



WOMEN LEARNING LIBERATION



The Women Learning Liberation (WLL) is an 18-month popular education course, crafted by the WoMin African Alliance. By drawing upon the principles of ecofeminist popular education, the programme is designed to equip participants with essential tools and frameworks to critically analyze and challenge oppressive systems that shape their lives and communities.

This course aims to build the political and organizational capacities of grassroots women leaders who are actively engaged in resistance against the damaging realities of extractive development across the African continent.

The curriculum is structured around eight national learning modules, with ten women leaders participating from each of the six involved African countries: Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Madagascar, South Africa, and Uganda. Each module is facilitated by trained feminist educators who guide participants through complex sociopolitical issues while honing their leadership skills and fostering a deeper understanding of grassroots movements. This thoughtful approach encourages collaborative learning and strengthens the ability of these women to challenge systemic injustices effectively.

The course began in July 2024 and wrapped in March 2026. A significant highlight of the Women Learning Liberation programme was the Pan-African Gathering, which took place during Module 7 of the course in Maputo, Mozambique, from October 2 to 5 2025. This Gathering served as a pivotal milestone in the educational journey, providing participants with a unique opportunity to convene in person, share invaluable experiences, and nurture Pan-African solidarity.

While Guinea faced unforeseen circumstances that prevented their participation, the event still had around 50 attendees from the other participating countries, who came together to discuss shared challenges and strategize collective actions toward achieving justice and liberation.

Beyond individual growth, the WLL encouraged participants' collective commitment to advancing a Pan-African ecofeminist movement, rooted in care, resistance, and collaboration.



THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR FACILITATING SESSIONS

The WLL programme is facilitated using **feminist popular education (FPE)** methodologies that are derived from Brazilian Paulo Freire's education for liberation principles. FPE thus puts emphasis on starting where the women are. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that these principles are upheld by keeping in mind that each participant brings knowledge and experiences that she can share with the group, and that all are equals. This is the opposite of the model of learning based on the idea that a teacher has all the knowledge and that the students are empty vessels to be filled.

The role of the facilitator becomes very fundamental in ensuring the success of the programme.

ROLE OF FACILITATOR

The facilitators play a crucial role in supporting and guiding participants through their learning journey. Their responsibilities include:

- Making considerations about the venue and setting up the space for the session;
- Undertaking adequate preparation before each session to familiarise themselves with the objectives, materials, and methodologies;
- Lead and facilitate sessions;
- Together with the participants, set grounding principles for the space and offer the opportunity for any concerns to be raised.

For these sessions, facilitators should have existing participatory facilitation skills, and an openness to hone their popular education approach. Ideally, facilitators should also:

- Have a somewhat strong grasp of the ecofeminist politics, critical perspectives on development, and other themes found in the curriculum;
- Have previous experience or a willingness to learn how to conduct a training utilising popular education approaches and methodologies;
- Have worked with women in struggle;
- Be comfortable engaging conflict and confronting power;
- Have feminist sensibilities and a broad commitment to progressive/alternative politics.

VENUE CONSIDERATIONS AND SETTING UP THE SPACE FOR THE SESSION



Setting up the space is an essential element of the training as it facilitates mutual learning and also sets the tone for the space. In choosing a space, practical matters that affect people's energy are important. Having windows and natural light help enormously and ensuring that the room is large enough to do body work and not feel cramped is also key.

Additional things that can help make the space feel safe and supportive are:

Tissues, comfortable chairs, cushions, sweets, medical aid kit with emergency sanitary towels and tampons, extra water etc. A sense of fun, enthusiasm and good humor adds to establishing a space of trust, community and mutual inquiry.

The sessions work best for small groups of activists (10-12 participants) led by a facilitator, and when a group is from the same community or organisation.

Remember:

1. Before the session:

- Know your participants (their needs; context; etc)
- Know your session (objectives; methodology; timing)
- Read and prepare all the materials
- Set up the space
- Look out for any potential risks or threats and have a mitigation plan in place

2. During the session:

- Start with a grounding exercise - you can tap into the vast knowledge in the room to come up with context and culturally appropriate grounding exercises.
- Collectively set expectations and agreements
- Pay attention to participants needs and energy
- Encourage participation and include everyone
- Answer questions and clarify where needed
- Adapt when necessary

3. After the session:

- Finish with a grounding/closing exercise
- Gather feedback (what worked; what didn't)
- Reflect if the session objectives were fulfilled
- Follow up with participants if needed



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SESSION: CLEVER ACTIONS TO RAISE AWARENESS



Key Themes: Organising; Environmental protection

Recommended time: 1 hour

Objective:

- To deepen awareness of tactics to raise community awareness

What will need:

- Handout for participants: "Defending the forest"

STEP 1: INTRODUCTION IN PLENARY

(5 MINS)



The facilitator notes that raising awareness in our own community on the harm caused by extractive companies is often a first step in organising. We will work in three groups to think through actions we can take to raise awareness.

STEP 2: FACILITATOR READS SCENARIO

(5 MINS)



Scenario: Your community group has just heard that a logging company is in discussion with the traditional leader about taking over the forest that your community depends on. The destruction of the forest will cause great harm and hardship to your community, all living creatures, and the environment. You depend on the forest for food and water. The forest is home to many living creatures, and rare medicinal plants. The forest links you to your ancestors and is an important part of your identity. You have heard that the company has the support of the government and that the traditional leader is leaning on the side of the company and government, even though he has not yet made a decision. You also know there are some NGOs who have spoken out about the environmental damage that will take place if the company goes ahead with their plan.

Question for group discussion:

What actions can your group take to make community members aware that the company's plan would create harm for the community and that the community members have a Right to Say No to the company's plan? (e.g. door to door visits, doing a theatre sketch in the marketplace, asking the priest for space to speak after a church service to put across information, etc)

STEP 3: PARTICIPANTS DISCUSS IN THREE GROUPS

(30 MINS)



The facilitator divides the women into three groups. In groups, each participant does a quick introduction, giving their name and country; and asks for a volunteer who will report to plenary. The facilitator gives each group the handout, with the scenario and question for discussion. Each group discusses and prepares a report back to plenary.

STEP 4: SHARING IN PLENARY AND WRAPPING UP

(20 MINS)



Each group shares their response in plenary. The facilitator highlights the main learnings from this session.





PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: DEFENDING THE FOREST



Scenario:

Your community group has just heard that a logging company is in discussion with the traditional leader about taking over the forest that your community depends on. The destruction of the forest will cause great harm and hardship to your community, all living creatures, and the environment. You depend on the forest for food and water.

The forest is home to many living creatures, and rare medicinal plants. The forest links you to your ancestors and is an important part of your identity. You have heard that the company has the support of the government and that the traditional leader is leaning on the side of the company and government even though he has not yet made a decision. You also know there are some NGOs who have spoken out about the environmental damage that will take place if the company goes ahead with their plan.

Discussion questions:

What actions can your group take to make community members aware that the company's plan would create harm for the community and that the community members have a right to say no to the company's plan? (e.g. door to door visits, doing a drama in the marketplace, asking the priest for space to speak after a church service to put across information, etc).





SESSION: DEFENDING THE COMMONS



Key Themes: The Commons; Ecofeminism

Recommended time: 1 hour

Objective:

- To highlight how communal resources (The Commons) are an essential part of community identity, and key to sustaining livelihoods.

What will need:

- Materials: Flip Chart sheets; markers
- Video: [Women strip to protest land give-away in Amuru](#)
- Handout: Amuru Women Defend Their land

STEP 1: INTRODUCTION IN PLENARY (5 MINS)



Before showing the video, the facilitator tells the story of women stripping to protest land give-away in Amuru. The video captures a protest in Amuru, northern Uganda, where a community blocked the road to stop government officials from accessing their land. During the protest, local women stripped off their clothing to show their opposition to the government's plan to allocate community land for sugarcane plantations.

As they strip, some men look away or cover their eyes, as public nudity by women (especially older women) in protest holds deep cultural power. Police and private security are called to control the crowd, and they use guns and teargas against the community. The Amuru women were fighting to remain on their ancestral land which was targeted by foreign companies, who, with the support of the government and armed forces, have been trying to displace them.

STEP 2: WATCHING THE VIDEO (5 MINS)



Trigger warning: This video shows police brutality and might bring up emotions from participants. Use the Capacitar finger holds if needed.

STEP 3: READING THE CASE STUDY AND SHARING IN THREE GROUPS

(20 MINS)



The Facilitator distributes handouts and asks participants to read and discuss the following questions in three groups.

Question for group discussion:

- What are Amuru women defending?
- Why are they saying NO to land grabbing?
- What strategies did the Amuru women use to deal with the situation?
- What strategies did the government use?

STEP 4: GROUPS SHARE IN PLENARY

(10 MINS)



The facilitator asks the groups to share their responses in plenary.

STEP 5: PLENARY DISCUSSION

(15 MINS)

After participants have shared the facilitator asks:



- What does the land represent for the Amuru community?
- What will they lose if they lose the land?
- The facilitator notes that protests and demonstrations often result in violence from the police. Are there ways in which community groups can prepare before they go on a protest? Do participants have experiences of violence from their own actions in their communities?

STEP 6: CONCLUSION

(5 MINS)



The Amuru women are protesting to protect communal property and to safeguard their existence, heritage, and identity. The land is held communally, and decisions about land should be made with community consent. Land holds deep ancestral and spiritual significance, is a source of life for people and all living beings, and sustains livelihoods. This is why women are defending their land.



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: AMURU WOMEN DEFEND THEIR LAND



In Amuru, Northern Uganda, foreign fossil fuel companies have been working with Uganda's State House and armed forces for many years to take over the ancestral communal lands of the Amuru people and to move the people out of these lands.

When President Museveni came to Amuru in 2012 to order residents to move out of their lands, women elders took off their clothes to curse him. Museveni fled on that day. But some years later a convoy of government ministers came in to force the land grab. They wanted to take over approximately 100,000 acres of land, which would affect thousands of families. The government ministers were confronted by the naked breasts of women elders. They were blocked by hundreds of children marching on the road. Confronted by the power of people, the government ministers were forced to leave.

A few years later armed forces were sent to Amuru to burn down residents' homes and brutalise local farmers. In protest against this, 234 Amuru residents went to a United Nations office in Gulu, and occupied it for thirty seven days. The residents called on the UN to take action against the Museveni regime. During this occupation, people back home in Amuru spoke with soldiers who had been sent to take action against the people and encouraged them to leave the army. Some soldiers, police, and park rangers fled their posts while others refused to carry weapons to work.

This occupation put a temporary stop to the abuses by armed state actors. Youth began to carry out citizens' arrests of anyone conducting harmful charcoal trade in their local forests. They blocked charcoal trucks, seized charcoal sacks, redistributed the charcoal to community institutions, and began reforesting their lands. To date, no company, investor, or government office has successfully stolen Amuru land.

The women's protests highlight the ways cultural practices can be used to resist extractivism and the importance of respecting indigenous land rights. The Amuru community is resisting not just land grabbing and displacement, but above all loss of cultural identity, and the exploitation of their resources without their consent.

Here are some comments by Amuru women on their struggle:

"This land belongs to all of us. Our ancestors settled here and left it for us. In Acholi, land is not owned by one person, it is for the clan and we all have rights to use it. When the government comes and talks only to a few leaders, it is not right." — Woman elder, August 2015

"For us women, land is everything. It's our most important resource for us and without it there is no life. We are now scared that if it is taken away, we shall have nowhere to collect firewood, nowhere to fetch water from, and nowhere to cultivate. Therefore, if Madhvani (the company) wants to take away our land, where shall we go? Where shall we eat from? Where shall we drink water from?" — Acholi woman, Amuru District

"We are not just fighting for a piece of land, we are fighting for our children's future. Our ancestors have lived and died here. If you take this land, you take everything that makes us who we are. This is not just land, it is our history, it is our heritage." — Acholi woman, Focus Group Discussion, August 2015

"Land is the only thing we have as a people. It feeds us, it unites us, it holds the bones of our mothers and fathers. If it is taken, we will be like people without roots." — Woman participant, Community Dialogue, August 2015

Source:

WoMin African Alliance, [Building the Right To Say NO to safeguard women's rights to land and natural resources in East Africa](#), 2024

[Women resisting large scale land acquisitions: A case of Amuru District](#), Uganda. (n.d.).

Academia.edu. Last visit: 01/05/2025



SESSION: DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING AND LEARNING



Key Themes: Knowledge; Popular Education

Recommended time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Objective:

- To build an understanding that knowledge is built everywhere, and formal schooling is not the only form of knowledge.
- To build confidence in participants' knowledge.

What will need:

Picture handout: What is knowledge and where does it come from?

STEP 1: ENACTMENT

(60 MINS)



The facilitator gives each participant a picture handout and asks them to quietly choose from among the pictures one thing they learnt to do (e.g. fishing). Each person then has a turn to act out the activity while others guess what it is. Once the others have guessed the activity, they share:

- How they learnt this activity
- Who or what was the teacher
- Why they learnt to do this activity

Each person has 5 minutes for acting out and sharing.

STEP 2: PLENARY DISCUSSION

(30 MINS)



The facilitator asks participants if they believe all of the activities in the picture can be considered 'knowledge'. Why do they say this? The facilitator notes that most people believe knowledge only takes place at schools and universities; that only formally educated people have knowledge. We must challenge these ideas. All of the things in the picture handout make up knowledge.

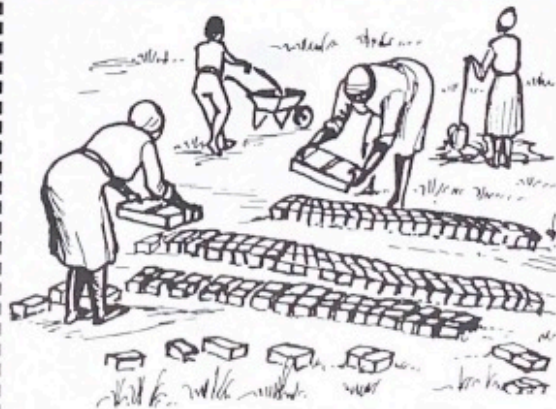
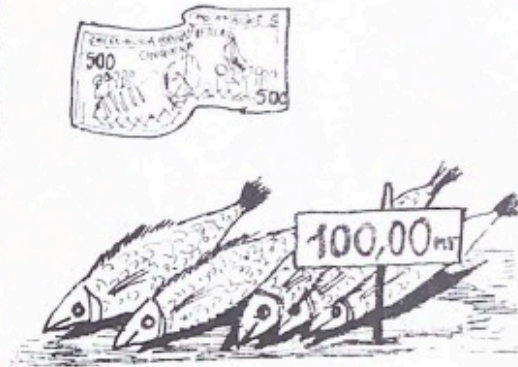
Facilitate a discussion reflecting on the many different ways of knowing and learning:

Learning takes place from the time we are born. It takes place in our family and our communities. All of the things we have learnt growing up makes up knowledge. There are reasons why we learn these things. Different societies at different times need different kinds of knowledge. For example reading and writing was not needed in earlier times in many societies. We challenge ideas that only people with formal schooling, and who speak a coloniser's language are knowledgeable. Learning happens everywhere, at any time, and takes different forms. Often the things women know and do are not valued, yet without women's work and women's knowledge, communities would be lost and in fact would struggle to survive.





PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?







SESSION: FEMINIST PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE



Key Themes: Feminism, Feminist principles

Recommended time: 1 hour 30 mins

Objective:

- To co-create a set of feminist principles which come from participants' experiences from their own organising.
- To use the emerging principles to explore what feminist practice means in another organisation of African women.

What will need:

- Handout: Rural Women's Assembly - the movement empowering women farmers in Southern Africa
- Reading: Mind map
- Materials: Large Post-its; 3 or more flip chart sheets connected and put up on the wall, ready for mind mapping

STEP 1: INTRODUCTION IN PLENARY

(5 MINS)

The facilitator introduces the session and notes that feminist practice exists now, in the many small and big ways people and movements live, struggle and build. Feminist principles can be found in both existing practices that people and groups are forging as well as in the ideas that they can imagine. Feminist principles and practices are women's power in action. They are not fixed; they continue to evolve and change. They are guided by what we believe in and value.

The facilitator then adds that the session will draw from women's organising stories in their everyday lives. We will then look at other organizations, to deepen our conversation about feminist practice and principles.

STEP 2: PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE

(20 MINS)

ORGANISING IN OUR COMMUNITIES



The facilitator shares how women in communities are organising. She then asks women to discuss and reflect on key feminist principles that guide their own organising work. The participants should write these down on large Post-its (one idea on one Post-it) and place these on a flip chart.

The participants then looked at the guiding ideas, noting similarities and differences, combining those Post-Its with similar ideas.

STEP 3: WHY FEMINIST PRINCIPLES ARE IMPORTANT IN A FEMINIST SPACE? (30 MINS)



The facilitator joins at least 3 flipcharts, placing these on the wall to create a mind map on the ideas shared by participants. The facilitator then asks participants to work in pairs to share their ideas on why feminist principles are important.

Each pair is invited in plenary to call out one feminist principle, which the facilitator captures on an emerging mind map. The facilitator goes around the pairs in a few rounds until all the ideas are captured.

Note to facilitator: Ensure that the aspect of centering working class and peasant women is captured.

STEP 4: RURAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY AS A FEMINIST SPACE (20 MINS)



The facilitator, together with 3 participants (if appropriate), reads the story of the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA). The facilitator points out the countries on the map as the story is read.

The facilitator asks participants, as they listen to the story, to think on what makes the Rural Women's Assembly a feminist space. After the reading of the story the facilitator leads a discussion based on the following questions:

Question for group discussion:

- What issues does the RWA focus on? Are these feminist issues? Why or why not?
 - How does the RWA organise themselves? What is the structure of the RWA?
 - How do they build members' capacity?
 - Why do they focus on one region i.e. Southern Africa?
 - Why and how do they restrict membership?
- Are there any new insights from this story for feminist principles and feminism in practice? Note these on a flip chart.

STEP 5: PULLING THREADS TOGETHER (10 MINS)

The facilitator goes through the set of feminist principles from the mind map and from the discussion on the RWA. The facilitator asks, is there anything missing that participants would like to add? Anything they'd like to remove? The facilitator notes WoMin's centring of working class and peasant women as leading their own struggles.



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: RURAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY = the movement empowering women farmers in Southern Africa



The [Rural Women's Assembly \(RWA\)](#) is an independent and self-organised rural movement of smallholder women farmers and peasant producers from across the Southern Africa region. In 2009, 250 rural women established RWA with the slogan Guardians of Land, Life and Love. Today RWA has a membership of over 150,000, in eleven countries in Southern Africa.

Three members from Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa tell the story of RWA:

Rejoice:

The Assembly is a movement. Its mission is to bring rural women of the Southern African region together on issues that affect them. Women in 11 countries have their own Chapters. To be a member, a woman must belong to her country's Chapter. Country Chapters are members of the Assembly.

Rural women must know about climate justice, gender-based violence, food sovereignty, seeds and the issue of land. Together we educate ourselves and fight for our rights. We do this in a way that women understand the issues of seeds, of land, in a way that they will be able to speak about them.

Different cultures influence the rights of women differently. So, the strategy that you will use or the policy you will advocate for will be different in each country. For example, what is the land issue and what are the land laws within Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique? And how do we ensure what we advocate fits that particular country?

Flaide:

We are a loose movement, but we have our identity. There are issues we stand for and we don't want members to join who won't identify with these issues. Southern Africa has its own issues. Of course, gender-based violence is a global issue, but the way things are happening in Southern Africa may differ from how things happen in North Africa, for example.

When you talk about the issue of land in Southern Africa, there are similarities about access to land: women are not allowed to access land. We decided to start small, and maybe later we can admit other members. Southern Africa has similarities when it comes to hardships women encounter. It's easier because we know how to fight. If you have more diversity, it's more complicated. We accepted Tanzania as a member which is not a Southern African country because they have similar issues. Congo is trying to apply, but we're quite skeptical because they have many issues that are different from ours. But we also want to have allies, you don't have to be necessarily a member of WRA, you can still be our ally.

**Reinette:**

We believe that women are the guardians of seeds, and we are trying to give women access to good nutritious food. Not having land is very critical because you can't produce, you can't feed families. In RWA, we talk about it, and we put pressure on our government. The name of this campaign is "one woman, one hectare".

We are in solidarity with one another. When we had trouble in Malawi, we had women from other Southern African countries coming to bring indigenous seeds to Malawi, to the women of RWA.

The land issue is also related to gender-based violence because in many cases, women are dependent on men. The man thinks he is the owner of the land—but he only comes when the products must go to the market to get the money.

Rejoice:

Talking about land and food security and sovereignty, we also must look at the impact of climate change on rural women. For example, in our 3 countries, we've had cyclones in the past years, and it has affected a lot of families, especially women who are the ones looking after the lands.

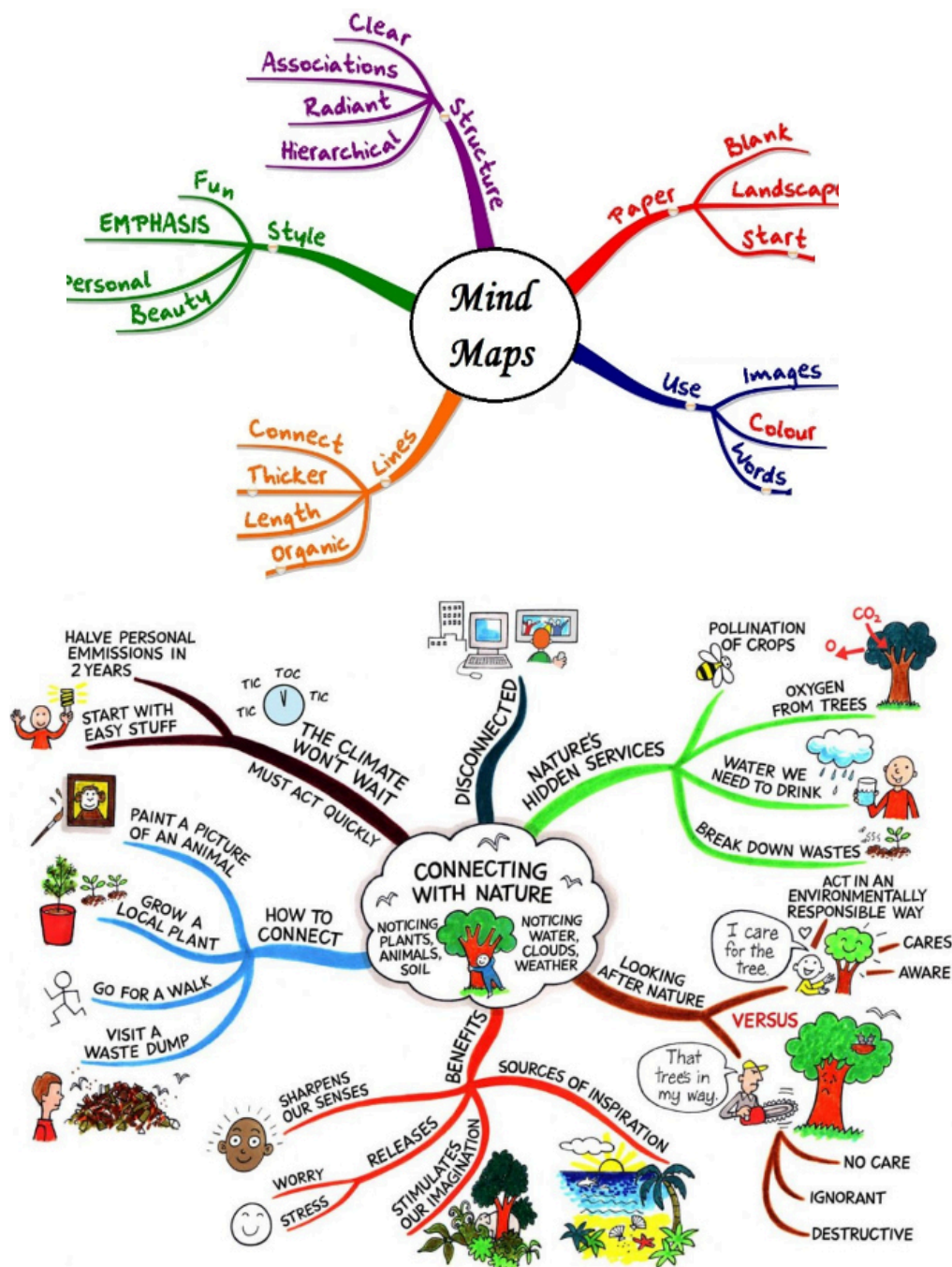
We are looking at sustainability. We want the small woman farmer to have a voice on climate resilience or climate justice. Often, women are not consulted when it comes to climate justice. We want a bottom-up approach. When the government wants to make changes, it must go to the ground and consult us. Southern African countries are suffering very much from the consequences of climate change. We are afraid that it's going to be even worse. We must stand together.

Adapted from: Esther Alves, The Perspective Webzine, December 19, 2023

READING: MIND MAPPING

This is a method of organising our thoughts and ideas, showing the connections between our ideas. Mind mapping is a visual technique used to organize information, ideas, or concepts around a central theme. It's like creating a picture of your individual or collective thoughts. You start with a main idea in the centre of a page, then branch out with related subtopics, and keep branching out as needed. Each branch can include words, images, symbols, or even doodles to help spark creativity and make the connections clearer. It can be done very simply, or you can elaborate with use of colours and images to show the key ideas and their connections.

An example of a mindmap:





SESSION: HOW CAPITALISM, EXTRACTIVISM, COLONIALISM & DEVELOPMENT AFFECT ME



Key Themes: Capitalism; Extractivism; Colonialism; Resistance

Recommended time: 2 hours

Objective:

- To highlight how these systems affect our everyday lives through time
- To link capitalism, extractivism and colonialism

What you will need:

- Flipcharts, markers
- Participant Handout: Development
- Reading: Hope and Resistance - Living the Development we imagine now

STEP 1: SHARING IN PAIRS HOW EXTRACTIVE PROJECTS HAVE AFFECTED THEIR WAY OF LIFE (20 MINS)



The facilitator asks participants to share in pairs how extractive projects (dams, plantations, mines) have affected their way of life, from as early as they can remember, and from what their parents and grandparents have told them, making sure to include experiences of women and men.

Question to help the sharing:

- What projects affect my community/ country?
- How long have these projects been in place?
- How have they affected us?
- What have we lost over the years?
- Who is benefiting from these projects?

STEP 2: PLENARY DEBRIEF

(30 MINS)



The participants share highlights of their stories in plenary.

The facilitator opens for discussion asking what can we learn from these stories about the impacts of an unequal, violent and destructive system which treats people and the environment as tools for profit making.

The facilitator adds to discussion and sums up key points drawing from handout 9.

STEP 3: SHARING STORIES OF RESISTANCE IN DIFFERENT PAIRS

(20 MINS)



In different pairs, participants share what their communities have done to challenge the current development model. This might look like: refusing the compensations offered; occupying the mine; building barricades to stop movement of vehicles; etc.

STEP 4: PLENARY DEBRIEF

(25 MINS)



Participants share highlights of their stories in plenary.

The facilitator opens for discussion and asks the participants what we can learn about resistance against this destructive model from the stories, highlighting the results and closing the session with a hopeful message about the strength and resilience of communities resisting extractivism

drawing from reading on *Hope and Resistance: Living the Development we imagine now*.





PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: DEVELOPMENT



Ideas about development have been influenced by European ideas of "progress," and have neglected the wisdom of the majority of communities from Africa, Asia, and South America.

Ideas about development have been shaped also by capitalist ideas (which focus on profits rather than the well being of people and the planet) by patriarchal ideas (which view women as inferior to men).

The development model for most countries has been decided by those in power—governments, corporations, and international financial institutions - who prioritize their own interests and the interests of a wealthy elite.

The needs and interests of marginalized groups, especially poor women and men, are ignored when those in power make decisions about the development model of a country.

The current development model leads to increased poverty and inequality for the majority of the people across the world.

In the 1970s organizations like the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) forced countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, to put in place Structural Adjustment Policies. These policies required governments to reduce spending on social services, and to charge for services that were previously freely available. This led to increased unemployment, poorer working conditions, and greater social and economic inequality.

Governments agreed to these policies in order to get loans. If they did not agree they would not get loans. But taking the loans meant that more money was leaving the countries taking loans than the money coming into these countries. This was because of high interest rates and pressures by the WB and IMF to pay back the loans. Debt repayment became a big problem for many countries across Africa.

International civil society movements like Jubilee 2000 and Occupy advocated for debt cancellation and opposed corporate influence on governments, which worsens poverty and inequality and increases the many burdens women face.

The dominant development model continues to prioritize profit for the rich and powerful. Current campaigns, like WoMin's challenge against the African Development Bank (AfDB), represent ongoing resistance to a development model that impoverishes rather than uplifts.

Hope and Resistance: Living the Development we imagine now

Resistance is not only about protests and demonstrations.

Resistance is also about insisting that women and their communities can make decisions about their lives.

Resistance is also about insisting that there is wisdom in indigenous knowledge.

Resistance is also about women and their communities living their lives as they want.

Resistance is also about saying NO:

- **NO to the capitalist development model.**
- **NO to extractive projects such as mines, dams and agricultural plantations that destroy the lives of so many people and the environment.**
- **NO to the ideas that colonised people and their cultures and religions are inferior and uncivilised. These ideas spread by the colonising countries still live within us even after independence.**

Struggles against colonialism, capitalism and patriarchal ideas have taken place in many countries across the world over hundreds of years. Women have been active in these struggles, making sure that their voices are heard and that they play an active part.

WoMin has worked with its partners and women in local communities to imagine their own ideas on development based on their needs.

These imaginings are very different from the harmful capitalist development model.

They are saying YES to a development model that is grounded in communities' needs and aspirations.

- **YES to valuing and protecting all living species and the environment**
- **YES to managing resources communally and living in solidarity with each other**
- **YES to respecting traditional spiritual practices and indigenous cultures**

In some cases women are living their lives in ways that are very different from the harmful development model. This is evident in communities where women are sharing indigenous seeds and practicing agroecology or where women are restoring mangroves to protect shorelines.

It is hope for a better future, and the possibility of living differently in the present that enables these struggles to take place.

Keeping hope alive is important and when women come together and support each other this creates hope.

In our struggles for change, and in our imaginings of a different development model we are hopefully guided by great feelings of love (as Che Guevara reminds us).

Love for our families, communities, ourselves, all living creatures, and the Earth.

Unlike corporations and governments who are driven by profits and greed.



SESSION: THE VIBRANCY OF OUR MOVEMENTS



Key Themes: Feminism, Feminism movement

Recommended time: 1 hour 30 mins

Objective:

- To recognize the value in diversity and plurality in women's movement
- To have participants represent our collective efforts visually

What will need:

- Materials to create a vision board: paper, pens, crayons, scissors, old newspaper/ magazines; objects from the surrounding environment (twigs, leaves, stones, etc), glue.

STEP 1: INTRODUCTION IN PLENARY

(5 MINS)

The facilitator explains that because of patriarchy and capitalism, as women we were taught to see differences as a negative trait, instead of embracing it. Women's movements grow and sustain themselves because of the differences in opinion, approach, and experience all women bring. We thrive by recognizing that these differences are sources of strength and diversity, like a garden made of many flowers, trees and insects, each playing a vital role in the ecosystem's growth and vibrancy.

In this session we will try to represent that garden with the materials we have.

STEP 2: CREATIVE WORK

(40 MINS)



The facilitator invites participants to use the materials available (paper, glue, crayons, etc) to illustrate an element of a garden. This can be a flower, a tree, an animal, etc. While thinking of this element, participants should reflect on:

- What does this element represent?
- What is the role of this element in the whole ecosystem?

STEP 3: SHARING IN PLENARY

(20 MINS)



Each participant shares what they did trying to correlate the element with women's movement building. For example: If a participant drew a bug, they might say that the bug is a small animal, but able to build great structures in the garden because of their ability to work as a team. This speaks to the women's movement, where one woman by herself might be small, but she is able to achieve many things when working with other women.

As each participant shares their element, they glue it to a flipchart paper that will start to look like a garden, as participants glue more and more elements to it.

STEP 4: CREATING A GARDEN

(15 MINS)



Participants are invited to take a look at the final product: a collective garden.

The facilitator highlights key components of the garden built by the women and leads a discussion on how it represents women's movement:

- What qualities do we recognize in ourselves according to what has been shared?
- How can this garden grow?

STEP 5: CLOSING

(10 MINS)

Facilitator wraps up highlighting that we all have a unique role to play in the collective garden that is the women's movement.

Just as a garden needs care, attention, and nurturing to flourish, so does our collective work.

Working around issues of conflict is like taking the weeds out, to make our garden more beautiful. Like each element in the garden contributes to the overall ecosystem, every woman, regardless of her background, perspective, or experience, brings something essential to the movement.





SESSION: WOMEN AND WATER



Key Themes: Ecological crisis; Ecofeminism

Recommended time: 1 hour 30 mins

Objective:

- To deepen the discussion on women's relationships with water and why women's involvement on matters relating to water are so crucial

What you will need:

- Reading: Notes on Women and Water in Africa
- Reading: Listening to the Spirit of Water
- Materials: Paper and crayons; each participant should have a pen/pencil

STEP 1: DRAWING WOMEN'S USES OF WATER (10 MINS)



The facilitator asks participants to work in two or three groups. She instructs participants to create a drawing to show all the ways they and other women in their community use or engage water. Examples given may include:

- food preparation
- recreation
- transport
- cleansing
- purification
- sanitation
- culture
- migration

Participants work together to complete their drawings.

STEP 2: DISCUSS WATER CHANGES OR CRISES (15 MINS)



In the same groups, the facilitator asks participants to discuss the following questions about their communities (overleaf):

- Have there been floods, drought, broken pipes, or broken infrastructure?
- Have there been any other changes or crises?
- How have the changes or crises affected you, your family, and your community?
- What actions were taken to respond to the water crises?

Note: Facilitator might write up the questions to help guide the learning process

STEP 3: ADD CRISES AND RESPONSES TO THE DRAWINGS (10 MINS)



The facilitator asks participants to add the crises and the actions taken to respond to the crises to their drawings. Participants update their drawings to show both water uses and water challenges.

STEP 4: GROUPS PRESENT THEIR DRAWINGS (20 MINS)



The facilitator asks each group to:

1. Pin their drawings on the wall.
2. Explain their drawing to the whole group.

Each group shares what happened and how women's lives are affected by water crises.

STEP 5: PULL THE THREADS TOGETHER (5 MINS)

The facilitator summarizes the discussion by explaining that water systems have mainly been developed by men in the interests of a capitalist economy, guided by greed and profit, which has little concern for women's needs and interests, and for those of other living beings. For there to be just water distribution and access for women and other living beings, women must be involved in decision-making.

STEP 6: DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF WATER (30 MINS)



The facilitator asks participants to form two groups:

- Group one is called "water is life."
- Group two is called "water for profit."

The facilitator explains that the groups will have 10 minutes to prepare a 3-minute performance using: movement, dance, song or words. The performance must show their understanding of “water is life” and “water for profit.” Each group then performs their presentation and explains their understanding of “water is life” or “water for profit.” During this process, the facilitator captures key points on a flipchart.

STEP 7: SUMMING UP PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS (5 MINS) **ON WATER**



The facilitator leads a discussion on the implications of the different understandings of water. The facilitator highlights that water is a shared resource freely available to all forms of life, including humans. Women use water in much of their work in households and communities, therefore they must have a major say in decision-making. Ecofeminists see the struggle for water justice as central.

The facilitator also explains that “Water for profit” leads to water being extracted to benefit the rich and leads to water poverty for most people, all living creatures, and plants. Modern water systems have been built based on colonial and capitalist understandings, with little acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge, customs, rituals, and spirituality.

STEP 8: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IF NEEDED

The facilitator remains aware that participants sharing experiences of crises might lead to difficult emotions and must be prepared to draw on finger holds or other Capacitar activities if these arose.





PARTICIPANT HANDOUT: READING: WOMEN AND WATER IN AFRICA



Adapted from [Urgent Action Fund-Africa \(UAF-Africa\) \(2023\) Women & water in Africa: an overview of water justice struggles](#)

Access to clean water is a basic human right but one that is denied to millions of poor communities across Africa. It is women who bear the brunt of the lack of water and this has an impact on their health and livelihoods as well as that of their families and the wider community. The report calls for a water justice campaign that focuses on strengthening grassroots organizing and feminist movement-building across Africa.

The authors emphasise that water is an intersectional issue that affects food production, health, housing, sanitation, and climate change. This means that social movements must be strengthened, and struggles at local, regional, and international levels need to be interconnected. Some key aspects of this include feminist political education at the grassroots level, strategic convenings to enhance solidarity, and influencing and building powerful counter-narratives through a continental water justice campaign.

Water & Gender Based Violence

There is a close link between lack of reliable access to water and gender-based violence. In most cases, women must walk long distances in search of water and are at risk of men sexually harassing and raping them along the way.

Because of the gender division of labour, when women lack access to water, they spend more time and effort in cooking, cleaning, and growing food, in the domestic sphere and in the realm of production.

Water & Conflict

Water is at the heart of the climate, hunger, and armed conflict crises across Africa. The report argues that the current global health, hunger, and climate crises require us to treat water as a political and feminist issue that requires a political solution driven by strong grassroots social justice movements.

Drawing on examples of water struggles in countries such as Ghana and South Africa, the research found that a neoliberal approach does not address the challenges of lack of water that African women in marginalized communities face. Instead, women's livelihoods are compromised, they experience violence from men in their attempts to search for water, and their health is negatively affected as is that of their children.

Water & Health

"I'm Marrel November and I'm upset that I have to be without water every day. It [the water meter] goes on in the morning and then it switches off again. I'm a pensioner and I am on medication, how am I supposed to take my medication if I don't have water? ...At night I have to scratch ice out of the freezer so I can take my tablets because there is no water to drink it with"

- Marrel November, African Water Commons Collective, South Africa

In water-scarce environments, women have to choose how best to use the available water. This has major impacts on health, by limiting hygiene and sanitation, which are crucial for preventing the spread of diseases. This became evident when during COVID-19 trade-offs were likely made between using water for hand washing or irrigation.

Water as commodity

With industrialization, water has come to be treated as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit, which has had a major impact on women. The major users and polluters of water are factories, mines, and commercial farms, which are not concerned about water's sustainable use. They pollute rivers, oceans, and lakes, and put the lives of humans and other life forms at risk. This is in stark contrast to indigenous understandings of water as one of the mysterious gifts of Nature that supports and holds life on Earth.

Massive land grabs of discounted arable land from 2008 onwards in Niger, Mali, Ethiopia, DR Congo, Madagascar, and Zambia, for example, resulted in the theft of water and privatization of some of the best watersheds that Indigenous communities depend on for survival.

Water is a feminist issue

Water is an intersectional and feminist issue, and so is water justice. Across Africa, struggles for water are at the heart of civil strife and household stress. The water-related issues women face worldwide are exacerbated by neoliberal water policies, while radical feminists and social movements continue to challenge them.

“Political ecology at a basic level, concerns itself with issues of power over natural or ecological resources. As a feminist political ecologist, I’m deeply concerned with the gendered dimensions and struggles over access and control over these resources, the neo-liberalization of nature and the ways in which women on the frontlines of these struggles are articulating their concerns, challenging the continued enclosure and dispossession that they and their communities are experiencing, and finally, the possibilities of building ecological commons that offer hope for liberation”

- Ruth Nyambura, African Ecofeminist Collective

A radical and alternative view to the neoliberal model has been developed by feminists and eco-feminist organisations such as the African Ecofeminist Collective, Pan-African movements such as Africans Rising, social movements like the Anti-Privatisation Forum and Rural Women’s Assembly, progressive academics and non-governmental organisations, among them WoMin and Earth Life. They call for democratized systems of water control and access, especially by African women, which are embedded in social relations and women’s own practices and requirements. Such radicals reject the privatisation of water and its control by multinational companies whose primary focus is to generate profit. There is a strong argument for water to be understood as part of the Commons, controlled by the people.

READING: LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT OF WATER



“Lake Victoria” by Stefan Magdalinski. (CC BY 2.0)

Water is one of the mysterious gifts of nature that supports and holds life on earth. Many indigenous communities knew the values of water a long time ago and to them water was considered to be the source of life. On the surface water can be seen as food, a means of transport, a ground for recreation or an element for cleansing, purification, and initiation in cultural ceremonies. But a deeper analysis into the values of water reveals that water is a sacred being that holds life on earth; a seed in the soil does not germinate until it receives water, which demonstrates that it is the spirit of water that ignites the production of life.

In the past, water attracted the formation of commercial cities and towns along the lakes and coasts. Water transport facilitated the exploration of the world. In Africa, people recognized and respected bodies of water as their source of spirituality. For example, Lake Victoria—before it was named so by British officer John Hanning Speke—was called Nalubaale, which literally means the home of spirituality. Bodies of water were owned and protected by communities, and people worshiped the spirit of water freely. All activities relating to water were conducted in accordance with peoples’ customs and cultural beliefs.

The introduction of western civilization to Africa changed native peoples’ attitudes and rights to water as a natural resource. The sacred relationship between people and water ended with the new political governance. Water became a commodity

to be taxed. Commercial fishing was introduced. Corporations were established to process and supply fresh water for payment. Western religious teachings demonized native cultural practices and hence the indigenous attitude and moral responsibility toward water as a sacred being gradually changed. Religious teachings associated cultural beliefs and practices with satan and primitivity. In reaction, many native people adopted a new religion, language, and lifestyle.

From a spiritual perspective, through the spiritual networks, planet earth is seen as an irregular ball immersed in water. If the sacred gift of earth is life, then water is the custodian of life. Nearly all living beings contain large amounts of water in their bodies; water facilitates their functions. Atmospheric space, too, consists of elements of water in vapor or in gaseous form. Therefore, water is the reconnecting element between our materialistic life and the spiritual world. Man cannot be a co-creator without adherence to the fundamental phenomenon of nature, and water is a major element to study and carefully handle. The spirits of life travel through all living organisms depositing active materials that consequently give individuals life along with the sacredness and potential it holds. All these activities are facilitated by the presence of water. A huge body of water connects Africa to America and through the conventional systems, water connects mountains with valleys, plants with animals, by sharing products or byproducts essential to each. Hence, water facilitates the natural phenomenon of interdependence.

The sacredness of water has diverse sources to support it. Water is a natural resource with unique value and consciousness that enables it to sense any slight imbalance in the life-sustaining systems. It is through water that we are physically and spiritually interrelated and interconnected with the living and non-living beings of earth and to the whole of life. Spirituality reveals that all material beings contain some spiritual life working in them, and since spirits are living entities, they travel from one material to another correcting and depositing different energy levels that get carried away by water, or through other conventional means, to heal the planet and the cosmos.

People should avoid encroaching on water grounds. Though water has several benefits, it should be treated with respect and dignity because it is a sacred natural resource that holds life. Our developmental policies, which portray water as a commodity to be traded and taxed to enrich some individuals, should be changed. Water is a right for all; nature provides it freely with the rains. Governments should raise external resources to enable the free distribution of water to all citizens. And natives should be involved in the management of sacred natural resources.

Industrial developments and allocations performed on water grounds like swamps cause floods to cities, towns, and residential areas. Health hazards are created, like cholera, and the industrial toxic waste materials released into the bodies of water cause a great environmental danger. Such toxic materials, when taken in by plants or animals, cause a loss of sacredness and a reduction in their natural consciousness.

In East Africa, Lake Victoria, one of the freshwater lakes, has been partitioned into private plots sold to investors; fishing and transportation have been commercialized. Today, indigenous people cannot afford to buy fresh fish and some buy bones after the flesh has been removed for export. Fishing used to be a way of living and source of income; however, because of restrictions on the lakes today, most fishermen sell their land to buy motorcycles to transport people in towns.

Similarly, the thick forests on the islands of Ssesse and Kalangala, among others, were cut down and people were displaced with or without compensation to plant palm trees for the production of cooking oil. Presently, the rainfall pattern has greatly changed and agricultural activities in the region have been affected. The previously precipitated convectional rainfalls from the islands on the lake do not arrive when expected. Extended dry seasons and inaccurate meteorological predictions have made agriculture an unreliable livelihood.

There is an agency to separate our human intentions from what life ought to be. There is a need to institutionalize spirituality as a separate system from religion and governance. As part of this spiritual system, we would actively listen to the voice of water and other natural elements instead of listening solely because of the enormous costs to infrastructure and life when nature is angered and violently striking at us through hurricanes, storms, earthquakes, or epidemic diseases.

The faith institutions preach the supremacy of a divine being, which is beyond humanity according to the spiritual hierarchies, though humanity is accountable to this divine nature. However, each day man interacts with the spiritual elements of earth, which have been demonized. These are the spirits of life that travel in water and this is the spiritual platform we should begin reconciling with.

Let's awaken the silent energies of the planet by uniting as communities to live in harmony with the spirits of life and work directly with nature; here is one path by which we shall reconnect to the silent value of water and nature as a whole for the benefit of humanity and the well-being of an interconnected world community.

By Chief Tamale Bowya

Source: <https://humansandnature.org/listening-to-the-spirit-of-water/>