

NIWA Regional Exchange 2024

The Network of Indigenous Women in Asia (NIWA) was founded in 2019 with support from the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP). It serves as an informal network of Indigenous Women's Organizations from 14 Asian countries, aiming to empower Indigenous Women by advocating for their socio-economic, environmental, and political rights through networking and movement building.

NIWA focuses on three strategic areas: leadership among Indigenous Women, building the Indigenous Women's movement, and recognition of their rights. Regular regional exchange visits are conducted to strengthen alliances, promote cross-learning, foster solidarity, and share experiences related to movement building and land rights.

In 2024, NIWA Regional Exchange was held in the Philippines. Indigenous Women Program, AIPP and the Network of Indigenous Women in Asia (NIWA) successfully held NIWA's regional exchange from April 21 to 26, 2024, in the Philippines, particularly during the 40th Peoples' Cordillera Day celebration in Sitio Liglig, Brgy. Tanglag, Lubuagan, Kalinga, in the Cordillera region. This year's exchange theme was, "Empowering Indigenous Women: Cultivating Leadership and Solidarity in Asia towards Genuine Land Rights and Self-Determination."

The exchange was attended by 24 participants, 16 of whom were delegates from NIWA's member countries in Asia: Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand, while 8 were observers and members of the secretariat.



Community Visit during the Cordillera Day (April 23-24)

The inaugural day of the centralized 40th Cordillera Day commenced with a mass gathering at Talang village, Kalinga province on April 23, 2024, with over 1400 participants hailing from various regions of the Philippines and different nations, demonstrating solidarity with the ongoing Indigenous Peoples' rights movement. The AIPP team and NIWA Exchange delegates joined the event to honor the memory of indigenous leaders who spearheaded the resistance against the construction of the Chico Dam and the rise of dictatorship in the Cordillera region between 1981 and 1984. The commemoration's name was changed to Cordillera Day in 1985 and has since continued to unite indigenous peoples across Cordillera's diverse provinces while fostering solidarity with national and international advocates and supporters.

The first day of Cordillera Day was packed with discussions from various speakers. Among them were Teddy Casiño of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New Patriotic Alliance) for the national (Philippine) situation, and Ned Tuguinay of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) for the situation in the Cordillera region. The delegates from participating organizations delivered their solidarity speech. Ke Jung, Deputy Secretary General of AIPP, delivered a solidarity speech on behalf of AIPP, extending unwavering support to the people of the Cordillera region. In his address, he emphasized the shared struggles and aspirations of the Cordillera indigenous people across the region and highlighted the importance of unity and mutual support in the face of challenges. He also shared AIPP's commitment to advocating for the rights and welfare of the Cordillera people, acknowledging their resilience and determination in preserving their cultural heritage and asserting their rights.

Indigenous Women Workshop:

On the second day of Cordillera Day, Innabuyog facilitated an Indigenous Women Workshop attended by over 50 participants, including NIWA delegates, local community members, and participants from across the Philippines. The local indigenous women shared their experiences with police brutality while opposing development projects, highlighting the risks they face. Indigenous women from Tanlang shared challenges such as legal charges, human rights violations, restricted access to natural resources, and the impact of hydropower and dam projects in the Philippines. They highlighted the lack of information about proposed mines, the dumping of poisonous chemicals into water sources leading to river contamination, and the pollution of farmlands. These issues are widespread across the entire Cordillera region.



Following this, NIWA delegates discussed the context of Indigenous women's rights to land, territories, and resources (LTR) in their country, addressing issues like gender-based violence and the effects of development projects on indigenous communities' livelihoods.

A NIWA delegate from Japan highlighted the issues and challenges faced by Okinawa, formerly the independent Kingdom of Ryukyu, before being overthrown by Japan in 1879. Indigenous peoples in Okinawa continue to experience systematic discrimination, with militarization and military bases being major concerns. The community suffers from social and criminal issues such as rape, murder, sexual harassment, intentional traffic accidents, and robberies due to the military presence. Efforts are being made to connect with other indigenous communities, learn about indigenous recognition at the UN., and exchange experiences to develop better tools for protecting indigenous peoples.

A delegate from Taiwan similarly shared the challenges indigenous women face in Taiwan due to the patriarchal values of mainstream society. This has disrupted traditional social divisions, with women often bearing the financial burden for their children and having lower economic independence than men. Domestic violence is a significant issue, impacting the mental health of women and children. Efforts in central Taiwan include empowering women through international workshops and training, providing shelters, and promoting decision-making roles for indigenous women. These initiatives aim to address obstacles such as limited working opportunities, ethnic discrimination, and the vulnerabilities of low-income and domestic violence victims.

A NIWA delegate from Malaysia further highlighted that indigenous women face significant challenges, including securing land rights due to land grabbing and lack of legal recognition, and socio-economic issues such as poverty and limited access to education and healthcare. They are

also at higher risk of gender-based violence and face barriers to education and healthcare, exacerbated by discrimination and cultural insensitivity.

NIWA delegates from Nepal discussed how Nepal faces similar issues to those in the Philippines, particularly regarding the violation of indigenous peoples' rights in the name of developing national parks and environmental conservation. They highlighted cases of gender-based violence in Chitwan National Park, where children born from military rapes struggle with citizenship and identity issues. Additionally, many indigenous women are trapped by traffickers each year, and the government is still biased against indigenous people and women.

The common challenges faced by Indigenous Women across various regions of Asia include discrimination (such as non-recognition of Indigenous Peoples' identity, lower priority in education, and limited employment opportunities), violence against women and children (VAWC), government neglect (including inaccessible healthcare services), and land rights issues leading to state repression.

Following this discussion, all participants agreed with the following suggestions:

- Indigenous Women, along with their communities, should unite against destructive projects and other rights violations perpetrated by the state.
- Indigenous youth should return to their communities, highlighting the importance of elders teaching children to preserve indigenous identity and culture.
- Indigenous youth can use social media as a platform to promote traditional practices.

Orientation on CEDAW and General Recommendation No. 39

Sushmita Lama, Indigenous Women Programme Coordinator, facilitated an orientation workshop on CEDAW and GR 39. In this session, the basic understanding on CEDAW GR 39 such as the historical background of the importance of indigenous women rights and the development process of the document including the official UN endorsement was introduced. As introduced, CEDAW GR39 is a specific international instrument that it addresses the long overdue discrimination for a long time, decades of not recognition on the rights of indigenous women and the rights indigenous women and girls are covered. The limitation or the challenge is how the government is implementing all of this and accountable in respecting all of this.

She further emphasized that CEDAW G.R. 39 offers recommendations to State Parties to fulfill their obligations under the CEDAW convention, aiming to eliminate intersectional discrimination faced by Indigenous Women and girls and ensure their equality in both law and practice. She highlighted that this achievement resulted from decades of advocacy, and due to limited awareness about it, it falls upon NIWA to disseminate this information, especially to Indigenous Women from grassroots communities. She also shared the NIWA's training plan, dissemination plan and plan for translation into different languages.

Towards the conclusion of her presentation, it was agreed upon to organize a separate and comprehensive workshop within the NIWA membership to conduct an awareness campaign regarding CEDAW, with a particular focus on G.R. 39.

