

Bracing Against the Tide to Uphold Environmental Rights and Social Justice: A Briefer on the Situation of Pacific EHRDs



APNED

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Foreword / Introduction

The Pacific Islands are abundant with natural resources from the mountains, lowlands, coasts down to the reefs. These have sustained them for generations shaping their culture and identity which are tied to the land and ocean. Their indigenous peoples have acted as traditional stewards of their natural bounty, ensuring its sustainable utilization for future generations.

However, it is for this abundance that the Pacific Islands have been subjected to centuries of colonization, re-colonization and semi-colonization. Conflicts have risen over the control and use of resources that continue to affect their livelihoods, homes, and way of life among others. The entry of local and foreign companies into resource extractive activities gave way to environmental degradation. At the same time, the global phenomenon of climate change is posing a great threat to many communities. Sea-level rise has already displaced families in several Pacific islands.

Faced with these issues, Pacific islanders have spoken out, formed organizations, and launched campaigns against environmentally damaging projects and for climate justice. As with other parts of Asia Pacific, these actions by environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) are met with varying degrees of political censorship and repression. Despite this, the people of the Pacific stay true to their connection with the land, ocean and each other, pushing forward and uniting despite adversity.

To learn more about the situation and struggles of EHRDs in the Pacific Islands, we, the Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) engaged in conversations with different EHRDs and conducted secondary research. The limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic allowed only a few participants in this brief report. Nevertheless, we hope that it will provide a glimpse into this part of the world inspiring solidarity, unity and action among EHRDs, civil society organizations, business sector, governments and other sectors not only in the Asia Pacific region but all over the world to improve the situation of the environment and its defenders.

**Secretariat,
Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders**

Environmental issues and conflicts in the Pacific Islands

Terrestrial and Offshore Mining

Mining is a lucrative economic activity in many parts of the Pacific. 1.2 billion metric tons of mining products were extracted from the region in 2017 alone (Reichl & Schatz, 2019). Metallic minerals have been historically extracted from the Melanesian territories in New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. New Caledonia, in particular, is notable for possessing more than one-fifth of the world's nickel reserves and having the first large-scale mining operations in the region in 1875 (Sarrailh, 2001).

The Pacific island region's long history of terrestrial mining is fraught with conflict. In the Melanesian islands, mining is fraught with violence, notable among them Canadian-owned Porgera Gold Mine and Chinese-owned Ramu Nickel in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Brazilian-owned Goro Nickel Mine in New Caledonia. In the Solomon Islands, armed conflicts in Bougainville and Guadalcanal were historically connected with large-scale mining since World War Two (Allen, 2017).

In Bougainville, the independence movement of the late 1980s to 1990s was sparked by anger over colonial Australian, and later PNG's handling of the Panguna copper-gold mine operated by Australian Bougainville Copper and Anglo-Australian mining company Rio Tinto. This war between PNG troops and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) killed some 20,000 locals, ending in a 2001 peace treaty with autonomy; however, conflict of interests and the mine still remained. Rio Tinto left the mine in 1989 to the BRA which handed mining shares to PNG and Bougainville. The people of Bougainville filed in 2000 a lawsuit against Rio Tinto over widespread environmental damage and complicity in war crimes, which was lost in 2013.

In many of these aforementioned conflicts, land grabbing and the lack of proper consultation and free prior informed consent (FPIC) figures centrally over local opposition to foreign large-scale mining. In Fiji, community resistance against black sand mining by two Australia-based companies - Amex Resources' magnetite dredging in Ba Province and by Magma Mines in Sigatoka - stems from glaringly insufficient consultation processes undertaken by mine owners with the traditional land rights owners of affected villages (Richards, A., et al., 2021).

Mining's adverse environmental impacts such as toxic and unsafe disposal of waste materials have also fostered resistance from Pacific island communities. In PNG, the Ok Tedi copper mine owned by Australian BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto's Panguna mine dumped mine tailings waste to rivers that contaminated soil and waters, leading to destroyed forest and farmland affecting their health, lives and livelihoods (Mudd, G. et al., 2020). In the Solomon Islands, vessels hauling bauxite from the country's mines spilled hundreds of tons of oil onto East Rennell, the only natural World Heritage site in the Pacific that is on the Danger List, which also affected the livelihood of the Tenuginuku tribe residing along the coast (Williams, 2019). Also in PNG, an estimated 200,000 litres of toxic mine tailings was spilled by Ramu Nickel into Basamuk Bay,

Madang Province in 2019 led to fierce opposition and broadening demand for nationwide ban on deep-sea tailings disposal (Fox, 2019). In the case of black sand mining in the Ba River in Fiji, communities have expressed concern that mining activities will affect their livelihood and have long term effects on the environment (BHRC, 2019).

While terrestrial mining has been done in the region for decades, technological advances have led to an upsurge in exploration, drilling, and mining activities offshore. The first licensed deep sea mining (DSM) project in 2018, Solwara 1 developed by Canadian company Nautilus Minerals, intended to extract high-grade Seafloor Massive Sulphide (SMS) deposits of copper, gold, zinc and silver from the Bismarck Sea in PNG. It was granted permission to operate by the PNG government without the FPIC of nearby coastal communities. The DSM left a significant negative economic outcome when the company declared bankruptcy, leaving the PNG government USD \$150 million poorer in joint investment costs for the project (Filer et al., 2020). Even in its extractive phase, implications for human health, fisheries and livelihoods, and threat of extinction of marine species were also recorded (Chin & Hari, 2020).

In response to the worsening threat to seabed mining affecting habitats and ecosystems, the Deep Sea Mining campaign began in late 2011 and continues to campaign against the impacts of DSM on biodiversity and ecosystems such as disturbance of the seafloor, sediment plumes, and pollution, which consequently affects the livelihoods of coastal communities and the food supply of PNG.

“We the people of the Pacific have not been consulted, let alone given our consent to deep sea mining. We will fiercely resist DeepGreen's (The Metals Company) dangerous [mining] plans, using a few Pacific Island states, to destroy our ocean. We ask...shareholders to heed our concerns and realise this is NOT a safe investment for you or for us. Do not vote to invest in TMC,”

- DSMC Media Release (September 2021)

Logging

Though only 5% of the world's total forest area is found in the Pacific, five of the top ten territories in terms of forest area relative to total land area is in this region, according to 2020 data of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. These five are Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Palau, American Samoa, and Papua New Guinea.

In the Solomon Islands, 70% of exports come from forest resources (Boudreau, 2012), with the chief recipient being China. However, a 2018 report by international NGO Global Witness found that illegal logging is rampant and deforestation is going on at an unsustainable scale, stripping primary forests. This prompted the country's finance minister to remark that at its current rate natural forests will be exhausted by 2036. Resistance to massive deforestation and illegal logging is driven by the industry's

opaque process of gaining consent from traditional land rights owners, minimal benefits to rural communities and adverse effects on their water and food sources (Wilson, 2013). Conflicts range from court injunctions against logging concessions to the imprisonment of forest defenders accused of destroying logging equipment (Hunt, 2019).

Papua New Guinea, with 79% of its 46.28 million hectares of land covered in forest, is the largest exporter of timber in the region. It exported 3.3 million tonnes of timber equivalent to US\$690 million in 2019 alone, mainly to China (Gwao et al., 2021). In the last twenty years, it lost 1.57 million hectares of tree cover, equivalent to 1.15Gt of CO₂e emissions (Global Forest Watch, 2021). Despite customary land rights prevailing over PNG, with 99% of land owned by indigenous communities, some 70% of logging was found to be illegal, often through collusion with corrupt local officials to cheat indigenous peoples of their land (Hance, 2014).

In West Papua, wide swaths of forests are cleared to make way for palm oil and sugar plantations. Conflict has arisen from the Korean-Indonesian Korindo palm oil plantation, the Korean POSCO-Daewoo palm oil plantation, and the Singapore-based but Malaysian-owned Wilmar International sugar plantation. According to the Environmental Justice Atlas, common variables in these cases are indiscriminate and massive clearing of tens of thousands of hectares of forest land, leading to biodiversity loss, water pollution, and loss of livelihood for resident indigenous peoples; and rights violations of indigenous peoples whose lands are being taken over by the foreign plantations.

Climate change

The small island countries and territories of the Pacific are particularly vulnerable to climate change, most especially the low-lying atoll islands of Micronesia and Polynesia. While globally, sea levels have risen between 3.0 and 3.4mm per year since the early 1990s, in the Pacific islands recorded sea level increases exceeded the global average, especially in Micronesia (Keener et al., 2012). With climate change expected to cause the melting of polar glaciers and ice sheets, sea levels are expected to further increase between 15 to 30 cm by 2050. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report has also indicated that at 2°C global warming and above, heavy rainfall and associated flooding events will increase in both frequency and intensity in the Pacific islands (IPCC, 2021).

Climate change threatens not only to alter Pacific islands' coastlines, but the way of life of many islanders who are deeply dependent on the sea and the land. Climate change will lead not only to more intense monsoons but also more intense droughts, which will gravely impact food and agriculture, while projected changes in the acidity and salinity of the Pacific Ocean will affect fish catch and food security.

These threats have compelled many Pacific communities to demand needed climate adaptation, mitigation, and financing to safeguard the futures of the young and future generations of Pacific islanders. One group, the Pacific Island Climate Action Network,

recognizes these threats and also demands accountability from countries with bigger responsibilities over greenhouse gas emissions. In Papua New Guinea, a campaign was launched to stop coal mining and the development of the coal industry in the country (FOE, 2020).

Reported Experiences of EHRDs in the Pacific

The exploitation of mining, forest, and other resources without sufficient safeguards to ensure environmental sustainability and protection and without proper consultation of local communities have led to various conflicts. This is not surprising given the high value placed by Pacific indigenous tradition on the stewardship of nature and its judicious use to ensure that its benefits redound to the entire community and successive generations. Thus many citizens and communities of the Pacific region find themselves among the ranks of environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) worldwide.

The UN defines EHRDs as “individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna”. It also added that the environmental defenders remain highly vulnerable and under attack across the globe. Worldwide, environmental defenders face growing assaults and murders- in conjunction with increasing intimidation, harassment, stigmatization and criminalization. At least three people a week are killed protecting our environmental rights- while many more are harassed, intimidated, criminalized and forced from their lands.

“For their tireless work in empowering communities and protecting ecosystems, environmental defenders are killed in startling numbers. Murder is not the only way environmental defenders are persecuted; for every 1 killed, there are 20 to 100 others harassed, unlawfully and lawfully arrested, and sued for defamation, amongst other intimidations”

- John Knox, former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment

In 2016, Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, called for states in Asia and the Pacific to recognise the role of EHRDs, to develop protection mechanisms for EHRDs, include EHRDs in relevant decision-making mechanisms, and to sign the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights, among others.

The Pacific EHRDs interviewed by APNED narrated their twin experiences of increasing concern over mounting environmental degradation brought about by illegal extractive activities and sea level rise, and their fight for climate injustice and violations of human rights. Several forms of human rights violations such as threats, intimidations, harassment and arrest were just some of the experiences disclosed by the subjects that they say were the result of their advocacy to uphold their right to a safe and healthy environment, fight against abuses, protect their land, and struggle for self-determination.

Harassment, Threats and Intimidation

One EHRD interviewed from the Social Empowerment and Education Program (SEEP) in Fiji stated that because of their organization’s campaign questioning gravel and

bauxite mining being done by a Chinese mining company in Tailevu and Namosi, they have been subject to harassment. Their NGO was summoned and interrogated by the Fiji Mining and Quarrying Council, a body established by the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation and made up by the heads of mining and quarrying companies. They have also been summoned and interrogated by the Ministry of Environment and Waterways. They believe that these interrogations by official bodies were meant to intimidate them and hinder their work because they are making communities more aware of the impacts of these mining activities.

The same EHRD from SEEP also reported getting “courtesy visits” from the police in the pretext that the law enforcement officers were “in the neighbourhood”. Their office, however, was located in a residential area that does not get regular police patrols. According to them, these police “visits” increased in frequency as their work on extractives took off, with senior police officials even asking them for “help”. This was especially notable in 2019 when they commissioned a legal research team to identify national mechanisms that can be used by citizens against foreign mining companies who they believe are causing undue harm to their environment and communities.

Aside from harassment experienced by their office, the communities they serve also reported rights violations in the form of restrictions to their movement and access to their places of livelihood. According to the SEEP subject interviewed, community members who used to go to the rivers for their daily needs are no longer allowed to go to the area by the mining companies engaged in gravel quarrying. The community members were also barred access to their regular fishing grounds.

Another EHRD from New Ireland, Papua New Guinea interviewed by APNED faced a more extreme kind of harassment. He reported being threatened and almost put behind bars in 2013 until 2015 for actively campaigning against deep sea mining (DSM). He was a teacher by profession and began campaigning against deep-sea mining after learning that the communities that were to be affected by DSM are not aware of the negative issues of this development. It took him and his organization between 8 to 10 years for the deep sea mining to stop operations.

He added that aside from their work against deep sea mining, he and the communities that he worked with also face threats because of their campaign against logging, deforestation and climate change. He reported that they tried to mount protests, but that as soon as it started, the government security personnel would dismantle it. While people were not hurt, the intent was to intimidate them and bar them from their right to self assembly and self expression. These experiences have led him to realize the importance of forming and networking with other groups.

Despite these threats, he and his colleagues have not lost hope. Working with the Alliance of Solwara Warriors they have built a solidarity network and have been joined by the Pacific Council of Churches and the PNG Council of Churches in their struggle for their livelihood. In 2019, they found triumph when the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum called for a 10-year

moratorium on deep-sea mining in the Pacific. The PNG government announced a moratorium and the company wanting to begin deep-sea mining abandoned its plans.

“We are all indigenous people. We lived in peace for tens of thousands of years without mining. We have had no big projects and needed no big projects. We have learnt to respect each other based on our culture, based on our traditions. We have to build regional solidarity on that basis in the fight to stop deep-sea mining.”

- Jonathan Mesulam, January 2020

An Amnesty International report published in May also chronicles harassment and intimidation experienced by West Papua supporters in other territories in the Pacific. Camari Serau, an LGBTI and women’s rights activist from Fiji who is also an active supporter of pro-independence activists from Papua and West Papua province, reported being subjected to questioning and surveillance by Fiji authorities. She believes that this is connected to her advocacy to end the exploitation of Papuan’s sacred land, and for Papuans to be allowed to govern their resources according to local development frameworks. Last year in July, upon returning from the Solomon Islands she was taken in for questioning by the Fiji Border Control Police. She was interrogated about her pro-independence advocacy for Papua and West Papua province. Local police have also stopped her and other activists from wearing Papuan activist t-shirts or carrying out any form of protest at public events. Camari had her social media accounts monitored, hacked, and reported many times by unidentified people. The same online harassment stemming from support for West Papuans has been reported by interviewees from other EHRD organizations in the Pacific. Camari is now looking for platforms where strong and innovative forms of advocacy are encouraged, reflecting her desire to speak out even louder and to insist on being heard.

The same Amnesty International report also chronicles instances of media censorship alongside threats and harassment experienced by an EHRD in Papua New Guinea who serves communities opposed to mining in their area. Emmanuel Peni, who is a coordinator of Project Sepik, has been very vocal on the environmental and community impacts of operations of Chinese mining company PanAust in the Sepik River, a large wetland system that some 400,000 locals depend on for their livelihood. He found that national media declined to broadcast stories of peaceful protests and of the impact of the exploration license on the Sepik communities. He added that he has faced threats and violence because of his work, including being harassed by the government and mining company officials. According to the report, Manu’s work has been “trivialised, dismissed, discredited and treated with hostility by the government and the mining company.”

Violence, Torture, and Arrests

Interviewees from the West Papua Pacific Organization, an organization which works for indigenous peoples rights and the self-determination of West Papua, report being violently dispersed by state police during protests in Jayapura in August of this year.

Many of their colleagues sustained injuries as they were subjected to water cannons and beatings with rubber batons and guns. Their advocacy for the self-determination of West Papua is rooted in the struggle of indigenous Papuans to their ancestral domain, the protection of their sacred land and resources from intense exploitation by large multinational mining companies, and for the fair and equitable distribution of local resources. They also reported a colleague, who as a university student activist was arrested twice in 2014 and then in 2017 for joining protests in support of West Papua.

According to another interviewee, residents themselves are subjected to militarization and harassment, either from state forces or from the hired forces of multinational corporations. In 2020, Ravina Shamdasani speaking on behalf of the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) in Asia, expressed concern over the escalating violence in the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua and the increased risk of renewed tension and violence. The OHCHR cited a shooting incident earlier in the year that killed and injured two youth, which followed reports of killings of individuals, activists and church workers as well as non-indigenous residents. Eighty four people including Wensislaus Fatuban, a well-known human rights defender and human rights adviser to the Papuan People's Council (Majelis Rakyat Papua or the MRP), and seven MRP staff members were arrested and detained by security forces in Merauke Regency in Papua province but were released the following day ahead of a public consultation organised by the MRP on the implementation of the Special Autonomy Law in Papua and West Papua provinces.

Similarly, the Pusaka Bentala Rakyat Foundation has documented the situation in Papua from April 2020 to June 2020, and has uncovered cases of violence, arrests, and even destruction of property, internal displacement, intimidation and death threats experienced by indigenous peoples and the EHRDs. The reports and investigations which were carried out chronicle alarming cases of violence that all seem to be related to indigenous peoples and EHRDs speaking out and defending their fundamental rights to life, land and livelihood, food, and the right to a healthy environment, all of which are at risk of being lost or taken from them by palm oil plantations and logging industries.

A member of Sulka Tribe in Papua New Guinea and a Community Facilitator for Wide Bay Conservation Association, Isidor Kaupun risked his life for standing up to fight against the company and believes that the government fully supports the companies through the police department who threaten them. He narrated that most of them have been in prison for protesting against what has been done on their land. They were captured and put in jail just for peacefully protesting against the company (Diplomacy Training Program, July 2021).

Media practitioners are also politically persecuted for reporting on environmental abuse in the Pacific. In April 2019, three New Zealand journalists were arrested by police in Suva, Fiji, after their attempts to interview Freesoul Real Estate Development. The company, which was previously reported to be linked to environmental devastation in Fiji, got the police to arrest the three over "criminal trespass," who in turn were released

the next day. Amnesty International denounced these arrests as attacks on freedom of expression, a situation which they report is faced by Fiji journalists on a daily basis.

Instances of members of parliament being arrested in defense of environmental and human rights. In June this year, six members of Fiji parliament and three other high-profile politicians were held for almost 48 hours without charge, then released after interrogation by the criminal investigations department. This is believed to be connected to their criticism of proposed amendments to the iTaukei Land Trust Act of 1940 that governs the administration of native land. Many native Fijians fear that the said amendments would remove protections to indigenous landowners' rights enshrined in the original law.

Women face a particular kind of abuse due to their gender. Cressida Kuala, a women's human rights defender (WHRD) of the Ipili Indigenous people and environmental activist from a gold mining town in the highlands of Porgera in PNG detailed in the 2019 Amnesty International Report how local women have been beaten and even gang raped by mining company employees and taken to jail for refusing to have sex with mining company employees. There have been forced evictions and arson. Police brutality is rife. She says the weakness of local government in PNG, coupled with the entrenched culture of impunity, gives her little hope of seeing justice. She further added that she and her children regularly face threats of rape and violence, including gun violence, and have at various points been forced to go in hiding. Her experiences have given her motive, however, to establish the Porgera Red Wara (River) Women's Association. Cressida says the government—and the legal system—has failed her and other EHRDs. Women EHRDs like Cressida worry about retaliation when they raise concerns about mining operations. The work they do poses serious risks to their safety and security.

Shrinking civic space

Civic space in Fiji has been coined "obstructed" saying that there are a set of restrictive laws that have been used to silence freedoms of opinion and expression as well as ongoing restrictions to the right to peaceful assembly according to the monitor of CIVICUS, a global tool tracking civic space (CIVICUS, Nov. 5, 2019). It also added that human rights defenders have continued to face harassment for undertaking their work, which was documented in their joint submission with various civil society organizations and alliance to the Human Rights Council in March 2019 since Fiji's last human rights review in 2014. Although Article 17 of the Constitution of Fiji guarantees the "right to freedom of speech, expression, thought, opinion and publication" in law, policy and practice, restrictions on the freedom of expression and media freedom persist. Sedition provisions in the Crimes Act have been used by the Fijian authorities to target the media and opposition politicians while the Public Order (Amendment) Act has also been used to harass journalists and civil society. The Media Industry Development Act (Media Act) has also created a chilling effect for media and press freedom.

One interviewee from Fiji who worked at the Social Empowerment Education Program in Fiji mentioned that the space for the voices of the people to denounce the illegal extractive activities and other climate injustices have shrunk. The use of cyber and online laws to shrink civil society spaces made it intimidating for normal persons to raise their concerns. The cyber security law can be used to target posts that are posted on Facebook. It's left to the government to have the broad discretionary powers to define what posts are inciting or not. She mentioned that the laws are framed or designed to impede the realization of everyday citizens and civil rights and NGOs.

There is a Human Rights Commission in Fiji but it is government controlled and lacks action. The interviewee mentioned that through the NGO Coalition on Human Rights which is composed of several organizations, it monitors the cases of human rights violations and stands for the voices of communities to amplify their voices and also raise awareness on human rights.

Reflections and Recommendations

The threats and violations of human rights committed on EHRDs cannot be underemphasized. While the cases in point do not depict the entire picture of what was the real situation of our EHRDs, these will somehow illustrate that the plight of the EHRDs are at risk, endangering their lives in defense of their land and resources.

There are no guarantees such as the laws and the justice system that will protect the lives of the EHRDs. At stake is not only the EHRDs but also the lives of the communities who also bear the brunt of the plunder of their land and resources.

Common environmental issues that cut across among the Pacific respondents were climate change, deforestation and mining. They all saw the interconnectedness of these issues that further exacerbate the degradation of their natural resources and environment. As one respondent has stated “ We, from the Pacific Islands, are connected through the ocean, and all these are treated as regional issues that must be addressed”.

Environmental human rights issues were not only limited to what were disclosed by the subjects. They also cited big challenges that need to be addressed. One of these is on how to raise the awareness and consciousness of the people particularly the youth and those in the rural communities who have yet to understand the nexus between human rights and environmental rights. They only view that climate change issues are always related to rights to access basic needs such as food and water. Two interviewees even mentioned that the link between climate change and human rights is not clear amongst the youth.

It was also seen as a felt need on how to document and track any case of environmental human rights violations especially this time of pandemic where there are so many restrictions to comply with in terms of mobility. The lack of monitoring tools to track and document cases of violations against environmental defenders is lacking. Human rights violations need to be monitored and well documented in order to establish if there are trends of political reprisals committed against these environmental activists, and as a concrete source of information in demanding accountability and justice from the perpetrators..

Communication is also a concern as all messages are virtually done and people need to be equipped with the virtual app or technology in order to communicate. This is further exacerbated with the lack of funding in order for the environmental defenders to be mobile, visible and continue to communicate with the communities. One interviewer mentioned that he has to spend from his own pocket in order to move around and visit the communities. The financial resources to defray the cost of mobility and communications is one area that needs to be addressed.

The magnitude and extent of environmental issues as these are being confronted by the EHRDs will require side steps in order to mitigate and address all these challenges.

The risks and increasing vulnerability of the EHRDs would warrant a creation of an open space where stories, experiences and other materials can be shared between other regions such as Asia and the Pacific.

One of the capacity development needs that require focus is increasing the knowledge and understanding on the nexus between environmental defenders and climate change. It is through capacity development that the cooperating regions such as Asia and the Pacific will be able to have a shared understanding on climate injustice, human rights and environmental defense as interconnected. Building solidarity support and action across the region will strengthen the exchange of information, learnings, and experiences. It is also through a strong solidarity network that will enable the two regions to foster a higher level of awareness and understanding on the current and pressing issues that must be addressed through local and international campaigns.

A strong networking and outreach amongst EHRDs in the Pacific is needed to exchange information, monitor and track the extent of EHR violations. As a result of this, systematic data can be generated and documented on human rights defenders' status. This will build the anchor and basis for a more proactive advocacy on improving human rights defenders' situation in the region.

Considering the uniqueness of each of the Pacific islands based on socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts, this article further recommends to do baselining and investigation specially on the state of the environment and the EHRDs. The common issues in the small Pacific island communities that were part of this study revolve around climate change, defence for land, and extractive activities. It is also interesting to take into consideration in the next study the issues and challenges that are prevalent among the EHRDs.

What needs to be done in the succeeding study as far as data collection and analysis will further shape the advocacy and communications platform between the cooperating organizations in Asia and the Pacific. The limited information that was generated on the state of the EHRDs cannot be used to generalize an assessment. What was captured during the interviews are preliminary information and can be further expanded in the next study, targeting as much information generated from primary and secondary data.

In future case studies, it would be important to identify concrete measures and steps in order to protect the EHRDs. Evidence based research will be taken into consideration in order to fully lay down steps that will serve as a binding mechanism from amongst solidarity groups and networks to enforce the security and welfare of all the EHRDs, environment activists and other green frontliners who are in defense of the environment.

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