Hunger and the Global Climate Crises

by the Cordillera Women’s Education Action Research Center (CWEARC)

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Introduction:

Our history tells that women have always been food producers and nourishers. Women have been largely responsible in producing food not only for their families but for their communities as well. In Asia, sisters who are in agriculture attest that women are primary crop breeders, seed-savers and source of knowledge about native biodiversity in traditional societies. Women bred most of the plants from which transnational corporations are trying to patent germ-plasm for crop breeding and pharmaceuticals. Women around the world continue to draw on extraordinary plant diversity to nourish their families.

Neo-liberal globalization however enabled corporate monopoly and the commodification of the food and agricultural system. Neo-liberal globalization is causing women’s displacement from key traditional economic activities and stripped the value of women’s essential contributions to feeding society. Concretely, this is pushed by the systematic commercialization and commodification of the food system—when food was shifted from the realm of common and shared ownership so nobody gets hunger, into the realm of commerce and profits where every single food source and natural resource is an item for profits by food and agriculture corporations. In many countries today, women are excluded from owning or accessing natural resources that they need to grow food.

Hunger in the Cordillera context:

Hunger and poverty in most villages in the Cordillera are more prevalent as compared to the survey conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS) in the fourth quarter of 2005 where close to one of every five Filipino households is hungry for at least one day while more than half rank themselves poor. In its survey, the SWS found 17% of Filipino families, equivalent to 14 million people went hungry at least one day. A study of Ibon Foundation, an independent think-tank in the Philippines, says that eight out of 10 Filipino families or 83% of the national population are poor.

The percentage of Filipinos mired in poverty is even higher (87%) if international standards are used to gauge poverty which is those living on US$2.00 a day or P85.00. A study made in 2005 by TNS Worldpanel, a known Briton research institution, said that poor Filipino families belonging to class E families or those earning below P7,500.00 (US$176.00) a month, are doing much belt-tightening for food, water and needs to maintain basic hygiene like soap.

During the Arroyo government, it insists that only 24.7% of Filipinos are poor or are living with a P12,267.00 (US$288) income. In early January 2006, the President Arroyo
ordered the release of P35 billion (US$1.4B) in government savings to subsidize rice and noodles and finance projects for the poor. Arroyo waited for this high level of hunger and malnutrition before making a palliative action. Obviously, she was temporarily pacifying the mounting anger of hungry Filipino families who have long cried for jobs and economic security. This is an insult to indigenous and peasant women, to rural food producers and to toiling women who don’t simply rely on dole-outs. This approach of Arroyo in alleviating hunger and poverty is only miring the poor Filipinos to deeper dependence to relief.

Indigenous peasant women in the Cordillera continue to struggle for the recognition of their land rights and support to their agricultural production under a genuine national agrarian reform program and the respect of indigenous peoples’ rights to land and resources. Obviously, this problem has not found answer in previous administrations and under the current regime of Aquino. The national agricultural program has always basically upheld a clear policy biased against traditional, indigenous crop production technology. The thrust of the national government on agricultural development is based on the prescriptions of imperialist globalization. Essentially, Philippine governments, from one to another, have turned over the country’s agriculture and food production to the agro-chemical transnationals like Monsanto. The Philippine government has become the agent of agro-chemical companies in promoting modern crops and production technology. High-input farming in rice, corn and vegetable breeds, first developed during the Green Revolution continues to be promoted by the Aquino government.

The Philippine government continues to promote farming with new hybrids of rice and corn, fruit and vegetables whose seeds are viable only on F1 (first generation) use. This orientation of agriculture only resulted to other problems which further buried peasant families in more debts and deeper poverty. Inherent to commercial agriculture is the high cost of production given its high-input dependency. Peasants receive no subsidy from the state beyond introduction stage. Credit facilities for agriculture like banks and cooperatives are not accessible to many peasant families and no viable credit alternative is provided by government or NGOs. Thus peasant families are dependent on moneylenders or supplier-financiers who impose usurious terms of credit or abusive terms of production-sharing.

A look into agricultural liberalization in the Cordillera:

Agricultural liberalization actually started as part of the International Monetary Fund’s Structural Adjustment Programs. This was accelerated with the Philippine legislature’s concurrence with the GATT-WTO in 1995. Legislature immediately fulfilled its WTO commitments by imposing tariffs to all import quotas and scheduled the steady reduction of all tariffs on agricultural products.

The Cordillera accounts for less than 1.8% of the country’s population yet it consistently produces more than 2% of the country’s rice, camote (sweet potato), coffee and
livestock. The Cordillera also produces 65-80% of the country’s potatoes, cabbages, carrots and other temperate-clime vegetables.

By year 2000, rice, potato, and cabbage which were regarded as strategic food crops, lost all protection from competitive imports. Since January 2000, Philippine domestic market has been flooded with rice and vegetables as well as meat and livestock imports that are far cheaper than identical local products.

By last quarter 2001, farmgate prices had declined drastically. Prices of temperate-clime and tropical legumes dropped by 50% and non-leguminous temperate-clime vegetables by 90%.
From mid-year 2002 to start of 2003, prices for temperate-clime vegetables dropped so low, most vegetable peasants could not pay their debts, and the smaller of their creditors started living on savings.

Relief came during the first quarter of 2003, when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) scare forced a halt to agricultural importation from China. By this time, however, many Cordillera vegetable growers had been forced out of production.

Even before becoming a signatory to the WTO, the Philippine government was giving very little support to agriculture. Government spending accounted for only 6% to 10% of gross value added in agriculture. Of its annual budget, government allotted at most 5% to domestic agricultural subsidy and none to agricultural export subsidy. Complying very strictly with its WTO commitments, the Philippine government has constrained itself from increasing the meager subsidies it provides to agriculture.

The Philippine government especially during the time of Arroyo has been telling farmers that its modernization program will help them cope with agricultural trade liberalization. But the program is limited to the promotion of hybrid rice and corn.

Indigenous and peasant women are getting poorer

In the Cordillera, about 80% of the population is dependent on agriculture for survival. More or less, half of this figure are women. About half of the 98,000 households which produce rice and other indigenous crops for self-subsistence are women. Women also comprise half of 66,000 households which produce 50% of rice and corn for self-subsistence and 50% for commerce, and about half of 47,000 households are women engaged in commercial vegetable, fruit, flower and broom production (Agricultural Situation in the Cordillera, APIT-TAKO).

Generally, in subsistence areas, the rice produce of a family is good for only 4-8 months. Even areas which produce rice twice a year hardly meet a year-round supply of rice for the family. So for the rest of the year, families have to look for other sources, such as por dia (daily) work within the village or outmigrate while waiting for the harvest season. Women leave their children for seasonal work as domestic workers or vendors
in provincial town centers or in the city. More and more women leave for abroad as
domestic workers.

Aside from *por dia* work or wage earning, more and more indigenous and peasant
women go into vending. A case study made by BINNADANG, the Innabuyog chapter in
Mountain Province, shows an increasing number of women vendors are observed in the
town centers of Sagada, Besao, Bontoc and in other commercial centers like Guinzadan
and Maba-ay, both in the municipality of Bauko. They buy and sell vegetables, fruits,
home-made snacks, second hand clothes (*wagwag*) and others. All of them have to
come up with their own small capital and all the requirements for the economic activity.
They contribute to the local government’s income as each vendor pays P10.00
(US$0.20) for every basket or crate of products they sell. Vending has become a
remedy for the family’s immediate demand for cash. A *linapet* (local rice cake) vendor
from Besao who sells in Sagada has a capital of P283.00 (US$6.6) for 70 pieces of
*linapet*. She sells this for P5.00 (US$0.10) per piece. In most cases, she is only able
to sell 60 pieces. At the end of the day, she brings home about P142.00 (US$3.30) after
deducting the cost to purchase glutinous rice, sugar, peanuts, lunch and transportation.
Her net profit for vending is P17.00 (US$0.40). The rest of the amount (P125.00) which
she takes home is the cost of her labor (P25.00 for preparing the *linapet* and P75.00 for
half-day to sell the product).

Most vendors, according to the same study of BINNADANG-Innabuyog Mountain
Province (indigenous women’s organization in Mountain Province), sell more than one
commodity at the same time. A vendor in Bontoc sells onion bulbs along with tikoy, a
kind of snack. When she is able to sell all, she gets something like P75.00 (US$1.7) a
day. Some vendors sell oranges with vegetables. A vendor for these goods gets about
P105-130.00 (US$2.4-3.0) per day.

The cash earned by vendors is way below the P180.00 (US$4.2) minimum wage
defined by DOLE for the Cordillera rural areas. It is way below the P465.00 (US$11.00)
daily cost of living for a family of six in agricultural areas according to the National
Statistics Office (NSO). It is a measly income, however indigenous peasant women
have no choice as they are in dire need of cash to be able to buy the family’s basic
kitchen commodities and for their children’s schooling.

Bigger loss is incurred by peasants involved in commercial vegetable production. Yet
they still take chances hoping to get a good price. In Letang, a vegetable area in Bauko,
Mountain Province, a family producing bell pepper only gets about P1,725.00
(US$40.50) for five months of production. A tomato farmer in Balugan, Sagada used to
earn P680.00 (US$16.00) per month in 1981, an income equivalent to a teacher’s pay
then. In 2004, a tomato farmer was only getting P5,669.50 (US$133.4) per cropping or
P1,889.83 (US$44.46) per month which is equivalent to 1/5 of the present salary of a
teacher. Like other peasants who are into commercial vegetable production, the tomato
farmer in Balugan is getting more and more indebted. An advantage for tomato farmers
in Balugan is they are able to shift back to rice production unlike the solely commercial
vegetable production areas in Benguet.
Indigenous peasant women in Betwagan, also in Mountain Province, who produce legumes get a cash equivalent of P9,160.00 (US$215.5) for a 4 month production. Of a harvest of 150 gantas, 10 gantas are set aside to pay for the seeds and 10 gantas for consumption. The remaining 130 gantas are for sale. But not all of these are sold. The entry of cheap imported legumes affect the sale of local legumes. Women have to travel to far areas to be able to sell the legumes. If the produce is sold to a local buyer, a ganta of the legumes is taken for free for every 10 gantas bought by the local buyer. The price is also lower by P20.00-30.00 per ganta.

In the town of Conner, in the province of Apayao, some women entered into small-scale business (buy and sell, small stores) or vending of local agricultural products. However, some of them closed-shop because of unpaid credits of their local customers. Women who are in buy-and-sell business of agricultural products like legumes suffered loss as a result of agricultural liberalization especially in the 2000 where cheaper imported legumes flooded the local market. The price of palay (unhusked rice), bananas, corn and other agricultural products are dictated by middlemen-traders and the market. It is always a gamble for women who are into this economic activity. In the same town, some women have availed of livelihood projects of the government like weaving, animal dispersal and raising. All these have not really created a difference in improving the economy of the beneficiaries. For one, the market is not assured. Another is the high cost of production. Hardly that the producers are able to recoup their expense like in the case of hog-raising. Another point is that the capital which is often a loan from a government program (e.g. livelihood projects like weaving, animal raising, food processing) is spent on emergency needs of the family like medicines, tuition fee for their children or payment of an expired loan. Projects such as these also create intrigues among beneficiaries instead of uniting them. It also becomes an avenue for corruption in the case of government livelihood projects which are only in name but have never been implemented. Or, funds of the project had been misused or pocketed by officers of government-established organizations.

Families are also forced to spare part of their food consumption to the market to generate cash for basic food commodities, materials for the education of their children and for other emergencies. Backyard fruits are sold in the market, so with vegetables even if these were just enough for family consumption. The women shared that before, when their produce was abundant and prices of basic goods for their families were affordable, it was easy to share their surplus to their neighbors, relatives and visitors. Sharing and giving for free has become difficult nowadays with the economic crisis and this traditional practice is disintegrating. The economic crisis is also eroding the traditional practice of mutual-help and cooperative exchange labor.

The experience of Conner is echoed by women from other communities of the Cordillera region. Despite the losses or low income earned, indigenous peasant women and their families are forced to engage in these economic activities just to generate the much needed cash. While indigenous peasant women are taking all chances and are trying hard to remedy for themselves, the national government is ironically killing their
sources of livelihood. The government’s import and trade liberalization program is a big
killer of rural agriculture and livelihood. Loans for small-scale livelihood projects which
are offered by government generally does not work for indigenous women in the rural
areas. As already cited, in most cases, the women who avail of loans end up more
buried in debt than being relieved. Government livelihood projects are usually coursed
through the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) or Department of
Agriculture (DA) and other line agencies of the government. These are mostly market-
oriented and dependent yet government does not address the fundamental issue of
ensuring market for these local goods. The livelihood projects offered by the
government also strengthen dependency on dole-outs instead of building self-
sufficiency and community cooperation. These kinds of projects also develop a mind set
that economic problems are solved by loans.

Government, being the culprit in introducing chemical based agriculture and exotic
forest and crop varieties, through it’s department of Agriculture and state schools on
agriculture and forestry, is now promoting organic farming and the production of native
rice. Over the past 5 years or so, the Department of Agriculture promoted unoy,a native
rice variety in Kalinga and tinawon, a native rice variety in Ifugao. But again this is not in
the context of securing food for local indigenous households and strengthening the
production of native rice varieties. Farmers are lured into a good income of selling
native rice which fetch from P60-100 per kilo which is double the price of commercial
rice which then will be sold to native rice exporters. Farmers complain of the rigid
quality control that require careful pounding to keep in tact the whole grain. At some
time, the farmers are told that there is already an excess of supply so that not all the
volume that the farmers desire or hope to sell are not purchased by native rice
exporters.

Amid hunger and poverty, rural women need to survive. No matter how serious and
difficult circumstances are, women are survivors. Women are fighters and will always
find strength despite their poverty and oppression. Innabuyog, an alliance of indigenous
women’s organizations in the Cordillera region, in its 5th regional congress last October
2005 passed a resolution taking up land, food and rights as the focus of its Women
Rights Campaign until 2008. A large part of the campaign is to provide education
venues for rural indigenous and peasant women to discuss the government’s national
agricultural program and other economic programs, including the national mining
agenda, which have adverse impacts on the food security of rural women. A continuing
discussion on globalization and the WTO’s impact on agriculture and food security were
carried out and continues to be conducted to add to the voice of women and people
around the globe who are demanding an end to this global trade regime. Cordillera
indigenous women have also acknowledged the crisis on climate which is adversely
affecting the local agricultural production.

Actions of women, along with peasant organizations to assert right to land and food
continue to be conducted in local, provincial and regional levels. Self-help mechanisms
of women and their communities are being encouraged and strengthened through their
organizations. Other local mechanisms to increase food production are being shared
and replicated in other communities and these efforts will have to be defended by indigenous peasant women from being killed by government’s promotion of commerce-oriented and high-input agriculture. Indigenous and peasant women in the Cordillera through Innabuyog will take other opportunities in the national and international levels where assertions and movements against imperialist globalization are further strengthened.

**Land and Food Wasted by Mining Projects:**

The Philippine government’s mining liberalization policy opened the Cordillera region to local and foreign mining corporations. Nationwide, there are 23 priority mining projects; 18 of these are in indigenous territories and 4 are in the Cordillera region. Nationwide, mining applications and on-going operations cover 66% of the country’s land area. This is about the same land area in the Cordillera region covered by mining operations—current operations and mining applications. Pollution of land and water resources by on-going mining projects have caused low production of rice like in the case of communities affected by the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corporation. Some of the lands are rendered unproductive by silt and poisons coming from the mine wastes.

It is also important to note that military deployment is present in areas where there are active mining operations or applications. Military operations in these areas, disturb agriculture and other economic activities of the people, putting women and children in perilous conditions where their security is threatened, their psychology and mental conditions are disturbed. The youth and children are used as guides for operating soldiers and recruited into paramilitary groups. The military tactic of using women as their protection is back with soldiers establishing affairs with local women and even leaders as a strategy of divide and rule.

**Exacerbation of Hunger by Climate Change**

Indigenous peoples and women are part of the 60-80% of people in poor countries who are engaged in small-scale agriculture. Changes in rainful pattern or decrease in volume of rainfall, floods, droughts and salinity due to a changing climate have grave implications for these small farmers.

Indigenous peoples and women also form part of the 90% of 15 million people working as small-scale fishers. Rise in sea levels, destruction of natural systems such as mangroves and seacoasts have disastrous impacts for fisherfolks and coastal communities.

About 500 million to 1 billion small farmers grow farm trees or manage residual forests for subsistence and income, while 60 million indigenous peoples rely fully on forests. The destruction of forests due to aridity and fire results in decline of forestry production, loss of biodiversity, decreased resources for food and livelihood, erosions, etc. Over 600 million rural poor keep livestock an important asset in the countryside. Adverse
changes in biodiversity translate to imbalances in the food chain and increase in livestock diseases.

The women’s perspective or dimension of climate change is gaining visibility as the stakes of climate change become increasingly clear. Discussions carried out by indigenous women’s organizations in the Cordillera had enabled them to realize that climate change is already beyond the natural level. Post-disaster recovery efforts and economic development programmes have proven that women and men are affected differently by natural hazards and environmental stress because of differences in traditions, resource use patterns, and gender specific roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, the already present inequality of women exacerbates women’s vulnerability to adverse changes in the climate as it limits women’s political voice, economic opportunity, health, education and access to information in particular. These constraints effect virtually every aspect of women’s lives, including those related to climate change, leaving poor and elderly women most susceptible.

UNIFEM acknowledged in their 2008 report the following notes:

1. Rural women are often dependent on the natural environment for their livelihood. Maintenance of households and women’s livelihoods, are therefore, directly impacted by climate related damage to or scarcity of natural resources.
2. Limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and exacerbates financial strain on women, especially in women-headed households.
3. Poor women are less able to purchase technology to adapt to climate change due to limited access to credit and agricultural services (e.g. watering technology, farming implements, climate appropriate seed varieties and fertilizers)
4. Damage to infrastructure that limits clean water, hygiene care, and health services can be especially detrimental to pregnant of nursing women as they have unique nutritional and health needs.
5. Public and familial distribution of food may be influenced by gender and make women and girls more susceptible to poor nutrition, disease and famine, especially when communities are under environmental stress.
6. Increased time to collect water (due to drought, desertification or increased salinity), and fuel (due to deforestation or extensive forest kill from disease infestation) decreases time that women can spend on education or other economic and political engagements and increase their risks of gender-based violence.

A common message of rural and indigenous women in the Cordillera is “the weather has become erratic. Rains are sometimes less or sometimes more. So the crop is not good and food becomes insufficient.” Another common message is that, “the weather pattern has become “crazy” and difficult to predict”. Now rural and indigenous women are forced to adapt to these changes in climate patterns, weather disturbances, temperature changes and others. They are forced to find and experiment on ways to mitigate the impacts and continue feeding their families.
In a village of Abra, also in the Cordillera region where CWEARC conducted a study, the women expressed their observation of reduced water for their irrigation and domestic supply. Some of their springs dried up due to lesser rains. The rainy season and typhoon months which used to be experienced from May to August has moved to a later period which is June to October or even longer. Heavy rains pour suddenly causing rising of rivers that flood ricefields along river banks. But when the rain stops, the water level in the river recedes quickly. However, they also experienced some rainy seasons with not so much rain like in 2009. The dryness and cracking of the lands made the rice fields and mountains vulnerable to massive erosions and land slides when typhoons came.

They also shared about hotter temperature especially during the peak of summer (March-May) as compared some 5-10 years ago. Women farmers have to time out from outdoor work at 10:00 in the morning and resume their farm work at 2:00pm. At these hot hours, some of the women would spend the time in the river to catch fish. The variety of fish has also dwindled and the women attribute this to the reduction of the river water and to siltation. Plants serving as food source for river fish, are also getting lost as observed by the local women. To be able to catch up to their farm work during the hot hours, women farmers bring along a shady bush to provide them shelter from the sun’s heat. Women of this village have initiated actions in regulating the gathering of forest products especially water bearing trees and timber and banning the sale of these products outside of the community. They also initiated the regulation of over-fishing and the use of dynamites and chemicals in fishing. While some of them accepted the cultivation of new rice varieties which were introduced by the government’s Department of Agriculture, the local farmers insist on cultivating these in the traditional way, resisting the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides thus enabling the adaptation of these new breeds of rice to the soil and environment. While labor intensive and tedious, traditional practices on agriculture are being maintained, as the women believe that there are no better substitutes for these in terms of maintaining their harvests. Crop diversification which is long practised by the local indigenous farmers and widely practised by indigenous peoples all over, is further intensified locally and indigenous women farmers are increasing their knowledge and practise in selecting plants suited for droughts or long wet periods. Synchronized cultivation is still observed and this helps control the attack of rice birds and rats. With the rise of pests (giant worms, rats, insects), indigenous pesticides are still being resorted to. Example is the crushing of “karot” (wild rootcrop) which then is spread in the ricefield.

In a study conducted among indigenous women in India (Kelkar, Govind 2008), examples of strategic priorities identified by indigenous women to reduce their vulnerability to climate change are the following:

1. Ownership and control of rights to land, credit, housing and livestock;
2. Crop diversification, including flood and drought resistant varieties;
3. Extension knowledge in sustainable use of manure, pesticides and irrigation;
4. South-south sharing of information on how women and men in other areas are managing their livelihoods and adapting to environmental stressors;
5. Capacity-building and training in alternative livelihoods;
6. Flood protection shelters to store their assets, seeds, fodders and food for livestock and poultry;
7. Easier access to health care services for the human as well as animals and plants;
8. Access to affordable and collateral-free credit for production, consumption and health care needs;
9. Access to markets and marketing knowledge to enhance trade of their agricultural produce and non-timber forest products with confidence, and not to feel nor be cheated and exploited by outside traders;
10. Equal participation of women in community affairs, management of community resources and “the commons” and decision-making related to negotiating and developing livelihoods and financing of adaptation strategies.

With disasters and which are compounded by climate change, rural and indigenous women are equally enabled to participate in community mobilizations and actions that reduce the risks of disasters. In the Cordillera and other homelands of indigenous peoples in the Philippines, the awareness to fight mining projects, mono-crop plantations and energy projects believed to increase disaster risks, is getting more visible.

Indigenous peoples and women are forewarned of market-based solutions being peddled by governments in collusion with corporations to solve the global problem of climate crisis. This should not be another injustice for indigenous peoples whose viable lifestyle and practices have long saved the planet from destruction. Drastic cuts of greenhouse gas emissions of the North should be done immediately without conditions and indigenous peoples should challenge and reject the “more business than usual” framework of governments of the North and their corporations.

Such statements have been forwarded by indigenous peoples and women on climate change discussions and conferences such as the Asia Summit on Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples in Bali, Indonesia in February 2009, the Anchorage IP Declaration in April 2009 and other succeeding gatherings of indigenous peoples to include the most recent International Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Climate Change and Self-determination in Baguio City, Philippines in November 2010. Such statement was also reflected in the submission of organizations and networks of rural indigenous women in the Asia-Pacific region on climate change to the parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2009.

**Globalized Hunger:**

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says that the number of people in the world who are hungry because of insufficient calorie intake, rose from 840 million in 2003 to more than one billion in 2009. It further says that another billion of people may have enough calories but are undernourished and in chronic poor health
due to micronutrient shortfalls. This means that nearly one-third of the world are malnourished and unable to secure sufficient health food to conduct normal activities.

History have shown us how hunger push people into civil unrest. The 2008 global food crises helped topple governments in Haiti and Madagascar. Currently, there are 31 countries on the FAO’s list of those in crisis and in need of external food assistance. The one bright aspect of this global tragedy is that more wealth nations and international organizations are recognizing the need to increase funding for agriculture development which dropped precipitously since 1979. Yet, there are big questions about how these funds will be invested and who will benefit.

Impact of hunger and malnutrition impacts more severely on women. More than 60% of the chronically hungry are women. Pregnancy and lactation impose major nutritional stresses on women’s bodies, menstruation leaches iron on women’s blood. Laws and social customs give women lower status and denying their rights to an equal share of household and public goods take food from women’s mouths.

In almost all countries, female-headed households are concentrated among the poorer strata of society and often have lower incomes than male-headed households. The number of female-headed households is increasing significantly in rural areas in many developing countries as rural men migrate due to lack of economic opportunities. In sub-Saharan Africa, 31% of rural households are headed by women, while 17% of households in Latin America and the Caribbean and headed by women. In Asia, 14% of the households are headed by women.

Hunger and food insecurity have lifelong consequences even if food becomes available. Recent research is showing ways that the stress associated with food insecurity changes brain chemistry, leading to chronically elevated stress hormones and a less effective immune response. When hunger and food insecurity are rampant, they affect the ability to think, work and plan.

Ironically, at the same time, women that women are most vulnerable to hunger, they produce most of the food, especially in those countries most prone to food insecurity. Women produce 60-80% of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world’s food production. They make up the majority of urban farmers in many cities around the world, although their contributions to total agricultural production may be discounted or invisible.

Women than men have more difficulty in gaining access to resources such as land, credit and the inputs and services that enhance productivity. This is also confirmed by a study made by FAO. The limited access of women to resources and their insufficient purchasing power are a consequence of interrelated social, economic, and cultural factors that force them into a subordinate role, to the detriment of their own development and that of society as a whole.
This imbalance in power and perception of the value of women provide in the food system exists not only in poor developing countries. Males have much more power in the global food system and they dominate administrative and management positions. Women are underrepresented in agricultural extension, research, teaching and business, even where the majority of students in biology and several agricultural and food disciplines are female.

Food sovereignty has emerged as a different way of viewing how food systems are and should be, in its principles draw attention to the particular needs for women and to have ownership and control of land and for rural women to be direct, active decision makers in food and rural issues. Having that as the base, food sovereignty includes the right of peoples to health and culturally appropriated food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems.

Ways forward:

The bottom-line in solving the hunger and food insecurity and in claiming climate justice among indigenous peoples is the respect and recognition of ancestral land rights, the self-determination of IPs to their natural resources and the recognition and further development of traditional knowledge and practices. Hunger and food insecurity in indigenous communities will never be resolved if land and resources are used to serve profit-based national and international development programs, and corporate interests are prioritized by governments over the interest of indigenous peoples and other marginalized peoples.

As part of bringing visibility to indigenous women’s contribution, there is an obvious need to document women’s contributions to food systems through gender-specific data collection and better monitoring of the impacts of barriers to participating in food systems and achieving the right to food for women.

More direct on-the-ground needs include ensuring women’s ability to own and access resources to produce and market food; providing education for women and by women; and giving women control over decision-making relevant to their own and their families’ food systems. Many of these measures will require changes in legal systems that are skewed against women, or do not recognize they have human rights.

While there is willingness of national and international communities to invest in agriculture to reduce poverty in the rural sector, the challenge lay in implementing policies that effectively overcome inequality and discrimination against indigenous and women farmers. Communities and organizations of indigenous women should be informed and their right to free prior, informed consent should be respected. The persistence of unrestricted violence against women within the home and outside, shows that policy measures to simultaneously reduce poverty and inequality is not a contradiction in terms. This would include policies that foster their ownership and control rights to land and credit, provide access to higher education, technical training and
health care and support their participation in relevant local and national decision-making process and governance.

Hungry indigenous women and their communities cannot wait. With funds and budget meant to solve the world’s hunger and poverty, it is essential that the questions about who will benefit from food programs and investments will be answered promptly and transparently. Else, this will only contribute to further inequity in the food system, and disempowerment of former sustainable and food sufficient communities to embrace the culture of dependence and dole-outs. The hungry population of the world will thus become ever more hungry.

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CWEARC field notes

The Cordillera Women’s Education Action Research Center (CWEARC) is a non-government organization facilitating services towards the empowerment of indigenous women in the Cordillera region, Philippines. Among the services it provides are research and publications, trainings and cross-learning, socio-economic projects in the framework of strengthening the food sovereignty of Cordillera indigenous women. CWEARC also holds other capacity-building activities for indigenous women and women migrants and facilitates the advocacy of indigenous women’s issues and in building a network of support for indigenous women.