

## Indigenous Women Rise Above Patriarchy in Community Struggle for Their Rights to Land and Healthy Environment





## Indonesia: Indigenous Women Rise Above Patriarchy in Community Struggle for Their Rights to Land and Healthy Environment

*This country briefer is based on the Climate Justice Feminist Participatory Action Research (CJ FPAR) journey of the indigenous women of Pargamanan Bintang Maria, Parlilitan, in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Kelompok Studi dan Pengembangan Prakarsa Masyarakat (KSPPM) has been working with the community for more than two decades in support of indigenous peoples' struggles for political, economic and environmental rights. This CJ FPAR aimed to strengthen indigenous women's capacities to document and analyse the impacts of the climate crises and how these are exacerbated by exploitative development projects. Ultimately, their goal is the legal recognition of their customary land rights and indigenous women's invaluable role in the collective struggles of the community against climate crises and in realising a healthy environment.*

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic country consisting of nearly two million square kilometres (km) of land. Due to its geography, topography and climate, Indonesia hosts an array of diverse ecosystems from sea and coastal systems to peat swamp forests to montane forests. With a population of 273 million, Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation in the world. This combination of high population density and high levels of biodiversity together with a staggering 80,000 km of coastline and 17,508 islands make Indonesia one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change.<sup>1</sup>



Being located in the vicinity of active tectonic plates and the Pacific Ocean, Indonesia periodically experiences peaks in natural disasters generated by natural processes. It has been identified as one of the top 35 countries with the highest risk for natural disasters. Between January and March 2021, the country recorded at least 650 natural disasters that displaced at least three (3) million people. Natural disasters in Indonesia have been on an upward trend in the past few decades, with each disaster having a more severe impact compared to a previous occurrence.<sup>2</sup> With climate change, these events have not only increased in frequency and intensity, it has also generated other types of disasters such as landslides, forest fires and flooding.

Massive clearing of forests for farming and commercial purposes, including for palm oil plantations to which Indonesia is by far the world's leading producer and exporter<sup>3</sup> of, has contributed to large-scale land conflicts with indigenous and local communities as well as severe air pollution or what is more commonly known as the "Southeast Asian haze", an annual phenomenon affecting the entire Southeast Asia.

<sup>1</sup> Climate Change Profile: Indonesia (2019). Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/indonesia/climate-change-profile-indonesia>

<sup>2</sup> Climate-induced Disasters and Indonesian Politics (2021). Retrieved from [https://think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/13944/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2021\\_98.pdf?sequence=1](https://think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/13944/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_98.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>3</sup> Palm oil industry in Indonesia: statistics and facts (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/topics/5921/palm-oil-industry-in-indonesia/#dossierKeyfigures>

The Indonesian Constitution underscores the state's obligation to guarantee decent life and a healthy environment for all citizens.<sup>4</sup> But the non-recognition of indigenous peoples' collective land rights has paved the way for exploitative economic development projects that are in contradiction with the obligation of the state to protect its peoples. This is evidenced once more by the experience of the Pargamanan Bintang Maria indigenous community in North Sumatra, who face multidimensional challenges of poverty, the impacts of a changing climate as well as corporate land and resource grabs. For indigenous women, their situation is compounded by the prevalence of patriarchal norms that exclude them from meaningful participation in the community's affairs, particularly decision making processes. Further to this situation, indigenous women continue to suffer from double burden where they have to work harder to manage the community's natural resources due to loss of lands and forests, while continuing to experience increasing domestic violence due to community and family hardships.

## Overview of Indonesia's Second Nationally Determined Contribution

Indonesia claims to have strengthened its commitment to implement the Paris Agreement<sup>5</sup> with its updated target to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions unconditionally to 29 per cent and conditionally (with international support) to 41 per cent compared to business-as-usual (BAU) by 2030. This is consistent with Indonesia's long-term strategy<sup>6</sup> to strike a balance between future emission reduction and economic development.

However, some studies rate Indonesia's NDC as 'highly insufficient'<sup>7</sup> because while it may have updated its NDC in December 2020, there was no actual increase in its climate ambition which is in line with 4 degrees Celsius of warming. Furthermore, although the plan shows a significant increase in renewable energy capacity, coal, which is Indonesia's biggest export product, continues to increase.

Reduce of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions unconditionally to **29%** conditionally (with international support) to **41%**

## MITIGATION



Forestry: peatland restoration of 2 million hectares and rehabilitation of 12 million hectares degraded land;



Energy: mixed energy use policy, development of clean energy sources as a national policy directive;



A national mandatory biodiesel policy;



Waste:

- Presidential Decree Number 97/2017 on National Policy and Strategy on Solid Waste Management;
- Presidential Regulation Number 35/2018 on Acceleration of Construction of Thermal Generation Facilities for Converting Waste into Electricity Energy with Environmental Sound Technology;

<sup>4</sup>Indonesia Long-Term Strategy for Low Carbon and Climate Resilience 2050 (2021). Retrieved from [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Indonesia\\_LTS-LCCR\\_2021.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Indonesia_LTS-LCCR_2021.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>The Paris Agreement (2015). Retrieved from <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

<sup>6</sup>Indonesia Long-Term Strategy for Low Carbon and Climate Resilience 2050 (2021).

<sup>7</sup>An Assessment of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) In-depth Country Focus: Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand Climate Change & Southeast Asia By Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law (ARIEL) (2021). Retrieved from <https://th.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/SEA-NDC-FOCUS-ARIEL-HBS.pdf>

# ADAPTATION

- National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation;
- Development of a nationwide climate vulnerability index data information system which allows public access to the information in the online system;
- Ministerial Regulation No. P.33/2016 on Guideline for Development of Adaptation Actions;
- Focus on three areas of resilience: economic resilience, social and livelihood resilience, and ecosystem and landscape resilience;
- Commitments under Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention to Combat Land Degradation and Desertification (UNCCD), RAMSAR convention, and Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were considered to have significant potential for synergy with NDC - adaptation.

## MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Indonesia needs an estimated

**USD 247 billion<sup>8</sup> by 2030**

to meet its NDC target of reducing GHG emissions. However, with total climate finance from the private sector (with 67 per cent coming from commercial financial institutions going towards renewable energy projects) reaching only

**USD 13.2 billion**

between 2015-2018, Indonesia needs to significantly scale up climate finance in the next 10 years to achieve its NDCs. Debt financing continues to be the preferred mode of lending, accounting for USD 9.4 billion or 71 per cent of total financing;

From 2015-2018, Indonesia spent

**USD 17.48**

billion on adaptation and mitigation activities;

Green financing efforts will be continued and promoted, particularly through

**green sukuk**  
(green bonds) and public-private partnerships;

Established a national agency for environmental fund management (Badan Pengelola Dana Lingkungan Hidup) to

**strengthen climate financing.**

## Indigenous women's realities amid the climate catastrophe

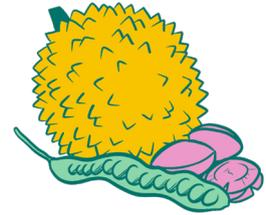
Pargamanan-Bintang Maria (PBM) community belongs to Batak indigenous group and is located in Simataniari Village, Parlilitan Sub-District, a mountainous area which experiences dry and wet seasons throughout the year. The main source of livelihood is incense harvesting and growing paddy. Men are responsible for incense harvesting while the women take care of paddy fields, family small plantations and general household upkeep.



*A gathering of the indigenous women of Pargamanan Bintang Maria.*

<sup>8</sup>Uncovering the private climate finance landscape in Indonesia (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/climate-finance-in-indonesia-our-top-stories-from-2020/>

In the last 20 years, this area has been affected by the climate crisis with longer dry seasons that result in the lack of water both for irrigation and domestic use, and intense flooding during the rainy season. Parlilitan used to be well-known for its products such as durian, jengkol (archidendron pauciflorum) and petai (parkia speciosa). Unfortunately, this has all changed with more occurrences of failed harvest due to failure in pollination particularly in the last five years. The women in the community have testified that this is the effect of the forest destruction around their village.



Changes in their environment due to climate impacts are an added layer to the community's problems. With the exploitative plantation activities of PT. Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL), currently, the yearly harvest for the incense trees has decreased due to the destruction of the primary forest. The benzoin forests that belong to neighbouring indigenous communities have also significantly been converted into eucalyptus plantations. This struggle of the Pargamanan Bintang Maria community started in the early 1990s when 1,701 hectare of their customary lands were unilaterally claimed by the government as part of the state forests. Indonesian Law No. 41/1999 on Forestry denied the recognition of indigenous peoples' land rights and allowed the government to award concession permits on customary lands to corporations for industrial forests.



PT. Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL), a pulp and paper company owned by one of the richest Indonesian entrepreneurs, was granted concession rights to 737 hectares of community land. Almost immediately, TPL cut down the benzoin forest trees from which incense is made, and replaced these with eucalyptus. Towards the end of 2020, the government took another 902 hectares of customary land and arbitrarily allocated this as a food estate area. As a result, the community now only has 62 hectares designated as 'Area for Other Purpose' (APL- Areal Penggunaan Lain) which include areas for housing and farming.



Before the intrusion of TPL into their customary land, the women of PBM had a good and steady source of livelihood from incense products. But the community has seen a dramatic decline in their incomes with the destruction of their forests. Since the presence of TPL, community harvest has continued to decrease. Women are witnessing the drastic harvest loss with the worsening climate crises, particularly in the last five years. Each family used to be able to fill 90 containers of harvest, this has now gone down to only 45 containers each year which is not even enough to cover the family's food needs. This increases burdens on women to make both ends meet, and they have resorted to working on somebody else's land for a small wage to avoid domestic violence from spouses and family members mainly driven by their patriarchal mindset exacerbated by the pressures from the ongoing poverty and hardships.

According to the community leader Eva Junita Lumban Gaol, 'the destruction of the forests has caused the climate situation to be unpredictable. We should adapt, or else we will all lose out.'

## Land grabs, deforestation and climate change nexus

When companies (both local and transnational corporations) grab forested land to replace it with monoculture plantations, it robs indigenous and local communities of their livelihoods and distinct identity including their cultural and spiritual belonging.

Land grabbing by corporations mostly for 'commodity agriculture and mining activities' worsens climate crises<sup>9</sup>. It is often associated with deforestation, high chemical intake, soil and groundwater contamination as well as the appropriation of land, including water, energy and forest resources among others. Land use changes<sup>10</sup>, especially in the form of deforestation, are the second largest anthropogenic source of atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions, after fossil fuel combustion.

Commodity agriculture stirs agriculture away from sustainable food production towards cash crops for foreign markets. Furthermore, deprivation of indigenous lands and natural resources results in a massive loss of biodiversity<sup>11</sup>, especially when Indigenous Peoples are safeguarding 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity. Most importantly, destruction of the environment and natural ecological balance, put indigenous communities at a great risk threatening their survival and distinct identity.

### Pargamanan Bintang Maria (PBM) indigenous women taking action

The indigenous peoples of PBM have long struggled to reclaim their customary forest. The community fought back many times which resulted in the temporary stop of the land clearance by the company. TPL employed many tricks to quell community resistance. Besides the usual strategy of intimidation and criminalisation, the company also used the politics of 'divide et impera' (divide and conquer), which further deteriorated social relations in the community.



Community consultation with Climate Justice FPAR women.

Batak indigenous groups have a strong patriarchal system in which the position of women in the struggle to defend customary land is terribly weak. Despite the Batak principle of 'Dalihan Na Tolu' (Three Pillars) which guarantees women's access to cultivate customary lands, this does not happen in reality. The patriarchal culture leaves no room for women to access or own land, and consequently, women's participation in the struggle for community land rights was hardly visible. Indigenous women shared how they were frequently disappointed with decisions taken by men on their community struggle, and they also criticise how the male leaders have failed to see through TPL representatives' tactics that weakened community resistance.

At the start of the FPAR journey, the women were afraid to speak and tended to be passive. Initially, there were only a few women who were confident enough to express their opinions. It was difficult for them to speak up and participate during discussions and in decision making processes for fear of being accused of violating customary norms and values. The indigenous women struggled to overcome patriarchal cultural practices, including convincing their husbands and male community leaders to give them the space to participate in community discussions and a larger collective struggle for customary land rights.



The establishment of the indigenous women's group through the FPAR in 2020 significantly increased their participation in community discussions, decision-making and collective actions. The women participated in leadership training sessions conducted by KSPPM that deepened their understanding of the linkages between TPL's destruction of their incense forest with the frequent climate disasters that have occurred, and their declining livelihoods. The training sessions also strengthened the women's capacities for public speaking as well as on advocacy and campaign work.

<sup>9</sup>Climate Change and Land: Summary for Policymakers (2019) Retrieved from [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM\\_Updated-Jan20.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf)

<sup>11</sup>Protecting indigenous cultures is crucial for saving the world's biodiversity (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.ied.org/protecting-indigenous-cultures-crucial-for-saving-worlds-biodiversity>

There were also skills sharing sessions that led to the women developing their own programmes on ecological agriculture and credit unions. This greatly boosted their confidence in finding their own voice to articulate their vision and claiming women's rights to cultivation and ownership of customary lands.

Through the FPAR, they were also able to analyse state policies and mechanisms they can use to resist government and corporate take-over of their customary lands. They have even become emboldened to lead their community as well as to stop and send away TPL representatives and forestry officials who come to their village to put land boundaries for food estate areas.

The FPAR resulted in a very significant change for the PBM women's group. They increased awareness and membership, strengthened solidarity, and two PBM women's group members have become administrative leaders in the community. Furthermore, this experience is a strong affirmation of women's strategic and important contribution in their community's struggle to reclaim their lands rights.

Not only did the PBM women's group become actively involved in the campaign for community land rights, they also took an initiative to find alternative sources of income from horticulture plants such as chilli, ginger and onion. By practising organic farming, they are able to reduce their dependence on chemical fertilisers that damage the lands and environment.



The women also set up a credit union to address difficulties in accessing financial capital for agriculture. As a result, women can maintain their agriculture and they are not tempted to sell their forest products with low prices during the pandemic as what happened in the neighbouring villages.

The PBM women's group also spearheaded regular tree planting activities in their customary areas, which was welcomed by other members of the indigenous community. Currently they have a tree nursery programme with incense, meranti, rattan and other endemic varieties which will be shared not only with community members but also with other indigenous communities.



## What do we want?

The PBM women's group is now actively participating in their community's campaign to reclaim their customary lands from TPL and to resist the further incursion in their lands as part of the government's food estate programme. Together with other community members, they developed plans to advocate with relevant government institutions for the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources and contribute to overall efforts on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

One main demand of the Pargamanan Bintang Maria indigenous women along with their community is for the government of Indonesia to **revoke the concession of PT. Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) and remove the company from the PBM customary land!**

The following are more recommendations of the PBM indigenous women's group:

**At the local level**, the district government must issue a district regulation on the recognition and protection of indigenous communities along with their customary forest and natural resources as stipulated by the Constitutional Court No.35/2012 and ensure its implementation as a way to guarantee the protection of the rights of indigenous communities over their customary lands.



**At the national level,** the government of Indonesia must be consistent and committed in achieving its Nationally Determined Contribution by protecting the rights of indigenous communities over their customary forests, and to recognise indigenous women as significant counterparts in the efforts towards climate justice.

The government of Indonesia must respect and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and ensure indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) on projects that may affect them or their territories.

**At the regional level,** feminists and grassroots women's movements must build a strong network of rural and indigenous women disproportionately affected by climate change to strengthen cross-regional solidarity in their collective struggles for the advancement of women's human rights, including their right to a safe, clean and healthy environment.



**At the global level,** developed countries must pay for their historical and ongoing responsibility to the worsening climate crisis and create mechanisms to enable direct access to climate financing for indigenous women to support community based climate solutions instead of the false climate solutions such as the carbon market mechanism that violate women's human rights and displace indigenous peoples from their lands and territories.



### **About APWLD**

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist and women's rights organisations and individual activists. For 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice. APWLD worked with and supported seven partner organisations from seven countries to conduct a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) between 2019 and 2021. This FPAR is part of APWLD's Climate Justice Programme.

Email: [apwld@apwld.org](mailto:apwld@apwld.org)

Website: [www.apwld.org](http://www.apwld.org)

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