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TUNIS, Tunisia-- Asia Pacific Research Network co-organized several fora and workshops with members and partner organizations at the World Social Forum in Tunis on March 24-28. The themes of these activities are in line with the research thrust that APRN members identified during the General Council meeting last year (Militarization and Wars, Post-2015 Agenda, Asia Integration, Corporatization/Corporate accountability and Trade and Development). The network is also co-organizer of the workshops Unpacking the SDGs and Accountability to Peoples. However, due to unforeseen challenges, the events were regrettably cancelled.

**Forum on Militarism and Democracy**


The forum on Militarism and Democracy tackled the rising militarism and how it impacts democracy and human rights in the African Continent, West Asia and North Africa, and Asia Pacific.

Ms. Corinna Mullin from the University of Tunis explored how the US War on Terror has been used to beef up the US security forces around the world and why the endless war is actually profitable for the military industrial complex. Mr. Anmal Djeffal of the Arab NGO Network for Development identified the dimensions of terrorism and its links to militarization in the Arab Region. Ms. Maisan Hamdan of Al Marsad shared on how the ethnic Druze in Palestine are forced to be drafted in the military to serve the Israeli occupation forces. Ms. Hamdan is currently leading a campaign called Refuse — Your People Will Protect You which aims to provide legal and financial support to Druze youths objecting army service so that they have alternatives to the state and private benefits bestowed by Israel upon being drafted to the military. Mr. Demba Moussa Dembele of the Africa Forum for Alternatives, a member of the International League of People’s Struggles, criticized the US efforts to militarize Africa through its project known as Africa Command (AFRICOM). Under the pretext of fighting against “terrorism” and how NATO forces are also using terrorism in the Sahel Region as pretext to intervene in Mali, Niger, and the Central African Republic. Ms. Marjorie Pamintuan of Asia Pacific Research Network expounded on the various aspects of the US Pivot to Asia Pacific and the resulting militarism in the region.

During the open forum, it was pointed out that the word ‘terrorism’ should be used with care and the real terrorists, who use state force and military power to impose their will should be properly identified. It was also raised in the open forum that even though the struggle against militarism is a long journey, people’s resistances are alive and thriving in every region and different organizations are jointly providing fora wherein struggles against militarism and other issues violating the rights of the people are discussed and strengthened. An example is the International Festival of People’s Rights and Struggles (IFPRS), which is an organized space that aims to draw lessons from and celebrate the victories of people’s struggles to claim and assert their rights. The IFPRS, which was first held in 2011, will once again be held on November 2015 in Manila, Philippines parallel to the APEC meeting that will also happen in Manila.

**Is capitalism compatible with the fight against climate change? Case studies of Philippines and Cuba**

*Co-organized with Médecine pour le Tiers Monde, IBON International*

In this forum, speakers exposed why capitalism is not at all compatible with the fight against climate change. Ms. Alexandra Fouarge of Médecine pour le Tiers Monde shared on how capitalism as the dominant economic system continues its destructive mode of production and consumption which makes climate change worse and threatens the lives of communities especially in the global south. To show concrete examples of how capitalism destroys the people and planet, Ms. Marjorie Pamintuan of
APRN presented the case of how mining in the Philippines worsens climate change and impacts communities. Ms. Liza Lebrun of COMAC shared on her experience in Cuba wherein the government implements various policies not only to mitigate the island-nation’s carbon emissions but also prioritizes policies that help people adapt to the changing climate. According to data she presented, Cuba is among the countries with the highest standard of living and yet among with the lowest carbon footprint in the world. Mr. Paul Quintos of IBON International expounded on the multiple crises of global capitalism and the fight for system change. According to Mr. Quintos, climate change cannot be resolved without fundamentally changing the system. In working towards system change, there is a need to organize and mobilize frontline communities, grassroots organizations and climate activists for a Global People’s Surge. The Global People’s Surge (GPS) as a campaign platform will put forward the perspectives, initiatives, and the struggle for climate justice and social change of grassroots movements, especially of those who are in the frontlines of climate change. It will engage in fighting for climate justice in all arenas and levels (not just engaging the COPs), expose and oppose corporate capture of the climate and false solutions, and articulate a Peoples Protocol on Climate Change.

Trade Agreements, post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, & the December 2015 WTO Ministerial in Kenya

Co-organized with Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) global network, Public Services International (PSI), LDC Watch, Kenya Small Scale Farmers Forum (KESSFF) and Third World Network Africa

This workshop explored how the global trade system under the WTO and other FTAs impact communities and affect the accomplishment of seemingly laudable SDGs. Speakers from Africa—Mr. Sylvester Bagooro of TWN-Africa and Mr. Justus Lavi of Kenya Small Scale Farmers Forum—shared on how the WTO and other trade deals impoverish local farmers and destroys the local agricultural industry. Mr. Biraj Patnaik of the Right to Food Movement talked about the need for changes in the trading system which currently wrecks havoc on the food security of developing countries, LDCs, and even emerging economies like India. Ms. Marjorie Pamintuan of APRN exposed how the TPPA as an example of a 21st century trade deal will worsen the impacts of the WTO and will prevent countries to achieve sustainable development. Mr. Arjun Karki from LDC Watch echoed the same sentiments on how trade is very important for LDCs in achieving the SDGs and yet, they are often at the losing end of trade deals. Calls for people’s mobilization against FTAs and the WTO were repeatedly made throughout the workshop. People’s movements and NGOs both in and out of Africa are already strategizing their inside and outside engagements for the upcoming WTO Ministerial in Nairobi on December 2015. (Marjorie Pamintuan, Tunisia)

Sendai Framework approved at Third WCDRR

IBON International | www.iboninternational.org

SENDAI, Japan — The Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction recently presented a 20-page President’s Proposal adopting the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The document sets down seven global targets that are expected to help achieve the outcome and goal of the framework.

These targets are: 1) substantial reduction in global disaster mortality; 2) substantial reduction in the number of affected people; 3) reduction in direct disaster economic loss in relation to GDP; 4) substantial reduction in disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services like health and education facilities; 5) substantial increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies; 6) enhanced international cooperation to developing countries and 7) increase in the availability of and access to multi hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments.

From March 14 to 18, about 7,000 delegates - from governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies, financing institutions, UN attached agencies, international non-government organizations, and major groups representing different social sectors - converged on the city closest to the epicenter of the destructive March 2011 earthquake to discuss different aspects surrounding disaster risk reduction. The delegates expressed high hopes to come out with “a concise, forward-looking and action oriented document” with objectives set to move forward what the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) has achieved. The HFA was...
US Certification process could rewrite Australian laws even after Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is signed and legislated.

“New evidence has emerged that the US blackmailed Australia into agreeing to additional changes to Australian copyright law after the Australia-US free trade agreement implementation legislation was passed in 2004. The US refused to finally ratify the agreement without additional changes which gave even more rights to copyright holders at the expense of consumers. The same process is likely to occur if the TPP is signed this year,” Dr Patricia Ranald, AFTINET Coordinator, said today.

“The TPP negotiations have missed many deadlines and dragged into 2015, partly because of community pressure on governments to resist US proposals which would require changes to domestic law in areas like affordable access to medicines, regulation of copyright and internet freedom, and regulation of local content in film and television,” said Dr Ranald.

“The United States also claims the right to veto and force changes to other countries’ TPP implementation legislation before it will allow the agreement to come into force. It did this with the Australia-US FTA, and with its agreements with Peru and South Korea. This is known as the Certification process,” said Dr Ranald.

“The briefing paper on the 2004 copyright law changes shows that the US government demanded the changes in November 2004 when the two governments were about to exchange formal letters for the ratification of the agreement, and made it clear that the agreement would not be ratified without the changes. It records that the Australian Howard government agreed to push new legislation through.”

“The Parliamentary Library’s Bills Digests noted that changes effectively created additional obligations for Australia. The Senate legal and Constitutional legislation committee was given 24 hours to consider, hear submissions and report on the new bill,” explained Dr Ranald.
Economy not going strong as government claims-- research group

IBON Foundation | www.ibon.org

MANILA, Philippines— Research group IBON debunked Malacanang’s claim that the economy is going strong amid calls for Pres. Aquino’s ouster. On the contrary, the slowing growth in 2014 debunks the much-hyped economic miracle and weakens the administration even on the economic front.

According to IBON, the country’s decelerating growth highlights how the recent episode of relatively rapid growth is artificial and unsustainable. Economic growth, which slowed to 5.8% after just two years, will likely register a much lower full-year figure than in 2013. The growth slowdown from its peak in 2013 will most likely continue in 2015 because the drivers of growth, like in the past, are short term and will likely be offset by the effects of the economy’s unsound fundamentals.

Malacanang has hyped supposed economic achievements to dismiss growing calls for Pres. Aquino to step down because of the Mamasapano fiasco and the controversy surrounding the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP).

The research group added that aside from growth, other economic indicators are also not moving as favorably. Since 2010, savings rates have fallen from 32.7% of gross national income or GNI to an average of 30.2% in 2011-2013. Capital formation has also fallen from 17.3% of GNI to an average of 17% in 2011-2013.

Revenue effort and tax effort have been slowly rising since 2010 but they are still below recent peaks under the Arroyo administration. The revenue effort of 14.9% of GDP in 2013 is lower than the 16.5% achieved in 2007, while the tax effort of 13.3% in 2013 is lower than the 13.6% in 2008. Growth in per capita GDP also slowed last year despite slower population growth.

Aside from these indicators, the more relevant measurements of development are also not improving as the jobs crisis continues and poverty persists. According to IBON, the slowing economic growth, severe inequality and deepening corruption are intensifying social unrest. Creating the illusion of a healthy economy despite difficult social realities will not prevent the people’s growing opposition, the research group said. ###

Aid watchdog calls for Australian support for PNG anti-corruption measures

AidWatch Australia | www.aidwatch.org.au

Australia spends $577 million a year on aid to Papua New Guinea (PNG). Two key focus areas are anti-corruption related – law & justice, and governance. PNG has concurrently undertaken a number of national processes to combat corruption without Australian support. Five years ago today, the Finance Development Commission of Inquiry (CoI) in PNG uncovered widespread fraud involving senior bureaucrats and law firms from the period 2000 – 2006, with 780 million kina of public finances stolen. To this day, no action has been taken to implement the recommendations of this report.

Since that time, there has also been a National CoI into Special Agricultural and Business Leases (SABLs), the lease mechanism that provided the pathway for large scale land grabs to occur in PNG. This has resulted in a loss of around 12% of the total land mass. The report found that of the 77 leases investigated, only 3 were found to have been legally obtained. The report also cited Australian companies including Queensland-based Independent Timbers and Stevedoring who fraudulently acquired a total lease area of 2 million hectares of traditional land. It was recommended that they be investigated for criminal misconduct and conspiracy.

One of the most significant anti-corruption processes to have taken place is the Task Force Sweep, established in 2011, to investigate allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the Department of National Planning and Monitoring, later extended to a number of other departments and individuals. Sam Koim, who headed the investigation, travelled to Australia in order to seek assistance and was publically rebuffed with Australia citing PNG corruption as a domestic matter. Mr Koim has since been sacked following the issue of an arrest warrant for PNG Prime Minister Peter O’Neill over an allegation that he authorised an illegal payment of $23 million to the Paraka law firm.

AID/WATCH Director Ms Thulsi Narayanasamy says, “Australia’s commitment to assisting PNG to end corruption appears to be purely rhetorical. Their reluctance to provide support for PNG’s internal anti-corruption measures coupled with their facilitation of corruption makes it evident that Australia is pursuing national commercial interests at the expense of assisting concrete anti-corruption measures.”

“It’s political theatre. Australia’s primary requirement from PNG is maintaining the Manus Island detention facility and their cooperation with resettlement of refugees. This has left Australia to posture about ending corruption with aid money though none of it supports the processes that really matter.”

“The enormous amount of aid money given to PNG for governance must be redirected into ensuring that the recommendations of the CoI in SABLs and CoI into the Department of Finance are implemented. This is what will have a real impact in PNG.”

AidWatch Australia | www.aidwatch.org.au

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Ms Narayanasamy continued, “In addition to Australia’s reluctance to assist with national anti-corruption measures is a concurrent facilitation of corruption. Nothing has been said or done about the activities of Australian timber companies who have engaged in illegal land grabs or the flow of money from corrupt individuals in PNG to Australia. An individual named in the Finance Department’s CoI report as having acted fraudulently has since been invited to study in an Australian University.”

Ms Narayanasamy concluded by saying that, “Australia presents the relationship with PNG as one of an equal partnership when the reality is that the cornerstone of the relationship is unequal power. So long as Australia can dump refugees on Manus Island, engage in an unfair free trade agreement, and facilitate its companies to have access in PNG – corruption is not a threat to Australia’s national interest, in fact, it appears to benefit from it.”

Reference: Thulsi Narayanasamy, Director, AID/WATCH Telephone number: 0405 801 943 E-mail address: thuls@aidwatch.org.au

Monsanto’s flagship pesticide linked to cancer and antibiotic resistance: PAN International calls for strong global response

The International Agency for Research and Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization (WHO) recently designated glyphosate as “probably carcinogenic to humans.”

The IARC concluded that there is sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals. The decision was made after 17 scientists met on March 20 to assess the carcinogenicity of the herbicide glyphosate and four organophosphate pesticides.

“Monsanto’s weed-killer glyphosate is wreaking havoc with the health of children and rural communities in Argentina,” said Javier Souza, chair of Pesticide Action Network International. “Thousands of people suffer from glyphosate-related illnesses, and the cancer rates are two to four times higher than the national average.”

Souza is from Argentina, which plants an estimated 24 million hectares of crops - mostly soybeans - that are genetically engineered (GE) to resist glyphosate. In 2014, 79 million gallons of glyphosate were applied on soybeans and other crops in Argentina. Brazil plants even more than Argentina, with 40 million hectares of GE crops, again mostly soybeans. Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia also grow millions of hectares of GE soy resistant to glyphosate.

Monsanto is the creator of both its brand-name herbicide RoundUp, containing the active ingredient glyphosate, and of GE soybean, corn, and cotton engineered to withstand applications of glyphosate. Glyphosate has become the most heavily used herbicide in the world, bringing billions of dollars in profits to the giant biotech corporation. In the United States, about 94% of the soybeans, 89% of the corn and 91% of the cotton planted are GE resistant to glyphosate.

“Glyphosate and other herbicides have also been linked to antibiotic resistance,” said Judy Hatcher, vice-chair of PAN International. “The combination of carcinogenicity and antibiotic resistance linked to Monsanto’s flagship pesticide are two loud wake-up calls for the global community. As a matter of highest priority, policymakers should keep the next wave of genetically engineered seeds - containing glyphosate and other old, hazardous chemicals - off the market,” she added.

Researchers in New Zealand found that formulations of herbicides containing glyphosate, 2,4-D, and dicamba can lead to development of antibiotic resistance in disease-causing bacteria, such as E. coli and Salmonella.

“In Asia glyphosate is widely used and the link with carcinogenicity and antibiotic resistance is a matter of urgent concern for farmers and agricultural workers who are exposed,” said Sarojeni Rengam from PAN Asia Pacific.

“Experience in Africa and other parts of the world show that toxic agrochemicals affect the poorest of the poor, and this situation cannot go on as usual,” said Abou Thiam from PAN Africa.

“Hazardous pesticides are part of an obsolete technology and don’t belong in agriculture,” added Keith Tyrell from PAN UK. And Carina Weber from PAN Germany remarked: “This is an opportunity for policymakers to exercise their political will, and move the world forward towards sustainable, healthy agriculture, free from toxins.”

As a result of the new research, PAN International calls on governments and policymakers to take urgent measures to curtail and stop the use of herbicide formulations containing glyphosate applied to genetically engineered seeds and crops. The network also urges governments to develop action plans within the next 60 days to layout how they will address the concerns highlighted in recent studies.

Furthermore, PAN International urges governments to stop the release and marketing of highly hazardous pesticides, and establish policies to promote safer agricultural practices that protect workers, consumers and the environment, and provides a dignified living to farmers. ###

Reference for Asia Pacific Sarojeni Rengam, Executive Director, PAN-Asia Pacific
Farmers’ or corporate sovereignty

Dr. Azra Talat Sayeed | Director, Roots for Equity [Pakistan] and Former Vice-Chair, APRN Board of Conveners

Given the new developments that have recently come to light with regards to genetically modified seed, the Senate has much to think about as it debates the Amended Pakistan Seed Act 2014.

The Act was passed by the National Assembly last month, just four days before the new findings by the World Bank’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) stated that glyphosate — a chemical in herbicides that are widely used on genetically modified (GM) crops — is ‘probably carcinogenic to humans’.

Glyphosate is used in Monsanto’s branded herbicide Roundup Ready, which can be sprayed on crops that have been genetically engineered to tolerate glyphosate.

For the Senate, this news is of critical importance in deciding the fate of the Amended Seed Act 2014. For over two decades, farmer and consumer organisations, as well as many scientists, have been asking governments across the globe to be cautious and adopt new technology only when it has been proven safe.

But gigantic corporations like Monsanto have tended to block moves by governments to follow a more sustainable agriculture policy, especially those that were designed to guard the economic interests of small farmers as opposed to those of corporations.

However, to some extent, genetically engineered crops and seeds and other GM products have been facing mounting pressure from many sides. In January, the European Union authorised individual member-states to decide if they would cultivate GM crops or not. This is owing to the persistent position taken by countries like Germany and France, which consider genetically engineered (GE) foods and crops harmful to human health and the environment.

If such technologically advanced countries are opposing GM crops, it is important for the Pakistani Senate to carefully analyse the issues in such technologies that could harm their own people. The National Biosafety Committee is no more functional and hence there is no legal mechanism for approving new GE seeds in the country. The issue, after the 18th amendment, is now a provincial subject, but the provinces have also not taken any steps in this area.

Asif Shuja, former director general of the Pakistan Environment Protection Agency (Pak-EPA), was recently quoted as saying that the country does not have the expertise to conduct safe trials of GM crops.

Furthermore, the current Pak-EPA Director General, Dr Mohammad Khurshid, has termed GM crops ‘weapons of mass destruction’. A recent statement by the Foreign Office said GM seeds are a matter of national security and trade.

No doubt, this is in context to the Trips Agreement in the World Trade Organisation, which was forced on third world countries to guard the profit-driven interests of industrialised countries.

Many Pakistani NGOs and farmer bodies have taken a principled stand against GE seeds. Recently, many of them sent a letter to the Senate’s chairman, asking him to reject the proposed Seed Act 2014 and enact a bill in its place that protects the seed related sovereign interests of small farmers. The stand is not only based on environmental and health issues — which are the basic concern of European people and Pakistani government officials — but also in the collective right of farmers over their use of seed.

Given the cultural heritage of our country and our farmers, why is the government promoting the interest of profit-driven seed corporations. New technologies are only welcome if they are in the interest of the people and farmers, and if they increase self-reliance, national and people’s sovereignty, and sustainable development.

It is hoped that the Senate will keep these aspirations as their guiding principles when its members sit down to discuss the potential benefit or harm of the draft Amended Seed Act 2014, whose function as a legal tool is to bring prosperity to the country’s most productive force: the small and landless farmers.

The writer is an activist working with landless farmers. She holds a doctorate degree in Social Pharmacy from the University of Minnesota, US.

This opinion piece was first published in Dawn, Economics & Business on April 13th, 2015.
“Women hold up half the sky” as the saying goes, and in the world of temporary labor migration, this is an almost literal truth. Women make up 48% of the total estimated 232 million migrant workers worldwide, according to OECD statistics, and they work in the most precarious jobs in developed countries. They are also more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than their male counterparts, but often do not get the policy and statutory protection they sorely need.

Receiving-country governments often take a myopic and superficial approach in addressing violations of woman migrant workers’ rights, such as in the abuse case of Erwiana Sulistyaningsih in Hong Kong. Even as Erwiana has won her court case against her former employer, the Hong Kong government adamantly refuses to consider reforming its discriminatory policies on foreign domestic workers, preferring to treat the matter entirely as one of law enforcement. It does not recognize such policies as the two-week rule and mandatory live-in arrangement and empowerment of placement agencies as creating a fertile breeding ground for abuse of women migrant workers.

Women migrant workers in the Middle East are in an even worse fix, subjected to virtual bondage by the kafala (sponsorship) system and running up against a feudal-patriarchal culture that sees women as inferior to men. Abuse cases such as sexual molestation and rape abound, and access to justice and redress is very limited. The victim is may even be treated as the culprit under the Sharia Law, and the death penalty is applied liberally even to such cases as killing in self-defense and adultery.

In Singapore, women migrant workers are employed under conditions that are comparable to the kafala system, wherein the Singapore government requires bonds to be placed by employers for their migrant workers to ensure that the employers are penalized for the misdemeanors of their employees. This causes employers to tightly control the movement and activities of their migrant workers, and has even led to the half-hearted implementation of the new law on 1-day paid leave per week under effect since 2013. As of April 2014, only 37% of foreign domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore enjoy this right, according to the government’s Ministry of Manpower (MoM).

On a larger scale, majority of receiving countries in the Asia Pacific region and even globally have not ratified nor adopted the principles of the ILO Domestic Workers’ Convention (C189). This shows that while governments such as Hong Kong and Singapore may showcase their adherence to women’s rights by signing the UN Convention to Eliminate of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), they draw the line at adopting international statutes that will oblige them to reform their discriminatory policies against women migrant workers.

But the largest discriminatory policy of all is the promotion of labor-export program that operate under the neoliberal ideology of “migration for development”, which consigns women workers and peasants in underdeveloped countries to labor in slave-like conditions abroad. The so-called “genderization” of migration refers to the fact that neoliberal globalization has not only perpetuated, but has even systematized, gender stereotyping in the labor market by channelling women toilers to jobs such as domestic work, caregiving, information and communications technology, garments and entertainment. Women currently under the neoliberal model of “development” are no nearer to liberation than they were under preceding periods of global capitalism.

This International Women’s Day, the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) unites with all women migrant workers all over the world in calling on migration-flow governments to attune their policies towards the protection and promotion of women migrant workers’ rights. Even more importantly, we demand that the labor-export policy of sending-country governments be scrapped, in favor of development programs that will lead to the elimination of structural poverty, social injustices, rampant corruption, militarism, foreign intervention, state repression and all other push factors of forced labor migration.

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The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) welcomes the positive elements of the European Commission's Communication A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015. The network recognizes the renewed commitment of the EU to sustainable development and inclusive growth, which are the cornerstones of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. We also welcome the EU’s support to deliver the goals, for poverty eradication and sustainable development. This partnership, according to the Commission, should include all development actors, including civil society and the private sector, and must be based on the principles of shared responsibilities, mutual accountability and respective capacity. The Commission also calls on a global partnership based on human rights, good governance, rule of law, support for democratic institutions, solidarity, non-discrimination and gender equality.

As much as the network lauds the recognition given to civil society and local authorities, and the call for the broadest participation of citizens in decision-making, APRN wants to call attention to the business-as-usual approach and the private sector-centered development that is being disproportionately promoted by the European Union.

Business-As-Usual Approach to Poverty Eradication and Development. The network feels that the EU remains business-as-usual on how it views poverty eradication and development in general. It does not lay the foundations for a transformative shift to a people-centered development agenda but instead gives a high level of importance to the current neoliberal world trade system which has already been proven to have failed in delivering on development needs of both within and between nations.

Specifically alarming is the support to the World Trade Organization and other international trade agreements, without recognition of and proposed solutions to the grave impacts of these agreements to, for instance, in disempowering women and weakening/destroying social protection, which the EU says it commits to. Also, while the removal of the fossil fuel subsidies is positive, the EU does not mention anything about the removal of subsidies to agriculture exports.

The EU’s support for trade facilitation ignores the negative impacts of easing the entry of imports into developing countries without enhancing the productive and exporting capacity of these countries. Aid for trade, which on the other hand is promoted to enhance developing countries’ capacity to address supply-side and trade-related infrastructure obstacles, which constrains their ability to engage in international trade, can be used by developed countries, along with blending mechanisms and debt financing, as convenient excuses not to fulfill their own commitments to aid and development effectiveness. These policy prescriptions also undermine democratic ownership and sovereignty of developing countries, which are central principles of ADE declarations like the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

The EU’s call for all countries to assess the sustainability of impact of trade agreements and their impact on LDCs must also be applicable to EU’s own bilateral trade agreements, including concerns over stronger IP protection beyond commitments in the WTO, which are highly leveraged in favor of private sector interests at the cost of national development and policy space.

Increased Role of Private Sector in Development. APRN fears that the Communication gives too much emphasis on the role of the private sector in development in providing them with broader space, especially in development at the national level. We are particularly concerned with the EC’s call for encouraging increased private sector’s role in domestic resource financing by providing different sets of incentives and aligning regulatory and economic instruments, including rethinking barriers and taxes, to maximize their own economic activities. Taken in a nutshell, this could result to states devolving their catalytic role on economic development to the private sector. Apart from the fact that the Communication does not provide a detailed narrative on how to ensure an enabling environment for other actors such as civil society, a number of experiences from Asia Pacific countries would point out to the disregard of people’s democratic rights in favor of private-sector led development. Experiences from communities in Asia Pacific and Latin American countries show how extractives companies which, often with government permits, have invaded indigenous people’s ancestral lands.

No Commitment to Binding Private Sector/Corporate Accountability. The Communication’s promotion of both government and private sector accountability is quite encouraging, especially on the mention of uptake of internationally agreed principles and guidelines, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. However, CSOs and affected communities would like to see accountability being enforced beyond the framework of corporate social responsibility, to actually having accountability mechanisms that enforce regulation of corporate actions. We are also gravely concerned over the undue influence of the corporate sector on the agenda of Business and Human Rights, which can prevent the adoption of international legally binding rules to prevent human rights abuses related to TNC practices.
No Commitment to CBDR in Delivering the Post-2015 Agenda. While it is true that all need to contribute to the success of the global partnership, it is highly disappointing that the EU does not fully recognize the need for differentiation between developed and poor countries’ responsibilities in delivering the Post-2015 development agenda. While the Communication highlights the role of South-South Cooperation, upper-middle income countries, and emerging economies in financing for development, nowhere in the Communication was the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) mentioned. Instead, the Communication has only a passing reference to ‘national circumstances and capacity’ only once. The nonmention of the CBDR principle is consistent in the EC’s communication titled The Paris Protocol: A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020 which outlines the EU’s climate change targets for the Paris Conference in December 2015. Instead of CBDR, the EC communication mentions “evolving responsibilities, capabilities and different national circumstances.”

Climate Commitments Lacking in Ambition. Aside from the lack of full recognition to CBDR, the EU’s commitments to addressing climate change also lack the level of ambition needed to deliver a just global climate regime that will combat climate change and help affected communities, especially the most vulnerable, to adapt to its impacts. While the EU claims to have already decided to dedicate 20% of its budget in 2014-2020- including for external actions – to climate-related projects and policies, it is not clear whether this funding is new and additional to the already committed funding of the EU. Also, the EU’s promotion of market-based mechanisms to reduce GHG emissions such as issuing tradable emission permits and carbon pricing do not guarantee reduction in GHG emissions and moreover, transfer the responsibility of Annex 1 countries to reduce their emissions to developing countries and allow them to not change their own old production and consumption patterns.

Myopic Approach to Migrants’ Concerns. While the recognition for the need for full respect for migrants’ rights and dignity to reduce their vulnerabilities, and the recognition of forced migration are very welcome, APRN is quite disappointed in the myopic approach which does not recognize that majority of the migration happening today is in the context of global inequalities and maldevelopment in sending countries. Addressing migrant workers’ concerns is limited to protection of human rights and managing migration towards contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. Although it is true that transaction fees and recruitments costs must be reduced to help migrant workers keep what they earned, this should not be a precedent to using migrants’ remittances or migration as a strategy for development because this encourages more migration, does not solve the root causes of forced migration, and contributes to more domestic problems such as brain drain. Migration as a strategy for development can provide the condition for developed countries to backtrack on their ODA commitments. This approach should be replaced with one that works in the framework of addressing the root causes of forced migration, which will involve tackling issues already mentioned above such as economic dislocation caused by unequal trade and rising inequalities within and between countries.

We urge the EC that instead of advocating for broader space for the private sector and taking the business-as-usual approach, the EU should support national measures to develop industries that would respond to the economic and ecological challenges of the country, and chart development plans that would put primacy to the needs and aspirations of the people. The Commission recognizes that national governments have the primary responsibility for implementing sustainable economic policies, which includes the use of public resources efficiently. Countries should thus be supported in developing and strengthening institutions to eradicate poverty and deliver development based on the democratic rights of the people. Civil society, among other stakeholders, could help States in this arena. The EU plays an important role globally as one of the major development cooperation providers. In order for the EU to fulfill its commitment to poverty eradication and sustainable development, there is a need to reimagine development cooperation to operate within the principles of equality, people’s sovereignty, and international solidarity, and include the grassroots and the most marginalized sections of society in policy making.

Call for Development Justice: What should be the cornerstone of the SDGs

APRN calls upon the European Commission to heed the call of CSOs from Asia Pacific and consider Development Justice as a framework for translating calls for a transformative and just development agenda into reality. Development Justice provides a comprehensive framework to guide approaches to the goals, as well as concrete recommendations for genuine change. This framework roots the causes of persistent inequality while respecting the inalienable democratic rights of the people, with priority given to the poor, the marginalized and the excluded. Development Justice gives equal opportunities to all stakeholders to guide people in charting their own development path, within the bounds of earth’s carrying capacity.

The framework is divided into five foundational shifts. CSOs gathering at the Asia Pacific People’s Conference on Development Justice in Hong Kong on September 2014 amplified their calls for Development Justice through a Communiqué they have drafted, finalized and endorsed to their constituents.

It is through Redistributive Justice, through the establishment of people’s access, control, and ownership of resources, wealth, power and opportunities that all human beings can live equitably and in harmony with nature. A genuine agenda for development must dismantle existing systems that have historically plundered and continuously channel resources and wealth from developing countries to wealthy countries, from the working masses to the elites within society.

End foreign control and plunder of our resources to achieve Economic Justice and build selfsufficient economies that uphold public interests over private profit. This will develop economies that enable dignified lives, accommodate for needs and facilitate capabilities, employment and livelihoods available to all, and is not based on exploitation of people or natural resources or environmental destruction. We also uphold the
people’s right to determine their own economic development based on the needs and resources, not dictated by existing international structures used by corporations, in connivance with capitalist states.

We call for Social Justice, by challenging and eliminating all forms of violence, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion, which exist between nations, within communities and between men and women. We call for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and marginalization on the basis of gender and preferred sexuality, of race, color, and ethnicity, of work, livelihood and social status, and more importantly, of class and economic background.

We call for Ecological Justice that recognizes the historical responsibility of countries and elites within countries whose production, consumption and extraction patterns have led to sufferings, human rights violations, global warming and environmental disasters and compels them to alleviate and compensate those with the least culpability but who suffer the most: farmers, fishers, women and children, workers, migrants, landless peoples, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups of the Global South.

We call for action to hold power-holders, particularly governments and corporations, accountable to people to realize and uphold peoples’ demands for democratic and just governments. Transparency and governance at all levels that uphold the people’s right to self-determination to enable people to make informed decisions over their own lives, communities and futures are prerequisites to realize a just development agenda. ###

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Review of Beijing+20: a rhetoric or for real?

Center for Women’s Resources | www.cwrweb.org

The declaration of Beijing+20 will remain unfulfilled so as long the governments continue to implement profit-driven neoliberal policies that prioritize the interest of the elite and foreign investors over women and people’s interests.

This is according to the Center for Women’s Resources (CWR), a research, training and advocacy center for women, in a validation forum of the alternative report on the Beijing+20 Review.

“No signing of declaration, like what the Philippine government has done in Beijing Platform, can supersede policies such as privatization of services and liberalization of trade,” says Jojo Guan, CWR executive director.

According to Guan, policies, programs, and strategies continue to block the full development and emancipation of women, thus blurring the real essence of the critical areas of concern stipulated in the Beijing Platform of Action. These concerns include poverty, economy, health, education, VAW, human rights, environment, media, power and decision making, among others.

“The Aquino administration should stop boasting of a growing economy and branding it as inclusive growth for the people. Poverty incidence among women remains high at 25.6%, despite the implementation of 4Ps (Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program), a conditional cash transfer scheme. Six out of ten women are employed in the services sector where 69% receive a daily average wage lower than P270.00,” said Guan.

Data from BLES (Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics) show that 3 million women work in agriculture receiving an average of P150.00 daily wage. More than four million of women are self-employed or own-account workers such as vendors, beauticians, laundrywoman, among others. More than two million or 16% of women are counted as unpaid family workers. On the other hand, the profit of the 50 richest families in the country comprised 25% or one-fourth of the country’s GDP.

“Social services such as healthcare remain wanting. The government recognizes the high maternal mortality rate at 221 per 100,000 but its perceived solution, like privatization of 72 public hospitals including maternity hospitals, is contrary to the welfare of the majority of women,” Guan explained.

“Another critical concern of the Beijing Platform is on violence against women. Sadly, despite 37 laws for women, one woman or child is battered every 55 minutes and one woman or child is being raped every one hour and 21 minutes. Worse, 75% of the victims of rape are minors,” said Guan.

According to Guan, poor women are also more vulnerable to abuse and violence and the lack of economic opportunity places them in a position to be controlled by those who are in power like their spouses or any one who is in authority.

“These are only a few examples of how women fared 20 years after Beijing, despite government’s pronouncement of its achievements. Unless a radical shift of policies and programs are made, the declaration of Beijing+20 will remain unfulfilled,” said Guan.

Guan added that for the Beijing Platform to be for real, certain conditions should be put in place, such as eliminating the barriers like the economic framework that is “profit-driven, elite-centered, foreign-controlled and neoliberal” and being cautious of isolating women’s concerns to the rest of the people’s concerns. Guan recognized that “social support and collective strength are key factors in building movements for genuine social change.”###
NEW RELEASES!
APRN Book on Development Justice

The APRN Secretariat shares with you the newest title under the network. Development Justice: Asia Pacific People’s Conference for a Transformative Post-2015 Agenda contains speeches and presentations made during the network’s biennial conference held in Hong Kong from August 31 to September 2, 2015. The book can be downloaded from the APRN website, www.aprnet.org.

The failure on delivering the needs of the people leads to the widespread clamour for a new development agenda that is truly transformative, just and sustainable. The global process for shaping the new development agenda has already started in the year 2013. However, the weak, marginalized and the most affected by unsustainable development are often not represented in these global conversations. Their voices must be included in the landmark decision-making process of creating the post-2015 development agenda.

The call for a truly transformative development agenda is encapsulated in the demand for Development Justice. By Development Justice, we mean a just and transformative framework for development that promotes people’s well-being, solidarity and equality (within and between countries, between men and women) while keeping within the earth’s carrying capacity.

Learning from Marginalized Workers: Strategies for organizing and negotiating among workers in the Informal Sector in India

Asia Monitor Resource Center

This report describes workers’ strategies of organising and collective bargaining in the informal sector in India. It discusses the organizing experiences of the most marginalised workers in society – waste workers, sex workers, domestic workers, rural workers and kite making workers. These are people who were always on the margins of Indian polity and society due to their class, caste and gender. Their marginality has increased in the last few years, as the State has abandoned even the modicum of ‘concern’ that it had for its citizens and has become an unabashed agent of Capital. It is indeed the return of the immiserated toiling masses.


Climate Change and Natural Disasters Affecting Women Peace and Security

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

Evidence connecting climate change to armed conflict is still evolving, but the implications of climate change for human and international security are clear. It is essential that we recognise the connections as factors affecting women, peace and security. Impacts of climate change, such as drought, floods, extreme weather events and reduced food and water security, affect women and men differently with the poorest being the most vulnerable. In the Asia Pacific region, 2013 was marked by devastating disasters that made clear that it is no longer enough to merely mitigate and adapt to climate change: the loss and damage to lives, property, land and livelihood caused by climate change induced events affecting rural, indigenous, and urban poor women must be addressed. Climate change is not gender neutral and as extreme weather patterns increase global competition and tensions over land and resources, the disproportionate burden of climate change already borne by women can only be augmented as climate change induced conflict further threatens their lives, livelihoods, peace, and security.

Available APRN Publications

Sowing Seeds of Change and Hope
The food producers of Asia Pacific are now reclaiming agroecological farming systems and methodologies through their own farmers’ organizations and other support institutions. These local ‘alternatives’ from the people are rooted on local context and situation and are mindful of sustainable management of communities’ resources.

Women Resisting Crisis and War
Although women are mostly at the receiving end of the negative impacts of neoliberal globalization and war, the reality is that they also go through various cycles of coping with, adapting to, and resisting the onslaught of the multiple crises.

WTO and Maldevelopment
Two decades since the establishment of the World Trade Organization, only developed countries gained and prospered. Developing countries, on the other hand, suffer from the plunder of corporate economy, giving way for more profit for the rich and powerful nations.

Contact the secretariat to get the full list of publications and how to avail of copies.