



“The deterioration of the environment and of society affect the most vulnerable people on the planet: Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.” – Pope Francis, Laudato Si, #48

Why Extractivism is a Women’s Issue

Extractivism has very particular impacts upon the work, labor, livelihoods and even the bodies of women around the world, particularly women already vulnerable from poverty and marginalization. Climate change, one of the results of extractivism, also has disproportionate impacts on women.

Since colonial times, assaults on indigenous women frequently have accompanied degradation of the environment to extract riches. Those assaults now often take the form of human trafficking to service men working in mines, oil and gas fields and other industries that exploit natural resources.

In addition, women end up as the primary care-givers for family members sickened by pollution, hunger and other extractive impacts. And female human rights and environmental defenders face disproportionate and unique risks when demanding land sovereignty and the freedom to reject extractive projects in their communities.

Finally, perpetuating the extractive development model actively suppresses the development of more [just alternative models](#) that women have been envisioning.

Background

Women historically were rarely hired for the jobs offered by extractive industries amid promises of economic and community development. Instead, women too often have been the [first to experience harms from](#)

[extractivism](#). They have found themselves displaced by these mega-projects, no longer able to feed their families from subsistence farms, and pushed into marginal work to survive. Changing balances of power in families and communities have deepened gender inequalities. While [companies are starting to address these](#) gender concerns, there is still progress to be made.

Women often are given little voice in the decision-making processes around siting extractive industries, and those who choose to resist face not only the risks of challenging corporations and governments but also of challenging deeply rooted gender norms.

Extractive industries also put women in greater danger for sexual violence, according to many human rights organizations and even the U.S. State Department. “The link between these industries and sex trafficking is increasingly an issue of grave concern,” states a 2017 [report from the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons](#). The report then details examples of sexual exploitation in mining and oil regions throughout South America and Africa. In the United States, indigenous organizations in 2015 petitioned the United Nations to [investigate sexual violence](#) in regions of North Dakota and Montana, as well as Alberta, Canada, amid a large influx of male workers for the fossil fuel industry.

Reflection

Given that historically extractivism has been violently patriarchal, any attempts to address the exploitation of resources needs to deal with the exploitation of women.

We can start by paying attention to the vocabulary of acquisition and domination. “Colonizers often described their territorial conquests in gendered terms – the land to be conquered was described as female,” notes EarthRights International attorney Kelsey Jost-Creegan. “Implied in this feminization of the land was the opportunity for conquest, for subordination and for plunder.”

We also can listen to and reflect on the wisdom of women in [Africa](#) who are defending their communities from the worst impacts of extractivism and leading the way in considering alternative models of truly sustainable development. “These models would allow

communities to decide on the future of their territories, to sustain their ways of living, and respect their cultural and spiritual attachments to their land and resources,” according to a 2017 report on women human rights defenders by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID).

And we can pray about our relationship with Earth and vulnerable people. One resource is the [Jesuits’ ecological examen](#), which you can reflect on through the eyes of women impacted by extractive industries.

Actions

1. Consider the particular impacts on women whenever you hear about a proposed extractives project, such as a pipeline, mining or fracking operation or mega-dam. Include those gender impacts in any advocacy you participate in around that project.
2. Consider alternatives to purchases that benefit the extractivist development model. The Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach’s consumer audit may prove useful. [ADD LINK](#)
3. Follow and support international efforts toward a legally-binding instrument on transnational corporations and human rights, especially with the [lens of human rights for women](#).