AN ECOFEMINIST IMPACT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK
Sendou I Coal Power Plant, Bargny, Senegal.
Credit: WoMin, October 2019
What is the Ecofeminist Impact Assessment tool?

In 2019, the WoMin African Alliance led a process, in partnership with two other non-governmental organisations - Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) in Senegal and Gender Action in the United States - to develop and implement a groundbreaking ecofeminist framework to explore and expose the impacts of the Sendou I coal plant in Bargny, Senegal on women. The organisations wanted to understand and analyse the extremely negative impacts this large-scale project has on women’s lives, livelihoods, and on the environment and natural resources they and their communities rely upon for survival.

The framework was implemented through a participatory research process involving the Khelkom Association of women fishers in Bargny, thereby ensuring that the outcomes could be taken forward locally with women in a leading role. The research report was officially launched in October 2019 in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire and women from Bargny as well as authors of the report met with the Gender Unit of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and five AFDB Directors to present the report and its major findings. See the full report ‘Women Stand their Ground against Big Coal: The AfDB Sendou plant impacts on women in a time of climate crisis’ in English and French.

WoMin is working to promote the framework as a powerful tool for similar assessments of large-scale development projects across and beyond the African continent. The framework can also be used for lobbying purposes. Civil society groups can present major financiers, including development banks such as the AfDB, with evidence of the impacts of their decisions to finance large-scale ‘development’ projects. Furthermore, it can be used to show how the International Finance Institutions (IFIs) undermine their own gender and environmental policies, principles and strategies.

In the best case scenario, WoMin intends that the findings from the assessments can be used in women’s advocacy to ultimately stop the financing of such projects and halt the construction of projects before the most serious impacts are felt. This is a critical imperative for women across Africa given the further poverty and immiseration which arises from these mega projects that financiers often claim as a vehicle for women’s empowerment.
The Problem the Ecofeminist Impact Assessment Framework responds to

The dominant gender division of labour assigns primary responsibility to women for the production, processing and preparation of food, the provisioning of water and fuel, and the care of household members. Because of these roles, women (and working class and peasant women in particular) deeply depend on natural resources and a healthy environment. Consequently, when there is a catastrophic environmental fallout as a result of projects such as Sendou I, the negative impacts fall most heavily on women and increase their unpaid care work.

The externalised costs women absorb in day-to-day life are generally ignored and are neither costed nor compensated for in claims against corporations and states. An ecofeminist analysis acknowledges that women, because of their gender assigned social and economic roles in society, have different perspectives on, and needs, in respect of development. An ecofeminist analysis insists all of this must be taken into account in any just development process.

WoMin has found that ecofeminist perspectives resonant powerfully with the experiences and perspectives of women in peasant and poor urban communities across the African continent. It is from this vantage point that WoMin has evolved its ecofeminist ideas and approach. We have brought this to bear in building this innovative ecofeminist impact assessment framework.

Impact assessment frameworks employed by women’s rights and mainstream development organisations, as well as multilateral institutions and IFIs are generally constructed around a gender perspective which brings attention to differences in gender roles, rights and interests on the basis of the social construction of gender. Such a gender approach to impact assessment would therefore identify gendered interests, forecast gendered impacts, and work to mitigate or challenge negative differentiated impacts on men and women. In contrast, an ecofeminist framework addresses the limitations of gender impact assessments by bringing questions of ecology and climate, women’s rights, and alternative viewpoints about development into the evaluation process.

In a time of growing ecological and climate crisis, associated pandemics, and rising inequality within and across contexts, an ecofeminist lens and political strategy becomes essential in the search for social and economic justice and equity.
Ecofeminist impact assessment framework

This framework is currently comprised of FOUR indicators with associated standards to guide assessment. The four indicators are:

1. Consent rights for affected communities and women

2. Women’s rights and ecofeminist analysis in project planning, implementation and ongoing monitoring

3. Compensation and redress

4. Ecofeminist cost benefit analysis

Indicator 1:
Consent rights for affected communities and women

The following sets out the standards to assess implementation of Indicator 1:

- Use participatory methods in which women, and all affected peoples, are involved in the processes of research, assessment of potential impacts and the making of informed decisions.
- Ensure full and ongoing participation of women in all key project cycle processes. This includes ongoing monitoring after a project has been put into operation and the provision of safe women-only spaces for them to express their views and perspectives about the project on an ongoing basis.
- Provide complete information about the full range of social, economic, political and environmental impacts on potentially affected community men and women. This should be presented to communities to inform their deliberations about whether the project should proceed or not. See Indicator 2.
- Based on them receiving all relevant and pertinent project information now and in the future: Affected community women and men exercise their free, prior and informed consent right to accept or refuse a proposed project which impacts on their rights to land, forests, fisheries, livelihoods, cultural heritage, bodily autonomy and health. Specifically, all people and women specifically, have the right to refuse:
  - the terms of a project proposal
  - the project with or without amendments to project design
  - resettlement to new land and / or homes which do not satisfy their needs and replace for real losses that will be incurred as a result of the proposed project
  - compensation, including monetary payment
  - corporate social responsibility attempts which do not address substantive losses
  - the introduction of toxic chemicals and harmful technologies, including “false solution” technological responses to the climate crisis, that destroy people's health and wellbeing, and negatively impact biodiversity, soil fertility, water quality and increase greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the risk of climate change calamities.
### Indicator 2: Women’s rights and ecofeminist analysis in project planning, implementation and ongoing monitoring

The following sets out to assess implementation of the standards for Indicator 2:

- Map and baseline gendered resource access and control, livelihoods, the gender division of labour and patterns to forecast potentially negative impacts on women in affected communities.
- On the basis of the above analysis and the experiences of other similar projects, present the most likely gendered impacts of the project for the following categories, bearing in mind that they are interrelated:
  - economic (land rights; economic displacement)
  - social (livelihoods; access to energy and drinking water; health)
  - culture (customs and cultural rights)
  - environment (air, soil and water pollution; climate change).
- Pay particular attention to the dominant gender division of labour, including:
  - the volume of women and girls’ unpaid labour
  - the tasks / areas of work in which the above predominates
  - carefully forecasting possible increases in this unpaid care work.
- Fully evaluate and measure situations where sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is likely to occur, and what measures are implemented to prevent it, especially in regard to:
  - potential SGBV perpetrated by security guards and / or military engaged to guard project sites
  - potential impacts of an influx of male construction workers
  - safety conditions for girls and women’s access to water points, energy, latrines, schools and other necessary services
  - mechanisms for redress in regard to SGBV, including providing high-quality healthcare and psychological support for victims / survivors and punishment for perpetrators.
- Has instituted measures to prevent negative project impacts on women and men within environmental safeguards, including:
  - risk calculations
  - financial guarantees and provisions for ongoing clean up and / or rehabilitation of land on project conclusion.
- Has mechanisms to ensure ongoing project monitoring, including mechanisms to gather and act on gender disaggregated data.
- Has established processes to address women’s specific issues, perspectives and concerns raised throughout the project cycle.

### Indicator 3: Compensation and redress

The following sets out the standards to assess implementation of Indicator 3:

- Provide full compensation and redress in the event that the project harms women in any of these ways:
  - reducing, interfering with or grabbing women’s rights to land and natural resources
  - eroding or eliminating women’s role in food production and stewardship of natural resources
  - causing gendered violence
  - increasing women’s unpaid labour.
Indicator 4:
Ecofeminist cost benefit analysis

**Note:** Cost benefit analysis is a rarity in project processes, and if undertaken is biased towards corporate and political interests. Transformed and just cost benefit analysis should embrace the principles of ecofeminism and cross-generational equity, and demonstrate a deep commitment to address the ecological and climate crisis. Ultimately, a cost analysis must include the costs to the planet and human life now and for future generations.

In a just ecofeminist orientation, data must always be disaggregated by gender, age, class and location and must challenge and replace standard corporate point-of-view notions of benefit. These conceal vested interests and hidden costs to the people affected.

The following sets out to assess implementation of the standards for Indicator 4:

- **Undertake a full project cost benefit analysis to inform decisions using these questions as a guide:**
  - What are the benefits, and who enjoys the benefits at different levels, in different contexts, and over time? Consider:
    - the national, regional, sub-regional and local economies
    - communities immediately adjacent to the project, and those indirectly affected
    - women and men differentiated by class, location, religious and cultural identity
    - future generations
  - What are the costs at different levels, for different people, and over time?
    - Environmental costs may require large government investment to clean up pollution. This drains the fiscus and negatively impacts the provision of other social services.
    - Similarly, rising ill-health of community members living in polluted communities may place great strain on the health system.
    - Large-scale development projects mostly benefit multinational construction, engineering and infrastructure corporations and local businesses rarely benefit. Few jobs are created in a context where land and natural resource-based livelihoods are usually heavily compromised by large-scale projects.
    - What is the cost, both now and into the future, of destroying ecosystems upon which life rests now and into the future?
    - What costs are carried now by this generation and what are the losses in wealth, choice and in a compromised environment and climate for future generations?
  - Compare development options: an analysis cannot be defined as one measuring true cost and benefit if it does not assess and compare a number of project / development options which claim to satisfy the same or similar objectives. This would include, for example:
    - different pathways to energy provision or electricity
    - building local economies and supporting livelihoods / work
    - opening people’s access to water and market infrastructure
  - Be transparent: open the cost benefit analysis to public scrutiny.
  - Involve potentially affected communities, and women in particular, in discussions about costs and benefits. This process should support people measure costs and benefits of different options against their own development aspirations. These may be at odds with large-scale development projects.