

This is the transcript of Women of Courage podcast, episode 1: Building Equitable Partnerships for Gender and Ecological Justice.

Jane Thirikwa: From KAIROS: Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, this is Women of Courage. We bring you stories of courage from women grassroots peacebuilders, women human rights defenders and key actors in the pursuit of inclusivity, democratic development, peacebuilding, human rights and ecological justice. I am Jane Thirikwa, Global Partnerships Coordinator at KAIROS, and I am your podcast host.

In this first episode, we delve into KAIROS' gender justice work and the impacts of collaborative partnerships with women-led grassroots organizations that advance transformative gender and ecological justice on multiple fronts.

2021, was a commemorative year for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. October marked 21 years since the adoption of the United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1325, that reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, [and the importance of their equal participation and full involvement, in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security]. 2021 also marked the 30th anniversary of the Global 16 Days of Activism Against GBV Campaign.

For Rachel Warden KAIROS' Partnerships Manager, 2021 was also a milestone year KAIROS, and its spirited actions for justice.

Rachel Warden: I have been working with partners for a long time now – the 20 years of KAIROS and then 7 years before that and I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. These partners include grassroots women's organizations, human rights organizations, Indigenous and land defenders, women peacebuilders, churches and ecumenical organizations in Colombia, DRC, South Sudan, Israel/Palestine and the Philippines and all over the world.

The KAIROS women of courage program is grounded in these partnerships, informed by the knowledge, experience, and realities of partners. It was initiated by partners and is at its best when led by partners.

The program began in 2010, when KAIROS responded to an invitation from the Organización Femenina Popular in Barrancabermeja, a partner in Colombia to participate in the [International Mobilization of Women against Militarization](#). In response, we organized a delegation of women, including global partners and Indigenous women from Canada. In Colombia, we visited Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities impacted by the war and accompanied community members in bus caravans across the country to participate in a gathering and vigil at a military base. At the end, we held a workshop with partners on the

gendered impacts of militarization and war and the use of international human rights frameworks to defend women's rights and build sustainable peace locally and nationally.

After many years of work on gender justice, I see this as [the birth of the Women of Courage program](#) .

We have learned a lot from partners about the impacts of war on women – the multiple ways in which women are victims and survivors of war, but also the critical role that women play in building inclusive, equitable and sustainable peace at all levels.

Finally, the impacts of war on women, and women's role in peacebuilding is being recognized in Canada and at UN - at least in theory. However, the implementation and funding of these policies and resolutions still falls short. Although, there is much evidence that peace processes that include women are more sustainable – they last longer, and, of course, are more equitable and just, women are still a small minority of formal peacebuilding processes which continue to be dominated by those who participated in the conflict - government representatives and former armed groups who are generally men.

From Cristina Pa-la- bay, general secretary of Karapatan a human rights partner in the Philippines, we hear about the huge gap between these UN and government resolutions and policies on gender justice, women's rights and equality and reality faced by women on the ground in the Philippines.

[Audio recording: Christina Pa-la-bay]: The current situation of women in the Philippines during the time of the pandemic, there are increased reports of violence against women, when women are mostly isolated and in their homes.

The kind of society that we have is largely driven by the economic and political factors, so there is widespread economic marginalization and majority of the women in the country are from that marginalized sector. Climate change and man-made projects like dams and mining projects, the impact is so much felt now on top of the impacts of the pandemic.

The other half of what is driving this largely still patriarchal society is the political dimension. Issues concerning governance. Now we have a president, he has this kill approach. This also includes many of his pronouncements regarding the political persecution. And what is frightening, is that we have a new anti-terror legislation that can go after those in civil society, women's rights advocates, and those in the churches, who are voicing dissent. So, this overall situation is increasingly very difficult for women.

Rachel Warden: Despite this huge disparity between these international commitments and the reality on the ground, women continue to work tirelessly to build conditions for just and equitable peace, particularly at a local level. They educate grassroots women about their right to live free from violence and to participate in peacebuilding. They advocate for the implementation of UN

resolutions, calling on governments to develop and implement national action plans. The UN resolutions have become important mechanisms to hold governments to account.

We have also learned from partners that when women who are victims and survivors of militarized conflict and violence are provided with opportunities to heal, restore self-esteem, and claim their rights, they can and do become key voices and actors in peace building processes.

Margaret Wasaba from South Sudan talks about the local women's groups and network, Women's Link, a program of the South Sudan Council of Churches.

[Audio recording: Margaret Wasaba]: We have women empowerment, through workshops and different trainings, such as human and women's rights, trauma healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, and teaching about GBV [gender-based violence], women's peace and security. Then peace intervention.

We also have monthly prayers that we have from church to church. The women come from different ethnic groups and denominations. All the churches are under the SSCC. We have outreach initiatives where we go from house to house, raising awareness about early marriage. Some tribes still force their children into early marriage.

(With) everything that we have done, there really has been great change. We give the message of hope for the future. Peace is going to be there.

Rachel Warden: Moni Tabitha Emmanuel, former coordinator of the National Women's Programme of the South Sudan Council of Churches, affirms the impacts of programs that provide psychosocial support, trauma healing and human rights training and their success in empowering grassroots women to raise their voices and to become involved in local leadership.

[Audio recording: Moni Tabitha Emmanuel]: Another great impact that I have seen, is that women's voices have been heard. Before, women did not know their rights as women. But after gaining empowerment through the training on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, we have seen women at the grassroots who have been appointed as Chiefs.

Before, they were looking at themselves, like this position belongs entirely to the men, but after getting the empowerment, getting the knowledge about their rights, the promotion of gender justice, these women have been able to participate. In Western Equatoria where I went to conduct a training on leadership and good governance, the entire training was filled with women who are Chiefs in their local areas, and they had great experiences that they sharing - what are the impacts they have seen through their work.

Jane Thirikwa: For decades, women have underscored the connections between climate change, gendered impacts of resource extraction, conflict, and violence against women. Most of the socio-environmental costs of the extractive industry, are felt by the rural populations of extractive regions. When extraction impacts the local environment, these impacts are especially felt by indigenous communities, particularly women, who rely on natural resources for their subsistence economy. They are further disadvantaged by societal and economic problems, as a result of colonialism, poverty, a lack of power and land rights, and a limited influence on decision making.

Gabriela Jiménez: Women are on the forefront in the defense of land and water, within and beyond the borders of colonial Canada.

With at least half of the world's mining companies headquarters, Canada is a global mining powerhouse. Extractive companies have a track record of human rights abuses and environmental harm and women, girls, and gender nonbinary people must deal with the individual and community impacts of extractivism in their territories. It is also women, girls, and gender nonbinary people who regularly take on the work of land and water protection.

My name is Gabriela Jiménez, and in my role as Latin America Partnerships Coordinator, I coordinate the gendered impacts of resource extraction program at KAIROS.

Since 2014, KAIROS uses a gender-based lens to make visible the social, economic, health, environmental, and political ramifications of extractivism—how, for example, displacement, economic precarity, water contamination, and social conflict accompany extractive projects which have specific consequences on and for women. KAIROS also draws attention to women's work in the defense of community rights and the environment and presses for women land defenders' legitimacy to be considered at policy and decision-making spaces. Lastly, KAIROS advocates for corporate accountability of the Canadian extractive sector.

Women human rights defenders from across Turtle Island and the Global South as well as the Final Inquiry report on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are clear: Extractivism is a form of gender-based violence that impacts not just women, girls, and gender nonbinary people but also the land.

Taken together, the gendered impacts of resource extraction constitute gender-based violence, violence that exacerbates and is intensified in contexts of armed conflict, such as in Colombia as Gloria Amparo Suarez of the Organización Femenina Popular affirms.

[Audio recording: Gloria Amparo Suarez] – English voice over: In Colombia in Barrancabermeja, Magdalena medial region, that is close to the Magdalena River, is a region that has been highly disputed by the different armed groups. It's a region that has experienced forced displacement and forced disappearances. Sexual and gender-based violence has also been prevalent. Our organization [OFP] was established in 1972. We have been working for

more than 40 years. Soon we will be celebrating 50 years of defending human and women's rights. We also defend land and natural resources.

Our community has been affected by the armed conflict. Members of our community have been maimed, murdered, exiled, suffered sexual violence as well, and been forcibly displaced and forced disappearances.

[In collaboration with KAIROS through] the Women of Courage program, we have provided support to women for more than 10 years. In addition to accompaniment and economic empowerment initiatives, we also respond to political issues [to demand for accountability].

Through this work, we have helped to improve the lives of women, and helped them to recover from the impacts of the armed conflict and war. These are women who have been victims, not only of gender-based violence in their homes, but also of political violence [where women's bodies have been used as tool of war] by all armed groups.

The Women of Courage program focuses on psychological and legal support, emotional well-being, collective action and support, and accompaniment of women human rights defense. It has allowed us to help women empower themselves [with knowledge] about their rights, to become more active, improve their self-esteem and autonomy.

Gabriela Jiménez: In Colombia where the Government and a former guerrilla group signed a peace accord in 2016, human rights defenders are being systematically criminalized, threatened, attacked, and killed. Last year, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights released a report on Business and Human Rights Defenders in Colombia to draw attention to the offensive on environmental protection in the country. The Special Rapporteur found that ninety percent of the reported attacks that occurred against land and water defenders between 2015 and 2019 were linked to four industries: mining, fossil fuels, agriculture and livestock, and hydroelectric dams. Women's organizations, like the Organización Femenina Popular, and women human rights defenders, like Gloria Amparo Suarez, emphasize how environmental rights must be a central tenet to a feminist approach to peacebuilding.

[Audio recording: Gloria Amparo Suarez] – English voice over: We continue to work with the [peace] agreement that was signed in [2016] between the Government and FARC - the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. We had a lot of hope with this agreement but so far, much of it has not been implemented.

There are so many issues that are urgent for us. However, as an organization, we have 3 priorities that we would like to strengthen in our work and with other organizations with whom we collaborate.

[One], we want to strengthen memory as part of the building peace building process; [two], addressing gender-based violence, which has worsened during the pandemic, increasing calls-

for-help from women by 114%; and [three], defending territory. Women are the main defenders of land and territory. Our focus is not only on protection of women, but of the whole community. We therefore are putting more effort extractivism issues and the impacts of the extractive industries in Colombia.

We hope to continue to defend the territory. The environment is being impacted and affected and we need to accompany women in the work of memory, to empower women and to make sure that these things are not repeated in the future. We need to work on transformation.

Gabriela Jiménez: There is a global offensive against environmental rights defenders—whether through physical attacks or criminalization. As recent events indicate, the criminalization of Indigenous women land and water defenders through injunctions and the use of the public forces to suppress the protection of Mother Earth do not just happen in what is termed the Global South.

From Wet'suwet'en (WET-SO-WET-EN) to Wabanaki territories, extractive companies mistake consultation for consent to defy Indigenous self-determination and Treaty rights. Meanwhile, provincial and federal governments come to the defense of corporate interests at the expense of Indigenous rights and gender and ecological justice. Indigenous women persist and insist on the protection of Mother Earth.

Visit MERE Hub at www.merehub.ca to learn more about the gendered impacts of resource extraction. MERE Hub is a digital hub created for and in consultation with women land and water defenders to support research, advocacy, information sharing, and movement building.

KAIROS encourages you to call on the Government of Canada to implement the Calls for Justice of the Final Inquiry Report, which includes the Calls for Extractive and Development Industries and the Calls for Human and Indigenous Rights and Governmental Obligations.

KAIROS also invites you to sign a [petition](#) calling on the Government of Canada to pass corporate accountability legislation.

You can find links to the petition, the [Final Inquiry report](#), and additional resources in the podcast's description.

Jane Thirikwa: Climate change represents the most complex challenge of our time. Across societies the impacts of climate change affect women and men differently. The adverse impacts of climate change continue to overly burden the poorest and the most vulnerable, especially women. Although the effects of climate change on ecosystems and livelihoods vary by region and season, they are harsher, on those living in already marginal conditions and in situations of conflict.

Radia Mbengue, KAIROS' Global Partnerships Coordinator: Africa and Climate Justice, affirms that despite growing recognition that women play a crucial role, in climate change adaptation and mitigation, women still have less economic, political and legal influence, and are hence more exposed to the adverse effects, of the changing climate and correlated violence.

Radia Mbengue: Today, and now more than ever, there are more talks around the correlation between the women, peace and security agenda and work around climate change adaptation and responses. But the reality is that all these conversations are not new. Indigenous communities and women from the global south have for so long advocated for their inclusion in global climate and WPS discussions because on the ground, they firsthand see how climate change not only impacts their livelihoods but is also a driver for conflict, food insecurity and gender-based violence.

Women are significantly affected by climate change every day, yet their roles and potentials in protecting the environment and responding to climate change are often overlooked. Local women's organizations in the Global South have indeed highlighted a gap in the intersection of gender, environment and peace in policies and practices, with very few Women, Peace and Security initiatives explicitly engaging in issues of socio-environmental conflicts, land rights and climate change.

There are nevertheless obvious effects of climate change around the world with serious consequences on women in particular. The reality is that women and girls are impacted by climate change and vice-versa, climate change adaptation cannot happen without them. Their equal and meaningful participation, which is a foundational element of the WPS agenda, is important to successfully address climate and gender-related security risks, but this also demonstrates that the WPS Agenda has the potential to push the promotion of women's participation in addressing climate and gender-related security concerns.

Despite contributing little to climate change, many countries of the Global South are left bearing the brunt with few resources to adapt. Climate change funding does not reach these communities with for example only [26%](#) of funding targeting Africa between 2016 and 2019.

When it comes to women and girls, Climate change has further exacerbated food and physical insecurity for them with many being displaced or being exposed to climate induced conflict and poverty. This situation is particularly alarming for those in conflict-affected, low-income and rural areas with limited access to sources of revenue and health services. Women and girls are also more vulnerable to conflicts, wars and natural disasters which challenge their ability to be go to school, be self-sufficient, take care of their households and to have consistent sources of revenue and nourishment.

Global warming has also caused an increase in the number of diseases and epidemics, putting women at a higher risk of physical insecurity particularly in zones where there are limited financial resources or access to healthcare. As a result, women are usually also facing Food scarcity but also high child mortality rates.

Our partner from the Global South, Volahery Andriamanantenasa, from the Research and Support Center for Development Alternatives in Madagascar, also points out how local and indigenous communities are more than ever vulnerable due to their dependency on natural resources and are constantly at risk of pollution, displacement, and gender-based violence. Their Right to Say No campaign also in partnership with our partner [WoMin](#), an African gender and extractive alliance, works on shedding lights on the effects of climate change on women and increases their capacity to not only defend their communities but also lead the fight against foreign extractives companies.

[Audio recording: Volahery Andriamanantenasa]: English voice over: With carbon dioxide emissions of 0.1 tons/capita, which are among the lowest in the world, Madagascar has contributed very little to the climate crisis. And the country is also a biodiversity hotspot, which includes very valuable and sensitive ecosystems, severely compromised by climate change.

According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2020, Madagascar is the 4th country in the world most affected by global warming whose effects threaten the survival of its endemic animal species and a large number of poor and vulnerable communities representing 80% of the population.

Obviously, all this has enormous and disproportionate consequences on women and especially rural women who suffer the most from these effects of climate change.

Unfortunately, in the context of widespread degradation of the country's natural environment, Madagascar's development policies are characterized by orientations that tend to perpetuate the extractivist system inherited from the colonial period and post-independence regimes.

Radia Mbengue: Supporting and funding local efforts and women initiatives should be the top priority to address climate change. There is already amazing work being done by civil society organizations on the ground like our partners who work on strengthening the capacities of women in different fields to not only participate in but also lead climate change adaptation.

Our partners from the Global South work on human rights campaigns alongside local women so that they can defend themselves, their rights and those of their communities. In Madagascar and in the South Kivu province of the DRC, they also work and promote agricultural techniques that are more adapted to climate change.

This agricultural work is particularly important because global warming is one of the major obstacles to achieving food security and social development for poor populations, particularly rural women and young girls who depend mainly on agriculture and animal husbandry.

To that effect, our partner HJ uses its radio broadcasts for example to sensitize populations on the risks of throwing plastic waste in lakes. The organization also supports women groups through its income-generating program consisting of helping women rent community fields for

agriculture and pig breeding. And to strengthen agricultural production, the women make compost from household waste and the excrements of the pigs, that they use as fertilizer for their fields.

Aside from these examples, general support should be aimed at empowering women and reducing as much as possible social and gender inequalities. It is important to invest in this because these inequalities are the reasons why women are mostly excluded from consultation and decision-making processes locally, nationally and internationally.

It is therefore necessary and essential to develop intersectional strategies to involve women and girls on all fronts and respect the work that is already being done on the ground by amplifying local women voices but also holding our governments accountable for their role in climate change and social inequalities abroad. For Canada, this would mean addressing the gendered impacts of resource extraction caused by its mining companies abroad.

OUTRO

Jane Thirikwa: Women's human rights are essential to achieving gender justice globally. Supporting women's rights organizations and movements, and women human rights defenders, particularly those working in fragile contexts demands rapid, flexible partnership that ensures their meaningful participation in relevant decision-making processes that are rights-based, and that apply gender-responsive methodologies. This moment calls for energizing, new efforts and focus, on strengthening women's movements to help lead the charge for social change on the most pressing issues, of our time.

This brings us to the end of this episode! Special thanks to the KAIROS Partnerships team, and to our international Women of Courage partners. The full episode transcript can be found on our website, www.kairoscanada.org. You can listen to our podcast on our website, or anywhere that you get your podcasts, and do not forget to follow, so you do not miss our upcoming episodes. Am Jane Thirikwa, thank you for listening.

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