



**Feminist Participatory Action Research for Movement Building Training  
Harare, Zimbabwe  
22 – 27 January 2018**

*“Every human being has knowledge and therefore every human being has power. There are different forms of knowledge, from fisherwoman to farmer, and these forms of knowledge complement each other and it has nothing to do with intelligence, it’s how the knowledge is applied. And patriarchy has a role in defining whose knowledge is important.” – Blandine Bonianga, Feso, DRC*



For six days in January 2018, WoMin with the support of Women and Land Zimbabwe convened the first module of a Feminist Participatory action Research (FPAR) training in Harare. The process drew together 43 participants, comprising representation of two community activists and one staffer from a solidarity NGO from each of eight African countries: Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, DR Congo, Madagascar, Burkina Faso and Senegal. Representatives from organisations in the host country, Zimbabwe also joined the training. The participants from each country will work together to design and facilitate a women-led FPAR in one site with a view to building capacity and practice, which could be generalised more broadly to other sites of struggle.

The training was led by a facilitation team consisting of Tamara Braam, an independent consultant who has accompanied WoMin’s development over two years, and Samantha Hargreaves and Mela Chiponda from the WoMin secretariat. Other WoMin staff - Georgine Kengne Djeutane, Nicky Le Roux, Caroline Ntaopane, Maggie Mapondera and Lebogang Ngobeni also supported the process. Just under half of the trainees were

from Francophone dominated countries, and two of the participants from Madagascar were Malagasy speakers and so the training was facilitated and interpreted in three languages. The training methodology was highly participatory, applying tools and methods participants would use in FPAR, and modelling forms of feminist facilitation and leadership that lie at the heart of FPAR. The experiences and knowledge of women in the room served as the basis of knowledge production and skills development.

#### Outcomes for WoMin FPAR Training Module 1

- Participants will have an understanding of what FPAR is;
- Participants will have an understanding of the values and principles of FPAR, relative to other forms of research;
- Participants will collectively explore the position of women in their own communities, and the different forms and ways in which power expresses itself;
- Participants will have shared their experiences and approaches to women's organising within their own communities;
- Participants will have explored feminist organising, feminist leadership and feminist facilitation as critical elements of rolling out FPAR and linking their local struggles to broader movement building in the region; and
- Participants will have engaged in a process of identifying the roll out of the preparatory steps for FPAR in their respective contexts.

## Background

WoMin's first effort to support FPAR was in 2014 and 2015, when we supported organisations in nine countries with a short two-day training, and distance accompaniment during design and implementation. The experience, by our reflection, had mixed results and so, in mid-2017, we initiated an in-depth and participatory review of this experience to inform the next round of effort to build FPAR as a key tool for women's organising and movement building. Many critical issues emerged from this review, namely that (i) the two-day inception training was very useful in introducing the approach, but was far too short; (ii) the slides and tools that were shared through the training were very useful in supporting implementing partners develop a deeper understanding of FPAR, and sharing this knowledge on to local partners; and (iii) WoMin provided distance support to prioritised countries, which was greatly appreciated, but limited by capacity constraints in WoMin, which was in its first cycle of organisation-building and had only one permanent staffer and a consultant working on retainer for a few days a month.

The impact review was complemented by a sideways assessment of the FPAR experience of other organisations across the world. This part of the review did not identify any organisations or movements in Africa employing the FPAR methodology in support of women's struggles for environmental, climate and development justice. WoMin's FPAR approach has been inspired and informed by the experience of our sister ally, Asia Pacific Women Law and Development (APWLD), which has been facilitating FPAR with women workers, fishers and farmers in countries across South and South-East Asia for some years now.

**We derived the following invaluable insights from the APWLD experience:** (i) working with a team from each country that consisted of a mentor and a young community based researcher provided an opportunity to strengthen FPAR as an approach, and facilitate on going mutual reinforcement and support; (ii) rolling the training out over a period of two years served to facilitate the consolidation of different core elements of the FPAR training; (iii) taking a layered approach to the roll out of training is an important factor in laying a firm political foundation for the process; (iv) the spaces between their four modules provided an opportunity for applying the learning in respective community contexts; (iv) bringing the training group back to together at pre identified time intervals allowed for participants to actively support collective knowledge creation, through providing feedback to each other and learning from each other's experiences and (v) it provided impetus for regional movement building, as cross cutting issues and struggles emerged.

## Approach & Design

Informed by the learnings from these reviews, WoMin adopted the following FPAR training design to test in 2018:

- Eight priority countries in which WoMin is partnering with allies on either its Women Building Power Energy and Climate Justice Campaign and/or its Women's Right to Consent programme. The FPAR would therefore be located in a longer-term programme of collaboration with allies.
- Three, or a maximum of four participants per country broken down as follows: at least two women grassroots activists from one community site and a maximum of two NGO support staff who would support and accompany the FPAR in this community.
- Two training modules of six days each, with the first in January, and the second in April 2018:
  - Module 1 focus: an introduction to FPAR - its political origins and subversion of traditional hierarchical forms of knowledge production; FPAR values and principles; ecofeminism, women's movement building and the place of FPAR in this process; feminist facilitation and leadership; phases in FPAR and in-depth orientation to phase one addressing preparation.
  - Module 2 focus: share experiences of implementing the preparatory phase in community sites; deepen discussion on ecofeminist movement building; applied training in key methods and tools for FPAR; explore the 'issues' emerging from the preparatory stage and build a design for the FPAR in each site; ; and explore approaches to documentation, advocacy and communications in a wider eco-feminist movement building process.

## Process

On the first day, participants started the journey of getting to know one another, and building a collective understanding of their own contexts and experiences through a powerful storytelling exercise. Storytelling opened the discussion about FPAR as a vehicle for centring women's experiences, building an understanding of the common sources of women's oppression, and the potential for women's liberation through feminist organising. However, the process also raised important questions about how to ensure that women/communities are supported and safe when conducting storytelling processes, which can often raise histories of trauma and violence.

On Day Two, participants learned more about WoMin and began to grapple with the meaning of concepts like ecofeminism and movement building. Participants continued to deepen their contextual analysis, working in national groups to identify the key problems communities, and women within them, confront, and to deepen their analysis of power and inequality within and beyond their families and communities. The group analysis and conclusions were reported through skits, talk shows and other creative presentations.

*"When I listened to each group and the stories of the communities I felt the force of the patriarchal system in our communities and the world. And I felt that we need to fight this system with all our hearts and with love, and it made me realise why ecofeminism is important for us to fight this system."* – **Patricia Bukungu, ADEV, DRC**

*"Ecofeminism is about co-creating a vision for a positive change in the world, changing the world as it is."* – **Zo from Madagascar, Zo Randriamaro**

Building on the first two days, participants began to examine what "knowledge" is by starting with the simple question – what is knowledge and who has it? The exercise was powerful as it pushed participants to question the conventional and accepted "holders" of knowledge, recognising the politics of power and privilege that shape these ideas. Referencing Paulo Freire, the group explored how participatory action research can be a transformative tool to challenge power, foster solidarity, and build movements for social change. A talk show panel consisting of Odette Toe (ORCADE, Burkina Faso), Emem Okon (Kebetkache, Nigeria), Lebogang Ngobeni (WoMin Fuleni fieldworker, South Africa) and Samantha Hargreaves (WoMin secretariat), then shared their key reflections and lessons from the first WoMin FPAR intervention and the

second deeper exploration of FPAR by WoMin in the Fuleni/Somkhele communities in 2016. From the Ibeno community, in the Niger Delta impacted by Exxon Mobil, to the struggles of women artisanal miners against large-scale gold mining in Kalsaka in Burkina Faso, each panellist shared how the FPAR had supported deepened analysis and activism.

The speakers pointed to the challenges of conducting FPAR, which is not a fixed linear process. Some women in the communities faced insecurity, backlash and risks for their research and organising. There were also questions raised about what to do with the information gathered through research, and the need for a mix of both traditional reporting, and creative documentation and communications in support of actions for change. The panel pointed out some of the tools and methods used, which included storytelling, social and community mapping, interviews and town meetings.

*“Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” –  
Paolo Freire*

In order to ground the first three days, the facilitators led the group through a map of the FPAR phases, which helped the participants obtain a clearer practical grasp of the process over time. This was a useful opportunity for participants to then apply the guide to their own contexts, and see how it might be adapted for the communities they live in and work with. Each country group then shared a map of the next steps they would take as part of the preparatory phase of FPAR in their countries.

These presentations raised a number of critical questions, such as safety and risk for the community researchers; the challenge of contextualising ‘feminism’ in ways that do not alienate communities; the importance of ensuring that women in the community own the FPAR and that it is not merely run by the organisational support partner; the difficulty of navigating deeply patriarchal and often violent community contexts; the reactions and resistance of communities who have felt used by NGOs in the past; and, critically, the complexity of balancing women’s financial/tangible needs with a research project, particularly if communities expect monetary compensation for driving and participating in the process.

On Day Five, the group started by exploring the principles that constitute WoMin’s approach to change and to FPAR: structural change, feminist, anti-extractives, intersectional, movement-building and collective action, solidarity, respect, safety and care, and consent.

Revisiting some of the urgent concerns raised on the previous day, the group used the world café methodology to rapidly explore three main questions: **risk and safety, women’s financial needs and expectations**, and **tackling patriarchy** in and through the FPAR. A discussion on the role of the NGO support partner and the community closed off the day, as the group expanded on the roles and responsibilities as they presently see them and raised potential concerns around power.

The last half-day of the process was spent, in country teams, discussing and finalising their plans for the FPAR preparatory work in their identified community site. WoMin outlined its support role, which encompasses regular check-ins, ongoing resource sharing and accompaniment and support by members of the secretariat up until the second module training.

## Looking Ahead

In April 2018, this same group of participants will re-convene for the second module of training, which will deepen their understanding of ecofeminist movement building, build applied skills in FPAR methods and tools, design the FPAR rollout, and develop an approach to documentation, communications and advocacy appropriate to their context and questions of safety and risk.