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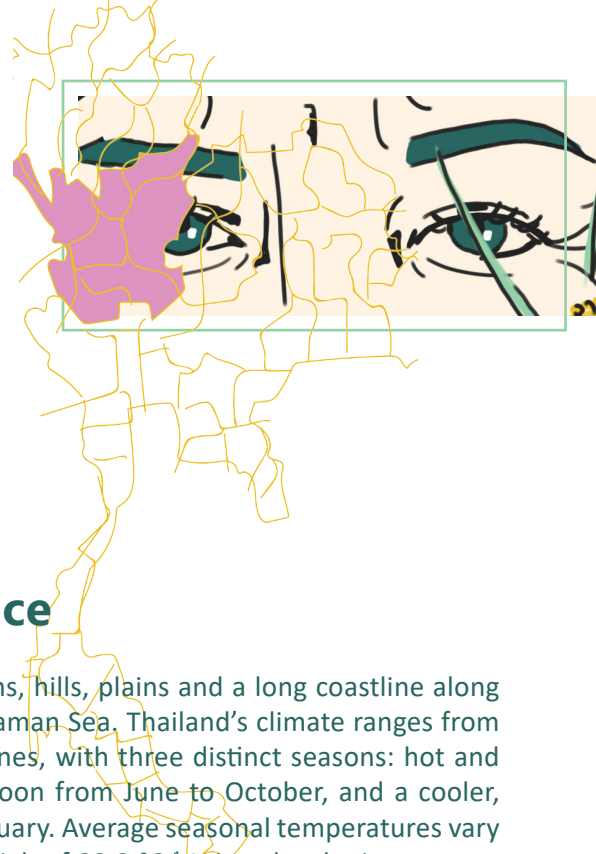
Peasant Women

Leading the Pathway Towards Feminist Climate-Resilient Future



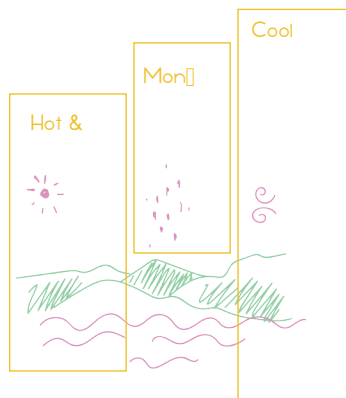
Thailand: Peasant women leading the pathway towards feminist climate-resilient futures

This country briefer is based on the Climate Justice Feminist Participatory Action Research (CJ FPAR) journey of the peasant women in the Lower Northern Region of Thailand (LNRT). The Forests and Farmers Foundation of Thailand (FFF) conducted the CJ FPAR to look into the impacts of climate crises on the livelihoods, well-being and lives of peasant women in the region.



Thailand at a glance

Thailand is a country of mountains, hills, plains and a long coastline along the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. Thailand's climate ranges from the subtropical to the tropical zones, with three distinct seasons: hot and dry from February to May, monsoon from June to October, and a cooler, dry season from November to January. Average seasonal temperatures vary between a low of 23.0 °C and a high of 32.2 °C.¹ It is a developing country highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and is ranked the 13th country in the 'extreme risk' category. Thailand's greenhouse gas emissions represent 0.77 per cent of global emissions in 2014, which is lower than the world average.²



The country has seen a marked increase in temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns over the past thirty years, which have a significant effect on food production. Thailand is also regarded as one of the ten most flood-affected countries in the world. In the last five to ten years, affected communities have observed more frequent and stronger floods. The aftermath of devastating floods in 2011 provides an example of how climate change can adversely affect the peoples including women living in poverty, with studies showing that post-flood, higher-income groups received more government support than lower-income groups³.

Sea level rise is a problem that is seen to affect the possible relocation of approximately 12 million people in Thailand by 2050⁴. Assuming they migrate internally, population density in less vulnerable places will increase significantly, affecting the quality of people's lives. Not only will certain areas become much more crowded and urbanised, but the loss of agricultural land and interruptions to water supply will cause food insecurity. The major drought in 2020 caused prices of rice, sugar and other crops to rise about 20 per cent compared to 2019. This hugely impacted employment as 31.44 per cent of Thailand's population is employed in the agricultural sector, with women agricultural workers comprising almost half of the agricultural labour force.⁶

¹United Nations Development Programme. Thailand (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/south-eastern-asia/thailand>

²Thailand's Updated NDC (2020). Retrieved from <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Thailand%20First/Thailand%20Updated%20NDC.pdf>

³World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank. Thailand: Climate Risk Profile (2021)

⁴Doyle-Houghton, E. (2021, February 1). Climate Change in Thailand. Retrieved from Story Maps: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6a890abfd3d0470aa78c4cc006cd1502>

⁵Bangkok Post: Thailand tackles worst drought in 40 years (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1853069/thailand-tackles-worst-drought-in-40-years>

⁶Food and Agriculture Organization Gender and Land Rights Database (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/en/>

Thailand submitted its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in October 2020, outlining the country's commitments to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20-25 per cent by 2030. Thailand's NDC target has been integrated into the National Strategy and will be implemented through the NDC Roadmap on Mitigation 2021-2030, the NDC Sectoral Action Plans and the NDC Supportive Action Plan which were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders' consultation and public participation processes at the national and local levels. There are several areas of policy underway, including: the Environmentally Sustainable Transport System Plan, a low emission development plan to increase the country's transportation capacity, a vehicle CO2 emissions tax scheme, a Waste Management Roadmap, feed-in tariffs, tax incentives to promote investment in renewable energy, and REDD+ Readiness.

Despite the increasing climate actions in the country, implementing gender-responsive plans in Thai national climate policies and related government agencies suffer from the lack of political commitment from the national to the local offices. This leads to uncertainty when translated into practice, for instance, gender budgeting. It is also observed that Thailand's national gender plans and strategies are likely to centre around social assistance, employment, political participation and promoting understanding of gender equality rather than environmental governance and natural resource management. And given that the preparation of the NDC and the National Adaptation Plan were dominated by engineers and related professionals within male dominated sectors such as water, public works and planning, as well as energy and transportation, the persistent gender biases are still manifested.

Gender integration remains under prioritised, especially in the mitigation component. There is only one reference on the need for gender responsiveness to be aligned with human rights in the adaptation component of Thailand's updated NDC report. References to gender and climate change experts are absent as is a system for designating a gender focal point. It is also observed that relevant national gender plans or strategies such as Thailand Gender Equality Act and Women's Development Strategy 2017-2021 do not reflect national plans to meet mitigation targets in the NDC. Much more work needs to be done to increase the greater degree of gender integration in climate policy instruments.



⁷An Assessment of the NDCs of States of Southeast Asia (2021). Retrieved from https://th.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/SEA-NDCs-ARIEL-HBSv4_0.pdf

⁸ Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+), is an essential part of the global efforts to mitigate climate change.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ NDC Equity Tracker: Thailand (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.ndcequitytracker.org/thailand>

Overview of Thailand's Nationally Determined Contribution¹¹

MITIGATION

20% - 25%

reduction in GHG emissions

20%

share of power generation from renewable sources by 2036

30%

share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption by 2036

30%

reduction in energy intensity by 2036

ADAPTATION

NDC highlights the National Adaptation Priorities, specifically on the following sectors:



water resources management
- increase water security and reduce loss and damage from water-related disasters;



agriculture and food security - maintain productivity by increasing ability to respond and manage climate risks;



tourism - enhance disaster management and climate risk reduction;



public health - enhance capacity to manage health risks by enhancing access to good quality public health service;



natural resources management
- enhance the conservation, rehabilitation, and sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity and strengthening public participation;



human resettlement and security
- enhance capacity of individuals, communities and cities to adapt to climate change

Means of Implementation

- NDC targets have been integrated into the National Strategy and will be implemented through the NDC Roadmap on Mitigation 2021-2030, the NDC Sectoral Action Plans and the NDC Supportive Action Plan which were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders' consultation and public participation processes at the national and local levels.
- Financial, technology development and transfer, capacity-building needed to drive effective and realistic implementation of NDC.
- Inter-ministerial committee established to oversee climate policy development and implementation

¹¹Thailand's Updated NDC (2020). Retrieved from <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Thailand%20First/Thailand%20Updated%20NDC.pdf>



Peasant women and the NDC

Thailand's NDC and its 25-Year National Plan on Climate Change do not adequately address human rights or the gender-responsive socio-economic needs of those who are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This puts the low income, elderly, sick, children and women more vulnerable to climate-induced extreme events.

There are no plans to address the problem of slow onset events, of which peasant women already feel some of the impacts. Losses in the agriculture sector due to slow onset events such as increasing temperatures force women to work outside of their hometown, leaving their families behind. Furthermore, mitigation actions such as energy transition and forest restoration are emphasised, but adaptation needs are not sufficiently addressed. Currently, there have been no long term plans based on climate projections and the needs for transition to a climate resilient community. The plans and policies are more focused on storing more water and provide humanitarian assistance to help communities get over droughts.



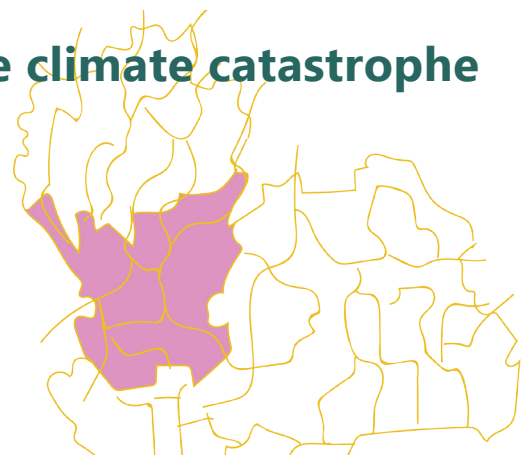
Thus, Thailand's NDC risks promoting false solutions. As an example, while the NDC addresses the problem of droughts, the solutions proposed, such as large dams, violate women's human rights and displace local communities, reduce the fertility of agricultural lands, destroy wildlife habitat and biodiversity, among many other negative impacts.

The needs of women and their communities affected by climate change are not sufficiently addressed by current political and decision-making processes, especially at the local level. Plans and policies are made and implemented without the meaningful engagement of grassroots women and affected communities. The community women stressed that they were not engaged in the discussion, planning and decision making in measures introduced by the government. For instance, because community water projects initiated by local authorities have left out women's particular contexts and needs, only those living near the irrigation sites or are related to village heads are able to access these projects.

Rather than implementing big projects that are not responding to the women's needs, the women opined that the most effective and gender-responsive use of government budget is to directly provide more funds for households and community, or at least enter into a partnership with them.

Peasant women's realities amid the climate catastrophe

The Lower Northern Region of Thailand (LNRT) is suitable for growing rice and other agricultural crops. The majority of the peoples in the region, including the women, earn their living from farming. Peasant women also take on other odd jobs to augment their family incomes.



The women of LNRT are quite active in their social and political engagement in the community. Many of them belong to different village social groups, where they get information on different topics of interest. While the Thai government claims that all citizens have social protection under the national universal health coverage, provident funds and crop loss schemes, not all peasant women are able to access these.

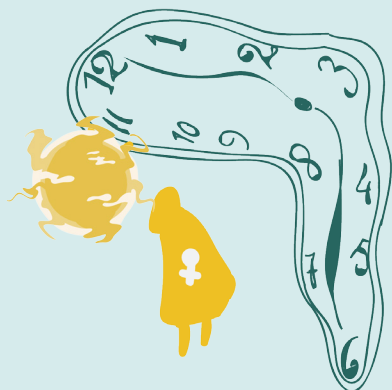


Nearly all women in the communities cited the frequency and longer period of droughts that stretch for up to five months and the unavailability of water for their household consumption, for growing their crops and caring for their animals as greatly affecting them. One of the village women, Mrs. Suree Panpoh, observes: 'no water in my pond for a long time, it has never been like this before. The soil is very dry, and there seems to be less or no underground water available to support the surface water. These abnormal droughts seem to have become normal now.'



Because of climate change, weather patterns are becoming more unpredictable, making it difficult, and at times risky, to plan when to plant crops. Many peasant women have seen their yields decreasing and more insects attacking crops. The women referred to their farms and gardens as a supermarket where they could get their food and other daily supplies. Now their 'supermarket' is with less supplies and is becoming more difficult to get.

Longer periods of intense heat and dry spells have also affected women's health as many peasant women experienced heat strokes, sunburn and skin rashes. According to them, the increased heat has made them less productive, forcing them to look for alternative sources of income, making them work longer hours each day. The women shared similar stories of anxiety as Mrs. Lakana Loysanan of Klong Larn, Kampaengpet:ch:



'it seems like there is not much work in the house, but in fact, it is endless. I normally wake up at 4 am and go to sleep at around ten or eleven in the evening. I can't be sick; I have to be very strong so I can continue taking care of everyone in the family.'

The women have all said that increased heat and droughts impact on their livelihoods; some added that the current impacts are already so severe that they could not imagine the future if the crises get any worse than what they are facing now.

LNRT women taking action

Amid the challenges, LNRT women are stepping up and playing integral roles in realising a climate-resilient future for their families and communities. Through FPAR, the Forests and Farmers Foundation of Thailand (FFF) together with LNRT women groups organised a series of consultations, mobilisation activities, workshops and meetings to support peasant women in the LNRT in their research and advocacy work.

Through training sessions on climate change issues and country climate policy, 37 women from five LNRT provinces strengthened their capacity and understanding around the injustices in the climate crises, linking these with the larger geopolitical and economic context and the systemic barriers that exacerbate women's oppression and exploitation.

The community women used to pool their own resources together to survive and rebuild during times of extreme climate events and disasters. They often took out bank loans to purchase seeds and farm equipment or to construct community irrigation. But they often end up steeped in debt, and their assets seized when they fail to pay their loans back.

The FPAR journey familiarised the women with different resources and tools enabling them to systematise data collection and gather evidence in support of their research and advocacy work. The LNRT women also developed a policy brief shared with other networks for their policy advocacy engagements with the local and national governments.

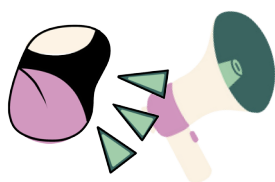
FFF and the LNRT women conducted advocacy activities throughout their FPAR journey, including initiating two dialogues with the local and national governments and inviting two national networks to share their stories to help craft national civil society demands. These opportunities allowed the LNRT women to strengthen their voices and raise the profile of their issues with the government and other networks. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in the country, and after the Thai government submitted its revised NDC, women leaders participated in an online dialogue organised by the Climate Watch Thailand (CWT). All these engagements further affirmed the value of grassroots women organising for systemic solutions to realise climate justice.



FPAR women exercising Body Mapping as part of their research tools.

The LNRT women's initiatives contributed to the formation of the Women for Climate Justice alliance. Members regularly communicate through social media and other online platforms, sharing and giving updates on activities happening in their areas. Some of them have participated in physical and online meetings to share their views on climate related issues, especially the impacts of heatwaves and droughts on grassroots women and their demands for feminist climate justice.

What do we want?



The peasant women of LNRT wanted to understand why all these changes in the environment impacting their lives and livelihoods are happening, and what they can do to improve their situation. Having understood the systemic and structural roots of the problems, they have taken it upon themselves to act collectively to realise a climate-resilient future.

At the national level, recognising the contribution of women in bringing solutions and supporting their initiatives is critical in overcoming the intensifying impacts of climate change while ensuring the centrality of gender justice and women's rights in climate action. Women are already initiating measures to address the impacts of climate-induced heat and droughts, using their practical knowledge, experience, resources and networks. The Thai government must:



Include the issues around climate-induced heat and its impacts on women in the NDC, NAP and climate plans and policies of Thailand;



Ensure the meaningful participation of women in discussions on climate solutions, particularly on water and natural resources management schemes;



Ensure women's access to scientific information on climate change so that they can combine this with their traditional knowledge to help them in planning for their cropping calendar and farming activities;



Provide direct access to financial and technology support for grassroots women and local groups

At the regional level, governments in Asia and the Pacific must support and strengthen exchanges on the impacts of climate change and initiatives undertaken by different women's groups in the region to share collective knowledge, and to inspire and foster international solidarity. Most importantly, provide support, facilitate and ensure access of women and their communities to knowledge and information on climate related issues.

At the international level, countries must reject any harmful technologies especially carbon capture and storage and other false solutions such as 'clean coal', large hydro and reforestation projects that displace local communities and threaten women's lives and survival.



Collective discussion of FPAR women with FFF team.

- Developed countries and corporations must pursue significant emissions reductions as these have severe impacts on women on the ground;
- Developed countries and corporations must own their historical and ongoing responsibilities in bringing the world to the current climate catastrophe, particularly compensate for losses and damages;
- Finance and investments in fossil fuels must be stopped and diverted to community based climate solutions;
- Adaptation finance must be made available, prioritised for, and directly accessible by, women and those impacted by climate change.



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.

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