

THE WEIGHT OF THE SKY



Partnership Model, Movement Building and Support Approaches

A WoMin's Evaluation Report

November 2025

Authors: Rudo Chigudu and Mariam S. Armisen



The women need WoMin because with
WoMin, there is concreteness

—Activist from Yaoundé, Cameroon



CREDITS

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November 2025

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Website: <https://womin.africa/>

Evaluators and report authors: Mariam S. Armisen and Rudo Chigudu

Final report author: Mariam S. Armisen

Evaluation coordination consultant: Jayshree Pather

WoMin's Oversight Group: Eliana Nzualo, Winner Shamuyarira, Gontse Muthusi, Trusha Reddy, Reine Baimey, Samantha Hargreaves, Georgine Kengne, Margaret Mapondera

Editor: John McAllister

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1. Introduction

WoMin, established in October 2013, is an African ecofeminist organisation dedicated to addressing the disproportionate impacts of extractive industries on women by working alongside organisations and community leaders representing women, small-scale farmers, and communities affected by those industries. WoMin's political analysis and actions are grounded in the understanding that extractivism disproportionately harms the bodies, labour, livelihoods, and lives of rural and working-class women in both the Global South and, increasingly, in the Global North. This understanding is both the foundation of WoMin's existence and the driver of its radical efforts for change.

WoMin's work centres on the following core strategies.

- **Documentation, Visibility, and Advocacy:** WoMin works to expose and publicise the devastating consequences of extractive industries on the lives and livelihoods of rural and working-class women. The aims are to build an ecofeminist knowledge base on extractivism and the climate crisis while documenting the specific ways in which these industries affect women's bodies, labour, and access to essential resources.
- **Movement Support, Building and Solidarity:** WoMin plays a crucial role in supporting women's organising and movement-building initiatives across Africa through feminist popular political education and other political spaces, as well as by facilitating learning exchanges and solidarity visits, organising convergences, and leveraging networking opportunities to strengthen women's collective power and solidarity.
- **Promoting Alternatives:** WoMin actively advocates for an African post-extractivist development model that centres the needs of women, prioritises ecological justice, and offers a generative, people-oriented alternative to the destructive development paradigms currently dominant on the continent. In keeping with its goal of democratic, life-affirming development, WoMin works in alliance with numerous other organisations to advance this vision.

These strategies position WoMin as a critical actor in the struggle for gender, social, and environmental justice in Africa, highlighting the crucial connection between ecological sustainability, environmental justice, and women's rights for the realisation of alternative development models. In 2024, WoMin completed its second five-year strategic plan. To help guide the next strategic development phase, WoMin commissioned an evaluation in early 2025.

1.1. Approach

WoMin's current strategic development process unfolded during a period of unprecedented global instability. Armed conflicts and a global trade war have created a more dangerous international environment, exacerbating existing challenges and creating new ones. This polycrisis is characterised by a renewed backlash against human rights and a significant weakening of civil society, hindering progress on critical issues such as environmental justice, women's rights, and the rights of gender-expansive people and communities. WoMin has responded by foregoing a conventional, outcome-oriented evaluation focused on measuring progress against pre-defined goals and benchmarks in favour of a more fine-grained and introspective approach. We believe that this approach, grounded in a nuanced analysis of the current organisational and political moment, has generated deeper insights into WoMin's work, relationships, and ways of being than a more conventional approach could do.

The decision to adopt this approach stems from the recognition that far-reaching internal adjustments were made throughout the 2019–2024 strategic period. The complex social, political, and economic effects (and after-effects) of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, forced WoMin, like many other organisations, to

rethink its priorities and ways of working. A rapidly developed COVID-specific strategy guided the organisation until 2021, but as WoMin has recognised,¹ COVID's influence has been longer-lasting than this.

Although some clarity on the programme structure for 2025 and beyond emerged internally, key strategic priorities and directions remained to be collectively finalised when this evaluation began. The evaluation was therefore designed less as a backward-looking performance assessment and more as a forward-projecting process to refine strategic priorities, clarify WoMin's future direction, and inform collaborative decision making. The goal was to fully engage staff, partners, allies, and community members and create space for honest reflection, open dialogue, and constructive analysis of WoMin's role, practices, priorities, and impacts.

1.2. Purpose and Objectives

WoMin wished to gather insights from both its partners and the women it supports. From its partners, it sought insights into their relationship experiences with WoMin and with how well WoMin may, or may not, have contributed to their work supporting women's organising and movement building. From the women it supports, WoMin sought to more fully understand how frontline activists and women in communities engage in movement building and to evaluate the extent to which WoMin's supports and processes have succeeded, or not, in fostering or enhancing their agency and organising capabilities. Lastly, WoMin wanted to turn its gaze inward to reflect on its ongoing efforts to build a more effective feminist organisation.

With these goals in mind, the evaluation process was guided by three primary lines of inquiry.

Feminist movement building and support as a mandate. The evaluation examined the role and identity of WoMin as an ecofeminist movement supporter and facilitator in relation to

- WoMin's progress relative to its ambitions as a movement-support alliance.
- WoMin's distinctive contributions to strengthening collective action across feminist, environmental, and social justice movements.
- How WoMin 'shows up' in movements—as catalyst, convener, disruptor, or otherwise.
- How feminist ideals of collective actions, mutuality and solidarity have affected WoMin's connections, particularly with grassroots women and frontline activists.
- The extent to which WoMin's work contests or reflects dominant paradigms of organising, development, and solidarity.

External resonance of WoMin's partnership model. The evaluation sought greater clarity around WoMin's relationships and standing in its wider ecosystem in order to understand

- Perceptions of WoMin as an organisation and experiences of its work by allies, long-term partners, staff, and the board.
- What WoMin represents to others, whether as a political home, a radical disruptor, or a connector across struggles.
- Whether tensions exist between WoMin's internal values and both external actors' expectations of WoMin and WoMin's expectations of external actors.

¹ COVID's influence has remained a key driver of our deep political perspective on a world in crisis and our understanding of the great malleability of capital (From WoMin's Evaluation Brief)

- The degree to which WoMin's vision and purpose are being advanced by current partnership and direct implementation models.

WoMin's structural capacity to develop as a feminist organisation. The evaluation examined the internal staffing, leadership, and operational practices of WoMin to assess

- The degree of coherence between feminist values and internal structures and processes.
- The degree of power-sharing, care, resourcing, communication, and emotional sustainability within the organisation.
- The degree to which internal culture and systems enable or hinder WoMin's agility, accountability, and capacity to achieve its feminist movement-building objectives.

1.3. Approach

Two consultants, one from Southern Africa and one from West Africa, led the evaluation. The former led the evaluation in East and Southern Africa and the latter in Central and West Africa and Madagascar. French and English were the working languages.

Guided by their practice of evaluation as an act of feminist solidarity and political engagement, both consultants employed an approach anchored in principles of care and accountability that foregrounded the voices and experiences of those most directly engaged with WoMin's work, including grassroots women and frontline activists, programme staff members from former and current partner organisations, consultants with experience working with WoMin and in African feminist organising, directors of partner organisations, and WoMin's staff.

In addition, the evaluation drew on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a guiding methodology. This involved identifying and expanding upon WoMin's strengths, successes, and best practices while also exploring potential areas for growth and transformation. The combination of feminist principles as foundation and Appreciative Inquiry as methodology ensured that the evaluation process was both critically reflective and creatively generative.

Data collection involved partner visits in a selected number of countries and a mix of in-person and online one-on-one interviews and focus groups, together with extensive internal document review. Country visits were made to Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa, where focus group conversations took place with representatives of women's organisations, community leaders, and frontline activists. The total number of participants in each country were: Cameroon (19), Côte d'Ivoire (20), Nigeria (48), Uganda (20), South Africa (17). Translation assistance was necessary with some focus group participants in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and South Africa.

One-on-one and focus group discussions were conducted with directors, staff, and volunteers from WoMin's partners in Burkina Faso (1), Cameroon (7), Côte d'Ivoire (6), Guinea-Conakry (1), Gabon (2), Liberia (5), Madagascar (4), Mali (5, including staff from Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon), Nigeria (6), Uganda (10), and Senegal (3). Online one-on-one interviews with eleven WoMin's staff and three external consultants were also conducted.

At the end of the data collection, WoMin held a six-day staff retreat to enable the initial findings to be shared. At this retreat, the evaluators facilitated an organisation-wide reflection on the findings and their implications for the new strategic development process.

Throughout the evaluation process, the two evaluators collaborated closely to synthesise findings across regions and ensure a coherent, integrated set of conclusions and recommendations that we are confident accurately reflect the whole range of inputs from participants.

1.4. Constraints

As a pan-African organisation, WoMin works with a wide array of partners encompassing women's organisations and movements throughout the continent as well as global allies. Time and financial considerations necessarily, therefore, constrained the breadth and depth of the data collected. The following limitations should be taken into account when analysing the data.

- Site visits could be conducted in only a subset of programme countries identified and prioritised by WoMin.² While all these locations offered valuable insights, the restricted geographic coverage means that the evaluation may not fully capture the diversity of contexts, operational challenges, and community dynamics across all programme countries.
- Another significant constraint resulted from the nature of WoMin's relationship with partners and the women it works with, relationships in which money unavoidably has an important, sometimes predominant, place. This is especially salient in WoMin's relationships with NGO partners, who for the most part are the direct partners through whom WoMin works indirectly with women in communities. The politics of money—who provides it and who receives it, in what quantities and with what conditionalities—can have profound implications for good or ill, especially in this moment of global funding crisis.
- In the Northern Cape in South Africa, the only site where WoMin is directly implementing programmes, translation assistance (Afrikaans to English) was required for the planned focus group, but no independent interpreter was available during the consultant's visit. This prevented a group discussion with community members from being facilitated. However, some one-on-one interviews with community members were conducted in English.

None of these limitations undermine the overall validity of the evaluation but do mean that the representativeness and richness of the data in some areas could be improved. In future evaluations, this can be mitigated by expanding site visits to include all programme countries and by ensuring availability of independent interpreters in all relevant languages to enable full participation of community members.

2. KEY FINDINGS

Each time I return from a training, I feel transformed.

—Women Learning Liberation (WLL) participant, Cameroon

Without supporting the financial independence of the women, all these trainings will amount to nothing if at the end of the day, they are still left to ask their husband for money for their basic needs.

—Director of a partner organisation

There is no denying that since its inception in 2013, WoMin has been in the vanguard of African ecofeminist organising to support the needs, lift up the voices, and build the power of rural and

² WoMin provided a list of countries and partners to engage with during the evaluation. The selection for country visits was mainly informed by the depth of ongoing work and also by the desire to learn from countries where partnerships presented considerable challenges.

working-class women in their quest for environmental and social justice. It has worked determinedly to promote rural women's solidarity, campaign for women's consent to development initiatives, lobby for sustainable alternatives to dominant development models, and support grassroots climate assemblies. It has worked to link up and unify African women's struggles through learning visits and other demonstrations of solidarity and has spearheaded campaigns on debt and reparations with particular emphasis on challenging the extractive development model of the African Development Bank. Through all these efforts, WoMin has built a wealth of resources centring a radical political ecofeminist analysis of debt and economic and climate justice while contributing powerfully to consciousness raising through feminist popular education.

As with any pioneering organisation seeking radical change, WoMin has struggled to promote a new, alternative paradigm while having to work within the dominant, repressive one. The two quotes at the beginning of this section capture this tension, as does the title of this report, *The Weight of the Sky*, an echo of WoMin's documentary film *Women Hold Up the Sky* (2021), which celebrates the stories of resistance of African women in their struggle to reclaim their land and humanity. WoMin is well aware of the contradiction. Its 2019 evaluation report raises a central concern in this connection: the expectation that already overburdened and marginalised women can be the primary, if not sole, leaders in addressing sustainability and rights issues at community level. Activism presents inherent costs—social, personal, and political as well as monetary—that often go unseen but take a toll on activists and community members alike and need to be uncovered and addressed, especially in these times of polycrisis in which old ways of organising can no longer meet today's challenges.

The evaluation invited reflections on WoMin's distinctiveness, contributions, relevance, and influence within the feminist and environmental justice ecosystem. The organisation's visionary and pivotal role was affirmed by everyone who contributed to the evaluation while, at the same time, they raised legitimate questions and concerns on certain strategies and ways of being and working. The following section summarises those questions and concerns.

2.1. Many Hands Holding the Sky: Approach to Partnership

WoMin's distinctive identity derives from its emphasis on advancing an African post-extractivist, ecologically just, women-centred alternative to the dominant, destructive model of development and on supporting the leadership and struggles of agrarian and working-class women and mining-impacted communities. It is doing so in a context where largely unspoken class and urban-rural divides continue to both exploit and marginalise the agency of working-class and agrarian women in African feminist movements. The downside is that WoMin constantly struggles to define how and with whom to advance its radical vision within the confines of entrenched NGO and civil society practices.

According to its 2018 Partnership Policy, WoMin 'understands partnership to be an agreement with separate entities with shared common goals working together to achieve an agreed purpose or outcome. This close collaboration is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), clear principles and a plan and budget that always involves a funding component'.³ Implementing WoMin's bold vision and the expansive scope of its work requires partnerships with organisations that are willing and able to execute its strategic vision. The challenge of finding and cultivating the right partnerships, especially in relation to political alignment and ways of working, is therefore a recurring one for the organisation. Previous evaluation reports (in 2017 and 2019) underscored the need for WoMin to prioritise political alignment in

³ WoMin (2018), Partnership Policy. Unpublished

its selection of partners. Although this remains a point of tension, WoMin has successfully collaborated with a diverse array of organisations led by both men and women, including NGOs and CSOs. As WoMin continues to navigate the complexities of partnership dynamics, it acknowledges the significance of these relationships in advancing its mission and is committed to evolving its strategies. Therefore, hearing from its partners, both current and past, was one of the primary concerns of this evaluation.

This proved to be a delicate exercise due to the dynamics of the financial relationship between WoMin and its partners. Although we facilitated extensive discussions with partners on their collaborations with WoMin, it was difficult to explore the intricacies of partnership dynamics in depth. WoMin's programme staff, who work on all aspects, including the funding side of the relationships, and have been grappling with these questions internally for some time, were more analytical. Thus, although the following sections contain feedback both from partners and WoMin's programme staff, it necessarily skews toward the voices and views of the latter.

2.1.1. WoMin as a Catalyst of Critical Consciousness

The partners unanimously affirmed that by merging ecofeminist politics with grassroots movements, WoMin fills a vital role largely overlooked by other NGOs and movements. All partners agreed on WoMin's powerful influence in contributing to the political consciousness and sophistication of its partner organisations and staff members. Many highlighted how WoMin informed or strengthened their analyses of extractivism, feminism, and ecofeminist practice, contributing to stronger political clarity within their own organisations. Partners cited as particularly impactful WoMin's ability to facilitate constructive, critical discussions around the intersections of gender, class, extractivism, economic exploitation, climate and environmental justice, and stated that these discussions have equipped them to engage in more critical and transformative advocacy.

WoMin's emphasis on practical solidarity through financial support, capacity building, and learning and solidarity visits have further solidified its position as a key ally. Most of the partners acknowledged that these collaborations have produced a shift in their political direction and helped amplify their voices and increase their visibility in regional and international forums, enabling them to more effectively challenge extractivist practices and advocate for feminist and ecological alternatives. The evaluation revealed a clear understanding among partners that WoMin's work, beyond providing essential resources, has contributed profoundly to their political consciousness and organisational resilience.

Some snapshots of WoMin's influence on the political awareness and direction of its partners:

- **Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD)**, whose objectives are 'to build a strong and dynamic civil society for the sustainable political, economic, and social development of Senegal', has been WoMin's key partner in Senegal since 2017 (receiving their first financial support from WoMin in 2018). As a result of their relationship with WoMin, male-led LSD has transformed from a traditional NGO working on 'development' issues to a feminist social movement that centres women's issues and leadership in their governance structure as well as their activities: 'In 2023, we changed LSD's political direction by adding two female vice-presidents. Currently, our board of directors is composed of nine people, including seven women. We amended our texts so that if the president is a man, the two vice-presidents must be women. In 2024, we added one of the female leaders of the Sendou project as the first vice-president of the board of directors'.
- **Green Development Advocates (GDA)** in Cameroon, though currently male-led also, has developed and implemented a 'gender-lens' in its strategic approach in order to centre the issues

and voices of women in key advocacy initiatives. As a result of their relationship with WoMin, ‘today we really have this sensitivity to gender, where we said to ourselves that we must promote women, promote women’s rights’.

- **Kebetkache**, a woman-led organisation in Nigeria, has been a partner almost since WoMin’s inception. Through their journey with WoMin, Kebetkache has evolved from focusing almost exclusively on violence against women and HIV/AIDS to encompassing environmental conservation, climate justice, and women’s inclusion in natural resource management. The partnership between WoMin and Kebetkache has influenced the organisation in changing its political identity to become an ecofeminist organisation and enhanced its advocacy strategies in favour of building an ecofeminist movement of community women’s groups in the Niger Delta and surrounding states.
- **Resource Rights Africa (RRA)** in Uganda, another male-led organisation, explained that, though always committed to challenging extractivism, before partnering with WoMin ‘we did not appreciate how [extractivism] impacts women specifically. Our feminist lens and approach were brought in entirely by WoMin; for instance, thinking about women’s loss of income when they were in our meetings is something we would never have thought of’.

Some snapshots of WoMin’s influence on the development of staff members:

- **Senegal**. ‘I joined LSD in late 2019/early 2020, just after the collaboration [with WoMin] began. As virtually the only woman at LSD at the time, I served as a liaison between the women of Bargni and WoMin. I participated in numerous capacity-building sessions on women’s rights and female leadership [facilitated by WoMin]. This collaboration shaped my activism. I am the activist that I am today thanks particularly to the mentorship of Georgine [WoMin’s Consent and Right to Say No programme staff], who went as far as travelling to Dakar to train at the beginning of our collaboration and who continues to mentor me’.
- **Madagascar**. ‘At a conceptual level, . . . the partnership with WoMin has really influenced my own vision of the work we do on the ground with women’.
- **Cameroon**. ‘Before, I wasn’t considering myself a feminist, but as one of the staff members coordinating WoMin’s processes in Cameroon, and after having participated in many of these processes myself, I now proudly identify as feminist. All of this is truly something. These trainings we participate in, even the exchange and solidarity visits, [are] . . . truly memorable. When you leave there, you have something, you have an idea of what you, too, can do’.
- **Uganda**. ‘You can never be the same person after attending a WoMin Feminist School. You know the issues, but there is a way of talking about the issues that changes, and it changes how we talk about the work with the communities we work with’.

2.1.2. WoMin as a Facilitator of New and Strategic Initiatives

Many partners described WoMin’s work as groundbreaking, particularly in bringing ecofeminist perspectives to struggles against extractivism. This integration of feminist, environmental, and economic justice framings is seen as unique as well as deeply valuable. In working with WoMin, partners feel supported to implement initiatives that few other (funding) partners are willing to support. WoMin’s strategic approach selects partners willing to take calculated risks and venture into less-travelled territories, and WoMin, by providing funding, political and technical expertise, networking opportunities, and strategic guidance, supports these partners to experiment and learn, which are essential for tackling complex challenges. Thus, partners’ relationships with WoMin have enabled them to expand their scope, develop their capabilities, and, ultimately, amplify their impacts.

2.1.3. WoMin as a Connector to Networks and Opportunities

Partners consistently highlighted WoMin's role in fostering highly valued connections to regional and continental networks that facilitate cross-learning and solidarity across diverse struggles, allowing partners to share experiences, strategies, and resources. Partners expressed deep appreciation for the access WoMin has provided to a wealth of non-financial resources, including opportunities for capacity building through workshops and training sessions as well as access to solidarity spaces that foster collaboration, mentorship, and mutual support. These spaces are seen as critical for building movements and empowering partners in their respective areas of focus. As one of WoMin's partners in Madagascar said, 'We have benefitted from several forms of support outside of our partnership agreements with WoMin, such as the integration of CRADO-I into the Africa Climate Justice Group or other very specific capacity building [opportunities] which are not necessarily part of the agreements we have with WoMin, but which still constitute assets for us'.

2.1.4. WoMin as an Amplifier of Marginalised Struggles

Partners unanimously acknowledged the uniqueness of WoMin's steadfast support for the leadership capacities of agrarian and working-class women. They recognise the extent to which WoMin's network and resources have been leveraged to strengthen their leadership and the significant community transformation that this has produced. They credit WoMin for positively reshaping political discourse, strengthening movements, and connecting local struggles to continental and global debates. Partners emphasised, in particular, WoMin's role as a convener and connector across feminist and environmental justice movements.

2.2. Areas of Tension

Our discussions with partners and WoMin staff revealed certain tensions relating to WoMin's approach to partnerships.

2.2.1. Individual Rather Than Institution-wide Relationships

Interviews showed that WoMin's approach to partnerships is more reliant on individual affinities rather than institution-wide relationships. Inquiries about the origins of partners' collaborations with WoMin consistently revealed ad hoc connections mainly through referrals from staff members of allied organisations or as a result of personal encounters, often at conferences where the founding executive director of WoMin has been present.

Internally, WoMin shared its practice of commissioning mappings of organisations in countries where it aims to implement initiatives. The first such mapping took place between 2011 and 2013, when partners such as Kebetkache in Nigeria and Save Lamu in Kenya, with whom WoMin still works, were identified. A second mapping took place in 2019 in Tanzania where the organisation needed implementing partners but without a similar outcome. In alignment with its partners' experiences, WoMin named the following ways it identifies partners: through its funders and through allied organisations such as GRAIN and WoMin's staff professional networks. Regardless of the entry point to establishing partnerships, networking (formal and informal) as opportunities arise plays an important role in identifying implementing partners for specific initiatives.

Networking played a crucial role in WoMin's formative years, helping it build visibility and establish essential connections with peers and funders. While a partnership policy exists, personal connections still

influence how partnerships begin. This, in itself, is not a problem, but WoMin still needs a stronger approach to its partnership-building process—one that defines when and how to come into and out of a partnership and, more importantly, how to engage in institution-wide relationships that support true mutuality in partnerships. The latter need is critical especially because WoMin's rapid growth and expansive areas of work create an equally growing need for implementing partners. This is a reality acknowledged by the founding executive director, who shared that 'when WoMin was smaller, our partnership relations were strong, open and involved greater exchange and collaboration'.

Some partners reported interacting with WoMin primarily through a single staff member and, as a result, experiencing significant communication gaps that have sometimes lasted for months and caused disruptions or suspension of activities when that staff member left WoMin. In Uganda, for example, partners cited staff transitions (though in their organisations as well as within WoMin) as having caused serious disruptions in the work that more robust, less personalised, institution-wide relationships could have avoided. Other partners also felt that their connections with WoMin have depended too much on the seniority of their contact within WoMin. In two cases, collaborations with well-established organisations have terminated unexpectedly, leading partners to feel unsupported or unappreciated.

This risk is mirrored on the partner side. In Guinea-Conakry, for example, when the staff member responsible for the implementation of WoMin's projects had to take a leave due to a family tragedy, WoMin's activities in that country were delayed for several months. An over-dependence on individuals, usually the head of partner organisations or a single member of their programme staff casts doubt on the long-term sustainability of relationships.

The quality of partnerships has also been impacted by a lack of consistency in the level and standard of involvement both within and across partnerships. Thus, although some partners have enjoyed strong, long-term, supportive relationships with WoMin, others reported more transactional relationships. This perception (from partners' sides) of lack of consistency has a rationale for WoMin; its partnership policy characterises partners as tactical (short-term) and strategic (long-term). The problem could be that the type of the partnership (tactical or strategic) and the implications of this need to be made clearer during conversations with potential partners.

2.2.2. Working Through vs. Working With

WoMin's approach to partnerships and project implementation raises important questions about feminist strategies and the power dynamics at play when defining feminist agendas. Because WoMin is not an implementing organisation, its praxis of partnership is primarily driven by the ability of partner organisations to implement its projects. As a result of this practical imperative, the critical issue of political alignment has become secondary. The internal narrative at WoMin justifying this choice is that few, if any, other African organisations share WoMin's ecofeminist agenda, but this precludes a deeper analysis of historical gender and class roles, the lingering racism of the philanthropic sectors, the evolving landscape of feminist and women's rights movements, and the continuing influence of patriarchal structures (including within funding institutions) in defining where and how women's voices, agendas, and leadership, especially those of black women, count or not.

Since its main concern is to find implementing organisations for its projects, WoMin approaches partnership as a matter of working *through* rather than working *with*. This largely determines the power dynamics in these relationships. All the partners interviewed for this evaluation acknowledged that WoMin had been the instigator of their relationship. This model of operation establishes a definite

hierarchy, with WoMin at the top acting as the primary source of both funding and programme direction and, as such, the leader in setting the agenda for the partnership, shaping the expectations for it, and defining the scope, focus, and deliverables of the projects it funds. Partners are thus expected, for the most part, to align their activities with WoMin's predefined priorities. Consequently, WoMin is viewed and experienced more like a funder than a peer organisation. This perception is reinforced by the nature of the interactions and the power imbalance inherent in financial dependency.

Although the most established partners, such as Kebetkache, LSD, and GDA, reported having autonomy to shape their projects, ways of working, and calendars, this autonomy is limited. It operates within parameters defined by WoMin, including budgets, deadlines, and overall project objectives.

All the partners who contributed to this evaluation advocated for a more collaborative approach to partnership. To many, a true partnership of shared power means defining agendas jointly, developing projects collaboratively, and applying for funding together, in other words, co-creation processes in which the perspectives and expertise of WoMin and its partners are valued equally and project goals, strategies, and activities determined collectively.

Partners also want to be able to approach WoMin with proposals for projects outside WoMin's priorities. This would allow them to leverage their own knowledge and expertise to address their communities' needs more effectively without being solely dependent on WoMin's predefined initiatives. They see this more genuinely collaborative model—a more equitable and participatory relationship that moves beyond the unspoken funder-grantee dynamic—as crucial for building sustainable partnerships, ensuring project relevance, and maximising the impact of collective efforts.

It is important to note that WoMin has attempted to establish a shared political space with a limited number of organisations and movements, such as through the Women Climate Assembly (WCA) initiative. Nevertheless, although the WCA programme, for example, was co-created with others, WoMin has the preeminent financial and political role, and as a result, the WCA is widely seen as a WoMin initiative.

What are the sustainability risks for such partnerships given their significant reliance on WoMin's influence, leadership and financial contributions? To be fair, WoMin has been reassessing its partnership approach and posing these difficult questions itself for several years. Yet, it still finds itself returning to the same questions.

2.2.3. Visibility Challenges

While WoMin's influence is acknowledged at continental, regional, and national levels, some partners say the impact of its initiatives is not always equally apparent—or equally beneficial—at the grassroots level. This disparity raises critical questions about how WoMin's work translates into tangible improvements in the lives of the communities it aims to serve. Communities may experience fewer direct benefits than partner NGOs, which is a stark contrast to WoMin's political stands.

Some partners expressed concerns that the organisation's focus on broader movement building and systemic change potentially overshadows or under-resources the immediate, pressing struggles of local communities. Partners were unanimous in their belief that for WoMin's work to have a meaningful impact on the lives of grassroots African women, efforts to achieve systemic change, which can only happen slowly and uncertainly, must be interwoven with initiatives that directly and immediately support the daily

subsistence needs of community leaders and their communities. This view was powerfully articulated by one director of a community-based organisation.

When we ask the women what they want, what they expect from us, the first thing they tell us is that they want to do business. . . . They want to develop income-generating activities. That's what always comes first. Because they understand that they're under pressure, under this economic pressure. And their first intention, their first idea, is to be able to alleviate this pressure.

This concern echoes a point of tension within WoMin, which was highlighted in a previous evaluation. How can WoMin effectively address the immediate needs of community women without compromising its longer-term political work and vision? In the past, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, WoMin attempted to bridge this gap by supporting local alternative efforts rooted in its movement building and collective endeavours. This involved seeding and/or deepening experiments with various alternative sources of subsistence: agro-ecology, peace gardens, small-scale energy solutions, and livestock processing. These initiatives were designed to empower community leaders by translating their struggles into concrete, small-scale, tangible initiatives that would directly benefit their communities, providing both immediate relief and building long-term sustainability. However, the balance between these efforts and the larger systemic change agenda remains a critical area for ongoing reflection and adaptation.

2.2.4. The Elephant in the Room: Who *Gets* the Money and Who *Does* the Work?

Although the directors of partner organisations hold the decision-making power to engage in partnerships with WoMin, the responsibility for executing the contractual obligations falls primarily on their programme staff. The staff members of partner organisations often, therefore, do the bulk of the work. This raises the issue of fairness in the distribution of power and funds. Interestingly, staff were more willing to discuss this issue, albeit indirectly, than directors. The central question is, 'who gets the money (the answer being WoMin) and who does the implementation work (mostly the staff of WoMin's partners)'.

All staff members expressed appreciation for WoMin's financial support, but a few noted that it comes mainly in the form of project-based funding that often fails to cover the operational costs of the partner organisations, including staff salaries. This creates a precarious situation in which staff members leading WoMin-funded projects in partner organisations find themselves with two jobs: the official job for which they were hired and that justifies their salary, plus the additional, largely or entirely uncompensated workload required to implement WoMin's projects. This creates unsustainable workloads that can harm the quality of their work and lead to burnout.

One male programme staff member provided a vivid illustration of this imbalance. In a discussion about a WoMin-sponsored risk and safety project, he highlighted the disconnect between WoMin's theoretical discussions of risk and safety and the practical realities faced by the implementing partners' staff, pointing out that while WoMin could comfortably theorise about gender-based risks and women's safety, the project-based financial support it offers does not adequately address the financial well-being of its partners' staff (who are women). He added that the project funding also did not provide for their physical and emotional safety while carrying out their duties. This, in his view, created a glaring gap between the project's stated goals and the lived experiences of the women doing the work on the ground.

The increasing cost of living and its effect on projects was raised by another staff member, specifically in relation to project partners who are expected to maintain the same level of activity annually despite rising costs. As a staff member of one partner said, ‘it is not just about project interventions. When the organisation is not stable, it cannot fulfil its role vis-à-vis WoMin. WoMin should also support the overall well-being of its partner organisations’.

WoMin’s practice of providing income-loss compensation to community women participating in its activities reflects another aspect of the unequal distribution of income. Although partners viewed the practice as a significant benefit, they noted that it can generate tensions by setting standards—and expectations of meeting them—that under-resourced partners cannot consistently meet and that complicate their collaborative efforts with communities.

2.2.5. Opportunities for (Un)Learning

This section summarises the key areas identified by WoMin’s partners as requiring improvement in their relationships with WoMin. Partners want greater consistency and continuity in their relationship with WoMin, decentralised power to foster more genuine mutuality, and more support to build their capacity to implement projects. The core underlying theme was about building more robust, more equitable, and more impactful partnerships grounded in mutual respect, clear communication, a unified commitment to feminist principles, and shared power.

For greater consistency and continuity, partners recommend:

- **Building long-term trust.** Sustained partnerships built on mutual trust and shared experiences are essential for achieving deeper impacts and fostering stable and more meaningful relationships.
- **Building more impactful alliances.** Consistent engagement over time will allow for more effective movement building through long-term strategising, sustained capacity development, and collective efforts to achieve systemic change.
- **Preventing sudden relationship disruptions.** Short-term or abruptly ended engagements are detrimental to trust building and undermine movement-building efforts. Partners suggested that WoMin should prioritise longer-term commitments whenever possible or at least ensure that short-term engagements are more carefully managed to minimise disruptions.

To decentralise power and foster mutuality, partners recommend

- **Greater transparency.** Partners expressed a desire for 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 their views are taken into account.
- **Clear expectations.** Establishing clear, agreed-upon expectations from the outset of a partnership is crucial. This should include clear delineations of roles, responsibilities, deliverables, timelines, and resource allocation.
- **Regular communication.** Implementing a consistent schedule for communication is essential. Partners emphasised the need for regular updates, progress reports, and opportunities for dialogue to ensure that everyone is informed and engaged throughout the process of project implementation.
- **Clarity on the partnership life cycle.** Special attention should be paid to communication at the beginning and end of partnerships. This should include a clear articulation of the characteristics of partnerships (tactical or strategic), their goals, scope, and duration upfront, together with a

transparent, structured process for concluding the relationship with due diligence and mutual understanding.

- **Minimal ambiguity.** A clear understanding of the partnership model helps to avoid misunderstandings about the scope, expectations, and commitment levels of each party. This is particularly important to manage expectations around resource allocation, decision-making power, and the overall goals of the collaboration.
- **Reciprocal learning processes.** Building learning processes that are more reciprocal is essential, especially around information sharing. WoMin's considerable knowledge base and specialised analytic expertise should be freely shared with partners.
- **Incorporating partner perspectives.** Partners have knowledge and expertise on their local communities that WoMin lacks. Actively soliciting and incorporating partners' insights and experiences into programme design, implementation, and evaluation is a necessity to maximise the impact and benefits of programmes.
- **Creating space for ongoing dialogue.** Facilitating more opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and exchange between WoMin and its partners will improve the quality of both the partnerships and project implementation.
- **Strengthening partnerships.** Making the necessary effort (on both sides) to foster reciprocal learning, mutual sharing, and equitable power relations will make partnerships more robust, more stable, more relevant, and more responsive to the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

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.** To equip partners with the skills and knowledge necessary to secure diverse funding streams with an emphasis on grant writing, donor relations, and resource mobilisation.
- **Feminist leadership.** To foster a culture of practical feminist leadership within partner organisations through training in actual leadership skills that are firmly aligned with feminist principles.
- **Governance.** To enhance both the effectiveness and the accountability of partner organisations through training in organisational decision-making processes, accountability mechanisms, and financial management systems.
- **Management of partnerships.** To enable more impactful programme implementation, greater sustainability of programmes, and more efficient resource management by supporting partners' capacity to sustain more equitable and effective relationships with WoMin, other partners, and grassroots communities.

These recommendations reflect the complex nature of WoMin's relationships with its partners, in which WoMin is viewed and related to as both a funder and a peer organisation.

2.3. Voices of Programme Staff

Working through rather than *with* partners has been a topic of passionate political debate within WoMin for several years, and WoMin's programme staff therefore have some deep insights into this seemingly perennial question.

2.3.1. Recognising Impact and Growth

WoMin's programme staff greatly value the contributions of partners in furthering the organisation's mission. They readily acknowledge the pivotal role these partnerships play and recognise that they significantly amplify WoMin's influence by extending its reach into a variety of local, national, and regional contexts. Collaboration with partners, in their view, ensures that WoMin's initiatives are adjusted to suit local perspectives and realities, thereby allowing for effective interventions without the need for WoMin to maintain a physical presence across all project locations.

Programme staff highlighted the operational advantages of collaborating with well-established partner organisations that have pre-existing infrastructure, efficient administrative systems, and, crucially, the trust of the communities they serve. These advantages greatly streamline programme implementation. In particular, they ensure a more effective allocation of resources and a reduced administrative burden for WoMin, allowing the organisation to focus on its key strengths of fostering political understanding of struggles, strategic oversight and programme development.

Beyond operational benefits, several staff members also emphasised the importance of the mutual learning fostered through these partnerships. The collaborative framework allows WoMin to gain invaluable insights from local organisations who have deep-seated knowledge of their communities' situations, challenges, and strengths. This exchange of knowledge has enabled WoMin to refine its strategies and adapt its approach based on the expertise of partners, ultimately leading to more impactful and relevant programmes.

2.3.2. Responding to Tensions

WoMin doesn't want to be called a funder, but in practice, the reality is that the relationships are based on WoMin's financial contributions.

—Programme staff member

Although WoMin was not initially structured to mobilise substantial funding, its increasing ability to do so has created a significant operational challenge that impacts its political objectives. Over time, WoMin has shifted its operational model to one that primarily mobilises resources to support the work of grassroots women's organisations. This support is channelled, for the most part, through national-level NGOs, which either implement WoMin's projects directly or sub-grant to women-led, community-based groups.

This evolution has created tensions within WoMin, particularly for some staff members who are uncomfortable with what they see as the ambiguous positioning that has resulted. Staff raised questions such as 'How do we ensure that our partners don't feel that we are a funding organisation when, at the same time, we are still giving them funding?'⁴ They note that WoMin struggles to reconcile its position as primary financial power within partnerships with its lack of direct project implementation capacity. This reluctance to fully embrace its role as increasingly an intermediary grant-making organisation fuels ongoing debates on operational practices and, critically, on the nature of its partnerships. WoMin's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which included solidarity funding support to former and new partners, inadvertently increased this imbalance in its relationship with partners.

The ambiguity manifests in inconsistent positioning. At times, WoMin presents itself as a peer whose role is to foster collaborative relationships; at other times, it acts solely as a funder, highlighting its control of

⁴ WoMin (undated). Cart clustering on partnership issues. Unpublished.

the financial dynamic of its partnerships. Despite its commitment to collaboration, WoMin inherently holds power within these partnerships due to its control of financial resources, convening spaces, and in consequence, of agenda-setting processes. This power imbalance creates muddled and often strained relationships with its partners. The lack of a clear, consistent identity fuels confusion and hinders effective collaboration on programme design and implementation.

For programme staff, resolving this identity confusion is a paramount concern. A well-defined identity would enable development of the clear, robust partnership model that is currently absent. Such a model needs to have a framework that articulates the driving forces behind partnerships, including what motivates WoMin to seek partners, the criteria for selecting partners, the guiding principles of collaborative project co-creation, the anticipated duration of each partnership, and the procedures for responsible and ethical exits from partnerships.

A clear articulation of its other role as an intermediary grant-maker and its expectations within those relationships is vital for fostering healthy, equitable, and effective collaborations that align with WoMin's overall mission and political goals. The lack of this clarity hinders WoMin's ability to effectively support the work of grassroots women and limits its overall impact.

2.3.3. Balancing WoMin's Expectations with Partners' Realities

In reflecting on the complexities of the partnership approach and its labour implications for partners, staff highlighted a shift in responsibility that manifests in several important areas.

- **Increased workloads for partners' programmatic staff.** Implementation demands significantly impact the programmatic staff's workload at partner organisations. In many partner organisations, especially smaller ones, a single person is often put in charge of all aspects of WoMin's projects with the organisation. This person is expected to take on these new responsibilities along with their current ones, making them feel overwhelmed and risking burnout.
- **Heavy administrative burdens.** These include managing WoMin's projects as outlined in each MOU and meeting demanding reporting requirements. The weight of this is felt most severely by smaller, under-resourced community-based groups that may not have the capacity to meet WoMin's and its funders requirements. In an effort to meet the requirements, they can deplete already scarce resources and skimp their own work.
- **Communication overload.** Staff also acknowledged that partners often experience 'too many touch points'. This occurs when partner organisations 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.

2.3.4. Overcoming Dependency Dynamics and Vulnerability in Partnerships

When asked how WoMin handles the tension of having more resources than its partners but not doing direct implementation (except in South Africa), some programme staff admitted that the organisation is not handling this tension well. Although there are discussions about having deeper conversations with partners on relationship building and agenda setting, these intentions have not translated into effective action as of yet.

Staff also highlighted how their implementation model creates inherent vulnerabilities for both WoMin and its partners. WoMin's operational strategy heavily leverages the reputation, connections, and expertise

of partner organisations to execute its programmes, but this introduces a delicate, unequal power dynamic that necessitates careful management of relationships, particularly with larger partners who have significant influence or resources of their own. The dynamic can manifest in several ways, including instances when WoMin was compelled to cancel or significantly readjust scheduled activities due to the unavailability or shifting priorities of a key partner. Navigating partner sensitivities, colloquially described as ‘kissing’, can inadvertently lead to the disempowerment of WoMin’s programme staff. Some staff described certain partners as ‘untouchable’ because of their close relationship with WoMin’s ‘leadership’ (meaning the director).

This tension is especially pronounced when disagreements or tensions arise between WoMin and its partners if the leadership sides with partners, leaving staff feeling unsupported in their decision making. The potential for some partners to exert undue influence, coupled with the desire, legitimate or not, to accommodate partners’ limitations, underscores the urgent need for WoMin and its partners to create a new partnership model with clear communication protocols and strategies to mitigate the risks associated with asymmetrical power dynamics within partnerships.

During interviews, and again at the evaluation and strategic development staff retreat, WoMin’s programme staff stressed their hope that the evaluation process would this time provide definite answers to the partnership issues. They appeared to believe that the partners hold the key to resolving the tensions and contradictions in the relationship, but the evaluation revealed that despite the centrality of money in the current partnership model of partnership—and despite practically all partners acknowledging an asymmetrical power dynamic in their relationship with WoMin—the partners we met expressed general satisfaction with their relationship with WoMin, in stark contrast to WoMin’s ambivalence about its approach of working through partners rather than with them.

Internally, there is an acknowledgement of the limitations of this current approach and a growing energy in the demand for something else. The question is, *what else?* Central to WoMin’s ethos is a vibrant culture of questioning. This practice reflects a deep curiosity and a critical engagement with the world and with the organisation’s own practices. It is both a celebration of feminist praxis and a key source of innovation. At the same time, it is important to examine whether this questioning also serves as a form of deferral, masking discomfort, deflecting decision making, and avoiding confrontation with difficult truths. This evaluation was not intended to offer a blueprint for organisational (re)development, but rather to support reflection on how form supports function. ‘Resolving’ the question of partnership would require WoMin to walk its talk by actually creating new ways of working.

2.4. Walking the Talk: A Case Study of Direct Implementation

This case study, based on internal organisational reflections and evaluations of WoMin’s Northern Cape operations, evaluates WoMin’s direct implementation approach in the Northern Cape region of South Africa. It analyses the organisation’s departure there from its traditional partnership-based model to engage directly in grassroots community organising and examines the operational effectiveness and strategic alignment of the direct implementation model compared to the organisation’s partnership-based work in other regions. The assessment reveals significant strengths in community connection and mobilisation while highlighting critical operational challenges that threaten long-term sustainability.

Prior to the Northern Cape project, WoMin operated exclusively through partnerships with local organisations. In 2016, through a learning and solidarity exchange on women and coal in Southern Africa, WoMin began to work with a number of organisations in Mpumalanga, Gauteng, and Limpopo provinces

in South Africa with a focus on the impacts of coal mining. After encountering issues with the sustainability of its work there, in 2021 WoMin decided to shift its approach to a direct implementation model that combines WoMin's established partnership model in other countries with hands-on community organising in one specific region. This project represents a strategic experiment for the organisation, offering opportunities to pilot new strategies and deepen WoMin's understanding of grassroots challenges based on internal organisational reflections and evaluations of WoMin's Northern Cape operations. The assessment examined both the operational effectiveness and strategic alignment of the direct implementation model compared to the organisation's partnership-based work in other regions.

2.4.1. Key Findings

Operational strengths and weaknesses were identified as well as longer-term strategic tensions.

Operational strengths. The direct implementation model in the Northern Cape has demonstrated several significant advantages over WoMin's partnership-based approach. The organisation has achieved unprecedented depth in community relationships; the locally rooted team has been able to build trust and connection that would be difficult to replicate through partner organisations. This direct engagement has been facilitated by the team's exceptional mobilisation expertise, with two team members bringing extensive experience in community organising that has successfully anchored WoMin's ecofeminist politics in real-world struggles.

The model has also provided invaluable learning opportunities, giving WoMin first-hand insights into community challenges and opportunities that enhance their broader continental movement support and building work. The Northern Cape has effectively served as an experimental work in which WoMin put into practice its own political ideology. In doing so, its direct organising presence has strengthened its credibility as a movement builder, demonstrating a commitment beyond purely advisory or funding relationships.

Critical operational challenges. Despite these strengths, the direct implementation model faces substantial operational difficulties. The most significant challenge stems from a fundamental mismatch between team skills and role requirements. While the team excels at community mobilisation, their positions demand extensive administrative, reporting, and compliance work for which they lack adequate preparation and resources. This disconnect has created ongoing frustration and strain within the team.

The three-person team structure has proven inadequate for the range of direct implementation activities that are required, leaving staff consistently overstretched and struggling to balance intensive fieldwork with organisational responsibilities. This capacity constraint is exacerbated by competing demands on WoMin's core operations team, who must simultaneously support both the partnership work across multiple countries and the direct implementation one in South Africa.

Strategic tensions. The direct implementation model creates internal inconsistency in how WoMin defines and practices its organisational role. The dual approach of working through partners in some regions while directly implementing in South Africa generates confusion about the organisation's strategic identity and optimal operating model. This ambiguity has sparked internal debates about whether WoMin should continue direct implementation, given its stated focus on movement support through partnerships. The current structure also raises serious sustainability concerns, as the small team risks burnout without additional staff or support systems. The model's long-term viability remains questionable under current resource constraints.

2.4.2. Analysis and Implications

The Northern Cape experience reveals both the potential and the pitfalls of direct implementation for movement-support organisations. While the approach has generated deeper community connections and more nuanced understanding of grassroots challenges, it has also stretched organisational capacity and created strategic confusion.

The success of community mobilisation suggests that direct implementation can enhance WoMin's movement-building credibility and effectiveness. However, the operational challenges indicate that such approaches require different organisational structures and skill sets than partnership-based models. The mismatch between mobilisation expertise and administrative requirements, in particular, highlights the need for specialised support systems. The tension between direct implementation and partnership models also raises a broader strategic question about organisational focus and identity. Organisations attempting hybrid approaches must carefully consider whether the benefits justify the increased complexity and additional resource requirements.

2.4.3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Strategic clarification. WoMin faces a critical decision point regarding its strategic direction. The organisation must determine whether to maintain a hybrid model or move toward a clearer, more focused approach. This decision should be based on careful analysis of organisational mission, capacity, and comparative advantage.

Operational improvements. If WoMin chooses to continue direct implementation in the Northern Cape, immediate operational changes are essential. The organisation should invest in specialised administrative support to allow mobilisation staff to focus on their strengths. This could involve hiring dedicated administrative personnel or restructuring roles to better match skills with responsibilities.

Resource allocation and sustainability. The current three-person team structure is insufficient for sustainable direct implementation. WoMin must either expand the team or reduce the scope of direct implementation to prevent burnout and maintain quality engagement with communities.

Learning integration. Regardless of the ultimate strategic direction, WoMin should systematically capture and integrate learnings from the Northern Cape experience into its broader movement-support work. The insights gained through direct implementation represent valuable knowledge that can enhance the organisation's partnership-based work in other regions.

Long-term implications. The Northern Cape case study highlights fundamental questions about scale, sustainability, and strategic focus in movement-support work. Organisations considering similar hybrid approaches should carefully weigh the benefits of direct community engagement against the operational complexity and resource requirements such models demand. Success requires not just strategic commitment but also appropriate organisational structures, skill sets, and support systems to sustain both community relationships and institutional requirements.

2.5. The Shoulders Bearing the Weight: Movement Support vs. Movement Building

Women, please come out and demonstrate. Because when you agitate, there is something done.
—Focus group participant in Port Harcourt, Nigeria (relating how women are now being called upon to lead public protests because they are less likely to be killed by the authorities than men)

The women from Africa, when they gather, realise they share similar realities.
—Focus group participant in Cameroon

WoMin views movement building and organising as potent strategies for combating destructive extractivism and fostering ecofeminist development alternatives in African communities and it has developed a wide range of tools and processes to achieve these objectives.

- National and regional convenings
- Grassroots, women-led campaigning
- Feminist political education and consciousness raising by means of feminist ‘schools’, solidarity and learning exchanges, and activist resource materials and guides
- Ecofeminist knowledge construction, based on feminist standpoint theory, by means of feminist political economy research, feminist participatory action research (FPAR), and information and knowledge tracking and management.

The evaluation sought to understand how these tools and processes translate into practice in different contexts and what has been seeded or created as a result of these initiatives. Field visits were undertaken to Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa for focus group discussions, and online interviews were conducted with partners in other countries (Burkina Faso, Guinea-Conakry, Gabon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, and Senegal).

2.5.1. WoMin Staff Perspectives

WoMin’s approach to its role within the feminist and environmental justice movements is multifaceted and internally debated. The issue of ‘movement building versus movement support’, in particular, is a subject of vigorous discussion, reflecting the organisation’s broad continental reach and its engagement with various forms of women-led organising.

WoMin has put feminist organising and movement building at the core of its strategic approach from the beginning, though staff acknowledge that this focus has only truly 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 contention within the organisation. In either case, many staff members agree that movement building has to be a long-term, iterative process requiring continuous reflection and adaptation. As one staff member said, ‘the question of movement building needs time and patience to examine what is and isn’t working’.

Diverging perspectives. In the view of some staff members, WoMin is not well positioned to engage directly in community organising. This perspective stems from the organisation’s history of working mainly through partnerships with other organisations. Concerns were also expressed that working directly with CBOs could put WoMin in direct competition with partners or former partners. From this perspective, WoMin is better suited to support existing movements by providing political education, critical analysis, resources, and platforms for strategic convening, all of which contribute to strengthening collective struggles.

Other staff members take the view that WoMin needs to get directly involved, particularly in contexts where existing women-led 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 should play a 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’.

For some staff members, connecting communities across diverse regions and struggles should be WoMin’s priority when it comes to movement building. They maintain that resisting extractivism and the hegemony of large corporations systemically requires a robust, unified, interconnected, continental network of activists. In this view, WoMin’s true value is as a connector and amplifier uniquely able to link the lived realities and concerns of grassroots communities to continental and global agendas, thereby facilitating knowledge sharing and fostering solidarity.

Reconciling movement support with movement building. The interviews also revealed the potential for integrating the two approaches. Staff recognise that supporting existing movements and building new ones are not necessarily mutually exclusive strategies. However, bridging this gap requires a clear, shared understanding of what ‘movement building’ actually entails for an organisation like WoMin. This would allow the organisation to develop a comprehensive strategy that could enable direct efforts to establish and nurture new formations while continuing to provide support for existing groups.

Leaning on possibilities. Although there was widespread agreement on the organisation’s vital role in strengthening feminist and environmental justice struggles, the optimal approach—building, supporting, or connecting—remains a topic of ongoing debate. Nevertheless, while ensuring that WoMin’s future initiatives are clear, strategic, and aligned with its vision, core values, and capacities is a priority for everyone, staff members agreed on the need for continuous experimentation and collective reflection.

2.6. What Is WoMin Seeding on the Ground?

The women who went through WoMin’s processes have been transformed. They now have another vision for their lives. They have another vision for how things should be done in their community.

—Director of a woman-led organisation in Cameroon

What WoMin is seeding first and foremost is a powerful kernel of personal transformation, drawing from the historical mass-organising tool that is feminist consciousness-raising based on the fundamental insight that the personal is always political. WoMin’s core goal, therefore, is to support African women, in all their diversity, to use their own lives in order to understand concretely the roots of patriarchy and of the corporate and political exploitation that male supremacy both grows out of and feeds. WoMin, like other feminist organisations, knows that this understanding is foundational for building and sustaining grassroots feminist movements.

2.6.1. Women Learning Liberation: A ‘School of Feminisms’

The most powerful process supporting WoMin’s consciousness-raising work to date is its groundbreaking eighteen-month ecofeminist popular education programme, Women Learning Liberation (WLL), which has been held thus far in Madagascar, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon, South Africa, and Uganda. The programme has been a transformative platform for feminist political education, as evidenced by both on-site field visits and online interviews conducted with participants.

The WLL programme is widely lauded as a ‘school of feminisms’ in which participants delve deeply into the causes and effects of patriarchy, capitalism, extractivism, and ecological destruction. However, the programme’s impacts extend well beyond theoretical understanding. In building confidence and assertiveness in the participants, it has a powerful knock-on effect on their organising work in their communities. The programme’s methodology, emphasising community-based learning through dialogue, sharing, and collective reflection, is highly regarded for embodying feminist values of care, mutual growth, and solidarity. Whether as a result of one-on-one conversations or focus group discussions, every participant in the WLL programme comes away with a compelling transformation story to share. These stories speak not only of personal empowerment but also how the programme has impacted participants’ families and communities.

- *Each time I return from a training, I feel transformed. The first people to benefit . . . are my family members, although in the community at large I’m beginning to feel stigmatised because people, mostly women, believe that I’ve become a rebel.*
—Participant in Cameroon
- *So, the training that the women went through, is it so that they can walk over us? My wife has changed so much that I no longer understand her.*
—Husband of a WLL participant in Cameroon (as related by a partner’s programme staff member)
- *Apparently, I have become an activist. In my community, I’ve been nicknamed an opponent.*
—Participant in Cameroon
- *Thanks to WLL, I’m now an unofficial couple counsellor. Husbands in my village now come to me asking to educate their wives.*
—Participant in Cameroon

2.6.2. Challenges and Critiques

Despite highly positive feedback overall, like any ambitious, transformative project, Women Learning Liberation received feedback that suggests a need for improvements in some areas. The criticisms can be grouped into four main themes.

Intensity and pace. Some participants found the programme’s content intensity overwhelming, suggesting a need to dedicate more time in the programme schedule to processing and integrating the information presented. These participants felt that the volume of material required more extended follow-up and more opportunities for discussion and reflection than the four-day timeframe permitted. Some said they would have preferred shorter intervals between modules as a way of maintaining momentum, indicating a diverse range of learning styles and preferences within the cohorts.

Accessibility and expansion. Many participants critiqued the limited reach of the programme— only ten women per country (albeit from diverse communities) were selected to participate—and advocated expanding the programme to reach a larger number of women within their communities. There was a strong feeling that the programme should be extended to include the women in communities who are most resistant to community organising efforts. This suggests a need for strategies to engage a broader range of perspectives and experiences.

Financial compensation. While participants appreciated WoMin’s approach to compensating for lost income during the training, some felt the amounts were insufficient. They pointed out the diverse nature of their income-generating activities, suggesting a need for a more nuanced and equitable compensation system that reflects the diverse financial realities of participants. A significant logistical challenge was

also identified in that participants had to cover their transportation costs to the training venue, with reimbursement on arrival. This approach, perhaps intended to streamline administration, created a financial barrier for some participants. Several women had to borrow money to get to the venues, causing them stress and anxiety.

Peer support and ongoing connection. Some participants reported difficulty maintaining consistent connections with their peers outside the formal training sessions, citing the demands of their daily lives and the financial implications of long-distance communication.

Reflections from facilitators (a combination of WoMin's and partner's programme staff) **and the two consultants** who informed the programme design, highlighted the complexities and impactful nature of an innovative programme designed to empower women from diverse backgrounds. They stressed WLL's distinctiveness: its explicitly ecofeminist and anti-capitalist principles; its stress on the interconnections of gender-based violence, colonisation, and capitalism; its focus on practical, inclusive learning; and its respect for and leveraging of the existing knowledge and experience of participants regardless of their level of formal education.

However, the facilitators and the consultants noted that the programme's ambitious scope creates limitations. Its considerable financial demands, especially the travel and lodging costs, pose a significant challenge for the sustainability of the model, as do language barriers encountered in the different countries involved. As well, managing such a complex programme is not easy and requires continuous adaptation.

Despite these challenges, the facilitators reported witnessing powerful impacts. Participants demonstrated marked improvements in their political analysis, increased confidence, and a greater understanding of systemic issues. The facilitators themselves experienced significant personal and professional growth as a result of their involvement in the programme. The entire team expressed a strong commitment to continuous learning and adaptation, while recognising the importance of ongoing refinements to enhance the programme's effectiveness.

Both the consultants and the facilitators identified several key tensions and trade-offs. These include the heavy workload placed on facilitators who often juggle other organisational responsibilities; the impact of time constraints on the depth of engagement with participants; the challenges of managing power dynamics between partners, facilitators, and the coordination team; and the logistical hurdles posed by geographic and language barriers.

Their reflections also touched on more nuanced concerns, including the potential for the programme to be perceived as overly challenging to existing systems of power, particularly by participants who may not identify as activists, as well as the lack of information on the programme's broader influence on regional movements. The education model itself is also a concern. As one consultant observed, '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'. Finally, all those interviewed acknowledged issues of fatigue among participants, facilitators, and the consultants, as well as the lack of real connection between facilitators outside of formal training sessions and meetings, which limited collaboration and knowledge sharing.

2.6.3. National, Sub-regional, and Language-based Feminist Schools

WoMin's feminist schools date back to shortly after its inception in 2014 when WoMin convened a dialogue of JASS (Just Associates), Rural Women's Assembly, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Forum Mulher,

and Open Society Foundation (Southern Africa) to share approaches to and practices of feminist popular education. Two years later, in 2016, WoMin organised its first pan-African feminist school in South Africa, followed by a second in 2017 in Ghana. Between 2018 and 2025, WoMin facilitated national feminist schools with partners and allies in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Uganda. In 2021, WoMin experimented with its first Francophone feminist school, which took place in Burkina Faso and involved women organisers from across West and Central Africa. An Anglophone school followed in Uganda in 2023. In 2024, WoMin held a feminist organising school for women activists impacted by African Development Bank (AfDB)-supported extractive and infrastructure megaprojects.⁵

In Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, the evaluation sought to gather insights into the tangible influence and outcomes of participation in the schools with a few participants. The responses provided were surprisingly limited in scope. While the participants uniformly acknowledged the significance of these political education spaces in their personal journeys, citing their importance in fostering their growth as activists and bolstering their individual commitment to feminist principles and praxis, they struggled to articulate any impacts on their broader movement and organising efforts. The reflections offered were primarily focused on the subjective experiences of personal empowerment and increased awareness rather than on any demonstrable shifts in collective actions. This lack of concrete examples presented a challenge to the evaluation team as we sought to understand the schools' wider influence beyond individual development.

2.6.4. A Flowering of Voices

Across regions, the R2SayNo (Right to Say No) campaign has been widely celebrated as one of WoMin's most groundbreaking initiatives, seen as giving language and visibility to women's right to resist harmful models of development and extractive projects. According to WoMin, the R2SayNo is a call by communities for their development sovereignty... the right to self-determination and decentralised power so that they can shape their own development without external intervention.⁶ Through feminist consciousness raising, R2SayNo supports women to develop their own understanding of corporate and state power and gives them tools to organise against it. Those interviewed for this evaluation describe the approach as eye-opening.

An overwhelming number of the community participants who were interviewed agreed that the R2SayNo training has supported them to find their own voice and emboldened them to speak publicly in the presence of men, village elders, chiefs, and even their own husbands. Testimonies abounded on R2SayNo's powerful impact at this personal level. One focus group participant in Nigeria had this to say.

Before, in my community, the first daughters of families were not allowed to marry so that they could stay home to care for their parents. After the R2SayNo training, we are now advocating with the chiefs and traditional leaders to revoke the custom and allow us first daughters to also marry.

Another focus group participant, also in Nigeria, said, 'the R2SayNo enlightened us to be bold and stand up to claim what belongs to us. We are now talking; they can see we have guts!'

⁵ A summary of WoMin's various documents as provided by the Director on October 29, 2025.

⁶ WoMin (2019), Concept note: R2SayNo. Unpublished.

Some of the power of R2SayNo comes from its implementation model and the ways in which WoMin's programme staff work with communities. The local R2SayNo training was said to have created powerful spaces for both women and men to organise together against harmful development and extractive projects. As one male staff of a partner organisation in Nigeria said,

R2SayNo is the most palpable of all WoMin's initiatives. The name is catchy and easy to remember, but most importantly, when we go into communities for training, people quickly make a link between the training content and what is happening in their communities. Word [about R2SayNo's power] is spreading. We are receiving requests from other communities to conduct the training in their localities.

We heard many more stories of how R2SayNo had emboldened local struggles in diverse locations. The stories that follow are a small sampling of the highly positive feedback we received.

A participant in Liberia explained that

Our partnership with WoMin, firstly, it opened our eyes to new dimension of advocacy and awareness of what is actually happening in the communities, particularly through the R2SayNo project. Though we had the vision and we had the ability before to raising awareness in the communities where we work, we didn't know that actually there are projects that normally can harm the communities or even women in particular. But with our engagement with WoMin and then developing our understanding on the principles of R2SayNo it strengthened our community mobilisation and advocacy work.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the community-based organisation Réseau des Femmes Braves (REFEB), located in Aboisso, a town about two hours from Abidjan, the economic capital, has adapted R2SayNo written material into a six-month curriculum to train one hundred girls and young women as part of the organisation's goal of construct an intergenerational feminist movement in the area.

In Nigeria, according to focus group participants, the town hall in their community in Bayelsa State was a no-go area for women in the community. Whenever there was town hall meeting, women were only expected to serve drinks, wait outside, and enter afterwards only to clean up, by which time all the important decisions had been taken. One participant said,

It was difficult [but] due to the training and the advocacy we were able to conduct [based on R2SayNo], we now have two women on the local council. That is a very big gain for us. And then, when it comes to access to scholarships for children, we were also able to advocate for girls' rights. And when it comes to oil company compensation, too, the same thing happened. [Before this], when money came into the community through oil companies, women were not given. But now, they give us. Before, when money came in, they transferred the money to men's accounts. Women were not allowed to open individual bank accounts where this money can be paid to them directly. But now, it is not like that. Because of our advocacy, the sensitisation and awareness-raised we have created, the community chiefs and the leaders, what they did was to meet a bank who came and opened accounts for all the women.

As a final example, this story from a female staff member of Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) in Senegal is particularly edifying.

The R2SayNo, it marked me so much. Because we attended the launch in 2018 at the World Social Forum which took place in Johannesburg. And when we came in, we appropriated the R2SayNo. Even if it wasn't at our level, we appropriated the R2SayNo. And the community women too. After the trainings, when a project was planned in their communities that could harm their environment and way of life, they said that 'we have the right to say no'. Yes, that's the reality. And through this same R2SayNo, they're setting up training sessions on the R2SayNo with the help of female lawyers with experience in gender and other issues. That's something we've seen so far. This is a very recent activity, linked to the R2SayNo, that was in April [2025]. We're working in the Saloum Delta against the Sangomar oil exploitation, and WoMin is supporting us in that through the R2SayNo. When the government organised a community forum, where women are the guardians of the Saloum Delta ecosystem, they called me and told me the government and oil company were organising a forum, but women were not invited. I asked, 'What do you want to achieve?' They told me to mobilise and protest. And it had such an impact on that forum because there was no community or person living in the delta who thought there were women who knew their rights and could give their opinion on what was happening. The minister was even disturbed during his speech and asked his wife to show him what was written on 'that piece of paper'. It was powerful, it was moving, and it was a source of pride. . . . So, what we're doing with WoMin . . . is having an impact and is starting to bear fruit.

The strong campaign and movement-support dimensions of R2SayNo were clearly apparent in the regional R2SayNo convergences organised by WoMin. These convergences serve as crucial spaces for knowledge exchange and solidarity-building among communities affected by resource extraction.

Although most interviewees offered only limited insights on the relevance and impacts of these gatherings, some participants, particularly those from Liberia, were much more expansive. One Liberian activist said the convergence she participated in had been 'very, very helpful because it's a space for exchange, for learning, experiencing. We learn of the work from the community there [the host country], how they are advocating for their rights, to learn how they are resisting in cooperation, so that when we go back [home], we try to use this knowledge and skill into our own community'. This comment highlights the practical value of the convergences as opportunities to share strategies and foster mutual support among communities facing similar challenges.

2.6.5. Challenges and Critiques

Despite the perceived benefits of the R2SayNo initiative, tensions were evident in two key aspects of project implementation.

Goals vs. resources. Several partners highlighted a tension between the ambitious goals of the campaign and the scarcity of resources allocated to support its grassroots advocacy efforts. As one Nigerian focus group participant pointed out, 'advocacy is about knock, knock, knock until a door opens, and that takes time and resources'. This succinctly captures the core challenges of sustaining advocacy, particularly in resource-constrained contexts against powerful forces such as oil and mining companies and governments. Questions were also raised about the practicalities of applying R2SayNo principles in communities that lack access to legal protections or face the threat of violent reprisals for their resistance to powerful, entrenched interests.

Goals vs. reach. The most common criticism levelled against R2SayNo was its limited scope. The overwhelming consensus was that WoMin needed to significantly expand R2SayNo's reach. Beneficiaries of the local training sessions and NGO partners alike urged WoMin not only to invest the necessary resources to sustain the programme but to include a greater number of communities in the initiative. An especially notable aspect of the call to expand R2SayNo was a strong consensus that it should also be a mixed-gender initiative. Most participants said they would prefer men from their communities to be included in order to tap into the potential of engaging men in support of women-led initiatives. NGO partners, too, see R2SayNo as an ideal entry point for galvanising male support. In fact, in a proactive response to participant's criticism, most have already begun providing R2SayNo training to both women and men.

2.7. Possibilities for Movement Support and Movement Building

WoMin has a range of powerful tools at its disposal to enhance movement support and contribute to movement building. These include

- Convergence/gathering spaces like the R2SayNo regional convergence and the pan-African Women Climate Assembly (WCA)
- Learning and solidarity exchanges
- The Debt, Reparations, and African Development Bank campaign, including the participatory ecofeminist cost analysis processes
- Risk and safety trainings and tools.

2.7.1. The WCA as a Platform for Agrarian and Working-Class African Women

The Women Climate Assembly emerged in response to the glaring lack of representation or of dedicated space for women within the African Climate Justice Collective (ACJC). To address this gender gap, WoMin and three partners—Kebetkache in Nigeria, Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) in Senegal, and Green Development Advocates (GDA) in Cameroon—came together to create the WCA, working with the support of a steering committee. According to WoMin, 'the WCA is a space in which grassroots women in communities impacted by mega extractives who live the climate crisis daily can come together to build and strengthen the Pan African women's climate justice movement'. WoMin, due to its significant financial and political influence, took the lead in sustaining the initiative and has played the main role in fundraising, coordinating the steering committee, organising the assemblies (beginning in Nigeria in 2022 and 2023, then Senegal in 2024), and spearheading the development of the agenda for each gathering.

The WCA is attended by the following groups of women, according to WoMin:

- Women resisting extractives projects including dirty energy, industrial agriculture, industrial mining, industrial fishing, industrial forestry, and infrastructure megaprojects.
- Women impacted by the fallout of climate warming: women in the Sahel confronting war; women fishers impacted by warming oceans and sea level rises; women farmers whose livelihoods have been destroyed; and women who have been displaced by climate migration, etc.
- Women working in NGOs and solidarity organisations who will stand with the women in the assembly.⁷

The three WCAs brought together a total of 460 women from Central and West Africa, making the WCA the largest women-centred climate justice gathering in Africa. Like the R2SayNo, the WCA has garnered

⁷ WoMin (2024) African Women Rise for Climate Justice, a concept note (2024). Unpublished.

widespread acclaim as a potent platform for agrarian and working-class African women, arguably the demographic most threatened by climate change, who have found in it a space in which to raise their voices confidently together. Indeed, some participants said they consider the WCA to be the single most visible manifestation of WoMin's ecofeminist movement-building efforts, and many spoke of profound personal transformations as a result of participating in the WCA. For some, attending the WCA was the first time they had left their home areas, travelled by plane, or navigated the unfamiliar environment of a hotel. Most importantly, for many it was the first time they had connected with hundreds of other African women from across the two regions. Wherever they came from and whatever their prior experience, participating in the assembly left an enduring impression on participants that has continued to foster a sense of solidarity and empowerment.

When asked what specific benefits came from participation in the WCA, the participants we interviewed highlighted six areas.

- **Clarifying the breadth of WoMin's agenda.** The WCA has served as a crucial platform for fostering the development of a more truly pan-African ecofeminist movement.
- **Amplifying African women's voices.** The assemblies provide a vital platform for women to freely and safely voice their concerns, experiences, and perspectives on climate justice and related issues.
- **Capacity building.** The assemblies are extraordinary capacity-building hubs that enable participants to gain a deeper understanding of climate and environmental issues by sharing their stories and ideas with women from throughout the continent, empowering one another with new knowledge and advocacy skills.
- **Networking and building solidarity.** The assemblies make participants realise that, despite diverse contexts, they share similar realities and challenges that need to be tackled in solidarity and enable connections to be made or strengthened, creating new networks and knitting together existing ones.
- **Igniting activism.** The assemblies energise and amplify participants' activism, inspiring them to take action and advocate for their communities more determinedly when they return home.
- **Valuing every contribution.** Assemblies are pre-eminently a space where every participant, regardless of background or experience, is respected and valued for their voice and their views.

2.7.2. Critiques of the WCA

From members of the WCA steering committee, the main criticisms we heard concerned

- **Lack of decision-making power.** Several members said the steering committee has insufficient decision-making authority. In their view, excessive dependence on WoMin's resources and leadership limits the committee's autonomy and its ability to shape the assemblies' agendas.
- **Chaotic assembly organisation.** Other members highlighted inefficiencies in assembly preparations and last-minute decisions from WoMin that put undue pressure on the host country, caused members stress, and created budgetary implications for WoMin itself.

Committee members recommended

- **Establishing WCA as an independent, stand-alone initiative.** Having its own clearly defined strategic vision and fundraising approach would, in their view, promote greater independence, focus, and accountability for the WCA's goals and activities as a whole.
- **Developing a dedicated WCA social media platform.** The aim of this would be to enhance visibility, expand reach, and drive increased engagement through more effective and timelier

communication with supporters, staff, and participants (including potential future participants), and dissemination of information to a much wider African and global audience.

From the perspective of WCA participants and project partners, the main challenges are

- **Limited political content and impact.** A few participants, and most NGO partners, felt that the assemblies' content should be more politically charged and impactful. They advocated taking stronger stances on the issues that concern participants, arguing that unless assemblies move in this more radical direction, the WCA risks becoming a siloed event without much influence or impact beyond the assembly itself.
- **Language barriers.** The limited fluency in English or French of many participants creates communication barriers that inhibit the informal conversations outside formal workshop settings that are necessary for more extensive and productive networking and relationship building.
- **Lack of follow-through.** Participants rarely learn how or whether the many declarations and resolutions that are adopted during an assembly are implemented or what results they achieve, creating a perceived lack of continuity and impact.
- **Insufficient documentation.** Failure to maintain and distribute full documentation on the struggles uniting the participants and on issues raised during assemblies limits knowledge sharing, institutional memory, visibility, and long-term impact.

Participants and partners recommend

- **Decentralising the assembly.** To enable more women in different countries to participate, national WCAs should be established to discuss issues and to network at national level prior to each pan-African WCA.
- **Empowering community-level participants with practical skills.** To enhance their agency and impact, community-based women should be trained prior to or during WCAs on skills and techniques for utilising the outcomes of assemblies, including how to draft and issue statements and declarations on issues of concern.

It is worth noting that prior to the 2024 Assembly in Senegal, WoMin played a crucial role by organising and facilitating a three-day training programme for facilitators. This intensive training brought together twelve community leaders from several countries, providing them with essential skills and knowledge to facilitate key sessions during the WCA in Senegal. The impact of this pre-assembly training was profound, as evidenced in the recollection from a Senegalese community leader who directly benefitted from the training. Reflecting on the experience, she shared that the process 'rose the lion in her heart to fight for climate justice'. This statement underscores the transformative effect of the training, which not only provided practical skills but also ignited a deep-seated passion and determination to fight for environmental justice and women's rights. Her words testify to the effectiveness of WoMin's efforts to build capacity and inspire action at the grassroots level.

2.7.3. Learning and Solidarity Exchanges

Solidarity and learning exchanges within and between countries build connection and solidarity, deepen participants' consciousness of the multiple systems that oppress women, and expose them to alternative ways of organising, producing, and providing local services. WoMin's learning and solidarity exchanges were widely lauded as transformative. For example, after a learning exchange trip to Conakry in Guinea, the Gabonese participants returned home and mobilised the women of ten different villages to oppose

harmful projects being funded by the AfDB in their home area. Of the Cameroonian participants in the same exchange visit, a staff member from a WoMin partner organisation there said, ‘after Conakry, we saw the wild in them. They were like flowers. They just bloomed!’

As with R2SayNo and WCA, these solidarity and learning exchanges made deep impacts on the women who participated in them but also on the host’s community. As a leader in Côte d’Ivoire shared, ‘when a woman’s organisation hosts one of these visits, it gives them values in the eyes of their entire community’. Every person interviewed for this evaluation—participants, NGO partners, and members of host communities—strongly advocated for the continuation of these visits.

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

So, I asked what you want them to do at this regional meeting on debt when they know nothing about it and we have never worked on the issue of debt with them. I don’t know, it’s an example to say that we cannot ask these women to give what they don’t have, and we cannot force them to enter into a process that they understand nothing about.

—Staff member of an NGO partner in Madagascar

The WoMin campaign on Debt, Reparations, and the African Development Bank started in Senegal, in partnership with LSD, around the Sendou coal-fired power station in Senegal, which was backed by the AfDB and the Dutch development bank (FMO). The primary focus of the work was to document how this project influenced women’s lives and means of support. The project then developed, and WoMin began mapping other AfDB investments in the countries they work in, with a focus on Central and West Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic added the dimensions of debt and reparations to this programme, justified by the reasoning that ‘because our countries are overwhelmed by debt, [they] cannot provide social and public services, including responses to the COVID crises due to their indebtedness’. As WoMin says, ‘this campaign is not only about revealing the cost of neoliberal and neocolonial types of investment, it also concerns African sovereignty’.

Due to time and budgetary constraints, we were unable to interview the main partners in this initiative. Those interviewed acknowledged the challenge of what one called the ‘abstract’ nature of the work. Educating communities about the operations of institutions like the AfDB and multinational corporations is a major challenge, which was also reflected in the evaluation reflections. With the exception of one partner, CADTM (Comité pour l’Abolition des dettes illégitimes), whose work is principally on illegal debt, the debt component of this campaign was absent in the conversations we had with partners.

Of those interviewed, several called for deeper awareness-raising efforts on the reparations campaign in particular. One NGO leader observed that most communities see reparations only as an economic issue and recommended that WoMin develop a long-term awareness-raising strategy that engages with all the implications of reparations. All of those interviewed stressed the necessity 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 our 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.

2.7.5. Participatory Ecofeminist Cost Analysis Research: Voices from the Field

To this date, I'm still proud of having been a community researcher.
—Community leader in Cameroon

The Debt, Reparations and the African Development Bank campaign is closely linked to the Participatory Ecofeminist Cost Analysis research project, which actually stemmed from the former. 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 organisation by engaging in a feminist participatory action research process focused on the impacts of mineral and oil extraction on women.⁸ While this project dates back to the organisation's inception and has been ongoing since then, the evaluation engaged with participants from Cameroon only. In that country, the research aimed to support women to identify and document the impacts of the AfDB-supported Nachtigal Dam project in 2024 and 2025. Its community-based methodology aimed to empower local women as researchers, collecting data and shaping the narrative. The project's impact thus extended beyond data collection to foster a sense of agency among the participating women.

The women involved in the research spoke of the project with a palpable sense of pride, recalling the challenges they overcame, including the difficulties of starting or returning to a programme of formal 'school', gaining the trust of other women and their families, and collecting and accurately recording the data. For the participating women, the project was an opportunity for personal growth that they welcomed and felt they had benefitted strongly from.

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 another community to collect data from women there. At the end of each day in the field, they met for a debriefing conversation in their shared hotel accommodation. The project thus offered a unique opportunity for these women to engage in focused research with peers outside their home villages and gain intimate access to the economic realities of women in other communities. The participants described how the data collection process involved entering into the privacy of other women's lives and how this deepened their understanding of the challenges and economic constraints faced by their peers and by themselves. The participants confirmed the transformative impact their work as researchers had on their social standing. Their involvement in the project altered how they were perceived by their community members and enhanced their status and recognition.

They were disappointed, however, that they had never received a copy of the research findings or been informed about the broader contexts or outcomes of their research. This oversight highlights the importance of follow-through in community-based research. To benefit fully from such projects, the participants need to feel involved in how the knowledge they helped generate is used.

⁸ WOMIN (2013-2014) PAR Research Framework cited in Feminist Participatory Action Research – Reflections and Observations from WoMin's Praxis 2017. Unpublished.

2.7.6. Risk and Safety Pilot Project and Handbook

WoMin's Risk and Safety project originated in 2017 following consultations WoMin facilitated in conjunction with a few partners. The process was informed by community leaders' observations and testimonies regarding the increasing backlash to their organising 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 designed to empower community leaders to proactively assess and address risks and safety concerns associated with their organising efforts. This initiative aimed to provide these leaders with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate potentially dangerous situations, ensuring their continued safety and the effectiveness of their vital work. Implementation of the strategy, however, had to be postponed. The global COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant delay in the planned pilot phase, but the pilot programme was successfully launched in 2021, engaging three of WoMin's key partners: WOME in Sierra Leone, Kebetkache in Nigeria, and Centre de Recherches et d'Appui pour les Alternatives de Développement – Océan Indien (CRAAD-OI) in Madagascar.

The pilot phase, while successful in initiating crucial conversations and raising awareness among community women of the dangers of their organising work, was criticised by both beneficiaries and partners as merely a one-off initiative. A recurring theme was frustration at the absence of continuous project implementation and inadequate communication on progress and future plans. This lack of follow-up undermined the programme's initial 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 the lessons learned, to build on the pilot's groundwork.

More specific recommendations emerged from the pilot phase in Nigeria and Madagascar. Activists and partner staff felt it was crucial for WoMin to contextualise and broaden its understanding of risk and safety to encompass the spiritual, economic, emotional, and digital dimensions of the issues in order to address the multifaceted challenges faced by activists.

Complementing the activities of the pilot phase, a dedicated risk and safety handbook was developed. This comprehensive resource, designed to be used as a practical toolkit, provided concrete guidance and support to women in their efforts to enhance their personal safety and security. With the added insights gained from broader consultations with leaders from other countries, the handbook later underwent a significant revision, and the revised and improved toolkit was publicly launched in 2023. This current iteration represents the culmination of extensive collaborative work, embodying the collective experiences, insights, and dedication of the women, partners, and allies with whom WoMin collaborates.

Through conversations during the evaluation—and in contrast to the pilot phase—the risk and safety handbook was strongly appreciated and has been used extensively across all regions. Activists recognise its value as a vital tool in their work. However, even here, there have been challenges around the limited availability of physical copies, which has hindered access and wider dissemination.

2.7.7. Publications and Other Resources

WoMin's publications in general have been praised for their intellectual depth, rigorous research, and incisive feminist political analysis. They are recognised as significant contributions to both feminist and

environmental justice scholarship and activism. The risk and safety handbook and the R2SayNo pamphlets have been particularly lauded for their strong feminist perspective and 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. In Nigeria, the partner has translated the R2SayNo pamphlets into Pidgin and other local languages to facilitate community awareness campaigns, particularly through community radio. The organisation also condensed the pamphlets into simpler, more concise single-page information sheets. Even more innovatively, some women community leaders in Nigeria have adapted the pamphlets into theatrical performances to stimulate community dialogues. In Liberia, one partner integrated the pamphlets into a toolkit for their training programmes and, at the time of this evaluation, was in the process of simplifying the risk and safety handbook for a similar purpose. A community organisation in Côte d’Ivoire adapted R2SayNo publications as a six-month curriculum for training one hundred girls and young women, and in Cameroon, another community organisation is using caravans as mobile classrooms in plantations to raise the local chiefs’ awareness of the complexities of extractivism and of the chiefs’ strategic importance in facing up to them. This is important because the authorities often engage with chiefs rather than directly with women.

Although this evaluation, with its focus on the partnership model, movement building, and movement support, could not fully encompass the expansiveness of WoMin’s multifaceted areas of work, the evaluation revealed that in the specific areas discussed above, WoMin is conducting remarkable and groundbreaking work. It has demonstrated a significant impact through its partnerships, which have fostered robust movement building and provided critical support to various environmental and social justice movements. WoMin’s approach, characterised by a commitment to intersectionality and the empowerment of grassroots organising, is yielding fruits that are challenging extractive industries, advocating environmental protections, and amplifying the voices of disempowered communities of women.

However, the evaluation also highlighted the inherent complexities of such ambitious and pioneering work. The rapid expansion of WoMin’s interventions, while indicative of its growing influence and impact, has also created certain blind spots. These are not necessarily failings, but rather areas where further refinement and attention are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of their initiatives. The following section delves into some of these areas.

2.8. Blind Spots in WoMin’s Movement Support and Movement Building

WoMin claims it supports grassroots leadership, but [it] prefers to fund NGOs . . . who then turn to us [women-led CBOs] to implement the activities. I don’t get it.
—Community leader in Cameroon

2.8.1. Pitfalls of the Familiar

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

offers several advantages, including efficiency and ease of implementation, as partners often possess pre-existing infrastructure, established systems, and existing community trust. However, this reliance on NGO partnerships has significant limitations. WoMin, through its support of grassroots organising via non-NGOs, finds itself inadvertently shaping the very structure and operational methods of the movements it aims to empower. The evaluation revealed a concerning trend: grassroots groups are increasingly encouraged by NGO partners to adopt formal organisational structures by registering as associations or other entities, depending on the local context. This trend poses a significant challenge to WoMin's radical vision, which is rooted in the principle of solidarity, grassroots autonomy, and the self-determination of communities. Furthermore, it undermines the long-term sustainability of the very collective grassroots organising WoMin supports.

The transition to formal organisational structures, often driven by the requirements of accessing funding and adhering to the protocols of NGO partnerships, has unintended consequences. These newly formalised organisations will find themselves competing for limited resources rather than fostering collaboration and solidarity within the broader movement. The imperative to demonstrate measurable impact, the demands of reporting to donors, and the pressures of operating within established funding cycles often lead to a focus on project-based activities rather than sustained movement building.

In its upcoming strategic development planning, WoMin must critically examine the political tensions and contradictions in its own implementation model. The organisation needs to reconsider the political risks associated with its current approach and explore alternative methods of enabling women in communities to organise and mobilise. This requires a willingness to move beyond the familiar but ultimately limiting terrain of the NGO model. This might involve supporting informal organising networks, expanding and sustaining its ongoing peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing, investing in capacity building that prioritises movement-building principles over administrative efficiency, and advocating for more flexible and less prescriptive funding models that allow grassroots groups to define their own agendas and strategies.

2.8.2. Top-down vs. Bottom-up Approaches

A critical consideration in WoMin's work, which involves collaborating with NGO partners to bolster women-led grassroots organising, centres on the potential for its approaches to lean more towards a top-down rather than a bottom-up model. This raises fundamental questions about the influence of capitalist frameworks on organisational structures, the role of respectability politics, and the ways in which class and gender privileges may shape the implementation of their programmes.

Specifically, the risk lies in how WoMin's implementation model may inadvertently reflect capitalist conceptions of 'structured' organisation, potentially prioritising 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.

Furthermore, the influence of respectability politics—the pressure to conform to mainstream funding and NGO norms and expectations—inadvertently shapes WoMin's approach. This might involve prioritising engagement with certain types of organisations or leaders, potentially marginalising those who do not fit within these frameworks, thus hindering the development of more diverse and inclusive movements. A reality captured in the quote that opened this section of the report.

The inherent power dynamics of class, gender, and race also warrant careful examination. Without a conscious effort to address the influence of class- and race-based privileges, the uneven flow of financial resources, and the unequal distribution of power within partnerships, WoMin risks reinforcing existing inequalities rather than challenging them. For instance, funding decisions, project implementation strategies, and the selection of beneficiaries could inadvertently favour certain groups or individuals, potentially sidelining the voices and experiences of the most marginalised women.

2.8.3. 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. These dynamics include internalised gender norms, pre-existing social hierarchies, competition for resources, and simmering underlying community tensions, often fuelled by historical grievances or economic disparities. WLL and WCA participants, for example, face resistance to their community mobilisation efforts because they are seen as privileged and thought to be gaining monetary rewards for their organising work. Too often they get responses such as ‘We are tired of your meetings. What is in them for me?’ This highlights the crucial need to demonstrate tangible benefits and address concerns about individual or group advantage.

Furthermore, the reality is that not all women share the same perspective or goals. Some women, influenced by factors such as economic dependence or perceived benefits, actively support the presence of extractive companies within their communities and actively resist efforts to organise against them. This can manifest in subtle ways, such as the deliberate spread of misinformation or, more overtly, through public opposition to activist initiatives. As shared by many participants, in a more insidious turn, some individuals may feign support for activists and join organisations with the express purpose of gathering information and reporting on their activities to the companies, village chiefs, or the authorities, thereby undermining the movement from within.

Moreover, pre-existing social hierarchies, deeply rooted in ethnic, and religious traditions or economic dynamics, can further complicate the landscape. These hierarchies often lead to the dismissal of women’s activism altogether. Women’s voices, especially those from marginalised groups, may be systematically silenced or disregarded, and their concerns treated with contempt.

Building a strong and sustainable foundation for community organising in these complex contexts, where competing interests, diverse opinions, and historical baggage abound, requires far 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 specific dynamics at play within each community is essential.

2.8.4. Personal Ambition and Co-optation

The evaluation observed instances where vocal and influential community leaders (who proudly shared their membership to) were co-opted into local political and corporate governing bodies such as committees and councils. While these individuals may have initially been at the forefront of grassroots movements supported by WoMin, their integration into these established structures risks diluting the grassroots nature of their movements while also starving the movements of independent leadership. This co-optation can lead to compromised political agendas and reduced accountability to the community while encouraging individual advancement over the collective good.

2.8.5. Generational Imbalance

Practically all the community leaders interviewed cited a significant weakness in WoMin's approach, namely the underrepresentation of younger women within WoMin's core activities. The collective experience and insights of seasoned activists, while invaluable, must be complemented by the fresh perspectives, technological fluency, and evolving priorities of younger generations. Without this vital infusion of youthful energy and engagement, WoMin risks becoming stagnant, losing touch with emerging challenges and opportunities, and, ultimately, diminishing its impact.

2.8.6. Women Living with Disabilities

At a focus group in Nigeria, a participant, herself navigating the world with mobility limitations, eloquently articulated the compounded vulnerabilities women living with disabilities face, particularly in the context of climate change and land expropriation. The participant emphasised that these women are not only grappling with the everyday challenges of disability, but also with the escalating threats posed by environmental degradation and the displacement of communities due to land grabs. She highlighted how these intersecting crises disproportionately impact women with disabilities, who may have limited access to resources, mobility, and support networks, rendering them even more vulnerable to the impacts of these events. She specifically urged WoMin to prioritise and amplify the voices and leadership of disability activists within the burgeoning African ecofeminist movement.

2.8.7. 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. There were cases where WoMin has left its partners or a process for some reason and local women's efforts have either stagnated or collapsed altogether. The following case study of WoMin's work in Uganda vividly illustrates this risk.

2.9. The Abrupt End of the Women Building Power Programme

This case study examines the abrupt termination of WoMin's Women Building Power (WBP) programme in Uganda, analysing the consequences of ending a transformative feminist organising initiative without proper exit planning. While the programme achieved significant impact in building feminist consciousness and community organising capacity, its discontinuation following internal staffing changes and proven allegations of financial misuse (investigated by a shared funder) created lasting challenges around trust, sustainability, and organisational relationships. The case highlights critical lessons about programme transition management and the responsibilities that organisations bear when building deep community connections.

2.9.1. Background and Context

The WBP programme in Uganda represented a significant investment in grassroots feminist organising implemented through local partner organisations rather than by direct implementation. The programme focused on building feminist political consciousness among women in communities affected by extractive industries and equipping participants with tools for community consciousness raising, feminist analysis, and organising.

The programme operated successfully between 2015 and 2018, establishing strong relationships with partner organisations and deep connections with community members. However, the initiative came to an abrupt end following a combination of internal organisational changes within WoMin, including the departure of the dedicated programme officer, and an uncomfortable organisational exit following

multiple allegations of sexual harassment, followed by a forensic audit (by a shared funder) that uncovered the misuse of funding by the partner organisation's most senior leadership. The donor then put pressure on WoMin to end the relationship, leading to the programme's abrupt termination without implementing a proper exit strategy. This created significant disruption for partners and communities who had invested deeply in the work.

This analysis draws from post-programme evaluations conducted with former partners and community participants in Uganda. The evaluations sought to understand both the lasting impact of the WBP programme and the consequences of its abrupt termination. Data was gathered through interviews and discussions with partner organisations and community members who had been actively involved in the programme.

2.9.2. Key Findings

Programme impact and transformation. Despite its abrupt ending, the WBP programme achieved a profound and lasting impact among participants and partner organisations. Partners consistently described the programme as deeply inspiring and transformative, with many organisations reporting that WBP seeded feminist politics within their own institutional structures and programming approaches. This suggests that the programme successfully achieved one of its core objectives—embedding feminist consciousness beyond direct programme activities.

At the community level, the impact was equally significant. Community members characterised their WBP experience as life-changing, emphasising how the programme equipped them with practical tools for consciousness raising, feminist analysis, and community organising. Notably, even years after the programme's termination, women in participating communities expressed deep investment in what they had learned and demonstrated remarkable resilience by continuing the work on their own initiative. The programme's approach appears to have successfully planted 'seeds' in communities that continued to grow even without direct organisational support. This organic continuation of feminist organising work demonstrates the enduring quality of the consciousness-raising and capacity-building methods employed by WBP, suggesting that the programme's pedagogical approach was particularly effective in fostering sustainable change.

Consequences of abrupt termination. The sudden ending of the WBP programme created significant negative consequences that undermined much of the trust and relationship building that had been central to its success. The departure of the programme officer was not communicated to partners or communities, creating confusion and uncertainty about the programme's status and WoMin's continued commitment to Uganda.

Partners described feeling abandoned by WoMin after the relationships and commitments built through years of collaboration ended without clarity or explanation. This sense of abandonment was particularly damaging given that feminist organising work relies heavily on trust and authentic relationship building. The lack of communication around the programme's termination violated these fundamental principles and damaged WoMin's reputation among partners.

The absence of proper exit planning also created a perception that WoMin no longer operated programmes in Uganda at all. This perception was reinforced by the absence of a WoMin board member from Uganda, further contributing to a sense of organisational withdrawal from the country despite the significant investments that had been made in building relationships and capacity. To WoMin's credit, the

organisation at that time was attempting to manage two separate crises in Uganda: the relationship with its partner and an internal process to remove the staff managing the WBP programme.

Loss of convening capacity. One of WoMin's most valued contributions to the programme had been its role as a convener of critical spaces where women could meet, reflect, and strategise together. Partners emphasised the importance of these convenings for building feminist consciousness and developing collective strategies to resist extractivism. However, when WoMin exited without transition planning, most of these crucial spaces were not sustained. The loss of convening capacity created a significant gap in the feminist organising ecosystem in Uganda. While some partners noted that WoMin's withdrawal pushed them to challenge themselves to deepen their own connections and organise together independently, the evaluation suggests that this organic replacement was insufficient to maintain the scale and consistency of connection that WoMin had facilitated.

Organisational resilience and adaptation. Despite the challenges created by the abrupt termination, the evaluation revealed significant organisational resilience among partners. The withdrawal of WoMin support forced partners to develop greater independence and strengthen connections among themselves, demonstrating both the strength of the relationships that WBP had helped to build and the capacity of partner organisations to evolve and adapt in response to changing circumstances.

However, this resilience came at a cost, as partners had to divert energy from programmatic work to rebuild the coordination and convening functions that WoMin had previously provided. The evaluation noted that existing partners remained vibrant and engaged, but they faced resource constraints that limited their ability to fully replace WoMin's previous role.

2.9.3. Analysis and Implications

Double-edged nature of transformative programming. The Uganda case illustrates the complex dynamics that arise when organisations successfully create transformative programming. The very depth of impact that made WBP effective also created greater responsibility for careful transition management. The programme's success in building deep relationships and fostering genuine transformation increased both the potential negative consequences of abrupt termination and the ethical obligations for responsible exit planning.

The continuing impact of WBP years after its termination suggests that transformative feminist programming can create sustainable change even under adverse circumstances. However, the damage to trust and relationships demonstrates that the way a programme ends can significantly affect an organisation's credibility and future opportunities for engagement.

Staff transitions and programme continuity. The case highlights the critical importance of managing staff transitions in relationship-based programming. The departure of the programme officer became a programme-ending event rather than a transition point, suggesting inadequate succession planning and institutional knowledge management. This points to broader questions about how organisations structure programmes to survive staffing changes and maintain continuity of relationships.

Partnership obligations and ethics. The evaluation raises important questions about the ethical obligations that organisations bear when they establish deep partnerships and community relationships. The feeling of abandonment expressed by partners indicates that WoMin's exit violated implicit commitments that had

been central to the partnership model. This highlights the need for clear frameworks for organisational responsibilities when ending partnership-based programming.

2.9.4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Immediate learning opportunities. The Uganda experience offers WoMin valuable insights into both effective feminist programming approaches and critical gaps in organisational systems. The lasting impact of WBP demonstrates the effectiveness of consciousness-raising and capacity-building methods, while the consequences of abrupt termination highlight essential areas for improvement in programme management and partnership ethics.

Programme transition planning. Organisations engaged in transformative relationship-based programming must develop robust systems for programme transitions that account for both planned and unplanned endings. This includes clear communication protocols, succession planning for key staff, and ethical frameworks for managing partnership obligations during organisational changes.

Re-engagement possibilities. The evaluation revealed strong interest among communities and partners in renewed engagement with WoMin, with specific requests for updated information and additional activities to strengthen ongoing efforts. This suggests opportunities for WoMin to repair relationships and build on the foundation that WBP established, though such re-engagement would require addressing the trust issues created by the abrupt termination.

Convening role sustainability. The importance of WoMin's convening role and the gap created by its absence suggests that organisations should either develop sustainable transition plans for critical functions or invest in building partner capacity to maintain essential coordination roles independently.

Organisational credibility and trust. The Uganda case demonstrates how quickly organisational credibility can be damaged when programme endings are poorly managed even when the programming itself has been highly successful. The contrast between the transformative impact of WBP and the negative consequences of its termination illustrates that how organisations end their work can be as important as how they conduct it.

Movement building and sustainability. The continuing grassroots organising efforts by community members years after programme termination suggests that effective feminist programming can create genuine movement sustainability. However, the loss of coordination and convening functions indicates that some organisational support remains crucial for maintaining the scale and connectivity necessary for broader movement building.

Implications for the partnership model. The case raises broader questions about partnership-based programming models and the responsibilities they create. Organisations considering similar approaches must carefully consider their capacity to maintain long-term commitments and ethical obligations when establishing deep community relationships through partners.

The Uganda experience ultimately demonstrates both the potential and the risks of transformative feminist programming, offering crucial lessons about the importance of matching organisational ambition with institutional capacity for responsible relationship management and programme transition planning.

3. Fortifying the Foundations: WoMin as a Feminist Organisation

That's the other assumption. That the people within, the women who work within WoMin do know something about what a feminist organisation is and should be. And they must be the ones to build it.

—One of WoMin's consultants

An evaluation of WoMin's organisational culture reveals a movement organisation that is deeply animated by 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 that affirm WoMin's feminist ethos and the challenges that require attention to sustain staff well-being and improve organisational effectiveness.

3.1. Strengths

At its strongest, WoMin demonstrates that feminist politics is not only something to advocate for in communities and movements, but also something to practice internally. Staff and partners alike recognise the ethic of care and solidarity that threads through the organisation. 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, and it is one of WoMin's most important legacies in the movements it nurtures. It is an ethic that manifests itself strongly in key aspects of WoMin's organisational culture, including

- **Sisterhood and care.** Staff spoke of a strong culture of care, especially in moments of personal crisis such as illness, grief, or emergency family responsibilities. The organisation was described as standing by staff during such times, reinforcing solidarity and compassion. Appreciation was also expressed for the strong employment benefits such as the pension fund and flexible leave arrangements.
- **Sense of purpose and alignment.** 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.
- **Space for discussion and debate.** Staff value the opportunities they are afforded to express their opinions and be heard in organisational processes, including meetings and consultations on strategy.
- **Political awareness and personal 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.
- **Commitment to feminist principles.** Staff recognise WoMin's deep grounding in feminist values, including the organisation's emphasis on solidarity, collective decision making, and the principle

of 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. These shortcomings were ascribed to always being on the go and not having time to reflect more deeply rather than from lack of commitment.

3.2. Challenges

The strengths above sit alongside real challenges. The 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:

- **Burnout and heavy workloads.** Overwork was a recurring theme. Staff reported working long hours under heavy workloads and difficulty maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Returning from leave often results in mounting pressure over accumulated tasks. As one staff member succinctly put it, 'We are just doing way too much'.
- **Isolation and limited staff cohesion.** Remote working arrangements, while necessary and beneficial in many ways, have sometimes led to feelings of isolation, weak team cohesion, and reduced opportunities for building trust and connection across the staff roster.
- **Emotional labour and unclear boundaries.** The organisation's strong culture of care, while highly valued, can also translate into emotional labour, with some staff feeling pressure to constantly 'show up' for colleagues despite emotional costs to themselves.
- **Decision-making tensions.** While the commitment to collective processes is appreciated, it is not always adhered to. Some staff said decisions affecting them and their work had been made without their involvement.
- **Gaps in approaches to care.** While WoMin's culture of care is strong, there were concerns that current structures are not responsive enough to ensure that care is provided equitably and sustainably. Although no one doubted that WoMin has the best of intentions, some staff members felt that the organisation does not consistently do enough to 'walk alongside' partners and communities and sometimes imposes its own agendas as well as onerous workload expectations.
- **Gaps in transparency.** Most staff expressed uncertainty about how and by whom decisions are made even on relatively simple matters such as petitions they are asked to sign. Staff described decision-making processes as opaque, with limited communication about the rationale behind key organisational or programmatic choices. This lack of clarity sometimes left staff feeling disconnected from the organisation's strategy and overall direction, reducing their sense of ownership over the work.
- **Uncertainties around agency.** About half the staff members felt they could not fully own their work due to sudden, unexpected decisions, shifting priorities, or changing approaches. This has created feelings of instability and, at times, of disempowerment. Other staff, however, noted that WoMin's flexible approach allows for adaptation to shifting political realities, though they acknowledged that this flexibility can also feel destabilising internally.
- **Growth and professional development.** Several staff members expressed their appreciation for the deepening political awareness that has come from working with WoMin, particularly around issues of extractivism, ecofeminism, and systemic analysis. However, just as many said that while they have grown politically, they feel they have been stagnating in areas such as skills

development, professional growth, or leadership opportunities. One described their experience as feeling like a ‘seedling within WoMin’ despite having felt like ‘a full-grown tree’ before joining the organisation. This metaphor captured both the humility of learning but also frustration with diminished agency and recognition.

- **Well-being and mental health.** Several staff members raised serious concerns about working conditions that negatively affect their mental health, pointing to heavy workloads, unclear structures, and the emotional demands of feminist organising. While there is an ethos of care in the organisation, some pointed out that this does not always translate into systemic practices that reduce pressure or ensure sustainable working conditions. Two staff members said that care responses are not fully institutionalised, with the result that different staff receive different levels of support.
- **Information sharing and internal communication.** Staff reported not having a clear picture of the organisation’s activities and feeling uninformed about processes within the organisation, noting gaps in internal communication and coordination that have sometimes caused disconnection between teams and that have overburdened partners.

Many staff emphasised that, despite the challenges, WoMin remains the best place they have ever worked, especially compared to toxic or authoritarian organisations they had worked in or with before. They highlighted WoMin’s feminist values, care, and solidarity as unique strengths that distinguish it from many other NGOs and movement spaces.

3.3. Becoming Fitter for Purpose

WoMin has generated a wealth of knowledge, methodologies, and political tools through its work. However, it still lacks an institutional structure to capture, consolidate, and carry these lessons forward. The organisation’s intellectual and political contributions are sometimes held within individuals rather than being embedded in a collective institutional memory. As a result, staff transitions can lead to gaps in continuity, and communities or partners may feel disconnected when programmes shift. This speaks to a wider challenge: how to sustain the seeds WoMin has planted in the movements it works with and ensure they continue to grow in ways that are connected back to the organisation.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that WoMin is both deeply fit for purpose because of its clarity of politics, grounded feminist values, and trust among partners but also lacking in the institutional scaffolding needed to translate values into consistent practices and ensure continuity. There is a sense among staff that the organisation is ‘stretched’ in ways that could compromise its sustainability.

Aligning WoMin’s internal practices more fully with its political commitments may therefore require:

- Re-imagining leadership and decision making so that political clarity is held collectively, not concentrated in a few individuals.
- Creating intentional systems of care and sustainability that make it possible for staff to thrive rather than burn out.
- 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.

WoMin's organisational culture is its greatest strength and its most pressing area of work. It inspires because it is rooted in feminist values, yet it also challenges the organisation to live those values more consistently. The question of 'fitness for purpose' is less about capacity and more about coherence: does 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.

4. What This Moment Asks of WoMin: Guiding Questions for the Next Strategy

As WoMin prepares for its next strategic period, the evaluation findings point to a pivotal moment of reflection and choice. The external context of intensifying violence of all forms—from the effects of extractivism, assaults on civic space, and deepening social and economic inequalities—requires greater clarity about WoMin's unique role and its position within the ecofeminist movement as a whole. Internal reflection, as evidenced by this evaluation, highlights the need to align WoMin's organisational culture, structures, and practices more firmly and consistently with its feminist values.

Together, the external pressures and the internal shortcomings call for courage, recalibration, and renewed imagination. Happily, as this evaluation has shown, WoMin's progressive values, history of groundbreaking initiatives, and extensive grassroots networks provide a solid foundation for this work. The following guiding questions identify key areas of reconsideration to accompany WoMin into its next strategy process.

4.1. Movement Building and Movement Support

- What is WoMin's unique role in this moment: to build feminist movements directly, to strengthen and support existing ones, or to facilitate connections across them?
- How can WoMin resolve the tensions between the need to build and support movements in a context of increasing urgency and the need for time, patience, and carefully cultivated grassroots connections for sustainable movement building?
- What strategies would enable WoMin to connect local struggles to regional and continental ones without overshadowing or replacing deep grassroots organising?
- In what ways can WoMin centre community voices so that movement building is defined from below rather than from organisational agendas?
- How does WoMin define 'success' in relation to movement building, and how can it avoid reproducing externally imposed measures of impact?

4.2. Organisational Culture and Internal Practice

- How can WoMin more deeply embody its feminist values in daily practice, particularly around care, decision making, and sustainability?
- What changes would ensure that staff have greater clarity and stronger feeling of ownership concerning decision-making processes?
- How can WoMin address issues of burnout and workload in ways that support both political commitment and personal well-being?

- In what ways can WoMin nurture a culture of trust, transparency, and shared accountability that enables creativity while reducing uncertainty?
- How can WoMin strengthen internal political education so that staff grow not only in their gendered understandings of extractivism but also in broader areas of feminist practice, facilitation, and leadership?

4.3. Partnerships and Community Engagement

- What principles of care and accountability should guide WoMin's approach to partnerships, entry points, co-creation, accountability, and exits?
- How can WoMin ensure that communities and partners do not feel abandoned when programmes shift or staff transitions occur?
- In what ways might WoMin model partnership practices that redistribute power, given its role as a resource-bearer?
- How does WoMin need to adjust to support the hybrid approach of direct implementation in South Africa while working through partnerships elsewhere?
- How can WoMin ensure that its partnership model is fully transparent, clear, and consistently reflects feminist ethics of care, reciprocity, and co-responsibility?

4.4. Feminist and Political Practice

- How can WoMin sustain spaces of feminist political education (such as Women Learning Liberation) as ongoing, transformative processes rather than one-off initiatives?
- What balance is needed between producing knowledge products (publications, campaigns, research) and investing in the slower, relational work of building solidarity and trust?
- How can WoMin continue to sharpen its feminist analysis of extractivism while ensuring that this analysis translates into practical tools and strategies for grassroots resistance?
- How might WoMin strengthen its intersectional analysis to connect extractivism with climate justice, labour struggles, food sovereignty, and reproductive justice?
- In what ways can WoMin position itself to influence continental and global debates while remaining rooted in the realities of local women and communities in Africa?

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

An evaluation of this nature is an act of courage on the part of WoMin. It is an invitation to be seen by others—and by yourselves—as a collective that is willing to reflect deeply and openly on the approaches it uses and on its impacts on communities and those engaging with it.

This evaluation process has surfaced a wealth of insight from staff, partners, and community members. Together, these voices affirm both the undeniable strengths and the complex challenges of WoMin's work. What emerges most clearly is that WoMin occupies a unique and indispensable place within the African feminist and ecofeminist movement landscape. Its commitment to resisting extractivism, centring women's voices, and advancing systemic change is recognised as not only impactful but essential. 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. These reflections are not limitations but invitations: opportunities to grow stronger, more transparent, and more sustainable. 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. That mirror reflects both 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.

Looking ahead, the recommendations offered here are not mere technical tweaks; they are pivotal steps for strengthening WoMin's political clarity, organisational culture, and role in supporting movements. They speak to the need for more intentional partnerships, deeper feminist accountability, 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; it is 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.