



# GROUNDWORK



## EJ Class of 2014



# In this issue

*groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental organization working primarily in South Africa, but increasingly in Southern Africa.*

*groundWork seeks to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in Southern Africa through assisting civil society to have a greater impact on environmental governance. groundWork places particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people who are most affected by environmental injustices.*

*groundWork's current campaign areas are: Climate Justice and Energy, Coal, Waste and Environmental Health. groundWork is constituted as a trust. The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is Joy Kistnasamy, lecturer in environmental health at the Durban University of Technology. The other trustees are: Farid Esack, Patrick Kulati, Richard Lyster, Thuli Makama, Sandile Ndawonde and Jon White.*

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*Oilwatch International*

*Global Anti-Incineration Alliance*

*groundWork is the South African member of Friends of the Earth International*

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# From the Smoke Stack



Photo by FoE

by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

The third quarter of 2014 was a crazy period for groundWork. Gill Addison took her long-overdue sabbatical and, as fate would conspire, it also ended up being a very busy period for groundWork. The newsletter is a packed one, which speaks to the work that has happened over this period.

During this period I spent time in Sweden working with two of our key supporters, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and African Groups of Sweden. I must thank Ove Erickson who spent much time with me showing me the ropes around Gävle, and Lotta Come and Gittan Arwén for taking me through Stockholm. From participating in the Klimatrigsdag – civil society climate parliament – to meeting with activists and unions in Stockholm, I was given an insight into the people who not only fund and support groundWork, but also the very many activists who were part of the anti-apartheid movement and today still seek to support community people striving for democracy in South Africa. I will write more about this in our next newsletter.

The biggest accomplishment over the last few months has been the launch of groundWork's first Environmental Justice School, which was held over two weeks in Pietermaritzburg. Gill was around for this; she would never have missed it for the world. It was intense, and after the first week I thought there would be a sense of cabin fever and a mutiny. But the participants remained and soaked up every second of the school and the experience.

During this time we also had Sören Ronge with us as an intern from Austria. A self-motivated and energetic character, he found a good home in groundWork and learnt much and brought a fresh and alternative insight into groundWork

and supported our local work well. Over the years we have had four overseas interns or visiting campaigners from the North, and they have all shown great maturity in how they have dealt with the groundWork politic and the general South African politic, and Sören lived up to this reality.

This was also a period when we released health research and a short video highlighting Eskom's impact on the people of Mpumalanga where Eskom has twelve of its coal-fired power stations, some of which are the largest in the world. When I speak to colleagues from abroad about Eskom, they sometimes seem skeptical, and then they hear the size of these power stations in such close proximity to communities and their jaws drop in disbelief. When the research was released, Steve Lennon, Eskom's Group Executive: Sustainability, had a short one-on-one twitter war, with groundWork's Megan questioning Steve Lennon's attempt to discredit the report on the basis that Eskom had not done their own health research on their coal-fired power stations. Needless to say, there was a silence when we suggested that we should have a public discussion about what was wrong with the report. Eskom has since had further challenges, with rating agencies questioning their financial stability. To top this, Steve Lennon, one of Eskom's long-term senior executives, has resigned, some say in frustration at not getting the top job at Eskom. Whatever the case, Eskom is going from bad to worse.

With the writing on the wall that we urgently need a new energy future, government continues to dabble with multinationals in their collective thirst for more fossil fuel. In south Durban, ExxonMobil is up against the community, and indeed people from all along the KwaZulu-Natal coast, as they seek to



explore for oil and gas offshore. While groundWork and south Durban were up against ExxonMobil senior executives in a community meeting – with government not making a show – ExxonMobil knew they had a way out as they had already cut a deal with government. What we finally got to know was that over a six-week period they were meeting with government in a fancy hotel in Durban – at the same time as the community meeting – speaking about how they and other companies were going to carve up the coast for oil and gas.

The engagement between government and the oil industry is called “Operation Phakisa”. As government claims in their media on this: “Through Operation Phakisa, government aims to implement its policies and programmes better, faster and more effectively.” In other words, government plans to do as it pleases with as little meaningful democracy as possible. It is based on Malaysia’s Big Fast approach which has resulted in community people losing their lands and livelihoods in Malaysia as multinationals make their way into their forest in the search of minerals. Earthlife Africa (Dbn) and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) has challenged government. The manner in which ExxonMobil and government have dealt with community concerns in south Durban is a sign of things to come.

With ignoring peoples’ concerns on the dig-out port proposal to Operation Phakisa, we are set for Operation ‘Groot Kak’ (a colloquial reference to big trouble) as our coastline is going to be undemocratically and possibly unconstitutionally destroyed. As the South African Oil and Gas Alliance has said on their website: “Operation Phakisa is a results-driven approach, involving setting clear plans and targets, on-going monitoring of progress and making these results public.” Maybe the results will be made public, but how government gets to those results will not be through a process of public engagement and scrutiny. Furthermore, their website says that Operation Phakisa “focuses on bringing key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, academia as well as civil society organizations together.” The question that is being asked by communities living on the coast is why, if civil society is to be engaged with, they were not invited to the detailed discussions on Operation Phakisa. Maybe south Durban civil society is not

“civil”, as ExxonMobil executives found out in a meeting with the community. We will watch this space closely to understand if government will indeed find a democratic way to engage with the very people who depend on the coastal waters of South Africa.

As far as fossil fuel goes, government is still set on extracting gas from the Karoo via the likes of Shell. groundWork is working with the Southern Cape Land Committee and Friends of the Earth The Netherlands (aka Milieudefensie), supporting local struggles in the Karoo that are resisting the start of fracking. During this period, in a community-to-community exchange, members of small Dutch communities resisting fracking successfully in their local neighbourhoods visited the Karoo to link with local struggles. While Shell is not looking to frack in The Netherlands, because it is its home country, Milieudefensie has raised awareness of its dirty operations elsewhere amongst the Dutch public to garner resistance against the company.

The Global Green and Healthy Hospital initiative has taken off after much time working with the hospitals and encouraging them to participate. The positive return was much sooner than we expected, and indeed shows us how ready the hospitals are to do things differently.

Finally, after many years of work on the ground and collecting and analysing not only information but also peoples’ experiences, we released *Slow Poison ... Air Pollution, Public Health & Failing Governance* in September. There was an embarrassing no-show of media in Johannesburg, but a strong showing in Durban, where front page leads and much airtime drove the point home that government is failing us in terms of protecting us from polluting industry.

There was an ominous silence from government on the report, but we hope that we will be able to present the report in parliament shortly. We hope that they will take the report seriously and work with it to better understand the situation on the ground and their role.

So, till next time and the closing out of a busy year.

Bobby ✕



# Birth of first EJ school

by Jeanne Prinsloo

## *Building activism!*

It was as long ago as 2002 when some groundWork folk were chatting to an international group of environmental activists around the flames and ashes of a braai held at the Balalaika hotel in Johannesburg. They were taking part in the corporate responsibility week which had been planned to coincide with the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Some of the activists were lamenting the diminished level of activism in South Africa and how, post-apartheid, many activists got absorbed into other sectors including government... but, despite their laments, they became inspired. Ka Sawa, a Burmese activist, spoke about the first Environmental Justice School that had been developed to create aware activists in the face of dire environmental injustices. So grave are conditions in Burma that the school is held in a neighbouring country. This proactive approach struck a resounding chord with the groundWork cohort who saw the need to build a new cohort of activists. "We need one!" was their immediate response. Unlike some plots hatched in the smoky early hours of the morning, this one was not dismissed the next morning as a late night, perhaps alcohol-induced, fantasy.

If the seed was planted then – and it lay dormant in the ground for a while – it has been gradually watered and nurtured and grown, and in July and August 2014, it blossomed for the first time. A group of seventeen activists came together for groundWork's first Environmental Justice School (EJS) for two weeks. Held at the Centre for African Enterprise outside Pietermaritzburg, this pilot school was the result of more than a decade of dreaming, planning and plotting.

The participants were chosen from those South African organizations that groundWork currently works with and included Highveld Environmental

Justice Network, South African Waste Pickers' Association, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, Southern Cape Land Committee, Surplus People's Project and the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance. In addition, the participants included two organizational people identified by Afrika Group Sweden (AGS), one from Zimbabwe and one from Mozambique, as well as two Zimbabwean participants identified by AGS from Zimcodd. This group spent two weeks in residence, where they encountered new ideas, new people and generated a wonderful sense of activist energy.

If groundWork's initial plan was (and still is) to run a school for such a group over a year, the 2014 school was a two week intensive pilot programme designed to expand the selected participants' knowledge and skills and to foster a sense of urgency relating to environmental justice action.

The experience and world views that the participants brought to the school were central to its planning. They all did preparatory work so they were ready to talk about themselves, their worlds and their organizations, and they shared this with the group on the very first day. In this way, all the participants became familiar with each other's stories and the range of struggles people are confronting.

The EJS had clear broad goals. It set out, in the first instance, to develop a strong knowledge base about contemporary environmental justice challenges. This meant that the participants had to grapple with ideas about the broad economic and social contexts, both local and global, that give rise to social and environmental injustices. Then, against this knowledge background it focussed on developing skills appropriate to activists who work within communities to develop and manage



## Lead

small-scale projects or campaigns and learn about resistance strategies to challenge environmental injustices. These goals serve the broader goal of producing informed and skilled activists to act creatively and strategically to foster social justice within a democratic framework.

The experiential component, that is drawing on personal experiences and reflecting on them, figured throughout the programme. The other recurring element was a focus on what became known as the 'Three Es', that is those mechanisms that create economic exploitation and produce environmental injustices. These feature in all groundWork's publications and include externalisation (of costs onto the poor in terms of health, wealth and well-being), enclosure (of wealth through various mechanisms), and exclusion (from making decisions about issues that impact on themselves and the public at large).

The group explored power relations at global and local levels. The questions were posed as to how the particular relations of power have come about globally and groundWork research associate David Hallows led the sessions on what forms it takes in South Africa. University of KwaZulu-Natal educator Anne Harley simulated trading games in which the dice are loaded in favour of the powerful or wealthy, and provided the basis for unpacking how power works – and can be resisted. The production of time lines, case studies and movies reinforced understandings too. Additionally, they were introduced by Melissa Fourie of Centre for Environmental Rights to sessions on the framing of the rights guaranteed in the Constitution, key environmental statutes, the rules they impose and the remedies they offer to activists. These included National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), the NEMA Air Quality Act, the NEMA Waste Act and the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act.

The second body of knowledge related to the Gigantic Waste Creation Machine and looked at how the economic order produces waste and destroys the commons. This included day-long sessions on four topics. "Waste: Air", facilitated by groundWork's Rico Euripidou, moved from providing a basic understanding of breathing and the significance of air quality to issues of air

pollution or waste in the air. "Waste: Water" with water expert Victor Munnik again began with basic understandings, here of the water cycle. It emphasised South Africa as a water-poor country and used an analysis of Steel Valley as a case study dealing with water issues associated with coal and acid mine drainage from coal.

"Waste: Land and Food" had two focuses. The one addressed exclusion from land and was facilitated by David Ntseng of Church Land Programme and drew strongly on participants' experiences. The focus on food sovereignty, presented by Elizabeth Mpofo (International Coordinator of Via Campesina and based in Zimbabwe) addressed agro-business and spoke for food sovereignty. "Waste: People and Justice" (facilitated by Melanie Samson from Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) considered waste management, with a particular focus on women in this environment. By reconceiving of waste as a commons it moved to consider capitalist initiatives to try to profit from this by enclosing the waste commons created by waste pickers. Finally, time (never enough) was given to the issue of Climate Change. Loads of movies were screened in a daily screening programme, copies of which were requested by the participants to take home to share with their organizations.

Beyond these focuses, the activist sessions led by groundWork's Bobby Peek culminated in the presentation of the projects or campaigns the participants had planned to be undertaken back home. It included a focus on activist messaging with groundWork's media person, Megan Lewis. As you can imagine, all this in two weeks was pretty intense and yet these students were active and present pretty much throughout. It was then fitting that Goldman award winner Desmond D'sa attended the final dinner, appropriately – considering its beginnings – a braai, to close the school with a rousing call for hard work and activism on the parts of these participants.

This pilot EJS was experimental and has proved successful on many levels. One presenter (who will remain unnamed) had this to say about it: "Many, many thanks for involving me in the EJ school. It was one of the most interesting and rewarding workshops I have been involved in for a very long time. I was tremendously impressed





## building activism

**FIRST CLASS 2014**

**21st July - 1st August**

Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

**groundWork  
Environmental  
Justice School**



by the quality and level of discussion and work that the participants produced – a sign of their own skill and expertise, but also of the fantastic foundational work that you all did in the days leading up to my session.” Another (similarly unnamed) noted, “I thought the level of participation was great. There was a wide range of educational background amongst participants and it was striking that they participated as equals and all seemed to learn from each other as much as from session leaders.”

Several people contributed enormously to this successful EJS, notably Anne Harley (adult educator at UKZN) and all groundWork staff. What began that smoky night over a decade ago thus has seen its first fruits. A second, short, three-week school is planned for 2015 to consolidate the work and to prepare for the next stage of the dream – the full year EJS. ✕

*Professor Jeanne Prinsloo teaches Media and Texts at Masters and film at Honours level at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. Her research is concerned broadly with issues of representation and identities. More recently she has focused on sexual identities and internet usage, and the debates on sexualisation, media and children.*



# Building solidarity: Local to local

by Bobby Peek

## *Taking on Shell*

In August, four local Dutch community activists who have successfully resisted fracking in The Netherlands visited South Africa, and the Karoo in particular, to speak with and share their local struggles with the people of the Karoo. This has come after an exploratory visit to the Karoo in 2013 by groundWork's partner organization, Milieudefensie in The Netherlands. Both groundWork and Milieudefensie are members of Friends of the Earth International (FoEI). Together with the Southern

Cape Land Committee (SCLC) we organized this exchange, which sought to bring local people together across international boundaries to build solidarity in their struggles. This is part of FoEI's Climate Justice and Energy programme.

The four Dutch people were joined by members of groundWork, Milieudefensie and SCLC in their very intense visit to the Karoo. The most interesting fact about Shell's activities is that, while they seek to frack the world, they have no fracking plans for

Credit:  
groundWork





The Netherlands. This was a deep irony for the participants on the exchange.

Dr. David Fig prepared a report for the participants, giving the context of fracking in South Africa. The report is going to be published shortly in both English and Afrikaans. The first day in Port Elizabeth was spent understanding the local context before the participants met with the community people in Graaff Reinet, as well as watching the documentary *Unearthed*, which is reviewed on the back page of this newsletter.

The meeting with the community people in Graaff Reinet was indeed an eventful process. Present were the local lawyer, Dereck Light, who is acting on behalf of various farmers in the matter of fracking, local farmworkers, and the local representatives of the Khoi Peoples. Not only was this a gathering for sharing information, but it was also a gathering for sharing solidarity and gifts. From traditional ceremonies by the Khoi people, to exchanging soil from The Netherlands with that of the Karoo, people built a sense of connectedness.

In the meeting, local people felt that some of the local municipalities would resist the onslaught of fracking and that these municipalities must be supported. One municipality was mentioned as a certainty for resistance. At the end of the process, it was recognised that there needs to be a multifaceted approach with local political pressure, legal pressure and mass mobilisation. The question of land was seen as central to the debate. The question I often ask myself is, "Will the fracking struggle lead to the resolution of the land question in the Karoo?" In other words, if we as people have to *all* resist in fracking, will it then not be in our collective interest once this battle is won, that the future for all people is an equitable and that everyone has enough land.

After an evening in Nieu Bethesda, we were on our way through the flat plains of the Karoo towards George and Cape Town. There is no doubt that I have a romanticism about the Karoo as a result of spending my childhood on the edges of the Karoo. For me, the drive highlighted the unique beauty that could be lost to a horizon of gas rigs.

In Cape Town, we had an interesting time speaking with local NGOs and Treasure the Karoo Action Group who have been in the middle of the public resistance to fracking. It was agreed that, despite differences in approaches, we all want the same outcome – no to fracking and the current elite energy system. A brief time in parliament was followed by an impromptu visit and protest outside the Shell headquarters, with us being met by their smooth reputational operators.

This was the beginning of what I hope is a new phase in local-to-local solidarity that has existed between Milieudefensie and groundWork for many years.

The highlight of the process was indeed when Milieudefensie put up a photo of a gas rig on the Karoo landscape for the community meeting. This was not a doctored photo, although it was actually a picture of Shell's exploration in Patagonia in Argentina, an area of South America which is similar to the Karoo. The meeting could not believe that it was not the Karoo. Thank God it is not and hopefully will never be. ✕



# A breath of fresh dust

by Robby Mokgalaka

*All around the country, poor people are choking on coal-mining related dust*

This is the challenge facing the community situated on plot 27, Farm 2651R of Hawerklip, South East of Delmas Town, in the Victor Khanye Municipality and Nkangala District Municipality, Mpumalanga Province. The community consists of about five hundred people who have been living in the area for more than twenty-five years.

The residents are facing a health risk situation from breathing dust from the newly established coal siding station under the ownership of Keaton Mining (Pty) Ltd (KEATON). The influx of trucks off loading coal to the station is causing lots of dust to blow into the community as they use the gravel road. The trucks drive past in numbers near their homes and residents are left covered in a cloud of dust every couple of minutes.

The school children and working adults use the same dusty road in the morning, breathing dust and exposing themselves to life-threatening trucks. The situation is causing frustration amongst the community members as they fear for the health and safety of their children. One of the community activists mentioned that five years ago a child was knocked down by a car on the same road and died. This happened three years before the Hawerklip siding station commenced their business in the area. Now, with so many trucks driving near their houses, the community fears more deaths from accidents.

These issues arouse serious questions about the commitment of the company to their Environmental Management Plan (EMP) in terms of National Environmental Management Act (NEMA). Metago Environmental Engineers (Pty) Ltd (Metago), which is an independent environmental consultant, was given the task to conduct some research for the Environmental Impact Assessment by Keaton.

The consultants did not conduct their public participation process properly as required by law. The

community members told us that the consultants simply threw pamphlets around the community without explaining anything to them. No meeting was arranged and held by the consultants with the community concerned. This means residents, who would be directly affected by the activities of the company, were not offered an opportunity, as per legal requirement, to participate in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. Their legal rights to participate meaningfully were undermined.

This is not surprising as it is a common trend with all consultants in the mining industries to fail to observe the legal requirement of proper public participation procedures. It goes without saying that they prioritize money over the valuable lives of the vulnerable people.

In May 2014, groundWork, with a Delmas community based organization, approached Victor Khanye local municipality in Delmas about the dust issue in the Hawerklip area. We had a meeting with an officer who is dealing with issues of environment and she promised to discuss the issue with her colleagues but said that we should address it in writing. We quickly wrote a letter, emailed it to her immediately and asked for the response to be made within fourteen days, in recognition of the urgent nature of the situation. After a month we'd received no response.

groundWork, still on behalf of the community, decided to escalate the issue to the Nkangala district municipality. We addressed the situation to their offices in writing directed to the environmental officer and asked for response within fourteen days.

The sensitivity of the situation prompted us to consult with the company (Hawerklip Siding Station) official regarding their plans for the dust and safety of the community. The company officials



told groundWork that they had had a meeting with the land owner (Schoeman Boerdery) regarding those concerns and they are yet to come up with a proper plan in response. The official mentioned further that there are suspicions that the residents are not legally allowed to stay in the area and the land owner is not happy with them.

groundWork then arranged a quick meeting with the land owner and he denied everything about residents staying there illegally. In fact, he said he was happy with them as he has a good relationship with the community. The land owner mentioned further that the meeting he had with the company was very informal as they did not even minute the proceeding. The company approached Schoeman Boerdery to ask for permission to build a fence for the safety of the community. And the Schoemans said they did not have a problem with it as they had also been concerned for their safety ever since

the company started. The land owner was still waiting for the company to come up with the plan to construct a fence as they'd promised to.

When groundWork went to confront the siding company with information gathered, they denied that the company was entirely responsible for the dust as the Delmas coal mine nearby was also using the same road. This was a clear sign that the company was trying to run away from their legal responsibility.

We further had a telephonic conversation with the environmental officer concerned to feed his office with the development which he appreciated and he promised to attend to things. He undertook to call upon the company and make queries with them. A month has passed and we've received no response. We will be making follow ups with the office in due course. ✕



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# Politics of extraction in the South

by Sören Ronge

*Our Austrian intern left behind a wealth of knowledge and took with him a little bit of South Africa*

This winter I had the opportunity to spend some time working with groundWork and learning from their years of experience. Already, before my first day, I was included as a “family member” in this warm and friendly organization and awarded full responsibility, demonstrating a great degree of trust. Mainly, I worked in the Coal Campaign together with Robby Mokgalaka, which was a logical consequence of my prior experience, but I also had a chance to follow other groundWorkers and attend various community and public participation meetings.

In 2012, I spent several months working with the NGO *Pensamiento y Acción Social* (Social Thought and Action) in Colombia, supporting rural communities being resettled due to excessively high air pollution in the area caused by coal mining. I ended up writing a 140-page thesis on this process, assessing the supply-chains, corporate social responsibility policies, local livelihoods and the political ecology and conflicts surrounding the displacement of populations for the extraction of minerals.

Following pressure by the International Monetary Fund and advised by a board of lawyers, of which roughly half just so happened to be lawyers simultaneously representing foreign mining companies, a new mining code was drafted in 2001 resulting in the consequent complete privatization of the mining sector and withdrawal of State participation.

The reality we were encountering in Colombia was a minimal return to the national (even less so for the local) economy in the form of royalties and taxes, as developing countries were competing to attract investments by lowering labour and environmental standards and thereby maximizing the profits of

the investors. The community we were working with was literally surrounded by coal mines and suffering because of dust, sinking ground water levels, surface water pollution, blasting, reduction of land and inflow of foreign opportunity seekers. This in turn led to declines in agricultural yields, loss of flora and fauna, illness, increased crime, loss of local cultural heritage, and higher spending for food, health and transport, with a simultaneously lower income from paid labour and produce from subsistence activities.

Looking at the supply/value chains of the coal industry in Colombia, I discovered that many of the companies involved in the extraction were actually present in all parts of the chain. Extraction, transportation, shipping and trading was all done by the same corporations. Obviously different parts were disguised in misleading names such as national subsidiaries, but nonetheless a closer look revealed their connections. This gives corporations a variety of possibilities to manipulate market prices and control global supply by withholding from markets and speculating on these activities.

This is only a very short summary of what I experienced in Latin America. Now how does this relate to what I found in South Africa?

Both countries are marked by extreme rates of poverty, inequality and crime. They both have a colonial legacy which up to this day affects land tenure and distribution, defines their position as resource provider for the mother lands and has left them with hefty foreign debts. Forced into various Structural Adjustment Programs by the International Financial Institutions, their economies were deregulated and liberalized, while public enterprises were privatized. Both countries are prominent on their respective continents for



holding huge amounts of mineral resources which have historically dominated (and still dominate) their exports. Colombia, like South Africa, has environmental and labour policies which are much less demanding and less strict than their European or US counterparts.

A major difference in the two countries is that of Colombia's coal almost 100% is destined for export to foreign markets. Roughly 70% of its energy comes from hydro electrics and only 30% from thermal energy. In South Africa, more than 70% of energy is sourced from coal. Dirty coal that is, because the high quality coal is, as in Colombia, exported to foreign markets.

These factors invite the inflow of transnational corporations seeking to extract minerals while market prices are high and policies still weak. Stringent environmental policies, emission standards, labour laws and high taxation make the extraction of "northern" resources much less feasible and are the main motivation for the outsourcing of these activities.

I was not surprised to find signs of corporations like Glencore, BHP Billiton or Anglo when visiting mining areas in Mpumalanga. These are the same corporations I had already encountered in Colombia, using the same public discourse of altruistically investing in developing economies and providing much-needed employment. Dirty extraction of minerals and use of cheap labour for sale to energy producers in the North seems just to be a by-product.

While Colombia "only" sacrificed its bio-diversity, eco-systems and local populations, by exporting the fossil fuels it extracts South Africa invented another way of attracting foreign capital. South Africa agreed to even sacrifice its air and rivers by burning the fossil energy right next to where it is extracted, sometimes having conveyor belts feeding the extracted coal right into the power stations. While working for groundWork I designed an interactive map, displaying the extension of the coal mining activities in Mpumalanga.

Followers of groundWork know of the incredible environmental harm created by the coal-fired power stations in the Mpumalanga region and one needs to seriously question the political ecology

of the logic applied by the State. While locked-up in SPAs (special pricing agreements) with multinationals, stemming from apartheid times, which provide the multinational corporations with energy under market value, the citizens of South Africa are charged unaffordable prices for their energy consumption. This has invited the absurd logic of outsourcing dirty and carbon-intensive industries to South Africa, making use of weak environmental policies with cheap energy prices and thereby not only outsourcing labour and industry but also pollution, contamination and environmental degradation.

While few people actually profit from these activities in the form of employment, the main benefits are exported along with the industrial products, leaving the lion's share of the profit with the corporations. The costs of these activities are, however, borne by the surrounding communities and environment. They are the ones who breathe the polluted air and drink the contaminated water without being asked for their consent, while, rather than having the advantage of special pricing agreements, they have to compensate for the losses inflicted by the low industry prices.

Part of the work I conducted for groundWork during my time in South Africa was a calculation of the externalities produced by these coal-fired power stations, using a variety of international studies. People's lives, health and environmental destruction can often not be undone and therefore trying to give a monetary value to these consequences, suggesting that they could be compensated by money, is very questionable. But doing it serves as a tool for demonstrating the hidden cost of coal, which is not considered when comparing different kinds of energy production. Even using the most conservative results of my calculations, the feasibility of fossil-based energy production must seriously be questioned. If you use public interest as your main value for reasoning – rather than individual corporate profit – then a fossil fuel phase-out seems to be the only logical conclusion.

All this being said, my experience in South Africa also painted a brighter picture. Often when talking to South African's, they felt bitter about their government and the democratic functioning of the State, but, compared to Colombia, democratic

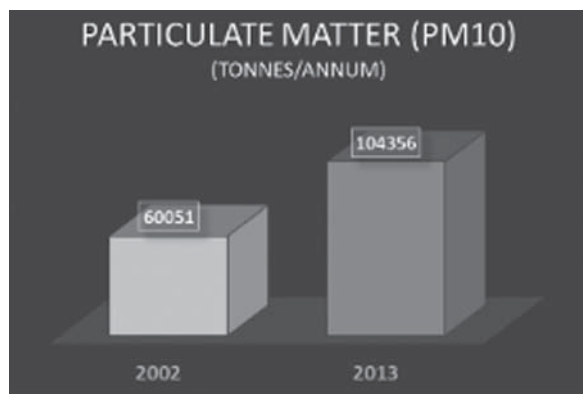
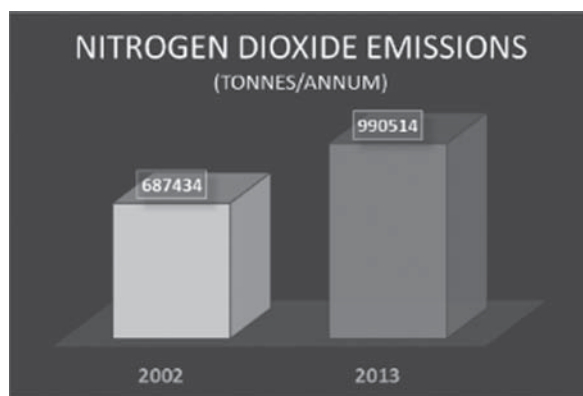
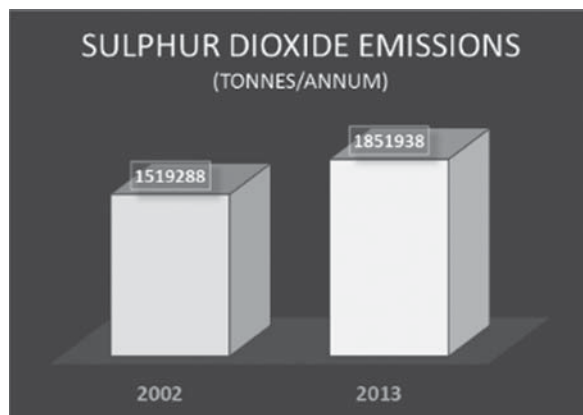


institutions indeed have teeth and social movements have the ability to make themselves heard and influence actions. While in Colombia social movements, public disobedience and protests are scarce, due to the very real threat of violence and retaliation by both state and paramilitary actors, South Africa has a strong culture of mobilization. Colombia has the highest murder rate of union members in the world.

In contrast, the communities I encountered and worked with in South Africa during this time proved to be courageous, organized and proactive. They actively sought to challenge impacts on their everyday livelihoods, their environment and their wellbeing. A good example of this is the Highveld Environmental Justice Network, where several civil-society organizations organized into an alliance to increase their power share and streamline their efforts in demanding environmental justice.

Illegal environmental behaviour on the side of corporations does often – when reported – result in follow-ups and punishment for the ones responsible and institutions such as the Green Scorpions, even though often under-staffed and lacking institutional capacity, actually have impact. Consultation and public participation meetings, even though often only executed as tick-off practices, do actually happen and mostly local populations have some kind of information on what is happening around them.

South Africa has a responsibility towards its people to move to cleaner and more socially just means of energy production. But this responsibility should not and cannot be borne by South Africa alone. It needs to be borne by all the banks, corporations, funds and investors who invest in the carbon-industry in the country and thereby directly contribute to environmental and social impacts on the local scales and all the consequences of climate change on the global scale. ✕



*These graphs have been taken from the report The Health Impact of Coal, discussed in The health cost of coal on page 15.*



# The health cost of coal

by Liziwe McDaid

*In May, independent researcher Liziwe McDaid conducted a desktop study using information from a variety of sources including industry, government and civil society sectors, which aimed at understanding the health burden on the Highveld, Mpumalanga due to its many coal-fired power stations. This is a summary of the report. The full report can be found on groundWork's website.*

South Africa has mined coal for longer than one hundred years and relies on coal for more than 90% of its electricity generation. Within the Mpumalanga Highveld, there are many collieries, and electricity is generated in fourteen power stations, coal is used by heavy industry to produce steel and other products, coal is trucked along the roads and coal is used for indoor household energy use.

The Mpumalanga Highveld is reportedly one of the worst air quality areas in the world and, in 2007, the government declared the Highveld Priority Area (HPA) a priority area for air quality.

However, in 2013, Eskom applied to the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) for exemptions (now "rolling postponements") from air pollution standards meant to reduce pollution levels and improve the people's health for a number of its coal-fired power stations. groundWork, together with Earthlife Africa Johannesburg and a variety of community based organizations have opposed Eskom's application for exemption.

The largest proportion of the emissions in Mpumalanga are due to coal-related pollutants, with Eskom's coal fleet responsible for 51%.

## How much pollution is produced?

When coal is burnt to generate electricity, the emissions include pollutants that cause climate change, damage the environment (including polluting rivers and streams) and can make people sick.

Over the last decade, Eskom has increased its emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen

dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulates (consisting of matter of 10 micron millimetres) by 22%, 44% and 74% respectively, and the trend is likely to continue upwards as those new coal-fired power stations under construction, and a possible third new base-load coal-fired power station, will further add to the pollution load of the country.

Emissions from power stations disperse into the air, spreading the pollution over a large area. Some of that pollution disperses into the atmosphere and some comes down to the ground. In the Mpumalanga HPA, due to local weather conditions, pollution from the coal power station stacks is brought down to the ground at certain times of the day.

## What are the pollution levels that have been measured on the ground?

Figure 1 shows the amounts of pollution measured, together with the permitted levels according to both the South African Air Quality Standard as well as the World Health Organization (WHO) international standard.

If we use the South African standard, our pollution appears to be within the allowed limits, but if we

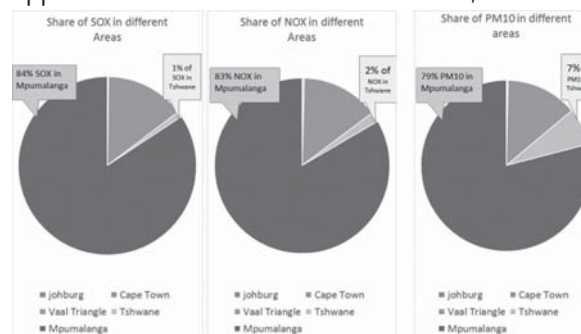


Figure 1: pollution measured on the ground



measure against the WHO standard we are highly polluted. We need to ask why we have weaker standards than the WHO.

There are also seasonal variations, with winter in most cases being worse than summer.

If people breathe in polluted air, they are at risk from diseases such as lung cancer, asthma, blood-pressure related diseases, other heart and respiratory diseases, and even premature death. Environmental health studies in urban areas of South Africa have estimated that outdoor or ambient air pollution caused 1.1% of child (under five years old) mortality due to acute lower respiratory infections.

Children and infants are among the most susceptible to outdoor air pollution, as their lungs continue to develop in childhood and, because children play outdoors more than adults, they are more susceptible to the health impacts of ambient air pollution.

### **What are the causes of outdoor air pollution that are likely to result in the breathing-related diseases and childhood deaths for three different urban centres in South Africa?**

In Tshwane, burning coal inside a house, fumes from diesel-burning vehicles and other sources are the highest risks, with some risks to health from electricity generation; in Cape Town, the highest health risk is burning wood inside the house. For Mpumalanga, the highest risk is due to emissions from Eskom's coal-fired power stations.

In the HPA, for every child who might die or get sick from outdoor air pollution-related diseases due to household coal use and industrial coal-fired boilers, more than three children each year would die from Eskom-produced pollution.

Because they live in the shadow of the Eskom power stations, the people of Mpumalanga HPA breathe more polluted air, and have a higher risk of childhood deaths, polluted water, mercury pollution, respiratory and cardio-vascular diseases, than people living in Cape Town or Tshwane.

### **Who bears the cost and who gains the benefits**

We all use electricity generated by the Mpumalanga power stations which is distributed all over the country via the national electricity grid.

There are very few rich households, but they use more than a third of the residential electricity share, whereas poor people make up about one quarter of the total households but only use a tiny amount of electricity (about 2.4%).

In Mpumalanga, poor households are often dependent on coal rather than electricity to meet their household energy needs. So, they don't get much of the benefit of electricity but they live with the pollution.

Eskom says that putting in technology to stop the pollution will cost R200 billion, which Eskom says is too expensive for them to pay. The people of Mpumalanga are paying the price of pollution through high risk of premature death, lung and heart related diseases.

International studies have shown that for every Rand that is put into abatement, R25 is saved in health costs so, if Eskom doesn't fit anti-pollution technology, it could cost South Africa R5 000 billion in health costs, and these costs will be borne by the people of Mpumalanga, who will suffer death and diseases.

### **What can be done?**

In order to stop the illness and death plaguing the communities of the HPA, there are a number of interim measures that need to take place. Ultimately, the government has to make a political decision to move away from coal in a just transition that will take the country to using cleaner, affordable alternates to producing electricity. These short term interventions are to:

- Improve local health data collection in polluted areas;
- Carry out health studies with similar socio-economic households in rural areas with clean air;
- Conduct in-depth analysis of pollution sources for 2014;
- Implement pollution abatement mechanisms in industry; and
- Refuse exemptions from any pollution standards for any industry (including Eskom) in the area. ✕

*The report and the short related video clip can be found on groundWork's website.*





# Waste pickers' flag flying in Rustenberg

by Musa Chumane

*Rustenberg Municipality has begun including waste pickers in their waste planning processes*

Most municipalities in the country have dumping sites on which there are many waste reclaimers or pickers. Reclaimers are scattered all over these sites searching for recyclables that they exchange for money. Municipalities have been criticised for allowing waste pickers to be on site. They are criticised based on the minimum requirements that are used to manage landfills. Politicians, administrators and the public look down upon people who make a living through waste picking. This activity is stigmatised as inhumane, dirty and illegal, forgetting that hunger and poverty do not have humanity or legality. There has been a contested debate in the past regarding waste pickers on dumping sites, the majority of which are not managed properly. Despite the negativity by different parties there are initiatives that are trying to formalise the work of waste pickers. There are municipalities that are starting to consider waste pickers in their plans, such as Rustenburg Local Municipality.

Rustenburg Local Municipality has seen the light when it comes to waste management and they have established another site as an alternative to the present site which is rapidly reaching capacity. The old site has waste pickers from various countries such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland. These immigrants ended up on the landfill because they came into the country in search of perceived jobs on mines. But the mining companies are cutting back labour to maximise profit and as a result people have no mining jobs and join the unemployed who gain their own labour through waste picking. The capitalist system always relies on maximising profits without expanding the labour force, and that is a challenge faced by aspirant mine workers.

The mines have contributed to the number of unemployed people in this region. Some of the workers were fired from the mines, while others came in search of jobs and when this did not go their way they resorted to waste picking. Most of the people who work as waste pickers share the hope of gaining a "formal" job on the mines for they feel there are too many challenges in waste picking.

The municipality has a dream of creating jobs and making sure that the Waste Act 2008 is honoured through recycling. The Rustenburg Local Municipality's plan is to make sure that the new landfill has a materials recovery facility (MRF). The municipality intends giving the MRF to a cooperative of waste pickers who are working on the site at present. The challenge might be that some of the waste pickers do not have the necessary working documents to allow them to work in South Africa, and this could pose a challenge to the successful launch of the process. By formalising the process, there will be those that will not be able to work for they will not have the requisite papers.

This has sparked debate amongst different role players to say waste pickers are waste pickers despite their country of origin. Unemployment is unemployment and therefore it is insensitive of the municipality to exclude waste pickers who are not South African. Industries are also in support of what the municipality is echoing. The MRF budget will come from Anglo-Platinum which has also voiced that they will be doing this for South Africans only. There is an assumption that the non-South Africans have no work permits.

The steering committee to this project has involved organizations such as the Africa Migration Centre



(AMC). The AMC has advised that some non-South Africans have an asylum status to be in the country, therefore it would be unfair to overlook them for jobs in the MRF. The South African Waste Pickers' Association's (SAWPA) position is that they don't mind working alongside non-South African waste pickers because for years they have been working together without the issue of xenophobia arising.

A dumpsite that has experienced xenophobia amongst waste pickers in the past was Marie Louw dumpsite in Soweto. This was solved by having two shifts, a morning shift composed mainly of South Africans and an afternoon shift dominated by foreign nationals.

The main challenge is to unite waste pickers across borders and make sure that the implementation of recycling projects in Rustenburg materialise. This leaves much to be desired though, since the majority of waste pickers are doing it for survival and are not looking at it as a business. This simply says there

should be a number of workshops that have to be done for waste pickers ranging from forming cooperatives to business skills development.

The support is there from various role players. Currently, SAWPA has convened two meetings with the waste pickers' leadership making sure all the countries are represented during the meetings. The second meeting was a mass meeting where about three hundred waste pickers were part of the meeting. They have showed the desire to be part of the MRF. There could be a number of cooperatives to be created because the municipality has a big plan in terms of waste for this town. There are plans for source separation, buy-back centres and drop off centres, with all of these prioritising waste pickers in terms of employment.

The plan from the municipality is to have a number of waste pickers to work at their transfer centres around the city. Having waste pickers at transfer centres is critical because they know recyclables and their value, thus the municipality will not have to spend money training people on recyclables. People are also required for the rehabilitation of the old site and the municipality wanted to start involving waste pickers in this process. There are a number of initiatives that would require people like waste pickers who are already doing something about waste.

The current situation is that waste pickers are now talking to each other about waste picker cooperatives. Rustenburg waste pickers are also busy developing a database of waste pickers so that SAWPA and stakeholders will have a clear understanding as to how many people they are dealing with.

Waste recycling is a big business if carefully planned for and it has the potential of creating thousands of jobs. Other than job creation, recycling has vast benefits to the environment. I believe projects of this nature have to be encouraged and should come with incentives for municipalities who have at least 25% of formal recycling. This would fuel the interest of excellency in dealing with issues of waste management. ✕

*Foreign wastepickers are in danger of being sidelined in more formal agreements*

*Credit:  
<http://www.immigration.southafrica.org/blog/xenophobia-the-insipid-evil/>*



# Slow poison

by Rico Euripidou

*groundWork's latest air quality report has been released*

groundWork has just published our most recent air quality report titled *Slow Poison: Air pollution, public health and failing governance*, which gives a snapshot of the state of the nation in terms of air pollution and goes on to explain the political failure to protect South Africans from this pollution.

*Slow Poison* is broken down into nine sections, beginning with a contextual history of air pollution in South Africa. It outlines the history of regulations governing air pollution – this is a story of collusion between the state and industry – and of people's struggles to secure an air quality regime that protects people's health, as outlined in Section 24 of the Constitution.

The report then goes on to describe the air quality priority areas that were established because of our developmental history and the legislative framework within which they were declared. Despite being declared the first air priority area in the 2007, the Vaal Triangle Priority Area has yet to meet many of the requirements set out in the priority area's Air Quality Management Plan and exceedances of particulate matter pollution, PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>, for twenty-five days and over have been numerous over the last five years, measurable since pollution monitoring stations were deployed in the priority area. The size of particles is directly linked to their potential for causing health problems. Small particles less than 10 micro-meters in diameter pose the greatest problems, because they can get deep into your lungs, and some may even get into your bloodstream. Exposure to such particles can affect both your lungs and your heart and can be linked to diseases such as strokes and ischaemic heart disease, as well cancer.

In new estimates released in March 2015, the World Health Organization reports that in 2012 around seven million people died – one in eight of total global deaths – as a result of air pollution exposure. This finding more than doubles previous estimates and confirms that air pollution is now the world's

largest single environmental health risk. Reducing air pollution could save millions of lives.

The substance of *Slow Poison* then goes on to detail the failure of government to implement and enforce the law which is given in the context of how communities have interacted with this failed legislative regime. Witbank (eMalahleni) is known today to have some of the dirtiest air in the world, and even though the Highveld Priority Area was declared an air quality priority area in 2008, there are similar patterns of gross pollution exceedances that are, like in the Vaal, far above South Africa's own prescribed air pollution standards and much higher than the World Health Organization's recommended standards. Of particular concern is that, even in light of pervasive exceedances of the South African National Air Quality Standards, government agencies are still allowing applications for large-scale coal-energy-intensive industries (such as coal fired power stations) that will only further compromise the air quality of these already pollution over-saturated air sheds. In fact, the the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) is currently considering an additional three stations.

Most importantly, this report is produced as we pass the twenty-year mark of democracy. It shows how our democracy has failed to protect people from corporate pollution and how government's failure to deliver clean energy to people results in them relying on dirty fuels. In our democracy, people are still polluted and made sick by this pollution. Many who live in the pollution hotspots are unable to get such jobs as are on offer because they cannot pass the health test. The corporations need healthy labour, and they still use the migrant labour system to get it from far away. Those who do get the jobs are put to work in environments which will probably kill them, even if they start healthy. And these jobs keep the pollution pumping out across local settlements and the broader region.



## Environmental Health

While not formally declared an Air Quality Priority Area by the Department of Environmental Affairs, the South Durban Basin has grown into a major industrial hub with two petrochemical refineries in amongst other polluting industries. Following ongoing wilful disregard for the Multi-Point Plan (originally conceived and declared in 2000) since 2011 by the eThekweni Metropolitan, and the systematic dismantling of the pollution control and risk management unit, today air pollution is still not taken seriously. Community people still believe that they are impacted by poor air quality and that they bear a disproportionate burden of disease related to poor air quality. Community people commonly complain of widespread asthma in their communities and an excess of cancers among young people who should not be getting these diseases at their age.

Furthermore, the eThekweni Metro continues to ignore the recommendations made by the South Durban Health Study published in 2006, which found that even modest increases in air pollution levels affect those already vulnerable to lung diseases and increases the number of people who will become vulnerable. The health study categorically recommended that permanent pollution monitoring sites should be established. These should be traffic-oriented, industry-oriented, and population-oriented, along with background sites to give continuous measurements that inform a process to apportion the origin of these pollutants.

With respect to the toxic pollutants, the health study highlighted that a number of pollutants, called contaminants of potential concern (including benzene, volatile organics, poly aromatic hydrocarbons and dioxin and furans – all commonly associated with the petro-chemicals industry), warranted particular concern due to their measured concentrations and potency that together cause potentially significant cancer and non-cancer health risks. These activities should have been supplemented by a parallel health surveillance system so that an ongoing assessment of the health status of South Durban communities could establish improvements in the health status of pollution-affected communities.

The health study findings also recommended that early warning systems of sudden large-scale exposure of pollutants such as SO<sub>2</sub> should be linked

directly to the schools in close proximity to the sources of pollution and that protocols with clear action plans for those children with known asthma are required. No such actions were implemented and it is because of these failures that we still have a situation where school children in South Durban are sent home because of pollution incidents even as they prepare for their exams.

*Slow Poison* clearly details government's failure to enforce the law or to maintain proper air quality monitoring and information systems while industry disdains compliance with the law. Critically, it concludes that government is once more allowing the air quality regime to collapse.

*Slow Poison* concludes with a short section on what this means for our health and how to move forward beyond the ruin. Government is allowing the air quality regime to fall apart. The evidence in this report points to the conclusion that this is the intention. For example: monitoring stations are not maintained; relevant health statistics are not collected; the half-hearted attempt to develop a functioning air quality information system, as required by law, has been abandoned; no attempt is being made to build capacity in any of the spheres of government and, where it has been developed, it is destroyed; pollution control budgets are inadequate; the law is offset; non-compliance is being legalised; and the DEA is evidently under instruction from other ministries.

For ourselves, we recognise that we must gather our strength through steadfast local organizing, mutual solidarity and participation in the broader movement for environmental, social and economic justice. We will use all means at our disposal to defend ourselves, our neighbours and our environments from the destruction brought upon us by the state and corporate capital. We will investigate and expose this destruction. We will use legal remedies, where appropriate, to access information, hold government to account and challenge corporations. We will use direct actions at all scales to highlight and disrupt the work of destruction. ✕

*The report is available in hardcopy and on groundWork's website.*



# Great steps for GGHH

by Luqman Yesufu

It has been a fascinating journey so far, as hospitals and health systems in South Africa are beginning to recognise the impact of some of their activities on climate change and are eager to commit towards reducing their environmental footprint. This is why, less than six months after rolling out the Global Green and Healthy Hospital initiative (GGHH) in South Africa, we already have one health system, three hospitals and two academic institutions signed up as GGHH members, promoting environmental health both locally and globally.

All GGHH member hospitals in South Africa are currently from the Western Cape Province, and this is understandable as the province has already embarked on a green flagship project, which involves organizations, municipalities and business submitting projects that show their commitment towards the green economy. This was an added motivation and another reason why engaging with the GGHH initiative, which would give them a platform to carry out green projects on environmental sustainability in healthcare, was an attractive proposition.

The Western Cape Department of Health endorsed the GGHH Agenda, joined the network and committed to two goals in Building and Energy. The GGHH building goal is aimed at incorporating green principles into the design and construction of health facilities. The Infrastructure Unit of the Western Cape Department of Health had just completed the construction of two new health facilities which were designed and built using the green principles. The Director of Infrastructure who designed and constructed these facilities was excited about the GGHH initiative and was eager for these newly constructed health facilities to join the network and showcase all their attributes to the world. She was also keen to improve on some of her existing building projects, like aspiring to have completely carbon-neutral buildings and managing storm water drainage. One of the many benefits of GGHH membership is that it gives you a platform for continuous interaction, sharing experiences and creating a learning environment.

The Chief Director of Strategy and Health Support was keen to see other hospitals within the Western Cape Department of Health also join the network. The Chief Executive Officers of both Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha Hospitals, who were both present at the Climate Change seminar, were keen to promote environmental health in their hospitals and had no problem endorsing the agenda and committing to two goals in Energy and Building. Both hospitals were built with high consideration for the environment. The natural plants and animals peculiar to the environment were maintained, and the building utilizes renewable energy in the form of solar energy for running its activities. It's very easy to find your way around these hospitals as they are built with adequate natural lightening, colourful signs and artwork that uplift one's mood. Thorp Koorts, who is the project manager and also a renewable energy expert at Mitchells Plain Hospital, was keen to show us around and share some of the strategies the hospital has embarked upon towards fostering energy efficiency and renewable energy use. The solar panels installed in the hospital contribute more than half the energy required for a day.

Our first member in South Africa, Lentegeur Hospital, which is a large psychiatric hospital also in the Western Cape, is doing an amazing job implementing their project and promoting environmental health. The overall aim is to rebrand the hospital as a leader in environmental health using green initiatives which focus on the environment and the communities they serve. The sustainability coordinator, who is also a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town, embarked on this remarkable journey in 2008, and his focus is to re-integrate these mentally ill patients into society, giving them a sense of connection, hope and empowerment. They achieve this through growing food crops and trees within the hospital. The garden and trees restore fresh oxygen into the environment of the hospital and supply healthy foods, and their production serves as a source of employment and income for in-patients and out-



patients as well as the hospital. He also has a bicycle empowerment project which is on-going and aimed at reducing the hospital contribution to local pollution and resulting climate effects.

It's interesting to note that academic institutions are also encouraged to join and promote environmental health within their institution. The Faculty of Medicine and Health Science, University of Stellenbosch, which has a spectrum of health professionals at both under- and postgraduate levels was quick to join the GGHH network. The sustainability coordinator at the Faculty has been doing a lot of work on environmental sustainability, integrating it into the Faculty's strategic plan over the years, which is handled by a committee that reports to the Dean's division. The focus is on areas of energy use, water, waste management, food, travel, transport, land use and academic curriculum which are clearly congruent with the GGHH Agenda. The sustainability coordinator has developed a work plan for 2013 to 2018 that would serve to promote environmental health and encourage hospitals and health systems that the institution works with to join the GGHH network.

Overall, the GGHH campaign in South Africa is getting more and more recognition, as we are beginning to increase in numbers and individuals are taking special interest in it. Within the next year we hope to have reached other countries in Africa.

### **US Trip and GGHH Connect**

We recently had our one week annual leadership meeting in Sonoma, California in August. It was a fascinating experience for me because I had the opportunity to meet and share experiences with colleagues from all around the world, some of whom I have only communicated with via email and Skype. It was also the first time I would travel for over twenty-seven hours, and I guess I travelled with the sun as it was sunny all through. It's also worth noting that I was the first person to get to the ranch, having it all to myself before everyone came in the following day.

We had the general introduction the first day, with the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) giving us a lecture on the history and future vision of HCWH. It was a thought-provoking speech, because it outlined the major reason for our struggle and

showed that we have to be persistent in our fight to ensure a sustainable health care system. We then had presentations from representatives from Asia, Europe, Argentina, Brazil, China, Nepal and South Africa. The presentations were meant to illustrate the general overview of the health care sector in their respective countries and regions, while also stating the challenges and successes they have had so far in implementing the GGHH project.

In addition, breakaway sessions were held to follow through the discussion on the guidance documents which illustrated the procedure of implementation for the goals. There was a lot of debate surrounding the improvement of this document, to make it really simple and less complicated, with many suggesting that it should have simple procedures for the implementation of a particular goal, drawing from examples from places with limited human and financial resources.

We also had an opportunity to get a first glimpse of GGHH Connect, a powerful Internet platform that will serve as the connective tissue of our global network of over four hundred members representing the interests of more than five thousand hospitals from every continent. Members from around the world will, for the first time, be able to meet, teach and learn from each other's experiences, thereby accelerating achievement of our shared sustainability and environmental health goals in a borderless environment. Both Nick Thorp (Global Community Manager) and Alejandra Livschitz (Global Communications Manager) gave us an intensive overview of GGHH Connect, showing us the amazing things you could do on connect, making it easy for communication and engagement.

GGHH Connect will house myriad new resources and tools, to assist members in their work. These include the guidance document and self-assessment checklist, including Agenda goal communities and experts. The communities will bring one together with members working on the same agenda goals, fostering connection, collaboration and innovation, while the experts from around the world will be available to answer one's questions, provide advice, and point one to helpful resources in each Goal Community. ✕



# Lost in interpretation

by Megan Lewis

*It is all about information and its complexities.*

A husband and wife in a rural town in Ethiopia go to the local clinic to ask about contraception, as they already have numerous children and cannot afford any more. The nurse shows them how to use a condom, using her thumb as an illustration. The couple go home happy. However, three months later, the wife discovers she is pregnant and they go back to the clinic, furious. They seek out the nurse. "We did exactly what you said!" the husband cried, using his thumb just as the nurse had done. "I put it on my thumb, just like you showed me, but look at my wife!"

This funny story was told at a recent meeting I attended with people from all over the continent and world. It is a vivid illustration of what gets "lost in translation", translation here also meaning interpretation and understanding.

Since last year, groundWork has been working with charity-based film production company SourcedTV on a video news release for the media and a campaign video centred around the health impacts of coal and the problem with South Africa's current energy policy, which is based almost completely on coal, with Eskom being the driver of this. Having more experience in print media as compared to broadcast, it has been a fascinating ride and, whilst we are still to complete the campaign video – likely by the beginning of October – I have already come out of this experience with so much more understanding of what makes this media type tick. And in many cases, this can be taken across into print and radio media too.

Being on the inside, it is easy to become so caught up in the story that, when we try and tell it, it is open to interpretation because some of those key points in the box to the right have not been followed. This could result in an "unwanted pregnancy" like in the above story or, in our case, a story that could be

misconstrued and possibly used against our cause as there are no figures or proper contextualising.

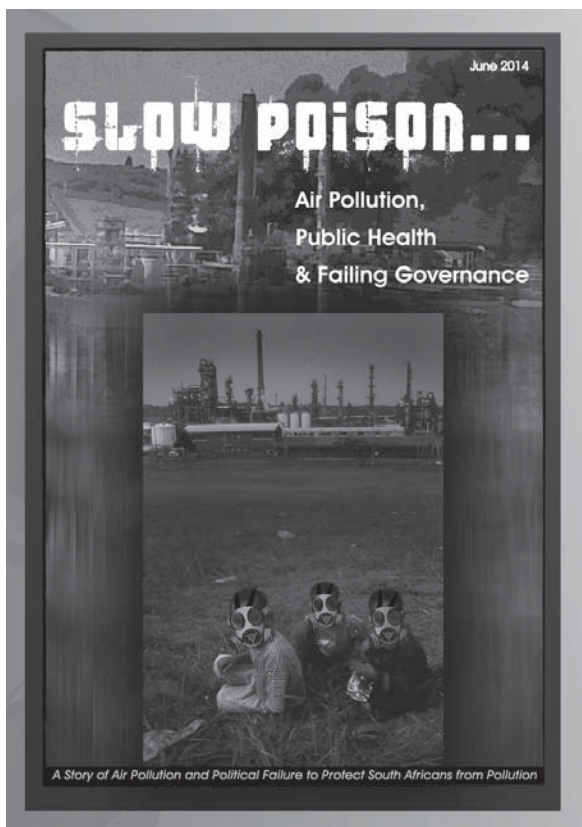
We recently released two important reports. The first *The health impact of coal: The responsibility that coal-fired power stations bear for ambient air quality associated health impacts*, a title which is somewhat self-explanatory, was the work of many months with SourcedTV, based in London, that coordinates the production of films about

## What to do:

- If releasing a report, spend time on pulling the main facts into a **media briefing**. Whilst you might have invested all of your time and energy into producing the report, 95% of traditional media will not read it.
- Pull out the **headline figures and statistics** when writing and speaking to media whether over the phone or at a press conference. Waffling about issues with little understandable or tangible evidence proves difficult for journalists to base a hard-hitting story on.
- A **contextualising narrative** based on the social, political and economic situation is helpful; you are giving your organization's world-view. However, whilst they are not figures, treat them as such so that you are clear and concise.
- Writing environmental justice stories is writing about people. Use a **human interest angle** to highlight a bigger issue – this is easier to relate to and excellent to portray through imagery.
- Always make **follow up phone calls**. Your press statement is one of hundreds that comes into a journalist or news editor's inbox; they need a reminder to open yours.



The cover of the air quality report, *Slow Poison*.



environmental and social injustices across the world. The report was released through a video news release, which was a short, seven-minute video targeting Eskom's application for postponements (effective exemption) from meeting the minimum emission standards and the heightened impact this would have on people's health, which is already poor in the Highveld of Mpumalanga. Whereas the UK media are used to this kind of package, we found it difficult to get South African media to host it on their websites. Nevertheless, the report was still picked up in the media. By the time you read this, we will have a thirty-minute campaign video which will be used online but, most importantly, taken into communities for screenings.

Secondly, we released *Slow poison: Air pollution, public health and failing governance* through a press conference and, while work was put into getting media interested, once they understood the consequences of the report it gained traction by itself. Interestingly, current IFP Member of Parliament and former MEC for Environmental Affairs Narend Singh, who grew up in Durban, called into a radio panel discussion that groundWork was part of and told the listeners he had made a motion in parliament to discuss the report. Allegedly, current MEC of the same department told him "not to believe everything groundWork says". Nevertheless, moving away from political "skinner", it has rattled the national air quality officer who held a press conference in response to our report. We have brought air quality to the forefront again and it resonates with people because of the health aspect.

The delivery of both reports made it very clear what the most critical statistics are and why they are important, as well as providing the context of coal and air quality respectively, in terms of the history, the legislative, and the social and environmental aspects. Media could grasp the story from the media briefing and sought advice from the organization where necessary.

Both reports and the seven minute video can be found on groundWork's website. [X](#)





# Saving CoAL?

by Greenfly

## *Offsets in motion*

It's offset on at Coal of Africa's (CoAL) Vele mine. The corporation has just signed an agreement with the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and National Parks (SANParks). CoAL will ruin a few thousand hectares of land on the banks of the Limpopo River and suck out the local aquifer to provide water to wash the coal. Of course, when you wash the coal you dirty the water but, however much you scrub, the coal is never clean. In return for ruined land and dirty water, CoAL is to fund SANParks to do wonderful things at the Mapungubwe national park just down the road.

This reflects the new thinking at the DEA: the mining industry is going to ruin it anyway so let's get some bucks out of them for conservation. On this logic, the more that is ruined, the more that can be saved. So it is just as well that the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) has handed out prospecting licences all over the district. The question on Greenfly's mind is how much you can ruin before there's nothing left to save.

CoAL is jolly pleased with this arrangement. Back in 2009, the DMR gave it mining rights for the Vele mine and it went ahead without bothering about water or environmental rights. That is not unusual. There are a hundred or so mines operating without a water licence and government is in no hurry to bring them to book. But Mapungubwe is a bit special. It is a world heritage site because it is the seat of an ancient kingdom that traded with India and China about a thousand years ago. A coalition of local organizations rallied in opposition to the mine and a World Heritage Committee is looking over the DEA's shoulder.

It took them a year, but in 2010 the "green scorpions" told CoAL to stop work on the mine. CoAL responded by saying that Vele would not scar Mapungubwe and would be run with "extremely tight compliance". What CoAL means by tight compliance was put on show a couple of months

later at its Mooiplaats mine in Mpumalanga. The provincial environmental department put it on notice for starting mining activities without any environmental authorisations and said it was polluting the upper Vaal catchment.

That spooked the investors and CoAL's share price crashed. But it bounced back in 2011 when the Vele mine finally got a water licence. The corporation then crowed at a great victory over "unreasonable" environmental opposition and regulatory red tape. It also signed a memorandum with the DEA and SANParks, which has now morphed into the offset deal.

The terms of the deal are that CoAL will pay R55 million over the next twenty-five years. That's R2.2 million a year or 0.2% of the Vele mine's expected revenues of more than R1 billion a year. And it's to be "tax efficient". The corporation has an equal seat with SANParks and the DEA on the committee which decides on the offset programme and it also gets to paint itself green.

While the coal is of Africa, CoAL is Australian and will take its profits home. But this little corporate no doubt feels at home in the local industry. The coal culture seems remarkably similar on the other side of the Indian Ocean where the industry has Prime Minister Tony Abbott in its pocket. He tells us that coal is good for humanity. Never mind the burden of death and disease from mining and burning coal. And don't think about climate change which is "absolute crap", or so says Abbott. He is listening to industry calls to outlaw anti-coal protests.

Meanwhile, the coal price has crashed and CoAL is running at a loss. It has sold off the Mooiplaats mine, which was "bleeding money", and taking debt to pay debt. So what happens to the offset agreement when CoAL goes bust? The damage at the Vele mine is already in process but the offset funding looks as precarious as an outsourced job. ✕



# Sasol's attack on air quality

by Robyn Hugo and Sylvia Kamanje

*The benefits of compliance are not worth the costs*

When Sasol's year-end results were announced in September 2014, the energy group's operating profit increased 7% to R41.7bn, and headline earnings per share were up 14% to a record R60.16 in the year ended June 2014.

And yet, in May this year, when Sasol and the National Petroleum Refiners of South Africa (Natref) – a Sasol Oil and Total South Africa joint venture – launched court proceedings against the government, aiming to set aside most of South Africa's hard-won air pollution regulations for big industry, one of the arguments they made is that the benefits of legal compliance are not worth the costs of adhering to the law designed to limit dangerous emissions from SA's biggest polluters.

Essentially, Sasol and Natref's case is aimed at obtaining a court order setting aside a number of minimum emission standards (MES) for eight sub-categories of highly polluting activities in the Air Quality Act's (AQA) "list of activities". The MES aim to protect human health and the environment. If the court application succeeds, the majority of South Africa's polluting industries – including all of Eskom's coal-fired power stations and all refineries – will not have to comply with pollution standards that would otherwise have come into effect on 1 April 2015.

Sasol and Natref argue that MES are unconstitutional, unreasonable and breach the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA). They claim that, until new standards are set, they will simply comply with emission standards that they themselves have determined. This is not only unacceptable, but manifestly unfair on those facilities that *have* incurred the required capital costs to comply with the MES.

Some of the other arguments made by Sasol and Natref in support of their application are that the Minister, in setting the MES, failed to have regard to the following:

- the MES-setting process prescribed in the Framework for Air Quality Management;
- all their objections;
- ambient air quality and ambient air quality standards; and
- plant modifications and industry cycles.

Sasol and Natref have launched this litigation despite the fact that:

- South Africa faces huge air quality challenges, and the health implications and present and future costs of air pollution to the state are only just starting to be understood. Sasol emits vast quantities of greenhouse gases (70.7-million tons globally for the 2012-13 period) and its Secunda plant is the world's biggest single-point emission source;
- Sasol and Natref's operations all fall within the Vaal Triangle Airshed Priority Area and the Highveld Priority Area – declared in terms of the Air Quality Act because of the extremely poor air quality in these areas (and which frequently exceeds South African ambient air quality standards) and in order to protect the health of people living in the Priority Areas. Sasol and Natref's emissions are a significant cause of this poor air quality and contribute to negative health impacts;
- the "polluter pays" principle in NEMA requires that *"the costs of remedying pollution, environmental degradation and consequent*



*adverse health effects and of preventing, controlling or minimising further pollution, environmental damage or adverse health effects must be paid for by those responsible for harming the environment";*

- despite Sasol's profitability, one of its key arguments is that the benefits of legal compliance are just not worth the costs. We believe that it is both inappropriate and immoral to compare the costs to be incurred by Sasol to reduce their pollution to the cost to human health if they fail to comply with air quality laws. Moreover, it is not for any single entity to determine whether or not it should comply with the law by reference to its own cost benefit analysis;
- since the passing of AQA in 2005, Sasol and Natref were aware that MES would become mandatory. Sasol and Natref were key players in the five-year long multi-stakeholder process convened to determine appropriate MES for big industry. It had certainty of these standards since early 2010;
- the final published standards represented a compromise on the part of the government and non-industry stakeholders, and are more lenient than those required of big industry in other parts of the world, including other countries in which Sasol operates;
- subsequent to the promulgation of the MES, Sasol and Natref lobbied the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) to obtain standards – published in November 2013 – that are significantly more lenient for petroleum industry combustion installations than those published in 2010. Despite this involvement – and the now-weaker standards – Sasol and Natref have failed to make the investments necessary to enable them to comply with these standards;

- the failure of Sasol's and Natref's management to approve the necessary expenditure to ensure compliance means that, regardless of the outcome of their court challenge, Sasol and Natref are likely to argue that there is not enough time to comply with the regulations when they come into effect in April 2015. This is a clear indication that Sasol and Natref's involvement in this process was conducted in bad faith; and
- Sasol and Natref are also both in the process of applying to the DEA's National Air Quality Officer to postpone compliance with the MES.

Given the possibly far-reaching consequences of this litigation, both the Centre for Environmental Rights and the Legal Resources Centre have given notice of their intention to seek consent to intervene – on behalf of different groups of civil society organizations – as friends of the court (or *amici curiae*). The *amici* have expertise regarding the impacts of air quality on health and well-being, as well as expertise regarding environmental decision-making in relation to matters of air pollution. They will provide expert legal and technical assistance to the Court to enable it to determine the issues in the context of the constitutional rights to an environment not harmful to health or wellbeing, and to have the environment protected. The current stage of the litigation is that the DEA is preparing its answering affidavit. Thereafter, the *amici* will prepare and submit their application, and Sasol and Natref also have an opportunity to respond to any new information in the answering affidavit.

Sasol derived extraordinary benefits from the apartheid state. What we as civil society expect from such a company is compliance with our country's laws, and corporate leadership and accountability. Instead, this extremely profitable company has resolved to lead the charge against the State's efforts to protect the constitutional rights of all South Africans to an environment not harmful to their health and well-being. ✕



# Unearthed

With hydraulic fracking of shale gas in South Africa being on the cards, but no wells having yet been drilled, *Unearthed* frames the South African story against the place of the technology's origin, the United States and its less than ideal legacy of fracking. Jolynn Minnaar, Karoo-born director of the documentary, shows the audience two important interlinked aspects of the fracking industry. As the documentary's slogan goes, "The deeper the dig, the darker the secrets". After eighteen months of research and having interviewed four hundred people, Minnaar once again exposes the reality of big energy companies.

Personal testimonies from people exposed to fracking's fallout range from fatigue, asthma and rashes to severely compromised immune systems manifested in respiratory diseases and cancers. *Unearthed* is similar to another documentary, *Gasland*, in that it shows these environmental impacts and the real stories from people living in the glow of flaring fracking rigs. Minnaar discovers this massive power dynamic that takes place when shale gas is found, where corporations put people under a gag order. Those who were previously open to speaking to Minnaar about these impacts of fracking suddenly go quiet and disappear as they sink into a situation that renders them paralyzed. Once shale gas is found underneath or near to a person's home, the corporation that comes in to do the extracting gives them one of two options: either leave or be kept mum through payment.

It is the epitome of the neoliberal capitalist system within which the US and South Africa both work. The somewhat incestuous relationship developed between governments and industry, forces people to sew up their mouths or face threats of removal. *Unearthed* paints a bleak view for South Africa if we do not reclaim our social power. If fracking takes place in South Africa and follows the same route as in the US, economic power colludes with political power, potentially leaving social power stunted. With our mining industry acting in the same way, we should be motivated to push back on this false solution to our energy "crisis".

