



NEWS FROM THE SHINE COLLAB

SHINE a spotlight. . .

From Mela Chiponda, May 2024

Greetings! I'm delighted to connect with you and provide an update on the **SHINE** journey since I joined full time in January 2024. We began the year by reflecting on **SHINE**'s story, our identity and contribution, and the contexts and politics that inform who we are. This sharpened our direction and approach for engaging with diverse partners and in spaces where energy justice might prove transformative.

The idea of radical collaboration stands out from our analysis – working across many geographic, sectoral, and thematic differences in new and experimental ways to bring to life a Gender Just Energy Transition with communities and leaders who are directly impacted by energy poverty and climate change. Strategies to get resources and technology into the hands of community and women's groups requires incubating and learning with frontline leaders as well as advocates and donors.

With new clarity about our approach, therefore, we're now officially The SHINE Collab.

The term "Collab" has become popular with feminist collectives and social movements that emphasize learning from practice, disrupting what is considered "expertise", and up-ending hierarchies between global and local. We will still campaign to build support for community-driven energy.

BUILDING NETWORKS

In January, we invited women-led energy enterprises in **SHINE**'s existing network for 'Tea with Mela'. They talked about their challenges, links to gender and climate justice, and work with local communities on energy solutions including solar home systems, water pumps, solar lanterns, mini-grids for household and livelihood use, clean cooking solutions, and maternal health support.

This virtual conversation moved us towards cross-sectoral approaches to work collaboratively with grassroots organizations and cooperatives, so that access to renewable energy not only improves lives and livelihoods, but also bolsters sustainable local economies and community self-determination. Improving lives while up-ending the structures of who decides and what solutions matter is core to **SHINE**'s systems-change approach.



TRANSFORMATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

ARE THE CORE PILLAR OF OUR STRATEGY TO PROMOTE LOCALLY LED GENDER-JUST ENERGY SOLUTIONS THAT CHANGE THE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES AT THE ROOT OF THE CLIMATE AND INEQUALITY CRISES.

Beyond energy-access as an enabler for other kinds of change, we seek energy democracy for a more just, inclusive and liveable future, one community at a time.

Over the past three months, we've drawn organizations fighting against fossil fuels and the extractive industries into meaningful and motivating discussions with those working for women's rights, economic justice, energy access, and climate – all aspects of a Just Transition if we are to take the word “just” seriously in terms of access and decision-making power.

To integrate experience and thinking from across the gender, climate, and energy sectors, we're engaging with partners, including [Earthlife Africa](#), [ESCR net](#), [SELCO Foundation](#), [FEMNET](#), [WEDO](#), [JASS](#), [Chisolm Legacy Project](#), [GOGLA](#), [Solar Aid](#), [Solar Sister](#) and [Energia](#) and with donors who take a gender-just approach to climate and environmental justice, such as [GAGGA](#), [Global Green Grants Fund](#), [Central American Women's Funds](#), and [MADRE](#).

During the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in New York in March – thanks to the ESCR-Net for supporting my participation – I shared a different perspective on addressing poverty with potential collaborators at speaking and strategy events:

- Hosted by ESCR-Net, we discussed how a just energy transition will deepen the debt burden, particularly on the African continent, and how decentralised renewable energy is the kind of community-controlled solution that is central to climate justice.
- A panel hosted by MADRE focused on the interconnections between climate, extractives, militarization, and the violence and displacement that women and communities are experiencing.
- We participated in a follow-up dialogue hosted by WEDO and MADRE on a feminist just energy transition from a community and human rights perspective.
- I spoke on energy poverty and clean cooking at two events hosted by FEMNET on reimagining development and feminist climate justice.

At **SHINE**, we're excited about the potential impact of new collaborations with these diverse organizations – so stay tuned!

GALVANIZING COUNTRY STRATEGIES

Over the first quarter, I had the opportunity to travel to Malawi, South Africa and my home country of Zimbabwe, to lay the groundwork for projects with community groups that I've known and worked with.

Building on the work of many other organizations, **SHINE** uses a feminist participatory action-oriented methodology to engage grassroots women in defining and leading how and for what purpose they can access renewable energy. In this way, ownership and self-determination are baked in from the beginning. Capacity-building and learning connect to real time material benefits – scaled up farming or improved healthcare –



COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED, DECENTRALISED, RENEWABLE ENERGY SYSTEMS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION. SHINE IS OUT TO SHOW THAT ACCESS TO ENERGY SOLUTIONS IS INTEGRALLY CONNECTED TO POWER-BUILDING STRATEGIES THAT STRENGTHEN SHARED LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION AND DRIVE STRUCTURAL CHANGE FOR JUSTICE.

and intentionally strengthen organizing and leadership in communities. The three countries vary in terms of energy access and economic and political conditions. We design and approach each country project as a joint learning endeavour and each strategy as emergent.

Zimbabwe

In Bikita, a massive, chaotic mine sits atop one of the biggest Lithium deposits on the continent, extracting what the government refers to as ‘white gold’. This in turn fuels the so-called green revolution, while the community, ironically, lacks electricity and basic services. I know these people and this place very well from my work as an environmental defender and climate advocate, supporting women resisting extractive industries, largely supported by the [Urgent Action Fund Africa](#), Global Greengrants Fund, and the [Africa Coal Network hosted by Groundwork](#), organizations with whom we will continue to collaborate.

*In the absence of regulation, the mine is a breeding ground for corruption and environmental destruction. A critical element of the **SHINE** process with communities are programs on energy literacy and awareness raising to enable communities to connect the dots between the global economy and their own lives. **SHINE** is developing relationships with local groups as well as the local Catholic Church where, as strong advocates of economic and climate justice, Jesuits have installed a solar mini-grid.*

South Africa

My two visits involved conversations with groups at differing intervention points in the much-touted government-led Just Energy Transition process. A visit to Mpumalanga proved an eye-opener. Mine closures have made this a priority location for the government’s Just Transition. Engagement with labour unions is an essential part of the Just Transition, but most South African women – indeed, most of the population – are active in the informal sector rather than organized in the formal trade unions, and so are excluded from the transition equation.

We met with women from the trade unions, the informal sector, micro-enterprises, and precarious work, including those in the care economy who lack both voice and protection in the current just transition plans. We also met with the affected community members in Mpumalanga’s Witbank, as well as with allies and partners, including Earthlife Africa, [Southern Africa Trust](#), and the Ford Foundation.

Malawi

*In late 2023, we engaged in a participatory needs-assessment process coordinated with support from JASS and their key partner, the Our Bodies, Our Lives (OBOL) network, both well known by Lisa VeneKlasen, a **SHINE** Senior Advisor, and me. In the least electrified country in the world, we spoke with several communities that have never experienced electricity and can barely imagine life with it.*

*Access to energy is top of mind for women’s cooperatives who envisage increased farm yields, product sales, and income, as well as improved lighting, safety, and charging for phones and laptops to benefit school children. In 2024, **SHINE** will continue planning with our unique mix of feminist, development, and climate justice partners in Malawi, including Christian Aid, JASS, Oxfam, Trust Africa, GIZ, faith-based organizations, and private energy enterprises.*

Engaging the Energy Sector

The first quarter also saw **SHINE**'s Senior Advisor Christine Eibs Singer engaging with [Solar-Aid](#) and members of GOGLA, the association for the off-grid lighting industry, on how the energy access concept of "leave no one behind" aligns – or not – with the Just Energy Transition. How could we develop a more integrated approach, one that takes into account unequal power relations at the community level? The challenge of focusing solely on access is that it easily reinforces a top-down 'we can solve your problems' approach, without considering people's differing situations and ability to take advantage of that access.

SHINE's approach is to facilitate both *access to* and *control of* a resource, a useful angle from gender theory.

Control – the ability to decide how the resource will be used – is as critical as access; equal opportunity will not ensure access unless efforts are made to address structural barriers. People most directly affected by climate change and inequality have the knowledge, solutions, and leadership to build a better future but are often left out or treated as passive beneficiaries, particularly where technology is concerned.



BUILDING ENERGY JUSTICE TOGETHER IS WHAT UP-ENDS THE DEEPLY EMBEDDED STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS OF POWER THAT CAUSED THESE CRISES IN THE FIRST PLACE.

Reframing the Conversation

To date, many organizations have not recognised community-driven renewable energy as enabling broader shifts, defaulting instead to a view of energy access as a top-down model of technology as a for-profit commodity.

To help re-position the energy-access narrative, the SHINE Collab team is developing the knowledge and learning component of our strategy.

We begin at the end of June with a webinar series on the Gender Just Energy Transition, convening diverse voices and experiences to explore what a gender just transition means in practice and why it matters. We have begun work on a "Playbook", integrating cross-sectoral definitions and references to support the case of energy access as an enabler of women's rights and economic, climate and energy justice and to help us navigate the ways that language can prevent or facilitate collaborative people-centred solutions.



ENERGY JUSTICE IS FINALLY MAKING INROADS INTO EMERGING CLIMATE-JUSTICE CONVERSATIONS AND STRATEGIES LED BY FEMINIST GROUPS. LIKE CLIMATE CHANGE, THE LACK OF ACCESS TO ENERGY IS BOTH CAUSE AND EFFECT OF WOMEN'S INEQUALITY, PARTICULARLY THAT OF WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL MAJORITY.

Stepping Forward

This year, we are forging team, governance, and organizational structures and identifying an African organization to serve as our fiscal-sponsor, in keeping with our intention to become an African-led and governed transnational network. We are grateful to [GreenFaith](#), a global multi-faith climate justice network and one of **SHINE**'s co-founders, for continuing to provide administrative support.

Watch out for our posts as we update our website and re-invigorate LinkedIn and other social media. We look forward to staying in touch and in conversation with you in the months to come. And we'd love to hear what a Gender Just Energy Transition means to you and how your work supports that vision. **Contact us at info@theshinecampaign.org.**