



Gender Justice & Promoting Women's Rights in the Extractive Industries
Elaine Zuckerman, Gender Action – 3/23/17

Good Morning Everyone,

I love that our strategic dialogue's name embraces **gender justice** and **women's rights**, the two phrases atop my organization Gender Action's masthead since founding in 2002.

I will spend my several minutes first presenting a snapshot of Gender Action's position on extractives, gender justice and women's rights; second our work on pipelines, coal and minerals; and third wrap up by proposing a few guiding principles.

I never imagined that my remarks today would be provocative but I seem to be the only speaker calling for an end to fossil fuel investments and grassroots-based decision-making on whether or not to extract, in lieu of corporate-led consultations, which are usually inadequate.

First a snapshot of Gender Action's position on extractive industries (EIs) and women's rights

Over a dozen years ago Gender Action began examining impacts of IFI-financed oil and gas pipelines on women. More recently we have examined gender impacts of coal and mining.

When we began this work over a decade ago, we assumed extractive investments were inevitable.

Subsequently learning that fossil fuels contribute to climate change, that we have ample clean alternatives today, and seeing extractives' gender injustices, Gender Action changed its position.

Mining, the other type of extractives, seems different. I doubt we can live without minerals in our cars, smartphones, computers etc.

Thus while we must end fossil fuel extraction, we must find unarmful ways to extract minerals or develop unarmful alternatives.

This was not always Gender Action's position.

Which leads to second, the history of Gender Action's work on gender impacts of extractives specifically oil, gas, coal and minerals.

Oil & Gas Pipelines (HOLD UP [Boom-Time Blues: Big Oil's Gender Impacts in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Sakhalin](#) [Broken Promises: Gender Impacts of the World Bank-Financed West-African and Chad-Cameroon Pipelines](#)): Around 2004, Gender Action began fieldwork with local partners that demonstrated that the World Bank Group, EBRD, and other IFI extractive investments discriminated against women and harmed women's health and livelihoods. We

examined the Central Asian Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), Russian Sakhalin II, Chad-Cameroon and West African Gas Pipelines.

Our findings demonstrated the following women's rights violations and gender injustices across countries. Pipelines:

- eliminated women's farming and fishing livelihoods
- employed males almost exclusively in building the pipelines and even in office jobs
- increased women's dependence on men
- drove some women into sex work out of desperation
- led to increased sexually-transmitted infections, trafficking in women, violence against women, and
- stillbirths — the latter caused by toxic pollution from inevitable pipeline leaks

None of the IFIs ever challenged Gender Action's findings. Instead IFIs responded as follows:

The World Bank created and staffed a gender and extractive industries unit and launched a gender and extractives webpage. John Strongman, in this audience, then head of World Bank EIs, attended Gender Action's 2006 launch of Boom Time Blues. We chatted after the presentations. Soon afterward the Bank hired staff to work on gender and extractives and opened web pages addressing them.

Also the World Bank **Inspection Panel chair, who spoke at Gender Action's Broken Promises launch, told me that Gender Action's extractives reports motivated the Panel** to begin addressing gender discrimination cases. After Gender Action pushed the panel to take gender discrimination for years, it is starting to do so.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which co-financed BTC and Sakhalin II, called me to ask Gender Action to end media reports about the pipelines' harmful impacts on women. Since EBRD then lacked a gender policy, strategy and action plan which others IFIs had, we got EBRD to create its first gender action plan.

The Inter-American Development Bank, to which I sent Boom Time Blues because of similar impacts of Latin American pipelines, created the only IFI do-no-harm gender safeguard to prevent the kind of negative impacts revealed in Boom Time Blues. I don't think the IDB has implemented this safeguard yet but it keeps promising to do so.

Now remarks on coal and minerals:

Coal extraction and coal powered plants, which also generate fossil fuel emissions, have similar impacts to pipelines.

One example: The World Bank is implementing a South Africa Eskom Project constructing a coal fired power station called Medupi in Limpopo Province. Earlier the African Development Bank also invested in Medupi. Medupi is Africa's largest African coal-fired plant. Medupi operations depend on exploiting dozens of new coal mines, which always violate human rights by destroying people's health, land, water, and contributing to climate change.

In 2013, Gender Action convened a workshop with women living around Medupi. They highlighted harmful environmental and social effects including:

- The influx of male workers constructing the plant sexually harrassing women;

- Women losing farmland and income from farming.
- Women farmers outside the plant having water and crops contaminated by coal pollution.
- Women, unable to obtain employment in the plant, getting menial jobs such as cleaning.
- Both women, who clean the plant, and men who construct and operate it, being routinely exposed to chemicals, which cause serious diseases.
- One of the last remaining clean water sources in the area, the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, being contaminated by pollution from Medupi.
- And Medupi's massive water consumption, causing women, who are primarily responsible for water collection, to travel farther to collect clean water or buy unaffordable private water.

While Medupi provides one powerful example of the gender and climate injustices of coal plants, today IFIs are financing coal plants worldwide especially through financial intermediaries. This is not surprising since over 2,400 coal power plants are under construction or planning globally.

Minerals. Since humans need minerals, the women and men of each local community around minerals should have the right and power after they receive all information possible to decide whether mining benefits outweigh costs and if so the mining terms.

I just returned from Haiti where the Haiti Mining Collective is brainstorming about terms for what looks like inevitable mining. It is a typical David and Goliath situation with communities who lack rights facing powerful corporations, IFIs and governments.

Third, to wrap up I recommend these guiding principles:

First, extractive financiers including the IFIs, the G20, governments and corporations, must stop financing fossil fuel extractives that violate women's rights and harm women and men's health, their environment and our planet. We have sufficient renewables to replace fossil fuels that destabilize our climate and wreck lives.

Gender Action's old recommendations to make extractive consultations gender-inclusive and train and place women in good-paying extractive jobs should not come into play for fossil fuel investments that must not occur at all.

Second, we should respect and support local women and men to help them realize their rights to obtain control over and access to their renewable energy and mineral resources.

A year and a half ago I participated in WoMin meetings that discussed the need to develop alternative **ecofeminist** models to the prevailing extractive model. I hope we are all or all become ecofeminists.

Our WoMin group visited former Niger Delta villages where oil and gas killed the land and sea so severely that nothing can live there today, not a woman, man, fly, or fish. Fisherwomen's and farmers' livelihoods and lives were devastated. Some even died.

We faced Shell's male militarized goons who were protecting the pipelines, toting rifles. They terrifyingly exemplified the militarisation of extractives that communities face.

And thus third, we need to address the intersection of gender and power, including militarization, around

extractives. A gender unjust extractive model is one where women lacking power are subject to sexual violence and land and water grabbing among other rights violations.

In conclusion, we ecofeminist women and men should support communities who own and control their resources.