

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

Let me start by saying the universe does not operate in years as I was warned when I said I cannot wait for the end of what has been an exhausting and challenging year. So, while we want to forget or discard 2020 to a bad memory, 2021 is going to bring us much of the same. An urgency to press alt-control-delete to reset how we live with each other and the planet is what we need.

The year was tough and brutal. We lost our friend and [Chairperson Joy Kistnasamy](#) unexpectedly. Moipone Nkwana, Environmental Justice School graduate of 2019 also bid farewell to us. Both Joy and Moipane were young strong women. Then as this year was closing, the viciousness of coal mining reared its head with the [murder of MaFikile Ntshangase](#).

Our annual Environmental Justice School was called off, just one day into the four-week event. Waste pickers lost their livelihoods overnight, and [some were imprisoned](#). The policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic was unjust and vicious as the defence force was brought in to manage people, resulting in the [death of Collins Khosa](#). Democratic spaces that were already closing were suddenly shut. But all of this did not go unchallenged.

groundWork had to find a new way of working. Our face to face approach of working with people and building movement through ongoing dialogue ended abruptly. Or so we thought. But working with people to respond to the crisis on the ground, found us building stronger ties. Our movement for just transition, for a new world order has grown and solidified. Through the dreadful medium of Zoom, we have managed to continue our work.

It has not been easy for many, as the majority of SA were either put off work, or asked to stay at home, care for children, become home school experts and isolate themselves from the elderly in cramped dense townships - a recipe for disaster. Very few of us have the privilege of having a house and garden.

Through these difficult times greater partnerships were built across sectors. Silos came crumbling down. The social justice sector got together and pushed together and gains

were made. The COVID-19 grant of R350. Is it the start of a [Basic Income Grant it should be.](#) groundWork worked with local government and with Minister Creecy who pushed for food parcels and vouchers to get to waste pickers as far and wide as possible before Easter. Yes, we know we are also drawing swords against each other, but we had to work hard and fast together.

Finally, groundWork looks forward to our work strengthening next year through our strong partnership with [Earthlife Africa](#) and the [Centre for Environmental Rights](#) in the [Life After Coal](#) campaign, our partnership with the Africa Coal Network, Friends of the Earth Africa, the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Health Care Without Harm, the various old and new friends (and fellow travellers) that have come together under the Urban Movement Innovation Fund and so many more other partnerships. and so many more other partnerships. It has been the year of developing new partnerships to challenge for a new tomorrow. A tomorrow that works on the just transition away from the death and destruction of the fossil fuel industry. As people living next to coal mines and exploding oil refineries are saying -they want a new tomorrow. They have learnt that corporates and the fossil fuel industry cannot be trusted!

Bobby Peek

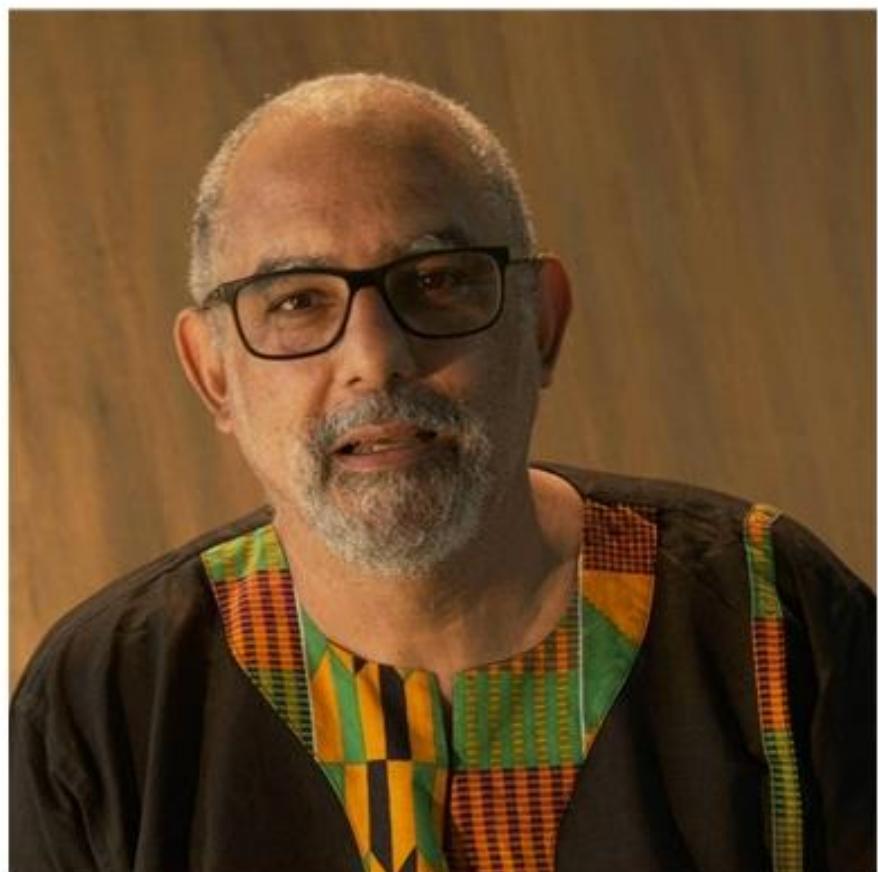
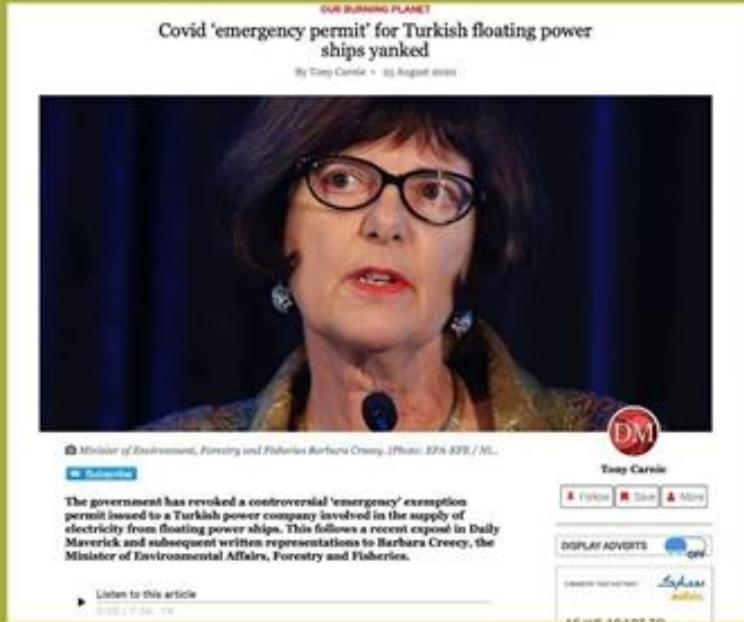


Photo by: Barry Downard

WE WILL NOT BE SILENCED

The Climate and Energy Justice campaign worked with NGOs and communities to ensure public participation, particularly under the Covid-19 State of Disaster where democratic spaces closed and were inaccessible to fenceline communities affected by dirty energy. The pandemic has been used to fast-track oil and gas developments by foregoing impact assessment processes and public participation processes, thus closing down democratic spaces. On 26th June 2020 Sonnyboy Bapela, Chief Director in the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries had the temerity to issue a verbal directive authorizing Karpowership SA (Pty) Ltd to generate power from gas on power floating ships at the ports of Richard's Bay, Ngqura and Saldanha Bay. Following media exposure and pressure from groundWork, Minister Creecy has to revoke the decision. Maybe there is some hope for open democracy. We are not holding our breath though.



SAWPA GOES DIGITAL IN A TOUGH YEAR

The South African Waste Pickers Association (aka SAWPA), launched its official website this year! The website serves as a platform to highlight the achievements of waste picker and their cooperatives, as well as to provide readily accessible resources on waste picker organising in municipalities. The website also provides information on the relevant contact persons for SAWPA provincial coordinators across the country. Users are encouraged to explore the new site to learn more about SAWPA, who has 2457 registered members and works with thousands of waste pickers across South Africa in more than 60 municipalities. In a tough year they have consolidated because they had to organise in response to COVID-19.



SAWPA members at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre. Photo by: Focalize Media

COVID 19 TRIGGERED AFFIRMATION OF WASTE PICKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

When President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the nation on COVID-19 he made special mention of waste pickers for the first time. They were given a [status of essential workers](#) during the hard lockdown due to the pandemic. This is a culmination of years of work at groundWork, [SAWPA](#), [WIEGO](#), [GAIA](#) and [ARO](#) pushing for waste pickers to be recognised and integrated into waste management systems. We also saw the [South African Human Rights Commission taking the uMsunduzi municipality to court](#) over the Pietermaritzburg landfill issue. The SAHRC responded to the calls by groundWork and various organisations for action after poor management and constant fires at the dumpsite that left the city regularly smothered by toxic pollution. The case is most likely to set a precedence for all municipalities in the country.



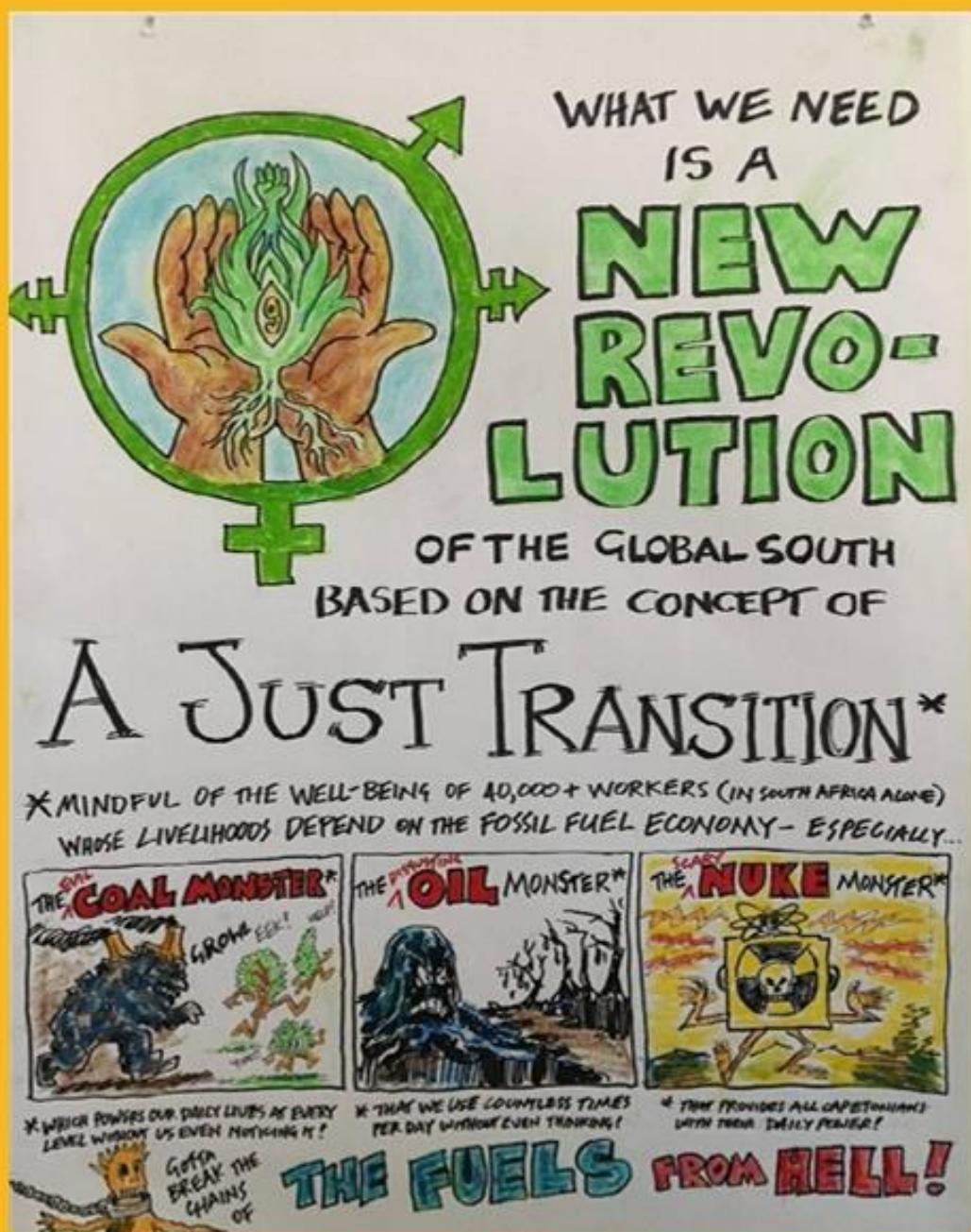
Xolani Gcina came to Pietermaritzburg from Lesotho in search of work, but ended up sorting and selling waste from the New England Road dump in Pietermaritzburg.

Photo by Mlungisi Mbele

JUST TRANSITION: A NEW WORLD ORDER?

groundWork has called for a just transition in various forms since the 90's. In 2005 we made it clear, that only when renewable energy is linked to and taken on by movements challenging for system change, will there be hope for a just transition. groundWork finds itself in many spaces, both in the trenches and along the barricades of resistance in communities throughout the country as well as in policy space. We built upon the advances in the call for a just transition 2019 and this year the President finally announced the Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Commission, and [Earthlife](#), the [Centre for Environmental Rights](#) and groundWork have been [appointed as members](#) of the 22 person committee. So the fun begins. Many old faces and some new faces.

Drawing by ND Mazin



AFRICA, HEALTH, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Three Health Systems from Africa, Netcare Limited (South Africa), Western Cape Government Health (South Africa), Mohammed VI University Hospital (Morocco) participated in the Healthcare Climate Challenge by stepping up to do its part to meet reduce the GHG emissions and foster a healthy future for people and the planet.



BRAND AUDITS: WE KNOW THE CULPRITS

Waste Pickers from SAWPA together with groundWork, collectively held a Brand Audit on Wednesday, 9th September 2020 at the Vaalpark Material Recovery Facility. The results from the activity revealed that Coca-Cola was the dominating brand within the area. This activity fed into a global [Brand Audit](#) that was organised by [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#), where the overall results revealed that the top 5 worst plastic polluters are Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestle, Unilever and Mondelèz International.



SAWPA members during the 2020 [#BreakFreeFromPlastic](#) brand audit -Photo by: groundWork

THE PANDEMIC, LOCKDOWN, FOOD, WATER AND JUSTICE

The lockdown provided a number of challenges to all South Africans including many organisations including groundWork. The big issue was not how we worked through the pandemic, but how we continuously support our community partners. The formation of the [Community Relief Fund](#) became an important process for solidarity with those we campaign with. We sought support for the fund from ourselves, our families and friends, individuals, organisations and from funders. The response was amazing. We have raised R448 172. We then had to find the system to distribute the money. To date we have distributed, R305 365. Working with our community partners money and food got out far and wide. A challenge that was easily overcome with technology. Community people who received support also decided to start working cooperatively and pooled their money so start food growing in places like Mabola. These and other projects, are proving more and more that communities want to do things on their own. People want to decide how they grow their food, distribute it and earn a livelihood without reliance on coal and mining. There is an ever-growing movement of food sovereignty in South Africa.



Activists from MCEJO in Somkhele distributing food parcels

Photo by: MCEJO



David Mokoena with fellow activists at a food garden initiative in the Vaal

Photo by:groundWork

FIKILE NTSHANGASE: A LIFE LOST FOR JUSTICE

When the shocking but not unexpected killing of activist Fikile Ntshangase took place in October, we committed our resources and gave it the full attention it deserved. In collaboration with other organisations we were able to escalate this not only to the local media but also international media houses. We challenged the [President Ramaphosa](#) and [Minister of Police, Bheki Cele](#) requesting speedy and effective investigation in this case. We have received support from more than 58 organisations and individuals globally.



Activist Fikile Ntshangase who was brutally killed in Somkhele. Photo by Rob Symons.



TO 2021!



groundWork