

Long Live Rural Women's Power!

More than 700 rural women leaders and representatives all over Asia took part in the 1st Rural Women's Conference (ARWC) in Arakonam, Tamil Nadu India. The **RIGHTS, EMPOWERMENT AND LIBERATION: ASIAN RURAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE** took place from **MARCH 6-8, 2008** and was hosted by the Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF), the Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Forum (TNDWF) and the Society of Rural Development (SRED). CARAM Asia participated in the capacity as Steering Committee member of the ARWC to address issues of labour migration and neo-liberal globalisation.

The conference did not only provide a venue for building perspectives, it also encouraged a process towards creating unity and solidarity among rural women and other movements. It was an attempt to develop new visions and new thinking about feminism, liberation, emancipation and the rural women's perspective on **globalisation, fundamentalism, militarisation and democratisation**. It provided a venue for various regional groups to engage rural women, discuss, debate, to brainstorm and to strengthen perspectives, strategies and collective action.

2.0 Rationale for CARAM Asia's participation

During the MHG Strategic Planning Workshop, November, Kuala Lumpur the taskforce identified and mapped the ARWC as a strategic community space for capacity and coalition building.

2.1 CARAM Asia's objectives:

1. The ARWC will provide a platform for CARAM to present and highlight the interlinkage between rural women and migration vis-a-vis the neo-liberal globalisation process. CARAM to contribute by raising visibility on CARAM's position on migration impacting rural women in the context of globalisation.
2. To create a space for rural women to share perspectives, strategies and sharing of struggles and experiences in dealing with globalisation and migration.
3. To ensure migrant women's, spouses and positive migrant workers participation at the ARWC and the Rural Women's march from Arakonam to Chennai. To create a space for their testimonies and voices to be heard during the ARWC.
4. Building coalitions with other NGOs and CBOs who are challenging the structures, strategies and process of neo-liberal globalisation.

2.2 CARAM Asia interventions:

1. Rural Women's Testimonies:

CARAM worked on putting together testimonies from FDWs and migrant spouses.

2. Plenary:

Resisting Globalisation and Claiming our Rights
(Organised by Tenaganita together with Committee of Asian Women - CAW).

3. Workshop:

Labour Migration and Displacement (Tenaganita, CARAM)

4. Participation:

23 participants with 10 participants from Asia, 10 from India and 2 from the Secretariat represented CARAM at the conference. Participants included foreign domestic workers, trafficked women, migrant spouses and positive migrant workers. Alongside the MHG taskforce, the TFEM and FDW taskforce also joined in to send in testimonies and participants.

Rural Women's Testimonies

Former migrant workers Shamima Akter, Bangladesh and Nining Ivana, Indonesia provided compelling and strong testimonies during the opening session of the ARWC.

Shamima a former domestic worker in Saudi elaborated her personal experience and the ill effects of globalisation. The disintegration of the rural economy in which her family depended on forced her to seek livelihood abroad.

Nining spoke bravely about her experience as a factory worker in Malaysia and the vulnerabilities of women migrants to HIV as they seek livelihood abroad. Nining called for the protection of migrant women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

For full versions of the testimonies, visit:

<http://www.caramasia.org/publications/arwcCARAMBooklet.pdf>

Plenary: Resisting Globalisation and Claiming our Rights

The 1st conference plenary laid out the context and frameworks of neo-liberal globalisation and its impact on rural women and it provided a prelude to issues which surfaced during the 6 workshops carried out after the plenary.

CARAM Asia was asked to address the conference. Nova Nelson presented a paper and statement on the structured injustice caused by neo-liberal globalisation, the displacement of rural women and consequences to migrant communities. Emphasis during this presentation was placed on the fact that rural migration is a by-product of economic and political globalisation strategies and policies. Migration is occurring under circumstances of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, economic and political instability, internal conflict, landlessness and the deterioration of the environment. All of which have intensified in rural areas under the process of economic and political globalisation forcing rural populations to seek work opportunities away from home.

Workshop: Labour Migration and Displacement

Workshop Objectives:

Neo-liberal globalisation has aggressively changed every facet of rural women's lives. This workshop aimed to highlight and give voice to the struggles and experiences of Asian rural women caught in the nexus of globalisation and migration.

The workshop created a platform to share and build on common strategies towards addressing the issue of rural migration in Asia. About 30 women from 8 countries participated in this workshop. Countries represented at this workshop were labour sending countries Sri Lanka, Nepal, Burma, Philippines, India and Indonesia and labour receiving countries Japan and Malaysia. Foreign Domestic Workers, migrant spouses, trafficked women, positive migrants and returnee women migrants were represented.

Messages and focus towards change

Key messages that came out from the workshop:

1. Yes to sustainable and fair development for rural communities. No to development for the MNCs.
2. Resist capitalism. No to WTO, IMF and World Bank policies, profiteering by MNCs and recruitment agencies.
3. Stop the exploitation of rural women. Stop development which rests on backs of women's labour and sexual exploitation.

4. No to forced migration. Reclaim the rural economy.

Key strategies:

1. Collective action - Unite and work with international movements – Resist neo-liberal globalisation
2. Community Voice – Speak out and ensure representation of rural women impacted by forced migration at local, national and international spaces.
3. Capacity building – Provide rural women with more knowledge and understanding on the impact of neo-liberal globalisation its policies and structures.
4. Advocate against forced migration. Lobby for rural women's right to education, political representation, sustainable livelihood and living wage for rural communities. Sustain push for protection of women migrants, recognition of domestic work, no to cheap labour and harsh working conditions.

Workshop Outputs were presented in a post workshop plenary by Carmelita Nuqui, DAWN:

1. Participants managed to weave divergent Asian rural women struggles into a common struggle against forced migration and neo-liberal globalisation. The root problem was identified as economic and political globalisation which has lead to a multiplicity of struggles experienced by Asian rural women.
2. Key messages and strategies listed above were shared.
3. A collective message from the workshop on forced migration and globalisation was included into the ARWC 2008 declaration:

“We demand an end to forced migration kept in place by the agenda of corporations and governments. For migrant workers, we demand protection of all rights including the right to stay or move and work with dignity.”