

THE JUST TRANSITION HITS THE GROUND IN KOMATI



AN EXTRACT FROM
THE GROUNDWORK
REPORT 2022:
CONTESTED TRANSITION

Extract from: “The groundWork Report 2022: Contested
Transition: State and Capital against Community”

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1.

'WE DON'T UNDERSTAND OR WANT YOUR JUST TRANSITION'

On 3 November 2022 around 100 people filled the Koornfontein Laerskool (primary school) hall to listen and respond to plans to decommission Komati coalfired power plant. There were many plans: to implode the four cooling towers, to keep certain buildings for a technical college, to install up to 150 MW of solar power on where crop fields currently are, to install up to 70 MW of wind turbines along the boundary of the Komati property, and to install a 150MW of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). The ash heap would be covered to stop the ash blowing, while some of the ash would be sold. There were maps of these plans and officials from Eskom on hand to explain in whichever South African language you preferred.

The Komati power station, which had started producing electricity in 1961, would be the first in the current Eskom fleet to be decommissioned and repurposed. It would be followed in the next five years by Hendrina, Camden and Grootvlei stations. Consultants explained that these power stations were old and breaking down which led to load shedding; it would be too expensive to fix them, and it would also be too expensive to install scrubbers to bring the sulphur dioxide emissions within legal limits to protect the health of people living on the Highveld. In fact, the coal fired power stations would have to be shut down as part of a deal with

international climate financiers in which South Africa would drastically decarbonise its economy, starting with a transition of the coal based electricity system to one based on renewable energy.

The people in the Komati Laerskool hall were scared and outraged. They were worried about how they were going to survive the shutdown and how they would find work and earn money to sustain themselves “after coal”. The coal mines around Komati had already started shutting down, and people had already lost jobs. They were not convinced that it was necessary to shut down coal. This transition was the agenda of overseas forces, they argued, and the consultants were talking from a white, elite, colonial perspective.

The consultants shook their heads in disbelief. All these questions were “political” and had no place in their meeting. With some charity, the questions could be interpreted as concerning the socio-economic conditions, which was the subject of another report, and a completely different work stream and another set of consultants. That report – on socio-economic conditions – had been released the day before, on the 2nd November. Nevertheless, argued one consultant, there had been consultations, that is to say interviews and focus groups, with local households before the report was written, so how could people say they know nothing about the transition?

But that was the crux of the matter: the people in the spotlight of the transition, nationally and internationally – see below – were saying that they did not understand what the so called “Just Transition” was for, why it had to happen, and in particular, how it would affect them. And they did not want it.

There was a lot to know about the transition, and it was complex. What the people in the hall were immediately confronted with, was the outcome of an Eskom specific

planning process with little consultation. This had two parts: the plans for the decommissioning and repurposing of the power station, and the plans to deal with the socio-economic impact of the power station closure. But both of these were supposed to fit into a much broader, national process for which the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) was responsible. The appointment of the commission was agreed to at the Presidential Jobs Summit in October 2018. Two years later, 22 commissioners were appointed to the commission (on 17 December 2020). The PCC was preceded, in 2018 and 2019, by a consultation process for the revision of Chapter 5 of the National Development Plan, as well as a history of developing resources for the transition (and false starts) as detailed further on in this chapter.

The Commission started work in February 2021, with representatives from a broad range of stakeholders – including communities, workers, trade unions and civil society, business and government. Their work was to construct and maintain a national consensus for the Just Transition, and monitor that process. This process was meant to bring South Africans to an understanding of the need for the transition, the pathways that it would follow, and how to deal with people disadvantaged by the change, such as workers losing their jobs and the fate of businesses – including very small scale informal businesses – as local coal economies shut down. In other words, what the fate of places like Komati would be [see gWR2022.]

2.

JUST TRANSITION HITS THE GROUND IN KOMATI

The Komati coal fired power plant decommissioning and repurposing “has been selected as a demonstration project by the Government of South Africa to establish that coal plants can be retired in a sustainable manner”, declared the World Bank [2022:13]. The Komati power station (KPS) started electricity production in 1961, was mothballed in 1987, and fully brought back into service in 2008, and finally closed down in (October 2022) is about 37 km south of Middelburg. According to the SEIS, 4 200 people live in the KPS PSA (project study area), with a population of just over 3 000 [Stats SA 2011] in the two biggest settlements: Komati Village and Blinkpan. The 5 km radius around the power station include, in addition, Brey Farm, Big House informal settlement, and 26 farms. The Koorfontein mine used to supply coal to the power station via a conveyor belt. Blinkpan and Goedehoop collieries also supplied coal to the power station, as well as Universal’s North Block Complex, Dorstfontein Coal Mine, Impunzi Coal Mine, Greenside Colliery Road IMP, Mzimkhulu Mine and Vangatfontein Coal Mine [2022:85].

Most of the community members have lived in the area for over 25 years, while some families had lived there for at least 16 years, suggesting that a many had grown up there. 58.8% are male, and 41.2%. Most individuals in the Komati PSA were of working age (15 to 34 years old (sic)) at the time of Census

2011. The household survey (for Komati Village and Blinkpan) revealed that:

16.3% of households had a total monthly income of R7 501 to R12 500. The second-largest income group (13.8%) earned an income of R15 001 to R20 000; this was followed by households earning an income ranging from R12 501 to R15 000 (12.5%). Of the households that were surveyed, 51.3% indicated that they relied on earned income only (salaries or wages). About 11.3% relied on both earned income and self-employment income, while 8.8% indicated that they relied on income from self-employment only. Other sources of income mentioned were grants (3.8%), spousal maintenance and grants (2.5%), and remittances from friends and family members living outside the area (1.3%).

Most of the population had some schooling, with 35% having matric, and a further 8% higher education, and 11% other training – presumably qualifications relevant to mining. There are two primary schools, Blinkpan and Koornfontein (in Komati Village). The only preschool – Wonderland – has closed. Based on Census 2011 data, nearly all of the dwellings in the Komati PSA were considered formal houses, flats or apartments. In Komati Village and Blinkpan, formal dwellings constituted 92.2% and 95.3%, respectively, of all dwellings. There are also informal settlements at Big House, Geluk Farm and Broodsnyersplaas. Approximately 57.5% of households indicated that they owned the property in which members resided, while the remaining share of households (42.5%) rented the dwellings where they lived. Access to basic services was fairly good: piped water and 80.7%, electricity 98.8%, refuse removal 97.4% sanitation 98.2%. The water is provided by the power station.

The list of primary data sources consulted for the study, according to the report [Eskom 2022] gives a good idea of the institutions in the area. For civil society: Ward committee members representing Goedehoop (now known as

Goedehoop South), Banks (now known as Goedehoop North), Blinkpan, Komati/Koornfontein Village, Maphila Traditional Council, community development workers, home-based care and community workers, the church forum, business forum, B and K Structure Forum, Isizwe Sekonsi, Thubaletu Community Structure and Farm Belt Community Development Structure. Local businesses in the area consisted of: “Mechanic, Café/Butchery, Afsol Petroleum, Igwababa Supermarket, OK Foods, Food Zone and Lakama Guest House”. Data was also gathered from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic); Mpumalanga Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Nkangala District Municipality and Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, the Mine Water Coordinating Body (MWCB), the Impact Catalyst, Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), Minerals Council South Africa, the Middelburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and GreenCape (now Mpumalanga Green Cluster agency). (2022:6) There is also a police station at Blinkpan, and two mobile clinics every Wednesday at the municipal offices and on Thursday at the SASSA paypoint.

3.

THE PLAN FOR KOMATI

The actual plan for Komati consists of 5 “pillars” making up an “up-spiral” sequence: “stabilise”, “develop”, “strengthen”; “grow” and “communicate”.

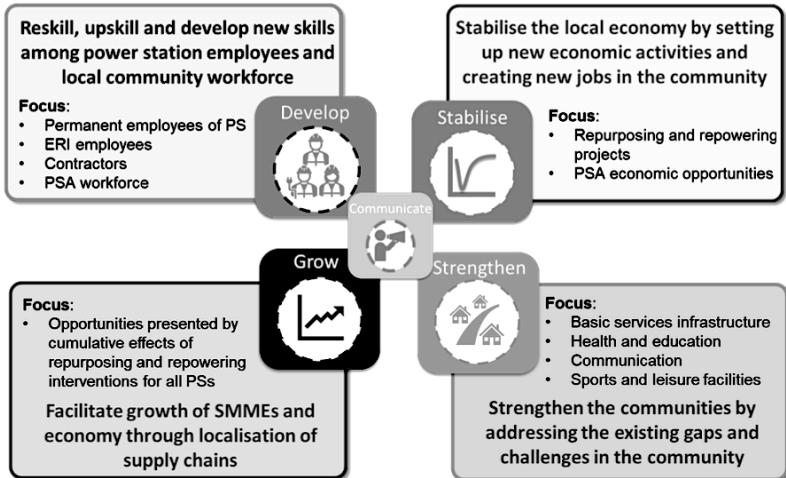


Figure 1: “Mitigation strategy framework” from Socio-economic impact study for the shutdown and repurposing of Komati Power Station, Eskom, 2022, p. 146

“STABILISE”

The first pillar is intended to stabilise the economic base of the Komati area by investing around R6.7 billion in 11 interventions, in the light of the expected loss of R19 million (in 2020 prices) of income per annum by households in the Komati PSA due to the shutdown. The elements of the first pillar are:

- Maintenance during the transition period,
- Decommissioning of KPS
- Containerised microgrid assembly
- Establishment of agrivoltaics plant
- Eskom Phase 1 Solar PV
- Eskom Phase 2 Solar PV
- Battery Energy Storage Systems
- Wind energy facility
- Synchronous condensers
- Alien vegetation removal and beneficiation
- Crop farming with mine-affected water

Note that six of these are directly about the power system. Together, these proposed 11 interventions are planned to create just over 2 200 direct and 5 300 indirect, temporary jobs during the construction. The target for permanent jobs is 537 direct and 1 489 indirect jobs, totalling to about 2 026 jobs, over a time frame of 3 to 5 years. “Until then, the employees of the power station will be seconded, retained for the transition period or transferred to other facilities while being reskilled and upskilled to take up new opportunities.” [Eskom, 2022: 148]. This compares to 586 people employed by the Komati Power Station in 2017, which shrank to 276 by 2020. Of these, only 41 employees were living within a radius of 5 km around the power station [Eskom 2022: 83]

TRANSITION

This is the maintenance of the power station between shutdown and decommissioning and repurposing. It includes civil and electrical maintenance, maintenance of the water plant, cleaning, garden services, security, pest control, waste management, fire services etc. This is expected to lead to 330 temporary jobs following shutdown, a possible total of 310 indirect jobs, also temporary, and a contribution of R415 million (directly) and R335 million (indirectly).

DECOMMISSIONING OF KOMATI

Decommissioning involves dismantling (in this case) selected equipment, demolishing selected buildings and structures, and cleaning the entire site – including disposal areas (both wet and dry) and coal yards. The main power station complex needs to be decontaminated and then dismantled. Materials are to be salvaged, and then either demolished or disposed of at a new on-site waste facility. Then the footprint area needs to be shaped and rehabilitated. Roads, fences, pipes and conveyors that are not needed for the new land use, need to be removed, and the area rehabilitated. The waste that is produced will be sorted, the concrete crushed and disposed of in the on-site waste facility – or at a hazardous waste disposal facility. The coal stockyard will be dismantled, infrastructure removed and the inert waste disposed of onsite at the waste facility, while some recyclable waste will be sold.

The following buildings and structures will remain: the main services building; the main stores complex and the Alstom and DB thermal workshops (among others); the HV yard and switching stations; the main office block, the engineering offices, and the medical centre; the turbine house (following the removal of core equipment and the demolition of the boiler house); and the water treatment plant. The reservoirs will remain as they are the source of raw

water supply to the water treatment plant which will remain in operation under Eskom.

Phase 2 of the decommissioning will deal with the ash dam and related infrastructure. The plan with the three dams at the power station. The plan is to evaporate the water, remove the equipment, remove and dispose of the dam liners, excavate and dispose of contaminated sediment on the existing ash heap, fill in the resulting cavities (a borrow pit will be needed for infilling requirements.) and revegetate the area. The upper surface of the existing ash dam and its side slopes will be shaped and a one metre cover added to prevent ingress of rainfall, establish vegetation, storm water management. The old asbestos facility will also be shaped, put under a similar cover, and vegetated.

CONTAINERISED MICROGRID ASSEMBLY

This involves manufacturing of containerised microgrids on 10 assembly lines, which would generate 20 jobs per assembly line. Solar panels will be mounted on a repurposed shipping container with an inverter and batteries for storing the electricity inside. The containers can host other RE technologies as well. Once in communities, these microgrids can create employment for community members including maintenance. The electricity could also support small businesses. The current target is to assemble 500 containers per year, but this could, according to the ESIA, be doubled. According to Eskom [2022], an Eskom pilot project in Ficksburg has demonstrated that a similar (but not containerised) micro-grid could produce 32 kW of electricity to 14 households with a total of 81 family members.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRIVOLTAICS PLANT

Agrivoltaics entail “positioning solar panels directly above agricultural land or produce”. This project is to be funded at R4.2 million. It will contain an aquaponics system for the combined production of fish and vegetables, as well as

mushroom domes. Forty people will be trained in aquaponics, and 10 in mushroom farming, which will produce exotic mushrooms for local and export markets. Six individuals will receive in depth training in maintaining the agrivoltaics system. The trained farmers can then compete to participate in the project. The system also allows opportunities for community members with mobility and hearing disabilities to find a job. The solar panels will feed electricity into the grid. Crops will be sold at the Nkangala Agri-hub and local fresh produce markets, and the fish are to be sold to the community. A portion of the income will go to Eskom for maintaining the systems, for which purpose 10 community members will be employed on a permanent basis.

ESKOM PHASE 1 SOLAR PV

The objective of the Eskom phase 1 solar PV is to provide electricity to balance the grid through the BESS, rather than feed electricity into the national grid, although excess electricity may be fed into the grid. During Phase 1, 100 MW of solar PV and 150 MW of battery storage are to be deployed at various locations at the power station. Requirements for capital expenditure (Capex) are R4.1 billion: R1.6 billion allocated to 100 MW solar PV, R2.5 billion for a 150 MW battery, and R20 million for first synchronous condenser. Operating expenditure is estimated at R135 million: for the solar PV plant at R32 million, for the BESS R96 million and for the first synchronous condenser R6 million. Direct jobs to be created come in between 56 and 85 jobs: 50 – 75 jobs for solar PV, 6 – 10 jobs for BESS and all synchronous condensers (this includes jobs created in Phase 2 Solar PV – see below). For this to work, Eskom will retain the switch yards, transformers, grid connections, and overhead electric cable lines at KPS. The ESIA recommends that this investment – the R4.1 billion in Capex – be executed as a REIPPPP project.

ESKOM PHASE 2 SOLAR PV, WIND ENERGY FACILITY AND SYNCHRONOUS CONDENSERS

A further R1.9 billion will be invested, also through a REIPPP project, in RE on site in a second phase: R783 million for 50 MW solar PV, R1.1 billion for 70 MW wind energy, and R40 million for two additional synchronous condensers. Operational expenditure of R63 million is assumed: R16 million for 50 MW solar PV, R34 million for 70 MW wind energy, R13 million for two synchronous condensers. The jobs created should be between 46 and 76 jobs: 25 – 38 jobs for 50 MW solar PV, 21 – 39 jobs for 70 MW wind energy. Jobs for synchronous condensers are included in Phase 1, above.

MANUFACTURE BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

The deployment of BESS at KPS forms part of a larger localisation drive by Eskom regarding battery storage, with a total of 13 sites (including KPS) identified for the deployment of BESS, with 8 sites to be completed by June 2023, and another four by December 2024. South Africa currently “does not have suppliers that have done BESS-related engineering, procurement and construction to the magnitude of Eskom’s requirements... “As such, investments in cell producing plants will be required to stimulate other suppliers in the associated value chain.” This will be done through Eskom’s Supplier Development and Localisation Strategy (SDLS) related to the deployment of renewable energies by using Eskom’s procurement spend.

A WHIFF OF GAS

At this point the ESIA slips in plans for gas with costs also in the billions of Rands: “Future projects to be considered include a 500 MW combined cycle gas plant with gas storage and a 100 MW biomass gasification plant. The capital investment requirements for these two projects were

determined at R10.4 billion and R3.5 billion, respectively.” [183]. While other projects are discussed in terms of their sustainability, their role in the food-energy-nexus etc. etc., no words are wasted on explaining the gas component.

ALIEN VEGETATION REMOVAL AND BENEFICIATION

“The removal of alien vegetation is necessary for the protection of ecosystems, the safeguarding of water reserves to facilitate water provision, the sustainability of agricultural activities, and the protection of livelihoods,’ argues Eskom [2022: 189]. This necessity has already been used in job creation through the government’s Expanded Public Works and Working for Water programmes. A biomass energy programme using alien vegetation may be financially viable “on condition that it operates in partnership with Working for Water”, according to an Eastern Cape case study. The project is intended to address the problem of invasive species throughout the province and could result in the production of biodiesel and green hydrogen, according to Eskom [2022]. “The project will also focus on equipping participants with skills related to entrepreneurship, which contributes to human capital development. In addition, the SMMEs which it is envisaged will be established are anticipated to be moveable, which increases the likelihood of sustained biomass supply” [2022: 190].

The Capex requirement is R3 million, for a business plan on the basis of which further funding will be sought. Up to 200 direct jobs may be created. Presumably the terms of these jobs – including the possibility of stipend jobs – will depend on what funding is finally found.

CROP FARMING WITH MINE-AFFECTED WATER

Eskom anticipates that mining land will become available at the end of coal mining, and that such land will “need to be utilised for sustaining local communities” (2022: 192). The study explains that “large volumes of acid mine drainage pose significant threats to the quality of South Africa’s water resources” and moreover, “studies... have found that crops such as maize and stalling rye grow much better when irrigated with mine-affected water than they do under a system of rain-fed crop production” (see Annandale et al 2019 for a study at Mafube colliery). Research at the Wonderfontein Colliery near Belfast, has “proven (that such crop production) was more profitable than their rain-fed counterparts, thus supporting the argument that agriculture can help sustain communities post-shutdown.” [2022:193]. The project was run by Glencore, the industry-oriented MWCB, the International Council on Mining and Metals, and Business for Development. While the ESIA foresees that growing of “salt tolerant crops” like winter wheat, maize, soya, and ryegrass may be extended to many ex-mining sites in the province, it recommends that it be implemented at the Goedehoop and Koornfontein mines close to KPS. The cost for establishment is R7 million per site and possible funders are MWCB, AngloCoal, Exxaro, WRC, and WRC360. During operation, 8 direct jobs per hectare can be created.

How salt tolerant are these crops, and won't the mine water, after a few seasons of planting, lead to very high soil salinity? The use of acid mine drainage affected water for crop farming looks suspiciously like a problem (cleaning up acid mine drainage) in search of a cheap answer that will also relieve mines of their liabilities. Why burden community farming projects with contaminated water? Why not rather release to these farmers the high quality water from Nooitgedacht dam no longer used by the power station?

“DEVELOP”

The second pillar of the strategy, “develop”, is about upskilling and reskilling Eskom employees and community members, at the new Komati Training Facility (KTF to be established on the site of the power station, repurposing some of the buildings) and a new small business hub in Komati Village. According to an Eskom HR plan there will be no job losses or retrenchments for Eskom’s permanent employees. Some employees will be reskilled for R&R options. Skill sets such as those for technicians, engineers, and operators, among others, will be reused – allowing for shifts to different technologies. Rotek employees (who work for the wholly Eskom owned subsidiary Rotek, which provides construction, maintenance and transport services to Eskom operations) will be transferred to other sites or operations, and alternatives are being considered through engagements with the suppliers of contract employees. 140 permanent employees and 190 contractors will be needed to maintain existing infrastructure during the incremental period. Up to 257 permanent employees will receive skills training in line with new technology requirements. The HR plan is to spend around R69 million, made up of the cost for Voluntary Severance Package (R36.9 million), redeployment/transfers (R15.1 million), and retraining (R16.8 million).

The KTF, housed in an existing building at the KPS that will not be demolished but repurposed, will operate as a satellite campus of the South African Renewable Energy Technology Centre at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, for a period of 24 months during which the aim will be to acquire the necessary skills and accreditation through the Eskom Academy of Learning, for employment in the RE industry. Learners will be selected from Eskom and local communities,

on condition that they meet certain minimum standards and have some level of experience as an artisan.

A separate career development centre will be established in Komati Village itself. Its aim will be to “[link] community members with employment opportunities in the area while providing targeted services to improve the employability of local community members.” Eskom states that “This initiative may be driven by the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Higher Education and Training in partnership with Eskom. In addition, partnerships with other agents may be considered such as the Middelburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry.” [161]. Costs will be renting office space at around R150 000 per year, with an operating budget of between R1.5 and R2 million per year, but with the 3 to 5 jobs created unlikely to be filled by community members.

An SMME incubation and business skills development programme will aim to “provide training and incubation programmes to capacitate and grow local businesses to be able to benefit from opportunities and create jobs” as well as to provide support to informal traders [162]. The intervention will target small business activities linked to the transition, the waste economy, agriculture sector, as well as catering, accommodation, telecommunications, food services or local vendors, and hospitality. The intervention will need R1 million to secure the necessary space, as well as running costs of R4 to R5 million per year.

“STRENGTHEN”

The third “strengthen” pillar aims to improve the community’s nutritional, physical and emotional health through health education, rolling out “economy scale” communal food gardens, upgrading recreational facilities and early childhood development programmes.

It will also provide better internet connectivity and a digital communication platform “for all local stakeholders” [150].

The sports and recreation intervention responds to key findings of the baseline assessment of the KPS PSA, which showed that...drug and alcohol abuse are rampant in the area, the result of unemployment and a lack of alternative activities to engage in, among other factors. It was also found that PSA communities are deeply engaged with each other in sporting activities such as soccer/football, netball, and volleyball, creating more opportunities for these engagements. However, the area has an inadequate supply of sporting facilities, and the existing sporting infrastructure has not been maintained” [2022:200].

Eskom will be looking to partner with the Mpumalanga province to do this on land in Komati Village that has been identified. The cost – without buying the land – will amount to between R1.5 and R2 million.

The community health intervention also refers to high levels of substance abuse, particularly among the youth, as well as a high incidence of TB, STDs, and HIV/AIDS and declares “to ensure that the shutdown does not exacerbate these social ills, it will be essential to establish community health and awareness programmes.” [202]. The operating cost will be R1.5 million per year, and programmes will be done with the Mpumalanga province and NGOs.

The improvement of connectivity plans align with the Steve Tshwete local municipality smart city plans, which are to:

- Make social services accessible through the provision of free public Wi-Fi in underserved areas and through improved internet usage in libraries;
- Provide communities with access to free portals that present free e-learning opportunities, easy access to career information, and a platform for youth to access job opportunities; and
- Economic development through the promotion of the digital economy. For SMMEs, entrepreneurs, and job seekers, this promotion may occur through public portals that increase access to services, digital noticeboards, and digital advertising [2022: 198].

For this project, undertaken with the Steve Tshwete LM, capital expenditure will amount to R500 000, operating expenditure is anticipated to be R1 million a year, and 10 to 15 employment opportunities could be created.

The digital platform should enable community members and projects partners to share notices of job opportunities and projects in the area, advertise small businesses, access e-services and share “any news/information that might socially or economically benefit end users” [220:198].

The community gardens project will be closely aligned to the SMME incubator. It will involve farming projects as well as the upskilling and training of participants to run bigger gardens. The Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs is seen as the key implementing agent, with support from Eskom. Costs are in the region of R1.5 million and 10 to 15 job opportunities can be expected.

Another intervention is to upgrade and expand Early Childhood Development facilities in the area, in tandem with the community gardens, sports and recreation and health

projects. The Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Social Development is seen as the key driver. The costs are capital of R2.5 million for a new facility, annual costs of around R1.3 million. Depending on the number of children enrolled, up to 20 jobs may be created.

“GROW”

The fourth “grow” pillar is based on broader economic opportunities flowing from the KPS decommissioning – such as demand for goods and services, including for local SMMEs from the 11 projects in pillar 1. There should also be broader economic opportunities related to the shut down of other power stations in the area, as well as “the establishment of a solar PV assembly plant, the manufacturing of components required in containerised microgrid assembly, the manufacturing of battery energy storage cells and assembly of batteries, and a facility for recycling renewable energy components.” (2022: 150).

The procurement strategy for repurposing and repowering activities of the power stations – for now Komati, Hendrina and Grootvlei - forms part of the Eskom’s SDLS for RE, focusing on increasing the capacity, capability, competitiveness, and cost-effectiveness of suppliers within the RE value chain. Local accommodation businesses will also be able to host trainees at the KTF. Further jobs will be created in cleaning and cooking services. At least R3 million should be allocated to this development, plus R500 000 to conduct a feasibility study and develop a business plan.

For now, it is estimated that between 45 and 150 new employment opportunities may be created solely for catering for KTF” [2022: 210]. Another opportunity may lie in catering services – that is activities related to food preparation,

transportation of food items, and cleaning. To increase local economic impact, “caterers may also procure food items from local retailers such as the OK in Komati Village or the Food Zone in Blinkpan, furthering the economic impact of the intervention. Furthermore, caterers may make use of the interventions focused on the digital activation of the local community to advertise their services.” [2022: 211]. This intervention would require R2 million funding (for the refurbishment of existing, though dilapidated facilities in Komati village), up to R500 000 for a feasibility study and depending on demand, could create 5 to 15 jobs. Transport is another “grow” option, but it is likely to be provided by a private entity and may well not suit the current skill sets in Komati.

In this plan, Komati is viewed as part of a bigger “economic ecosystem”, so for example, Nkangala District Municipality IDPs need to be taken into account. These projects, if they happened, could result in around R7.9 billion in investments, 9 000 temporary employment opportunities during construction, between 370 and 750 direct jobs, adding between R305 million and R510 million per year to the regional economy. Provincial and national plans are similarly important.

“COMMUNICATE”

The fifth “communication” pillar is there to ensure that the strategy gains support from stakeholders, external and internal. It will disseminate the key findings of the study and highlight the mitigation measures that have been identified, “informing, consulting, collaborating, and involving” (2022: 219).

4.

THIS IS NOT PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

This is not a participatory, shared response to the challenges of climate change and the decommissioning of the power station. The people at the 4 November 2022 meeting about the decommissioning and partial demolition of the Komati Power Station on 4 November 2022, mentioned at the start of chapter 2, knew this. We can also observe that what was happening, was the exact opposite of procedural justice as defined in the Just Transition Framework, namely:

A just transition puts people at the centre of decision making, especially those most impacted, the poor, women, and youth—empowering and equipping them for new opportunities of the future... supporting worker and community organisations (unions, civics, advocacy groups, etc.) to participate actively in just transition policy-making processes, ensuring decisions are made in their best interests and allow them to take advantage of opportunities [2022: 7].

After the consultants had explained their work and their approach, there were many questions. Local resident Mr Shabangu told the meeting “I have a Bible full of questions”. These included:

Is the just transition just? You only took care of Eskom employees when you closed the power station, why? Why are institutions of Just Transition and reskilling not here? Why are you only now planning for decommissioning now? What if this

meeting says we don't want the decommissioning? The big bosses and capitalists have already made decisions. Our economy is in tatters. The coal mines are closed already. The JT is lying when they say local people will benefit.

Other speakers asked:

“How are you going to identify the affected communities?”

“The shutdown will affect the trucking business.”

“Renewable Energy failed in Germany. They went back to coal, so why must we give up coal?”

“HOW MANY OF US ARE GOING TO LEARN NEW GREEN SKILLS? MOST OF OUR PEOPLE ARE COMING FROM THE FARMS. HOW ARE YOU GOING TO TALK TO THEM AND HELP THEM? I AM WORRIED.”

“We don't have any health facilities here. I have asthma. I could help myself until my contract with Eskom ended. And what about the other sick people here? Ones who never worked for Eskom? What must we do now? We are waiting now.”

People were particularly critical of the timing of events: the power station had shut down 4 days before the meeting, on 31 October. The SEIS had been released literally the day before the Komati meeting, on 3 November, and not yet discussed with the community. In response to complaints about a lack of participation, one of the consultants pointed out that there were people in the meeting that had been part of focus groups. He argued that they knew about the decommissioning and that, in fact, one could learn a lot more

from a focus group than a hall of people. It got heated. groundWork's Thomas Mnguni got up to explain to the consultants what was wrong, and offered them advice to loud cheers from the people in the hall:

Eskom knew about the closure long ago. This session is not good. We need a general discussion about the Just Transition. We need to know about health issues. You did a socio economic study and did not share it. You only want to meet decommissioning legal requirements. You don't want to talk about broader issues like the informal economy. Let's come back here and talk about everything. What all your plans are. Talk about skilling people here. Talk about what will happen to people's livelihoods.

And local cleric, pastor Mdluli said:

“PLEASE RESPECT THESE PEOPLE. THEY DON'T WANT TO DISCUSS THE DEMOLITION OF THE KOMATI POWER STATION. THEY WANT YOU TO BRING ALL THE DECISION MAKERS HERE AND DISCUSS WHAT THEIR FUTURE WILL LOOK LIKE BEFORE THEY AGREE TO ANYTHING.”

What is clear is that outsourcing this essentially political process to consultants outside of a structured process of engagement with the Komati communities, which should really have been driven by the PCC in combination with local, provincial and national politicians and officials, cannot measure up to the promises in the Just Transition Framework. The transition cannot in practice be run by the same tired old process of fragmented, tickbox EIAs that have been so useful in legitimating extractive economy projects in the past.

When communities are not fully and timeously informed, when they are not engaged in the solutions, when consultants shield government from the people, and cannot give answers about what really concerns people, it cannot be called fair process. Substantive justice only happens when the benefits and the burdens of the transition are shared fairly – and transparently. It is not the case in Komati and it is not the case in the broader process.

5.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO?¹

Two immediate points stand out from this analysis: There is an absence of a proper process in the Komati area, and there is a lack of leadership and accountability.

The SEI study has gathered information and produced plans, some of which have a chance of working, but it has not fostered a community understanding and momentum. More fundamentally, the plans come from the outside – from Eskom and the consultants. The next step is to “communicate” the plans, a process that may develop more ownership and support, but not what a co-design process could have achieved.

The documentation and experience of the process points to a community, or set of communities, that are also not organised to the point of being able to face a difficult future. There is a list of institutions within the community, or involved with the community (for example local government), but there is no unified or representative community structure, as yet.

There is also no credible outside “champion” or driver for these plans. Eskom can indeed be responsible for the 6 out of 11 projects that are concerned with energy, as well as further projects (like the training facility) that will be located on its land. However, as the circle widens, the plans include

¹ This is a new section not appearing in the gWR2022

more actors, particularly the Steve Tshwete local municipality, and the Ekangala district municipality. Without their support, the plans won't work and won't be sustained. So it is crucial that such agency be identified or developed within the LC and DM. It is possible that the Mpulanaga Green Cluster could step forward and plan an important role. The PCC needs to have a serious look at this situation, as it is supposed to be a case study that will be closely watched.



FIND OUT MORE:

Read the full groundWork report here:

<https://groundwork.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/gW-Report-2022-for-web.pdf>

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Image: Betty Zulu, in her homestead, part of the “Big House” settlement next to Komati power station in the background. Note the generator in the foreground; the homestead has no connection to the grid. With kind permission of Daylin Paul from the collection “Broken Land” see <https://www.daylinpaul.com/broken-land>. Komati, Mpumalanga. 2018