge, and aligning training with domestic and international market needs to mitigate precarious migration from occurring in the short-or-long term.
2. The government should create employment opportunities for migrants affected by climate change by undertaking advocacy efforts with countries of destinations, including carbon emitting countries for setting up bilateral agreements (MoU/BLA) and in line with the Global Compact on Migration objectives, create legal pathways for people migrating as a result of climate change.

3. The government of Bangladesh needs to develop effective and realistic action plans to reduce climate change-induced vulnerabilities and internal migration. The government should also launch social safety net programmes and support mechanisms directed at climate migrants and disaster-affected people.
  
4. The government should invest in advanced research on habitability, livelihoods, and resettlement and comprehensive risk management approaches. Based on such research, there should be a proper action plan to develop the knowledge and capacities of coastal community members.

*Ruchi Sravasti for OKUP*

# Nature and People of Indonesia: Past and Now

SERIKAT PEREMPUAN INDONESIA (SERUNI)

## Statement of SERUNI at COP 26

Freedom from imperialism is a requirement to liberate people and nature from global warming and climate change.

*Message and demands of the Indonesian People to COP-26 Glasgow, Scotland, 31 October - 12 November 2021*

Indonesia has a strategic geographical location with 6° North Latitude to 11° South Latitude and 95° East Longitude to 145° East Longitude. It is part

of the Southeast Asia region which only has dry and wet seasons. Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world with a total population of 270 million people. The total area of land and water reaches 980 million hectares, of which 190 million hectares are land and 790 million hectares are sea and ocean. It has a unique landscape – a combination of mountainous highlands and peaty lowlands



and swamps. Indonesia is a country with great biodiversity and abundant natural resources. It has a significant role to play in handling and preventing global warming as well as climate change. However, due to colonialism since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the domination of imperialism since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indonesia remains a pre-industrial agrarian country under a Semi Colonial and Semi Feudal system.

Indonesia is an archipelago with 17,508 islands. Five of them are very large islands, namely Kalimantan, Papua, Sumatera, Java, and Sulawesi. Sumatera has an area of 473,606 square kilometres, two times bigger than Great Britain or 74% of France. Kalimantan island has an area of 539,460 square kilometres, larger than Spain. Sulawesi and Java-Madura are as big as Germany. Some small islands of Indonesia, such as Bali and Lombok, have become great tourist attractions. Indonesia shares Kalimantan with Malaysia in the north, Papua with Papua New Guinea in the east, and mainland of Timor Island with Timor Leste in the south. Indonesia also shares sea and ocean boundaries with Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and People's Republic of China.

In the colonial era, all the large islands of Indonesia were dense tropical forests with rich ecosystems like the Amazon. In just half a century, since Suharto's New Order was implemented, most of the tropical forests have been destroyed. There are just a few in Kalimantan, Sumatera, Papua, and Sulawesi. The size is decreasing every year. In ten years, Indonesia lost approximately 800,000 hectares of forest when the expansion of palm oil plantations, wood plantations for pulp and paper, and rubber plantations owned by big landlords reached its

peak. It was supported by large inflows of capital and international financial institutions.

Fire due to the dry swamps and peatlands, again, because of palms, accelerates the destruction of tropical forests. In Java, the loss of forests was started by the Dutch Colonial Government to cut teak trees for the development of Batavia City. Teak wood was exported, and the development of tea and coffee plantation began. With the help of German experts, the Dutch Colonial Government developed massive pine and teak plantations in Java in the concession area of PERHUTANI (forestry state-owned enterprises) which continues until now. Today, the so-called forest in Java is a big wood plantation owned by PERHUTANI in an area of 2.4 million hectares.

Millions of poor landless peasants are living around the concession of PERHUTANI. This area is the largest source of migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. The government uses different ways to hold the lands from landless peasants and peasants who have very limited land. They are also convincing people and the international community that these plantations are forests and are necessary to address CLIMATE CHANGE. In fact, the plantations have destroyed rivers with whole fish, animals, and water plants. President Suharto financed his power by logging natural big timber, selling crude oil and coal for export. This tradition has continued under his successors. Amazingly, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was still able to promise a 29% emission reduction and President Joko Widodo is confident that Indonesia will be able to replace petroleum with 30% biofuel.



Beautiful Indonesia is now affected by temperature change, flood and soil erosion, air and water pollution, and drought. Moreover, while one of the reasons to move the capital city from Jakarta is to overcome the rise in sea level, the government also gives permission to property companies to build luxury housing. People have always been negatively impacted by the destruction of tropical forests in Indonesia. The unique nature of the lowlands of Sumatera and Kalimantan has turned into the most dangerous and deadly disaster threat. Swamps and deep peats in low-lying areas are the largest carbon storage holding up to 20 times more carbon than that of ordinary soil. Fifty percent of Riau Province is peatland. The land has been dried to be given to landlords to be turned into palm plantations. The dried peats release large amounts of carbon. It also changes the

natural temperature around and of the earth as a whole. This land is very flammable.

Farmers with their traditional agricultural practices are always blamed for the fire in swamps and peat lands. The Indonesian government indiscriminately has often prohibited traditional farmers from cultivating in thin peat soil with planned small fires to grow food crops such as rice and corn. In their frustration, the peasants were influenced by big landlords to plant oil palm and rubber on the small pieces of land. When swamps and peatlands dry up, freshwater fish are threatened. For many years freshwater fish had provided food and income to peasants and fisherfolks in Kalimantan and Sumatera. Endemic fish like Sumateran Toman, Baung, Patin, Sema, and Belida are rarely found now. The disaster in Papua was started by Freeport McMoran, a large US mining corporation as the pioneer. In the name of food sovereignty, Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estates (MIFEE) were established. By the time the Papuans realised what was happening the palm plants of the landlords had grown huge.

Soon Sumatera and Kalimantan will become like Africa. There will be only deserts and palms. In the past, by using water transportation along the river, we could enjoy the tropical forests with their large natural woods. Monkeys, many species of birds, orangutans, and even elephants and tigers could be seen occasionally. Today, when you are walking down the rivers, you can only see the monoculture plants of palms, rubber, and acacia. Occasionally, a cobra passes through to chase a mouse. Biodiversity is history. Oil palm plantation has reached 11 million hectares and the Indonesian government is addicted to foreign exchange earned through palm oil. Amid this crisis, the government is still talking about biofuels to

impress the world with renewable energy. It still needs to reserve 17 million hectares for biofuel by 2025! Amazingly, the EU delegation believes that. Capital flows fast and the international market is flooded with palms of Indonesia.



Are palm farmers prosperous? Farmers with two or even five hectares of land only suffer from palm thorn prick in their legs with the world CPO price and the price of Fresh Fruit Bunches (*Tandan Buah Segar/TBS*). Meanwhile, landlords who have thousands or hundreds of thousands of hectares of land still enjoy the surplus products from peasant-laborers though the price of CPO just one hundred rupiahs. The landlords and the Indonesian government are happy that the US,

Europe, China, Russia, and other countries are willing to buy Indonesian CPO and do not question the destruction of forests land, drains, peats, swamps and even the big rivers in Indonesia!

In the past, Indonesia was a tropical country with two seasons – dry and rainy seasons, alternating every six months. June to September was the dry season while it rained during December to March. Certain areas of this tropical country were showered by rain all year round. This weather condition prevailed all over

Indonesia, except central Maluku. There, the rainy season occurred from June to September and the dry season was from December to March. Then the transition period was from April to May, and October to November. Temperature and humidity in low-lying coastal areas was average 28 degrees Celsius, while in inland and mountainous areas the average was 26 degrees Celsius. In some mountainous regions and highlands, the temperature reached 23 degrees Celsius. As a tropical country, Indonesia had average air humidity around 70% to 90%, with a minimum point of 73% and the maximum was 87%.

Today, Indonesia has only one season and it is very diverse in each island and area. In one island, the dry season can occur continuously with no stop, causing flood and erosion that destroy whole plants, wash away houses and people. At the same time, the other islands may suffer from dry season, cracked grounds, and tank cars selling water in the villages. When floods occur in Padang and West Sumatera, the peasants in Java are fighting for watering their fields. What is the solution? The government of Joko Widodo through the aid of World Bank, ADB, and IMF develops roads passing through peat lands, cuts forests to build island crossing and builds giant dams and power plants and Food Estates.

Paddy fields are primary wetland to produce paddy, especially in Java, Sulawesi, Bali, and West Nusa Tenggara. Due to the green revolution, paddy fields have become toxic chemical waste dumps of Monsanto, Dupont, Bayer, and Syngenta. The use of pesticide and insecticide does not allow the soil to produce micro-organisms naturally. Bad irrigation, prolonged wet and dryness as well as deterioration of soil quality makes the lives of farmers miserable. Even superior rice is yellowing. The harvest drastically decreases. Initially, the use of fertiliser,

herbicide and pesticide was limited to oil palm plants and other commodities like coffee, tea, and cocoa. Within a short time, its use spread to rice and other crops.

Indonesia is beautiful and special with many rivers that flow from mountains to the sea. Farmers could irrigate their fields easily and traditionally. Dinghies and boats sailed on the rivers to meet oceans. Since the introduction of rubber commodity, rivers became places to soak the rubber. Rivers which were cradles of civilisation were turned into garbage dump with faeces, and the water now is always muddy. The natural condition of Indonesia not only gives profit and benefit to people generally but also brings disasters and distress. Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis can come at any time because of the geographical position of the country. Today, natural disasters are more frequent because of the practices of companies.

Destruction of forests for the construction of large monopoly plantations has destroyed colonies of wild animals such as elephants and tigers in Sumatra, so that these animals enter people's fields and villages and threaten the safety of life. Because the imperialists know that they will continue to destroy nature, they hypocritically create national parks and various conservation areas just to remind themselves that forests and animals once existed and lived in the world.

The peasants are the genuine nature keepers. They cultivate and use the natural wealth not only to preserve but also advance nature.

*This is a shorter version of a very rich and comprehensive statement issued by  
Seruni, Indonesia during COP26.*



# Impact of Climate Change: Our First Conversation

SHRAMAJIVI MAHILA SAMITY

Ruby Mahto and Sanjay Pradhan from Shramajivi Mahila Samity called a meeting of the women's group in Baljuri in Jharkhand, India to discuss climate change and its impacts on their lives. Pushpa, an active member of the group, said that this was a new topic for them and they may not have anything to share. Will we be able to say anything on this? After some persuasion from Ruby, the group agreed to meet in the afternoon on 12 February, 2022.

The group met with Ruby and Sanjay in the afternoon.

Reena, Vindeshwari, Manjura, Yamuna, Pushpa, Sukurmuni, Jyotsna, Saraswati, and Tupi – all members of the group sat in a circle. While Ruby facilitated the discussion, Sanjay took notes and photos.



Ruby started by asking the women about the changes they have noticed over the years in the weather pattern and how it is affecting their lives and livelihoods.



Sisters in the age group of 45-50 started sharing their experiences of the past. Vindeshwari said that nowadays it is not easy to see any difference among seasons. It rains when it shouldn't. Summers are longer and harsher than before. The time of sowing of paddy has also changed, forests are no longer dense. The variety of forest produce is also slowly going down. Taking the discussion further, Sahchari said that 20 to 25 years ago, her family used to get three months' worth of family expenses from forest produce, but now they get very little. As a result, people are leaving the villages and migrating to cities for work. Saraswati said that due to changes in weather patterns, our bodies have become weaker than before and we are getting more skin diseases. She said that earlier people used to treat skin infections with *neem* leaves, turmeric, and herbs from the forest but now people depend on expensive medicines. Cancer is so common these days. It must be because of the food that we are eating. Wounds in the uterus and gallstones, which are a precursor to cancer, are often found in middle-aged



women. We are very concerned about it. How will our next generation be able to cope with all these?



Yamuna and Pushpa said that their friend Kavita's entire family was in distress due to drought and all the family members had migrated in search of employment. Everyone said that we women and the elderly are facing more difficulties due to climate change. But how can we solve this problem alone? We have to think about it more and have more discussions about it.

*Ruby Mahto, Sanjay Pradhan and Purabi Paul for Shramajivi Mahila Samity,  
the state of Jharkhand, India*

# Impact of Climate Change and our Response

SURABHI WOMEN'S GROUP



We work on the land; land is our deity. We call her *Nelathalli*, the mother earth. We worship her. She is our provider and nurtures all of us through life and death. She gives birth to all kinds of organisms and species on her lap. But sadly, many people among us do not care for her. Many human beings are violent to her. We poison her with chemical fertilisers and pesticides. We think that we will produce more and save our crops from pests by using chemicals. We don't realise that we are also poisoning ourselves and destroying the future of our children.

Chemical inputs such as fertilisers, nourishers, and pesticides are produced by large industries. They are very expensive. But companies employ sales agents

who come to our doorstep and convince us that without those, we will not be able to get good production. They have spread their nets wide and we are trapped.

We feel sorry about the loss of friendly organisms such as the earth worms. Our water bodies, canals, ponds, and lakes have been contaminated because of the chemicals we use. We have forgotten the traditional methods of protecting our plants from pests and insecticides. The Surabhi women farmers groups are now struggling to retrace our old ways of natural farming. We do not see any alternative. We have adopted sustainable ways of life to reverse the climate crisis as well as save ourselves from the debt trap. After much collective effort, we have been successful in converting 30-40% of our members to switch over to agro-



ecological practices. Women who have access to bio manure have been able to do that more easily.

We are in the drought prone Rayalaseema district in Andhra Pradesh. To irrigate our lands many of us drill bore wells. Each year the ground water level goes down. In summer we have no water, and the temperatures soar high. Our cows have no grass to eat. All the common grazing areas are in the hands of rich and influential people. Some of us find it very difficult even to feed ourselves. Sometimes we are forced to give away our domestic animals. We are now pleading with our government to reverse all the man-made disasters.

Surabhi women support all work that is done under the NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) that helps in conservation and contributes to climate justice.

But we also know that many government schemes to help in agriculture operations do not reach women farmers, as many women belong to scheduled caste communities and live far away from the mainland. Without the help of CSO volunteers or staff no information and schemes will ever reach working class and lower caste women.



Some of steps that Women's Initiatives has taken to address the impacts of climate change include:

- Rain Harvesting Structures
- Farm ponds to rejuvenate water springs
- Use of sprinklers and drip irrigation
- Planting of trees, especially when it is felled for road widening
- Intercropping in mango gardens
- Promoting millets - crop diversity in place of monocrops/cash crops.

These steps have proven beneficial for us who have been through the trainings and exposure visits to sustainable agriculture farms with the help of WINS. This has helped us to have food and nutrition security especially during hard times.



We the Surabhi women have also taken up bio-diversity campaigns that encourage school children, youth, and others in the community to avoid single-use plastic. We encourage everyone to set an example by carrying cloth bags, jute bags instead of using single-use plastic bags. We feel very happy when young people tell us that our campaign has changed their behaviour. Plastic is thrown all over the place. Not just in our houses and roads but also in the field and water bodies. Animals and fish eat it and are affected by it. Plastic blocks waterways. We hope our campaigns bring some change.

Surabhi women have noticed that construction of roads and houses are not properly planned. Long stretches of concrete roads are built where it is not really needed while we do not have them where we need. Covering up a lot of ground with concrete blocks rainwater from being absorbed and we experience water logging and flash floods. This has become a regular challenge during rainy season. Women spend a lot of time clearing the water logging inside their houses. Many women fall sick from continuous work.

Another interesting thing noted by the Surabhi women is that these days many girls have thin and dull hair. Older women felt that in their youth they used castor oil and natural products to wash their hair. So they had thick and silky hair and their skin had a healthy glow. Older women in the group feel that with all the chemical shampoos and soaps young women are losing their natural beauty.

Overall, members of Surabhi feel that we have been able to take some action to address the negative impacts of climate change. We think that the government and the people need to do much more. We will continue our work.

*Translated by Meera Raghavendra from WINS*





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