

WAMA Newsletter

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Women in Action on Mining in Asia

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Climate change dialogues and targets for mitigation and adaptation have started to pose new and heightened threats to many local communities. Our members are witnessing a big increase in mining operations, new minerals being extracted and more forest lands being diverted for mining and climate finance projects in the name of transition minerals and afforestation, conservation, green energy and green economies.

They say that Transition Minerals are necessary for addressing the climate crisis. We are told that fossil fuels will be phased out and renewables will give the world clean energy and green

economy. But what we women in Asia are facing in this new crisis is losing more and more land and more and more forests. Not only for coal but for many more minerals -nickel, copper, silica, bauxite, iron-ore, lithium and others. We are also losing more and more lands and forests for solar parks and plantations and national parks and wind projects. After Covid, this is a new crisis for us. Not Coronavirus, but climate action targets. How these are affecting us women on the ground as herders, farmers, forest dwellers and foragers since the Covid pandemic came to light when we met at the **WAMA Skillshare**.



Field Visit to the Communities Affected by the Thermal Power Plant in Mae Moh

Women who have had a long struggle against the IFI investors and the thermal power company in Mae Moh, Thailand, shared how they put up a stiff legal battle and collectively held out against the severe air pollution, land grabs and loss of livelihood.

In the early 2000s, the affected communities set up the Occupational Patients Rights Network, which filed several lawsuits against the thermal plant in Northern Thailand's Lampang. The plant is fueled by a 135 km² open-pit lignite mine, one of the largest in Southeast Asia.

The construction of the power plant [began in 1972](#), when it consisted of just three units. As the project was expanded over time, with 14 units installed today, the mine inched closer and closer to the people's homes. The people started complaining of respiratory illnesses and damage to their crops due to the deadly sulfur dioxide fumes released by the plant. They were troubled by round-the-clock noise pollution, the walls of their homes began to crack, and high levels of toxins were also found in their water sources.



The lignite mine (below) and the thermal power plant (left) in Mae Moh





Even though the Asian Development Bank (ADB) [admitted](#) that the thermal plant and mine caused environmental and social concerns, the local leaders failed to take any immediate action. The villagers, fed-up with the lack of political will to put an end to the mining, took the legal route.

After a 12-year-long struggle, the [Supreme Court in 2009](#) upheld the earlier ruling of a provincial court and directed the Electricity Generating Au-

thority of Thailand (EGAT) to pay compensation to 131 people, which included the families of those who died of lung cancer. The filed lawsuits also resulted in compensations for crop damages, a hospital for the community, relocation of affected people to sites at least five kilometers from the project, and the conversion of a controversial [golf course](#) back into a forest.



With the community members in Mae Moh (left), visit to the mine site (right), women from Mae Moh sharing their story of struggle (top of page)

In this issue of the newsletter, we present some of the country stories that were shared and our statement of demands. All our stories and problems were almost identical - only countries were different. We share here some of the situation analysis in a post Covid extractivist politics.

MONGOLIA

Mining is Eating Up Herder Lands

In Mongolia, Herders are now told that having too many cattle is the problem, not too much mining. So desertification is addressed with telling herders to have less cattle and to put their livestock in fences so that more land can be given for mining. The gold in the Gobi desert is up for grabs. Mine toxicity is not a problem, but cattle dung raises temperatures? Are the green climate funds bringing the right solutions? These are questions that women from the Gobi are raising. And herders are **demanding for their formal rights to pasture lands and right to clean water, air and grazing lands - a law that determines their tenurial rights with clear titles.**

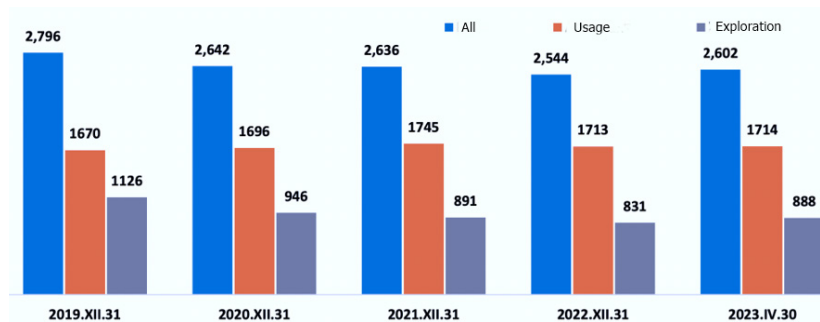
Mining Scenario in Mongolia

Since the 1990s, the period of transition to a market economy, mining has become the leading sector of the Mongolian economy. In 2021, [mining contributed](#) around 22% to the country's GDP and accounted for over 80% of exports. The country is rich in mineral resources like copper, gold, coal and fluorspar. In the last 20 years, the main investors in Mongolia's mining industry have been Canada, Australia, Japan, and the EU.

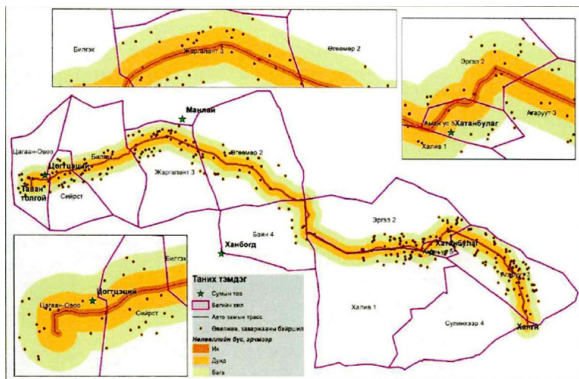
However, during the development of the mineral resources sector, the environment and society, especially the health of children and quality of life of pastoral women, are being endangered. The mining industry has substantially taken over



Valuation of Mongolia's Mineral Resources Sector



Exploration and mineral licences 2019-23



The location of herdsmen's winter and spring shelters in the highway's impact zone

land and water resources, making conventional livestock production unfeasible.

A Concession agreement was signed for the construction of two export roads during the Covid-19 lockdown. Around 180 herder families live along one of the highways, which is also used by heavy mining trucks for transportation. They did not even put asphalt on that road, saying that production, building material costs have gone up, and till now it remains a dusty road. So families try to live at least 500 metres away from the road.

Issues

Mongolia has only around three million people, but 70 million livestock. So overgrazing is pub-

licly declared as the major problem while the real problem of overexploitation from mining remains unchecked.

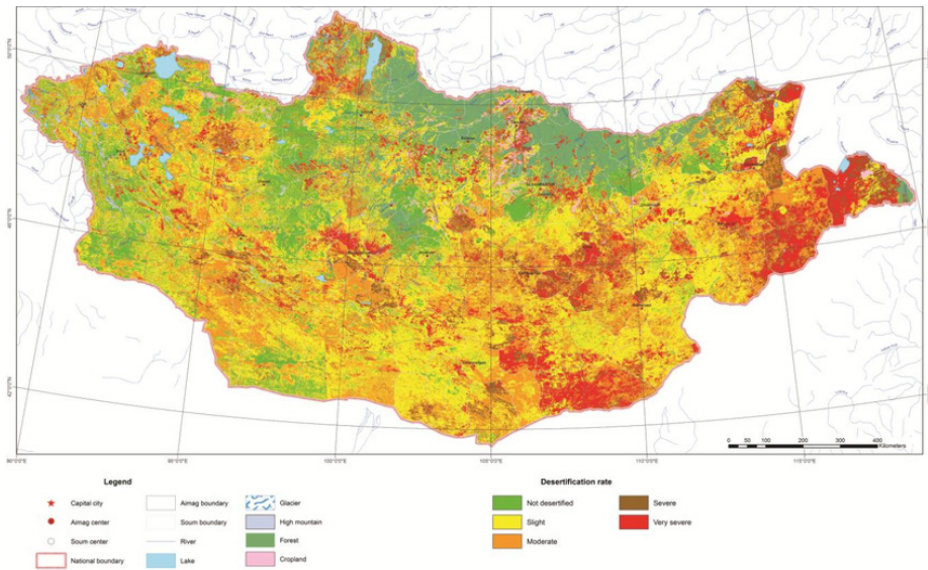
The Impact of Mining on Women Herders

Special mining permits are issued on pastoral lands, which are the source of livelihood for the women herders and their families. As a result of mining, animal fertility and production of milk sees a decrease. The biggest negative impact is on the access to quality water, creating conflicts. Herders fight each other when the availability of drinking water and pastures decreases, and in the Gobi region, there were two cases reported where herdsmen shot each other to death over water and pastures.

When mining projects are implemented in Mongolia, only environmental risk assessment is done, but social and health risk assessment is not done. Because of this, fair resettlement and compensation are not provided. There are many cases where land was vacated without any compensation at all. Citizens have complained to the government, but the cases have not been resolved. As a result, there are tensions between the herders and the mining companies. Mining companies meanwhile, continue to focus only on technical remediation, while neglecting biological remediation.



A woman herder with her livestock



Land desertification
in Mongolia

The country's water bodies are also drying up. [More than 70 per cent](#) of the total area is desertified. As a result, women herders are required to move 2-3 times a month in search of a place with good vegetables and sufficient water, which in turn increases the workload and psychological pressure on women. In addition, they no longer have time to actively participate in social life, thus creating a lot of negative consequences, such as women falling behind and alienating themselves from society, and losing opportunities for their own development.

Situation During Covid

The Covid restrictions meant herders had no opportunity to avail public services or resolve complaints. The herders were unable to protest, gather, or express their opinions in order to protect

their pastures and drinking water, and if they did, they would be fined 100,000 to 1 million MNT under the Violation Law. During the pandemic, the government designed and enacted legislations to restrict the movement of people but under the pretense of saving the economy, did not enforce a quarantine on the mining industry.

Watch: [Participatory Environmental Monitoring \(PEM\) initiatives in Mongolia's mining areas](#)

SARAANA NATURE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (SNCF), which works in Central Mongolia, undertook research to assess the mining impact on the Gun Galuut Locally Protected Area (GGLPA).

Water quality and heavy metal testing: A total of 11 water samples were collected from GGLPA's wetlands. It was found that the water in the area



is harmful for both livestock and human health. Traces of 53 heavy metals were found. High amounts of Uranium, Copper, and Aluminum were found in two lakes. The evidence collected shows how the health of herders and their livestock are increasingly under threat as even large companies are not following environmental safeguards.

How Local NGOs like SNCF are helping herders to protect themselves and monitor their pasturelands

- Training on field techniques of Bird, water quality and pasture ecology
- Raising awareness on wetland conservation and biodiversity
- Meeting and Discussion to introduce survey results of the local biodiversity
- Provide educational resources to learn about local biodiversity and wetlands, its main threats
- Sampling and collecting data on surveys of the bird monitoring and water quality, vegetation
- Conducting Gun Galuut eco-tour
- Special interest tours including Birdwatching, wildflower watching, walking

Nomadic Herders and their Entitlements to Pasturelands

While mining is having an adverse effect on livestock, the government is instructing the herders to focus on quality rather than quantity, on the pretext that the large population of livestock is the unscientific cause for desertification. For the herders, the growing conflicts in their rangelands and the [high taxation on livestock](#), are forcing them to restrict their cattle. But this is not saving their crisis because they say that mining compa-

nies are expanding and destroying their pasturelands. Their livestock are not the real problem.

Good quality and safe pastures are critical to the livelihood of herders. Meat and dairy products are the main source of livelihood and food for the nomadic population of Mongolia. Herders supply raw materials including leather, wool, and cashmere for national industries. Herders are the bearers of nomadic culture. They are at the forefront of the fight against environmental degradation and climate change. Yet, herders are being pushed out of their customary boundaries for private mining interests. Herders are not involved in decision-making related to land and no proper assessment of the human rights situation of herders has been conducted to address their concerns.

Hence, the Herder Women's Demands in Brief

- Call for the Government of Mongolia to provide a legal definition of the right to land and protect the pastoral lands from impacts of business operations, as the country's economy is rapidly expanding to a mining based economy. The government should enact a law recognising the formal entitlements of herders to their pasture lands and they should have the right of decision-making for any diversion of these lands.
- Policy to conduct the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment before implementing the project in the nomadic pastoral land and develop a plan to be implemented among crosscutting sectors
- Clean up and restore the water bodies and pasture lands contaminated by mining operations.
- We recommend the national agencies to improve the protection of herder and women human rights defenders under the new Law on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, which was approved for the first time in Asia.

Indigenous Women Litigating for their Lands in Nepal

Climate change action programmes and energy transition policies have become a more serious challenge to indigenous people, whether it is hydro projects or conservation parks, says INWOLAG, a team of committed indigenous women lawyers representing diverse groups of indigenous women in Nepal. Reduction in fossil fuel dependence to meet the COP targets has translated into increase in other forms of energy production and expansion of national parks. Indigenous communities are paying a very high price to maintain the world's unmitigated demand for more energy and market driven economies. Nepal stands as an example of this global trend.

Energy Transition and Tanahu Hydropower Project

Women say that International Financial Institutions are promoting unsustainable energy projects in Nepal despite long standing opposition from indigenous communities. Women from the Magar community, whose ancestral land, territory, and natural resources are being destroyed for the massive Tanahu hydro project, have filed complaints to the inspection panel of the ADB on the violations of national and international policies that protect IP rights. With support from INWOLAG and other CSOs, the community has been holding dialogues with the series of missions of the IFI, but with little progress witnessed so far, on their demands. They question whether the IFIs' hold any commitments to women and indigenous peoples' rights. The negotiations are at a standstill as commitments given to meet the demands of the community for land for land compensation appear to be dragging. The wom-



Source: Tanahu Hydropower Limited

en complain how this has added a huge stress to their daily life as uncertainties loom ahead.

Watch: [Indigenous Peoples Rights and Hydropower](#)

Challenges for Indigenous Women in Protected Areas

Chitwan, Koshi Tapo, Dorpatan are national parks and wildlife projects in indigenous peoples' lands in Nepal. While hunting by foreigners is promoted, indigenous people have been thrown out of their traditional homes in Dorpatan. Due to the high presence of the army in Chitwan and Koshi Tapo even though indigenous women have been using resources from the forest for generations, they now have limited access to their own resources and are constantly under pressure of physical and sexual assault. Women are permitted into the forest for a limited number of hours for collection of firewood or food, for fishing and foraging, and any small delay in returning from the forest is met with criminal cas-



The scarred arm of a wildlife attack victim in Chitwan

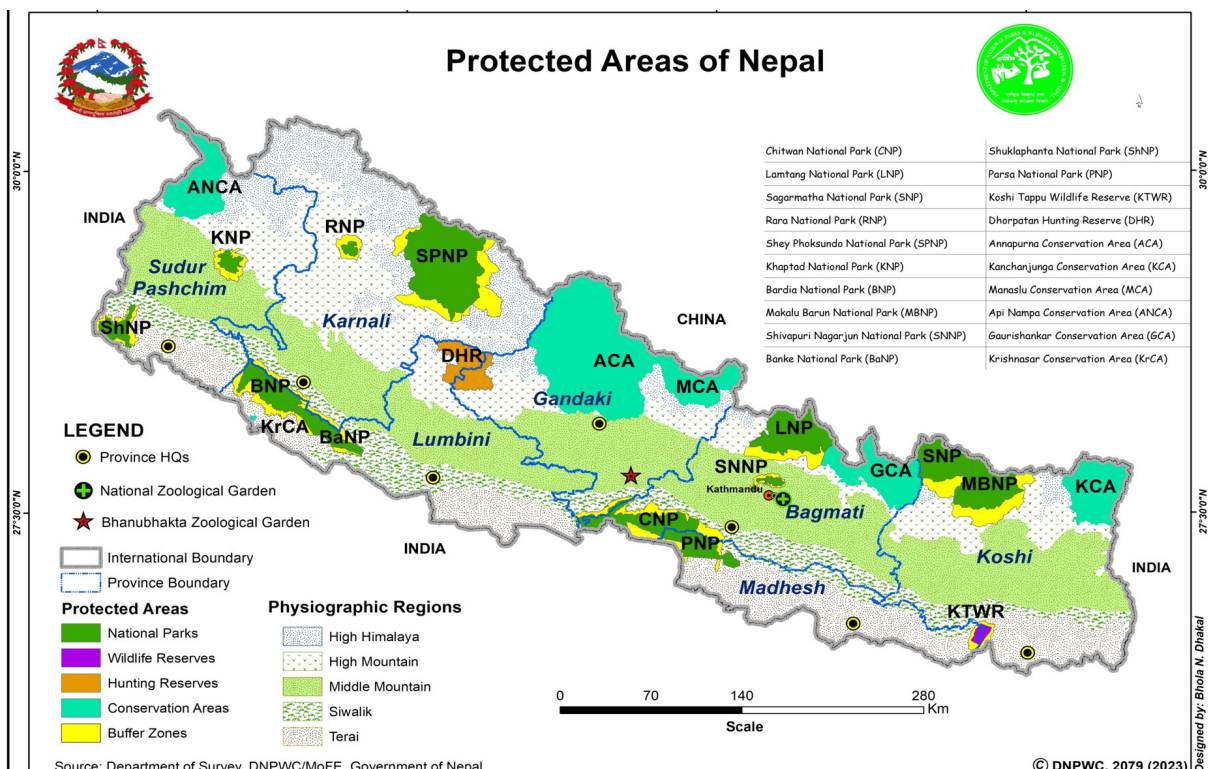


Women from an indigenous fishing community

es slapped on them, demands for sexual favours or fines. Local communities have tried to relocate but their traditional skills and occupation depend on fishing and without this access, their inability to survive forced them to return. Women in these two parks have several complaints of rapes, pregnancies and forced abortions as a result. However, putting up any formal complaints makes them vulnerable to public shaming with no action on the offenders. Hence, women remain silent. Additionally, they face the constant risk of wildlife

attacks like crocodiles and rhinos, and some of them have had injuries and narrow escapes without receiving any compensation for their medical treatment or losses.

In Dorpatan, which is the only hunting reserve in Nepal, the lucrative gaming gets precedence over local community rights. The indigenous community which lives in the Dorpatan mountains for some parts of the year and comes down to the plains during the harsh winters, is being pushed



out of their customary territories for these commercial activities.

The indigenous women team of lawyers, IN-WOLAG, is currently working on building awareness within the community about their rights, and creating spaces locally for women to understand complaints mechanisms and access justice. They are also lobbying with the local government to enable the participation of indigenous women in lobbying for their security within the national parks.

Protected Areas Management Strategy: 2022-2030, Government of Nepal

5.1.4 HUMAN-WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE Issues

- Dependency of poor and marginalized communities on park resources
- Wildlife intrusion into farmlands and settlements
- Inadequate relief support for wildlife damage • Inadequate capacity to respond to Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC) Strategies and strategic actions
- Develop and implement site specific HWC management action plans
- Implement alternative livelihood improvement activities targeted for poor and marginalized communities
- Expand and improve habitats, and promote wildlife-friendly physical barriers to control wildlife intrusion into human settlements while ensuring barrier risk to dispersal of wildlife
- Revise existing HWC relief guidelines to increase relief support and simplify the process
- Strengthen the capacity of frontline staffs to respond to HWC

5.2.3 GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION Issues

- Inadequate safeguard mechanism in the workplace
- Inadequate representation of women, indigenous people, and marginalized groups
- Strategies and strategic actions
- Mainstream GESI in PA management and biodiversity conservation
- Ensure GESI sensitive budget and programs
- Increase meaningful participation of women, indigenous people, and marginalized people at all levels
- Ensure access and equitable benefit sharing mechanism to local communities

https://dnpwc.gov.np/media/publication/PA_Management_Strategy_2022-2030.pdf

Yet, the larger issues remain - are expanding national parks the solution to climate change when women have not been the destroyers of wildlife or biodiversity. Can climate protection be sustainable at the cost of injustice to indigenous women whose knowledge and dependency on the flora and fauna are seriously affected. The Strategy document makes tall claims on its future actions for addressing gender and human-wildlife conflict issues. The indigenous women witness a different reality.

INDIA

Promise of a New Beginning for Mining-Affected Families

After a long struggle of over two decades, 97 families who were forced to remain in deplorable living conditions at Dalmia colony, a mine-workers' settlement in Vijayanagara district of the southern Indian state of Karnataka, have finally been promised rehabilitation.

Through funds from the DMF (District Mineral Foundation), a district-level non-profit trust fund for the benefit of mining-affected communities, the local administration handed over land plots at a nearby location to the affected families, who had nowhere else to go after the iron-ore mining company had shut shop in the early 2000s.

Since then, life in the colony has been a story of endless struggle, with the living quarters in a battered state, the absence of toilets, and the settlement having no proper road connection to the rest of the district. People have to risk death as they dangerously cross railway tracks on foot to the nearest village on the other side. As a result, they have severely limited access to basic facilities like healthcare and education.

Since the families do not own any agricultural land, most of them depend on daily wage work in the nearby mine sites as drivers,



Dilapidated living quarters at the colony

helpers or manual labourers. Women are doubly burdened as they also have to manage domestic work and take care of their children alongside their daily-wage labour.

With the dedicated support of Sakhi Trust, which lobbied extensively with the officials, the residents have now got house sites, a drinking water treatment plant, the crumbling building of the local primary school has been renovated, and periodic health drives are conducted now – all with the DMF funds. With the successful progress witnessed in Dalmia camp, other mining camps are now being surveyed for similar entitlements and restoration work. There is a hope that the abandoned mine workers will finally get some decent form of living and access to employment guarantee.

Watch: [Desolation to hope: Rebuilding lives in Dalmia Camp](#)

In part II of this newsletter, we will be presenting more country stories from our WAMA members.



Women from Dalmia Colony meet the district collector

WAMA Declaration, Chiang Mai



UnJust and Regressive Transition: Women from Asia Denounce Indiscriminate Extractivism and False Global Climate Solutions

We, the members of WAMA (Women in Action on Mining in Asia), representing 8 countries - India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines, have met at this Regional Skillshare on Extractivism, Climate Justice and Women's Natural Resources Rights, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 2-8 July 2023.

As collectives of women from ancestral, rural, pastoral and mountain lands and small islands, we have been protecting our life systems, cultures, biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods. We have long fought the harmful oligarchic global mining industry and climate finance projects with no justice so far despite long pending serious grievances.

The decline in environmental health and human rights, through rise in state and corporate authoritarianism has resulted in contamination of all our eco-systems and destruction of livelihoods. Women leaders continue to be harassed, incarcerated, assaulted and killed. Women and children continue to face severe health problems from mine pollution with no relief or justice.

Yet we are witnessing an adverse increase in extractives projects even after the Covid 19 and the escalation of global climate crisis. Corporations, banks and governments are justifying this destruction as essential for energy transition in achieving net zero targets.

We condemn this expansion of extractivist projects and protected areas, fortressing of indigenous and local community forests, customary areas, sacred grounds, demolition of small islands and farmland grabs for large scale renewables, ecosystems services and plantations projects - all in the name of green extractivism and carbon sequestration.

We reiterate that this corporate capture of governments, ecosystems and natural resources must end immediately if we are to address the current climate crisis. **Therefore, we demand from southern and northern governments, international financial institutions, banks and international institutions like the UN Bodies to:**

Stop the false solutions being used to promote and justify corporate extractivism like increase in silica, copper, lithium, nickel and other transition minerals extraction, setting up large solar and wind parks in our ancestral lands, artificial heritage sites and expansion of national parks in our community owned forests and pasturelands.

WAMA Declaration, Chiang Mai

Stop the criminalization and attacks against women environmental and human rights defenders. Stop the spread of fake news and misinformation and repression of independent reporting on violations by mining and climate projects.

Recognise that women are already practising real sustainable nature based solutions and green economies in our forests, pasturelands, coastal lands and other ecosystems.

Recognize and uphold legally, the ancestral land rights of indigenous, mountain and pastoral communities and our right to withhold consent and to continue traditional land based livelihoods vis-a-vis extractives and climate action projects.

We demand for proper implementation of the ILO Conventions, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the FPIC, the right to withhold consent, to be included within the Legally Binding mechanisms.

We demand that states enact stronger laws and strengthen institutionally active mechanisms for judicial redress of human rights defenders and due diligence mechanisms in granting environmental clearances to extractive and climate action projects.

Demand for legally binding accountability instruments to hold corporations and banks accountable through international judicial mechanisms for affected communities and citizens to get redress, justice and reparation without delay.

We demand for transparent, inclusive periodic gender audits of mining and climate action projects and women's access to state and donor mine audit reports in their local languages and formats.

We demand for states to reinstate and support strong and vibrant institutions that uphold democratic governance, including vigilant civil society participation and community assertion.

We state that we women have the knowledge and wisdom to guide the world in constructive pathways for addressing the global climate crisis through promotion of our green economies.

And therefore, it is not participation we seek but our leadership and right to decisions in the global climate negotiations.

WAMA will stand by our communities and collectives to continue our advocacy for a gender just environmental governance and sustainable development.

We will continue to stand in the frontlines to demand corporate accountability and justice for our sisters, their families and communities and for their lands, waters and forests. We will be vigilant against abuses and destruction, and will hold perpetrators accountable for their violations.