



# FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR A WORLD IN CRISIS



**The world is in deep crisis.** The earth's systems are on the edge of collapse, and the survival of the majority of the world's people threatened by resource grabs, ecosystem failure, wars, and climate change. The roots of this manifold crisis lie deep in a political-economic-social system, which is driven by profit, which supports overconsumption by some and underconsumption by too many, which has for centuries dispossessed peoples of their land and waters and forests, and which uses violence to create and sustain itself. The costs of this system are carried by working class, peasant and indigenous women in the global South. Yet it is in the heritage, living practices and 'development' hopes of these same communities, the world's majority, that the alternatives, which the planet and humanity so desperately need, live. The policy tinkering and technical fixes by development organisations in the last decades have ultimately served to reinforce the system and helped to extend its longevity. Now is the time for bold actions and brave solutions, of genuine solidarity and ultimately the expression of a love for humanity and our beautiful planet.

Thanks for reading!

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

**'Where are the Alternatives for Women?'** Searching for Real Alternatives alongside the Alternative Mining Indaba

**Activist Voices: Building Empowerment Together,** Zimbabwean activist Gladys Mavhusa shares her story

**SPEAK OUT:** Women Activists VS Tendele Mine

**Highlights**

# 'Where are the Alternatives for Women?'

## Searching for Real Alternatives alongside the Alternative Mining Indaba



"They [mining bosses] did not understand that our struggle was not to wrestle power or get some money from the mining corporations," explains Gladys Mavhusa (Marange, Zimbabwe). "We simply wanted our rights to be respected and our voices to be heard."

The eighth annual [Alternative Mining Indaba](#) brought together 470 participants from 45 countries to, in theory, carve a platform for communities, activists and civil society actors to discuss community led alternatives to mining. The theme of this year's AMI was "Making Natural Resources Work for the People: Domestication of the Africa Mining Vision: from vision to reality." The [Africa Mining Vision \(AMV\)](#) was signed by African ministers responsible for mineral resources development throughout the continent along with its accompanying policy framework, [Minerals and Africa's Development](#) (2011). Combined, the two documents provide the most "comprehensive strategy for African industrialisation in the 21st century" (The Africa Mining Vision: A Long Overdue Ecofeminist Critique, WoMin).

The starting point of the AMV is the assumption that development in Africa, of necessity, must start with mineral resource development and extractives industries. However, for many communities who are experiencing the shattering impacts of mining and other extractives industries, this assumption must be challenged—for the survival of communities as well as the environment. The task for attendees at the AMI was to grapple with and interrogate the great promise and mission of the Africa Mining Vision: "[to tackle the] paradox of great mineral wealth existing side by side with pervasive poverty."

*(WoMin has written extensively on the Africa Mining Vision from a women's rights perspective, read our paper, [The Africa Mining Vision: A Long Overdue Ecofeminist Critique](#))*

## Mining – Ethics = Disaster

During the opening session, panellists and commentators raised questions related to the sustainability of an extractives driven development pathway, the lack of accountability and ethics of transnational corporations and the structural, physical and ecological violence of the extractives industries from Marikana to Marange to Lily Mine.

*“Who will watch the watchmen? You can put all your mining laws [and policies] developed by the best from Harvard, will that help us? No. You can put forward the best economic solutions developed by the best economic gurus. Will that help? No. Ethical virtues and values are what is necessary. Mining minus ethics is equal to disaster”.*

Going beyond the limitations of an ethics perspective vis a vis a profit driven system of economics, Nonhle Mbutuma-Forslund, from the Xolobeni community in South Africa offered a simple but powerful solution to the development problematic: “[communities] must have a right to [their] own alternatives of development.” For Mbutuma-Forslund, “government is always on the side of the mining companies and not on the side of the people. That is why we are facing a lot of violence and death. All these struggles, it doesn’t frighten us. We are ready to die for [our] land. [We believe] that without land you do not know yourself. That’s why land is so important in Pondoland. We know who we are because of the land. We need to have a right to say yes or no.” [The Xolobeni community has been fighting successive attempts to mine titanium on their land for well over a decade.]

### Critical Perspectives

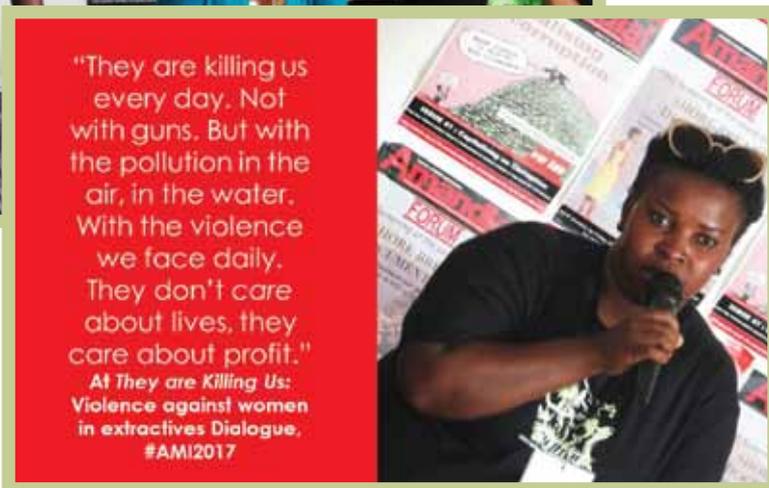
WoMin’s Mela Chiponda presented a critical perspective on the African Mining Vision at a session on Day Two of the AMI. In a debriefing to WoMin staff and allies after her input, she shared an anecdote which powerfully expresses the logic and shortcoming of the AMV and its proponents:

*“The man from the AU said, ‘We don’t care what happens in your villages. African leaders sat down and agreed on this African Mining Vision. And just as African leaders agreed on the SDGs and the MDGs, you cannot at your village say that you are against what has been agreed upon.’ ... I said to him, ‘What happened at the Berlin Conference in 1884 is what you did in Addis, assuming that the development that you have decided is what African women want. As rural women in Africa, we have nothing to do with the AMV.... Where are the ‘alternatives’ when women are suffering from energy poverty and injustice?’” – Mela Chiponda, WoMin*

## Where are the alternatives for women?

For WoMin and many of our allies, the AMI offers an important platform of convergence within and around which to organise spaces of dialogue and discussion on the alternatives to a destructive extractives oriented development model. In that spirit, community activists supported by WoMin and its allies convened a series of public discussions and events.

On Tuesday 7 February, the **Public Dialogue on Violence against Women in Extractives** drew nearly 100 people to hear five women activists from Zimbabwe and South Africa share their frontline experiences and analysis of the gendered violence in communities impacted by extractives industries, from mining to commercial agriculture. Convened by Rural Women’s Assembly, Chiadzwa Community Development Trust, Masifundise Development Trust, Mawubuye Land Rights Forum and WoMin, this session offered a radical space for conversation about the deeply violent nature of extractivism. Women talked about the different layers of



violence that women confront daily, from the family to the workplace and out to the wider community. Pollution of water and air by mining and energy production activities and by dangerous pesticides in industrial agriculture result in respiratory and other illnesses afflicting women and their families. Women regard this as violence. The theft of land and water, which forces women to spend up to five hours per day searching for clean water is also a form of violence. Women also highlighted the intimidation and harassment that women activists face from police and other community members when they speak up for their rights.

*“We have to get back to the system because there’s no way that farm workers or mine workers or farming and mining communities will be free... as long as this feudal arrangement continues to exist.” – Samantha Hargreaves, WoMin*

WoMin’s ally, Women from Mining Affected Communities United in Action (WAMUA), organised a women’s picket of the Mining Indaba, a powerful moment for women to stand up and speak out against corporate power and its impact on African women’s bodies, livelihoods and lives. Their action received **wide coverage** on social and **traditional media**. Public events on ‘Marange to Marikana’ and the Campaign to Stop Corporate Impunity enabled critical conversations and collective strategizing.

Going forward, WoMin will continue to work alongside our allies to deepen and widen the conversation around alternatives and building towards post-extractivist, eco-feminist development models *led* by women and their communities.

# Activist Voices: Building Empowerment Together, Gladys Mavhusa

“...I want a world where women are empowered,” says Gladys Mavhusa. “And I believe that we must build that empowerment together so that every woman can stand up for herself and with others.” A community activist from Chiadzwa, home to the Marange diamond fields in Zimbabwe, Gladys has worked within her organisation, Chiadzwa Community Development Trust (CCDT) to fight for justice and for women’s empowerment, safety and security since mining activities began in the area around 2006.



*Speaking at the Public Dialogue on Violence against Women in Extractives* convened on Tuesday 7 February by WoMin, CCDT and other allies<sup>1</sup> at the Alternative Mining Indaba – Gladys told her story as a woman who has witnessed life pre- and post- the mineral rush at Marange. She shared the impacts of mining activities on her community and especially on women who so often bear the burden of extractives industries as well as the ways in which she and her community are organising themselves in the face of great challenges. In her words<sup>2</sup>:

## “They took away the forests where we used to worship...”

I want you to understand my story, so I am going to speak in my language<sup>3</sup>. I was born in Chiadzwa. When I was growing up my life was very good, I lived a relatively free life. I was born in a family that was rich, I married into one too because we were farmers. We had cattle, goats, chickens, everything... The problem came when diamonds were discovered. The first thing we were told was that we were no longer free to move around. The land that we had lived on all our lives, the fields that we had cultivated and depended on – they were all taken away. The forests, where we used to worship and pray to our gods for rain, were taken. Our ancestral graves, the graves of our chiefs – sacred places that we all valued when I was growing up – were taken over by the mines.

1 Allies who convened the public dialogue: Rural Women’s Assembly, Masifundise Development Trust, and Mawubuye Land Rights Forum.

2 This testimony was recorded and printed with full permission from Gladys Mavhusa.

3 Most of this testimony and interview were given in Shona with careful translation by Mela Chiponda and Maggie Mapondera.

We had trees, the bark and reeds of which we used to weave baskets – I think anyone in southern Africa knows about the baskets and mats that used to come from Zimbabwe, we were famous for it once. We used to earn a living from doing that basket weaving but we could no longer do that after the mines. We used to dry vegetables and sell them. That was no longer possible for us after the mining started.

## **“It was and is very painful for us...”**

They displaced us from our lands and stripped away our freedom of movement. When our land became a restricted area, it meant that there was a boom gate to enter our town. This is where public transport would stop and the ‘officials’ there would perform strip searches. Women would be searched in our mouths, our ears, everywhere including private parts. Sometimes these officers did not change their gloves, using the same one on many women to the point that some of us began to develop infections. Women started having problems with their reproductive systems, fibroids and other growths. For us to go and seek medical treatment... we could not because we were no longer farming and thus, we had no money.

During this time, many women were **raped and suffered other forms of sexual violence**. In order to survive, many young girls and women began to engage in sex work. It was and is very painful for us.

We tried to engage with the diamond-mining bosses but their company is responsible for much of this violence, directly and indirectly. Now, in our area, we have one company that is mining in Marange, **Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company** (ZCDC), a merger of government and corporate interests backstopped by military and security forces. So, in effect, there are soldiers and ‘artisanal’ miners who are working with the police in Marange.

These ‘artisanal’ miners are also doing a lot of smuggling activities, thievery and endangering our lives in other ways. Many of them come to squat at our homesteads even though we have little space. As women, we cannot do our daily work of collecting firewood or water because we are afraid. If you go out to do this work and come back alive, you must thank god. If you are raped, it is even a relief because at least they did not kill you. Even as I am here talking to you, a man in my neighbourhood was shot, leaving behind his wife and three children. They tell us that only soldiers have guns. But if only soldiers have guns then who shot this man?

So that you can understand clearly, the ‘artisanal’ miners I am talking about are not workers; they are thieves who are there to steal. They are not locals, they are men who have come from different places around the country and they come to Marange to form syndicates with the security forces. If a soldier comes from Shurugwi (a town in another province in Zimbabwe), that person then tells his relatives to come and work in Chiadzwa to dig for diamonds. These ‘artisanal miners’ don’t help us in any way; *we want them out* of Chiadzwa. It gets worse every day, there are now too many of them, in excess of one thousand.

Traditional leaders have not been much help to us – if we go to them to tell them that we do not want this influx of people in the area, they cannot take action against the artisanal miners who can come and sleep beside your house and disappear into thin air the next morning. To go to the government or the soldiers to ask for help is difficult because they are in bed with the company.

## Women are facing problems from all directions

Women are facing problems from all directions. If our husbands see that we have been raped, they blame us and they claim that we asked [for it]. If our children are raped or engage in sex work, the men blame us women again and say, "It's your child." This situation has brought so much conflict into our families and our communities. Our husbands cannot understand that it is impossible for us to look after our families and deal with all of these problems at the same time; they say that we are lazy.

We can no longer weave our baskets and mats because the baobab trees and other trees are long gone. We cannot grow vegetables or crops, because we do not have land. Women are facing the greatest challenges because now we do not know how we are even supposed to survive and live.



## Women building strategies & solutions together...

The [Chiadzwa Community Development Trust](#) began with women who wanted to organise. We realised that they [mining companies and artisanal miners] were violating our rights and stealing our land so we began to organise ourselves. We started first by organising to refuse relocation – we told our local Member of Parliament (MP) that we are not going to respect that relocation. We faced some early backlash for this organising – intimidations and threats from local 'officials' and the fact is, our living situation was very painful, so some of our group chose to relocate. Soon after, some of those who relocated lost their homes anyway.

As CCDT, we are doing work to support the women left behind, many of these women lost their husbands through murder or disappearance. In cases where it is possible, we support with litigation, otherwise, we work together to find practical means to support widows and their families. We also help affected women to access counselling and trauma services along with legal aid, in partnership with the [Counselling Services Unit](#) (CSU) and [Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights](#) (ZLHR). It is important for women to know their rights – economic, social and cultural – and so we do community trainings with women. At the heart of our strategy is raising awareness so that our community can take the lead in finding solutions.

If I could dream for the future, I would say that I want a world where women are empowered and I believe that we must build that empowerment together so that every woman can stand up for herself and with others. I want a future where women and my community can move freely without fear, can have the jobs they need and provide for themselves and their families. We are working under very difficult circumstances but we are determined to keep fighting!

# **SPEAK OUT:** Women Activists VS Tendele Mine

*“Can you see the dust we drink? We drink this water because we are poor. What are we supposed to do? Imagine what our insides must be like? No good comes from the mine. We live a difficult life. There’s nothing which I can point out to you which the mine has done that has been of benefit to us.”*  
**Khiphile Msweli, Somkhele KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa at the Peoples Tribunal on Corporate Power, Swaziland, August 2016**

Women activists from Somkhele in northern KwaZulu-Natal, an area afflicted by an open cast coal mine, have fought for over five years to have their voices heard and their rights to water, land, livelihoods and lives respected. Dismissed as ‘troublemakers’ for their resistance to mining activity activists there, including women, have repeatedly sought the attention of the Tendele mine, through letters, petitions and marches, but have yet to receive adequate response and redress.

According to participatory action research (PAR) carried out by women activists in Somkhele and the nearby area of Fuleni, the Tendele mine operations have had extremely negative impacts on the surrounding communities. These impacts are extensive and include land and water grabs; infections of the skin, eyes, lungs and reproductive organs caused by coal dust and water pollution; mine blasts that have cracked houses; grave desecrations; and community conflict. Women bear the heaviest burden of many of these impacts due to their roles as caregivers and subsistence producers.

Women are also ready to hold the government accountable for its inaction. For seven years, the Tendele Mine operated without a proper water license, consuming vast amounts of water in a drought-stricken area, with no government intervention. Furthermore, municipal officials are aware of corruption in the supply of emergency water supplies but have refused to listen to community complaints or take the needed corrective action. At every turn, the mining company has failed to fulfil its responsibilities and conform to law. But, Tendele is not working alone – the state has failed to protect and safeguard its citizens too.

Drawing on PAR and a women’s water assembly held in northern KwaZulu-Natal in August 2016, WoMin and its allies published an article for Amandla Magazine (September 2016) on the experiences and struggles of women in Somkhele and Fuleni. This provoked a detailed written response from Tendele, which WoMin and its allies have, in turn, responded to. Amandla Magazine covered this response in its December issue. WoMin is sharing this important written record that exposes Tendele Coal for its lies, flouting of law and general disregard for the people of Somkhele and Fuleni. All contributions of allied organisations and of our sisters in Somkhele and Fuleni are fully acknowledged. [Access all documents on the WoMin website \(http://tinyurl.com/acttendele\)](http://tinyurl.com/acttendele).

This public interaction is a powerful example of what community women activists can do through sustained advocacy, awareness raising and movement building work in solidarity with political allies, such as WoMin. As we write, Tendele Coal is expanding its operations to mine at Siyembeni on the iMfolozi Wilderness boundary, which will place the oldest wilderness area, and largest concentration of white rhino, in Africa at great risk and dispossess another 240 families of their land and livelihoods. This expansion is occurring without due process, without proper consultation of affected communities, and ignoring a substantial body of community members who do not want mining. The struggle continues and women will continue to play a leading resistance role. On 28th March, women from Somkhele and Fuleni undertook an action targeting the Mtubatuba local council to demand accountability and action related to water corruption, and on that same day, they launched their exciting and powerful participatory action research 'No Longer a life Worth Living'. Available to download on [womin.org.za](http://womin.org.za).

## Launch of the Somkhele Fuleni PAR report



# HIGHLIGHTS



**REGIONAL | #Consent4Communities** In December 2016, WoMin convened a roundtable of over 35 community activists, practitioners and theorists in Nairobi, Kenya to grapple with ideas and strategy related to consent. Looking ahead, WoMin will work with allies to expand on three core themes: interrogating ways to use customary law strategically to advance women’s rights in decision-making/consent; working with others to strengthen women’s land rights in common property systems to bolster their voice in decision making; and, developing strategies to strengthen consent as opposed to ‘consultation’. Read more about our consent work here: <http://tinyurl.com/wominconsent>.

**NIGERIA | #Women4CleanUp** On December 17 2016, hundreds of women from across the Niger Delta took action to speak out against pollution that is destroying their lands, livelihoods and communities. Kebetkache Women Development and Resource Centre supported an action led by local women calling for the government to clean up oil spills, stop gas flares and provide basic amenities, like water, to improve lives. Read their powerful declaration and demands here: <http://tinyurl.com/women4cleanup>.

**SOUTH AFRICA | Women Walk for Climate Justice** Scores of women activists took to the streets of Sasolburg to protest against dirty energy and to highlight the devastating effects of mining and climate change in Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng. Read more about South African women’s actions around the issue of water: <http://tinyurl.com/waterassembly>.

*“We are building a movement from the grassroots, nobody knows our pain. Our harmony, our peace and our dignity have been disturbed. Before mining companies, we did not worry about buying water. We have been made poor by the elite, and we are staging this walk to build awareness and show the strength of women who are challenging mining and this kind of dirty, unsafe and unsustainable development.” – Caroline Ntaopane, WoMin*

