



GROUNDWORK



**UN Special Rapporteur
on toxics and human rights
SA must tackle crude legacy
of environmental racism**

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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

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groundWork is affiliated to the following international organizations: Health Care Without Harm; International POPs Elimination Network; Basel Action Network; Oilwatch International; Global Anti-Incineration Alliance; groundWork is the South African member of Friends of the Earth International

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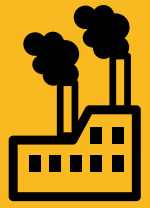
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Photo by F&E

From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



Dear Friends

I am not sure how many environmental justice climate activists know where Yasuní National Park is situated and why it is important. For global climate activists to local community people in the trenches defending their lands, Yasuní in Ecuador, one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, is a place where democracy has delivered a verdict that people wanted rather than one that corporates stole. In August, after 10 years of struggle, Ecuadorians voted in an historic referendum to halt the development of all new oil wells in the region. Indeed, a celebration for just transition.

Concurrently, another referendum to protect the Ecuadorian Chocó Andino forest and peoples' lands, by banning open pit mining, was successful. It is a proud moment for the hope that democracy can deliver. And for groundWork, who visited the area in the 2000s, this is indeed a moment where we truly feel power from below. How we learn from this democratic victory, and how we ensure that the Ecuadorian political system delivers on the outcome, is the next struggle.

Back at home in South Africa, alongside and part of the many environmental justice struggles is the fight for worker justice: from challenging for worker justice through various just transition spaces, including the Presidential Climate Commission, to workers taking on the corporates themselves. You cannot hope for justice; one must take it, fight for it. It is not going to be delivered on a platter. And workers affected by mining-related diseases know this too well.

Workers supported by Richard Spoor, a worker activist lawyer, who was successful in the R5bn silicosis worker settlement against South Africa's gold sector, are now challenging the coal industry over occupational lung disease. Coal mining has delivered

“scorched lungs of mineworkers” who were part of the “ruthlessly exploited migrant labour system”.

At the same time, ex-workers of Thor Chemicals affected by mercury poisoning in the 80s and 90s continue to fight for the justice. A struggle of three decades. To give a short refresher: Thor Chemicals was forced out of the UK because of mercury emissions at their plant in Margate, England. They shipped the plant to South Africa and imported mercurial toxic waste to South Africa in the 80s and 90s. Here, Thor Chemicals exploited “the lives of the underprivileged communities for financial gain”, lament the ex-workers at Thor Chemicals. They claim that the “agony has been made worse by the fact that, despite numerous requests to our democratic government officials, it has taken more than 20 years to give this issue the attention it merits”.

In this last period we lost two ex-workers, Timto Summerton and Banambithile Gumbi. Out of the 111 former employees of Thor Chemicals who are known to have worked there, 60 of them have since passed away. Over the last five years, ex-workers have organised themselves and through a selected committee they have successfully challenged the state to respond to the worker justice demands: a flat rate of compensation for all workers who have worked at Thor Chemicals. Just this August, after a detailed health assessment of all the workers who are still alive, Minister “Thulas” Nxesi met to hear the report back from the health assessment and the position of the ex-workers. As I write this, the issue is going to Cabinet and the waste continues to be repackaged and shipped to Europe.

These successes in struggle have all been based upon the fact that people will not give up. These victories must give us hope as environmental justice activists that we struggle for victory and not in vain.



A site of evergreen contestation is Sasol Ltd and their pollution against communities and even government. Over many years, people have produced evidence and have challenged the government and parliament to act against Sasol. Will I ever forget the posters on the floor in the centre of the parliamentary room where the hearings on the Air Quality Bill in 2004 was being held – calling Sasol out on their pollution and impact on people’s health and death? This would never be allowed in parliament today. It would be considered unruly. How our democracy has changed. It has become straight-jacketed.

Thus, the failure of Sasol’s attempt to not have to meet sulphur-dioxide emissions at its Secunda petrochemical complex is a comfort for those of us who have fought in the trenches against this South African relic of apartheid. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment’s denial of Sasol’s attempt to not meet the law must be recognised as an important victory for society. Seldom does one have an opportunity to say well done to the department – but indeed, well done.

Over this last quarter, groundWork has been instrumental in supporting the country visit of Dr Marcos Orellana, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and toxins. From Constitutional Hill to the coal-affected communities on the Highveld; in Durban, from Thor Chemicals to the disaster of United Phosphorous Limited (UPL) and across the country to Cape Town, groundWork opened doors and encouraged people to share their views and thoughts honestly with Dr Orellana.

His reflections on departure brought back the reality of our desperate situation. He warns that “the legacies of environmental racism are enormous, and they are compounded by structural inequality, widespread poverty, unemployment, corruption, a severe energy crisis and new environmental threats such as the climate emergency”. He goes on further to speak about the contradictions of government. While government makes climate commitments, he was “perplexed to hear about its licensing of new

coal and greenhouse gas-intensive projects” from coal mining to numerous offshore oil and gas projects. Sadly, he also questioned our democracy in relation to information availability on pesticides. The strength of groundWork’s on-the-ground work and connections, tied to our international reach, made Dr Orellana’s visit more honest.

Our democracy must ensure that the policies and laws that we have developed are implemented; a reflection shared by the special rapporteur. This lack of implementation is evident at a local level in various municipalities, including eThekweni, where waste picker integration to the waste management systems still is not being implemented. The result is that the value of waste pickers is not realised, and the death of a waste picker in July at a waste site in Durban at the hands of a security guard is not the first. More deaths are going to occur across the country if government does not implement the hard-fought-for gains we have made in policy. People will remain unrecognised. Recognition cannot come only in violent death.

Sadly, this brutal response against people wanting to participate and define our new democracy is a reality across South Africa. In the same month Khaya Ngubane, the man who assassinated Ayanda Ngila, deputy chairperson of the eKhenana Commune – where groundWork works on just transition with Abahlali baseMjondolo – was found guilty of murder by the Durban Magistrate’s Court. Abahlali laments that the “price for land and dignity has been paid in blood”.

Finally, in this time of ongoing struggle and victories, things change. Marina Agortimevor, of Ghana has taken on the co-ordination of the Africa Coal Network. Nerissa Anku, who has been with the Network for three years, is moving on. Dorothy Brislin joins the team in September as our Communications Campaign Manager. After five years with groundWork as a consultant, Shelley Paterson has left. A big thank you to both Nerissa and Shelley for sharing their time with us.

Till next time. A Luta Continua. 🌞



UN special rapporteur visits South Africa



by Rico Euripidou

In a statement issued at a press conference at the conclusion of his official country visit, the UN special rapporteur highlighted that to address gross environmental injustices that still exist in South Africa:

South Africa must redouble its efforts to tackle the crude legacy of pre-1994 environmental racism, including the abhorrent practice of intentionally situating landfills and polluting industries along racial lines and in low-income and migrant communities. To this day, the legacy of pervasive air, water and chemical pollution disproportionately impacts marginalised and poor communities.

The intention of the special rapporteur's visit was to consult with stakeholders and survey issues related to toxics and human rights. He met with government officials, experts, academics, civil society organisations, and individuals, who all had the opportunity to give their perspectives on toxics and human rights. The mandate of the special rapporteur seeks to help states, businesses and other stakeholders to adopt solutions with regard to the impact of harmful substances on human rights in the following thematic areas:

Exposure to hazardous substances, and its causes and consequences, including for groups in vulnerable situations such as women, children and people living in extreme poverty;

Implementation of international chemicals and waste conventions, as well as international, regional and national human rights and environmental standards;

Good practices, with a view to discussing, exchanging, sharing and transferring policy experiences and knowledge;

Chemicals and hazardous wastes issues, such as mercury, e-waste and asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances

(PFASs), and other persistent organic pollutants, lead paint and lead acid batteries;

Solid waste management and facilities and related challenges in South Africa, including hazardous waste and plastics management;

Assessment of port reception facilities for handling ship-generated waste;

The adverse effects of climate change, air quality and its effect on the enjoyment of human rights, including issues of coal combustion, energy efficiency and incineration;

Current cases and issues with a view to the application of human rights standards, in particular regarding import and dumping of hazardous wastes, water bodies pollution, pesticides and any other of relevance;

Access to an effective remedy for harm caused by hazardous substances and wastes, with a specific focus on accountability and redress, particularly with regard to populations with specific vulnerabilities, such as children, women, older persons, workers and local communities, as well as people living in extreme poverty and other marginalised groups;

Access to information, participation and free, prior and informed consent;

Other issues, being any other matter of interest to the mandate.

Affected groups are still welcome to provide input for the country report!

Overall, the special rapporteur found what we have been saying all along: that the distribution of environmental risks and harms disproportionately impacts Black low-income groups who have contributed least to our biggest environmental pollution problems and who have the least agency to do something about it.

He also found that, regardless of our strong legislative framework, good laws and policies, these are in many cases contradicted by “powerful



actors who are allowed to act with impunity and disregard environmental protections, the confidence in democracy and the environmental rule of law” and also by laws dating from the apartheid era that are resulting in harms and human rights infringements.

Examples include the Hazardous Substance Act, No.15 of 1973 and similarly, the Fertilisers, Farm Seeds, Seeds and Remedies Act 36 of 1947, which are both outdated, fragmented and effectively... “allow for the import of hazardous pesticides that are banned in their country of origin. This results in the legalised poisoning of agricultural workers in the fields and neighbouring communities”. groundWork has long advocated that highly hazardous chemicals that are banned in the jurisdictions where they are manufactured should be banned from export and import into the global south!

In the Highveld, the special rapporteur got to witness first hand the legacy of our electricity generation model and the air pollution generated from coal. He noted that the “mining and burning of coal are chief contributors to South Africa’s air pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases” and how often “real time data on air pollution is lacking, and

monitoring equipment is frequently non-functional”. “Some areas in Mpumalanga resemble a ‘sacrifice’ zone as low-income, Black communities live in the vicinity of heavily polluting industries which have disproportionately impacted their human rights.”

In recognising the 2022 Deadly Air judgement, he expressed that he “sincerely hopes that the regulations that the government started preparing will be finalised promptly and implemented effectively”. We, together with the Life After Coal Campaign have the same hope and look forward to the implementation of these regulations.

Finally, in considering the government’s commitments on climate action, the special rapporteur observed that he was perplexed to learn of government’s plans for “licensing of new coal and greenhouse gas intensive projects, including the Musina Makhado Special Economic Zone, another coal mine in Lephalale, and numerous offshore oil and gas projects”.

A report summarising the country visit and including recommendations will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in September 2024. 🌍



Mpumalanga
Delegation: From left to right: Nonhle Mashinini-Nkosi, Noura AlZaid, Marcos Orellana (UN Special Rapporteur, MEC: DARDLEA, Busisiswe Shoba, Nomfundo Shabalala DG DFFE, Zekhethelo Ndlovu, Community relations Eskom and Frank Khumalo, CoGta
Credit: groundWork



A special visit: The UN special rapporteur's visit to Highveld

by Thomas Mguni

On 3 August 2023, **groundWork** hosted and accommodated the UN special rapporteur on toxics and human rights on a tour of Komati Power Station and thereafter held a discussion with the community group VEM at their Witbank offices. Part of the visit included them seeing first-hand how we (communities, government and industry) respond to toxics, air pollution and the rights of people as per the constitution. Later, they met with VEM to understand what VEM does, but most importantly to talk about the Deadly Air Case and what the judgement means.

At Komati Power Station, we first visited the plant, which is old and decommissioned, and then observed the current developments that are happening. After the site visit, we then had a meeting with the provincial government delegation.

The provincial delegation presented several interventions to deal with climate change and mentioned areas of interest, especially around reducing air pollution. What was more interesting was the attendance of many different stakeholders from government: including the Departments of Health, International Relations, Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and Human Settlements, which were all part of the presentations done on the day. Their presence showed a positive impact of our work, as we have always called for all government departments to be involved to find solutions to environmental justice problems.

From Komati we drove past Black Wattle mine, to show the special rapporteur how people have been resettled and yet still live under the dark cloud of mining as they are exposed to dust and still remain unemployed.

Our tour ended with a discussion with VEM at their Witbank offices, where the focus was on the Deadly Air Case. Both parties explained their respective roles in the struggles on DAC and why they were involved. Interestingly, it was a good thing for VEM members to know and understand the role that was played by Marcos Orellana when preparing for the case.

The most striking question for all parties was, where to from here? How does the DAC judgement influence changes from an advocacy and campaigns perspective?

In a media statement at the conclusion of his country visit, the special rapporteur said South Africa must tackle the crude legacy of environmental racism and toxic exposure. “To this day, the legacy of pervasive air, water and chemical pollution disproportionately impacts marginalised and poor communities.”

In the Highveld he observed that, “communities related how they were left with no other choice but taking up jobs in an area of coal mines and coal-powered stations that imposed tremendous adverse health impacts on them... some areas in Mpumalanga resemble a ‘sacrifice’ zone as low-income, Black communities live in the vicinity of heavily polluting industries, which have disproportionately impacted their human rights.”

In reference to the Deadly Air Case he said... “I sincerely hope that the regulations that the government started preparing will be finalised promptly and implemented effectively”.

For **groundWork** and our different community partners, this visit should be looked at as a big development, as more people rely and count on us to tell about local issues and clarify the position about how our rights are being violated. 🌞



SA must tackle crude legacy of environmental racism



United Nations Press Release

South Africa must redouble its efforts to tackle the crude legacy of pre-1994 environmental racism, including the abhorrent practice of intentionally situating landfills and polluting industries along racial lines and in low-income and migrant communities, a UN expert said today.

“To this day, the legacy of pervasive air, water and chemical pollution disproportionately impacts marginalised and poor communities,” said Marcos Orellana, the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights in a statement issued at the end of an official visit to South Africa.

“The challenges to overcoming the legacy of environmental racism are enormous, and they are compounded by structural inequality, widespread poverty, unemployment, and new environmental threats such as hazardous synthetic chemicals and the climate emergency,” Orellana said.

The Special Rapporteur noted that the South African Constitution is renowned worldwide for its advanced positions on human rights. For example, the Constitution recognises the justiciable right of everyone to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being. He pointed out that it took the UN General Assembly another 25 years to globally recognise the critical importance of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Since 1994, South Africa has also adopted important norms governing chemicals and wastes. There are also important measures in progress, such as a project to eliminate polychlorinated biphenyls, a program to remove asbestos from roofing, and a climate bill.

“But at the same time, there are laws predating 1994 that continue to result in harms and human rights infringements, such as the laws governing hazardous

waste from 1973 and pesticides from 1947,” Orellana said.

“South Africa’s strong legislative framework should serve as the backbone for accountability and access to effective remedies,” he said. “Yet where powerful actors are allowed to act with impunity and disregard environmental protections, the confidence in democracy and the environmental rule of law begin to erode.”

According to the expert, for many decades the mining industry has contributed to South Africa’s economic development. Its legacy also includes thousands of derelict mines and mine waste dumps in the country. Orellana said that often the hope for pollution prevention and remediation upon mine closures is lost in the poor enforcement of legislation. “The result is a landscape scarred by abandoned mines, tailing dumps and acid mine drainage,” he said.

Dust from coal mines, along with ashes, mercury emissions, and PM_{2.5} from coal burning have a severe negative impact on air quality, as the country generates almost 90% of its electricity from coal. South Africa has begun to transition away from fossil fuels for energy production, but the process faces serious obstacles, not least the licensing of new coal mines and offshore oil and gas, the expert said.

“In the Western Cape Province, I heard from women farm workers who were routinely exposed to hazardous pesticides and who denounced serious adverse health impacts in their communities,” Orellana said. The expert said that during his visit he had also learned that pesticides meant for agricultural use are illegally sold and used to combat rampant rat and cockroach pest infestations that spread in the absence of sanitation and waste management services in informal settlements.



“I was appalled to learn of the many children who were poisoned or died from eating, drinking or handling hazardous pesticides,” Orellana said. “South Africa should ban the import of all highly hazardous pesticides, including those that have been banned for use in their country of origin, without delay,” he said.

At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Rapporteur thanked the people of South Africa for their hospitality and the Government for its invitation to visit the country. The UN expert will present a report on his visit, including his findings and recommendations to the Human Rights Council in September 2024. ☺

Marcos A. Orellana, Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, was appointed by the Human Rights Council as of July 2020. Dr Orellana is an expert in international law and the law on human rights and the environment. His practice as legal advisor has included work with United Nations agencies, governments and non-governmental organisations, including on wastes and chemicals issues at the Basel and Minamata conventions, the UN Environment Assembly and the Human Rights Council. He has intervened in cases before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes and the World Trade Organisation’s Appellate Body. His practice in the climate space includes representing the eight-nations Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean in the negotiations of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and serving as

senior legal advisor to the Presidency of the 25th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. He has extensive experience working with civil society around the world on issues concerning global environmental justice. He was the inaugural director of the Environment and Human Rights Division at Human Rights Watch. Previously, he directed the trade and the human rights programmes at the Centre for International Environmental Law, and he co-chaired the UN Environment Program’s civil society forum. He teaches International Environmental Law at the George Washington University School of Law and International Law at the American University Washington College of Law. Previously, he has lectured in prominent universities around the world, including Melbourne, Pretoria, Geneva and Guadalajara. He was a fellow at the University of Cambridge, visiting scholar with the Environmental Law Institute in Washington DC, and instructor professor of international law at the Universidad de Talca, Chile. The Special Rapporteurs are part of what are known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council.

The Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN human rights system, is the general name for the Council’s independent investigative and monitoring mechanisms that deal with specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent of any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.





Mr President: act now!

by Robby Mokgalaka



Human rights defenders are playing a significant role in our society as they defend the rights of the vulnerable groups. They sacrifice their lives to protect the rights of others without any payment. Such sacrifices come at a price, as they are subjected to threats, intimidation and death. Corporates such as coal mines are violating the constitutional rights of the community with impunity. It is the constitutional duty of the government to protect the constitutional rights (in terms of Section 24 of our national constitution) of the affected communities, but the government does nothing to fulfil its duty. The government lacks the political will to hold the defaulting corporates to account in their violation of these fundamental human rights.

The scourge of human rights defender murders in South Africa has received the attention in the corridors of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations' General Assembly. In November 2022, various member states in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process of the Human Rights Council recommended that South Africa develop a legal framework to protect human rights defenders, including whistle blowers.

The South African government adopted the recommendations in its own diplomatic meeting in March 2023. The challenge is that the recommendations made in the UPR are not binding, although they hold particular political gravity. This means that adopting the recommendations is just a process to fake compliance with the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, unless real action is taken to deliver legislation and implementation plans, with time frames and monitoring systems to review implementation. South African has a duty to ensure that such legislation is developed and implemented.

On the ground, South Africans are still experiencing the rise of threats and intimidation directed towards human rights defenders. The Somkhele community in the north of KwaZulu-Natal and the Newcastle activists are moving into hiding as they receive threats from unknown callers for their positions in challenging coal mines.

In June 2023, Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO) took the Somkhele coal mine, owned by Petmin (Pty) Ltd, to the High Court for commencing their mining activities without proper environmental go-ahead. The mine bused people to come to court for support, while the MCEJO members also marched outside the court to oppose the mine. The pro-mining group started singing insulting songs to the MCEJO members, advancing towards them with the aim of inciting a fight. After the court case, the MCEJO members went into hiding as they did not feel safe in their own community. The Somkhele community are still living in fear after Mam Fikile Ntshangase (MCEJO deputy chairperson) was killed in 2020 and the killers have still not been arrested.

Meanwhile, the Newcastle environmental activists started receiving threatening calls after they protested against the Chelmsford coal mine owned by Future Coal (Pty) Ltd for failure to disclose their Social Labour Plan (SLP) since its inception 14 years ago.

groundWork decided to hold a discussion with the affected communities to come up with some form of social security group within the communities. We recognised that the most effective and immediate security response can come from the activists themselves. The close relations and social integration of the community give the community an advantage to create a fruitful social security. These groups have been provided with airtime and phones to communicate amongst themselves in the case of emergencies. The groups will be formally introduced to both the provincial minister and the local police stations. The aim is to develop a meaningful working relationship between the police and the affected community groupings.

In October 2023, all human rights defenders will protest in Pretoria, demanding from the president and the national minister of police the development of legislation that seeks to recognise and protect human rights defenders, the immediate arrest of the killers of the human rights defenders and condemnation of the killings of the human rights defenders. 🌞



gW and ACN contribute to a paper



by Michelle Cruywagen

This year, groundWork and the Africa Coal Network is participating in a global working group that is developing a discussion paper outlining guiding principles for the rapid roll-out of renewable energy. The discussion paper is titled *Developing Principles and Parameters for Safe, Clean and Renewable Energy Systems* and has been prepared by a global working group on “Guardrails” for the Rapid, Equitable and Just Transition to Renewable Energy Systems.

The working group is led by our partners, the Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD), who hosted a collaborative working session in Quezon City, Manila, in the Philippines earlier this year. Bobby Peek, director of groundWork, Michelle Cruywagen, Just Transition & Coal campaigner and Marina Agortimevor, co-ordinator of the Africa Coal Network, participated in a lively three-day workshop, during which the principles were discussed, debated and expanded. Participants in Quezon City included representatives from groundWork, the Africa Coal Network, APMDD, Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, 350.org, Bankwatch and Beyond Fossil Fuels.

Following the workshop, the working group consolidated the discussion paper, as a tool to obtain ideas and facilitate consensus-building towards a unity paper on *Principles and Parameters for the Rapid, Equitable and Just Transition to Safe, Clean and Renewable Energy Systems*. The idea is that the unity paper will be adopted by a broad ecosystem of energy and climate campaigners and advocates.

The discussion paper covers the following 10 key principles:

- Addressing energy poverty and ensuring the right to universal, gender-just and equitable access to sufficient energy for basic needs
- Equitable, efficient and sufficient energy production and consumption
- Building democratic and efficient energy systems

- Land, water and marine resource use and governance
- Sustainable and equitable extraction of critical minerals for renewable energy
- Upholding and protecting basic human rights
- Mobilising finance for renewable energy
- Ecological restoration and regeneration, ecological integrity and biodiversity
- Safety and security
- clean and renewable energy sources with no potential and actual harm to people, communities and ecosystems

Organisations, movements and other contributors may submit inputs, suggestions and feedback (and may also organise wider consultations for this purpose) through the following ways:

1. Submit proposals (in Google docs) to the Global Working Group via this email address: guardrails2023@gmail.com or via your contact among the members of the Global Working Group
2. Provide feedback and suggestions directly to the discussion paper by inserting COMMENT boxes referring to the specific sections, paragraphs, sentences or phrases of the discussion paper

In both cases, please provide your name and organisation so the working group will know the source.

Lidy Nacpil, co-ordinator of the APMDD, outlined the rationale for the ‘Guardrails’ discussion paper:

“As we all work for the rapid, equitable and just transition to renewable energy systems, we believe we will be more powerful as a community and network



if our messages, demands and aspirations are coming from shared principles and framing of the parameters of this transition,” explains Lidy. “We believe we already do have many of these in common already, but we can broaden and deepen our unities further.”

Lidy emphasised that the discussion paper is aimed at facilitating the exchange of ideas and building consensus and that communities are encouraged to use it as a tool to elicit contributions and comments.

Lidy expands, “We are looking forward to receiving comments from yourself, your colleagues, your members, and your partners – and share these with us so we can incorporate them in the development of a “unity paper” that can be endorsed, adopted and used by a broad eco-system of energy, climate, development, economic justice, human rights and other campaigners and advocates.” 🌍



groundWork's Senior Coal Campaigner Michelle Cruywagen and Africa Coal Network Coordinator Marina Agortimevor.
Credit: groundWork





GGHH network updates

by Azeeza Rangunwala



Following the hottest month on record, there are various updates at the nexus of climate change and health as we spotlight a few events relevant to the GGHH community. Championed by Healthcare Without Harm, a Global Gathering was hosted to navigate how we can centre health equity in the Race to Zero. Health and health equity are determined *by the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, play and age*, as well as biological determinants. Health equity is important, especially in the global south, considering that structural, social and political determinants of health impede the human right to health. The outcome of the gathering will be a guidance document based on knowledge, experiences and practices shared by members in the network. The engagements also included the Just Transition for healthy people on a healthy planet. Our quality of life depends on our health, and I do not need to remind you of the pandemic that so many are trying to forget.

On local action, the GGHH member hospitals and health systems have been engaging with their communities on environmental health. We acknowledge that health happens outside of a hospital and commend these initiatives. Thelle Mogoerane Regional Hospital, in Vosloorus in Gauteng, hosted an open day in July and the aim of the event was to showcase different occupations, careers and services that are rendered at the hospital. Secondary school students around Kathorus (Katlehong, Gauteng) attended this event. Environmental Health practitioners from Thelle Mogoerane Regional Hospital (Busisiwe Mashaine, Junior Sambo and Thandiwe Malisa) showcased nine functions that they are rendering, including waste management, which is their chosen GGHH goal.

Pholosong Hospital, in Brakpan, Gauteng, hosted a food safety awareness event in June, engaging with patients. This included presentations on food safety and information on how the patients can start and maintain a garden at home to grow organic food. The Environmental Health team also participated in Mandela Day, recruiting other health workers to

assist with preparing the beds in their food garden for sowing the seeds, removing debris and cleaning up the space in preparation for the new season. Rising inflation rates have caused food insecurity and, while gardening requires time and effort, environmental health practitioners at Pholosong are committed to making a difference in their communities. The hospital also bids farewell to GGHH champion, Unathi Stemela, who will be going to McCord Provincial Eye Hospital, in Durban.

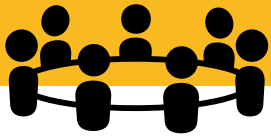
Xhariep District Environmental Health Services, in Free State, as part of Primary Health Care Re-Engineering, conducted training in June for Ward Based Primary Health Care Outreach Teams (WBPHCOTs) which mainly consist of community health care workers and outreach team leaders. The purpose was to emphasise the role of environmental health and foster a relationship between the program and the outreach teams to ensure better co-ordination. Three days of training was attended by 30 WBPHCOT members in the Kopanong/Mohokare sub-district. An additional 15 people in Letsemeng received training on the role of environmental health, focusing on health care risk waste management, which includes the pharmaceutical patient returns strategy that is part of the GGHH goal to reduce pharmaceuticals that end up in the landfills and wastewater works. The team also ran training on infection prevention and control for aid personnel (cleaners and groundspeople), as required by the ideal clinic framework.

The GGHH network has expanded and we recognise efforts that go beyond decarbonisation, as adaptation and resilience are increasingly important for the public health sector. We recognise efforts of public servants promoting environmental health in an effort to prevent illness and disease. With spring and summer approaching, there have been warnings of a very hot season in South Africa and we hope that health systems are equipped for heat-related illnesses. This is another reason why health equity should be central to health management. 🌞



A seat at the table: a collaborative approach

by Mafoko Phomane



Fenceline communities' increased understanding of their constitutional right to live in an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being is contributing to building momentum for environmental justice groups and is strengthening the environmental justice movement. This awareness is bearing fruit in facilitating community participation in discussions where decisions on environmental governance are made. Such is the case for the Sukumani Environmental Justice group (SEJ), which was founded in 2019 with the goal of assisting coal mining-affected communities in challenging industry, by highlighting the effects of Ikwezi Mining's operations in Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal.

A collaborative partnership has been developed through the leadership of groundWork's Coal Campaign manager Robby Mokhakala and SEJ. SEJ has built its collective agency by mobilising the community of Danhauser to engage with key stakeholders in mining and this has gradually led to building a supportive relationship with the Amajuba District Municipality Environmental Management department.

SEJ's and groundWork's participation in the Amajuba District Committee for Environmental Education Committee Advisory Forum has borne the success of the Deputy Director of Environmental Management and her team facilitating various workshops on Air Quality and Health. The purpose of these workshops has been to highlight the municipality's commitment to adhering to Section 24 of the constitution by enabling the municipalities to protect and promote the long-term health and well-being of people through managing and regulating activities that have a potential to impact the environment, public health and well-being, including ensuring that air pollution is mitigated, minimised or avoided in Newcastle.

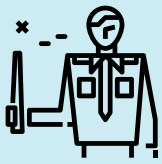
At one of the workshops that was hosted close to the Ikwezi Mine, a groundWork Health Literacy session was presented, which led to participants undertaking to engage the nurse in charge at the Sukumani Clinic with the intention of becoming part of the Clinic Committee in order to represent community health needs and to encourage the health sector to support those affected by air pollution from mining activities in the area. SEJ, as part of their initiatives, has previously conducted a door-to-door campaign to measure the environmental health problems in their community, the findings of which will be presented to the health sector for appropriate interventions.

Government officials leaving the comfort of their offices and conducting outreach in the community complies with the *Batho Pele Principles* of consultation, openness and transparency, where citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public service they receive and whenever possible should be given a choice about the services that are offered. They should also be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost and who is charge.

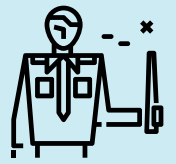
Following continuous participation of groundWork and SEJ in the Amajuba District Committee for Environmental Education Committee Advisory Forum meetings, members of SEJ have proven their ability to make meaningful input on areas that should be included in Air Passive Monitoring activities that are conducted by the municipality. They also talk of the recognition they have received by having a seat at the table and being able to make plans for further collaboration with stakeholders of the advisory forum to advance environmental justice.

What remains a task at hand is to engage with representatives from the Department of Health to participate meaningfully in the advisory forum. 🌟





Buffelsdraai landfill site waste pickers seek justice



by Asiphile Khanyile



Waste Pickers, SAWPA and groundWork meeting in Buffelsdraai, 17 August 2023. Credit: groundWork.

The story of 17 waste pickers shot and one deceased has grasped the public's interest and left many with unanswered questions. The incident took place on 12 July 2023 at the eThekweni Municipality's Buffelsdraai Landfill Site in Verulam, north of Durban. The incident happened between the waste pickers and the municipal landfill security guards, although the cause of the shooting is still unclear. Following this tragedy came the declaration of the landfill site being closed by the Mayor of eThekweni Councillor Mxolisi Kaunda at the community meeting held on 19 July 2023, leaving many waste pickers without access to their daily bread. Today, both the

community members and the waste pickers are still dealing with the after-effects of this incident.

The incident at Buffelsdraai is part of the new normal because in the past eight months the cases of landfill site closures and waste picker evictions have skyrocketed across various provinces of our country. On the one hand, drugs, violence, disputes and theft have been the common reasons for the municipalities to justify the landfill closures and evictions of waste pickers. On the other hand, waste pickers are left without a livelihood and their human rights have been violated.



Most importantly, these landfill closures and evictions are undermining and threatening the role of the Waste Picker Integration Guidelines, which demonstrate how municipalities should integrate waste pickers into their municipal waste management systems. Waste pickers have a right to work, which they have fought for since 2007. Unfortunately, many municipalities have not fully grasped the methods of implementing these guidelines; hence, we are seeing incidents like that at Buffelsdraai becoming a common reality, especially in areas such as New England Landfill (KwaZulu-Natal – 2022), South Mangaung Landfill (Free State – 2023), Boitsepi Landfill (Free-State – 2023), Garankuwa Landfill (Gauteng – 2023), Howick Landfill (KwaZulu-Natal – 2023) and Buffelsdraai (KwaZulu-Natal – 2023).

Despite everything else, the waste pickers of Buffelsdraai have been proactive towards seeking justice. There have been recent developments following the shooting incident and the community meeting in July 2023. For instance, the waste pickers have managed to organise themselves a traditional

court meeting with the local chief Inkosi Ngcobo to tell their side of the story. The waste pickers have also been working closely with the KwaZulu-Natal national provincial co-ordinator of the South African Waste Pickers Association, Nonhlanhla Mhlophe, for assistance on this case.

Currently, we are seeing the perseverance of the Buffelsdraai waste pickers towards seeking the truth and justice for those injured and the one who lost his life. On 10 August 2023, the case of the waste pickers versus the municipal landfill management was meant to be heard for the first time at the Verulam Magistrate Court. Unfortunately, the court never sat because none of the waste pickers who opened the case had been given case numbers. Following this disappointment, a meeting was held with the waste pickers, SAWPA and groundWork on 17th August 2023, where a new subcommittee was chosen and key points were discussed, to pass on to the next Mayoral Community Meeting. For now, we say strength to the waste pickers in this struggle and condolences to those who have lost a loved one. 🙏



Waste Pickers and community members addressing the Mayor and Municipal Officials, 19 July 2023. Credit: groundWork

Resisting extractivism, Mobilising for a just transition



by Tsholofelo Sepotokele

On 7 May 2023, excitement, enthusiasm and a keen spirit filled the air as we began this year's groundWork Environmental Justice School for activists (EJS). We were greeted by lush greenery, the Town Bush stream, a spectacular waterfall – and the resident monkeys. The 19 activists, hailing from various parts of Gauteng, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, were welcomed to the Centre for African Enterprises in Pietermaritzburg. This was where the participants were to spend three weeks in residence to take part in the first phase of the school. By the end of the three weeks, participants had developed environmental justice projects that they will implement in their communities.

To commence the intensive, stimulating three-week programme, we explored the spaces that the activists come from through a mapping exercise, where participants drew and presented their maps to the group, highlighting the environmental challenges that they are currently facing in their communities and how these affect their lives negatively. The resounding issues that were noted related to the impact of coal mining, the oil and steel industry, and the mismanagement of waste on people's health and that of the environment. We then linked these issues to the global economy by looking at the life cycle of cell phones and the three Es of exploitation.

The programme then encouraged participants to think about why our world is the way it is over sessions concerning power within society, focusing on capitalism, neoliberalism and so-called development. This discussion was followed by a session on the Just Transition, where participants were introduced to the five pillars of the economy and explored what a Just Transition could look like in their communities. Participants also created a time-line of the history of capitalism and energy, deepening their understanding

of environmental injustice by becoming familiar with the history of capitalist expansion in South Africa.

The curriculum also moved closer to home again to investigate particular environmental injustices and develop deeper knowledge about them. Discussions on citizen science, food sovereignty, climate change, waste and plastics were at the centre as we explored the degradation of land, water, air and health as a consequence of the economic order and power relations. Participants were also introduced to the relevant rights and regulations, enshrined in Section 24 of our South African Constitution.

In between all the hard work and active learning, participants were treated to excursions to Mpushini Valley Conservancy, Mandela Capture Site and uShaka Marine World. Additionally, movies relating to the topics discussed at the school were aired in the evenings.

The final stretch of the programme was dedicated to strengthening mobilisation efforts. The key focus was on understanding the importance of planning activist actions for collaborative and effective activism. This built upon earlier sessions, where participants considered the assets available in their communities and subsequently developed a vision, goal and objectives for their projects. Engagements with participants included discussions on people's education for awareness raising, messaging, power analysis, cutting the issue using SMART, and activist strategies. Then, with the assistance of groundWork mentors, participants planned projects and presented the actions that they will undertake from June to August 2023.

The EJS 2023 cohort was an energetic, brilliant and united bunch! We are looking forward to welcoming them back to EJS for the Return Week in September, when they will reflect on their project implementation and plan future actions. 🌞



The 2023 participants were selected by the following organisations to represent them at the school:

- African Health Research Institute (AHRI),
- Asiye eTafuleni (AeT),
- Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organization (MCEJO),
- Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA),
- Vukani Environmental Movement of Action (VEM),
- South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA),
- South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA),
- Women's Leadership Training Programme (WLTP), and
- Womxndla Community Development (WCD).

Towards Food Sovereignty



Published by groundWork
2023



Tel: +27 33 342 5662
www.groundwork.org.za

New resource alert:

groundWork and BioWatch have published a book on food sovereignty. It explores agroecological practice as an alternative to commercial agriculture by examining how the industrialised food system affects people and the environment.





Introducing Marina Agortimevor

Marina Agortimevor joins groundWork as the co-ordinator of Africa Coal Network (ACN). She will be directly involved in ensuring that there is a just transition to renewable energy (RE) in a democratic manner, serving Africa and its development first.

Additionally, she will work with, support and strengthen ACN members, comprising over 80 organisations in 24 African countries. She will do this by co-ordinating and linking the different initiatives in Africa and ensuring cohesion between different campaigns and struggles, aiming to stop coal development and, when relevant, gas and oil, and ensure justice for communities and workers already impacted.

Her academic background includes a BSc in Electrical/Electronics Engineering, a Master's in Business Administration and some certified training courses in the fields of solar project development, solar powered irrigation systems (SPIS), green technology and sustainability, and the like. She is also a certified professional engineer of the Ghana Institution of Engineering (GhIE).

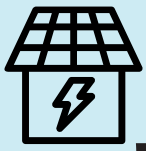
Coming from a non-activist background, she has a demonstrated history of working in the renewable energy sector (solar), power transmission and distribution sector, climate space, sales and business development fields, and the electrical and electronic manufacturing industry.

More recently, she has been a technical energy advisor for an international development organisation. She is a renewable energy advocate and provides energy and climate consultancy services. ☺



Being a part of the groundWork team is something I needed in this season of my life and professional development. Working for years in the renewable energy space birthed a dream where I wanted to see Africa transition to sustainable sources of energy in a way that will be just, people friendly and regenerative and I get to do that in this project. I like that ACN also creates an opportunity to unify Africa and bring about solidarity in working towards a just transition.





Co-operation around local renewable energy solutions

by Lucas Nowicki

A group of South African social movements have joined forces with two environmental NGOs to install and raise awareness around community-led and owned renewable energy solutions in three different communities across South Africa.

The *Urban Movement Incubator: Energy Democracy Project* was launched in 2021 and brings together environmental NGOs groundWork and Sustainable Energy Africa with Durban-based movements Abahlali baseMjondolo and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), as well as Vukani Environmental Movement from eMalahleni in Mpumalanga.

The first year of the project focussed on raising awareness around renewable energy and what locally owned energy solutions could look like in the three different communities, says Siphesihle Mvundla, Energy Democracy Campaigner at groundWork in Durban.

Each of the three community movements hosted local dialogues and information sessions around loadshedding and renewable energy, as well as listening to different people's experiences with electricity and engaging local government around rates and energy more broadly.

“From the get go, it started with us introducing what socially-owned renewable energy means. How can communities work with this concept? While we were doing this, the environmental education aspect of it came out, because many people didn't know much about different types of renewable energy,” said Kershni Ramreddi, UMI: Energy Democracy project officer for SDCEA.

Ramreddi said SDCEA started building relationships with communities in South Durban, such as the Bluff, Wentworth and Chatsworth, through these dialogues.

Despite the success of the dialogues, the first year of the project was stalled because, while Durban-based movement Abahlali baseMjondolo was facilitating similar dialogues in eKhenana, leaders and facilitators of the dialogues, including Ayanda Ngila, Nokuthula Mabaso and Siyabonga Manqele were assassinated in a spate of political murders targeting the movement. However, after a period of uncertainty, the project was restarted in eKhenana.

Thapelo Mohapi, general secretary for Abahlali, told *GroundUp* that the movement joined the project because “energy has been a crisis for the poor for years” as “people living in informal settlements have had to connect themselves to the grid unlawfully, posing risks around shack fires and electrocution.”

Mohapi said that instead of just delivering solar panels to poorer areas, the project tries to enhance people's “understanding about the energy situation and the status quo we are facing as a country”.

A central part of this awareness and implementation of locally owned renewable energy solutions was the installation of three solar photovoltaic (PV) units in eKhenana, Wentworth and eMalahleni last year.



In eKhenana, a communal electricity hub and library was set up in a container, with PV units on the roof.

“Now we have a library in a container with lights, a fridge and TV when there is loadshedding. People can come together and watch, and they can boil water and so forth. It has worked well because of the communal way of life in eKhenana. It can also be a safe space at night during load shedding,” Mohapi told *GroundUp*.

In Mpumalanga, Promise Mabilo, co-ordinator at Vukani Environmental Movement, told *GroundUp* that initially it was difficult to get the eMalahleni community to understand what the project was about.

However, after the PV units were set up in eMalahleni, Mabilo says the community “understands exactly what we are trying to achieve” and are “coming in and out to learn how it works, with loadshedding pushing them to notice that an alternative is needed.”

Mabilo says that the community uses the energy hub, which is located in Vukani’s offices, to charge phones and laptops during loadshedding

The more technical part of the project was led by Sustainable Energy Africa (SEA), a non-profit based in Cape Town that promotes clean energy development in Southern Africa.

Josh Dippenar from SEA said that the construction of the three PV units in eKhenana, Wentworth and eMalahleni was meant to show “the resilience that these distributed solar and storage systems offer in times of loadshedding and power outages”.

Although these units have done just that, SEA realised that “rooftop solar is not a scalable model for low-income communities and that we need to find a way of building large community solar systems that sit at the heart of a community and are protected as a community asset, similar to a clinic or school.”

That is the mission for the next phases of this project: scaling up; creating more accessible and integrated locally owned energy hubs across marginalised communities in the country; as well as continuing to engage local governments around policy change. ☀️



Opposite: The UMIED renewable energy units at Khenana informal settlement in Durban

Above: Abahlali Basemjondolo member Nombulelo Mavudla demonstrating the daily use of renewable energy.

Credit: groundWork



An African Reflection of INC2

by Merrisa Naidoo



Croissants, Geopolitics and [dis]Honest Brokers

Against the backdrop of one of the world's most iconic towers, world leaders gathered in the French Capital from 29 May to 2 June 2023 for the second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC2) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. There were more than 1 700 participants in UNESCO HQ in Paris – over 700 Member State delegates from 169 Member States and over 900 observers from NGOs. This demonstrated how high the stakes were for this second convening on what will form the foundational objectives, core obligations, control measures and implementing elements for the global plastics treaty.

As I prepared for my heart to be captivated by the true beauty that Paris is, I kept playing back to the INC Secretariat's words: "We have to make Paris count", and we were off to an almost steady start as we heard from President Macron, commending the African continent – particularly Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa – for their strides on plastic policies and laws in his opening statement. It was also encouraging and refreshing to hear the executive director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), Inger Andersen, concluding her opening statement by emphasising that we cannot recycle our way out of the plastic crisis and that priority has to be given to upstream measures.

However, it did not take too long before geopolitics set in and rocked the boat. Suddenly, what seemed to be a glistening summer's day in Paris with the lingering smell of freshly baked croissants and "amour" became two days of long hours and intense stalling of negotiations by a small handful of large oil and plastic-producing countries. They raised procedural issues to delay discussions on the substantive matters of the treaty and gain veto power over the treaty text by advocating for consensus only, with no opportunity for voting if agreement could not be reached on decisions.

Historically, previous conventions successfully adopted decisions based on voting when consensus could not be reached in the case of disagreements,

such as in the Minamata Convention. Removing the voting provision will prevent us from achieving an ambitious plastic treaty and will undo hard-earned negotiated efforts. With the clock ticking, we fast found ourselves in informal negotiations on Rule 38.1 (Consensus vs Voting) that went on into the wee hours of the morning, which has led to the Draft Rules of Procedure (the rules that govern the negotiations) still not being adopted. They remain applicable only provisionally as agreed at INC1. Countries decided to make an interpretive statement on this rule, which can come up again – for more time wasted – at INC3.

Despite the delay tactics, as the African continent we can be proud of how our member states, especially Senegal, remained true to their mandate for the INC2 and took a strong stance in denouncing the time-wasting, calling on countries to get their act together and focus on the task at hand. As honest brokers in this process, the African Group has continued to speak with one voice and demonstrate leadership towards achieving an ambitious global plastics treaty.

In his opening statement, the chair of the African Group reaffirmed that Africa stands ready to partner with the rest of the world to engage in negotiations towards an implementable, international, legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution so as to address the larger triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

The African position has also been strong in calling for measures that speak directly to reducing the trade, production and use of plastics, limiting the presence of toxic chemicals in plastics, prohibiting dangerous practices such as open burning, incineration, firing in coal-fired power plants and other waste-to-energy processes, co-processing in cement kilns and chemical recycling, to protect human health and the environment and uphold principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, particularly the principle of equity, the polluter-pays-principle, precautionary approach and the principle of just transition.





Merrisa Naidoo, Rico Euripidou and other members of the GAIA Africa Network in Paris.

Whilst we applaud the clear demonstration of leadership among the African Group, there is still a battle to be fought to ensure that the rights, voices and equitable participation of fenceline communities, waste pickers, indigenous peoples, youth, and other members of civil society who are most impacted by plastic pollution are recognised as rights holders in the negotiations.

Two weeks before INC2, CSOs learnt their fate of not being guaranteed entry into the INC2 venue, as we were restricted to one floating badge per organisation. Given the ever-growing interest in the process and the clear need for greater inclusion of under-represented constituencies, this was not acceptable, especially considering the amount of energy, time and travel that many of us had to bear to be a part of this process, only for the doors of UNESCO to be shut on us. It took a civil society staged action outside UNESCO, back and forth chats with governments and an open letter to the secretariat for UNEP to acknowledge the impacts of restricting and limiting access to CSOs.

GAIA and BFFP Africa members in attendance at INC2 remained high-spirited amidst the access uncertainties, championing the demands of African CSOs by calling for African leaders to negotiate on a strong global plastics treaty. Fifteen Members from nine African states (Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt,

DRC, Kenya, Cameroon, Tunisia and South Africa), as well as two friends of GAIA and BFFP from Senegal represented the African CSO contingent at INC2. During INC2, African members made their voices heard in many ways, apart from direct engagement with their INC focal points, that included: 1) Participating in a global south press briefing and highlighting the most impacted voices of plastic pollution; 2) Voicing the concerns of CSOs at an EU informal Meeting; 3) Radio interviews about plastic pollution in Africa; and 4) Delivering a statement on behalf of the youth at the High Ambition Coalition event.

It is also important to acknowledge members' advocacy efforts even well before INC2 in the form of an African CSO meeting in Nairobi; Nigerian members convening multi-stakeholder preparatory meetings and ministerial media briefings as well as the delivering of the GAIA/BFFP Joint Member statement at the African Group preparatory meeting. These efforts continue to contribute to the strong positions taken by our African Leaders to END PLASTIC POLLUTION!

Let the road to INC3 begin, where we will have a zero-draft treaty to now negotiate on! See you in Nairobi. We will be looking to our African leaders to raise the stakes even higher on home soil. 🌞





The Return of El Nino

by Greenfly

El Nino, the boy, is back and the heat is on. For the last three years his sister La Nina has brought cold water to the surface of the Pacific Ocean along the equator. La Nina cools the whole earth. Nevertheless, the three La Nina years were hotter than any year before 2015. In 2020, La Nina was just getting started. It was the second hottest year ever. She came on strong in 2021 and 2022 but they were still the seventh and sixth hottest years ever.

El Nino brings hot water to the surface over the same vast area of the Pacific. He heats the whole world. El Nino was last with us seven years ago. He got started in 2015, the fourth hottest year, and developed into a 'super El Nino' in 2016, the hottest year to date. That is, the hottest year till 2023. El Nino is just getting started. He's expected to gather strength in the second half of the year and into 2024. He's expected to be strong, but not 'super'. But he's already breaking all the records. June was the hottest June ever. July was not just the hottest July, but the hottest month ever by a very long way. And 21 days in July were hotter than all previous days ever – that is, for at least the last 120 000 years.

The odds are that 2023 will be the hottest year ever – by a long way. And the bets are on that 2024 will beat 2023 – by a long way. South Africa should get ready for drought – except that the pumps don't work even when there is water.

It's not just hot on land. The oceans are also hotter than ever before. El Nino is pushing up the temperature in the Pacific but marine heat waves are spoiling the fishing across the world – in the southern Indian and Atlantic oceans, in the north eastern Atlantic from west Africa northwards. And the Caribbean Sea at 38°C is the temperature of a hot bath.

Europe is burning. The politicians aren't dithering about. They are pouring oil on the fire. Norway likes to think of itself as a climate leader. And indeed it is. Leading the burning party with a decision to open 19 oil and gas fields for investments of US\$18.5 billion. This would make for high production, jobs and "value creation", said the oil minister. Never mind the value destruction on the charred earth.

Then there's Britain's Rishi Sunak with a rictus grin fixed to his face as he issues over 100 drilling licences. The policy is to wring the last drops from the North Sea or, as the energy minister says, it's "maxing out our oil and gas reserves". Rishi says this is good for the economy, good for energy security, good for jobs. And good for the climate. Drill Baby, Drill for the Climate.

They'll add a carbon capture and storage (CCS) project to make things look good. That'll be bad for the economy, bad for energy security, bad for jobs and won't work anyway. But the promise to divert carbon in the future is the standard political diversion to justify drilling now.

Over in the US, meanwhile, Republican senators complain that people are complaining about the heat. 48°C ain't so bad – if you live in air conditioned buildings. Like Rishi, they have big dollar donations from big oil to protect. Democrats are naturally horrified, but quietly issue more drilling licences.

African politicians are right there with them. They cry, "Hypocrisy". Indeed. Northern climate hypocrisy justifies Gwede Mantashe and his African energy peers as they stand shoulder to shoulder with their northern peers, hosing oil on the flames. They claim to drill for the poor while the oil, gas and coal flows to the ports and out to the global markets in the North+China. The profits go the same way. The poor get poorer as their crops are charred in the field. Southern developmental hypocrisy justifies more and bigger pipelines to take it away.

Common but differentiated hypocrisies are the ground for elite solidarity in the making of a climate regime designed for dysfunction. The elites, north and south, will stage serious pantomime conflicts at CoP28 in Dubai. But they'll all cheer together as the CoP28 Petro President punts CCS to justify burning more fossils now.

"Fill your pockets up with earth. Get yourself a dollar's worth. Away boys, Heave away." Thanks to Tom Waits for the last line. 🌀



AMSA and government, friends in the business of air pollution

by Tsepang Molefe



On 15 August 2023, **groundWork** and the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA), with legal support from the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), launched a legal application in the North Gauteng High Court. The legal action seeks to set aside decisions by the Minister and the NAQO to allow Arcelor Mittal South Africa (AMSA) to avoid adhering to legislated limits, or minimum emissions standards, for pollutants, and instead comply to standards that are between three to seven times weaker than the 2015 emission standards.

In May this year, communities and activists from Sharpeville and Bophelong staged a protest outside ArcelorMittal South Africa Ltd's (AMSA's) main plant in Vanderbijlpark. The protest targeted the AMSA 2023 Annual General Meeting and sought to highlight a number of issues, including ongoing pollution, non-compliance, failure to engage meaningfully with fenceline communities and unclear plans to decarbonise its operations. ☀️

*Images from the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance protest during the ArcelorMittal 2023 Annual General Meeting.
Credit: Chris Louw took all the photographs*







FOSSIL FUELS FAIL AFRICA

Paris, 2015: the world reaches an agreement to take action to limit global warming to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels.

8 YEARS LATER

“EVEN IF COAL WERE PHASED OUT OVERNIGHT, EMISSIONS FROM OIL AND GAS FIELDS ALREADY UNDER DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE **BEYOND 1.5° CELSIUS**”

THE SKY'S LIMIT AFRICA REPORT, 2018

THE COSTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ARE ACCELERATING

WILD SKIES

WILD FIRES

RISING SEAS

COASTAL FLOODING AND EROSION

FLOODS & DROUGHTS

RURAL POVERTY & HUNGER

COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

CROP FAILURES

FOOD INSECURITY

ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE

SPECIES LOSS

ACCORDING TO OUR ASSESSMENTS, EXISTING AND APPROVED PROJECTS IN AFRICA ALREADY TAKE US BEYOND 1.5°C, CLOSER TO 2°C.

AFRICAN FOSSIL FUEL PROJECTS

AND AFRICA IS ALREADY VERY VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

I'M AFRAID SO. IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH.

STAYING BELOW

1.5°C

IS **INCOMPATIBLE** WITH FOSSIL FUEL DEVELOPMENT OF ANY KIND

More than 60% of fossil fuel projects in Africa are owned by multinational corporations.

FOSSIL FUELS ARE NOT ONLY FUELING THE CLIMATE CRISIS, BUT...

FOSSIL-FUELED 'DEVELOPMENT' BYPASSES AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

Despite decades of fossil fuel development, economic inequality and the 'energy gap' in Africa keep getting worse.

AFRICAN FOSSIL FUEL FIASCOS

SENEGAL:

Offshore gas corruption scandals involve Senegalese politicians, BP and Kosmos Energy.



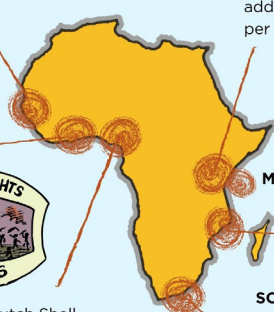
EAST AFRICAN CRUDE OIL PIPELINE:

A controversial multi-billion dollar pipeline will disrupt ecosystems supporting 450 million people and emit an additional 34 million tons of CO₂ per annum.



GHANA:

A corrupt offshore gas scheme costs Ghana hundreds of millions of dollars per annum.



Mozambique: LNG megaproject corruption has led to crippling national debt, economic collapse and violent terrorism.

NIGERIA:

Royal Dutch Shell and Nigerian politicians gain billions of dollars from rampant oil field exploitation, environmental degradation and human rights abuses.



SOUTH AFRICA: Heavy reliance on ageing coal-fired power stations has led to a national electricity crisis with severe economic consequences, while corruption stands in the way of diversifying the energy mix.

ENERGY POVERTY IN AFRICA



More than 45% of Africa's population (600 million people) don't have access to electricity, and 70% (900 million people) don't have access to clean cooking.

EMPTY PROMISES AND STRANDED ASSETS

Overblown and false promises of energy access, jobs and profits don't deliver

Billions in public finance for fossil fuels have failed development goals and harmed communities.

While the rest of the world moves to clean energy, Africa will be locked into dirty energy infrastructure.

AFRICA HOLDS 39% OF GLOBAL RENEWABLE ENERGY POTENTIAL. Wind and solar are already cheaper than fossil fuels around the world.

A JUST TRANSITION

GOVERNMENTS AND BANKS NEED TO SHIFT THEIR CLIMATE FINANCE COMMITMENTS TOWARDS A RENEWABLE JUST TRANSITION IN AFRICA.

DON'T LOCK AFRICA OUT!

NOW IS THE TIME TO LEAPFROG OVER FOSSIL FUELS TOWARDS A CLEAN GREEN ENERGY FUTURE!

All the data in this infographic is based on the report - "The Sky's Limit Africa: The Case for a Just Energy Transition from Fossil Fuel Production in Africa (2021)". To read the report and learn more about the organizations behind it, please visit: <http://bit.ly/SkysLimitAfrica>. Designed by ToonZA.

