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WOMEN'S RESISTANCE AGAINST AUTHORITARIANISM IN BRAZIL, THE PHILIPPINES, AND ROJAVA (NORTHERN SYRIA)

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PHOTO |

Courtesy of [JINWAR Free Women's Village](#)

¹ Commission on the Status of Women. *Challenges and Opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls: Agreed Conclusions*. UN CSW Sixty second session, March 12-23, 2018. para.17.

² *Ibid.* p. 16, para yy.

³ Rojava refers to Western Kurdistan, which is located in Northern Syria. In 2012, Kurds declared their self-autonomy and implemented Democratic Confederalism, which promotes a non-state system of grassroots democracy, decentralization, gender equality and environmental sustainability. Since 2016 the region has been officially called the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) to reflect the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the region.

In 2018, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW 62) “reaffirm[ed] the right to food and recogniz[ed] the crucial contributions of rural women to local and national economies and to food production and to achieve food security and improved nutrition, in particular in poor and vulnerable households”.¹ UN CSW 62 further called on States “to strengthen and build the resilience and adaptive capacity of all rural women and girls to respond to and recover from economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters, humanitarian emergencies and the adverse impacts of climate change”.² Indeed, the multiple crises of the past decade have shown how images of women as victims have been transformed into images of survivors and responders taking on the task of ensuring household and community safety and survival, especially in securing food.

What has not been sufficiently acknowledged is how these crises are equally affected by the political climate. The rise of populist leaders and authoritarian rulers espousing right-wing politics, nationalist chauvinism and neoliberal policies threatens women and girls, food sovereignty and human rights more broadly.

How can we expect governments to support the resilience of women and girls in rural areas in contexts where right-wing populism and authoritarianism are on the rise? Three women activists discuss this contradiction based on the experiences of women living in Brazil, the Philippines, and Rojava, a region in Northern Syria.³

“Women want to build changes”, says Michela Katiuscia Calaça Alves dos Santos from Brazil. In order to build these changes, women have “no other choice but to

oppose, expose, propose”, says Mary Ann Manahan from the Philippines. Women’s narratives of change need to be heard to counter false claims by authoritarian rulers that they are the change that people want. So what do women want? “Kurdish women are trying to assert their autonomy”, says Salima Tasdemir, a Kurdish activist. In the latter case, autonomy means institutionalizing Democratic Confederalism,⁴ a social paradigm committed to women’s liberation and an ecological society, while in the former two cases, women are finding many other ways to challenge the status quo.

While there are significant differences among these three cases, these women deliver one clear common message: women are at the heart of transforming systems and are asserting their own alternatives. Hence, it is not just about resilience, it is also about resistance to current structures and systems and re-claiming these as their own.

RESISTING AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

Women in these three countries face a common threat, with concrete consequences in the lives of their communities: the rise of both explicit and tacit authoritarianism in their respective countries.

Kurdish people have been subjected to massacres, assimilation and discrimination within the four states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) of their homeland. Their identity, culture and language have been suppressed. In Syria, hundreds of thousands of Kurds have been deprived of Syrian citizenship.⁵ The Kurdish regions are the most underdeveloped regions due to the states’ deliberate policy of neglect. State-led forced displacement and deforestation have affected the lives of local people due to loss of livestock, and the destruction of fields and orchards, agricultural tools and other assets. The Kurds’ land and natural resources were burnt down and destroyed by the Turkish and Syrian states as part of a project of ‘Turkification’ and ‘Arabization’ of the Kurdish land. Economic deprivation in the Kurdish regions is coupled with socio-cultural deprivation resulting from traditional patriarchal practices, which put the burden of regional underdevelopment disproportionately on the shoulders of women. In Syria, the conditions that emerged with the conflict started in 2011, led the Kurds to declare self-autonomy. Kurds began to implement Democratic Confederalism, which as described above offers an alternative to women. Despite these developments, people in the region still struggle on multiple levels. The economic embargo imposed mainly by Turkey, but experienced from almost all sides,⁶ has meant limited access to food and to other means of survival, such as water and electricity. In the context of an ongoing war in the Kurdish regions, women face multiple discrimination: “They are discriminated because of their ethnic identity and because they are women. They are targeted by state authorities and oppressed by the patriarchal structures of their own societies”, says Salima.

In the Philippines, President Rodrigo R. Duterte, who came to power in 2016 and was reelected in 2019, has launched a continuous assault on human rights and human rights defenders, liberal democracy and due process. Duterte won by a large majority with a campaign line of ‘change is coming’ and a promise to launch a war on drugs. Three years later, Duterte was dubbed ‘the executioner’, with more than 20,000 lives lost in this war.⁷ The majority are men who come from urban poor communities and leave behind widows who have to take care of their families on their own.⁸ “There is no separation of the three branches of government anymore, and

⁴ Democratic Confederalism is a non-state social paradigm, which is based on three ideological pillars: radical democracy, gender equality and ecology. For more information, please see: Ocalan, Abdullah. *Democratic Confederalism*. International Initiative Edition, 2011. Available at: www.freeocalan.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Ocalan-Democratic-Confederalism.pdf.

⁵ For more information on the stateless Kurds in Syria, please see: Human Rights Watch. Syria: *The Silenced Kurds*. October 1996. Available at: www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Syria.htm; Kurd-Watch. *Stateless Kurds in Syria: Illegal invaders or victims of a nationalistic policy?* March 2010; Habitat International Coalition. *Systematic Housing and Land Rights Violations against Syrian Kurds*. Submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the twelfth session of the Universal Periodic Review, March 17, 2011. Available at: lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session12/SY/HIC-HabitatInternationalCoalition-eng.pdf.

⁶ Ayboga, Ercan. “Total Embargo!” ISKU Informationsstelle Kurdistan, January 29, 2017. Available at: mesopotamia.coop/total-embargo/.

⁷ As cited by the Human Rights Watch, the government recorded around 4,948 suspected drug users and dealers who died during police operations from July 2016 to September 2018. However, the Philippine National Police also said that around 22,983 similar deaths fall under “homicides under investigation.” For more information, please visit: www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/philippines.

8 Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights). “The War on the Poor: Extrajudicial Killings and their Effects on the Urban Poor Families and Communities - Findings of the 2017-2018 Documentation of Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) committed under the so-called War on Drugs of the Duterte Administration”. Quezon City, Philippines, September 2018.

9 Furtés-Knight, Joanna. “Attacks on the media show Duterte’s Philippines is heading for despotism”. *The Guardian*, February 15, 2019. Available at: www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2019/feb/15/attacks-media-duterte-philippines-rappler-maria-ressa.

10 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender people, transvestites, cross dressers, intersex and gender queer people. For more information on discrimination against the LGBTTIQ community, and how they are organizing, see the article “Coming Out! Gender Diversity in the Food System” in this issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*.

11 For a concrete example of the impact of global trade rules on food sovereignty, please see: Rachmi Hertanti. “INSIGHT 8.1 An Experience from Indonesia: Trade Agreement Preys on Peasants and Food Sovereignty”. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2017): 82-83. Available at: www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_W_2017_ENG_8.pdf.

12 Democratically-elected President Dilma Rousseff was ousted on August 31, 2016 following an impeachment process widely regarded as a ‘parliamentary coup’.

13 Civil society organizations collected around 35,000 signatures worldwide through an online petition to demand that Bolsonaro bring back the CONSEA. In a political defeat for the government, Congress recreated the CONSEA, but it is not clear yet what form it will take. FIAN International. “Bolsonaro Shuts Down National Council for Food Security and Nutrition.” FIAN International News, June 15, 2019. Available at: www.fian.org/en/news/article/bolsonaro-shuts-down-national-council-for-food-security-and-nutrition-2162.

Duterte ousted the only Supreme Court Justice who was a woman and replaced her with his own candidate. The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Diego García-Sayán, has criticized the government, but other international organizations have remained silent”, says Mary Ann. Many of Duterte’s strongest critics are women – including Senator Leila de Lima and journalist Maria Ressa, both of whom have faced criminal charges; the former is in jail while the latter was released on bail.⁹ In the political climate created by Duterte, female journalists and activists also face ‘woman shaming’ by the President himself and his followers especially online – hateful comments on their appearance, gender, and sexuality – and threats of sexual violence.

In Brazil, Michela describes how the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro, who took power earlier this year, has “designated us [the left] as enemies.” “The military”, she adds, “now occupies all the strategic spaces in the government, including the vice-presidency and direct adviser to the President of the Supreme Court.” Religious conservatives also occupy influential positions in the government, including the former Ministry of Human Rights, renamed Ministry of Women, the Family and Human Rights. The current government fosters a climate of impunity for hate crimes and represents fear, violence and death for many marginalized groups, including women, the LGBTTIQ,¹⁰ peasants, black people and Indigenous peoples.

RESISTING NEO-LIBERAL PARADIGMS

At the same time as these states display a strong propensity for repression; they loosen control over private corporations. Subscribing to neo-liberalism, their government policies favor market interests under the guise of improving services and broadening economic choices. The privatization of social services burdens women as they cope with the increasing costs of living, and with the lack of social protection and of sexual and reproductive health and rights programs. Trade liberalization policies in agriculture have facilitated the shift from producing food for local consumption to producing food for export,¹¹ and this sidelines women’s roles in various food production activities.

In Brazil, “from the coup in 2016¹² to the current government, we are no longer demanding progressive public policies but defending existing rights and policies. These are governments that bring together two political platforms: the minimum state in social policies and conservatism in values”, explains Michela. For example, the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), created by the Workers’ Party government to support family agriculture, was downgraded to a Special Secretariat in 2016. And one of Bolsonaro’s first decisions was to dismantle the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition (CONSEA), a prime example worldwide of representative food governance structures that focus on groups suffering from food insecurity.¹³ It is feared that agribusiness models will be promoted even more under his leadership.

“Free market competition will have a negative impact on women – it will displace them, lower their income and force them to move to other economic sectors”, warns Mary Ann as she comments on the recent moves by the Philippine government to intensify neo-liberal and structural adjustment policies. The enactment of the *Rice Tariffication Law*, in February 2019, effectively removed all restrictions on rice imports. The rice sector had retained its quantitative restrictions under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture because it is the country’s main agricultural crop and

national staple. However, the 2018 rice price crisis was used as justification to open up the market for more affordable rice. This leaves Filipino rice farmers vulnerable to switching to other crops or land use if they fail to compete with the cheaper rice imports. A compounding problem is that farmers often do not hold title to their land. After thirty years of agrarian reform, 600,000 hectares remain undistributed.¹⁴ Women farmers, whose full rights to land were recognized comprehensively by law only in 2009, now have to deal with issues of land conversion and land grabbing. This can be linked with the World Bank's policy on market-assisted land reform (MARL) that has weakened the role of the state to acquire and distribute land under the same program.¹⁵ "This is not surprising because the administration follows World Bank policies. The President also prioritizes financing from China¹⁶ for large-scale projects in mining and energy", adds Mary Ann.

Regarding the Kurdish lands, Salima similarly expresses her concern on so-called regional development projects that fail to adhere to environmental, social and cultural heritage standards. "Big international companies operate in Turkey, and much of those operating at the national level have international counterparts that support them in 'social development' projects that end up destroying the natural resources where Kurdish people live."¹⁷ Living mostly in rural regions, the Kurdish people have been particularly affected by the construction of dams, forced migration and displacement. This cannot be dissociated from the efforts of the Turkish State to demobilize the Kurdish struggle. Similar policies against Kurdish land and natural resources were implemented by the Syrian state as well.

RESISTING SEXISM

Mary Ann depicts the top leader of the Philippines as the epitome of anti-women: "he is misogynist, objectifies women in his speeches, jokes about rape and upholds gender stereotypes." As early as the 2016 presidential election, women's groups filed a case to denounce Duterte's violation of the Magna Carta of Women (MCW).¹⁸ The MCW was passed to implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and serves as a comprehensive women's human rights law in the country.¹⁹ Technically, the women won the case, but the decision could not be carried out after Duterte won the Presidency and established political control over the three branches of government. The court case did not even dissuade him from making sexist remarks, for example by offering "42 virgins" to investors and visitors²⁰ and telling soldiers to shoot women rebels in their vaginas because without them "women would be useless".²¹ As mentioned earlier, women also suffer the consequences of extrajudicial killings in the war on drugs. Thousands of women have become single parents to children whose fathers have been killed, while illegal warrants of arrest have pushed some women, sometimes very young, to trade their bodies for the release of their partners, husbands or parents, a practice dubbed as 'sex for freedom'. Women live in constant fear and insecurity, and this could become even worse for mothers if the prioritized bill aimed at lowering the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) from 12 to 9 years old is passed. These varying issues have spurred various forms of resistance and tactical alliances among women and feminist groups, such as the #BabaeAko (I am a woman) social media campaign (inspired by #MeToo movement)²² and the work of World March of Women-Philippines.

Brazil also has an openly misogynist President. As a federal deputy, he told a woman deputy: "I am not a rapist but, if I were, I wouldn't rape you because you don't de-

14 Manahan, Mary Ann. "Introduction: Part One Thirty Years of Agrarian Reform under CARP/ ER Is there Reason to Celebrate?" *Reporman Agraryo at Pagbabago, Narratives of Agrarian Conflicts, Transitions and Transformation*. Quezon City: Focus on the Global South, 2018, p.19.

15 Manahan, Mary Ann. *Banking on the Rural Poor?: Critical Insights and Policy Questions on Foreign Aid and Agrarian Reform in the Philippines*. Focus on Poverty. Available at: www.focusonpoverty.org/download/reports/Banking%20on%20the%20Rural%20Poor.pdf.

16 For more information on the impact of China's interventions, as well as of the activities of Chinese industrial companies, on the right to food and nutrition of local communities, especially fishermen and fisherwomen, in the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, please see: FIAN International, People's Movement against Port (PMAPC), and Traditional Fishermen Association (KNTI). *China's Extraterritorial Obligations vis-a-vis the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition of Fishers in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka - Joint Submission to the UN UPR of China (Third Cycle/31 Session)*. November 31, 2018. Available at: www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/china/session_31_-_november_2018/js38_upr31_chn_e_main.pdf.

17 One example is the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant Project on the river Tigris, planned in the mainly Kurdish populated Southeast of the Turkish state, as a part of the large scale 'South-eastern Anatolia Project' (GAP). This project was supposed to improve the region's socio-economic status through the provision of hydro-electric energy and irrigation. In 2005, German, Swiss and Austrian companies became involved. However, in 2009, due to the failure by Turkey to comply with the required environmental, social and cultural heritage standards, and large international protests, some of the companies withdrew. For more information, please see: Hasankeyf'i Yaşatma Girişimi. *Report on the current status of the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant Project and the counter campaigns*. May 27, 2019. Available at: www.hasankeyfgirisimi.net/?p=861.

18 Philippine Commission on Women. *Magna Carta of Women*. Philippines: Office of the President. Available at: pcw.gov.ph/sites/default/files/documents/laws/republic_act_9710.pdf.

19 Also known as Republic Act 9710, enacted on August 14, 2009 by the 14th Congress.

20 Al Jazeera News. "Duterte offers 42 virgins to visitors of the Philippines." January 27, 2018. Available at: www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/duterte-offers-42-virgins-visitors-philippines-180127074930801.html.

21 Ellis-Petersen, Hannah. "Philippines: Rodrigo Duterte orders soldiers to shoot female rebels 'in the vagina'." *The Guardian*, February 13, 2018. Available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/13/philippines-rodrigo-duterte-orders-soldiers-to-shoot-female-rebels-in-the-vagina.

22 Regencia, Ted. "#BabaeAko: Philippines' Duterte 'intimidated by strong women'." *Al Jazeera News*, May 30, 2018. Available at: www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/babaeako-philippines-duterte-intimidated-strong-women-180530131100613.html.

23 DW News. "Brazil Arrests hundreds for violence against women". August 25, 2018. Available at: www.dw.com/en/brazil-arrests-hundreds-for-violence-against-women/a-45218982.

24 For more information, please visit: jinwar.org/de/home-3/.

25 Evans, Rachel. "Revolutionary Rojava: A polyethnic, feminist and anti-capitalist experiment". *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. October 26, 2018. Available at: links.org.au/revolutionary-rojava-polyethnic-feminist-anti-capitalist-experiment.

serve it". According to Michela, religious forces have "legitimized violence against women and LGBTTIQ, the return of women to the domestic sphere, and many other setbacks in the name of god and the family".

Incidence of violence against women increased in recent years. As of 2017 alone, according to the Brazilian Forum on Public Security, there was an 8% increase in rape accounting to 60,018 rapes and about 1,133 femicides.²³ Issues of welfare and access to resources continue to burden women in Brazil, especially in the countryside. As Michela emphasizes, "Women are the first to suffer the impacts of the lack of water and food, because they are the ones who have to look for solutions. They have to travel long distances in search of water for their families. They are also the first to go without food so that their children and husbands can eat."

According to Michela, the water situation has worsened since the 2016 coup, with the end of public programs for semi-arid regions conducted in partnership with civil society, and which prioritized women at all levels (training, access to water, agroecological production, among others). Michela concludes that the State has abandoned rural families and the urban peripheries: "The conservative discourse of the government is nothing more than the expression of less-state economic policy, fewer rights and more responsibilities for women, who should do that work for free as if it were a loving obligation, without sexual rights, and with a strong agenda against sexual and reproductive health." The Bolsonaro government defends the view that the fetus is a subject of rights from the moment of conception. The Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights refuses to debate the reasons why so many women die in clandestine abortions, seeking to criminalize them instead. According to Michela, the type of family that the current government defends is white, urban, and heteronormative.

Salima explains that women have been systematically disempowered by institutionalized forms of patriarchy, from the family to the state. The situation of women is worsened by the ongoing conflicts in the Kurdish regions. Kurdish women have been subjected to sexual and other forms of violence. Some women and girls, for example, are being captured by ISIS and subjected to sexual slavery as a means of warfare. This is why in Rojava, women are taking matters into their own hands and are organizing self-defense and education assemblies. They have created a safe space for women who have experienced violence due to war or other forms of patriarchal oppression.²⁴

When Rojava declared its autonomy, they banned 'honor killings', forced marriages, child marriages, polygamy, and other forms of violence against women. It was observed that "before the Rojava Revolution, the prevailing gender system strictly controlled women and restricted their ability to do anything except childrearing and domestic work". This has been changed under the new constitution, effectively replacing the old patriarchal system by affirming women's right to participate in all areas and spheres of life.²⁵

DEFENDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

It is in these interlocking contexts of authoritarianism, neo-liberalism and sexism that the women's movements from Brazil, Philippines and Rojava display their resistance. In doing so, women are planting seeds of hope as they uproot barriers to food sovereignty.

Resistance, according to Michela, means constructing a food system that is different from what transnational corporations want. This message comes from food sovereignty actors such as agroecology organizations, peasant farmers, La Vía Campesina and rural unions, as well as from urban workers, left political parties, and Black and feminist movements. There is no better way to ensure adequate food for everyone than to strengthen family farmers, peasants and traditional populations. Resistance against agri-businesses, however, is not just a national fight. International solidarity is important, especially coming from other social movements that know the importance of nature, peasant seeds, real food, and agroecology.²⁶ Michela emphasizes that “this fight will not only undermine authoritarianism and broaden popular participation, it will also benefit the planet that suffers from the consequences of climate change”.

²⁶ For more information on the intersection between agroecology and feminism, please see article “Without Feminism, There is No Agroecology” in this issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*.

Kurdish women implement autonomous food systems and governing structures that are aligned with Democratic Confederalism.²⁷ Committed to women’s liberation and an ecological and democratic society, Kurdish women secure separate and safe spaces for women, but are not dismissive of shared spaces with men. They build women-only cooperatives that develop their own food system and operate bakeries, restaurants, production sales and farming. Salima reiterates: “women have created women cooperatives and other women-led institutions to ensure women’s right to food and nutrition.” She acknowledges that this is a process “by the women, for the women.”

²⁷ *Supra* note 3.

The Filipino farmers could relate to this vision of autonomy, especially in terms of being able to exercise control over one’s space or territory. The urgent demand towards food sovereignty in the Philippines is for peasants and women in rural areas to have control over their lands and coastal resources. This will allow them to promote agroecology, prevent the conversion of farmlands to non-agricultural use and extractive activities, as well as protect coastal resources from exploitative commercial purposes. Mary Ann reminds us that “women demand not just social justice but food, dignified jobs, sustainable sources for their livelihoods, in order to provide for their families”. Grassroots women organizations have been defending food sovereignty through initiatives like women-managed coastal zones, women-to-women seed banking and exchange, and organic farming. Apart from promoting these initiatives, the National Rural Women Congress (PKKK), a national rural women coalition and a member of the World March of Women-Philippines, pushes for the continued coverage of agricultural lands under agrarian reform, for the enactment of a protection law for critical watershed areas, and for a policy review to amend or if possible suspend the *Rice Tariffication Law* (2019).

ORGANIZING OUR RESISTANCE

What others perceive as women’s resilience is actually born out of resistance. Conversely, what started as women’s resistance gathers strength from their resilience through collective organizing.

Kurdish women are organizing on the ground not just to counter the different power structures at multiple levels of decision-making, but also to showcase that alternatives are possible. One such case is the story of *Jinwar* – a word that refers to “woman’s space” or “woman’s land” in Kurdish. On November 25, 2018, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the village of Jinwar was declared a “free ecological women’s village, providing space for women who have lost their husbands and other relatives in the war and do not have a proper place to stay

with their children. It is also a space for women who have experienced violence due to war or other forms of patriarchal oppression. With 30 homes, a school, museum, and medical centre, Jinwar has become a space where women gather, live and work together, based on the vision of a free and communal life”, conveys Salima.

Salima refers to Jinwar as born out of women’s consciousness about their oppression. This is reflected from Jinwar’s self-description:

*Reconstructing our homes as havens of peace is a significant act of resistance in the face of violence and war. But far from being simply a collection of houses, the village will also provide an alternative way of life. Building onto the rich cultural heritage and historic knowledge of women, JINWAR aims to create a way of life in which every woman can reach her full potential free of the constraints of the oppressive power structures of patriarchy and capitalism.*²⁸

²⁸ For more information about JINWAR, please visit: jinwar.org/about/.

Indeed, critical consciousness nurtured by a growing number of organizations can build a strong movement. In Brazil, the *Marcha das Margaridas* (March of the Daisies) has been held since 2000 and reflects a sustained agenda against hunger, poverty and gender-based violence. The march is held every August 14 and is considered to be the most massive action of the working women of the countryside, forest and the waters against the agribusiness violence that have spelled death for peasant family farms and their environment. The march is composed of several feminist organizations from both rural and urban areas.²⁹

²⁹ For more information about the March of the Daisies 2019, please visit: fetase.org.br/mobilizacoes/marcha-das-margaridas/.

As Michela observes, “Women who had never participated in organizations before now have the urge to do it, to fight for their rights.” This is also Mary Ann’s experience with the growing anti-misogyny movement and the protests against extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, where women who used to keep silent find themselves joining and speaking in rallies, and where alliances are built between middle and upper-class feminists and mass-based women organizations.

Women’s groups are as diverse as their struggles and political backgrounds. It is but logical that women’s groups do not agree on everything. What needs celebrating is that amidst multi-dimensional conflicts, there are tactical alliances and inter-sectoral actions that help women, including young women and girls, find a common voice. As Michela puts it: “a revolution is when a woman makes time in her day to day to do politics”.



IN BRIEF

No amount of recognition for women in their food production roles can translate to food sovereignty and the right to food and nutrition, so long as there are threats to their freedom, structural barriers to social equality, and gender discrimination. This is best illustrated by the experiences of women and girls living in the rural areas of Rojava (Northern Syria), Brazil and the Philippines, where they face authoritarian rule, both explicit and tacit, espousing right-wing politics, nationalist chauvinism and neoliberal policies.

Three women activists – Salima Tasdemir (UK-based Kurd), Mary Ann Manahan (Philippines), Michela Calaça (Brazil), shared how these authoritarian regimes have persecuted peoples and communities, abused women and girls, favored corporations over community-based food systems in their respective countries/regions. In response, women display not just their resilience during crises but more so their resistance through collective organizing.

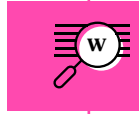
The women's imperatives are to defend food sovereignty, resist sexism and counter neoliberal policies in various organized ways. One example is to create safe and autonomous spaces by and for Kurdish women under the Democratic Confederalism framework of women's liberation and ecological society. They have established women-only cooperatives engaged in food production activities and other spaces for women affected by war and violence. In the case of Brazil and the Philippines, women's groups are first to protest in the streets and build tactical and inter-sectoral alliances to combat increasing violence against women, LGBTTIQ, and other marginalized sectors. There are grassroots initiatives as well that push for the recognition of the right to land and territory to fully secure agroecology and food sovereignty practices.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Authoritarian rule in countries/regions like Rojava (Northern Syria), Brazil and the Philippines implement sexist and neoliberal policies that threaten women and girls, their basic freedoms, and food sovereignty. These countries/regions witness increased incidence of violence against women, both as direct and indirect targets of the state violence and impunity.
- Neoliberal policies allow commercial big plantations, construction of dams, extractive activities and other import-export oriented policies that displaced community-based food systems and push women in the rural areas to look for other means of livelihood. Privatization policies have exploited women's social reproduction roles and have burdened them further with their care work.

→ More than resilience, women's resistance is necessary to 'expose' structural issues, 'oppose' human rights violations, and 'propose' alternatives for building a better society. Women are exercising their political agency from the household to the community to the state to achieve real changes and autonomy.



KEY WORDS

- Authoritarianism
- Sexism
- Neoliberalism
- Women's Resistance
- Food Sovereignty