

Defense of Land and Water: Economic Empowerment for Women

A Parallel Event to the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
United Nations Secretariat, New York

Concept Note

In context of the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, this highly interactive and experienced panel will explore a proactive human rights approach to women's economic empowerment. This event will specifically examine the impacts of extractive industries, land grabbing, and issues regarding the human rights to water and sanitation on women in the changing world of work. These impacts result in poverty and exclusion for many, particularly indigenous women. Eradicating poverty is central to the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030, and is critical for the economic, social and political empowerment of women and girls.

Background

Human rights defenders have gone to great lengths to protect the earth and their communities from degradation and extreme poverty; some have even given their lives. Indigenous Honduran woman, Berta Cáceres, is an example of this sacrifice. Assassinated in March of 2016, she was esteemed as “mother, teacher, patience, joy, activist with a contagious smile who cut her teeth on revolutions”. As an indigenous woman of the land, she believed that the “true path towards justice is to accept that the land never belongs to us.” She detailed how “we must undertake the struggle in all parts of the world, wherever we may be, because we have no other spare or replacement planet. We have only this one, and we have to take action”. Berta's work sought to address a growing socioeconomic inequality involving human rights violations, and she launched her own grassroots campaign to empower the people and the earth. Land and its resources, while important to all, have a particular significance for indigenous communities, whose livelihoods and strategies for sustainable development are inextricably linked with respect for and protection of the rights of the planet.

Socioeconomic inequality and poverty are manifested when human rights are denied. Land and water grabbing benefits extractive industries while creating conditions for poverty. And it unweaves the social fabric by reducing access to health, water, sanitation and shelter, while also marginalizing communities—particularly women and girls. Native peoples are being displaced in many parts of the world; land grabbing has forced communities to leave their homelands and begin anew. This displacement divides individuals, particularly women, from their family units, local communities and grassroots organizations.

This divide is seen in many parts of the world. On a global scale, transnational corporations fail to see the long term effects that directly impact the land, water and community. In the United States, construction plans for the Dakota Access Pipeline has ignored the human rights of indigenous communities, threatening sacred land and access to clean water. In Africa, land grabs for large-scale projects and resulting community displacement is a growing driver of conflict, as communities struggle to defend their land rights.¹ And Southeast Asia has become one of the hotspots of the global

¹ Rights and Resources Initiative. 2017. *From Risk and Conflict to Peace and Prosperity*. Washington, DC: RRI. Available at: http://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/From-Risk-and-Conflict-to-Peace-and-Prosperity_RRI-Annual-Review-2016-2017_English.pdf

land grab phenomenon, accounting for about 30 percent of transnational land grabs globally². Land and water defenders have advocated against this form of violation of human rights, taking action to highlight injustice to the earth and to communities.

Rationale

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, land and water grabbing continue to be a barrier to the economic empowerment of women. Sustainable Development Goal 1 seeks to address this inequality through Target 1.4 that states “all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.”³ This goal provides an avenue through which these inequalities can be addressed.

Objective

This panel aims to highlight:

- The impact of extractive industries and land-grabbing on the earth and local communities, particularly indigenous women.
- Some best practices from local communities on defending their rights to land and water.

In the context of Agenda 2030, the panel will make the link between those in conditions of poverty due to displacement and the need for economic empowerment.

Proposed Co-Sponsors

- NGO Mining Working Group

Panel Discussion

The panel will comprise of human rights advocates, including those with first-hand experience of marginalization who will highlight specific issues with regard to land and water grabbing. The panelists will address the issue of poverty within their own communities and illustrate best practices with how they are working towards both economic empowerment and eradicating this injustice.

² Neef, Andreas. *Land Rights Matter! Anchors to Reduce Land Grabbing, Dispossession and Displacement*. Brot für die Welt –Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e. V. Berlin, September 2016. Pg. 8

³ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>