

Women's Funds in action: Women strategise across movements in Kenya

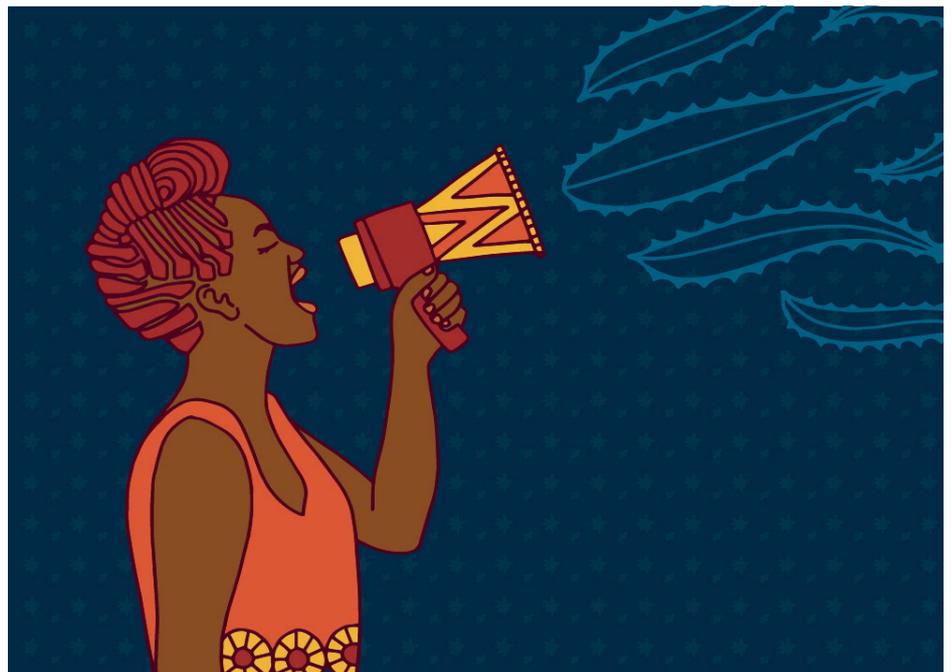
Extractive industries and industrial development pose a threat to ecosystems around the world. In Kenya, women are fighting back. They are coming together to advocate across multiple levels of government - protecting their lives and livelihoods by protecting their local environments.

On a small island off the northern coast of Kenya is what UNESCO calls “the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlement in East Africa.” To this day, the rich history of the region is still present through its architecture in Old Lamu Town. Lamu not only continues to be an important centre for Islamic and Swahili cultures across the region, the Lamu Archipelago is known for its diverse coral reefs, sea-grass beds, sand bars, lagoons and creeks, hosting 75% of Kenya’s mangrove areas.

And all of that history and biodiversity is under threat.

The Kenyan Government initiated the Lamu Port and New Transport Development Corridor leading to Southern Sudan and Ethiopia (LAPSSET), a large-scale infrastructure initiative whose plans include a new berth port at Lamu, in 2009. They then initiated construction of a 1,050-megawatt coal plant in Kwasasi, about 20 km from Lamu Town in 2013. Since then, substantive concerns have been raised about both LAPSSET and the coal plant regarding potential harmful impacts to both local communities and the environment, as well as the lack of adequate community consultation.

The people of Lamu are almost completely dependent on their natural resource base



for farming, fishing, livestock, tourism, and non-timber forest products. To protect their home, Lamu Environmental Protection and Conservation (LEPAC) started Save Lamu in 2009 as an umbrella advocacy organisation that brings together over 35 community-based organisations from across Lamu County, Kenya.

“There is no way you can talk about coal or talk about the environment and leave behind women....a woman is always attached to the natural resources they have.”

Save Lamu representative

Given that the impacts of the extractives sector, and coal in particular, are gendered, Save Lamu recognised it needed to strengthen women’s voices speaking against the harmful effects of the planned port and coal plant and for renewable energy in Kenya. Partners under the GAGGA Alliance – WoMin, the Global Greengrants Fund, Lumière Synergie pour le Développement, Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-A), and Womankind Worldwide – have provided funding, visibility, and support for exchange visits with other women’s environmental groups within Kenya and to South Africa to build strategy and share tactics across movements.

Despite often facing criticism and intimidation for stepping outside the bounds of social norms, today women are at the forefront of Save Lamu’s community organising efforts and advocacy successes.

For example, a woman environmental defender representing Save Lamu presented the community’s concerns to executive directors of the African Development Bank (AfDB). Following this, four U.S. senators wrote to the AfDB asking them not to support the project. (The U.S. government is a major shareholder in the AfDB.) Kenya’s National Environmental Tribunal then issued a stay order following receipt of an appeal by Save Lamu, halting the development of the proposed coal plant until further notice.

However, neither the port nor the coal plant has been completely taken off the table by the Kenyan government or their financiers. Thus the activism and organising efforts of the women of Save Lamu continue.



↑ All images courtesy of Urgent Action Fund - Africa.

Thanks to Shinaz Rehema Ali of Urgent Africa Fund-Africa for her contributions to this profile.

To learn more, see: gaggaalliance.org