Indigenous Women and Climate Change:
Lessons from the Ground: The Experience of Tagbanua Women in Green Mussel Aqua-Culture
Establishment within the Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay, North Palawan

Abstract

The strong correlation of ecological vitality and indigenous peoples’ culture can be rooted to the IPs worldview governing the ecosystem. The land, rivers, seas and shores are not just physical abodes or sources of sustenance but more so, as vessels of cultural identity and breathing history. IPs have a deep spiritual connection with their ecosystem whose integrity and stability define their very existence. Thus, indigenous peoples are the most keen observers of nature’s rhythm and the Earth’s climatic tempo, and can be regarded as the best earth keepers.

Indigenous women are holders of vital indigenous knowledge and practices from which existing environmental worldviews and ecological sensitivities emanate. They are dominant forces of economic production and visible actors of political activities and thus majorly contribute to the sustenance and holistic growth of their respective tribal communities. However, indigenous women doubly suffer – because of gender discrimination as women per se, and because of oppression as national minorities. In addition, they become primary human rights victims and environmental refugees due to imposed policies and institutionalized state structures that pave way to the encroachment of their ancestral domain, by foreign entities.

Recent ground realities besetting IP women such as in the case of the Tagbanuas of Palawan reveal the harsh implications of the climate crisis upon them. The case study shares the lessons drawn from the experience of the Tagbanua Tandolanen women in Old Guinlo, in their initiative (also in coordination with an NGO, the Ecumenical Center for Indigenous People – EDCIP) to establish a Green Mussel livelihood project. The coastal community is within the so-called Inner Malampaya Sound in the Municipality of Taytay, northern Palawan, Philippines. The Tagbanua women’s experience affirm the grave impact of climate crisis to the land, life and survival of indigenous communities. It portrays how IP women doubly burdened by a climate crisis, find strength in their collective action to face these alarming threats. Further, insights from the local experience of the indigenous community highlight the threat of the climate crisis as a potent conduit for social movement and protruding ground of asserting social and environmental justice wherein indigenous women play a vital role.

Indeed, the climate issue is not an isolated ground for development actions. It is intrinsic to the indigenous peoples’ struggle for their rights to self-determination, ancestral domain, social and environmental justice --- the only path through which the IPs can genuinely sustain their survival. It also necessitates concerted action with other sectors, the climate crisis being a global issue, and that which resulted from excessive and wanton emissions of green house gases (GHG) by developed countries such as the US (25% carbon emission is from the US).