



**Strengthening Women's Rights Advocacy in ASEAN:
Policy Alternatives for Regional Integration, Governance and Justice**

7-8 November 2017

Sequoia Hotel, Quezon City, Philippines



This Regional Forum on “Strengthening Women’s Rights Advocacy in ASEAN: Policy Alternatives for Regional Integration, Governance and Justice” was organized by WEAVE (Weaving Women’s Voices in ASEAN), a regional network of national women’s organizations in Southeast Asia working on a variety of women’s rights issues in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines. Formed in 2014, WEAVE seeks to improve women’s quality of life and dignity in Southeast Asia through influencing ASEAN and by working with grassroots women and their organizations in the region. Building on its achievements from engaging in the ASEAN Vision 2025 drafting process, WEAVE continues to promote cross-movement engagements. This Forum was organized in partnership with Regions Refocus, an initiative committed to advancing progressive and feminist policy, co-constructed deliberately with autonomous CSOs in the South.

Objectives and Agenda of the Forum

This Forum was intended to contribute to developing alternatives for regional economic integration. The specific objectives were the following:

1. Examine the implications of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and national development plans given the rising authoritarianism, violence, misogyny and how these are perpetrated by state actors in the region;
2. Develop a feminist analysis of economic integration. WEAVE hopes that each organization would contribute to the analysis to be forwarded to the ASEAN. Through the forum, organizations may contribute to each other’s agenda;
3. Undertake cross-movement discussions and strategize towards potential collaborations among women’s and other social movements (labor, rural, peasant, migrant, indigenous, disability, LGBT, etc.) to promote women’s rights in ASEAN’s agenda and action plans.

The Forum was divided into seven sessions. The first session aimed to cumulatively gather experiences of participants around key sectors of marginalized groups of women. The second and third sessions are very closely interlinked, focused on the economic sectors that the forum aims to address— trade, finance, investment—as these relate to agriculture, migrant work, public-private partnerships among other issues of the marginalized constituencies. Session four offered the opportunity for collective storytelling to give concrete examples of the interlinkages. Session five emphasized political authoritarianism, threats to women’s rights and women’s activism. Session six addressed cross-sectoral linkages in the region. Session seven examined what a regional agenda might look like.

This Forum was financially supported by FES, SHAPE-SEA and Oxfam.

Session 1: ASEAN Women's Rights Café Tour

During this session, participants took turns participating in small groups through four stops: women with disabilities, indigenous women, women workers, and rural women. Participants explored inter-linkages of economic policy, political authoritarianism, culture of misogyny and sexual violence as experienced by marginalized groups of women.

Summary of Human Rights Issues of Marginalized Groups of Women			
SECTOR/ THEME	Economic policies	Political authoritarianism	Culture of misogyny and sexual violence
Women with disabilities	<p>Very minimal data about persons with disabilities.</p> <p>Lack of education of PWDs on their rights. No access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health services.</p>	<p>Authorities violate the rights of persons with disabilities.</p> <p>The government uses lack of data as an excuse for inaction. Women with disabilities are underrepresented in political decision-making processes, even among disability groups.</p>	<p>Women with disability who report violence against them done by their family members and strangers have no recourse.</p>
Indigenous women	<p>Various forms of land grabbing, mining, illegal logging, conversion to plantations threaten ancestral domain.</p> <p>Lack of education affects access to resources and exercise of other human rights.</p>	<p>Women's voices are not heard at all levels of decision making, including tribal councils and during FPIC.</p> <p>Freedom of movement is curtailed by the implementation of martial law and the war on drugs. Increase in food prices adds to multiple burden of women.</p> <p>The Philippine President's disrespect for women endangers them and causes them to feel fear.</p>	<p>Communities tolerate VAW. Perpetrators are not penalized. Sexual violence is normalized.</p> <p>When mining companies enter the ancestral domain, prostitution in the community increases.</p> <p>Home birthing is penalized.</p>
Women workers	<p>Labor laws do not cover informal workers.</p> <p>Governments do not reciprocate efforts of multinational companies on LGBT Rights in the workplace.</p>	<p>Misogyny is accepted because of populism. Policies of ASEAN Member States on migrant workers tend to be protectionist rather than rights-based.</p>	<p>Data on discrimination and sexual violence among workers is lacking. There are many cases of sexual harassment in the workplace.</p>
Rural women	<p>Farmers are getting poorer. Young women are driven out of their communities.</p> <p>Migration increases because governments do not provide adequate support.</p> <p>Women's contribution in the economy is not valued. They have limited access to land and other productive assets.</p>	<p>Rural women are not organized. Most of them bear the burden of unpaid work.</p> <p>Cross-movement building is yet to be explored. There has not been many collective action to address, for example, extraction of resources.</p>	<p>Land distribution policies have failed. Massive land conversions drive young women out, most of them end up in domestic work and are trafficked in some cases.</p>

Sessions 2 and 3: Inter-linkages between Gender, Trade, Finance and Investment, Women's Marginalization, Economic Policy, Political Authoritarianism, and the Culture of Misogyny and Sexual Violence

This combined session aimed to surface insights and analysis that could lead to constructive recommendations to address the impacts of economics on the culture of misogyny and sexual violence. Several discussants were invited to present on a range of topics.¹

PIDS highlighted the cycle of exclusion and discrimination as a framework useful in understanding the experiences of women. The care economy results in time poverty of women, which in turn leads to low development outcomes. Low development outcomes result in further exclusion, marginalization and discrimination against women. Challenges in terms of gender-blind agricultural policies exist. PIDS proposed to strengthen adaptive social protection to address this cycle of exclusion and discrimination aggravated by negative impacts of climate change.

Kalyanamitra shared how Indonesian communities are threatened by their government's economic plan. Natural resources are exploited and large quantities of imported produce threaten local industries. Employment is unable to compete with labor supply from other ASEAN countries. Poor people cannot access basic services because of privatization. The AEC will impact all marginalized women regardless of race, sexual orientation and class. Further, discrimination against religious minorities is increasing. Kalyanamitra fears the new administration will make worse regulations for women because it is supported by fundamentalist ideology.

Verceles of UP mentioned that the main argument for private-public partnerships (PPP) is that this modality minimizes costs and increases returns on investments. Women are in need of public services which can be provided through PPPs. However, PPPs tend towards investments in infrastructure projects and not in services. The role of the State as principal duty bearer is eroded because of multi-stakeholder partnerships that delegate state obligations to private actors. Further it falls in the error of integrating women in traditional economy without interrogating women's multiple burden. To move forward, PPPs should be periodically assessed against human rights and gender equality standards.

Foundation for Women illustrated the compromises in the recent Gender Equality Law passed by the Thai government. Much is not known about the effects of AEC on tariff and taxation but the new economic policy of the government could lead to businesses taking advantage of poor segments of Thai population. It pushes women into precarious and vulnerable jobs both locally and overseas. Informal vendors, many among them women, are displaced. Many people in Northeast Thailand migrate with no security. Thai women end up working in massage shops overseas under exploitative conditions. The regional framework for trafficking fails to protect women. There are many other cases of rape against migrant girls but these never get reported to the police. Thai citizens who are victims of rape can get

¹ List of presentations and discussants: PART 1: Women, Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods, Connie B. Dacuycuy, Philippine Institute for Development Studies | Economics and Culture of Violence in Indonesia, Rena Herdiyani, Kalyanamitra | Public-Private Partnerships and Gender, Nathalie Verceles, University of the Philippines | Migrant Workers from ASEAN under the Military Government of Thailand, Foundation for Women. PART 2: Alternative and Feminist Approaches to Regional Integration, Marina Durano, Open Society Foundations | Analysis of the labor movement and working class situation under the Duterte administration, Philippines, Joanna Bernice Coronacion, SENTRO | In defense of the commons, Mary Ann (Meanne) Manahan, Focus on the Global South | Indigenous Women, Judy Pasimio, LILAK | ASEAN Economic Integration and Gender Equality, Jelen Paclarin, Women's Legal & Human Rights Bureau

compensation, whereas migrant workers do not have this entitlement. Further funds and development aid are pulling out of Thailand. This leads to fewer resources for services such as free legal aid for women victims of violence.

Durano of OSF offered three points for women and networks to consider. What women should be looking at are the questions of (1) surveillance not just of civil and political rights but of the economy and how it is run, (2) redistribution of wealth, and (3) industry and its relevance given planetary limits and climate change. Women can look into monitoring of macroeconomic policies and address the challenge of the value of wages and of things that the people consume. Policies, particularly taxation, fail to address redistribution of wealth. They do not promote inclusive growth. And lastly, industrialization is and has been the main pathway to poverty alleviation but it is known that capitalists are not engaged in industry. Given the serious effects of climate change, does it make sense to think of industrialization as the main way to uplift people from poverty?

SENTRO shared their analysis on the labor movement in the Philippines. The lack of reckoning of martial law years, the ongoing fake news, collective amnesia and historical revisionism, and the steep rise of inequality are all results of the failure of the 1986 EDSA Revolution. The main error was the inability of the Left Movement to provide alternatives that people could understand. Decades after, the inequalities in the country have hardly changed. The poor has to contend with 20 percent of the country's wealth. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Though the labor movement fought a long battle, it's still necessary to address structural causes of poverty.

Focus on the Global South made a case for strengthening the commons. Commons are arenas of intense social organizing and mobilization and action to reclaim against enclosures, to challenge corporate and state impunity. People in Southeast Asia are defending the long tradition of communing as they are collectively threatened by authoritarianism and populism. Defending the commons is a way to confront the ill-effects of privatization and the threats to the rights of women and the time-immemorial claims of their communities.

LILAK asserted that currently the Philippines has a violent, misogynist authoritarian government with neoliberal framework—this is a deadly combination, in a literal sense, for indigenous women who have been struggling even in their own communities to be part of decision-making processes. The policy of “Kill and Build” has little impact on alleviating policy in indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples have been wanting change. But the situation for them has worsened. The culture of violence, normalization of killing affects everyone. Lastly the talks about constitutional change favoring federalism breeds more worry than relief. Indigenous women are still struggling to have their ancestral domains recognized and yet there is move to subdivide these lands into federal territories. Federalism is a big threat to indigenous peoples, in terms of the fight over control of resources.

WLB shared the findings from their research on the impacts of the ASEAN Economic Community on gender equality in Southeast Asia. They have found that economic growth is rising but poverty and inequality persist. AEC does not consider the sociopolitical aspects of gender. Political authoritarianism and misogyny compound the situation. The instrumentalist view of women in economic development policies leads to gender stereotyping, which is why most jobs given to women are menial and service-type occupations. It reinforces gender based stereotypes and unequal gender power relations. The commodification of women's bodies and labor is prevalent in the AEC. Policies seem to have a protectionist view of women. As a way forward, WEAVE calls for a clearer articulation of equality in the

context of trade and the redistribution of wealth, and asserts that discrimination should be addressed in the economic sphere and economic policies should contribute to social change.

Participants shared examples and experiences from their countries. The following insights and analysis were highlighted in the discussions.

- Climate change has a disproportionate effect on women and children, particularly by increasing their vulnerability to violence and poverty. Women may suffer from a cycle of violence aggravated by negative impacts of climate change.
- PPPs are not friendly for organizing women workers. There are gaps in PPP laws when it comes to collective bargaining. Strong labor forces are needed to penetrate PPP projects.
- Authoritarian governments are divisive. They appear threatening when civil society and progressive groups lack rapport and solidarity. Unorganized people are more vulnerable.
- The underbelly of authoritarianism is populism. Gender equality is the collateral damage or the concession made by authoritarian governments.
- Big trade partners may threaten a country's economy by pulling out much needed investments. People lose their jobs. Migration tends to increase in the region. These are all significant economic problems brought by unstable political situation.
- Sustainability and diversification of economy is a concern of ASEAN economies, particularly of well-off countries such as Brunei. How could these economies maintain the quality of lives of their citizens?
- Political spaces for citizen's participation shrink as ASEAN economies open up through neoliberalization and the AEC. There are fewer spaces for citizens to demand transparency and accountability of states and corporation.

Participants also identified some strategies to move forward: continue research and dialogue among civil society groups, critically engage with ASEAN bodies and their processes, enable grassroots women's organizing and strengthening collectives, and nurture local to global solidarity. Participants also discussed on the need to flesh out feminist strategies:

- Feminist strategies could be seen in stories that women have shared in researches conducted and forums such as this. There is a need to look more into economic strategies of women.
- CSOs have a long history of strong lobbying and successful advocacy work. Women have been negotiating and women know that they have to negotiate from a position of power and not from a position of compromise. Negotiation with power is of course a challenge. Still, there are some success that we need to highlight to encourage us to push forward, even in the context of constraints in ASEAN.
- Feminist movements should clarify the objectives of their engagement with ASEAN. For example, is the objective to integrate women in ASEAN's pillars?
- Recent trends in technology, for example automation, affect women's work. This scenario is not new. Women and civil society can learn from the time when the world shifted from telephone to digital technology. Societies are qualitatively in different stages of automation. But what needs to be done is to imagine the type of progress that women want to achieve. The need is to create new forms of economic relations, such as those that promote solidarity, democracy and women's empowerment.

Session 4: Women's Stories in Tableau

Participants divided into groups and conceptualized and acted out tableaux highlighting the interlinkages of economics, political authoritarianism, and culture of violence experienced by marginalized groups of women.



The first group for Session 4 presented the exploitation and abuse that marginalized groups such as indigenous women face under neoliberal economic policies.



Group two for Session 4 focused on the struggles of women migrant workers, their vulnerability to exploitation and violence perpetrated by employers.

Session 5: Countering Political Authoritarianism, Sexism, and the Silencing of Women

Participants discussed how political authoritarianism and economic and social conservatism perpetuate the culture of misogyny and sexual violence aimed at silencing women, and how women and feminist activists are responding to these threats.

One group of participants shared that they see the rising culture of misogyny and impunity in each of their countries. This fosters fear with women and in communities where crimes and violations occur. In Cambodia, a woman was jailed because of her connection to the opposition leader. In the Philippines, women of the political opposition are silenced by threatening to expose their private and sexual lives even if these had nothing to do with the case or issue at hand. In Indonesia, forced eviction causes a lot of problems for women and children. In Myanmar, members of the military rape and kill women in communities after accusing them of harboring rebels. In Thailand, cases of sexual harassment and rape in the workplace do not prosper in the courts. The group offered the following ways forward:

- Act as a regional group, strengthen women's collective actions;
- Bring women's organizations and networks to act on issues across ASEAN states;
- Petition the AICHR to carry out its mandates;
- Draft a collective statement, drawing from conferences and regional forums such as this one;

Another group of participants illustrated national examples of manifestations of political authoritarianism. In Brunei, the king is the singular power who controls everything. In the Philippines, political violence continues to target women and distort existing democratic checks and balances. These are misogynistic expressions of authoritarianism. Men continue to have control of wealth and economic resources. Marginalized groups of women, such as women with disabilities, suffer from double oppression. Women have responded by setting up free legal aid for women, putting up migrant centers, building networks, alliances and coalition, community organizing and social media campaigns.

The third group discussed the overall situation in the region mainly in the Philippines. Many of the people who oppose and criticize the current President face accusations and charges. In all of the countries there is an attempt to discredit women leaders and persistence of victim blaming. The group notes the rising religious fundamentalism in the region. As way forward, the group emphasized the following:

- There is a need for collective action of women's organizations across the region. Strategies should be geared towards increasing participation of grassroots women;
- Strengthen linkages with other groups;
- Maximize social media. Work with the media in creating campaigns and other public education initiatives;
- Continue to collect evidence through research and documentation.

Participants voiced the strong need for regional collective action against misogyny, including by creating more spaces where women can come together and strengthen each other. Women need to identify and articulate the ways by which they can support each other. Awareness-raising activities about women's equality for the public, the government and its institution are still needed. Women should continue to push for laws against sexual violence. Shrinking spaces for civil society are a constant and urgent concern throughout ASEAN. There are efforts to suppress civil society, the media, academics, organizations in ASEAN countries. Still there are examples where women pushed through despite threats to their safety and security.

Participants mentioned the idea of creating an ASEAN ethics agreement and use this to hold governments accountable. More thought should be put on how to deal with ASEAN's principle of non-interference. The long-term dream is to have an ASEAN where leaders are gender-sensitive.

Session 6: Cross-Sectoral Strategies to Promote Women's Rights, Particularly of Marginalized Women

Four speakers were invited to share ideas and initiatives for collaboration across sectors and organizations.² The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus highlighted the trend of state-led homophobia and

² List of speakers: ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, Ryan Silverio | SHAPE SEA, Harpeet Kahlon | Regions Refocus, Anita Nayar | Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Natalia Figge | UN Women, Chang Jordan

transphobia fueled by political and economic factors and by religious extremism. Further, pockets of development in certain ASEAN countries occur in politically fragile communities. All of those compromises the rights of LGBT people. The ASEAN SOGIE Caucus:

- affirms the strategy of alternative regionalism fueled by strong engagements of local activists and efforts and of putting forward evidence-based reports for human rights mechanisms at domestic and global levels;
- recognizes that building a transnational movement is a core element of the work, to create stronger advocacy in ASEAN;
- works on engaging spaces for participation, including by negotiating with governments and holding dialogues;
- recognizes intersectionality and take it seriously by including it as a core principle in the organizational mandate; and
- disseminates research results and policy briefs.

SHAPE-SEA offered to address data gaps through research on gender-specific issues. Results of which could be presented in regional conferences and national seminars. As an academic institution, SHAPE-SEA works in research, education, academic partnerships and publications. There is also a need to introduce feminist pedagogies in universities and to continue developing non-traditional means to sensitize stakeholders on feminist and sexual identity issues.

Regions Refocus explored ideas about how research can bridge and be more responsive about the needs of social movements and for enlarging spaces for autonomous voices in the region. FES shared ways they explore agendas for more economic equality in the region. There are also efforts to see what the past and present of feminist movement in specific countries look like, and the issues that drive them currently.

UN Women shared how the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces could address sexual harassment in public spaces. UN Women reiterated the need for increasing public awareness and enabling behavior change, support for capacity building for local enforcement, local programming and working with city governments.

During the discussion, participants cautioned about the ethical tensions that may arise between poor women in the communities whose voices are silenced because of the presence of the academe. Participants stressed the need to enable communities to influence and to look at various forms of data owning and production that is sensitive to the experiences of grassroots women. Participation, partnership and ownership are key guidelines and principles for research engagements. Stakeholders could also identify spaces for movement building through research.

At the national level, women's groups are mobilizing and monitoring policy implementation. There is a great need to work with grassroots movements on this. Further, for movement building there is a need to support community organizing activities. There must be efforts to capacitate community leadership and address requirements for community mobilization. What are the ways we can build solidarity in the context of rising authoritarianism?

Shrinking spaces affects the political foundations of organizations. Organizations were forced to close down their offices. There is support for community organizing through working with grassroots organizations.

Having both strong movements and being responsive to those who are not currently organized could be a strategy. Women are found in a continuum of engagement in politics. Strengthening spirit of self-agency is an important step towards collective action.

Session 7: Strategies to Advance an Alternative Development Agenda with Women's Rights in ASEAN

Participants listed a number of strategies to address the priority economic issues, sexual violence, and lack of political participation of various marginalized groups of women:

- Capacity building related to trade, business, and SMEs, as well as for political participation;
- Provision of services for women with disabilities, children, migrants, and VAW victim survivors. This include setting up support mechanisms for families of survivors;
- Sharing of experiences and agenda of marginalized groups of women such as rural women and PWD;
- National and regional campaigning on sexual violence;
- Transformational partnerships;
- Equal pay for equal work;
- Responsible agribusiness investments and fair share of returns and value.
- Broaden and expand regulation of skilled labor regulations;
- Decent work in all economic sectors and industries;
- Uphold trade union rights, regularization of workers, maternity benefits; and
- Promote women's sexual and reproductive health rights, access to justice, social protection.

Participants also shared collaborative strategies which include:

- Create safe spaces for cross-movement building;
- Sharpen analysis and exchange ideas, eg gender analysis of social enterprises;
- Conduct regular dialogs with government agencies at the local, national, and regional level;
- New campaigns on non-interference, use social media;
- Conduct studies on investment guidelines of major trading blocs;
- Joint trainings and capacity building, monitoring and research;
- Monitoring; and
- Coalition building.

During the concluding session, WEAVE indicated that they will carry out some of these recommendations. SHAPE-SEA is looking for sustainable partners in 2019 for civil society collaborations. Mekong Migrant Network would be happy to conduct joint research and advocacy projects on dialogs next year. Collaborations between trade unions and CSOs are ongoing, through APF. There is an ASEAN Disabilities Forum in December which people can join. A challenge for everyone is to continue working together towards setting a collective agenda for the engagement in ASEAN. Finally, Regions Refocus and Foundation for Women on behalf of WEAVE congratulated all participants in contributing to the aims for the Forum.

In October 2017, WEAVE prepared an [advocacy paper](#) that was submitted to the Joint Consultative Meeting. The Joint Consultative Meeting was represented by the different heads of the three pillars of ASEAN.

WEAVE's submission is focused on the following thematic issues:

- Achieving gender justice in the AEC;
- Impact of sexual violence to women and girls;
- Interconnection of sexual violence and the ASEAN economic community;
- Developing and upholding civil society engagement; and
- Aligning ASEAN economic policy with international and regional instruments.

WEAVE hopes that through the submission, the issues and recommendations will be brought forward to the attention of relevant and concerned sectoral bodies in ASEAN to ensure that women's agenda is included across the three pillars and human rights cooperation can be operationalized in ASEAN. WEAVE aims to make women at the center of decision-making both at the national and regional levels. One of WEAVE's main strategies is to locate where the women are in the AEC, and how the policies of AEC will impact them. The forum provided a space for WEAVE to start the ball rolling and to work with allies – groups and individuals from other disciplines.

In WEAVE's assessment, this strategy worked because in most WEAVE interventions in all ASEAN related meetings that they were present and even in WEAVE organized meeting, the members always articulated the value to connect sexual violence to political and economic issues. This consistent linkage made other civil society organizations and even government agencies realize that sexual violence is not a separate and single issue of women and girl-children advocates, but must be examined and addressed along with the political and economic contexts of a particular country. This has been articulated by WLB in one of the meetings with the three pillars of ASEAN and made the Joint Consultative Meeting agenda in October, to look on cross cutting themes and issues. The same experience also transpired with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), during the launching of WEAVE's research last August 2017, the network articulated the same and AICHR Malaysia requested WLB to submit a concept note to operationalize human rights cooperation across the three pillars of ASEAN.

Days after the Forum, WEAVE attended the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) 2017. The Forum was strategically organized by WEAVE to take place prior to the ACSC/APF, and, simultaneously with the 31st ASEAN Summit. WEAVE brought the outcome of the Forum to the ACSC/APF, where spaces were utilized to forward women and girl children's human rights and access to justice in the ASEAN.

The Open Space during the ACSC/APF 2017 also became a venue for WEAVE to launch its Regional Research, **Coming out of the Dark: Pursuing Access to Justice for Girl Children in Cases of Sexual Violence**. As part of this, the video ([x](#)) from the Forum was used to introduce the work of WEAVE.