

Climate Justice, Gender and Extractivism



There are interconnections between extractivism, large-scale (mega-)extraction of natural resources such as minerals, oil, or gas, gender-based inequality in resource access and control, conflicting land uses, and stacked resource transactions over the same area. Similarly, gains and liabilities are distributed in socially distinct ways, with companies mostly in the Global North benefiting. Parallel to earlier colonial practices, rural and indigenous groups in the Global South - particularly women - are disproportionately affected.

What is extractivism?

Natural resources such as oil, gas, or minerals are often extracted in regions that are peripheral to the global economy and exported as raw materials to other parts of the world where they are further processed and sold. This is made possible through an international governance of financial and economic policies, such as free trade agreements.

Extractivism is embedded in the logic of the commodification of nature. While the burning of fossil fuels as energy sources is the major cause of global warming, processes of extraction also contribute significantly. A study assessing the total greenhouse gas emissions from the mining sector (considering 65 mineral materials) estimated that it accounted for 15% of GHG emissions in 2020. This estimate excludes the emissions from billions of tons of sand and gravel extraction and the substantial volumes of water extracted.

The extraction and use of fossil fuels as energy sources play a key role in global warming and today's climate crisis. The EU has approved a set of policy initiatives, called "Green Deal", wherein it has committed to phasing out

the use of fossil energy and becoming "climate-neutral" by 2050. However, the production of both electric cars and solar panels also requires the use of minerals and rare earth elements that need to be imported from abroad. For instance, for the batteries of electric cars, lithium is needed, besides cobalt, graphite, nickel and manganese. Meanwhile, the electronic industry (mobiles, computers, smart devices) is a significant end consumer of tin, cobalt, platinum metals, and other metals and rare earths, such as tantalum, gold, palladium, silver and copper.

Gendered Impacts and interrelationships of extractivism

A common feature of extractivism is the massive ecological costs, negative health impacts and the displacement of people. People who live near big extractive industries are bearing these costs, being confronted with water scarcity, unsafe water and air pollution, and women – due to their socially assigned role as caregivers – also with increased care duties. For example, a rare mineral such as lithium comes from a few countries, including the "lithium triangle" in the highlands of Bolivia, Chile and Argentina, in which it uses an immense amount of water in already very dry areas, leading to local communities losing their livelihoods and traditional ways of living.

Extractivism has direct implications on health, especially on women's and girls' reproductive health, while rising poverty and food insecurity impact [maternal and neonatal health](#). Effects such as the loss of income and resources, displacement and humanitarian crisis may result in increased rates of gender-based violence, including sex trafficking and harmful practices such as early marriage and forced unions. The effects of extractivism



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are long-lasting. The multiple threats posed by mining also weaken the ability of marginalised groups of people to adjust to climate change and other environmental pressures.

Mining is a male-dominated sector, with women playing a minor role as employees, often informally at the margins of mining sites, with a lack of safety measures and in low-paid activities. The concentration of a male workforce in mining and in the (linked) transport sector goes hand in hand with increased sexual exploitation of women and girls, health risks (like HIV) and gender-based violence.

Disputes over access to resources and the role of the State

Post-colonial countries that are resource-rich are often confronted with a "resource curse", though not exclusively. This means that these countries are highly exposed to corruption, lack of good governance, and a lack of diversification of the economy. This often results in lax environmental regulations and tax evasion which impacts the provision of public services – essential for women's health, education and the reduction of unpaid care work. Mining carried out by licensed companies may coexist with a large informal mining sector where safety and labour standards tend to be even lower. Struggles over access to resources are connected with the recurrent appropriation of new spaces on the one and dispossession of – often indigenous – land on the other hand.

Multifaceted conflicts frequently appear between extractive companies, state agencies, non-governmental

organisations, environmental-social movements, and heterogeneous groups of local people. These conflicts often concern the need to challenge the authority to make decisions over how environments are to be used, how the benefits and burdens of extraction are to be distributed, and who bears responsibility for the resulting harms. Asymmetric power relations provide significant opportunities for companies to trade off amongst local leaders. Furthermore, extractivism often leads to militarisation and securitisation at extraction sites and in the regions. Local protests against labour exploitation, environmental damage and health implications are often heavily repressed.

Women's resistance to exploitative extractivism

Gender and climate justice in extractivism means a fair distribution of benefits and burdens, but also taking into account the different stakeholders' representation in diverse spheres of decision-making. Women and girls historically suffer from systemic discrimination derived from the stereotypes and differentiated social, economic, and political roles that are assigned to them in cultures and societies across the world and are therefore less represented in decision-making spaces. Women face the worst impacts of a neoliberal extractive agenda. However, women also engage in resistance to extractivism, stepping out of traditional gender roles, and becoming leaders in movements fighting destructive extraction.

Recommendations

- ⇒ Implement CEDAW Article 14 in domestic and international (trade) policies on the right of women living in rural areas to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels and enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly concerning housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, among others.
- ⇒ Implement ILO Convention 169 domestic and international (trade) policies on indigenous peoples' rights, an international legal instrument that includes the right to be consulted on issues affecting their lands, territories and resources.
- ⇒ Governments need to mainstream the rights of women, children, LGBTI people, people with disabilities, minorities, indigenous peoples and other groups that face intersectional discrimination in national and international climate change strategies and extractivism policies. The rights of people cannot be compromised for the rights of companies to make a profit.



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“Extractivism has not happened through time without resistance. For instance, Nigerian women have been resisting oil extraction in the Niger Delta for up to 70 to 80 years now. In Marikana (South Africa), women protested when 34 mine workers were murdered by the police because they were striking for a decent wage. Women affected by coal extraction in South Africa have been resisting; women in the peace movement in the Niger Delta; women fighting oil extraction on extremely unequal terms.”

(Samantha Hargreaves, WoMin)

This story began in 2017 when the local people from a region known as the “Granary of Bulgaria” found out that a company had an investment plan to do gas exploration in the region. The method of exploration and development of the gas fields was euphemistically called “horizontal drilling” in the documentation submitted to the relevant government institutions. A closer reading by specialists reveals that the full description of the method coincides with “fracking”. Independent expert assessments were that such exploration, and consequently gas extraction, would lead to radioactive and chemical pollution apart from soil, water and air pollution, as well as polluting Varna Lake and the Northern Black Sea coast. In late 2017, a referendum was held in the region and over 97% of those who voted were against such investment. Initial opinions from the relevant institutions were negative and did not allow the company to start its exploration. Since 2018, lawsuits have been filed against the institutions that issued the relevant prohibitive decisions, and the company has also initiated lawsuits against the officials themselves to intimidate and instil fear in anyone who tries to confront them. Using various administrative ploys in the process of litigation, and an army of highly paid lawyers, the investor firm has been trying to achieve the objectives without regard to the life and health of people. Three brave women led the successful fight against the investor - Dr Donna Pickard from Sofia, PhD in Sociology and owner of land in a village in the region, Ivanka Kazakova, an individual member of the Initiative Committee “For a Clean Bulgaria”, and Ayden Yaiya, resident of a local village and organic honey producer.



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Abbreviations

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

GHG - Greenhouse Gas

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ILO - International Labor Organization

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About The Project

'Gender and Climate Justice: Knowledge for Empowerment' with the acronym 'COPGendered' is an EU-funded project under the Erasmus+ programme that commenced in December 2022 and will run for three years. The project is led by WIDE+ and a transnational consortium of seven leading partners, including Gender CC, WIDE Austria, GADIP, KULU Women and Development, Mundubat, and CSCD. The primary aim is to equip learners with tools, knowledge, and methodologies to understand and address the critical connections between gender inequality and the climate crisis.

This briefing paper is part of a series of papers that delve into specific themes on the nexus of gender and climate justice. This includes the following briefing papers:

- Gender and Climate Justice
- Climate Justice, Gender and Energy
- Climate Justice, Gender and LGBTIQ
- Climate Justice, Gender and Transport
- Climate Justice, Gender and Migration

You can read more about the COPGendered project at: <https://wideplus.org/copgendered-project/>

