

# STORIES OF CHANGE

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP AND  
EMPOWERMENT IN ASEAN PROJECT



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ACWC</b>	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and the Protection of the Rights of Women and Children
<b>ADWLE</b>	Association for Development of Women and Legal Education
<b>AEC</b>	ASEAN Economic Community
<b>AICHR</b>	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
<b>AMS</b>	ASEAN Member States
<b>APF</b>	ASEAN People's Forum
<b>CAM</b>	CEDAW Action Myanmar
<b>CBOS</b>	Community Based Organizations
<b>CCF</b>	CEDAW Compliance Framework
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CESCR</b>	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>CGFED</b>	Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development
<b>CLMV</b>	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DFAT</b>	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>ESC</b>	Economic, Social and Cultural
<b>FBO</b>	Faith-based Organizations
<b>FFW</b>	Foundation for Women
<b>GADC</b>	Gender and Development for Cambodia
<b>GADNET</b>	Gender and Development Network
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GRAISEA</b>	Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South East Asia
<b>ICESCR</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-governmental Organization
<b>IWRAW AP</b>	International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific
<b>MOWA</b>	Ministry of Women's Affairs
<b>MSWRR</b>	Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plans
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>NGOGG</b>	NGO Gender Group
<b>NPA</b>	Non-Profit Association
<b>NSPAW</b>	National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women
<b>OP-ICESCR</b>	Optional Protocol-International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>RGC</b>	Royal Government of Cambodia
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>SUB-CAW</b>	Sub-Commission on the Advancement of Women
<b>TPP</b>	Trans Pacific Partnership
<b>TWGG – VAW</b>	Cambodian National Technical Working Group on Gender to end Violence Against Women
<b>UNGP</b>	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women
<b>WEE</b>	Women's Economic Empowerment
<b>WEL ASEAN</b>	Women's Economic Leadership and Empowerment in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>WEP</b>	Women's Empowerment Principles
<b>WER</b>	Women's Economic Rights
<b>WLB</b>	Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau
<b>WON</b>	Women's Organizations Network
<b>WRO</b>	Women's Rights Organization
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women Christian Association

# PREFACE

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community (AEC) has moved towards greater integration in 2015. This has provided spaces for free movement of goods, services, investments, skilled labour and free flow of capital. Given this model of development, women are exposed to new opportunities and risks in this environment of economic openness. Poor women, in particular, remain vulnerable to economic policy changes that occur in the region. Implementation of the AEC has the potential to offer unprecedented economic opportunities to women, but also to seriously undermine their ability to contribute to the future of the region.

Specifically, skilled labour in the formal sector is prioritized over informal sector labour. Women are largely concentrated in the informal sector as domestic workers, part-time workers, daily wage labourers and workers concentrated at the very bottom of value chain operations in the garment, agriculture and manufacturing industries. As a result, they are often excluded from ASEAN's economic policies, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Prior to AEC integration, men have generally dominated the public, and women the private spheres. This implies that men can secure more benefits from changes in economic policy than women.

As a result of diverse political, economic and cultural contexts in ASEAN, the region faces significant challenges for improving women's economic rights (WER). Advocacy on women's rights in ASEAN is challenging because of the entrenched patriarchal structures, systems and attitudes. The space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the region is historically limited and continually shrinking, especially at the national level. As a result, it is very difficult for CSOs to advocate for certain issues that are perceived as political such as land grabbing, natural resources governance, accountability of corporations and migrant workers' rights at the national level. It also leads to strong concerns about the security of Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) in the region. The ongoing economic integration of ASEAN is multiplying the challenges for women living in the region.



# THE WEL IN ASEAN PROJECT

The Women's Economic Leadership and Empowerment in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (WEL in ASEAN) project was implemented to strengthen the capacity of WROs to be able to influence laws and policies for women's economic leadership and empowerment in the formal and informal sectors of the AEC. The project commenced in June 2014 and ended in October 2017.

Partner-beneficiaries of the WEL in ASEAN project are WROs in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines including: Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC), Association for Development of Women and Legal Education (ADWLE), NGO Gender Group (NGO GG), Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED), Foundation for Women (FFW), and Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (WLB).

The key strategy of the WEL in ASEAN project was to increase the engagement of WROs in the ASEAN region primarily through the review mechanism of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as an avenue to raise awareness of priority issues for women's economic leadership in ASEAN.

The objectives of the project were to:

- *Develop and increase the capacity of women and WROs in ASEAN to develop their analysis of the impact of ASEAN on women in the formal and informal economy;*
- *Strengthen WROs network and mobilization for advocacy with their states and with ASEAN; and*
- *Challenge discriminatory laws and practices against women in ASEAN, and advocate for progressive laws and socio-economic policies and programs which promote women's human rights, women's economic leadership and empowerment in the informal and formal sectors of the ASEAN economy.*

The project has built capacity of WROs on economic rights standards and emerging rights issues, specifically within domains of migration, natural resource management and value chains. This ensured women's issues were integrated into the broader work of national WROs when campaigning for greater equality, and facilitated stronger links with other WROs in the region. Throughout the WEL in ASEAN project, WROs have mobilized to advocate for greater WER and leadership in collaboration with other CSOs, governments and private sector. Collaboration has supported WROs to better understand their respective situations against the ASEAN economic backdrop. It has further helped develop their respective strategies based on actual needs and contexts to improve women's economic empowerment and leadership in their countries and the region.



Field visit during the Regional Training on Women's Economic Rights, Thailand 2015.

# LEARNING WORKSHOP

This 'Stories of Change' booklet captures a selection of key achievements from each country as a result of the WEL in ASEAN project. It also includes lessons learnt of this capacity building, advocacy and movement building project around the project's key themes of migration, women in value chains and natural resource management.

*"Where am I in this process of change? How much am I invested in this fight for equality? How can other people appreciate my story that is always unknown and just being questioned for more?"* These were some of the questions that were considered by participants in the Learning Workshop (Chiang Mai, Thailand August 6-7, 2017) of the WEL in ASEAN project and have informed this booklet. Over two days, partners and stakeholders in the ASEAN region (mostly WROs) discussed lessons learnt, the views and perspectives of participants, as well as concrete stories of change from project partners. The participants were able to formulate these stories by looking back on the implementation of the WEL in ASEAN project in their respective country, as well as the regional level in ASEAN.

The workshop used participatory methodologies - in particular the 'Most Significant Change (MSC) Approach'. MSC is a qualitative research methodology through which organizations, stakeholders, project staff and/or beneficiaries are actively engaged to share their views and perspectives on an outcome and impact level. A full day workshop was spent reflecting on change, lessons learnt and commitments on ways forward - an exercise that was filled with energy and personal motivation.

The following stories of change demonstrate how the application of CEDAW and the knowledge gained from the WEL in ASEAN project has been applied to each country's context at the national and regional levels. Given the different capacities of partner-beneficiaries, the stories examine their roles and how the WEL in ASEAN project has supported them to advance WER. It can also be gleaned from partners' stories how the WEL in ASEAN project has enabled them to collaborate with allies in the region, and contribute to women's rights dialogues, such as the ASEAN Peoples Forum (APF) and through the CEDAW Committee. The latter resulting in certain common WER issues being "observed" by the CEDAW Committee and directed towards the concerned ASEAN Member States (AMS) for implementation.



Participants at the two day Learning Workshop held from 6-7 August 2017 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



Participants discussing the learnings from the project at the two day Learning Workshop held from 6-7 August 2017 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

## DISCLAIMER

It is important to note that the stories contained in this booklet represent partners' most significant change stories in their eyes. As a result (and inherent in the MSC methodology), the booklet is not a complete summary of all change/ accomplishments/activities under the WEL in ASEAN project.

The stories of change in this booklet also reflect a number of unexpected outcomes of change resulting from knowledge gained from the WEL in ASEAN project (for example, the Cambodia partner's story of change focuses on their advocacy on the Domestic Violence Law, which was not a focus area under the project, but resulted from the partner's increased capacity on CEDAW).

# IWRAW AT WORK IN THE REGION

## CREATING SPACES FOR ALLIANCE BUILDING AND CROSS-CUTTING ADVOCACIES ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN ASEAN

PARTNER: International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW AP)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: Women rights activists, women's networks, and the CSO network at the national level

WEBSITE: <https://www.iwraw-ap.org/>

IWRAW Asia Pacific is the only regional/international NGO working with the CEDAW Convention as a main tool for change in the Asia Pacific. We see a critical role for ourselves in filling the gap between the promise of women's rights and their actual realisation.

Since women are excluded and/or poorly represented in ASEAN economic policymaking spaces, it was crucial to come together as women's rights activists and organizations and jointly strategize to influence policy and decision makers. When implementing the WEL in ASEAN project, IWRAW AP focused on increasing the spaces and platforms for women's rights activists and organizations. We amplified women's rights voices from ASEAN to be in these economic policymaking spaces and to raise critical issues on WER.



To build the capacity of the organizations involved, IWRAW AP developed tools and knowledge resources such as the Framework on WER in ASEAN, Training Materials on WER, a Briefing Paper on Natural Resources and Women's Human Rights and a Report on Women Migrant Workers Rights. These tools were used to break down very technical concepts and to strengthen the understanding of the actors and the rights violations at hand. They have been translated into the national languages of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam and were used in national trainings with women's rights activists and organizations in these four countries.

We also integrated these tools and knowledge resources into the regional training that aimed at enhancing the capacity of WROs to examine WER using the CEDAW Compliance Framework. This training strengthened partners' capacity on WER and they could pass on their newly acquired knowledge and skills by conducting trainings at the national and local level. The trained organizations were now in a position to raise awareness of WER with national and community groups, including women migrant workers, indigenous communities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning (LGBTIQ) persons and women with disabilities. Reaching out

to specific groups of women who face specific challenges, and marginalized groups who are disproportionately impacted and often overlooked in laws and practices, was an important step.

The CEDAW Compliance Framework (CCF) proved to be an accessible and valuable tool to bring about a conversation on various national issues, and was at the same time feeding back information into national policy areas.

*"Through the different convening that we had we could leverage on the outreach of our partners in the Mekong regions, as well as in Thailand and the Philippines, calling on the expertise at the grass-roots level, the affected communities, to come together. And all their contributions provided us with the evidence, information and the knowledge to create specific position papers on the three priority issues: natural resource governance, women migrant workers' rights, as well as women in the value chains. These issues were not really part of the political dialogue in this region before." – Audrey Lee, Program Manager, IWRAW AP*

For example, when Vietnam reported to CEDAW in July 2015, issues around the security of WROs were brought to the attention of the CEDAW Committee members. The CEDAW Committee raised the same issue in their Concluding Observation for Vietnam and Myanmar and asked the government to take specific steps to create an enabling environment for women human rights defenders and WROs to



operate freely. In Laos, WEL in ASEAN partner ADWLE actively informs government stakeholders about WROs and works with them as partners on national level activities creating spaces for other WROs and CSOs to engage with the government.



*IWRAW-AP, represented by Shanti Uprety (right) delivering an oral statement during the 61st Commission on the Status of Women in New York, March 2017.*

## SPACES FOR ADVOCACY

At the regional level, IWRAW AP and partners were active in the APF and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Together, we organized regional dialogues on gender and the value chains (2015); women migrant workers (2016) and natural resource governance (2017). At the international level, we were present in the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Association for Women's Rights in Development Forum. IWRAW AP also organized an event on Women's Rights and Natural Resources in ASEAN at the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Forum in 2016, and a side event on 'Redefining the value of women's work' at the Commission on the Status of Women in 2017. National partners participated in these events, bringing the WEL ASEAN agenda to these international spaces. We contributed as well to drafting of the new General Comment by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) on the accountability of business actors.

## OPERATING BEYOND THE NATIONAL LEVEL

We were able in the WEL in ASEAN project to advocate on the various rights issues not only at a national level, but also at regional and international levels. Together with our partners, we recognized the importance of engaging in strategic spaces that could influence global and regional policies on economic rights. Operating beyond the national level is important for WER advocacy because of transboundary issues and wider impact of rights violations. By creating regional spaces for advocacy, WROs could do things that would otherwise be challenging at a national level. We deliberately used these regional spaces to examine issues of women migrant workers, value chains and corporate accountability so that partners could discuss in a safe environment.

The regional convening gave us the opportunity to respond to violations happening across borders in the region, such as violations against women migrating from Cambodia or Laos to Thailand or Malaysia. Seeing the value of this regional focus, the implementing partners put significant emphasis on developing regional strategies over the course of the project. Moreover, the solidarity of WROs and activists in the region reduced the divisive nature of ASEAN geopolitics and made it easier to overcome shrinking spaces at the national level. Regional spaces often filled gaps felt at the national level. Furthermore, participating in different global activities enabled us to take the actual experience of women in the region into the discourse and dialogues on WER.

Looking back at the project, what we found crucial to improving WER in ASEAN was the interplay between international, regional and national experiences. Our work at a regional level aimed to highlight the participation of women whose lived realities were important in informing discussions. For instance, at the Regional Dialogue on Women Migrant Workers, we were able to have women migrant workers present and contribute to discussions. We recognised how important it was for advocacy at the regional and international level to be grounded in national experiences and to respond to local challenges. At the same time, regional and international efforts also supported national advocacy. For example, after participating in regional events, GADC Cambodia strengthened its national advocacy to integrate women's human rights issues relating to the use of natural resources and is working towards making these issues part of the mainstream discussions in Cambodia.



*Participants at the Regional Dialogue on Women Migrant Workers held from 7-9 December 2016 in Bangkok.*

## LINKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The WEL in ASEAN project has synergies with IWRAW AP's Business and Human Rights work where we pay specific attention to the private sector in advocating for WER. The role of the private sector is increasing in ASEAN, but there is no proper regulatory framework to hold private sector players accountable, particularly on issues related to migrant workers, land grabbing and value chains. We created a space at the Regional Dialogue on Women Migrant Workers and at the Regional Dialogue on Women's Rights and Natural Resources for groups to engage with private sector actors. Although private sector engagement remains a challenge, after these two meetings IWRAW AP and partners realized that there was a need for a clear strategy on private sector engagement. Joint reflections prompted the development of a discussion paper titled 'Corporate Power and the Space for Women's Human Rights Activism'. This paper outlines the possible ways of addressing the private sector in the advocacy work of IWRAW AP and partners.

## LEARNING AND WORKING TOGETHER

As we come to the end of the WEL in ASEAN project, IWRAW AP recognizes the importance of learning and working together in creating spaces for advocacy on WER. First, we could bring the lessons learned from other regions (e.g. the experience of garment factory workers in Bangladesh and the response of women's rights groups there) to apply to the WEL in ASEAN project implementation and advocacy in the region. Secondly, together with our partners, we discovered the importance of building and nurturing cross movement solidarity. We recognized that joining hands with the labour rights movement, trade unions, indigenous rights and disability rights movements yields better results than working in our own 'box', and helps to support lasting change. Governments and private sector actors find it more difficult to ignore an integrated advocacy campaign of different organizations. For us, working on WER and realizing more change, operating across movements and joining hands with others remains vital.

A third decisive aspect was our convening capacity that made it possible to bring together a diverse pool of actors. Because we could connect people to knowledge, institutions, and mechanisms for accountability, joint strategizing and building a common approach was possible. Lastly, working together also requires recognizing and respecting each other's strengths and weaknesses. It was the collective efforts of IWRAW AP and partners, and our joint willingness to engage on economic rights issues, despite the contextual challenges, that contributed to the achievements.

## CONTINUING THE WEL IN ASEAN JOURNEY

In the coming years, IWRAP AP will continue to identify strategic opportunities to advance the WER agenda at the national, regional and international level. We are determined to keep engaging policymakers on critical issues and have integrated the priorities of the WEL in ASEAN project and the WER agenda into our Three Year Strategic Plan. Our immediate objective will be to continue working on WER in South East Asia with a national-level focus on Bangladesh and Vietnam. The lessons learned in Vietnam under the WEL in ASEAN project will, for example, be integrated in future efforts in Bangladesh and the learning from Bangladesh will contribute to national level advocacy in Vietnam.

We will continue our participation in various rights networks to maintain engagement with all WEL in ASEAN project partners. As a working group member of Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights within the global network ESCR-Net, we will contribute to solving issues around the right to work, land, and natural resources. The network is using CEDAW and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as the framework in their advocacy. We will also build on the work of the existing women's rights networks in the region, such as the Women's Caucus, responding to contextual challenges, particularly linked to the AEC and thereby making women's rights advocacy sustainable. We also plan to fulfil our role as an umbrella organization in the region by updating tools and resources on WER relevant for the national partners and other stakeholders. With these ongoing efforts, we hope we can continue to work with our partners to improve WER in ASEAN.

*"I really hope in the next few years that there will be stronger recognition of the rights of women migrant workers in ASEAN and that mechanisms and structures are put in place to advance their rights, as well as enable them to access justice. The dream is to have ASEAN understand, recognize and protect the intersectional lives of women migrant workers!" – Sanyu Awori, Program Officer IWRAP AP*

# CAMBODIA

## STRONGER INFLUENCE IN ADVOCACY

PARTNER: Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: Women rights activists, women's networks, and the CSO network at the national level

WEBSITE: <http://www.gadc.org.kh>

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/genderissue/>

GADC is a local non-profit and non-political organization that works in cooperation with the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and members of CSOs to advocate for gender sensitive projects and programs, improved national laws and policy formulation in Cambodia. GADC supports, and is a member of, the Gender and Development Network (GADNet) – a network of 35 NGO partners in Cambodia that aims to be a collective voice for advocacy on gender equality issues.

Over the past years, as GADNet, we have become stronger in advocating for gender equality using the CCF. This change was powered by a training about the CCF, organized by IWRAP AP under the WEL in ASEAN project (attended by 18 of our members in 2014). Our members realized that the CEDAW framework was a powerful tool to support their advocacy work and could be of great help promoting social, behavioural and policy change. Because of this capacity building, we could jointly initiate the amendment of the Law on The Prevention of Domestic Violence and The Protection of Victims (DV Law) in Cambodia.

*“Looking back over the last three years, the most significant change that I am so proud of is seeing the members of our network having more knowledge and ability on the CEDAW Compliance Framework. One of them mentioned for example, that it really built their confidence knowing their advocacy work is protected under international law. Together, we were able to develop a new draft of the law on domestic violence that complies with CEDAW.” – ENG CHANDY, Advocacy and Networking Program Officer, GADC/GADNet*

When adopted in 2005, the DV Law was considered gender blind: many articles of the law did not pay attention to gender equality, nor did it effectively prevent domestic violence against women. Moreover, less privileged women were inadequately recognized. Although the shortcomings of the DV Law were observed by the CEDAW committee, and a recommendation to amend the law was passed on to the Cambodian government, real capacity to prepare and draft an amendment was lacking. It was only after GADNet and NGO-CEDAW (an alliance of 30 organizations) teamed up in 2015 that things started moving in the right direction.

## LAW ON THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE PROTECTION OF VICTIMS (DV LAW)

The DV law has the objective to prevent domestic violence, protect victims and strengthen the culture of non-violence and harmony within households and society in the Kingdom of Cambodia. Even though its objective is endorsed by many, in the eyes of GADNet and its members, some articles in the initial law do not favour women. For example, the law mentions that counselling and issue solving in the event of domestic violence can only happen when it concerns a 'serious' case. The problem is however, that it is unclear who determines the 'seriousness' of the matter, and what 'serious' exactly means. It therefore leaves too much space for unfavourable interpretation. Moreover, the law does not report of 'non-consensual sex', thereby leaving space for marital rape to happen without any chance of prosecution and punishment.

Using the CCF, we started to analyze the DV law, harvested ideas in consultative workshops, and shaped important suggestions for changing the law. Our joint efforts were recognized by the Cambodian National Technical Working Group on Gender to end Violence Against Women (TWGG-VAW) – a body connecting CSOs to give input on gender issues and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Cambodia.



TWGG-VAW offered us a seat at the table, allowing us to share our inputs and influence the DV Law amendment. For us, this was a crucial step in bringing women's issues of gender equality to a national policy level. Between 2015 and early 2017, GADC has managed to contribute to the amendment of the DV Law through our participation in TWGG-VAW. A draft amendment law is currently accepted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). Although a final decision has not yet been made, as GADNet, we consider the current stage of the amendment process a very important accomplishment on the path towards gender equality in Cambodia.

All this will contribute to realizing the future goal of GADNet: to be the leading advocacy network on gender equality, equipped with critical policy analysis and capacity based on CCF and other human rights instruments in Cambodia. A three-year strategic plan for 2017-2020 will guide our work on specific laws and policies such as the DV Law and convention on Domestic Workers (ILO 189). By 2020, we aim to have full capacity in CCF and the analysis of law and policies that comply with CEDAW, making sure our network tackles gender equality issues as effectively as possible.

*"Working with networks, local, regional and at the international level, I have learned that it is very important to be together, together we are stronger in achieving gender equality." – ENG CHANDY, Advocacy and Networking Officer, GADC*

## TAKING ADVANTAGE AND MOMENTUM ON THE NETWORKING POWER

While the political context in Cambodia sometimes restricts the movement and work of CSOs, and the turnover of CSOs and NGO staff can pose challenges for the continuity of our advocacy work, a strong and dedicated collaboration between GADNet members, other CSOs, government bodies, and other partners created windows of opportunity in changing the DV Law in Cambodia. Working together on advocacy, building capacity on frameworks such as CEDAW, and continuously learning from each other are therefore key elements for us when working towards gender equality in the future.

Practically, this first means that we will continue organizing events for network members reflecting on grassroots gender issues with the CCF and other human rights instruments. Secondly, paying attention to documenting and sharing of experiences, challenges and lessons learnt will feed into an ongoing learning process of our network. Overseeing these perspectives, and finalizing the WEL in ASEAN project, we also acknowledge the need for a stronger and clearer organizational structure. This will enable us to attract the much needed financial and human resources to effectively continue our advocacy work in the coming years. Moreover, we aim to further build the capacity of our members (both the representatives and the leaders of NGO partners) about the CCF, gender equality, and advocacy.

*"I want to see women equally access land and financial resources... and benefit from the economic development of the ASEAN economic integration. I want to see that the state protects and promotes WER and that government enforces regulations for private sector players to take responsibility on Corporate Social Responsibility when investing in Cambodia..." – SAM ATH TENG, Capacity Development Program Manager, GADC*



Panel members at the 10th National Advocacy Conference on "Working Together for Social Justice and Sustainable Development" held on 30 November 2016 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

**KEY LESSON:** Networking power is key to effective advocacy.

**NEXT STEPS:** Sustain influence and engagement with government to strengthen advocacy on natural resource management.



## BETTER RECOGNITION OF LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

PARTNER: Association for Development of Women Legal Education (ADWLE)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

WEBSITE: [www.adwlelaos.org](http://www.adwlelaos.org)

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/ADWLE-412921338800353/>

ADWLE is a Non-Profit Association (NPA) consisting of 10 women and two men, with the intention to promote gender equality and women's rights in Laos. Projects focus largely on legal education relating to gender issues, national and international women's rights laws and instruments; and capacity building in the form of trainings and outreach activities. Most recently, ADWLE has introduced the provision of free legal advice and assistance to female victims of GBV.

### CONTEXT FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN LAOS

In Laos, the space for CSOs is slowly increasing and the government approach towards civil society is changing. For example, in 2009 the National Assembly passed a law for the existence of national NPAs. Moreover, six core human rights conventions have been signed and allow NPAs to develop and implement community programs. Ever since, the number of NPAs has been growing steadily and they are eager to receive more knowledge and expertise from the regional and international women's rights community.

It was in this context that ADWLE organized meetings for CSOs in Laos on WER in ASEAN. After two of our staff members were trained on CEDAW, we have also been able to organize national events focusing on strengthening CSO capacity to integrate the CCF in their work.

### BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Central to the meetings was our focus on building productive partnerships between stakeholders: International Non-government Organisations (INGOs), CSOs and Laos government bodies. As we organized the process in close cooperation with the Laos government Sub-Commission on the Advancement of Women (Sub-CAW) and different line ministries, we became an acceptable partner for CSOs and the government. Because of this approach we were, for example, invited to participate in the Universal Periodic Review and treaty meetings.

Looking back over the past three years, we can say we have successfully developed relationships and established cooperation between INGOs and the Laos government in building capacity for CSOs on WER. The meetings enabled CSOs to share experiences and to make connections with other associations working in similar fields, or facing similar issues. In many cases, discussions and sharing lessons learned continued after the meetings, addressing many other questions and ideas about present and future projects.

*"To be sincere, it was a big deal for me to convince the Sub-CAW to be our key partner. The collaboration made us undertake the activities successfully. Without a partnership with government such a project cannot reach its objectives. The challenges from the implementation of this project will be good lessons for ADWLE and other Laos CSOs."* - ADWLE Staff

Looking ahead, we do feel that as our work continues, there is still a lot to learn for ADWLE and partner CSOs in Laos. The WEL in ASEAN project activities triggered their initial passion for WER, but a follow-up seems an obvious next step. It will be important not to wait too long with this, making use of the current momentum; there are many enthusiastic advocates that participated in the workshops that are expressing a strong interest to continue.

## IMPACTING LAOS WOMEN

As a result of WEL ASEAN trainings, national CSOs have applied what they have learned about WER in their respective communities. This is contributing to gradual change in the way women function in the economic sphere. ADWLE has observed that women increasingly engage in generating family income by raising animals, weaving, trading and employment in the government and the private sector. Their beliefs are changing as well, including the view that they can do the same work as men, can get paid equally, have equal rights to make decisions and can be leaders. Consequently, many women are not waiting anymore on their husbands for providing food and money. They stand up to fight for family survival and are step by step having more decision-making power in their families.

*“After finishing our initial activities, Sub-CAW has carried on the discussion on human trafficking. Together, we approached the police of Xaythany district to stop human trafficking by distributing an order letter to 104 Chief villages to cancel marriage certificates to Chinese men. I can say this is a significant change in our target villages.” – ADWLE Staff*

## NEXT STEPS

Based on knowledge gained by the WEL in ASEAN project, we will continue along this line in the future. It is ADWLE’s aim to increase the understanding of women’s empowerment and women’s leadership. We feel that in the near future, women will have more knowledge of their economic rights and make progress in exercising them. They will develop themselves, for example by attending vocational training, increasing their knowledge and building more skills to be equipped for a professional career in both the public and private sector. We are hopeful that through our continued work with CSOs, INGOs and the Laos government on recognizing and advocating for WER, more Laos women will be engaged in the socio-economic development in ASEAN and play an important role in the country’s economic growth.



Panel members at the Workshop on ASEAN, AEC, Labor Migration and Human Trafficking, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment held from 18-21 October 2016 in Vientiane Province, Laos.

**KEY LESSON:** Building relationships with the government is a tool for constructive engagement.

**NEXT STEPS:** Reinforcing capacity of more local CSOs and empowering local community women to change behaviours so that they can appreciate and exercise their rights.

# MYANMAR

## WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

PARTNER: NGO Gender Group (NGO GG)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: National Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and their members, NGO GG and their partner organizations and networks (Women's Organizations Network (WON), CEDAW Action Myanmar (CAM))

FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/ngogg.myanmar](https://www.facebook.com/ngogg.myanmar)

NGO GG is a nationally formed group to promote gender equality in Myanmar through collaboration, facilitation, capacity building initiatives and networking with multiple organizations. The group especially works with NGOs, Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and Community-based Organizations (CBOs) engaged in development and humanitarian programs in Myanmar and direct project intervention activities.

One of the most significant changes that NGO GG has realized through the WEL in ASEAN project was inspiring Myanmar CSOs to adopt and apply CEDAW and to gain more knowledge on WER. This was done through organizing trainings, workshops and networking initiatives for representatives of organizations like the National YWCA, CAM and WON. For us, this is a huge achievement because it was very challenging to establish a network around these issues at first.

The key reason why partner collaboration worked out eventually was that some of our initial members successfully used their personal relationships in persuading CSOs to participate, instead of only formally approaching like-minded organizations. Once they agreed to participate, they could join the regional and national networking and gained more knowledge on economic women's rights linked to migration, natural resource governance and value chain programs. Many organizations now use CEDAW in their women empowerment programs. Participants of our activities passed their newly acquired knowledge onto other project staff and their communities, for example by organizing a Violence Against Women (VAW) campaign. NGO GG, has so far partnered with WON on CEDAW capacity building and a GBV response program. CSOs that operate on a national level, such as National YWCA, are also actively encouraging their local members to consider women empowerment programs by introducing CEDAW.

### EXAMPLE OF MYANMAR CSO INTEGRATING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS

As a result of participating in national level training on CEDAW through the WEL in ASEAN project, National YWCA was influenced to give greater consideration to WER within their other project work. National YWCA has a special focus on internally displaced girls, and one example of a project in which this new focus has integrated WER is their "Enabling Economic Empowerment and Justice for Women" project. This project aims to empower young women in post armed conflict areas with the use of ICT as a tool for economic development and advocacy on their rights to peace, justice and security. This YWCA project has been carried out in Thandaung, Taungoo Township in Myanmar, where the young women are particularly vulnerable to illegal cross border migration and human trafficking. Employment opportunities are crucial to support young women's economic empowerment. The participants of this separate YWCA project received trainings on ICT and media, human rights, GBV, the role of women in peace making, CEDAW and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), ASEAN and AEC and WER. On top of these trainings, they received skills training on balm, soap and shampoo making, printing on fabrics, crystal key chains and bag making.

*"One of the most prominent challenges in achieving change was to gain the interest of organizations as well as participants; organizations in Myanmar are working mostly within their own box and do not want to pledge for difficult tasks."* – MAY MAY PYONE, Executive Director, NGO GG

### AN INVALUABLE PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

Through our activities on CEDAW and Women's Rights, we became more well-known and respected. Because we were involving a wide variety of stakeholders in our activities - local CSOs, Members of Parliament and government - we were soon invited by various government bodies to share our knowledge.

Looking back on the different interactions with the government, one of our most important achievements was the collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) working on CEDAW and GBV response services. For example, the MSWRR requested us to conduct a training on CEDAW for six other ministries. We were also asked by the Kayah State Department of Social Welfare to participate in a State level consultation on CEDAW.

*“One of the other activities that we could implement on request of the government, was the production and broadcasting of a video clip about the CEDAW Compliance Framework. Several directors of the ministerial departments stated that they had never heard about CEDAW, and requested us to raise more awareness on different levels of government staff.” – May May Pyone, Executive Director, NGO GG*

## MAKING MORE OF WHAT ALREADY WORKS

In our view, what is needed to sustain the outcomes of the project is in the first place realizing an even better relationship with the government and CSOs in Myanmar. We want to keep the momentum we have now to continue working on women’s rights issues. To a large extent we can build on what already works:

*“NGO GG is now a member of the GBV working group under the Myanmar National Committee of Women’s Advancement. We have a good partnership with Women’s Organizations Network through project activities as well.” – Naw Khin Pyu Myint, Project Officer, NGO GG/Focal person for CEDAW Action Myanmar*

Secondly, we are now hosting several workshops, inviting directors from the Women’s Department and the Department of Social Welfare. By involving them in WER issues, we aim to build a platform on GBV prevention and response for Department of Social Welfare and CSOs. Lastly, we intend to conduct Training of Trainers on CEDAW for staff and partner organizations as we want to build networks of facilitators and champions on women’s rights. Eventually, we would like to build a CSO alliance that can increase the advocacy on WER in Myanmar.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN CREATIVE WAYS

For learning purposes, it is interesting to consider some of the challenges that we had to overcome to achieve intended outcomes. Apart from our initial struggle to engage CSOs, one of the main challenges was working within tight timeframes and finding additional funding for organizing the activities. When the demand for workshops was growing, the lack of resources became more apparent. To deal with this, we successfully developed a cost-sharing approach, which was quite new for NGO GG. For conducting the CEDAW workshops in the ministries and producing the video clips for the Myanmar Radio and Television station, NGO GG had no budget. We requested the Department of Social Welfare for the venue and Diakonia and IWRAP AP for the resource materials, travel costs and translation of the video clip. With support from various stakeholders, NGO GG managed to make it all happen.

*“Something to be proud of is that NGO GG gained more knowledge and experience in conducting trainings and workshops, thereby becoming a respected partner of the Women’s Department of the Ministry of Social Welfare. We are now invited to their forums and meetings regarding CEDAW and National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW).” – May May Pyone, Executive Director, NGO GG*



NGO GG press statement on 11th July 2016 on CEDAW Shadow report after returning from session in Geneva.

**KEY LESSON:** Sincere personal commitment on “advocacy” is a major factor to sustain the work on WER, as well as networking and resourcefulness.

**NEXT STEPS:** Establish a pool of WER champions and leverage the good engagement with the government to inform GBV prevention through WEE initiatives.

# VIETNAM

## SHAPING YOUTH AS KEY CHANGE MAKERS

PARTNER: Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: Youth/Adolescent and Students; Youth Network, Women/Gender Network, WROs

WEBSITE: <http://en.cgfed.org.vn/>

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/CGFED/>

CGFED acts for gender equality based on freedom, diversity and human rights. With over 20 years of experience operating in the fields of Action Research, Communication, Advocacy, Community Development Support, Training and Consultation. It also focuses on themes like: ensuring Young People's Rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health, Gender and Climate change, Gender and Economics, Gender Sensitiveness in Law and Media, Gender and Mining, and Empowerment of Ethnic Minorities, including women and adolescents, through the promotion of SRHR.

## YOUTH FOR CHANGE

Looking at the Vietnamese context, respecting and protecting the security and dignity of women and creating a supportive environment for achieving WER was necessary in the eyes of the CGFED. The WEL in ASEAN project gave us a concrete opportunity to act in this field.

Based on our prior activities for gender equality, we choose to work with young people when implementing the WEL in ASEAN project. Over and over, we see that this group lacks knowledge about the impact of the AEC. For example, a survey among young female workers in industrial zones in northern Vietnam, conducted in June 2017, showed that this group is completely ignorant of the AEC. By targeting youth groups, we aimed at harnessing the creativity and dynamism of youth and adolescents to kick-start a movement spreading change on human and economic rights in Vietnam.

*"During the very first project activities in the first year, the youths were just participating in trainings and awareness raising activities as representatives of youth groups in different parts of Vietnam. But through follow-up activities, they were actively connected and interacted with the CGFED project team and shared ideas and opinions to better organize community activities." – Pham Thi Minh Hang, Vice-Director of CGFED*

During the three years of implementation of the WEL project in Vietnam, we have trained and established youth groups to understand WER and to have the capacity to change policies and the legal system as well as developing practical activities to improve these rights. Because we knew awareness and knowledge about human rights is lacking in Vietnam, we decided to educate our participants on human rights first, before diving into WER. By taking it step by step, and making sure activities were building on each other, we have triggered awareness about WER and created forums for dialogue, discussion, and debate. We have also hosted practical activities for youth to internalize the themes better. As a result, the youth became positive actors that promote the basic values of human rights, gender equity and equality to the surrounding community.

*"In the third year of the project, they were even able to develop a plan to improve public awareness of issues of WER making use of community art. I feel touched and proud when I look back on our journey. It is great to see the transformation and development of a group of young people, seeing them even participating directly in WEL project activities." – Pham Thi Minh Hang, Vice-Director of CGFED*

Over the course of the project, the involved youth have been able to positively change their attitude, knowledge and skills regarding WER. As a result of the WEL in ASEAN project, young men engaged in the project also learned about the rights of women, and are now confidently talking about these rights. They consider women's rights as equal to theirs and they stand for respecting and protecting of women's rights. Young women now talk with self-confidence about their rights and demand those rights to be respected and protected.

## SAFE SPACES AND CREATIVE APPROACHES

As we worked intensively with the youth groups, we learned it was crucial to create safe spaces that were suitable for them to operate in and that could actively empower them. This was done by gearing activities towards their specific context. Appropriate



methods and approaches for their age group were used to engage youth and involve them in issues relating to WER in a way that was appealing. For example, the use of art performances by youth groups to promote more awareness on issues relating to WER in a creative and interactive way.



*Street performance by youth group (CGFED partner) aimed at raising awareness of WER for youth. This was held in Nam Dinh province, Vietnam on 23 April 2017.*

## SWITCHING ROLES

In Vietnam, it is very common for women who enter the workforce to be primarily assigned as 'waitress', having to prepare drinks for colleagues and guests. This is almost an unwritten rule or considered as an office culture, most people consider it to be normal and say things like "girls must be like that", or 'girls' nature is to take care of people, they do it to show their 'femininity'. This stereotype was challenged in a performance with students of the Academy of Journalism and Propaganda. We created an office on stage and invited a man from the audience to perform the role of a female newcomer. He was asked to do things often assigned to the new girl: making tea and coffee for people, pouring water to invite guests, washing cups etc. After acting out situations, the performance was stopped and both the 'actor' and the audience were asked to reflect. The male audience member said that he was really upset, feeling it was unfair, etc. He also laughed and said that when he experienced the treatment given to female newcomers by himself he saw that "this culture is so ridiculous".

After each performance, the public was invited to offer its own solutions for problems that still exist in the communities they are living or working in. This level of engagement, and use of real life examples, opened the way towards changing attitudes and behaviour of communities.

## BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE

Looking back on the success of the youth groups and all our other efforts – for example on Natural Resource Governance and Women Migrant Workers, within the WEL in ASEAN project we are especially content with the way we could link all project activities to the core objectives of the project. From the training activities to improve knowledge on rights issues, the international legal framework and Vietnam, and the CEDAW framework; to dialogue forums among stakeholders such as the State bodies directly responsible for ensuring economic rights for women, WRDs and key youth groups; all activities were interconnected and interrelated to achieve the overall success of the project.

Strengthened by our experiences in the WEL in ASEAN project, we will continue building a network of young people and adolescents that advocate for more WER. Next to promoting new and established groups and networks, we will explore possibilities to provide them with resources to realize the necessary changes in WER in ASEAN. Furthermore, building on our work during the WEL in ASEAN project, themes like Natural Resource Governance and Women Migrant Workers will have our special attention when implementing our current five year strategy.

**KEY LESSON:** Creative approaches are important for influence and advocacy tools to be relevant for youth.

**NEXT STEPS:** Continue shaping youth to be catalysts of change, especially on WER in ASEAN.

# THAILAND

## ALLIANCE BUILDING FOR WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS' RIGHTS IN ASEAN

PARTNER: Foundation for Women (FFW)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: Thailand representatives of ASEAN Human Rights Bodies

WEBSITE: <http://www.womenthai.org/eng/>

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/womenthai.org/>

FFW implements activities by applying human rights principles aiming at respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of individual women and young girls, with a special emphasis on rural women, young women, women workers, women and children vulnerable to forced prostitution and international trafficking, including victims of domestic and sexual violence.

### RIGHTS ISSUES OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS

In the Thai context, as FFW, we see that women migrant workers in Thailand often find themselves in vulnerable and exploitative positions. Women domestic migrant workers are especially exposed to unfavourable conditions. They are often not treated well by their employers. For example, travel documents are often confiscated, workers experience verbal and physical abuse, they live in poor living conditions, and extremely low wages are not uncommon. Because many of these women are undocumented and the human rights violations happen in the private sphere, they are poorly represented in economic and labour fora. It is, for example, close to impossible for them to voice their concerns about their situation, and they are unable to access Thai protection and registration systems. Even if an individual case is brought, in our experience, corruption still prevents satisfactory settlement. One of the main questions is therefore: how can women – who are so important to many families – benefit from the AEC?

Our involvement in the WEL in ASEAN project enabled FFW to build an alliance, including with Homenet – a network of domestic and informal workers – and various other CSOs. Through Homenet, we are more effectively addressing the needs and rights of women domestic migrant workers in Thailand. This was important because many organizations concerned with migrant issues generally tend to pay most attention to 'big news', like issues impacting workers in the fishery sector, while rights violations against women domestic migrant workers often go unnoticed.

Having an alliance with a clear focus on women domestic workers made it possible to address their specific issues. At the same time, working in an alliance enabled us to advocate more strategically to the Thai government. When we advocate for the rights of women migrant domestic workers, we communicate with the government, ministers and government agencies. FFW is also monitoring and advocating for the regulations on domestic workers to be changed. If multiple organizations voice the same concern, it shows the government that it is not just one organization, but that there is a larger network that is invested in these issues.

### LINKING PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE POLICY AREA

The networking approach under the WEL in ASEAN project enabled FFW to utilize our experience on working with migrant women and advocate better.

*“Working through an alliance can create more impact. For example, indigenous women and rural women face similar issues as women migrant domestic workers. Through working together, we can expand the ownership around these issues. This is more impactful because when we come together, we are a big group and we are stronger.” – Dararai Raksasiripong, Project Officer, FFW*

As FFW, we have supported many women directly by rescuing them from their precarious situation and guiding them towards a safe (work) environment. However, this more hands on approach didn't address their economic rights in the policy domain. We started with this aspect when our project officers participated in the training on WER organized by IWRAP AP, which boosted their knowledge and skills regarding advocacy for WER. The training enabled us to link our more practical women's protection tools with those used in the

policy area. After being introduced to the shortcomings in economic laws and policies, we feel safeguarding the development and enforcement of these laws and policies is crucial for a sustainable improvement of the economic position of women migrant workers.

The WEL in ASEAN project activities have boosted our advocacy capacity through the knowledge we received during training, by enlarging our mobilizing capacity and funding extra policy staff. Together with our alliance partners, we put all this into practice by using the CCF to analyze and reflect upon policies and laws that are affecting migrant domestic workers. Together, we compiled a document on laws and policies regarding domestic work, including a situation report based on several case studies. Together we organized consultations with government agencies who are responsible for the rights of domestic workers, representatives from ASEAN human rights bodies, and other CSOs. During consultations, representatives from domestic worker groups shared their stories, for example, about difficulties with job registration and how domestic migrant workers are often left out of the labour protection system. Looking back on this process, we are especially proud that we have been able to create connections between the various rights movements, and jointly work on addressing the issues that challenge the fulfilment of WER. Moreover, FFW's analysis formed the basis of fruitful discussions on how migration policies affect the situation of migrant domestic workers, as well as discussions on the need for amending the regulations on domestic work in Thailand. We used this opportunity to discuss with government agencies on CEDAW Convention compliance and the situation of foreign domestic workers in Thailand. The WEL in ASEAN project has thus created an opportunity for the alliance to bring important issues related to women's migrant domestic workers economic rights to the forefront of several key policy forums, dialogues and initiatives at national level.

*"I am very proud of the Forum that we organized with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights [AICHR], the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children [ACWC], domestic workers, migrant workers, and government representatives. As a cross-cutting movement we were really able to raise awareness and facilitate a productive dialogue with all of these stakeholders."*

– Usa Lerdgrisuntad, Program Director FFW

## AN ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE

To us, building an alliance on WER prompted by the WEL in ASEAN project has been a rewarding experience that will also serve national and ASEAN women's rights advocacy work in the future. Using the alliance as our vehicle, we aim to build more space for policy advocacy in Thailand and ASEAN. We will continue to advocate for the improvement of WER laws and policies through the alliance. In this regard, we will pay specific attention to the New Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Foreign Workers Employment in Thailand that will have an impact on the economic rights of women domestic workers in ASEAN. Moreover, by continuing to empower the network of domestic workers, we aim to better enable them to voice their needs and raise their concerns about the current policy and plans.

*"In the near future, I would like to see no discrimination towards women in the informal sector and recognition of domestic work in the labour protection system...They should be seen as professional workers of the ASEAN Economic Community."* – Usa Lerdgrisuntad, Program Director, FFW

For this to work, we recognize the need to strengthen and expand the alliance. This will be done by firstly, regularly sharing experiences and communicating amongst the existing partners, and secondly, by attracting new organizations to the alliance, for example organizations in neighbouring ASEAN countries that are working with migrant women and girls. Because, with an even bigger alliance, we hope to enlarge our advocacy impact for the economic rights of women in the informal sector, which began during the WEL in ASEAN project.



Empowering women with alliances building – Thailand's briefing session with the CEDAW Committee in July 2017.

**KEY LESSON:** It is important to build alliances to develop a stronger voice, particularly on issues often considered as low priority i.e. violation of women domestic workers' economic rights.

**NEXT STEPS:** Build more space for advocacy in Thailand – a priority is the New Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Foreign Workers Employment in Thailand.

# PHILIPPINES

## REALIGNING THE FOCUS: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS AS A KEY ELEMENT OF WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

PARTNER: Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (WLB)

TARGET AUDIENCE/BENEFICIARIES: Women's movements, cross-movements, women grass-roots communities, women's rights defenders, advocates, etc.

WEBSITE: <http://wlbonline.org>; <http://wlbonline.org/women-demand-accountability-of-asean-end-culture-of-impunity/>

FACEBOOK: [https://web.facebook.com/womenslegalbureau/?ref=br\\_rsmoting-womens-agenda-and-human-rights-in-the-asean-in-2017/](https://web.facebook.com/womenslegalbureau/?ref=br_rsmoting-womens-agenda-and-human-rights-in-the-asean-in-2017/)

WLB is a feminist legal NGO composed of women's rights activists and advocates. They are professionals in the various disciplines of the law and social science, social work and community development addressing women's issues and concerns.

### CONTEXT FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Women's voices and women's issues have been left out of the decisions that have a great impact on their rights and their lives. For instance, there is no mention of women's roles and participation in the AEC 2025 blueprint. The AEC blueprint has also not made it evident as to how it will facilitate women's equal access and the participation of its targets. There is inadequate attention given to the obstacles to women's participation and access to information. On the economic front, economic policies and measures are often considered insensitive to poor and marginalized communities and disproportionately impact on women. These also arguably exacerbate poverty, inequalities, and human rights violations.

The most significant change for WLB is our understanding of how our institutional mandate and work on women's rights and access to justice is situated against and deeply embedded in the overarching economic and political contexts in the country and worldwide. Over the past three years, WLB reached a turning point - together with the newly established women's movement - Philwomen on ASEAN, and the regional network, Weaving Women's Voices in ASEAN (WEAVE). Whereas much of our previous work was centered around VAW and feminist legal advocacy, we found that more work must be done for women's voices and perspectives to become more visible and prominent in economic and political discussions, from the micro to macro levels. This institutional shift and clarity of direction - the thrust to make women's issues central to the political and economic agenda of governments - serves as one of WLB's most crucial changes under the WEL in ASEAN project.

*"We have moved from focussing on national legal advocacy on Violence Against Women, towards expanding to women's rights and girls' rights advocacy, economic, social and cultural rights perspectives in the political and economic agenda of the government and the ASEAN. This has been reflected in updated versions of our vision, mission, and goals; and strategic plans." - Chang Jordan, Program Manager, WLB*

### MOVEMENT BUILDING AND JOINT ADVOCACY

Given the challenging economic and political context, WLB focused on movement building, as a strategy for raising women's issues and feminist perspectives in economic policies and national dialogue. This approach also supports WLB efforts for women to be at the forefront of advocacy for democratic freedoms, working together with women from other movements and communities.

Cross-movement work is important where social movements, women's movements and other sectoral movements can work together in highlighting the issues of marginalized women in relation to the economic agenda and the challenging national political contexts for women's rights. Therefore, we have been building and strengthening movements, and working on the capacity building of grassroots women and women's organizations across different sectors. Through our work, we have been developing a new cadre of women leaders for the women's movements.



*“Through the WEL in ASEAN project, I have seen how women’s movements are working together to find effective and concrete strategies to demand accountability from the State in relation to violations against women’s rights. I found that these women are fighting for all women, marginalized women especially, including myself. And I am one with them.” – Chang Jordan, Program Manager WLB*

Together with Philwomen on ASEAN, we have been creating avenues and platforms for movements to raise perspectives on the implications and potential impact of the ASEAN economic agenda on women. For example, WLB organized two national consultation workshops under the WEL in ASEAN project. These workshops provided a conducive and enabling space for women advocates to discuss position and strategies vis-à-vis regional economic integration in ASEAN, and the political climate in the Philippines. In time for the ASEAN Anniversary on 8 August 2017, WLB, together with Philwomen on ASEAN and WEAVE joined the mobilization with other foreign delegates from AMS. The position of Philwomen on ASEAN was reflected in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples’ Forum (ACSC/APF) statements and covered in media outlets. Together with Philwomen on ASEAN and WEAVE we raised the issue of political constraints in ASEAN, including the Philippines; as well as highlighted the exclusion of marginalized women in the ASEAN integration. Looking back on the past years, we feel the dedication and commitment of women’s movements and grassroots communities to work together to raise women’s issues must be at the centre of the economic and political agenda of the country and the region. Women’s movements initiating actions, the sharing and pooling of resources, and maximising opportunities and openings together, are instrumental to creating “change” – without these, successes and gains in women’s rights advocacy would not be possible.

## NEXT STEPS

Throughout the WEL in ASEAN project, we have been advocating to the State and other social movements to not sideline women’s issues and perspectives in economic and political decision-making processes. For our future work, we feel continuing to enhance women’s capacities to understand the complex concepts and highly technical language, especially in economics is crucial for their informed and meaningful participation in economic discussions.

In the coming years, WLB will keep on advocating for women’s issues to be mainstreamed, integrated and reflected in political and economic policies at the local, national and ASEAN level. WLB will aim to institutionalize regular, inclusive and meaningful dialogues between women’s groups and relevant government bodies involved in developing and implementing economic policies. Moreover, strengthening the women’s movements and cross-movements work remains crucial in achieving social change and transformation. At this current juncture, women need to be front and centre in the call for greater accountability for women’s rights.

## CONTRIBUTING TO NEW MOVEMENTS

The WEL in ASEAN project contributed to strengthening the work and advocacy of women’s movements in relation to ASEAN, particularly Philwomen on ASEAN’s women’s rights advocacy on the ASEAN economic integration. This advocacy is shared at the regional level by WEAVE. In collaboration with other women’s groups, WLB initiated the birth of Philwomen on ASEAN, a national network consisting of more than 80 women’s groups and advocates advancing the rights of rural and urban poor women, indigenous women, women workers, migrants, lesbians, bisexual and trans women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV, young women, and others. WLB also co-founded “WEAVE” or “Weaving Women’s Voices in ASEAN,” a regional network with members from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand. In collaboration with Philwomen and WEAVE, WLB strengthens its work towards raising the intersectionality of women’s rights issues, especially in the engagement with ASEAN, alongside our community and national legislative advocacy work.



WLB with other CSOs convening for regional consultations in advance of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples’ Forum 2017 (ACSC/APF 2017).

**KEY LESSON:** Institutionalizing advocacy of WER is key for organizations to have a direct and effective engagement with ASEAN.

**NEXT STEPS:** Sustain the collaborative work between national and local women’s organizations for cross-cutting advocacies on WER, as well as aim for “institutionalization” of meaningful dialogues between women’s groups and governments.



# LESSONS LEARNING

## THE FOLLOWING LESSONS WERE ALSO CAPTURED THROUGH THE PARTNER'S REFLECTIONS AT THE LEARNING WORKSHOP:

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- In advocacy efforts, it is more effective to refer to existing country policies and use CEDAW as a guide to provide strong evidence and documentation to support arguments.
- For advocacy to be more effective, specific and coherent advocacy plans are useful tools.
- It is important to monitor and review the implementation of strategic approaches and work plans to contribute to advocacy learning and improvements.
- Engaging directly with communities affected by political/economic/social policies is important to ensure women's voices are central to the discourse on WER.
- There is an ongoing need to build capacity of WROs and support approaches which focus on business actors' roles in protecting WER.
- There is a need to have multi-focal strategies addressing different stakeholders:
  - Regulatory frameworks should address the role of private sector in respecting women's rights, and addressing gender issues in business. This also requires working with state and regulators, as well as engagement with corporate actors;
  - There is value to engaging with other social institutions, such as workers unions, to build solidarity strategies.
- It is important to build women's rights based understanding, particularly of those most at risk of exploitation in migrant worker structures and value chains. This requires WROs to build strong relationships with community level support groups.
- The inter-governmental nature of the ASEAN human rights bodies means that both national level engagement and regional level engagement remain essential as points of engagement for women's human rights advocacy.
- Partners' interactions with the private sector and ASEAN decision makers made them aware of the importance of nurturing strong relationships with stakeholders they want to influence.
- Although the WEL in ASEAN project at first identified important actors to influence, it did not develop ways for women's rights groups to influence these actors, formally or informally at the outset.
- Effective advocacy should represent local experiences and the voices and stories of those with less access to platforms, resources, and power. Using actual case studies, data and examples helps strengthen policy advocacy.
- Partners can use increased capacity, knowledge and skills (designed to support WER) on other human rights issues, for example, application of CEDAW to influence positive change on VAW.

# RESOURCES

## WEBSITES

**AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE:** <http://dfat.gov.au>

**OXFAM AUSTRALIA:** <https://www.oxfam.org.au/>

**OXFAM IN LAOS:** <https://www.facebook.com/Oxfam.in.Laos/>

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTION WATCH - ASIA PACIFIC:** <https://www.iwraw-ap.org/>

**GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT CAMBODIA:** <http://www.gadc.org.kh/>

**ASSOCIATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN AND LEGAL EDUCATION:** <http://adwlelaos.org/>

**NGO GENDER GROUP:** <https://www.facebook.com/ngogg.myanmar/>

**RESEARCH CENTRE FOR GENDER, FAMILY, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT:** <http://en.cgfed.org.vn/about-cgfed/>

**FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN:** <http://www.womenthai.org/eng/index.php/about/>

**WOMEN'S LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS BUREAU:** <https://wlbonline.org/>

## DOCUMENTS

**FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS IN ASEAN:** <http://admin.iwraw-ap.org/plugins/tinymce/plugins/moxiemanager/data/files/Framework%20on%20Womens%20Economic%20Rights.pdf>

**BRIEFING PAPER ON WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND NATURAL RESOURCES:** <http://admin.iwraw-ap.org/plugins/tinymce/plugins/moxiemanager/data/files/Organization%3EActivities%3EIWRAW%20Asia%20Pacific%20Reports/Briefing%20Paper%20-%20Women's%20Human%20Rights%20and%20Natural%20Resources.pdf>

**OTHER PROJECT DOCUMENTS MENTIONED IN THIS BOOKLET WILL BE AVAILABLE ON THE IWRAW AP WEBSITE ([HTTPS://WWW.IWRAW-AP.ORG/](https://www.iwraw-ap.org/)) IN FUTURE. THESE INCLUDE:**

- Discussion Paper on Corporate Power and Space for Women's Human Rights Activism
- Briefing Paper on Key Issues and Recommendations Concerning Rights of Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN
- WEL in ASEAN Training Materials
- The Missing Women: Implications of the ASEAN Integration on Women Migrant Workers' Rights
- Corporate Accountability for Women's Human Rights

# NOTES



