



GROUNDWORK

The Awe and Destruction of Climate Change

KZN FLOODS: 459 deaths * 63 still missing * More than 3000 homes destroyed



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Cover picture by Phill Magakoe



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groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice 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. These campaigns are supported by the Media, Information and Publications Campaign and the

Environmental Justice Education Campaign. groundWork is constituted as a trust. The Acting Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is Judy Bell. The other trustees are: Farid Esack, Patrick Kulati and Richard Lyster.

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groundWork is affiliated to the following international organizations: Health Care Without Harm; International POPs Elimination Network; Basel Action Network; 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

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



Friends, it has been a bone-jarring and emotional three months as Durban and KwaZulu-Natal suffered their worst floods on record. Today, we mourn the 443 people who lost their lives and the more than 50 who are still missing. On the 27th of April, on Freedom Day, when I visited Dassenhoek on the outskirts of Durban, people were talking of hundreds missing. What the final tally will be, we will never know for sure.

As I write this in May, we are in the middle of another storm, where April is being repeated. And roads that were repaired in April are now washed away again. People on the ground are feeling abandoned and frustrated. From a list-serve, “V” screams out at us: “Let us translate Sihle’s (Sihle Zikalala, Premier of KwaZulu Natal) bullshit into plain English: ‘Shelters’, which implies places of safety where people are provided with regular hot meals, decent sleeping arrangements, clean water, showers, counselling if needed and at least some privacy, are nothing like that. Mostly people are jammed into very old, dilapidated, leaking, cold, poorly maintained community halls, in hostels and communal facilities in other poor communities, churches, schools etc, wherever anyone can find space and a roof. Food – often what little there is – is supplied and prepared mostly by private donors and volunteers who often have very little themselves – NOT the state in most cases. In instances where DSD food parcels are being provided, there are not enough to go around. There is zero privacy, little safety and not one person I have spoken to or heard of has received trauma counselling provided by the state, despite having lost multiple family members or having lived through the trauma of repeated dispossession.”

This is how people are having to live after the flooding. Urgent action is now needed and meaningful solidarity and climate reparations must be forthcoming: from the global North that got rich on burning fossil fuels, China and India which continue to bank on fossil fuels, and the middle classes in the global South, who take more than their fair share of carbon space.

In May, I had the privilege of addressing the Afrikagrupperna – aka AGS – annual general meeting.

AGS is a long-time funder and solidarity partner of groundWork. In April they – and other Swedish NGOs supporting the global South – were informed that the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is cutting their budgets by 39%. So, on the back of this, I was asked to address the AGM.

There are four issues that grabbed my attention in the last period that call for us to continue and intensify the decades-long solidarity between Sweden and the global South, and in our case between Afrikagrupperna and southern Africa and Western Sahara.

In this age, the brutality and overtness of colonialism and neo-colonialism has been replaced by sophistication and stealth, as displayed by the US and Germany at the recent Kathmandu climate finance obligations discussions, hidden away from mainstream media and strong civil society presence. Here, the US and Germany questioned the decades-long agreement on how climate finance should be considered, questioning in a sophisticated manner a very simple reality of developed and developing countries. From the outset, the most prominent finance fight in the world – climate finance and reparations – was being watered down. As Third World Network reports, the fight was “over country classification based on the fundamental bifurcation of development levels viz. ‘developing countries’ and ‘developed countries’.” Essentially this move “pushed to undermine their climate finance obligations to the developing countries which is firmly embedded in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement (PA)”. All done away from the prying eyes of the public.

Getting back to the issues that grabbed my attention.

One, was how the crisis in Ukraine results in Europeans spinning a narrative that allows them to place Africa and the world in greater danger by continuing to push for increasing extraction of fossil fuel. The renewable energy power plan (REPowerEU) says that: “We want to build long-term partnerships that are mutually beneficial – boosting renewable energy



and increasing energy efficiency around the globe and cooperating on green technology and innovation.” Something that reads as noble, and might even have a hint of global solidarity in it. But in the leaked “EU Energy Strategy” – now called “EU external energy engagement in a changing world” – there is a clear articulation of securing more oil and gas, rather than shifting to renewable energy as soon as possible. It says that “the REPowerEU Plan aims to reduce Europe’s dependence on Russian gas” and “before this summer, the EU aims to conclude a trilateral agreement with Egypt and Israel on supplying Europe with LNG” and it focuses on countries in sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular, in Western Africa like Nigeria, Senegal and Angola, which offer untapped LNG potential. Clearly, EU is talking with forked tongue. What the EU should be doing now is to cut their addiction to fossil fuel.

Secondly, Germany, Italy and Japan have been in the news. On the back of Russia’s invasion, they seek to increase coal imports and to recommission decommissioned coal-fired power stations. And at the same time, they expect us in the global South to stop digging and burning coal.

Thirdly, the adoption of a bilateral agreement to relocate asylum seekers in the UK to Rwanda, “where their cases will be processed. If they are granted asylum, they will be encouraged to remain in Rwanda for at least five years.” While the UK has exited the EU, the EU is not unfamiliar with this approach as *The Conversation* reported that it is “part of a wider strategy deployed by the powerful governments of richer nations, from Australia to the EU, to discourage unwanted arrivals by creating conditions that are hostile or inhumane.” Europe always had to have African compradores for its agenda to extract resources and manage African dissent.

Finally, there was a call for solidarity from Australians campaigning for freedom and democracy in Western Sahara to push back on the West African Oil and Gas pipeline that seeks to cut through Western Sahara on its way to Morocco and then on to Europe. This across a land that is occupied by Morocco and where Morocco seeks to falsely establish a presence.

These issues raise the critical need for Swedish citizenry to lead in solidarity and question the actions Europe and the powerful in the global North, and to continue supporting those in struggle in the global South. It is critical that progressive civil society in

the global North looks beyond the aid paradigm, and wrestles with a politic towards global humanity.

We also need to understand the conflict moving forward and understand its purpose of expanding military power, military budgets and the arms industry, and then questions who the threat is. Cutting budgets under the guise of Ukraine, Sweden is saying that Ukraine is more important than the deep global crisis we have in terms of refugees and ‘undemocracy’. As the Swedish United Nations Association has articulated: “The reception of Ukrainian refugees will unavoidably have an affect on the state budget. However, it should not be to the detriment of the world’s poorest people” – a people made poor because of the extractive ‘development’ forced upon them by Europe, neo-colonialism and the large financial institutions such as the World Bank. What also affects state budgets is the increase of the state’s military spending and its link to arms corporations. Sweden has the resources to not have to cut their support to build democracy globally, and they have further resources because of not squandering money on militarism. Under these circumstances we have to ask who the threat in the expansion of the spend on militarism really is.

This month, the Stockholm +50 gathering was held in Stockholm. The origins of the idea of a just transition could be said to have started in Stockholm at the 1972 gathering and, with Sweden cutting aid, this goes against that deep history based upon solidarity. We need to always remember that the North and Sweden owe the South reparations and not only aid. We do not see support as aid. We see support that emerges from the Afrikagrupperna grassroots of Sweden as something that is deeply political, an act that emerges from people’s belief in the injustice of the past and their conscious effort to reverse that, not by aid but by supporting those movements in the global South that seek to challenge the status quo and call for a new world order.

This is a call for a world built on climate and environmental justice that calls for all people to live well with each other and the earth, where empowered people live in relations of solidarity and equity with each other and in non-degrading and positive relationships with their environments.

A Luta Continua! 🌍





An opportunity in climate crisis for all of us



by Bobby Peek

On Tuesday morning, the 12th of April, around 1:15AM, a neighbour called my mother-in-law, warning her of the rising water in their semi-detached house. Getting out of bed, she stepped into already knee-high water. Panic-stricken, the family managed to gather a few essentials and get their car out of the yard. Others in the neighbourhood were not so lucky and they climbed over walls to get into higher properties to escape the gushing waters, or stood helpless atop tables and other furniture as their homes flooded, unable to get out and fearing the worst. Some families in their neighbourhood of Springfield, Durban, lost loved ones in mud slides.

Fifteen minutes after my family left their house, banks collapsed in the district and a mudslide engulfed their house. Two days later, when the flood had subsided, but the danger was still present, we entered the house and salvaged some documents and clothes. That was all we could save. Everything else in the house – irreplaceable mementoes, much

treasured furniture passed down through generations, groceries and clothes – were in a heart-breaking heap of mud-covered, water-drenched and fast-moulding mess. For many, however, the biggest loss is a sense of place, especially in communities like Springfield, where the descendants of market gardeners – the first inhabitants relocated by the apartheid government to the area mainly from the Tram and Magazine Barracks – still live. There is a pervading sense of despair and hopelessness in this close-knit community, where many have lived through floods more than once in their lifetimes.

Ironically, among the documents saved was a 35-year-old settlement letter from the then chairman of the Disaster Relief Fund, which allocated R1 406 to my mother-in-law for losses she suffered in the 1987 flood damage. In a further cruel irony, it was just last year that the furniture damaged in these floods was finally restored, only to be now destroyed in the mudslide.

A rescue team searches for missing victims at a house washed away by the floods in KwaNdengezi, Durban. Credit: Phill Magakoe



As we filled sandbags to protect what was left of the home and redirect the storm and sewage waters flowing around our ankles, I recalled the words of Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados. She was pleading for action with nations at the UN climate jamboree in Glasgow, in November 2021. She spoke of the suffering from the impacts of climate change and, reciting the words of Eddie Grant, she asked, “Will they mourn us on the frontline?” I now reflected on the reality of the frontline. I am not only a campaigner advocating for climate justice; I am also an individual on the frontline, living climate injustice.

As campaigners within groundWork, we have advocated since the 1990s that we need to urgently shift from fossil fuels. In 2005, we started conversations on alternative energy that laid the foundations for the discussions on the just transition. In 2010, together with Earthlife Africa, residents from Lephalale and 192 organisations globally, we called on the World Bank not to grant Eskom the \$3.75 billion loan to build more polluting coal-fired power stations. We asked that instead there should be concrete plans made for a just transition to energy for the poor and well-paid ‘green jobs’. We were vehemently opposed by the ministers of finance, energy and public enterprises.

Since 2011, we have worked with workers and unions calling for a just transition and over the last few years, together with coal-affected community partners and the Life After Coal Campaign, we have developed an *Open Agenda for the Just Transition*. This is a transition that recognises the fact that, for us to have a future where we will live well with each other and the earth, we have to build upon a base of equality between people. And it must come with service delivery, infrastructure development, housing, health systems and decent jobs that are resilient to the world we live in, which is a world in which climate change is now a daily reality.

The one-in-a-hundred-year flood is a misnomer from the past, and now things have changed irrevocably. Consider the reality that Durban was hit by flooding in 2022, 2019, 2017, 2007 and 1987. The floods of the last years have broken daily rainfall records, with one deluge of rain dropping about a third of Durban’s annual rainfall on the 11th of April.

How do we respond to this reality? Government has been warned repeatedly, and it is not a surprise

that people are angry. People in my mother-in-law’s neighbourhood complain about the lack of democracy, how they are never heard, how the many calls to the council about blocked storm water and sewage systems are ignored.

The South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), organising across Durban, has since 1995 repeatedly called for a disaster preparedness plan, a disaster management plan to manage the damage when it happens, and a disaster recovery plan to learn from the mistakes and build a better city. They have been ignored. It is now time for an open democracy, where people and government speak to each other, and government does not hide behind laws and practise exclusion. Come speak to the people where they have lost lives, land and belongings and build a future with them, using the strength of our people. Let’s use this crisis as an opportunity to build a resilient city that serves people first.

As a commissioner on the Presidential Climate Commission, together with some fellow commissioners from the Centre for Environmental Rights, Earthlife Africa, and youth and labour, I have visited communities to hear their concerns about climate change and a just transition. And what we have heard was that people are excluded from decisions by local government. They want what was promised them in 1994: municipal services, housing, roads, schools, health care and clean air and water. Since our first meeting with the president, I have said that for people in townships climate change is about developing services and homes that are resilient. This flood showed us why this is urgent. The Commission must now seek to act with urgency to advise how South Africa stops the madness of relying on fossil fuels, ensures that as a society we adapt to a climate change reality and develops a resilient economy that serves people first.

If we are going to have restorative, distributive and procedural justice, as the Commission wants, it must start with an open democracy where people are heard, and their issues are engaged with. It is only through such a process that trust can be built.

Come to the frontlines and fill the sandbags. Let us respect nature and use the crisis as an opportunity to build a new and open democracy. 🌞





Thor: The struggle for compensation moves forward



by Musa Chamane



Some of the chemical stores at Thor Chemicals. Credit: groundWork

Three decades ago, the Thor Chemicals plant, situated in Cato Ridge 30 kilometres outside Durban, committed a very costly environmental crime by poisoning workers who subsequently died as a result of mercury poisoning.

Thor Chemicals moved its mercury incinerator plant from the UK to South Africa in the mid-1970s, and the company began importing chemicals to the Cato Ridge facility. The plant had a licence from the government to import chemicals, including mercury, into the country to be processed, or “recycled”, at the Cato Ridge site. Since then, these imports have resulted in the biggest mercury waste deposit globally. Calls to clean up the site have been ignored by the company and government for many years, but we are happy that the days for remediation have come for the clean-up of the site. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) is to be appreciated for the clean-up, which is currently ongoing.

When this plant arrived in the country in the 1970s, South Africa’s environmental legislation was weak. All was well until a couple of workers showed signs of being in poor health. When they went to hospital, it was found that mercury poisoning was the cause. Urine tests were conducted on the workers and 32 out of 36 workers tested positive. It was found that they had very high levels of mercury in their bloodstreams. The facility was adamant that it was not responsible for these mercury levels, which amounted to poisoning, in their workers. The facility insisted that it was below World Health Organisation (WHO) standards until the Davis Commission of Inquiry into Thor Chemicals was appointed by President Nelson Mandela, just after 1994. The Commission’s report was delivered in 1997 and, amongst other things, reported that the health of workers was not taken into account while they were dealing with such dangerous chemicals.





Rodgers Khanyile, one of the Thor Chemicals ex-workers. Credit: groundWork

As a result, a number of workers died and some have been paralysed, due to chemical exposure.

The impacts of mercury on the life of a human being include blurred vision, tremors, brain damage, coma, and even death. Mercury is classified as a neurotoxin, meaning it affects the nervous system and can lead to brain malfunction. Even today, ex-workers and the families of victims are still crying foul, complaining that the democratic government has not delivered any justice when it comes to this facility.

groundWork, together with Carte Blanche, took samples from the Umgeni River – which flows past Thor Chemicals, is joined by a tributary, the Umsundusi, and then flows into the Inanda Dam. As recently as 2020, a high level of mercury was found in Thor ex-workers, as well as in the riverbed.

Communities shared with us that their livestock at some point was not allowed to drink from the river, since it was poisoned, and some of them told us that they had lost their livestock due to poisoning. Although it was a long shot, the community wanted the plant to relocate and to make sure that clean-up and remediation occurred. Government was in negotiation with Thor headquarters in the UK, who suddenly agreed to contribute R300 million for the clean-up.

The DFFE is doing a wonderful job by making sure that the clean-up is conducted. The Department started the clean-up in April 2021 and, hopefully, it will be completed by mid 2022. They are reported to

have shipped half the mercury waste to Switzerland for treatment. This is a huge victory for the community of Cato Ridge. The remediation will free local people in terms of access to fresh, uncontaminated water for their livestock.

Ex-workers at Thor Chemicals held a protest on the 28th of February 2022 to demand justice and compensation for the health impacts of Thor's deadly waste. The outcome of this protest is that the ex-workers were afforded a chance to meet with the Department of Employment and Labour about their ex-workers saga. More than 100 people attended the meeting. It was agreed that the Department of Labour and Employment will assist them in terms of compensation. The files are being collected as we write, and the application will be lodged with the assistance of the Department. There is a committee from the workers' side that is facilitating the applications. The families of those who have perished are filing their applications with the Department of Labour. The issue of compensation has been taken up by various lawyers in the past, but it was reported that documents had been lost by both the Department of Labour and some of the lawyers. Fortunately, the Department has managed to locate the files.

Finally, it seems that some compensation for the ex-workers, and for the families of deceased victims, will be awarded this time round. 🙏





Beyond the pale

by Tony Carnie



The noxious history of skin-lightening creams in South Africa still haunts us

Toxic skin-lightening creams are still sold freely across South Africa, despite clear health dangers and the legacy of apartheid.

In the dying days of apartheid, South Africa banned the sale of cosmetic creams that were designed to make black people look whiter.

On the 10th of August 1990, the National Party health minister Dr Rina Venter banned the importation, manufacture and sale of cosmetic skin lighteners and also banned any products that claimed to “bleach”, “lighten” or “whiten” people’s skins.

At last, it seemed, the marketing of products that degraded the natural beauty, dignity and health of millions of South African women was coming to an end.

More than 30 years later, however, it’s pretty much business as usual.

Across South Africa, women (and a growing number of young men) still purchase small tubs of toxic “skin lightening” (SL) creams for as little as R30, despite the known risks of permanent skin damage and some much more serious health impacts.

Even as a white man – with a very shaky cover-story – I found no difficulty buying several cheap skin-lightening creams in Durban. Then we sent them to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research for laboratory analysis and waited for the results

Every single tub of cream we bought had mercury levels above the global legal limit of 1 ppm (one part per million) – with one tub showing mercury levels above 29 000 ppm.

But first, a little history about skin-lightening creams and some of the actors who have profited from their sale, which may serve to illuminate the current state of affairs.

For thousands of years, skin lightening has been practised in several parts of the world among women of many hues. More recent use is linked closely to the legacies of slavery, colonialism, racial superiority and the pervasive power of globalisation and Hollywood, but researchers from the University of Michigan note

that chalk dust and herbal teas have been used by Chinese women to lighten their skin since 200 BCE.

The teas were made from the bark of a cinnamon-like bush, which inhibited the production of melanin, the dark natural pigment responsible for colouring people’s skin, hair and eyes.

Some of the earliest skin-lightening mixtures in ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt contained vinegar, olive oil, chalk or white lead. By the 1800s, women in Victorian England were also using “wafers of arsenic” to lighten their skin.

Why?

University of Washington history professor Lynn Thomas believes that the politics of skin colour have undoubtedly been shaped by slavery, segregation and notions of racial superiority in the US and elsewhere, yet she suggests there are also deeper historical, class and gender dimensions that have since been morphed by the expansion of global consumer capitalism.

Closer to home, says Thomas, the earliest evidence of skin lighteners being marketed to black South African women goes back to the early 1930s.

Some were imported from America. Others were made here by chemists such as WC Turpin & Son in the town of Middelburg.

Laden with a toxic heavy metal (mercury) and marketed under the “Karroo” brand, these products were aimed at both white women and “women of colour”.

Thomas suggests that the manufacture of skin lighteners really took off after World War 2 as white businesses sought to cultivate black consumers, while the National Party’s electoral victory in 1948 ensured that skin colour also took on greater political significance.

“Under apartheid, even more than in prior forms of segregation, nuances of skin colour could inform where one lived, one’s school and work opportunities, whether one could vote, and whether one needed a government pass to move in and out of urban areas.



“Like whites, black consumers used skin lighteners for a variety of reasons which ranged from clearing blemishes, to lightening tanned skin, to ‘brightening’ to looking more ‘modern’ or sexy. Nonetheless, the broad appeal of these products relied on pernicious official and popular ideologies that linked lighter skin to power and beauty.”

It was also an era when some job advertisements invited only applicants who were “light-skinned” or “slightly coloured”.

Products such as Ambi were widely advertised in the 1970s and 1980s to promote skin lightening. By the late 1960s, says Thomas, a remarkable 60% of urban African women in this country reported using bleaching/lightening creams.

It was around this time that the enterprising Krok brothers came into the picture.

Born in Johannesburg, twin brothers Abe and Solly Krok have often been associated with gambling, ownership of the Mamelodi Sundowns soccer team and as benefactors of the Apartheid Museum at Gold Reef City.

Though they were not the first to manufacture skin lighteners for black South African consumers, they pioneered new formulas, direct marketing techniques and multiple brands and eventually cornered the market and made a fortune.

Initially, the Kroks used ammoniated mercury, suggesting that their Super Rose Freckle and Complexion Cream would make women irresistibly attractive to men.

But as medical evidence piled up about the dangers of mercury, the Kroks switched to hydroquinone as the chemical additive for whitening dark skin.

It was a smart move (for a time) as the government eventually moved to prohibit mercury from cosmetics in the 1970s. Then, in the late 1980s, the government began regulating against hydroquinone too – and so the Kroks turned to the courts to protect their business profits.

News reports at the time noted that Twins Pharmaceuticals controlled nearly 70% of the multimillion-rand market and they fought to keep

their products on supermarket shelves. While the government originally planned to ban the creams in June 1989, then postponed the move until early 1991, Venter, the health minister, suddenly ordered all such products off the shelves on the 10th of August 1990.

But more than 30 years later, skin-lightening creams containing toxic additives such as mercury, hydroquinone, lead and steroids are still sold openly by street vendors and from shop counters across the country. ☹

An advertisement from the 1930s for Sweet Georgia Brown skin bleaching cream. Credit: Wikipedia



Deadly air: our rights are immediately realisable



by Rico Euripidou

When I first started working at groundWork 16 years ago, a constant struggle/argument with colleagues in government was the unresolved issue of whether our environmental constitutional rights were to be interpreted as progressive or immediately recognisable. We persistently argued the latter. Needless to say, it's been a 16-year-long legal exercise in the making, with meticulous planning along the way by our excellent legal partners, the Centre for Environmental Rights, to test this constitutional argument in court.

The Deadly Air judgement now finally puts this to rest! In March 2022, Judge Collis of the Gauteng High Court in Pretoria upheld the argument that poor air quality in the Mpumalanga Highveld coal belt is a breach of our constitutional rights and that government cannot hide behind the façade that our environmental constitutional rights are progressively realisable rather than immediate.

By the time you are reading this, the official global death toll attributed to Covid-19 is thought to have passed the 6.5 million mark, a significant public health milestone by any metric. However, what is less well known and all the more tragic is that, since that fateful day in March 2020 when we first entered our lockdowns and shuttered our economies to “save lives”, over 20 million people globally died prematurely from air pollution. We know this with a high level of confidence because inhaling tiny amounts of dirty air increases the risk of just about all non-infectious diseases, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, pneumonia, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer. To add insult to injury, in all probability it also increases the risk of severe illness following infection with Covid-19.

In Judge Collis' ruling, she stated that “if air quality fails to meet the National Ambient Air Quality

Standards, it is a *prima facie* violation of the right. When failure to meet air quality standards persists over a long period of time, there is a greater likelihood that the health, well-being and human rights of the people subjected to that air are being threatened and infringed upon.” She went on to add that “...poor air quality falls disproportionately on the shoulders of marginalised and vulnerable communities, who bear the burden of disease caused by air pollution.”

This is the premise of environmental justice as I understand it: the people least responsible for air pollution are the people most affected by it but they have the least agency to do something about it!

So, what now?

Globally, the impact of pollution and health is still the world's largest environmental risk factor for disease and premature death, mostly in low-income and middle-income countries. The impact of pollution on health remains much greater than that of war, terrorism, malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, drugs and alcohol, and the number of deaths caused by pollution are on par with those caused by smoking. However, the health sector response to this is not in line with the scale of the problem.

We have to constantly highlight the links between our human rights, the impacts on our health and the environmental protection that has now been established by this constitutional court decision. Economic growth at the expense of people and the planet is no longer an option and, even though air pollution disproportionately impacts marginalised groups living on the fence line, we know that air pollution ultimately knows no boundaries and that the climate crisis is lurking ever closer to home. Just ask the good people of KZN. ☀





Court victory for the Somkhele community



by Robby Mokgalaka

The community of Somkhele and supporting environmental justice organisations are still celebrating the victorious court judgment against the Tendele coal mine, delivered on the 5th of May 2022. The court case was all about the Somkhele community and coalition, as represented by All Rise Attorneys (environmental lawyers), and their challenge concerning the mining rights of the Tendele coal mine and its intention to expand its operations in the Somkhele area.

The judgment was preceded by a community protest, which took place on Thursday the 24th of February 2022, in northern KwaZulu-Natal, against the Tendele Coal Mine and the local traditional council. The protest action was in response to a letter issued in December 2021 by the traditional authority, addressed to President Cyril Ramaphosa, requesting

his intervention in the court case between the mine and affected communities. In the letter, the traditional council claimed that resistance against the mine did not reflect the views of the majority of the community. Thanks to the separation of powers, no intervention was possible, not even by the president.

The February protest intended to discredit the claim by the traditional authority that a majority of the Somkhele community supports the mine, and also to demonstrate to the public the solidarity between coal-affected community members, environmental activists and civil society when voicing concerns and issues related to the Tendele mine’s operations in Somkhele. The march invited all affected people in Somkhele to present their demands to the mine.

The organisers of the protest did not have an easy time of it and had to address significant challenges.



Somkhele community members marching to Tendele coal mine

Credit: groundWork



*Military personnel monitoring protesters at the Tendele coal mine main gate
Credit: groundWork*



The police and the local municipality of Mtubatuba colluded with each other in attempts to ensure that the protest did not happen. The community were told in the Section-4 meeting that the municipality would not authorise the protest, as notice of the protest had not been served on time.

The community, however, defied this instruction and went ahead with the protest, relying on the provisions of the Gatherings Act. This Act states that a notice can be served any time up to 24 hours before an event, provided that the people seeking permission have valid reasons for their late submission. Further, the Act also states that protesters do not need permission from the authorities in order to protest, and that serving a notice was legally sufficient for the protest to go ahead.

During the protest, the police came to stop the event, indicating that the protest was illegal because it had not been approved by the authorities. The protesters produced the Gatherings Act and showed the police that it says that protesters do not require permission to protest, and the protest went ahead peacefully.

The concerns around mining in the area of Somkhele had drawn national and international attention earlier, in October 2020, when activist Fikile Ntshangase was assassinated at her home in the area. Ntshangase was a vocal and active member

of the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO), a community organisation that resists mining and is organising the community to fight for their rights. However, the community has been voicing its grievances against the mine since 2011.

Recent years have seen a rise in violence linked to mining in the Somkhele area, with reports of threats and intimidation targeting those who oppose the mine. Two years ago, in the same area, the Mthethwa family was targeted; their home was sprayed with a hail of bullets because they refused to relocate. The perpetrators in both incidents have still not been arrested. The fact that they are still at large inspires fear in the lives of community members, who want to challenge the mine, in accordance with the protection of their constitutional rights.

The Tendele coal mine in the area is bringing tears to the community people of Somkhele, instead of helping them to develop.

The judgment on the 5th of May is a sweet victory, particularly as the team had encountered so many challenges aimed at blocking the court case. This victory is a huge sigh of relief for the suffering community who are still breathing coal dust on a daily basis. The legal team is still discussing the way forward on how to implement the court order. ☀️



All Rise – Attorneys for climate and environmental justice - by Kirsten Youens and Janet Tooley

Judgment in the long-standing matter of MCEJO and Others v Minister of Minerals and Energy and Others was handed down on the evening of the 4th of May 2022.

In her well-reasoned 48-page judgment, Judge Bam finds in favour of the Applicants by rejecting all of Tendele's arguments and declaring Tendele's mining right invalid. The Minister's decision in dismissing the appeal against the grant of the Mining Right and the approval of the Environmental Management Programme is also declared invalid and set aside. The Applicants, the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO), the Global Environmental Trust, MACUA, SAHRDN and ActionAid SA, are elated by the victory.

By way of background, in May 2016 Tendele was granted a mining right of 212 km² to significantly expand its Somkhele opencast coal mine, located in northern KwaZulu-Natal, subject to approval of an Environmental Management Programme (EMP). Tendele's EMP, prepared as part of a Scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA), was approved several months later in October 2016. The applicants appealed to the Minister of Minerals and Energy in August 2017 against the Department of Mineral Resources' (DMR) decision to grant it. The Minister subsequently dismissed MCEJO's appeal in June 2018. In November 2018, the applicants brought an application in the Pretoria High Court to review and set aside the 2016 Mining Right, the approval of the EMP and the Minister's appeal decision in Tendele's favour.

The Court determined three main issues, namely: i) the defective Scoping and EIA; (ii) the ground based on the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act (IPILRA); and (iii) defects in public participation [para 24]. Judge Bam states in her no-holds barred judgment that "the wheels came off" during the scoping phase "when the regional manager of DMR, KwaZulu-Natal (RM), allowed

Tendele's consultants, GCS, to dictate to him how Tendele intended to carry out the exercise that would lead to the Scoping Report instead of insisting on compliance with the law" [para 14]. She further states that "[i]ndeed the record shows that the RM accepted Tendele's Scoping Report, even though it had been compiled without consultation with interested and affected parties and without providing proof of the information shared during the consultation, which was clearly in violation of the law".

Judge Bam provides detailed interpretation of the law around scoping and EIA and refers to Tendele's view that the scoping phase required no public participation as "a fundamental breach of the law with regard to public participation". She further states that "Tendele's attempts to justify their exclusion of groups ... was nothing short of egregious". The Scoping/EIA failed to meet the demands of legislation. She states that "[t]he attitude displayed by Tendele during the scoping phase of it's application process is offensive. It portrays Tendele as an 'unbridled horse' that showed little or no regard for the law".

A large portion of the judgment deals with the applicants' accusation of Tendele riding roughshod on the rights of the community in that the applicants' members were neither consulted nor did they consent to the deprivation of their communal rights to the land in terms of IPILRA. 3 [para 39]. The Court refers to Tendele's 'disturbing' defence that 'since the grant of a mining right does not extinguish the right of a landowner or any other occupier of the land in question; the question of compensation does not arise".

According to Tendele's interpretation of IPILRA the requirements of compensation and section 2(4) (community consent) are only triggered when the deprivation is caused by a disposal of land.

Judge Bam finds that "Tendele's interpretation appears to lose sight of the fact that it is interference with the use, enjoyment or exploitation or diminution to the occupation or ownership that brings about compensation. For this reason, how the deprivation arises should not water down the compensation element provided for in IPILRA. Tendele's interpretation epitomises the 'blinkered



peering at an isolated provision in a statute' that the court warns against in *Scribante* as opposed to reading the statute purposively... Tendele's interpretation waters down, if not renders nugatory, the protection offered by IPILRA to shield the informal rights holders. Such interpretation cannot be allowed".

Tendele's second defence, that it obtained consent from the Inkosi, is also shot down in flames by Judge Bam. The referenced consultations with iziNdunas who provided consent by way of a Resolution of the Traditional Authority "says nothing more than the [traditional authority] granted consent to Tendele. There is no evidence to support that the applicants were lawfully deprived of their informal rights in terms of IPILRA. There is no evidence of invitation to the community and its representatives, no agenda, no minutes, no evidence of who was present. The Resolution on its own does not meet the requirements of IPILRA".

Judge Bam's final reason why Tendele's defence must fail is centred around the fact that a decision to grant consent to a mine "has far reaching consequence in so far as the mining operations ability to interfere with the occupiers' and landowners' rights." With reference to the court in *The Ingonyama Trust and Advancement of the South African Constitution and Others v The Ingonyama Trust and Others*, Judge quotes:

"Consent must be given freely, without duress or deception, and with sufficient legal competence to give it... Consent must be properly sought and freely given, and the person whose consent is required must have full and reliable information relating to the scope and impact of the subject matter, and must have the choice to give or withhold his or her consent."

"In all, Tendele did not obtain consent as envisaged in section 2 of IPILRA and the applicants ground therefore succeeds".

The appeal is therefore remitted back to the Minister for reconsideration in accordance with the findings of the judgment.

In summary, the findings and the effects thereof are: The Scoping/EIA was unlawful. Prior to the Minister making a decision on the Appeal, a valid Scoping/EIA must be conducted.

There was no consent in terms of IPILRA. Prior to the Minister making a decision on the Appeal, informed consent must be obtained from the majority of those whose land rights will be affected by the mining operation.

The public participation process was defective. Prior to the Minister making a decision on the Appeal, a full public participation process must be conducted, and such process must comply with the requirements of the Public Participation Guidelines in terms of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 and Chapter 6 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2014.

Costs were awarded to the applicants, including the costs of two counsel for this application and the Rule 7 application that was brought by Tendele in December 2020 and withdrawn at the 11th hour in March 2021.

"Tendele is the author of its own misfortune. Had DMR and Tendele complied with the law back in 2013, when this mining application process began, none of this would have been necessary. The court has made it clear that the people of the land must be seen, must be heard, and must be consulted when their rights are going to be so fundamentally affected. The fact that the DMR and Tendele ignored the law and the people for so long is the reason that the applicants were forced to bring this application. It has been a long road but finally they have won." *Kirsten Youens, attorney for the Applicants.*



Somkhele community members marching to Tendele coal mine - Credit groundWork





Meet Merrisa

Merrisa Naidoo, directly translated, means ‘ruler of the sea’. She was born in the heart of the beautiful coastal city, Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal, and is from a small town in Verulam. One of Merrisa’s major accomplishments, of which she is most proud, is that whilst a student in the field of Marine Biology she was selected from among 800 applicants worldwide to participate on the month-long training expedition, on board a research vessel from Stanley (Falklands) to Bremerhaven (Germany).

Merrisa is a recent master’s graduate. Her thesis was focused on assessing the levels of microplastic pollution within the Knysna Estuary – one of South Africa’s most important estuaries in term of conservation – and its occurrence in juvenile fish and syngnathids (such as pipefish, which are relatives of the endangered Knysna seahorse).

She has now joined the waste team at groundWork and represents the GAIA/BFFP Africa team as the regional plastics campaigner, which takes her back to her passion of actively working towards a plastic-free future. A goal of hers has always been to translate her science to real solutions for real people on the ground.

Prior to her current role, Merrisa has been walking a path among the strong youth (Youth for Marine Protected Areas – Youth4MPAs) in South Africa, through advocating for increased ocean protection. She represented the movement as their spokesperson and youth leader (2020-2021) and has been an active member since 2018. In this role she was engaged in activities, campaigns, leadership, administration and social media platforms that promote ocean conservation and the effective implementation of marine protected areas in South Africa.

Her work with the youth led to her role as the MPA project youth co-ordinator at WILDOCEANS,



a division of WILDTRUST. Here she was responsible for harnessing the power of the youth, not only in South Africa but on the African continent, to come together and ignite change for the African continent, her people, lands and oceans.

To her new role as the Africa Plastics Campaigner, she brings expertise in campaign development, movement building, research and report writing, project coordination, strong activism and communication skills.

She envisions being able to contribute to the development of lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis that align to a circular economy and are people and environment centric. To achieve this, she believes in unlocking the power and strengthening the voices of the GAIA/BFFP Africa community and supporting grassroot movements. 🌍



Meet Nqobile



Nqobile Bulelwa Nontuthuko Ranela was born and bred in a small town in the Mpumalanga Province called Middelburg. She studied at the Nelson Mandela University, and obtained a degree in BSc Environmental Sciences, majoring in botany and geography. She is currently working towards obtaining an honours degree in geographic information systems with a project titled *Developing rehabilitation priority areas in catchments invaded by **Pteronia incana** using GIS weighted overlays*.

Her interest in environmental studies sprouted when she was still in high school, when she questioned herself about what it really means when teachers tell us that plants are alive. She was really curious about how they thrive in the environment while they are immobile. Later, she learnt that that specific study is called ecology. In her undergrad degree, she more than anything else enjoyed anything that touched on the topic of ecology.

As a child, she loved gymnastics. Unfortunately, due to the lack of information and facilities, she never got the chance to explore that part of her life. However, she still feels that, if she had been granted the opportunity, she would definitely be representing South Africa in the Olympics. With all that said about her dream that never came true, she at least got an opportunity to play for the school netball team in primary and high school.

In the year 2020, which was the final year of her undergrad studies, she was a mentor for first year students. She fell in love with the position because it granted her the opportunity to challenge her character and enhance her interpersonal skills, as she was



exposed to people from different backgrounds who also held different principles and values.

In April 2022, she was appointed as an intern at groundWork. Her first experience there was being involved in the annual strategic plan, and she also had the opportunity to interact with researchers who work with the Presidential Climate Commission. What has stood out the most thus far is the experience of the Environmental Justice School (EJS). This experience has given birth to the activist in her, and she is looking forward to every opportunity to grow that is yet to come. 🌞





Meet Michelle

Michelle Cruywagen recently joined groundWork as a Senior Just Transition and Coal Campaign Manager. Her work includes giving support to the Africa Coal Network (ACN), Life After Coal Campaigns and capacitating grassroots activism. Prior to joining groundWork, she provided input to GIZ's Climate Support Programmes' response to the IKI call for proposals for a just transition to a decarbonised economy. Michelle has an MPhil in Sustainable Development and her master's thesis explored the cost of a just transition in South Africa. Her career includes 20 years of strategic communications experience.

Her first two months at groundWork started with a Strategic Planning breakaway on KZN's south coast during the tragic floods in April. At the workshop, Michelle familiarised herself with groundWork's various campaigns, campaign teams and their plans for the year. "My first impression of groundWork was that we're rooted in a rich history of environmental activism and that groundWork has been instrumental in resisting harmful industries, both locally and globally, for decades. During the team breakaway, I developed an appreciation for the deep knowledge and commitment that each team member has for their work, and this is inspiring to me!"

While her work is centred around a just transition in coal-affected communities, Michelle grew to understand groundWork's view of a just transition at the Environmental Justice School held at the Vuleka Centre, Botha's Hill in April. "At the heart of a just transition for groundWork is a desire to 'live well with the earth and each other', which is a more regenerative approach. This is rooted in our belief that everyone matters and is guided by the principles of an open democracy. Therefore, our daily work is informed by a grounded desire to move away from extractivism and consumption towards a restorative approach that ultimately builds resilient communities and strives towards more equitable livelihoods."



This month, Michelle attended various Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) engagements to get input on the PCC's Just Transition Framework, including a community engagement in Carolina, Mpumalanga, and multi-stakeholder dialogues held in Midrand. "During the community meeting in Carolina, I was struck by the challenges of poverty exacerbated by a lack of service delivery and the impacts of mining, including pollution of the wetlands that the community relies on and the neglected state of infrastructure, like the roads being worn down by coal trucks. However, it's encouraging that these communities are organising, particularly around issues of gender and environmental justice, and it was important for these communities to be heard by the PCC." 🌟





Environmental justice action – towards a just transition

by Tsholofelo Sepotokele

After a hiatus of two years as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, groundWork's sixth Environmental Justice School for Activists (EJS) resumed this year at Vuleka Centre, Botha's Hill, in KwaZulu-Natal, running from the 21st of April to the 14th of May 2022. A final week will be held later this year, from the 8th to the 14th of August 2022. Our 2022 cohort includes activists from as far afield as Sekhukhuneland, the Highveld in Mpumalanga, the Vaal, Newcastle, Mamelodi, Pietermaritzburg and south Durban, who join an alumnus body of more than 100 students from seven African countries, who have previously attended the school.

Although preventative measures to curb Covid-19 infections required us to put the school on hold in 2020 and 2021, this was not in vain. groundWork dedicated this time to developing and producing resources to broaden knowledge among activists, as well as their understanding of history, power, zero waste, the extractive economy, and the just transition. These new materials were incorporated in this year's sessions, and were also given to activists as part of their resource pack to be utilised on their return to their communities, to strength their mobilisation and awareness-raising efforts.

The commencement of EJS 2022 coincided with Earth Day, and participants reflected on their relationship with the earth by mapping their worlds and exploring issues in their communities. These issues arise from environmental injustices caused by the government and corporates, which in turn have a devastating impact on the health, well-being and livelihoods of communities. Struggles that the participants identified within their individual communities include expanded mining efforts, waste management, false solutions and fossil fuel extraction,

all of which lead to poor air quality and environmental degradation. Throughout the school, as part of the reflection process following various sessions, participants added new content to their maps.

To expand the understanding of participants, when reading how capitalism works they were introduced to the Three Es of capitalism: namely *exclusion* from decision making, *enclosure* of resources and *externalisation* of negative impacts to the community. The extractive economy, as an aspect of capitalism, was also explored through a discussion of cell phone usage and a case study titled the *Life Cycle of a Cell Phone*. The study provided details of various stages in the life of a cell phone, including design, extraction, production, use and disposal. Participants came to understand the unequal power relations between the global North and the global South, as well as how the negative effects of the extractive industry are externalised to those with less power and less control over their environments.

Exploring the theme of "Why the world is this way", activists were taken on a journey into history, to be introduced to, and to understand, the various ways in which power functions within a capitalist society. This was supplemented with a critique of neoliberalism and the 'development' process.

In the subsequent week, experts from groundWork, the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), the Association for Rural Advancement Land Rights Advocacy (AFRA), the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity (CCRRI), WaterCAN, BioWatch, and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) joined the school to facilitate various sessions dedicated to rights and regulations, environmental health issues, land, gender, climate





*Environmental Justice School 2022 participants during a visit to the Mandela Capture Site in Howick.
Credit: groundWork*

and energy justice, water and environmental citizen science, food sovereignty vs food security, zero waste, and the global plastics pollution crisis.

The activism strand marked the end of the first phase of the school, which focused on equipping participants with vital skills for their activism, while drawing on the sessions conducted during the first two weeks of the EJS. At the end of the intensive first three weeks, each participant designed and began to develop their own project, which they will implement at home/ their place of work, with the support of their mentors, to address challenges they have identified within their communities.

Community organisations present at this year's School included: Mining Affected Communities United (MACUA), Masithobelane Support Group (MSG), Middleburg Social Justice and Environmental Justice Alliance (MSEJA), South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA), South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA); Sukumani Environmental Justice (SEJ), and Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA).

Participants are expected to return in August for the EJS Return Week, when they will update groundWork on the progress of their projects. 🌞





Renewable energy in communities

by Avena Jacklin and Mary-Joy Masetlane

The advantages of transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy are numerous and far-reaching. For fenceline communities living in eMalahleni, declared a Highveld Priority Area (HPA), renewable energy will not only drastically reduce the air pollution caused by intensive mining activities and coal-fired power plants, but also has the potential to enable a just transition that is people-led, inclusive and fair.

Renewable energy technology prices are decreasing globally and in South Africa, as is evident in the results of bid window 5 of the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP). Moreover, the transition to renewable energy for low-income and marginalised communities means improving the livelihoods of people by creating safe and decent jobs, reducing electricity costs and significantly reducing the adverse impacts of pollution, fire risk and climate change.

Different types of solar PV systems

The month of April marked the peak of the Urban Movement Incubator (UMI) Energy Democracy project, in which community based organisations (CBOs) South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) in Austerville, Durban, and the Vukani Environmental Movement (VEM) in eMalahleni, had rooftop photovoltaic (PV) demonstration units installed through grid-tied and off-grid systems respectively. Here is an explanation of the different types of solar PV systems:

Off-grid solar PV system: This standalone type home installation does not have the grid back-up and may require battery storage, which can drive up the cost of the systems significantly. In addition, smaller units are more costly than larger units. In an area such as eMalahleni, off-grid offers benefits such as air quality improvements and meeting basic energy needs

while waiting to be connected to the electricity grid. The demonstration unit installed at VEM serves as a learning tool for the community. During workshops conducted by the project's technical partner Sustainable Energy Africa (SEA) and the suppliers, communities learnt a new skill in how to maintain the system. Acquiring such skills will become essential when new green job opportunities arise in eMalahleni as the old coal power plants are retired and repurposed.

Grid-tied solar PV system: While the solar PV system at eMalahleni (VEM office) is off-grid, SDCEA's system is grid-tied; that is it is connected to the grid. It is estimated that 85% of households are already connected to the grid. However, low-income households that are grid-connected struggle to meet their basic energy needs due to ever rising electricity tariffs. In a grid-tied PV system, the grid provides a far cheaper back-up power source than battery storage. End-users consume solar generated electricity during the day, which reduces their overall consumption of grid-electricity and monthly electricity bill. Battery storage is not needed because grid-electricity is available as back-up at night and during heavy cloud cover.

Mini-grid systems can be installed on rooftops or on vacant land and are the best option for community-led, collectively owned, renewable energy solutions. Establishing such a system is a lengthy process but provides the best overall benefit, including affordable and reliable energy services. Cooking and low current refrigeration can be enabled, and the system results in reduced electricity bills, employment opportunities and the promotion of a circular economy. Due to the economies of scale, larger generation facilities with metering are cheaper per household when compared to off-grid or individual grid-tied systems, which are still costly for low-income groups.

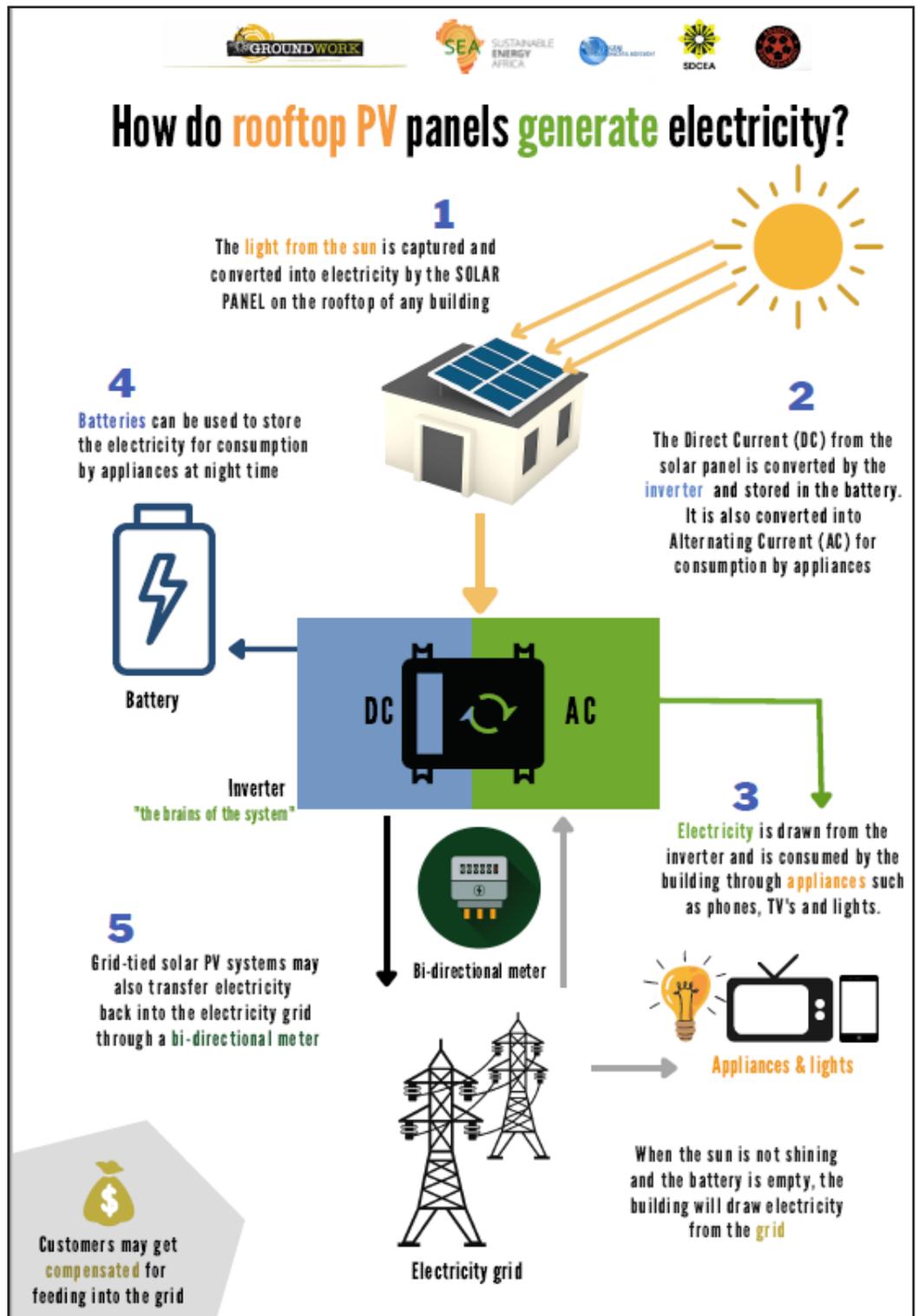


Grid-tied mini-grid systems may form the foundation of a widespread and scalable renewable energy solution, which can be facilitated through partnerships between municipalities and communities.

South Africa is facing the effects of the climate crisis, as was witnessed in the recent devastating heavy rains that led to flooding in low-lying areas, massive mudslides, damaged homes, displacement of people and hundreds of lives lost. Project partner and CBO Abahlali baseMjondolo, working with the communities of eKhenana and eNkanini in Durban, were hit hard by the catastrophic weather event while still distraught over the brutal assassinations of key leadership members Ayanda Ngila and Nokuthula Mabaso. Their solar installation has been postponed due to further heavy rains.

Following installations at the SDCEA offices on the 7th of April, the heavy rains resulted in prolonged loadshedding, and the rooftop solar provided some comfort and relief to affected communities.

“Solar works wonders, especially during the recent load shedding in the KZN floods. The SDCEA office was open and community groups were able to charge their phones and laptops, whilst having a hot cup of coffee,” said Desmond D’sa, co-ordinator at SDCEA.





Decolonising waste in African countries

by Niven Reddy and Carissa Marnce

The term decolonisation describes the process of indigenous people achieving sovereignty over their land, culture, political and economic systems. African countries have largely achieved political independence from colonial powers, and have attempted to dismantle political systems and symbols of oppression. Sadly, in the 21st century we are facing a new wave of neocolonialism from multinational corporations.

Colonial settler objectives are rooted in principles of gaining control and exploiting indigenous territories. Likewise, corporations have taken over public space, destroyed consumer choice and displaced individuals from their traditional mechanisms of subsistence.

In the waste sector, colonialism is evident in several ways. It can be described as the export of waste from economically powerful countries to lower income countries, where there is a clear lack of infrastructure to manage problematic waste streams. This is further compounded by the double standards that corporates evince by sending cheap, single-use products to African countries under the guise of development, while boasting effective sustainable waste management practices where they operate in the global North. Petrochemical plants, which are part of the plastic production process, are often placed in poorer communities at the expense of their health and well-being. Waste colonialism is also evident when corporations propose false solutions like waste-to-energy incineration (WTE), which disregards and will displace waste pickers and their contribution to the local economy. Fundamentally, these practices of waste colonialism treat people as if they are disposable, and that is unacceptable.

In Ghana, a German company, McDavid Green Solutions, has proposed to construct a facility in the Ashanti region. Waste workers in Ghana have helped increase waste management services across the 261 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to 80%, across the country. A facility like this risks displacing waste workers who are integral to

the country's waste management system. Since there is a high level of organic waste in the African waste stream, meeting the quotas of waste needed to be burnt to make incinerators financially feasible would need recyclable materials to be burnt as well.

The way forward

We need African governments to:

- Uphold existing legislation like the Basel and Bamako conventions, which prohibit the illegal exportation of waste from economically powerful countries.
- Invest in the ongoing discussions around a global plastic treaty, and ensure this mandate reflects the local plastic pollution realities within the region and that attempts are made to address the problems of plastic across its entire value chain with significant emphasis on slowing down production.
- Avoid false solutions like WTE, and rather empower individuals with local solutions to waste management by adopting zero waste practices.

Last year we commemorated Africa Day on the 25th of May by releasing a solidarity video on Waste Colonialism. This year we continued creating awareness on the different impacts and forms of waste colonialism by holding an online meeting with our African member organisations, with presentations from expert speakers. In addition to the online meeting, we developed a sign-on letter on waste colonialism, directed to African governments.

To quote Griffins Ochieng, director of the Centre for Environmental Justice and Development in Kenya: “When waste is within your boundaries, it is your responsibility to deal with it, and assess how you manage this waste. You don’t export this to other countries to live with your problem.”





Towards a just transition: Voices from under a dark cloud



by Tsepang Molefe

Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS), the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), groundWork and Peta Wolpe are working together as part of a consortium in a project that aims to drive and foster a just transition plan that is inclusive of, and which takes into account the interest of, the affected communities in eMalahleni and Steve Tshwete in Mpumalanga.

In April of this year, the consortium released a documentary film that it produced in 2021. Titled

Voices from under a dark cloud – towards a just transition in the coalfields of South Africa, the film is captured and delivered through a series of webinars and local engagements held over 18 months. Its primary purpose is to provide a platform for affected communities to have their voices heard. On Wednesday the 28th of April 2022, the documentary was officially launched and screened to local community members and activists in Middleburg, Mpumalanga.

Watch the documentary here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRQkI-SEVho>

Liberation struggle stalwart Mavuso Msimang speaking during the launch of the just transition documentary. Credit: Lloyd

