IN OUR BONES
STORIES FROM WOMEN DEFENDING LAND, COMMUNITY, HUMAN RIGHTS & THE ENVIRONMENT IN INDONESIA & THE PHILIPPINES

URGENT ACTION FUND FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS
ABOUT URGENT ACTION FUND:

Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights (Urgent Action Fund) supports women human rights defenders (WHRDs), such as those included in this report, who are striving to create cultures of justice, equality and peace. In partnership with its sister funds Urgent Action Fund-Africa and Urgent Action Fund-Latin America, Urgent Action Fund provides rapid response grants to WHRDs around the world. Urgent Action Fund responds to all requests within 72 hours. Its rapid response grants improve security when WHRDs face threats and enable strategic action during windows of opportunity to change laws, policies and public opinion. Since its founding in 1997, Urgent Action Fund has awarded more than 1,500 rapid response grants to support WHRDs in 110 countries worldwide.

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We are honored to share with you here powerful stories of grassroots women leaders tackling environmental challenges in Indonesia and the Philippines. This opportunity to learn from their stories grew out of earlier work in the region.

In August of 2014, the International Network of Women’s Funds (INWF) and Global Greengrants Fund (GGF) hosted a summit on women and climate change in Indonesia. The summit brought together activists, funders and environmental experts under the banner of the shared recognition that climate change is among the greatest challenges facing humanity and that women are on the cutting-edge of grassroots solutions. Despite their leadership, women are often unrecognized and lack funding for their environmental work. Thus, the summit was designed to create the conditions for a stronger, better supported, and more unified movement for women’s rights and environmental sustainability.

The tactic was cross-pollination: creating opportunities for learning, exchange, and collaboration. Over five days, activists, allies, and funders listened to stories of struggles and strategies for environmental and gender justice, charting commonalities as well as differences in our movements. We ate together, went for walks together, and even danced together, always deeply grateful for the natural beauty around us. Ultimately, we forged ties and learned to see our respective work as woven together in a larger tapestry for sustainability.

Urgent Action Fund supports women human rights defenders carrying out frontline activism. Samdhana Institute, a member of the Greengrants Alliance of Funds, nurtures a community of fellows in Asia who, learning alongside farmers and indigenous peoples, are committed to sustaining people, nature and culture. Together, we were both inspired by the summit and catalyzed by the call to develop concrete collaborations.

After a year of dialogue, our organizations jointly convened women leaders from the Philippines and Indonesia who are forging solutions to environmental challenges. Coming full circle, these activists convened and, in a space dedicated to their voices and experiences, shared with one another their unique challenges and triumphs as women. The publication that follows tells their stories. May we all learn from them and commit to supporting their incredible work.

In solidarity,

Kate Kroeger
Executive Director
Urgent Action Fund

Nonette Royo
Executive Director
Samdhana Institute
Yes, there is a difference between women’s and men’s experiences in environmental justice activism, because the activism of men is widely accepted, but if you are a woman they ask, ‘why you?’

The stories shared in this report are not unusual. Throughout Southeast Asia, hundreds of women environmental activists have been jailed, defamed as threats to “national security,” or suffered discrimination and violence. Yet, the experiences of these courageous women too often remain untold.

This report shares their stories. In these pages, you will meet women who have taken a stand for the environment and for the survival of their communities, often at great personal risk. These women are also human rights defenders and work at the intersection of environment, human rights, and gender equality. They advocate to end violence against women and to address climate change. They draw no artificial distinction between working to improve maternal health, challenging discrimination against indigenous peoples, and ending the devastating use of mercury in gold mining.

We choose to tell their stories because intersectional work and activism are often overlooked when they do not fit neatly into preconceived boxes of who a feminist is or what an environmental activist looks like. Their stories offer lessons in achieving a more sustainable, equitable world. Our report closes with recommendations for donors and allies.

In the Mindanao region of the Philippines, criminalization of environmental and indigenous human rights defenders has reached unprecedented levels. Tactics such as false charges and imprisonment, harassment, and violence are used to deter their work. Such threats occur in the context of an ongoing conflict and are sometimes carried out under the pretext of the government’s campaign against local insurgent groups. In addition, human rights defenders, their families and their communities face displacement by the conflict and are targets of “fake encounters” (extrajudicial killings staged to appear as though they took place because of the military conflict). Women human rights defenders are at particular risk of sexual violence; rape is used to attempt to shame them and to discourage their activism.

In Indonesia, which has over 17,000 islands in its territory, the situation for women that fight for land rights and environmental justice is equally challenging. Much of the land grabs and environmental degradation take place in remote areas, making it difficult to document violations of human rights and environmental law. Women also struggle against social norms that have traditionally seen only men as leaders. In many cases, as highlighted in our case studies, palm oil production or gold mines are run by the state or managed by local companies (even if contracted by an international corporation), further complicating efforts to ensure legal and environmental compliance.

In both countries, women are at the heart of these struggles. In the following profiles, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) from Indonesia and the Philippines describe what motivated them to break from traditional roles, how they built new networks and alliances for change, and what happened when they took on leadership roles in these efforts.

These profiles are drawn from individual interviews and from group discussions during a convening held by Urgent Action Fund and Samdhana Institute in Indonesia in September of 2015. Interviews were completed by Arimbi Heroepoetri, who used a her-story-inspired methodology. This approach helped us to ensure that the women are speaking in their own voice and at their own pace, placing themselves at the heart of their stories.

At the same time, considerations were made for other experiences that may not be explicitly ‘gendered’ but are equally important, especially in the context of rural and indigenous peoples’ communities. The interview questions were developed in line with the Women Human Rights Defenders Guidelines as published by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) in Indonesia. Nina Jusuf and Judy Pasimio, both Advisors to Urgent Action Fund, provided further contextual guidance and input. The testimonies have been translated into English.

“When our ancestral domains are under the threat, women are paramount to defending environmental rights as we are deeply connected to our land.”

—Mary Jane Real, Advisor, Urgent Action Fund
Self-care as a Strategy

by Nina Jusuf

As a facilitator with years of experience supporting women human rights defenders (WHRDs), the first thing I noticed when I met the women whose stories are shared in this publication was their love for the land. Their love for the land was the foundation – it gave them the strength to face a wide range of pressures and challenges: their family’s disapproval, questioning of their ‘womanhood’, slanders, imprisonment, torture and even death threats.

Women like Eva, Jull, Bae Rose, Bai Ali and others experience stressful events on an almost daily basis while defending their lands. As the struggle is ongoing, they are in a continuous traumatic state. The accumulated trauma, if not addressed, can affect every aspect of activism - how decisions are being made, both individual and collective, leadership longevity, and the sustainability of the movement as a whole. Equally important is the recent past and historical trauma resulting from centuries of colonization, ongoing militarization, and displacement. Historical trauma, as a cumulative collective experience passed on through generations, is often overlooked but can manifest itself negatively in activists’ emotional and physical wellbeing.

To support women and their activism, it is imperative to introduce self-care as a strategy, not as a luxury. Self-care means understanding the impacts of current, recent past, and historical traumas on women’s bodies and finding pathways to healing. Women activists are also inevitably leaders, and as such, are expected to appear strong and be supportive of others. The biggest obstacle is integrating the practice of self-care on daily basis and not feeling ashamed or perceiving it as an indulgence.

The healing process is essential, and unfolds through the creation of safe spaces for women to share their stories and experiences, through counseling, and by tapping into their existing cultures of storytelling. Where it is very difficult to discuss trauma publicly or directly, creative approaches are needed. Through a group story weaving process, for example, women take turns telling a story and sharing their emotional state. Above all, simply introducing the idea that self-care is also a vital part of her work can plant a seed within an activist that will begin to grow and sustain her.
Eva Susanty Hanafi Bande (Eva Bande)

Eva is a defender of women’s human rights, land rights, and the environment and a mother of three from the district of Banggai, in Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Her activism began in 1998 when, while still a university student, she became an advocate for survivors of sexual violence and for the rights of women and children.

Through her work with women, Eva began to hear of forced evictions and of farmland stolen by palm oil companies. One company in particular, PT Berkat Hutan Pusaka, had illegally appropriated land from local indigenous people and from the Bangkiriang Wildlife Reserve in Central Sulawesi. The company logged native trees from the land and replaced them with palm for oil production. Local communities quickly began to feel the impact. Without the protections against soil erosion offered by native trees, flooding became more common and the paddy fields and homes were constantly swamped. The incidence of water-borne diseases like dysentery and diarrhea increased.

Witnessing this, Eva founded the People’s Front for Central Sulawesi Palm Oil Advocacy to organize communities to stop the illegal land grabs and to monitor environmental degradation. Together with local farmers, she organized peaceful demonstrations against the company. When the Indonesian military stepped in and tried to end the protests, tensions escalated. Eva attempted to mediate and calm the situation, but local anger boiled over and a group of farmers set fire to some of the company’s equipment.

Along with 23 others, Eva was arrested and on May 26, 2010, sentenced to 4 years and 6 months of imprisonment, even though she herself had no role in starting the fire. At the time, she had three young children at home.

Eva continued to organize behind bars. “I will always be with you, my friends, no matter what the risks are,” she said every time farmers from the community visited her in jail. While in prison, Eva protested the injustices perpetrated by the corporation and the court with a hunger strike. Her extensive network
of colleagues and friends, some from her student activism days, advocated for her tirelessly. The issue of Eva’s imprisonment was also raised with the newly elected President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, who promised her release during his election campaign. On December 10, 2014 President Jokowi finally granted clemency for Eva, and scheduled her release for December 22, Indonesia’s National Women’s Day.

Eva’s imprisonment was also hard on her family. It was difficult to explain her imprisonment to her three young children and it took her three months to prepare emotionally for their first visit. Initially, she told them she was away from them because she was attending school to become a teacher. For Eva, this was the only way she could think of to help her children to deal with the trauma. The prison’s location, in Luwuk, was a 14 hour car drive from her home. To be closer to Eva, her husband and the eldest child relocated to Luwuk.

Eva has a deep commitment to the value of education, especially for women. When her father expected her to work after graduating from high school, Eva insisted on getting a college education instead. When her father refused to help her pay for college, she supported herself by working at a local radio station. She has found that the knowledge she gained in the classroom on law later enabled her to assist farmers in advocating for themselves. For Eva, her teacher’s lessons carried far beyond college. As she says: “land justice cannot be discussed in the classroom only, it has to be put in practice.” Ultimately, her father came to understand and support her work. And it was this support from her family that Eva credits with giving her the strength to survive her sentence.

Jull Takaliuang

Jull Takaliuang is an indigenous woman, a legal advocate, and a defender of the environment and human rights from the small village of Menggawa in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Jull founded AMMALTA, an organization that fights for the rights of communities impacted by gold mining. Since 1998, she has led Yayasan Suara Nurani Minaesa (YSNM), an environmental and human rights advocacy organization.

“To lead is to take risks. The violence I experienced in jail definitely left a mark on me, and it shook the community as well. We have to continue to strengthen the community because the fight is far from over.”
—Eva Bande

Jull began her environmental advocacy when she discovered that people in the primarily indigenous communities living in and around Buyat Bay were showing symptoms of metal poisoning, resulting in paralysis and even death. Tests of the soil indicated high levels of contamination caused by hexavalent chromium, a toxic industrial waste product from mining operations nearby.
In response, Jull organized the Bangka Island community in Buyat Bay and led a successful campaign that ultimately shut down the Chinese mining company responsible for the pollution. Jull believes strongly that justice can be achieved through the just application of the law. She led the efforts to help the Bangka Island community find lawyers and to monitor and document the problem, as well as provide data and information to support their case in court. In January 2012, they filed a lawsuit to revoke the company’s exploration permit, but in August 2012 their suit was rejected by the Administrative Court (PTUN) in Manado. Following this, the Bangka people, together with allies from the tourism industry, appealed to a Higher Administrative Court in Makassar, South Sulawesi, and were successful. In March 2013, the Court reversed the earlier decision and revoked the exploration permit. The mining company then appealed to the Supreme Court, but their appeal was rejected.

Because of her activism to stop destructive gold mining, reclaim beaches from exploitation, and halt illegal logging carried out by members of the police on Bangka Island, Jull experienced many threats. These included physical attacks arranged by the mining company. She was also unlawfully detained and placed under house arrest, with one year’s probation, in retaliation for her activism.

“When the land is taken, we do not have power.” Jull strongly believes this and reminds her community to fight for their ancestral domains and to reclaim their own leadership. Community members showed full support when Jull had to attend court proceedings; they accompanied her in court, bringing her food and water for long court sessions.

Jull’s activism also had consequences for her family. As a result of her involvement in a campaign for improved maternal health services during the years 2010-2014, Jull and her family were blacklisted and prevented from using hospitals and health services in the area. When her son needed to be hospitalized for dengue fever, it was difficult to find doctors who would agree to treat him. Jull, fearing for her child’s safety, only kept him in the hospital for one day.

For more than a decade, Jull has led efforts to prosecute offenders in mining and land grabbing cases, taking on the Indonesian government and powerful corporate interests. In recognition of her tireless activism to defend the rights of her community, Jull received the N-Peace Award from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2015.

“Often women give up when faced with challenges, but we are fighting for a bigger cause: fighting for women who are losing their land, women who cannot fish anymore because the water is poisonous, women who are becoming poorer, because the environment is contaminated.”

—Jull Takaliuang
Wilfrida is an indigenous activist from Oekopa village, Biboki Tanpah, in North Central Timor District, East Nusa Tenggara. She belongs to the Usatnesi Sonaf K’bat tribe in Oekopa. As one of the oldest tribes in the region, they are respected and trusted as leaders in the community. Wilfrida is a part-time teacher in a local junior high school and a weaver. She is the mother of seven children, two of whom have passed away, and one of whom is deaf. Her husband, Kanisius Ceunfin, is a farmer.

Oekopa is a village of approximately 1,500 residents. The majority of Oekopa people make their living as farmers. In 2010, a manganese ore extraction company came to Oekopa to explore the area for mining. A preliminary meeting was held with the community, but neither the company nor the government followed up with the village, and in 2012, the company returned with a permit to begin operations. Wilfrida began to organize her community. “At night, I went door-to-door, combing through the village, and talked to people one by one to strengthen our position and not be swayed by sweet talk from the mining company. I don’t really care what people say.” The Usatnesi Sonaf K’bat tribe rejected the company’s proposal.

Because of her stance, the police went to Oekopa intending to arrest Wilfrida. She was brought in for interrogation, but instead she turned the table and questioned the officers about the legitimacy of the questioning. She told them: “This land is our property, and anyone who wants to deal with this land must ask us first... If we talk about our rights, what is wrong with that?” The police had no answer for her; and let her go.

Wilfrida next organized the community members who had rejected the mining plan to visit the local administration in Kefa, the capital of their district, to voice their concerns. “We also had meetings with environmental organizations such as WALHI, LAKMAS and JPIC, as they expressed their willingness to help us to investigate the mining permit and contact the media.”

Wilfrida and her fellow community members then performed a customary (adat) ritual of nahake paham ma pao nifu in busan, which, in Wilfrida’s words, means that “if this land is not truly ours then it will be yours (the mining company’s), but if it truly belongs to us, then no matter what you (the mining company) do, nothing will happen.” Decisions made in such customary ceremonies are considered legally binding by the community. A week after the
ceremony, the company left. “The company entered our land on May 2012, and on September 2012 they left without saying goodbye.”

“Adat (customary law) and harmony with nature guide us and our work,” says Wilfrida. “All the work of rejecting the mine is upheld by nature. I do not know what should be the way, but our customs and nature guide us. I myself never thought that I had the courage to talk to the police, the council and the company.”

Afrida Erna Ngato

Afrida Erna Ngato is an indigenous activist from the Pagu tribe in North Halmahera, Indonesia. She is a “Sangaji Pagu” – a/the leader of the Pagu and a rare woman tribal leader in Indonesia, a position usually held by men. As an activist, she works closely with the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN).

The Pagu tribe has been living on their land since the 11th century, for at least 14 generations. Previously leaders of the tribe were all men. When the position of tribal leader was left open for some time, Afrida, who is a descendent of prior leaders, stepped forward. However, the leadership was not handed to her so easily - she had to ‘prove’ herself first. Ultimately, her commitment and tirelessness in preserving her land and her culture were recognized and the elders entrusted her with the position and formalized it in a customary ceremony.

Gold ore was first processed in Gosowong in the North Halmahera region of Indonesia in 1999. Since then, more than 4 million ounces of gold and 3 million ounces of silver have been extracted from these mines. PT Nusa Halmahera Minerals (PTNHM), a joint venture between Newcrest (an Australian corporation) and PT Antam (Persero), operates on 29,622 hectares of indigenous territories. The AMAN Indigenous Regional Council estimates that approximately 5,000 people in Hoana Pagu experience health problems due to the mining operation. Pollution, including mercury poisoning, impacts the health and livelihoods of indigenous people and the environment alike.

The mining caused water shortages, polluted rivers and bays, damaged ecosystems, and loss of biodiversity. According to AMAN, in 2010, 2011, and again

“Our traditional system has weakened, in fact, we are even embarrassed to speak our own language, perceived as uneducated and backward. Government policies often relocate us for unknown reason, the result is that we are deprived of our culture. I survived because there is a strong desire in me, as a member of the Pagu community, to feel confident as an indigenous woman.”

—Afrida Ngato
in 2012, waste pipe tailings owned by the company broke, spewing pollution into the river and several tributaries that empty into the Gulf of Kao. Since the pipe bursts, people began to fear eating fish from the Gulf of Kao. They also feared using the river water, and began having trouble finding shrimp, scallops and fish in the river. Before the mining companies came in, fish and seafood were easy to obtain. Now they are gone. Likewise, local crops like coconut are no longer productive. Access to clean water has reached crisis levels, with villages experiencing water shortages or being forced to pay steep prices to buy clean water.

AMAN reported this crisis to the Ministry of Environment (MOE), the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) and the National Human Rights Commission, outlining the environmental problems experienced by local residents. Neither Ministry responded; the Human Rights Commission has said it will study the case.

“Mia tonaka demia akele demia bongana, mabirahi de majojamanaaanii, kao nyawa yoma sisanaaan-gi... (Our land, our water, our forest, all beautiful only for the enjoyment of others not us).” Afrida sang these words and danced in front of the mining company office accompanied by traditional music instruments of the Moluccas. Hundreds of community members protested alongside her.

After a full day and night of singing and dancing, Afrida and twenty-three community members were arrested by the police. Afrida told the police that she would take legal action. She said “I am not a criminal, I have rights!” The day after the arrest the head regent who knew her work intervened, and the police released Afrida and the others.

After this incident, Afrida widened her network by collaborating with neighboring tribes to map the tribes’ borders. Through the mapping process, they were reclaiming their ancestral lands and learning about their rights, making it more difficult in the future for mining companies to exploit them.

Afrida believes that it is important to know and respect one’s own culture. She has worked on a dictionary for her Pagu indigenous language and built a customary office in Sosol village named “Nanga Wola” – “Our House” – that serves as the hub for all cultural preservation and community organizing efforts.

Her work with AMAN has opened up new horizons and speaks to the power of networks and alliances in activism. “AMAN helps me to meet various people, develop networking skills and learn best practices that in the end are supporting my struggle.”
The Power of Locally-Designed Strategies

Grassroots activists working on women’s rights and the environment face considerable risks and obstacles. They often work in remote locations, with limited access to funding or other resources, and may experience backlash, harassment and violence. Within this context, the ingenuity of locally-designed, locally-led strategies contributes to the effectiveness and resilience of activists and their organizations. These tactics complement traditional legal strategies and policy advocacy, yet are less recognized and thus too often under-funded.

Creative, locally-developed strategies used by the women profiled in this report include:

- Documenting human rights abuses via informal interviews and community meetings.
- Door-to-door canvassing to raise awareness of a specific concern.
- Using traditional songs and dances in the context of peaceful protests.
- Civil disobedience via barricades to stop transport of mining equipment.
- Using customary law to strengthen the legitimacy of community decision-making about the use of their land and natural resources.
- Telling the history of women’s leadership and stories of strong women leaders to strengthen community support for women’s activism.

Stories from Women Defending Land, Community, Human Rights & the Environment in Indonesia & the Philippines
IN OUR BONES

Veronica Malecdan

The Cordillera region on the island of Luzon, Philippines, is a mountainous region abundant in natural resources. It is the home of the Cordillerans or Igorot, a collective name for different indigenous peoples of Cordillera, communities that are known for the tenacity of their struggle for their land. This struggle intensified in the 1970’s, when then President Ferdinand Marcos pushed for the development of power plants, commercial mining and other environmentally-destructive projects that encroached on the Igorot lands. Today, though the Marcos dictatorship is long gone, the Igorot’s struggle for their land continues.

For Veronica, a Kankanaey from the Mountain Province, the process of becoming an activist did not happen automatically. Raised in poverty, Veronica found employment as a migrant worker in Hong Kong. Distance brought perspective. “When I was in Hong Kong, I could see the injustices that we faced, the different forms of violence against women, and the state’s neglect of our plight.” Her experience as a migrant worker inspired Veronica to return home, and engage in work for the rights of indigenous peoples in Cordillera.

Shortly after she returned, Veronica began to work with peasant women, and soon became an advocate for a 16-year-old girl who had been raped by a military officer in 2012. “The rape case challenged me so much to continue organizing more women in the Cordillera,” she says. When the officer received a mere slap on the wrist for his crime, “this showed me how the state and the justice system do not work for the welfare of its people, especially women and girls.”

After this, Veronica took on increasing leadership roles in community-organizing work. She was appointed Secretary General of Innabuyog, an alliance of indigenous women’s organizations in the region. “While there are other indigenous peoples organizations in the Cordillera, Innabuyog plays a critical role through its campaigns on land, food, women’s rights, militarization and violence against women.” Within the alliance, she leads advocacy on cases related to the exploitation of natural resources and the resulting negative impacts on women and communities. She routinely goes toe-to-toe with major corporations and the forces that protect them.

“In almost every conflict involving natural resources, I always the encounter military forces,” says Veronica. The military in the Philippines play a role in the “Investment Defense Force,” created in 2009 by
President Gloria Arroyo, to protect the infrastructure of multinational companies. With the military involved, there is always the threat of being labeled as a rebel, and once tagged as a rebel, continuing activist work can become very dangerous. The military has been known to arbitrarily detain and torture people, abuse them physically and sexually, and even engage in extrajudicial killings.

“Sometime it makes me scared. That is why we have to draw wider support and make the best of what we are doing.”

Veronica is the mother of five children, and she fears for her family. Being a mother is one of the greater challenges she faces, in terms of balancing her roles, and the risks that her family may be subjected to. “As a mother of five children, it is also quite difficult for me to meet the needs of the family, and work as Secretary General of Innabuyog at the same time.”

While economically difficult, the balancing of these roles is emotionally taxing too. “Something else had hit me. Not the challenge of the job, but when I lost my 23 year-old son in a small-scale mining accident.” This happened just last year. Veronica’s friends and colleagues have been a tremendous source of support. “They strengthen me…encourage me...sometimes I want to quit, but they continue to strengthen me.”

**JOSEPHINE PAGALAN**

Josephine is a community leader in Surigao del Sur province in the northeastern part of Mindanao. She is a Manobo woman, one of the major tribes of Lumad (indigenous) peoples in the southern Philippines. Along with others, she has protested the incursions of mining operations into her community. For this activism, she and her community have been targeted.

At dawn on September 1, 2015, Josephine woke to go to the toilet, which was across from her home. As she went out, she was faced with two armed men, who pointed guns at her. She was allowed to go to the toilet, but afterwards they went with her into her house and checked if she had any guns inside. Seeing that there were none, they left.

Soon thereafter, her friend and colleague Dionel Campos was brought in front of her sari-sari store (a very small convenience store), and shot to death. Dionel Campos was the chair of Josephine’s community organization, which was engaged in peaceful protests against mining and logging operations. The brutal killing left Josephine shaking. “It was the first time I saw someone being shot and dying in front of me.” Two others were killed that morning in their community – Campos’ cousin, Bello Sinzo, and tribal school director Emerico Samarca. To justify the killings, the military falsely accused those they had shot of involvement with an armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, a tactic often used to suppress environmental and human rights activism.

“While there are other indigenous peoples organizations in the Cordillera, Innabuyog plays a critical role through its campaigns on land, food, women’s rights, militarization and violence against women.”

—Veronica Malecdan
Josephine has also been a target of death threats since becoming involved with the campaigns against mining and logging companies. Because of the danger, she has taken a regional leadership position and now spends most of her time in the city, away from her community. “In our community, which is 16 kilometers away from our barangay (village or city municipality), you will be killed and no one will know.”

However, this means Josephine is often away from her family. She is the mother of four children and recently became a grandmother for the first time. Her evacuation to the city also means that her family’s income is reduced because they can not continue to operate the sari-sari store. Yet Josephine would not alter her path. “I need to do what I have to do as a leader. My campaigns against mining and logging companies mean the protection of our resources and our lands. I do this for my people; but especially, I do this for my children and theirs.”

The Lianga Bay logging company and the Semirara Coal Mining company have been in Surigao and Agusan del Sur since the 1970s. The Manobo people have been struggling against these companies since then, and lives have been lost in this struggle. By the year 2000, Josephine said that “women started to take over the front line.” The filing of legal cases against the mining company and the documentation of human rights violations by the military and paramilitary groups are critical tasks mostly done by women. As a leader, Josephine works to ensure that the community’s concerns are publicized; she speaks on radio programs and engages the media. When the community stages protest actions, or files legal cases, Josephine goes the media to explain these actions to the public and seek their support.

In the past, Josephine felt the military treated women activists with more restraint, “…as if they are facing their mothers.” More recently, violence against women activists is escalating, and concern for her own security is growing, yet this does not deter her. “If I let fear take over, the lives that were taken before will lose their meaning. For those of us who are still alive, we need to continue the struggle. Our rights are not handed down to us, but are something we need to fight for.”

Bai Ali Indayla

Bai Ali Indayla is a Bangsomoro (Moro) activist from the Maguindanaon region, Mindanao, Philippines. Her path to leadership was not an easy one. As a Moro woman growing up in a patriarchal, Muslim society, she always felt “out of the mold” of what a girl was expected to be. She studied mathematics in college, a track dominated by male students. While still a university student, Bai Ali was elected as president of the student body, the first female student to hold this position.
After graduation, she became active on issues of militarization, peacebuilding and documentation of violations against the Bangsamoro communities. These activities were risky, especially in the context of the ongoing conflict between the national government and insurgents seeking regional autonomy. A peace process has been ongoing since 1976, and an Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, or ARMM, was established in 1996. However, many indigenous activists have been disappointed with how the ARMM was implemented and governed. High rates of poverty remain, and basic social services are not reaching the Moro communities. This region is rich in natural resources and agricultural land; as a result, clashes between various armed groups, land grabbing conflicts and inter-communal violence continue and contribute to the heavy militarization of Mindanao.

With her role as an activist growing, Bai Ali became the Secretary General of KAWAGIB - Alliance for the Advancement of Moro Human Rights, a position she still holds today. This position brings increased risk, since groups critical of the government's policy in the region are often branded as threats, even though their work is peaceful. Yet, as the armed conflict between the government and the MILF has intensified, and the list of human rights violations against the Bangsamoro communities grown longer, Bai Ali knows that KAWAGIB’s work is needed more than ever.

KAWAGIB is continuously monitored and harassed by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) of the Philippines’ government. In 2009, a NICA agent interrogated Bai Ali’s teacher, family members and friends, to get more information about her, and her activities. “My family was afraid on possible plans of abduction or even killing. So my friends and colleagues gave me suggestions to ensure my security. There would be times when my family would ask me to stop being an activist. But I remained firm on my beliefs, and continue to do what I have been doing.”

Bai Ali continues her work, but not without fear, and not without being careful. Her approach is to fight against the harassment and threats by reporting her experiences publicly. “The more we speak, the more people are alerted, and the perpetrator will keep distance.” She and her colleagues also work with lawyers in Mindanao and at the national level for protection.

Bai Ali is acutely aware of being a human rights defender as a Moro woman. As such, she has been focusing on the rights of Moro women. KAWAGIB is acting as a secretariat to Khadidja Moro Women organization in Davao City, another organization working for the recognition and empowerment of Moro women. “There are many challenges I face being a woman human rights defender and at the same time, being a mother and a Moro. One has to constantly look over your shoulder, or change your patterns of movement; while you remain calm, and strong, being a leader of your organization, and as a mother for your children.”
Bai Ali is the mother of a two-year old. She worries about keeping her family safe and also about making ends meet, given the limited income she can earn working within community development and activist organizations. “Despite all these challenges, I am firm on my principles,” she says. “The support of my family, friends and the people reached by our organizations is one of the things that inspire me to continue. And for as long as there is still discrimination against women, and oppression of the people, I will continue advocating for the rights of women, children and my community.”

Wilma Tero Mangilay

Wilma traces her activism to her high school days when she joined her classmates in a barricade to prevent the logging trucks from entering their province and to protest illegal logging activities. At first, her participation was obligatory, given that her teacher asked them to join. Later on, when she understood the issues surrounding the illegal logging – the impacts on the environment, and the consequences on the lives of the farmers, food growers and the Subanen people – she participated in the barricade as an informed, willing, and dedicated person. They were able to stop Sunville Timber Products’ logging operation in 1987.

Wilma is a Subanen woman from Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur province. Subanen is one of the major groups of Lumad peoples in Mindanao. As her understanding of environmental and development issues grew, Wilma became an active member of Kesabuukan Tupusumi Pusaka, a Subanen people’s organization. Through environmental activism, Wilma gained a deeper understanding of the rights of indigenous peoples, and became a staunch defender of the rights of the Subanen. This meant becoming more visibly involved in more barricades – against numerous logging activities in their areas, and then against large mining companies. To be part of a barricade against a mining company such as Geotechniques and Mines, Inc. (GAMI) is a big risk, given the support they have with local politicians. Being a woman activist in a barricade in a rural area poses a specific set of challenges. “For us, as women, it was hard to find toilets and water. There were animals around us, and it was rainy and the soil was muddy. It is hard to sleep in the field together with men. But we have no choice, we are so poor that we are unable to equip our barricade action with proper infrastructure.”

“How can you fight for your rights if you do not know them, or understand them? There has to be continuing education and awareness-raising, with yourself, and your community.”

—Wilma Tero Mangilay

These experiences made Wilma stronger in her commitment to defend Subanen ancestral lands. Committed to learning and education, she participated in various trainings, and discussions with activist organizations at the provincial, regional and national level. In 2000, she served on the paralegal team for her organization. Since then, she has led community organizing efforts, documentation of human rights violations, and legal cases against mining companies.
Because of her prominent role in these campaigns, Wilma was targeted by the mining companies, and by local politicians who supported them. In 2011, two defamation cases were filed against her and her colleagues. The case was clearly meant to intimidate and silence her. And Wilma was indeed intimidated. She could not afford her own legal defense. The Catholic Church in their diocese helped pay for her defense. But numerous visits to the courts caused Wilma both physical and emotional stress. In moments when she found herself alone, she would ask herself, “Should I continue doing this?” Wilma also received death threats. “Was I afraid? Of course! Who would not be?” The male leaders, called Timuay in Subanen language, would have the protection of their community. “But as a woman, and non-Timuay, I could not have that kind of protection. I have, however, my family and friends. And more than that, I have my faith that I will do what I feel I have to do for our community. And Megbebaya’ (God) will take care of me.”

After three years of filing legal suits against the mining company, Wilma and her organization won the case, and the mining company ceased operations. This was indeed a victory, but sixteen new mining applications are currently being processed. This, however, does not deter Wilma in her struggle. “Our lands are rich in minerals. There will always be interests from corporations. We have to be steadfast in our defense of our rights.”

As she continued her environmental activism, Wilma began to focus on the fact that she and the other Subanen women did not enjoy equality in determining community affairs. She fights for the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for her community, but Subanen women are not given the chance to be part of this process. She asserts the right of the Subanen people to be part of decision-making processes, but Subanen women are not part of community decision-making. This realization, coupled with the knowledge that equal rights women are not provided by the law, has added a new dimension to her advocacy.

“The right to participate in decision-making processes within the community, as well as legal processes, is critical for us Subanen women. We need to assert this.” On one occasion, during a national indigenous peoples’ gathering in July 2015, Wilma spoke on a panel about the importance of women’s rights, and was confronted by male leaders and accused of not understanding her own culture. Wilma held her ground by asserting that the recognition of Subanen women’s rights does not undermine their culture. “This is the new big challenge that I face – asserting our rights as women and as indigenous people, because people see this as a conflict between our indigenous culture and women’s rights. I see my role here as someone who can help balance between culture and women’s rights, without sacrificing one over the other.”

Bae Rose Undag-Lumandong

Rose Undag was a high-school student in the early 1980’s when she became involved with student activism on tuition fees. She was organizing the youth sector, which then led to organizing on behalf of her community.

Rose is a Higaonon from Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Oriental province. The Higaonon people are one of the major tribes of the Lumad (indigenous) peoples of Mindanao. As an indigenous woman activist, she became deeply engaged with protecting her community’s land. Given her engagement with political issues, as a student, and now as part of an indigenous peoples organization, it was not a surprise when Rose was first picked up by the military and detained. At that time, Rose was married to Tony Lumandong, an indigenous leader himself; and her son was only 5 months old. Tony was detained along with Rose. Rose was interrogated at gunpoint by the military about her political activities as well as the identities of her companions. It was a traumatic experience for Rose, and made doubly difficult by her concern for her child. Because of organized pressure from human rights groups, they were both released.

This experience left her and her family feeling vulnerable. They moved to Manila. For Rose, being in Manila did not mean discontinuing her work. She was part of
the historic formation of the National Federation of Indigenous Peoples (KKAMP) in 1997. The next year, she and her family went back to Mindanao, and the process of her being recognized as a leader of the Higaonon community began.

In Higaonon communities, one inherits leadership from one’s parents or ancestors. In a traditional ritual, the Baylan (priestess) saw that Rose had inherited the leadership from her grandmother, as manifested in her work and her character. Rose was then named Bae Nay Laghay (from the name of her maternal grandmother). In the following years, Bae Nay Laghay went through different stages and rituals until in 2005, when the biggest gathering in her community was held, and she became a full-fledged Bae, or Higaonon woman leader.

With this position came honor, but also more challenges. According to Bae Rose (as she is known outside her community), for her, as an activist, the “enemy” is clear – the exploitative corporations and the government programs that support them. As a community leader, Bae Rose must mediate conflicts within her community, and cannot take sides. As a woman leader, she often faces comments such as “Babae ka lang. You’re just a woman.” This is even more hurtful when expressed by Higaonon women themselves.

Supporting the recognition of women’s leadership and participation in the indigenous political structure is one of the key issues Bae Rose has been taking on. Utilizing the research conducted by some progressive anthropologists, in collaboration with other Higaonon leaders, Bae Rose was able to surface past leadership roles played by Higaonon women. This historical record of women’s leadership has served as a basis for the modification of the current indigenous leadership structure. Although a long process, Bae Rose is committed to continuing her work helping Higaonon women recognize their value as leaders and pursue their rights as indigenous women. Bae Nay Laghay or Bae Rose is also the Indigenous Sector Representative to the Philippine Commission on Women. Together with Wilma Tero Mangilay, she is also part of the LILAK collective (Purple Action for Indigenous Women’s Rights).

Because of Bae Rose’s leadership and activism, she faces ongoing threats. In 2014, two male leaders, with whom she had closely worked in campaigns against logging and mining, were murdered. When asked how she deals with feelings of fear, Bae Rose explained “I focus on what I have to do – contribute to achieving peace in my community, and beyond; and doing what I can to lessen discrimination and poverty among my people.”

“To become a Bae is a huge responsibility. I was both honored and apprehensive to have accepted this role.”

- Bae Rose Undag-Lumandong
“Advocacy is not only part of our work, it is part of our body, part of our bones, part of our blood, part of our lives.”

The September 2015 Convening of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) from Indonesia and the Philippines was a unique opportunity to learn directly from grassroots activists about their approach to policy advocacy. During the convening, participants spoke about what advocacy means to them, and the specific strategies they use. All affirmed that advocacy is the driving force of their work, highlighting their focus on dialogue with government and other stakeholders at all levels to foster transformative change. Activists from the Philippines emphasized, “Of course advocacy is a key part of our work, because we know our rights and we know how to assert them and push the government to implement them to see justice.”

Advocacy Strategies

WHRDs reported accessing a range of advocacy venues, which they targeted strategically and selectively, depending on the issues they focused on, as well as their location, capacity, and the funds available. All of the activists used local and national mechanisms as well as international United Nations structures. Most had decided to bypass the limited regional systems in Southeast Asia, namely the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), because they found them ineffective and even counterproductive at times. Instead, they focused on building and strengthening their civil society alliances within the Asia Pacific region.

Local and National Mechanisms

At the local level, they targeted community leaders with direct advocacy and dialogue, and, when these failed, street demonstrations. At the national level, they engaged in both litigation and non-litigation advocacy efforts. Sometimes, litigation was not successful, or positive judicial decisions were received but not implemented. When this happened, they shifted their approach from litigation to other strategies, such as sensitizing key allies in relevant ministries or government agencies, organizing online and offline awareness-raising campaigns, and providing paralegal services to educate people about their rights. They also focused on forming networks and coalitions and working with their National Commissions on Human Rights and both houses of their national parliaments. Additionally, WHRDs in the Philippines accessed the Office of the Ombudsman, which they described as useful and responsive.

Regional and International Mechanisms

The value of building international solidarity was often cited, and WHRDs were eager to engage in actions in support of each other’s national advocacy campaigns. All reported expending a considerable amount of energy on international networks and global advocacy mechanisms. WHRDs from the Philippines highlighted the International People’s Tribunal as one of the key global NGO networks they relied on for their international advocacy.

All also engaged actively with the UN, but they used diverse strategies targeting different instruments and spaces. Their activities ranged from preparing and presenting NGO Shadow Reports to the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and to various treaty monitoring bodies such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against
Women (CEDAW), to providing testimonies of violations and recommendations to Special Procedures, such as the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders, the rights of indigenous peoples, the human rights of internally displaced persons, and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Among the legal and policy documents they found most useful in their work, they drew attention to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the growing number of business and human rights instruments – in particular those focusing on legally binding obligations rather than voluntary mechanisms.

Strikingly, while WHRDs at the convening targeted a very broad range of UN mechanisms in their international advocacy, most of these were not specifically focused on women. They shared that they used all the mechanisms and strategies they knew of and would appreciate more resources and information to facilitate their engagement with additional spaces and instruments. Some of the WHRDs from Indonesia had engaged with the CEDAW Committee, but WHRDs from the Philippines shared that they had not been able to write a Shadow Report for CEDAW due to a lack of resources, and, as a consequence, there were no civil society recommendations on indigenous women at that CEDAW Committee session. They stressed that funding for these types of activities would be essential to enable them to seize valuable opportunities like this one.

Advocacy Outcomes

Convening participants shared their frustrations about the difficulties and uneven results of their advocacy initiatives. Even when they succeeded in pushing for positive legal or policy developments, implementation remained too often insufficient. Impunity for human rights abuses as well as backlash against their victories discouraged them and the people whom they had organized. Indigenous WHRDs from both countries described the frequent arguments about “culture” that were raised to oppose their agenda for women’s human rights. All agreed that it remained challenging to push governments to tackle the root causes of the issues they fight for.

Despite these daunting challenges, WHRDs spoke of advocacy with enthusiasm and underscored that the positive impacts of their efforts far outweighed the challenges. They stressed that although setbacks could be discouraging, in their view there was no alternative because, as a WHRD from the Philippines explained, “If we don’t engage in advocacy the situation will be much worse.” Most importantly, they shared that their advocacy actions had given hope to and strengthened the leadership, confidence, and voice of individual WHRDs, along with their organizations, networks, and movements, and the grassroots constituencies they mobilized and activated. The advocacy of these WHRDs also helped build greater recognition of the issues, as well as more support and solidarity.

Finally, their advocacy sometimes brought concrete results, some of which are shared in these case studies. For example, in the Philippines, WHRDs’ advocacy led to visits, investigations, and reports by Special Rapporteurs in Mindanao and other regions. They collectively concluded that advocacy is a long and arduous process that requires patience and resilience but that can produce invaluable results, ranging from bringing about concrete policy or legal changes to more broadly strengthening and sustaining WHRDs and their movements. “My advice?” offered one participant from Indonesia, “Just don’t stop doing advocacy!”
The stories shared in this report are examples of commitment, perseverance and optimism, despite the most difficult conditions. As we embarked on this research, meeting and getting to know these extraordinary women, their stories continued to inspire us exponentially.

As a rapid response grantmaking organization, we understand firsthand the importance of flexible and speedy funding in the context of environmental justice work. We also know that this kind of work requires specific kinds of support. At the September 2015 convening in Indonesia, women human rights defenders shared their wishes for international solidarity and support. Their input is synthesized in the recommendations below.

**Recommendations for Funders**

Support leadership development for indigenous and rural women’s human rights defenders (WHRDs). This includes WHRD-led community-based dialogues and mediation, tribal leadership, negotiation skills, and legal training, while taking into consideration customary law and its potential for community-led reform.

- Fund locally-led campaigns that address environmental and/or women’s rights issues. Have the flexibility to support efforts that address local needs. For example, the Save Our Schools campaign in Mindanao is focused on moving military encampments away from schools, while also advocating for an end to the military’s protection of illegal or unethical behavior by extractive industries.

- Support local and regional solidarity campaigns, even if success is not necessarily anticipated; solidarity is important for maintaining buoyancy, momentum and sense of connectedness within the movement.

- Support the resilience of WHRDs and sustain the movement at the local, national, regional, and international levels by providing funding for general operating costs, convenings and strategy meetings, coordination, self-care, and capacity building activities requested by the networks. Specifically:
  - Ensure funds are sufficient to cover basic costs such as mobile phones, phone credit and travel, as many WHRDs are located in remote areas.
  - Include funds for security and support culturally appropriate and creative ways of addressing burnout and promoting the sustainability of activism.
  - When activists are the targets of spurious lawsuits or unjust detention, funding is needed for legal aid, trial observation, and for post-imprisonment support, when activists may need medical care or assistance with housing.
  - Consider supporting local organizations that can assist human rights defenders during periods of prolonged threat or detention, including providing support to their families.

“Networking at the international level can affect public policy in Indonesia. There is a critical need for funding and international support to achieve these strategic objectives.”

—Eva Bande
Fund local and regional strategy meetings and convenings, which focus on issues as determined by WHRDs themselves. Ensure that there is adequate time for relaxation and informal conversations, and be open to funding childcare during the convening as needed. Specific advocacy plans are not the only important outcomes of convenings; the strengthened networks that result from them are vital to increasing WHRD’s resilience.

Work with intermediary organizations to reach and support grassroots environmental WHRDs that are working in informal/unregistered organizations. Identify and support who lead environmental work at the grassroots is crucial to sustaining movements.

**Recommendations for International Allies**

- Provide resources – both information and funding – to grassroots environmental and/or indigenous WHRDs to enable them to provide input into NGO shadow reports to United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review processes and treaty monitoring bodies.
- Connect grassroots environmental and/or indigenous WHRDs with UN agencies, treaty monitoring bodies, Special Procedures, and other international and regional mechanisms so that they can share their experiences, challenges, and recommendations directly with these mechanisms.
- Assist WHRDs in building cross-border alliances to increase their impact. For example, coalitions that connect activists seeking to hold multinational corporations accountable for their activities.
- Support the policy and legal advocacy capacities of groups and coalitions, including legislative strategies. As Eva Bande noted: “an important requirement for achieving our strategic objectives is a strong network that has the power to influence political policy-making and law.” These cases are winnable, but most communities do not have the resources to bring them to trial.


The activists that shared their stories within this report use a wide range of advocacy strategies, including international mechanisms, to support their work. As a reference, we list the relevant mechanisms here.

1. **United Nations’ Special Procedures with mandates that are relevant to the protection of WHRDs working on environmental and land rights include:**
   - the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.
   - the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
   - the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.
   - the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing.
   - the Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order.
   - the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
   - the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.
   - the Special Rapporteur on the right to food.
   - the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism.
   - the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
   - the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

2. **Key instruments on corporate accountability and business and human rights include:**
   - the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the UN Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework.
   - the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.
the OECD Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises.

the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA).

3. **Other relevant venues and mechanisms for advocacy include:**


- United Nation General Assembly and Human Rights Council Resolutions on HRDs and WHRDs.

- treaties such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and their monitoring bodies, as well as the individual complaints mechanism available to parties to the Optional Protocol for each of these treaties and CEDAW.
STOP KILLINGS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES!