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An African Ecofeminist Perspective on the Paris Climate Negotiations

WE PREDICT: The climate negotiations will fail AGAIN...

The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has failed African women and their communities before it starts! In Paris, voluntary pledges (the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions or INDCs) by the big polluting countries' leaders will, at the time of writing, raise world temperatures by a conservatively-estimated 3°C. It is an untenable outcome for Africa, which will experience average increases of more than 6°C in this scenario. Given the non-binding nature of the deal, violations are likely, so Africa and its peoples will cook, and tens of millions of Africans will die in the next third century, before 2050. Christian Aid estimates that 180-million African deaths will be attributable to climate change-related disease by 2100.

Our evidence for this position is the record of outcomes of 20 conferences held since the first COP in Berlin, Germany in 1995, with the most significant erosion of commitments taking place in Copenhagen in 2009 which dispensed with binding emissions reductions in favour of 'bottom-up' pledges. The multilateral negotiations process has failed to prevent dangerous climate change until now and COP 21 will be 'business as usual'. The failure has mainly been due to the rich countries that carry historical

liability for a looming climate change catastrophe, but Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) are also implicated with four of the five being party to the devastating 2009 Copenhagen Accord.

Fossil fuel and industrial corporations, financiers and related elite interests have captured UN institutions and processes over the last decades, and the UNFCCC negotiations are no exception. COP 21, like its predecessors, will fail to address the disease of climate crisis at its roots: fossil-based energy production, car-based private transport and ubiquitous air travel, sprawling urbanisation, the liberalised global trade regime, industrialised agriculture, and over-consumption in the Global North (including parts of the geographical South). Instead, COP 21 will affirm false solutions, many of which present significant social and technological dangers: the failing carbon markets and offsets, nuclear energy, 'clean' coal, big dams, natural gas, agro-fuels, weather modification, geo-engineering, and Carbon Capture and Storage.

WoMin and our allies stand with the wider Climate Justice movement to denounce COP 21 and the UNFCCC. We affirm that the majority of the citizens of the planet, and women in particular, have the vision and practice of real solutions to the climate crisis. To that end, we proudly uphold the lived alternatives in agro-ecology and food sovereignty of peasants; of natural resource stewardship by fisher folk, forest dwellers and indigenous peoples; and the labour of care by women in all of their diversity across the globe.

An African ecofeminist perspective on extractivism, energy and the climate crisis

Fossil fuel extraction and burning are the major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions which cause climate change. At all points of the fossil-based energy chain – from extraction, through to refining and energy production, and consumption – it is women and workers in the Global South, including parts of the geographic North, who most immediately suffer the accompanying social and environmental devastation. We are the main victims of oil spills, land grabs, devastated livelihoods, water and air pollution, poor health and high mortality, lack of state services or high-priced commercialised services, and high levels of inter-personal, domestic and sexual violence, often linked to militarisation associated with energy resources.

Whilst women and poor communities carry the negative impacts of energy production, they do not enjoy a fair share of its benefits. Transmission lines carry energy from major hydro dams and coal-fired power stations past communities to Global-north and increasingly Southern-based energy corporations, mining companies, smelters and industries.

Global warming is projected to result in temperature increases in Africa which may well be double that of elsewhere, and vulnerability is greatest in Africa which counts amongst its numbers seven of the ten countries most susceptible to climate change. If the rise in temperature exceeds 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, we can expect unprecedented, large-scale disruptions of human and natural systems, food and water insecurity, and untold loss of life.

Women are also concerned about a corporate-led, profit-oriented renewable energy system (solar, agro-fuel and large hydro) which does not present a real alternative to traditional fossil-based energy. Like fossil fuels themselves, this for-profit model of renewable energy is already causing large-scale land dispossession, the transfer of vast tracts of land from food to energy production, and the reproduction of deep inequalities in energy access.

It is Africa's more than 500-million peasant and working-class women that carry the burden of immediate and long-term impacts of both fossil fuels extraction and energy production, and the false solutions to the climate crisis, including corporatized renewable energy. This is because of the patriarchal-capitalist division of labour, our greater responsibility for agricultural production and social reproduction of families and communities, and our structural exclusion from decision-making in our families, communities, national governments and multilateral institutions.

The development alternatives from the perspective of African women

African women, alongside our working-class, indigenous, peasant and black sisters in other parts of the world, offer the most revolutionary alternatives to this deeply destructive model of development. These alternatives are found in the ways African women produce food, conserve and steward natural resources, and take care of our families and communities. Ours are the LIVING alternatives to be recognised, built on and supported.

In **WoMin**, there are women organising against coal, oil and gas extraction, and major hydro dams, in a dozen African countries. We have begun to outline an alternative development agenda for African women and our communities:

- **Climate and ecological justice:** a binding, international climate treaty of the UNFCCC to reduce carbon emissions to a maximum 1.5 °C global average warming, and which clearly reflects the principle of differentiated historical responsibility; all communities enjoy clean living environments that guarantee good health and general wellbeing; our governments develop, implement and enforce environmental laws and policies, which hold corporates fully accountable for all social and environmental costs of their activities; a binding global treaty on transnational corporations which is ratified and enforced by all governments acting in unity to curb the power of corporates; full compensation, with specific provisions for women, by polluters for environmental devastation and social impacts of fossil fuels extraction and burning, and related climate change effects; an end to financing of fossil fuels investments; and, instead of the Green Climate Fund's dubious priorities, a different strategy or climate finance based upon debt reparations, adaptation funds and mitigation strategies which primarily benefit the majority of women in Africa: the farmers, traders and care workers.
- **Energy justice:** leaving 80% of all known fossil fuel reserves in the ground and undergoing a rapid global transition from fossil fuels as the primary source of energy to a popular, democratically controlled, decentralised, socialised renewable energy system which respects the needs and

contributions of women; assures work and decent livelihoods for women especially; treats energy as collective wealth; and guarantees clean affordable and accessible energy.

- **Food justice:** includes women's independent access to and control over land; an end to land grabs and land dispossessions of an involuntary and/or coercive nature; seeds being banked, shared amongst and controlled by women and other small-scale farmers; the implementation of laws, policies and government programmes that support an agro-ecological smallscale family-based model of agricultural production; the realisation of fair economic value from food crops based on government price-setting and regulation; the protection (including through local subsidies) of local and national food markets from food dumping, subsidised food imports, and genetically modified seeds and produce; and state investment in local infrastructure (small dams, local renewable energy solutions and transport) that supports flourishing local economies and markets connected up through local trade and exchange.
- **Gender justice:** women enjoy full equality with men in all parts of life including the family, community, economy, state, religious institutions, schools, and cooperatives; have a voice and are able to participate in decision-making in all areas of our lives and in development institutions at the local, national, sub-regional, regional and international levels; are treated with respect and dignity by our family members, communities, and local, national, sub-regional, regional and international governing institutions; and enjoy freedom from all forms of violence and obtain full justice when these rights are violated, including by the military and police.

The logic of the demands above are central to the campaigns and work of **WoMin** in Africa, *but these demands are either ignored or are very weak in the UNFCCC*. An African ecofeminist approach is a vital correction to the capital-centric and patriarchyreinforcing strategies of nearly all the country delegations to the COP 21.

Resistance to dominant extractivism and ecological crises = the struggle for peace

The dominant destructive mode of patriarchal extractivism, and the manifold crises it creates – social, ecological, reproductive, energy, and climate – are the predominant reasons for militarisation, violence, conflict and war. Women's bodies are typically one of the terrains upon which these conflicts are waged, with women subject to sexual abuse and rape by male miners and members of extractives and climate impacted communities, combatants and military men, and employees of private security companies.

At the same time, African women have engaged in uninterrupted, but often invisible and unrecognised resistance against the dispossessions and encroachments upon their lands and natural resources. African women have resisted war and often led movements for peace. In spite of the divisions and conflicts created amongst our peoples, African women have stood together united as sisters, friends and allies.

The recent terror attacks in Paris, Beirut, Baghdad, and Bamako are a response to deepening systemic crises African women have been contesting. The struggle against an oppressive development paradigm is, at one and the same time, also a fight against terrorism, militarisation, racism and war. This is our fight as African women; it is a fight for justice, peace, solidarity and love across the globe.



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