



SOCIETY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBALS

(आदिवासी विकास संस्था) EM142/ma/154

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Statement by Alma Grace Barla

On behalf of the Society for Development of Tribals, India

On Item 6: Study on the Promotion and Protection of the rights of indigenous people in natural disaster risk-reduction, prevention and preparedness initiative

Thank you Mr Chair,

Johar, my traditional greetings to all Expert Members, Government delegates, indigenous brothers and sisters present here,

Based on a small research study on impacts of climate change (CC) on Indigenous women carried out in the tribal villages of Sundargarh district in Odisha, India, I would like to add some information and recommendations to the study on promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in natural disaster risk reduction, prevention and preparedness initiative, under Section III, A (*Climate Change, Vulnerable Livelihoods, Environment & Geographical factors, Resource Extraction, Health Risks & Migration*).

On the EMRIP study report which states indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, I would like to add that the rural indigenous women are more disproportionately affected by the climate change as compared to men because of their dependency on farming and the forests produces for their livelihoods. They are the main caregivers, water and food providers and yet they have the least access to land, education, health facilities, technologies and agricultural technical assistance, disaster relief services, and credit assistance. Many of them suffer from discrimination in their own communities, in the dominant society and in the labour market. Indigenous women are the major actors in food security and overall well-being of their families and communities; they also hold and practice traditional knowledge on sustainable use of bio-diversity. **Yet, they are underrepresented in the design, decision-making and implementation of climate change measures and policies both at local and international levels.**

Odisha State, where I come from, is a home to 62 indigenous communities of which 13 are categorized as 'Primitive Tribal Groups or Vulnerable Groups' by the Govt. This is a region of India where large numbers of mining companies are being operated causing environmental pollution and forest degradation. The state has been teetering from extreme weather condition from heat waves to cyclones, drought to floods. During this summer various regions recorded highest temperature of 45-46 degree Celsius, claiming more than 20 lives due to heat-stroke. There have been issues of farmer suicides (for not being able to pay the agricultural loans) and

hunger deaths due to poverty and malnutrition. The issue of Dongria Kondh is world-wide known for their resistance to stop operation of Vedanta Alumina in the region. The indigenous communities are highly vulnerable to climate change, partly as their poverty limits their capacity to deal with the situation.

The research study shows direct and indirect impacts of climate change causing deteriorating health condition of women, increase labour burden, loss of traditional knowledge, poor economy affecting agriculture and livelihoods, eventually leading to migration and trafficking of tribal women for the purpose of domestic work or other menial jobs including flesh trade in mega cities. Additionally the study also shows a situation of '**fight or flight**', a sharp escalation of heat in the research area, breakdown of traditional ways and means of subsistence, a breakdown of tribal community and social life.

Some indigenous peoples are playing constructive roles in protecting the climate from change by rain water harvesting, water shed protection, reforestation, forest management by women groups, protecting animal and human lives etc. but such small protective measures are local attempts for a global crisis. Though such local measures cannot solve the problems but they are surely the roadmaps for the whole world to imitate.

Recommendations:

1. As indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision making in matters affecting them, indigenous women also should be actively engaged in disaster reduction, prevention and preparedness initiatives.
2. To expand EMRIP studies on Indigenous Communities in India by involving Indigenous Researchers, Academicians and Institutions.
3. To promote more research studies on climate change and its effects on various aspects of Indigenous peoples' lives and communities.
4. To recommend both private and public agencies to recognize, protect and promote indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and community-based adaptation practices, measures and strategies and to protect them.

Thank You Mr Chair.