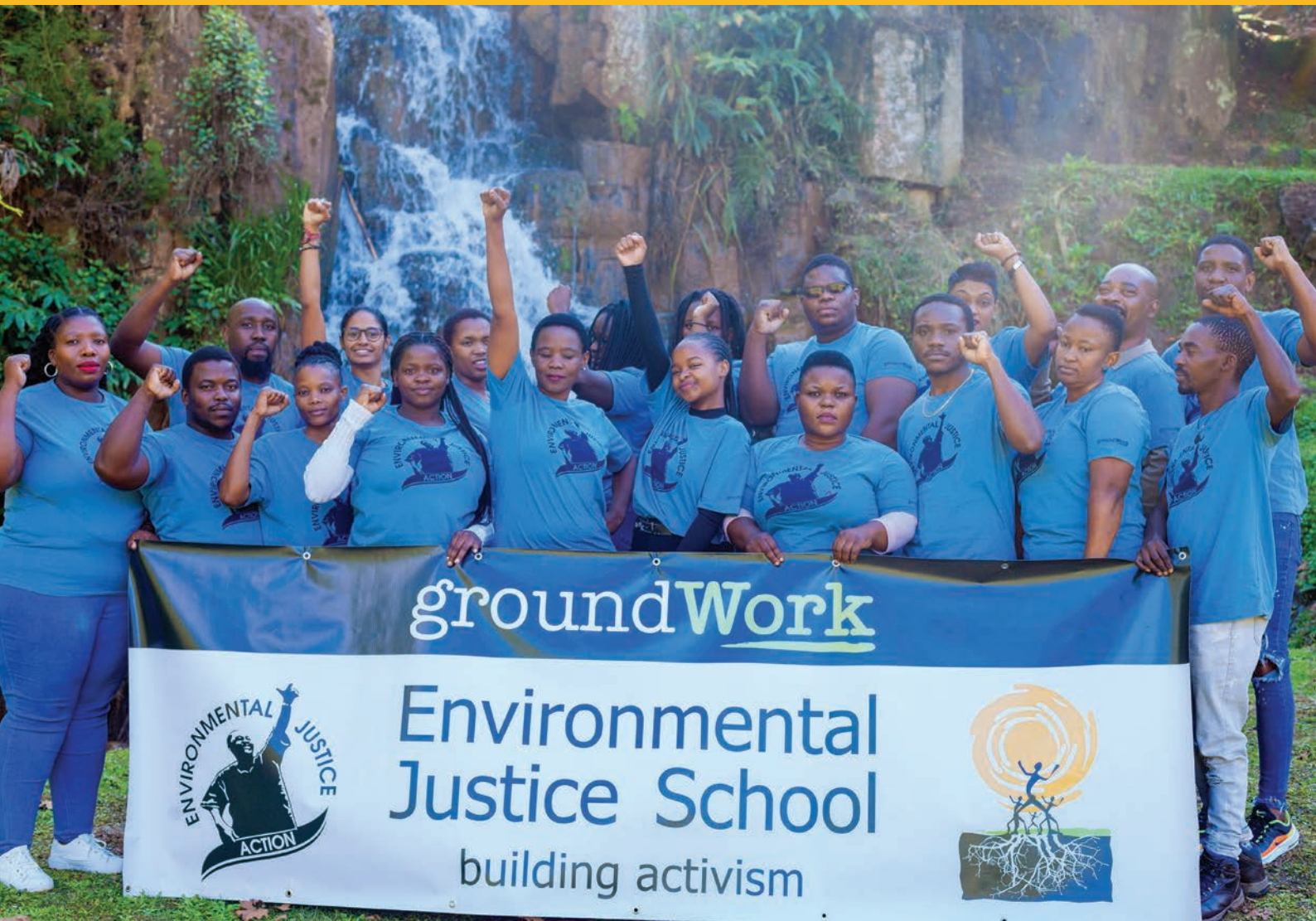




GROUNDWORK



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

Strengthening movements in Africa

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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 Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is Judy Bell. The other trustees are: Farid Esack, Richard Lyster, Angela Conway and Johan Riekert.

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Photo by FoE

From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



Dear Friends

It has been a very exciting second quarter to 2023. groundWorkers have been busy with projects that range from working with waste pickers in the Durban Warwick triangle, South Africa's largest market place, to challenging for a world free of plastics in Paris. From pushing for a public debate on green hydrogen at the Presidential Climate Commission to working with movement partners organising for real socially-owned renewables. We hosted our first Environmental Justice School for the Africa Coal Network in April and the annual South African school in May. It is a stressful, busy time, but we are excited to be able to be at the cutting edge of struggle for environmental justice and an open democracy in this global phase of a just transition.

While many South Africans are feeling deflated by Eskom and the political crisis around the crumbling of our national energy provider, reflecting back over the last twelve months we have much to be positive about. In July 2022, the president addressed us on the energy crisis. He called on "all South Africans to be part of the solution", called for investment in rooftop solar, and called for the development of feed-in tariffs for electricity so that those with solar can gain some income from the energy they produce on their roofs.

While we see the crumbling of municipalities around us, it is important to look deeper – there is some hope. More than 100 municipalities are working on systems to facilitate solar rooftop energy development, and 40 municipalities already have feed-in tariffs. But the fear is that this only caters for the wealthy. There has been "*a massive surge of private investment* in electricity generation which continues to outstrip expectations," says the Presidency.

In the first quarter of this year the National Energy Regulator of South Africa registered RE projects with a value of 2427 MW. In the budget speech by Minister Kubayi of Human Settlements, the minister said that "all subsidised houses that are being build will be provided with solar panels, and rainwater harvesting devices"[sic] from April 2023. These are achievements by government that we have been pushing for. We need to own them and celebrate them.

We spent a day reflecting on the above when we hosted our planning meeting for year two of our Energy Democracy Project – a partnership between Abahlali baseMjondolo, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, Sustainable Energy Africa, Vukani Environmental Movement and groundWork – that seeks to democratise energy production and provision that will result in meaningful social ownership of renewable energy. We recognised that our demands – delivered in countless memoranda over the years – are being responded to by the powers that be, albeit slowly.

But Promise Mabilo of Vukani articulately warned the meeting that they are "planning with our ideas, but without us". So, we need to ask the president: Is it only those who can afford to put solar on their roofs who will benefit from democratising energy? And we have to ask Minister Kubayi: How is providing a single solar panel to the poor going to solve the energy crisis and democratise the energy system in SA? From research done globally it is clear that one cannot get meaningful energy from a single solar panel.

We need to find ways to ensure that those who are poor do not get the crumbs of RE, but rather are integrated into the RE system so that they are part of the system of the future and have agency in that



system. And this can only be done if government policy and implementation seek to bring the masses of South Africa into the energy system meaningfully, rather than as an afterthought. We need that “*massive surge of private investment*” to be matched and gone beyond by a “*massive surge of public investment for the public good*”. We cannot just hope for private RE, as suggested by our first Electricity Minister, Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, who suggests a 15 000 MW additional RE in a “mega bid window”.

No one in South Africa should be without energy; no one in South Africa should think that energy is a mere flick of a switch. Democratising energy can be the basis of a more democratic and regenerative economy, one that seeks to answer people’s needs first – unlike the plans of Germany, which is seeking to import our RE via green hydrogen, and corporate profits in mega bid windows. Democratising energy can deliver the truly just energy transition that we call for in our Just Transition Open Agenda, and that the president promises in the Just Transition Framework.

So, while we can be all doom and gloom, our organising for justice is delivering.

We recently bade farewell to Melissa Fourie, the founding director of the Centre for Environmental Rights. Melissa will be missed, but Melissa and Wandi Phama have done a great job in taking the Centre through a transition process and I look forward to working with the new-look Centre alongside Wandi, Palesa and Majury.

While we are thinking hard about how to make the Deadly Air judgement a reality, Kusile, which is at the heart of the polluted Mpumalanga – and because of this was developed with pollution reduction equipment – crumbled on us because of poor design, workmanship

and who knows what else. Now we have to consider the proposal to not use pollution reduction equipment and allow for the pollution to go straight into the air, without going through filters, which will result in increased health impacts and deaths.

In the ongoing energy justice crisis, we cannot ignore the fact that Karpowership, the Türkiye floating power ships, will just not go away. Mozambique will not allow their new proposal because it would “be inconsistent with Mozambique’s climate commitment” but at the same time our Department of Transport is opening harbours to them. They are back challenging once again to set up shop in South Africa.

In April, I had the privilege of finally getting to Lamu, Kenya. groundWork has worked with Save Lamu for about a decade now, pushing back on the ludicrous proposal to place a coal-fired power station in the peace of this garden of Eden. It was good to be in a place where we have stopped coal. The gathering in Lamu brought together community and NGO people from around the world, but also primarily from the Congo. Listening to the stories of war, death and militia from the Congolese, there is no doubt in my mind that our Just Transition Open Agenda needs another pillar, and that is saying no to militarism and the armaments industry and yes to dialogue and peace.

Finally, we also have a newbie with us. Siphesihle Mvundla has joined the Climate and Energy Justice Team as the Energy Democracy project officer. Another young person in groundWork. Welcome, S’Phe.

So, the struggle continues. A Luta Continua.

Till next time, Bobby 🌀



ACN EJ School for Activists

by Jeanne Prinsloo and Tsholofelo Sepotokele

The groundWork Environmental Justice Education (EJE) campaign engaged in an exciting new project, the African Coal Network Environmental Justice School (ACN EJS) which took place from 16 to 29 April 2023. It hosted 14 activists from several African countries at the Centre at African Enterprise (AE) outside Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, a green and conducive venue with its spacious green grounds and a tranquil atmosphere.

The school was spearheaded by Africa Coal Network (ACN), which sets out to contribute to building a people's movement against fossil fuels and the extractive economy and for a people-centred just transition to a regenerative economy.

ACN staff identified the participants from organisations that are part of their network chapters and who resist fossil fuels and extractivism. Like a minor league of African nations, they hailed from Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as ACN co-ordinator Nerissa Anku, who is also from Ghana. Unfortunately, six of the selected participants couldn't attend. Those from Ghana, Kenya, Togo and Nigeria

were prevented from joining the group because of delays either in receiving their passports or their entry visas into South Africa.

The school curriculum was designed along the Freirean lines of People's Education. It drew on the conceptual frame that groundWork has developed for its annual EJS, but was designed to meet the specific and shared needs and contexts of the participants. The school was driven by a clear purpose – to work towards a people-centred just transition, moving from an extractive to a regenerative economy. This approach goes beyond simply a transition from fossil fuel to renewables, but is also about settlements, housing, water, sewerage, land, food, transport and pretty much everything else – about the workers in fossil fuel industries, but also about communities polluted by those industries and about everyone whom the system makes poor.

Most of all, it was concerned with changing relations of power between people, about people's democratic inclusion, and about the creation of a more equal society where everyone – women and men – can live well with each other and with the earth. This is consistent with the grant purpose submitted to the



Participants from the first Africa Coal Network Environmental Justice School. Credit: groundWork



funders (The Sunrise Project) to strengthen and build the people's movement against fossil fuels and the extractive economy.

Consistent with the popular education approach, the programme began with the participants mapping their worlds and sharing their contexts and challenges, the first step to creating a network. They shared their stories of how they and their communities experience the dangerous and negative impacts of the fossil fuel industries. They told of the existing degradation of land, air, water and people resulting from existing fossil fuel mining, from Hwangwe in Zimbabwe to Kijumba Village and Albertine Graben in Uganda, to Rukwa in Tanzania and to Maamba in Zambia. They told of resistance to anticipated developments in their countries, for example coal in the Okavango in Botswana. We also learnt about the cross-country projects in the pipeline – in fact, quite literally in the pipeline. Consider the proposed East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), which is controversially planned to run from Uganda to Tanzania, which will not only impact on the environment but also detrimentally affect humans.

The programme took them to critique the global order of the economy. They approached it as a case study of the life cycle of the mobile phone and interrogated how exploitation occurs within a linear economy. The participants constructed a large wall timeline of the histories of exploitation and resistance. In this way, the interconnections between the extractive fossil fuel industries were connected to the history of colonisation too, and to the climate crisis, a consequence of the global extractive economy.

Two sessions were tailored to the specific challenges relating to mobilising against the fossil fuel industries in Africa. One of them addressed constitutional provisions and legal redress. Lucien Limacher from Natural Justice importantly differentiated between different moments in the extractive industry process and the kinds of activist interventions and resistance appropriate to each, for example at the pre-extraction, extraction and post-extraction moments.

These important insights were complemented by the session on funding and financing extraction (facilitated by Emma Schuster and Ayabulela Quzu from Just Share). What was a powerful recognition among the participants was how extraction is financed,

the idea of equities, and, as activists, to know about who is benefiting and how it is necessary to follow the money trail.

The intensive programme addressed a range of other topics from power, gendered power relations and community health to waste issues. Alongside these sessions ran an activist strand that aimed to provide participants with an activist framework. It also set out to support them in planning a project to undertake on their return home, whether it is a new activist project or one already in process. This strand dealt with visions, goals, objectives, planning and communicating.

The ACN EJS was a great success. We believe that it achieved its goals most successfully and this pilot school has convinced us of the value of conducting future just transition schools for activists across Africa. 🌍

The list below will give you a sense of the kind of projects that the participants will be pursuing in their ongoing struggle against fossil fuels extraction.

- No more oil in Kijumba village (Uganda) – Centre for Citizens Conserving Environment & Management (CECIC)
- Towards a Just Transition Rukwa (Tanzania) – Foundation for Environmental management and Campaign Against Poverty (FEMAPO)
- Mchenga for renewable energy; MC-4-RE (Malawi) – Youth for Environment and Sustainable Development (YSD)
- Save the Okavango (Botswana) – Botswana Khwedom Council and Tane Ko Temahane
- Yaounde South Regenerated (Cameroon) – Green Life Act (GLA)
- Empowering Oil Extraction affected communities especially women to fight and defend their land rights in the Albertine Graben (Uganda) – Women for Green Economy Movement Uganda (WoGEM)
- Cease Hwange Coal Fires (Zimbabwe) – Greater Hwange Residents' Trust (GWRT)
- Maamba Free From Coal (Zambia) – Musa Community Development and Sustainability Organisation (MCDS)





Maiden ACN EJ School

by Nerissa Anku

In April 2023, the Africa Coal Network organised its maiden Environmental Justice School (ACN EJS 2023) for activists in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The primary goal of the ACN EJS 2023 was to strengthen the capacity of members to work against the fossil fuel industry and the extractive economy that privileges corporates and investor profits. The school had a focus to produce knowledgeable and skilled African activists who will act and mobilise people for environmental justice action and also call for a Just Transition in Africa.

The first cohort of learners were members of the network living in eight African countries including Botswana, Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The curriculum of the school was designed to foster resistance to the extraction of fossil fuels that are the primary contributing factor to climate change, alongside other forms of extractivism through mineral extraction and deforestation.

The school provided an opportunity for activists to take a closer look at the environmental justice issues affecting their communities and the reason for these undesirable occurrences, and to discern the actions that are needed to avert the situation. The topic of power relations between people, in particular the inclusion of ordinary people in decision making, was comprehensively covered during the two-week period. The participants were introduced to power relations within a framework to challenge the narrative of Africa being powerless, and to empower leaders of a pan-African Environmental Justice movement. The forms of power, the faces of power (invisible power, ideology and socialisation) and gender power relations in an extractive economy were discussed. The participants identified democratic inclusion of local communities in decision making and the implementation of existing policies on environmental protection as key to building a more equal society in a regenerative economy.

In the neutral environment of the school, trainers encouraged participants to use their power within and

power without to foster resistance against the global extractive economy and funding and extraction of fossil fuels in Africa. The participants were also tasked with identifying specific constitutional provisions and legal redress that relate to their struggles and that they could lean on in their countries.

As part of the entry requirements for the school, participants identified environmental justice projects that they intend to carry forward in their communities upon graduation. For this reason, the programme of the school was conceived to gradually assist participants to develop action plans for their proposed projects. The activist strand of the environmental justice school programme was efficient in guiding participants to contextualise their projects, set relevant goals and objectives, and to outline and plan activities towards the achievement of their goals. Also, the activist strand featured campaigners from groundWork, who shared their work and experiences in order to inspire the activists for environmental justice action. Here, the Health Campaign, Climate and Energy Campaign, Coal Campaign, Media Campaign and the Zero Waste Management Campaign teams of groundWork interacted with participants.

During the 2023 ACN EJS, the evenings and weekends were as interesting as the weekdays. Participants were treated to fun-packed activities such as movie nights, group discussions, reading assignments, a picnic and an excursion to further add meaning to the topics covered. The participants paid a visit to the Mandela capture site monument to learn more about the history of exploitation and resistance in South Africa. Jeanne Prinsloo, the Environmental Justice Education Coordinator at groundWork, planned and coordinated the school with support from Tsholofelo Sepotokele, groundWork's Environmental Justice Education Manager.

Overall, the maiden ACN Environmental Justice School was a success, achieving its goal and exceeding the expectations of the participants.



Learning exchange inspires Guinean community activists

by Michelle Cruywagen

In February 2023, a delegation of 18 community activists from Guinea, West Africa, joined fellow South African community activists to participate in a learning exchange hosted by groundWork and The 11th Hour Project.

Guinea and South Africa both face challenges of poverty, and similarly both countries are exporters of significant mineral wealth. While Guinea is a leading bauxite exporter, mainly to China for the production of aluminium, Guineans also experience the destructive impacts of mining on their environment daily.

During the 10-day learning exchange, the Guinean delegation visited South Africa's most heavily polluted mining areas, including the Highveld Protected Area (Mpumalanga), the Vaal-Triangle (Free State and Gauteng) and the Platinum Belt in the North-West Province. The tour also included visits to the Apartheid Museum, Sharpeville Museum, Vaal Technorama/Coal Museum and Constitution Hill. At each site, the Guinean participants were warmly welcomed by community activists and their communities, who generously shared the histories of their organisations, their experiences of the devastating health effects of extractive industries and their approaches to resisting dirty energy and strengthening movement building.

Guinean delegates expressed a keen interest in land displacement caused by mining and shared the multiple challenges they face. They also enquired about:

- how compensation is handled;
- how communities mobilise;
- how ecosystems such as rivers are valued;
- what resources are available to communities; and
- how to support people who do not want to be relocated.

Some of these questions were addressed during a visit to the Bravo Community, who live in a relocated community adjacent to Kusile Power Station, located close to Emalahleni in Mpumalanga Province. Further-

more, relocation was also addressed by Eric Mokuoa of Benchmarks in Rustenberg in the Platinum Belt, where 80 households were relocated in the late 1990s.

During community-based engagements, activists Promise Mabilo (VEM), Thomas Mnguni (groundWork), Samson Mokoena (VEJA) and David Ramohanoe (Benchmarks) shared “tried and tested” approaches, tools and processes they use to strengthen their mobilisation efforts and litigation strategies. The activists highlighted that the false promises made by extractive industries very often don't materialise. For example, the unemployment rate in Mpumalanga is higher than the national average despite intensive industrialisation.

Thomas Mnguni focused on the importance of *building your own evidence base* to counter misleading narratives and mentioned the South African Constitution, in particular:

- Section 24 The Right to an Environment that is not harmful to health and well-being;
- Section 32 The Right to Access Information and
- Section 33 The Right to Administrative Action.

Thomas further stressed the importance of understanding key laws such as the Mineral, Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPDRA), National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) and National Water Act (NWA) and special reports by groundWork, including *Broken Promises: The Failure of South Africa's priority areas for air pollution – time for action* and Dr Mike Holland's Report on the *Health Impacts of Coal Power Plants*.

During a visit to Vukani Environmental Movement (VEM), Promise Mabilo focused on the Deadly Air court judgement, which was handed down in March 2022 and in which the court ruled that Highveld Communities have a constitutional right to clean air. Promise invited our Guinean visitors to use precedent-setting judgements to achieve greater accountability and cautioned, “If you don't take action then the system



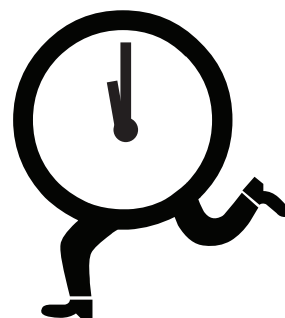


A delegation of community activist from Guinea during a coal fields visit in Mpumalanga. Credit groundWork

will persist”. Promise also introduced delegates to the Air Beam Air Quality Monitoring System, which communities can use to measure particulate matter in the air and then use the measurements to submit evidence-based complaints.

In the Vaal-Triangle, Samson Mokoena highlighted the endurance required to challenge big steel industries such as ArcelorMittal. Samson explained that it took VEJA two decades of ongoing legal action before they finally won a milestone case in the High Court. “This victory brings a lot of hope as it paves the way for more cases to enter the courtroom,” says Samson. 🌞

The 11th Hour Project was established in 2006 and works to restore a balanced relationship between people and planet. The foundation partners with communities around the world in working for renewable energy, resilient food systems, healthy oceans and the protection of human rights.





Human rights defenders at risk



by Robby Mokgalaka

The shrinking of civic space is increasing with human rights defenders (HRDs) receiving threats and intimidations, and to some extent getting killed in their line of duty. These incidents inspire fear in the hearts of the defenders, compromising their ability to do their work diligently and freely.

In South Africa, the HRDs unfortunately don't enjoy the protection they deserve from the government, as they are perceived to be anti-development groupings. There have been many incidents where human rights defenders have been killed, and the government has said nothing to discourage the killings. It is very sad that the government fails to understand that the defenders are doing the very job that the government should be doing, which is protecting its own citizens.

The impunity that coal mining corporations have in their illegal conduct and violation of people's rights in terms of Section 24 of the Constitution has led to the arrogance of the corporation. It has encouraged further imposition on people's environmental rights by corporations. The government is morally and constitutionally bound to protect the rights of its people against any form of violation and human abuse. This constitutional duty should not be selectively based on who you are or the type of work you do, as that may amount to an unfair discrimination.

The passive response by the government in protecting the HRDs led to the arrangement of an annual protest in the Somkhele area of the KwaZulu-Natal province, where Mam Fikile Ntshangase was killed. The protest is a direct remonstrance against the South African Police Services (SAPS) at the provincial level, demanding the immediate arrest of the killers of Mam Ntshangase.

Life After Coal (LAC) decided to take the issue of the safety of the HRDs further. A special focus has been adopted after realising that the scourge is spiralling out of control and the struggle on the

ground is affected. The partnership is starting a strong campaign in response to the situation with strong and well-thought-out short- and long-term objectives.

The short-term objective is to engage with the government for protection of the HRDs. The government would be required to speak publicly to discourage the killings, abuse of HRDs and violation of their rights. Government will also be encouraged to develop a plan in response to the outcry.

The second objective, which is long-term, is to have a constant engagement with the government to develop a policy that recognises the HRDs. We realise that it will take a while before we achieve the desired results, so we have developed long-term strategies to keep the struggle going until we reach the goal.

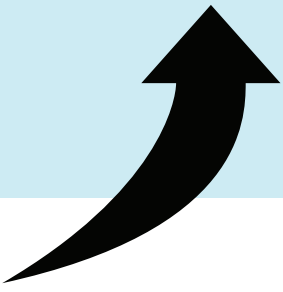
The plan is also to engage with the South African national parliament on demands based on these two objectives. In this plan, the affected communities will be bused to parliament to speak about how their lives are being targeted and the failure on the government side to protect them.

Another opportunity presented itself whereby one of our campaigners will be trained on advocacy skills by the Swiss organisation International Service for Human Rights. The program entails imparting knowledge on the United Nations' mechanisms in the Human Rights Council. Strategic approaches are shared on how to make sure that one's message is well received and responded to by the United Nations.

The last ten days of the program will be completed in Geneva, and arrangements will be made to meet with the UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders at the United Nations headquarters. The experience and skills will come in handy in boosting the HRD campaign to reach the global community in the quest to force the government to make amends to the situation.

When people are united, change is inevitable. 🌍





HEJN Revival

by Thomas Mnguni

In 2015, different community organisations met and took a decision to form a regional network that they could work through in order to fight injustices. At the time, at least 14 community-based organisations signed up as founding members of the Highveld Environmental Justice Network (HEJN).

The HEJN was set a task to mobilise other groups within the Highveld. HEJN had a vision to promote awareness of, and advocating for, environmental justice within the Highveld.

Some of their objectives were to:

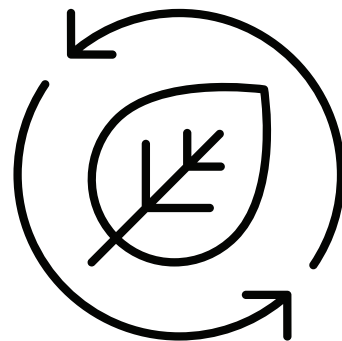
- * seek to create unity amongst environmental and social justice, faith, labour, youth and other relevant organisations based on the Highveld in order to have a common voice on environmental justice issues;
- * be a platform of solidarity for local communities against environmental injustices relevant to the Highveld and/or its people;
- * educate, organise and mobilise with organisations and the public on environmental justice issues relevant to the Highveld and/or its people
- * conduct research and report on environmental injustices in the Highveld or those relevant to the Highveld and/or its people; and
- * respond to grassroots concerns on environmental injustices relevant to the Highveld and/or its people

Along the way, some of the organisations couldn't sustain themselves and this led to HEJN becoming dysfunctional. But in 2022, organisations from Carolina, Witbank, Middelburg, Secunda, Ermelo and Phola met during November for their own planning. Out of this planning they took a decision to revive HEJN. What is expected is for the network to support the growth of their members and mobilise others.

In 2023, the organisations met in Eastdene Hall, Middelburg, to formalise the process around the revival of HEJN. One of the key decisions was that it is important for community organisations to develop a common position and fight as a collective because our struggles are similar.

The resolutions speak volumes, as most of the time we fight our struggles in silos and it becomes easy to give up or to lose, as there is no one around to support or join you. It also comes at a critical time when everyone is demanding justice in terms of development and that ordinary residents/people should influence and be involved in decision-making process.

Lastly, the revival of HEJN speaks volumes in terms of how environmental justice movements are beginning to reshape their struggle and push for solidarity. 🌀



Loadshedding – an added load on the healthcare system



by Azeeza Rangunwala

Rolling blackouts, implemented to keep the grid stable, are destabilising an already strained health care system. With the responsibility and duty of care, keeping patients alive has become harder for health workers in South African hospitals. Globally, at least one billion people access health facilities that lack reliable access to electricity. Regarded as a basic resource, electricity is required for lighting, ventilation, communication, water supply, life-saving medical procedures and infection prevention. The lack of electrification support of the healthcare sector is especially detrimental due to the high burden of disease in South Africa, with problems such as maternal and child health, HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis, non-communicable diseases and injury. Our system is reactive and not preventative; hence, each burden of disease is independently impacted by power outages.

The power outages also lead to an increased patient load for a variety of reasons linked to loadshedding. People turn toward unsafe sources of energy such as paraffin, gas, petrol, plastic and wood. The frequency of loss of basic services exacerbates several mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. There is existing inequity regarding access to healthcare. Traffic accidents increase due to loadshedding as traffic lights are affected and there is increased road rage. Issues of safety also affect emergency medical services (EMS) personnel and several health workers have mentioned that they feel unsafe, particularly women.

In Ghana, a link was found between the frequency of power outages at healthcare facilities and mortality in the facilities; the risk of death increased by 43% for each day the power was out for more than two hours. About 80% of the South African population is dependent on public healthcare and are at a higher risk of health complications in the event of electrical failure at a public hospital.

From a hygiene and infection prevention and control aspect, sterilisation of equipment and UV disinfection are directly impacted. Temperature control has an effect on patients' health as buildings are not insulated against the weather. Cold chain items that are temperature sensitive are also affected, reducing efficacy of medication. Refrigeration is not only essential for medication but also for food, and food safety is being compromised.

Diagnostic services are also affected. Where there is no back up power supply, hospitals have to refer patients to larger facilities, adding a burden to EMS. Power surges damage expensive medical equipment and decrease their lifespan. Communication is also affected and delays in relaying important information affect quality of care. Backup diesel generators have blown health budgets as loadshedding stages have increased.

Laheer et al (2019) outlined recommendations for loadshedding preparedness, which include implementation of alternative energy sources and establishing community-based shelters where patients who need technology can access a power supply. With winter approaching, parents of young children using nebulisers have been struggling to ensure continuous medical care. Each health facility has different energy needs and we have to keep in mind that health is also outside of the hospital.

Decentralised renewable energy solutions allow healthcare facilities to be energy independent, avoiding the risk of loadshedding, fuel shortages and price variability. Harmful pollution from on-site diesel generation in health-care facilities has to be reduced, leading to wider community health benefits. This has been a massive challenge for our Global Green Healthy Hospital members that are actively working on reducing their carbon footprints. Reliable electricity also reduces the damage to medical devices caused by low-quality electricity supply. Energy efficiency is





Solar panels at GGHH member Netcare in Alberton. Credit groundWork.

an important consideration for sustainable healthcare and local capacity must be built to achieve long-term operational sustainability.

According to the deputy minister of health, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is conducting a due diligence exercise for the installation of solar panels at public health facilities as part of the department's medium-term intervention. Minister Joe Phaahla had a virtual media briefing in September last year on the impact of loadshedding on the provision of healthcare services and intervention measures, at which he confirmed that generators do not adequately meet the increasing demands during load-shedding in health facilities, with facilities needing to switch off some critical areas, compromising patient care.

While a select few health facilities are exempt from loadshedding, the public healthcare system is under tremendous strain to fulfill their constitutional mandate. The private sector that is gearing for a race to zero is facing the challenge as well. Ensuring consistent renewable power supply contributes to achieving multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. Climate change and the need to make health systems more resilient against its impacts, including extreme weather events, increases the urgency for accelerating electrification. Delaying a just transition is increasing the social cost of inaction. Electrifying health-care facilities through decentralised renewable energy builds climate resilience. Without a reliable electricity supply, universal health coverage is merely an aspiration. 🌞



Health Literacy: an advocacy tool for fenceline communities



by Mafoko Phomane

Strengthening health literacy is pivotal for realising the social, economic and environmental objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially through the lens of environmental justice. Health literacy suggests the attainment of a level of knowledge, and the personal skill and confidence, with which to take action to improve personal and community health by changing lifestyles and living conditions.

At groundWork, improving health literacy for communities in the Mpumalanga Highveld, the Vaal Triangle and parts of KwaZulu-Natal provides the foundation which enables communities to participate proactively by advocating for improved health, by being at the forefront of community action for health, and by propelling government to meet its responsibilities to address health and health equity through a justice lens. Under this premise, groundWork has developed its health literacy approach to address the health literacy needs of fenceline communities affected by air pollution from coal-fired power stations in South Africa.

As an environmental justice NGO, groundWork works with community-based organisations in the priority areas declared “affected by air pollution” from coal-fired power stations and other mining activities. Communities identify their own concerns and actions in relation to corresponding decisions and actions taken by powerful stakeholders, such as government and corporations. One of their most pressing concerns is air pollution and how it has impacted their health and destroyed their local environments. We aim to support community-based organisations that are desperate to be involved in their own environmental governance.

A justice and rights-based approach

At groundWork, the Environmental Health Campaign and the Coal Campaign together lead the Health Literacy initiative. This enterprise is rooted in a rights-based approach, the core of which draws on the South

African Constitution, with a particular focus on the Bill of Rights, which states:

- (1) *The Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom.*
- (2) *The State must respect, protect, promote and fulfill the rights in the Bill of Rights.*

We also unpack different sections of the Constitution, including Sections 24, 27 and 28, in efforts to ensure that the rights of children are immediately attainable. In an effort to instil hope in our participants, who are mostly frustrated and disheartened by the state’s failure to uphold these rights, we celebrate our recent victory in the Deadly Air court judgment which sets an important precedent and has been hailed as a “David and Goliath” case – demanding the people’s right, in Section 24 (a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health and wellbeing. The state was found to be in breach of that right. The judgment declared that Section 24 of the Constitution is immediately applicable to communities in the Highveld.

We highlight aspects of the National Health Act 61 of 2003, which not only creates the foundation and framework for the healthcare system but also encourages users of the health system to participate in clinic committees, hospital boards and in budget and health policy-making processes. Based on this guidance, as a further call to action, we also implore communities to exercise their right to complain, compliment and make suggestions for an improved health system that will work for them, and, if all else fails, to reach out to the Office of Health Standards Compliance, which has been tasked with ensuring quality and safety in healthcare.

Umoya Impilo Modules

Our two modules on Air Pollution, for which the overall title is *Umoya Impilo* (Air Is Life), address



the health impacts of air pollution on fenceline communities, particularly on children, as well as legislation on air quality – the National Environmental Management Air Quality Act 39 of 2004 (NAQA), and Air Quality Management Plans for the Priority Areas. These modules facilitate learning and create awareness of the health impacts of air pollution on human health, and aim to promote activism, build movements and support groundWork’s community partners in the Mpumalanga Highveld, Vaal Priority Areas, and parts of KwaZulu-Natal.

A basic understanding of health literacy imbues patient groups and communities with the confidence needed to demand their right to health. More importantly, health literacy teaches them *how* to demand a health plan for priority areas, in keeping with the principle of restorative justice, to redress the legacy of air pollution and its health impacts on marginalised fenceline communities.

In improving people’s access to health information, and facilitating their capacity to use the information effectively, health literacy becomes critical for empowerment. We applaud the success of the Treatment Action Campaign’s (TAC’s) flagship treatment literacy programme, which facilitated a model of highly informed grassroots activism. The treatment literacy program taught TAC members and the general public the science and treatment of HIV and AIDS, TB and adherence to treatment for other diseases through informative materials that were disseminated by means of localised social mobilisation campaigns.

The environmental justice struggle is a struggle for health in that it seeks to address the social and environmental determinants of health. We call upon local health practitioners to urgently demonstrate their support for environmental justice struggles, by promoting this health literacy approach in their public statements and professional engagements. 🌱

Excerpt from the Umoya Impilo Community Science Toolkit - Module 1

But just because you cannot see what is in the air, it does not mean that it is not harming you, and the government and industry have a responsibility to people to see to it that the air that we breathe does not make us sick.

PARTICULATE MATTER

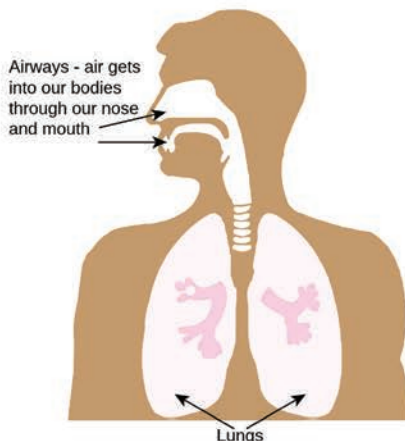
I learned that one of the reasons that my boy Sibusiso has asthma is because of the **particulate matter** that he breathes in all the time. Because children jump around a lot, they often pant and then they breathe in a lot of air. As their bodies are still developing, they can be badly affected by what they breathe in.

If we could look inside Sibusiso, we would be able to see the air passages and inside the lungs, and it would look a bit like this:

WORDS & CONCEPTS EXPLAINED

Particulate matter: These are very small things that are in the air. They are often too small to see. It is things like the smallest parts of dust, pollen, soot and smoke.

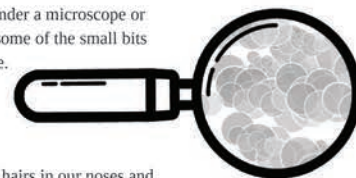
These small pieces are given a number to show how small they are: PM₁₀ is big enough to feel or see, but PM_{2.5} is so small that you never notice it, even when you breathe it in.



Industrial pollution makes the lungs dirty. Small particles can stick to parts of the lung, and this means that the lungs cannot work properly anymore



If we could look at the air that we breathe under a microscope or magnifying glass, we would be able to see some of the small bits that are in the air, that we can't normally see.



Some of those small bits are stopped by the hairs in our noses and by small hairs in the airways. They are the kinds of things that make us cough and sneeze. Other bits are so very small that they are not stopped and they get into our lungs. From our lungs they can pass into our blood, and then they can get into other parts of our body.

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM IF WE BREATHE IN SMALL BITS?

The small bits that we breathe in may be or may carry chemicals that can make trouble in our bodies. Also, the continuous irritation of the small bits in the lungs can make the lungs weak. When people breathe in dirty air all the time, they can get diseases like asthma or other breathing diseases.

They can also get sicknesses that affect the heart. This can be a heart that does not beat properly, or even a heart-attack.

Many kinds of cancer are caused by things that we breathe in.

PEOPLE CAN DIE FROM AIR POLLUTION

Each year, more than 7 million people in the world die from sickness that is caused by dirty air. That is a lot of people! So that you can compare, about 1 million people die each year in traffic accidents. About 1 million die of HIV and AIDS. About 1 million die from TB.

We know that lots is done to try to reduce how many people die in road accidents and from HIV, AIDS and TB. But it does not seem like much is done to help the many more people who die from bad air.



Bad smells in the air are a sign that there is something bad in the air



Making zero waste work with waste pickers



by Asiphile Khanyile

Over recent years, zero waste has become an important vision and action that defines how waste is managed. Zero waste is a game changer and an opportunity that plays an important role in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, which accelerates climate change. Fundamentally, zero waste asks us to change actively, collectively and inclusively the manner in which waste should be managed. Hence, the definition of zero waste outlined by the Zero Waste International Alliance (ZWIA) is

“the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of all products, packaging and materials without burning, and without discharges to land, waste or air that threaten the environment or human health”

and it compels us to look at the entire lifecycle of waste which is: extraction, production, consumption, collection and disposal.

Reading the definition above, my mind immediately zooms to the waste pickers who are central to a zero-waste system. Luckily for me, I have had the privilege of working with waste pickers on the ground and that has enabled me to delve deeper into their world.

Firstly, in a zero-waste system waste pickers are recognised as an integral part because of their significant contribution towards saving landfill airspace, diversion of recyclable materials, keeping the recycling value chain viable and climate change mitigation. Hence, the definition mentioned above opens up an opportunity for us to continue to engage and work with waste pickers.

Since 2021, I have worked with waste pickers through groundWork's Warwick Zero Waste Project (WZW), the South African Waste Pickers Association

(SAWPA) and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA). I have learned that waste is a source of livelihood for waste pickers, and that they are also people who hold a pool of knowledge about the recyclable materials. As part of civil society, we have recognised that waste pickers are fundamental to a zero-waste system.

It is important to ensure that waste pickers are not exploited, stigmatised, harassed and excluded. How do we continue to educate our communities about the relationship between zero waste, climate change and waste pickers?

Every time I do my work these are some of the questions that ramble through my mind. Some of the answers to these questions came from the several visits I had in the months of February, March and April 2023 when, as groundWork, we engaged waste pickers from a buy back centre, landfill and on the streets (Free State, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal). From my experience in Warwick and the visits, I have noticed that it is about working collectively, opportunities that foster active participation and engagements, infrastructural support by government – and even the private sector, and capacity support and building for waste pickers that will create the opportunity for waste pickers to thrive in clean, dignified and safe spaces in order to make their work easier.

Mostly, importantly, on some of the visits I saw tons of recyclable materials that could have ended up in landfill, dumpsites or even in the natural environment, diverted. Hence, I was reminded that, for zero waste to work it should ideally NOT be capital intensive, high tech and exclusionary. Instead, for zero waste to work it should be easily accessible, inclusive, low-cost and -tech and viable, and have at the heart of the process, waste pickers. 🌞





*Meeting with waste pickers- Marie Louw Landfill-Gauteng.
Credit: groundwork.*



*Waste Pickers queuing for selling recyclable materials:
Bloemfontein-Free State. Credit: groundwork.*



*Waste buy back centre in Bloemfontein, Free State. Credit:
groundWork.*



*Visit to Use it Waste Beneficiation (RF) NPC site with
groundWork, SAWPA and Use it, Hammersdale, KwaZulu-
Natal. Credit: groundwork.*



Welcome, Siphisihle Mvundla

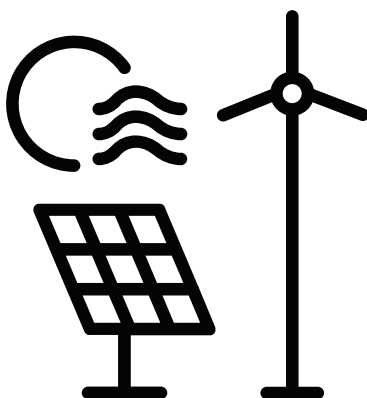


Siphisihle Mvundla joins groundWork as the Energy Democracy Campaigner in the Climate and Energy Justice Campaign. He will be directly involved in a project whose aim is to strengthen and enable social movements in South Africa to engage all tiers of government towards realising renewable energy community solutions that can become implemented at scale. Additionally, he will coordinate groundWork's input to the project as directed and supported by the Climate and Energy Justice campaign manager, as well as work with the project team to ensure that the campaign plan is implemented by all partners and is visible to and recognised/acknowledged by communities and government.

Much of Siphisihle's background has been in various roles in the academic space, at first tutoring and later lecturing Political Ecology in the School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His academic background includes a Master of Science in Environmental Sciences, specifically focused on air quality management in South Africa. He also holds an Honours degree in Development Studies as well as an undergraduate degree in Geography and Environmental Management – all from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He has recently completed a Master of Arts qualification in Development Studies through research in global environmental governance at the same institution.



“Being a part of the groundWork collective is important to me. The Energy Democracy project I am working on is exciting and fresh and now allows communities to drive energy solutions that are community led and socially owned. This project aims to encourage and support project partners from SDCEA, Abahlali baseMjondolo and Vukani Environmental Movement to engage meaningfully with local government, and a host of other actors, towards realising a just transition that allows for renewable energy solutions.”



Green hydrogen and the false solutions bubble

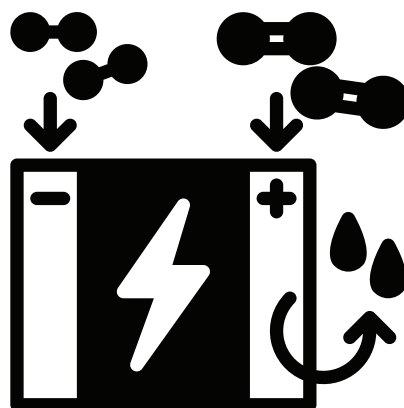
by Bobby Peek

False solutions featured prominently in the recently published sixth synthesis report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), with carbon capture and storage, nature-based solutions and green hydrogen (GH) all being included in the big push for climate action. This also formed the pathways mapping our predicted climate future, while the science showed the world is currently 1.1 degrees Celsius hotter than 1850-1900. The road to 1.5 degrees warming is looking precipitous indeed. But scenario's presenting 2, 3 and 4 degrees are also being included for consideration by politicians, scientists and society.

In Africa, we are faced with the old colonial masters knocking on the door with alms in the form of concessional loans for our just energy transition partnership. A partnership that follows the same extractivist patterns of old, leaving lost livelihoods and broken environmental systems in its wake. South Africa's JET-IP includes three pillars, of which GH features significantly as one pillar. In the first draft of the Green Hydrogen Commercialisation Strategy prepared by the Industrial Development Corporation, no mention of local utilisation was made, the focus being entirely on the export market. A telling reminder that, as we charter new territory for our energy future, the past lingers on.

The story of the fisher folk and local communities of the Northern Cape also needs to be told. The injustice and pain that these communities will continue to endure as their way of life, common lands and heritage are taken away to make way for GH development begs the attention of all South Africans. GH for whom? Development for whom? The Boegoebaai project near Port Nolloth will displace artisanal fishers who have utilised this space for generations. The hectares of solar panel installations required to power the GH and ammonia derivatives plants will dwarf local settlements. The land grabs from communities who only six months ago received their ancestral commons paints a disgraceful picture. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

What do we need to realise the just transition to a social, economic and environmental system that supports and enhances the freedom of all people? Let's phrase the discussion on renewable energy that has increasingly been shown through research to be cost-effective, efficient and responsive, and open to socially owned models where communities and workers are involved. No nascent, untested techno-fixes backed by mountains of public money masked as economic stimulus subsidies, and certainly no bail-outs for the fossil fuel giants, the likes of Sasol included, to pave their new net-zero pathway window decor. 🌞



Stronger together for climate action!

The first gathering of the Climate Action Group was jointly convened by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and groundWork on 2 to 5 May in Johannesburg. Participants were received from various parts of South Africa including Musina, Marapong, Sharpeville, Carolina, Emalahleni, Mtubatuba, Ulundi and South Durban. Discussions were broadly framed on the ever-changing landscape of climate politics and science, and community monitoring and evaluation for the just transition.

After completing a mapping exercise, participants were briefed on the IPCC sixth assessment report, green hydrogen and other false solutions, as well as the Upstream Petroleum Resources Development and Climate Change Bills, and regional climate justice spaces with upcoming events. Day three explored the just transition for each provincial group, identifying the broad areas of monitoring change. A fantastic midday session yielded exceptional clarity on the people's transition, providing input into three sets of indicators directed at communities, local government and the PCC/national government. A brief encounter with the vice-president of FES and his delegation was supported by community panellists, who handled his questions brilliantly. In closing, we left with full hearts and action lists, to return in October. Our Life After Coal team will continue to coordinate community monitoring reporting during this time as a pilot study of this approach.

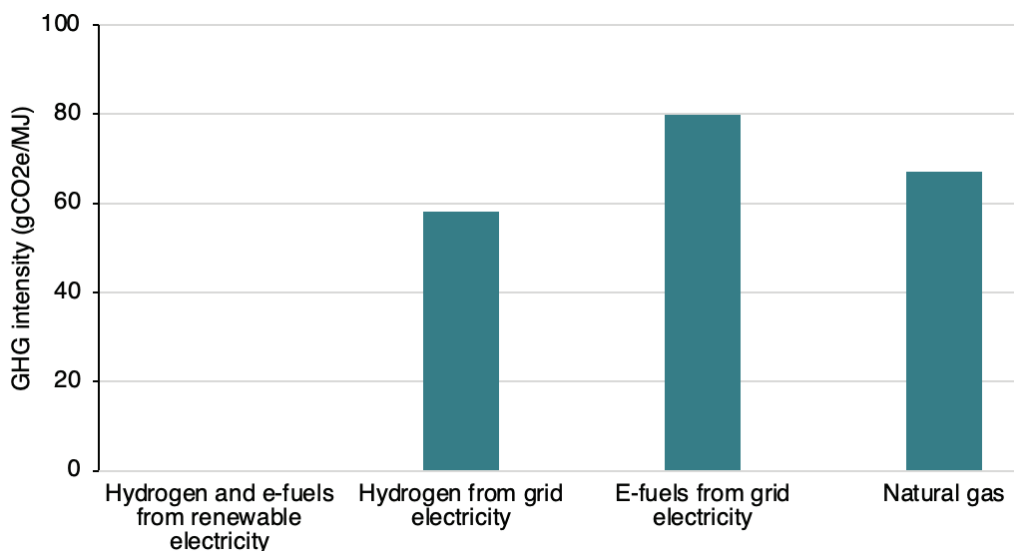
Don't let the industry greenwash green hydrogen

The term “green hydrogen” involves a bit of green washing. “Green” hydrogen and e-fuels (synthetic fuels made from hydrogen and CO₂) are made using electrolysis, which in turn harnesses electricity to split apart water into its elemental components, hydrogen and oxygen. The electricity is hopefully renewable – and it makes a big difference if it's not. If “green” hydrogen and e-fuels are made using regular grid electricity, they can be no better for the environment than fossil fuels.

The figure below shows our calculation of the GHG intensity of a) hydrogen really made from 100% renewable electricity, b) hydrogen made from EU grid electricity in 2030, c) e-fuels made from EU grid electricity in 2030, and d) natural gas. As shown, hydrogen and e-fuels made from 100% renewable electricity really are zero-carbon, but when made from grid electricity, these fuels are little better – or worse – than natural gas. How is this possible when we expect high renewables penetration on the grid by 2030? Because around one-quarter of the energy in the electricity is lost when it's converted to hydrogen, and around one-half is lost for e-fuels, the GHG emissions from the fossil fuels on the grid are essentially magnified in the GHG intensity of the final fuel.

<https://theicct.org/dont-let-the-industry-greenwash-green-hydrogen/>

Figure: Greenhouse gas intensity of hydrogen, e-fuels, and natural gas. Calculated using the GREET model and the projected 2030 grid electricity mix in the progressive scenarios of the EU's Climate Target Plan.





The African waste picker movement

by Carissa Marnece



Quietly, discreetly and in multitudes, we shall inherit the earth

The growing African waste picker movement brings to mind Sylvia Plath's 1960 poem, *Mushrooms*. The poem is a social commentary on women's rights. It uses mushrooms as a metaphor to describe how, despite being unseen and enduring perilous conditions, the mushroom grows in great numbers. From Cairo to Kenya, the struggle of waste pickers for inclusion, recognition and respect is the same across the continent. They have been sidelined for so long, but their efforts to organise and speak truth to power have resulted in the mass mobilisation of many.

The paradox of organising is that once waste pickers reach a state of consciousness about their value and contributions to society, they then identify that there is a whirlwind of further challenges that prevent them from doing their work. However, being organised means that they are now well-placed to address the challenges they encounter. One of these challenges is prejudice from the public.

Through our partner organisations, we got testimonies from waste pickers across Africa about their experiences interacting with their communities. Joseph Smart Usang, a waste picker from Nigeria, said: *"People look at the work I do, and they see it as a dirty job, and because of that they look down on me. One of the things that we need to change is perception. The things we are collecting have value. There is dignity in*



Gift Mongwe chatting to a glass recycler at Soshanguve landfill, South Africa. Credit: Daylin Paul



labour, and I am proud of my work.” More testimonies from waste pickers can be found on the GAIA Africa Instagram page, @africaforzerowaste.

Education as a tool to bring about social change is a principle that many waste picker groups are implementing in their communities. In the words of Fred Hampton, *you can't build a revolution without education!* In Tanzania, waste pickers work with Nipe Fagio, a local organisation, in a zero-waste model in the Bonyokwa community. The project combines separation at source, organic waste management and recycling into a decentralised framework. They have built collection points to provide waste pickers with facilities for waste segregation. The community and the local government now recognise the benefits of waste picker integration for a successful waste management system. To educate more people about the daily work of waste pickers, we launched a photo essay titled *A Day in the Life of a Waste Picker*. This photo essay takes us through waste pickers' daily lives in four different African communities. These photos are available for viewing on our 3D Virtual Gallery. The link to the exhibition is <https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/node/11527882>.

Apart from education, legislation is the vehicle for other changes to take place. Last year, in February 2022, during UNEA 5.2, waste pickers were mentioned in an environmental resolution for the very first time, recognising their role in providing solutions to the plastic crisis. Later that year, at the First Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution, the formation of a Group of Friends of Waste Pickers was announced. The group is a voluntary body comprising representatives of member states worldwide to ensure waste pickers' voices are heard in the Plastic Treaty negotiations. For the Second Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution in May 2023, waste pickers are calling for a just transition for waste pickers and other workers in the plastic value chain.

Waste pickers are receiving much-needed attention during this process, and many new groups are interested in working with them. Civil society organisations can be critical partners for waste pickers. Drawing from the experiences of organisations across Africa, some of the support given to waste pickers includes: assisting the process of individuals

organising themselves, amplifying waste pickers' demands for respect, recognition and inclusion, providing capacity-building for any needed skills, and helping to address the pressing and immediate needs of waste pickers, such as health care needs and personal protection equipment. However, organisations should not fall into the trap of speaking or making decisions for waste pickers. We launched a podcast episode featuring Maditlhare Koena (South African Waste Pickers Association) and Asiphile Khanyile (groundWork) on how civil society organisations can best support the work of waste pickers. Listen to the episode here: <https://pod.link/gaia>

Slowly and in multitudes, we are making strides to achieve zero waste, whereby there is responsible production, consumption and recovery of materials, where all people in the waste management chain, including waste pickers, are respected and integrated. 🍄

Extract from *Mushrooms* by Sylvia Plath

Our hammers, our rams,
Earless and eyeless,

Perfectly voiceless,
Widen the crannies,
Shoulder through holes. We

Diet on water,
On crumbs of shadow,
Bland-mannered, asking

Little or nothing.
So many of us!
So many of us!

We are shelves, we are
Tables, we are meek,
We are edible,

Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:

We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot's in the door.





Plastic on a plate

by Greenfly

Time was when the milk jug was covered with a cotton net weighted with beads around the edge. So too the sugar bowl, sauce boat, butter dish, jam jars, salad bowl and whatever else a fly might land on. Now, at any average South African canteen or hotel, they are sealed off with plastic cling film. Biscuits or muffins on a plate, fruit or salad in a bowl. All must be under cling film.

Down at the supermarket, everything comes in plastic. Even if it has its own skin, like a banana, it's put in plastic. Paw paws are put in a polystyrene mesh and, in the latest fashion, with cling film wrapped around the polystyrene. Meat is wrapped in plastic, prepacked or direct from the butcher. So too with fish. So with just about everything, especially when it's screaming freshness and good health.

And for extra care, the thing wrapped in plastic is put into a plastic barrier bag before going into your plastic shopping bag.

The message is in the wrapping. Transparent plastic shows off the goods. And it's sealed to stay fresh and keep clean. It's sealed to keep the dirty world out. The world of human hands and human breath. The world of polluted air. The world of polluted water. The world polluted by ... plastic.

The stuff is everywhere. At the bottom of the deepest ocean trench, on top of the highest mountains, underneath the thickest polar sea ice. It is broken up into small and smaller microplastics. The smallest bits are ingested by the smallest plants and creatures, the ones at the bottom of the food chain, that get eaten by small creatures that get eaten by bigger creatures that get eaten by us. Apparently healthy birds fall from the sky. Plastic scratches their throats and fills their stomachs. They die of starvation.

It is in every river, in drinking water from the tap and the guaranteed clean drinking water bottled in plastic. It is in the soil, in all grains, in the oh so good for you fruit and vegetables, in the healthy hunk of

meat on your braai. It's in your wine and in your beer. It's in your kombucha. It's in the air you breathe.

It's in your stomach and small enough to pass through the digestive membranes into your blood stream. It's in your flesh, your liver, spleen, kidney, heart, lungs, testes and womb. It's in the child yet to be born. It's in every mother's milk and every formula used to substitute for mother's milk.

We choke ourselves on the notion of cleanliness.

Plastic signifies clean for a brief moment in its life cycle. In the spotless halls of consumerism, far from the slaughterhouse gore, from the greenhouses, orchards and fields saturated in pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and nematicides. Far from the workers paid a pittance to toil in the ecocidal mists.

Plastic starts life in the fires, smoke and dust of coal mines and oil and gas fields. It is then churned out from petrochemical plants in the form of nurdles – billions of beads of plastic as prone to spilling as the oil and gas from which they are made. On to the fabricators, a million invariably toxic additives are mixed in as melted nurdles are extruded, rolled and moulded into a million different products.

Around half goes to packaging and other stuff designed for instant dumping. That's not counting superfluous cling film wrapping. Over 400 million tonnes are produced and over 300 dumped each year. And those numbers rise year on year as big oil makes another big punt to expand sales.

Since the 1950s, when plastics took off, they have produced 7.8 billion tonnes. By 2050, say the boffins, they'll have produced 26 billion tonnes of plastic, six billion tonnes of synthetic fibres and two billion tonnes of additives. And pretty much all of it ends up in the environment, overflowing the dumps, going up in smoke, blocking drains, floating out to sea or blowing in the wind.

Never mind the climate. Big oil has more ways to ruin earth.





Contested Transition - groundWork report launch



byTsepang Molefe

It is always an exciting time when the date arrives to launch The groundWork Report, which gives an account of the state of environmental justice in South Africa in relation to a focus theme. In 2022, we chose to speak with and listen to people who are living the transition. What is not a surprise is that it is not just. Indeed, we see many left on the waste heaps of an economy that feeds capital accumulation rather than what is promised in our celebrated Constitution: a development that is ecologically sustainable and that seeks to promote “justifiable economic and social development”. The transition now is one of capital closing shop and moving on – from the Shell and BP oil refinery in south Durban to Eskom’s power stations in Mpumalanga. People are reporting to work, and they are being told to go home. We are closed.

Contested Transition

State and Capital against Community



Contested Transition

The groundWork Report 2022

On 24 March 2023, groundWork launched its 2022 special report on the Just Transition in Johannesburg. The main launch was preceded by a two-day community launch and workshop in Mpumalanga. During the two days, groundWork researcher David Hallows and Life After Coal’s Victor Munnik unpacked the content of the report with activists and community members from Witbank, Ogies, Middleburg, Komati, Carolina and Hendrina.

The groundWork Report 2022 follows the 2019 and 2020 reports in its focus on the just (or unjust) transition. But we have been writing and calling for this since the 1990s. The groundWork report incorporates the work and insights of the 2022 community activist researchers from different areas around the country. The report posits in detail the on-the-ground realities around burning topics like climate finance, the end of coal and a nationally determined consensus. It draws from recent developments and



events such as the KwaZulu-Natal floods of 2022, and the closure of Komati Power Station in Mpumalanga and its repurposing plans.

About fifty people attended the official public launch in Johannesburg. groundWork executive director Bobby Peek gave the welcome and opening address. Bobby gave background on how the idea of a groundWork state of environmental report was conceived and the just transition work that groundWork has been working on for decades now.

Between 1999 and 2001 we thought long and hard about the bland state of environment reports that government was producing. These reports ignored the people and were a clear indication of the collaboration between the state and corporations in the extractive economy. We then decided that we were going to produce annual reports on the state of environmental justice for the people we are in struggle with daily. From 2002 we have done 16 state of environmental justice reports – Bobby Peek

Makoma Lekalakala from EarthLife and Leanne Govinsamy from the Centre for Environmental Rights were the main speakers. Lekalakala complemented groundWork on the launch of the report and gave insightful perspectives on the transition at a local level and also globally.

This report covers a number of issues, but the title A Contested Transition: State and Capital against Community also opens up a number of questions, including: are we in a democracy when state and capital are against community? What is the real situation on the ground? – Makoma Lekalakala

Govinsamy congratulated groundWork and highlighted the main issues around JETIP and climate finance.

This is what this report does. It connects deep contestation to real local solutions. The report bridges an important gap between the complex and the methodology that looks at local solutions from a community researcher angle - Leanne Govinsamy

The event was streamed live on groundWork's YouTube channel and audiences were able to join online. It was also exciting to see energetic engagements from the audience, and hear their views and perspectives on the transition and the impacts thereof in affected areas and communities. These include lived experience accounts of the impact the shift is having on ordinary people and how they can actively participate in the transition processes.

The importance of a Just Transition cannot be stressed enough because it ensures a sustainable and equitable path towards a low-carbon economy, promotes social justice and inclusivity, strengthens economic resilience, fosters political stability, and encourages global cooperation in tackling climate change. 🌍



David Hallowes and Victor Munnik addressing the audience at the report launch in Johannesburg.
Credit: Daylin Paul





Above: Display of hardcopies of the groundWork report. Below: Attendees and activists singing at the groundWork report launch. Credit: Daylin Paul





Above: Makoma Lekalakala from Earthlife speaking at the groundWork report launch. Below: Leanne Govindsamy from the Centre for Environmental Rights speaking at the groundWork report launch. Credit: Daylin Paul



24 YEARS OF gW



24 Years of groundWork

Since our inception in 1999, we have stood firm and resolute against environmental injustices – from the fenceline of struggles to global platforms. Whether these injustices were driven by governments or multinational corporations, our resistance has remained and will remain unflinching in the struggle for an inclusive, free, fair and just society.

We have worked in partnership with and supported communities within the borders of South Africa and beyond. We have enjoyed victories. But we have also faced challenges that seemed impossible to overcome. Yet we confronted these relentlessly, with the support of our fellow comrades and partner organisations in the environmental justice movement.

We continue to mobilise with communities, cultivating resilience to climate impacts, building social power through mutual solidarity and alliances with workers and the wider justice movement. We continue to resist dirty energy and toxic production and mobilise the community agenda for open democracy and a just transition, to an egalitarian and regenerative economy.

A LUTA CONTINUA

24 years on, we reaffirm our pledge and re-commit to our vision of:

PEOPLE ARE LIVING WELL WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH THE EARTH.

#HappyBirthdaygW #24YearsofgW #24YearsOfEnvironmentalJustice

