

Reflection on the Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) Capacity Building Program

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Background

Environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs), who tirelessly advocate for the protection of the environment, face growing security risks in their pursuit of sustainable development. According to the Global Witness last 2022, 23 of the 200 EHRDs killed were from Asia Pacific, accounting to 16.5% of the global total. Southeast and South Asia were the sub regions with the greatest number of killings. These killings are related to environmentally destructive industries such as large-scale mining, agribusiness plantations and logging. They also face cyberattacks, surveillance, and defamation campaigns. Environmental defenders are frequently criminalized, portrayed as obstacles to development or economic progress, and falsely accused of crimes.

The lack of capacity to assess and mitigate risks leave EHRDs more vulnerable to further attacks, hindering their valuable work on environmental rehabilitation, protection and conservation. Indigenous people and the youth are particularly important to be supported, being the most affected and the latter having the vigor for climate action and highest stake amidst the climate crisis.

The Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) has therefore been conducting various capacity building activities on topics identified by EHRDs that are most crucial to their work. These topics were encapsulated in the “EHRD Toolkit: A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights” which was released in 2022 led by APNED, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Development Programme (UNDP), Center for Environmental Concerns - Philippines Inc. (CEC) and the Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP).

It is in this light that APNED is continuing its efforts to support EHRDs through capacity building in this year’s training on conducting risk assessments, security mechanisms and psychosocial wellbeing which are Modules 2 and 5 of the EHRD Toolkit.

The training will be followed by the assessment and strategic planning of APNED applying the topics learned from the training on the EHRD Toolkit topics.

My reflection

This training is so helpful for me personally and for all human rights defenders in Timor-Leste reflecting to the current human rights issues in Timor-Leste after independence. Apart from the newest country Timor-Leste as everyone knows, the country has stronger memory through the experiences of its people on how struggled against the human rights violation form from the several colonial countries in the past that we had witnessed through the CAVR report, so no one won’t be repeat it again. Unfortunately, here is still some strength order behind the scene that backing policy brutality against the student’s movement during all demonstration against the form of injustice written inside the resolution of the national parliament for buying the car for its members, instead of allocating to the basics needs of

development of citizens, such school, medicines, roads and other productive sectors like agriculture, that majority of the population living. On the other hand, disrespectful behavior of the Police authority that psychologically and physically decrease the spirit of the community and its defenders as a social control in this democratic country, even criticized the elders leaders in social media in Timor-Leste the citizens it's able to arrest have punishment. In this case it's necessary for the Timorese young human rights defenders to have appropriate training on the risk assessment and data controller from the frontline defenders to mitigate it before going to aggravate as other countries in the region and in the Pacific as well. In this case I would like to highlight some cases that shows our country will be danger for its citizens:

- After political crises in 2006 there were martial arts was an issue that divided the youth liquidated in divers group apart of the shooting from the military and rebels group. This situation remind to questioning the political system in this country why the government able to end the political crisis but it's hard to end the martial art issues, even though these group are the core of the social conflict this time? One member from one Martial art organization stated that *"here was no direct pressure, but there was a sort of psychological pressure, because in our neighbourhood if you don't participate in the MAG and you go somewhere in the neighbourhood, you might get beaten up. If you are not a member there is no one to protect you, but with us your safety is guaranteed!*
As a young activist in this country, we're living under pressure, that means we must be careful when criticizing anyone publicly, even though it's good but our lives will not safe if the violator is from any martial art organization. It is easy to arrest us secretly, by their members any time. This organization also involved by police members, this case when the suspect can suffer in the detention room if the police is from different group. Like in 2022 one member of PSHT martial art group dead in the detention room in Dili and so many cases.
- This year, policed arrested Ela Varian a Timorese woman activist in Dili who has criticized Xanana on facebook, seems like less respected to the Timorese woman such sexual harassment. This action saw that the policy authority is breaking a piece of the National Police of Timor Leste (PNTL) says "law and order", they favoring more on order than law, which is recognize through the national constitution "freedom of express and information' in article 40. This is a kind of discrimination against the civilians as watchdog or social control for the poor people. This case was happening between civilians Xanana was not prime minister, so the police arrested the activist without any permeation from the court?
- Finally in Timor-Leste the citizens are not aware how to take action on the environmental issues in the society such as burning and any kind of the destruction against the right of the clean environment, water and wind because they are afraid from each other because no protection mechanism that convince them so far.

On this points hope the next DTP is an option to the Timorese to prepare and learn more.