

Changing the world  
with **women and girls**  
**act:onaid**

## Volume 3: Ensuring a just transition



## Another World is Possible:

Advancing feminist economic alternatives to secure rights, justice  
and autonomy for women and a fair, green, gender equal world.

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# Glossary

**Agroecology** is a sustainable approach to farming to produce healthy food and preserve natural resources, applying social, biological and agricultural sciences and integrating these with traditional, indigenous and farmers’ knowledge and cultures.

**Austerity** refers to government policies that are implemented to reduce gaps between money coming into the government (revenue) and money going out (spending). Austerity policies typically cut government spending and increase taxes.

**Ecofeminism** is both a philosophy and a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation of and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women through patriarchal structures.

**Extractivism** describes an economic and political model based on the exploitation and commodification of nature by removing large amounts of a nation’s natural commons for sale on the world market.

**Food sovereignty** is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

**Gender based violence (GBV)** is violence that is directed at an individual based on their biological sex or gender identity. It includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation, whether in public or private life.

**Gender Responsive Public Services (GRPS)** describes essential, rights-based services such as education, health, transport, water and sanitation, childcare, agricultural extension and street lighting which are publicly funded, universal, and publicly (not privately) delivered, gender equitable and inclusive, focused on quality, and in line with human rights frameworks.

**Global North** refers to the societies of Europe and North America, which are largely characterised by wealth, technological advancement, relative political stability, aging population, zero population growth and dominance of world trade and politics. Not strictly geographical, the definition can also broadly include Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea.

**Global South** refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including “Third World” and “Periphery,” that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised.

**Heteronormativity** is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or “normal” mode of sexual orientation. It is predicated on use of the gender binary, classifying gender into two distinct, opposite forms of male and female, masculine and feminine, and assumes sexual and marital relations are most fitting between opposite sexes. It aligns biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles.

**Just Transition** is a framework of principles, processes and practices that build economic and political power in order to shift economies from exploitative and extractive paradigms towards sustainable production. The term is used by the trade union movement to secure workers’ rights and livelihoods, and by climate justice advocates to combat climate change and protect biodiversity.

**Fiscal Justice** is people having the space, voice and agency to exercise their rights and using this to influence and monitor fiscal systems (tax, budget cycles and public spending) to mobilize greater revenue and increase spending for quality public services.

**Instrumentalism** describes a conceptual approach that sees and adopts women’s rights and empowerment primarily through the lens of contributions to wider societal and economic outcomes such as GDP growth. It is sometimes referred to as the “business case” for women’s rights.

**International Financial Institutions (IFIs)** are financial institutions that have been established or chartered by more than one country to provide loans and other forms of financial support to countries. They include the Bretton Woods institutions – the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) – as well as multilateral and regional development banks.

**Intersectionality** is the concept that different forms of structural oppression overlap. Gender is one of the bases of discrimination. Others include class, caste, race, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, work, health, HIV status, educational levels, physical abilities and so on. None of these oppressions operate independently of the other, they are interlinked.



**Low Income Country (LIC)** describes countries with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$1,035 or less (World Bank calculation for 2019).

**Macro-economics** the economy as a whole on a national or international level.

**Multinational Corporations (MNCs)** are large companies producing or selling goods and services in several countries across the world. Also known as transnational corporate organisations, they are characterised by large budgets and centralised control in a parent country.

**Patriarchy** is a system of power influencing everything that we do. It encourages a dominant form of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ which affects how men and women are expected to behave and offers advantages to all things ‘male,’ creating societies characterised by unequal hierarchical power. Within this universal system, men dominate women. Patriarchy plays out in the economy, society, government, community, and family, and gives rise to accepted discriminatory behaviours, attitudes, and practices (‘patriarchal norms’).

**Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)** are (often) long-term contracts between a private party and a government agency for providing a public service or asset.

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** means the right for everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, HIV status or other aspects, to make informed choices regarding their own sexuality and reproduction and have access to quality, accessible healthcare including to materialise their choices.

**Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)** is a values-based approach to economic development with explicit social (and often environmental) objectives. It envisions facilitation of the economy through various solidarity relations such as cooperatives, mutual associations, and the protection of commons.

**Time poverty** is when an individual does not have enough time for rest, personal development and leisure after taking into account the time spent working, both on paid labour (both formal and informal), and on unpaid care & domestic work (including activities such as fetching wood and water).

**Unpaid Care & Domestic Work** is non-remunerated work carried out to sustain the well-being, health and maintenance of other individuals in a household or the community, including domestic work (meal preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water and fuel collection) and direct care of persons (including children, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as able-bodied adults) carried out in homes and communities.

**Violence against women and girls (VAWG)** refers to any act of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, mental or economic harm to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)** often refers to policies and programmes aimed at providing universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and adequate hygiene services that are essential to a population’s health, welfare, and development.

**Womxn** is an alternative spelling of “woman/women” that attempts to move away from patriarchal language (the suffix “man/men”), inviting greater inclusivity especially of transgender people, nonbinary people and other marginalized people identifying as women.

# 1 Introduction

It has long been argued that the prevailing economic system serves to both exploit and exacerbate women’s relative position of economic, social and political exclusion. The time for a complete overhaul of thinking and approach to economic development as well as our understanding of the economy and its role to society and nature has never been more urgent. As the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic it is crucial that human rights, climate and social justice drive social reform. This must redress gender inequalities at the national level as well as power imbalances between the Global North and Global South, which intensify gender inequalities.

Feminist economists, activists, women’s rights organisations (WROs) and movements have for decades been imagining, developing, advocating for and implementing economic models, frameworks, strategies and approaches as ways of organising economies and engaging in economic activity as alternatives to mainstream, orthodox approaches. Although extremely varied and context-specific, these feminist economic alternatives (FEAs) all tend in some way to address women’s position of structural disadvantage, resist mainstream economic norms, and seek to challenge and transform gendered and other oppressive power relations and the systems and structures in which they manifest themselves. FEAs are rooted variously in principles and values of care for all life forms, the promotion of women’s autonomy and leadership, cooperation and solidarity, democracy and pluralism, valuing of local knowledge and freedom from gender-based violence. They offer principles as well as concrete policy frameworks, ways of decision-making, distribution and allocation of resources, strategies and approaches – from local to global level – that can support the re-forging of our economic system to one that serves and sustains people and planet.

These FEAs need to be recognised, supported and taken-up by decision-makers as part of an urgent change agenda, even more so in the context of responding to Covid-19, grounded in an understanding that the economy, economic policies and the ways these are experienced by women and men are deeply gendered as well as shaped by colonialism and its inescapable legacies like racism and other identity and location-based power differentials.<sup>1</sup> Their uptake is essential if commitments under the Beijing Agenda and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), the Right to Development and other regional and global commitments to women’s rights are to be met and a

climate crisis averted. The horrifying lessons from the Covid-19 crisis must be heeded.

This report is part of a compendium of case studies seeking to shine a light on just some of the vast multitude of feminist economic alternatives that exist, demonstrating their huge value and providing inspiration and practical examples for policy-makers. The compendium is spread across four volumes. Volume 1 collates and examines an important pool of feminist economic alternatives. It shows how they secure rights, justice and autonomy for women and girls, while working for a fairer, gender-equal and green future, and gives selected examples from existing policies, systems and initiatives around the globe that demonstrate another world is possible. The main volume of the series, Volume 1 offers recommendations for governments, donors, International Finance Institutions (IFIs), civil society and companies to work towards transformative change through feminist economic alternatives. Volumes 2, 3 and 4 showcase further examples of FEAs around the world organised by one of the following themes: centring economies around care; ensuring a just transition; building the conditions for FEAs to flourish.

This volume (Volume 3) delves deeper into the myriad of stories and examples of FEAs grouped under the theme of ensuring a just transition. Section 2 summarises what feminist economic alternatives are and lists their main components. In section 3, readers will find the reintroduction of the two main subthemes around which feminists and WROs have been organizing of ensuring women’s land rights, food sovereignty & self-sufficiency, and resisting extractivism for a just transition. This is followed in section 4 by three examples of FEAs in action at the local level that were not included in Volume 1. The examples of food justice through feminist agroecology in Senegal and resisting extractivism while building the alternative in South Africa and Brazil showcased in pages 24 to 28 of Volume 1 for this theme will not be repeated here.

## 2 Defining feminist economic alternatives and their transformative power

Not all the approaches and strategies described in what follows are the result of explicitly feminist perspectives. ActionAid also recognises that feminist economic alternatives typically emerge in response to particular contexts and forms of oppression experienced by specific groups of women. There are obvious questions around scalability or adaptability, which is why the initiatives featured in this report are highlighted as examples to learn from and not necessarily as one-size-fits-all models.<sup>2</sup> We also note that the term ‘alternatives’ could imply we see FEAs as secondary options to current approaches, and as therefore somehow lesser. We do not mean to suggest this with our use of the term and fully acknowledge that many aspects of FEAs are based in pre-colonial, centuries-old forms of economic organising that were replaced by neoliberal policies as countries were forced to engage with the international financial architecture – e.g. when accessing loans from the IMF or trading under WTO rules. We do not mean to imply that there is a one definitive feminist economic alternative. Rather, we argue squarely that the idea of ‘one economic system’ must be challenged and that feminist economic alternatives should be pursued as an urgent priority. This report builds on the work of many feminist economists and activists and women’s rights organisations and groups. Our modest contribution to this area of work is to help shine a light on the diversity of economic approaches and strategies, as a way to challenge the perpetual undervaluing and denial of this thinking, practice and evidence by decision-makers at the national and global level.

Women’s collective action is central in pushing the transformation of the prevailing economic system. Although incredibly diverse and often context-specific, feminist economic alternatives recognise and reckon with the biases in the prevailing economic system, while demanding and putting into practice steps towards the *systemic transformation* of the rules of the economy. Systemic transformation entails calling out and dismantling unequal power relations that are rooted in systems of oppression (patriarchy, racism, neo-colonialism, extractivism, ableism, cis-heteronormativity etc.) and a reconstruction of the economic systems, structures, policies and institutions that both perpetuate and benefit from them, so that economic systems are instead focused on ensuring the democratic and accountable attainment of human rights for all and environmental preservation.

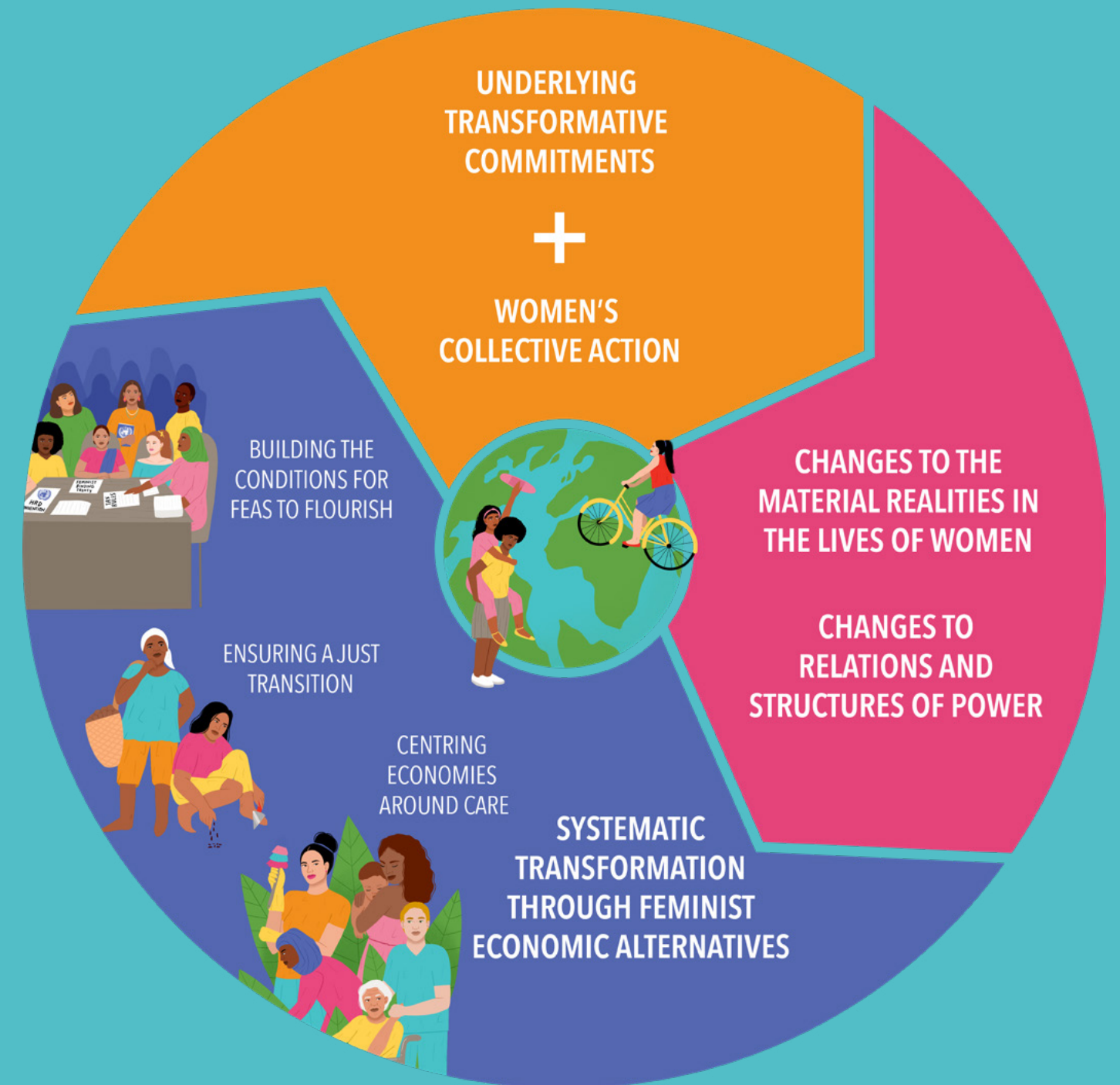
While the aim of feminist economic transformation is urgent systemic change, the sheer scale of the task

means that many strategies seek to achieve this through incremental steps. These changes take place at different levels – from the very local to the global – and take different forms. To make what this means more tangible we describe two levels at which change can take place towards systematic transformation, namely: changes to the material realities in the lives of women, and changes to relations and structures of power. FEAs exist from the grassroots to the global levels and in most cases these steps are pursued simultaneously. The examples discussed in section 4 of this volume are from the national and local levels.

Many of the propositions and frameworks for feminist economic alternatives featured as examples in this report series contribute to systemic transformation. They all share a number of key underlying transformative commitments that lead to incremental change (summarized in the infographic on page 7, a full description is available on page 9 of Volume 1 of this series).

In researching and compiling examples of FEAs for the purposes of this report series we found that they have a number of crosscutting demands<sup>3</sup> and a number of unmet demands<sup>4</sup> which can be grouped under the following three key interrelated themes that make up the goals of FEAs:

1. Centring economies around care;
2. Ensuring a just transition;
3. Building the conditions for FEAs to flourish.





### 3 The importance of a just transition

Women are more impacted by the ways that the climate crisis is changing their living environment and are at the forefront of the struggle for climate justice, yet women are less likely to take part in meetings where decisions are made that affect how we deal with the climate crisis. Confronted by the effects of human-induced climate change, accelerated by extractivist and exploitative economic methods, the case for transitioning from our current agriculture, food and energy systems which cause the massive depletion of natural resources and biological diversity is an urgent one.<sup>5</sup> The term “just transition” does not only describe *what* the new system will look like, but also *how* that transformation should be carried out. To be truly just, transitions must address – and not exacerbate – inequalities; transform systems to work for people, nature and the climate; ensure inclusiveness and participation; and develop comprehensive policy frameworks.<sup>6</sup> Feminist academics are deeply involved in current global debates on natural resource management and the case is being made by feminist movements and women’s rights organisations (as JASS and WoMin) for a just transition that goes beyond an energy transition. A just transition to replace the global extractive economy, which is based on the concentration of power over and exploitation of resources and human labour – especially of women’s bodies and work. These groups argue that this system should be replaced with a regenerative economy, based on community resilience, social equity and ecological & social care and wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, they are demanding that the externalisation of the costs of the prevailing extractive neoliberal system, through for instance the impending natural disasters caused by the climate crisis, on women and the environment is ended. There are many different ideas on what a just transition should look like, but the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) speaks about a universal basic income, energy democracy and the redistribution of land as key components of a just transition.<sup>8</sup>

There can be no just transition without addressing the barriers and exclusions that women face in the prevailing economic system. Patriarchy is one of the key pillars of the extractive economy that is causing the climate crisis. As the WRO Just Associates (JASS) explain in their framework for a just transition “Patriarchy together with racism and colonialism constitute the interconnected and pre-capitalist structures of domination that are the foundation of the extractive economy.”<sup>9</sup> A just transition must recognise that women’s unpaid work sustains societies and that women’s work commonly is in low emission – yet insecure and informal – employment, including subsistence farming, service industries, domestic and

care work.<sup>10</sup> In a just transition towards ‘green jobs’ it is crucial that jobs are also created in the care sector. Some ecological feminists have adopted the term ‘ecofeminism’, explaining this as challenging both patriarchal and neo-colonial structures for women’s communal ownership and control over land, seeds and the valuing of associated indigenous knowledge. In their seminal book ‘Ecofeminism’ Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva explain how “everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental destruction. As activists in the ecology movements, it became clear to us that science and technology were not gender neutral; and in common with many other women, we began to see that the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature, (shaped by reductionist modern science since the 16th century) and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women and prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones, were closely connected.”<sup>11</sup> Gender, race and class inequalities are of importance in intersectional ecofeminism. However, some ecological or environmental feminists do not use the term ecofeminism and it is also distinguishable from intersectional environmentalism.<sup>12</sup> Ecofeminism is understood by others as a ‘feminist political ecology’ (FPE). Central to FPE is the notion of the commons (which are not reducible to mere “resources” – care work, for instance, is included) and the recognition that commons reflect gender and other relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. Attention must be paid to how gender and other power dynamics shape access to and control over resources (as land, seeds, water etc.) in a specific place and that commons are the product and site of communal acts of care and responsibility. Or, as academics Sato and Alarcón explain: there can be “no commons without a community.”<sup>13</sup>

#### Ecofeminist movement in Uganda

The ecofeminist movement in Uganda emerged in response to systemic abuses of women’s rights resulting from corporate and government land abuses. The movement includes more than 2,700 women across the country and covers a range of environmental issues, such as climate change, sustainable food systems and land rights, and places women at the centre of its analysis and advocacy. The National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) and the National Association of Women’s Action in Development (NAWAD) play a key role in the ecofeminist women’s movement in Uganda. Of concern for the ecofeminist movement is the way in which land is acquired by extractive industries operating in Uganda – illegal evictions following false land claims and inadequate compensation for land rights are common – and the need to address the impacts of climate change and energy poverty. During the Covid-19 pandemic, acknowledging and supporting the work of rural women in keeping the nation fed has been a key target of these organisations and the movement more broadly, highlighting the need for local and sustainable food systems that are not overly dependent on international imports.

#### Ruth Nyambura of the African Eco Feminist Collective, explains further:

“In a very narrow scope, an ecofeminist movement to me is concerned with transforming the ways in which economic, intellectual and ecological resources are accessed by women, especially those most vulnerable and often on the frontlines of ecological devastation and climate change. It also means constantly working to re-claim and re-imagine much more just and egalitarian ways of being with one another and fundamentally for me that means destroying patriarchy and reclaiming ideas of the commons”<sup>14</sup>

There are two types of FEA within this theme: resisting extractivism for a just transition and the demand for women’s land rights, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency within a just transition from extractive food systems.

### 3.1 Women’s land rights, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency

Working a triple shift is a burden most women farmers face. In addition to farming, women do most of the household labour, collecting water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and washing, as well as caring for family and community members. Women have always been active in producing food crops, processing food and marketing. However, despite comprising almost half of the world’s agricultural producers,<sup>15</sup> women have access to and control less than 20% of the land globally.<sup>16</sup> Their weak land rights and limited access and control over land makes them extremely vulnerable to land grabbing by investors or even by the men in their communities and families. Measures as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGTs)<sup>17</sup> and (FPIC) or meaningful consultation are weakly applied, if applied at all. Land rights affect women’s livelihoods in many ways and determine their access to affordable nutritious food, their economic, educational and healthcare options and their resilience in the face of climate change.<sup>18</sup>

Poorly designed trade policies and a system of rules that privilege the interests of wealthy countries and corporates over women’s rights, human rights and the environment have been deeply harmful to women. Trade policies often undermine the livelihoods and land rights, including of small-scale women farmers, producers and informal economy workers, who struggle to compete with multinational companies and commonly face displacement and the fall-out of environmental harm.<sup>19</sup> This is repeated in ODA disbursements, through donors promoting industrial agriculture for export by MNCs, such as the G8’s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa<sup>20</sup> from which countries such as France and the US have been withdrawing.<sup>21</sup> Food sovereignty allows communities control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed, so that food systems are created for people and the environment rather than to make a profit.<sup>22</sup> Peasant organisations (for which the struggle against the oppression and exploitation of women is often fundamental<sup>23</sup>) are calling for food self-sufficiency, to ‘take the neoliberalism out of agriculture,’ focusing on trade, localisation and shorter food supply chains in addition to reclaim the sovereignty of Southern governments. This moves the focus from just national self-sufficiency in food production (‘the right of nations’) to local self-sufficiency (‘the rights of peoples’).<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2 Resisting extractivism for a just transition

Alternatives are often born from women's collective resistance. In resisting extractivism, women are actively saying 'yes' to an alternative for the future. As Samantha Hargreaves from WoMin explains: "As people say 'no' they are saying 'yes' to what they are defending: their land, their own decision making processes, their way of living, resources they are depending from etc. We can look at resistance and see what the alternatives

are that people are defending. Women are often clear in their defence of their resources as they know what is necessary."<sup>25</sup> This is where the spaces for collective co-creation and imagination are once again of importance. "Often women at the community level do not have the opportunity to move towards a space that is imaginative and offer more propositional ideas, away from what corporates and the government make possible. Going to the 'yes' [and what women are actively defending] more thoughtfully is how we can support the ideas needed for an ecofeminist just transition."<sup>26</sup>



## 4 Stories of feminist economic alternatives in practice

### 4.1 Feminist Guidelines for a just transition

"The importance of a just transition is that it goes beyond an energy transition to be a more expansive social, environmental and economic transition centred on human beings, care and not on profit."

Samantha Hargreaves, WoMin<sup>27</sup>

Feminist organisations are pushing for a feminist perspective to be incorporated into ideas of just transition and for these ideas to be built from the grassroots up. As Zo Randriamaro from WoMin (African Women Unite Against Destructive Resource Extraction) explains: "This is a moment in history where if we must think about an alternative world and an alternative economic system, then this system has to be feminist and it has to embrace ecological balance and climate justice. The future has to be ecofeminist."<sup>28</sup> Recognising that women carry the burden of the climate crisis and are at the forefront of the fight against extractivism in South Africa, a group of feminists and climate justice activists<sup>29</sup> convened in Mogale, Johannesburg in 2018 to discuss the global crises confronting people and planet today and the kinds of deep social and economic changes needed to achieve a socially just and sustainable future. They recognised how the concept of just transition needs to be understood as a contextual one. "Behind the notion of a just transition there is a history, which is quite different from an African perspective than from a European perspective. African women have very different experience of a development system [than African men]. We have to acknowledge a diversity of experiences and articulate our own views of a just transition."<sup>30</sup> Recognising the diversity of contexts for an African Ecofeminist Just Transition, together they created the "Mogale Declaration" as a set of guidelines, rather than specific policy proposals. The "Mogale Declaration" offers a framework for building and strengthening a community-driven feminist just development alternative: an African Ecofeminist Just Transition<sup>31, 32</sup>

Essential to supporting the building of ecofeminist just transitions is to work and co-create with women at the community level to base ideas on their lived experiences

and perspectives on an alternative future. Within these spaces women reflect on histories of living, producing and relating to nature, thinking about what knowledge and practices that may have been lost, undervalued or destroyed. Then examining the now and looking to the future and what future families and communities look like. With 'energy assemblies' discussions are held on how renewable energy could look like from the community perspective. Yet also within resistance to extractivism it can be seen what women are actively saying 'yes' to for the future and to what they are defending. This is where the spaces for collective co-creation and imagination are once again of importance.

### 4.2 Ownership and control over seeds – Ghana, India, South Africa

Central to ecofeminist alternatives are collective ownership and control over land, seeds and the valuing of associated indigenous knowledge.<sup>33</sup> Globally, across many cultures, women are recognised as seed custodians within rural societies. The commercialisation of agriculture and a move towards cash cropping and mono-cropping has undermined these roles, disrupting women's power within farming systems and removing their autonomy within farming processes. Limiting women's seed sovereignty impacts food sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> Today just ten corporations control more than 75% of the world's commercial seed market, although in Africa an estimated 80% of all seeds still come from farmer-managed seed systems – where farmers save, select and swap their own traditional or indigenous seed varieties.<sup>35</sup> Policies (such as trade policies, seed policies and intellectual property rights) have undermined these roles, disrupting women's power within farming systems and removing their autonomy within farming processes. Limiting women's seed sovereignty impacts food sovereignty.<sup>36</sup> Women's indigenous knowledge of seeds and the selection, storage and planting of diverse and often hardy crops increase climate resilience. Considering this agricultural extension services should be reclaimed as public and reoriented to support and build on women's knowledge as these have now been extensively cut or privatised so that the only technical advice available is heavily weighted to commercial farmers and does not serve the interests of women small-holders. Moreover, extensive mono-cropping



has made agriculture more vulnerable to pests, disease and drought, often leading to a dependence on the pesticides and fertilisers produced by the same companies that sell the commercial seeds now being pushed across Africa.<sup>37</sup> Policies that further a reliance on commercialised seeds to the detriment of indigenous strains are a feminist issue, particularly when they criminalise farmers who refuse to use commercial seeds.

Fighting for collective ownership and control of their seeds is the Rural Women's Farmers Association of Ghana (RUWFAG), who are campaigning against a new law that would put important seeds, such as cowpeas, at risk of corporate ownership. Cowpeas are an important staple for Ghanaians and a key feature in many Ghanaian dishes but they are also a key nitrogen fixing crop, used by many practitioners of agroecology for intercropping and maintaining soil fertility without having to purchase chemical fertilisers. Corporate control of this essential seed would prove disastrous. Women from RUWFAG frequently gather to exchange seeds and farming tips. The ability to save and exchange seeds after each growing season is an age-old practice that ensures that small scale farmers have seeds to sow the following year. The seeds are free for the farmer and they have the knowledge of what seed is required, for what conditions and the different tastes that complement the food they cook. Where they do not have a particular seed, they can ask other farmers in the community to share seeds. Keeping seeds and sharing seeds is essential for sustainable livelihoods as well as ensuring communities have access to nutritious and culturally relevant food. But this is all under threat by a proposed bill – dubbed the 'Monsanto Law' – in Ghana. Its effect would be to bolster the power of multinational seed companies whilst restricting the rights of small farmers to keep and swap their seeds. This bill will see the control of seeds being transferred away from small farmers and into the hands of large seed companies.<sup>38</sup> RUWFAG has been mobilising and campaigning against this Bill since 2015.

## 4.3 Women challenging tribal land privatisation – Morocco

Collective land, property in joint ownership of ethnic communities, is one of the oldest forms of land use in Morocco and now constitutes some 15 million hectares (nearly 2 million ha of cropland), used by 4,600 ethnic communities.<sup>39</sup> Morocco has been liberalising its economy since the 1990s, including under World Bank-promoted privatisation policies. The signing of the Morocco Free Trade Agreement<sup>40</sup> with the United States in 2004 further increased the economic incentive to privatise and develop traditional lands.<sup>41</sup> These lands had first been transferred from tribal control to

the State under a decree issued by colonising French powers in 1919. When Morocco gained independence in 1956, the state retained control of communal lands, and instituted committees of rural men called *nuwabs* – from which women were excluded – to represent their communities' interests. Communities were still allowed to farm the lands, but lacked any formal ownership.<sup>42</sup>

Under the more recent liberalisation push, the state began seizing collective land and selling it to real estate agents.<sup>43</sup> In the past, collective lands could not be privately owned, but 'Law 62.17' of July 2019 authorised private ownership of these lands for the benefit of members of ethnic communities and their transfer for the purposes of private investment projects.<sup>44</sup> However, customary tribal law prevents single women, widows, divorcées and women without sons from inheriting their ancestral land. This meant that during every round of reform to the collective land, while men from the villages were compensated with land and money, thousands of women had no choice but to move to urban slums where they lived in extreme poverty.<sup>45</sup> This injustice is especially clear when considering that women make up half of the agricultural labour force.<sup>46</sup> Nearly 5 million women across the different regions of Morocco are affected by the problem. These women, who live on community lands, are mainly rural, illiterate and poor.<sup>47</sup>

The Soulaliyate movement started in 2007 when Rkia Bellout, a Soulaliyate from the Kénitra region, was excluded from the sale of her ancestral land while the men in her family profited.<sup>48</sup> The term Soulaliyate is derived from that of *Soulala* referring to the bond/lineage between members of an ethnic community that originally had a common ancestor.<sup>49</sup> Bellout sought the support of Moroccan women's rights organisation, l'Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), who organised a national grassroots movement of Soulaliyates calling for equality in land ownership.<sup>50</sup> The alliance first mobilised 500 women to protest in front of Parliament to claim recognition of their rights to land on the same basis as men, which drew widespread attention to the issue. At their next demonstration, thousands of women from all over Morocco participated<sup>51</sup> and the Soulaliyate movement expanded from a fairly localised to a nationwide movement. The ultimate objectives of the Soulaliyate movement are to (1) search for solutions that guarantee women the effective and equitable benefits of collective land, and (2) adopt affirmative action measures aimed at promoting women's access to private ownership of land.<sup>52</sup> Women have continued to mobilise collectively to challenge privatisation of communal lands and their exclusion from any benefits, often in the face of threats, intimidation and violence from men within their own communities.<sup>53</sup> "These skills we acquired have made us credible. The men of the tribe and the local authority, who laughed at our demands, take us seriously now because they know we can win. They see

us on television, in the newspapers, and that counts" (Mennana, Kenitra region).<sup>54</sup>

The Soulaliyate women have also taken their grievances directly to the courts and certain cases were ruled in their favour resulting in access to collective land and financial compensation for previously transferred land.<sup>55</sup> In response to the Soulaliyate collective action, the Ministry of Interior has also issued a series of ministerial guidelines called "circulars."<sup>56</sup> However, the circulars are non-binding. For instance, 'Circular 17' recognises the Soulaliyates' right to land ownership in theory, but not in practice.<sup>57</sup> The "circulars" ignore the real discrimination suffered by Soulaliyate women for centuries and their exclusion from benefitting of the goods of the community. As a result, women are at risk of further exclusion in the context of privatisation of non-irrigated agricultural land (they are already excluded in irrigated areas). The Soulaliyate movement is now looking into monitoring systems in order to closely monitor the implementation of the law, in particular the process of land privatisation and its impact on women.<sup>58</sup> Despite this, these circulars have enabled many women to benefit from compensation when land is transferred to public bodies or local authorities, or to access land, thereby helping to encourage new groups of women in other regions of the country to claim their right. "There have been certain successes. In the past, before the mobilisation of the movement, only the male representatives of different tribes had a seat in the various bodies managing collective lands. As a result, women's voices and interests were not taken into account. Today, the Soulaliyates are represented, albeit still timidly, in decision making processes and the Law 62.17 of July 2019 recognises their right to be part of them." <sup>59</sup>

The struggle of the Soulaliyates was initially an economic one taking into account the vulnerable situation of the overwhelming majority of these women. Their mobilisation gradually became a story of collective empowerment as it had sparked, in several of them, a feminist conscience (from "me, soulalya" to "us, soulaliyates").<sup>60</sup> The Soulaliyate movement and struggle has led to the emergence of new leadership. For instance, nearly 30 women have gained seats in the representative bodies of their community naibates, positions previously occupied exclusively by men. Rkia, one of the first leaders of the movement and the first to have applied for this role, faced enormous difficulties. "I had to fight for gender equality in the witness group and I won the battle. It was a matter of principle because I could not accept this systematic rejection of women."<sup>61</sup>





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