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Évènements en 2021

West Papuan women

A patriarchal culture is strong among the Indigenous communities of West Papua and Indigenous women's rights are limited. In most Indigenous communities in Papua, women are seen as subordinate to men.¹ Men are dominant in decision-making, while women's role is mostly limited to taking care of the household, raising children, maintaining gardens and harvesting products, as well as collecting rewood.²

Although this situation is found in both the lowlands and mountains, there are some variations among the communities in terms of the subordination of women.

In some villages in Yahukimo regency, women are not allowed to speak in community forums. Even when worshipping in church, they are prohibited from playing a role and are separated from men.³ At the same time, however, in the coastal part of north Papua, women can become heads of households and even community or religious leaders, or judges.⁴

The limited participation of Papuan women in local politics and administration is due to this patriarchal structure. While the Indonesian constitution stipulates that women's representation in legislatures should aim to be 30%, this has never been achieved in Papua. For example, of the 55 elected members of the Papuan provincial legislature, currently only eight are women.⁵ In West Papua province the figure is seven women out of 45 elected members.⁶

A much better situation can be observed in the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP), a culturally representative body of Indigenous Papuans formed as a part of the Special Autonomy process, where women's participation and representation is guaranteed by the Special Autonomy Law.⁷

Economic marginalization of Indigenous Papuan women

Papuan women are passing down Indigenous knowledge of resource management, forest conservation, agriculture and livelihoods from generation to generation. Despite this important role, however, recognition of their vital economic contribution is limited.⁸

In recent years, women in various parts of West Papua, especially in the Central Highlands, have been reporting reduced access to natural resources and land, gardens and forests.⁹ Loss of access to land occurs as a result of violent conflict, State land-use policies, adverse social norms experienced by women after violent incidents, or a combination of these.¹⁰

Women play a key role in Papuan traditional markets. Unlike migrant women, however, who normally sell a variety of products, including processed food, Papuan women tend to specialize in small-scale trading, selling bitter nut, vegetables and tubers for example. Their involvement in and adaptation to the cash economy often presents challenges, not least due to their low level of formal education: they have difficulty accessing established markets and competing with traders selling processed food¹¹ as these have often been monopolized by non-Papuans,¹² and face challenges accessing cheap credit and using the banking system,¹³ thus barely being able to compete with traders.

Violence against Indigenous women

A comprehensive study of the situation of Indigenous women in Papua revealed that more than 26% of respondents had experienced a state of violence.¹⁴ Most of the violations occurred during military operations against the Free Papua Movement (OPM) in the central mountains. However, there has still not been a single case of such violence against women perpetrated by the security forces brought to justice through the courts.

In the past few years, the protracted armed conflict between the Indonesian security forces and the West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) in Nduga and Intan Jaya has caused displacements. Sexual violence is one of the methods used by the Indonesian security forces to terrorize Indigenous people and force them to leave their homes and lands.¹⁵

In Nduga and Intan Jaya regencies, 206 mothers and children died between October 2015 and February 2021 as a result of the conflict between the government security forces and the TPNPB.¹⁶

Meanwhile in another region -Wamena-, as of May 2021, 620 IDPs, including women and children in Wamena had died of hunger and other diseases.¹⁷

Away from their land and gardens, internally displaced persons (IDPs) struggle to meet their basic needs, including access to health, access to livelihoods and freedom from fear.¹⁸

Sexual violence perpetrated against Indigenous women in Papua was reported on a number of occasions throughout the year, including cases involving minors.¹⁹ Among the perpetrators were one police instructor and five local government officials. In all cases the victims' families reported the crime to the police and Komnas Perempuan Indonesia (*National Commission on Violence Against Women*). While some of the victims' families and lawyers have been receiving threats,²⁰ justice has yet to be served.

Intrusion of privacy is another form of harassment experienced by Indigenous women in Papua. On a number of occasions in 2021, MW, a human rights defender from the *Association of Human Rights Lawyers for Papua* (PAHAM Papua) was photographed and videoed by unknown persons both inside and outside the courtroom.²¹

Meanwhile, in September, Papuan women participating in a peaceful demonstration to demand the annulment of the 1962 New York Agreement that paved the way for Papua's integration into Indonesia were subjected to sexual intimidation and harassment.^{22,23} Several women were arrested and are now in the middle of judicial process.

Domestic violence is also a common phenomenon in Papua. In 2021 alone, 262 cases of domestic violence involving 238 female victims were registered in Papua province,²⁴ while in West Papua province, there were 228 cases with 119 female victims.²⁵

Victims of domestic violence report difficulties in accessing justice. In Papua, cases of intimate partner violence are most often handled through a customary process with outcomes that do not usually favor the women.²⁶

The marriage system practiced in some of Papua's Indigenous cultures also has a negative impact on women and girls. For example, in Keerom, in the north-eastern corner of Papua province, a "marriage exchange" is still practiced. This practice allows the brother of the bride to marry a woman from the groom's family and is used to avoid the payment of dowries between the two families.²⁷

Access to women and child health

Health care facilities in Papua are mainly located in and around cities, leaving Indigenous women living in rural areas with few options. In November, it was reported that residents of Kampung Miami in Jayawijaya regency had to rent a helicopter themselves to transport critical patients²⁸ but, in most cases, Indigenous people would not be able to afford to pay for such transport to hospital. Even basic health care is a challenge, and this is despite the existence of national and local health schemes.²⁹ And many of those who do have a government health facility nearby often cannot obtain health services because they do not have an Identity Card or cannot pay for transportation costs, or because of a shortage of healthcare staff in the facilities.³⁰

HIV/AIDS is a major problem in Papua. Papuan women are twice as likely to contract HIV/AIDS than the rest of the population. The HIV prevalence rate is 2.9% among Indigenous Papuans, which is significantly higher than the 0.4% among non-Papuans.³¹ According to the Chair of the Papua Province Aids Prevention Commission (KPA), Dr. Anton Tony Mote, as of 1 December 2021 there were a total of 46,967 HIV/AIDS cases in Papua province.³²

COVID-19

The policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Papua has been influenced by the military, its reliance on security approaches, and the ongoing violence in Papua.³³ This explains the slow roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Papua in 2021. Without meaningful consultation with local residents or outreach regarding COVID-19 vaccination options and individual rights regarding vaccination, rumors quickly spread alleging the involuntary nature of the vaccination program.³⁴

This high level of public distrust did not prevent the authorities from introducing proof of vaccination as a requirement to access certain public services in Papua in 2021, for example obtaining residence documents at the Civil Registry of Cessna. And, in December, there were reports of Papuan women being denied access to Manokwari market on the basis that they did not have documentation confirming their vaccination status.³⁵

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