The destructive economic system communities are saying NO to

Communities say NO to a destructive, harmful, and unjust economic system because it creates lives of hardship for most people across Africa. At the heart of this economic system are large-scale extractive industries - mining, agriculture and fisheries, forestry, and energy - owned by companies from countries considered rich, such as Canada, Britain, the United States, and France, to name a few. These countries have supported big corporations extracting enormous mineral and agricultural wealth from poor countries for more than 150 years.

**Corporations and the elite benefit**

In this ‘bad’ development model, the corporations and political elites of rich countries, and some African political elites, get richer. In contrast, most African people live in poverty, with high levels of unemployment, and increasingly unable to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and health care.

This development pathway is creating great inequality within and across countries. Oxfam has calculated that trillions of dollars of wealth sit in the hands of just 1% of the world’s population who are predominantly pale and male. The rich now have more wealth than 4.6 billion people who make up 60% of the world’s population.¹

Communities robbed of land and natural

¹ https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-shocking-facts-about-extreme-global-inequality-and-how-even-it
resources to get the coal, gas, and forests, and to build dams, powerful companies with the help of governments seize the land and resources of local peoples. Rivers, forests, beaches, and common grazing areas are enclosed so people no longer have access. People’s nature-based livelihoods, such as farming, fishing, or crafting, are usually destroyed. The social bonds that hold communities together are torn apart. Other costs to people include unsafe labour conditions, the destruction of ancestral graves, unequal wealth distribution and physical and sexual violence.

Violence against women and their communities

Communities who live near the mines face daily violence. Company security guards, with the help of state army and police, move in to safeguard the land and mineral wealth stolen from communities. Men with guns threaten and intimidate local people, at times using physical violence, including assassinations.

Women are often subjected to sexualised violence, including sexual harassment and rape by the military and private security. In many cases, the company security control access to water and fuel sources and demand sex in return for women getting access to these resources.

A model of development largely built on the large-scale extraction of natural resources creates so much violence - against women, workers, all species, and the planet. It is this destructive and violent economic system that women and their communities are saying NO to.

Costs are carried by people and the environment

The companies who get rich from this economic system do not carry any of the costs of their destructive impact. The affected communities, and especially women in these communities, are forced to carry the costs through their labour, as they clean up polluted lands and water bodies, and with their bodies, as they experience growing ill-health and deaths.

The cost to nature of this damaging economic system includes high levels of pollution and climate warming contributing to the destruction of plant and animal life. The world is seeing a growing extinction of species causing a loss of biological diversity. Scientists have determined that much of this damage cannot be reversed.

Destructive development and the climate crisis

Scientists tell us that climate warming has been more rapid in Africa than the rest of the world. They also say that when the earth warms to 2°C higher than what it was at the start of the industrial revolution (1850-1900) in Britain and the United States, the average temperature in north and southern Africa will almost double to 3.6°C. The earth has warmed by an average
of 1.1°C since industrialisation started and the impacts of climate warming are obvious: wildfires, hurricanes and cyclones, droughts, flooding, sea level rise and more.²

Climate heating is fuelled by carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that works to trap heat close to the Earth. Carbon emissions mainly come from the extractives sectors: industrial agriculture and forestry; mining oil and gas extraction and the burning of these fossil fuels for energy; and the transportation of raw and unprocessed minerals and products across the world.

**Women carry the main costs of this harmful system**

Women carry most of the costs of the destructive economic system and the violence it breeds. In most communities there is an unfair division of labour where women are expected to care for family members, put food on the table and earn income. Men’s work in most communities is to bring in an income and not do any of the caring or housework. Thus, it is usually women who must walk further in search of clean drinking water and firewood when mining companies take their land, water, and fuel sources. When air, water, and soil pollution lead to diseases such as cancers and respiratory illness, the work of caring for the sick falls on women and girls in families. This adds to their already heavy workloads increasing the time it takes to meet basic family needs.

The destructive economic system exploits the earth, and it exploits women’s bodies through the increase in women’s work to take care of their families and clean the environment, and through their increased experiences of violence.

The system uses the oppression women face in families and communities to oppress them further. The system does not have to pay for women’s labour, the cost of health care for sick family members, or the cost of cleaning up pollution, because families and communities have already made sure that this is part of women’s unpaid work. Women in communities affected by mining are oppressed many times over: by men, by capital, by mining companies and governments.

Often companies and governments do not consult communities about their plans. In the few cases where companies have consulted communities, women are not included in these discussions, because they are usually not allowed to participate in decision-making in most traditional communities.

**Women’s central role in resistance**

When women and their communities are informed and receive solidarity support, they understand the costs of extractives’ projects and can resist these projects that take their land, water, and forests. In their struggles, they

issue a resounding NO to the destruction of their land, livelihoods, and health.

Women are often at the centre of these struggles. As carers of and providers for families, women know that the land and natural resources need to be cared for so that the community today, and the communities of their children and grandchildren may live happy lives.

Resistance can take many different forms, depending on the context within which people are struggling and what is politically and legally possible. Based on the experiences of WoMin and its allies and partners, community members may stop prospectors from coming onto their land. They might blockade roads and mine entrances and stop trucks or trains moving the minerals out of the mine. Communities may try to stop a mine by going to court. And, in some communities, defending their land and developing their local economies is a key form of protest. Examples of the Right to Say No (R2SayNO) in living struggles can be read here.

With resistance comes risk to community leaders, women, and artisanal miners. Governments hand in hand with corporations use the police and the military to spy on, threaten, assassinate, and in the case of women, violate them sexually. For more on these risks in resistances, and some basic information on protection and safety, see Information sheet 6.

This is one of 6 information sheets on the Right to Say No:

Information Sheet 1:
What is the Right to Say NO?

Information Sheet 2:
The Destructive Economic System
Communities are Saying NO to

Information Sheet 3:
Laws and instruments communities may draw on to support their Right to Say NO

Information Sheet 4:
Why is the Right to Say NO a women’s rights question?

Information Sheet 5:
Communities say YES to the right to community decision making and the right to development that supports life

Information Sheet 6:
Dealing with risk when claiming the Right to Say NO

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