

THE WEIGHT OF THE SKY



Partnership Model, Movement Building and Support Approaches A Summary of WoMin's Evaluation Report

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CREDITS

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Movement Building and Support Approaches and Partnership Model

A WoMin's Evaluation Report

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1. Introduction

WoMin, established in October 2013, advocates for an African post-extractivist development model that centres the needs of women, prioritises ecological justice, and supports people-oriented alternatives to destructive development paradigms. It partners with organisations and community leaders to expose the disproportionate impacts of extractivism on women's bodies, labour, and access to resources and to support women's organising and movement building through learning exchanges and solidarity visits, convergences, and networking. It is a critical actor in the struggle for gender, social, and environmental justice in Africa.

WoMin's second five-year strategic plan was completed in 2024, and early in 2025, it commissioned the evaluation summarised here to help guide the next plan. The current strategic development process unfolded during a global polycrisis characterised by renewed backlash against human rights and significant weakening of civil society. This called for a more fine-grained and introspective approach to evaluation than the conventional measuring of progress against pre-defined goals and benchmarks. The aim was to fully engage staff, partners, allies, and community members in honest reflection, open dialogue, and constructive analysis of WoMin's role, practices, priorities, and impacts.

Two consultants facilitated the process: one in Southern and East Africa in English, and one in West and Central Africa and Madagascar in English and French. Their approach was anchored in feminist principles of care and accountability and foregrounded the voices of those most directly engaged with WoMin's work: grassroots women and frontline activists, programme staff and directors from former and current partner organisations, consultants who had worked with WoMin, and WoMin's staff. The evaluation used Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a guiding methodology.

Data was collected through partner visits in selected countries, in-person and online one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and internal document review. Focus groups and interviews with representatives of partners' organisations, community leaders, and frontline activists were held in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa, and with directors, staff, and volunteers from WoMin's partners in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Conakry, Gabon, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, and Mali (where staff from Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon also participated). Online interviews with eleven WoMin's staff and three external consultants were also conducted. A six-day retreat for WoMin's staff was held to share initial findings and facilitate an organisation-wide reflection on them. Throughout the process, the evaluators collaborated closely to synthesise findings and ensure a coherent, integrated set of conclusions and recommendations that accurately reflect the whole range of inputs from participants.

Time and budget limitations did not permit site visits to the large number of countries, locations, organisations, and individuals throughout Africa that WoMin works with. The evaluation therefore may not capture the full diversity of contexts, operational challenges, and community dynamics in all programme countries. The need to rely on interpreters to conduct some of the focus groups—and in Northern Cape, the non-availability of an interpreter—constrained the ability to communicate with some participants at community level. The following sections of this document provide a summary of the evaluation findings.

2. Key Findings Overview

2.1. The Many Hands Holding the Sky: Approach to Partnership

WoMin works mainly through partnerships with other organisations that support its ecofeminist vision, but it does so in a context of entrenched NGO and civil society practices and often unspoken class and urban-rural divides that marginalise working-class and agrarian women. Finding and cultivating the right partnerships is therefore a recurring challenge. Hearing from its partners, both current and past, was therefore one of the primary concerns of this evaluation. This was a delicate exercise due to the dynamics of the financial relationship between WoMin and its partners. Although the consultants facilitated extensive discussions with partners, it was difficult to explore the

intricacies of partnership dynamics in depth with them. WoMin's programme staff, who have been grappling with these questions for some time, were more forthcoming.

Affirming Insights

Partners unanimously affirmed that partnering with WoMin has greatly strengthened and enriched their understanding of extractivism and ecofeminism, enhanced their ability to facilitate discussions around the intersections of gender, class, extractivism, economic exploitation, environmental and climate justice, and equipped them to engage in more critical and transformative advocacy. They praised WoMin's emphasis on practical solidarity through financial support, capacity building, and learning and exchange visits. They agreed that partnering with WoMin has contributed profoundly to their political consciousness and organisational resilience, enabling them to amplify their voices in regional and international forums, challenge extractivist practices more effectively, and argue more confidently for ecofeminist alternatives.

Many partners described WoMin's unique integration of feminist, environmental, and economic justice framings as groundbreaking and deeply valuable. They say that WoMin supports them to experiment, learn, expand their scope, develop their capabilities, and amplify their impacts and that it fosters connections to regional and continental networks that enable them to share experiences, strategies, and resources, and build solidarity. They appreciate the opportunities WoMin provides for capacity building through workshops and training sessions as well as access to solidarity spaces that foster collaboration, mentorship, and mutual support.

Partners highlighted WoMin's distinctiveness, relevance, contributions, and influence as follows:

- **WoMin as a Catalyst of Critical Consciousness.** Partners credit WoMin with strengthening their political analysis of the relationship between feminism, extractive practices, and ecofeminist activism and enabling them to challenge extractivist practices more visibly and strategically.
- **WoMin as a Facilitator of Innovative and Strategic Initiatives.** Partners value WoMin's provision of political and technical expertise, networking opportunities, and strategic guidance, and funding for initiatives that involve calculated risks and novel approaches that enable partners to experiment, learn, and tackle increasingly complex challenges.
- **WoMin as a Connector to Networks and Opportunities.** Partners consistently praised WoMin's role in fostering connections and dialogues across regional and continental networks that facilitate cross-learning and solidarity and provide spaces in which to share experiences, strategies, and resources and connect local struggles to broader debates, foster collaboration, mentorship, mutual support, build capacity and solidarity.
- **WoMin as an Amplifier of Marginalised Struggles.** Partners unanimously acknowledged the uniqueness of WoMin's support, particularly as a convener and connector across feminist and environmental justice movements, for the leadership capacities of agrarian and working-class women and the significant community transformations this support has enabled, which has reshaped political discourse, strengthened grassroots movements, and connected local struggles to continental and global debates.

WoMin's programme staff highlighted the operational advantages of collaborating with partner organisations that have pre-existing infrastructure, efficient administrative systems, and, crucially, the trust of the communities they serve. These advantages streamline programme implementation, ensure a more effective allocation of resources, and reduce the administrative burden for WoMin, allowing it to focus on its key strengths of fostering political understanding, providing strategic oversight, and strengthening programme development. Insights from partners' deep knowledge of their communities enable WoMin to refine its strategies, adapt its approach, and co-create more relevant and impactful programmes, extending WoMin's reach much further than it could do on its own and ensuring that its programmes are adjusted for local perspectives and realities.

Tensions and Contradictions

WoMin's approach to partnerships and project implementation raises important questions about feminist strategies and power dynamics. Because WoMin is not an implementing organisation, its partnerships depend on the ability of partner organisations to implement its projects. Because WoMin's main concern is to find organisations that can

effectively implement its projects, WoMin approaches partnership as a process of working *through* partners rather than *with* them. As the primary source of funding and programme direction in its partnerships, WoMin sets the agendas, shapes the expectations, and defines the scope, focus, and deliverables. It is therefore perceived more like a funder than a peer by partners. Even the most established partners, such as Kebetkache (Nigeria), Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD), and Green Development Advocates (GDA) in Cameroon, which reported having autonomy to shape their projects, ways of working, and calendars, have to adhere to budgets, deadlines, and overall project objectives defined by WoMin. WoMin has attempted to establish more equal collaborations with some organisations and movements, such as through the Women Climate Assembly (WCA) initiative, but although the WCA was genuinely co-created with partners, WoMin has the preeminent financial role, and as a result, even the WCA is widely seen as a WoMin initiative.

There is a perception that WoMin's approach to partnerships relies too much on individual rather than institutional relationships and on ad hoc connections made through referrals from staff in allied organisations or through chance encounters, often at conferences, with the founding executive director. Opportunistic networking helped WoMin make essential connections with peers and funders in its formative years, but although a formal partnership policy now exists, WoMin's rapid growth has inhibited consistent institution-wide mutuality in its partnerships.

Some partners reported interacting with WoMin primarily through a single staff member and experiencing sometimes months-long communication gaps when that contact left WoMin or the partner organisation, causing serious disruptions that less personalised, institution-wide relationships could have avoided. The quality of partnerships has also been impacted by what some partners see as inconsistent engagement caused by WoMin's partnership policy, which characterises partners as either tactical (short-term) or strategic (long-term), and by not always making the implications of this distinction clearer during conversations with potential partners.

Partners also feel that WoMin's focus on movement building and systemic change neglects the more immediate struggles of local communities, so that the impacts of WoMin's partnerships are not always as visible—or as beneficial—at the grassroots level as they are at partner level, but as the director of a community-based organisation told us, 'When we ask the women what they want, . . . the first thing they tell us is that they want to develop income-generating activities. That's what always comes first'. During the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, WoMin attempted to bridge this gap by seeding and/or deepening experiments with agro-ecology, peace gardens, small-scale energy projects, and livestock processing, but the balance between these efforts and the larger systemic change agenda requires ongoing reflection and adaptation.

All staff from partner organisation that we talked with expressed appreciation for WoMin's financial support, but some noted that funding often fails to cover the operational costs of the partner organisations, including staff salaries. Staff then find themselves doing two jobs: their official salaried job and the largely or entirely uncompensated "job" of implementing WoMin's projects, a double workload that can harm the quality of their work and cause burnout.

Although WoMin was not initially structured to mobilise substantial funding, its increasing ability to do so has created an operational model focused on mobilising resources to support grassroots women's organisations mainly through national-level NGOs that either implement WoMin's projects directly or sub-grant to community-based groups. Some of WoMin's own staff members feel that WoMin struggles to reconcile its ambiguous position as the financial power within partnerships with its lack of direct implementing capacity. As one staff member commented, 'WoMin doesn't want to be called a funder, but in practice, . . . [our partnerships] are based on WoMin's financial contributions'. Despite its commitment to collaboration, WoMin controls the finances, convening spaces, and agenda-setting processes in its partnerships. This power imbalance fuels confusion, creates muddled and often strained relationships, and hinders effective collaboration on programme design and implementation, hindering WoMin's ability to effectively support the work of grassroots women and limiting its overall impact at community level. For programme staff, resolving this confusion is a big concern.

Partners experience ‘too many touch points’ when they are required to interact with numerous WoMin staff members across different programmes. This multitude of points of contact can lead to communication breakdowns, duplication of effort, confusion regarding instructions, and an overall sense of being overwhelmed by the process.

Staff expressed concerns about partner relations in WoMin’s indirect implementation model, especially the approach of working through partners rather than with them. They were also concerned that navigating partner sensitivities, colloquially described as ‘kissing’, can inadvertently disempower WoMin’s programme staff. Some staff described certain partners as ‘untouchable’ due to their close relationship with WoMin’s ‘leadership’ (meaning the director). When tensions arise between WoMin and a partner, and the leadership sides with the partner, staff feel unsupported.

Learning Opportunities

WoMin leverages partnerships with NGOs in order to expand its reach and ensure that its work is grounded in diverse local realities without requiring a direct physical presence everywhere. This approach takes advantage of partners’ pre-existing infrastructure and community trust. However, the evaluation revealed a concerning trend: grassroots groups are increasingly encouraged by NGO partners to adopt formal organisational structures by registering as associations, etc. This trend has unintended consequences when the newly formalised organisations find themselves competing for limited resources. The need to demonstrate measurable impact and the pressures of operating within established funding cycles encourage project-based activities rather than sustained movement building.

The strategy of collaborating with NGO partners, a top-down model in structure, if not necessarily in practice, risks inadvertently favouring capitalist values of formalisation and ‘efficiency’—the predetermined agendas, expected outcomes, and demanding reporting requirements of institutional NGOs—over the organic, less-structured processes of grassroots cultures. As one community leader told us, ‘WoMin claims it supports grassroots leadership, but [it] prefers to fund NGOs . . . who then turn to us to implement’. In mobilising women in communities, WoMin needs to explore alternative methods beyond the NGO model such as supporting informal networks, expanding peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, prioritising movement building over administrative efficiency, and promoting more flexible funding models that allow grassroots groups to define their own agendas and strategies.

Overall, partners want greater consistency and continuity in their relationships with WoMin, decentralisation of power to foster more genuine mutuality, and more support to build their implementing capacity. Their feedback focused on the need to create more impactful alliances by building long-term trust and preventing sudden relationship disruptions, which require consistent engagement over time, long-term strategising, sustained capacity development, and collective efforts on systemic change. Partners want more open and transparent decision-making processes that include clarity on how decisions are made, the rationale behind them, who makes them, who is consulted, and how partners’ views are taken into account, along with clear, mutually agreed expectations and clear delineations of roles, responsibilities, deliverables, timelines, and resource allocation.

More consistent communication is also seen as essential, especially at the beginning and end of partnerships. Partners emphasised the need for regular updates, progress reports, and opportunities for dialogue as well as upfront clarity on the partnership, its goals, scope, and duration, and a transparent, constructive process for concluding the relationship.

Partners also want more reciprocal learning processes built into partnerships, especially around sharing WoMin’s knowledge base and analytic expertise and incorporating partners’ knowledge of their local communities. Facilitating more opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and exchange between partners and WoMin will improve the quality of partnerships and project implementation and foster reciprocal learning, mutual sharing, and more equitable power relations, making partnerships more robust, more stable, more relevant, and more responsive to the evolving needs and priorities of communities.

Furthermore, partners want to be able to approach WoMin with proposals for projects outside WoMin's priorities to leverage their own knowledge and expertise in addressing their communities' needs. They see this as a more genuinely collaborative model that would escape the unspoken funder-grantee dynamic and address the need to integrate the goal of achieving long-term systemic change with support for the immediate needs of grassroots activists and their communities.

Resolving the questions around partnership will require WoMin to 'walk its talk' by actually creating new ways of working with its partners. And building partners' capacity to implement projects requires support that goes beyond political education. Partners therefore recommend action to strengthen their core organisational competencies in fundraising, feminist leadership, governance, and management of partnerships.

2.2. The Shoulders Bearing the Weights: Movement Support and Building

WoMin has put feminist organising and movement building at the core of its strategic approach from the beginning, but some of its staff feel that this focus has only really taken hold during the last three or four years and that the question of whether direct community organising is a necessary component of movement building (in addition to convening, connecting, and resourcing allies) remains a point of ongoing reflection. Many staff members agree that movement building has to be a long-term, iterative process that, as one of WoMin's staff members said, 'needs time and patience to examine what is and isn't working'.

In the view of some staff members, WoMin is not well positioned to engage directly in community organising due to its history of working mainly through partner organisations. Concerns were also expressed that working directly with CBOs could put WoMin in competition with partners or former partners and that WoMin is better suited to providing support to CBOs through established partners.

Some staff members take the view that WoMin needs to get more directly involved, as in the Northern Cape direct implementation approach, particularly in contexts where existing ecofeminist organising is weak or absent, such as in French-speaking West Africa. They argue that the absence of robust feminist and ecofeminist grassroots organisations necessitates a more proactive approach in which WoMin plays the central role in creating political homes and spaces for organising, fostering dialogue, and facilitating collective action. One staff member outrightly stated that 'we cannot say we are building movements if we are not organising directly on the ground'.

Other staff see connecting communities across diverse regions and struggles as WoMin's priority in movement building, arguing that resisting extractivism and corporate hegemony requires a continental network of activists. Most recognise, however, that supporting existing movements and building new ones are not mutually exclusive strategies provided there is a clear, shared understanding of what movement building entails and a comprehensive strategy to enable new formations to be nurtured without lessening support for existing groups.

3. Key Findings on Specific Movement Support and Building Processes

3.1. Women Learning Liberation

All staff agree that WoMin's underlying goal is to support African women to understand the roots of patriarchy, corporate and political greed and exploitation and that this understanding is foundational for building, sustaining, and connecting movements. The most powerful tool in this consciousness-raising work has been WoMin's Women Learning Liberation (WLL) programme, an eighteen-month ecofeminist popular education programme that has been held thus far in Madagascar, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, South Africa, and Uganda. The evaluation field visits and online interviews confirmed that WLL has been a transformative platform for participants. Its community-based learning methodology is highly regarded for embodying feminist values of care, mutual growth, and solidarity, and every participant we spoke with had a compelling transformation story to share.

Nevertheless, participants had concerns around the programme's taxing intensity and pace, the limited reach of the brief four-day timeframe (involving only ten women per country), and lack of support to connect with peers outside the formal training sessions or after the programme ended.

The facilitators praised the WLL's ambitious scope, ecofeminist and anti-capitalist principles, stress on the interconnections of gender and sexual-based violence, colonisation, and capitalism, practical focus, and leveraging of the knowledge and experience of participants. They reported marked improvements in participants' political analysis, understanding of systemic issues, and confidence as well as in their own personal and professional growth. However, they cited language barriers, management complexities, time constraints, the programme's high costs (travel, lodging and compensation for lost income). One of the consultants who helped design the programme highlighted the challenging nature of the content, especially for participants who may not identify as activists, as sustainability challenges going forward. She also observed that 'the workshop space, the very notion of a workshop, the very idea of a facilitator, all of that comes from a very Western education paradigm'.

3.2. R2SayNo

Across regions, the R2SayNo (Right to Say No) campaign has been widely celebrated as one of WoMin's most innovative initiatives in supporting women to organise against corporate and state power. An overwhelming number of the participants interviewed agreed that the training supported them to find their own voice and had emboldened them to speak publicly in the presence of men, village elders, chiefs, and even their own husbands.

Tensions were evident in two key aspects of project implementation. Several partners highlighted a tension between the campaign's ambitious goals and the scarcity of resources allocated to support its grassroots advocacy, as well as the practical difficulties of applying R2SayNo principles in communities that face violent reprisals and lack access to legal protections. The most common criticism levelled against R2SayNo, however, was its limited scope. Beneficiaries of the local training sessions and NGO partners alike urged WoMin to invest the necessary resources to include more communities. There was a strong consensus that it should also be a mixed-gender initiative.

3.3. Women Climate Assembly

The WCA emerged when WoMin and three partners—Nigeria's Kebetkache, Senegal's (LSD), and Cameroon's GDA—responded to the gender gap in the African Climate Justice Collective (ACJC) by organising assemblies in Nigeria in 2022 and 2023, and then in Senegal in 2024. With a total of 460 women from Central and West Africa participating, the WCA is the largest women-centred climate justice gathering in Africa and, according to some of the participants interviewed, the single most visible manifestation of WoMin's ecofeminist movement-building efforts. Many participants spoke of profound personal transformations as a result of participating. For some, it was the first time they had left their home areas, travelled by plane, stayed in a hotel, or connected with African women from distant regions. By providing a platform for women to voice their concerns, experiences, and perspectives on climate justice and related issues, the assemblies have left an enduring impression on participants, fostering a sense of solidarity and empowerment, building solidarity and new networks, and energising and amplifying participants' activism and determination to advocate for their communities. Prior to the 2024 Assembly in Senegal, WoMin organised and facilitated a three-day training for facilitators, and the impact was profound. One Senegalese community leader said it 'rose the lion in [her] heart to fight for climate justice'.

Some participants—and most NGO partners—nevertheless feel that the assemblies' content should be more politically charged and impactful, arguing that the WCA otherwise risks becoming a siloed event without much impact beyond the assemblies. Language barriers, lack of follow-through, and insufficient documentation were also cited as concerns, and it was suggested that national WCAs be held prior to each pan-African WCA to train participants in skills and techniques for utilising the outcomes of the assemblies.

The main concerns of members of the WCA steering committee were what they saw as dependence on WoMin's resources and insufficient autonomy to shape the assemblies' agendas. They also felt the assemblies had been poorly organised, citing last-minute decisions by WoMin that put undue pressure on the host country, caused members stress, and increased costs. To promote greater independence, a clearer focus, and more accountability,

they would like to see the WCA established as an independent initiative with its own strategic vision and fundraising authority. They also recommend a dedicated WCA social media platform to enhance visibility, expand reach, drive increased engagement, and enable wider dissemination of information to a pan-African and global audience.

3.4. Debt, Reparations, and the African Development Bank (AfDB) Campaign

WoMin's partnership with LSD on Debt, Reparations, and the African Development Bank started in Senegal, prompted by the AfDB-backed Sendou coal-fired power station there. The aim was to 'map' how the station harmed women's lives. WoMin then extended this mapping to other AfDB investments in Central and West Africa, and later the COVID-19 pandemic added concerns around debt and reparations to the programme.

Time and budgetary constraints limited the number of partners we were able to interview, but several called for deeper awareness-raising, in particular on more than just the economics of the reparations issue. One recommended that WoMin develop a long-term awareness-raising strategy that engages with all the implications of reparations, and all stressed the need to plan the reparations campaign for the long haul and from multiple angles. Others raised more specific challenges. One partner noted that 'it's not easy to enter a community to campaign against a multinational when that community has already received some form of compensation from the company'. Another cited lack of leadership from the campaign steering committee, which 'is always waiting for WoMin to lead' and wondered if this means the committee members are 'out of their depth'. One partner drew attention to a generally unspoken but serious structural limitation, observing that this is a campaign in which CBOs and NGOs dependent on external donor support are taking on politically powerful actors with enormous financial resources.

3.5. Participatory Ecofeminist Cost Analysis Research

WoMin's participatory ecofeminist cost analysis research supports groups of women such as farmers and small-scale miners to develop knowledge, build consciousness, access information, and strengthen their organising efforts through feminist participatory action research on the gendered impacts of mineral and oil extraction. Although this project has been ongoing since 2013, the evaluation was able to engage only with participants from the research conducted in 2024 and 2025 in Cameroon on the impacts of the Nachtigal Dam project in which, over three intensive days, six women were trained in the fundamentals of feminist research methodology and equipped with the skills needed to conduct a focused study. They were then deployed to different communities other than theirs to collect data from women. The participants spoke of the project with a palpable sense of pride as an opportunity for personal growth that they had benefitted strongly from. They were disappointed, however, that they have yet to receive a copy of the research findings or be informed about the broader contexts or outcomes of their research.

3.6. Risk and Safety Pilot Project and Handbook

The Risk and Safety project originated in 2017 following consultations WoMin facilitated in conjunction with partners. The process was informed by community leaders' testimonies on the increasing backlash against their resistance work and the related safety and risk factors. These risks were gendered, with women, especially activists and those within resistance communities, targeted in particular; the threats frequently involved sexual violence by men to assert their control and power.

In 2019, following extensive consultations, WoMin developed a comprehensive strategy to empower community leaders to assess and address risks and safety concerns associated with their organising efforts. The aim was to provide leaders with tools and knowledge to navigate potentially dangerous situations. After a delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot programme was launched in 2021 with three partners: WOME in Sierra Leone, Kebetkache in Nigeria, and Centre de Recherche d'Appui pour les Alternatives- Océan Indien (CRAAD-OI) in Madagascar.

The pilot phase, while successful in initiating crucial conversations and raising awareness, was criticised by both beneficiaries and partners for being a one-off initiative with insufficient follow-up and inadequate communication on progress and future plans. This lack of follow-up undermined the programme's momentum as well as its

potential for long-term impact. Participants voiced a strong desire for a follow-up project incorporating improvements and course corrections based on lessons learned in the pilot. In Nigeria and Madagascar, activists and partner staff felt the programme needed to contextualise and broaden its understanding of risk and safety to address the multifaceted dimensions—spiritual, economic, emotional, and digital as well as gendered—faced by activists.

A risk and safety handbook was developed as a practical toolkit, then revised in 2023 with insights gained from consultations with leaders in other countries, to provide concrete guidance and support to women's efforts to enhance their personal safety and security. The handbook later underwent a significant revision before being publicly launched. The revised handbook is therefore the culmination of extensive collaborative work and embodies the collective experiences, insights, and dedication of the women, partners, and allies with whom WoMin collaborates. It has been used extensively across all regions and is recognised by activists as a vital tool in their work despite the limited availability of physical copies, which has hindered access and wider dissemination.

3.6. Publications and Other Resources

WoMin's publications in general are praised for their intellectual depth, rigorous research, and feminist political analysis and recognised as important contributions to feminist and environmental justice scholarship and activism. The risk and safety handbook and the R2SayNo pamphlets have been particularly lauded for their politically potent yet accessible style. Distribution has been an ongoing problem, however. Although the animated films and other videos available on YouTube are easy to find—and highly popular—many community members lack access to the handbook and pamphlets. Partners and community leaders have developed innovative strategies to make these publications more accessible such as translating them into Pidgin and other local languages, using them in community radio campaigns, condensing them into single-page information sheets, basing training curricula on them, and even creating local theatre from them.

3.7. Blind Spots in WoMin's Movement Support and Movement Building

Pitfalls of the Familiar. The evaluation revealed a concerning trend in which grassroots groups are increasingly encouraged by NGO partners to adopt formal organisational structures by registering as associations or other entities. This may look like a way to strengthen and stabilise groups, but transitioning to formal organisational structures, often driven by funding rules and other protocols of NGO partnerships, has unintended consequences. The newly formalised organisations can find themselves competing with each other for limited resources rather than seeking collaboration and solidarity. WoMin's upcoming strategic plan needs to take a critical look at the political contradictions of formalisation.

Top-down vs. Bottom-up Approaches. WoMin's implementation model may inadvertently reflect capitalist conceptions of 'structured' organisation and prioritise efficiency and formalised structures over the organic, often less-structured processes inherent in grassroots movements. This can manifest in several ways, such as setting predetermined agendas, prioritising specific outcomes, or imposing rigid reporting requirements that may not fully align with the needs and priorities of the grassroots women being supported.

Complex Dynamics of Small Communities. Assumptions that individual consciousness raising is sufficient for movement building overlook the complex social dynamics that exist within small communities such as internalised gender norms, social hierarchies, respectability politics, resource competition, and historical grievances. These factors can lead to rivalries, resistance, and internal sabotage. Building a strong and sustainable foundation for community organising in these complex contexts, where competing interests, diverse opinions, and historical baggage abound, requires more than just individual consciousness raising. While raising awareness is a crucial first step, it is insufficient on its own. A deeper understanding of the dynamics at play within each community is essential.

Personal Ambition and Co-optation. Community leaders sometimes choose individual advancement over the collective good and join local state or corporate decision-making bodies, diluting their grassroots legitimacy, limiting their accountability to the community, and starving local movements of independent leadership.

Generational Imbalance. Practically all the community leaders interviewed cited a significant underrepresentation of younger women in WoMin's core activities and called for an infusion of youthful energy, fresh perspectives, and technological fluency to complement (but not replace) the experience and insights of seasoned activists.

Women Living with Disabilities. The compounded vulnerabilities of women living with disabilities, particularly in the context of climate change and land expropriation, and their limited access to resources, mobility, and support networks, make it incumbent on WoMin to do more to amplify the voices and leadership of disability activists within the African ecofeminist movement.

Sustainability and Community Impact. Questions were raised about the long-term sustainability of WoMin's movement-support model and its ability to generate tangible impacts within communities where WoMin is sometimes the only partner supporting organising and movement efforts.

4. Being Fit for Purpose: WoMin as a Feminist Organisation

An evaluation of WoMin's organisational culture reveals a movement organisation deeply committed to feminist values of justice, care, and solidarity, but also one that faces important tensions as it seeks to embody those values in practice. The ethos and internal dynamics within WoMin are both a source of inspiration and a mirror reflecting the wider challenges of feminist organising under extractive and patriarchal systems. In interviews and focus group discussions, WoMin's staff members shared a wide range of perspectives on the organisation's culture, values, and ways of working. These reflections highlight both the strengths of WoMin's feminist ethos and the challenges that require attention to sustain staff well-being and improve organisational effectiveness.

Staff and partners alike recognise WoMin's ethic of care and solidarity. Many describe WoMin as a rare political home where commitment to African women's struggles is felt not only in the outputs of programmes but in the ways in which colleagues support one another, particularly during difficult times. This emphasis on care has allowed the organisation to survive periods of strain and transition, support staff through illness, grief, or family emergencies, and provide strong employment benefits such as a pension fund and flexible leave arrangements.

Staff feel motivated by WoMin's political mandate and the clarity of working within a transformative ecofeminist framework that connects local struggles to broader systemic change. They value the opportunities they have to express their opinions and be heard in organisational processes. Regarding personal and professional development, many staff members highlighted how working at WoMin has extended and deepened their understandings of feminist politics, extractivism, and movement building and contributed markedly to their professional and personal growth. Staff recognise WoMin's deep grounding in feminist values, including the organisation's emphasis on solidarity, collective decision making, and centring women's lived realities in both programming and internal practices. However, they noted that WoMin's practices do not always reflect these values, particularly when it comes to transparency, accountability, and care in relation to workloads and decision making. Staff explained that WoMin's aspiration to horizontality and shared ownership often clashes with organisational realities. Decision making can feel centralised, with staff describing uneven opportunities to shape strategic direction. This does not negate the commitment to collectivity, but it highlights the difficulties of balancing strong political leadership with practices of shared governance.

The main concerns that staff highlighted include:

- Unclear information sharing and internal communication.
- Remote working and limited staff cohesion.
- Inconsistent commitment to collective decision-making processes and gaps in transparency
- Uncertainties around agency and ownership of work, and professional development.
- Excessive workloads and unclear structures of responsibility, leading to exhaustion and burnout.
- Emotional labour and unclear boundaries.
- Gaps and inconsistencies in care for staff well-being.

Many staff emphasised that, despite these challenges, WoMin remains the best place they have ever worked, citing WoMin's feminist values, care, and solidarity as strengths that distinguish it in movement spaces. Nevertheless, many staff feel that WoMin lacks the institutional scaffolding needed to manifest its values consistently. There is a sense among staff that the organisation is 'stretched' in ways that compromise its authenticity and sustainability.

Aligning WoMin's internal practices more fully with its feminist principles requires:

- Re-imagining leadership and decision making so that political clarity is held collectively, not concentrated in a few individuals.
- Practicing systems of care consistently so that staff are supported equitably.
- Strengthening communication and transparency internally and with partners to ensure that trust built over years is sustained through transitions and change.
- Embedding organisational learning as a living practice so that knowledge generated by WoMin becomes part of the organisation's collective memory and legacy.
- Honouring deliberation and reflection as much as urgency and action, recognising that feminist movement building and support requires both.

Do WoMin's internal ways of being fully reflect the transformative vision it champions in the world? The answer is: not yet. However, with a more conscious, structured, and consistent attention to care, communication, learning, and shared leadership, WoMin can become even more powerfully aligned with the feminist futures it seeks to build. This moment asks WoMin not only to review what has been achieved, but also to imagine boldly what comes next: how to live its feminist values more fully, how to nurture solidarity across movements and geographies, and how to contribute to systemic change in ways that are sustainable, caring, and transformative.

5. Closing Reflections

This evaluation highlights WoMin's strengths and challenges. It acknowledges WoMin's unique and essential role in the African feminist and ecofeminist movement, particularly in resisting extractivism and centring women's voices. At the same time, the feedback highlights areas where WoMin must reflect more intentionally on how it organises internally, how it sustains partnerships, and how it positions itself in relation to movements and communities.

The spirit of this feedback is not one of rejection but of deep care and constructive critique. Staff, partners, and communities alike value WoMin's contributions and want to see it live its feminist principles more fully in decision making, in accountability, and in relationships. The purpose of this evaluation has not been to judge performance but to hold up a mirror through which WoMin can see itself more clearly and grow stronger, more transparent, and more sustainable. The mirror reflects both WoMin's groundbreaking achievements and the spaces where alignment with feminist values can deepen. Holding both affirmation and honest critique together is itself a feminist practice of care and accountability.

The recommendations offered here are not mere technical tweaks. They speak to the need for more intentional partnerships, deeper feminist accountability, more consistent care for staff, and a continued grounding of all WoMin's work in community priorities. Ultimately, this evaluation reaffirms that WoMin's vision and work remain indispensable in the struggle against extractivism and in advancing African women's liberation. To act on these recommendations is not simply to strengthen the organisation but to fortify a political project of care, justice, and resistance. WoMin now has the opportunity to pause, consolidate, and ready itself for the next phase, to move forward with clarity, courage, and renewed purpose in the struggle for a feminist, anti-extractivist future.