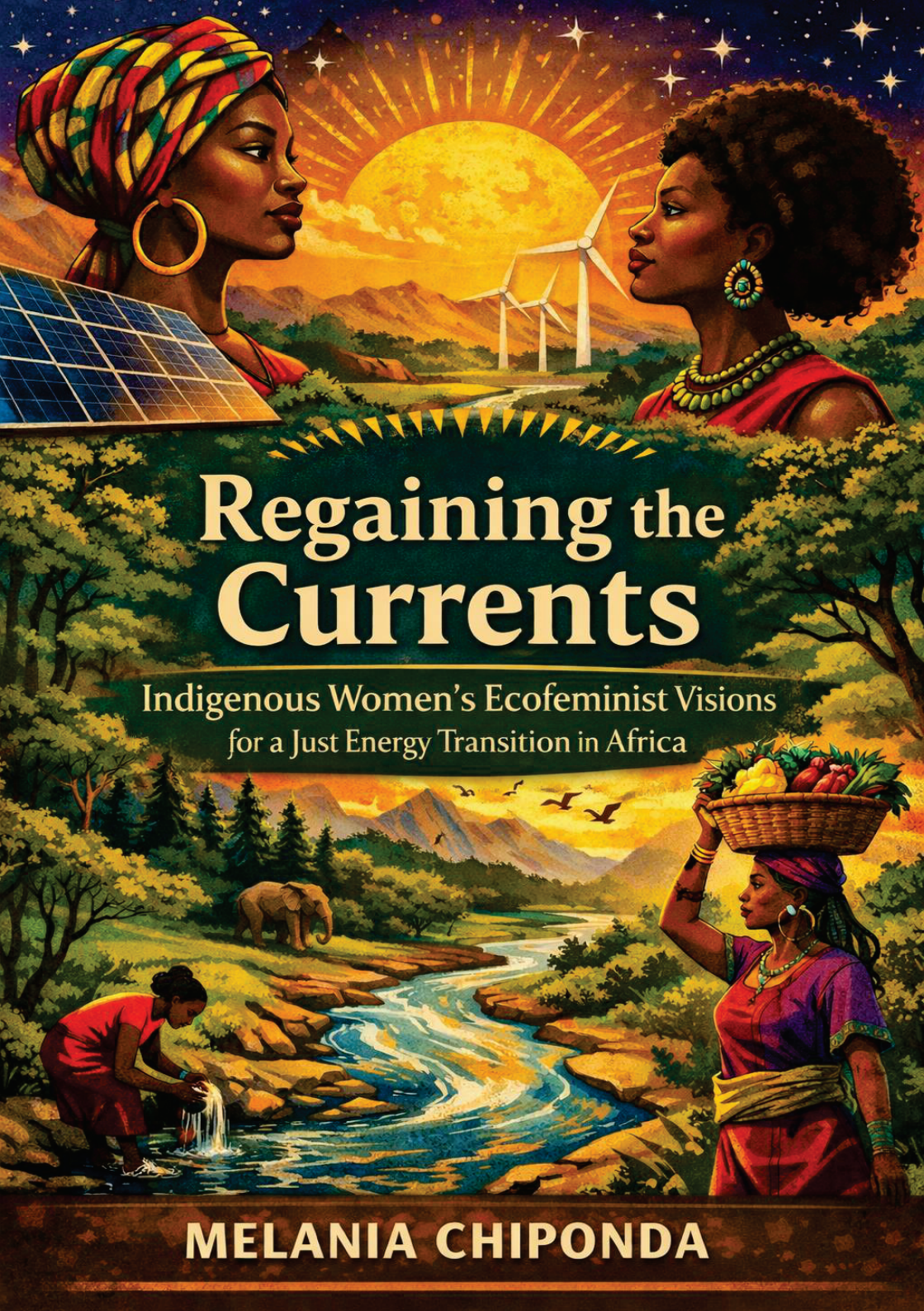




# Regaining the Currents

Indigenous Women's Ecofeminist Visions  
for a Just Energy Transition in Africa

MELANIA CHIPONDA

# Regaining the Currents

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Just Energy Transition in Africa

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## **Dedication**

This book is woven from the breath, labour, tears and laughter of African women, from the fields of millet and cassava, from riverbanks and marketplaces, from mining-affected villages and crowded townships, from kitchens warmed by firewood and from meeting halls lit by new solar light. It is born from your stories, your strategies of survival, your fierce tenderness, your refusal to disappear.

To the women who wake before dawn to cultivate land that corporations covet.

To the young organisers who challenge extractive economies with courage beyond their years.

To the grandmothers who carry ancestral memory like a sacred archive in their bodies.

To the market traders, seed keepers, healers, teachers, water protectors and movement builders - this book is yours.

May these pages honour the truth that you have always known: that the struggle for land, water and energy is inseparable from the struggle for dignity, care and collective freedom.

I dedicate this work with deepest love to my grandmother, Pomereni Regina. Though she has journeyed beyond this earthly realm, her spirit moves like wind across the fields of our homeland. I see her in the steady hands of women planting seeds in contested soil, in the unyielding backs of those standing before bulldozers, in the quiet prayers whispered before community gatherings. Her wisdom lives in every woman who protects territory as though it were her own child - because it is.

And I bow in gratitude to the foremothers and forebears who shaped my politics, the liberation fighters, the ecofeminist thinkers, the village elders, the organisers who taught me that justice must be rooted, embodied and uncompromising. Your courage is the soil from which these words have grown.

## **Acknowledgements**

With deep ecofeminist gratitude, I acknowledge the Ford Foundation for making it possible to return to research as a living, relational practice, one that honours Indigenous women's knowledge, activist wisdom and community memory as theory in its own right. Your support allowed us to continue moving away from extractive research traditions and towards processes rooted in consent, reciprocity and care. It enabled us to sit longer in circles, to listen more deeply, and to treat women's lived experiences not as data to be mined, but as sacred knowledge systems that guide political transformation.

I extend heartfelt appreciation to Comic Relief and the Wallace Global Fund, whose partnership has strengthened the slow, necessary work of collective knowledge-building within movements. By supporting assemblies, storytelling spaces and feminist popular education, you have recognised that change is not only built through outputs, but through relationships, reflection and shared analysis. Your trust has allowed knowledge to be co-created across generations, grounded in struggle, yet oriented towards hope.

Finally, to SHINE Collab, thank you for holding the space to dream research differently. You have nurtured a home where inquiry is intertwined with organising, where documentation walks alongside resistance, and where imagination is treated as infrastructure for liberation. In SHINE, research is not detached observation; it is accompaniment. It is accountability. It is collective becoming.

My deepest gratitude to Mikhail Aruberito for his honest, candid, and incisive recommendations, which have profoundly shaped the tone, clarity, and integrity of this book.

May this work continue to honour the women whose knowledge lights our path forward.

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### **Preface**

To delve into this book is to enter a space where stories and struggles intertwine, where histories of dispossession meet visions of hope, and where the earth's heartbeat resonates through the voices of Indigenous women across Africa. It is an invitation to reimagine the future of energy, not as a sterile landscape of technologies and policies conceived in distant capitals, but as a living process rooted in ancestral knowledge, intimate relationships with land and water, and a fierce commitment to justice that pulses through communities often rendered invisible. This work is born from dialogues with courageous Indigenous women, humbled by their wisdom, and inspired by their resilience. This is a gentle reminder to reimagine what energy transition truly means. It encourages us to challenge the old stories based on colonial extraction and exploitative capitalism. Instead, let's embrace a new way of thinking, one that centres sovereignty, care, and ecological interconnectedness, not just in policies but also in our shared vision for the planet's future.

Across Africa, the promise of a “just energy transition” is often articulated in global power corridors, on multinational corporate boards, at international agency summits, and in technocratic reports. Embedded within these dominant blueprints are troubling continuities: the persistence of settler-colonial logic that overlooks Indigenous land rights, the perpetuation of economic inequalities that deepen the marginalisation of women and rural peoples, and the silent erasure of knowledge systems that have sustained ecosystems for millennia. To discuss energy transitions without centring those who have endured the most environmental destruction and social exclusion risks reproducing the very injustices we aim to dismantle. This critical tension catalysed this book, seeking to unearth and amplify Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions that challenge hegemonic frameworks and articulate alternatives grounded in decoloniality, relationality, and collective well-being.

Ecofeminism, when viewed through the lens of Indigenous African experiences, emerges as an organic and vibrant thread woven throughout this narrative. It's not an abstract theory, but a lived

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practice, evident in morning rituals of tending sacred groves, in harvest celebrations honouring human-soil reciprocity, and in resistance movements where women bravely oppose mining expansions or exploitative energy projects that desecrate their territories. By foregrounding Indigenous women's leadership, this book reveals how gender justice and ecological justice are inseparable kinship relations, how land exploitation mirrors the marginalisation of women, and how healing one necessitates nurturing the other. These women's stories are not monolithic but richly diverse, reflecting a mosaic of cultural traditions, socio-political contexts, and lived realities that together paint a powerful picture of courage, resilience, and transformation.

The journey unfolding in the chapters ahead is as much about confronting colonial histories as it is about embracing future possibilities. Africa's energy systems have long been intertwined with colonial designs: infrastructures facilitating resource extraction for foreign interests, policies marginalising Indigenous governance structures, and narratives exoticising or diminishing Indigenous knowledge. In today's climate crisis, a new yet familiar form of "green extractivism" has emerged, cloaked in the language of sustainability yet often replicating patterns of dispossession and environmental degradation. Lithium mines or solar farms, for instance, uproot communities under the guise of climate mitigation. Through rigorous analysis and vivid case studies, the text unveils these contradictions, illuminating how climate racism relegates African landscapes and peoples to sacrifice zones for the energy demands of the Global North. This critique is not only intellectual but deeply personal, grounded in conversations and testimonies from Indigenous women who live at these intersections of injustice and resistance.

Amid these stark realities, the book is imbued with hope and the possibility of transformation. Women-led renewable energy projects, community governance of environmental resources, and grassroots mobilisations emerge as radical acts of repair and sovereignty. These initiatives embody alternative epistemologies, i.e.

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ways of knowing and being, that resist commodification and instead emphasise interdependence, respect for all beings, and the centrality of dignity. They remind us that solutions need not be imposed from above but can flourish from the soil itself, nourished by ancestral wisdom and contemporary innovation alike. The stories here are invitations to policymakers, scholars, activists, and readers alike to listen deeply, unlearn presumptions, and join collective action that honours Indigenous rights and ecological harmony.

In crafting this work, a conscious effort has been made to privilege Indigenous women's voices, not as objects of study but as co-creators of knowledge and agents of change. Ethical engagement, consent, and respectful representation have guided each stage, ensuring that the narratives conveyed are authentic and rooted in solidarity rather than appropriation. Moreover, the writing strives to bridge academic rigour with accessible language, weaving scholarly insights with storytelling that evokes empathy and connection. The interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry, spanning history, feminist theory, environmental studies, and political economy, reflects the complexity of the challenges and the richness of the solutions this moment demands.

Dear reader, as you turn these pages, I invite you to engage with diverse perspectives and profound insights, grapple with uncomfortable truths, and courageously imagine what a just energy future for Africa might look like through the lenses of Indigenous women ecofeminists. This is a book of radical hope, critical urgency, and shared responsibility. It beckons us to reorient our gaze, honour the land and the women who defend it, and forge pathways that are not only green and sustainable but also just and regenerative, not only about energy but about life itself. May this journey inspire you to listen, learn, and act in ways that nourish the earth and uplift the dignity of all peoples.

With humility and solidarity,  
Melania Chiponda

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### **Chapter 1: Historical Foundations of Africa's Energy Systems**

#### ***Voices from the Soil***

*Before the sun stretches her golden arms across the hills, I am already awake.*

*The rooster has not yet called, but my body knows the hour. Dawn belongs to women. I rise quietly from my reed mat and step into the cool breath of the morning. The fire has died in the hearth. There is no electricity, no switch to flick, no glowing bulb to soften the dark. Energy poverty, though we did not call it that then, wraps itself around my day like a second skin. If there is light, I must make it. If there is heat, I must gather it.*

*I walk toward the edge of the forest with other women, carrying my axe. Firewood first. Always firewood. The colonial administrators have taken the fertile lands for their farms, pushing us further from the rivers and the thick trees. The distance grows each year. Our backs bend, but we do not break.*

*My husband has gone to work for taxes, chibharo, forced labour introduced by the colonial government. They say every hut must pay. They say every man must account for his existence on land that has always known his footsteps. So, he leaves before sunrise to work on roads and farms that do not feed us. The coins he earns return to the same system that starves us.*

*At home, I remain.*

*Five boys. One girl. And the extended family, widowed aunts, ageing parents, orphaned cousins. Our homestead breathes like a living thing. It is open to all our people. Hunger does not knock; it enters. And so must food.*

*My labour is resistance.*

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*When I till the soil with a hand hoe, I am resisting. When I plant rapoko and groundnuts in hidden patches away from the colonial eyes, I am resisting. When I store dried vegetables in clay pots to outlast the dry season, I am resisting. The empire counts taxes and labour units; I count mouths, seasons, and seeds.*

*By mid-morning, smoke rises from my kitchen hut. The firewood crackles, hard-earned energy. I grind maize with rhythmic determination. My daughter watches closely. She must learn not only how to cook, but how to endure, how to organise, how to hold a community together when the men are summoned away by force.*

*The boys herd cattle where grazing still remains. They whisper stories of resistance, of spirit mediums calling the people to rise, of chiefs refusing orders, of night meetings in the mountains. The land itself feels restless. We are in the middle of occupation, yes, but also in the middle of remembering who we are.*

*In the afternoons, women gather beneath the musasa tree. We exchange seeds and news. We speak in low voices about raids and arrests. Some have lost husbands to prisons or distant mines. Yet we laugh too; loud, unapologetic laughter, because joy is also rebellion. Energy poverty shapes every movement of my day. Water must be carried from the river in clay pots balanced on my head. Grain must be pounded by hand. Clothes must be washed by the riverbank. The forest grows thinner as settlers take more land. The river runs lower when new farms divert its flow.*

*But I know something they do not.*

*They believe power comes from guns and paper decrees. I know power comes from women who wake before dawn and keep entire nations alive.*

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*When night falls, my home fills again. Travellers, cousins, neighbours fleeing patrols, all find warmth at my hearth. My door is never closed to my people. The children sleep in rows like planted seeds. I sit by the fading fire and crack groundnuts by ember light.*

*Exhaustion presses against my bones, but I do not surrender to it.*

*Tomorrow I will rise again before dawn.*

*I will gather wood. I will fetch water. I will plant. I will cook. I will shelter. I will listen. I will hold.*

*And in doing so, I will resist.*

*For as long as I feed my children.*

*For as long as my home remains open.*

*For as long as the land remembers our names.*

*I am Pomereni Regina Chiponda.*

*My labour is love.*

*My labour is survival.*

*My labour is resistance.*

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the roots of Africa's current energy systems, highlighting how they emerged from colonial expansion, territorial control, and economic practices aimed at resource extraction. It reminds us that energy infrastructure on the continent was never just about technology but was deeply intertwined with political efforts that favoured imperial resource flows, transformed landscapes, and reshaped social relationships, effects that still influence us today. We start by looking at how colonial powers organised energy systems mainly to benefit external industries, often creating spatial inequalities and social hierarchies that marginalised Indigenous communities. The chapter then delves into the lasting impacts of these arrangements on land, governance, and daily life, showing how energy development often led to displacement and economic exploitation. It wraps up by

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examining how these patterns continued beyond independence, becoming part of post-colonial policies, development plans, and global economic ties. By placing today's energy transitions within this historical context, it becomes clear that current inequalities aren't just recent or accidental; they are the result of over a hundred years of institutional and infrastructural choices. Grasping these roots helps us better understand what limits current transition efforts and highlights the profound changes needed for truly fair and just energy futures.

### **1.2 Historical Overview of Colonial Energy Extraction**

The establishment of energy infrastructure on the African continent cannot be fully understood without engaging deeply with the historical contexts of colonial conquest and domination. Africa's energy systems were forged in the crucible of imperial ambition, where economic extraction and geopolitical control dictated the design, placement, and purpose of infrastructure. This legacy, imprinted by colonial powers, continues to shape energy realities today. The maps, pipelines, railways, and power grids that course through the continent were not neutral technological advances but strategic tools of dispossession and exploitation. From the outset, Indigenous communities were relegated to the margins of these projects, dispossessed through the violent seizure of land, coerced labour, and the instrumentalisation of nature to serve the interests of settlers and colonial administrations. Energy was thus harnessed not for the well-being of local peoples or ecosystems but as a mechanism to fuel the economic engines of distant metropolises and emerging global industrial complexes.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the intensification of colonial infrastructure explicitly designed to serve extractive industries such as mining, plantation agriculture, and resource extraction. For instance, the discovery of vast mineral deposits, including gold and diamonds in Southern Africa, copper in Congo, and oil in North Africa, precipitated the rapid construction of railways and electrical grids that linked mines to ports, facilitating the smooth

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export of raw materials to European markets. These infrastructural developments were often accompanied by extensive deforestation, river damming, and land reconfiguration, all orchestrated without consultation or consent from the Indigenous populations whose environments were irrevocably altered. This transformation was not incidental but reflected a coherent colonial strategy: to retool African landscapes into resource reservoirs and logistical nodes crucial for sustaining industrial growth in Europe and North America.

Significantly, energy infrastructure was embedded within racialised and gendered modes of governance that marginalised Indigenous voices and knowledge systems. Colonial administrations systematically excluded Indigenous peoples, particularly women, from decision-making, deeming their ecological knowledge irrelevant or inferior, and instead privileged foreign technocrats whose allegiance was to imperial interests. The coercive imposition of cash economies and forced labour regimes further alienated Indigenous communities from their traditional relationships with the land and energy forms, such as biomass and other renewable local energy sources, which sustained their livelihoods and cultural practices. The disruption of these energy-relational systems fractured the social fabric, undermined community autonomy, and contributed to long-term socio-environmental vulnerabilities.

During the colonial era, many hydropower and electrification projects were promoted as symbols of 'progress' and 'modernity'. However, beneath these narratives lies a more complex story of dispossession and inequality. For example, large dam projects across African rivers mainly provided electricity for settler farms, mining operations, and colonial administrative centres, seldom reaching rural Indigenous communities. The construction of dams like Akosombo in Ghana, Kariba on the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, and Aswan in Egypt was tied to development goals rooted in colonial extraction. These projects displaced thousands of Indigenous people, with promises of national growth often driven by foreign interests.

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They changed ecosystems, flooded ancestral lands, and disrupted fisheries, especially impacting women who relied on these resources for their livelihoods and social roles.

The colonial period established deep-rooted inequalities in energy access that still affect postcolonial countries today. The way energy infrastructure was organised favoured cities and resource-rich areas, in line with colonial economic plans. As a result, large rural regions, mainly inhabited by Indigenous peoples, remain underserved and disconnected from national power grids. This uneven distribution of energy created ongoing regional differences. It contributed to the internal coloniality of energy management, in which Indigenous lands and knowledge are often overlooked in policymaking dominated by elites, technocrats, and external influencers. After gaining independence, many governments inherited these colonial systems and often continued to support rather than change them, influenced by global financial institutions and geopolitical interests that promoted energy models prioritising industrial growth over community-based sovereignty.

Understanding the embeddedness of green extractivism within this historical framework is crucial. Contemporary pushes toward renewable energy in Africa, while promising ecological benefits, often replicate colonial patterns of resource enclosure and marginalisation. The extraction of minerals essential to batteries and solar panels occurs in the same geographies that have been historically exploited for copper, gold, and oil, landscapes shaped by colonial violence. Indigenous lands are appropriated under the guise of clean energy projects, frequently excluding local voices and exacerbating inequalities under a veneer of environmentalism. This continuity reveals how the colonial energy extractivism that dispossessed Indigenous women and communities is not a relic but an active, evolving force in Africa's energy narratives.

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The histories of forced labour and environmental displacement in energy development are deeply connected to the gendered aspects of colonial energy. Indigenous women often felt the heaviest burdens as colonial economic activities disrupted their key roles in caring for community health, food security, and ecological protection. The loss of land and water, along with damage to local environments and the introduction of unfamiliar capitalist labour systems, shook traditional economies in which women's knowledge of managing wood fuel, water sources, and biomass was essential. As modern energy systems favoured industries and city needs, women's important contributions became less visible, a trend worsened by policies that overlooked gender inequalities and ecological ties. The absence of Indigenous women's energy knowledge has had lasting effects on the resilience and sustainability of their communities.

Colonial energy extraction deeply shaped broader political systems of inequality and control. Energy networks were linked with legal and administrative systems that marginalised Indigenous communities and exploited labour. Land laws introduced during colonial times often disrupted traditional land use, enabling settlers and corporations to claim land for mining and energy development. Increased policing and surveillance around resource-rich areas aimed to suppress resistance and ensure access to valuable energy and minerals. These efforts established a pattern of social and spatial dominance that limited Indigenous sovereignty and entrenched colonial rule as an ongoing reality. Recognising these historical patterns helps us see how energy infrastructure has long been used not just for extracting resources but also for exerting cultural and political power.

Within these oppressive frameworks, Indigenous peoples, especially women, actively resisted and reimagined energy relations. Subtle acts of everyday resistance, such as maintaining traditional energy practices, resisting forced labour, and engaging in communal governance despite colonial impositions, demonstrate the persistence of Indigenous agency. These histories are often overlooked in

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mainstream narratives that portray Indigenous communities solely as victims; instead, they reveal a complex interplay of domination and resilience rooted in ecofeminist principles of relationality and care. Indigenous women's knowledge systems offered alternative energy epistemologies, emphasising interconnectedness with ecosystems and the community, and challenging colonial abstractions and the commodification of energy resources.

Bringing these histories to the fore is essential not only for historical justice but for envisioning just energy futures. Without critically engaging with the colonial foundations of Africa's energy infrastructures, contemporary energy transition discourses risk perpetuating the same inequities and exclusions under new guises. Recognising how colonial energy systems structured dispossession, marginalisation, and environmental harm provides a lens to interrogate the persistence of these dynamics and the need for decolonial approaches. Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions reclaim sovereignty over energy, land, and community identity, challenging the technocratic, extractive paradigms inherited from colonial rule.

The roots of Africa's energy systems are deeply linked to colonial extraction practices that caused dispossession, social and environmental upheaval, and gendered injustices. Energy infrastructure was often used as a tool of control to serve external capitalist goals, often ignoring Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women, whose ecological knowledge could have provided sustainable solutions. The lingering effects of colonial energy development continue to impact today, as seen in unequal access, environmental harm, and persistent inequalities. It's important to acknowledge this history and honestly imagine new, transformative futures. Addressing these past injustices openly is essential for driving energy changes that respect Indigenous sovereignty, promote gender justice, and support ecological balance, shifting away from colonial extraction towards shared well-being and resilience.

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### **1.3 Impact on Indigenous Lands and Communities**

In Africa's vast and variegated landscapes, the histories underpinning contemporary energy systems are deeply entangled with the violent legacies of colonial domination. The imprints of colonial energy projects are not merely infrastructural or technological; they are enduring inscriptions on Indigenous lands and communities, patterns of dispossession that have irrevocably altered the social, cultural, and ecological fabric of countless societies. At their inception, colonial energy infrastructures served as instruments of imperial expansion and control, designed primarily to channel the continent's abundant natural resources into the voracious engines of European industrialisation and economic growth. This extractive imperative was achieved not through technological neutrality but through designs and implementations that systematically disregarded Indigenous sovereignty, welfare, and knowledge systems. Indeed, the lands selected for dams, mines, and early oil extraction were rarely chosen for technical efficiency alone; they were often territories where Indigenous peoples' rights could be overlooked or suppressed with little regard, facilitating large-scale dispossession under the guise of progress.

The construction of vast hydroelectric dams, such as those spanning the Nile and Zambezi rivers, starkly exemplified this dynamic. Entire communities were uprooted, their ancestral homes submerged beneath artificial lakes, and their sacred landscapes rendered inaccessible or destroyed. These environmental transformations had cascading effects on Indigenous livelihoods, particularly for those whose survival depended on complex relationships with riverine ecosystems, seasonal flood cycles, and traditional farming and fishing practices. Consider, for instance, the BaTonga people's displacement following the construction of the Kariba Dam, which disrupted their social structures and severed spiritual connections woven into the rhythms of the land and water.

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These projects were not isolated acts of infrastructure development; they were strategic seizures that severed communities from their territories, dismantled social cohesion, and imposed alien socio-ecological conditions that Indigenous peoples were often left to navigate without redress.

These displacements were accompanied by a pervasive erasure of Indigenous governance and authority over land. Colonial regimes frequently imposed systems of land tenure and legal frameworks that invalidated customary claims, recasting Indigenous territories under state ownership controlled by colonial bureaucracies or settler interests. This legal dispossession facilitated the establishment of energy infrastructures that prioritised imperial extraction over local needs or rights. The result was a fracturing of community autonomy and a loss of capacity for self-determination, as Indigenous peoples found they had neither recourse nor recognition under the imposed regimes. Simultaneously, traditional gender roles within communities were disrupted; women, often the custodians of ecological knowledge and caretakers of communal lands, experienced intensified marginalisation as control over territory slipped into foreign hands and male-dominated extractive industries. The imposition of such colonial energy schemes therefore did not simply remove people from land; it extinguished the intimate, relational ways Indigenous communities understood and interacted with their environments.

As energy infrastructures became increasingly entwined with colonial economies, they also shaped social hierarchies and labour dynamics within Indigenous societies. Large-scale projects demanded labour, often coerced or poorly compensated, drawn primarily from Indigenous populations. This labour extraction was embedded in broader patterns of racialised economic exploitation that further entrenched poverty and dependence, fostering cycles of marginalisation. Beyond the immediate trauma of displacement and labour exploitation, these dynamics seeded distrust and resistance. Yet they were frequently met with repression or forced. The colonial

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state's portrayal of Indigenous resistance as barriers to 'modernisation' often undermined community autonomy, strengthening power imbalances that favoured extractive activities at significant social and environmental expenses. 'Modernisation' systematically delegitimised community autonomy, reinforcing power asymmetries that privileged extractive endeavours at the expense of massive social and environmental costs.

The colonial energy paradigm did not dissipate with formal independence but was instead reinforced and adapted within post-colonial state structures, often as a heavy legacy. New African governments, navigating the pressures of development and modernisation post-independence, inherited energy systems and policies largely designed to serve external capitalist interests rather than local communities. In many cases, the structural dependency formed during the colonial era persisted, as national elites maintained extractive industries and large-scale energy projects that continued to dispossess Indigenous peoples or marginalise rural and peri-urban communities. The narrative of progress associated with electrification and economic growth often obscured ongoing social injustices, deepening inequalities rather than alleviating them. Large hydroelectric projects, mines, and fossil fuel extraction continued to be prioritised, frequently with disastrous results for Indigenous territories.

For instance, in regions that are rich in mineral deposits or hydro resources, Indigenous communities often find themselves excluded from decision-making processes. Their voices are not heard in important energy policy discussions that shape land use and environmental management. This situation deepens historical injustices, leading to a continued denial of rights and benefits related to resource wealth. The social fabric of these communities continues to weaken as economic marginalisation feeds into broader patterns of disenfranchisement, including limited access to education, healthcare, and political representation. The impacts on women are particularly

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severe, as energy projects can increase workloads for Indigenous women, raise health risks, and increase exposure to gender-based violence linked to extractive operations and the militarised enforcement of resource control.

Underlying these developments is the insidious phenomenon of ‘green extractivism’, as scholars term it. Despite the rhetoric of sustainability, contemporary energy transitions often replicate colonial patterns, embracing renewable energy projects such as solar farms, biofuel plantations, and wind turbines, which continue to dispossess Indigenous communities of their lands and erode traditional lifeways. This continuity reveals the depth of structural inertia within energy systems, where the form of extraction shifts but its core logics of accumulation, dispossession, and marginalisation persist. Indigenous lands, increasingly recognised for their ecological significance, are paradoxically targeted for ‘green’ energy development, frequently under international development agendas or investment schemes that prioritise export-oriented renewable infrastructure over community sovereignty. Many stories tell of projects that, despite promising local benefits, proceed without the necessary free, prior, and informed consent. This can deepen social divisions and continue the cycle of ecological harm in lands that Indigenous communities have cared for over generations.

At the heart of these dynamics is the erasure of Indigenous epistemologies and governance. Energy systems designed and controlled without Indigenous participation disregard intricate bodies of knowledge that encompass not only technical understanding of ecosystems, but also relational ethics and governance models rooted in reciprocity and care. This exclusion replicates colonial logics that universalise Western scientific frameworks and market principles, rendering invisible the diverse knowledge systems that historically maintained ecological balance and social harmony.

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The disruption to Indigenous social structures thus transcends materiality, constituting an epistemic violence that undermines community resilience and the capacity to envision alternative futures.

The social impacts ripple into the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, languages, and cultural practices, which are intimately linked to land and environmental stewardship. Dispossession fractures these transmissions, impeding Indigenous women and elders who often serve as cultural custodians and educators. The severance from land and community authority alters identities and collective memory, generating psychological and spiritual wounds that interlock with material harm. The ecological transformations wrought by energy projects introduce alien biophysical conditions, altering hydrological cycles, degrading soils, and causing biodiversity loss, irrevocably changing landscapes. For Indigenous communities, these changes are not mere environmental degradation but profound disruptions of cosmologies and lifeways, requiring a reconstitution of community and identity amidst loss and resistance.

Despite these formidable challenges, Indigenous women across diverse African contexts have demonstrated remarkable resilience and resistance. Their leadership in contesting dispossession and asserting land rights reveals a deep commitment to preserving relational worldviews and communal well-being. Resistance takes varied forms, from legal battles and international advocacy to grassroots organising and the reassertion of cultural practices and ecological knowledge. These struggles often foreground the inseparability of social justice and environmental care, articulating ecofeminist perspectives that challenge dominant extractive paradigms. Indigenous women articulate energy sovereignty as inseparable from territorial sovereignty, weaving together histories of colonisation with contemporary struggles over renewable energy and climate justice.

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Analysing the impact of colonial energy projects on Indigenous lands and communities reveals a continuous pattern of dispossession and disruption that persists into present-day energy transitions. Recognising this continuity is essential for dismantling prevailing inequities and transforming Africa's energy futures. It demands amplifying Indigenous voices, restoring governance autonomy, centring relational and ecofeminist knowledge systems, and creating energy frameworks that do not reproduce the colonial violence embedded within existing infrastructures. Only by confronting these intertwined histories of extraction, dispossession, and resistance can a truly just and decolonial energy transition be imagined. One that honours the dignity, sovereignty, and wisdom of Indigenous peoples and their intimate relationships with the land and ecosystems they have long nurtured.

### **1.4 Post-Colonial Continuities and Challenges**

In the complex landscape of Africa's energy systems, the shadows of colonial enterprise stretch far beyond the immediate era of imperial rule, subtly embedding themselves in modern policies and infrastructures. These legacies of dispossession, extraction, and subjugation are not mere relics of a distant past but active forces shaping present realities, dictating who controls energy flows, who benefits from development, and who remains marginalised. To fully grasp the contours of Africa's contemporary energy landscape, it is crucial to confront the enduring colonial continuities that serve as both structural and ideological foundations for ongoing injustices. The colonial powers, in their relentless quest for raw materials, engineered infrastructures that were profoundly extractive, designed to facilitate the efficient removal of resources from the continent with little regard for the well-being or sovereignty of Indigenous communities. These infrastructures, such as railways, pipelines, dams, and power grids, were laid out as veins feeding imperial appetites, often cutting through Indigenous territories without consultation or consent, forcibly uprooting communities, and fragmenting ecosystems in significant ways. The spatial logic of these systems was premised on the needs of

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external markets rather than internal development, thus embedding an economic architecture oriented toward export and profit extraction rather than equitable access and local empowerment.

Even after the formal end of colonial rule, many African states inherited these energy systems largely intact, often burdened with infrastructures poorly suited for broad-based development or sustainable use. Post-colonial administrations faced the paradoxical task of nation-building within frameworks explicitly designed to undermine autonomous governance and community control. Energy policies frequently replicated extractive patterns, emphasising large-scale, centralised projects such as hydroelectric dams and fossil fuel extraction that echoed colonial priorities. These project choices were often influenced by global financial institutions and foreign investors who continued to be interested in maintaining neo-colonial economic relations. Far from dismantling colonial infrastructures, many governments integrated them into national strategies, perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities and environmental degradation. The promises embedded in post-independence rhetoric around modernisation and progress often masked the persistence of power asymmetries, particularly the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples and women. Their traditional knowledge and stewardship practices remain sidelined in favour of technocratic expertise and capital-intensive development models.

The continuity of extractive thinking in post-colonial energy governance is compounded by legal and institutional frameworks that uphold private property regimes and resource ownership doctrines, echoing colonial constructs. Land tenure systems inherited from colonial administrations often disenfranchise Indigenous communities, eroding their claims to ancestral lands rich in energy resources. This dispossession is frequently legalistic rather than overtly violent, perpetuated through administrative procedures and policy reforms that obscure their colonial roots. The ‘modern’ state’s authority over resources is often legitimised by international

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recognition and constitutional frameworks, but in practice sidelines Indigenous sovereignty and customary governance systems. This has led to escalating tensions and conflicts as communities resist encroachment and environmental harm. Yet state apparatuses are empowered by these inherited legal orders to enforce development agendas that prioritise national growth or global market integration over local well-being.

Energy infrastructures in many African countries continue to reflect spatial inequalities shaped by colonial-era patterns. Urban centres and export corridors receive disproportionate investment and access, while rural and Indigenous territories often remain energy-insecure or rely on environmentally damaging and socially precarious energy sources. This uneven distribution exacerbates social divides, reinforcing exclusionary development that mirrors the spatial logic of colonial extraction. The lingering colonial mindset often frames rural and Indigenous spaces as ‘backward’ or peripheral, legitimising their marginalisation from technological advancements such as modern renewables or grid electrification. Even where renewable energy projects are introduced, without recognition of Indigenous rights and knowledge, they risk reproducing cycles of dispossession, both through land acquisition processes and through fractures in community cohesion caused by top-down implementation approaches.

The gendered impacts of these post-colonial energy continuities are especially stark. Indigenous women, historically marginalised by colonial regimes that upended social structures and imposed patriarchal governance models, continue to bear disproportionate burdens in energy transitions. Extractive energy infrastructures and policies often exacerbate existing inequalities, limiting women’s access to clean energy, land, and decision-making platforms. Women’s care responsibilities and ecological knowledge, central to ecofeminist perspectives, are frequently overlooked in technical and policy discourses dominated by male-driven imaginaries of progress and development.

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The persistence of colonial gender hierarchies in energy governance thus undermines the potential of Indigenous women to lead and innovate in sustainable and just energy solutions.

In examining post-colonial energy policies, one must further acknowledge how these frameworks are not isolated from global economic and political dynamics rooted in colonial relations of dependency. African nations operate within an international system where the Global North maintains considerable influence over energy financing, technology transfer, and market access. Conditionalities imposed by international lenders and bilateral aid agencies often perpetuate development models centred on resource extraction and large-scale infrastructure projects aimed at integration into global energy supply chains. This external pressure aligns with the enduring colonial logic that positions Africa as a resource periphery rather than a site of autonomous energy sovereignty. Energy policies, therefore, are shaped within a context of systemic inequalities that sustain a flow of wealth and resources from African countries to the benefit of multinational corporations and foreign states, effectively reproducing a form of eco-colonialism cloaked in narratives of modernisation and sustainability.

This dynamic also manifests in the emerging field of ‘green extractivism’: the extraction of minerals and metals essential to renewable energy technologies, such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements. These resources are predominantly found in Indigenous lands across Africa, yet the extraction practices often mirror the destructive and dispossessive logics of colonial mining operations. While framed globally as essential components of climate solutions, the mining of these ‘green’ materials frequently involves environmental degradation, displacement, and violations of Indigenous rights. This perpetuates a paradox in which energy transitions touted as sustainable simultaneously replicate historical patterns of exploitation and marginalisation. The continuation of extractive approaches under the guise of green energy epitomises the

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persistence of coloniality in energy systems, illustrating that without a fundamental reorientation toward Indigenous sovereignty and care for the land, new forms of injustice will proliferate.

At the societal level, these colonial continuities in energy systems have profound implications for the social fabric and cultural integrity of Indigenous communities. The imposition of externally driven energy projects undermines traditional modes of land and resource management anchored in relational and communal worldviews. The alienation from ancestral lands disrupts intergenerational knowledge transmission, spiritual practices, and ecological stewardship, all of which are intimately tied to place. In many cases, community resistance to energy infrastructures represents not only a struggle over material resources but a fight for cultural survival and self-determination. Indigenous women frequently emerge as central figures in these struggles, drawing on ecofeminist principles to articulate a vision of energy justice that honours the interconnectedness of people, land, and future generations. The ongoing presence of colonial legacies thus complicates the energy transition by entangling it in histories of violence and domination that must be reckoned with through frameworks that prioritise decolonial justice, relational governance, and gender equity.

In response to these enduring challenges, Indigenous women leaders and communities are asserting alternative paradigms for energy governance that break from colonial hegemonies. Their approaches emphasise sovereignty over land and resources, community authority in decision-making, and ecofeminist values of care, reciprocity, and collective wellbeing. These visions challenge the dominant narratives of energy policy that prioritise growth, extraction, and technocratic control, instead proposing models rooted in local knowledge and social justice. Indigenous women-led renewable energy initiatives, for instance, demonstrate how decentralised, community-managed systems can both empower marginalised groups and align energy provision with ecological stewardship. By centring Indigenous

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epistemologies and resisting the reproduction of colonial infrastructural and policy logics, these efforts offer pathways toward energy futures that are not only sustainable but fundamentally just.

Analysing post-colonial continuities in Africa's energy systems shows that the embedded injustices are intentional outcomes of historical actions and systemic power imbalances. Addressing these challenges demands more than technical fixes or superficial reforms; it requires dismantling the colonial matrix of power that structures energy governance and reconstructing it around Indigenous sovereignty, gender justice, and relational ecological governance. Only by confronting and unravelling these entrenched legacies can Africa's energy transition truly become a transformative project that heals historical wounds, restores dignity, and envisions futures of resilience and equity for all peoples and ecosystems.

### **1.5 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that Africa's contemporary energy landscape cannot be understood apart from the historical infrastructures of colonial extraction and their post-colonial continuities. Energy systems were never simply technical arrangements; they were instruments of territorial control, economic ordering, and social restructuring that displaced Indigenous governance and reconfigured relationships between land, labour, and power. The persistence of these structural patterns reveals that present inequalities are historically produced rather than incidental. Historical explanation alone does not fully account for how affected communities interpret, resist, and reimagine these systems. To understand the deeper ethical and relational dimensions of energy, it is necessary to move beyond institutional history and engage the knowledge frameworks through which Indigenous women understand land, care, and ecological responsibility. The next chapter, therefore, turns to Indigenous ecofeminist worldviews, examining the epistemologies that shape alternative understandings of energy, community, and environmental governance.

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### **Chapter 2: Indigenous Women's Ecofeminist Worldviews and Knowledge Systems**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the intellectual and epistemic roots through which Indigenous women in Africa interpret, relate to, and manage their connections with land, resources, and energy. Instead of viewing ecofeminism as an abstract theory, it situates it within lived-knowledge traditions rooted in ecological stewardship, community responsibilities, and relational worldviews. It first outlines the core principles of Indigenous ecofeminist thought—such as care, relationality, and community authority. Then, it examines how these principles are expressed through diverse epistemologies across African contexts, highlighting the plurality of Indigenous knowledge systems and the ethical frameworks that guide environmental practices. Finally, it features the voices and testimonies of Indigenous women, illustrating how their lived experiences generate political insights and ecological knowledge that challenge dominant narratives around development, sustainability, and governance. By emphasising these perspectives, the chapter offers an alternative lens to understand energy and environmental change. It portrays energy not just as a material resource or economic input, but as a relational and ethical domain rooted in responsibilities to land, community, and future generations. This epistemic foundation shapes the conceptual critique of current energy transitions developed in the subsequent chapters.

#### **2.2 Understanding Indigenous Women's Ecofeminism**

##### **2.2.1 Foundations of Ecofeminism**

At its core, ecofeminism deeply interrogates the intertwined oppressions of women and nature. This conceptual framework resists simplistic binaries, inviting a reimagining of identity, ethics, and power relations. Ecofeminism is far more than an academic theory; it's a lived philosophy, often rooted in the everyday experiences and wisdom of Indigenous women whose lives are intimately tied to the land, ecosystems, and the rhythms of life in ways that transcend

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reductionist categories. Within African contexts, this framework gains urgency and richness as it intersects with histories of colonial plunder, racialised exploitation, and ongoing struggles for sovereignty, both territorial and epistemological. African Indigenous women embody ecofeminism not by adopting imported ideas but through their ancestral worldviews, stewardship practices, and modes of resistance that honour relationality, care, and community as foundational to ecological and social wellbeing. Their contributions reveal ecofeminism as a living dialogue, constantly shaped by place, history, and social context, offering invaluable insights into the quest for justice within and beyond environmental concerns.

The concept of care is central to African Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions. Unlike dominant Western paradigms that often frame environmental stewardship primarily as a scientific or policy concern, or Western feminism's focus on individual empowerment and rights, care in these Indigenous frameworks is profoundly relational and embedded in everyday life. Care is a form of political and spiritual engagement that involves nurturing not only human kin but also nonhuman entities, such as animals, plants, soils, and waters, which are recognised as vital agents within a shared world. This ethic of care resists the extractive logics that have systematically severed human communities from their ecological foundations through colonialist dispossession and capitalist commodification. In many African societies, Indigenous women bear the responsibility for their families' and communities' well-being. This role has historically required intimate knowledge of land and its resources, seasonal cycles, medicinal plants, and sustainable harvesting methods. Far from passive caretaking, this labour involves continuous negotiation with ecological limits, asserting a stewardship fundamentally about reciprocity and respect rather than domination.

Relationality, another core ecofeminist principle, weaves through these practices of care and challenges dominant epistemologies that emphasise individualism, human exceptionalism, and linear notions of

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progress. Indigenous African worldviews often conceive of existence as a network of relationships, where the boundaries between self and other are porous and interdependent. In these ontologies, humans do not wield superiority over nature but are interwoven with the nonhuman world in cycles of mutual influence, responsibility, and regeneration. This contrasts sharply with prevailing development and energy paradigms that position nature as a passive resource to be exploited. Instead, relationality affirms the dignity and agency of rivers, forests, animals, and ancestral sites as co-participants in sustaining community health and identity. Indigenous women's stories frequently articulate these connections through narratives, rituals, and customary laws that assert their right and duty to speak for the earth and to defend lands against incursions that threaten spiritual and material continuity. Such relational epistemologies resist the fragmentation imposed by Cartesian dualism and illuminate alternative pathways for environmental governance rooted in respect and coexistence.

The concept of community authority is deeply intertwined with care and relationality. It champions collective governance and decision-making, based on shared accountability and the recognition of diverse knowledges. African Indigenous women's leadership often emerges not through formal political office but through community consensus, oral traditions, and the transmission of knowledge across generations. Their authority is acknowledged in family units, kinship groups, and broader communal structures, where decision-making is more deliberative and less hierarchical than in Western political models. This communal approach challenges dominant energy transition frameworks, which tend to prioritise top-down, technocratic solutions imposed by nation-states or multinational corporations. Such frameworks often sideline local voices and perpetuate patterns of exclusion and disempowerment. Indigenous women's leadership offers a counter-model that insists on democratic participation and respects Indigenous rights and knowledge. In this sense, community authority acts as a tool for decolonial praxis, reclaiming sovereignty over land

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and energy futures from colonial and neoliberal encroachments. It represents a politics of care that is inherently relational and place-based, connecting social and environmental justice in ways rarely acknowledged by mainstream paradigms.

While Western ecofeminism has provided valuable critiques of patriarchal domination and environmental degradation, African Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions both differ from and deepen this discourse through their emphasis on decoloniality and epistemic multiplicity. Many Western feminist environmental narratives originate in contexts dominated by industrialisation and urbanisation, often portraying nature as a backdrop to human concerns or as a victim in need of rescue. In contrast, African Indigenous frameworks are rooted in colonised landscapes where environmental harm is inseparable from racialised dispossession and cultural erasure. The very idea of “nature” can be problematic when it implies separation from humans, while Indigenous cosmologies recognise a fluid distinction between culture and nature. Thus, the African Indigenous ecofeminist challenge highlights the importance of dismantling colonial epistemologies that have simultaneously marginalised women, erased Indigenous knowledges, and legitimised violent resource extraction under the guise of 'development' or 'sustainability.' This critique extends beyond environmentalism to encompass economic, social, and political spheres where the legacies of slavery, imperialism, and capitalist extraction continue to shape contemporary energy regimes.

Central to this decolonial shift is recognising the multiplicity of Indigenous epistemologies across Africa, resisting any tendency to treat Indigenous knowledge as a monolith. The continent's immense cultural diversity yields a spectrum of ecofeminist insights, grounded in localised understandings of human-environment relationships. For instance, among some Bantu-speaking communities, land is viewed spiritually as both a grandmother and a sacred caretaker. At the same time, in the Senegal River valley, the Jola people use matrilineal

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systems to govern fishing territories communally. Such knowledge systems incorporate rituals, taboos, and customary laws that regulate resource use on ways that balance and sustain resources, often upheld through women's custodianship. This plurality also fosters rich practices of innovation, adaptation, and resistance to colonial and capitalist impositions, offering a range of models for sustainable energy governance. Engaging with these epistemologies ethically requires not only listening to Indigenous women's voices but also deconstructing the extractive paradigms that have historically commodified both knowledge and peoples.

To articulate ecofeminism within African Indigenous contexts, it is imperative to confront the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class colonialism entrenches. Indigenous women often occupy precarious positions at the margins of formal power structures, vulnerable to multiple and compounded violences, land dispossession, environmental contamination, and social exclusion. Yet within these struggles emerge potent forms of resilience and epistemic sovereignty, embodied in practices that nurture both land and community. These practices foster resistance to extractivist economies that threaten to extinguish Indigenous lifeways. Examples include communal tree planting, water ceremonies, and energy initiatives that prioritise decentralised, locally controlled renewable sources. These exemplify ecofeminist principles enacted in situ, reclaiming autonomy over energy futures and asserting the inseparability of ecological health from social justice. They refuse to separate environmental politics from the colonial and capitalist histories that shape African realities. This insistence on intersectionality within ecofeminism expands debates beyond gender alone to encompass broader dimensions of justice and the need for integrated approaches that honour whole worlds.

Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives illuminate the gendered impacts of energy extraction and transition, often overlooked in dominant climate narratives. When large-scale mining, hydroelectric

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dams, or fossil fuel projects displace communities, Indigenous women disproportionately bear the burden through loss of livelihood, increased domestic responsibilities, and heightened exposure to violence. Their reproductive labour – caring for kin, ensuring food security, and mediating social cohesion becomes vital to community survival amid ecological turmoil. Simultaneously, their knowledge of renewable energies, agroforestry, and land restoration is foundational to the emergence of alternative energy futures that reject extractivism's social and environmental costs. Engaging Indigenous women as central agents rather than passive victims transforms the conception of energy transition from a technocratic challenge to an ethical imperative rooted in dignity and reciprocity.

Reframing sustainability within this ecofeminist paradigm demands a radical departure from the growth-oriented, market-based frameworks that dominate global energy discourse. African Indigenous women's visions emphasise sustainability as the maintenance of balanced relationships within ecosystems and communities over time, privileging quality of life, spiritual connection, and collective well-being over mere economic indicators. This perspective critiques the green economy's limitations, exposing how so-called sustainable initiatives may still perpetuate dispossession and marginalisation when divorced from Indigenous governance and ethics. Furthermore, it calls for a revaluation of knowledge systems, recognising that technological solutions must coexist with and be informed by ecological wisdom accumulated over generations of lived experience. By centring Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives, the quest for just energy transitions can move toward reparative and restorative futures that affirm sovereignty, resist further extractive violence, and rebuild reciprocal relationships with the earth.

The foundations of ecofeminism as understood and practised by Indigenous African women are deeply rooted in principles of care, relationality, and community authority. These principles challenge dominant Western feminist and environmental discourses by situating

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ecological justice within a broader matrix of decolonial struggle, gender justice, and sovereign self-determination. They invite us to rethink what it means to govern land and energy resources through lenses that prioritise interconnectedness, respect for diverse knowledges, and the inseparability of social and ecological health. Such foundations provide a vital intellectual and practical framework for envisioning energy transitions that are not only environmentally sustainable but also socially just and culturally affirming. Recognising and amplifying these voices reorients the possibilities of a just energy future in Africa, one that honours Indigenous women not merely as stakeholders but as visionary leaders whose ecofeminist insights are indispensable to the healing of communities, landscapes, and the wider planet.

### **2.2.2 African Indigenous Epistemologies**

African Indigenous epistemologies serve as profound sources of knowledge, deeply intertwined with the landscapes, spiritualities, and social fabrics of diverse communities across the continent. These knowledge systems, transmitted orally through generations, embodied in daily practices, and embedded in ritualistic connections to land and water, offer a radically alternative framework to dominant Western paradigms and even to mainstream feminist or environmental discourses. Central to these Indigenous epistemologies is an understanding of the world as an interconnected, living whole, one where humans do not exist separate from nature but rather as an integral part of complex ecological and social relations. This holistic worldview is not merely an abstract thought system, but a lived, constantly evolving practice shaped by intimate, reciprocal relationships with the earth, ancestors, and future generations. It foregrounds values such as care, relationality, responsibility, and community authority, which are foundational to ecofeminist philosophies as practised by Indigenous women in Africa.

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Within these epistemologies, care is not simply an act of kindness or a social role but a profound ethical imperative that governs how human beings relate to each other and to non-human entities. Unlike the individualistic, transactional ethics often found in Western thought, African Indigenous care ethics emphasise mutual flourishing and the maintenance of balance within ecosystems and societies. Indigenous women, as custodians of these knowledge traditions, embody care through their stewardship of water, soil, seeds, and biodiversity, often mediating between the seen and unseen forces that sustain life. Their practices of care are deeply gendered but transcend simplistic notions of femininity; they involve political negotiations, resistance to extractive industries, and the nurturing of collective wellbeing. For example, in many rural and peri-urban communities, women's knowledge of traditional medicinal plants, forest regeneration methods, and sustainable agricultural techniques constitutes both ecological wisdom and strategic resistance against dispossession. These practices illuminate a model of existence that rejects separation and domination, preferring co-creation and interdependence as the foundations of environmental stewardship instead.

Relationality, a core tenet of African Indigenous epistemologies, moves away from Western dualisms that separate nature and culture, subject and object, human and non-human. Within Indigenous frameworks, all beings – whether human, animal, plant, or spirit – are part of webs of relations that define identity and social responsibility. This relational ontology recognises multiple forms of agency and voice beyond anthropocentric narratives. Indigenous women navigate these complex networks through an embodied knowledge that connects livelihoods, cosmologies, and governance structures. These connections are often expressed in rituals, communal ceremonies, and storytelling traditions that affirm collective memory and ecological wisdom. They underscore the importance of place-based knowledge and resist universalised or abstracted solutions to ecological crises. The relational approach also extends to temporal dimensions, where ancestors and future generations coexist as vital participants in the

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social-ecological continuum. This perspective fundamentally challenges dominant Western energy paradigms that prioritise technological fixes and economic growth while failing to acknowledge humanity's embeddedness in ecological and spiritual systems.

Within African Indigenous epistemologies, community authority is exercised collectively rather than conferred hierarchically. Indigenous governance systems, often matrilineal or founded on principles of consensus, allocate decision-making power in ways that express communal sovereignty over natural resources and cultural practices. This stands in stark contrast to neoliberal frameworks that commodify nature and impose top-down policy interventions. Indigenous women's leadership within these communal structures underscores the inseparability of gender justice and ecological justice. Their authority is recognised not only through formal roles but through everyday acts that sustain relational networks, whether tending sacred groves, organising collective labour, or mediating disputes. This form of authority resists both patriarchal domination and colonial impositions, reasserting Indigenous self-determination and governance in energy and environmental matters. Far from being marginalised actors, Indigenous women emerge as dynamic agents whose knowledge and authority are indispensable for envisioning and enacting just and sustainable energy futures.

The contrast between African Indigenous epistemologies and dominant Western feminist and environmental discourses is both striking and revealing. Western feminist thought has been critiqued for its universalising tendencies and for insufficiently engaging with the lived realities and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples. While ecofeminism in the Global North has made significant contributions by linking the domination of women and nature, it often remains rooted in Western ontologies that prioritise individual rights and scientific rationalism. In contrast, African Indigenous epistemologies decentre the human subject, emphasising relationality

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and collective wellbeing, thus expanding the ethical and political horizons of ecofeminism. Furthermore, conventional environmentalism, often driven by state or corporate actors, tends to adopt technocratic and instrumental approaches that obscure power imbalances and fail to address historical injustices. African Indigenous knowledge systems challenge these narratives by foregrounding historical continuity, cultural memory, and place-based sovereignty, demanding a more nuanced and inclusive approach to sustainability.

Indigenous women's ecofeminist practices in Africa articulate a politics of refusal and repair, contesting green extractivism and the so-called 'green economy' frameworks. These frameworks, while oriented toward climate mitigation and renewable energy, frequently reproduce colonial patterns of extraction and dispossession, framing African land and resources as sacrifice zones for global energy demands. Indigenous epistemologies offer counter-narratives that insist on energy sovereignty as inseparable from land sovereignty and cultural survival. For example, the use of traditional knowledge in managing forests and watersheds resists industrial-scale energy projects that threaten ecological integrity and community livelihoods. These practices also embody epistemic sovereignty, reclaiming knowledge from erasure and asserting Indigenous worldviews in policy and practice. Indigenous women's custodianship of knowledge about local ecosystems provides crucial insights into sustainable resource use that transcends the reductionist logic of carbon accounting or market-based environmental instruments.

The principle of care within these epistemologies extends beyond immediate ecosystems to encompass social healing and decolonial futures. Ecofeminist Indigenous leaders mobilise care ethics to address the complex legacies of colonial violence, including the gendered impacts of displacement, environmental degradation, and political marginalisation. Through community ceremonies, storytelling, and intergenerational education, they restore relational ties fractured by imposed governance and extractive industries. This

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process of relational repair is essential for rebuilding trust and asserting agency in energy decisions. The agency of Indigenous women in these contexts frequently involves navigating multiple systems of power, including state authorities, multinational corporations, and global climate institutions. Their knowledge and leadership offer alternative frameworks for energy transition that are deeply embedded in diverse cultural cosmologies and grounded in the material realities of land and life.

African Indigenous epistemologies also emphasise the inseparability of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality. Knowledge is not merely a cognitive asset but a sacred trust, inseparable from the responsibilities it entails toward ancestors, nonhuman kin, and future generations. This spiritual dimension shapes ethical obligations that guide everyday interactions with the environment and underpin resistance to unsustainable practices. Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions thus emerge from and contribute to spiritual traditions that affirm the sanctity of life and the interconnectedness of existence. This stands as a powerful counterpoint to secular, utilitarian frameworks that dominate mainstream energy discourses. The spiritual aspect of Indigenous knowledge systems insists on humility, reciprocity, and the acknowledgement of limits, concepts often marginalised in technocratic climate policies. This spiritual grounding also fosters a resilience that prioritises adaptive capacity and relational well-being over economic growth or efficiency.

In drawing on these epistemologies, Indigenous women articulate a vision of energy transition that transcends narrow technical or economic metrics. Their ecofeminist critiques highlight the limitations of current policies that prioritise infrastructure development and market mechanisms over social justice and ecological balance. Instead, they propose energy futures rooted in deep local knowledge and collective governance, where energy systems are designed to sustain human and nonhuman communities alike. This includes renewable energy projects guided by principles of ecological integrity,

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cultural continuity, and social inclusion. These initiatives are often small-scale, community-controlled, and imbued with cultural significance, reflecting the inseparability of technology and traditional practices within Indigenous lifeways. By centring Indigenous epistemologies, the book illuminates the pathways through which a truly just energy transition can emerge: one that dismantles colonial legacies, honours Indigenous sovereignty, and fosters ecological harmony.

African Indigenous epistemologies stand as vital intellectual and practical resources for reimagining humanity's relationship with energy, land, and each other. Their emphasis on care, relationality, and community authority challenges prevailing paradigms and offers a complex weave of alternatives grounded in justice, dignity, and sustainability. Indigenous women, as bearers and innovators within these knowledge systems, provide indispensable leadership in navigating the complex socio-ecological challenges of the twenty-first century. Their visions invite a decolonial, justice-centred approach that recognises the inseparability of social and ecological wellbeing, urging a profound transformation in how energy futures are conceived and enacted across Africa. The epistemologies that inform these visions are not relics of the past but living, dynamic sources of resilience and hope, essential for building equitable and vibrant futures in a changing climate.

### **2.3 Voices of Indigenous Women**

In the layered landscape of Africa's diverse Indigenous communities, the voices of Indigenous women resonate as powerful bearers of ancestral knowledge, guardians of ecological harmony, and fierce advocates for justice that transcends conventional boundaries. These testimonies and narratives are not mere expressions of personal experience but profound embodiments of ecofeminist values, elaborately woven into their lived realities. Here, care is not simply an abstract ideal but a daily, embodied practice that sustains not only individual lives but relational webs spanning human and more-than-

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human worlds. It is in these narratives that we encounter a form of knowledge inseparable from place, steeped in relationality, community authority, and a holistic vision of wellbeing that challenges dominant Western feminist frameworks and environmental discourses. Indigenous women's voices emerge not just as counterpoints but as transformative critiques that expose the limits of externally imposed paradigms and illuminate pathways toward ecological justice grounded in Indigenous epistemologies.

The vital role of oral testimonies in conveying Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions cannot be overstated. Across the continent, from East Africa's rolling savannahs to Central Africa's dense rainforests, these narratives articulate a profound interconnectedness among women, the land, water, the sky, and all beings. This defies the fragmentation characteristic of modern Western thought. The stories are richly layered with meanings and practices that assert care as an ethical and political commitment. This care is far from sentimental; it is robust, intertwined with struggles for survival against extractive industries, climate disruption, and colonial harms. Indigenous women speak of tending to the earth as one tends to a living relative, recognising the intrinsic vitality of all forms of life rather than viewing nature as an inert resource. This ethic of care insists on respect that demands reciprocity, a dialogue rather than domination.

Consider Wangari's testimony from a small pastoralist community in northern Kenya. Wangari recounts how her ancestors taught her that water sources are sacred nodes within the community's lifeworld. These are places that are both physical and spiritual arteries connecting generations. When multinational corporations began prospecting for uranium nearby, drying up wells and poisoning soil with toxic runoff, Wangari and her fellow women resisted. They did so not only to defend their water but because they understood the violation as a rupture in their kinship with the earth itself. "It is not just water," she said, "it is our mother's blood, our child's future." Her words echo an ecofeminist insistence on care as a form of resistance, a

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refusal to accept the instrumentalization of landscapes that nourish their communities. The image of blood intertwining with water is a potent reminder of how deeply Indigenous epistemologies embody relationality; bodies, land, and non-human others are interconnected in cycles of care and harm, resilience and vulnerability.

This relational worldview sharply contrasts with prevalent environmental narratives, which are often grounded in technocratic and commodified logics. These tend to privilege ‘nature’ as detached and objectified, subordinated to economic calculations. Indigenous women’s accounts reveal the inadequacy of these dominant frameworks by elaborating a worldview in which individual well-being cannot be disentangled from community health or the vitality of local ecosystems. In the Peruvian Amazon, where Indigenous women leaders collaborated with African counterparts at transcontinental forums, a shared language of care and relational responsibility emerged, despite vastly different geographies and cultures. They articulated a universal yet deeply local logic that prioritises the integrity of ecosystems as living relatives. Indigenous women emphasise that taking care of the earth means taking care of ourselves and our loved ones, who are eternally connected to that land. This perspective extends far beyond the limited timeframes often prioritised by industrial capitalism.

Central to these testimonies is the concept of community authority, which Indigenous women assert as a cornerstone for equitable and sustainable environmental governance. This authority is not a hierarchical imposition but a fluid, dynamic process constituted through collective decision-making, trust, and accountability embedded in long-term reciprocal exchanges. Women from various African Indigenous groups emphasise that their leadership is often informed by intergenerational dialogue, in which elders and youth converge to steward natural resources in ways that safeguard ecological balance for future generations. This vision starkly contrasts with the technocratic, top-down governance models that dominate

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current energy and environmental policies. In the Niger Delta, for example, women from the Ogoni community narrate how oil exploitation by multinational companies disrupted centuries-old systems of water management and communal land tenure. Their ecofeminist resistance involved reviving Indigenous councils that centre women's voices and holistic ecological knowledge, both of which are critical to healing the land and the social fabric.

One elder's reflection encapsulates the profound wisdom and determined hope animating Indigenous women leaders: "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." This proverb, shared by a Venda woman in South Africa, invokes a radical ethos of responsibility that enshrines future-oriented care as a political imperative. In such a worldview, energy transitions cannot be reduced to infrastructural shifts or carbon accounting; they must foreground relational justice and the restoration of sovereignty over territories systematically dispossessed through colonial and capitalist extraction. Indigenous women's ecofeminist principles thus resituate sovereignty not as state-centric or militarised control, but as an expression of collective stewardship animated by care.

These narratives are also marked by a keen awareness of gendered violence and its entanglement with ecological destruction. Indigenous women resist framing environmental degradation as a purely technical or economic concern by revealing how extractivism perpetuates intimate violations of both bodies and lands. Across contexts, from the copper mines in Zambia to the oil fields in Nigeria, women testify about the physical, social, and spiritual violence that cascades from predatory energy development projects. These include forced displacement, contamination of food and water sources, erosion of cultural practices, and the intensification of domestic violence linked to heightened social inequalities.

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Through their stories, we see ecofeminism as both a lens and a practice for exposing these intersections and fostering healing. Crucially, Indigenous women emphasise their role as nurturers of resistance and renewal, grounded in relational ethics that prioritise empathy, solidarity, and ancestral continuity.

The stories also convey a nuanced critique of dominant Western feminist environmental discourses, which, while advocating for gender justice, often fall short in appreciating the complex entanglements of coloniality, indigeneity, and ecological sustainability in African contexts. Indigenous women speakers articulate how Western feminist frameworks sometimes universalise experience and prioritise individual rights and empowerment, thereby obscuring collective identities, communal responsibilities, and land-based sovereignties. In contrast, African Indigenous epistemologies insist that women's liberation cannot be separated from ecological wellbeing, community cohesion, and the redress of historical dispossession. These epistemologies also challenge the assumption that knowledge production is the exclusive domain of formal academic institutions, underscoring the authority of lived experience, oral traditions, and reciprocity in knowledge exchanges instead.

A remarkable example comes from the Maasai women of Tanzania and Kenya, whose narratives emphasise the inseparability of gender, land, and ritual practice. They describe “enkiteng” (a space for collective gathering and decision-making) in which women's voices shape community approaches to resource management and conflict resolution. For them, these traditional spaces are gendered sites of power that resist external impositions premised on patriarchal and capitalist values. This indigenous feminist governance embodies what ecofeminist theorist Vandana Shiva describes as “epistemic pluralism,” affirming multiple ways of knowing and relating to the earth as foundational to just energy futures.

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The Maasai women's stories reveal how these practices sustain community resilience despite pressures from land grabs, climate impacts, and state marginalisation.

As I explore the rich testimonies of Indigenous women across Africa, it becomes evident that their ecofeminist visions are rooted not only in resistance but also in creativity and regeneration. Women-led renewable energy initiatives in peri-urban and rural settings exemplify how care and relationality translate into tangible alternatives to destructive extractivism. In a Swahili-speaking coastal village, women established solar cooperatives that not only provide clean energy but also revive communal labour traditions and enable local governance structures to flourish. These initiatives challenge the dominant paradigm by reconnecting energy to social relations, cultural meanings, and ecological stewardship, rather than solely to profit maximisation. The testimonies surrounding these projects reveal a deep sense of satisfaction and empowerment that arises from reclaiming authority over energy systems as extensions of community and kinship.

Throughout these narratives, the pervasive presence of spirituality affirms the inseparability of the material and spiritual realms in Indigenous ecofeminist ontologies. Indigenous women describe rites, prayers, and songs directed towards sustaining the land's vitality, connecting them to generations past and future. This lived spirituality embodies relationality in its most profound dimension, one where care is sacramental, and governance is a sacred trust. This spiritual dimension serves as a powerful source of resilience and resolve, enabling women to navigate the often-brutal terrain of energy conflicts and environmental degradation. Rather than framing spirituality as antithetical to modernity or scientific knowledge, Indigenous women's voices articulate an integrative epistemology that bridges these realms, offering a holistic foundation for justice-centred energy transformation.

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These testimonies further expose the coloniality embedded not only in resource extraction but also in the very epistemic frameworks that shape knowledge about energy and environment. Indigenous women's narratives reveal how dominant discourses erase their histories, marginalise their expertise, and homogenise diverse experiences into monolithic categories of victimhood or development needs. By asserting their epistemic authority, they reclaim history and knowledge production as acts of decolonisation. For example, in the Okavango Delta region, Indigenous women leaders narrate how conservation zones, imposed without local consent, disrupted longstanding ecological practices and spiritual ties to the land. Their ecofeminist critique unmask these 'green' zones as contemporary colonial legacies, perpetuating marginalisation under new guises.

By listening attentively to these voices, the contours of a radically different energy future begin to emerge, one that honours care, relationality, and community authority not as peripheral ideals but as grounding principles. These Indigenous women's testimonies call for policies and practices that disrupt capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial control over energy systems, advocating instead for frameworks that prioritise Indigenous sovereignty, ecological integrity, and holistic wellbeing. Their experiences illuminate how the energy transition is inseparable from broader struggles for land rights, cultural survival, and gender justice. Their visions invite a profound reimagining of sustainability, moving beyond reductionist metrics towards transformative change that reconciles ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

The voices of Indigenous women carry the wisdom of centuries and the hope of generations yet unborn. Their lived experiences and ecofeminist praxis offer a navigational compass through the turbulent waters of Africa's energy transition. Honouring these voices requires more than acknowledgement; it calls for a profound shift in how knowledge is valued, who is recognised as a leader, and which futures are pursued. Through their narratives, Indigenous women teach us that

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true ecological justice is inseparable from decoloniality, communal care, and an ethic of responsibility that transcends individualism. Their testimonies not only challenge dominant paradigms but also illuminate pathways of resilience, dignity, and flourishing that can inspire and guide just energy transformations across the African continent and beyond.

### **2.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter highlights Indigenous women's ecofeminist knowledge systems as vibrant and caring frameworks rooted in relationships, care, and community. These perspectives see energy not just as a resource, but as part of a rich web connecting land, spirituality, and future generations. By sharing these insights, this work has opened a new way to view and understand energy systems through a respectful, inclusive lens. Of course, these vital knowledge systems do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a larger global energy transition influenced by powerful economic and political forces that can sometimes overshadow local voices. To truly appreciate how Indigenous ecofeminist practices thrive, it's important to examine the modern structures governing resource use, investment, and technological advancement. The next chapter explores the political economy behind the green energy shift and the worldwide forces that shape who holds power, faces risks, and reaps benefits.

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### **Chapter 3: Green Extractivism and Global Capitalism**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Building on the historical foundations of energy systems and Indigenous ecofeminist knowledge frameworks, this chapter explores the modern political economy of the global energy transition. It highlights how the move towards renewable energy unfolds within existing structures of capital accumulation, geopolitical inequality, and resource extraction, often repeating patterns like colonial exploitation. The chapter starts by analysing green extractivism, illustrating how demand for minerals, land, and infrastructure linked to renewable energy leads to new forms of dispossession and environmental harm. It then places these issues within the wider context of global capitalism, examining how investment flows, market logics, and development finance influence the organisation and distribution of energy projects. Later sections assess how these processes impact different regions and communities, including climate injustice, sacrifice zones, and increased gendered vulnerabilities. Ultimately, the chapter argues that the energy transition is more than a technological shift from fossil fuels to renewables; it is a restructuring of power relations that affects resource control, environmental burdens, and who benefits from new energy economies. By exposing these structural dynamics, the chapter offers a critical perspective on the energy transition as a contested political and economic process rather than an inherently equitable route to sustainability.

#### **3.2 Defining Green Extractivism**

In the current global discourse on climate change and sustainable development, “green extractivism” emerges as a critical and paradoxical phenomenon. It challenges widely held assumptions about the transition toward renewable energy. At first glance, the prefix “green” suggests a break from fossil fuel dependence, which has long fuelled environmental degradation and climate instability. However, beneath this green veneer lies a continuation of extractive practices that have historically dispossessed Indigenous communities,

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especially women, and replicated patterns of environmental exploitation and social injustice. To fully understand green extractivism within Africa's energy sector, one must look beyond the optimistic rhetoric of clean energy and recognise how the underlying economic and political frameworks remain steeped in colonial legacies and capitalist imperatives that prioritise accumulation and control over equitable and regenerative futures.

Green extractivism can be defined as the extraction of mineral, biological, and land-based resources deemed essential for renewable energy technologies and “sustainable” development. This occurs through methods and processes that perpetuate social and ecological harms, such as traditional extractive industries. This includes large-scale mining of minerals such as lithium, cobalt, copper, and rare-earth elements. Such materials are integral to the global production of solar panels, wind turbines, and batteries powering the so-called green transition. Africa's vast natural wealth has increasingly become a target for these green ventures, positioning the continent as an indispensable supplier of “clean energy minerals” to global markets dominated by countries in the Global North. At its core, green innovation still reflects a deeper structural dynamic, such as the extractive colonial economy. In this system, land, resources, and labour are treated as commodities to be bought and sold, which, unfortunately, deepens existing inequalities rather than addressing them. In African contexts, green extractivism operates through the deployment of large-scale, often foreign-led projects that impose on Indigenous lands without meaningful consultation or consent. These projects are framed as essential steps towards achieving global climate goals, lending them an aura of legitimacy and urgency. However, in practice, they frequently displace communities, disrupt local livelihoods, and inflict long-term environmental damage. Soil erosion, water contamination, deforestation, and biodiversity loss associated with mining activities emerge as persistent consequences, undermining the very ecological health upon which Indigenous peoples depend. For Indigenous women, who hold specialised

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ecological knowledge and bear primary responsibility for managing household and community wellbeing, the impacts are profoundly gendered. Their roles in gathering water, cultivating food, and maintaining family health become increasingly difficult as access to clean water and arable land diminishes. Additionally, the disruption of social structures and the rise of conflict in extractive zones amplify gender-based violence and economic marginalisation.

Global capitalism's role in driving green extractivism cannot be overstated. The relentless pursuit of profit maximisation and market expansion propels the extraction of "green" resources within frameworks that treat nature as an inert repository of commodities rather than a living system with its own rights and agency. International corporations and financial institutions channel vast investments into mining and renewable energy infrastructure projects across Africa, often with minimal accountability to local communities or environmental standards. These ventures frequently rely on neoliberal policy regimes imposed by international financial bodies, privileging deregulation, privatisation, and export-oriented growth. African states, grappling with developmental challenges and constrained policy space, may align with these models in the hope of achieving economic gains. Yet, the dividends seldom diffuse equitably, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and dispossession.

Green extractivism is supported and perpetuated by global climate governance frameworks that inadequately critique the underlying political economies of extraction. Instruments such as carbon markets, offset schemes, and sustainability certifications often overlook the social conflicts embedded in resource extraction, providing an alibi for continued exploitation under the guise of environmental responsibility. These mechanisms obscure the fact that renewable energy technologies are not inherently benign. Their material foundations require critical reflection on how they affect the landscapes and peoples of resource-rich regions. The drive to meet international climate targets thus risks reproducing climate

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colonialism, where the environmental burdens of decarbonisation are externalised onto marginalised and Indigenous populations in the Global South. At the same time, beneficiaries predominantly reside in wealthy nations.

The notion that green extractivism is merely a technological or environmental issue misses its deep entanglement with colonial histories. Many African countries rich in critical minerals have not yet achieved energy sovereignty, since foreign actors and multinational companies based outside the region often hold investments and control. Territories inhabited by Indigenous peoples are subject to extractive leases that disregard customary land tenure systems and ancestral stewardship practices. The extraction and exportation of minerals for green technologies echo the historical patterns of resource exploitation designed to fuel the accumulation of imperial centres. This colonial continuity manifests in governance dynamics where local communities have limited agency to influence decisions, voice concerns, or share in benefits. The extraction infrastructure frequently dismantles social cohesion, undermining the relational, communal modes of being that Indigenous epistemologies uphold.

Within this extractive paradigm, Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives illuminate the profound interconnections between social justice, ecological integrity, and energy futures. Ecofeminism foregrounds how patriarchal and capitalist systems intersect to oppress both women and nature, challenging the compartmentalised views of environment and society perpetuated by dominant policy frameworks. Indigenous women assert that care ethics, relationality, and collective responsibility must be central to any transition away from fossil fuels. They warn against replicating extractive models under new guises, emphasising that the true essence of "green" lies in honouring sovereignty, reciprocity, and ecological harmony rather than in technology alone.

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Their lived experiences reveal how projects promising “clean energy” and “sustainable development” often sideline their voices, ignoring gender-specific issues and reinforcing unequal power dynamics.

An illustrative example can be drawn from recent lithium mining expansions in countries such as Zimbabwe and Mali, where the rush to secure resources for batteries and electric vehicles has intensified land conflicts and environmental degradation. Indigenous women report that mining operations encroach upon sacred lands, rivers, and forests crucial to their cultural and subsistence practices. The promise of job creation and economic growth feels hollow amid health risks, water scarcity, and the erosion of traditional governance. Community consultations are often reduced to tokenism, failing to incorporate meaningful dialogue or participatory decision-making. In such contexts, green extractivism serves not only as an economic process but also as a site of cultural violence and epistemic erasure, where Indigenous knowledge systems and social structures are subordinated to techno-economic imperatives.

Framing renewable energy transitions solely through technological innovation and infrastructural deployment offers a narrow vision that overlooks alternative pathways grounded in Indigenous stewardship. Large-scale solar farms, hydropower dams, and wind turbines, heralded as green solutions, sometimes operate within the same extractive logic of land appropriation and environmental disruption. For instance, mega-dam projects in several African countries, envisioned as renewable energy sources, have led to community displacement, altered river ecologies, and biodiversity loss. This underscores how infrastructural mega-projects can replicate the injustices of fossil fuel industries. These cases compel a reassessment of what constitutes just and sustainable energy, favouring decentralised, community-led approaches that centre Indigenous governance and ecological knowledge.

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It is critical to recognise that green extractivism is not an inevitable or static condition but rather a product of specific political-economic choices and power relations. Alternative models of energy transition demand the decolonisation of economic frameworks governing resource extraction. This entails dismantling exploitative partnerships, securing Indigenous land rights, elevating community authority, and fostering cooperative economies rooted in care and mutual support. Indigenous women, as frontline defenders and knowledge bearers, embody alternative epistemologies that challenge anthropocentric and profit-driven models, advocating for energy systems that nurture life and sustain diverse forms of existence. Their visions include restoring ecological balance, revaluing non-extractive resource use, and building autonomy over energy production and consumption.

Shifting from extreme green extractivism involves adopting an ecological ethic that is both politically and culturally transformative. It demands a critical interrogation of how “green” is defined and deployed in policy and practice, calling for energy transitions attentive to intersectional justice and ecological resilience rather than techno-managerial efficiency alone. Recognising the gendered and racialised dimensions of green extractivism also necessitates more inclusive governance that amplifies Indigenous women’s voices and secures their meaningful participation. Only through such reorientation can renewable energy truly become a vehicle for redressing historical injustices and fostering just, sustainable futures for African peoples and their environments.

Green extractivism encapsulates the contradictions of Africa’s current energy transitions, in which the sheen of sustainability masks the reproduction of exploitative extraction fuelled by the global capitalist order. It highlights how green technologies are embedded within social relations that continue to disenfranchise Indigenous communities, especially women, by dispossessing them of land, undermining livelihoods, and enforcing environmental harms. Efforts to confront and dismantle green extractivism must place Indigenous

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women's ecofeminist insights at the heart of dialogue and decision-making, harnessing their knowledge to envision energy futures that are just, decolonial, and life-affirming. Only by transcending extractive paradigms and centring relationality, care, and sovereignty can Africa chart a truly transformative path toward sustainable and equitable energy systems that honour its peoples and ecosystems alike.

### **3.3 Capitalism and Energy Transition Dynamics**

Within the vast and interconnected machinery of global energy systems, capitalism exerts a formidable presence that shapes, defines, and often restricts the trajectory of energy transitions, particularly within the African continent. The narrative of energy transition, often presented in progressive, optimistic terms that evoke visions of cleaner, more sustainable futures, must be critically examined against the structural imperatives of capitalism. This economic system, with its relentless drive for accumulation, expansion, and profit maximisation, imposes a distinct logic on energy policies and projects that frequently contradicts the rhetoric of sustainability. Far from being neutral or benevolent, these capitalist imperatives often reproduce the very dynamics of exploitation, dispossession, and environmental degradation that they claim to resolve. This paradox is starkly evident in the surge of so-called 'green' energy initiatives, which, while framed as pivotal solutions to climate crises and renewable aspirations, continue to mirror the extractive logics and inequities embedded in colonial and neo-colonial frameworks.

Capitalism's influence on energy transition paradigms is not an accidental byproduct but a fundamental element shaping decision-making processes, technological deployments, and economic considerations that prioritise market logics over communal needs or ecological balance. The integration of capitalist imperatives into energy governance is evident in how projects are financed, implemented, and managed. Whether through international financial institutions, private investors, or multinational corporations, energy

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initiatives are often conditioned by the demands of capital accumulation, risk mitigation, and the commodification of natural resources, including energy itself. This economic environment fosters a scenario in which the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure is driven less by concern for ecosystems or social justice, and more by its potential to open new markets, generate competitive advantages, and secure proprietary control over emerging technologies and valuable materials.

This capitalist orientation creates a dissonance between the proclaimed environmental benefits of green energy projects and their on-the-ground social and ecological realities. Across Africa, Indigenous territories and communities become prime sites for these interventions, their lands and resources subsumed within logics that treat nature as an infinite repository for extraction and transformation into capital. The veneer of sustainability often masks strategies that replicate patterns of dispossession, in which land is appropriated, local autonomy curtailed, and the social fabric unravelled as communities are sidelined in decision-making and compensation processes. Indigenous women, who hold intimate knowledge of these lands and their complex ecologies, find themselves disproportionately affected by these displacements and disruptions, often enduring the worst of environmental harms, loss of livelihood, and erosion of social structures critical to their communal wellbeing.

The intersection of capitalism and the ostensibly green energy transition thus reveals a troubling continuity with past and ongoing forms of colonial exploitation. The logic underpinning capitalist expansion does not fundamentally challenge the paradigms of domination and resource extraction but rather reshapes them under new technological and ideological guises. For instance, the growing demand for critical minerals such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements, which are essential for renewable technologies like batteries and solar panels, intensifies mining activities primarily in African regions, often marked by weak governance, poor labour protections,

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and conflict over land rights. These mining operations, tied to global supply chains dictated by capitalist markets, often inflict severe environmental degradation and social dislocation. The framing of these activities as components of a green future obfuscates the continuation of a sacrificial geography where African lands and peoples remain reservoirs for the Global North's consumption and profit.

In this context, energy projects promoted under global frameworks and financial instruments typically carry significant conditionalities that reflect neoliberal economic principles. These conditions often emphasise efficiency, cost-competitiveness, and scalability, prioritising easily quantifiable metrics over the qualitative dimensions of social justice, cultural preservation, or ecological integrity. Indigenous women's traditional knowledge systems, which stress relationality, custodianship, and collective wellbeing, rarely find a place within these technical-economic paradigms. Instead, their voices and experiences are marginalised, obscuring the complex socio-environmental costs borne by their communities. The homogenising rationality of capitalist energy policy thus not only marginalises diverse epistemologies but also perpetuates gendered inequities by disregarding the gendered division of labour, care responsibilities, and social roles integral to ecosystem stewardship.

The green energy transition under capitalism often manifests spatially and temporally in ways that exacerbate existing inequalities. Projects are typically located in areas offering cheap land and labour, frequently Indigenous territories, where regulatory oversight is minimal, and resistance can be suppressed through coercion or manipulation. These sites become zones of environmental sacrifice, where ecological risks and social disruptions are externalised onto vulnerable populations, while the benefits (economic profits, energy access, technological innovation) are concentrated elsewhere. Temporal dynamics also play a role; the push for rapid deployment to meet global climate targets can sideline thorough social consultations

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and impact assessments, leading to rushed implementations that fail to address or even recognise cumulative harms. Within this accelerated capitalist framework, the urgency of climate action paradoxically becomes a rationale for compromising justice and accountability.

The capitalist framing of energy transition is intertwined with the commodification of not just energy, but also nature itself. Ecosystem functions, water sources, forests, biodiversity, and traditional ecological knowledge are increasingly monetised, patent rights assigned, and market mechanisms created to regulate and capitalise on these elements. Carbon trading schemes, biodiversity offsetting, and payments for ecosystem services exemplify such trends, in which nature and Indigenous custodial practices are integrated into market logics. This commodification often entails profound epistemic violence, stripping these entities of their intrinsic, relational, and cultural significance, transforming living systems into mere economic inputs or outputs. Indigenous women, whose relationships to land and environment are deeply spiritual, reciprocal, and embedded in community ethics, confront a violent rupture as their knowledge and care practices become subordinated to capitalist valuation.

In discussing the capitalist dynamics of energy transition, it is imperative to highlight how these imperatives specifically reproduce gendered patterns of marginalisation and oppression. Indigenous women's social positions are frequently characterised by the intersection of multiple axes of exclusion, based on gender, indigeneity, economic status, and geographic marginality, which compound their vulnerabilities in capitalist projects. For example, their labour, often invisible and unpaid within capitalist frameworks, is essential for maintaining households, cultivating food, gathering water, and managing natural resources. Disruptions to energy infrastructure can exacerbate these burdens, forcing longer water treks, reduced agricultural yields, and increased exposure to pollution and violence.

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Furthermore, the exclusion of Indigenous women from formal decision-making arenas in energy policy, dominated by patriarchal, technocratic elites, diminishes their political agency and limits their capacity to advocate for just and equitable outcomes.

Capitalist logic also insidiously shapes the narratives and discourses surrounding the energy transition. This subtly reinforces perceptions that align progress with technological innovation, scale, and profitability rather than with community sovereignty, ecological balance, or gender justice. Media coverage, international climate finance discourse, and policy documents often celebrate large-scale renewable projects with corporate partnerships, sidelining alternative models rooted in local knowledge, smaller scales, and communal ownership. This dominant storytelling serves to delegitimise Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions as peripheral or impractical, framing them as obstacles to economic growth rather than essential agents of transformation. It reflects an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western scientific knowledge systems and capitalist development imaginaries over Indigenous worldviews and community-centred innovation.

Within these oppressive capitalist frameworks, Indigenous women resist and create spaces of possibility that challenge the prescribed roles imposed by extractive energy capitalism. Their resistance takes multifaceted forms, ranging from grassroots organising and land rights assertion to the revival of traditional ecological practices and the development of community-led renewable energy projects that centre relational care and ecological harmony. These initiatives often exist on the margins of formal economies yet embody powerful counter-narratives that disrupt capitalist logics by emphasising interdependence rather than individual profit, stewardship rather than exploitation, and collective wellbeing over accumulation. Such practices reimagine energy not as a commodity but as a communal resource intertwined with social and ecological systems, revealing alternative pathways to sustainability that defy capitalist imperatives.

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This tension between capitalist dynamics and Indigenous women's agency underscores the urgent need to reconsider not only the technologies and policies of the energy transition but also the underlying economic systems and value frameworks that animate them. Engaging Indigenous feminist perspectives prompts a re-evaluation of energy futures that goes beyond incremental adjustments within capitalist structures to envision systemic transformations grounded in decoloniality, gender justice, and ecological relationality. Such a shift entails uprooting the logic of endless growth and commodification, embracing principles of sufficiency, reciprocity, and community sovereignty. It demands new metrics of success that value social justice, cultural integrity, and ecological health over mere profitability or scale.

This reframing invites critical scrutiny of the global geopolitical dimensions of the energy transition, in which African resources and bodies are entangled in complex webs of capitalist extraction that serve predominantly Global North interests. It calls for solidarity and accountability mechanisms that acknowledge the historical and ongoing extractive relationships shaping these dynamics. Importantly, it opens space for policy frameworks that prioritise Indigenous women's leadership, integrate their knowledge systems, and recognise their role as custodians and innovators in sustainable energy governance. Only by confronting, dismantling, and moving beyond the capitalist imperatives regulating current energy transitions can decolonial futures emerge. Futures in which energy systems uphold dignity, equity, and ecological thriving rather than reproducing cycles of harm.

In this complex mosaic of contradictions, the energy transition discourse must grapple with the ways capitalism's imperatives generate what can be aptly termed "green extractivism." This concept captures how ostensibly environmentally friendly technologies and policies perpetuate extraction and exploitation under new façades. The allure of renewable energy, i.e. a promise of decarbonisation, job

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creation, and technological progress, encourages colonial and capitalist actors to entrench systems that valorise resource extraction, often ignoring the intimate social and ecological interdependencies woven through Indigenous women's lives. Green extractivism becomes a means to sustain capital accumulation by repackaging old practices and promoting large-scale projects such as hydropower dams, biofuel plantations, and industrial-scale solar farms that disrupt communities and ecologies alike. These projects rarely address the structural injustices that precipitated the climate crisis, instead perpetuating patterns of dispossession in the name of sustainability.

The complex interplay of capitalist forces in shaping energy transitions demands critical attention. This includes not only the technologies and policies involved but also the broader socio-political and economic contexts in which they operate. Indigenous women's contributions offer essential insights for this endeavour. Their lived experiences reveal the limitations and harms of capitalist-driven energy paradigms and highlight alternative approaches rooted in care, relationality, and collective empowerment. Their ecofeminist visions challenge us to imagine energy futures that go beyond capitalist accumulation, harnessing the creative, healing potential within Indigenous knowledges and community sovereignties.

Neglecting this analysis of capitalism's influence on energy transitions risks perpetuating environmental harm and social injustice. It dismisses the very people who possess the wisdom, resilience, and agency needed for truly transformative change. Consequently, understanding capitalism's role in energy policies and projects is not just an academic exercise but a vital step towards dismantling oppressive systems. It's crucial for fostering just, inclusive, and sustainable energy futures across Africa and beyond.

This examination reveals that the promise of a green energy future cannot be separated from its political economy; it must critically address who controls energy systems, who benefits, and who is

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sacrificed. In confronting these realities, Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives emerge as powerful catalysts for reclaiming energy transitions as acts of justice, sovereignty, and ecological integrity.

### **3.4 Consequences for Indigenous Communities**

Indigenous communities face multifaceted, damaging, and often deeply contradictory consequences from so-called 'green' energy projects. At first glance, the promises of renewable energy, sustainability, and ecological preservation seem to offer a hopeful solution to the widespread environmental destruction caused by fossil fuel dependence and industrial extraction. Beneath this surface, many Indigenous populations experience worsening marginalisation, land dispossession, ecological degradation, and social upheaval. The adoption and spread of green energy initiatives, particularly across Africa, are frequently embedded within the same exploitative frameworks that have historically undermined Indigenous sovereignty and well-being. The shift from coal and oil to wind farms, solar arrays, and biofuel plantations is not inherently liberating. Instead, it often replicates the structural violence of extractivism under a new guise, perpetuating historical patterns of dispossession cloaked in environmental rhetoric. This paradox creates consequences that profoundly affect Indigenous lives, fundamentally altering their relationships with land, resources, and community, with Indigenous women bearing the brunt of these displacements and violations.

One of the most significant and visible consequences for Indigenous peoples is the expropriation of land. For Indigenous communities, land is not merely a resource or economic commodity; it is the very foundation of identity, culture, and survival. It embodies spiritual significance, collective histories, sacred sites, and ecological knowledge passed down through generations. However, green energy projects, from large-scale solar farms to hydropower dams and bioenergy plantations, often require vast tracts of land. These projects are frequently approved without genuine consultation or free, prior,

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and informed consent, disregarding the living presence and governance systems of Indigenous peoples. The forceful imposition of energy infrastructure violently severs Indigenous communities from their ancestral territories, echoing familiar colonial land grabs. The expansion of these projects under capitalist imperatives prioritises the commodification of natural spaces for global energy markets and investor profits over the sustenance of Indigenous lifeways. Dispossession thus continues, simply under a new name and with new justifications about ‘climate solutions’ and ‘sustainable development.’

Environmental damage accumulates alongside these spatial dislocations. Despite being labelled ‘green,’ many renewable energy initiatives cause significant ecological disruptions that harm local ecosystems, on which Indigenous communities depend. The construction of wind turbines, while generating emission-free electricity, disrupts migratory patterns of birds and bats, fragments wildlife habitats, and alters land dynamics. Solar farms, particularly when sited on previously uncultivated or community-managed lands, can lead to soil degradation, water depletion, and biodiversity loss. Biofuel plantations often rely on monoculture, significantly reducing ecological diversity and soil fertility, worsening the vulnerabilities of local environments already burdened by climate change. Moreover, hydropower dams flood vast expanses of forest, fertile lands, and rivers, obliterating fish populations and altering hydrological cycles crucial for sustaining agriculture and cultural practices. These environmental disruptions diminish the capacity of Indigenous populations to practise traditional livelihoods such as fishing, farming, foraging, and herding, thereby aggravating food insecurity and economic precarity.

Compounding these material impacts are social and cultural ruptures that emerge from the entanglement of extractive green technologies with global capitalist networks. Indigenous ways of life, grounded in collective stewardship and reciprocal relationships with nature, bear the weight of neo-colonial forces working to restructure communities

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around narrow metrics of ‘development’ and profitability. The influx of construction workers, security personnel, and corporate agents into Indigenous territories generates social tensions, sometimes even violence, disrupting the delicate social fabric that sustains communal life. The disruption extends to community governance, undermining traditional authorities and decision-making processes by imposing external regulatory regimes and corporate interests. This removal of Indigenous agency is further heightened by the gendered aspects of these projects, in which women bear the disproportionate impact but remain systematically excluded from consultation and leadership positions. The gendered impacts are profound and multifaceted. Indigenous women are both custodians of ecological knowledge and central actors in community survival through their roles in food production, water management, medicinal plant use, and cultural transmission. Dispossession and environmental degradation triggered by green energy projects unravel these roles, subjecting women to increased burdens. The loss of land and resources compels women to travel longer distances for water, fuel, and food, exacerbating their daily workloads and exposure to gender-based violence. The disintegration of social networks and the influx of mostly male labour forces increase the risks of sexual violence and exploitation. While this phenomenon is well documented across various extractive industries, it remains inadequately addressed in the renewable energy sector. The psychosocial toll on Indigenous women is compounded by eroded cultural practices, loss of communal solidarity, and the fracturing of intergenerational bonds.

These gendered harms intersect with economic exclusion. The touted benefits of ‘green jobs’ and local development rarely materialise within Indigenous communities. Employment opportunities are often transient, low-wage, or contingent on external technical skills and credentials inaccessible to many Indigenous people, especially women. Additionally, revenue-sharing models, where they exist, rarely equitably distribute financial gains, reinforcing pre-existing inequalities. Consequently, Indigenous women frequently find

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themselves peripheral to economic participation in energy projects located on their lands, while simultaneously shouldering increased labour and vulnerability. The disjunction between the promises of economic empowerment and the lived reality of dispossession perpetuates cycles of marginalisation deeply rooted in colonial and capitalist extractivism.

Beyond immediate, tangible impacts, green energy projects inflict profound psychological and spiritual wounds on Indigenous communities. Land dispossession severs not only physical territory but also the intangible connections of memory, identity, and cosmology that interweave humans and the environment. In testimonies gathered through field engagement, elders recount how solar panels atop sacred hills desecrate ancestors' resting places, while the concrete pouring for wind turbines disrupts the rhythmic cycles of natural phenomena that inform Indigenous temporalities and rituals. This desacralisation fractures cultural continuity, engendering grief and a sense of existential loss that resonates across generations. The mental health repercussions of these disruptions are rarely acknowledged in policy discussions focused on technology and infrastructure, yet they are central to Indigenous experiences of injustice and resistance.

These consequences must also be situated within the broader geopolitical context of climate racism and global energy politics. Africa's positioning as a supplier of critical minerals, such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements essential for renewable technologies, exemplifies a paradox: the continent is rendered a sacrifice zone for the decarbonisation ambitions of the Global North. The extraction of these minerals, often controlled by multinational corporations, causes intense environmental degradation, dispossession, and human rights abuses precisely in Indigenous and marginalised communities. Though outwardly linked to a green energy transition, this model reproduces the violent logics of colonial resource extraction, in which profits flow abroad. At the same time, local communities bear the

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environmental and social costs. Indigenous women are caught in the crossfire, facing intensified dispossession, labour exploitation, and health impacts from mining activities.

The dominant global frameworks for the energy transition tend to obscure these uneven impacts, prioritising techno-scientific progress and market-based solutions while sidelining Indigenous knowledge, rights, and leadership. This erasure operates as an extension of colonial epistemic violence, neglecting the sovereignty and alternative worldviews of Indigenous peoples that emphasise relationality, care, and reciprocity with the environment. Instead, Indigenous communities are often relegated to extractive roles or passive recipients of predefined development projects. The resulting disempowerment deepens dependency on external actors, weakening local resilience and constraining the possibility of self-determined energy futures aligned with Indigenous values.

Resistance to these patterns, however, is both ongoing and resilient. Indigenous women have mobilised against green energy projects that violate their lands and livelihoods, forging alliances across communities and with environmental and feminist movements. Their activism highlights the inseparability of ecological justice and Indigenous sovereignty, rejecting false choices between environmental sustainability and social equity. By re-centring Indigenous knowledges and care ethics, these movements contest the dominant techno-economic paradigms and advocate for transformative energy models grounded in community authority, relational governance, and intergenerational responsibility. Through storytelling, legal challenges, and grassroots mobilisations, Indigenous women assert their rights and visions for energy transitions that honour both the earth and their peoples.

The social and environmental consequences of green energy projects on Indigenous communities are deep-rooted and complex. The promises of renewable energy are too often undermined by

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continuities of dispossession, environmental harm, cultural erosion, and gendered violence that echo colonial and capitalist extractive logics. Indigenous women bear disproportionate burdens while simultaneously driving critical resistance and envisioning alternative pathways. To fully comprehend these consequences, it is necessary to dismantle prevailing frameworks that compartmentalise energy solutions from Indigenous rights and ecological sovereignty. Only through such radical re-conceptualisations can just and sustainable energy transitions emerge. Transitions that repair rather than replicate historical injustices, uplift Indigenous voices, and nurture the interwoven relationships between people, land, and the nonhuman world that remain vital for Africa's collective futures.

### **3.5 Climate Racism and Africa's Sacrifice Zone**

#### **3.5.1 Conceptualising Climate Racism**

The concept of climate racism offers a vital analytical lens for understanding the complex and systemic injustices faced by African communities within global environmental and energy dynamics. At its core, climate racism describes the uneven distribution of environmental harms and benefits along racialised and spatial lines. Marginalised racial groups, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples, disproportionately bear the brunt of ecological degradation and the consequences of the climate crisis. This phenomenon is neither coincidental nor isolated; instead, it is deeply rooted in historical processes of colonialism, racial capitalism, and global power imbalances that continue to shape how energy is produced, allocated, and consumed worldwide. In Africa, climate racism manifests through ongoing patterns of exploitation, dispossession, and environmental violence, inextricably linked to the continent's peripheral role in the global energy economy, primarily serving the insatiable demands of the Global North.

To grasp climate racism's relevance in Africa, one must place it within the broader legacies of coloniality, where racial hierarchies were constructed to justify the expropriation of land, labour, and

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resources from Indigenous and African peoples. Colonial energy infrastructures were designed not to serve local communities but to extract wealth and fuel imperial centres, embedding racialised disparities in who controls energy and who suffers its consequences. The postcolonial era has seen these dynamics persist and transform, with new forms of energy exploitation, framed as “green” or “sustainable,” masking continued environmental and social injustices. Across Africa, sites have become what scholars and activists describe as “sacrifice zones”: geographic areas designated for resource extraction and experimental energy projects that involve significant ecological disruption and social displacement, primarily endured by racialised and Indigenous populations whose voices remain marginalised in decision-making arenas.

Climate racism in Africa intertwines with the geopolitical structures of the global energy order. The continent remains a supplier of critical minerals essential for renewable technologies such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements, positioning it as a material base for the Global North’s energy transition ambitions. The extraction processes tied to these resources often reproduce colonial logics of dispossession and racial exclusion, leaving local communities to endure land grabbing, pollution, and the destruction of ancestral territories. These impacts are compounded by intersecting gendered dimensions: Indigenous women, often the custodians of ecological knowledge and community wellbeing, face heightened vulnerability amidst energy projects that disrupt their social fabrics and access to natural resources. The targeted marginalisation of these groups is not incidental but woven into structural forms of inequality sustained by global capitalist and colonial legacies, which environmental policies and market-based “solutions” often fail to challenge fundamentally.

Climate racism in the African context operates through what has been termed “climate colonialism” or “green extractivism,” where the rhetoric of climate mitigation and sustainability conceals exploitative practices that disproportionately impose environmental burdens on

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African landscapes and peoples. Large-scale renewable energy projects, such as solar farms, wind parks, and hydroelectric dams, are frequently developed without adequate consultation or consent from the communities directly affected. This reproduces patterns of epistemic violence by dismissing Indigenous knowledge systems and governance structures. This dynamic solidifies the continent's role as a resource frontier, primarily benefiting external actors, while exposing local populations to displacement, livelihood loss, and ecological collapse. The uneven power relations embedded in these processes underscore how climate racism transcends mere environmental inequality, constituting a systemic oppression that limits African agency in shaping just and equitable energy futures.

The phenomenon is inextricably linked to broader socio-political frameworks governing environmental governance. International climate agreements and funding mechanisms often prioritise emission reduction and technological transitions, failing to incorporate justice imperatives rooted in decolonisation and sovereignty. This technocratic bias perpetuates narrow understandings of sustainability, viewing African countries primarily as sites for resource extraction or carbon offset projects rather than as autonomous actors with rights to land and self-determination. As a result, communities are forced to agree to conditions set by external donors, corporations, and government entities, whose priorities might conflict with ecological health and social fairness. Climate racism thus becomes visible in the disparities between those formulating energy agendas and those living with their consequences, revealing ongoing violence that disproportionately affects racialised groups marginalised in economic and political hierarchies.

The spatial dimensions of climate racism are crucial for understanding how environmental harms are distributed. Many African communities inhabit regions rich in natural resources yet are simultaneously vulnerable to ecological transformation caused by mining, deforestation, and industrial energy infrastructures. Designating these

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regions as sacrifice zones often entails systematic exclusion from formal political participation, where local identity is criminalised or delegitimised, and knowledge systems devalued. This spatial injustice aligns with racialised histories of settlement and dispossession, where Indigenous and Black populations are relegated to marginal lands subject to environmental degradation. At the same time, affluent urban centres and international markets benefit from energy production and consumption. The entanglement of race and space in climate racism thus reinforces hierarchical geographies of power that sustain inequality and hinder the emergence of alternative models grounded in community authority and ecological care.

Climate racism is not only about disproportionate harm; it also speaks to the erasure and invisibilisation of Indigenous and African knowledges, experiences, and leadership in energy transition discourses and policies. The dominant narratives surrounding climate action, often framed within Global North epistemologies, privilege technological innovation and market solutions while minimising the contributions of local communities in stewarding ecosystems and imagining sustainable livelihoods. African Indigenous women embody rich ecofeminist traditions centred on relationality, reciprocity, and care that challenge individualistic and extractive paradigms dominant in global sustainability frameworks. The systemic sidelining of these perspectives within mainstream energy policies perpetuates climate racism by denying these communities meaningful participation and by failing to recognise their rights and knowledges as foundational for just and resilient energy futures.

The significance of climate racism in Africa also extends to health and everyday survival. Environmental degradation stemming from extractive energy projects contributes to water contamination, soil infertility, and air pollution, directly impacting community wellbeing and exacerbating historical marginalisation. The compounding effects of poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and social exclusion mean that African populations subjected to these harms have limited capacity to

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adapt or resist, deepening cycles of vulnerability. These health inequities are racialised and gendered, as women and children disproportionately bear the consequences of environmental stressors and resource scarcity. Thus, climate racism intersects not only with environmental and economic justice but also with the right to health, dignity, and life itself.

The concept also intersects with global economic inequalities underpinning climate finance and development programmes. Financial mechanisms designed to support renewable energy deployment in Africa often prioritise projects aligned with capitalist growth models rather than fostering community-led, decolonial approaches to energy sovereignty. Such dynamics reinforce the continent's role as a subordinate actor within the global energy regime, servicing the needs of the wealthy Global North while sidelining justice-driven alternatives. This economic marginalisation is racialised through the unequal distribution of investment, technology transfer, and capacity-building, which constrains African agency to influence energy policy in culturally congruent and ecologically sustainable ways. In this sense, climate racism operates as a structural feature cemented by international economic and political orders.

At the same time, recognising climate racism opens pathways for resistance and transformation, grounded in the agency and leadership of Indigenous women and communities. By naming the racial and colonial dimensions embedded in energy and climate policies, activists, scholars, and communities are better equipped to challenge the dominant paradigms that reproduce dispossession and ecological harm. This critical framing calls for an expansion of energy justice discourse beyond technical fixes towards political struggles centred on sovereignty, reparations, and healing. It foregrounds the necessity of dismantling the white supremacist and capitalist underpinnings of global energy systems to create genuinely inclusive and equitable futures.

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Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions become pivotal here, offering relational and place-based alternatives that emphasise care, community authority, and regeneration rather than exploitation and extraction.

Thus, climate racism in Africa is both a diagnosis and a call to action. It elucidates how racialised histories and geographies shape contemporary environmental injustices linked to energy transitions and underscores the urgent imperative to centre marginalised voices, especially those of Indigenous women, in defining and enacting sustainability. Confronting climate racism means challenging structural inequities embedded within colonial legacies and global capitalism, recognising the interdependence of racial justice, environmental stewardship, and gender equity. It demands a reparative justice framework that reclaims African agency over land, resources, and energy futures, ensuring that energy transitions serve not corporate interests but the dignity, sovereignty, and well-being of African peoples and ecosystems. By engaging deeply with the concept of climate racism, this book seeks to illuminate the systemic dimensions of injustice that must be dismantled to foster transformative, just, and decolonial energy pathways across the continent.

### **3.5.2 Sacrifice Zones in Africa**

Across Africa's vast landscapes, hidden beneath narratives of progress and development, lie the troubling realities of sacrifice zones. These are geographies where the heavy tolls of energy extraction and industrial projects are forcibly borne by local communities, predominantly Indigenous peoples and women, who often remain unheard and unseen in the corridors of power. These sacrifice zones are neither accidental nor isolated phenomena; they are the direct outcomes of deeply entrenched systems of racial and spatial injustice that trace their lineage back to the violent machinations of colonialism and its enduring aftershocks. The designation of certain African regions as expendable territories to fuel the insatiable energy demands

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of the Global North is a stark manifestation of climate racism, interwoven with coloniality's persistent grip on land, bodies, and resources. To understand sacrifice zones in Africa requires dismantling the complex fabric of historical dispossession, racialised environmental governance, and the neoliberal configurations of "green" development that perpetuate marginalisation under the guise of sustainability.

The origins of many sacrifice zones can be traced back to the long history of extractive industries that were foundational to colonial enterprises on the African continent. From the Belgian Congo's catastrophic rubber and mineral exploitation to South Africa's apartheid-era mining operations, colonial powers engineered spatial layouts that embedded racialised hierarchies into the very soil. Indigenous territories, once custodians of vibrant and biodiverse ecosystems, were transformed into extractive sites where ecosystems were decimated, and local populations were forcibly removed or conscripted into labour systems marked by extreme oppression. The colonial state's logic was clear: African lands and peoples existed not for their own flourishing but as reservoirs for the accumulation of wealth elsewhere. This logic remains embedded in contemporary energy politics, now under the veneer of globalisation and climate change mitigation, where the so-called "green energy transition" imposes new forms of sacrifice, especially on African regions rich in critical minerals such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements.

One profound example lies in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where cobalt mining underpins much of the global production of batteries for electric vehicles and renewable energy storage technologies. The extraction conditions here expose the brutal relations at the heart of so-called green energy chains. Local communities experience severe environmental degradation, water contamination, deforestation, and relentless health hazards. Children and women bear the brunt of these impacts, with increased vulnerability to exploitation, displacement, and violence. Although the

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region's global demand cements its role in future energy systems, its residents remain in a sacrifice zone, with their ongoing struggles overlooked in international discussions that concentrate solely on technological fixes. This spatial marginalisation is not incidental; it is emblematic of a racialised division of labour and risk whereby African bodies and environments are disproportionately subjected to harm for benefits reaped overwhelmingly by Northern actors and corporations.

In extractive-affected regions of South Africa, particularly in Mpumalanga's coal-mining belts, similar patterns emerge. Large-scale coal operations here exemplify the contradictions inherent in energy transitions promoted by both government and private sector. While South Africa has committed to a future beyond carbon-intensive energy, coal mining communities remain mired in a paradoxical limbo. They are simultaneously positioned as indispensable pillars of economic viability and as sacrificial grounds for toxic pollution, land degradation, and chronic health ailments, including respiratory diseases and cancers. Indigenous women and rural inhabitants navigate a precarious existence where their local environmental knowledge is systematically devalued in favour of technocratic approaches that prioritise short-term economic output over community wellbeing. The vestiges of apartheid spatial planning compound these injustices, as marginalised Black communities live in proximity to polluting industries, their spatial segregation a physical reminder of systemic environmental racism.

Sacrifice zones are reproduced not only through extractive projects but also via large-scale renewable energy infrastructures imposed without adequate consultation or consent from Indigenous landholders. The proliferation of massive solar farms, wind turbines, and hydropower dams across Africa often replicates colonial practices of dispossession under a different guise. For instance, in Northern Kenya, large-scale wind energy projects have been developed on the ancestral lands of the Rendille and Samburu peoples, disrupting the

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livelihoods of pastoralists who depend on seasonal migrations and fragile water sources. These communities face forced relocations, loss of grazing lands, and depletion of water reserves vital to their survival. The promises of clean energy and climate mitigation obscure the lived realities of displacement and cultural uprooting, revealing how environmentally framed interventions can seamlessly continue the spatial and racial violence characteristic of colonial state formation.

Climate policies that focus on global emissions targets and technological shifts often overlook these uneven geographies of sacrifice. By framing climate challenges as national accounting and carbon budgets, such policies obscure how the burden is fundamentally skewed towards historically marginalised and racially minoritised populations. Africa's sacrifice zones are emblematic of a global economy built on exploiting peripheral regions as "sinks" for ecological damage. This extractive logic is further entrenched by multinational corporations that operate in the weak regulatory environments of African states, perpetuating environmental degradation and social dispossession. This dynamic is exacerbated by weak governance structures and complicity stemming from neo-colonial economic dependencies. The intersection of race, class, and gender becomes a crucible where multiple forms of oppression coalesce, making certain African communities systematically more vulnerable to the harms of energy transitions that prioritise external interests.

The concept of sacrifice zones must also acknowledge the resilience and resistance of Indigenous women who inhabit these spaces. Their ecofeminist perspectives highlight how these impositions are not merely infringements on land but constitute attacks on relational systems of care that connect people, ancestors, and ecosystems. Women-led grassroots movements in regions like the Niger Delta have vociferously challenged oil companies and state actors, articulating a broad understanding of environmental justice that prioritises health, cultural continuity, and sovereignty. These

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movements reveal that sacrifice zones are not passive areas of ruin but contested spaces where Indigenous knowledge and ethical frameworks confront colonial-capitalist extractivism. Women's leadership is particularly vital in advancing alternative visions that transcend narrow utilitarian logics, prioritising stewardship and the intrinsic rights of both human and nonhuman beings.

The existence of sacrifice zones challenges dominant sustainability paradigms that emphasise “green growth” and technological innovation, while failing to question neoliberal capitalist imperatives. The very notion of “green extractivism” exposes how environmental harms are repackaged as seemingly sustainable, thereby masking ongoing social and ecological violence. In many ways, the continuation of sacrifice zones reflects the failures of global energy governance to address historical injustices and the unequal distribution of resources. The privileging of market-based mechanisms and corporate-led transitions ensures that the benefits of clean energy are unevenly distributed while externalising costs predominantly to racialised and Indigenous communities in Africa. This calls for a radical reimagining of energy justice that centres decoloniality, not only recognising Indigenous sovereignty over lands and resources but affirming epistemic pluralism and relational ethics as foundational to transitioning towards truly just energy futures.

Sacrifice zones are not static or inevitable conditions; they exist within dynamic relations shaped by political struggle and possibility. Indigenous women's voices and leadership demonstrate how localised resistance can reshape energy trajectories, reclaim agency and transform imposed burdens into sites of healing and regeneration. In parts of Zimbabwe, for example, women in rural communities have spearheaded decentralised energy projects powered by solar and biogas that align with traditional ecological knowledge and communal governance structures. These initiatives interrupt the logic of sacrifice by rejecting extractivist dependencies and affirming collective wellbeing as the core of energy production and use. They provide

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glimmers of hope that dignity, sovereignty, and justice can reconfigure Africa's energy landscape away from zones of sacrifice towards spaces of care, reciprocity, and flourishing.

Thus, analysing sacrifice zones in Africa compels a reorientation of energy transition discourses towards recognising the ethnicised and racialised geographies of environmental harm. It demands policy frameworks that transcend tokenistic inclusion and extractive partnerships, instead fostering genuine participatory governance grounded in respect for Indigenous women's leadership and knowledge systems. This entails rethinking development not in terms of Gross Domestic Product growth or technology deployment but through the lens of historical repair, reparations, and transformed relationships between peoples and nature. To dismantle sacrifice zones is to confront the legacies of colonial violence that continue to structure who pays the price for energy futures. It is to envision an energy justice that dissolves the spatial binaries of power and dispossession in favour of interconnectedness, mutual care, and ecological balance, thereby honouring Africa's rich fabric of Indigenous wisdom and the enduring struggle of its women for sovereignty and survival.

### **3.5.3 Global Energy Inequalities**

The landscape of global energy consumption starkly reveals entrenched inequalities that transcend mere economic disparity, extending deep into the embedded historical fabrics of race, coloniality, and spatial injustice. Africa occupies a peculiar and profoundly troubling position within this global schema: it is at once a vast reservoir of natural resources and a region persistently marginalised from the benefits of energy access and technology proliferation. Within the prevailing global energy order, African communities disproportionately bear the environmental and social costs of energy extraction and production, costs that mirror, yet multiply, the legacies of colonial exploitation. These costs manifest not only in degraded ecosystems and health disparities but also in the

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erosion of cultural sovereignty and the widening economic opportunity gap. Meanwhile, the Global North, with a fraction of the planet's population, wields outsized energy consumption patterns, historical emissions, and resource claims, effectively displacing environmental burdens onto African landscapes and bodies. This violent reallocation of ecological harm is no accident; it is the material outcome of persistent racial and spatial hierarchies shaped by centuries of colonial domination and capitalist expansion.

African economies and ecologies have long been entangled in what might be described as 'sacrifice zones,' where natural resources are mined, drilled, and degraded to fuel the insatiable appetites of industrialised nations and global capital markets. These zones are neither incidental nor purely geographic. Still, they are racialised and political constructs that map onto the global configuration of power, where the environment serves as a site of extraction and dispossession primarily of Black and Indigenous lands and peoples. The systemic racialisation underpinning this unbalanced energy geography consigns African territories to the margins of global decision-making, rendering local voices inaudible in processes that profoundly shape their futures. Despite Africa's abundant potential for renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal, much of this potential remains underdeveloped or co-opted, further entrenching dependencies on extractive industries whose byproducts disproportionately harm women, children, and marginalised rural communities.

The implications of these disparities are both immediate and intergenerational. In countries rich in critical minerals needed for the so-called "green transition", such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements, mining operations often lead to environmental devastation, soil erosion, water contamination, and irreversible damage to biodiversity hotspots. The alkaline and acid drainage from mines alters river systems, contaminating water sources on which communities rely for subsistence agriculture, livestock, and daily livelihoods. These consequences, however, are not uniformly

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distributed; they violently intersect with pre-existing social vulnerabilities shaped by gender, race, and economic exclusion. Indigenous women find themselves at the intersection of multiple oppressions, simultaneously enduring the worst of environmental degradation while being marginalised from political forums where energy and environmental policies are designed and enacted. Their traditional ecological knowledge, rooted in principles of stewardship and interconnection, is frequently dismissed or appropriated without recognition. In contrast, Global North nations continue to propagate narratives that frame Africa's resource wealth as a solution to global climate crises, often without acknowledging the ongoing harm inflicted on local communities or the continued foreign extraction of value with minimal reinvestment in affected regions.

Global energy inequalities also reflect differing historical responsibilities for climate change emissions. Industrialised countries in the Global North have historically emitted vast quantities of greenhouse gases over the course of centuries, thereby establishing an early and sustained trajectory of energy-intensive development. Africa's emissions, although on a rising trajectory due to urbanisation and industrialisation pressures, remain comparatively low per capita and in absolute terms. Still, African nations are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, including droughts, floods, and ecosystem collapses, which exacerbate existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. This paradox of being least responsible yet most affected is a cornerstone of climate justice discussions but remains poorly integrated within mainstream energy policies and international negotiations. The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," articulated in global climate frameworks, often falls short in practice, with funding for adaptation and sustainable energy development in Africa failing to meet commitments. Instead, global energy markets favour technological and infrastructural solutions that perpetuate dependence on multinational corporations and reproduce neocolonial patterns of control over resources and knowledge.

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In defining sacrifice zones, mainstream environmental governance often employs a spatial logic that ignores the embodied nature of racialised and gendered harms. Environmental policies and industrial energy strategies repeatedly impose externalities, pollution, displacement, and health risks onto communities already grappling with historical marginalisation, creating what scholar and activist communities rightly identify as ‘climate racism.’ This term encapsulates how environmental burdens are disproportionately placed upon racialised communities, both within and across national borders, to safeguard the prosperity and lifestyles of predominantly white, wealthy populations. African rural and peri-urban communities subsist in contexts of chronic energy poverty, unreliable grids, and exposure to extractive industries that generate little local benefit. The expansion of so-called green extractivism, extracting minerals for renewable technologies, often replicates colonial extractive logics, masquerading as sustainability while entrenching social injustice. Rarely, if ever, are these socio-environmental costs accounted for within global accounting systems or trade arrangements, which remain blind to the qualitative and cumulative impacts of dispossession.

The racialised geography of energy production and consumption is further evident in the allocation of knowledge and technology. Innovations in renewable energy technologies and infrastructure are concentrated within Northern institutions and corporations, leaving African countries reliant on potentially exploitative supply chains and high-cost imports. This pattern not only hinders local innovation but also creates a structural barrier to self-determined energy sovereignty. Indigenous knowledge systems, long focused on sustainable co-existence with the land, are marginalised in energy governance discussions that prioritise quantitative efficiency and market-driven approaches. The failure to recognise and incorporate Indigenous women’s ecofeminist perspectives in energy planning contributes to ongoing epistemic violence, reproducing colonial silences and erasures precisely when equitable solutions are most urgently needed.

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Energy inequalities manifest in daily realities: households without reliable electricity, communities without access to clean cooking fuels, and women burdened with the gendered labour of energy procurement and management. These are not abstract statistics but lived experiences reflecting systemic exclusion from the global energy economy. The unevenness of energy access intersects with health, education, and economic opportunities, reinforcing cycles of poverty and marginalisation. For many African communities, the energy transition envisioned by international actors appears to be a distant promise, often framed through top-down interventions that overlook local knowledge and priorities. The imposition of large-scale renewable energy projects, while heralded as climate solutions, can result in land grabs, disruption of social structures, and compromised food security. These contradictions expose tensions between technocratic sustainability narratives and justice-centred approaches that foreground relationality, collective well-being, and the agency of Indigenous women, who remain stewards of their territories.

The global governance mechanisms designed to regulate climate action and energy transitions exhibit deep structural biases favouring the interests of the Global North. Financial institutions, regulatory bodies, and international partnerships frequently uphold frameworks that prioritise market-led solutions, commodification of nature, and so-called ‘green growth,’ often sidelining questions of sovereignty and reparations. Funding for energy transition in Africa tends to flow into large-scale infrastructure projects oriented toward global export markets or elite consumption rather than community-controlled distributed systems. The resulting policy landscape risks replicating colonial patterns of extraction under the guise of sustainability, failing to address the roots of inequity embedded within the global political economy. Indigenous women emphasize decolonial epistemologies and energy justice, challenging the existing system by advocating for transformative approaches. They view energy not just as a commodity but as a shared resource vital for cultural survival and environmental health.

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The disproportionate impacts of energy extraction and consumption patterns on African lands and peoples highlight the urgent need to reimagine energy futures through frameworks that dismantle ongoing coloniality. This entails recognising how race and place operate as axes through which energy inequalities are produced and sustained. It requires confronting the hypocrisy of a global energy system that externalises ecological and social costs onto communities least responsible for climate change, while reaping the benefits of wealth and energy security. Addressing these inequalities demands a shift from extractivist paradigms toward models of energy sovereignty rooted in Indigenous governance, ecofeminist ethics of care, and community authority. Only by centring the voices and visions of Indigenous women, whose lived experiences reveal the intertwined struggles against environmental degradation and social marginalisation, can we begin to chart energy transitions that are truly just, equitable, and sustainable.

The systemic, racialised, and spatial injustices that define global energy inequalities are not just barriers; they are also sites of resistance and possibility. Across Africa, Indigenous women navigate the complex challenges of dispossession, climate violence, and policy exclusion. They mobilise ecofeminist practices of relationality, care, and collective stewardship to reclaim agency over their energy futures. Their leadership challenges the technocratic systems imposed by Global North paradigms, advocating instead for pluralistic knowledge systems and communal models of wellbeing. Through their grassroots initiatives, they expose the limits of dominant sustainability discourses that fail to account for historic reckoning, structural reparations, and the redistribution of power. These women's visions catalyse critical reflection on the entwined legacies of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy shaping global energy dynamics, offering transformative pathways toward a decolonial, dignified, and just energy transition in Africa and beyond.

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Understanding global energy inequalities requires a framework that articulates the intersections of race, coloniality, environmental injustice, and gendered dispossession. The intertwined histories and contemporary realities of energy disparities reveal how Africa exists not in isolation but as a central battlefield for claims and counterclaims over resources, energy sovereignty, and future sustainability. Unequal patterns of consumption and responsibility underpin a global energy regime that privileges the North's prosperity while sacrificing African peoples and ecosystems to its consequences. Reversing these injustices requires challenging entrenched power relations in international energy politics and centring Indigenous women's ecofeminist approaches as foundational to reimagining and enacting fairer, more resilient energy systems. It is through such deeply contextualised and intersectional analyses that the bridge might be built between urgent climate imperatives and the reparative justice so long withheld, paving the way for a radically transformed energy landscape that honours African sovereignty, dignity, and ecological harmony.

### **3.6 Gendered Violence and Economic Exclusion**

#### **3.6.1 Forms of Gendered Violence**

Within the labyrinth of Africa's energy transitions, the experiences of Indigenous women reveal a painful and persistent pattern of violence that is simultaneously physical, economic, and structural. This is all deeply interwoven with the legacies of colonialism and entrenched systems of racial and gendered oppression. These forms of violence cannot be isolated or understood in separate silos. Rather, they emerge in overlapping and mutually reinforcing ways that render Indigenous women uniquely vulnerable as energy projects proliferate across the continent's landscapes. The physical violence they endure is not merely a byproduct of general insecurity but is intricately tied to the very ways energy resources are extracted, commodified, and controlled. In many regions where large-scale hydroelectric dams, mining operations for rare earth minerals, or fossil fuel extraction have taken root, local Indigenous women face heightened risks of

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gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and harassment by security personnel affiliated with these projects. Indeed, the sudden influx of predominantly male workers and the militarisation of affected territories generate social environments rife with increased violence, disrupting fragile community dynamics and fostering spaces of fear and control. This violence frequently manifests in roadways and camps, also penetrates domestic and communal spheres, where traditional support systems for women weaken under the stress of displacement and economic upheaval. These experiences are not isolated incidents but rather symptoms of a systemic pattern where women's bodies become sites upon which broader political and economic struggles are negotiated and enforced.

Economic violence manifests in subtler ways. Energy projects, often justified as 'development' and 'progress,' systematically deprive Indigenous women of resources essential for their livelihoods and cultural heritage. The expropriation of land for mining or energy infrastructure disrupts subsistence farming, gathering, and artisanal work, activities mainly undertaken by women who depend on these ecosystems both economically and spiritually. Displacement, whether temporary or permanent, cuts women off from ancestral territories that are not only sources of income but also hold cultural knowledge and identity. This leads to a chain of effects: forced migration to overcrowded urban fringes with few jobs, increased dependence on informal, unstable work, and the breakdown of communal economies based on shared stewardship and reciprocity. Economic marginalisation worsens as dominant energy policies and investments often exclude women from decision-making and benefit-sharing, reinforcing patriarchal structures and gendered inequalities.

In many cases, the benefits of renewable energy projects or extractive industries accrue disproportionately to external corporations and male-dominated political elites. At the same time, Indigenous women remain relegated to the margins with little access to the promised

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infrastructure or income-generating opportunities. This economic violence is thus a form of structural subjugation that perpetuates poverty and dependence, while simultaneously eroding the autonomy and resilience of Indigenous women and their communities.

Structural violence, often the least visible yet most pernicious, is deeply embedded in the colonial histories and persistent racialised and gendered power structures that shape energy governance in Africa. This violence operates through institutionalised exclusion, legal frameworks that fail to recognise Indigenous land and resource rights, and governance mechanisms that prioritise capital accumulation over community wellbeing. The very frameworks of energy transition, drafted in technocratic languages and global policy forums, often obscure or silence Indigenous epistemologies, reinforcing a form of epistemic violence that devalues women's ways of knowing, caring, and managing landscapes. For example, the dominant discourse around renewable energy in Africa frequently promotes market-based solutions and large-scale infrastructure projects that replicate colonial patterns of resource extraction rather than community-based, participatory approaches grounded in Indigenous ecofeminist principles. This not only marginalises women's leadership but also reinforces spatial and social inequalities by concentrating control over energy resources and decision-making in the hands of national governments, international financiers, and private corporations, many of which remain unmoved by calls for justice or reparations. Indigenous women thus encounter systemic barriers when attempting to assert sovereignty, access land, or gain meaningful representation in energy politics, resulting in ongoing disenfranchisement. This exclusion intensifies the conditions under which they must resist and survive, but also manifests as psychological and cultural violence, as erasure and silencing undermine their sense of dignity and self-determination.

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The intersection of these violences intensifies when considering the racialised histories that underpin contemporary energy projects. Africa's energy policies are entangled with global dynamics marked by neocolonial exploitation, where the continent remains a resource hinterland for the industrialised North's insatiable energy demands. Indigenous women bear the brunt of this geopolitical arrangement not only because of their marginalised social location but because colonial legacies constructed bodies like theirs as inherently expendable in the face of 'progress.' Their experiences reveal how climate racism operates, where the environmental harms and social costs of energy transitions are disproportionately imposed on racialised and colonised populations while benefits flow elsewhere. The environmental degradation wrought by energy extraction, the contamination of water, deforestation, and soil erosion further exacerbates women's vulnerability by undermining food security and health. These ecological harms disproportionately affect women, given their roles in managing household nutrition and water. These environmental assaults are entwined with the broader systemic violence that indigenous communities suffer, reinforcing cycles of dispossession and marginalisation that are gendered at their core.

The social fabric within which these energies are produced and contested weaves yet another dimension to this complex violence. Energy projects often fracture communal relationships, including kinship networks and collective forms of governance, undermining the influence of Indigenous women, who historically held considerable sway as custodians of community wellbeing and environmental care. The imposition of energy infrastructure and extraction sites disrupts these social ecologies by reshaping spatial relations, encouraging individualisation over collectivism, and alienating women from traditional roles and responsibilities. The resulting social fragmentation fuels further vulnerabilities, diminishing the community's capacity to resist or adapt to ongoing assaults, thus perpetuating cycles of violence. Women's efforts to organise, whether to protect land rights, demand equitable resource distribution, or

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advocate for safer conditions, are frequently met with repression, intimidation, or co-optation, reinforcing a climate of fear and precarity. These realities sketch an all-too-familiar pattern in the contested spaces where energy transitions meet the lived urgency of survival, dignity, and justice.

Amidst these forms of violence, Indigenous women persist as agents of change, weaving resistance and resilience into the fabric of their everyday struggles. Their ecofeminist knowledge systems, emphasising relationality and care, challenge and disrupt these violences at multiple scales, from grassroots mobilisations to transnational advocacy. By articulating alternative visions that centre Indigenous sovereignty, communal governance, and ecological balance, they provide potent critiques of dominant energy narratives that fail to reckon with the gendered and racialised dimensions of violence. Their testimonies illuminate how energy transitions, if rooted in justice and decolonial frameworks, could transcend being sites of violence to become spaces where healing and restoration are possible. However, fully realising such transformations demands dismantling structural inequalities and placing Indigenous women's voices at the heart of policy and practice.

In this light, examining the forms of gendered violence linked to energy projects is not merely an academic exercise but an urgent ethical and political imperative. It forces us to confront how the material realities of energy extraction and infrastructure are entangled with lived experiences of harm, exclusion, and resistance. Acknowledging the multi-layered nature of this violence (physical, economic, and structural) sheds critical light on the uneven burdens borne by Indigenous women. It challenges simplistic or technocratic solutions that ignore social justice. It also underscores the necessity for approaches that disrupt colonial and capitalist logics embedded within contemporary energy regimes, embracing instead Indigenous epistemologies and leadership that seek harmony between people and the planet.

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Only by centring these perspectives can a truly just energy transition emerge, one that repairs rather than reproduces the gendered harm that has long been woven into the continent's energy futures.

### **3.6.2 Economic Marginalisation**

Economic marginalisation among Indigenous women in the context of Africa's energy transitions reveals a deeply entrenched web of structural inequalities. These inequalities are meticulously woven through colonial legacies, patriarchal systems, and contemporary global capitalist agendas. These intersecting dimensions not only restrict Indigenous women's access to economic opportunities but also heighten their vulnerability to violence and social fragmentation, creating significant barriers that undermine both individual agency and collective wellbeing. At the heart of these barriers lies the pervasive invisibility of Indigenous women's labour and knowledge, systematically devalued and often rendered invisible within dominant economic frameworks shaped by extractive industries and techno-centric energy policies. In many regions across Africa, energy projects, whether large-scale hydroelectric dams, mining operations linked to battery production, or expansive solar farms, are imposed on Indigenous territories without meaningful consultation or consent. This imposition disrupts local livelihoods, dismantles social cohesion, and exacerbates existing socioeconomic divisions, particularly along gendered lines. Indigenous women frequently bear the brunt of these disruptions as custodians of communities' subsistence economies, traditional ecological knowledge, and cultural heritage. These roles remain unrecognised and uncompensated within prevailing economic paradigms.

The economic marginalisation of Indigenous women unfolds not merely as an outcome of exclusion from formal employment or entrepreneurial ventures but is deeply embedded in how colonial histories have shaped property relations, labour expectations, and social hierarchies. Colonial administrations instituted legal and customary frameworks that dispossessed Indigenous peoples of

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ancestral lands, forcibly subordinated women's roles, and imposed extractive economic models predicated on domination and dispossession. Even with formal independence, these colonial legacies persist, translated into contemporary policies that privilege foreign direct investment, technological innovation, and centralised control over natural resources, often sidelining Indigenous governance systems and community-oriented economic models. In this environment, Indigenous women find their economic activities circumscribed by dual marginalisation: their imposed racialised status that deems their territories as untapped 'resources' for exploitation, and the patriarchal constraints that limit their decision-making authority both within their communities and in state or corporate arenas. This intersectionality of race, gender, and colonial dispossession creates a significant obstacle to meaningful participation in the emergent energy economies.

The gendered violence that often accompanies large energy projects functions as both a symptom and a mechanism of economic marginalisation. Projects that entail influxes of transient labour forces, militarisation of lands, or increased surveillance exacerbate vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence, which undermines women's capacity to engage economically and socially. Indigenous women's bodies become battlegrounds where colonial violence is reenacted in contemporary forms, with displacement, harassment, and assault further fracturing community networks essential to economic resilience. This violence reverberates beyond immediate physical harm; it destroys social trust and erodes the communal fabric that sustains collective economic endeavours such as cooperative farming, artisanal mining, or renewable energy initiatives led by women themselves. Such erosion fractures social cohesion, leaving women isolated both from protective community networks and from broader platforms for political and economic advocacy.

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The profound impact of this intersecting violence and economic exclusion is often ignored or minimised in mainstream energy transition discourses, which tend to prioritise technological progress and financial returns over socio-cultural realities.

Economic marginalisation is deeply intertwined with the systemic denial of Indigenous women's rights to land and resources, rights fundamental to their autonomy and economic agency. Land dispossession, whether through formal state mechanisms or informal encroachments for energy infrastructure, directly displaces women from territories where they cultivate medicinal plants, gather food, and steward ecosystems sustainably. This displacement severs vital connections between Indigenous women and their environments, disrupting livelihoods, cultural identities, and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. When energy policies fail to recognise or protect these relationships, which are often codified in customary law but superseded by statutory regulations favouring industrial development, Indigenous women face compounded economic precarity. Their exclusion from land ownership or land-use decision-making consequently denies them access to benefits such as leasing payments, employment opportunities, or participation in the governance structures of energy projects. Thus, economic marginalisation is deeply connected to ongoing struggles for land sovereignty, with women bearing the disproportionate costs of exclusion.

Resistance narratives from Indigenous women across diverse African contexts illustrate both the depth of these economic barriers and the transformative potential in reclaiming agency. Women have continually challenged the status quo by fostering alternative economic models rooted in collective stewardship, ecofeminist ethics, and community sovereignty. In numerous rural and peri-urban spaces, Indigenous women-led cooperatives, agroecological projects, and small-scale renewable energy initiatives couple economic empowerment with cultural revitalisation and environmental justice.

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These grassroots efforts confront the extractivist paradigm by insisting on relational ways of knowing and producing that prioritise interdependence over accumulation, care over exploitation, and sustainability over dispossession. However, even as these initiatives demonstrate resilience and innovation, they often remain underfunded, undervalued, and marginalised within national energy frameworks that favour corporate interests and market-driven solutions. Consequently, Indigenous women's economic contributions remain precarious, requiring continuous advocacy for equitable recognition, resource allocation, and supportive policy environments.

The global discourse on energy transition frequently prioritises technological innovation and scalability, sidelining the political economy of race, gender, and indigeneity that shapes whose labour is valued and whose voices are heard. Indigenous women's economic marginalisation cannot be disentangled from the neoliberal logics that frame energy development as a domain of investment, profit, and efficiency rather than justice, dignity, or relational care. The allure of green economies often masks and reproduces patterns of exclusion, dismissing women's traditional economies as subsistence or backward even as they constitute vital ecologies of care that sustain biodiversity and resilience amidst environmental crises. In this context, Indigenous women's economic marginalisation arises not only from direct exclusion but also from epistemic violence that delegitimises their ways of working, knowing, and governing. The path toward just energy transitions, hence, necessitates dismantling these epistemic hierarchies and centring Indigenous women's economic realities as a foundation for reimagining economies that heal rather than harm.

Intersecting with economic marginalisation is the challenge of access to education, technical training, and financial capital, critical enablers for participation in the evolving energy landscape. Indigenous women frequently confront barriers in gaining such access due to systemic discrimination, geographic isolation, and cultural marginalisation. Educational curricula often fail to incorporate Indigenous languages,

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histories, or ecological knowledge, alienating learners and exacerbating dropout rates. Technical programmes in renewable energy or sustainable agriculture may be inaccessible or non-inclusive, skewed towards male participation and designed without gender-sensitive approaches. Financial mechanisms such as microcredit or grants intended to empower women entrepreneurs often entail bureaucratic hurdles and impose repayment conditions that are incongruent with community economic rhythms or collective ownership models. These barriers limit Indigenous women's capacity to scale economic ventures or engage with formal energy governance structures on equal footing, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and economic precarity.

Economic marginalisation is also evident in the disconnect between policy formulation and lived experiences. Policymakers and energy planners often operate within technocratic frameworks that prioritise quantitative metrics, such as megawatts generated, investment attracted, or carbon emissions reduced, over qualitative factors such as social resilience, cultural continuity, or gender equity. This disconnect leads to policies that inadequately address the unique challenges and aspirations of Indigenous women. For instance, utility-scale renewable projects may promise electrification but fail to deliver meaningful economic benefits for local women, who may be excluded from employment or have their rights appropriated without compensation. Similarly, energy subsidies or social safety nets often overlook women's informal economies, making the economic gains of energy transitions invisible or inaccessible to them. The absence of Indigenous women's perspectives in policy discussions perpetuates this marginalisation, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive governance models that simultaneously respect Indigenous sovereignty and gender justice.

The socio-cultural fabric within Indigenous communities also significantly shapes economic marginalisation. While Indigenous women may hold considerable informal authority and control over

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local resource management, patriarchal norms often restrict their formal participation in economic decision-making or leadership roles within energy projects. External actors sometimes exploit this gendered division of labour and power to justify exclusion or tokenistic engagement, further entrenching inequalities. Nonetheless, many Indigenous women actively navigate these patriarchal structures, employing strategies that blend traditional knowledge with contemporary advocacy to create spaces for economic autonomy and leadership. Their efforts underscore the importance of contextualised approaches that recognise the fluidity of gender roles and the potential of ecofeminist praxis to transform power dynamics both within and outside Indigenous communities.

Amidst the harsh realities of dispossession and marginalisation, stories of Indigenous women reveal remarkable resilience and ingenuity. In communities impacted by mining for cobalt or lithium, metals essential to global green technologies, women often organise around demands for environmental remediation and economic justice, linking local struggles to global solidarity networks. These narratives challenge portrayals of Indigenous women as passive victims, instead highlighting them as knowledge bearers, political actors, and economic agents striving to redefine the future of energy. Their multifaceted engagement underscores the necessity of moving beyond simplistic dichotomies of tradition versus modernity or victimhood versus empowerment, recognising the complex, situated realities that shape economic participation.

The erosion of social cohesion that accompanies large-scale energy development has economic repercussions that disproportionately affect Indigenous women. Displacement fractures kinship networks and mutual aid relationships vital for survival in marginalised settings, leaving women isolated from support systems essential for economic and emotional sustenance. These disruptions also undermine communal labour practices, such as shared agricultural work or

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cooperative crafts, eroding economies based on reciprocity and collective care. The destruction of these social bonds translates into heightened economic vulnerability, often forcing women into precarious informal labour or dependence on male-dominated employment sectors marked by exploitation and instability. These complex social dynamics illuminate the intertwined nature of economic marginalisation and social disintegration, emphasising the need for holistic approaches that safeguard community integrity alongside economic rights.

Given these multifaceted barriers, an alternative vision emerges, rooted in Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives that prioritise relationality, sovereignty, and care as foundations for just economic participation. This vision rejects the isolationist individualism of capitalist frameworks, instead proposing robust models of community governance and economic redistribution that honour Indigenous epistemologies and gendered realities. It advocates for recognising unpaid and subsistence labour as essential economic contributions, shifting away from private property logics in favour of collective land stewardship, and elevating Indigenous decision-making structures within energy planning and benefit-sharing. Crucially, this vision insists on embedding anti-violence measures and gender equity within all aspects of economic development, recognising that economic justice cannot be separated from bodily and social safety.

Achieving such transformative economic inclusion requires concerted efforts across multiple scales. At local levels, culturally relevant and gender-specific capacity-building initiatives must be prioritised to empower Indigenous women with the skills, resources, and platforms necessary for meaningful participation. Nationally, legislative reforms to secure land rights, mandate gender equity in energy sector employment, and incorporate Indigenous governance models can create enabling environments. Internationally, climate finance mechanisms must be restructured to support community-led, women-centred energy projects rather than corporate-driven extraction.

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Throughout, intersectional research and participatory policymaking are essential tools for uncovering hidden inequities and crafting solutions that resonate with Indigenous women's lived experiences.

The economic marginalisation of Indigenous women in Africa's energy transitions is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by colonial histories, gendered violence, land dispossession, epistemic exclusion, and sociocultural dynamics. It reflects broader structural injustices that intersect to limit Indigenous women's economic agency and undermine community resilience. Yet, within these constraints, Indigenous women's leadership and ecofeminist visions illuminate pathways toward economic systems grounded in justice, relationality, and collective wellbeing. Addressing economic marginalisation, therefore, is not merely about inclusion within existing paradigms. It entails a radical reimagining of economies that honours Indigenous sovereignty, dismantles patriarchal and colonial structures, and centres care as a transformative force within Africa's energy futures.

### **3.6.3 Resistance and Community Solidarity**

In the shadow of energy projects sprawling across the African landscape, often heralded by governments and corporations as gateways to modernisation and development, Indigenous women find themselves grappling not only with the physical impositions of these projects but also with the deep social ruptures they create. These projects, far from being neutral interventions, crystallise histories of exclusion and violence, exacerbating long-standing inequalities shaped by the intertwined forces of gender, race, and coloniality. For many Indigenous women, this means confronting displacement from ancestral lands, erosion of economic autonomy, and the stark realities of gendered violence that are both a consequence and a mechanism of marginalisation. Amid these conflicts, a profound and resilient spirit of resistance and community solidarity flourishes, charting pathways that defy the dominant narratives of progress and technocratic control.

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The violence accompanying energy developments is often presented as an unfortunate byproduct of economic growth. It is deeply embedded in systemic structures that prioritise profit and resource extraction over human dignity. Indigenous women frequently bear the brunt of this violence in multiple ways. Physically, they face increased insecurity as militarised forces or corporate security personnel enforce project perimeters, often leading to harassment and abuse. Economically, as land is seized or contaminated, traditional livelihoods, from farming to artisanal crafts, are undermined, drastically reducing opportunities for economic participation and self-sufficiency. Social cohesion, the very fabric sustaining communal life, frays as external actors impose divisive agendas, fostering mistrust and competition over scarce resources. These intersecting forms of violence coalesce into a lived experience that is deeply gendered, reflecting a colonial legacy that has long cast Indigenous identities as disposable and peripheral to the so-called march of progress.

Indigenous women do not passively endure these assaults. Instead, their responses are layered and complex, informed by a keen awareness of the political, social, and ecological stakes. Resistance takes shape not only through confrontation but also through weaving solidarity networks that reclaim agency over their bodies, lands, and futures. Often, these forms of resistance embody ecofeminist principles, emphasising relationality, care, and collective governance as antidotes to the atomising effects of capital-driven energy agendas. Community meetings become spaces of empowerment where women share knowledge on legal rights, mobilise to document abuses, and strategise collective actions, asserting their roles as custodians of both cultural heritage and environmental sustainability.

In many rural and peri-urban settings, Indigenous women have spearheaded grassroots campaigns that intertwine environmental stewardship with social justice. By reviving and adapting traditional land management practices, these women assert sovereignty over territories that energy corporations seek to exploit. This reclamation is

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both symbolic and practical, serving as a bulwark against the imposition of extractive models that disregard relational land ethics. Furthermore, women-led cooperatives often emerge as economic alternatives to the precariousness engendered by extractive industries. These cooperatives harness renewable energy technologies, promote sustainable agriculture, and foster markets for Indigenous crafts, thereby creating resilient local economies that resist dependency on vulnerable resource booms. Such initiatives challenge dominant energy paradigms that equate progress with large-scale infrastructure while sidelining community knowledge and leadership.

The strategies of resistance also emphasise the critical importance of storytelling and knowledge-sharing as acts of epistemic justice. Indigenous women narrate their experiences and visions with a rich blend of oral histories, songs, and rituals that reaffirm identity and continuity amidst disruption. These cultural expressions function as counter-narratives to extractive discourse, centring Indigenous epistemologies that value intergenerational responsibility and harmony with the earth. They reveal how the energy transition's promises of sustainability and inclusion often ring hollow when stripped of these relational foundations. By amplifying their voices through community radio, social media, and alliances with non-governmental organisations, Indigenous women challenge the monopolisation of energy debates by technocrats and policymakers. This movement toward visibility is essential for dismantling the invisibility that underpins structural violence, ensuring women's participatory rights in shaping energy futures.

Resistance strategies also address the intersectional dimensions of exclusion. Indigenous women navigate a landscape where their gender identities intersect with racialised and colonial marginalisation, creating unique vulnerabilities and strengths. They critique mainstream feminist or environmentalist movements that sometimes fail to account for these intersections, advocating for frameworks that recognise their full humanity and sovereignty. This critique extends to

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institutional processes, such as environmental impact assessments or policy consultations, which often tokenise Indigenous female participation without transferring real power. By organising in alliances that cross ethnic, geographic, and political boundaries, Indigenous women build solidarities that transcend narrow interests and amplify collective bargaining power. These solidarities are not merely political tactics; they embody a commitment to mutual care and interdependence, reflecting ecofeminist worldviews.

Activism against gender-based violence in energy-affected territories is a critical dimension of these resistance efforts. Indigenous women link the physical and psychological harms they endure to the broader political economy of extraction, reframing violence as a structure maintained by extractive capitalism and colonial dispossession rather than isolated incidents. This understanding fuels the pursuit of transformative justice measures that move beyond punitive responses to healing-centred approaches rooted in community values. Workshops, healing circles, and educational programmes become vital spaces for rebuilding trust, sustaining resilience, and envisioning non-violent, inclusive futures. These initiatives highlight how energy justice is inseparable from gender justice, both requiring systemic change that addresses root causes rather than symptoms.

Indigenous women often negotiate with state and corporate actors, leveraging legal frameworks, international human rights mechanisms, and environmental laws to assert their claims. Though challenging, these engagements demonstrate sophisticated political acumen, blending traditional governance with contemporary advocacy tools. Strategic litigation, participation in policy dialogues, and engagement with United Nations forums broaden the scope of resistance, linking localised struggles to transnational movements for climate justice and Indigenous rights. These processes reflect an important dimension of solidarity that invites diverse allies to recognise the intertwined fates of communities and ecosystems and to commit to equity and reparative action.

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Resistance also manifests through education and intergenerational transmission of knowledge, ensuring that future generations inherit the tools and consciousness necessary to confront ongoing and emerging threats. Indigenous women are instrumental in reimagining curricula that integrate Indigenous cosmologies, ecofeminist ethics, and critical analyses of energy politics, thereby fostering critically aware youth who can navigate and transform oppressive systems. This pedagogical work is deeply transformative, nurturing pride, belonging, and a sense of responsibility while challenging assimilationist and extractive paradigms imposed by dominant educational models.

The work of resisting exclusion and violence is often shadowed by the immense emotional and physical labour it demands, compounded by limited access to resources and persistent stigmatisation. It is precisely this labour that reconstitutes Indigenous women's roles as knowledge keepers, community leaders, and agents of ecological stewardship. Their resistance is not reactionary but forward-looking, rooted in a vision of energy futures that are equitable, just, and harmonious with the earth's rhythms. It disrupts the fatalistic narratives that present African energy transitions as doomed to replicate colonial extractivism, instead offering nuanced, grounded alternatives that honour Indigenous sovereignty and women's leadership.

The narratives emerging from these resistance movements reveal the power of community solidarity, forged through shared struggle and collective care. As Indigenous women come together, they weave networks of mutual support spanning rural villages, urban neighbourhoods, and diasporic communities. These connections enable them to pool resources, provide emotional sustenance, and amplify their political voice. They also create intergenerational bonds that sustain resistance beyond fleeting political moments. Solidarity, in this context, is not merely strategic but ontological. It is the lived expression of interconnectedness that stands in opposition to the atomising logics of capital and colonial governance.

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Examining these strategies reveals that Indigenous women's resistance to exclusion and violence within energy projects fundamentally challenges the core principles of mainstream development paradigms. By centring relationality, care, and collective authority, they propose an alternative political ecology that contests neoliberal subjectivities steeped in individualism and commodification. Their insistence on communal ownership over land and energy resources redefines sovereignty beyond state-centric models, envisioning it as a multispecies governance rooted in respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. This expansive conception not only resists-imposed violence but also opens pathways for healing historical traumas wrought by colonial dispossession and capitalist exploitation.

Through their combined efforts, Indigenous women craft moments of rupture and possibility within landscapes marked by extraction and exclusion. Their resistance stories affirm that energy transitions are far from technologically neutral or politically uncontested processes. Instead, these transitions are deeply embedded in relations of power and identity, demanding an attentive eye toward intersectional injustices and decolonial aspirations. The community solidarities that they nurture illuminate how resilience is not merely survival but a radical act of reimagining and remaking futures that honour dignity, diversity, and ecological balance.

### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter's analysis shows that the current energy transition occurs within deeply unequal global systems. Green extractivism, capital growth, and climate policies reshape resource frontiers but often continue patterns of dispossession and environmental harm. Instead of a clear break from extractive histories, many renewable energy pathways build on earlier ideas of territorial control and unequal development, now via new technologies. If mainstream transition models perpetuate structural injustice, the key question is not just how they function, but whether alternative models can be practically

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realized. In various contexts, communities are already trying different approaches that prioritize relational ethics and collective governance in energy production. The following chapter investigates competing sustainability frameworks and highlights Indigenous and community-led energy projects that present tangible alternatives to conventional development models.

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### **Chapter 4: Competing Models of Sustainability and Indigenous Alternatives**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter transitions from a review of various systems to a friendly comparison, highlighting how different communities and models approach sustainability. It starts with a warm look at the dominant frameworks shaping today's energy plans, highlighting their focus on technology, markets, and large projects. These often emphasise efficiency and growth but can miss out on important social ties, diverse knowledge, and local voices. The chapter then gently discusses critiques of these main models, especially how they can create inequality, concentrate power, and shut out community involvement. In contrast, it celebrates Indigenous ways rooted in relationships, shared decision-making, and local ecological wisdom. Special attention is given to women-led renewable projects, community-controlled energy, and practices blending new technology with cultural and environmental care. By bringing these perspectives together, the chapter shows that sustainability is not just a technical goal, but a lively debate influenced by different values, governance styles, and ideas about our relationship with the environment. The comparison highlights that alternative approaches are already working, providing inspiring examples of energy systems based on care, reciprocity, and community authority. These real-world examples help us rethink how energy transitions can be designed in more inclusive and caring ways.

#### **4.2 Overview of Dominant Sustainability Models**

The dominant sustainability models shaping contemporary energy transitions, particularly in the African context, are overwhelmingly informed by technocratic and market-driven paradigms. These frameworks tend to prioritise efficiency, innovation, and profitability, drawing heavily upon quantitative metrics and engineered solutions. At first glance, such approaches appear to offer pragmatic strategies for addressing urgent environmental challenges. They promise cleaner

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energy, economic growth, and technological progress. Yet, beneath this veneer of objectivity and progress lies a complex web of exclusions and erasures. This is particularly so for the voices, knowledge systems, and lived experiences of Indigenous communities and women who have long stewarded Africa's landscapes. These models, in their narrow focus on technical fixes and market mechanisms, often fail to adequately grapple with the deeply embedded social injustices and historical violences. Such violence shapes energy access, resource control, and environmental degradation across the continent. This chapter embarks on a critical unpacking of these dominant sustainability narratives. It exposes their limitations and contrasts them with alternative Indigenous perspectives centred on relationality, care, and community sovereignty.

At the core of technocratic approaches to sustainability is a belief in scientific rationality, data-driven decision-making, and the managerial capacity of experts and institutions. The technocratic lens adopts a problem-solving orientation that treats energy challenges primarily as technical tasks, such as optimising grid efficiency, improving renewable energy technologies, and reducing carbon footprints through innovation. This perspective values credentials, formal knowledge, and standardised methodologies, often positioning technical experts as the primary agents of change. In many African countries, national policies and international development aid packages are heavily shaped by technocratic imperatives, where the language of “modernisation,” “scale,” and “integration” dominates. This expertise-driven discourse tends to marginalise community knowledge, disrupting the symbiotic relationships Indigenous peoples have nurtured with their environments over generations. When sustainability is reduced to technological optimisation, the complex social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of ecological governance are neglected.

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Indigenous women's voices, which embody holistic understandings of land, water, and energy as living entities intertwined with human wellbeing, are rendered invisible in these technocratic design processes.

The technocratic model's emphasis on centralised control and expert authority also feeds into top-down planning structures that frequently exclude those most affected by energy transitions. Decisions are made in policy corridors and boardrooms far removed from the daily realities of rural and peri-urban communities. Local perspectives that challenge mainstream narratives about what constitutes sustainability are dismissed as outdated or irrational, reinforcing dynamics of epistemic violence. This marginalisation becomes particularly acute for Indigenous women, whose knowledge systems do not separate human labour from ecological vitality but instead emphasise reciprocity, respect, and care. The protocols of technocratic planning, such as feasibility studies, impact assessments, and cost-benefit analyses, rarely account for the relational and intergenerational values these women uphold. Instead, they reduce environmental significance to numeric indicators, effectively erasing subtle cultural logics and ethical priorities that resist commodification. The fixation on "objective" knowledge and market efficiencies thus upholds colonial legacies by sidelining alternative ontologies and governance forms embedded in Indigenous cosmologies.

Parallel and often intertwined with the technocratic approach is the market-driven model that dominates global climate and energy governance. Rooted in neoliberal economic thought, market-based sustainability champions privatisation, competition, and commodification as the mechanisms to allocate resources efficiently and incentivise green innovation. Carbon trading schemes, renewable energy certificates, and public-private partnerships become the preferred policy instruments. International financial institutions and transnational corporations frame Africa's energy future as an investment opportunity, where market logics dictate the terms of

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engagement. This vision is imbued with assumptions about universal rational actors responding to price signals and market rewards, sidelining socio-cultural complexities and historical injustices. While market mechanisms claim to internalise environmental costs and mobilise capital flows towards low-carbon technologies, they often reproduce and deepen patterns of dispossession and inequality.

One critical flaw of the market-driven approach is its fundamental reductionism – the attempt to translate ecological and social values into monetary terms. Nature becomes a resource to be priced, traded, and exploited in global markets, with sustainability claims often enacted as “green growth” imperatives contingent on expanding capital accumulation. In African contexts, such financialisation exacerbates existing power imbalances, privileging well-resourced actors who can navigate or manipulate markets over marginalised communities who rely on communal land use and subsistence economies. Indigenous women, whose livelihoods intertwine with non-market relationships and stewardship responsibilities, face intensified vulnerabilities as their territories are converted into sites of green extractivism justified by market rationale. The allure of renewable energy projects couched in economic development terms can mask the continuation of colonial logics where land is appropriated without genuine consent, and social displacements are rationalised as necessary trade-offs for progress.

Market-based sustainability frameworks also tend to emphasise scalability and replication, favouring standardised models suitable for investment portfolios over customised, context-sensitive approaches. The demand for “bankable” projects often sidelines small-scale community-led initiatives that prioritise self-determination, relational governance, and care ethics. Indigenous women’s grassroots renewable energy projects, which prioritise social wellbeing over profit maximisation and centre collective ownership, are frequently deemed insufficiently profitable or too localised to attract funding. This disconnect reveals how dominant market logics not only alienate

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but also actively suppress alternative forms of sustainability, effectively maintaining the hegemony of capitalist development paradigms. Furthermore, accountability mechanisms within these markets remain weak and fragmented, often privileging corporate interests and global supply chains at the expense of on-the-ground justice for landholders and resource custodians.

Both technocratic and market-driven sustainability models share a fundamental underpinning: a commitment to universalising frameworks that abstract away from situated knowledges, histories, and social relations. Within these models, sustainability becomes a generic, depersonalised concept, divorced from the lived experiences of communities undergoing ecological and social transformations. The resulting approaches often fail to acknowledge the entangled legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and racial capitalism that drive contemporary energy injustices in Africa. They frame problems as technical or economic, to be solved without tracing the underlying political histories of dispossession, environmental racism, and gendered violence. For instance, many “green” energy projects promoted under these models replicate the dynamics of earlier extractive frontiers, dispossessing Indigenous territories in the name of decarbonisation while reinforcing systemic inequities. In this way, rather than fostering an emancipatory shift, dominant sustainability narratives can operate as instruments of what scholars’ term “green extractivism,” perpetuating socio-ecological harm under new guises.

In stark contrast, Indigenous approaches to sustainability, as articulated through women’s ecofeminist visions across Africa, emphasise relationality, holistic care, and community authority, thereby challenging the core assumptions embedded in technocratic and market-driven models. Indigenous epistemologies reject the binary separation between humans and nature, privileging understandings of energy and environment as dynamic, interconnected systems sustained through reciprocal relationships. These knowledge systems are grounded in collective memory, oral traditions, and lived

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practices that honour the earth as a sentient, living being. Indigenous women leaders articulate sustainability not as a matter of optimising resource extraction or maximising returns, but as nurturing balance and dignity for present and future generations. This entails a profound ethic of care that foregrounds responsibility, interdependence, and healing rather than control, efficiency, or commodification.

Community authority stands at the heart of Indigenous ecofeminist sustainability, contrasting sharply with the centralised and profit-driven logics of dominant models. Indigenous women emphasise governance rooted in consensus-building, cultural protocols, and respect for diverse knowledge systems. Decision-making processes incorporate relational accountability to land, water, ancestors, and neighbouring communities. Energy transitions envisioned from this standpoint prioritise sovereignty and self-determination, resisting alienation from territory and knowledge. Instead of treating communities as passive beneficiaries or obstacles to technical progress, Indigenous visions centre them as active agents shaping ecological futures. Importantly, this involves reclaiming Indigenous jurisdiction over energy resources, redesigning systems to reflect local values, and restoring spiritual and material connections severed by colonial and capitalist exploitation.

This ecofeminist framework offers a gender-just critique of sustainability that challenges the patriarchal biases embedded in technocratic and market-driven paradigms. Indigenous women highlight how energy extraction and policy decisions frequently exacerbate gendered disparities, intensify caregiving burdens, and perpetuate violence against women. Their knowledge systems foreground gender as a crucial lens for understanding and addressing environmental harms, emphasising inclusion, relational wellbeing, and care work as integral to sustainability. In doing so, they dismantle dominant conceptions of development that valorise masculinist traits of control, competition, and domination over nature. The nurturing values central to Indigenous women's ecofeminism open pathways for

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reconceiving energy futures that prioritise ecological restoration, social justice, and collective flourishing beyond utilitarian metrics.

Indigenous approaches are not merely reactive critiques but offer constructive pathways for transformative change. Across diverse African contexts, Indigenous women's leadership has catalysed community-driven renewable energy initiatives that embody principles of reciprocity, self-governance, and ecological stewardship. These grassroots innovations demonstrate how sustainability can be realised through relational energy systems that integrate traditional knowledge with appropriate technologies and equitable governance. They reveal alternative imaginaries in which energy is a web of relationships rather than a commodity, and in which justice entails healing historical traumas as part of ecological restoration. Such models challenge technocratic and market orthodoxy by foregrounding pluralism, dialogue, and generative tensions rather than convergence upon narrow metrics and market logics.

Indigenous visions call for a systemic reorientation of sustainability frameworks that moves beyond isolated technical or market reforms. They advocate for decolonial epistemologies that reclaim Indigenous sovereignty and re-centre Indigenous ontologies as foundational for energy governance. This entails recognising Indigenous rights to land, water, and energy resources, supporting community-led decision-making, and dismantling legal and financial structures that enable dispossession and exploitation. Such a shift also demands recalibrating policy norms to value intergenerational equity, cultural survival, and ecological harmony over short-term economic gains. Indigenous women's leadership embodies this holistic praxis, blending activism, research, and communal care to foster just energy transitions that honour dignity, relationality, and care ethics.

By foregoing dominant assumptions, Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions establish a divergent narrative from the mainstream sustainability discourse, one that insists on confronting the colonial and capitalist roots of environmental degradation and social injustice.

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They reveal the insufficiency of models that merely tweak existing systems without altering their foundational logics. Through their lived experiences, stories, and teachings, Indigenous women in Africa illuminate paths toward energy futures in which technological innovation and market mechanisms are neither rejected outright nor reimagined through lenses of care, sovereignty, and collective wellbeing. In this way, they expand the horizon of what sustainability can mean and for whom it can serve.

The significance of this contrast between technocratic and market-driven models on the one hand, and Indigenous relational frameworks on the other, cannot be overstated. It compels policymakers, scholars, and activists to critically interrogate not only the tools and metrics they employ but also the underlying values that shape energy transitions. Without such critical reflection, sustainability efforts risk perpetuating the very inequities and ecological harms they seek to remedy. Shifting towards just energy futures in Africa demands embracing complexity, plurality, and humility. It also demands a willingness to listen to Indigenous women's voices as vital epistemic authorities and architects of alternative sustainabilities rooted in relationality, care, and justice.

Technocratic and market-based approaches currently dominate sustainability paradigms in Africa's energy transitions. This is despite their limitations in addressing intersectional social injustices, colonial legacies, and Indigenous knowledge systems, which are profound and widespread. These models, with their emphasis on technical expertise, commodification, and efficiency, often marginalise community voices and obscure the social dimensions of energy pathways. Through the lens of Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions, sustainability instead emerges as a relational practice grounded in care, reciprocal governance, and decolonial sovereignty. It provides a compelling alternative that challenges dominant sustainability narratives and offers meaningful paths for just and equitable energy transformations across the continent. Recognising and integrating such Indigenous

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perspectives represents not only an ethical imperative but a practical necessity for crafting energy futures that honour dignity, ecological balance, and collective wellbeing.

### **4.3 Limitations and Critiques**

In the evolving discourse surrounding Africa's energy transition, it is crucial to interrogate the prevailing paradigms through which solutions are framed and implemented, particularly to uncover the profound limitations and critiques embedded within technocratic and market-based models. These dominant frameworks are celebrated for their emphasis on efficiency, scalability, and economic rationality. They, however, often overlook, or, more troublingly, actively marginalise the nuanced realities of equity, justice, and ecological integrity that shape lived experiences on the continent. When examined through the lens of Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives, it becomes apparent that orthodox approaches to sustainability and energy transitions are not merely insufficient but frequently perpetuate cycles of dispossession, exclusion, and environmental degradation. This raises urgent questions about whose voices are heard, whose knowledge is valued, and whose futures are envisioned.

Central to these critiques is the recognition that technocratic approaches are characterised by their faith in scientific expertise, data-driven decision-making, and technological innovation as panaceas for climate change and energy poverty. This often reduces complex socio-ecological phenomena to problems of optimisation and management. This reductionism abstracts local contexts, thereby distancing policy interventions from the everyday realities of communities most affected by energy extraction and distribution. Indigenous women's lived realities, marked by intimate relationships with the land and closely connected social networks that sustain community wellbeing, are particularly alienated in such frameworks because these perspectives insist on a holistic understanding of energy that transcends mere kilowatt-hours or carbon metrics. The technocratic

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gaze tends to render invisible the interconnectedness between ecological health, cultural practices, and gendered experiences of power and vulnerability, fostering solutions that prioritise infrastructural expansion and economic growth over the nurturance of relational life.

Market-driven models underpinning much of the global energy transition discourse champion commodification and privatisation as pathways to sustainability, promoting competition and profit motives as mechanisms for technological diffusion and system efficiency. This infusion of capitalist logic into energy policies often exacerbates inequalities by privileging investors, corporations, and elite groups while marginalising local communities, especially Indigenous peoples and women who are already disenfranchised by historical and ongoing colonial dispossession. Such market mechanisms fail to recognise energy not just as a commodity but as a fundamental human right intrinsically linked to dignity, cultural survival, and ecological stewardship. This commodification obscures the political dimensions of energy access and control, thereby reinforcing economic exclusion and failing to challenge the structural underpinnings of energy injustice. The reliance on global financial markets and carbon pricing schemes, for instance, often leads to what scholars and Indigenous activists' term 'green extractivism', a continuation of exploitative resource extraction in new forms that undermine sovereignty and deepen environmental harm.

These technocratic and market-based models often adopt a universal, one-size-fits-all approach that inadequately addresses the intersectional dynamics of identity, power, and place. Gender, race, ethnicity, and class intersect to create differentiated experiences of harm and resistance, which dominant sustainability narratives often overlook. Indigenous women bear disproportionate burdens of environmental degradation, resource conflicts, and displacement linked to energy projects. Yet they remain sidelined in governance structures that determine energy policy and project implementation.

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Their epistemologies, rooted in care, relationality, and custodianship, offer rich critiques of alienation and exploitation, advocating for community authority and collective wellbeing as pillars for just energy futures. The absence of meaningful participation by Indigenous women in decision-making processes not only undermines democratic legitimacy but also overlooks critical knowledge systems essential to resilient, adaptive environmental stewardship.

In contrast to these limitations, Indigenous ecofeminist approaches foreground relational ethics that challenge the individualistic and instrumental perspectives dominant in technocratic models. These approaches emphasise interdependence among humans, non-human beings, and the land, articulating a vision of energy that honours reciprocity, responsibility, and regenerative practices. Indigenous women leaders consistently call for an energy transition grounded in sovereignty, where communities reclaim control over natural resources and governance mechanisms reflect their priorities and values. This relational framework directly counters the atomising logic of market-based policies by centring community authority and collective wellbeing, rather than isolated economic metrics or abstract technical efficiency.

Indigenous epistemologies highlight the inseparability of ecological justice from social justice, underscoring how the health of ecosystems and the dignity of marginalised peoples are mutually reinforcing. The systemic injustices embedded in global capitalism and coloniality manifest as uneven environmental burdens, socio-economic exclusions, and violations of rights that technocratic and market-driven models often mask or neglect. By integrating these perspectives, it becomes evident that sustainability cannot be quantified solely through emissions-reduction targets or renewable energy installations, but must include qualitative dimensions of justice, the restoration of traditional lands, the healing of historical traumas, and the protection of cultural practices. Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions thus expand the conceptual terrain of what a just

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energy transition entails, asserting that the future of energy must be inseparable from the future of life itself in all its vibrant interconnectedness.

Another critical limitation of dominant energy transition frameworks is their failure to adequately grapple with the colonial legacies that continue to shape energy infrastructures and resource governance across Africa. Colonial extraction models, characterised by dispossession, resource expropriation, and forced labour, have left an enduring imprint on how energy systems are structured, often perpetuating patterns of external control and local marginalisation. Technocratic models, by emphasising depoliticised technical fixes, tend to ignore or underestimate these historical and ongoing power dynamics. They often presume a neutral, apolitical terrain for technology deployment, disregarding how modern energy interventions can replicate colonial extractive relationships under the guise of ‘development’ or ‘decarbonisation.’ This erasure of coloniality diminishes the potential for truly transformative change that disrupts hierarchical power asymmetries and instead reinforces hegemonic systems that exclude Indigenous claims to sovereignty and resource rights.

The environmental impacts of ostensibly ‘green’ technologies are seldom given sufficient attention within dominant discourses. The mining of materials essential for renewable energy, such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements, often occurs on Indigenous lands, exacerbating ecological degradation and social conflict. The discourse around scalability and techno-innovation frequently obscures these harmful processes, framing them as necessary sacrifices for the greater global good, especially for the Global North’s energy transitions. Indigenous women, positioned at the forefront of these extractive sites, articulate how ‘green extractivism’ reproduces patterns of violence, dispossession, and environmental ruin akin to fossil fuel-based industries.

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These lived testimonies offer incisive critiques of dominant narratives that portray green technologies as inherently benign or progressive, emphasising the need for holistic evaluations of evaluations grounded in on-the-ground realities.

Community governance and knowledge systems emerge as pivotal counterpoints to the impersonal and centralised modes of energy planning endorsed by technocratic frameworks. Indigenous women's ecofeminist epistemologies highlight the importance of local decision-making structures rooted in ancestral protocols, consensus-building, and collective care. These governance practices not only ensure that projects align with community values but also reinforce social cohesion and resilience in the face of environmental uncertainties and socio-political challenges. In contrast, top-down models often disregard such relational governance logics, imposing external agendas that breed conflict and undermine local capacities. The privileging of quantitative indicators, market logic, and expert authority thus risks disempowering communities, fracturing social fabrics, and fostering resistance rather than collaboration.

Critiques from Indigenous women scholars and activists stress that energy justice must be understood as a multidimensional and ongoing process rather than a static goal. They challenge simplistic metrics of '100% renewable' or 'net-zero emissions' that ignore the dynamism of ecosystems and social systems. Instead, they advocate for a vision of energy transitions as living, evolving endeavours that integrate spiritual, cultural, and ecological renewal alongside economic and technological change. This perspective demands patience, humility, and a willingness to unlearn ingrained assumptions about progress and development, inviting a reorientation toward coexistence and care that is often absent in technocratic projections.

The epistemic violence enacted by sidelining Indigenous knowledge systems in energy policy and research warrants urgent reflection. The privileging of Western scientific epistemologies as the sole legitimate

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basis for understanding and acting upon energy crises marginalises alternative ontologies and methodologies. This epistemic exclusion often translates into the erasure or tokenisation of Indigenous women's contributions, reinforcing colonial hierarchies within academia, policy spaces, and activist arenas. The lack of ethical frameworks to guide engagement with Indigenous knowledge further compounds these injustices, risking appropriation and misrepresentation. Responses that genuinely seek to centre Indigenous agency must therefore prioritise respectful collaboration, consent, and intellectual sovereignty, embracing epistemological plurality as foundational to just and effective energy transitions.

The limitations and critiques of technocratic and market-based energy transition models reveal a fundamental disconnect between dominant sustainability paradigms and the realities of justice, ecology, and sovereignty as articulated by Indigenous women in Africa. These models' tendencies toward reductionism, commodification, universalisation, and epistemic exclusion constrain their capacity to address the intertwined crises of climate change, social inequality, and coloniality. Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions offer compelling alternatives that foreground relationality, care, and community authority, inviting a reimagining of energy futures that honour diverse knowledges, histories, and lifeways. Recognising and embracing these critiques is vital to shaping energy transitions that are not only technologically innovative but also culturally resonant, ecologically regenerative, and fundamentally just.

### **4.4 Alternative Paradigms from Indigenous Perspectives**

In discussions about Africa's energy transition, dominant narratives have overwhelmingly focused on technocratic efficiency and market-based solutions. These approaches, rooted in capitalist rationality and neoliberal governance structures, often present their strategies as universal and inherently progressive. They prioritise metrics like cost-benefit analyses, scalability, and rapid technological deployment, promising a future powered by innovation and integration into global

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energy markets. Yet, beneath the sleek façade of these approaches lies an unsettling commonality: they routinely marginalise, if not erase, the voices and lived realities of Indigenous communities, especially Indigenous women, whose intimate, ancestral relationships with land, water, and energy transcend conventional economic valuations. This profound dissonance between dominant frameworks and Indigenous cosmologies becomes a critical starting point for reimagining alternative paradigms that genuinely sustain African landscapes and societies. These alternatives, rooted in relationality, interdependence, care ethics, and community sovereignty, offer not only a critique but also a vibrant, hopeful vision of what regenerative energy futures could embody.

Central to Indigenous worldviews is the concept of relationality: the recognition that human beings are inseparably intertwined with the natural world and with each other. Unlike the compartmentalised and extractivist mindsets underpinning most energy frameworks, relationality insists on a holistic understanding of existence. It perceives energy not as a mere commodity but as a living force embedded within cycles of reciprocity and balance. To many Indigenous women across the African continent, energy emanates from more than mechanical or electrical sources; it flows from the lifeblood of ecosystems, from the vibrant interactions of soil, plants, animals, ancestors, and spirits. This relational approach fundamentally challenges modern energy paradigms by dissolving the artificial divides between nature and culture, between economy and ecology, and between technical and social dimensions.

In the hearts of rural villages in countries such as Kenya, Namibia, and Mozambique, Indigenous women uphold ecofeminist principles imbued with this relational consciousness. Their traditional knowledge systems meticulously map out sustainable ways to harness energy while maintaining ecological equilibrium. For instance, bioenergy practices that incorporate agroforestry and crop residue management are not mere technical choices but deliberate acts of

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stewardship, ensuring the land's fertility and biodiversity remain intact for future generations. Such practices are embedded in communal ceremonies and governance structures that celebrate the interdependence of all beings. These women's leadership in applying such models signals a mode of sustainability that prioritises care over consumption, reciprocity over exploitation, and collective wellbeing over individual profit.

Contrasting starkly with this is the prevailing technocratic approach, heavily promoted by international development agencies and private-sector actors in Africa's energy sectors. These models often impose top-down solutions such as solar farms, wind turbines, and hydropower dams that prioritise grid centralisation, foreign investment, and export-oriented growth. While pitched as climate-friendly and modern, they tend to reproduce extraction paradigms under a green veneer, commodifying nature and sidelining Indigenous claims to land and resources. The deployment of such technology frequently lacks mechanisms for genuine community consultation or control, treating people's needs as secondary to market efficiency. Consequently, such interventions can exacerbate existing inequalities, engender social dislocation, and fuel conflicts over resource ownership and decision-making power.

The dominance of market-based approaches further undermines the possibility of embedding justice within energy transitions. By framing energy access as an economic transaction, these models risk favouring those able to pay for services, while excluding marginalised groups whose immediate concerns extend beyond affordability to encompass cultural survival and environmental integrity. Indigenous women's knowledge and leadership, which foreground interconnected social and ecological wellbeing, remain sidelined within policy spaces fixated on private-sector partnerships and investment returns.

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The technical language and specialist jargon that characterise these discussions create additional barriers to meaningful participation, especially for elders and women who possess oral, experiential wisdom often dismissed as non-scientific.

This marginalisation deepens the social fragmentation caused by colonial legacies and capitalist expansion, which disrupted pre-existing systems of governance and reciprocity across African societies. Indigenous communities, traditionally governed by principles of communal stewardship and intergenerational responsibility, find their ways of living delegitimised in favour of profit-driven, state-centric development agendas. However, it is specifically through these embedded structures that energy transitions can be made accessible and free from colonial influences. Recognising and elevating Indigenous epistemologies, especially those articulated and enacted by women, reveals pathways toward sustainability grounded in dignity, sovereignty, and relational justice.

One compelling alternative paradigm emerging from Indigenous perspectives is the ethos of community authority, which reclaims governance over land, resources, and energy systems from state or corporate control. This principle places decision-making within collective bodies formed by kinship ties, cultural affiliation, and shared custodianship of the environment. By centring community authority, energy development processes become embedded in local contexts, responsive to diverse needs, and accountable to those most affected. Indigenous women often play pivotal roles as guardians of community knowledge, mediators in conflict resolution, and advocates for equitable resource distribution. Their involvement ensures that energy initiatives do not merely replicate hierarchies but enhance social cohesion and cultural continuity.

In practical terms, community authority translates into energy projects that integrate holistic criteria beyond efficiency or profitability. These projects emphasise ecological conservation, cultural revitalisation,

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food sovereignty, and social wellbeing in equal measure. For example, in parts of Tanzania and South Africa, small-scale renewable energy cooperatives led by Indigenous women combine solar power installations with community education programmes on environmental stewardship and health. These initiatives not only provide electricity but foster renewed connections among people and place, enabling communities to envision futures where technology serves relationships, not the other way around. Such approaches reveal that sustainability is inseparable from the ethics of care, mutual aid, and the honouring of ancestral wisdom.

The ecofeminist dimension of these Indigenous paradigms further enriches the critique of dominant energy models and proposes transformative alternatives. Ecofeminism, as embraced and adapted by African Indigenous women, links the oppression of women and nature under colonial capitalist systems. It challenges the militarised, masculinist logics of domination at the heart of extractivism and advocates for a politics of care, empathy, and restorative justice. By situating women's embodied experiences and ecological knowledge at the centre, ecofeminism resists both colonial violence and ongoing socio-environmental harms. This lens unravels the false dichotomies assumed by mainstream transitions between nature and culture, technology and tradition, progress and preservation, paving the way for integrated, justice-oriented practices.

Within this framework, care is not merely an ethical stance but an actionable principle guiding energy relationships. Care involves attentiveness to the long-term health of ecosystems and communities, patience in nurturing regenerative processes, and humility in respecting the agency of all beings. Indigenous women in regions like the Congo Basin eloquently describe care as encompassing “listening to the forest,” honouring water spirits, and weaving alliances among human and non-human actors.

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These practices are often accompanied by rituals, knowledge-sharing circles, and governance mechanisms that reaffirm connections and responsibilities. Care thus empowers collective well-being and sustains the social fabric, which is crucial for resilience amid climate uncertainties.

Relational sustainability, as articulated by Indigenous women, demands a radical reconfiguration of how progress is measured. It rejects the narrow utilitarian calculus that prioritises short-term economic gains and instead embraces multidimensional indicators attentive to social harmony, ecological balance, and cultural vitality. Time, in these paradigms, unfolds cyclically rather than linearly, where past, present, and future generations co-create the conditions for flourishing life. Such temporal sensibilities inform energy planning that avoids irreversible disruptions, favours low-impact technologies, and nurtures local control. In this light, just energy transitions become processes of healing, repairing landscapes scarred by violence, restoring social bonds fractured by displacement, and reviving traditions endangered by modernisation.

These alternative models do not romanticise Indigenous knowledge as static or isolated from innovation. On the contrary, Indigenous women embody dynamic sites of creativity, synthesising ancestral wisdom with contemporary realities to adapt to ecological and social transformations. For instance, integrating photovoltaic solar panels with traditional water management systems, or using digital tools to document and safeguard customary governance protocols, illustrates how Indigenous agency can negotiate modernity on its own terms. This hybridity counters prevailing assumptions that position Indigenous peoples as obstacles to development or passive recipients of aid. It demonstrates instead that energy transitions can be pluralistic, locally grounded, and technologically diverse while anchored in justice and relationality.

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However, realising the potential of these alternative paradigms requires deliberate dismantling of structural barriers entrenched in global energy governance. It demands that policymakers, funders, and development practitioners move beyond mere consultation towards genuine partnerships that redistribute power and resources. Recognition of Indigenous land rights, protection of cultural heritage, and mechanisms for self-determination must form central pillars of any just energy transition agenda. Furthermore, spaces for Indigenous women's leadership should be expanded, including in technical training, policy formulation, and environmental impact monitoring. Such inclusivity not only enriches policy quality but also strengthens community resilience and environmental stewardship.

Equally vital is creating platforms that recognise Indigenous epistemologies as legitimate knowledge systems capable of guiding sustainable energy futures. This involves revising educational curricula, research methodologies, and public discourse to value oral histories, spiritual cosmologies, and relational ethics alongside scientific data. It also means fostering intercultural dialogue that challenges hegemonic epistemic hierarchies and embraces epistemic plurality. In doing so, societies can broaden their imagination of what energy transitions entail, shifting from extractivist logics to regenerative and equitable modes of existence.

The juxtaposition of Indigenous relational and care-centred paradigms against dominant technocratic and market-driven energy models exposes profound ethical and political questions about justice, sovereignty, and sustainability. While dominant frameworks persist in treating energy as an instrument of profit and control, Indigenous women's visions articulate a world where energy is inseparable from nurturing all forms of life. This alternative vision insists on the dignity of communities and ecosystems, recognising that neither can be sacrificed for relentless growth or expediency. It reveals that just energy transitions must not only decarbonise economies but also decolonise relationships with land, technology, and each other.

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Through the lens of Indigenous women's ecofeminist insights, energy transitions become acts of collective healing and regeneration. They restore broken covenants with the Earth, affirm diverse knowledge systems, and institute governance systems based on care and respect. These paradigms call on all stakeholders, such as academics, policymakers, activists, and community members, to embrace humility and solidarity, working together to dismantle the extractive violence embedded in current models. Such collaborative efforts can foster resilient and equitable energy futures, where technology enhances rather than erodes life's web.

The shift towards community-centred, relational sustainability models, driven by Indigenous women, represents more than an alternative policy choice. It embodies a profound epistemic and ethical revolution, challenging hegemonic paradigms that have long dictated Africa's energy trajectories. This revolution reclaims the meaning of progress and development, rooting them in justice, reciprocity, and interconnectedness. It invites us all to listen deeply to Indigenous women's voices, the custodians of wisdom, care, and hope, and envision energy futures that sustain the fullness of life for generations yet to come.

### **4.5 Women-Led Renewable Energy Initiatives**

#### **4.5.1 Case Study: Solar Microgrids in Rural Communities**

In a remote corner of southeastern Kenya, the sun rises not only over fertile slopes and acacia-studded savannah but also over a new dawn of energy autonomy spearheaded by the resilient women of the Wasimba community. This rural enclave, long marginalised by the uneven tides of development and overshadowed by sprawling fossil fuel and corporate extraction narratives, has embraced an alternative path rooted in Indigenous knowledge, ecofeminist values, and communal sovereignty.

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The solar microgrids flourishing here are not merely technical infrastructures installed by outside agencies with transient interests; they are living, breathing embodiments of women-led governance, self-determination, and relational care that reimagine what an energy future can be for rural African communities.

Central to this transformative movement is the unwavering leadership of women elders and youth alike who, driven by a deep sense of caretaking and intergenerational responsibility, have taken ownership of the microgrids from inception to ongoing management. Unlike conventional renewable energy deployments that often replicate top-down, extractive modes of operation under the guise of ‘green development,’ the Wasimba women rejected models that positioned them as passive recipients. Instead, through a decade-long journey of collective organising, knowledge exchange, and persistent advocacy, they established a community-run energy cooperative that integrates ancestral custodianship of land and resources with contemporary solar technology. The cooperative’s governance structures are deliberately participatory, convening women’s assemblies at each village cluster to deliberate on energy production, distribution, maintenance, and the social allocation of power benefits.

This grassroots control embodies an ecofeminist ethic, challenging the dominant industrial logic that treats energy as a commodity, separate from social and ecological contexts. For the Wasimba women, energy is understood relationally, as nourishment not only for material needs but also for the social fabric and ecosystems that sustain life. Their daily stewardship reflects a balance between human and nonhuman worlds, acknowledging the sacredness of sunlight, soil, and water that weave together in cyclical reciprocity. Decision-making within the cooperative emphasises consensus-building, ensuring that marginalised voices, especially those of elderly women and girls, are heard and respected.

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This approach contradicts the patriarchal technocracies that frequently usurp Indigenous territories, promising modernisation and climate action, but ultimately entrenching existing inequalities and dispossession.

The profound implications of women-led solar microgrids extend far beyond electrification metrics. Electrified households in Wasimba now benefit from reliable energy, powering safe lighting, water pumps, and mobile charging stations. This facilitates educational opportunities, healthcare delivery, and economic ventures, such as artisanal crafts and agro processing. However, the narrative underpinning this technological access is inseparable from the reweaving of social relations and cultural resurgence. Women's collectives conduct workshops that interlace technical training with storytelling, reinforcing confidence in their dual roles as energy technicians and cultural custodians. This dual knowledge practice revitalises respect for women's expertise, traditionally invisible in both patriarchal rural economies and mainstream development regimes.

The cooperative structure allows for the creative redistribution of energy benefits, aligned with principles of collective wellbeing. Revenues generated through small-scale energy sales within and beyond the community fund critical social services, including maternal health clinics and educational scholarships for girls. Such reinvestment mechanisms resist the extractive siphoning of profits typical of private energy ventures, embedding wealth circulation within communal lifeways. During periods of drought and economic strain, cooperative members enact solidarity protocols, such as sharing energy credits and suspending fees, to ensure no household is left in the dark. This embodiment of care and mutual aid starkly contrasts with market-driven energy commodification and highlights how Indigenous women's leadership infuses material infrastructures with ethical purpose.

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Another vital dimension lies in the intentional integration of climate resilience and ecological restoration into the microgrid project. Recognising that energy sovereignty cannot be disentangled from environmental stewardship, women-led initiatives incorporate agroecological practices around solar stations. This includes replanting indigenous flora, creating pollinator habitats, and practising water conservation to buffer against the increasing volatility wrought by climate change. This holistic vision aligns with ecofeminist thought, asserting that the liberation of marginalised peoples, especially women, is intertwined with the healing of the Earth's damaged web of relationships. By restoring degraded lands and nurturing biodiversity alongside renewable energy access, the Wasimba women practise a decolonial politics of repair that disrupts dominant narratives of progress grounded in relentless extraction and environmental sacrifice.

The story of Wasimba is echoed in many other African contexts where women harness solar microgrids as spaces of autonomy and resistance. In northern Tanzania, for example, pastoralist women organise solar-powered water kiosks that are collectively governed by women's councils. These kiosks reduce the time spent collecting water and minimise the physical burden on women and girls, while simultaneously curbing dependence on polluting diesel pumps. The proceeds are pooled into communal funds that support education and health initiatives chosen by the women themselves, illustrating how energy interventions can be directly linked to advancing gender justice and community agency. These panels become more than energy sources; they emerge as potent tools for countering multifaceted oppressions and reshaping rural development paradigms through Indigenous feminist vision.

However, the path to these successes is fraught with challenges and ongoing struggles. Women leaders often confront entrenched patriarchal resistance within their communities, scepticism from government authorities toward unconventional governance, and

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systemic barriers embedded in national energy policies that favour large-scale, capital-intensive projects. Accessing financial resources for initial system installations and long-term maintenance requires navigating complex funding frameworks that seldom accommodate non-traditional, community-based ownership models. Yet the persistent determination and strategic alliances that women cultivate with local NGOs, solidarity networks, and sympathetic policymakers illustrate their adeptness in carving out political spaces despite structural constraints. These strategies underscore an essential insight: community sovereignty over energy infrastructure is not merely technical but profoundly political and relational, demanding redefined modes of engagement and recognition from external actors.

The emphasis on self-governance and Indigenous epistemologies within women-led solar microgrids also challenges dominant sustainability discourses that often prioritise narrow parameters of efficiency and emissions reduction at the expense of social and cultural sustainability. In Wasimba and similar contexts, success is measured by intimate qualitative criteria such as restored dignity, strengthened community bonds, and enhanced capabilities to provide for future generations. These metrics reveal that just energy transitions entail far more than replacing fossil fuels with renewables; they require transforming the underlying logics of production and distribution towards approaches that centre equity, care, and ecological harmony.

The microgrid initiatives serve as fertile grounds for intergenerational learning and leadership cultivation among young Indigenous women, who are nurtured to become not only technicians but also advocates for energy justice and environmental advocacy. Exposure to science, technology, and governance, integrated with cultural affirmation, fosters confidence and aspirations to challenge dominant gender and economic norms. These youth-led engagements highlight how Indigenous knowledge systems are living, evolving forces that gain strength when intertwined with innovative practices.

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By nurturing a new generation of ecofeminist leaders, such community initiatives promise transformative ripple effects across Africa's energy landscapes and social structures.

The narratives conveyed by the Wasimba women underscore a radical reimagining of the relationship between energy, sovereignty, and life itself. Their microgrids are more than mere assemblages of panels and batteries; they are vibrant networks of care, knowledge, and resistance that refuse colonial and capitalist impositions of dispossession and ecological degradation. These projects attest to the possibilities of harnessing renewable energy technologies in ways that centre Indigenous women's voices and values, dismantle exclusionary power structures, and foster futures anchored in justice and relationality.

In reflecting on these vibrant case studies, it becomes evident that women-led solar microgrids challenge prevailing paradigms not only by providing clean energy but by reasserting Indigenous women's sovereign rights over their lands, bodies, and communities. They model approaches where energy transitions are inseparable from struggles against gendered violence, environmental destruction, and colonial legacies. Rather than mere recipients of 'development,' these women emerge as masterful agents of ecological and social regeneration, illustrating that just energy futures must be authored by those historically marginalised and intimately connected to the sustenance of life.

The Wasimba experience thus serves as an urgent call to recognise and support Indigenous women's leadership in Africa's energy transition discourse and practice. It demands a radical decentring of technocratic, market-oriented frameworks in favour of relational governance rooted in care, sovereignty, and dignity. As these communities continue their journey toward energy self-determination, their stories offer hopeful blueprints for a continent-wide movement, one where solar microgrids become beacons illuminating pathways toward sustainable, equitable, and decolonised energy systems.

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Through their unwavering stewardship, Indigenous women demonstrate that the sun's energy, when properly reclaimed and managed, can fuel not just homes and enterprises, but also the revival of entire worlds shaped by justice, respect, and collective well-being.

### **4.5.2 Biomass and Sustainable Agriculture Practices**

In the heartlands of many African communities, where the rhythm of daily life is intimately woven into the cycles of the earth, Indigenous women have long held the sacred knowledge to sustain the land and nourish their people. This profound relationship between energy, agriculture, and communal wellbeing unfolds most vividly in their engagement with biomass and sustainable agriculture practices. These initiatives, far from being mere technical ventures, are living embodiments of ecofeminist principles, enacting care, relationality, and resistance against the extractive forces that have historically dispossessed and marginalised them. At their core, these women-led endeavours demonstrate how renewable energy can be more than a clean alternative; it can become a restorative act affirming food sovereignty and deep ecological stewardship.

The story of biomass in this context is inseparable from the story of food. Unlike the industrial monocultures imposed through colonial and capitalist agricultural systems, which have systematically eroded local knowledge and biodiversity, biomass-based farming insists on the restoration and preservation of diverse biotic communities. Indigenous women understand that energy generated from biomass is not simply about fuelling machines or homes; it is about harnessing the cycles of life that sustain their livelihoods in ways that honour kinship with the earth. In regions such as the savannahs and wetlands of Eastern Africa, women have innovated small-scale bioenergy systems that convert agricultural residues, such as maize stalks, banana leaves, and coffee husks, into biogas. This transformation is both literal and symbolic: it breathes new life into what capitalist frameworks deride as waste, illustrating a radical redistribution of value rooted not in profit but in regeneration.

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Central to these practices is the intertwined nature of energy and food sovereignty. When Indigenous women generate energy autonomously within their communities, they reclaim power over the very means of sustaining life: feeding their families from fertile soils tended with care and powering the tools that support these efforts, without dependence on external, exploitative markets. This sovereignty is fiercely political, challenging dominant narratives that conceive of African agriculture as backward or in need of modernisation through industrial inputs, which often translate into debt, land loss, and environmental degradation. In contrast, women's biomass initiatives affirm a decolonial epistemology in which the soil is not merely an object of extraction but a living being, deserving of respect and nurturance.

A compelling example comes from the fertile highlands of Uganda, where a cooperative of women farmers has pioneered a biogas programme. This initiative uses composting toilets and the circular reuse of organic waste to meet household energy needs. This innovation not only eases the burden of wood fuel collection, which is a typically gendered task fraught with risks of violence and exhaustion, but also enriches the soil with nutrient-rich compost, thus closing the loop between waste, energy, and fertility. Such symbiotic cycles move beyond the reductionist logic of 'clean energy' as a singular carbon metric. Instead, they embody a holistic ethic of care that interweaves human health, ecological balance, and energy justice. The women involved emphasise how their practice nurtures relationships, not only among themselves but also between their families, their plants, and the soil microbes that animate life underground. The energy produced is an emergent property of these relationships, not merely a commodity to be extracted or sold.

In West Africa, similar stories unfold amid the shifting agricultural landscapes of Senegal and Burkina Faso. Here, women are actively reclaiming indigenous agroforestry systems for both food cultivation and energy production. Biochar, a charcoal derivative produced by

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controlled biomass pyrolysis, enriches soil while serving as a clean-burning domestic fuel. Women's expertise in producing and applying biochar demonstrates sophisticated ecological knowledge that enhances soil fertility, water retention, and carbon sequestration. This practice reclaims the power of fire, often demonised by environmental orthodoxies, transforming it into a tool of empowerment and regeneration. Moreover, by cultivating multi-species agroforests rich in fruit trees, medicinal plants, and nitrogen-fixing shrubs, these women create diversified landscapes that resist climate shocks and strengthen communal food security. The vegetative biomass generated thus simultaneously provides food, medicine, and fuel, forming integrated threads in the fabric of life that defy capitalist fragmentation.

This integration of biomass and sustainable land stewardship also challenges prevailing energy paradigms that prioritise technological fixes devoid of social context. While large-scale solar or wind projects promise clean energy, they often perpetuate dispossession and undermine local autonomy, resembling earlier waves of extractivism under 'green' guises. Against this backdrop, Indigenous women-led biomass systems assert an alternative temporality, one that honours gradual rhythms, cyclic renewal, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Their hands cultivate the earth with an attentiveness born from centuries of ancestral wisdom, aware that energy production must nurture rather than disrupt the systemic health of the community and ecosystem. These practices disrupt the hegemonic idea of energy as a commodity violently separated from social relations and environmental well-being, instead articulating energy as relational and deeply embedded in place-based commitments.

The challenges these women face are formidable. Institutional frameworks routinely marginalise biomass as a secondary or backward energy source, depriving these initiatives of funding, technical support, or political recognition. The dominance of fossil fuel companies and international donors focused on high-tech

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renewables often relegates biomass projects to the margins, perpetuating a hierarchy that values abstraction, scalability, and market logic over relationality, sustainability, and sovereignty. Moreover, women navigating these initiatives confront gendered barriers embedded within both local and national power structures that limit their access to land, credit, and decision-making authority. Despite these obstacles, women's resilience shines through, as they form cooperatives, advocate for policy shifts, and construct knowledge-sharing networks that bridge rural and urban divides. Their work advances a collective agency that dismantles not only environmental injustices but also patriarchal and colonial legacies.

A profound insight revealed by these narratives is that biomass and sustainable agricultural practices cultivate dignity. The everyday labour of growing food, managing organic waste, and generating clean energy fosters a sense of purpose and belonging for women whose roles have been historically devalued or rendered invisible. Energy sovereignty is thus not a distant policy goal but a lived reality, manifest in mornings where children gather around stoves fuelled by biogas, or in evenings warmed by biochar fires amidst shared stories of resistance and hope. These moments counteract the alienation wrought by industrialised energy systems, reconnecting bodies, communities, and nonhuman kin within a framework of care. It is a care that transcends the utilitarian and engages with ethical responsibility toward past, present, and future generations.

Linking biomass to food sovereignty in these contexts challenges dominant sustainability narratives that segregate energy from agriculture, environment from society, and economy from culture. Instead, women's practices reveal the fallacy of such neat compartmentalisation, underscoring that energy transitions must be integrated with broader struggles for land rights, ecological integrity, and social justice. This intersectional vision aligns closely with ecofeminist critiques that expose how gender, race, and class intersect with environmental exploitation. By foregrounding Indigenous

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women's knowledge and leadership, biomass initiatives disrupt extractive paradigms that have long inflicted harm across multiple dimensions, proposing alternatives grounded in dignity and collective flourishing.

These women-led biomass projects highlight the potential for technology to be reimagined through decolonial lenses. Unlike imported technologies imposed without regard for context or culture, biomass systems arise organically from local materials, needs, and expertise. They embody incremental innovation driven by women who navigate complex environmental and social landscapes, adapting traditions and novel insights in tandem. This situated knowledge challenges the universalising tendencies of mainstream development models, affirming the validity and necessity of diverse epistemologies in confronting climate and energy crises. The technologies become intimate extensions of life, forged through trust, negotiation, and reciprocity rather than abstraction and domination.

In this light, biomass and sustainable agriculture emerge not just as technical pathways but as ethical-political projects centred on relationality and community authority. The energy produced in these systems carries with it the histories, struggles, and hopes of Indigenous women who resist the erasure of their lands and lives. Their work reshapes the contours of energy justice by refusing to separate environmental health from social equity, gender justice, or cultural survival. Through their stewardship, the land breathes anew, feeding bodies and spirits with a regenerative energy that counters the destructive logics of green extractivism. In doing so, they map a future where African energy transitions are not merely about clean technologies but about reweaving the social and ecological fabric grounded in care, reciprocity, and sovereignty.

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These women-led biomass initiatives stand as vibrant testaments to the transformative power of ecofeminist praxis in the African context. By linking renewable energy to food sovereignty and ecological care, they offer a profound critique of dominant energy and agricultural systems, showing that just transitions must be rooted in decolonial, intersectional, and relational understandings of power and community. Their stories radiate hope and blueprint pathways for a future where Indigenous women's visions guide sustainable energy futures, ones that honour the dignity of all life and restore harmony to the earth and its peoples.

### **4.5.3 Community Empowerment through Energy Access**

In the dynamic energy landscape of Africa, Indigenous women are not just achieving technical feats in community empowerment through energy access; they are driving profound socio-political transformation. Central to this transformation is a radical reshaping of relationships: between people, their environments, and the knowledge systems that sustain them. Far from passively receiving external solutions, Indigenous women harness renewable energy not only to light homes or power appliances but to foster sovereignty, cultivate dignity, and mend social fabrics frayed by centuries of colonial dispossession and capitalist exploitation. Their efforts exemplify ecofeminist principles in action: care, relationality, and collective authority made manifest through renewable energy as an intimate, lived experience of liberation and reclamation.

The social impacts of community-based energy access initiatives led by Indigenous women extend far beyond merely providing electricity or fuel. These initiatives bring about significant shifts in household dynamics, gender relations, and communal agency. In many rural regions, traditional gendered divisions of labour have historically confined women to roles of subsistence and caregiving, often worsened by the drudgery of energy poverty—collecting firewood, drawing water, or working at night by candlelight. The introduction of decentralised solar systems or biogas units, often designed, installed,

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and managed by women's cooperatives, alleviates these burdens and radically transforms daily routines. Women report not only time savings but a reframed sense of possibility: freed from endless energy-related chores, they invest time in education, entrepreneurial ventures, cultural practice, and political engagement. In this light, energy access is not just a convenience but an enabler of personal and collective metamorphosis. It empowers women to transcend imposed marginality and reclaim their roles as knowledge bearers and decision-makers within their families and broader communities.

These benefits are most evident in stories from remote villages where solar microgrids highlight communal resilience and resistance against extractive practices. In the Sahel region, for example, women-led energy cooperatives have become vital hubs for social interaction and economic empowerment. One such cooperative, deeply rooted in ecofeminist values of mutual care, functions not only as an energy provider but as a centre for cultural preservation, teaching younger generations both sustainable energy management and indigenous environmental stewardship. The technological infrastructure is intrinsically linked to this web of knowledge and care, each empowering the other in iterative cycles. By cultivating spaces where women collectively govern renewable resources, these initiatives counteract the alienation caused by large-scale energy projects managed remotely. In doing so, they revive forms of community authority that colonial and neo-colonial paradigms sought to fracture.

Economically, women's control over renewable energy systems directly translates into diversified and sustainable income streams, often in contexts of deep economic marginalisation. Access to reliable energy supports numerous microenterprises, including milling grains, preserving fruits, running small shops, and managing communal refrigeration for perishables. These activities have a ripple effect, stabilising local economies and reducing reliance on exploitative wage labour or migration. For many, renewable energy becomes a foundational asset, enabling financial autonomy and resilience amid

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environmental uncertainties and market volatility. Moreover, the revenues generated often circulate within women's savings groups, which embody principles of reciprocity and collective empowerment, further amplifying socio-economic uplift. This dynamic challenges patriarchal and capitalist structures that have historically diverted wealth from Indigenous territories, funnelling it instead into extractive industries and colonial metropolises.

Beyond economics and daily life, community-led energy access projects foster broader political consciousness and activism among Indigenous women. By challenging the deep-seated power imbalances within state and corporate-controlled energy frameworks, these projects expose the violence of technological regimes that prioritise profit over people and ecosystems. Women define their energy sovereignty not merely as control over watts or kilowatts, but as a direct challenge to the structural impositions of extractive industrial models that continue to dispossess Indigenous territories and bodies. This assertion of energy as a focal point of political struggle aligns strongly with ecofeminist critiques of interconnected oppressions. As women take control of renewable technologies, they simultaneously assert their rights to land, water, and cultural self-determination, forming grassroots networks that span borders and sectors. The alliances built through shared struggles for energy justice catalyse mutual learning and strategic solidarity, enabling women to engage with regional and international policy processes on their own terms.

The social fabric revitalised through women-led renewable energy initiatives is deeply connected to notions of ecological wellbeing and relational ethics, which are central to Indigenous epistemologies. Energy access is always linked to the stewardship of land and community. Women engage in holistic practices that honour the intrinsic value of ecosystems, resist extractive approaches that harm planetary and social health, and envision a regenerative coexistence with nature's cycles. These values are embedded in everyday energy decisions, from choosing technologies that suit local ecological

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contexts to managing resources to ensure intergenerational justice. Through this lens, renewable energy goes beyond being a technical fix; it becomes a language of repair and continuity, woven into Indigenous women's stories of survival and resurgence. The ecofeminist principle of relationality underpins these efforts, emphasising that the well-being of people and land is inseparable and that community governance must reflect this interdependence.

These community-driven narratives also reveal significant challenges and resistance from dominant political-economic structures. Many Indigenous women face systemic marginalisation within policy arenas, often excluded from decision-making despite their crucial roles in managing renewable energy projects. Bureaucratic obstacles, gender biases, and inadequate financial support reinforce disparities, even as the rhetoric of sustainable development advances. The rise of green extractivism—securing rare minerals for batteries or establishing large-scale solar farms disconnected from community needs—poses threats that undermine calls for energy sovereignty. These contradictions highlight the necessity of an explicitly decolonial approach, one that honours Indigenous women's leadership while resisting co-optation by capitalist logics. Through testimonies and ethnographic accounts, women articulate the tensions between their grassroots initiatives and external pressures that seek to instrumentalise "green" projects for profit-driven agendas rather than community wellbeing.

Considering these dynamics, the empowerment fostered through women-led energy access takes on a revolutionary aspect: it is simultaneously a practice of survival, resistance, and regeneration. It disrupts narratives that confine African energy futures to narrow parameters of technological modernisation, divorced from social justice. Instead, it envisions an energy transition rooted in dignity, relational care, and collective authority. This vision is not a utopian fantasy but a grounded, lived reality unfolding daily in homesteads, communal spaces, and local governing bodies. Indigenous women's

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ecofeminist leadership in renewable energy, therefore, offers indispensable models for reimagining energy sovereignty not as a commodity or state monopoly but as a vibrant web of life-affirming relations. Their initiatives challenge policymakers, activists, and scholars to recognise that just energy transitions require centring those most historically and presently marginalised, not only as beneficiaries but as architects of change.

The stories within these initiatives highlight that renewable energy is intrinsically linked to transformations in education, health, and cultural revitalisation, all of which form part of the broader project of community empowerment. Access to energy enables evening classes, powers community health clinics with refrigeration for medicines, and supports cultural ceremonies through lighting and media. These intersections deepen the social impacts, illustrating how energy sovereignty is fundamental to holistic wellbeing rather than being isolated infrastructure. Indigenous women narrate these lived experiences with an eloquence that bridges intimate moments and systemic analysis, affirming their role as keepers of knowledge and hope. Every installed solar panel or managed biogas unit powerfully reaffirms that energy systems must serve people and ecosystems in concert, honouring histories of resilience and visions of flourishing futures.

In communities often marked by environmental degradation and economic precarity, women-led renewable energy initiatives implement strategies of repair and renewal that reclaim space and time for Indigenous ways of being. These practices foster intergenerational learning, transmitting vital ecological wisdom and sustainable technologies while nurturing young women's leadership. Such continuity strengthens community responses to climate crises, creating adaptive capacities that blend traditional and contemporary knowledge. These empowered collectives model pathways that resist extractive development and climate injustice, proving that energy transitions grounded in ecofeminist principles are both feasible and

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transformative. By weaving together technological innovation, participatory governance, and Indigenous worldviews, they craft vibrant alternatives that challenge dominant energy paradigms and open horizons for equitable futures.

This lived experience of empowerment challenges the simple narrative of African women as victims of energy poverty. Instead, it emphasises their roles as creative agents of change. They skilfully navigate internal and external limitations by designing projects that suit local conditions rather than relying on top-down solutions. Many women embody hybrid identities: elders with ancestral knowledge and innovative users of advanced solar technologies. This hybridity highlights the importance of centring Indigenous women's voices in energy discussions, not as tokens but as carriers of unique knowledge systems capable of addressing structural inequalities. Their stories demonstrate that access to clean, controlled energy is a way to reclaim autonomy, countering systemic efforts to displace and undermine Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, by asserting control over energy resources within communal governance frameworks, Indigenous women renegotiate power relations within patriarchal and capitalist contexts. Their projects often manifest as cooperatives, collectives, or councils that prioritise consensus, shared responsibilities, and mutual support rather than competition or hierarchy. These relational governance models embody ecofeminist collectivism, where sovereignty is exercised through reciprocity and care. Decision-making processes are deeply inclusive, integrating diverse voices within communities and reaffirming the social contract that sustains collective wellbeing. In these spaces, energy technology is not a sterile tool but a catalyst for rebuilding social bonds and affirming cultural identities. These transformations testify to the inseparability of ecological and social liberation.

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In the broader continental context, these local empowerment stories contribute to a growing chorus of Indigenous women contesting dominant energy narratives and proposing alternative futures that honour decolonial and ecofeminist values. Their grassroots initiatives compel a re-evaluation of “development” and “progress,” questioning the legitimacy of energy policies that reproduce colonial extraction and marginalisation. They amplify demands for recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems into policy frameworks. By documenting and disseminating these practices, the book offers vital pathways for learning across movements and geographies, fostering transnational solidarities anchored in shared struggles for justice, dignity, and ecological balance.

Community empowerment through energy access, led by Indigenous women, challenges us to reimagine energy transitions not just as technical shifts but as profoundly political and cultural ruptures with colonial-capitalist legacies. It urges recognition of knowledge and authority embedded within Indigenous ecofeminist praxis as essential to crafting sustainable, just futures. These women’s stories embody hope and resilience, illuminating how access to clean, renewable energy, governed through collective care and sovereignty, becomes an act of repair – repairing land, bodies, and histories wounded by centuries of extraction. Their leadership heralds a future where energy sustains life in all its interdependent forms, affirming Africa’s place not as a sacrifice zone but as a pioneer of decolonial ecological transformation.

### **4.5.4 Challenges and Successes**

The path toward establishing women-led renewable energy initiatives in African Indigenous communities is marked by an interwoven tapestry of trials and triumphs, each moment imbued with profound significance that often transcends the immediate technical or environmental scope. Embedded within these initiatives are the lived realities of Indigenous women who navigate a complex landscape of

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socio-political constraints rooted in colonial histories, entrenched patriarchy, and the ongoing pressures of neoliberal capitalism. Among the most significant challenges faced is the persistent marginalisation of Indigenous women in decision-making processes, whether within local governance structures, national energy policy frameworks, or global climate dialogues. This exclusion is not merely incidental but reflective of long-standing systemic erasures that render Indigenous knowledge and leadership invisible or subordinate. Women leaders often face scepticism or opposition from male community members, government officials, and external actors who see their involvement as a deviation from traditional power structures. These challenges highlight the importance of such initiatives, not only to showcase the practical advantages of renewable energy but also to affirm Indigenous women's voices as essential to sustainable ecological management.

Compounding these structural hurdles is the pervasive challenge of resource constraints, both material and financial, which severely limit the scope and scalability of women-led projects. Access to capital, technology, and technical expertise is frequently circumscribed by discriminatory lending practices and a lack of tailored support mechanisms that account for the unique socio-cultural and geographic realities of Indigenous communities. Women often face additional barriers due to their roles within societal and familial structures, including disproportionate domestic responsibilities and limited mobility, which inhibit their ability to attend training, meetings, or workshops critical for project advancement. Yet it is precisely within these constraints that the resilience and ingenuity of Indigenous women emerge most vividly. By leveraging communal networks, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and locally available materials, they circumvent conventional dependencies on external technologies or bureaucracies. In doing so, they foster models of energy production and management that resonate with ecofeminist values, emphasising relationality, care, and reciprocal responsibility to the land and to each other.

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Another significant obstacle lies in the wider socio-environmental context, shaped by green extractivism. This phenomenon sees so-called “clean” or “renewable” energy projects replicate extractive dynamics, perpetuating dispossession and environmental harm. Indigenous women spearheading renewable energy efforts often confront the paradox of engaging with green technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, bioenergy systems that, while offering alternatives to fossil fuels, can still be embedded in exploitative supply chains, land grabs, or ecological disruptions. This tension demands a critical negotiation between embracing technological innovation and safeguarding Indigenous sovereignty and ecological integrity. Success in navigating this terrain is evidenced by the intentional integration of traditional knowledge systems and ecological ethics into project design and implementation. For instance, women-led initiatives frequently prioritise decentralised, small-scale energy solutions that protect local ecosystems and communities, resisting large-scale, industrialised energy paradigms that prioritise profit over people. Their approaches challenge mainstream narratives that equate sustainability solely with technical efficiency, instead proposing holistic criteria that encompass social equity, interspecies kinship, and cultural continuity.

In terms of achievements, these women-led efforts have profoundly reshaped community relationships with energy, the environment, and governance, marking an invaluable shift from extractive dependency towards regenerative autonomy. Several case studies show that introducing community-controlled solar microgrids or biogas digesters has significantly enhanced livelihoods by providing reliable power for domestic needs, small enterprises, and communal spaces without degrading natural resources. This access to clean energy not only alleviates health hazards associated with biomass cooking fuels but also creates new avenues for economic empowerment, particularly for women who often manage household energy. The dignity and self-determination gained through controlling energy resources cultivate a sense of collective well-being that transcends material improvements.

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Moreover, these initiatives have rekindled cultural pride by reinstating Indigenous worldviews that honour the sacredness of the environment and question the alienating logics of commodification. The documented success stories thus underscore the transformative potential of situating energy transitions firmly within Indigenous epistemologies and gender justice frameworks.

A particularly poignant dimension of success is the capacity of these women-led initiatives to forge solidarities that bridge ethnic, geographic, and generational divides. In many communities, energy projects become focal points for participatory governance, where open dialogue, consensus-building, and shared responsibility nurture social cohesion and resilience. Such processes embody the ecofeminist ethos of relationality, in which the well-being of the individual is inseparable from that of the community and the broader ecosystem. By centring Indigenous women's leadership, these initiatives disrupt entrenched gendered power relations and create safe spaces for marginalised voices to influence development trajectories. Additionally, interlinkages with regional and continental networks amplify their impact, enabling the exchange of strategies, advocacy platforms, and resource mobilisation. These interconnected communities of practice challenge reductionist policy discourses that tend to fragment or isolate grassroots efforts. They also counteract narratives of victimhood by foregrounding agency, innovation, and hope in the face of compounded crises such as climate change, economic precarity, and political marginalisation.

However, the path to success is rarely linear or uncontested. Alongside moments of triumph, there are episodes of resistance from state authorities unwilling to cede control over energy resources, from commercial interests invested in maintaining extractive regimes, and, at times, even from within communities where ingrained patriarchal attitudes resist women's claims to leadership and change. Instances of sabotage, legal obstruction, or social ostracism have been documented, reflecting the high stakes involved when Indigenous women challenge dominant structures that link energy with power and

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capital. These confrontations require not only persistent grassroots organising but also strategic engagement with policy frameworks, human rights mechanisms, and media platforms to assert rights and visibility. Success, therefore, is as much about survival, persistence, and adaptability as it is about tangible outputs such as electrification rates or environmental restoration.

The resilience demonstrated by Indigenous women's energy initiatives is further accentuated by their commitment to ongoing education and capacity-building, which bridges Indigenous knowledge with contemporary scientific understandings. Educational workshops, community dialogues, and participatory mapping exercises become sites for intergenerational and intercultural knowledge exchange, equipping participants with technical skills, critical consciousness, and leadership capabilities. These processes embody a pedagogy of empowerment rooted in respect for Indigenous epistemologies as they navigate the complexities of modern energy technologies. Such efforts transform local communities into sites of innovation rather than mere beneficiaries, ensuring that energy transitions are not imposed but co-created. Furthermore, fostering youth engagement is recognised as crucial for sustaining momentum and embedding ecofeminist values in future generations. Success in this realm contributes to dismantling educational inequities and combating the alienation of Indigenous youth from their cultural and environmental heritage.

One of the most compelling successes lies in how these women-led projects have expanded notions of sovereignty and governance over natural and energy resources. Rather than reproducing top-down or market-driven models, they embrace inclusive, deliberative community authority that is responsive to the needs of the most marginalised. Decisions around siting energy systems, managing resources, and distributing benefits are embedded within norms of care and reciprocity informed by Indigenous cosmologies. This collective stewardship confronts dominant energy paradigms that prioritise commodification, competition, and short-term gain. By

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doing so, these initiatives simultaneously nurture ecological balance and social justice. The assertion of sovereignty through energy autonomy challenges both local power dynamics and broader colonial state formations, creating openings for legal and political recognition of Indigenous rights. Such breakthroughs have ripple effects beyond the immediate communities, inspiring movements for decolonial governance elsewhere in Africa and globally.

Nonetheless, these successes are tempered by persistent external pressures, such as policies favouring large-scale infrastructure investments driven by global financial institutions and multinational corporations. These policies often overlook or sideline women-led grassroots initiatives, privileging techno-economic metrics over human and environmental dignity. The resulting competition over land and resources can engender conflict or marginalisation of Indigenous energy projects. Moreover, the precarity of funding and technical support threatens the sustainability of small-scale systems, which may require ongoing maintenance beyond community capacities. Responding to this necessitates robust alliances with sympathetic policymakers, civil society actors, and funders who acknowledge the value of decolonial, justice-centred approaches. Advocacy that situates Indigenous women's energy leadership within broader struggles for climate justice, human rights, and sustainable development proves vital in cultivating enabling environments.

The experiences of Indigenous women leading renewable energy initiatives across Africa reveal a narrative rich with determination, creativity, and profound transformative potential. While the challenges are formidable, ranging from entrenched structural inequalities to the contradictory nature of green technologies, their successes testify to the strength of ecofeminist principles when enacted on the ground. These women demonstrate that just energy transitions are not merely technical fixes or policy adjustments, but involve a radical reimagining of relationships between people, land, and energy. Their efforts illustrate how sovereignty, dignity, and

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collective well-being can be reclaimed through participatory, caring, and ecologically grounded practices. This complex interplay of obstacles and achievements constitutes a vital knowledge base from which future energy justice endeavours may draw inspiration, ensuring that Africa's energy futures are shaped by those most intimately connected to the land and committed to nurturing its vitality.

### **4.6 Relationality, Care, and Community Authority**

#### **4.6.1 Defining Relationality and Care**

At the heart of Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions for a just energy transition lies a profound reaffirmation of relationality and care. These principles ripple through the intimate fabric of community life and extend into the larger cosmos of environmental and social justice. To understand these guiding concepts, it is crucial to disentangle them from dominant Western frameworks, where relationships are often reduced to transactional interactions, and care is relegated to the private sphere or dismissed as sentimental. Instead, within many Indigenous epistemologies and ecofeminist thought, relationality is not merely a way of being but a foundational ontology: a mode of existence that recognises all beings, human and nonhuman alike, as profoundly interconnected through webs of mutual dependence, respect, and responsibility. Relationality, in this worldview, transcends individualism, emphasising that no entity exists in isolation and that the well-being of the self is inseparable from the well-being of the community and the environment. This forms an ethic deeply counter to the atomising, competitive logic of capitalist energy extraction and governance that often privileges profit over people and commodifies land and life into mere resources for exploitative consumption.

Relationality unfolds as a dynamic interplay of connections grounded in respect and reciprocity, weaving together diverse forms of knowledge, memory, and care that have sustained Indigenous women and their communities over generations. This paradigm resists the

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fragmentary outlook that separates society from ecology and instead insists on a holistic vision where human decisions, particularly in the energy sphere, ripple across social, cultural, ecological, and spiritual domains. Indigenous women's narratives reveal how this relational ethos is not abstract theory but a lived, expressed sensibility that shapes everyday interactions and collective governance. For example, decisions about energy access or changes in resource use are not isolated acts carried out by a few technocrats or external investors, but are embedded in communal deliberations in which voices, especially those rooted in care and historical interdependence, hold central sway. The importance of relationality, therefore, lies in its power to reconfigure authority and decision-making from top-down, profit-driven frameworks to horizontally inclusive processes that honour community sovereignty and foster environmental stewardship.

Alongside relationality, the principle of care underpins Indigenous ecofeminist critiques and aspirations. Care, in this context, extends far beyond self-care or the caregiving labour traditionally assigned to women within patriarchal societies; it emerges as a radical political and ecological practice that sustains life, restores balance, and challenges the depersonalising forces of extractive economies. Care is embodied in practices of nurturing land, water, flora, and fauna, as well as the ongoing work of healing community relationships fractured by colonisation, dispossession, and environmental violence. This form of care insists on attentiveness to the needs of others, both human neighbours and non-human kin, and champions an ethics of responsibility that rejects exploitation or indifference. It also challenges technocratic energy models that prioritise efficiency and profit maximisation, which too often obscure or devalue the labour of care essential to sustaining ecosystems and social cohesion. Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives assert that care is not a vulnerable or passive state but a source of radical power and sustained resistance, a lens through which resource governance can be reimagined to protect sacred life and uphold rights rooted in dignity rather than extraction.

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In many Indigenous communities, the fusion of relationality with care manifests as a dynamic mosaic of knowledge and action that contests colonial legacies embedded in energy infrastructure and policy. These knowledge systems are transmitted through intergenerational storytelling, ceremonies, and collective memory, asserting the inseparability of social justice from ecological well-being. For instance, Indigenous women often articulate how caring for ancestral lands and waters is a political act of reclaiming sovereignty and challenging the alienating forces of commodification imposed by dominant energy regimes. The ecofeminist ethos they embody dismantles the false binaries of nature/culture and human/other by situating care at the intersection of communal life and ecological process, acknowledging that the health of the Earth is fundamentally entwined with the health of human relationships and governance models. This relational care disrupts the false logic that pits economic development against environmental protection, demonstrating instead that the flourishing of people and planet depends on reciprocal, respectful, and nurturing interactions.

The conceptual richness of relationality and care also illuminates how Indigenous women critique and offer alternatives to the dominant narratives surrounding energy transition. Whereas mainstream models often frame energy change through techno-economic lenses that emphasise market efficiency, innovation, or carbon-reduction metrics, Indigenous ecofeminist perspectives ground energy futures in the lived realities of communities that endure the most significant gendered and ecological harms of extraction. They reveal how individualistic and profit-driven approaches ignore or erase the web of social relations that sustain life and collective dignity. By centring care, these perspectives restore visibility to often marginalised labour, such as the everyday water fetching, tending of communal gardens, and upkeep of renewable energy systems, which sustain energy access and create resilient socio-technical commons. Furthermore, relationality infuses energy governance with ethical imperatives that challenge extractivism and promote forms of community authority

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rooted in consensus, shared responsibility, and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems. This reframing is critical in contesting dominant power structures that centralise control while marginalising Indigenous women's voices and expertise.

The relational ethic highlights the ecological dimensions of care, embedding energy policy within an understanding that natural systems possess agency, rhythms, and limits that must be honoured rather than subjugated. Indigenous women leaders articulate how renewable energy projects designed without attentiveness to these relational ties risk replicating patterns of dispossession and environmental degradation, even when framed as “green” or “sustainable.” For example, large-scale solar farms or mining for critical minerals can disrupt sacred sites or undermine biodiversity, fracturing the relational bonds upon which Indigenous cosmologies and livelihoods depend. Here, care intersects with relationality to foreground responsibility toward future generations and non-human entities, insisting that energy transitions must be negotiated in ways that sustain, rather than fracture, community and ecological health. These approaches envision a profound reciprocity in which energy use aligns with cycles of regeneration and with respect for the land as a living entity.

The practice of relationality, coupled with care, also reorients notions of authority and governance. Rather than consolidating power in centralised institutions driven by market logics, Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions emphasise distributed, collective stewardship. Governance becomes a matter of nurturing reciprocal relationships among people, spirits, lands, and waters that inform community decision-making and ensure accountability. Embedded in networks of kinship and communal bonds, authority is exercised through dialogic processes that prioritise listening, relational accountability, and the inclusion of diverse voices often excluded from technocratic debates. This relational governance challenges the hegemonic state and corporate control over energy systems, advocating self-determination and autonomy, with Indigenous women and their community's

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reclaiming stewardship of their energy futures. This is not merely a governance adjustment but a reweaving of social fabrics that connect care, respect, and authority.

Central to this reimagining is the recognition that relationality and care are embedded in the everyday practices of resistance and resilience. Indigenous women's experiences reflect how these values are enacted in moments of struggle against displacement, environmental harm, and gender-based violence linked to energy extraction. By nurturing community solidarity, sustaining cultural knowledge, and maintaining ecosystems, these women craft alternative futures that defy imposed energy paradigms. The principles of relationality and care offer fertile ground for envisioning energy transitions that do not reproduce historic injustices or colonising tendencies but are rooted in justice, dignity, and ecological harmony. They cultivate a horizon in which energy is understood as a communal lifeline, interwoven with stories, histories, and responsibilities, rather than a mere commodity.

Relationality and care are not static ideals, but dynamic, evolving responses shaped by historical trauma and contemporary challenges. Indigenous women's leadership in ecofeminist thought involves navigating tensions between upholding tradition and innovating responses to the complex pressures of climate change, globalisation, and neo-extractivism. Through relational care, they weave together ancestral wisdom and contemporary knowledge, affirming the ongoing role of Indigenous women as custodians of sustainable energy futures. This praxis embodies a deeply grounded, ethical stance that demands recognition, respect, and transformation of dominant systems that currently marginalise Indigenous voices and diminish collective wellbeing.

Conceptualising relationality and care within Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives reveals a transformative framework for energy transition. This framework is rooted in interconnectedness,

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responsibility, and community sovereignty, challenging reductionist and individualistic paradigms. Instead, it offers a vision of energy governance that is relational, just, and life-affirming. It invites us to rethink energy beyond mechanistic formulas, reconnecting it to the pulse of communities, lands, and histories shaped by Indigenous women's wisdom and resilience. This lens enables a reorientation from extractive, profit-driven models toward regenerative, inclusive energy futures, where justice and ecological harmony are foundational rather than afterthoughts. Recognising and centring these principles in policy, activism, and scholarship is imperative for fostering energy systems that honour the dignity of Indigenous peoples and the vitality of the African continent's ecosystems.

### **4.6.2 Community Authority in Practice**

In the unfolding matrix of Africa's energy narratives, where tradition, ecology, and power intertwine, community authority emerges not merely as a political concept but as a lived practice. It is an embodied enactment of relationality and stewardship that Indigenous women have long championed amidst the pressures of neo-colonial and capitalist hegemony. To understand community authority in the context of energy, one must first abandon the dominant imaginations fixated on privatisation, individual ownership, and market efficiency. These frameworks echo colonial legacies that prioritise extraction and profit over interconnected wellbeing and sustainability. Indigenous women articulate a vision of energy governance that is fundamentally collective, grounded in an ethics of care that reverberates through kinship ties, ancestral relations, and reciprocal responsibilities toward the land and each other. Their authority is not anchored in hierarchies or centralised bureaucracies but flourishes in communal deliberation, shared custodianship, and inclusive participation that honours multiplicity and difference.

Consider the experience of the BaTonga women in Zambia's Lower Zambezi basin, whose stewardship practices have been passed down through generations alongside evolving relational ecologies. The BaTonga women organise around localised energy projects, not

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merely to secure access, but to redefine the very terms of energy use and production. Here, solar energy initiatives were designed and managed through clan councils where women convened alongside elders and youth, weaving a network of voices that transcended age and gender binaries. Decision-making was less about votes cast and more about consensus cultivated through storytelling, nurturing dialogue, and listening attuned to the ebbs and flows of communal life. Within these spaces, authority was distributed, as the recognition of each member's knowledge and lived experience was essential to ensuring that energy infrastructures aligned with cultural values and ecological rhythms. The BaTonga women's stewardship unfolded as a profound act of care, where maintaining the integrity of riverine ecosystems and safeguarding sacred groves became inseparable from the pursuit of equitable energy access. Their energy transitions were not isolated technical ventures but embedded within a matrix of social relations that resisted commodification and control by external actors, thereby challenging the colonial-industrial matrix that sought to displace them.

In Niger's vast Sahelian landscapes, Indigenous women's community authority is evident in the revitalisation of traditional water-harvesting and solar-electrification projects. Here, women's cooperatives act as custodians of both natural and social capital. Tuareg and Fulani women articulate ecofeminist principles by rooting governance in a reciprocity that is simultaneously ecological and social. This collective stewardship reframes energy as a web of care, nurturing not only the immediate family but also extending to the ecosystems that sustain pastoral livelihoods. Decision-making forums are held in open-air assemblies where women's voices shape the allocation of solar microgrids, ensuring no household is excluded and that energy use promotes sustainable grazing practices and preserves biodiversity. Crucially, these forums reject external technocratic prescriptions that prioritise scalability and profitability. Instead, they affirm diverse knowledges and foster intergenerational dialogue, positioning younger women as both heirs and innovators in sustaining ancestral

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stewardship. The authority exercised here disrupts extractive paradigms that commodify energy as a mere resource, reframing it as a relational force woven into the fabric of communal life and ecological harmony.

Across Kenya's Rift Valley, the Mau Forest Indigenous communities offer another profound example of community authority in energy governance. This is particularly evident in their collective response to deforestation and hydropower projects threatening ancestral lands. Indigenous women leaders have been at the forefront of mobilising resistance against large-scale energy developments that displace communities and degrade ecosystems. Their approach is not solely oppositional but also constructive, emphasising community-led reforestation alongside decentralised renewable energy initiatives, such as small-scale biogas digesters and solar drying units. These efforts are coordinated through customary councils where women elders convene with youth representatives, employing a governance model that balances elder wisdom with youthful innovation. The Mau Forest women's authority is firmly rooted in relational accountability, with decisions made through dialogue that considers long-term community wellbeing and environmental regeneration rather than immediate economic gain. Their stewardship challenges technocratic narratives that prioritise hydrological output and infrastructural expansion at the expense of ecological and cultural integrity. By reasserting control over land use and energy systems, these communities embody a sovereignty that transcends mere political administration, reflecting a deep reciprocal relationship with the forest and waterways that sustain them.

Further south, in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands, the gendered dimensions of community authority coalesce within the Zunde raMambo frameworks – traditional community granaries managed predominantly by women. Here, collective food security operates in tandem with energy sovereignty. Indigenous women have leveraged this traditional institution as a platform to integrate ecologically

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sensitive energy solutions, such as micro-hydropower and solar lantern distribution, within their holistic vision of communal wellbeing. The process unfolds through rituals and meetings where women's councils deliberate on energy needs, aligning them with agricultural cycles and climatic patterns. Community authority here is enshrined in the communal provision of resources, where the consumption and stewardship of energy are regulated by shared norms that cohere with reciprocal obligations to kin and land. The Zunde women assert their leadership through practices that resist commodification, ensuring that energy infrastructures serve collective nourishment and resilience rather than individual accumulation. Their governance model exemplifies how community authority, when grounded in ecofeminist values, functions as both a shield against exploitation and a seedbed for nurturing social cohesion and ecological balance.

In the deltaic communities along Nigeria's Niger River, Indigenous women embody community authority through integrated approaches to managing the complex interplay between oil extraction, environmental degradation, and emergent renewable energy alternatives. Amidst the devastation wrought by decades of the fossil fuel industry, women's grassroots organisations have emerged as key agents of collective governance, combining environmental monitoring, advocacy, and renewable energy projects. Their authority transcends formal political structures, enacted instead through networks of mutual support, knowledge exchange, and communal rituals that reaffirm their custodianship of land and water. Women have organised solar energy cooperatives that not only provide power but also finance environmental remediation efforts, including mangrove restoration and soil detoxification. These initiatives are collectively governed, with decision-making processes that emphasise transparency, equity, and long-term ecological responsibility.

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By centring relational care, these women simultaneously confront the legacies of green extractivism and craft pathways toward regenerative justice, demonstrating that community authority is inseparable from a politics of repair and sovereignty.

The interwoven dynamics of community authority also resonate in Madagascar's highland villages, where Indigenous women safeguard traditional agroforestry systems that underpin community energy needs. Renewable energy interventions such as biomass gasification and micro-hydropower are integrated within Indigenous knowledge systems and managed through collective assemblies that emphasise consensus and shared responsibility. Women's councils here harness their historical role as guardians of seed biodiversity and forest medicines to inform energy governance, ensuring that energy production does not decimate ecological diversity but instead synergises with regenerative land care. The authority exercised in these contexts is relational, recognising the interdependence of human, more-than-human, and spiritual worlds. Decision-making unfolds as a practice of attunement to seasonal cycles, ancestral guidance, and communal wellbeing, with women mediating between the various temporalities and ecologies that sustain life. This form of community authority offers a powerful counternarrative to technocratic energy regimes that reduce ecosystems to commodities and neglect the relational fabric that sustains them.

Similarly, in South Africa's rural Eastern Cape, Indigenous Xhosa women have cultivated energy governance rooted in Ubuntu, a philosophy affirming communal humanity, manifesting as collective resistance to extractive energy projects and proactive investment in localised renewable energy systems. These women organise energy cooperatives that prioritise equitable access and ecological sustainability, embedding governance in community gatherings where storytelling, song, and spiritual practice intersect with practical decision-making. Their community authority operates through social accountability mechanisms that ensure all voices are heard, and power

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is diffused across age, gender, and social strata. Through this participatory process, women expose the limitations of neoliberal energy policies that marginalise rural populations and fail to address intersecting injustices. The Xhosa women's leadership embodies an ecofeminist praxis in which care for community and land is inseparable, and energy is conceptualised as a shared resource, governed through relational ethics that reinforce social bonds and environmental stewardship. Their experience reveals that community authority is not static but dynamically negotiated through everyday interactions that cultivate resilience and collective agency.

In these varied but interconnected examples, community authority is built through practices that prioritise Indigenous women's relational ways of knowing and care ethics. This creates spaces where energy governance is not imposed but co-created in dialogue with land, ancestors, and community members. This authority challenges and moves beyond the alienation caused by capitalist energy systems, instead affirming a sovereignty that is communal, intergenerational, and ecological. Rather than making Indigenous governance subservient to technocratic models or market logic, these lived experiences show how Indigenous women exercise agency by revitalising customary governance institutions and developing new forms of collective stewardship adapted to contemporary challenges. Their authority is demonstrated through managing natural resources, navigating social complexities, fostering knowledge-sharing networks, and performing rituals that maintain both ecological and social integrity.

This communal authority is supported by an ecofeminist ethic that challenges dichotomies of nature and culture, individual and collective, human and non-human. Indigenous women define governance as a holistic system where care is the currency and relationality are the framework within which decisions about energy, meaning, responsibility, and reciprocity. Thus, energy is not merely a commodity or infrastructure; it is woven into the relational fabric of

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community wellbeing and ecological balance. By centring Indigenous women as knowledge holders and decision-makers, community authority becomes a powerful counterweight to the extractive logic of state and corporate actors, reclaiming governance as an emancipatory project founded on justice and dignity.

The collective governance models championed by Indigenous women highlight the inseparability of social and ecological justice, emphasising how energy systems intersect with land rights, food sovereignty, health, and cultural survival. Their authority embodies a multifaceted struggle to resist dispossession and environmental harm while cultivating regenerative energy futures. This approach disrupts dominant narratives of progress that equate energy transition with technological fixes and economic growth, instead illuminating pathways that prioritise relational accountability and long-term resilience. In doing so, Indigenous women's community authority points toward a decolonial politics of energy—one that rejects extractive paradigms, honours embodied knowledges, and fosters collective liberation.

These practices of community authority offer profound lessons for broader energy transitions in Africa and beyond. They affirm that just energy futures cannot be achieved through technocratic abstractions or market-driven models alone but require anchoring governance in the lived realities, values, and aspirations of Indigenous peoples, especially women. By embracing relational decision-making, shared custodianship, and care-centred stewardship, these communities inspire transformative reimaginations of what energy governance can be: an act of healing, sovereignty, and collective flourishing rooted in a profound respect for life and land. This radical reconceptualization challenges policymakers, scholars, and activists to move beyond dispossessive and profit-driven paradigms, recognising that community authority, as practised by Indigenous women, is both a historical inheritance and a vital, dynamic source of hope for a just, equitable, and sustainable energy future in Africa.

### 4.6.3 Political Implications for Energy Transitions

In the deeply pluralistic context of Africa's energy transition, the political implications of Indigenous women's ecofeminist principles of relationality and care present a profound challenge to entrenched structures of power and dominion. These principles do not merely offer an alternative mode of governance or sustainability; they embody a radical reshaping of what authority means within energy systems. They propose a transition away from dominant paradigms rooted in extractive capitalism and colonial legacies towards communal sovereignty and stewardship, deeply embedded in interdependence. At the heart of this transformative vision lies the reclamation of community authority, a concept that transcends the often atomised and individualistic models that characterise most contemporary energy policies. Instead of prioritising profit-maximisation or technocratic management, Indigenous women lived experiences reveal governance as a web of relationships that honours the interconnectedness between human and more-than-human worlds, privileging care, reciprocity, and collective wellbeing.

This reorientation unsettles familiar power structures by questioning who holds decision-making authority in energy transitions and on what grounds. Conventional energy governance is frequently centralised, hierarchical, and designed to serve narrow economic interests, often embedded in Western liberal frameworks that elevate private property rights and market-driven outcomes over social and ecological justice. Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives assert that such models not only exacerbate inequalities but also inherently disregard the web of life that sustains communities. Their insistence on relationality underscores the necessity of dismantling isolated individualism, instead highlighting accountability that flows horizontally through kinship networks, community institutions, and land stewardship.

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This shift complicates the political terrain by foregrounding governance as a process of collective negotiation, in which power is shared, negotiated, and continually renewed through practices of care, ranging from nurturing ecosystems to protecting cultural knowledge and future generations.

The political implications extend to the mode of engagement and participation in energy decision-making. Indigenous women's insistence on embedding relationality into governance processes means that energy systems cannot be merely technical or economic projects; they must be socially embedded, culturally resonant, and environmentally attuned. This demands power-sharing mechanisms that prioritise free, prior, and informed consent, ensuring that energy initiatives are not imposed but co-created with Indigenous communities. Such a principle counters the prevailing top-down approaches often justified by state actors or multinational corporations, which reduce community members to passive recipients or obstacles rather than active agents. Herein lies a subtle but profound reconceptualisation of sovereignty, not merely as political territory, but as the realisation of agency through sustained community participation and recognition of Indigenous knowledges. This repositioning of power simultaneously affirms the political subjectivity of Indigenous women, whose voices have historically been marginalised in energy and environmental discourses, yet who embody the relational ethics necessary for sustaining resilient energy futures.

This recasting of authority, rooted in relationality and care, challenges the dominance of profit-driven models pervading Africa's energy landscape. African nations are frequently framed within global climate and energy narratives as sites for resource extraction, whether fossil fuels or minerals essential to renewable technologies, creating new circuits of economic exploitation under the guise of "green transitions." Indigenous women's ecofeminist principles confront this by exposing the systemic violence embedded in such green

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extractivism. They advocate for energy paradigms that recognise energy not as a commodity to be extracted and traded, but as a common good intimately tied to life-sustaining relationships. This proposition confronts capitalist logics that prioritise accumulation and growth, instead proposing a politics centred on sufficiency, care, and ecological balance. It demands the redistribution of power so that profits and benefits are not concentrated in the hands of global corporations or elites, but are directed to support local economies, social infrastructure, and environmental restoration, directly benefiting Indigenous peoples and their territories.

Within this political recalibration, Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions also offer a counter-narrative to state-centred approaches that often frame energy transitions as national security or development imperatives, marginalising localised concerns and knowledge. By centring community authority, they articulate a pluralistic politics that recognises diversity in energy models, grounded in cultural specificities and local ecosystems. These visions valorise the autonomy of communities to define what energy sovereignty looks like. For some, it may mean rejecting large-scale infrastructure that fragments sacred lands, while for others, it may involve collaborative, small-scale renewable energy that reinforces social cohesion. In this light, energy politics becomes inseparable from struggles over land, water, and cultural survival, demanding holistic governance systems that nurture all dimensions of life and justice.

Indigenous women's articulations of relationality and care compel a reconsideration of the temporal dimension in energy politics. Dominant energy models are overwhelmingly driven by short-term profit cycles and exploitative resource extraction that irreversibly degrade environments and communities. In contrast, care ethics rooted in Indigenous cosmologies emphasise long-term reciprocity with the land and future generations, requiring energy governance to be measured by sustainability over centuries rather than quarters. This temporal reimagining challenges political agendas that prioritise

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immediate economic gains over intergenerational equity. It insists on decision-making frameworks that anticipate cumulative impacts, embed precautionary principles, and honour the responsibilities owed to the unborn and non-human kin. This extended temporality destabilises political logics premised on rapid resource turnover and transient benefits, fostering more resilient and regenerative energy systems aligned with Indigenous worldviews.

The political terrain is further transformed by how Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives highlight intersections of gender, race, and class within energy transitions. The emphasis on relationality surfaces the interdependence between social justice and ecological integrity, recognising that energy policies cannot be disconnected from the systemic oppressions that Indigenous and marginalised women face—dispossessions, violence, exclusion, and environmental racism. Their political project thus expands beyond technical solutions to encompass broader frameworks of justice that interrogate power imbalances across multiple axes. By integrating gender justice into energy governance, Indigenous women demand the dismantling of patriarchal and colonial institutions that perpetuate harm, asserting the validity of their knowledge and leadership. This intersectional lens complicates simplistic portrayals of energy transition as a purely technological or economic shift, insisting that political systems must be responsive to lived experiences of marginalisation and resilience.

The grounding in relationality and care recalibrates political alliances within energy transitions, fostering solidarities that transcend national borders and cultural differences. Indigenous women's visions often emphasise the shared struggles among Indigenous peoples globally, advocating for transnational coalitions that resist extractive capitalism and uphold Indigenous sovereignty. These solidarities challenge the geopolitics of energy that prioritise competition and domination, proposing a politics of mutual support and shared stewardship instead. Through collective action grounded in relational ethics, Indigenous

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women disrupt the isolation often imposed by centralised energy regimes, envisioning networks of care that connect rural and urban, local and global, past and future. Such political imaginaries offer pathways for mobilising against corporate power and state violence, while simultaneously nurturing regenerative alternatives grounded in community empowerment.

At the policy and institutional levels, the political implications of Indigenous women's ecofeminist principles present both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, mainstream energy policies and international climate finance mechanisms remain largely entrenched in technocratic, market-based models that marginalise Indigenous voices and community authority. On the other hand, increasing recognition of Indigenous rights and methodologies, driven in part by persistent advocacy and grassroots resistance, creates openings for legal and institutional reforms that embed relational and care ethics into governance. These dual tensions demand political strategies rooted in both critique and constructive engagement, in which Indigenous women lead efforts to redefine policy priorities for ecosystem health, social justice, and cultural regeneration. Their engagement challenges policymakers to move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward meaningful power-sharing and co-governance arrangements that transform institutional cultures and practices.

Indigenous women's ecofeminist political vision critically examines the role of technology within energy transitions. The mainstream discourse tends to treat clean technologies and renewable infrastructures as neutral solutions, capable of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. Yet Indigenous women's narratives reveal how technological deployments are inevitably political acts shaped by relations of power and values. Their emphasis on care insists on technologies that are culturally appropriate, ecologically harmonious, and embedded within community governance rather than imposed through external expertise or market logics. This perspective fosters political demands for decentralised,

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community-managed energy systems that uphold sovereignty and relational accountability, resisting the commodification of energy infrastructures and knowledge. It also foregrounds the imperative to interrogate who benefits from technological innovation and at what ecological and social costs, integrating ethical considerations alongside technical effectiveness.

The political implications thus extend to contesting dominant narratives about progress and development embedded in energy transitions. Indigenous women's ecofeminist principles invite a radical rethinking of what constitutes development, proposing measures beyond Gross Domestic Product growth or energy access metrics that often obscure systemic inequalities and environmental harm. This redefinition centres dignity, relational wellbeing, and the flourishing of diverse ways of life as key political goals. It challenges the colonial legacy of universalising Western notions of progress, asserting the validity of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies as foundational to political imagination. Through this lens, energy transitions become opportunities for reclaiming political sovereignty, cultural survival, and ecological balance, rather than tools for perpetuating extraction and dispossession.

In essence, rooting Africa's energy transition in Indigenous women's ecofeminist principles of relationality and care represents a profound upheaval of conventional power dynamics. This approach calls for dismantling colonial-capitalist logics that concentrate authority and wealth while excluding marginalised communities from decision-making. Instead, it envisions energy governance as a practice of collective responsibility, nurtured through ongoing relationships of care between people, land, and non-human kin. This vision entails not only new institutional forms and policies but also a transformative politics of identity, knowledge, and solidarity that weaves together social, ecological, and spiritual dimensions.

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By centring these principles, the political landscape of energy transitions can shift away from domination and exclusion toward justice, dignity, and ecological reciprocity, offering a hopeful pathway for Africa's diverse peoples to reclaim their futures in harmony with the earth.

### **4.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter highlights the contrast between dominant technocratic sustainability models and Indigenous and community-based alternatives rooted in relational governance, collective responsibility, and local knowledge. These alternatives show that energy systems can be organized to emphasize social cohesion, ecological balance, and participatory decision-making instead of just scale, efficiency, or market growth. They demonstrate that different energy futures are real and lived, not just theoretical. However, local initiatives, even when transformative, operate within larger institutional contexts that influence their success and limits. Legal frameworks, policies, and geopolitical power dynamics often restrict the growth or sustainability of community-based systems. Therefore, true transformative change must consider both alternative practices and the governance structures governing land, resources, and decision-making. The upcoming chapter explores these institutional aspects, focusing on political shifts needed to reform energy governance at local, national, and transnational levels.

### **Chapter 5: Decolonising Energy Policy and Governance**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Building on the existence of alternative practices and governance models, this chapter examines the institutional and political transformations required to reshape energy systems at broader scales. It focuses on how power is organised, contested, and reconfigured across legal frameworks, policy regimes, and transnational movements that influence energy governance. The chapter begins by analysing efforts to decolonise energy policy, exploring how inherited legal structures and administrative arrangements continue to marginalise Indigenous authority over land and resources. It then examines the interconnected struggles surrounding land rights, labour conditions, and resource control, demonstrating how energy governance is inseparable from wider political and economic relations. The chapter also considers the emergence of transnational networks and solidarity movements that link local resistance to global advocacy, creating new forms of collective political engagement. Through these discussions, the chapter shows that transforming energy systems requires more than technical innovation or local experimentation. It involves restructuring decision-making authority, redefining ownership, and renegotiating the distribution of benefits and burdens across multiple scales. Governance transformation is therefore presented as a central arena in which the possibilities for just energy transitions are either constrained or expanded.

#### **5.2 Critique of Current Energy Policies**

In tracing the contours of Africa's contemporary energy policies, one must confront the unsettling reality that these frameworks often do not simply emerge from neutral technocratic calculations or benign developmental visions. Rather, they are deeply entangled with a long history of colonial domination, extraction, and systemic marginalisation of Indigenous peoples, particularly women. The colonial project, with its defining impetus to control territory and resources for the benefit of imperial metropolises, imprinted an

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extractive logic upon African landscapes that has not been undone by independence or the promises of sustainable development. Instead, current energy policies frequently replicate and reinforce these colonial continuities through mechanisms that exclude Indigenous voices, undermine sovereignty, and prioritise external capital and technocratic expertise over community-led initiatives grounded in local ecological knowledge and cultural values. To understand this persistence, it is critical to unveil how prevailing energy frameworks perpetuate power asymmetries inherited from colonial rule, locking Africa into cycles of dispossession and environmental injustice and rendering Indigenous women, who are the custodians of relational ecologies and bearers of ecofeminist wisdom, largely invisible.

Contemporary energy strategies across African nations frequently tout the allure of transitioning toward renewable sources and ‘green’ energy futures. Yet, beneath the veneer of sustainability often lies a pernicious replication of colonial extraction, couched in the language of technological progress and market efficiency. This phenomenon, sometimes termed green extractivism, exemplifies how the extraction of resources such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth minerals, vital to renewable energy technologies, continues a vast scale, precisely in the same regions that were historically subjected to exploitative mining under colonial administrations. These mineral niches, largely located within Indigenous territories, withstand the worst of new waves of extraction demanded by global climate ambitions. The policies designed to facilitate this resource mobilisation frequently sideline the epistemologies and decision-making capacities of Indigenous communities, treating them as mere beneficiaries or obstacles rather than sovereign rights holders and proactive agents of energy futures. The result is a policy landscape that masks continuity beneath change, embedding colonial power relations in fresh configurations while deepening socio-environmental fractures.

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Within these policy frameworks, Indigenous women's experiences reveal profound omissions and marginalisation. Energy projects, whether large-scale hydropower dams, solar farms, or mining ventures for battery materials, have routinely been imposed without adequate consultation, informed consent, or recognition of Indigenous governance systems that emphasise collective responsibility for land, water, and biodiversity. This disconnects echoes colonial tactics of imposing foreign knowledge systems that devalue Indigenous worldviews, especially those that insist upon the interdependence between people and ecosystems. Energy policies, steeped in capitalist growth models and technocratic rationales, rarely allow for the integration of ecofeminist insights that recognise the inseparability of social justice and ecological care. Instead, they prioritise metrics such as megawatt capacity or foreign direct investment, disregarding the harmful effects on local livelihoods, cultural reproduction, and the gendered dimensions of labour and care work. Indigenous women, who often bear the compounded burdens of environmental degradation, loss of subsistence resources, and increased violence linked to energy extraction zones, remain marginalised not only in policymaking chambers but also in the imagined narratives of Africa's energy future.

Further scrutiny reveals how governance structures embedded in these policies perpetuate exclusions by privileging centralised state authorities and international corporations while sidelining customary land tenure systems and decentralised community governance. This model mirrors colonial administrative hierarchies that subjugated local authorities to central control, eroding Indigenous political institutions. The imposition of 'best practices' in regulatory frameworks often entails standardised assessments, environmental impact studies, and stakeholder engagement processes designed without meaningful Indigenous input. These mechanisms also lack the transformative vision necessary to dismantle the embedded inequalities within energy systems. Rather than facilitating equitable participation, they frequently serve as procedural hurdles that validate pre-formulated

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projects while deflecting community objections. Such dynamics not only undermine Indigenous sovereignty but also flatten the rich diversity of Indigenous cosmologies, ethics, and approaches to stewardship that challenge prevailing anthropocentric and capitalist paradigms. In this light, current energy policy is less a pathway to justice and sustainability and more an apparatus for maintaining a status quo skewed towards external profit and internal elite interests.

This critique, however, is not a wholesale rejection of all existing efforts towards renewable energy or climate mitigation in Africa but a call to historicise and politicise these interventions so that they can be reimaged through anti-colonial and ecofeminist lenses. Policymaking that neglects the colonial legacies embedded in energy infrastructures risks replicating cycles of dispossession and environmental violence. A critical interrogation of policy texts, funding flows, and institutional mandates reveals that without a decolonial reorientation, efforts towards ‘green transitions may exacerbate inequalities and reinforce neocolonial dependencies rather than dismantle them. For instance, donor-driven climate finance often imposes conditionalities linked to market liberalisation and privatisation, pressuring African governments into models that mirror neoliberal agendas of resource exploitation rather than community empowerment. Moreover, such structures disproportionately affect Indigenous women, as they frequently lack access to formal information channels, decision-making forums, and legal protections necessary to assert their rights within these shifting landscapes. The invisibility and sidelining of Indigenous women’s knowledge mean that policies are designed without grounding in the lived realities of those most affected by energy transitions, resulting in interventions that are misaligned with socio-cultural and ecological contexts.

Advancing frameworks based on Indigenous sovereignty, participation, and justice requires a radical disruption of inherited structures. Sovereignty must be understood not merely as legalistic territorial control, but as an embodied and relational concept that

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includes self-determination over knowledge production, energy systems, and economic futures. Policies embracing this vision cannot operate within hegemonic definitions of development and progress; instead, they must prioritise Indigenous epistemologies that foreground the interconnections among social well-being, ecological health, and gender justice. Participation, in this reimagining, moves beyond tokenistic consultations and requires that Indigenous women have meaningful authority in decision-making processes at all levels, from project inception to implementation and monitoring, and that their customary governance structures are recognised and supported. Justice, moreover, includes reparative measures that acknowledge historical and ongoing harms caused by colonial and capitalist energy paradigms, specifically addressing the gendered and racialised dimensions of exclusion, violence, and ecological destruction. Recognising these dimensions compels a reframing of energy policy objectives to integrate collective well-being and dignity as core outcomes, alongside environmental sustainability and economic viability.

Such a shift demands not only new policy texts but fundamentally different institutional arrangements. Decentralised energy governance models that centre community authority have shown promising results in multiple Indigenous contexts, where energy sovereignty is conceived as intertwined with land stewardship and cultural resurgence. Policies must facilitate access to resources, technical training, and financial mechanisms that empower Indigenous women-led renewable initiatives as acts of both environmental repair and political resistance. This includes supporting hybrid knowledge systems that blend Indigenous practices with appropriate technologies, creating energy solutions that resonate with local needs and values rather than imposing standardised models driven by external actors.

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Further, legal frameworks must incorporate principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) that respect Indigenous customary laws and collective decision-making, ensuring that no energy project advances without the genuine participation and approval of affected communities.

To move toward decolonial energy futures, policies must actively engage with intersectional gender dynamics, addressing how colonial legacies of patriarchy and racialisation intersect with environmental injustice. Indigenous women's leadership must be explicitly supported through affirmative measures, capacity building, and platforms that elevate their voices in policy dialogues traditionally dominated by men and technocrats. This involves reconfiguring institutional cultures and power relations, dismantling systemic barriers that hinder Indigenous women's participation and recognition. Such transformations are not only ethical imperatives but practical necessities for achieving a just energy transition that safeguards both human rights and ecological integrity.

In essence, critique of current energy policies reveals that without confronting the colonial continuities embedded within them, purported 'green' transitions risk replicating patterns of dispossession, marginalisation, and ecological harm under new guises. The path toward justice requires a profound reorientation toward frameworks rooted in Indigenous sovereignty, meaningful participation, and intersectional justice. These frameworks recognise that energy systems are not simply technical infrastructures but socio-political relations reflecting histories of power and resistance. By centring Indigenous women's knowledge, leadership, and aspirations, energy policy can evolve from an instrument of domination to a vehicle for healing, empowerment, and ecological resilience. This transformation presents an urgent challenge and a profound opportunity for Africa's future, where energy justice becomes synonymous with decolonial liberation and the flourishing of communities and ecosystems alike.

### 5.3 Principles of Decolonial Governance

At the heart of any meaningful discussion on just energy transitions in Africa lies an essential task: to rethink governance in ways that transcend the persistent colonial legacies that have long shaped political, social, and economic realities. This task demands a profound engagement with the principles of decolonial governance. This paradigm seeks not only to dismantle inherited colonial power structures but to replace them with frameworks rooted in Indigenous sovereignty, meaningful participation, and restorative justice. Such principles are not abstractions or mere conceptual ideals; they are active, living guidelines that must reshape the very fabric of energy policies to ensure they foster genuine autonomy, community stewardship, and equitable resource distribution. To delve into these guiding principles is to confront both the historical violence enacted through colonial governance and the subtler, yet equally damaging, continuities that manifest in contemporary policy frameworks. These frameworks often perpetuate exclusion, marginalisation, and control by privileging technocratic expertise, market-driven logic, and state-centric authority, thereby undermining Indigenous voices and disrupting ancestral relations to land, water, and energy. Decolonial governance demands a radical inversion of these logics by centring Indigenous epistemologies, ethics, and agency, thereby envisioning governance as a reciprocal relationship rather than a top-down exercise of power.

Central to decolonial governance is the recognition and safeguarding of Indigenous sovereignty, understood as the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and jurisdiction over their territories, resources, and cultural practices. This concept, often reductively framed in mainstream policy debates, encompasses much more than legal or political autonomy; it reflects a holistic worldview where sovereignty intertwines with relationality, care for land and community, and the preservation of ancestral knowledge systems. Framing sovereignty in this way disrupts the colonial dichotomies imposed between humans and nature, and between governance and

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the environment. Indigenous sovereignty thus implies reclaiming governance mechanisms that affirm Indigenous peoples as self-governing subjects with the authority to develop, apply, and enforce laws and policies consistent with their values and traditions. This goes beyond tokenistic recognition or consultation; it entails the transfer of real power and decision-making capacity to Indigenous communities, enabling them to chart paths that reflect their distinct visions for energy futures. It calls for dismantling the paternalistic and surveillance-oriented structures embedded in state frameworks that have historically criminalised Indigenous governance and imposed external policies under the guise of development or modernisation. The assertion of Indigenous sovereignty within energy policy reform is therefore an act of resistance against ongoing colonial violence and a foundation for sustainable and just transitions.

A crucial pillar of decolonial governance is the principle of participation, but understood in a profound, transformative sense that disrupts the conventional frameworks of inclusion frequently deployed within neoliberal democratic contexts. In dominant policy spheres, participation often means ‘stakeholder engagement’, where Indigenous communities are invited to provide input or feedback without any guarantee of influence or authority. Such forms of participation can, paradoxically, reinforce colonial power by appearing inclusive while retaining control in the hands of state actors or private corporations. Decolonial governance reimagines participation as a process of co-governance and co-creation, where Indigenous peoples are active and equal partners throughout the entire policy cycle: design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This necessitates cultivating spaces where Indigenous voices are not relegated to footnotes but are integral in setting agendas, defining priorities, and shaping criteria for success. It requires that these participatory spaces respect and incorporate Indigenous languages, protocols, and decision-making customs, bridging epistemic divides without demanding assimilation into state-imposed formats. Moreover, participation must be intersectional, attentive to the

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diversity within Indigenous communities, particularly by embracing the leadership and knowledge of Indigenous women, whose ecofeminist perspectives uniquely illuminate the relationships among community wellbeing, environmental care, and energy sovereignty. Such robust, decolonial participation transforms policymaking from a technocratic exercise into a democratic process grounded in respect, dialogue, and shared authority.

Justice, within the framework of decolonial governance, emerges as a multifaceted and indispensable principle, encompassing not only distributive concerns, the fair allocation of resources and benefits, but also procedural, restorative, and epistemic dimensions. Prevailing energy policies in Africa frequently reproduce systemic injustices by privileging corporate interests, external investors, and political elites, while exacerbating inequalities for Indigenous peoples who endure the brunt of environmental degradation, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. A decolonial lens insists on recognising these historical and ongoing harms as structural rather than incidental. It demands accountability and redress pathways that go beyond compensation to address root causes. Restorative justice plays a crucial role, seeking to repair relationships between Indigenous communities and the state, as well as between people and their environments, disrupted through exploitation and dispossession. This involves recognising Indigenous land rights, honouring treaty obligations, and returning control over natural resources to Indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, epistemic justice challenges the hierarchies of knowledge that have historically marginalised Indigenous knowledges as inferior or unscientific. Validating Indigenous ecological knowledge systems as foundational to energy planning restores dignity and ensures policies draw upon diverse sources of wisdom that are contextually appropriate and sustainable. In this way, justice under decolonial governance is emancipatory and transformative, aiming to dismantle inequalities and create enabling conditions for the flourishing of Indigenous peoples.

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A core concept in decolonial governance is relationality, an Indigenous epistemological principle that emphasises interconnectedness and responsibility among people, land, ancestors, and future generations. This contrasts sharply with the fragmentation and commodification typical of colonial governance and capitalist resource extraction, which treat land and energy as discrete assets for exploitation rather than as vital components of living systems and community identity. Relationality holds that governance decisions must honour the web of relationships sustaining life and nurture reciprocal obligations to maintain balance and harmony. In practical terms, relational governance would prioritise energy solutions that sustain biodiversity, uphold ecosystem integrity, and respect cultural sites, rather than imposing extractive projects that devastate ecological and social fabrics. It also prioritises collective wellbeing over individual gain, recognising that community resilience depends on nurturing social cohesion, cultural continuity, and shared stewardship. By embedding relationality at the core of governance, policy reform can shift away from reductionist cost-benefit analyses towards more holistic measures of success that reflect the health of ecosystems and the dignity of people.

The principle of community authority further defines decolonial governance by asserting that communities, particularly Indigenous ones, hold primary authority over decisions affecting their lands, waters, and ways of life. The state does not grant this authority, but it stems from ancestral occupation, cultural ties, and custodial responsibility. Decolonial governance frameworks must therefore prioritise community-led governance structures over centralised or corporate control, challenging the dominance of neoliberal models that value private ownership and market mechanisms in resource management. Community authority manifests in diverse governance forms, whether through elders' councils, women's collectives, or youth assemblies, reflecting Indigenous political traditions. These structures possess unique capacities to manage resources in accordance with ethical, spiritual, and ecological principles, making

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them well-equipped to steward just and regenerative energy transitions. Moreover, recognising community authority means establishing legal protections for Indigenous land tenure and decision-making rights, resisting processes such as ‘free, prior and informed consent’ being reduced to perfunctory consultation without binding power. Empowering communities to govern fosters self-reliance, reinforces cultural identities, and supports the implementation of sustainable energy projects attuned to local realities.

Integral to these principles is the necessity of embracing decolonial governance as an ongoing, relational process rather than a fixed set of rules or a policy reform checklist. It requires continuous reflexivity and humility on the part of state and non-state actors to recognise their positions within colonial power structures and the imperative to relinquish control. This process involves genuine partnerships grounded in mutual respect and learning, where Indigenous knowledge holders are respected as experts and custodians of energy wisdom shaped over millennia. Furthermore, it demands vigilance against co-optation and the commodification of Indigenous identities for political or economic gain. Decolonial governance envisions a dynamic political ecology where governance institutions evolve responsively to community needs, cultural values, and ecological constraints, resisting rigid technocratic templates.

The principles of decolonial governance offer a politically and ethically sound framework for reimagining Africa’s energy transitions. They centre Indigenous women’s voices and ecofeminist insights, emphasising care, relationality, and sovereignty. These principles collectively challenge the colonial and capitalist policies that continue to exploit African lands and bodies, often disguised as sustainability and green development. They pave the way for reparative policies that restore Indigenous agency, uphold justice, and create equitable, environmentally harmonious futures. By embedding Indigenous sovereignty, transformative participation, multifaceted justice, relationality, and community authority into governance

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reforms, Africa can move beyond extractive and exclusionary energy models. This shift can lead to a new paradigm where energy serves the well-being of both people and the planet. This reimagining brings us closer to fulfilling the promise of a just energy transition that is not merely a technical shift, but a radical awakening to shared responsibilities and liberated futures.

### **5.4 Pathways to Inclusive Energy Governance**

To envision truly inclusive energy governance in Africa, it is essential first to recognise how deeply entrenched colonial power structures continue to dictate current energy policies. These frameworks, often presented as modernisation and green progress, frequently mask ongoing dispossession, exclusion, and epistemic violence against Indigenous peoples, particularly women who are on the frontline of energy injustice. Acknowledging this colonial foundation is a necessary starting point for identifying mechanisms that facilitate genuine Indigenous participation and leadership. These should not be token gestures but foundational pillars of a just energy transition. Inclusive energy governance, therefore, requires an unwavering commitment to dismantle extractivist paradigms and epistemologies, while simultaneously elevating Indigenous sovereignties grounded in relationality, communal authority, and long-standing reciprocal environmental ethics.

Mechanisms for Indigenous participation begin with the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), a cornerstone articulated by international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, beyond merely invoking FPIC lies the critical challenge of its meaningful implementation. The exploitative nature of energy projects often reduces FPIC to procedural checkboxes, depriving communities of substantial agency over decisions that irreversibly impact their territories and livelihoods. To address this, FPIC must evolve into a dynamic and ongoing dialogue rather than episodic consultation. It must ensure Indigenous voices retain veto power, not just in theory

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but in practice, over the development, deployment, or rejection of energy infrastructure. Indigenous women, who embody ecofeminist values of care and stewardship, should play central roles in these dialogues, free from patriarchal and technocratic gatekeeping that frequently marginalises their insights. Their lived knowledge of environment-energy interconnections offers critical wisdom in charting sustainable alternatives that resonate with Indigenous cosmologies and sustainability ethics.

Establishing Indigenous-led governance entities offers another vital pathway. These institutional forms must be sovereign spaces where Indigenous women leaders, elders, and youth collectively determine energy strategies that reflect their community's needs and aspirations. Such entities challenge prevailing top-down, state-centric, and market-driven governance models. For example, community energy cooperatives or Indigenous energy councils can foster collective ownership and stewardship, facilitating local control over energy resources while embedding care-based principles that resist exploitative extraction. These spaces simultaneously serve as platforms for intergenerational knowledge transfer and innovation, blending traditional ecological understandings with appropriate technologies suited to local contexts. Importantly, these Indigenous governance formations demand legal recognition and protection from the state and international frameworks. Without this supportive infrastructure, Indigenous-led institutions risk tokenism, invisibility, or co-optation, perpetuating the same colonial hierarchies under new guises.

Policy frameworks that explicitly promote Indigenous participation must be designed with intersectional and decolonial perspectives. Intersectionality reveals how gender, ethnicity, age, and class uniquely shape Indigenous women's experiences and leadership challenges. Many policy attempts to 'include' Indigenous women fall short when they ignore systemic barriers, such as patriarchal norms within communities and the broader societal marginalisation imposed by

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colonial legacies. To genuinely enable Indigenous women's leadership, policies should integrate culturally contextualised, linguistically accessible, and community-driven capacity-building provisions. Equally critical is the creation of funding streams dedicated to grassroots Indigenous women-led energy initiatives, moving away from conventional models that favour corporate-led projects and external expertise. Decoloniality insists on co-constructing these policies with Indigenous women at all stages, from conception and design to monitoring and evaluation, treating them not as passive beneficiaries but as equal architects of change. This collaborative methodology counters tokenistic stakeholder engagement practices prevalent in dominant policy circles and fosters accountability grounded in respect, trust, and mutual recognition.

In practice, inclusive governance frameworks must embed systems for knowledge co-production and pluralism. The epistemic dominance of Western scientific paradigms in energy governance marginalises Indigenous knowledge systems, which encompass holistic understandings of energy relationships and draw on centuries of place-based observations, ceremonies, and cosmological connections. Embedding spaces where multiple knowledge forms interact as equals enables innovative solutions that address energy needs without sacrificing ecological balance or cultural integrity. These knowledge exchanges can challenge the reductive measures often prioritised in technocratic discourse, such as quantified carbon reduction or energy efficiency, by centring values such as reciprocity, regeneration, and relational responsibility. Indigenous women, as custodians of such knowledge, should be supported to lead these co-production processes, facilitated and amplified through participatory research programmes, community mapping, and storytelling platforms that value their epistemologies alongside scientific datasets.

Reframing governance to be more inclusive also necessitates legal and policy reforms that restore Indigenous land rights as cornerstones of energy sovereignty. Colonial and postcolonial state regimes have frequently undermined Indigenous territorial claims,

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producing legal ambiguity that enables exploitative energy projects to proceed without community approval. Secure land tenure and control not only protect against displacement and resource grabs but also empower Indigenous peoples to negotiate energy pathways aligned with their social and ecological well-being. Land tenure reform must therefore be seen as inextricably linked to energy justice. Indigenous women, who bear disproportionate burdens from land dispossession and environmental degradation, should actively shape these reform processes. Their leadership can advocate for land governance models that prioritise custodianship and sustainable stewardship rather than commodification. This restoration of land rights enables Indigenous communities to become decision-makers, determining whether and under what conditions energy development will occur.

Transparency and accountability mechanisms are essential components of inclusive energy governance. Historically, energy projects affecting Indigenous territories have been shrouded in secrecy, with communities often denied accessible information about environmental risks, contract terms, or revenue flows. Inclusive governance must institute mandatory disclosure of energy agreements, environmental impact assessments, and financial arrangements, all translated into Indigenous languages and communicated in locally trusted formats. Indigenous women leaders can spearhead community monitoring initiatives, employing technologies such as participatory GIS mapping and community-based environmental observation to democratise oversight and validate community concerns. These forms of accountability not only prevent abuses but also cultivate trust among Indigenous communities, governments, and investors, fostering collaborative rather than adversarial relationships.

The integration of Indigenous worldviews into governance structures further challenges linear temporality and orality, as well as extractivist logic, which is dominant in the dominant ideology. Indigenous epistemologies emphasise cyclical time, relationality with non-human entities, and the sacredness of ecosystems, a stark contrast to the

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profit-driven urgency embedded in many energy transition agendas. To embed these ontologies, governance processes should include ceremonial and deliberative spaces for communal decision-making, acknowledging the spiritual dimensions of energy and environmental stewardship. Indigenous women, often the holders of ritual knowledge linked to land and water, are uniquely positioned to guide these processes. Recognition of Indigenous governance as holistic, incorporating spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions, disrupts the technocratic reductionism that frequently marginalises community concerns and well-being.

Inclusive governance extends beyond national boundaries to encompass regional and pan-African collaboration grounded in Indigenous solidarity. Energy policies devised within isolated nation-states often overlook transboundary Indigenous ecosystems and shared cultural landscapes. Platforms that connect Indigenous women leaders across borders can facilitate mutual learning, coordinated advocacy, and collective resistance to extractivist energy projects promoted by multinational corporations and international financial institutions. These transregional linkages also provide opportunities to influence continental energy agendas, such as those within the African Union, and to advance Indigenous perspectives within supranational climate and energy policy fora. Such collaborative networks echo Indigenous principles of interconnection and collective responsibility, reinforcing alternative governance paradigms in contrast to competitive neoliberal frameworks.

The democratisation of energy governance must embrace technological sovereignty as a safeguard against new forms of dependency and exclusion. Emerging renewable energy technologies are often developed and controlled by external actors, replicating colonial patterns of knowledge extraction and control. Indigenous communities must have authority over the selection, design, and management of technology, ensuring solutions that align with their ecological ethics, labour dynamics, and cultural values. This requires

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investment in Indigenous-led research and technical training programmes that facilitate the co-creation of contextually appropriate technologies. Indigenous women's leadership in these endeavours is particularly transformative, given their roles as knowledge bearers, caretakers, and innovators within their communities. By reclaiming technological sovereignty, Indigenous peoples can reject externally imposed energy futures and instead manifest energy systems reflective of their autonomy, dignity, and sustainable coexistence with the land.

Pathways to inclusive energy governance demand comprehensive strategies that transcend tokenistic incorporation to centre Indigenous sovereignty, especially spotlighting Indigenous women's leadership as crucial catalysts for change. This involves a radical reimagining of governance institutions, policy architectures, and knowledge systems embedded within decolonial and ecofeminist principles. Only through such transformative paradigms can Africa's energy transition begin to rectify historical injustices embedded in colonial legacies and green extractivism, moving toward equitable, dignified, and sustainable energy futures rooted in Indigenous self-determination, relational care, and collective wellbeing.

### **5.5 Intersecting Struggles: Land, Labour, and Energy**

#### **5.5.1 Land Rights and Energy Projects**

In many Indigenous African cosmologies, land is not merely a resource or commodity but a living, breathing extension of community, identity, and spiritual existence. It embodies histories, relationships, and responsibilities nurtured across generations. Yet this profound connection is continuously undermined by energy projects that prioritise infrastructural expansion and profit over the ecological and social fabric that sustains Indigenous women and their communities. The conflicts arising from land use have become flashpoints where the violent legacies of colonialism intersect with contemporary capitalist development paradigms, inflicting dispossession and exacerbating structural inequalities. Energy projects, often heralded as pathways to modernisation and progress,

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paradoxically generate profound dispositional crises, undermining the very sovereignty and dignity they claim to enhance, especially when viewed through an Indigenous women's ecofeminist lens.

At the heart of these conflicts is the issue of land rights, which remain fragile and frequently disputed in many African states. Indigenous women often find themselves caught in the crosshairs of land grabs that accompany large-scale renewable energy infrastructure, such as solar farms, wind turbines, and hydroelectric dams. These projects, despite their "green" branding, perpetuate extractivist practices, tearing through landscapes and communities in ways reminiscent of colonial dispossessions, all while cloaked in the rhetoric of sustainability. As vast tracts of fertile land are reallocated, often without the free, prior, and informed consent of local communities, Indigenous women face not only the loss of physical territory but also the erosion of social structures intimately tied to land stewardship. The communal nature of land tenure systems in many Indigenous contexts is disregarded in favour of state or corporate legal frameworks that prioritise individual property titles, a move that frequently marginalises women's traditional access and rights. Consequently, the very tenure arrangements that sustain Indigenous women's livelihoods and cultural practices are rendered invisible, leaving them vulnerable to displacement and disenfranchisement.

In rural villages bordering planned energy zones, resistance is simultaneously a survival strategy and an assertion of sovereignty. Indigenous women emerge as frontline defenders of their homelands, articulating nuanced critiques that challenge dominant development narratives. Their resistance embodies ecofeminist principles, weaving together the protection of the land, the preservation of biodiversity, and the assertion of gender justice against a backdrop of systemic inequalities. Storytelling becomes a powerful tool in these struggles, a means to re-centre Indigenous knowledge systems and disrupt the erasure imposed by technocratic planning.

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These narratives expose the multiple layers of violence inflicted by energy projects, not only ecological destruction but also the social disintegration caused by forced displacement and labour exploitation.

The dispossession of land invariably leads to the exploitation of labour, another dimension deeply entangled with energy injustices. Often, the advent of new energy infrastructure promises jobs and economic development. Still, these assurances mask exploitative labour practices characterised by low wages, precarious working conditions, and gender inequalities that disproportionately affect Indigenous women. Women's labour in these contexts is largely undervalued and made invisible, both in formal employment settings linked to energy projects and within the informal economies that sustain community resilience amid upheaval. Indigenous women frequently bear the double burden of performing arduous, underpaid labour while simultaneously maintaining the reproductive and caregiving roles essential for communal wellbeing. This labour exploitation compounds the dispossession of land, as communities are uprooted from their traditional means of subsistence and pushed into vulnerable labour markets where patriarchal and racialised hierarchies are deeply entrenched.

The intersection of land rights and labour exploitation reveals the inadequacy of sector-specific responses that treat energy transitions purely as technical or economic phenomena. There is a pressing need for integrated approaches that recognise the inseparability of land, labour, and gender in addressing energy injustices. Indigenous women's rights to land and their economic autonomy cannot be compartmentalised; they must be situated within holistic frameworks that centre dignity, relationality, and ecological regeneration. The imposition of externally driven energy agendas disrupts these interconnected relationships, but Indigenous women's resistance simultaneously creates spaces for alternative practices rooted in sovereignty, care, and collective governance.

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Energy projects frequently fail to engage meaningfully with Indigenous women as rights holders and knowledge bearers, reinforcing colonial power dynamics and perpetuating cycles of marginalisation. The bureaucratic mechanisms governing land acquisition and project approvals are often opaque, cumbersome, and alien to Indigenous decision-making processes, excluding those most affected from shaping outcomes. Even when consultation mechanisms are nominally implemented, they rarely reach Indigenous women in ways that affirm their agency and leadership. These procedural failures deepen mistrust and ignite conflicts that manifest in protests, legal battles, and grassroots organising. Yet, through these struggles, Indigenous women articulate visionary alternatives to dominant paradigms of energy development, demanding governance systems that are participatory, just, and attuned to local ecologies and social realities.

Many Indigenous women's movements have evolved to weave together struggles for land rights with demands for just and sustainable energy futures. Their activism challenges the persistent invisibility of intersectional oppressions in energy policy frameworks and calls for reparative justice that addresses the historical and ongoing traumas embedded in land dispossession. These movements often employ a range of strategies: advocacy at international forums, alliance-building with environmental and feminist groups, and grassroots mobilisation rooted in Indigenous worldviews. They fortify spaces where Indigenous knowledge systems, particularly those emphasising balance, reciprocity, and sustainability, inform energy governance alternatives that resist extractivism and champion community control.

At the heart of these visionary demands is a profound questioning of sovereignty as a concept intertwined with land and energy. Sovereignty, from an Indigenous woman's perspective, is not about fragmented claims to territorial control but about restoring relational harmony across human and non-human entities, reviving ancestral

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custodianship of ecosystems disrupted by colonial and corporate intrusions. This relational sovereignty demands that energy projects respect the land's integrity and the community's rights as inseparable dimensions. Such insights challenge prevailing models of energy development that prioritise scale and efficiency over justice and regeneration.

The conflicts that emerge around land rights and energy projects also reveal the homogenising tendencies of dominant policy discourses that categorise Indigenous communities as obstacles to progress. This framing delegitimises community resistance and renders invisible the gendered dimensions of dispossession. It obscures how Indigenous women's intimate knowledge of land informs sustainable energy practices that contrast sharply with industrial, monocultural, or extractive approaches. For instance, Indigenous women leaders have long championed renewable solutions that are small-scale, community-driven, and interwoven with local agricultural and ecological cycles, embodying principles of care and responsibility absent in larger infrastructural megaprojects. These alternative energy models foreground biocultural diversity and gender justice, illuminating more just pathways forward.

The persistent prevalence of green extractivism complicates these visions. Despite promises of transitioning to clean energy, many projects replicate colonial-era extraction patterns by appropriating land and labour through so-called low-carbon developments. These ventures often externalise environmental costs onto Indigenous territories and women, reinforcing uneven burden-sharing in climate mitigation efforts. The gendered nature of these injustices is evident, as women disproportionately suffer the loss of livelihoods tied to the land, increased domestic labour burdens amid environmental disruptions, and heightened exposure to violence in contexts of social instability induced by displacement.

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This reality challenges the simplistic binaries of clean versus dirty energy and calls for intersectional, decolonial analyses that reveal the continuities of structural oppression in emerging energy landscapes.

Furthermore, the commodification of land for energy projects raises critical questions about the very foundations of development and progress narratives in Africa. Indigenous women's lived experiences highlight that the relentless search for energy often overlooks the cultural and ecological vitality that land sustains. This oversight fractures community cohesion and undermines food sovereignty, which is intimately linked to land access and use. Without secure land tenure, Indigenous women face formidable barriers to exercising autonomy over energy choices, perpetuating cycles of dependency and marginalisation. Thus, land rights emerge as pivotal for enabling just energy transitions that align with Indigenous worldviews and prioritise community wellbeing over extractive imperatives.

While legal recognition of Indigenous land rights remains uneven across African contexts, emerging jurisprudence offers some pathways for redress, often catalysed by Indigenous women's activism. Strategic litigation, alongside customary law assertions, supports claims for restitution and protection against encroachment by energy corporations and states. These legal battles are not mere skirmishes but arenas where contestations over sovereignty, identity, and futures unfold. Indigenous women's leadership in these struggles is pivotal, as their deep connection to land imbues their claims with legitimacy and urgency that transcend formal legal categories. Such struggles foster spaces for reimagining energy governance beyond an extractivist logic, moving towards models that honour community protocols, intergenerational equity, and environmental stewardship.

In mapping these struggles, one encounters a dynamic tension between imposed development paradigms and Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions of land and energy governance. This tension manifests not only as conflict but also as productive frictions that

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generate new forms of alliance and knowledge exchange. Indigenous women's activism compels a reconsideration of the boundaries of energy transition debates, pushing them beyond technocratic fixations towards holistic considerations that embed social justice, gender equity, and ecological restoration at their core. Their frontline engagement transforms contested lands into sites of knowledge production and political contestation that challenge dominant energy imaginaries privileging extraction over regeneration.

The narratives emerging from communities affected by energy projects vividly illustrate that dispossession is not merely a loss, but a complex process interwoven with trauma, resilience, and creative resistance. Indigenous women are vital storytellers and knowledge keepers who articulate the multifaceted impacts of land alienation, from the rupture of kinship networks to the erosion of cultural rites tied to specific territories. Yet, in these stories, the powerful affirmation of survival and innovation also shines as women mobilise community resources, revive traditional practices, and forge solidarity networks to contest exploitation and claim alternative futures. These grassroots efforts expand the horizons of what energy justice entails, centring relationality and collective wellbeing as indispensable frameworks.

Addressing the conflicts over land rights and energy projects through an Indigenous women's ecofeminist framework reveals the complex entanglements of environmental, social, and gendered injustices embedded in Africa's energy transitions. It underscores the necessity of dismantling colonial and capitalist epistemologies that commodify land and labour, and advancing governance models rooted in Indigenous sovereignty and ecological care. By centring Indigenous women's voices and experiences, we gain access to transformative possibilities that reconceptualise land not merely as an asset but as a living foundation for just and sustainable energy futures. These futures demand energy policies and practices responsive to the rootedness of Indigenous women's livelihoods, knowledge, and rights

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– policies that honour the sacredness of land while fostering resilience and regeneration across African ecosystems and societies. This integrated approach holds promise for disrupting prevailing injustices and cultivating the relational grounding essential for a truly just energy transition.

### **5.5.2 Labour Contributions and Exploitation**

In many African contexts, the nature of energy-related labour is deeply entangled with histories of dispossession and structural inequality. Indigenous women often find themselves at the complex intersection of unpaid and paid labour within the energy sectors. This dual burden is frequently overlooked in mainstream analyses, yet it embodies a silent but potent form of both resistance and exploitation. Tracing women's labour contributions reveals that their work is not simply an economic input; it is a site where colonial legacies, capitalist extraction, and patriarchal control collide, reinforcing systemic injustice. The worlds of domestic care and labour-intensive energy production, far from being separate spheres, are deeply interwoven. This creates a mosaic where Indigenous women's labour sustains both community wellbeing and the energy infrastructures that frequently extract value while dispossessing their peoples.

The unpaid labour Indigenous women perform is often overlooked precisely because it operates in the realm of social reproduction: the everyday work of tending to land, caring for children, managing households, and nurturing communal relationships. These contributions underpin the very fabric of societal life, providing the conditions for survival and resilience in communities facing relentless pressures from energy extraction projects and alternative development schemes. When a mining operation encroaches on ancestral lands, it is Indigenous women who bear the brunt of food insecurity as agricultural lands are degraded or taken away. Simultaneously, they intensify their labour in domestic and subsistence realms to compensate for the loss of natural resources.

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This labour, no less strenuous or fundamental than wage work in mines or power plants, remains largely invisible in official economic accounts precisely because it operates outside capitalist logics of commodification and sale.

This invisibility allows extractive and energy industries to sustain their operations by relying on Indigenous women's labour as a kind of unpaid subsidy, an unacknowledged cost of production. The devastating effect is twofold: not only are these women deprived of recognition and compensation for their indispensable work, but their intensified labour remains disconnected from any meaningful decision-making power regarding resource governance. Their labour is appropriated to keep social and ecological systems afloat, all while they are excluded from the benefits of energy projects that claim to promote development and progress. The patriarchal structures within both local communities and corporate regimes further alienate Indigenous women from spaces of control, rendering their labour vulnerable to exploitation and erasure.

The conditions of paid labour in energy sectors reveal an equally troubling narrative of precarity, discrimination, and heightened vulnerability for Indigenous women. Despite widespread acknowledgement of gender disparities, women remain severely underrepresented in formal employment within mining, oil, gas extraction, and large-scale renewable energy projects across Africa. Where they are present, their roles are often confined to the lowest-paying, most hazardous, and least secure jobs, ranging from manual labour to informal sector work that escapes regulation and protections. The intersection of gender, indigeneity, and class compounds these injustices, as women face systemic barriers rooted in racist and sexist assumptions that shape recruitment, retention, and promotion within energy enterprises.

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Labour rights violations are rampant, ranging from wage theft and contract insecurity to exposure to health hazards and workplace harassment. In the extractive zones that characterise much of Africa's energy landscape, Indigenous women workers often find themselves on the frontlines of environmental contamination, toxic exposures, and physical dangers, simultaneously confronting inadequate social protections or healthcare access. This brutal reality mirrors historical patterns wherein Indigenous women's bodies and labour have been systematically devalued and subjected to violence as colonial regimes sought to control land and resources. The continuity of such exploitation in supposedly modern energy economies exposes the insufficient transformation of labour conditions and justice frameworks.

The toll of labour exploitation within energy sectors is not limited to economic hardship but deeply affects the psychological and communal well-being of Indigenous women. Their stories reveal the heightened challenge of balancing familial responsibilities with demanding work schedules, navigating displacement or coerced migration, and enduring psychosocial stress linked to ongoing environmental degradation. The energy projects that promise national prosperity often result in profound social dislocation, the fracturing of kinship networks, and the erosion of cultural identities. Indigenous women's labour, in its multiple forms, becomes a poignant testimony to survival amid these ruptures – labour suffused with both exhaustion and resilience.

Resistance to labour exploitation intertwines with Indigenous women's broader struggles for sovereignty and ecological justice. In some rural and peri-urban communities, women have organised cooperatives and collective labour initiatives rooted in ecofeminist principles of communal care and relationality. These endeavours emphasise shared decision-making, equitable labour distribution, and sustainable resource management as alternatives to extractivist and patriarchal models.

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By asserting control over the conditions, use, and benefits of their labour, Indigenous women are reclaiming the power to define what true development and energy justice mean within their contexts.

These collective efforts also challenge the fundamental assumptions underpinning dominant energy transitions, which often prioritise technological innovation or market-friendly solutions over social equity and cultural continuity. Indigenous women's labour contributions recentre energy justice debates around lived experiences and embodied knowledge, bringing visibility to the strong webs of care, community, and custodianship that sustain both human and non-human life. Their insistence on integrating labour rights with land rights highlights how disentangling the dispossession of territory from the exploitation of labour is not feasible in the pursuit of just energy futures.

Addressing these interconnected injustices requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes Indigenous women's roles as workers, caregivers, and knowledge holders. Such an approach rejects the compartmentalisation of labour policies from land restitution, gender equality measures from environmental protection, or economic empowerment from cultural recognition. Indigenous women's ecofeminist insights deeply challenge extractivist logics that commodify labour and nature alike, proposing instead governance rooted in interdependence, relationality, and reciprocity. Moving beyond tokenistic inclusion, this paradigm demands that Indigenous women occupy central roles in shaping energy policies and labour frameworks, ensuring their labour is respected, valued, and justly compensated.

This comprehensive vision foregrounds the need for legal and institutional mechanisms that safeguard Indigenous women's labour rights alongside territorial sovereignty. By embedding labour protections within broader decolonial and environmental justice struggles, these mechanisms can disrupt cycles of dispossession and

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exploitation. Policies that embrace community-led energy generation underscore the importance of localised labour control, where Indigenous women define the terms of participation, remuneration, and environmental stewardship. This shift challenges dominant capitalist energy models premised on extractive accumulation, inviting instead sustainable economies rooted in dignity and collective well-being.

Recognising Indigenous women's unpaid and paid labour in energy sectors reveals fundamental contradictions within Africa's energy transition narratives. It exposes how entrenched colonial and capitalist structures reproduce inequality by invisibilising or exploiting the labour that sustains communities and ecosystems alike. Yet within this recognition also lies transformative potential: Indigenous women's labour, imbued with ecofeminist values of care and relationality, can become a powerful lever to reimagine energy systems that heal rather than harm. These women's struggles pulse with hope for a just energy transition that reunites labour and land, rights and responsibilities, fostering futures where Indigenous peoples and the earth thrive together, free from dispossession and exploitation.

### **5.5.3 Strategies for Recognition and Justice**

In the interconnected universe of Africa's energy landscape, strategies for recognition and justice emerge as essential threads, weaving together the diverse experiences of Indigenous women who have long borne the brunt of dispossession, labour exploitation, and environmental degradation. These struggles, deeply rooted in colonial histories and contemporary neoliberal paradigms, require advocacy and policy responses that do not merely address surface-level symptoms but rather delve into the systemic and structural inequities that perpetuate energy injustices. Recognition here transcends mere acknowledgement; it involves affirming Indigenous women's agency, knowledge systems, and rights in energy decision-making processes. Justice demands not only restitution for past and ongoing harms but also the establishment of frameworks that prevent future violations,

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ensuring equitable participation and benefits for those historically marginalised. This comprehensive approach demands both an unflinching critique of existing power dynamics and the co-creation of pathways that centre Indigenous women as sovereign actors shaping their own futures.

Central to this pursuit is the understanding that land dispossession functions as a violent erasure of Indigenous women's relationships to their territories, severing cultural, spiritual, and economic lifelines. Energy projects – whether large-scale hydropower dams, mining ventures for renewable energy minerals, or biofuel plantations – often encroach upon and appropriate these lands without free, prior, and informed consent, leading to displacement and social disintegration. Advocacy within this context calls for robust mechanisms of territorial recognition that safeguard Indigenous collective ownership and stewardship models against both state and corporate encroachment. Such mechanisms must be grounded in Indigenous legal traditions that often conceptualise land not as property but as a living, reciprocal relationship. When policy frameworks mimic or impose Western conceptions of property and development, they inadvertently perpetuate patterns of exclusion and exploitation. Advocates collaborating with Indigenous women thus promote legislative reforms that enshrine territorial sovereignty, including the codification of customary land rights within national legal systems, the recognition of Indigenous governance structures, and the establishment of independent oversight bodies that effectively monitor compliance and redress grievances.

Equally essential to justice is addressing the multifaceted labour exploitation Indigenous women experience within extractive and energy supply chains. The feminisation of labour in these sectors is frequently unacknowledged and undervalued, masking the disproportionate burdens borne by women who continue to perform subsistence agriculture, domestic care, and informal economy activities while contending with hazardous working conditions, wage

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discrimination, and eroding livelihoods. Labour rights advocacy aims to dismantle exploitative employment practices by demanding fair wages, occupational health and safety standards, and social protections tailored to informal and precarious labour contexts. In parallel, there is a critical need to highlight and validate Indigenous women's knowledge and contributions to environmental management and sustainable resource use, countering narratives that render them invisible within formal labour frameworks. Policy responses that integrate gender-sensitive labour regulations, recognise unpaid care work, and facilitate collective bargaining by Indigenous women's groups represent transformative shifts towards labour justice within energy transitions.

At the intersection of these struggles lies the imperative for integrated approaches that refuse to fragment rights and resources into isolated sectors or agendas. Dispossession and labour exploitation are mutually reinforcing phenomena; land loss undermines livelihoods and economic autonomy, while exploitative labour practices compound vulnerability to ecological harm and deepen socio-economic inequalities. Hence, strategies for recognition and justice necessitate hybrid frameworks that interweave land rights, labour protections, gender equity, and environmental sustainability. Such intersectional approaches are often championed by Indigenous women's collectives that operate at the confluence of grassroots activism, legal advocacy, and policy engagement. These collectives embody relational governance, cultivating solidarity across diverse communities and leveraging both traditional practices and contemporary political strategies to resist dispossession and reclaim agency in energy futures. They actively participate in multilevel dialogues, from local assemblies to international climate negotiations, insisting that Indigenous knowledge systems and feminist ethics be integral to shaping the design and implementation of energy policies.

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One powerful mode of advocacy emerges through strategic litigation that challenges state and corporate violations of Indigenous land and labour rights. Courts have become critical arenas where Indigenous women assert claims grounded in constitutional guarantees, international human rights treaties such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and emerging principles of environmental justice. Legal victories in these spaces not only secure restitution or compensation for affected communities but also set precedents that recalibrate governance frameworks for energy development. For example, jurisprudence mandating the consultation and consent of Indigenous communities before project approval reiterates their status as rights-holders rather than passive stakeholders. Indigenous women lawyers and activists often spearhead these efforts, combining legal acumen with cultural wisdom to navigate formal justice systems while preserving community cohesion. However, they also critique the limits of litigation, recognising that legal remedies may be insufficient or inaccessible in many contexts and must be complemented by broader political mobilisation and policy reforms.

Policy engagement forms another crucial front in advancing recognition and justice. Indigenous women navigate complex political terrains, advocating for the inclusion of their perspectives in national and regional energy transition strategies. They emphasise that energy frameworks designed without their participation risk replicating colonial extractivist logics disguised as green transitions. In response, advocacy groups push for participatory policy-making models that institutionalise Indigenous representation on decision-making bodies and promote co-management of energy projects. These models prioritise local knowledge and leadership as indispensable to identifying renewable energy solutions aligned with community values and ecological wellbeing. Moreover, policy agendas framed around justice insist on redistributive measures, such as revenue-sharing, community benefit agreements, and direct investments in Indigenous-led renewable energy initiatives. By ensuring that energy

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transitions contribute to poverty alleviation, health improvements, and cultural revitalisation, such policies disrupt the historical pattern of dispossession and marginalisation.

International development and climate financing mechanisms also emerge as arenas for advancing recognition and justice. Indigenous women's advocacy critiques prevailing funding models that often impose conditions privileging market-based logics over social and environmental rights. They demand reforms that allocate resources directly to Indigenous communities, enabling grassroots project ownership and capacity-building. This approach not only fosters self-determination but also counters technocratic models that position Indigenous peoples as beneficiaries rather than partners. Additionally, Indigenous women advocate for accountability mechanisms within these financial institutions to monitor and mitigate negative social and environmental impacts. They call for transparency and inclusivity in monitoring processes, ensuring community voices shape evaluation criteria and outcomes. By challenging the terms and conditions of development assistance, these advocacy efforts highlight the colonial underpinnings of global energy governance and insist on transformative change.

Cultural resurgence and the reclamation of Indigenous worldviews are indispensable to strategies for recognition and justice. Indigenous women argue that a just energy transition must prioritise epistemic justice by dismantling dominant narratives that marginalise alternative knowledge systems and disconnect humans from nature. Storytelling, ceremonies, and artistic expressions become powerful tools for reaffirming Indigenous identities and relationships with land and energy, enabling communities to articulate visions of development rooted in respect, reciprocity, and relationality. Advocacy thus integrates cultural revitalisation as both an end and a means of resistance, challenging extractive paradigms that commodify nature and people. This cultural dimension also informs policy advocacy by demonstrating how Indigenous cosmologies offer generative

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frameworks for sustainable energy governance that transcend the binaries of modernity and tradition. By centring these narratives, strategies foster pluralistic and decolonial approaches that recognise Indigenous women as knowledge holders whose contributions enrich and broaden global energy debates.

At the grassroots level, Indigenous women employ diverse tactics that blend direct action, coalition-building, and knowledge sharing. From organising community assemblies that deliberate on energy projects to engaging in peaceful protests and legal blockades against destructive mining and infrastructure, these acts of resistance assert collective sovereignty and challenge hegemonic power structures. Importantly, they weave feminist principles of care and relational authority into these movements, resisting extractive individualism and fostering inclusive dialogues that uplift women's voices and experiences. These localised mobilisations often connect with broader networks, nationally and internationally, creating webs of solidarity that amplify demands and facilitate the exchange of strategies and resources. Such interconnected activism contests the fragmentation of Indigenous struggles, forging unified platforms that influence policy discourse and public opinion.

Environmental education and capacity-building initiatives also underpin strategies for recognition and justice, equipping Indigenous women and communities with the technical knowledge and skills to engage effectively in energy governance. Programs that integrate scientific understanding with Indigenous environmental knowledge empower women to develop culturally appropriate, ecologically sensitive, adaptive, renewable energy technologies. This empowerment challenges stereotypes that confine Indigenous peoples to passive roles and counters narratives depicting them as barriers to development. Instead, Indigenous women emerge as leaders and practitioners innovating sustainable models that balance human wellbeing with biospheric health.

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Additionally, knowledge exchange workshops and participatory research methodologies facilitate mutual learning among communities, scholars, and policymakers, fostering trust and collaboration that are essential to just energy transitions.

These advocacy and policy efforts face formidable challenges. Institutional inertia, entrenched corruption, and the continued dominance of corporate interests pose significant obstacles to achieving recognition and justice. The co-optation of Indigenous agendas through tokenistic representation or bureaucratic procedures risks diluting transformative demands. Similarly, gender biases within Indigenous and broader societal structures can marginalise women's leadership, undermining the gender justice components of advocacy. To surmount these barriers, strategies emphasise building resilient and autonomous Indigenous women's organisations capable of sustaining long-term struggle. They also prioritise intersectional solidarity, linking Indigenous women's campaigns with allied movements for racial, gender, and environmental justice. Such coalition-building expands the political base for change, increases visibility, and exerts pressure on decision-makers.

In envisioning policy futures, Indigenous women advocates propose comprehensive frameworks that reimagine energy governance through a decolonial lens. This vision entails dismantling the legacies of extraction and exploitation embedded in current energy paradigms and instituting new models rooted in reciprocity, respect for Earth sovereignty, and communal well-being. Policy pathways include recognising the rights of nature, integrating Indigenous legal orders into national systems, implementing participatory budgeting in energy investments, and fostering technologies that enhance local resilience and autonomy. Crucially, these frameworks acknowledge energy not merely as a commodity but as a relational force intertwining social, ecological, and spiritual dimensions.

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By centring Indigenous women's leadership in policy arenas, these approaches seek to transform energy transitions from top-down, extractive ventures into collaborative, regenerative processes that honour past struggles and nurture future flourishing.

The imperative for integrated strategies that combine advocacy and policy responses to combat dispossession and labour exploitation in Africa's energy transitions cannot be overstated. Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives illuminate the profound interconnectedness of land, labour, gender, and ecological justice, offering radical blueprints for transformative change. These strategies embody a relentless pursuit of recognition, not only of rights but of humanity and dignity, and a resolute demand for justice that reclaims sovereignty and fosters equitable, sustainable energy futures. Their collective work serves as a clarion call to policymakers, activists, scholars, and communities alike, challenging them to dismantle oppressive systems and collaborate in the co-creation of energy landscapes that are truly just and life-affirming. Embracing this challenge offers not only the promise of redress but also the hope of regenerating relations between people and planet, nurturing resilient ecosystems and vibrant cultures for generations yet to come.

### **5.6 Global Solidarity and Transnational Movements**

#### **5.6.1 Networks of Indigenous and Feminist Activism**

Across Africa's expansive and diverse landscapes, the vibrant pulse of Indigenous women's activism reverberates through networks that stretch beyond local or national borders, weaving complex alliances that challenge the dominant narratives imposed by colonial and capitalist frameworks. These networks, dynamic, multifaceted, and deeply rooted in both place and identity, embody a radical form of solidarity that transcends geographical constraints while remaining fiercely grounded in the particularities of Indigenous women lived experiences. They represent a living archive of resistance, resilience, and imagination, forging pathways that confront the extractive forces shaping the continent's energy economies and environmental futures.

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At the heart of this emerging network of activism are organisations, coalitions, and informal collaborations that express ecofeminist principles. They focus on care, relationality, and sovereignty, connecting local struggles into unified global efforts.

Among the most notable of these movements are organisations led and shaped by Indigenous women who have long been custodians of land and ecological knowledge. These groups often operate at the intersection of environmental justice, gender rights, and decolonial politics, creating spaces where Indigenous epistemologies reclaim authority over resource governance and energy decision-making. In East Africa, the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network (IWBN) stands out as a critical hub that catalyses Indigenous women's voices, drawing from diverse communities such as the Maasai, Ogiek, and Samburu peoples. Through the IWBN, Indigenous women have mobilised participatory workshops and advocacy campaigns that integrate traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary environmental policy, creating a formidable challenge to extractive projects like geothermal expansions that disregard local territories and sacred sites. Their work illustrates a keen awareness of how energy projects are not neutral developments but battlegrounds where sovereignty and cultural survival are contested daily. This intersectional activism engages not only with environmental institutions but also with feminist networks, illuminating how gendered impacts of expropriation and environmental degradation reinforce systemic oppression.

In West Africa, the West African Alliance for Gender and Climate Change Activism is a vital coalition that amplifies Indigenous women's ecofeminist perspectives in synergy with regional feminist movements. This alliance has crafted closely connected campaigns against large-scale hydropower dams and mining operations that threaten rivers, farmlands, and Indigenous livelihoods. Crucially, these campaigns foreground the voices of women, who are often most affected by the disruptions these projects cause, and who are the

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custodians of food sovereignty, water, and communal wellbeing. Their activism not only confronts environmental injustices but also challenges existing development paradigms that present industrial-scale renewable energy as inherently beneficial. They scrutinise who is building their energy future and at what social and ecological costs. By centring Indigenous women's narratives and organising at the crossroads of gender, ecology, and Indigenous rights, this West African alliance disrupts simplistic sustainability imaginaries and insists on energy futures that honour cultural continuity and autonomy.

Moving beyond continental confines, the integration of African Indigenous women's movements within a broader global feminist ecology has opened crucial channels for knowledge exchange and solidarity. The Indigenous Women's Global Network Against Extractivism serves as a fundamental transnational platform, where African voices resonate alongside counterparts from the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. This global network fosters strategic dialogues that connect the localised struggles of African women facing green extractivism with analogous battles against mining, fossil fuel extraction, and industrial agriculture elsewhere. Within this shared space, Indigenous women articulate a collective critique of 'green' economies that masquerade as solutions but perpetuate extractive logics and neo-colonial dispossession. These global linkages enrich African Indigenous activists' tactical repertoires, infusing their campaigns with comparative insights while reinforcing a shared commitment to decolonial sovereignty and ecological stewardship. Such solidarity refutes narratives that silo African struggles into isolated incidents, instead presenting them as integral to a global movement against environmental violence and for radical justice.

The African Feminist Forum (AFF), although not exclusively Indigenous-focused, plays a pivotal role in articulating feminist frameworks that interlace with Indigenous women's ecofeminism. The AFF's synthesis of feminist discourse, activism, and policy

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critique creates a fertile ground for recognising the gendered dimensions of Africa's energy questions. Its contributions have been instrumental in positioning environmental justice as inseparable from struggles for gender equity and social transformation, advocating for policies that confront intersecting oppressions manifest in energy production and resource governance. By engaging Indigenous women leaders and community activists, the AFF promotes an understanding of sustainability that refuses to divorce ecological concerns from the social relations of power and care. In this context, Indigenous knowledge is not just validated but also prioritised as a vital basis for feminist practice that considers local realities and intergenerational guardianship. The interlinkages between Indigenous women's networks and feminist organisations also manifest powerfully in the shared endeavour to dismantle extractivism's socio-environmental devastations through coordinated grassroots mobilisations. Collaborative campaigns have emerged, for instance, against mega-dam projects in the Congo Basin, where Indigenous women from several ethnic groups have joined with feminist and youth organisations to challenge the enforced displacement, loss of biodiversity, and social disintegration imposed by such developments. Through joint forums, petition drives, and culturally resonant storytelling, these coalitions amplify marginalised voices, repositioning Indigenous women as central agents of change rather than passive victims. Their strategic use of both local languages and global communication platforms disrupts hegemonic narratives that minimise or erase Indigenous resistance, forging visibility and demanding accountability from multinational corporations and state actors alike.

These networks harness traditional governance structures, revitalising community authority and relationality as bulwarks against extractive intrusions. Indigenous women leaders often navigate complex social terrains, negotiating with elders, spiritual figures, and youth, and rooting their activism in the cultural fabric that binds society to the land and to energy. Organisations such as the Ogiek Peoples'

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Development Program in Kenya exemplify this approach by situating their environmental advocacy within customary systems of knowledge and decision-making. This connection to ancestral frameworks enables the articulation of ecofeminist ethics that reject individualism and commodification in favour of reciprocity, collective wellbeing, and dignity. Through workshops and participatory mapping exercises, the Ogiek and allied groups have documented sacred sites, forests, and water sources, creating alternative benchmarks of value and legitimacy to counter state and corporate land claims. Their methods emphasise relational accountability to the earth and to community, instilling a consciousness of energy transition that is inseparable from cultural survival and resistance to ongoing colonial dispossession.

The networks also generate vibrant spaces of intergenerational mentorship, where elders transmit ecological wisdom and political consciousness to younger women, fostering a continuum of activism imbued with historical memory and renewed strategies. This dynamic has been especially vital in contexts where energy policies threaten not only environmental integrity but also interwoven social fabrics. For instance, in Mozambique, the Association of Women Peasants and Artisans bring together Indigenous women who advocate for renewable energy solutions that prioritise communal benefit and sustainability rather than profit. Elders guide the integration of traditional healing practices and agricultural cycles with community-scale solar initiatives, crafting an energy transition that respects the earth's rhythms and nurtures social cohesion. These mentorship relationships also facilitate healing from trauma inflicted by extractive violence, holding space for collective recovery as an essential component of resistance and reclamation.

The role of storytelling and art within these activist networks further enlivens their ecofeminist visions. Poetry, music, dance, and visual arts are wielded as tools to bridge divides, convey deep ecological insights, and mobilise people across linguistic and cultural borders. Events such as the annual Indigenous Women's Gathering convene

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participants from multiple countries, where stories of loss, resilience, and hope are shared in ways that build solidarity and renew commitments to collective action. These gatherings transcend the transactional politics of conventional activism by weaving affective ties that sustain movements through cycles of struggle. Artistic expressions rooted in Indigenous cosmologies challenge dominant representations of energy transition as purely technocratic and highlight the sacred relations binding humans, non-human beings, and the land. This blending of epistemologies and affective practices equips networks with a powerful arsenal to confront the dehumanising narratives and practices of extractivism.

An important dimension of these networks lies in their engagement with policy spaces at national, regional, and international levels. Indigenous women activists navigate complex political terrains, often entering forums historically inaccessible or hostile to their participation, such as climate summits, energy policy workshops, and multilateral environmental agreements. Their presence demands reconfiguring these spaces to accommodate Indigenous epistemologies and governance models, challenging the hegemony of dominant knowledge systems that render Indigenous knowledge invisible or tokenistic. Organisations like the Pan-African Indigenous Women's Initiative have brought critical issues of land rights, gender-based violence linked to resource extraction, and culturally appropriate energy alternatives to the forefront of policy dialogues. Through persistent advocacy and alliance-building, these activists push for mechanisms that recognise and protect Indigenous sovereignty and gender justice as prerequisites for any just energy transition.

Importantly, this political engagement is underpinned by a radical praxis that refuses to separate thought from action or theory from community. Networks constantly move between grassroots realities and broader discussions, ensuring that policy interventions remain accountable to the material and cultural contexts of Indigenous

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women's lives. This blend of methods is reflected in co-produced research, participatory mapping, and community-led monitoring of energy projects, which generate empirical evidence rooted in lived experience rather than abstract metrics. The democratisation of knowledge created through these processes counters technocratic dominance and empowers Indigenous women as experts. It also creates a feedback loop where policy critiques and proposals are continuously informed by community needs and values, fostering energy transition models that embody respect, dignity, and collective well-being.

Alongside these engagements is a conscious effort within these networks to decolonise their own operations and knowledge practices. Indigenous women-led organisations often struggle to maintain their cultural integrity amidst funding landscapes shaped by international NGOs and donors whose priorities may not align with Indigenous realities. This tension sparks ongoing reflections on sustaining autonomy, avoiding co-optation, and crafting forms of solidarity that do not replicate hierarchical power relations. Embracing principles of horizontal governance, transparency, and mutual care, these networks experiment with relational governance models that foster trust and accountability. Such approaches resist the extractive logics they collectively oppose, embodying within themselves the transformative futures they envision for Africa's energy landscape.

The cumulative effect of these networks of Indigenous and feminist activism is profound. They form a vibrant ecosystem of resistance and creativity, where knowledge flows multidirectionally across continents, tactics evolve through shared experience, and visions of just energy futures are cultivated collectively. They embody an expansive ecofeminist ethos that challenges not only the extraction of resources but also the extraction of stories, experiences, and histories that centre Indigenous women's realities. By knitting together local struggles with global movements, these networks reimagine energy transition as an emancipatory project that upends colonial legacies and

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capitalist imperatives. In doing so, they illuminate pathways toward energy justice that honour the sovereignty, dignity, and interconnectedness at the heart of Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions for Africa and beyond.

### **5.6.2 Knowledge Exchange and Mutual Learning**

In the diverse landscape of Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions for a just energy transition in Africa, knowledge exchange and mutual learning weave a powerful narrative of cross-regional solidarity and shared resistance. The process of knowledge sharing transcends mere communication; it embodies a collective empowerment that challenges entrenched colonial and capitalist architectures that rob communities of their autonomy, dignity, and environmental well-being. Within African Indigenous experiences, this exchange serves as a vibrant bridge, linking local struggles against destructive energy practices to a wider global chorus of movements confronting green extractivism and environmental injustices. It is here, in the dynamic interplay of conversation and collaboration across diverse contexts, that the efficacy of Indigenous women's ecological wisdom and strategies is amplified, reinforcing a collective vision rooted in relationality, care, and sovereignty.

Central to this process is the understanding that no community exists in isolation. Systemic challenges like climate racism, resource dispossession, and gendered violence transcend borders, echoing among other marginalised groups worldwide. Indigenous women from African rural hinterlands find parallels with First Nations women in Canada, Mapuche women resisting extractive mining in Chile, and Adivasi women in India confronting the loss of sacred forests. These connections are not superficial or generic; they are deeply rooted in shared histories of colonisation, systemic oppression, and resilience. Through forums, workshops, and grassroots exchanges, often facilitated by Indigenous-led networks and ecofeminist alliances, women articulate their struggles and successes. They debate unifying principles of ecojustice, sovereignty, and non-extractive living. This

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dialogue enriches local practices with global insights, while also contributing unique African Indigenous epistemologies to the broader discourse, challenging dominant narratives that often homogenise or silence diverse knowledge systems.

These exchanges of experience are not merely about replicating technological solutions or policy models. Fundamentally, they are about learning from the values, ethics, and relational worldviews that Indigenous women embody in their approaches to energy and ecology. The idea of knowledge as a common good, freely flowing to sustain community wellbeing, contrasts sharply with the commodified, proprietary nature of information in capitalist paradigms. Mutual learning here adopts a decolonial posture. It demands humility and openness from participants to listen deeply to non-Western ontologies and epistemologies that emphasise interconnectedness with the environment and community authority. For example, African women's embodied knowledge of seasonal cycles and land stewardship resonates with Indigenous teachings from the Pacific Islands, fostering a dialogic space where healing and regenerative principles converge. These shared teachings reinforce alternative visions that resist reductionist, technical fixes to the climate crisis, advocating instead for transformations that honour cultural sovereignty and ecological balance.

This cross-regional sharing encompasses not only the transmission of wisdom but also strategic frameworks for resisting the relentless advance of “green” extractivism masquerading as sustainable development. Indigenous women activists from the Niger Delta speak ardently at international gatherings about the destruction wrought by supposed “clean energy” projects, biofuel plantations, and hydropower dams, which uproot communities and erode livelihoods. This experience is mirrored by Amazonian women contesting mega-hydroelectric projects in Brazil. By sharing maps, stories, legal strategies, and campaign methodologies, these women build a repository of tools to expose the false promises of green capitalism.

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They undertake joint advocacy at United Nations forums and regional summits, invoking international law while grounding their positions in ancestral rights and cosmologies. This alliance network serves as a formidable counterweight to corporate narratives, co-creating alternative imaginaries of energy futures that are just, rooted in reciprocity with the land, and resistant to commodification.

The practicalities of knowledge exchange have evolved with technological advances, yet they remain delicately balanced with respect for Indigenous protocols and sovereignty. Digital platforms host multilingual webinars and virtual roundtables, enabling Indigenous women to participate across vast geographies, from the Sahel to the Cauca Valley. These online spaces facilitate the immediate sharing of updates on renewable energy initiatives, legal battles, and community mobilisations, while also generating action plans responsive to the accelerated pace of climate emergencies. However, embracing technology is critical; Indigenous women often caution against unreflective digital dissemination that may expose vulnerable communities to surveillance or cultural appropriation. Instead, these exchanges are framed through consent-based practices and community-controlled channels that safeguard sensitive knowledge and prioritise empowerment over exploitation. Simultaneously, the revival of in-person gatherings, especially in culturally significant places such as sacred forests or communal meeting spaces, fortifies the embodied nature of learning and reaffirms relational bonds strengthened through song, ceremony, and storytelling.

In rural African settlements where traditional energy practices intertwine with modern aspirations, Indigenous women often serve as knowledge holders and mentors in these exchanges. They articulate experiences of managing woodlands sustainably for fuel, implementing solar micro-grids tailored to community needs, and negotiating with external actors on terms that preserve self-determination. Through mutual learning, these women expand their

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technical acumen by drawing on insights from parallel contexts worldwide, integrating innovations such as biogas digesters and water-harvesting systems adapted to their ecosystems. Conversely, they contribute their expertise on social cohesion and community governance structures that often elude technocratic energy models. This bidirectional flow challenges the hierarchical production of knowledge in development discourses, positioning Indigenous women not as beneficiaries but as co-creators of solutions that are culturally resonant and ecologically viable. The strengthening of such cross-pollination refutes the isolating impact of extractive industries, which tend to fragment communities and erase Indigenous leadership.

Furthermore, knowledge exchange extends into the realm of art and cultural expression, which plays a pivotal role in sustaining collective memory and inspiring activism. Indigenous women across continents utilise storytelling, music, and visual arts to narrate their relationships with land, water, and energy systems. These creative mediums traverse languages and borders more fluidly than policy reports, enabling empathy and deeper understanding among diverse peoples. For instance, African griot traditions merge with contemporary eco-poetry in international festivals, amplifying environmental messages while honouring Indigenous aesthetics. Such exchanges renew a shared sense of identity and purpose, affirming the centrality of the body, spirit, and community in energy transitions envisioned from an ecofeminist perspective. They also serve as powerful pedagogical tools within and beyond Indigenous spaces, illustrating complex interdependencies and evoking a collective responsibility for sustaining Earth's life systems.

Central to these cross-regional solidarities is an evolving political consciousness articulated by Indigenous women leaders who stake claims not merely for environmental protection but for the restoration of sovereignty and the right to self-determination. The collective learning dialogues often illuminate the intersections of energy justice with struggles for land rights, gender equity, and cultural survival.

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These forums foreground Indigenous governance systems predicated on consensus, stewardship, and multi-generational accountability, in contrast to the top-down, profit-driven energy policies imposed by states and corporations. By sharing narratives of resistance, legal victories delaying destructive mining operations, community-managed renewable projects generating equitable benefits, or alliances successfully disrupting exploitative supply chains, women build confidence in the transformative possibilities of their visions. These stories circulate widely, inspiring neighbouring regions and fostering a sense of shared destiny within continental and global networks committed to overturning extractivist paradigms.

Mutual learning often stems not solely from intention but from necessity, as Indigenous women confront immediate crises exacerbated by climate change and global energy demands. For instance, drought-induced energy scarcity in the Horn of Africa sparks dialogues with counterparts in the Caribbean who face similar vulnerabilities linked to extractive economies. These interactions highlight the urgency of adopting community-oriented renewable solutions firmly embedded in ecosystems and social fabric, moving beyond blueprints imported from distant technocratic centres. The sharing of success stories about solar cooperatives or bioenergy hubs offers practical hope that local knowledge, when fused with appropriate technology, can chart sustainable paths forward. Each exchange thus becomes a foundation for resilience, blending ancestral wisdom with innovative adaptation strategies to craft responses that resist both ecological collapse and socio-political marginalisation.

At the institutional level, Indigenous women's ecofeminist frameworks have begun to influence transnational policy dialogues through their collective voices in forums such as the African Union and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In this context, knowledge exchange functions strategically by turning grassroots realities into advocacy language that questions mainstream development models. Indigenous women leaders, drawing on trans-

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regional campaigns, articulate demands for the recognition of Indigenous energy sovereignty and equitable participation in climate finance mechanisms. They critique the green economy's tendency to sideline intersectional justice and elevate techno-economic metrics over communal wellbeing. Through this engagement, cross-regional learning facilitates the convergence of policy alternatives rooted in respect for Indigenous rights and ecological balance, promoting coherence between local aspirations and international norms. This formal interaction underscores the need to sustain mutual learning within community-based, relational knowledge systems to avoid co-optation and dilution.

The power of knowledge exchange and mutual learning manifests in the reimagining of futures that defy the destructive logics of extraction and exploitation. The alliances forged through shared struggles nurture hope, solidarity, and a collective capacity to envision energy systems that honour the earth and all its inhabitants. Indigenous women, by continuously weaving together their diverse experiences and insights across regions, contribute to a polyphonic narrative that centres justice, decoloniality, and the sacredness of life. In this process, mutual learning becomes far more than a method; it emerges as a living praxis, a political act of generative relationality that transforms isolated resistance into an expansive movement for systemic change. This vibrant exchange offers a beacon of possibility, illuminating pathways toward an energy transition that is truly just, inclusive, and regenerative.

### **5.6.3 Challenges and Opportunities in Global Solidarity**

The landscape of global solidarity in the context of African Indigenous women's ecofeminist struggles is as vast and complex as the continent's diverse terrains. It is a landscape marked by profound possibilities yet shadowed by complex entanglements that demand careful navigation. To reflect on the challenges and opportunities that arise in forging these solidarities is to embark on a journey that aims to transcend mere rhetoric and gestures, instead seeking to materialise

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alliances grounded in mutual respect, historical accountability, and transformative action. The interplay between local realities and global networks forms a dynamic web where knowledge, resistance, and hope circulate, but where power imbalances and competing interests also lurk, threatening to undermine the very possibilities that make solidarity meaningful.

Global solidarity movements aiming to support Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions in Africa must first confront the deeply colonial legacies that continue to shape international relations, development agendas, and environmental governance. Past centuries have witnessed the extraction not only of natural resources but also of knowledge, labour, and identities from African territories, casting long shadows over present-day engagements. International environmental campaigns and global justice discourses often carry remnants of paternalism, where well-meaning actors in the Global North seek to "save" or "empower" African communities without sufficiently prioritising Indigenous leadership or understanding nuanced local contexts. This dynamic creates a settler-colonial echo within supposedly "progressive" solidarity networks, where even well-intentioned activists may unconsciously replicate patterns of extraction, silencing, or erasure. Acknowledging these historical and ongoing inequalities is critical to avoiding the perpetuation of new forms of imperialism under the guise of partnership.

At the heart of this challenge lies the tension between universalising discourses of environmental justice and the particularity of Indigenous women's experiences, epistemologies, and sovereignties. Global solidarity initiatives, driven by the urgency of climate crises and energy transitions, often prioritise quantifiable outcomes and streamlined narratives that fit within donor frameworks or international policy dialogues. However, Indigenous women activists emphasise the need for approaches that honour relationality, community authority, and spiritual connections to the land, dimensions that resist reduction into metrics or easily translatable

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policy prescriptions. This limits the visibility and appreciation of Indigenous knowledge systems in global arenas, creating a gap between localised, embodied ecofeminist practices and the abstraction of international solidarity rhetoric.

Despite these obstacles, the possibility of genuine solidarity has increased considerably in recent decades, driven by the steady and ongoing efforts of Indigenous women leaders and allied movements. These women have asserted their voices not as passive beneficiaries of aid but as active agents of change, weaving their struggles into transnational tapestries that link the resistance to extractivism in Africa with Indigenous sovereignty movements in the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. This has fostered spaces of horizontal learning, where stories, tactics, and philosophies circulate, enriching collective strategies and building coalitions that recognise difference without dissolving it. The sharing of experiences around resource dispossession, land defence, and ecofeminist healing practices demonstrates that solidarity must be rooted in a pluralistic worldview that embraces multiplicity and complexity rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

The exchange of knowledge between African Indigenous women and global allies also expands the conceptual terrain of ecofeminism beyond dominant Western interpretations, imbuing it with insights that centre decoloniality and sovereignty in direct opposition to exploitative energy regimes. These translocal dialogues challenge hegemonic structures by affirming the legitimacy of Indigenous self-determination as foundational for any just energy transition. For example, community-led renewable energy projects initiated by women in rural Africa resonate with similar endeavours in Indigenous communities elsewhere, where grassroots technological innovation is coupled with cultural preservation and governance autonomy.

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Such convergence propels a politics of hope grounded in tangible agency rather than top-down development models, illustrating how local actions can ripple outward to inform and influence international discourses.

However, building these solidarities presents logistical and political challenges. Language barriers, differing legal frameworks, and unequal access to communication technologies often hinder sustained collaboration and trust-building. Moreover, the risk of co-optation by global organisations with agendas misaligned to Indigenous priorities raises concerns about diluting or depoliticising movements. While vital, external funding can also impose conditions that shift focus from community-defined needs to donor-driven objectives, thereby threatening the authenticity and autonomy of initiatives led by Indigenous women. Navigating these tensions requires vigilant critical engagement and a commitment to reflexivity that prioritises Indigenous protocols and decision-making structures within transnational partnerships.

Additionally, the landscape of global activism often reproduces a hierarchy of struggles, where Southern voices are both seen as containers of suffering and kept out of leadership roles at international forums. Indigenous women from Africa often face multiple layers of marginalisation: as women, as Indigenous peoples, and as residents of a continent historically framed as a site of crisis needing external intervention. Confronting these intersecting oppressions involves dismantling tokenistic representations and creating pathways for Indigenous women's meaningful participation, leadership, and authorship across global platforms. This includes respecting their right to define agenda priorities, articulate visions for change, and control how their stories and knowledge are circulated.

A particularly promising aspect of global solidarity is its capacity to amplify Indigenous women's narratives in campaigns that critique and contest the global political economy of energy transitions.

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By linking local struggles against green extractivism, such as mining for minerals critical to renewable technologies, with international lobbying and advocacy, solidarity networks expose the hidden continuities between fossil fuel dependency and so-called “clean energy” pathways. This intersectional critique challenges simplistic technological fixes and calls attention to the social and ecological costs often borne disproportionately by Indigenous women and communities. Through coordinated actions, such as global days of resistance, international court cases, and transnational policy engagements, African Indigenous women can leverage wider awareness and pressure to demand accountability from multinational corporations and governments alike.

Solidarity forged through intercultural rituals, storytelling, and shared moments of care introduces affective dimensions vital for sustaining long-term movements. Recognising shared struggles and acknowledging the wounds inflicted by colonial extractivism fosters empathy and solidarity beyond strategic alliances. These emotional ties create resilient networks that nurture healing and replenish the momentum necessary to confront entrenched systems of injustice. In this way, global solidarity is not merely instrumental but also transformative, facilitating the mutual reimagining of futures rooted in care, relationality, and justice.

The emergence of digital technologies and alternative media channels has opened new avenues for connecting Indigenous women’s ecofeminist voices across continents, democratising access to platforms previously gatekept by dominant institutions. Social media campaigns, community radio, virtual workshops, and collaborative research projects have created virtual spaces where stories from African Indigenous women reach global audiences and spark dialogues with activists, scholars, and policymakers worldwide. These digital solidarities facilitate rapid mobilisation and information exchange, making visible often overlooked narratives and disrupting dominant knowledge hierarchies. However, digital engagement also

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raises concerns about surveillance, data sovereignty, and unequal access that must be addressed to ensure these tools empower rather than expose vulnerable communities.

Considering these dynamics, building strong global solidarities calls for a careful balance between uniting around shared planetary and social justice goals and honouring the specificity of Indigenous women's diverse experiences and visions. It demands an ethic of active and ongoing listening, a willingness to cede control, and a recognition that solidarity is a process rather than a static state. This process encompasses continual negotiation, conflict, learning, and humility. It also entails the courageous work of confronting uncomfortable truths about power, privilege, and complicity within solidarity networks themselves. Only by embracing this complexity can these alliances nurture inclusive, just, and sustainable alternatives to extractive energy paradigms.

The promises of global solidarity are bound up with the recognition that no single movement or geographic region can address planetary crises alone. The systemic challenges of climate change, energy injustice, and colonial legacies are interconnected and demand coordinated responses that transcend borders. Indigenous African women's ecofeminist visions provide vital ethical and epistemological grounding, situating justice and relationality at the centre of global efforts. When solidarity embodies these principles, it becomes a force for reparative justice, opening spaces to challenge hegemonic systems and co-create resilient futures. The struggles and alliances that arise from this global-local intersection are powerful reminders that justice is not a zero-sum game but a collective journey toward dignity, sovereignty, and ecological harmony. Through patience, persistence, and principled collaboration, global solidarity can transform from a fragile ideal into a lived reality that elevates Indigenous women's leadership and nurtures the flourishing of African lands and peoples.

### **5.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the institutional terrain within which energy systems are governed and contested. It has shown that struggles over land, labour, and resource control are inseparable from broader questions of sovereignty, representation, and political power. Efforts to decolonise energy governance and build transnational solidarities reveal that institutional transformation is both necessary and ongoing, though uneven and incomplete. These governance struggles open the space for imagining more just energy systems, but they do not by themselves determine what such futures should look like or how they might be realised. To move from structural critique and institutional analysis toward constructive direction, it is necessary to articulate guiding principles, identify barriers, and consider pathways for transformation. The final chapter, therefore, turns toward the future, synthesising the book's insights to explore what just energy transitions might entail in practice and how they might be pursued.

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### **Chapter 6: Imagining Just Energy Futures**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The final chapter looks to the future by synthesizing the book's analysis of history, knowledge, politics, and institutions to suggest pathways for just energy transitions. Instead of treating the future as a fixed endpoint, it views it as a contested space shaped by different visions, structural barriers, and new forms of collective action. It begins by outlining core principles that define equitable energy futures, based on ethical and governance frameworks discussed earlier. The chapter then explores political, economic, and social obstacles that hinder transformative change, such as entrenched institutional setups, unequal power dynamics, and conflicting development goals. It also highlights opportunities for innovation, coalition-building, and reform that could lead to more just energy paths. The conclusion offers policy recommendations and strategic priorities, stressing the importance of Indigenous leadership, relational governance, and shifting energy systems toward social and ecological well-being. Overall, it frames the energy transition as not just a technical effort to reduce carbon emissions, but as a social transformation that must address past injustices and foster more equitable, sustainable futures.

#### **6.2 Principles of Just Energy Futures**

To develop energy futures that transcend mere technological and economic gains, justice must be central, especially in Africa, where respectful stewardship of its rich ecological and cultural heritage is required. A just energy framework should be rooted in values that restore sovereignty, uphold dignity, protect ecological health, and support community wellbeing. These are not distant ideals but are informed by the experiences and visions of Indigenous women, who have faced colonial and capitalist violences. Their ecofeminist insights provide crucial guidance for shaping energy policies that honour diverse forms of life, rather than reducing them to market-driven or technocratic models.

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Fundamentally, sovereignty demands reclaiming energy systems from oppressive structures that have historically marginalised Indigenous peoples and local communities.

Sovereignty in this context transcends territorial control; it embodies the assertion of self-determination over how energy is produced, distributed, and consumed in accordance with Indigenous laws, values, and priorities. It demands dismantling power structures that prioritise foreign interests or narrow profit margins at the expense of community consent and participation. This means recognising the inalienable rights of Indigenous peoples to territory, cultural practices, and governance mechanisms, without which any 'transition' risks perpetuating cycles of extraction, displacement, and environmental degradation. Indigenous women, as custodians of knowledge and stewards of relational ecologies, articulate sovereignty as a collective, intergenerational covenant, a sacred trust to honour the lands, waters, and skies that sustain them. Alongside sovereignty, dignity forms a central pillar of just energy futures, calling for the respectful inclusion and amplification of Indigenous women's voices and experiences. Too often, the discourse around energy transitions is shaped by abstract, depersonalised narratives that erase the human and cultural dimensions of energy injustices. Dignity demands that every person affected by energy projects be recognised not as a passive recipient or statistical subject, but as an active agent with inherent worth and rights. This recognition must confront and dismantle intersecting oppressions, colonial legacies, patriarchy, racism, and economic inequality, which dehumanise Indigenous women and communities, rendering their suffering invisible or irrelevant.

Upholding dignity entails ensuring equitable access to clean, affordable, and culturally appropriate energy sources, while safeguarding against harms such as environmental contamination, health risks, and social dislocation. It involves meaningful participation in decision-making processes and the acknowledgement of traditional knowledge as a source of innovation and resilience

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rather than an obstacle to progress. The principle of ecological balance further grounds just energy futures in an ethic of care and reciprocity with the natural world, contesting extractive modes of production that treat ecosystems as mere resources to be exploited. For too long, energy systems have been designed under industrial rationalities that externalise ecological costs onto communities and non-human life, contributing to biodiversity loss, climate change, and ecological collapse. Indigenous ecofeminist perspectives emphasise an intimate kinship with the Earth and its non-human inhabitants, fostering a relational mindset that seeks harmony rather than domination. This principle calls for energy solutions that restore and regenerate ecosystems, safeguard water cycles, and respect the integrity of biodiversity hotspots. It also demands scrutiny of the so-called green energy transition, revealing how mining and material extraction for renewable technologies often replicate patterns of dispossession and ecological harm.

Ecological balance insists that sustainability must be holistic, attending not only to carbon emissions but to the full spectrum of environmental impacts, interwoven with social and cultural dimensions. Finally, the principle of community wellbeing envisions energy futures anchored in the flourishing of people and places, measured through metrics beyond Gross Domestic Product or technological output. This principle recognises that energy has social, cultural, and relational meanings that shape identities, livelihoods, and collective potentials. Community wellbeing encompasses health, education, food security, cultural vitality, and social cohesion. Just transitions require that energy access foster social equity, empower local economies, and support cultural continuity. Indigenous women's leadership in community-led renewable energy initiatives exemplifies this principle; local projects built on trust, mutual aid, and place-based knowledge disrupt extractivist paradigms and cultivate resilience to climate and economic shocks.

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Wellbeing also entails repairing historical and ongoing harms inflicted by extractive industries and energy injustices, through processes that are restorative rather than punitive, and that prioritise healing and reconciliation. It recognises that communities are dynamic and diverse, requiring flexible approaches attentive to unique needs, histories, and aspirations. Together, these principles form an inseparable constellation, each reinforcing and supplementing the others to generate a just energy transition deeply grounded in African realities and Indigenous epistemologies. Sovereignty without dignity risks becoming authoritarian or exclusionary; dignity without ecological balance may produce unsustainable or tokenistic outcomes; ecological balance absent community wellbeing can lead to technocratic disenfranchisement; and wellbeing without sovereignty may perpetuate dependence and vulnerability.

This holistic framework challenges dominant mainstream energy narratives that centre on centralised, market-driven, and technology-focused approaches with little regard for social justice or cultural integrity. It disrupts the complacency with which many policymakers frame ‘transition’ as a narrow technical fix and exposes the neocolonial dynamics embedded in so-called development agendas. By centring the knowledges and leadership of Indigenous women, these principles insist that energy futures cannot be imagined in isolation from broader projects of decolonisation, gender justice, and ecological restoration. They invite a radical rethinking of the relationships between people, Earth, and energy, one in which care, responsibility, and mutuality replace exploitation, extraction, and accumulation. This implies adapting energy governance models towards participatory, decentralised, and community-controlled systems that honour place-based histories and futures. It acknowledges that transitions entail difficult trade-offs but insists these must be negotiated through transparent, inclusive processes that prioritise those historically marginalised.

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Embedding these principles in policy demands dismantling entrenched institutional barriers, legal frameworks, financial structures, and epistemic hierarchies, which reproduce inequality and undermine Indigenous sovereignty. Advancing just energy futures also requires transformative alliances that bridge grassroots movements, research institutions, and progressive policymakers, ensuring that Indigenous voices shape the conversation at every level. This collaborative approach facilitates the co-creation of knowledge and solutions that are both contextually appropriate and scalable. Importantly, the principles of just energy futures are not static prescriptions; they are dynamic, evolving constructs informed by ongoing dialogue, resistance, and learning from lived experiences. They must remain open to contestation and adaptation to reflect the diversity of African contexts and the plurality of Indigenous worldviews. At their core, however, these principles reaffirm a profound ethical commitment: that energy systems must serve life in all its forms rather than fracturing it for narrow interests. They inspire hope by illuminating pathways where energy becomes a source of empowerment, justice, and regeneration rather than dispossession and harm. Through such an orienting vision, Africa's energy transition can become a beacon of possibility, not only for the continent but for the global community, demonstrating that just, equitable, and ecologically attuned futures are within reach when the voices of Indigenous women and their ecofeminist visions lead the way. This journey challenges us to reimagine progress itself, away from extractive modernities toward relational modes of being where the health of communities and ecosystems flourish in unison. It invites each actor (policymaker, scholar, activist, or community member) to embrace responsibility, humility, and solidarity in the shared work of crafting energy futures that honour the dignity of all beings and the Earth that sustains us.

### **6.3 Community-Led Energy Models**

Within Africa's evolving energy transition, community-led energy models are emerging as profound sites of hope, resilience, and decolonial practice. These initiatives, taking root across rural villages,

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peri-urban enclaves, and regions grappling with the impacts of extractive industries, embody a transformative vision that rejects top-down impositions. Instead, they prioritise Indigenous knowledge systems, relational governance, and deep commitments to ecological integrity. The promise held within community-led energy models extends far beyond mere technological innovation; these are living manifestations of sovereignty exercised through collective action, dignity reclaimed in the face of dispossession, and an ethic of care that enshrines both human and non-human flourishing at the heart of energy futures. Embedded in these endeavours is a radical reimagining of energy as a common, not a commodity to be extracted and sold in global markets, but a shared resource interwoven with social, cultural, and environmental fabrics.

The strength of these models lies in their inherent scalability and replicability. These qualities arise organically from their foundation in local contexts yet possess a universal relevance that invites adaptation across diverse African settings. A notable example comes from community microgrids powered by solar energy in remote areas of Tanzania, where Indigenous women have played a leading role in designing, managing, and sharing energy systems that match the daily lives and needs of their communities. where Indigenous women have been at the forefront of designing, managing, and disseminating energy systems that align directly with their communities' rhythms and needs. These microgrids are not just technical apparatuses for electrification; they function as platforms for empowerment, education, and economic revitalisation. Women leaders organise cooperatives that manage the grids democratically, allocate energy equitably among households, and develop social funds, fuelled by energy revenues, to support health clinics, schools, and local agricultural projects. The model's replicability is underscored by its modular approach, systems can be scaled up or down depending on community size and resource availability, coupled with its emphasis on training local technicians, thereby ensuring autonomy and long-term sustainability. Furthermore, these initiatives flourish within trust

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networks cultivated over generations, blending scientific knowledge with Indigenous epistemologies that honour the land's cycles and unpredictable patterns, ensuring energy infrastructure remains resilient against environmental shocks.

Many community-led energy models offer a profound critique of centralised utility systems that have historically perpetuated inequalities through exclusion and neglect of marginalised populations. This critique materialises vividly in the community biogas projects pioneered by Maasai women in Kenya's arid northern territories. Responding to deforestation and energy scarcity, these women mobilised pastoralist knowledge and accessible technologies to transform livestock waste into clean cooking fuel and organic fertiliser. This not only replaced harmful reliance on charcoal and kerosene but also revitalised degraded soils, enabling the regeneration of native plants vital for both biodiversity and cultural practices. More than an environmental intervention, these biogas initiatives are acts of resistance against the extractivist forces that have long stripped the region of its vitality, affirming a sovereignty of place through the revival of circular economies and closed-loop energy systems. Their replicability relies on simplicity and cultural responsiveness. These affordable, low-maintenance systems enable women to reshape local energy markets, which improves food security and health, tackling interconnected ecological, social, and economic injustices.

Across the Democratic Republic of Congo, community energy cooperatives led by Indigenous Pygmy women present another compelling vision. One that integrates forest stewardship with renewable energy production through solar and micro-hydro installations. These cooperatives challenge pervasive narratives that cast remote forested areas as 'empty lands' ripe for industrial exploitation. Instead, they reposition forests not only as critical carbon sinks but as sacred territories imbued with cosmological significance and sustained through reciprocal relationships between people and non-human beings. Energy projects here are strongly tied to

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conservation efforts, with local women serving as gatekeepers who monitor ecological health and manage resource access in accordance with ancestral laws and communal protocols. These projects generate clean electricity for basic needs such as lighting, refrigeration for medicines, and communication devices, thereby reducing dependency on polluting diesel generators and halting ecological degradation linked to fossil fuel extraction. What sets these models apart is their deliberate integration of energy governance within customary institutions, blending formal and informal mechanisms of accountability and conflict resolution. The cooperative structures provide fertile ground for replication, demonstrating that integrating Indigenous governance and ecological stewardship within energy systems yields holistic benefits. This model underscores the critical insight that energy justice cannot be disentangled from cultural survival and environmental regeneration.

In South Africa's Eastern Cape, Indigenous women spearhead solar water heater cooperatives that address one of the most pressing intersectional challenges: access to clean water for domestic and agricultural use amidst climate-induced droughts. These cooperatives exemplify community-led models that anticipate not just energy needs in isolation but their profound entanglements with water sovereignty, food security, and gendered labour burdens. Women's leadership here is pivotal; solar water heaters reduce the time and physical strain of fetching water, an often-invisible labour that contributes to health disparities and limits educational and economic opportunities for girls and women. Beyond improving quality of life, these initiatives symbolise a challenge to the legacies of apartheid-era spatial planning that deliberately marginalised Indigenous communities in energy infrastructure investment. The model's scalability is attested by growing partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and international funders who recognise the imperative of centring Indigenous women's priorities.

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Through cooperative management, knowledge sharing, and iterative design adapted to local ecological conditions, these water-energy projects foster resilience that extends beyond immediate needs, integrating community well-being with climate adaptation strategies.

A key theme in these community-led models is the focus on intergenerational knowledge transfer and education as pillars of sustainability and innovation. In Zimbabwe's Matabeleland region, Indigenous women elders run workshops that combine traditional ecological wisdom with modern renewable energy technologies, encouraging youth involvement that respects cultural continuity. These educational spaces are transformative, cultivating a new generation of ecofeminist leaders who aim to connect ancestral relationalities with sustainable environmental governance. This method challenges technocratic energy paradigms that often reduce Indigenous knowledge into commodified fragments, losing their holistic essence. By integrating education into community rituals and daily practices, these women ensure that energy transitions are seen as ongoing, life-affirming relationships with land, water, and communities. The success of this model lies in its adaptability and deep roots—it can tailor curricula to different cultural contexts while maintaining its core focus on decolonization and relationality, providing a community empowerment model that extends beyond infrastructure.

These examples collectively illustrate crucial aspects of community-led energy models, demonstrating that they are not only viable but also essential for a just energy transition in Africa. They highlight sovereignty as relational and practised, demonstrating the right to define energy futures not through extractive, profit-driven logic but through communal care, reciprocity, and ecological balance. The dignity of Indigenous women emerges as central, not simply as beneficiaries but as architects and stewards of transformative processes that challenge colonial and capitalist legacies within energy systems. The ecological ethos embedded in these models recognises

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that energy, environment, and society are not separate; rather, they form an indivisible web, each part requiring careful governance that respects limits and nurtures regeneration. Furthermore, these initiatives call for a reconfiguration of governance itself, moving from hierarchical, state-centred systems towards decentralised, participatory models where community authority is not delegated but inherent, grounded in local knowledge and collective decision-making.

The scalability and replicability of community-led energy models depend not on the wholesale transplantation of technological blueprints but on adaptable frameworks that prioritise process, principles, and relationships. External interests, whether governmental agencies, NGOs, or private sector actors, must recognise that supporting these models requires humility, a willingness to cede control, and genuine partnership that follows rather than leads. Success is measured not by megawatts installed or market share secured, but by the flourishing of community relations, the enhancement of cultural sovereignty, and the restoration of ecological harmony. This redefinition of progress challenges dominant development metrics that, to devastating effect, have framed energy solely as a driver of economic growth, abstracted from lived realities.

Community-led energy models offer essential alternative perspectives to ‘green extractivism’, which is the widely accepted but uncritical promotion of large-scale renewable energy projects that often perpetuate dispossession and environmental damage under the pretense of sustainability. By demonstrating how localised, relational energy systems contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation while honouring Indigenous rights and gender justice, these models deflate the false dichotomy between development and environmental protection. Instead, they point toward a convergent path where dignified livelihoods, vibrant ecosystems, and sovereign self-determination coalesce.

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Community-led energy models offer not merely alternatives but foundational blueprints for reconstructing Africa's energy landscape in ways that resist colonial histories and capitalist imperatives. They illuminate pathways toward a just energy transition that is democratic, feminist, ecologically sound, and culturally resonant. Their stories and practices compel a profound rethinking of what energy is, who it serves, and how it is governed, and embed hope and possibility for futures in which African Indigenous women and their communities reclaim the right to energise their lives on their own terms.

### **6.4 Policy and Institutional Reforms**

Efforts to chart a truly just and transformative energy transition in Africa must inevitably confront the complex policy frameworks and institutional structures that have long shaped the continent's energy landscape. These frameworks, entangled in colonial legacies and entrenched capitalist agendas, often perpetuate power configurations that marginalise Indigenous communities, particularly Indigenous women whose voices have been historically excluded. To move beyond superficial reforms and toward systemic transformation, it is imperative to engage with these foundational architectures, reimagining governance spaces and legislative instruments to prioritise sovereignty, dignity, ecological harmony, and the well-being of communities as integral components rather than afterthoughts. This requires an audacious overhaul of governance paradigms, a shift away from centralised, technocratic approaches that prioritise profitability and external interests, towards pluralistic, participatory models that embody the relational values integral to Indigenous ecofeminist worldviews.

A central part of this reconceptualisation must be the recognition and legal protection of Indigenous sovereignty over lands, waters, and energy resources. Sovereignty here goes beyond mere titular acknowledgement; it demands the return of decision-making authority to Indigenous communities, affirming their right to define and control how they generate, manage, and distribute energy. This political

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rebalancing requires reforms that dismantle the inherent injustice in current systems, where Western scientific knowledge and market logic override Indigenous understanding and worldviews. Legislative frameworks should establish mechanisms that facilitate meaningful, ongoing consultation and consent processes, rooted in the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent but expanded in dialogue with Indigenous feminist ethics of care and relational accountability. Such reforms must not only stop extractive projects imposed without consent but proactively empower communities to manage their energy futures in alignment with ecological cycles and cultural imperatives.

Institutionally, the structure of energy governance needs significant reconfiguration to break the monopolistic hold of large state utilities and multinational corporations that have historically sidelined local agency. Instead, decentralised, community-controlled energy cooperatives and trusts based on Indigenous governance models should be legislatively promoted and funded. These institutions, built upon collective ownership and stewardship rather than individual profit, align closely with ecofeminist principles that value interconnectedness, shared responsibility, and reciprocity between humans and the natural world. Policy reforms must therefore support the development of financing mechanisms suited to the realities of Indigenous communities, acknowledge the structural inequalities that have denied them access to capital and technology, and facilitate capacity-building initiatives that empower local actors to lead renewable energy projects. This will require a deliberate redirection of subsidies, grants, and development assistance towards models that prioritise community resilience and social equity over mere energy output.

Furthermore, policies must integrate gender justice as a core principle rather than treating it as a secondary concern or symbolic gesture. This involves embedding gender-responsive budgeting and impact assessments within all aspects of energy planning and implementation, ensuring that the diverse needs and knowledge of Indigenous women

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are not only recognised but actively shape policy outcomes. Institutional reforms should mandate gender equality and diversity in leadership positions within energy agencies, regulatory bodies, and decision-making committees, reflecting the essential role Indigenous women play as custodians of environmental stewardship and community wellbeing. Beyond representation, there must be deliberate efforts to decolonise technical expertise itself, valuing Indigenous women's experiential knowledge as valid and essential in defining energy solutions. This calls for a restructuring of educational curricula and professional training to dismantle longstanding biases and cultivate inclusive diversity of knowledge.

These systemic adjustments also include the restructuring of the legal and regulatory environments governing land tenure and resource rights. Current frameworks that prioritise extractive contracts and foreign investment often make Indigenous land insecure, worsening dispossession and environmental degradation. Sustainable energy policies must therefore be underpinned by secure, legally recognised collective land rights that protect ecosystems and community livelihoods from speculative land grabs and destructive development. This legal security provides communities with the confidence to invest in renewable infrastructure aligned with their socio-ecological values. Environmental regulations must be radically strengthened and enforced to ensure that green energy projects do not replicate patterns of extractive harm disguised as sustainability. This requires contractual clauses that mandate ecosystem restoration, transparent environmental impact assessments inclusive of social dimensions, and stringent accountability mechanisms in cases of ecological harm or displacement.

Policy coherence across sectors is another critical area for reform. Energy transitions cannot be isolated; they intersect closely with agriculture, water, health, education, and economic development. Existing institutional frameworks often perpetuate fragmented governance, where ministries and agencies operate in isolation,

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undermining holistic planning and fostering contradictory agendas. A just energy transition demands integrated policy platforms that facilitate inter-ministerial coordination and community participation, ensuring that interventions recognise and build upon the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems. Doing so aligns with Indigenous ecofeminist conceptions of relationality, emphasising that energy solutions must support broader ecological health and social wellbeing rather than narrow output metrics. This approach necessitates the creation of intersectoral councils or Indigenous-led forums within governmental structures, mandated to oversee planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes grounded in decolonial principles.

The financing architecture for energy transition also demands systemic realignment. The prevailing global climate finance mechanisms frequently reproduce neocolonial dynamics, imposing conditions that reinforce dependency and prioritise technologies or projects misaligned with Indigenous worldviews. To counter this, policy reforms must prioritise financial sovereignty for Indigenous communities, establishing Indigenous-managed funding bodies and participatory budgeting processes that channel resources directly into community-led initiatives. Additionally, international climate finance institutions and bilateral donors should be compelled to adopt transparency standards ensuring that funds do not exacerbate social inequalities or environmental harms. Domestic financial policy ought to incentivise regenerative and distributive economic models by restructuring tax codes, subsidies, and tariffs to favour decentralised, clean energy technologies accessible to marginalised populations. Transforming financial policies to reflect justice imperatives cultivates landscapes not only of renewable energy but of economic dignity and inclusive prosperity.

Capacity-building and knowledge-exchange frameworks represent another crucial dimension of policy and institutional reform. Many Indigenous women-led initiatives grapple with systemic barriers to

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accessing technical expertise, research networks, and innovations without compromising their knowledge sovereignty. Reforms should drive the creation of collaborative platforms that elevate Indigenous women's knowledge systems alongside scientific knowledge, fostering co-production approaches to research and technology development. Institutional policies must protect intellectual property rights relating to traditional ecological knowledge, ensuring that Indigenous women are recognised as rightful knowledge holders and beneficiaries. Moreover, policymaking bodies need to institutionalise ongoing training and mentorship programmes to build Indigenous women's leadership across energy sectors and embed ecofeminist principles in practice. These investments create generative spaces that nurture intergenerational learning and sustain vibrant, culturally grounded energy transitions.

In tandem with formal policy and institutional channels, new accountability and redress mechanisms must be woven into governance systems to ensure commitments to justice and sustainability are not mere rhetoric. Indigenous women's leadership should be central to the design and monitoring of these mechanisms, as their lived experiences offer critical insights into the social and ecological consequences of energy projects. Policies should mandate transparent reporting and community audits, facilitated through participatory tools that empower local people to assess the impacts of energy transitions in real time and hold actors accountable for rights violations or environmental damages. Legal recourse avenues must be accessible, culturally sensitive, and responsive to Indigenous governance structures, recognising the limitations and harms of resorting solely to state courts or international arbitration. Embedding restorative justice frameworks rooted in Indigenous traditions enhances healing processes and builds trust amongst stakeholders, supporting more resilient governance.

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As Africa navigates its energy future, there's a pressing need for policy and institutional reforms to address the geopolitical dimensions that influence energy decision-making. The entanglement of African energy systems with Global North interests, through foreign investments, technology transfers, and market dependencies, often perpetuates extractive relationships under the guise of green development. Decolonial reforms require policies that reclaim autonomy over energy infrastructure and technology choices, fostering regional cooperation that centres African knowledge and priorities, free from external conditions. Institutional reforms should strengthen regional bodies such as the African Union to function as platforms for aggregating Indigenous voices, harmonising policies that support just transitions, and resisting exploitative global market pressures. This regional solidarity must be embedded in national policy frameworks, creating vertical integration that bolsters Indigenous sovereignty from the village square to the continental stage.

To ensure the energy transition also fulfils its promise of ecological restoration and resilience, policies must expand their definition of sustainability to embrace regenerative paradigms. Moving beyond narrow metrics of carbon neutrality or efficiency, institutional reforms should embed circular economy principles and biodiversity conservation as core mandates of energy governance. Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions illuminate the inseparability of human and non-human wellbeing, emphasising care networks that span ecosystems. Policy prescriptions, therefore, must incentivise energy systems that nurture soil health, water cycles, and ecosystem services while fostering social cohesion. This may involve integrating land management policies with renewable energy development plans, supporting agroecological practices alongside solar installations, or promoting decentralised microgrids that reduce ecological footprints and enhance local autonomy. Such integrative policies challenge dominant notions of progress and technology, insisting on humility and reciprocity in humanity's relationship with nature.

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These transformative reforms must be pursued with deliberate attention to democratic deepening and political will. Without genuine commitment from leadership and robust grassroots mobilisation, policies risk replicating exclusionary practices under new guises. Indigenous women leaders, activists, and community members must be recognised as political subjects and rightful participants in shaping agendas, not only in consultative capacities but as co-creators and rightful governors of change processes. Cultivating spaces that facilitate their political empowerment, resource access, and alliance-building is essential for sustaining momentum and resisting co-optation. Institutional reforms should institutionalise mechanisms for civic accountability and transparency, reinforcing the social contract between governments and the people they serve in the context of energy governance. This democratic rejuvenation is fundamental to realising an energy transition rooted in justice, dignity, and ecological balance.

The policy and institutional reforms necessary for a just energy transition in Africa go beyond technical fixes or incremental adjustments. They constitute a profound realignment of power relations, knowledge systems, and governance logics. By centring Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions, anchored in sovereignty, care, relationality, and ecological reciprocity, these reforms offer pathways to dismantle colonial and capitalist legacies that have rendered Africa's energy futures sites of dispossession and exclusion. Through legal recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, decentralisation of governance, gender-responsive approaches, secure land rights, integrated multi-sectoral planning, financial sovereignty, knowledge co-production, accountability mechanisms, regional solidarity, and democratic deepening, the continent can chart energy pathways that restore dignity, uphold ecological balance, and foster thriving futures for communities and ecosystems alike.

The transformation of policy and institutions thus becomes the cornerstone of a movement not only to transition energy systems, but to reimagine African futures in radical solidarity and hope.

### 6.5 Challenges and Prospects for Transformation

#### 6.5.1 Political and Economic Barriers

In the vast and often turbulent landscape of Africa's energy transition, political and economic barriers stand as towering obstacles, deeply woven into the fabric of entrenched power dynamics and systemic inequalities. These barriers are not merely incidental; they are deliberate mechanisms sustained by a complex interplay of local, national, and global interests that resist any deviation from established paradigms of resource control and capital accumulation. Political resistance often emanates from governments whose legitimacy and survival hinge on maintaining the status quo: an energy economy shaped by extractivist industries that benefit narrow elites and multinational corporations. These actors, unwilling to cede power or risk disruption of their revenue streams, frequently enact policies that marginalise Indigenous women and communities, framing their resistance as illegitimate or backward. This political front of resistance employs tools ranging from legislative repression and bureaucratic inertia to co-optation, all designed to silence or undermine Indigenous-led initiatives that challenge hegemonic energy narratives. The corridors of power are notoriously inaccessible, cloaked in technical jargon and procedural opacity, further alienating Indigenous women who seek meaningful engagement or influence. In many instances, Indigenous women are portrayed not as policy actors but as beneficiaries or, worse, obstacles to 'development': a framing that erases their leadership and agency while entrenching gendered and racialised exclusions. The political barriers thus extend beyond mere governance structures; they penetrate cultural representations and public discourse, embedding scepticism or hostility toward Indigenous knowledge systems and ecofeminist epistemologies that contest dominant energy models.

Economically, the barriers are equally formidable and profoundly tied to patterns of global capitalism and neocolonial exploitation. Africa's abundant renewable energy potential, from solar to hydro to

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geothermal, paradoxically becomes both a promise and a commodity subjected to global market logics that prioritise profit over people. The phenomenon of green extractivism exemplifies this contradiction, where ‘clean’ energy technologies necessitate the continued extraction of minerals such as cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements. These commodities fuel not only the technological transition in wealthy nations but also entrench exploitative labour practices and environmental degradation, disproportionately impacting Indigenous territories. Economic barriers are sharpened by the pervasive influence of international financial institutions and private investors, which impose conditions conflating sustainability with market efficiency, often sidelining social justice and Indigenous sovereignty. The commodification of energy resources leads to a form of enclosure, where communal lands and knowledge are privatised or appropriated under the guise of investment. Indigenous women, whose livelihoods and cultural identity are intimately tied to land and environmental stewardship, face dispossession and economic marginalisation as a result. Financial mechanisms purportedly designed to support renewable energy development frequently neglect Indigenous-led projects unless these initiatives align with investor-oriented metrics, marginalising grassroots solutions grounded in relationality and community authority. Economic barriers intersect with gendered labour divisions, as Indigenous women confront systemic undervaluation of their work, limited access to capital, and exclusion from formal economic decision-making spaces, exacerbating their vulnerability within volatile energy transitions.

Social, political, and economic hurdles intertwine with entrenched discrimination and marginalisation that Indigenous women navigate daily. Their leadership and knowledge are often delegitimised not only within formal institutions but also at the community level, where patriarchal norms and colonial legacies shape power relations. The multiplicity of social barriers, from gender-based violence exacerbated by extractive projects to exclusion from participatory forums, presents a daunting terrain for collective action. Indigenous women resist

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within this context by fostering networks of solidarity grounded in shared histories of dispossession, care for the land, and mutual support. Their resilience is enacted through community gatherings, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and strategic alliances that transcend ethnic, national, and even continental divides. However, these efforts must continually confront social stigmatisation perpetuated by dominant narratives that paint Indigenous women's claims as impediments to 'progress' or 'modernity.' The social barriers thus include both the visible violence of repression and the subtle erasures of representation and voice that maintain unequal power relations. It is within these very spaces of marginalisation that Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions emerge, emphasising collective wellbeing, relational governance, and honouring the interdependence of human and non-human life.

Environmental barriers further compound this layered web of challenges. The degradation of ecosystems through extractive ventures, pollution, and climate-induced disruptions undermines the very foundation of Indigenous women's knowledge systems and sustainable practices. Political and economic interests, enmeshed in a framework of dispossession, often neglect or consciously override ecological wellbeing in favour of short-term gains. This environmental precarity not only threatens biodiversity and cultural landscapes but also triggers social instability and health crises, disproportionately affecting Indigenous communities. Environmental harm serves as a tool of extraction and domination, creating landscapes of scarcity that justify continued external interventions and militarisation. Indigenous women's ecofeminist resistance recognises these ecological devastations as inseparable from socio-political injustices, insisting that environmental restoration is integral to any just energy transition. They advocate for energy pathways that do not replicate the colonial extractive logic but instead reimagine relationships with land, water, and energy as sacred and reciprocal. However, such visions clash with dominant development paradigms that remain blind to ecosystem limits and Indigenous sovereignty, thereby reinforcing environmental barriers within policy and practice.

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Navigating these intertwined political, economic, social, and environmental barriers requires strategies rooted in resilience, collective action, and decolonial principles. Indigenous women lead with an insistence on self-determination, crafting alternatives that embody sovereignty over their territories, bodies, and knowledge. Their resistance takes myriad forms, from community-led renewable energy projects that prioritise local needs and ecological balance to legal battles asserting land rights and demanding accountability from governments and corporations. These acts of resistance often harness the power of storytelling, ritual, and ceremony, grounding political struggle in cultural continuity and spiritual connection. By leveraging traditional governance structures alongside contemporary advocacy networks, Indigenous women cultivate a hybrid form of power that disrupts linear progress narratives and technocratic solutions. Emphasising relationality, these initiatives seek to rebuild what was broken: trust, community authority, and the complex bonds between people and their environments. Collective action remains central, as coalitions of Indigenous women, male allies, activists, and sympathetic policymakers coalesce to challenge hegemonic energy policies and envision just transition pathways that respect dignity and ecological harmony.

International solidarity also emerges as an indispensable strategy, connecting African Indigenous women's struggles to global movements against extractivism, climate injustice, and gendered violence. Such transnational networks amplify marginalised voices and facilitate knowledge exchanges that support innovation and adaptation in the face of repression. However, Indigenous women leaders continuously negotiate the tension between engaging global platforms and preserving the integrity of their epistemologies and priorities, asserting that true solidarity must reject paternalistic or tokenistic involvement. Within national contexts, mobilising local communities through education, participatory governance, and culturally appropriate technologies empowers Indigenous women to overcome exclusion and assert agency in energy decision-making.

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Importantly, these strategies are not just defensive; they affirmatively construct new paradigms grounded in centuries-old wisdom and contemporary insights, articulating just energy futures that transcend mere substitution of fossil fuels with renewables.

Economic strategies aligned with Indigenous ecofeminist values extend beyond seeking external funding, fostering communal economies and resource sharing that challenge capitalist logics. By recuperating practices of mutual aid, cooperative labour, and circular resource use, Indigenous women's initiatives demonstrate viable alternatives to profit-driven models. These efforts frequently prioritise intergenerational equity and ecological sustainability, envisioning energy systems that nourish rather than exploit. Policy advocacy plays a crucial complementary role, where Indigenous women's leadership demands the institutional recognition of their rights, knowledge, and contributions within national energy frameworks. This includes pressing for free, prior, and informed consent mechanisms, environmental justice provisions, and gender-responsive budgeting. Engaging in these political processes requires navigating highly gendered and racialised spaces, necessitating persistent capacity-building and alliance formation; yet such engagement is vital for systemic transformation.

The political and economic barriers confronting Indigenous women in Africa's energy transition are deeply entrenched, multifaceted, and sustained by complex power systems resistant to change. It is through the very recognition of these barriers that Indigenous women articulate powerful ecofeminist visions rooted in resilience, relationality, and collective empowerment. Their resistance dismantles prevailing colonial-capitalist logics by centring community authority, ecological stewardship, and gender justice as foundational pillars for a just energy transition.

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Far from passive victims of systemic exclusion, Indigenous women emerge as dynamic architects of alternative futures, demonstrating that overcoming these political and economic barriers is not simply about dismantling obstacles but about reclaiming energy futures that honour dignity, sovereignty, and the interconnectedness of life itself.

### **6.5.3 Social and Cultural Challenges**

The social and cultural challenges that Indigenous women face in Africa's energy transition are deeply embedded within longstanding gender norms and community dynamics. These are intricately woven into the historical fabric of each society, exacerbated by colonial legacies and capitalist expansions. Such norms shape not only how women are perceived and valued but also the roles they are allowed or expected to play within their families, communities, and broader socio-political arenas. In many Indigenous African communities, traditional gender roles have long delineated spheres of influence and labour, often relegating women to domestic and subsistence realms. At the same time, men occupy public and decision-making spaces. These entrenched norms create formidable barriers to Indigenous women's participation and leadership in energy initiatives, which are frequently viewed through a masculinised lens that equates technical knowledge and authority with men's expertise and experience. The rigidity of these gendered social scripts can foster resistance to women-led energy projects, limiting their legitimacy and support within communities and from external factors such as policy institutions and development agencies.

It is precisely at the intersection of these social constraints and cultural narratives that Indigenous women's resilience and adaptive strategies emerge most poignantly. Women's intimate relationship with natural resources, through roles as nurturers, healers, and custodians of biodiversity, provides deep reservoirs of knowledge and a profound ethic of care that challenge the dominant paradigms of resource exploitation. However, this knowledge faces social obstacles. In many cases, women's capacity to assert their expertise is undermined by

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social taboos or expectations that they defer to male authority, even in matters concerning household energy use or environmental stewardship, where they hold experiential expertise. This dynamic perpetuates their invisibility, rendering women's insights undervalued and often excluded from critical conversations on environmental and energy planning. The consequences of such exclusion are not merely symbolic but have tangible impacts on how energy transitions are conducted, frequently ignoring or misrepresenting community priorities, exacerbating inequalities, and eroding trust between project leaders and beneficiaries.

The pressures to maintain social cohesion in tightly knit communities complicate Indigenous women's efforts to forge new paths within the expanding energy sector. Communities that have historically been marginalised face scrutiny from the state and multinational corporations, which often frame local resistance to extractive projects as backward or obstructive. In this fraught context, women leaders must carefully navigate intergenerational tensions, balancing respect for elders and cultural traditions with a bold push for transformation. The risk of social sanctions, ostracism, or even gendered violence against women challenging established hierarchies looms large, placing an emotional and physical toll on those who dare to dissent. Additionally, patriarchal gatekeeping within political structures frequently manifests as exclusion from formal decision-making arenas. Even when women do succeed in gaining positions of influence, their authority is frequently contested, and they must continually prove their legitimacy to male counterparts and the wider community, often at the expense of their time, energy, and well-being.

Within this complex social milieu, community dynamics can be both a source of constraint and a potential source of liberation. Indigenous societies are rarely monolithic; rather, they encompass diverse relationships, alliances, and contestations that shape social organisation and possibilities for change. Women's networks, informal associations, and solidarity groups emerge as crucial

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platforms for shared learning, mutual support, and resistance. These collectives enable women to consolidate resources, amplify their voices, and collectively negotiate with external actors. For instance, developing locally controlled renewable energy projects, such as solar mini-grids or biogas systems, often relies on women's collective labour, decision-making, and monitoring. Such collaborative efforts demonstrate how relationality, an ecofeminist principle emphasising interconnectedness and care, operates in practical terms, disrupting individualistic and competitive models propagated by mainstream energy policies. By mobilising cultural values of community responsibility and reciprocity, Indigenous women create alternative governance frameworks that prioritise sustainable use, equitable distribution, and long-term stewardship over short-term profits or efficiency metrics.

These community-based initiatives consistently face the challenge of either integrating or resisting external pressures. These pressures come from development agencies, governments, and private-sector entities, who often approach energy transition projects with a technocratic, market-driven focus. Many such actors fail to appreciate or accommodate Indigenous social structures, instead promoting interventions that disrupt existing social fabrics and reinforce, rather than dismantle, hierarchies. Women frequently bear the brunt of such dislocations. Projects that impose new ownership models or mechanistic management undermine their authority and exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities. For example, pay-per-use energy models can marginalise poorer women who previously relied on communal sharing, forcing them to shoulder economic burdens or miss out on benefits entirely. This pattern reflects a broader disconnect between dominant sustainability frameworks and Indigenous epistemologies, where the latter view energy not merely as a commodity but as a life force embedded within relational worlds.

Another layer of complexity arises from the intersections between gender norms and broader social stratifications, such as ethnicity, age,

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class, and legal status. Indigenous women are rarely a homogeneous group. Some may face compounded marginalisation if they belong to minority clans or displaced communities, or if they live in peripheral rural areas with limited access to education and infrastructure. These intersecting identities influence women's agency and their ability to engage in energy transitions on an equitable footing. For example, younger women may struggle against age-based hierarchies that limit their participation in community decision-making, even when they bring innovative ideas and technical knowledge. Conversely, older women, while respected for their wisdom, may be burdened by social expectations to preserve tradition and find it challenging to advocate for radical change. In contexts where colonial-imposed legal frameworks erode Indigenous governance systems, women can be caught in conflicts over land and resource rights, complicating their capacity to lead energy projects that depend on secure territories and access.

Despite these formidable social and cultural challenges, Indigenous women deploy a remarkable array of strategies to negotiate, resist, and transform their realities. Storytelling and oral traditions become powerful tools to reclaim histories of stewardship and resistance, disrupting colonial narratives that have erased Indigenous women's contributions. These narratives serve not only as repositories of knowledge but also as rallying points for political mobilisation and identity affirmation. Women enact ecofeminist praxis by intertwining cultural renaissance with political activism, engaging in ceremonies, rituals, and artistic expressions that reclaim connection to land and reinforce collective sovereignty. In many cases, women leverage kinship ties and community politics to build alliances with sympathetic elders and male relatives, creating strategic coalitions that expand their influence and shield them from backlash.

This nuanced balancing act reveals a sophisticated political ecology where flexibility, relational mindfulness, and pragmatism coexist with an unwavering commitment to justice and sustainability.

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Furthermore, education and capacity-building emerge as pivotal arenas for challenging and reshaping gender norms within communities. Indigenous women's access to formal and informal education on renewable energy technologies, environmental governance, and legal rights equips them with the tools to contest gendered power dynamics and articulate visions for just energy futures. Simultaneously, feminist consciousness-raising and exchanges across communities foster awareness of broader systemic injustices, enabling women to situate their struggles within continental and global frameworks. These processes generate new cadres of leaders who translate ecofeminist principles into viable policy proposals, community protocols, and advocacy initiatives. Such gains depend on sustained support from networks within and beyond Indigenous territories, fostering solidarity across social differences and strengthening women's collective bargaining power.

However, these transformative impulses confront persistent risks and uncertainties. Gender-based violence, physical, economic, and symbolic, remains a shadow over women's engagement in energy transition efforts. Encroachments by extractive industries, militarised land conflicts, and the criminalisation of environmental defenders disproportionately threaten Indigenous women who defend land, water, and cultural integrity. The stigmatisation of ecofeminist activism as subversive or anti-development can isolate women from social and institutional support, risking burnout and retreat. Moreover, neoliberal austerity policies and shrinking civic spaces leave communities with fewer resources to sustain grassroots initiatives, further entrenching social inequalities. Against this backdrop, resilience is not simply about endurance but requires active, adaptive communal strategies that incorporate care for mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being alongside material needs.

In facing these multifaceted social and cultural challenges, Indigenous women exemplify a visionary reconceptualisation of leadership, governance, and knowledge production. They insist that genuine

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energy transitions must reckon with the deeply rooted social relations that shape lives and livelihoods. Energy justice, from this perspective, cannot be achieved solely through technological deployment or economic investment; it must be anchored in dismantling oppressive social orders and building radical inclusivity that honours diversity and amplifies marginalised voices. This entails creating spaces for Indigenous women to define the terms of engagement, lead decision-making processes, and co-create knowledge systems that combine ancestral wisdom with contemporary innovations. By centring Indigenous women's agency, ecofeminist visions illuminate pathways toward energy futures where sovereignty, dignity, and care coexist harmoniously, a transformative horizon that challenges dominant paradigms and ignites collective emancipatory potential.

The social and cultural dimensions of Africa's energy transition require attentiveness not only to the obstacles Indigenous women face but also to the creative, relational, and deeply political ways they confront and transcend them. Their leadership reframes energy as a shared, sacred resource embedded within cultural meanings and social responsibilities, offering profound lessons for reimagining sustainability beyond technocratic confines. Recognising these dynamics compels policymakers, scholars, and activists to adopt intersectional, decolonial approaches that dismantle barriers, nurture community authority, and promote gender justice within ecological struggles. It is within this richly textured fabric of social relations, fraught with tensions yet brimming with possibility, that the prospects for just, inclusive, and resilient energy futures in Africa can truly be realised.

### **6.5.4 Opportunities for Alliances and Innovation**

In the interwoven heritage of Africa's arduous yet hopeful journey towards a just energy transition, alliances and innovation are both a beacon and a binding force. Amidst the multifaceted barriers, rooted deeply in political inertia, economic disparities, social marginalisation, and environmental degradation, there exists a potent

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undercurrent of possibilities that beckon transformative change. These openings emerge not merely from external enablers but, crucially, from the grassroots ingenuity and vibrant resilience of Indigenous women, whose ecofeminist visions serve as catalysts for reimagining energy futures anchored in justice and relationality. Recognising and nurturing these enablers demands a deliberate and nuanced approach that comprehends the intersecting complexities while channelling the strength of solidarity, participatory governance, and culturally responsive innovation.

At the political forefront, although established frameworks often uphold colonial legacies and neoliberal agendas, evolving discussions on climate justice, Indigenous rights, and gender equity are creating opportunities for change. The international arena, often criticised for its extractive and technocratic approach, paradoxically offers platforms where Indigenous women leaders, activists, and knowledge communities are making space to voice their insights and demands. The growing recognition of Indigenous peoples in global environmental governance, enshrined in instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), provides avenues for greater political influence. Here, alliances that connect Indigenous women's collective leadership with progressive policymakers, human rights organisations, and climate justice movements can strengthen efforts to dismantle dominant, exclusionary energy systems. Such partnerships can elevate Indigenous sovereignty as central to crafting energy policies that avoid tokenism, instead embedding consultation, consent, and co-governance as core principles rather than afterthoughts.

These political openings, however, require sustained translation into meaningful institutional reforms, which in turn necessitate innovative political strategies from Indigenous women and their allies. Community assemblies, participatory mapping of energy resources, and the co-creation of governance models that reflect traditional ecological knowledge are such innovations. These strategies, while

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deeply rooted in ancestral practices, align with contemporary governance demands for transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. They foster a political culture that challenges the extractive logic, whether fossil-fuelled or greenwashed mining, and instead promotes stewardship of land and energy as intertwined commons. Importantly, these innovations challenge the oversimplified technocratic governance that decontextualises energy planning, emphasising the intergenerational responsibility and relational ethics fundamental to Indigenous worldviews instead.

Economically, systemic poverty, exclusion from formal energy markets, and the commodification of natural resources pose daunting obstacles. Yet within these constraints, Indigenous women are pioneering innovative economic models based on reciprocity, communal ownership, and sustainable stewardship, which diverge sharply from profit-driven models. The establishment of women-led cooperatives for solar microgrids, biogas production, and sustainable biomass utilisation exemplifies these economic innovations. These grassroots ventures not only create immediate livelihood opportunities but also reconfigure economic relations by centring care, equity, and ecological balance. They provide tangible demonstrations of economic sovereignty, reclaiming energy as a common good rather than a commodity subject to speculative capital.

These initiatives often leverage hybrid knowledge systems that combine Indigenous knowledge, scientific expertise, and community-based monitoring to optimise resource use and ensure sustainability. Such integrative approaches point toward an economic innovation that is simultaneously pragmatic and deeply ethical, resisting the trap of ‘green extractivism’ that exploits land under the guise of sustainability. By foregrounding communal ownership of energy infrastructure, Indigenous women’s economic innovations build resilience against volatile global markets, insulating communities from the shocks of foreign corporate control or unsustainable debt. These economic models invite broader debate on what constitutes

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‘value’, expanding it beyond monetary metrics to encompass social wellbeing, ecological health, and cultural integrity.

Socially, the formidable barriers of patriarchy, marginalisation, and social fragmentation often shape how energy and environmental policies exclude or harm Indigenous women. Yet within the social fabric, there is tremendous scope to build joyful, emancipatory alliances anchored in solidarity and mutual respect. Indigenous women, activated by ecofeminist principles, have been central in nurturing this social solidarity, weaving networks across villages, regions, and even national borders. These networks operate as spaces for knowledge and support exchange, linking women in storytelling, ritual, and joint action, strengthening not only individual capacity but also collective political agency. Importantly, such alliances are not mere collections but embody relationality, recognising interdependence and care as foundational social currencies shaping resistance to extraction and dispossession.

Social innovation thus emerges as a powerful enabler for a just energy transition, exemplified by strategies such as participatory theatre, community radio, and social media campaigns that amplify Indigenous women’s narratives and visions. These forms of communication disrupt prevailing monocultural discourses dominated by Western, patriarchal frameworks and cultivate counter publics where Indigenous epistemologies and languages thrive. Storytelling holds transformative potential, embodying lived experiences, ecological wisdom, and future visions in ways that quantitative data cannot. This narrative innovation fosters empathy, bridges knowledge divides, and challenges dominant imaginaries that frame Africa as merely a resource hinterland or sacrifice zone. Consequently, such social innovations contribute to redefining collective identities as resilient and sovereign agents of energy futures rooted in care rather than exploitation.

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From an environmental perspective, the barriers of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate instability are interconnected with all other domains, compounding vulnerability. Indigenous women's intimate ecological knowledge and stewardship practices enable potent environmental innovations. These include agroforestry systems, water-harvesting techniques, and sacred site conservation strategies that simultaneously sustain ecosystems and meet communities' energy needs. Such innovations exemplify the principle of relationality, recognising that human well-being is inseparable from the health of the land, water, and non-human beings. This perspective challenges dominant environmental narratives that often prioritise techno-scientific 'fixes' divorced from socio-ecological contexts.

The revalorisation of Indigenous women's eco-centric knowledge systems spurs innovations in renewable energy designs that are appropriate, affordable, and culturally resonant. For example, integrating solar technologies with traditional energy practices enhances adoption and sustainability, ensuring that technological solutions do not supplant but complement community needs and values. These environmental innovations also support community-led, context-specific, and equitable climate adaptation strategies, contesting top-down, one-size-fits-all models imposed by external agencies. Recognising and supporting these ecological innovations entails shifting funding priorities and research paradigms towards co-created knowledge production, privileging local expertise and its capacity to generate holistic solutions.

The opportunities for alliances and innovation do not operate in isolated silos but are deeply entwined, each domain reinforcing the other. The ability of Indigenous women to harness political openings is amplified when paired with social solidarity and economic experimentation, just as environmental innovations gain traction when embedded within supportive governance and culture frameworks.

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Strategic alliances among civil society actors, policymakers, researchers, and Indigenous communities can foster synergistic innovation ecosystems with transformative potential. These alliances work best when predicated on principles of horizontal collaboration, mutual respect, and an unwavering commitment to dismantling colonial and capitalist legacies embedded in mainstream energy transitions.

Digital technologies emerge as a novel frontier for alliance-building and innovation, presenting new possibilities and challenges. While digital divides persist, the appropriation of mobile communication, community mapping apps, and online advocacy platforms by Indigenous women enhances connectivity and amplifies marginalised voices in national and international arenas. These tools facilitate real-time knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation, and participatory decision-making processes that transcend geographical isolation. Critical engagement with digital infrastructures is necessary to guard against surveillance, data extraction, and exclusion, reinforcing the need for technology to be shaped by and for Indigenous peoples, reflecting their values and priorities.

Educational initiatives, both formal and informal, intertwine with these opportunities to nurture future generations of Indigenous women leaders and innovators. Culturally grounded curricula that integrate ecofeminist thought, Indigenous epistemologies, and practical renewable energy skills empower youth with the confidence and competence to navigate and transform energy landscapes. Mentorship programmes linking elders and youth create intergenerational knowledge flows, vital for sustaining both traditional wisdom and novel adaptations. Such educational innovations challenge the colonial legacies of education systems that have historically devalued Indigenous knowledge, affirming its centrality instead to sustainable and just energy futures.

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The mobilisation of finance is another critical area where innovation and alliances converge. Traditional financing mechanisms have often excluded Indigenous women-led initiatives due to criteria reflecting Western-centric risk assessments and profit imperatives. However, the emergence of alternative financing models, community funds, impact investing aligned with social and ecological returns, and crowdfunding platforms tailored to Indigenous-led projects, signals new opportunities to unlock capital that respects Indigenous sovereignty and dignity. Strategic alliances between financial institutions committed to ethical investment, Indigenous organisations, and technical experts can catalyse these alternative funding flows, enabling the scaling of community-driven renewable energy solutions constrained by capital scarcity.

Policy innovation is a vital enabler in this confluence of opportunities. Local, national, and regional policies that explicitly recognise and protect Indigenous women's land rights, energy agency, and participation can dismantle structural barriers. Innovative policy design includes provisions for free, prior, and informed consent, community-led monitoring of energy projects, and benefit-sharing mechanisms that avoid the extraction-dispossession cycle. When developed collaboratively, such policies embody an intersectional lens that foregrounds gender justice, environmental protection, and cultural integrity. This policy innovation also requires dismantling pervasive regulatory frameworks that privilege large-scale, centralised energy infrastructures at the expense of decentralised, community-led models where Indigenous women's leadership thrives.

It is necessary to underscore that many of these opportunities materialise through resilient collective action, an intentional weaving of diverse actors and knowledges pursuing shared goals of justice and sustainability. Indigenous women's networks exemplify this resilience, often in the face of harsh repression, dispossession, and gendered violence. Their persistent organising, rooted in hope and relational ethics, catalyses trust and cooperation that transcend difference, forging broad coalitions capable of influencing energy

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discourses and practices. These collective endeavours counteract isolating neoliberal dynamics and foster solidarity economies that sustain both resistance and regeneration. The emergence of cross-continental alliances, connecting Indigenous women from different African regions and beyond, exemplifies the power of collective mobilisation to push back against extractive forces and advance just alternatives.

The very narrative of opportunity must be situated within humility and vigilance. The risks of co-optation, tokenism, and the replication of oppressive systems under the banner of innovation are ever-present. Hence, cultivating alliances and innovations must be rooted in ethical commitments that prioritise Indigenous self-determination, relational accountability, and the dismantling of power asymmetries. Recognising the centrality of Indigenous women's leadership in navigating this complex terrain ensures that opportunities become pathways rather than pitfalls. This delicate balancing act, while challenging, is indispensable to forging a just energy transition that transcends the failures of the past and cultivates futures abundant in dignity, resilience, and ecological harmony. In this crucible of alliances and innovations, Africa's Indigenous women illuminate a beacon of transformative possibility, one in which energy is not a commodity to be extracted but a life-giving force to be stewarded in kinship with all beings.

### **6.6 Policy Recommendations and Calls to Action**

#### **6.6.1 Supporting Indigenous Women's Leadership**

Achieving a truly just and transformative energy transition across Africa necessitates recognising the pivotal role of Indigenous women's leadership. This is not merely about social inclusion; it is an indispensable foundation for ecological sustainability, decolonial governance, and gender justice. Indigenous women have a deep understanding of land, community, and energy based on their experiences, wisdom, stewardship, and spiritual ties. To unlock their potential in leading energy initiatives, often focused on local,

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renewable, and culturally rooted solutions, strategies must empower, resource, and amplify these leaders. This involves not only providing material support but also confronting and dismantling the multifaceted structural barriers that have historically marginalised Indigenous women's voices in policy spaces, economic systems, and global discussions on energy and climate. True empowerment here must move beyond tokenistic inclusion, instead cultivating a landscape where Indigenous women's leadership is normalised, respected, and positioned at the core of decision-making processes that fundamentally shape the continent's energy trajectory.

A primary strategy involves creating accessible, sustainable funding mechanisms that recognise the unique contexts and knowledge systems of Indigenous women's collectives. Conventional funding often has rigid requirements, short cycles, or misaligned priorities with Indigenous knowledge, limiting grassroots leaders' impact. Alternatives like community-based funding, Indigenous-led grants, and cooperative finance focus on sovereignty, reciprocity, and collective wellbeing over profit. These models facilitate autonomy in shaping projects, from initiating renewable energy cooperatives in remote villages to nurturing seed funds for traditional knowledge exchanges that reinforce ecofeminist principles. Equally critical is addressing gendered economic disparities by incorporating targeted capacity-building efforts that enhance Indigenous women's skills without eroding their epistemic frameworks and governance styles. Training initiatives must be framed in culturally respectful ways, privileging peer-to-peer learning and intergenerational knowledge transmission to build resilience without imposing external hierarchies.

Equally imperative is the intentional creation of political and policy spaces that elevate Indigenous women's leadership beyond consultation roles into arenas of substantive power. Decolonial governance requires reconfiguring energy policy to embed Indigenous women's epistemologies as core, not peripheral, elements. This requires institutions at local, national, and transnational levels to

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actively reform legislative frameworks that recognise Indigenous sovereignty and territory rights, enabling communities to exercise self-determined energy decisions. Such reforms must integrate gender justice through legal mandates and monitoring systems conscious of intersectional oppression, ensuring Indigenous women's concerns around land dispossession, environmental degradation, and socio-economic exclusion shape policy outcomes. Genuine participation can be fostered through the establishment of Indigenous women's advisory councils within government ministries, dedicated budget lines for women-led energy initiatives, and collaborative decision-making models bridging state actors and grassroots leaders. These mechanisms guarantee accountability not just in rhetoric but in measurable shifts toward justice-centred energy futures.

Beyond institutional engagement, it is vital to foster networks of solidarity and exchange among Indigenous women across Africa and globally. This facilitates the cross-pollination of ideas, strategies, and culturally embedded innovations. Such networks counteract the isolation imposed by geographic remoteness, systemic marginalisation, and digital divides, offering platforms for mutual support, advocacy, and collective action. Digital technologies, thoughtfully adapted to local contexts and linguistic diversity, can play a catalytic role here, enabling virtual gatherings, knowledge-sharing portals, and storytelling initiatives that amplify Indigenous women's narratives to broader public and policy audiences. Care must be taken to avoid extractive digital colonialism; Indigenous control over data and narratives, as well as respect for privacy and community protocols, remain paramount. Furthermore, solidarity networks can transcend sectors, linking Indigenous women in energy with movements for land rights, climate justice, and women's sovereignty, fostering a holistic approach to intersecting struggles and strengthening collective bargaining power.

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In education and cultural revitalisation, supporting Indigenous women's leadership calls for integrating Indigenous ecofeminist knowledge systems into broader educational curricula while defending traditional practices that nourish identity and ecological balance. Formal and informal education spaces must collaborate with Indigenous women to co-create curricula that honour local histories, languages, cosmologies, and land-based forms of learning, challenging colonial epistemic dominance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These educational transformations empower younger generations of Indigenous women to engage confidently with emerging renewable technologies on their own terms, blending innovation with ancestral wisdom. Moreover, community ceremonies, storytelling, and rituals led by Indigenous women serve not only as cultural preservation but also as acts of resistance against commodification and environmental destruction. Their continuance and visibility reinforce the deep-rooted connection between ecological health and social harmony, sustaining the spiritual and ethical framework necessary for just energy transitions.

Alongside these cultural and educational efforts, it is essential to confront the pervasive violence and discrimination Indigenous women face, which undermines their leadership potential and community wellbeing. The intersection of colonial legacies, patriarchal structures, and extractive industries has exposed Indigenous women to disproportionate levels of gender-based violence, land dispossession, and environmental toxins. Strategies to empower Indigenous women must incorporate robust protections and support systems, encompassing legal aid, safe spaces, mental health services, and community-led monitoring mechanisms. Recognising and addressing violence as not only a social ill but also a barrier to energy justice is vital; effective leadership flourishes only when women can exercise agency free from fear and oppression. This holistic safety framework also extends to counteracting environmental violence, ensuring that Indigenous women participate in guarding ecosystems against exploitative projects disguised as 'green' modernisation.

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Media representation is another critical arena for supporting Indigenous women's leadership. Dominant narratives often erase or misrepresent Indigenous women's contributions to energy and environmental stewardship, overshadowing the rich diversity of their perspectives and undermining public awareness of alternatives to extraction-driven development. Intentional media engagement strategies must empower Indigenous women to tell their own stories through community-driven journalism, documentary projects, and creative expressions that resonate within and beyond their communities. Amplifying these stories disrupts stereotypes, fosters respect for Indigenous epistemologies, and cultivates broader societal support for just energy policies. Partnerships with sympathetic media organisations, along with capacity-building in digital storytelling and communication, can enhance Indigenous women's visibility as leaders and innovators, helping shift public discourse away from technocratic and colonial frames toward relationality and care.

International and regional alliances must recognise their responsibility in supporting Indigenous women's leadership while avoiding paternalistic dynamics that replicate colonial power imbalances. Donor agencies, NGOs, and climate finance mechanisms should reframe their strategies by implementing participatory frameworks that prioritize Indigenous women's voices in decisions related to resource distribution, program development, and evaluating impacts. This means moving beyond extracting Indigenous knowledge or labour toward genuine power-sharing arrangements and long-term partnerships grounded in trust, mutual respect, and accountability. Furthermore, international legal instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and emerging frameworks on climate justice provide a foundation for demanding that governments uphold Indigenous women's rights in energy transitions. Mobilising these rights-based approaches through concerted advocacy campaigns led by Indigenous women leaders themselves strengthens their claims and political leverage at multiple governance scales.

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Supportive strategies must also embrace innovation rooted in Indigenous epistemologies rather than importing external technologies without contextual adaptation. Indigenous women have long demonstrated ingenuity in harnessing renewable energy suited to their environments, from solar-powered water pumps integrated with traditional irrigation techniques to bioenergy projects that respect seasonal cycles and biodiversity. Facilitating access to appropriate technology involves collaborative research partnerships that are equitable and driven by community priorities, ensuring innovations reinforce local sovereignty rather than erode it. Providing technical training informed by Indigenous knowledge and dialogues with scientific experts creates hybrid models that are both effective and culturally meaningful. Methodologies that prioritise ecological footprints, social cohesion, and community benefit over mere energy output metrics align the design and implementation of energy initiatives with ecofeminist values. This approach not only yields sustainable outcomes but also reclaims energy as a common good shaped by collective ethical responsibility.

An underexplored but essential dimension of empowerment lies in transforming market and economic structures to support Indigenous women-led energy enterprises. Current capitalist frameworks often marginalise communal economies and impose profit-centric measures that conflict with Indigenous relational philosophies. Supporting alternative economic models like cooperatives, social enterprises, and community trusts promotes economic independence and incorporates ethical values such as equity, solidarity, and environmental care. These models facilitate shared ownership of energy assets, equitable distribution of benefits, and reinvestment in community services, laying a foundation for resilient and just livelihoods. Policy reforms are necessary to support these enterprises by providing incentives, technical assistance, and legal acknowledgment, while also removing bureaucratic obstacles that unfairly impact Indigenous women. This economic empowerment enhances women's agency not only within

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their households but also at broader societal levels, interlinking with political and cultural dimensions of leadership.

A final but indispensable strategy is ongoing dialogue and collaboration between Indigenous women leaders and a wide spectrum of societal actors, including men within their communities, non-Indigenous allies, researchers, and policymakers. Building reciprocal relationships nurtures understanding, trust, and shared commitment toward a co-created vision of energy futures grounded in justice. Importantly, engaging men and boys as allies in dismantling gender hierarchies and colonial legacies fosters community-wide cultural shifts necessary for sustaining women's leadership. These dialogues must centre Indigenous knowledge as a living, evolving system that both informs and is enriched by diverse perspectives. The process of co-creation ensures that strategies for energy transition are not imposed externally but emerge organically from the interwoven realities of African Indigenous peoples, reflecting their aspirations, challenges, and strengths.

Supporting Indigenous women's leadership in Africa's energy transition requires a multifaceted, deeply intersectional approach that is attentive to historical contexts, power dynamics, and epistemic sovereignties. It is a call to reorient energy policies and practices away from exclusionary technocratic paradigms and towards arrangements that embrace relationality, care, and justice as core principles. By investing in material resources, political power, cultural revitalisation, safety, media representation, and economic innovation anchored in Indigenous women's voices, the continent can foster an environment where energy sovereignty is realised in harmony with ecological regeneration and social dignity. This transformative journey is neither linear nor easy but brimming with hope, as Indigenous women stand at the forefront of crafting energy futures that honour the past, challenge injustice, and illuminate paths towards collective flourishing.

### 6.6.2 Integrating Ecofeminist Principles in Policy

The imperative to integrate ecofeminist principles into energy policy is neither merely theoretical nor peripheral; it is central to transforming Africa's energy futures in ways that honour Indigenous women's wisdom and lived realities. At the heart of this integration is a profound commitment to relationality and care, concepts that challenge and transcend the prevailing technocratic and extractivist frameworks dominating the continent's energy discourse. Relationality, as an ecofeminist principle, insists on viewing human communities not as isolated entities competing for resources but as interconnected beings embedded within complex ecosystems, histories, and social fabrics. Care, meanwhile, moves beyond a sentimental or individualistic notion to encompass a political and collective ethic that prioritises the well-being of all, including non-human life and future generations. Embedding these principles demands more than superficial inclusion; it calls for a radical reorientation of policy design, governance structures, and implementation processes, positioning Indigenous leadership and knowledge at the epicentre of energy decision-making.

To meaningfully infuse relationality into policy, it is essential to dismantle the entrenched hierarchies that separate environmental concerns from social justice and that compartmentalise energy governance into narrow sectors divorced from community and ecological contexts. Policies must be crafted not as isolated recipes for economic growth or technological advancement, but as holistic frameworks that recognise that land, water, air, and life-sustaining relations are inseparable from energy considerations. This approach involves acknowledging the agency, sovereignty, and stewardship of Indigenous women who have nurtured reciprocal relationships with their environments for generations, often resisting the imposition of alien, extractive paradigms that disregard these connections. Consequently, policymakers are urged to foster collaborative governance models that facilitate multi-directional dialogue and

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shared authority, rather than relying on top-down technocratic solutions that marginalise local voices.

Central to these governance frameworks is the principle of care, which must be operationalised through policies that explicitly value and protect the labour, knowledge, and leadership of Indigenous women. This entails creating spaces within institutional architectures where Indigenous women are not mere beneficiaries or peripheral actors but co-creators and decision-makers, their ecological knowledge systems legitimised alongside scientific expertise. Care requires recognising the gendered dimensions of energy transitions: women disproportionately bear the burdens of environmental degradation and energy poverty while simultaneously embodying resilience and custodianship. Policies must therefore include gender-responsive budgeting, targeted capacity-building, and mechanisms that address intersectional vulnerabilities without reducing women to homogenous categories. Integrating care thus requires not only revisiting policy content but also cultivating supportive environments that uphold dignity, healing, and restorative justice.

Embedding these ecofeminist principles further involves recalibrating policy goals to move beyond narrow sustainability metrics that prioritise efficiency and carbon reduction while failing to address underlying social inequities. Energy transitions founded on relationality and care resist the seductive simplicity of green extractivism, which too often substitutes one form of exploitation for another under the guise of clean energy. Instead, such policies commit to a decolonial vision that rectifies historical injustices, restores community authority over land and resources, and fosters regenerative practices that replenish rather than deplete ecosystems. This requires embracing longer time horizons, being attentive to intergenerational justice, and balancing urgent climate imperatives with processes that nurture cultural survival and ecological integrity. Policies must be reflexive and adaptive, able to learn from and be shaped continuously by the communities they serve.

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A practical pathway to putting these values into practice lies in deliberately institutionalising Indigenous women-led initiatives within national and regional energy strategies. This could involve funding frameworks that prioritise community-owned renewable energy projects, legal reforms recognising customary land tenure and energy sovereignty, and participatory monitoring systems that integrate traditional ecological knowledge into environmental governance. Policy tools must be designed to reflect the communal ethos of Indigenous structures, favouring collective decision-making and shared benefits over individualistic, market-driven models. Partnerships between governments, civil society, and Indigenous organisations should be structured to redistribute power equitably and support sustained capacity rather than episodic consultations or tokenistic representation.

Education and knowledge exchange also emerge as critical areas for embedding ecofeminist principles because they shape the narratives and values that underpin policy consensus. Training programmes for policymakers and practitioners should include curricula on Indigenous knowledge systems, feminist ecology, and decolonial theory to cultivate a group that is empathetic and informed, equipped to navigate the complexities of just energy transitions. Simultaneously, support for Indigenous women's leadership in knowledge production, through research funding, publication avenues, and platforms for dialogue, ensures that their perspectives are not filtered through external interpretations but resonate authentically in the policy arena. This dual focus on education nurtures mutual respect and trust, which are essential for the durable transformation of governance relations.

In the realm of implementation, integrating relationality and care demands flexibility and responsiveness to the particularities of place, culture, and community dynamics. Policies should avoid universal prescriptions and instead embrace tailored approaches co-designed with those most affected. This collaborative practice involves iterative feedback loops where Indigenous women's insights actively inform

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adjustments and innovations. It also requires mechanisms for accountability that extend beyond formal institutions to encompass communal ethics and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing, recognising energy transitions as deeply moral and cultural undertakings. By fostering this kind of relational accountability, policies become living processes of care, healing, and interdependence.

Adopting an ecofeminist lens foregrounds the necessity of safeguarding non-human life and biodiversity as integral stakeholders in energy transitions. Energy policies must integrate ecological thresholds and honour the rights of nature, moving away from anthropocentric views that subordinate ecosystems to human needs. This principle is vividly embodied in Indigenous worldviews that regard land and water as kin rather than mere resources and demand a reparations-oriented relationship with the earth. Legal innovations such as recognising rivers or forests could be incorporated into energy governance, reinforcing the ethic of care and the interconnectedness that relationality champions. Such frameworks encourage energy development that harmonises with natural cycles and community well-being rather than disrupts them.

Financial models underpinning energy transitions must also be reimagined through the lens of relationality and care. Conventional funding mechanisms tied to profit maximisation and capital accumulation often alienate Indigenous communities and perpetuate inequities. Embracing ecofeminist principles suggests promoting community-controlled financing, cooperative ownership structures, and ethical investment criteria that respect Indigenous sovereignty and ecological limits. Transparent, participatory budgeting practices enable communities to exercise agency over financial resources, ensuring that investments align with collective values and priorities. This redirection of financial flows embodies the ethic of care at an economic level, challenging extractive capitalism's dominance within energy sectors.

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These principles should not be relegated to isolated policy domains but embedded across interconnected sectors such as agriculture, water, health, and education to reflect the holistic nature of Indigenous worldviews and ecofeminist thought. Energy policies must therefore be woven into broader socio-environmental strategies that recognise the cascading effects of energy decisions on food sovereignty, water security, public health, and cultural continuity. This systemic perspective enables the identification of synergies and trade-offs that conventional siloed approaches overlook, promoting integrated solutions rooted in relationality.

The transition to just and sustainable energy futures also requires confronting and transforming the narratives that normalise dispossession and inequality. This involves embracing storytelling and cultural expressions that affirm Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions as central rather than marginal, elevating diverse epistemologies and imaginaries within policy discourses. Recognising the power of narrative to shape perceptions and political will, policy frameworks should incorporate participatory media, community theatre, oral histories, and arts-based approaches to validate and widely disseminate these visions. Such cultural interventions amplify the affective and ethical dimensions of care, fostering empathy and solidarity across societies.

The full integration of ecofeminist principles into energy policy is inherently a collective, ongoing endeavour that requires patience, humility, and vigilance against co-optation. It calls for continuous dialogue among Indigenous women leaders, scholars, policymakers, and communities to navigate tensions, share lessons, and build accountable alliances. These relationships must be grounded in respect for Indigenous sovereignty, affirming rights to self-determination and cultural integrity as non-negotiable foundations.

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By keeping relationality and care at their core, energy policies can transcend technocratic constraints and embody the transformative potential of ecofeminism, enabling Africa to chart energy futures rooted in justice, dignity, and ecological harmony.

### **6.6.3 Fostering Inclusive and Participatory Governance**

Ensuring that the voices and perspectives of Indigenous communities, particularly Indigenous women, are effectively integrated into the governance of energy transitions necessitates a fundamental reimagining of decision-making mechanisms, ones that dismantle exclusionary structures shaped by colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist paradigms. In this pursuit, fostering inclusive and participatory governance means building systems that acknowledge and elevate community autonomy, knowledge systems, and leadership as the backbone of energy policy and practice. It demands a commitment to dismantle the persistent barriers that have historically silenced Indigenous voices, thereby restoring sovereignty over land, resources, and futures to those most intimately connected to the environments being transformed.

Central to inclusive governance is recognising Indigenous women as vital custodians of ecological knowledge and community well-being. Their lived experiences intersect environmental stewardship, cultural survival, and resilience against the encroachments of extractive industries and greenwashing agendas. Consequently, governance frameworks must move beyond tokenistic inclusion to genuine empowerment, where Indigenous women's leadership shapes policy from inception through implementation.

This involves creating formal spaces and institutional mechanisms for their participation that respect Indigenous protocols and decision-making traditions, which are often consensus-based, relational, and oriented towards long-term communal welfare rather than short-term profit or technocratic efficiency.

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Community assemblies or councils, designed to operate on Indigenous terms and blend customary governance systems with contemporary legal and political frameworks, are a powerful mechanism for fostering participation. These forums facilitate multi-generational and identity-inclusive dialogue, enabling the weaving together of holistic energy perspectives that honour ecological balance, social justice, and cultural integrity. They function as a counterpoint to top-down, centralised institutions, which frequently impose external priorities that marginalise local concerns. By grounding governance in relationality and reciprocity, Indigenous communities can assert authority and negotiate partnerships that reinforce autonomy rather than dependency.

To institutionalise such participatory governance more broadly, legal reforms must enshrine the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in all energy-related decision-making. This is not merely a procedural checkbox but a profound shift towards recognising Indigenous sovereignty as fundamental to sustainable futures. Guaranteeing FPIC demands accessible, culturally appropriate information and dialogue, allowing communities to weigh risks and benefits within their cosmologies and lived realities. When respected, it opens avenues for co-creating energy pathways that align with Indigenous values of care, stewardship, and communal well-being, disrupting extractivist paradigms that prioritise external profit at the expense of local lives and land.

Fostering inclusive governance entails addressing structural inequalities that hinder Indigenous women's equal participation. Intersectional barriers, such as gender-based violence, limited access to education, restricted mobility, and socio-economic marginalisation, must be systematically dismantled through targeted policies and resource allocation. Empowerment programmes that build Indigenous women's leadership skills, technical knowledge in renewable energies, and negotiation capacities benefit not only individuals but

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also the collective resilience and adaptive governance of their communities. Enabling Indigenous women to claim their rightful political space strengthens governance systems by incorporating perspectives often overlooked in male-dominated or technocratic arenas, which can perpetuate gendered invisibility and ecological degradation.

Participatory governance thrives when local, regional, and international linkages are established, enabling Indigenous voices to influence energy transitions beyond their immediate territories while retaining control over their knowledge and priorities. This multi-scale engagement counters isolation and vulnerability, leveraging solidarity with environmental and feminist movements globally to advocate for systemic change. Yet these connections require careful navigation to avoid external co-option or dilution of Indigenous agendas. Hence, governance frameworks must prioritise Indigenous protocols that safeguard collective knowledge and regulate engagement on community-defined terms, ensuring that alliances amplify rather than appropriate Indigenous leadership.

Technological innovations and digital platforms offer emerging opportunities to expand the scope and accessibility of participation, especially for remote or marginalised Indigenous populations. However, the deployment of such tools must be attuned to local contexts, languages, and cultural values, avoiding techno-optimistic fantasies that neglect the socio-political dynamics shaping inclusion. Technology can facilitate transparent information-sharing, real-time consultation, and community-led monitoring of energy projects, thereby enhancing accountability and responsiveness. Governance mechanisms should be hybrid and deeply relational, balancing digital approaches with in-person, culturally resonant modes of dialogue and decision-making to preserve communal trust and rootedness.

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Another critical dimension in fostering inclusive governance is transforming knowledge hierarchies that privilege scientific, economic, and managerial expertise over Indigenous epistemologies and practices. Genuine participation necessitates that Indigenous knowledge holders are recognised not as informants or passive stakeholders, but as authoritative experts whose insights into land, ecology, spirituality, and social relations are integral to energy policy design and evaluation. This involves co-creating knowledge in intercultural spaces where different epistemologies engage in respectful dialogue without assimilation or erasure, generating hybrid frameworks that better capture the complexity and embeddedness of energy systems within lived realities. Such epistemic pluralism strengthens resilience and adaptability, offering pathways that reconcile technological innovation with ecological regeneration and social justice.

Equally, accountability mechanisms within governance structures should be reconfigured to reflect Indigenous concepts of responsibility and stewardship. Additionally, emphasising relational accountability to future generations and non-human beings. Conventional models fixate on financial or regulatory compliance metrics, often overlooking social and ecological impacts experienced on the ground. Incorporating community-based monitoring, participatory mapping, and restorative justice practices ensures that governance remains responsive not only to immediate stakeholders but also to the broader web of life-sustaining Indigenous livelihoods. This holistic accountability fosters trust, transparency, and mutual respect, essential foundations for long-term cooperation and equitable energy transitions.

In the practical realm, fostering inclusive governance means supporting community-controlled renewable energy projects as living laboratories for decolonial practice. These initiatives demonstrate how Indigenous leadership, governance, and ecological ethics can manifest in practice, offering alternatives to the dominance of extractive industries. Community ownership of energy infrastructure allows for

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decision-making aligned with social and environmental priorities rather than external profit motives. It also generates local economic benefits, reinforcing sovereignty and reducing dependence on fossil fuels and exploitative energy supply chains. At the same time, these projects face challenges in financing, technical capacity, and policy recognition. These necessitate enabling environments through supportive legislation, capacity-building, and partnerships rooted in respect and equity.

Policy reform to embed inclusive governance must be intersectional and holistic, integrating concerns of land rights, gender justice, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and economic self-determination. Energy policies cannot be developed in isolation from broader social justice struggles; they must reflect the interconnectedness of struggles against colonial dispossession, patriarchy, and ecological destruction. Governments and international agencies have a responsibility to facilitate participatory processes that are not extractive or superficial, and to provide resources and authority to Indigenous-led bodies rather than imposing top-down frameworks. Such engagement requires humility and sustained commitment, recognising that decolonial governance is a continuous process rather than a finite achievement.

At the heart of fostering inclusive and participatory governance lies an ethic of care – a relational orientation that honours the dignity, knowledge, and autonomy of Indigenous peoples, particularly women. Governance becomes a practice of nurturance rather than control, collaboration rather than coercion, stewardship rather than exploitation. This ethic is antithetical to colonial logics that commodify land and labour; it insists on a politics that centres empathy, respect, and interdependence. Indigenous women's ecofeminist visions offer vital insights here, reclaiming governance as a collective responsibility embedded in reciprocal relationships with the Earth and with one another. They illuminate pathways for energy

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transitions that integrate equity, sustainability, and justice in ways that dominant political paradigms have yet to imagine.

Fostering inclusive governance requires vigilance against new forms of exclusion, co-optation, and erasure that can arise even within well-intentioned participatory frameworks. Power differentials, social hierarchies, and internal community tensions must be acknowledged and navigated carefully to ensure governance remains genuinely inclusive and transformative. Continuous reflection, dialogue, and adaptation are necessary to uphold the principles of decoloniality and gender justice throughout the evolving processes of energy transition. By centring Indigenous women's leadership and community authority, governance can become a site of empowerment, healing, and resilience, catalysing just energy futures that honour the past, respond to the present, and safeguard the future.

### **6.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter synthesizes the historical, epistemic, political, and institutional themes developed throughout the book and outlines what just energy futures grounded in relational governance and Indigenous leadership might look like. The analysis emphasizes that energy transitions are more than technical or environmental shifts; they involve changes in social relations, authority, and ethical commitments. Achieving just energy futures depends on addressing historical injustices, redistributing decision-making power, and re-integrating energy systems into ecological and communal relationships that support life. These changes are neither automatic nor guaranteed. They require ongoing political activism, institutional reform, and acknowledgement of knowledge systems long marginalized in global energy discussions. The visions of the future presented here are ongoing projects of collective negotiation and responsibility. Their realization depends on the sustained efforts of communities, movements, and institutions dedicated to creating energy systems that are low-carbon, equitable, relational, and life-affirming.

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## **Regaining the Currents**

This book is a work of narrative non-fiction. It is not written from the distant towers of detached scholarship, but from the soil, the dust, the forests, the rivers, and the frontlines where women stand in defence of life. Its knowledge is grounded, relational, and accountable.

Melania Chiponda draws the intellectual roots of this work from ecofeminist and political thinkers who have illuminated the entanglements among patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and ecological destruction; scholars such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Sylvia Tamale, Wangari Maathai, Silvia Federici, Ruth Nyambura, and Achille Mbembe, among others. Their analyses of extractivism, land dispossession, gendered labour, and colonial modernity have shaped the political grammar through which these stories are interpreted.

But this book is not merely an academic conversation. It is born from lived testimony, from women resisting lithium extraction, from communities negotiating the promises and violences of the energy transition, from land defenders confronting mining corporations, from caregivers sustaining life amidst infrastructural abandonment. The knowledge here was generated through listening circles, participatory processes, embodied presence, and years of relational work.

What you will encounter in these pages is story as method. Memory as archive. Care as epistemology.

This is a book that honours the political writers who named systems of domination, and the frontline women whose lived realities expose those systems daily. It is narrative truth rooted in ecofeminist resistance: rigorous, situated, and accountable to the communities from which it emerges.



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