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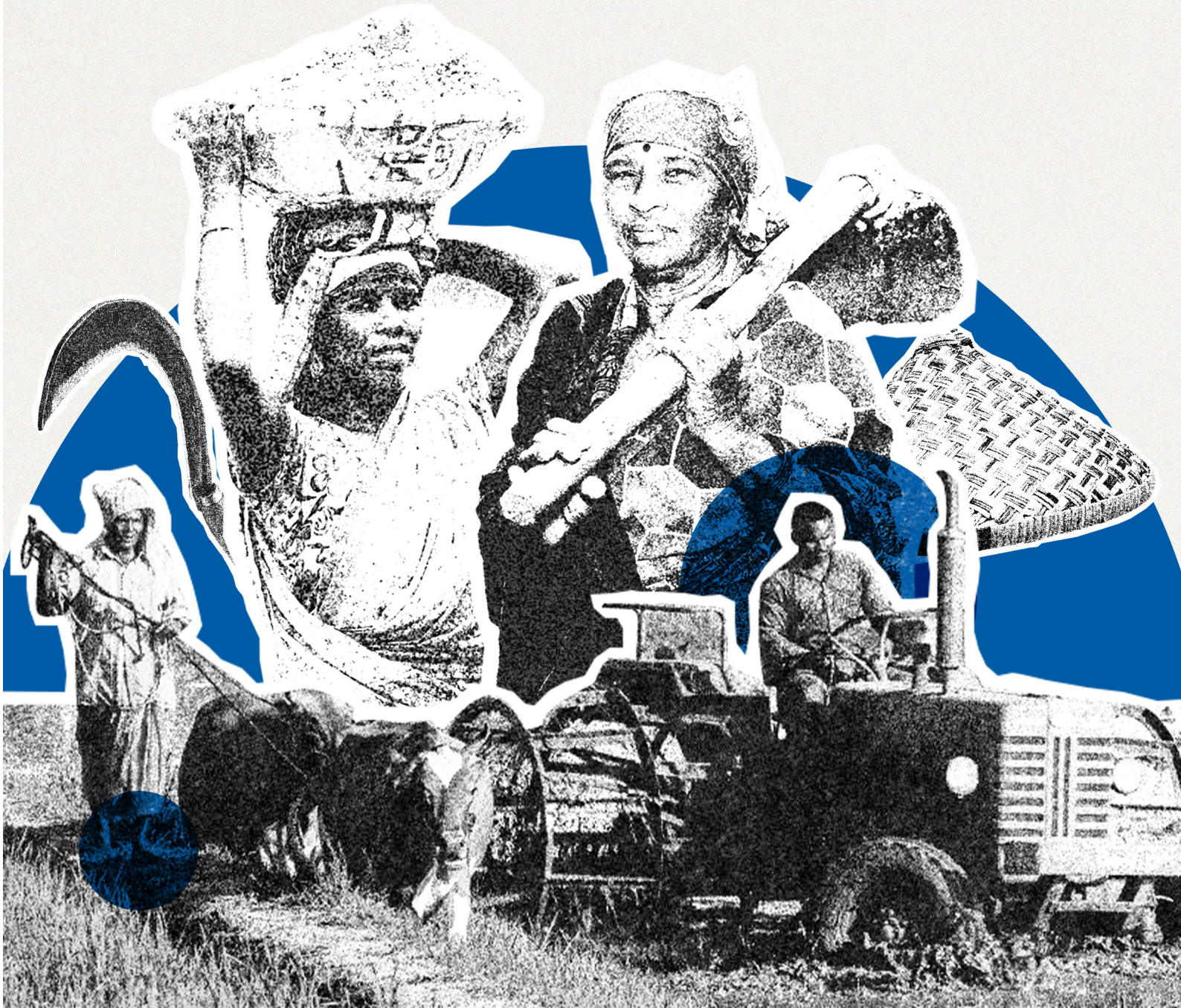
Towards a Feminist, People-Powered Just Transition

An Advocacy Toolkit



Towards a Feminist, People-Powered Just Transition: An Advocacy Toolkit

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Background

The peoples of the world contend with overlapping crises caused by increasing debt burdens, climate breakdown, ecological collapse, and deepening economic inequality. These are not abstract disruptions but lived realities in the global South: vanishing livelihoods, soaring food and energy costs, catastrophic weather events, and a steady erosion of rights, self-determination, and sovereignty.

Women and marginalised communities bear a disproportionate burden under this paradigm characterised by the globalisation of finance, transnational capital flows, monopoly capitalism, and resource extraction chains built on fossil fuel dependency. These systems, reinforced by authoritarian regimes in client states, embody ecological colonialism, extracting resources at the expense of domestic well-being and environmental integrity in formerly colonised regions (Temper & Martínez-Alier, 2025).

Today's extractivism and militarism have advanced in scale and sophistication, now wrapped in the cloak of greenwashing (Feghali, Najem, & Metcalfe, 2021). Western powers and corporate elites disingenuously market "clean" transition models, while continuing to plunder Global South ecosystems. Scholars call this "green colonialism": a continuation of colonial extraction under the guise of sustainability (Calvão, Benya, & Archer, 2022).

A feminist agenda for sustainable consumption and production (SCP) insists that societal shift must transcend mere carbon reduction. It must dismantle the intertwined systems of exploitation—extractivism, militarism, privatisation—that have fuelled environmental destruction and social collapse. Centring women, Indigenous peoples, informal economy workers, and other marginalised groups is fundamental to this approach. These communities are the stewards of sustainable ecological knowledge, and they sustain life. Their labour, wisdom, and resistance define environmental justice, demanding economic models grounded in reparations, redistribution, rights, care, and collective sovereignty (Mohamed, Chattopadhyay, & Gahman, 2024).

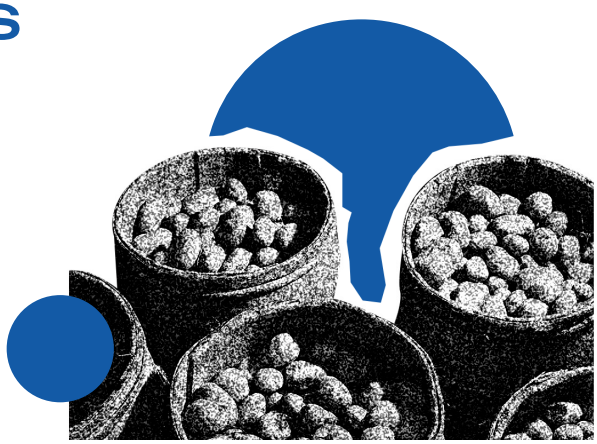
The call for a people-powered transition reclaims commons from privatisation, counters false technological or market-based "solutions", and champions democratic, localised systems of food, energy, and production that are both ecologically sustainable and socially just.

It is developed for grassroots movements, civil society, and advocates in the global South to provide tactical guidance for communications and advocacy strategies that reflect the lived experiences and grassroots leadership of feminists and activists.

This toolkit emphasises that genuine and transformative transitions must be rooted in equity—ensuring that no people, workers, or communities are left behind.

Key Frameworks

These frameworks provide a justice-oriented lens for confronting the root causes of ecological breakdown, deepening inequalities, and systemic exploitation and injustices of the world today. Together, they shape the analytical foundations for movement-led advocacy and strategic communications that centre the rights of people and communities over markets and capital.



People-Powered Sustainable Consumption and Production (PPSCP)

Mainstream narratives of "green growth" and sustainability remain confined to market logic—centering technological fixes, consumer choices, and "circular" supply chains while sidestepping deeper questions of power, inequality, and extraction. Feminist and Global South movements have long critiqued this depoliticisation of ecological crises. The People-Powered SCP (PPSCP) framework emerged as a counterpoint: asserting that ecological futures must be shaped by communities themselves, not dictated by elites or corporations (IBON International, 2020).

At its core, PPSCP recognises that unsustainable consumption and production result from intersecting systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism. "Sustainability," therefore, must prioritise redistribution, equity, and survival—not corporate competitiveness. Transitions must be people-centred and justice-oriented, grounded in the agency of women, workers, farmers, and marginalised communities (IBON International, 2024; Paulson, Saave, & Mookerjea, 2025).

Serving as both lens and strategy, PPSCP challenges market-centric sustainability narratives and amplifies the leadership of Global South communities. It links ecological justice to struggles for gender, economic, and political justice—equipping movements with the tools and language to demand systemic transformation (IBON International, 2020; IBON International, 2024).

Feminist Political Economy (FPE)

Where PPSCP offers a justice lens on ecological transitions, Feminist Political Economy (FPE) deepens the analysis by exposing the gendered foundations of economic life. Feminist economists have long shown how mainstream economics invisibilises entire realms of labour and care. The concept of "male bias" reveals how state budgets prioritise infrastructure and military spending while cutting health and social services—costs that fall disproportionately on women (Elson, 1991). Unpaid and informal labour further shows how capitalist economies depend on invisible reserves of care and reproductive work (Benería, Berik, & Floro, 2016).

FPE insists that inequality is not marginal but central to how economies function, as extraction, patriarchy, and colonial relations determine who bears the costs of ecological destruction (Stevano, 2024). It clarifies that capitalism and patriarchy are co-constitutive—devaluing women's work, exploiting migrant labour, and pushing racialised communities into precarity. In debates on "just transition," FPE compels us to ask: transition for whom, and at whose expense?

By exposing the hidden subsidies that women, migrants, and marginalised groups provide to the global economy, FPE challenges the illusion of neutrality in sustainability discourse. It equips advocates to demand policies that value care, centre well-being, and dismantle patriarchal economic structures—anchoring the toolkit's vision for a feminist and people-powered transition.

Resist, Reform, Reimagine: A Feminist Praxis on Advocacy

While PPSCP and FPE anchor the analysis, they are not themselves strategies for action. Advocacy requires praxis—ways of moving from critique to change. Movement ecology offers one entry point: it describes how social movements function like ecosystems, where different actors—whether oriented towards service, mobilisation, or advocacy—play complementary roles in driving change (Case, 2018; McAfee & Howard, 2023).

PPSCP and FPE implies prioritising women, workers, farmers, marginalised communities, and their allies, as agents of action and transformative change. Movement ecology emphasises the interdependence of strategies and forms of action towards short-term objectives and long-term visions.

Scholarship on resistance underscores that these interdependent roles are also political and ethical: questions of who leads, who benefits, and who bears the costs must remain central (Aldossari & Calvard, 2022). Feminist political philosophy deepens the critique by showing how structures of domination—gendered, racialised, and class-based—shape both the distribution of resources and the capacity to act politically (McAfee & Howard, 2023).

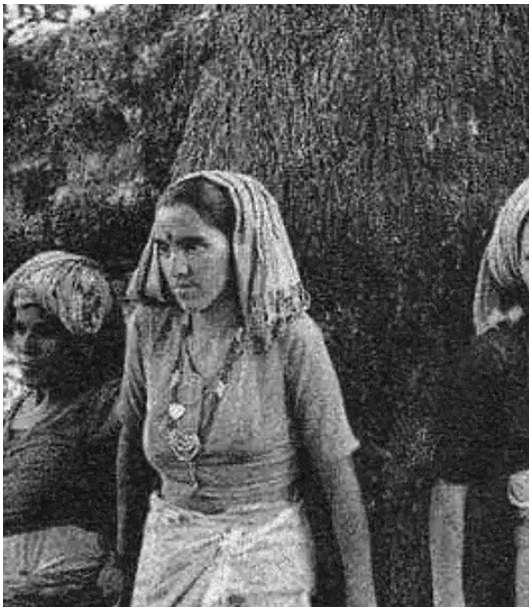
Drawing on these insights and on longstanding traditions in feminist movements, we arrive at a praxis framework that links critique to transformation. The 3Rs—Resist, Reform, Reimagine—capture how movements push back against structures of power, engage with institutions to shift resources and norms, and cultivate visions of radically different futures.

Together, they provide a compass for feminist advocacy: a way of connecting immediate struggles, tactical openings, and long-term horizons.

RESIST: Feminist advocacy begins with resistance. It means naming, confronting, and contesting the actors and systems that drive ecological and social harm. Resistance can take many forms: exposing corporate "greenwashing", challenging authoritarian crackdowns, disrupting elite narratives that reinforce inequalities. Mohanty (2003) describes this as "making power visible"—refusing the myth that exploitation is inevitable or apolitical. Our resistance must be linked to the bigger agenda of movement-building and self-organisation to sustain collective action towards transformative change.

Chipko Movement, India

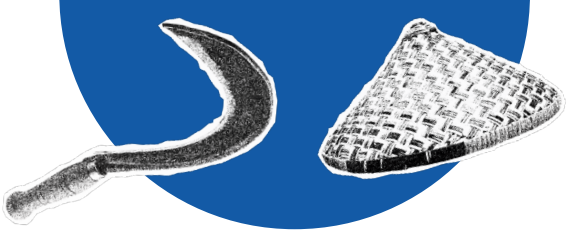
One of the most iconic examples of feminist resistance to ecological harm is the Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand in the 1970s. Women in villages literally embraced trees—hugging trunks to stop contractors from logging—in order to protect sources of food, firewood, fodder, and clean water essential for their daily survival. Their action was not only about forests but also about defending life itself: ecological survival, subsistence economies, and community autonomy (Greenpeace, 2023). The movement grew through local organising, direct action, and collective solidarity, with women making visible how patriarchal development policies and commercial logging devastated both ecosystems and livelihoods (WRM, 2019). By putting their bodies on the line, the Chipko women articulated an ethic of care for communities and nature that continues to inspire global struggles for climate and environmental justice.



REFORM: Resistance and movement-building can be complemented by reform for greater impact. Within feminist praxis, reform means working inside institutions to shift resources, laws, and norms, while recognising the limits and dilemmas this entails. Rights frameworks and policy reforms can redistribute power and open protections, but they also risk reinforcing dominant structures (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). Experiences with gender-responsive budgeting and feminist law reform show how states and legal systems can be leveraged as sites of struggle, redirecting priorities towards care, social reproduction, and equality—even if such gains are partial (IISJ, 2020). Historically, feminist movements have treated reforms not as endpoints but as tactical openings—stepping-stones to build collective power and press for deeper structural change.

Ghana's Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act

Ghana's passage of the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act in July 2024 didn't happen spontaneously—it is the outcome of decades of advocacy mobilised by feminist movements, civil society coalitions, and persistent political pressure (Global Centre for Pluralism, 2024). Groups like the Affirmative Action Coalition and ABANTU for Development led sustained engagement with parliamentarians, used gender equality research (e.g. the Global Pluralism Monitor) to show where disparities were worst, built public awareness through media campaigns, and provided input during stakeholder consultations stretching back to Bill introductions in 2011. Over time, they pressured both ruling and opposition parties to commit to the law, framed gender quotas as essential for democracy, and held lawmakers accountable—ensuring that policy reform was grounded not just in abstract rights, but in political organising, evidence, constituency demand, and normative shifts among citizens.



REIMAGINE: Feminist movements do more than resist or reform; they prefigure the futures they seek. Reimagination, by contrast, refuses these limits. It is about narrative and vision—creating spaces for what has not yet been thought, for what is exploratory and still forming. Through storytelling, art, speculative methods, and community visioning, movements prefigure alternatives, turning imagination into a site of political struggle and possibility.

Reimagination demands that we make visible what dominant systems render unthinkable: ecological interdependence, shared responsibility, and dignified livelihoods. In this sense, it is both method and horizon—cultivating unthought futures and opening spaces where hesitant, experimental, and visionary politics can take root. More than an act of dreaming, reimagination is a call to abolish oppressive structures and to anchor our struggles in the collective creation of liberatory worlds (Milojević, 2024; Coleman & Jungnickel, 2024; Al-Noaimi, 2025). It is a call to reconstruct political, economic, and gendered relations, so that people are truly sovereign over economic and ecological decisions at the community and national level, with the possibility of eventual systemic change.

Self-Employed Women's Association, India

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India has, since the 1970s, organised women in the informal economy into cooperatives that span agriculture, handicrafts, banking, and health care. By pooling resources and building solidarity, SEWA demonstrated how women workers can create livelihoods outside exploitative labour markets, while also securing social protections such as micro-insurance and childcare. Its cooperatives embody a feminist vision of economies built on reciprocity, care, and sustainability rather than profit maximisation. SEWA's model has influenced policy debates in India and internationally, showing that feminist alternatives to neoliberal development are not abstract ideas but already existing practices.

Together, these three modes form an ecology of praxis. Resistance exposes harm; reform extracts concessions and creates pathways; reimagination sustains vision and hope. No single mode is sufficient on its own. But in interaction, in the course of uprooting the causes of ecological and economic harm, they give feminist advocacy its resilience and transformative potential.

Unpacking the Issue: Towards a Feminist, People-Powered Just Transition

Effective advocacy starts with how we frame our narrative. In a time when the climate crisis is deepening and consumption patterns remain unsustainable, dominant stories often obscure systemic injustices, ignore histories of exploitation, and offer false, technocratic solutions. This section uses the toolkit's foundational frameworks to help you unpack and reframe those narratives and center grassroots concerns and realities.

Dominant Narrative	Feminist & People-Powered Messaging
Environmental degradation stems from individual overconsumption and population growth.	**The crisis is driven by capitalist overproduction and extractive economies, not by individual consumption nor population growth.** Corporations and states that plunder resources and profit from ecological destruction must be held accountable—not the communities already fighting to survive.
Natural resources should be harnessed for economic development.	**Extractivism is not development.** It strips communities of their land, water, and livelihoods while enriching elites. A feminist vision redefines resources as commons to be stewarded collectively, centering care, reciprocity, and community well-being over profit. Development requires democratic decisions on the use of resources for the needs and priorities of communities.
Climate action is being delivered through net-zero pledges, carbon markets, and geoengineering.	**Carbon markets, net-zero pledges, and "green growth" are not solutions, they are escape hatches for corporations and governments that refuse to change.** These schemes let polluters keep extracting and burning while shifting the costs onto the global South and the most marginalised. A real transition cannot be traded or offset. It must dismantle extractivism at its roots and build people-powered systems—food sovereignty, energy democracy, and economies of care—that confront the crisis with justice, not profit.
"Just transition" is a neutral, technocratic policy framework.	**Without centering justice, redistribution, and accountability, "just transition" becomes another tool for elites to greenwash exploitation, deceive communities, and consolidate power.** A feminist approach insists that workers, women, Indigenous peoples, and frontline communities lead decision-making. Transitions must be measured not by corporate profits or GDP, but by whether they restore livelihoods, redistribute resources, and repair the harms of extractivism.

Crafting Your Messages

Campaign messaging for a feminist, people-powered just transition must confront dominant stories, uplift the lived realities of marginalised communities, and push for fundamental systems change. These guidelines will help craft strategic, movement-aligned communication that resonates across the global South.

MAKE POWER VISIBLE

When messages generalize blame to "people" or "society," they obscure who holds actual responsibility. Be explicit and name the actors—corporations, financiers, or institutions—whose decisions drive environmental degradation. This builds credibility and inspires collective agency, rather than diffusing accountability.

LINK LOCAL STORIES TO SYSTEMS

Narratives must connect lived experiences—like women's loss of access to natural resources—to structural drivers such as extractivism, militarization, and corporate-driven development. Without that connection, stories remain isolated and fail to challenge the systems causing harm.

EMBED FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Feminist frameworks from the global South teach us to center gender, race, class, critiques of colonialism and imperialism, as well as the multiple burdens that deepen oppression.

CENTER COMMUNITY AGENCY

Portraying communities simply as victims undermines the very fabric of social movements. Instead, highlight their leadership and innovation. When women in agroecological cooperatives are framed as architects of transition, that narrative fosters solidarity and encourages broader participation.

USE ACCESSIBLE, CULTURALLY-RESONANT LANGUAGE

Communication must reflect local epistemologies and metaphors, and avoid Eurocentric academic or technocrat jargon. Feminist communication practices in the global South have used participatory tools like body mapping and storytelling to convey complex issues through embodied, culturally rooted expression.

Advocacy Stratregies Across Sectors

A feminist, people-powered just transition cannot be built in silos. Crises in labour, agriculture, energy, humanitarian response, and cross-movement building are interconnected, shaped by extractivism, debt, militarism, and patriarchal economic power. This section shows how the toolkit's principles can be applied in concrete ways across different fields of advocacy.

Labour and Workers' Rights

Mainstream just transition debates often pit jobs against climate action, casting workers as obstacles to ecological sustainability. A feminist PPSCP framing recognises that labour itself is already under assault by neoliberal globalisation, austerity, and precarisation. Just transition here means not merely shifting workers from one sector to another, but transforming the conditions of work by centering dignity, care, and collective rights. It reframes workers—especially women and informal labourers in the global South—as key architects of transition, whose struggles for justice are inseparable from ecological survival.

Strategies & Tools

Develop feminist budget scorecards to monitor government transition funds and show whether they include allocations for informal and care workers.

Organise worker–feminist assemblies (e.g., domestic worker unions + climate activists) to draft shared demands and critiques of the neoliberal framing on 'just transition,' publishing them as open letters.

Create visual explainers showing how informal and care work are systematically overlooked in mainstream 'green economy' frameworks, despite being essential to sustainability.

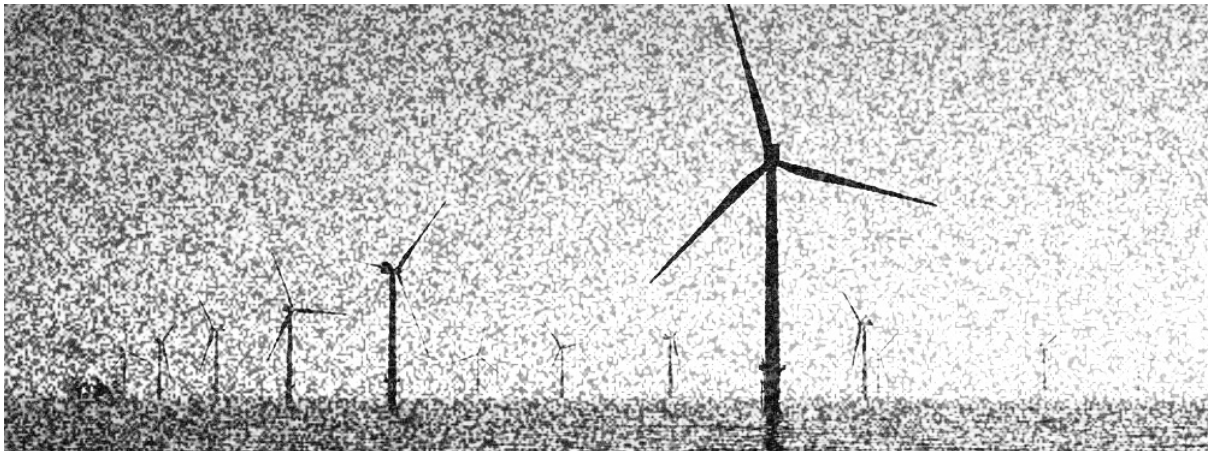
Agriculture & Food Systems

Agriculture is often reduced to a technical fix: cut emissions here, boost productivity there. But such framings ignore the histories of dispossession, extractivism, and the commodifying of land that have reshaped rural life. Feminist PPSCP insists that food systems are a frontline of struggle. Women and small farmers are not passive victims of industrial agriculture — they are keepers of seeds, of agroecological knowledge, of practices that nourish people and ecosystems together. A just transition here is not about greening agribusiness. It is about reclaiming sovereignty over land, food, and livelihoods in resistance to plunder.

Strategies & Tools

- Co-create community seed banks with women farmers to preserve Indigenous seed varieties and counter corporate seed monopolies.
- Record radio dramas and storytelling programs (in local languages) that contrast corporate, industrial agriculture with women-led agroecology and assertions of food sovereignty.
- Build farmer-led monitoring groups that document land grabs and present findings to local councils and regional/national human rights bodies.

Energy & Climate Justice



"Green growth" and renewable expansion dominate the conversation, but rarely do we ask: who owns this new energy, and who bears the cost? Feminist PPSCP reframes energy transitions as questions of democracy and care. Energy is not just technology; it is the power to cook, to heal, to study, to live. Any just transition that replicates the same extractive logics — new mines, new enclosures for corporations and elites — is no transition at all. A feminist approach insists that energy be understood as a common good, shaped by those most affected by both fossil fuel extraction and so-called "green" alternatives.

Strategies & Tools

- Establish women-led solar cooperatives with transparent revenue-sharing models for rural electrification.
- Design participatory mapping workshops to track energy access gaps, then publish findings as open-access dashboards.
- Develop legal toolkits and solidarity campaigns with Indigenous communities resisting displacement and militarisation due to hydro or wind mega-projects.

Humanitarian & Crisis Response

Crisis response is usually cast as temporary relief, a way to patch things up until "normal" returns. But for many in the global South, crisis is the norm — produced by debt, austerity, conflict, and climate breakdown. Feminist PPSCP reframes just transition in this sector by connecting immediate survival to systemic change. It calls attention to the infrastructures of care that communities themselves sustain, even when formal systems fail. Here, just transition means refusing to treat disasters as interruptions and instead seeing them as evidence of why transformation is urgent.

Strategies & Tools

- Train community correspondents to document and publish women-led recovery efforts in newsletters and local media.
- Organise public tribunals where affected communities testify on loss and damage, linking disasters to corporate plunder and state negligence.
- Build feminist reparations calculators that estimate climate debt owed by major polluting states and corporations.

Cross-Movement Building

Fragmentation weakens us. Feminist PPSCP offers another vision: a weaving together. Extractivism and patriarchy cross every border, so our solidarities must, too. A feminist framing sees care, reciprocity, and collective survival as political principles, not private matters. In this way, just transition stops being a technical plan and becomes a people-powered horizon, built across struggles, across borders, across generations.

Strategies & Tools

- Convene regional feminist just transition experts and leaders that train activists from multiple sectors in shared frameworks.
- Produce joint multimedia campaigns (e.g., short videos linking debt, labour, and climate) with captions in multiple languages.
- Coordinate cross-movement delegations to international summits (COP, IMF-WB, ASEAN), ensuring unified feminist demands are presented.

Conclusion

A feminist, people-powered just transition is not about adjusting what already exists; it is about breaking the systems that brought us to crisis in the first place.

Patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism continue to treat women, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalised communities as expendable, while corporations and states market "green" fixes that leave exploitation intact. Against this, feminist movements insist that transitions must be led by those who have carried the costs of extractivism the longest, and whose visions of care, reciprocity, and sovereignty point the way forward.

Together, they form an ecology of struggle—complex, interdependent, and in progress, but powerful enough to move us from critique to transformation. Reimagination gives this ecology its direction: it refuses the boundaries set by dominant systems and insists on building worlds organised around care, solidarity, and ecological balance (Milojević, 2024; Coleman & Jungnickel, 2024).

A feminist, people-powered just transition is not a dream waiting on the horizon—it is being built every day in the organising of workers, farmers, feminists, and frontline communities who refuse to accept sacrifice zones as the price of development. What remains is to amplify these struggles, deepen solidarities, and act with the urgency of social transformation.

The future will not be delivered from above; it will be claimed from below, in the collective courage to resist, to reform, and above all, to reimagine economies that put life before profit.

Case Study 1:
Munduruku Resistance to the Tapajós Dams, Brazil

The Tapajós Basin in the Amazon was targeted as Brazil's "hydroelectric frontier"—with more than 40 dam plans projected, including the massive 8,040 MW São Luiz do Tapajós Dam, which threatened to displace the Munduruku people, flood sacred land, and upend river ecosystems (Walker & Simmons, 2018).

The Munduruku led resistance rooted in their own political traditions and territorial sovereignty. They organized assemblies in their villages, took part in self-demarcation efforts for the Sawré Muybu territory, and held meetings across riverine, Indigenous, quilombola, and urban civil society groups to build consensus. At COP 21 in Paris (December 2015), they presented their case to the global stage. They leveraged both their constitutional rights and international environmental mechanisms, while exposing flawed environmental assessments and asserting their own knowledge and legal claims before domestic institutions. When FUNAI formally recognized Sawré Muybu as traditionally occupied land, IBAMA suspended and ultimately cancelled the São Luiz do Tapajós project in 2016—a landmark victory for Indigenous-led organizing (Salisbury, 2016; Blocksom & Rosa, 2016).

Key Strategies

- Reframed hydropower not as "development" but as extractivism—foregrounding ecological, spiritual, and social harm.
- Built diverse alliances (Indigenous, quilombola, riverine, environmental NGOs, urban supporters, legal experts) to strengthen political pressure.
- Made rights claims through self-demarcation, international visibility (e.g. COP 21), litigation and domestic constitutional law.
- Centered Munduruku's own governance and cultural practices (language, participatory assemblies, consensus decision-making) as sites of power.

What to Replicate?

- Indigenous-led assemblies and self-demarcation as foundational organizing tools.
- Leveraging international fora as amplifiers of local voices and claims, combined with domestic legal strategies.
- Broad-based coalition-building stretching from frontline communities to urban and NGO allies.
- Using lived cultural, spiritual, relational practices (language, rituals, consensus) not just as symbols but as political tools.

Case Study 2:
Indramayu Food Sovereignty Area, Indonesia

The Indramayu region in West Java, Indonesia, was historically dominated by sugarcane plantations serving colonial and corporate interests. In recent years, villagers and grassroots groups have reclaimed this land to establish a Food Sovereignty Area (FSA), transforming it into a cooperative space for rice farming, agroecology, and community resilience. Farmers, many of them women, have organized to resist corporate control over seeds and land, while advancing food production models rooted in ecological care and social justice (Prabha, 2025).

Through cooperative farming, seed saving, and agroecological practices, the Indramayu FSA reframes agriculture as more than food production: it is a struggle for sovereignty, justice, and ecological balance. The initiative has reduced production costs by shifting to natural fertilizers, engaged young farmers in collective governance, and built networks that sustain community autonomy over land and livelihoods. These everyday practices of care and survival illustrate how feminist just transition principles can take root in agriculture—where women's agricultural labour, knowledge, and leadership are central to ecological and social transformation (Prabha, 2025).

Key Strategies

- Reclaimed extractive plantation land and converted it into cooperative agroecological farming.
- Elevated women's knowledge and leadership in seed saving, rice production, and food sovereignty.
- Linked agrarian reform and food systems to ecological justice, not corporate profit.
- Built collective governance structures that prioritise care, reciprocity, and redistribution.

What to Replicate?

- Integrate agroecology into advocacy as a lived example of just transition in food systems.
- Support women farmers as leaders in climate and food justice movements.
- Reframe land reform and food rights as feminist ecological struggles, not just economic ones.

Case Study 3:
Solar Mamas, Zanzibar, Tanzania

In Zanzibar, Tanzania, women known as the "Solar Mamas" are transforming the landscape of energy access. Through a program led by Barefoot College, rural women—many with little formal education—are trained as solar engineers. They learn to install, maintain, and repair solar systems in their villages. Since 2015, 65 women have been trained, bringing renewable energy to thousands of households across 29 villages (Smith, 2025).

This initiative reframes energy justice by positioning women as producers and decision-makers, not passive recipients. It resists the marginalisation of women in technical fields, challenges dependency on fossil fuels and centralised grids, and reimagines energy as a common good tied to care, livelihood, and community survival. By decentralising both technology and power, the Solar Mamas show how feminist leadership can put just transition principles into practice (Smith, 2025).

Key Strategies

- Trained rural women as solar engineers, breaking gendered barriers in technical fields.
- Expanded access to clean energy in marginalised communities while reducing fossil dependency.
- Reframed energy as care work and a community right, not a corporate commodity.
- Built cross-village solidarity and networks of women leaders driving energy justice.

What to Replicate?

- Center women as leaders and technicians in renewable energy projects.
- Combine technical training with community empowerment to decentralise energy systems.
- Reframe energy transition as feminist and people-powered, rooted in justice and care.

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