

The logo for SAGE OF FUND, featuring the word "sage" in a lowercase serif font and "OF FUND" in a smaller, uppercase sans-serif font below it. A thin white line curves around the text.

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# BUILDING POWER IN CRISIS

**WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO EXTRACTIVISM**

A Landscape Analysis by The SAGE Fund



# sage OF FUND

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY  
IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

## ABOUT THE SAGE FUND

SAGE cultivates powerful new ways to build a healthy, just, and inclusive global economy. Our “laboratory” approach equips advocates across fields with the financial and technical resources along with hands-on support that creates breakthrough strategies that hold economic actors accountable. Since 2015, the Fund has supported 59 projects with \$8.2 million in over 40 countries, creating a pipeline for emerging work on human rights and the global economy. SAGE concentrates collective work on a theme that is poised for innovation and builds a critical mass of strategy development and learning around that theme, sharing it with civil society organizations, movements and donors for greater impact.

SAGE is one of three inaugural partners in the Resilient Women and Natural Resources Plus Fund, an initiative of the Ford Foundation that seeks to boost the impact, resilience, and collective response of women defenders resisting natural-resource extraction and the structural violence that it engenders and exacerbates. The SAGE Fund gratefully acknowledges the Ford Foundation for its support of this participatory research and analysis, and the opportunity to support exploratory grantmaking based on the findings.

Visit [SageFundRights.org](http://SageFundRights.org) to learn more about this initiative and the work of SAGE and its partners.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Introduction

Around the world, communities impacted by extractive industries—mining, drilling, industrial agriculture—face multiple and intersecting forms of violence. Violence in this context is gendered, in terms of how it operates as well as who it benefits and harms. Patriarchal power structures tend to exclude or make less visible the ways that women, trans, intersex, and nonbinary people experience the impacts of extractivism. This report explores the breadth of gendered structural violence created or reinforced by extractivism and focuses on the experiences of women and girls living in frontline communities.

Based on nearly 100 interviews with women leaders and their allies, the report is a cross-movement analysis of the needs and opportunities for supporting work at the intersections of gender, natural resources, and extractivism. The report offers multiple entry points for funders, civil society, and social movements accompanying impacted communities. The findings aim to strengthen strategies that center women's knowledge, practices, and experiences as well as leverage support for approaches with untapped potential.

Research draws from the perspectives of women leaders on the frontlines of extractivism in East and Southern Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Mesoamerica and South America. Social movement leaders, scholars, researchers, and civil society groups working from the local to global level were also consulted. Participants located themselves within diverse social movements ranging from feminism and women's rights to human rights, indigenous rights, corporate accountability, environment and climate, and natural resources. The strategies identified in the research span a broad range of fields and expertise, from community organizing to strategic litigation.

## SUMMARY VERSION AND COMPLETE REPORT

This document summarizes the full-length report, *Building Power in Crisis: Women's Responses to Extractivism*, which features dozens of case studies and rich examples of strategies led by women across contexts. For the full report in English or Spanish, including detailed methodology, citations and sources, visit [SageFundRights.org](https://SageFundRights.org).

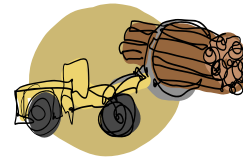
# What Is Extractivism?

Extractivism is a dominant economic model that centers growth and profit over the wellbeing of people and planet. This model—typically framed in terms of development—relies on the removal of natural resources and raw materials on a massive scale for export. Crucially, the term extractivism pertains to not only the activity or the process, but also the *conditions* under which resources are extracted (such as the absence of consultation or consent of local populations) and the *interests* they serve (such as elite, corporate, and criminal interests rather than the public good).

## Many kinds of activities characterize extractivism:



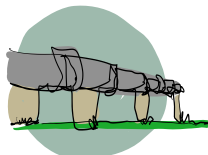
Taking nonrenewable natural resources including fossil fuels and minerals



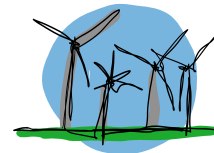
Appropriating renewable resources through practices such as logging, fishing, and poaching



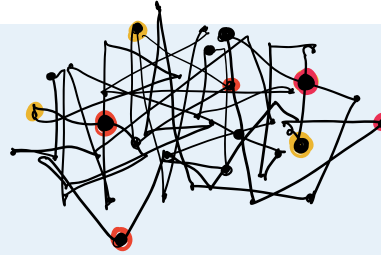
Operating industrial agriculture plantations such as palm and soy



Building infrastructure to sustain projects such as roads, ports, and pipelines



Implementing some renewable energy projects such as large-scale wind farms and hydropower including dams



## A COMPLEX WEB OF POWER

Extractivism involves a constellation of actors including government officials, corporations, investors and financiers, security forces, media elites, armed groups, and criminal enterprises— who wield power in interconnected and often non-transparent ways. This web makes it extremely difficult to disentangle for the purposes of holding actors accountable.



## PATRIARCHAL

Extractivism is designed for the benefit of men and operationalized through the domination of women, nature, and Indigenous and rural people. Women's exclusion from decision-making roles around extractives extends from worksites to corporate board rooms to agenda-setting spaces on climate, environment, rights, and security. Even within families, communities, and social movements, women must navigate patriarchal norms that prioritize male leadership and relegate women to supportive or caretaking roles.

# Characteristics of the Extractive Model



## NEOCOLONIAL

Extractivism is built upon the seizure and control of raw materials for the purpose of export rather than the benefit of local populations. Today, those benefiting from extractivism may be urban elites or corporations located in the Global South, but whether flowing North or South, profits rarely return to those on lands from which the resources were taken.

# Who Is Impacted?

Frontline communities are those most impacted by extractive industries (as well as by environmental devastation and climate change). Access to natural resources directly determines these communities' access to food, water, housing, and safety. Indigenous people, rural people, campesinos, farmers, fisherfolk, forest dwellers, and pastoralists are sustained by the same land and territory that has been claimed for extractive projects or directly harmed by them, often through environmental degradation and pollution.

**Women and girls** often have unique roles with respect to land and natural resources. In most of the Global South, women farmers produce between 40-80% of food, and women are responsible for water collection in two-thirds of households. Their extensive knowledge of forest conservation, sustainable agricultural practices (including seed collection and saving), and stewardship of local water systems places women in a central role of resource management and biodiversity protection.

When extractive activity disrupts women's relationship to land and natural resources, women are unable to fulfill these roles. This loss has wide-ranging effects not only on women but also entire communities and their territories and ecosystems.

The SAGE research revealed myriad gender impacts that have been under-reported or under-examined, including:

- **Loss of women's livelihoods** linked to farming, fishing, harvesting forest products, and other land-based work;
- **Devaluing of women's roles** as stewards of conservation and protectors of biodiversity;
- **Loss of ancestral and traditional knowledge** including agroecology practices and traditional medicine;
- **Limits on women's participation** in and decision-making about economic survival and everyday realities;
- **Gender-based violence** associated with heightened militarization and securitization of industries; and
- **Heightened burdens for family and community caretaking**, while balancing increased workload from resistance activities.

# What Are the Drivers?



1

## **HYPER-CONSUMPTION AND THE RACE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY**

Raw materials produced by extractive industries are destined for export to satisfy ever-increasing demand for energy and goods, particularly in the Global North. Hyper consumption puts pressure on cash-strapped countries in the South to accelerate extractivism. Meanwhile, the rapidly growing competitive market for “clean technology” requires metals and minerals that must be mined in significant quantity. Demand for renewable energy is also reviving support for large hydropower dams. As the green transition moves forward, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring that harms from the extractive model are not replicated in the just transition to clean energy.



2

## **LAND AND RESOURCE GRABS**

Dispossession can occur directly as a result of land grabs by third parties, or indirectly due to pollution or climate change caused by extractive industries. Financialization of the agricultural sector following the global economic crisis of 2008 was one of the primary drivers of land seizure, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Land grabs are often violent and carried out with complete disregard for the people who depend on land for their livelihoods, and without accountability or remedies. Women and Indigenous people are the least likely to have secure land tenure and are therefore particularly impacted.



3

## **CORPORATE POWER AND IMPUNITY**

Over the last 50 years, the power of multinational corporations has grown significantly over various realms of public life. In many jurisdictions, corporations hold the same (or greater) rights as private citizens yet without corresponding obligations towards people or planet. States offer extensive financial incentives to extractive industries, undermining governments’ ability to mobilize resources for domestic use. Corporations are often able to evade public scrutiny through lax oversight and by concealing their dealings through complex technical and financial arrangements. The absence of levers in host or home countries to hold corporations accountable breeds impunity for human rights and environmental harms.





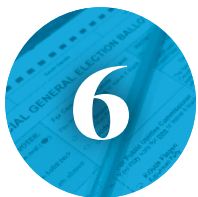
## MILITARIZATION

The forces behind extractive industries are highly incentivized to secure their multi-billion dollar investments over the long-term. States and corporations often work together using security forces, private military and security companies, paramilitary groups, and illegal armed groups to secure projects from perceived threats from local people. Organized crime is now a major player in extractive industries, bringing with it new forms of violence and control. These overlapping actors and blurred chains of command create barriers to documenting abuses and identifying perpetrators. Consequently, security actors often operate with impunity. Restrictions on freedom of movement like curfews and checkpoints impact women's livelihoods and make them vulnerable to gender-based violence.



## CLOSING OF CIVIC SPACE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST DEFENDERS

Environmental and land defenders—including many Indigenous peoples—face the gravest threats and danger from the deepening erosion of civic space, proliferating laws to restrict civil society activities and silence dissent, and widespread harassment and violence. Activists and the organizations and movements they are part of face enormous barriers to organizing due to criminalization of human rights activity, including surveillance, censorship, and restrictions on assembly and association. Digital harassment is a growing form of violence against human and environmental rights defenders; online attacks are gendered to deter women activists and intimidate others from speaking out.



## RISE OF RIGHT-WING POLITICS AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Anti-democratic trends are fueled by the promise of wealth for national-level elites. Corruption leads to lack of regulations, weak state institutions to conduct due diligence or oversight, and policies that prioritize short-term profit over sustainability. Right-wing nationalist agendas, often promoted by “strongman” leaders, take aim at the Indigenous people and rural ethnic minorities who often lead resistance to extractive industries. To gain favor with popular fundamentalist movements, political leaders frequently attack women's rights, gender justice, and LGBTQ rights. The links between ethnonationalism and patriarchy are not new, but authoritarian leaders are increasingly pushing extractivism as a tool to consolidate their political and economic power.

# What Forms of Violence Are Fueled by Extractivism?

Extractivism produces and reinforces **gendered structural violence**, a term that refers to an expansive and multi-dimensional set of gender-based harms produced in various forms including economic, environmental, political, and sociocultural. By focusing on structural violence, this report spotlights the systems, institutions, and structures that give rise to and sustain violence in the context of extractivism, rather than the specific roles of individual perpetrators.



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a direct form of violence used to control, subjugate, and maintain rigid gender roles and inequality. Forms include physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse; harassment; threats; coercion; economic or educational deprivation; and control over freedom of movement. GBV may also be directed at organizations or groups as a means to control, stop, or influence their activities. In the extractives context, GBV occurs at multiple levels: the family; organizations and social movements; the worksite of extractive activity; the community; and the political sphere. Multiple, often intersecting, factors including indigeneity, race, ethnicity, age, caste, geographic location, and disability increase discrimination against certain women and make them differently vulnerable to GBV. A militarized presence—of public forces like military and law enforcement, or private security forces charged with securing sites of extractive activity—is often associated with high rates of GBV. Women and girls living near extractive sites, or working in these industries, experience high levels of GBV perpetrated by male workers. GBV against sex workers who migrate to extractive communities is both extreme and common.





## ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

Economic violence refers to the destruction, appropriation, exploitation, and devaluing of the sources and products of people's livelihoods and basic economic survival. It can include taking land, crops, access to forests; nonpayment of wages; human trafficking; forced labor; and exploitation of domestic and reproductive labor. Women experience numerous forms of economic violence from extractivism, beginning with the fact that they are less likely than men to own or control land. When land grabs or environmental degradations occur, women's economic security is threatened along with food sovereignty for entire communities. This can lead to other gendered impacts; for example, GBV tends to rise when resources are scarce or under threat. Women are disproportionately excluded from economic benefits offered to local communities by the extractive sector, including employment and compensation agreements. With men migrating for higher wage jobs in the sector, women take on more caretaking responsibilities that increase the gender imbalance of labor.



## ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

Environmental violence is the human-caused direct damage to natural resources, environment, and climate to such a degree that it prevents regenerative and evolutionary processes that allow ecosystems to survive, adapt, and thrive. Environmental violence jeopardizes natural resources necessary for human survival. Pollution from extractive industries can devastate food production systems in rural areas through pollution of water, land, and air. Because men tend to have access to more fertile land, women are often the first to struggle with lower crop yields. Pollution creates a range of reproductive and sexual health problems that disproportionately burden women, from high-risk pregnancies to infant mortality. Meanwhile, women are also expected to take extra responsibility for the health and care of their families, which is especially challenging in rural areas with minimal public services and poor infrastructure.



### Gender-Based Violence

Violence within the family, community and workplace, perpetrated by private and/or public actors.



### Socio-Cultural Violence

Violence caused by disruption to indigenous or traditional ways of life and women's roles in preserving them.



### Economic Violence

Violence arising from threats or disruptions to women's livelihoods and economic survival

# Gendered Structural Violence



### Political Violence

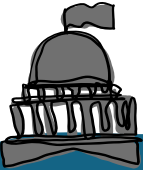
Violence that aims to silence or delegitimize women community leaders and land defenders



### Environmental Violence

Violence stemming from the degradation of natural resources and threats to health, food systems and livelihoods





## POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Political violence manifests in threats, attacks, and intimidation from the state, corporations, security forces, political actors, media, and other elites frequently working together or as part of a chain of economic and political interests. These attacks can occur when activists and organizations directly challenge power, when power is contested through democratic processes, or simply when women activists and the communities they represent are perceived as an obstacle to extractive interests. Attacks against women are often intended to not only punish women for their political activity but also for their deviation from gender roles. Political violence and repression may target individual women or women's groups, social movements, and institutions where women play a leadership role. Women's roles in resisting or confronting extractive projects can trigger a negative reaction from within the family or community. This pressure can pull women leaders in two directions, leading many to feel they must choose between defending their land and territory or caretaking for their families. Women leaders in different regions articulate a similar paradox: the more visible they become, the greater the frequency and intensity of the attacks against them.



## SOCIOCULTURAL VIOLENCE

Extractive industries can disrupt traditional or indigenous ways of life, culture, art, economic systems, customs, beliefs, and traditions. For traditional and indigenous communities, land is more than a physical location. It is sacred ground where ancestors are buried and viewed as integral to cultural survival. The loss of land through displacement, dispossession, or environmental degradation can be experienced as emotional, psychological, or spiritual violence. In many indigenous cultures, women are often charged with guarding ancestral wisdom and knowledge, including through practices such as seed saving, cultivating plants for traditional medicine, or teaching methods for ecological restoration. This loss of connection to land and natural resources erodes women's socially reproductive roles in the community as well as the networks that women build and cultivate through them.

# Strategies

Communities directly impacted by extractive industries talk about their struggle as a **fight for survival**—one that involves using all the tools at their disposal to defend their bodies, culture, livelihoods, resources, land, and territories. The strategies women use to confront extractives emerge from their community roles as food producers, environmental stewards, spiritual and physical healers, caretakers, educators, sustainers, organizers, and movement builders. Their approaches are highly dependent on historical context, economic opportunities, political openings, and strategic alliances. In some contexts, these strategies may be influenced by more tactical considerations, for example by which forms of information, technical support, or resources are available.

The SAGE research reveals that women are using multiple approaches to **build, confront, or transform power**. This means they are seeking to change the behavior of diverse targets, including government officials making and implementing policy, corporations spearheading extractive projects, private and public security forces guarding investments, national elites, and the media. At the same time, women are challenging gendered power structures that constrain their participation and leadership in extractive struggles, including within community-based groups, social movements, and civil society organizations. The research identified a clear pattern of women working together with allies to understand where these forms of power reside and how they operate, before deciding which strategies to use. Women's approaches often have the following characteristics:

- **Multi-pronged approaches** allow for diverse efforts to target actors at different levels (local, national, regional, global) to achieve different goals and objectives (to resist, reform, or create alternatives);
- **Layered strategies** proceed in parallel, operating across domains (public and private) on varied timelines (short-, medium-, and long-term); and
- **Long-term partnering** with trusted allies who bring complementary knowledge, expertise, solidarity, and resources to help sustain community-led efforts.



The SAGE report groups strategies used by women in frontline communities, and the allies who accompany and support them, into three categories:



### Foundational Strategies

Build women's power to confront threats and sustain their participation and leadership for the long-term



### Site-Specific Strategies

Prevent, stop, or delay a specific extractive project, find accountability for those creating harm, and secure remedies and redress for those impacted



### Transformational Strategies

Designed to address the root causes of gendered structural violence and create autonomous systems that build towards a sustainable future

In practice, these categories are less discrete than they appear to be. For example, many strategies that may start as site-specific lead to transformational change, such as a women-led protest to stop the granting of a mining concession that turns public opinion against the project, leading to legislation enacting a mining ban. Women's approaches constantly evolve as the targets themselves shift strategies and tactics. Rather than assessing the importance of any one strategy or group of strategies, this report emphasizes the **overlaps and interlinkages among strategies** that challenge extractive power.

For each strategy, SAGE identifies an **example** to illustrate how women are using it in practice and in combination with other approaches. Within each strategy there are clear **opportunities** for civil society organizations and funders to engage, amplify, and support them. As strategies evolve, so will opportunities. The following are offered as a starting place for reflection about how to address gendered structural violence and rebalance power.

# Foundational Strategies

Community-based power-building strategies are critical to the endurance and success of any extractive struggle. Power-building is a long-term strategy to educate, organize, and mobilize communities that are often marginalized from power structures and decision-making processes. In frontline communities, women tend to build and mobilize power differently than men—in ways that are often less formal, visible, or easily understood. Foundational strategies describe those that prepare, equip, and sustain women to build their leadership and power to sustain their struggle against extractivism.

## FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
- LEADERSHIP BUILDING
- BUILDING POLITICAL POWER
- SHAPING COUNTERNARRATIVES TO EXTRATIVISM
- COLLECTIVE CARE AND PROTECTION

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

The ability of frontline communities to survive depends on their internal organizational strength. When community life is disrupted by an extractive project, women often first come together to discuss shared grievances or address survival needs. This work can include time and space for sensitization and awareness-raising about the immediate problems, as well as analysis of root causes that may be harder to identify. Such spaces build trust that allows women to reflect on and challenge patriarchy, racism, militarism, and other forces that constrain their daily lives. It also allows space to generate self- and collective-care practices that benefit leaders and whole communities. This work builds cohesion in the



face of external pressures, laying the groundwork for effective mobilization when the timing demands it.

In many contexts, male leaders are resistant to examining patriarchal structures and attitudes that repress women's leadership and preserve traditional gender roles. Women who focus on ways that they are uniquely harmed by extractive power are often accused of sowing divisions or distracting from the (often male-led) community resistance effort. This can intensify once a project is imminent. If extractive proponents encounter resistance, they accelerate efforts to divide communities against one another, magnifying existing internal tensions. Trusted allies are critical to helping women examine the links between patriarchal oppression from within the community and external forms of structural violence. Allies also bring resources, technical knowledge, skills, and access to critical platforms or decision-makers that help leverage women's collective demands.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Provide ongoing and flexible forms of support to frontline communities for organizing and power-building:** specifically, to address their immediate basic needs, protect themselves from urgent threats, and allow space to envision different futures and develop alternatives.



**Saramanta** is an informal collective of Indigenous women in Ecuador who call themselves “defenders of women and nature.” Saramanta formed in 2012 to demand the right to clean water in response to pollution from mining operations. The group’s purpose is to exchange expertise and build political leadership among women living in communities affected by extractives, particularly mining.

“In the Amazon there are many threats, much persecution. Saramanta provided the chance to form the Amazon women’s collective against extractivism, and this was very strong. Coming together gave us an umbrella of protection. It gave visibility to the fight. Each time we were more public, women had more presence in the national and international arenas. Creating space for connecting can facilitate our own organic organizing initiatives.”

–IVONNE RAMOS  
COORDINATOR OF SARAMANTA

- **Support women’s organizing efforts before extractivism threatens to disrupt a community** by identifying potential hotspots of extractive activity and investing in organizing efforts, however nascent, by women-led groups, feminist allies, and other social movement partners.
- **Engage in and structure long-term accompaniment with women in frontline communities** by understanding the context and constraints they face, responding to requests for support with agility and flexibility, supporting women to organize at their own pace and in formations that work best for them, centering women’s priorities, and transparently sharing knowledge and information.

## LEADERSHIP BUILDING

Building and/or strengthening women’s leadership, especially in patriarchal contexts where their participation in political struggles is not the norm, is key to addressing the gendered dimensions of structural violence. In family and community roles, women often exercise leadership informally –such as through mentorship and solidarity relationships– which is less recognizable to those accustomed to individual leadership models. Women’s roles may sometimes lead to more formal leadership roles within organizations and movement structures. Leadership-building strategies vary greatly in principles and

values (individual, collective, transformational), approach (feminist, popular education, indigenous), and modality (political education schools, training institutes, workshops, mentorship programs, and informal accompaniment). Strategies that mix these modalities and approaches can nurture and sustain women leaders in extractive struggles.

In Mesoamerica, the **JASS Alquimia** school uses feminist popular methodologies and power analysis tools to equip Indigenous and rural women to map the sources and targets of power, then build the leadership and networks to confront intersecting forms of violence. The school’s processes include face-to-face and virtual workshops, and follow-

up accompaniment for each participant in the context of her organization or movement to support multiplying her skills. These spaces are conceived to create conditions for women to build alliances and collaborate around shared strategies. *Alquimistas* are involved in providing training once they have “graduated” and formed their own network.



Photo: JASS



## LEADERSHIP BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Intentionally support women’s collective organizing and leadership-building efforts**, which may be less recognizable or visible than demonstrations of male leadership and therefore require more upfront effort to identify.
- **Support and strengthen growing ecosystems of women’s diverse leadership-building approaches** that emerge from different philosophies and practices and incorporate varied modalities.
- **Create opportunities for women to network and learn** from those in other frontline communities impacted by extractivism within and across regions, and provide clear pathways to implement this learning in their own communities.

## BUILDING POLITICAL POWER

When women build their organizing and leadership capacities, they begin to link family- and community-level violence to structural political and economic violence. The goal of building power in the public sphere is to ensure women occupy decision-making roles with the ability to influence governance and economic policy, including negotiations and outcomes around extractive projects. The SAGE research surfaced numerous examples of Indigenous women

**Lilak** (Purple Action for Indigenous Women’s Rights) is an organization of Indigenous women leaders and allies across the human rights, feminist, and environmental movements who support the struggle for Indigenous women’s human rights in the Philippines. Lilak convenes “resistance dialogues” with groups from six countries in Asia Pacific. The dialogues provide an opportunity to build solidarity among groups across the region by sharing strategies for territorial defense and resistance to extractive activities on indigenous land. The cross-movement network also helps build alliances with key civil society advocacy groups working at these intersections, in order to access and influence decision-making spaces at the regional and global levels.





in particular building political power in response to their exclusion from both indigenous decision-making bodies and mainstream political structures. Indigenous women use diverse mechanisms including networks and coalitions as well as the development of new parallel, women-led governance structures that are gaining more visibility and respect.

## BUILDING POLITICAL POWER OPPORTUNITIES

- **Strengthen cross-movement solidarity networks** at the national, regional, and global levels with the goal of nurturing political leadership among women who have been historically excluded from decision-making spaces, especially Indigenous and rural women who are disproportionately impacted by extractivism.
- Through networks, **provide layered support that Indigenous women need to sustain political leadership**, with an emphasis on sharing strategies to combat patriarchal views and practices from within and outside communities.

## SHAPING COUNTERNARRATIVES

Given the stark power imbalance and shrinking public space for women confronting extractivism, shaping discourse about their own experiences is critical for reclaiming power. Women's groups use a variety of media and platforms, including traditional and online forums, to communicate their messages, mobilize constituencies, and expand their power base. Although social media can be a particularly powerful messaging and mobilization tool, it is increasingly weaponized against women and communities. Women leading struggles are frequently the targets of smear and defamation campaigns that seek to

**The Lamu Women Alliance** organized a successful media strategy that played a crucial role in swaying public opinion against a coal plant in the Lamu Archipelago in Kenya. As a result of the Lamu Women Alliance's efforts to document impacts on women, Raya was asked to share her story in court. The judge cited her testimony in his decision to nullify the plant's operating license.

**“We mobilized women to advocate through social media, WhatsApp groups, TV and small documentaries. We saw the importance of women taking part in learning and making decisions.”**

**—RAYA AHMED**  
ORGANIZER

damage their credibility and turn the public against their efforts.

Taking control of the narrative allows women to tell the full story about extractives and their gendered impacts. A new discourse can also shift stigma away from frontline communities—who tend to be framed as “anti-development” or “anti-progress” for their opposition to extractive projects—placing it instead on those causing the harm. And it helps women mobilize their communities around a collective vision that generates alternatives and centers people and planet over profit.

## SHAPING COUNTERNARRATIVES OPPORTUNITIES

- **Support development of counternarratives** that challenge the myths of extractivism and name the gendered structural violence it both creates and reinforces.
- **Accelerate efforts to address online threats,** violence, and harassment against women leaders and environmental defenders.
- **Provide support and training for women in frontline communities to produce stories** about their experiences, nurture connections to journalists that can elevate their stories, and develop new or strengthen existing platforms to disseminate messages.

## COLLECTIVE CARE AND PROTECTION

Resisting extractivism takes a substantial toll on women’s safety, health, and wellbeing, in large part because it can destabilize their relationship to self, family, and community. Collective care and protection frameworks and practices have emerged from Indigenous women and feminist allies working together to protect and support defenders who face heightened risks. Collective protection recognizes that violence is systemic, and the need for women defenders’ safety is a constant and continuous struggle demanding a new logic of organization and connection. It builds on and strengthens community-based support networks, in accordance with the culture, capacities, and resources of where defenders work. These networks may include collective decision-making about land and development processes, sustainable livelihoods, and other practices based on community cohesion. Holistic care supplements protection strategies by focusing on physical and emotional well-being, helping activists and their families guard against stress, exhaustion, and burnout.

Collective care and protection provides an alternative approach to traditional human rights models aimed at protecting high-risk and visible individuals. When lacking a gender analysis, these strategies can make

women leaders vulnerable to critiques from within the community for violating traditional gender roles. They may also heighten the risk of retaliation from external forces that seek to divide and weaken communities by targeting their leaders. Collective care and protection is intended to minimize the burdens on any individual leader by focusing on community unity and collective power.

### COLLECTIVE CARE AND PROTECTION OPPORTUNITIES

- Engage directly with communities, including women human rights and environmental defenders, about the kind of protection they need, and **support a holistic care infrastructure** for activists and communities.
- **Support opportunities to learn about and elevate collective care and protection practices** among allied civil society organizations and funders in the human rights protection field.



Photo: IM-Defensoras

**Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos (IM-Defensoras)** is a field leader in conceptualizing and practicing collective care and protection. Built upon a system of documenting violations, the IM-Defensoras consists of five national networks comprised of Indigenous and frontline women as well as journalists, labor rights organizers, and feminists working in NGOs who are at risk. These networks respond to attacks and provide women defenders and their families a combination of direct assistance (legal and financial support, digital and physical security) and solidarity (advocacy and media campaigns, retreat centers). Some of IM-Defensoras's most important contributions include how it has influenced the international human rights and protection community to adopt a gendered understanding of risk and to recognize women defenders who exist outside of formal structures.



# Site-Specific Strategies

Frontline communities facing specific or imminent threats due to extractive activity use a range of strategies to prevent, delay, or stop it. If unable to stop a project altogether, communities may use strategies to limit or ameliorate its impact, or pursue remedies for human rights and environmental harm. Because these strategies respond to threats from actors holding outsized power, they are more likely to succeed if communities have addressed internal divisions, planned for the safety and wellbeing of those at risk, and leveraged the support and strengths of trusted allies who are well positioned to advance elements of the overall strategy. These strategies are more effective when accompanied by long-term efforts to challenge the inevitability of extractivism and work towards sustainable solutions.

## SITE-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- DIRECT ACTION
- COMMUNITY-LED DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH
- CORPORATE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY
- TERRITORIAL DEFENSE AND FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT
- LEGAL AND ADVOCACY STRATEGIES
- INVESTOR STRATEGIES

## DIRECT ACTION

Direct action—including protests, marches, blockades, boycotts—can be an effective way of pausing or delaying an extractive project, and in some cases gaining concessions from industries. For decades, women have participated in direct action as the first line of defense to block harmful projects from beginning or proceeding. They have used protests, marches and blockades; engaged in occupations and political theater; and targeted everything from extractive sites to supply routes to corporate offices. Direct actions led by women have the potential to influence a broader range of people than those

directly impacted. The impact of women confronting power can be effective at grabbing the attention of media and eroding the legitimacy of those in power. Importantly, they can create delays that provide time for other strategies to take root.

Direct action may bring many benefits, but it carries high risks for frontline communities and for women specifically. Companies or governments targeted by protest will call in public or private security forces to defend their interests directly (through force against activists) or indirectly (public relations campaigns that blame activists for inciting civil unrest). The consequences for women activists can be brutal. Governments are increasingly passing legislation that criminalizes protest and weakens organizations and individuals who engage in direct action. Harassing lawsuits and media smear campaigns are used to weaken resistance movements.

Due to the outsized power of the opposition, direct action is more likely to succeed when there is a highly organized community that: (1) has addressed internal divisions, including patriarchal leadership structures and gender roles, (2) has invested in collective care and protection practices, and (3) is connected to external forms of support that can activate quickly.

Together with the **Peaceful Resistance of Santa Rosa, Jalapa and Jutiapa**, the Xinka people of southeastern Guatemala are using direct action in combination with legal strategies to block the Escobal silver mine, the world's second largest silver deposit. At the forefront of the struggle is the **Xinka Parliament**, representing more than 500,000 Indigenous people across 13 communities, and the **Diocesan Committee in the Defense of Nature (CODIDENA)**. Xinka protests combined with court decisions at the mine forced operations to cease in 2017. Xinka women organized informally to work in collaboration with the Xinka Parliament and have played a key role in sustaining the resistance encampments blocking the mine. The delay provided time for the Xinka Parliament and allies to successfully pressure the Guatemalan government to comply with a court order and carry out a consultation according to the Xinka's worldview and decision-making systems, which may stop the mine altogether.



Photo: Xinka Parliament

## DIRECT ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

- **Support long-term organizing efforts** so that frontline communities are unified before a threat arrives, well placed to mobilize direct actions when the moment demands, and prepared for inevitable backlash.
- **Create learning opportunities across communities where women leaders have played a key role** in sustaining direct actions in order to harness their tactical learning and identify key gaps and opportunities for support.
- **Build and fortify networks of local lawyers trained to defend activists** facing backlash, and identify intermediaries who are well placed to advance communications or direct funds for specific actions.

## COMMUNITY-LED DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH

In collaboration with research institutions and civil society organizations, frontline communities are increasingly leading documentation and research methods to develop tools to challenge extractive projects. These include tools for assessing social and environmental impacts of projects, supporting litigation and other accountability strategies, and engaging directly with corporations and other interests behind projects. Community-led documentation can be highly effective because it builds long-term awareness and capacity while laying the groundwork for a set of strategies in response to a clear threat or urgent need.

**Asia Pacific Forum on Women in Law and Development (APWLD)** has adopted Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) as an organizing and movement-building tool. Women impacted by extractive projects, militarization, mega development, and land grabs lead research, gather and analyze data, and create policy recommendations tailored to their context. This methodology is based on three regional-level trainings: 1.) taking a structural analysis and feminist lens to problems; 2.) feminist and participatory data-collection and analysis methodologies; and 3.) building capacity and understanding of human rights and media advocacy. FPAR reveals new insights about the gendered impacts of land dispossession, which advocates elevate to regional and global mechanisms and which influence the agendas of allied environmental and climate movements.





These participatory methodologies can bring different sectors of communities together to analyze and address common problems. Reliance on local expertise often produces more accurate information than assessments led by outsiders. The processes can fill gaps in official environmental and social impact assessments, particularly around women and other groups who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. By generating visibility about how women are affected by extractive projects, the documentation can lead to the design of gender-specific remedies.

## COMMUNITY-LED DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

- **Support community-led documentation processes** that help communities respond to urgent extractive threats while also building long-term capacity, including greater awareness of gendered structural violence as well as documentation and research skills.
- Provide long-term accompaniment to help communities **develop research methodologies that center women's voices and needs**, as well as partnerships to leverage the research through other strategies, such as advocacy and litigation.

## CORPORATE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

Corporate research tools aim to uncover the structure and financing of extractive projects to identify strategies communities can use to block or change a project. Mapping the corporate structure and financing to expose shareholders, investors, financiers, and buyers along the supply chain is a highly complex process. It often requires specialized skills and resources such as technical knowledge, literacy in business English, and access to costly proprietary financial databases. The barriers to this

**The Count Me In! Consortium** (comprised of AWID, CREA, JASS, Mama Cash, Red Umbrella Fund, Urgent Action Fund Africa, Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, and WO=MEN) produced a toolkit called "Behind the Scenes of Extractives: Money, Power, and Community Resistance." This is one of the few tools designed with and for women environmental defenders to better understand the financial drivers behind extractive projects and reveal potential advocacy targets. This accessible tool provides activities and case studies from women in frontline communities in different regions to share and build on the knowledge generated by the research.



work are even greater for women's groups due to entrenched discrimination that prevents women from accessing educational or professional opportunities. Partnerships with often Northern-based NGOs that specialize in this research can produce valuable information about where and how corporate power operates. These allies can equip communities to conduct their own research and lead advocacy to redirect extractive project funding towards more sustainable solutions.

### **CORPORATE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES**

- **Support civil society organizations—and women's groups in particular—in the Global South** to develop their own expertise in corporate research and raise awareness among frontline communities about how to access and use this information.
- **Forge partnerships between frontline groups and allied organizations that specialize in corporate research and advocacy** to leverage the full range of tools and methodologies available, develop layered strategies, and identify key pressure points for advocacy.

## **TERRITORIAL DEFENSE AND FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSENT (FPIC)**

Indigenous peoples use the framework of territorial defense to describe a set of strategies used to protect land, territory, and resources which may transcend geographical and national borders. This framework reflects an indigenous cosmovision based on a spiritual, cultural, social, and economic connection with the land that is distinct from dominant models of ownership, privatization, or development. Indigenous people have fought for and secured international recognition of the right to give or withhold their consent regarding development that affects their land, territories, or natural resources, commonly referred to as the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Although recognition of the right varies greatly by national context, it can often be used as part of a legal or advocacy strategy to delay or halt an extractive project that has not secured consent.

Indigenous women's participation in FPIC processes is deeply impacted by patriarchal laws favoring male land ownership and gender norms precluding women's participation in decision-making processes around land and livelihood. A first point of struggle is ensuring gender inclusion in FPIC processes to ensure that women's perspectives on extractive development are heard. Meaningful participation in community

consultations opens the door for women to play a greater role in designing and leading responses.

## FPIC OPPORTUNITIES

- Working within and across community formations, **support Indigenous women's efforts to increase their participation in FPIC processes** to ensure a robust gender analysis of potential harms and remedies.
- **Support Indigenous women's groups to grow their organizational capacity** to take a stronger leadership role in community decision-making processes.

## LEGAL AND ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Communities use legal and advocacy strategies to defend themselves against the criminalization increasingly targeting individuals, groups, and entire communities involved in resistance. For example, SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation) are a popular tactic used to harass protesters and force them to spend precious time and resources to defend their rights to speech and association in court. Because of a dearth of lawyers from frontline communities, legal defense is often led by allies with relevant skills working in collaboration with those directly impacted.

The **Indigenous Women's Legal Awareness Group (INWOLAG)** are Indigenous women legal experts and professionals focused on ending discrimination and violence against Indigenous women in Nepal. Since 2016, they have supported the Magar Indigenous people in their efforts to challenge land grabbing associated with the Tanahu Hydropower Project (THP). Communities were not adequately consulted, resulting in displacement from ancestral lands and unjust compensation. Women were excluded from discussions and decision-making processes because male members of households control land access and ownership. INWOLAG offered the community support to build awareness about FPIC processes and develop an advocacy plan. In that process, they helped ensure that women reached 50% representation in community discussions. INWOLAG supported a community-led survey of community-wide impacts of the THP, which were incorporated into complaints filed with the Asian Development Bank and other key advocacy processes.



Litigation is also used to challenge the legality of an extractive project or to seek redress for harms caused by the project. Litigation targets may include the company operating the project or the government that granted concessions or permits. Cases are often brought in the project's host country, but are also filed in the parent company's home country, to hold it accountable for the actions of its subsidiary. The goal of this litigation is usually to stop or halt a project or to seek remedy for its harms; thus, few if any



cases take an explicitly gender focus but may include gender-based harms as one violation among others.

Obtaining justice for communities, especially for women, is often difficult even where legal strategies lead to positive outcomes. For example, there is a substantial risk of increased retaliation against witnesses or parties to litigation, and women experience particular forms of targeting linked to gender and sexuality. Compensation to communities from a legal judgment or settlement may magnify gender-based power imbalances at the family or community level.

## LEGAL AND ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

- **Strengthen support for local lawyer networks**, especially those led by women and frontline community members, as they are best placed to understand the context and needs of those facing criminalization.
- **Guard against threats of external retaliation and internal division** by improving coordination with community leaders, consulting women about their concerns, and developing plans to minimize risks to witnesses and parties to litigation.
- Recognize that while legal strategies are a powerful accountability tool, they are **most effective when developed in concert with other strategies to raise visibility**

As part of the **Say No To Gas in Mozambique Campaign**, the UK chapter of **Friends of the Earth**, in close collaboration with **Justiça Ambiental (JA! - Friends of the Earth Mozambique)**, targeted



the financiers of a natural gas project in Cabo Delgado. The case was filed against the UK's export credit agency, UK Export Finance, for its decision to approve \$1.15 billion to support the project. Gas projects in Mozambique have resulted in the displacement of communities, deprivation of their livelihoods, and have contributed to conflict in the region including mass abduction and GBV targeting women and girls. If successful, the lawsuit would cut off project financing and hold the British government accountable to its climate commitments. In addition to litigating against the export credit agencies involved, JA! and the other members of the Campaign have targeted the corporations and financiers involved, including Eni, ExxonMobil, Total, Standard Bank, and HSBC. The litigation and the global advocacy are made possible through JA!'s deep and longstanding connections with the communities.

**and target key pressure points** behind the extractive project, sustain community engagement for the many years it may require to obtain resolution, and ensure equitable implementation of legal decisions and remedies.

## INVESTOR STRATEGIES

Pressuring an extractive corporation's investors and financiers is one of the powerful leverage points communities can use to stop or change a project, especially in combination with on-the-ground resistance. Communities use these strategies to target different types of investors: shareholders, private banks, and development finance institutions (DFIs). Increasingly, civil society organizations are investing in training frontline communities to leverage DFI involvement to address gender-related harms from extractive projects.

## INVESTOR STRATEGIES OPPORTUNITIES

- **Foster partnerships between feminist movements and civil society networks and initiatives** that track investor activity and hold expertise in investor advocacy strategies, to alert groups about upcoming extractive investments and potential gender impacts, provide an entry point for women's groups to access investor advocacy and receive accompaniment where needed, and activate advocacy networks to highlight the gender impacts of a project or an entire sector.
- Increase opportunities for women in frontline communities to **understand the financing of extractive projects and to develop the tools and capacity to target investors directly.**

The **International Accountability Project (IAP)** and the **Center for**



## Early Warning System

**International Environmental Law (CIEL)** developed the **Early Warning System (EWS)** in 2013 to monitor DFI investments, flag potentially harmful projects, and alert affected communities, ideally before the investment is approved by the DFI. The Chilean CSO **Sustentarse** is one of the co-administrators of the EWS, disseminating information to communities in Latin America and training them to use it. One such project was an IDB-financed, billion-dollar mega-desalination plant to supply industrial water to mining activities in northern Chile. Sustentarse supported **Asopesca Tocopilla**, a traditional fisherfolk organization, to file a complaint with the IDB's independent accountability mechanism in January 2020. While their complaint was dismissed, their advocacy contributed to pausing of the project financing. Sustentarse encouraged the fisherwomen to form their own association, **Mujeres Changas de Tocopilla**, to support each other and defend the resources upon which their livelihoods and indigenous culture depend. The organization has since formalized, grown its membership, and assumed leadership among Changas indigenous groups. Paty Páez, the leader of the Mujeres Changas de Tocopilla, participated in the First International Meeting of Communities Impacted by DFIs that took place in Brazil, organized by the Early Warning System.

# Transformational Strategies

Often led by women, communities in every region are developing new—or reviving traditional—autonomous systems for re-organizing economic, social, and political life. Supported by cross-movement coalitions and allies, women in frontline communities are articulating new frameworks that reflect their visions for the future. These are being translated into bold policy agendas that meet the planet’s most urgent demands, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, while addressing the problems’ roots, such as corporate impunity or insecure land tenure. In this way, women are creating new realities while they agitate for structural transformation.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS TO EXTRACTIVISM
- SETTING POLICY AGENDAS
- NEW RULES FOR CORPORATE CONDUCT
- SECURING WOMEN’S LAND TENURE
- CREATING AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS

## DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS TO EXTRACTIVISM

Over the last several decades, Indigenous, rural, women of color in the Global North and South, and feminists in all regions have collaborated with the environmental, climate, indigenous rights, labor, and racial justice movements to challenge dominant frameworks grounded in patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and extractivism. The emergent frameworks reflect a political analysis of structural drivers and solutions as well as an articulation of cross-movement priorities and demands. Through their contributions to these frameworks, feminists are playing a significantly more visible and influential leadership role in policy debates, resistance efforts, and alternatives to extractivism.

### **BUEN VIVIR**

The concept of “good living” was developed by indigenous communities in South America, and further developed by Indigenous women and feminists to challenge the neoliberal development model and articulate a vision for a post-extractive future.

### **ECOFEMINISM**

Coined by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies in the 1970s, this “new term for an ancient wisdom” is being revived by women’s groups predominantly in Africa to examine the interconnected gender, ecological, and climate impacts of extractive and mega-development projects.

### **POST-COLONIAL/DECOLONIAL AND COMMUNITARIAN FEMINISM**

In response to colonial, racist, and antidemocratic approaches, Latin American feminists prioritize collective power, de-center western white feminism, and prioritize knowledge and perspectives of women of color, Indigenous women, and women in the Global South.

### **FEMINIST GREEN NEW DEAL**

Emanating from feminists in every region who now work together transnationally, these frameworks argue that the extractive economy is subsidized by women’s unpaid labor and call for structural solutions.

### **FEMINIST JUST TRANSITION**

Emerging from collaborations among feminists, environmental and climate justice, indigenous, and workers’ rights movements, this framework exposes the patriarchal and colonial roots of the extractive model and calls for radical transformation of the fossil fuel-based economy.

### **GENDER JUSTICE**

Rooted in an analysis of anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism, gender justice movements tackle intersecting oppressions and are community-led, multi-issue, and feminist, queer, and trans-inclusive.

## **DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS TO EXTRACTIVISM OPPORTUNITIES**

- **Engage in and provide long-term support for cross-movement coalition spaces** inclusive of feminist civil society groups; Indigenous women’s networks; and rural, peasant, and campesino women’s groups to develop and implement alternative frameworks to extractivism.
- **Support the participation of women in frontline communities in cross-movement spaces** to ensure they can shape social movement discourse, enter into new partnerships and alliances, and build larger agendas for change.



## SETTING POLICY AGENDAS

SAGE research revealed several key strategies women and feminists are using to set policy agendas and mobilize transnationally, across social movements and sectors, for broader impact. These include partnering with bridge-building organizations that can socialize and disseminate alternative frameworks; coalition-building, especially with environmental and climate groups; and advocating for feminist leadership in decision-making spaces. Through these strategies, women are changing the power structures around who participates in discussions, the terms of debate, and ultimately the decisions themselves. Feminist coalitions are calling attention to barriers to women's representation—particularly rural and Indigenous women—in global and regional agenda-setting spaces. Trends such as corporate capture of the UN and other norm-setting spaces have prompted feminists to work in coalition with other movements to identify opportunities for pushing back or holding the line. The closing of civic space has prompted other feminist groups to shift their attention back to local solutions and focus on implementation of rights already secured.



Feminist and women's rights groups have invested deeply over the past several decades in building expertise around economic policy, trade, investment, and development, and using this expertise to access coalition and decision-making spaces that were historically closed to them. These include global feminist organizations and networks like **WEDO** and **Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)**, regional networks and alliances such as the **International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP-Asia Pacific)**, **African Gender and Extractive Alliance (WoMin)** and **Asia Pacific Forum for Women in Law and Development (APWLD)**, and Indigenous women-led networks including **Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas (FIMI)** and **WECAN International**. **Feminist Action for Climate Justice (FACJ)** and the **Women and Gender Constituency (WGC)** are coalitions advocating for meaningful women's participation in climate policy spaces and a gender justice approach in discussions around the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

## SETTING POLICY AGENDA OPPORTUNITIES

- Strengthen support for regional and global networks that **bring a feminist analysis to policy forums**, especially those related to trade and investment, economic development, and climate.
- Support feminist, indigenous, and rural women's networks to **serve as bridges between frontline communities and global policy spaces** by elevating community needs and experiences to the international level, documenting women-led solutions, and translating progress in policy arenas to help communities understand where they have leverage.
- Foster collaborations among feminist, indigenous, human rights, and other groups **monitoring trends around corporate capture of global policy-making spaces**, to expose how this trend furthers extractivism and find opportunities to push back at the national and multilateral levels.

## NEW RULES FOR CORPORATE CONDUCT

Spurred by a long record of human rights, labor, and environmental violations in the extractive industry among other sectors, the past two decades have witnessed renewed efforts to change corporate accountability. In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council endorsed the voluntary UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). While the UNGPs successfully put business and human rights on the global agenda, many in civil society criticized



Photo: Womankind Worldwide

Through the global coalition **Feminists for a Binding Treaty**, feminists have organized to insert gender analysis into the UN business and human rights treaty negotiations, advocating for mandatory gender-impact assessments of business activities and gender-sensitive remedy mechanisms.

the nonbinding standards. A renewed push has emerged for a binding international treaty and mandatory due-diligence policies. Meanwhile, civil society advocacy has led to new laws in France, Germany, and Norway, among others, that require companies to undertake human rights due diligence.

## NEW RULES FOR CORPORATE CONDUCT OPPORTUNITIES

- **Continue to support feminist coalitions advocating for corporate accountability** and remedies for harms caused by extractive industries, including support for feminist participation in the UN Binding Treaty as well as robust cross-movement engagement in the treaty-drafting process.
- **Support the development and implementation of new due-diligence laws at the national and regional levels**, including for groups agitating for and testing the capacity of these frameworks to address gendered structural violence.

## SECURING WOMEN'S LAND TENURE

Women's lack of secure title and land tenure is an enormous barrier to defending against land grabs and dispossession triggered by extractive development. Across all regions, women are working to protect access to and use of land—whether held by individuals or communally—as well as access to other natural resources that ensure the food sovereignty, life, and livelihood of whole communities. In addition to defending against imminent threats, securing land tenure can be a proactive strategy to advance women's autonomy, economic security, and other fundamental rights. And because women are critical

The **Copperbelt Indigenous Peoples Land Rights Network (CIPLRN)** works with communities in Zambia's Copperbelt region that have been displaced by land grabs related to extractive industries. Women are disproportionately impacted because they maintain gardens and engage in small-scale agriculture to feed their families, and dislocation or pollution threatens their ability to grow and produce. CIPLRN uses litigation and advocacy, but because of the power differential between communities and extractive companies, their preferred tool is a traditional form of mediation. CIPLRN acknowledges that mediation secures modest victories for families, but the impact is boosted through lobbying the government for land reform, rights-based community education, and media campaigns to expose land grabbing and pressure companies to stop.

stewards of natural resources, securing their land rights can benefit the entire community in terms of ensuring sustainability of vital resources.

Gender discrimination in inheritance law and in local customary law and practice prevents women from owning or leasing land, as well as from securing loans to purchase land or insurance. Efforts to reform patriarchal land laws are therefore a major focus of women's movements across all regions. Women are leading and working in tandem with Indigenous people as well as rural, peasant, and campesino movements advancing broader reform agendas around communally held lands threatened by extractivist agendas.

## SECURING WOMEN'S LAND TENURE OPPORTUNITIES

- Strengthen support for diverse national approaches (legal, policy, communications, and education) to **eliminate gender discrimination in land rights**, especially via inheritance laws and other customary laws and practices that restrict women's ownership of and access to land and natural resources.
- **Support partnerships between women's groups and other movements** working to secure tenure and land rights for historically marginalized communities whose lands are communally held.

## CREATING AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS

Across regions, women are creating new ways of living that reflect an alternative world view to extractivism. These realities are grounded in harmony and healing with the natural world, intergenerational knowledge

The **Amadiba Crisis Committee** was formed in 2007 by villagers of Xolobeni in Pondoland on South Africa's Wild Coast. Led by activist Nonhle Mbuthuma after their original leader was murdered, the group organized villagers whose land

was threatened by a titanium mine. Because they resisted through the legal system, the government labeled the villagers "anti-development" and refused to provide for their basic needs as part of a campaign to pressure them to relocate. Working together, the community built their own homes, repaired roads, and installed renewable energy sources such as solar panels. This collective work helped build unity that sustained the community through many years of legal challenges as the government and mining companies sought to divide them.



Photo: Amanda/AIDC



and learning, feminist values, community solidarity, sustainable development, and environmental stewardship. Women interviewed emphasized the importance of developing autonomous community-based systems—including food, livelihoods, markets, media, health, and education—as critical to their survival. These typically emerge from women’s ancestral knowledge of natural resources including practices like seed-saving, harvesting forest products, or producing plant-based medicines.

In most cases, creating or reviving community-based systems builds trust and collaboration that can be critical for community survival in the extractives context. Economic empowerment activities, for example, are often an entry point for women to build confidence in their own skills apart from male family members. With long-term accompaniment, such programs plant the seed for rights education, organizing, leadership development, and political formation. Women’s efforts to create autonomous systems are often under recognized because they are small-scale and implemented locally. They are misunderstood as low-impact initiatives that benefit a few, rather than bold or radical proposals to reimagine society according to a different set of values. But these small projects often lay the foundation for community resistance to extractivism.

## CREATING AUTONOMIC SYSTEMS OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide long-term accompaniment to women in frontline communities and their allies to **create autonomous local systems that have the power to heal or unify** those impacted by extractivism, provide livelihood support while communities engage in resistance, and build the skills, partnerships, and power to sustain long-term efforts.
- **Support communities to develop sustainable political, social, and economic systems** that, while initially small-scale, can grow over time and transform dependence on extractive activities.

# Key Findings



## Operationalize a framework for addressing gendered structural violence

The SAGE research makes visible the many dimensions of gendered structural violence created and reinforced by extractivism. The layered analysis of drivers and impacts provides a more robust framework for understanding how extractivism operates to marginalize and exclude women as it also devastates communities and the environment. Extractivism must be understood as a neoliberal economic model, grounded in colonial logic, deploying the tools of gendered and racialized violence. With a deeper understanding of where and how extractive power operates, civil society may be better able to anticipate where gendered structural violence is likely to intensify and take measures to prevent or mitigate harm.



## Catalyze and strengthen cross-movement alliances

Tackling extractive power will require a shift in orientation to support long-term preventative strategies that transform the conditions giving rise to structural violence alongside strategies designed to tackle imminent crises. Over several decades, cross-movement alliances have built collective power, formulated intersectional frameworks, crafted narratives to dispel myths equating extractivism with development, and clarified political agendas to address the root causes of extractivism. With increased support, these coalitions are positioned to expand their base, build on these agendas, and lead on implementation in the next phase.



## Address patriarchy from within to equip women and communities to withstand external threats

For women, the violence and discrimination triggered by extractivism often begins with patriarchal attitudes and practices within the family and community. Strengthening the foundational power-building strategies identified in this research—especially women-led community organizing and leadership-building practices—will help women build the resilience, leadership, and structures necessary to challenge patriarchal violence over the long-term and develop robust responses to extractivism. Long-term political accompaniment by trusted allies has supported women in frontline communities to develop promising practices such as collective care and protection strategies. Civil society actors can learn from and amplify these holistic approaches to ensure that strategies designed to protect women leaders and defenders do not have unintended consequences.



## Leverage across three integrated sets of strategies

This research surfaced three categories of interdependent strategies—foundational, site-specific, and transformational—led by women in frontline communities with the support of their allies. Starting with the understanding that strategies are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, funders and civil society can support women leaders and groups for the full spectrum of approaches this crisis demands.

### **Foundational power-building strategies**

strengthen women's participation in extractive struggles and keep communities unified in the face of efforts to divide.

**Site-specific strategies** prevent, stop or delay imminent threats from a specific project, and seek justice and remedies for those harmed.

**Transformational strategies** encompass women's efforts to create autonomous systems that heal frontline communities, provide livelihood support, and create alternatives to the extractive development model that sustain communities over the long-term.



## **Proactively identify, engage, and support women's organizing structures**

Women's organizing is often informal and less visible than male-led efforts. Consequently, civil society and movement allies have a heightened responsibility to identify where women's leadership resides and find entry points for engaging with their practices and forms of organizing. Allies play a critical role in facilitating connections to power and resources, such as policy spaces where women in frontline communities can advance alternative agendas, or brokering connections to groups that offer complementary forms of support, such as rapid response funding or lawyers' networks. Allies who have built longstanding, trust-based relationships with women leaders and groups have a rich body of stories, strategies, and analysis which can be shared horizontally (among women facing extractive struggles across contexts) and vertically (across movements and civil society sectors approaching this work from differing vantage points).



## **Nurture and scale autonomous, women-led community systems of support**

In all regions, women in frontline communities are leading efforts to create autonomous community systems for resource management, sustainable livelihoods, media production, and more. Yet these are often misunderstood as low-impact initiatives that benefit a few instead of radical proposals to reimagine society. It is often these small projects that lay the foundation for resistance to extractivism and sustain communities over the long-term. Strengthening these transformative efforts—and making visible the ways that women serve as agents of change—will help sustain women's organizing and leadership practices while benefiting entire communities fighting for an extractive-free future.



## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The SAGE research team conducted interviews with nearly 100 people working in diverse contexts, sectors, and levels of the field. More information about the methodology can be found in the full length report available at [SageFundRights.org](http://SageFundRights.org). This list includes the interviewees who consented to be included with their name and/or organizational affiliation.

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