

WORKING WITH WOMEN TO DREAM AND IMAGINE A FUTURE COMMUNITY, COUNTRY, AND AFRICA

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND TOOLS

Introduction

It has been agreed with a network of organisations and movements working across the African continent that a collaboration to support the building of dreams/imaginings for a different future with women from below is a key political task. The commitment arises from an African Ecofeminist Just Transition roundtable which took place in Mogale City, Johannesburg in July 2018. This group emerged with the [Mogale Declaration](#) which sets out 26 key principles to guide thinking about the Just Transition from an African Ecofeminist perspective. During that roundtable, the participants formed a Steering Group, which has carried the work to date.

Whilst this was an important start to imagining a different Africa, the participants were clear that a group of privileged women cannot define this agenda, but instead that this must be driven from below by women across the continent who bear the costs of a destructive extractivist capitalist form of development. The concept was that women's dreams and imagination would be translated into a Charter for a Just Transition/ Just Development Alternative (DA), though the Steering Group is not wedded to the form of a written Charter.

A methodological framework and tools to support the dialogue/dreaming process between women at the community level were developed, and tested in Madagascar, South Africa and Guinea Conakry from October 2020 to January 2021, as the work at national level became possible in those countries in the context of the COVID 19 restrictions. The piloting exercises were conducted in four (4) sites characterised by community and women's resistance against extractivist development projects: Toliara and Sakatia Island in Madagascar; Newcastle in South Africa; and Khoré Lafou in Guinea Conakry.

The methodological framework and tools have been revised based on the results of the pilots. This note aims to provide guidance on how to use the adjusted

methodological framework and tools to support and document women's dialogues.

1. METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES AND TOOLS

1.1. WHAT DOES DEVELOPMENT MEAN TO YOU? - All the piloting processes started with an introductory session consisting of an activity entitled WHAT DOES DEVELOPMENT MEAN TO YOU? (see full description in Annex) which allowed to address the key issues/aspects related to development. This activity adapted from the resource published by the International Accountability Project (IAP) titled "*The Community Action Guide on What is Development?*" has been widely used at the community level in Africa and beyond. During the piloting exercise, it has proved to be quite effective in enabling women to start analysing and understanding 'development'; to tell their stories and remember what was/is important in their history that inspires them to take action.

This was because the activity started with describing and building women's understanding of what 'development' means generally; the second step was about asking them to describe the kind of development they see in their community and to tell their own stories about what happened and whether or not they benefit from that; the last step was about dreaming and imagining the kind of development that they want for themselves, their community and society, and how they can get it.

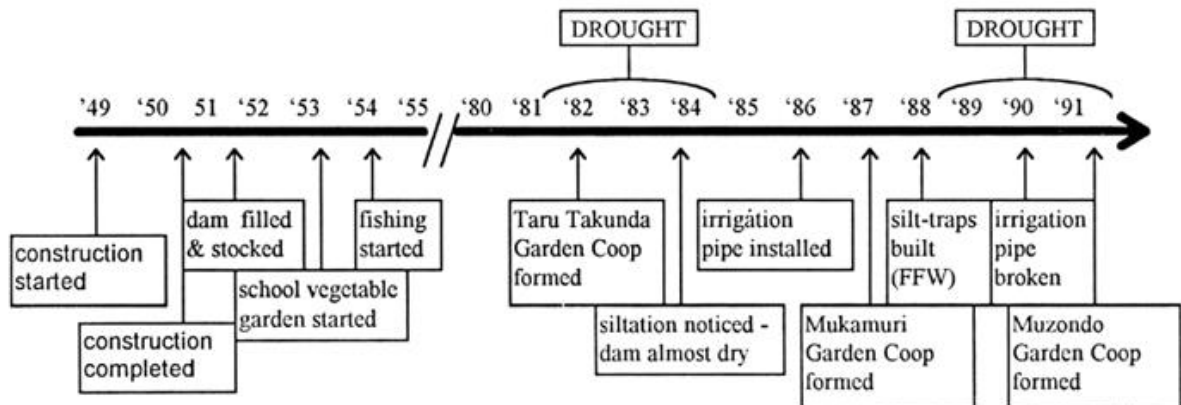
In regard of this last step, the dialogue also focused on the right of women and communities to claim their right to development, and the State's responsibility for respecting and realising their rights.

1.2. LOOKING BACK IN TIME - to identify and recover traditional knowledge, ways of producing, ways of living with nature, philosophies and spiritual practices, and governance/decision-making systems that have been eroded by colonisation, urbanisation and neoliberal development impositions. Women elders in the community will be critical to these conversations and enable an inter-generational exchange.

Tools that could be used:

- a) ***Historical timeline*** - Women could look back over time to identify the periods when the community or their families were healthy and well, when there was enough land and water for producing, and when there was no conflict. These markers could indicate different periods and then, through discussion, women could explore why this was the case,

what was working then, what was good/not so good for women in the community, etc.



b) Storytelling - A few of the women elders could be asked to tell stories to the circle of women about the past when 'life was well and good' – when was this and why? Was life equally good for men and women? What were women celebrated for? Were women elders regarded as wise? How were women oppressed?

Alternatively, women could be invited to walk together in pairs while they are telling each other stories, and then to bring their bilateral discussions into the circle.

c) Mapping - women elders could be asked in smaller groups to draw on paper or make images in the sand (using stones, sticks, scrub etc.) about a moment when 'the community' had a 'good life' and then unpack the details about what was happening in that moment – including in terms of territories, climate, livelihood systems - and of course also probe around women's specific experiences. Doing this in groups could enable deeper exploration between women, including across generations, and bring forth several examples and related explorations.

1.3. CONSIDERING AND APPRAISING THE PRESENT – to identify practices, ways of living and producing, human relations and beliefs guiding these, governance and decision-making systems etc. which support women and should be taken forward, including through a process of transformation, and those which women feel do not have a place in a just DA.

Tools that could be used:

a) **Card sorting** - women could be asked to quietly reflect on their own about what is working in their family/community for women now and what is not. By 'working' we mean women are respected, safe, able to produce, control the resources they use and their bodies...

Each woman could draw or write on small cards what is working for women and their community and what is not. Going around the circle women could each present one thing that is working, explain what it is and place it in the YES bin. Go around until the cards are exhausted.

Then ask what is not working and go around again with women binning the NO cards. It would be good to identify what could be transformed from 'what is not working' to something different and better for women and their community.

1.4. IMAGINING AND DREAMING THE FUTURE - what women discuss in terms of the past and present are key building blocks for the future, but space should be created for open imagination and discussion about what women desire at the level of the family, community, society and continent.

Tools that could be used:

Storytelling and drawing have proved to be the best tools for this discussion as both allow for dreaming and the stimulation of people's imagination.

The piloting exercise pointed out that

- these types of deep conversations are not possible with groups of more than 12 - 15 women, and are best conducted as focused conversations over 2.5 - 3 days;
- the time frame for imagining should not be more than a decade or two from now;
- women found it difficult to think about the future of the continent.

2. DOCUMENTING WOMEN'S DIALOGUES

It is critical to document using a range of methods:

- Photos of images, drawings, maps, timelines, and stories attached to a record of the narrative explanation/story
- Recordings of stories told by the women elders and photos if consent has been obtained

- Notes, as detailed as possible – a rapporteur should ideally be brought in.

It would also be important for each dialogue/conversation with women to conclude with a question about how they would want their story/their imagination shared with other women and told continentally. Also, how would they like to tell their own story/dream? This will guide decisions about how this dreaming is told and presented outwards, and by whom.

What happens to this documentation?

- Copies should remain with women in the community as this is their story and their record
- A compilation of images, photos, stories, documentation will be stored online in an open access (for all the members of this initiative) repository, which WoMin is already building.

3. WHAT WE ARE BUILDING TOGETHER

The process should guide us all collectively – with a focus to community women – towards the ‘outcome’. It could be a collection of resources more than a single ‘outcome’ – an assembly of women’s stories and/or images/drawings; a tapestry of pieces contributed from different communities of women across the region, like the World March of Women Charter; a large wall hanging of beadwork with images which describe women’s dreams from across the continent, etc.

Annex (Adapted from IAP. *The Community Action Guide on What is Development?*)

ACTIVITY : WHAT DOES DEVELOPMENT MEAN TO YOU?

Objective: There are many different ideas and models for development. This activity will help your community think about what development means to you.

Time: 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Materials: Flipchart, drawing paper, and markers

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1

Ask participants to relax, close their eyes and prepare to use their imaginations. When they are relaxed, say to them:

- Think about **your community** – your family, your neighbors, all the people in your village or town. Think about what they do in their daily lives. What are their hopes and concerns?
- Now, think about **your home**, the land and buildings all around, and all of the places that you and your community use and enjoy.

STEP 2

Give participants some time to think. Then, while keeping their eyes closed, ask them the following questions, pausing to allow them time to think between questions:

- What are some ideas that can help improve people's lives in your community?
- What would help everyone be healthier, happier, and have more opportunities?
- How do we grow our community in harmony with nature?

There are many different possibilities. Maybe you are thinking about education for children, or skills training for adults, or better food for families. Maybe you are thinking about a new road, or market, or health clinic. Or, maybe you have an idea for a program you want to start in your community. It could be something just for your community, or something for the whole country. After they have had time to think, tell the participants they will now have a chance to share their thoughts.

STEP 3

Break into small groups of no more than 5 people. Give each group or each person a large sheet of paper with a line drawn across the middle dividing the top from the bottom. Ask them to talk briefly about their ideas for development in their community and then to draw these ideas on the top half of the paper. Ask them to do this in no more than 15 minutes. Make sure that everyone has a chance to speak and to draw.

STEP 4

Bring the groups back together and ask each person to show their drawing and talk about their visions for development. After everyone has shared, ask them to think about the visions of development being promoted in their community and region by companies, the government, or development banks - the institutions seen as holding power. Allow them a few minutes to think about this.

STEP 5

Breaking into the same small groups, ask the groups to share their ideas. Then using the bottom half of their papers, ask participants to draw these visions of development being promoted by companies, the government, or development banks. Tell them that this can include both projects they like and ones they do not.

STEP 6

Have everyone tape their drawing to the wall. Bring the group back together, and ask each person or group representative to share about their drawing. After everyone has shared, lead a discussion about the different ideas of development included in the drawings.

- Do all of these pictures represent development to you, or just some of them?
- Are the ideas of the people similar or different from the projects proposed by companies and the government? What is different?
- What are the reasons behind these differences?
- Who has the right to say what development is, and what a community should have?

Debrief: Thank everyone for sharing. Point out that, as seen in our drawings and conversations, people have different ideas about development. While it may not be possible for all of us to agree, the important thing is for all of us to participate in deciding what kind of development happens in our community and our

country. When more people are truly able to be part of the debate and decisions, development is much more likely to actually meet everyone's needs and make lives better.