



GROUNDWORK

DON'T GAS



AFRiCA!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 3 From the Smoke Stack
- 4 Marikana – wounds unattended
- 5 Gas proposals to replace 50% of Eskom Energy
- 7 Gas will not support Africa's transition from coal
- 8 How to ensure \$8.5 billion JETP deal is just
- 10 Scarred for life by poisonous skin-lightening creams
- 13 Introducing the Highveld health researchers
- 15 SAWPA: celebrating 13 years of movement building
- 17 Warwick Zero Waste: a new milestone
- 19 Real solidarity – real politik
- 20 Building activism
- 22 Plastic bag laws
- 24 Climate finance: lies by the dozen
- 26 Community protest against dirty steel giant AMSA
- 28 The start of Women's Month brings good news!

Cover graphic by Andy Mason



Help us spread the word
www.facebook.com/groundWorkSA



www.twitter.com/groundworksa

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.

AFFILIATIONS:

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

groundWork's STAFF ARE:

Director: Bobby Peek * **Deputy Director:** Gill Addison * **Logistics and Administration Manager:** Bathoko Sibisi * **Office Administration Intern:** Fano Mbatha * **Campaign Coordinator:** Rico Euripidou * **Waste Campaign Manager:** Musa Chamane * **Just Transition and Coal Campaign Manager:** Michelle Cruywagen * **Coal Campaigner - KwaZulu Natal:** Robby Mokgalaka * **Coal Campaigner – Mpumalanga:** Thomas Mnguni * **Coal Campaign Intern:** Nqobile Ranela * **Senior Climate and Energy Justice Campaign Manager:** Avena Jacklin * **Media, Information and Publications Campaign Manager:** Tsepang Molefe * **Researcher:** David Hallows * **Environmental Health Campaign Manager:** Mafoko Phomane * **Health Care Without Harm - Africa Regional Coordinator:** Azeeza Rangunwala * **Bookkeeper:** Gill Waterworth * **Financial Consultant:** Shelley Paterson * **Coordinator for Africa Coal Network:** Lorraine Chiponda * **Assistant Coordinator for Africa Coal Network:** Nerissa Anku * **Friends of the Earth Africa Regional Facilitator:** Nerisha Baldevu * **GAIA Africa Coordinator:** Niven Reddy * **GAIA Communications Coordinator:** Carissa Marnce * **GAIA/BFFP Africa Plastics Campaigner:** Merrisa Naidoo * **UMI Waste Project Campaigner:** Asiphile Khanyile * **Environmental Justice Education Campaigner:** Tsholofelo Sepotokele * **Environmental Justice Education Coordinator:** Jeanne Prinsloo * **groundWork Research Associate:** Victor Munnik * **Executive Assistant to Director:** Joan Cameron.

HOW TO CONTACT US:

8 Gough Road
Pietermaritzburg
P O Box 2375, Pietermaritzburg,
3200
Tel: 033-342-5662
Fax: 033-342-5665
e-mail: team@groundWork.org.za
Web: www.groundWork.org.za



Layout by Boutique Books
Printed by Digital Action

groundWork



Photo by F&E

From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



Brevity is critical. I have only 600 words to speak about one of the busiest and most exciting periods over the last years, and sadly also reflect on the brutality of the system.

Across groundWork it has felt as if we and the world have tried to accomplish all of the work for 2020 and 2021, coupled with 2022's work, in one year. Three years rolled into one. People are taking strain and we must reflect on how we engage going forward because people are feeling overwhelmed. This cannot and must not be the new norm.

In August – the month of the 10th anniversary of the state's massacre of miners in Marikana as they were striking, demanding better working conditions – Lindokuhle Mnguni, a member of Abahlali baseMjondolo, was assassinated. Like many other signed up members to Abahlali – over 100 000 people – and millions of others around the country hoping for a South Africa that serves its people rather than the political elite and corporates – his activism for a true democracy was not welcomed. “Democracy cannot solely be something enjoyed by the middle classes. It must be for everyone. Until everyone in SA has the right to organise freely, it should stop calling itself a democracy,” laments Imraan Buccus, researcher and political commentator.

Democracy is at the core of our struggle in South Africa. And government has been warned about this as communities have successfully challenged Shell's seismic operations off the South African coast. Here, the court in August has stated that “... the top-down approach, whereby kings or monarchs were consulted on the basis that they spoke for all their subjects, is a thing of the past which finds no space in a constitutional democracy”. In our constitutional democracy, people must be engaged with and heard and not murdered.

On to the work. From the groundWork health team in Zambia working with hospitals and the Lusaka mayor, to the coal fields of the Highveld, where a just transition and energy democracy is being pushed by the climate and energy justice and coal

team; from working with the South African Waste Pickers Association at their Biennial General Meeting to the Africa Coal Network's 4th annual gathering, bringing together activist from across the continent in Durban; and the completion of the last week of the 2022 Environmental Justice School, groundWork has continued to support struggles across South Africa and Africa with strong campaigners and a hard-working admin team and comms support.

During this last quarter, the creation of wealth and poverty was stark. “Amid world crises, ‘grotesque greed’ wins out” warns the Washington Post as the five majors made \$55 billion in three months as energy prices have escalated; this while the world's poor suffer the impacts of rising energy costs. United Nations Secretary General António Guterres considered this “abhorrent” and urged governments to “aggressively tax these corporations ‘profits’”. I'm not holding my breath.

We go into the last quarter of the year with great changes within groundWork. We are going to be hiring a financial director and operations director as Gill Addison moves on. And yes, her job goes to two people. When we (Linda Ambler, Gill Addison and I) started groundWork 23 years ago, we were three. We are now more than 30 and growing as the demands to challenge for environmental justice grow. In these last 23 years there is much that we all can reflect upon with pride and take credit for. An environmental justice school that will soon be hosting the first African organising school, the launch of EJFUNDSA, the strong partnerships with various organisations that has spread environmental justice across South Africa and the continent, and a growing environmental justice movement and shout-out for environmental justice across the country by communities organising.

And organise like crazy is what we must do as Europe seeks to expand its demands for gas from Africa – all while it demands we stop our coal.

A luta continua! 🌀





Marikana – wounds unattended

by Bobby Peek

August marked the tenth anniversary of the Marikana Massacre. On the 16th of August 2012, 34 workers were gunned down by the South African police, following a week of brutality that resulted in a total of 10 lives lost, even before a single shot was fired on the *koppie*, one of the small hills of Marikana. It was a week of violence that the police and the South African government could not, or would not, stop.

Most of South Africa's Sunday newspapers reflected on Marikana. The *Sunday Times* editorial stated that "Marikana continues to blight our democracy". The reality is that Marikana is not a moment in South African history, but rather an ongoing scourge of reality that presents itself at the nexus between corporate rapacity supported by a political power, and the deep poverty that exists in South Africa, forcing workers to toil in brutal conditions while working underground, and communities to live in unserviced settlements, such as the Nkaneng settlement in Marikana.

Marikana is not only a struggle of the workers against capital and the political elite. Marikana is the daily experience of people who live with the violence and environmental injustice of post-apartheid South Africa.

Yes, poverty is violent. It forces people to work in dangerous conditions for a pittance, knowing their lives are in danger. It leads to the high rates of the gender-based violence associated with it – as men in South Africa build upon a foundation of apartheid patriarchy entrenched in a capital corporate-led state. Poverty is brutal because it is constructed: there is no default position for not having.

Poverty is caused by the theft of land, water and air from citizens. Poverty instigates the death of formerly strong, healthy men from HIV and Aids, and mining diseases that include silicosis and black lung, leaving families destitute, losing their paltry income together with the loss of their fathers, sons and brothers. Marikana is about communities – and not only about workers.

Today, South Africa claims that it is preparing society for a just transition. Frequently I am seated around a table with many of my colleagues, trying to engage with the very same political people and institutions I have challenged in the preceding paragraphs of this article. This is not a comfortable endeavour; indeed, it is one of extreme contradiction and personal psychological wrangling.

A just transition is never going to happen if one does not reflect honestly and speak openly about the intentional violence of the powerful, whether individuals, corporates or the state. This is the violence that has led to the deaths of Bazooba Radebe and Mama Fikile Ntshangase, because they questioned the viability and negative impacts of mining. Deaths which, like those of the Marikana Massacre, are forgotten, with accountability is never being attributed.

A new world is desperately needed. Oupa Lehulere of Khanya College saw Marikana as a 'turning point'. It signalled the demise of the old anti-apartheid movement as a moral force. But "forging a new movement will require a whole new historical phase, and new intellectual tools, before such a movement finds its own identity and voice," reflected Lenny Gentle in his tribute to Oupa.

Indeed, we need to build a new moral force. A force that seeks to develop a voice that is enmeshed in the present, a voice that demands change, a voice that is prepared to break with the past and is autonomous from the decaying politics of the land. A voice that seeks an economy that serves people first.

Today, as we struggle for a just transition, let us not forget that it will be the same workers who will toil in mines to provide the minerals we need for new forms of energy. But we can choose to build a new energy system as well as a new economy – a new system that is deeply democratic, serves all our people, works cooperatively, does not harm the earth or its people, and is shared – a regenerative economy.

May we always remember Marikana and know that every action we take to fight injustice is a fight for Marikana. ☀



Gas proposals to replace 50% of Eskom Energy



by Avena Jacklin

Eskom's capacity is presently 45 000 MW. Today there are applications for a shocking 25 000MW capacity of gas-to-power plants targeting the ports of Richards Bay, Saldanha Bay and Coega. This is ludicrous at a time when we need to zero out on greenhouse gas emissions. How can we be talking about a Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P), or even the slimy net-zero debate, when we have this on the cards?

Civil society organisations are mobilising together to resist the onslaught of these developments as industry continues to push dirty fossil gas as a 'transitional fuel', despite growing evidence that it is not needed to meet our energy requirements. Signing in gas contracts will crowd out space for cleaner, safer and more affordable and accessible energy solutions that include the poor and vulnerable, and will jeopardise all our efforts to ensure an inclusive and fair just transition.

As CoP 27 brings focus to Africa and its climate vulnerability, we are equally experiencing a stronger push by industry to entrench dirty energy colonialism even further.

The African Union's recent proposal to endorse gas (African Position on Energy Access and Transition) was rejected by the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) in Addis Ababa. A pro-gas position would distract from adaptation, mitigation and climate finance priorities.

Growing evidence shows that gas exploitation in Africa will not bring long-term economic benefits for the continent. Renewables are already cheaper and safer. The only short-term winners will be European countries looking for alternative Russian gas supplies, as well as oil and gas majors looking to make huge profits. Carbon emissions have no borders. Increases in one country will impact on us all. ☀️

LATEST ACTIONS TAKEN BY GROUNDWORK

South Africa's first challenge of a gas-to-power plant

Eskom Holdings was granted an environmental authorisation (EA) in December 2019 for the development of a 3000MW gas-to-power plant. groundWork and SDCEA, supported by Natural Justice and represented by Cullinan and Associates, challenged the proposed plant to be constructed in Richards Bay. Tanica Naidoo, senior project officer at the SDCEA Richard's Bay office said: "The SDCEA attended the Pretoria High Court on the 2nd of August as the First Applicant. The day was full of twists and turns, but the Applicants' arguments were compelling. Humanity and the environment will always be one. The proposed power plant is deeply at odds with both."

The project failed to consider the climate crisis, notify and consult with affected communities and consider renewable energy alternatives. The Centre for Science and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Meridian Economics have shown that this type of mid-merit gas plant is not necessary for at least another 15 years, if at all, to meet South Africa's energy demands. Alternatives are available to meet needs during limited hours of peak electricity demand. Furthermore, no public participation was conducted in isiZulu, despite the EIA report identifying that 76% of the people living in the affected area are isiZulu speaking.

"Eskom's gas power plant will have significant implications for the climate crisis, the people of Richard's Bay and the public at large. People have the right to have their voices heard and the right to a government that hears their concerns, that considers all options to meet their needs and that respects their future", said Delme Cupido,



Southern Africa hub director of Natural Justice. During the court case, two protests took place in Westville, outside the Eskom Holdings offices, and in Richards Bay.

Karpowership – neither needed nor desired

On the 1st of August, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) dismissed the three Karpowership appeals. The refusals were due to inadequate Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). The DFFE considered harms, including GHG emissions, marine biodiversity impacts, risk to local fishing communities' livelihoods and public participation processes that were insufficiently addressed in the assessments. Karpowership still requires regulatory approvals from the National Energy Regulator (Nersa), which are opposed by several groups, including groundWork.

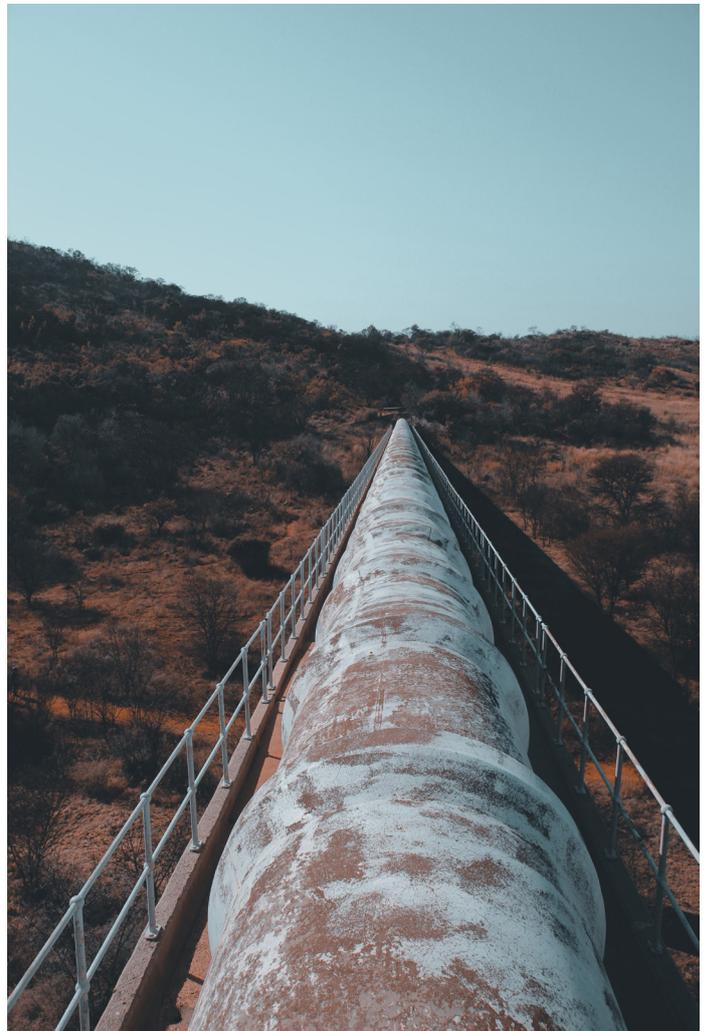
groundWork and SDCEA raised concerns about cumulative impacts, the gas supply chain and climate impacts. Karpowership's attempts at locking South Africa into long-term gas contracts would exacerbate the climate crisis. An irreversible amount of methane gas emissions (up to 50-million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent) would be emitted, 1.18% of the national carbon budget, making it impossible for South Africa to meet its climate change commitments.

Phakwe Power – not another one!

groundWork and SDCEA submitted comments to the Richards Bay Gas-to-Power 3's 2000MW gas plant's EIA on the 22nd of July. This is the third application by Richards Bay Gas-to-Power for the Richards Bay area. groundWork's submissions challenged the need and desirability of the project as being misguided and not based on best-available science. It does not align with the "low gas utilisation" goals of the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), which it states "will not likely justify the development of new gas infrastructure and

power plants". There is no evidence to justify the need for building a massive, costly and polluting project, not even for meeting baseload. Job creation is only expected to be in the form of short-term construction jobs, with no bright future for long-term, sustainable, clean and safer jobs and livelihoods, which renewables can offer.

Furthermore, the EIA report suggests that climate impacts will only occur in the future, whereas we are already experiencing the effects of climate change, evidenced in the 2022 April floods with over 230mm over four days in Richards Bay. Twenty-two homes were destroyed in uMhlathuze Municipality and roads were also damaged. Across KwaZulu-Natal, about 450 people died and 40 000 were displaced with 12 000 homes completely destroyed.



*A gas pipeline snakes its way through South Africa
Credit: Aaron Jones on Unsplash*



Gas will not support Africa's transition from coal



by Lorraine Chiponda

The Africa Coal Network and various African CSOs across the continent have been pushing back hard on the growing narrative of some African governments and businesses that Africa's energy transition should leverage on its climate-intensive gas reserves. The sudden appetite for African gas has been largely attributed to the global energy crises and is not aimed at meeting the developmental and energy needs of the African people, of who nearly 600 million live in energy poverty. Gas infrastructure currently being proposed or built is meant to feed into European markets such as the Trans-Saharan gas pipeline, which will traverse Nigeria, Niger and Algeria across the Sahara Desert to Europe. These developments will sink Africa into debt and indeed assign the world to a future of devastating climate change impacts – which we are already experiencing.

Gas deals are being signed as Europe feels pressure due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and sanctions and cutting of its gas supply from Russia. Deals are now being struck between Italy and African countries such as Angola and Congo and there are already confirmed supply agreements with Algeria and Egypt.

Rather than cause further pollution by exploiting Africa's fossil fuels, Europe should take responsibility for past emissions and show climate leadership by supporting the transition of Africa and other poorer nations towards a just renewable energy transition.

The US President recently signed a climate and tax bill that promises to cut the US's dependence on fossil fuels. But to date the UN Climate negotiations have been consistently undermined by the US government. Is this a change? I doubt it! In 2009, Hillary Clinton promised \$100 billion annually from 2020 – but we are still waiting. Rather than pouring money, infrastructure and resources into gas and fossil fuel resources, money should be poured into the transition towards renewables and fighting climate impacts.

Just last month a group of African Union officials, represented by energy and transport government officials from various African countries, were calling on African countries to deploy all forms of energy, including gas and nuclear to expand “modern energy”. The proposal to expand gas in Africa will significantly increase carbon emissions, which have been much lower than other regions globally. The group drafted a proposal that they hope will be pushed by the African Union during CoP27, ignoring climate commitments made under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 °C.

African CSOs, including the Africa Coal Network, came together to push this back and launched the *Don't Gas Africa Campaign*. We wrote an open letter to the Africa Union in which we urged the African Union to reject the proposal and not to push for the expansion of fossil fuels on the continent. The open letter and position received much attention from various media outlets and the Africa Coal Network will continue to strengthen African voices demanding a just transition and just development that does not advance coal and gas. With the rise in frequency and intensity of climate disasters on the continent, adding new gas projects on the continent as is being pushed for in countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania and others, poses a serious threat to Africa's survival and development.

Finally, in other regions of Africa, the struggle with coal is still ongoing, with communities still pushing back on dirty energy. In Zimbabwe, a Chinese firm Mugatech Logistics was dragged to court by Hwange residents to stop them from carrying out mining activities at the Nechenge Coal Mine Project site in Matabeleland North Province. The Tendele coal mine in South Africa is embroiled in ongoing battles with communities and environmentalists are winning some of the fights through protests and court battles. ☀





How to ensure \$8.5 billion JETP deal is just



by Michelle Cruywagen

Real listening and transparency are key to ensuring that an ‘accelerated’ \$8,5bn JETP deal is just

CoP 26 President Alok Sharma visited South Africa earlier this year to ‘accelerate’ the \$8,5 billion Just Transition Energy Partnership formed at CoP 26 between South Africa and an International Partners Group (IPG) of countries comprising the EU, UK, US, France and Germany.

Mr Sharma’s visit included a discussion with coal workers, union members and coal-affected communities in Emalahleni, which was facilitated by groundWork and NALEDI, after the British High Commission reached out to ask for assistance. He also engaged with government ministers, including the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team, as well as representatives from business.

During his discussion with workers and communities, Mr Sharma emphasised that the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) funds would be allocated towards projects that deliver on a long-term just transition with a focus on reskilling workers in the coal sector in support of their livelihoods. He invited workers and communities to describe what a just transition meant to them, especially in the light of the increasing affordability of renewable energy. Furthermore, he asked communities to share what they would like to convey to South African government ministers.

Responding to the prospect of accessible, renewable energy, Promise Mabilo, community activist from Vukani Environmental Movement (VEM), highlighted transparency related to electricity costs. “Communities need to fully understand all associated

COP President Alok Sharma in conversation with representatives from groundWork and COSATU in eMalahleni, Mpumalanga. Credit: ggroundWork





COSATU representatives and groundWorkers Nqobile Ranela, Michelle Cruywagen, Thomas Mnguni, and Promise Mabilo (VEM) with Alok Sharma president of COP. Credit: groundWork

costs up front. We need to know how much we will be paying in relation to what we will receive. It is unfair to place a debt burden on low-income communities living in rural areas. We require transparency regarding the renewable energy installations in our community and what the actual costs will be,” she said during the meeting.

Thomas Mnguni, groundWork Coal Campaigner, shared some of the realities Highveld communities live with every day. He questioned the assumed benefits of industrialisation, indicating that the unemployment rate was higher in the Mpumalanga province than the national average, despite extensive coal mining in the province. Mr Mnguni proposed an emphasis on decent, clean jobs, improved livelihoods and good service delivery in the transition. He explained that communities living in the Highveld were continually exposed to health risks such as pollution and that the water in their taps was undrinkable.

“When we talk about financing a Just Transition,” Mr Mnguni said, “we need to consider the externalities our communities live with every day, we need to recognise that countries that have financed coal mining have contributed to these burdens.” Mr Mnguni raised the question of who pays for these externalities.

Although the deal was announced more than seven months ago, Mr Mnguni stressed that there is not a lot known about the deal, especially concerning the terms and conditions. “We require transparency to determine the implications for coal-affected communities. For the deal to be truly just, the financing should be offered at a reasonable rate and have positive impacts for coal communities.”

To achieve a just transition, Mr Mnguni further explained that we need finance that is transformational and shifts us to a regenerative system that puts people first. A regenerative approach would include access to land, agroecological farming and ensuring that the land and water systems are rehabilitated properly. He also highlighted the opportunity to create jobs for local communities through land rehabilitation and local manufacturing, including local components for renewable energy. Finally, Mr Mnguni suggested that the JETP has a role to ensure that the South African government is held accountable, and that issues of transparency, justice and governance are ensured.

So, it can never be said that governments, both in the UK and in SA, do not know what people really want on the ground: a real just transition and not greenwash! 🌞





Scarred for life by poisonous skin-lightening creams



by Tony Carnie

Millions of women across Africa and the world have been scarred for life or suffered very severe health damage due to a range of toxic additives such as mercury, lead and hydroquinone in skin-lightening creams.

Gugu Mvelase (not her real name) is thankful that her flirtation with skin-lightening creams was brief. Two years ago she started using a powerful cream that “really messed up my skin”.

“I was buying them from a lady who has an office next to a doctor’s rooms in central Durban – so I was under the impression that the products were safe.

“I’m a very dark person and I also had acne. But after six months, my skin was terrible and it had turned at least two shades lighter. My friends knew something was going on and this also started to affect my confidence.”

Why did she want to make her skin lighter?

“I don’t know, really. I was 30 at the time. It’s just society, I guess. If you are lighter, you are... more beautiful. I didn’t have a specific reason. But I wanted to be more noticeable.

“Now I realise it was the biggest mistake of my life – I learnt the hard way. Thankfully, I stopped using them after receiving proper medical advice, before there was permanent damage. Now I am back to my natural dark complexion.”

Gugu was lucky. Millions of women across Africa and the world have been scarred for life or suffered very severe health damage due to a range of toxic additives such as mercury, lead and hydroquinone.

Yet the severe health risks of mercury have been known for hundreds of years. In 1687, for example, French chemist Marie Meurdrac recommended that mercury and other heavy metals be completely avoided for skin bleaching.

“In addition to destroying the beauty of the face with long use, they produce very troublesome and occasionally incurable illnesses, and it is of this that ladies must beware,” she warned.

During the 18th century, English hat makers used mercuric nitrate to stiffen felt hats, often working in poorly ventilated rooms. Over time, many inhaled mercury vapours and developed psychosis, excitability and tremors – symptoms that became so common in hatters that the phrase “mad as a hatter” was born.

In Cato Ridge, KwaZulu-Natal, several workers died or became severely disabled in the early 1990s after being exposed to mercury fumes at the Thor Chemicals plant.

Globally, the most dramatic evidence of health damage from mercury exposure occurred in Japan, due to liquid industrial wastes that poisoned fish and shellfish in Minamata Bay between 1932 and 1968.

This led to thousands of cases of Minamata Disease, which included symptoms such as depression, insomnia, tremors, delirium, lung injuries and kidney collapse. In some cases, infants born to exposed mothers suffered brain damage and severe deformities of the limbs.

This health tragedy later gave birth to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The Minamata Convention

Named after the devastating wave of mercury-related sickness that affected thousands of people around Minamata Bay, Japan, this international convention came into force in 2017 and aims to rapidly reduce global supply and demand for mercury.

It bans new mercury mines, while existing mines can continue for only 15 years after a country joins the treaty.

The convention also aims to phase out or reduce mercury use in a number of products and processes. Several of these phase-outs became effective from January 2021, to ban or restrict mercury-containing products that include some batteries, compact fluorescent lamps under 30 watts, cosmetics (such as skin-lightening creams), pesticides and



thermometers. Dental fillings which use mercury amalgams are also regulated under the convention to phase down their use.

The convention was a result of just three years of meetings and negotiations by delegates from nearly 140 countries and was signed in 2013.

The objective of the Minamata Convention is to protect human health and the environment from human-influenced emissions of mercury and mercury compounds.

Every year up to 9 000 tons of mercury is released into the atmosphere, in water and on land. The largest source of mercury emissions is artisanal and small-scale gold mining, followed closely by burning coal for electricity and industrial heat, non-ferrous metal production and cement production.

More recently, researchers have reported several cases of Kenyan women suffering kidney damage after frequent use of commercial skin-lightening creams.

Recent case studies among Mexicans living in California have emphasised the severe risks, not just for the women who use them, but also their children and other family members.

In 2014, doctors in California diagnosed mercury poisoning in a 20-month-old baby suffering from

hypertension, refusal to walk, irritability, difficulty sleeping and poor appetite. The skin-lightening cream used by the mother contained 38 000 ppm of mercury. Researchers suggested the most likely exposure contamination route was through physical contact with the mother and contaminated household items.

In a second case, a 17-year-old boy was admitted to an intensive care unit after using a non-commercial, artisanal cream from Mexico to treat acne. His symptoms progressed rapidly from weakness in his legs to involuntary muscle twitching. Later he developed severe back pain, visible muscle-twitching, unsteady gait, delirium, agitation, sleep disturbances and profuse sweating.

He had only been using the acne cream twice a day for about six weeks before the onset of symptoms. Eleven family members were found to have very high mercury levels and almost all furniture and personal belongings in the home were discarded as hazardous waste. The creams were later tested and found to contain between 96 000 ppm to 210 000 ppm of mercury.

And yet, skin-lightening creams with very high mercury levels are still on sale across South Africa.

Though local sales volumes remain unclear, there are some indications that the use of various skin-lightening products is growing – popularised in



Skin-lightening creams can cause irreversible damage to the skin, such as ochronosis or lesions.



part by entertainers such as Khanyi Mbau, Sorisha Naidoo or the late Kwaito star Nomasonto “Mshoza” Maswanganyi.

At a global level, the World Health Organisation suggests that the skin-lightening industry is one of the fastest-growing beauty industries worldwide and is estimated to be worth \$31.2-billion by 2024.

Professor Ncoza Dlova is an internationally renowned Durban dermatologist who has seen scores of patients whose skin was damaged permanently by these creams.

Dlova, who is also Dean and Head of the School of Clinical Medicine at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, describes the skin-lightening phenomenon as a sociopolitical issue that dates back to the days of African-born slaves in North America who believed they would be better off with a lighter skin.

“If you had lighter-coloured skin you were able to work inside the master’s house, but if you were darker, you had to work outdoors.

“In South Africa, some domestic workers darker in shade were also told to make their skins lighter – this is documented in anthropology literature by Professor Lynn Thomas from Washington University in Seattle.”

Some creams were also used by several white women in the past.

“There was this notion that women who had darker skins from working outdoors were poor – so they started using bleaches. Now, it’s the other way round for white women. The more suntanned you are, the richer you appear, because your suntanned skin is proof that you can afford a beach holiday in an exotic location.

“Among the Indian community there is still a caste system, and there are examples of this here in South Africa, with a perception that darker-skinned Indians come from a lower caste... Even with marriage, it can still be an issue to marry someone who is darker in complexion.”

In 2012, Dlova conducted a study among 600 Indian and African women seen at university teaching hospitals in Durban. The results showed that nearly 70% of those interviewed at public health clinics used skin-bleaching creams to get rid of acne and other skin disorders, while 30% of them with normal skin used creams to make their skin lighter.

“Despite more than 20 years of governmental regulations aimed at prohibiting both the sale of cosmetics containing mercury, hydroquinone and corticosteroids, and the advertising of any kind of skin lightener, they are far from having disappeared,” she reported.

“There is even discrimination among black people. There are lighter-skinned people called ‘yellow bones’ who are seen by some as being more attractive.

“We have been seeing this phenomenon more often over the last 10 years, especially among celebrities, and young high school girls. Even men are starting to use skin-lightening creams,” says Dlova.

This is despite several visibly dangerous effects from both short- and long-term use, such as ochronosis (speckled or very dark pigmentation on the face and neck).

“The skin can become red and inflamed and mercury-containing products also create irreversible dark patches. Some corticosteroid skin creams are imported and can cause thinning and infection of the skin or excessive hair growth – and in some cases skin cancer due to long-term use.

“There are also neurological implications that can extend to the foetus in pregnant women who use mercury-containing skin bleaching creams. Unfortunately, some people cannot afford to go to dermatologists, so they buy cheap products to treat skin disorders.”

She suggests that there are some treatments that can be used safely to treat skin disorders, such as arbutin, vitamins A and C, kojic acid, niacinamide C and hydroquinone (although hydroquinone should only be used under proper dermatology supervision and care).

The problem is that some patients use it for a long time, or in very high concentration, and they go out into the sun without using sunscreens.

“Unfortunately, the safe products are expensive and unemployed consumers cannot afford them. That’s why many of the illegal products we see are very cheap (as little as R15 or R20 for about 30g). You can still buy them at many hair salons, in supermarkets, spice shops and from street vendors.” ☀️



Introducing the Highveld health researchers



by Mafoko Phomane

The Mpumalanga Highveld is in dire need of active and accountable leadership and an urgent commitment to address the public health disaster caused by air pollution. The main concerns of any health system are to promote health, prevent and treat disease and help to restore the health of citizens. The Highveld area was declared the Highveld *Priority Area* (HPA) in November 2007, and yet – in 2022 – there is still no health plan for communities living in the HPA. Residents continue to suffer the negative health consequences of coal-fired electricity and active or abandoned coal mines – and they continue to contend with poor health services that are not fit for purpose, within an already ailing health care system.

The people most affected by air pollution in Middleburg, eMalahleni and Phola have shared harrowing stories of a health system that continues to fail them, mostly due to the conduct of unprofessional health workers who have long since laid to rest the *Patients' Rights Charter / Batho Pele Principles*, or so it seems. Communities have been left to cope with clinics that keep unsuitable operating hours, medications that are constantly out of stock, and non-existent ambulance services, while at the same time they suffer from the adverse health outcomes – such as asthma, sinusitis and skin irritations – caused by air pollution.

It is now generally accepted that the climate crisis is also a health emergency that affects two interlinked spheres: human health and the health of the environment.

Communities are actively seeking committed partnerships, allyships and a show of solidarity from the health community at large, hoping to establish a fully functional health system under the leadership of the National Department of Health (DoH). By law, the DoH is the custodian of the right to health for all, including health professionals. This group comprises environmental health activists and practitioners,

nurses, doctors, community health workers and health researchers.

To address these needs, the Life After Coal (LAC) campaign has engaged health researchers on a short-term project to (a) investigate the health situation on the Highveld, and (b) provide scientific evidence that will inform a health plan for a Just Transition on the Highveld. The researchers have been seconded to the project from the School of Health Systems and Public Health at the University of Pretoria, and the College of Health Sciences School of Nursing and Public Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Initial research activities started with focus group discussions involving different groups on the Highveld, including young and older people, and especially women, who have borne the brunt of a health system that has broken its promise.

The health researchers have been mandated to prepare the first outline of a health plan that will provide restorative justice to people on the Highveld whose health has been ruined by decades of pollution. They will consult with affected communities, health and environmental professionals, and activists, regarding the following issues:

- Seek answers to the question, “What are the health challenges on the Mpumalanga Highveld, resulting from pollution from coal mining and related burning?” This question will form part of interviews with residents as well as workshops to be held in selected communities.
- Seek answers to the question, “What would residents like to see in an Mpumalanga Health Programme that will address most if not all these issues?”
- Analyse health challenges and recommend possible solutions.
- Inspect current relevant policies and plans applicable to the Mpumalanga Highveld.
- Produce a draft or outline of a health plan to provide restorative justice to community members living on the Mpumalanga Highveld.



We look to this draft health plan to galvanise the National Department of Health to play a more active leadership role, to reduce people's vulnerability to climate change, to build resilience and to curb the existing burden of disease for people living on the Highveld. We are hopeful that this health plan will provide guidance on how to collect, monitor and utilise health data related to environmental health and applicable to the Mpumalanga Highveld. We anticipate that this could lead to a radically reformed public health system that is also climate-smart.

Together with supportive health professionals, we will continue to mobilise affected communities to ensure a collective voice when demands are made regarding the right to health for all! 🌞

Batho Pele Principles:

CONSULTATION:

Citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice about the services that are offered.

SERVICE STANDARDS:

Citizens should be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.

ACCESS:

All citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.

COURTESY:

Citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration.

INFORMATION:

Citizens should be given full, accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive.

OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY:

Citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge.

REDRESS:

If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy; and when the complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response.

VALUE FOR MONEY:

Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best possible value for money.

ENCOURAGING INNOVATION AND REWARDING EXCELLENCE:

Innovation can be new ways of providing better service, cutting costs, improving conditions, streamlining and generally making changes which tie in with the spirit of Batho Pele. It is also about rewarding the staff who "go the extra mile" in making it all happen.

CUSTOMER IMPACT:

Impact means looking at the benefits we have provided for our customers both internal and external – it's how the nine principles link together to show how we have improved our overall service delivery and customer satisfaction. It is also about making sure that all our customers are aware of and are exercising their rights in terms of the Batho Pele principles.

LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION:

Good leadership is one of the most critical ingredients for successful organisations. Organisations who do well in serving their customers can demonstrate that they have leaders who lead by example, who set the vision, and ensure that the strategy for achieving the vision is owned by all and properly deployed throughout the organisation. They take an active role in the organisation's success.



SAWPA: celebrating 13 years of movement building



Statement from SAWPA's BGM 2022

The South African Waste Pickers Association has today democratically elected a new leadership structure. This follows a three-day gathering at the SAWPA biennial meeting held in Observatory, Johannesburg, which was attended by 120 waste pickers from all nine provinces and 38 municipalities in the country. The meeting also welcomed visitors from other African countries like Kenya, Ghana and Sierra Leone.

During the meeting, we also welcomed engagements and presentations from the City of Johannesburg and the national Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. We appreciate the involvement of local and national government and see this as an important step in making sure that waste pickers work collaboratively with all spheres of government to address the issues of waste management.

As a grassroots national organisation we were also honoured to have Abahlali BaseMjondolo president S'bu Zikode in our presence. Abahlali pledged their solidarity with waste pickers and also shared experiences and strategies on mobilising.

Over and above the election of a new leadership structure, as SAWPA we also highlighted some of the main issues and challenges facing the organisation and waste pickers in different municipalities around the country. These include the following:

- **Just transition** – how waste pickers take part and are included within this process. Waste pickers are well informed on how this affects them and their work.

- **Democracy and transparency** – maintaining democracy and openness within the organisation, to make sure that all waste pickers are united and all speak in one voice.
- **Waste picker national registration** – the ongoing process of registration of waste pickers across the country continues to a national database and also the registration of SAWPA members.
- **Waste picker integration** – the drive to engage all municipalities to make sure that waste pickers are formally integrated into the municipal waste management systems.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme** – waste pickers need to be the primary beneficiaries of the EPR scheme from the funds paid by big industries and producers of waste through their packaging.
- **Safety and security** – there are issues of violent armed gangs and groups that intimidate and create an unsafe environment for waste pickers. This does not only threaten the livelihood of waste pickers but also their lives.

We congratulate all those appointed to serve and lead the waste picker revolution. The organisation pledges its support in working with the newly elected leaders. We are convinced that these are the leaders who are capable and fit to maintain unity within the organisation and also strengthen solidarity with all our national and global partners. 🌍





Newly elected members of the South African Waste Pickers Association National Coordinating Committee

South African Waste Pickers leadership structure

National Coordinating Committee (12)

National Chairperson: Lefa Mononga
 Secretary: Nonhlanhla Mhlophe
 Mantwa Mokoena
 Cynthia Nkosi
 Portia Phoshoko
 Gwyneth Pinaar
 Madithlare Koena
 Muziwendoda Mathiyane
 Palesa Maloisane
 Johannes Modise
 Msindo Makhanye
 Mogomotsi Mopomoti

Provincial Coordinating Committee (9)

Gauteng: Palesa Maloyisane
 KwaZulu-Natal: Nsizwa Tshabalala
 Mpumalanga: Nkosiyabo Nzima
 Limpopo: Edwin Sadiki
 Northern Cape: Michael
 Western Cape: Nokuzola Dumalisile
 Eastern Cape: Gcobisa Lajobode
 Free State: Xolile Baleni
 North West: Moses Mothoatlhaga



Warwick Zero Waste: a new milestone

by Asiphile Khanyile

The Warwick Zero Waste (WZW) Project has reached a milestone worth noting. On the 28th of June 2022, the first 240-litre bin with organic waste from the Early Morning Market was sent to the Durban Botanic Gardens in order to be composted. How did we get here?

Part of the research we conducted in 2021 highlighted that a significant amount of organic waste generated from the Early Morning Market was going straight to landfill. As a result, organic waste diversion to landfill became one of the preferred co-designed pilots to implement in the project. Globally and in Africa, organic waste is as one of the major contributors towards the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere, especially methane, which is posing an even bigger threat to climate change the CO₂ (GAIA, 2020). Furthermore, in African countries, like many other developing nations, most of the waste generated is organic. In addition to this, around the world the waste sector is one of the key sectors that contributes significantly to climate change, especially

during the processes of natural resource extraction, production/manufacturing, consumption and disposal. Hence, the idea of the organic waste diversion pilot makes a lot of sense, especially for this waste stream, since it can be locally adapted as a climate change mitigation strategy.

Before this experiment on organic waste diversion started, the WZW project held a series of webinars in the African Zero Waste Management Learning Hub on the 28th of April 2022, as well as on the 31st of May 2022. Our key partners – Green Africa Youth Organisation (Ghana), Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (India), Solid Waste Collection and Handling (India), Instituto Pólis (Brazil) and Nipe Fagio (Tanzania) – shared their key insights for the different methods they use to work with organic waste, both at a local and city-wide level. The two-part series was titled: *Organic Waste Management: Learning from Cities in the Global South*. Through the webinars, we were able to learn and understand how different countries with their local partners use the methods such as anaerobic



Organic Waste from the Durban Botanic Gardens and the Early Morning Market. Credit: Warwick Zero Waste Project



digestion, composting and black soldier fly farming for organic waste management.

Since then, the project partners – groundWork, Asiye eTafuleni, and Durban University of Technology-Urban Futures Centres – have collaborated with the following stakeholders: eThekweni Municipality Durban Botanic Gardens, eThekweni Municipality Business Support Unit and Durban University of Technology’s Department of Horticulture, as well as informal traders and waste pickers. The purpose of these partnerships is to conduct experiments and enhance our understanding of the composting research and then to decide how we can further develop it into a

proper co-designed pilot. Thus, from June 2022 until the end of October 2022, we are experimenting on a weekly basis with the compost heaps to learn about organic waste. Furthermore, we want to showcase how local partnerships can be formed in order to strengthen our journey to zero waste.

Lastly, we hope that through this co-designed pilot we will be able to demonstrate how and why a zero waste model is a more viable and preferred climate change solution when compared to false solutions like incineration, especially for the waste management sector. ☺



Composting team: eThekweni Municipality Durban Botanic Gardens, Durban University of Technology-Urban Futures Centre, groundWork, Asiye eTafuleni and DUT - Department of Horticulture. Credit: Warwick Zero Waste Project.



More than a decade ago, I visited Sweden in the height of summer to meet with our partner, Afrikagrupperna, an organisation that from the 60s has challenged colonialism and the apartheid state in Southern Africa. Linked to people throughout Sweden who abhorred the racism of colonisation, solidarity ranged from working in Africa with those fighting for liberation in the liberation camps across Southern Africa to sending financial support to the anti-apartheid movement.

Many things stand out for me from that visit. The long summer evenings and supper with the friends at the Folk Skole, meeting with local activists, young and old, the herring on the side of the street in Stockholm and visiting the Gävleborgs Biståndsgrupp.



Here, I entered a world where local people work daily in a world of not producing new goods, but of ensuring that what society discards does not become waste. Here people, equivalent to the waste pickers on

the streets in South Africa, take waste and ensure that it has new value. In front of me was the regenerative economy in the real; not only in academic writing and activist advocacy.



But what was and is more profound is that through this process of selling second-hand goods, local activists raise funds that are then sent to those campaigning for a new world and a just transition in the South. Just this year, the Emmaus solidarity group that works with the Gävleborgs Biståndsgrupp decided to donate 100 000 Swedish crowns of its surplus to groundWork, which was “magnified ten times by the SIDA support”, as per the rule in Sweden. The surplus came from selling these second-hand goods. Whatever Afrikagrupperna activists raise to support struggles globally, the Swedish government puts in additional money from tax-payers’ contributions in a ratio of one to nine.

This work by local activists, some of who have never travelled to Africa, is the real solidarity that remains within society across Sweden.

This is a big “shout-out” – a phrase that a young Swedish activist taught me years ago – to our fellow travellers in Sweden on the road to a just transition.

As was, and continues to be, said across Mozambique and Africa, *a luta continua*. The struggle continues for liberation. 🌀



Building activism

by Tsholofelo Sepotokele

The 12th of August marked the conclusion of groundWork's sixth Environmental Justice School for Activists (EJS), as well as the graduation of the 2022 cohort. Following three-months of mentoring and project implementation, participants returned to Vuleka Centre, Bothas Hill, KwaZulu-Natal on the 7th of August 2022 for the second phase of the school's programme.

On the first day of the intensive week, participants presented reports on the outcomes of their projects, focusing not only on the successes they achieved, but also on the challenges that they faced and responses to said challenges. Later on in the week, project leaders presented plans for their individual projects after attending EJS.

This year's cohort carried out nine projects within their communities, namely:

- Developing Resources to Create Awareness on the Health Impacts of Mining (Mining Affected Communities United in Action)
- Creating Awareness on Air Quality Issues Affecting the Middleburg Community (Middleburg Social Justice and Environmental Justice Alliance)
- Developing Awareness on Air Quality and Health Literacy (Masithobelane Support Group)
- Asikhulene Sonke as Waste Pickers (South African Waste Pickers Association)
- Uniting Waste Pickers to Mobilise for a Decent Work Facility at the Pietermaritzburg Landfill (South African Waste Pickers Association)
- Reviving Vaal Park Recycling Centre (South African Waste Pickers Association)
- Creating Awareness for Renewable Energy Amongst the Youth (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance)
- Data Collection of Coal and Health Impacts in Dannhauser (Sukumani Environmental Justice)
- Waste Management and Food Sovereignty Awareness Campaign (Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance)



Environmental Justice Education Campaigner Tsholofelo Sepotokele and Environmental Justice Education Coordinator, Jeanne Prinsloo. Credit: groundWork

The second day of the return week coincided with National Women's Day. In commemoration, it was only fitting to have a session on gender, which concentrated on gender justice and discussions on masculinities and femininities, with an emphasis on toxic masculinities.

In the following days, sessions also included organisation- and activist-centric capacity building presentations. Organisation-centric sessions focused on understanding critical aspects of organisations, ideas about how participants can support positive change within their organisations, building supportive admin and finance systems for their work, as well as utilising



social media for awareness raising. The activist-centric session promoted the value and importance of self-care to restore and maintain participants' resilience through dialogue and collective healing.

During this week, participants also revisited and consolidated core concepts of the EJS through the life cycle of fast fashion to deepen their understanding of the three Es (exclusion, enclosure and externalisation) as mechanisms of exploitation within an extractive economy, based on the global economic order of capitalism and neoliberalism. As an alternative economic order for a just transition, participants were encouraged to imagine how a regenerative economy, to counter fast fashion, would work through the five pillars of the economy (resources, work, purpose, worldview and governance). Participants came up with creative illustrations of how they envision a just transition from an extractive to a regenerative clothing and textile economy.

The school ended off with an evening of celebration, which started off with a quiz where the Amandlas faced off with the Scorpions. This saw the Amandlas coming out victorious and winning first prize. groundWork was then treated to a moving sketch performed by the EJS 2022 participants.

The main event of the night was the graduation ceremony that began with a final address by environmental justice stalwart Des D'sa and ended off with our proud graduates vibrantly walking across the stage to receive their certificates.

Joining an alumnus of over 100 EJS graduates from seven African countries, the 2022 cohort, through their projects, will continue to collaborate with groundWork on efforts to mobilise communities and raise awareness on environmental injustices to work towards and fight for a just transition. 🌞



groundWork Executive Director, Bobby Peek handing over EJS certificate to Thamsanqa Msomi during the EJS 2022 graduation. Credit: groundWork





Plastic bag laws

by Merrisa Naidoo and Zama Shamase



East Africa has set the gold standard for single-use plastic (SUP) bag laws and policies on the continent and globally, with 17 of the 18 East African countries having passed a law banning plastic bags and having implemented the law or intending to implement it, making East Africa environmental leaders at the forefront of plastic bag legislation.

However, a lack of regional cooperation and regional instruments to support the efforts to stop illicit trade of plastic across all borders, as well as limited availability of affordable alternatives to plastic bags and plastic packaging and the desire for convenience, undermines the plastic bag legislation in East Africa. Ways around this would be for East Africa to develop and harmonise regional laws and enhance regional cooperation, source more sustainable packaging alternatives and innovative ways to redesign that are subsidised, and to increase awareness by educating the public on the implications of continued use of single-use plastic bags on human health and the environment at large.

In Southern Africa, interventions on plastic bag reduction policies vary in stages of implementation with limited evidence of their enforcement or effectiveness. These policies are challenged by the influential power of the plastics industry and top-down policy development approaches that pay little to no heed to consulting the informal sector that produces and distributes plastic, civil society or all stakeholders. This is coupled with a lack of national awareness-raising campaigns and internal political disagreements that are associated with plastic bag-related policies. There is, therefore, a need to establish effective multi-faceted engagement strategies with all stakeholders, from civil society to all – formal and informal – plastic manufacturers, at the onset of policy development. This will lead to policies that are more in tune with the reality of each country. Additionally, developing sustainable national campaigns that lobby buy-in from multiple stakeholders and lead to long-term change and strengthen the bodies responsible for enforcing and implementing the bans against any undue political pressures should be a priority.

Many countries in West Africa have welcomed legislative SUP bans, especially for plastic bags, which marks their commitment to dealing with SUP pollution. The main drivers of plastic bag bans in West Africa have been for environmental protection, sanitation, livestock protection and farmer's livelihoods, and maintaining the tourism industry's standards. However, these bans have been characterised by poor enforcement regimes, which has resulted in a reduced impact across the West African sub-region.

In West Africa, there is a strong dependence on SUP bags to serve food to clients by food vendors and hawkers and a lack of plans and provisions for reusable alternatives. Bans are also characterised by very short lag times between announcement and implementation, which is often in the same year that the ban was announced. This gives businesses and consumers very little time to adjust their behaviour and can open up black market use and distribution of plastic bags and other SUPs. The plastic manufacturing sector also fears potential job losses, leading to bans in certain West African countries being revoked.

Governments should, therefore, identify, incentivise and make provision for alternative delivery systems at prices that are affordable to the populace. This will mainstream the transition from SUPs to reusable alternatives and refillable systems. Ample time should be given to policies on plastic bags and other SUPs to allow the players in the plastic value chain and the public to adjust appropriately. This will prevent opposition to bans that could jeopardise its success. Subsidies, revolving funds and loans should be provided that assist firms to transit from SUPs to reusable alternatives. This will prevent job loss and opposition to policies that reduce SUPs and ensure a just transition.

North Africa unfortunately was the second highest per capita consumer of plastic bags in 2015, which has motivated the sub-region to crack down on plastic and attain greener policies. In North Africa, retailers are afraid of losing clientele if they stop distributing plastic bags, which causes plastic bags to reappear in markets and in small shops despite bans. False



alternatives (such as non-woven bags that are made of 100 percent plastic, using a polypropylene fabric, which are often masked as “fabric bags” and which have become as disposable as the previous bags) are promoted, which strongly limits the potential of reducing plastic pollution. Monitoring systems are also inconsistent.

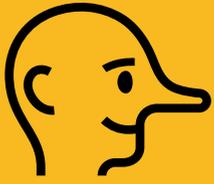
It is recommended that efforts are concentrated to check and support the informal sector to transition away from producing and distributing plastic bags to the marketplace. False alternatives should also be debunked, and the use of effective and creative alternatives should be promoted instead of continuing to subsidise alternatives that are, for the most part, still made out of plastic. Stricter monitoring indicators by law enforcers should be set up, such as routine checks to educate users and illegal traders about the negative impacts of plastic bags, conducting more foot patrols, developing strong connections and continually improving social networks in communities. They should share policies, information, investigative results and other important information about legislation.

Amidst the strides made and challenges faced by the African continent on plastic bag laws and policies, it is important to recognise that the plastic pollution crisis is a systemic problem that can only be solved with systemic solutions if we are to ultimately bring about systemic change – and that starts with reducing the amount of plastic that is produced and that enters the market, place both formal and informal. This can only be achieved through the prioritisation of upstream solutions and extending the responsibilities of the plastic manufacturing industry to the entire life cycle of plastic. Such mechanisms include but are not limited to:

- Phasing out single-use products and packaging such as plastic bags;
- Redesigning non-reusable or recyclable products and putting systems in place for reuse;
- Providing financial support for public and informal alternative delivery systems;
- Building on existing municipal waste management systems, particularly those who have been engaged in plastic recycling, such as waste pickers and community recycling organisations. ☺

*Credit: End Plastic Pollution
Uganda*





Climate finance: lies by the dozen



by Greenfly

Mendacious is a grand adjective for habitual liars and lying statements. But the world of climate finance goes much further. Mendacity is coded into its foundation.

The polluter pays principle stands behind climate finance: the rich countries of the North did the polluting, not to mention the plundering, but poor countries in the South get the worst of the damage. So, the rich owe a climate debt to the poor. And this is where the mendacity begins. The rich want to be seen as generous donors, not as recalcitrant debtors.

In 2009, at CoP 15 in Copenhagen, the then US foreign secretary Hilary Clinton announced with great fanfare that they would mobilise US\$100 billion a year by 2020. The figure compared with the seven trillion dollars already made available to save the Wall Street banks from the consequences of their own actions. It compared with \$600 billion that the US then spent on its military. And it compared with estimates that the real need for climate finance was in the order of \$1 trillion a year.

Moreover, it was an empty promise made for the moment in front of the cameras. A promise made to be broken. It was included in the Copenhagen Accord, negotiated by the US with the BASIC countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – and subsequently agreed by Europe. And the wording of the Accord already hedged against any liability: “This funding will come from a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including alternative sources of finance”. No obligations for the US or for Europe there. Nor was there any hint of how private finance, made available in the expectation of a profitable return, would help poor and already indebted countries caught in the climate crisis.

The Accord was negotiated in back rooms and met with disbelief and derision by country delegates who had not been consulted. The Copenhagen CoP then broke up in disarray and without agreement. Nevertheless, a year later at CoP 16 in Cancun, the

Accord was effectively adopted and the catcalls of 2009 magically turned to cheers in 2010. Obligations were out. Promises were in. Only Bolivia stood against it. The chair ignored the UNFCCC requirement for consensus and the Cancun decision was steamrollered through. Bolivia, a small and poor country, subsequently fired its chief negotiator rather than risk further isolation.

The \$100 billion a year pledge was carried through the next five CoPs to be written into the Paris Agreement at CoP 21 in 2015. Come 2020, as expected, the promise had not been kept even within the fuzzy definition of ‘mobilising’.

So how do they lie?

1. By refusing any working definition of climate finance. So no-one knows what counts and the technically expert rich countries can add it up any way they please. ‘Mobilising’ is pure genius for the purpose. Private capital is ever obscure and ducks behind ‘commercial confidentiality’ at the first whiff of scrutiny.
2. By exaggeration. Big figures boggle the brain but the numbers shrink on scrutiny, with the noughts dropping off the end. The greenness of funding is also exaggerated, particularly when private capital issues ‘green bonds’ which may be half green at best.
3. By claiming innovation in climate finance, which merely obscures new debts.
4. By deploying very clever technical experts to produce highly technical reports which, on scrutiny, turn out to be ideological justifications. The expertise lies in dressing up the World Bank’s economic ideology in technical jargon.
5. By ‘blending’ commercial and concessionary loans into climate finance deals which end up costing the recipient as much or even much more than commercial loans.



6. By calling themselves ‘donors’ even when the grant portion is small. Overall, the larger part of climate finance is loan, not grant.
 7. By pretending that climate finance is additional to traditional overseas development aid (ODI). Some is but much isn’t. It’s merely ODI rebranded and is taken from support for health, education and other social goods.
 9. By claiming spending in the ‘donor’ country – on those very expensive experts amongst other things – as part of the funding transferred to the recipient. This is typical of ODI and particularly galling when recipients must pay back loans for advice designed to benefit ‘donors’ and donor country investors. By reproducing the forms and practices of ODI, the ‘donors’ retain power in the relationship with recipients.
 9. By promoting insurance as climate finance. Except, of course, that the poor do not have the means to pay for it; insurers tend to bail out with their profits as the risks increase; and some risks are certainties – like small islands sinking beneath the waves of the rising sea – and uninsurable. Meanwhile, the question of responsibility – of who done it – is erased.
 10. By neglecting the promise that adaptation and mitigation would receive equal funding. But adaptation doesn’t make a profit so ‘mobilised’ capital doesn’t go there. So, with deep concern, promise again what you will neglect again.
 11. Rising seas, fiercer storms, hotter heatwaves, longer droughts, more intense wildfires all add up to ‘loss and damage’ which is not to be contemplated under climate finance – in case someone asks who done it.
 12. By entwining climate finance with carbon trading: not only a false solution to climate change but a way of disguising land grabs and the dispossession of poor people as a public good. This form of mendacity is set to rise exponentially with a new round of carbon trading given the green light at CoP26 in Glasgow.
- Glasgow was called the finance CoP. Perhaps to be known as the liars CoP. CoP 27 in Sharm el-Sheik will be about consolidating the rules to make profiteering look like generosity. The road to Scams el-Shaik leads to another theatre of lies. 🌞



Community protest against dirty steel giant AMSA

by Tsepang Molefe

On the 9th of June 2022, communities of Sharpeville and Bophelong gathered outside ArcelorMittal South Africa Ltd's (AMSA's) main plant in Vanderbijlpark to protest against ongoing pollution, non-compliance, failure to engage meaningfully with fenceline communities and unclear plans to decarbonise its operations.

The protest was preceded by AMSA's annual shareholders meeting, held on the 19th of May 2022. Community groups were refused permission to protest at the time of the AGM due to the two-week-long AMSA worker strike, led by the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) over inadequate wages.

Despite AMSA's revenue being two-thirds higher than in 2020, it reduced its environmental spend from R151 million to R64 million in the last financial year. This is a worrying trend given AMSA's history of pollution and environmental non-compliance.

Shareholder activists from VEJA (Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance), groundWork and the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) attended the AGM to ask questions related to AMSA's ongoing environmental non-compliance, including soil and water contamination as well as air pollution; lack of meaningful community engagement; and its insufficient and opaque climate commitments. ☀





The start of Women's Month brings good news!



Kirsten Youens, founder and executive director of ALLRISE, was awarded third place in the category of outstanding human rights activist, social justice activist, and pro bono woman lawyer at the Woza Africa Awards recently.

WOZA AWARDS are presented each year to women lawyers in Africa in recognition of their outstanding dedication, achievements and contribution to the profession, whether it be services, legal education, human rights or the pro bono sector.

<https://mailchi.mp/30a74e53c98e/the-start-of-womens-month-brings-good-news?e=8a78a68d37>

As a non-profit clinic, ALLRISE need funding to do their work. If you would like to support them, they would be very grateful! Head to this link to donate: <https://allrise.org.za/donations/>

