



2021 HIGHLIGHTS

What a year! Yes, we always say this in groundWork, and we always promise that the next year is going to be less hectic, but the reality is we are activists, and this is how we roll. On adrenalin. Ok, I am getting old, and moving slower and more of a manager these days than an activist. But it is exciting to hear about all the work every Monday morning in our staff gathering and to be able to guide and with activists, shape struggle. I sometimes feel as if I am an intruder, because there is so much happening and keeping on top of all – is nigh impossible. From 3 we are now more than 20 with support associates. To make this growth happen in a coherent manner we have developed our five-year strategy from 2022 to 2026; we have had a great evaluation highlighting the strength of groundWork – and yes, some areas that need strengthening; and we are in the middle of a change process to better understand and manage our growth.

It is exciting to be part of local struggles in South Africa and across the continent. I live vicariously through the actions of all staff – and I wish I could be with of you every day. What an honour to lead such a great team. Sadly, we bid farewell to Luqman, who put our hospital work on the map in South Africa and Africa, but Mafoko and Azeeza have joined us to lead the Environmental Health Campaigns. And yes, we had to increase management in groundWork, and stepping up to the challenge was Rico. Thanks for taking on this challenge. And a big shout out to our young cohort of Nerissa, Asiphile, Mary-Joy (MJ) and Vuyi. Keep us rocking.

Finally, to all other staff not mentioned by name, we (Gill and I) love you all, to the Board, and especially the community organisations and people across South Africa and Africa who put their trust, faith and hope in us as we struggle with them – thanks for all your support. To our NGO partners – the Centre for Environmental Rights, Earthlife Africa, the Public Health Association of South Africa, Friends of the Earth International and Africa, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives Oilwatch, Health Care Without Harm, Naledi, Support Centre for Land Change, Environmental and Rural Solutions – thanks for working with us. To all our funders – for supporting us, and for challenging us along the way.

A Luta Continua
Bobby Peek



WASTE CAMPAIGN

Thor Chemicals clean-up: At Long Last

The British-based multinational group has finally agreed to cough up nearly R174-million to ship several thousands of tonnes of the deadly imported mercurial waste from the old Thor Chemicals factory to Switzerland for treatment. The waste will be shipped to Batrec Industries near the town of Wimmis, one of the few facilities in the world equipped to deal with this waste. groundWork has worked tirelessly on this issue for over two decades doing a number of activities which included, mobilising the affected communities in Cato Ridge, supporting affected former workers of Thor in their endeavours to reach out to government and pushing the national environmental department for years to engage with Batrec.

During the early 1990s at least four Thor Chemicals' workers died and several more were maimed or disabled from being exposed to powerful toxins that damage the brain and nervous system. Activist and scientists had rung the alarm bells several years earlier after engaging with workers and finding high levels of mercury in the surrounding soil, groundwater and streams. Last month, in response to written questions in Parliament, Environment Minister Barbara Creecy confirmed that just over 1,000 tonnes of waste had been removed so far in 57 sea-freight containers.

Though her department has declined to comment on the final cost of the operation – and whether SA taxpayers will also have to chip in – DM168 searched English company records and established that the UK-based Tato Holdings group has agreed to set aside nearly R74-million for the clean-up.



Photo: Mercury stockpiles in Cato Ridge

SAWPA: Moving a little quicker towards zero waste



It's time to #StopWasteColonialism in the Global South!



We have seen the effects of waste colonialism in Africa, where our natural resources have been depleted, to fuel corporate greed. Our resources are returned to us in the form of waste and cheap products made from toxic recycled materials where plastic waste has infiltrated its way into our land, oceans and physical bodies, severing our cultural connections with the earth and violating our rights to a clean and healthy environment.

As Global South countries start closing down their borders to this unjust practice of waste dumping, we need to proactively guard against this happening in other parts of the world.

The Global North cannot continue to export its waste problem onto the Global South.

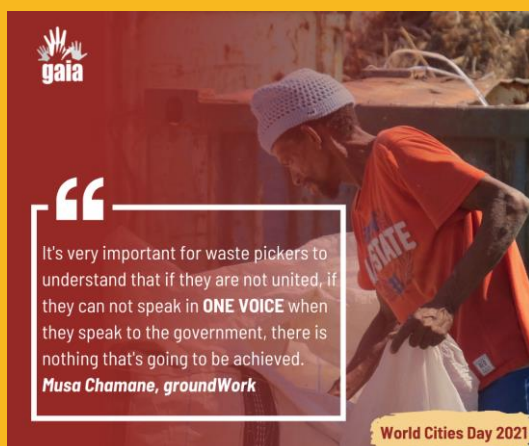
groundWork, together with 14 allied organisations around the African continent, participated in a mobilisation video to call for all countries to take responsibility for how they produce and manage their waste. No place should be a dumping ground; African people are valuable and deserving of clean and healthy environments. We must return to the traditional indigenous practices that encapsulate principles of preservation, reuse and regeneration to drive the local solutions needed for our health and wellbeing.

Video Series: Benefits of waste picker organising

Waste pickers play a crucial role in mitigating climate change and the fight for environmental justice by collecting and selling recyclable materials as a livelihood strategy in many Global South cities. Despite their critical social, environmental and economic role, waste pickers across the globe are faced with many challenges. By partnering with each other, they can ensure that their voices are heard at local, national and regional levels in a unified call to improve working conditions and be provided with safe spaces to sort, collect and sell their recyclable materials.

To celebrate World Cities Day, 28 October, groundWork together with partners from the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Break Free From Plastic, South African Waste Pickers Association, Nipe Fagio and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, participated in a four-part video series that focuses on the benefits of waste pickers organising themselves into associations. The series, available in French and Swahili, covers four critical topics: the need for organising, how to manage a waste picker organisation, advocating for gender equality in waste work, and the role of waste pickers in preventing poor waste management solutions. This series will serve to educate unorganised waste pickers across the African region.

[Watch it here.](#)



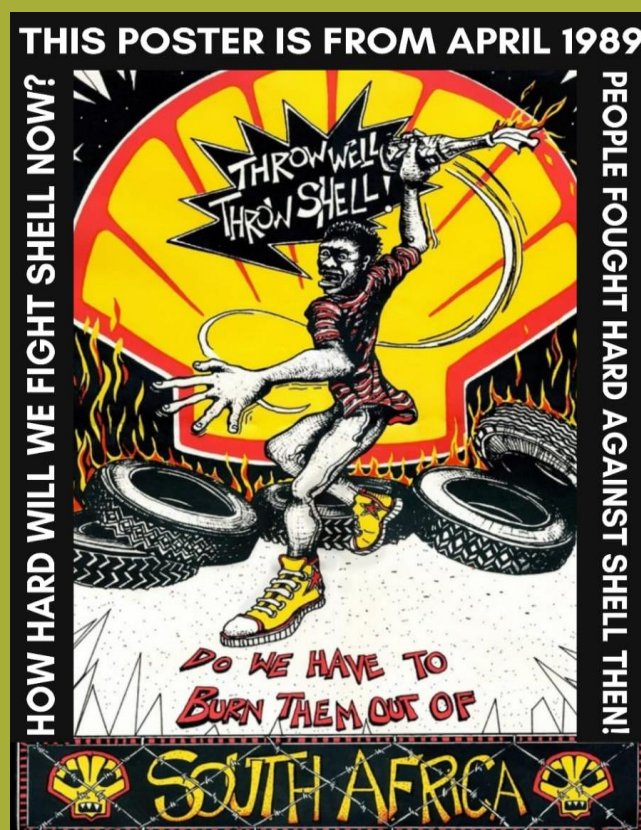
CLIMATE & ENERGY JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

The [Urban Movement Incubator](#) (UMI) Energy Democracy project which aims to raise awareness about and advocate for energy democracy, a just transition and viable renewable energy solutions for low-income communities kicked off in July this year with project partners [SDCEA](#), [VEM](#), [Abahlali](#) and [SEA](#). Mobilizing being one of the project objectives, we have had two fruitful [community events](#) (dialogues and workshops).

2021 also marked the first annual Gas Resistance and Food Sovereignty gathering of 15 organisations and community groups across South Africa. The result was a [People's Statement on Gas](#) and the beginning of a 5-year Food Sovereignty Exchange programme starting in Limpopo province next year.

After months of resisting Total's application for an additional ten exploration drill wells and seismic testing next to Brulpadda off the coast of Mosselbay, they [withdrew their application](#) on 14th April 2021. We worked with community organisations to mobilise and resist the [onslaught of gas](#) and [Gas-to-Power](#) applications including the [landmark litigation](#) against Eskom's CCPP, as well as, [Karpowerships](#) and [Nseleni Independent Floating Power Plants](#) who were both refused their Environmental Authorisations in June and November respectively. We amplified the strong message that [gas does not make sense and is not needed](#) as a bridging fuel in the Just Transition, in addressing the [climate crisis](#) and at the [Sasol AGM](#) after COP 26. We worked with gas communities to understand and speak out against new gas legislation including the [Gas Amendment Bill](#) and the [Water Fracking Regulations](#). The year ended with us working in solidarity with thousands of South Africans to push back against [Shell's seismic testing](#)

Regionally, groundWork helped launch the [Friends of the Earth Africa Just Recovery Plan for Africa Report](#). We organised and participated in the first [People's Counter COP](#) process and side events (Energy Democracy and Pushing Back on Fossil Fuels; and Waste and Climate) with regional organisations such as the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), FOEA, Africa Coal Network (ACN), South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA), Break Free from Plastics and Friends of the Earth Togo.



COAL CAMPAIGN

First Year Commemoration of Fikile Ntshangase's Passing

22 October 2021 marked the one-year anniversary of the murder of environmental rights defender, Fikile Ntshangase for opposing the expansion of Tendele Coal Mining in Somkhele, in the north of KwaZulu-Natal. groundWork worked closely with MCEJO to remember Ntshangase and to call for justice for her and her family. The commemoration of Ntshangase's assassination took place in Mtubatuba, where various organisations – including VEM, VEJA, Amadiba, SEJ, MACUA - gathered to demand justice and marched from Ntshangase's home to the Kwa-Msane police station to hand over memorandum concerning their grievances. It's been a year since the killing and no one has been arrested by the police or even named as a person of interest. Activists from the Vaal, Mpumalanga Highveld, Xolobeni, Newcastle, and Mtubatuba joined the protest action



Deadly Air Case Hearing

The Deadly Air Case filed by groundWork and Vukani Environmental Movement in Action against government was heard at the Pretoria High Court in April. The hearing which was heard over two days was first launched in June 2019. Legal representatives made their presentations before a judge and the case received both national and international media attention. Affected communities and activists staged a protest outside the Pretoria High Court. While judgement is still pending, the case itself has created and raised awareness on the impacts of air pollution on people's health and living standards.

Cancel Coal Case Launched

groundWork, the youth-based African Climate Alliance and Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action week launched landmark constitutional litigation in the North Gauteng High Court against the South African government, demanding that it abandon plans to build 1 500 MW of new coal-fired power on grounds that new coal-fired power poses significant unjustifiable threats to constitutional rights. The burning of coal is the biggest contributor to global climate change, in addition to unacceptable health impacts caused by air and water pollution. Government's current plans to build 1 500 MW of new coal-fired power in South Africa are costly, unnecessary and an unjustified limitation of the Section 24 right to an environment not harmful to health and wellbeing, along with other rights, and should be abandoned. There is no justifiable basis for the limitation of constitutional rights because cleaner and less harmful renewable energy is both a feasible and cheaper alternative to new coal power.



Africa Coal Network

2021 brought the end of new coal power into view marking a great turning point in the struggle against coal in Africa. China held the largest percentage of coal pipeline projects such as the proposed Zimbabwe's Sengwa 2100 MW, South Africa's Musina Makhado 1 320MW and Kenya's Lamu 1050 MW plants. The announcement by China's President Xi that China will no longer support overseas coal projects consigned the proposed coal power plants to history. This was a huge victory for Africa as we look to increasing our renewable energy capacity that will provide clean energy to the millions of Africans living in energy poverty. We hope that President Xi will ensure that China's commitments to support the expansion of renewable energy globally will be fast tracked in Africa.

In 2021, the membership of the Africa Coal Network grew massively, covering five new countries (Mali, Chad, Niger, Tanzania and Burkina Faso) in addition to the existing nineteen member countries. The rise in membership generally resulted in increased participation in the network's activities, including thematic working group meetings, experience sharing webinars and the Annual Coal Gathering. During this year's Annual Coal conference, the network mobilised funds and support for participants from more than 120 community organisations challenging dirty energy across 20 African countries. The conference presented a platform to advance knowledge for effective activism and share stories from the frontline of Coal Struggles.

Consequently, the Africa Coal Network initiated a grant scheme to strengthen actions and processes that halt the further development of the coal industry in Africa through active engagement with its six thematic (Coal Finance, Renewable Energy, Women's Circle, Just Transition, Campaigns Support Human Right Defenders and Closing Democratic Spaces) working groups. Ensuring resources get to the ground is a key focus of the ACN. In 2021 the ACN facilitated 30 grants which ranged from \$US500 to \$US25 000. This was also an exciting year of brining on much needed additional staff capacity.

[Watch Cartoon Here](#)



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CAMPAIGN

Global Green and Healthy Hospitals & Sustainable Health in Procurement Project

Two health institutions in Gauteng province that are participating in the sustainable health in procurement project achieved remarkable success in phasing out mercury and engaging in sustainable waste management respectively. Sizwe Hospital and Sebokeng Hospital achievements have helped strengthen sustainability in the healthcare sector in South Africa, while also impacting the public environmental health. Sizwe hospital phased out all its mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices, which has not only ensured that people and environment are protected from mercury emissions, but has also helped raise awareness and inspired another healthcare facility to do same – with Bongani Hospital in the Free-State province joining in.

Healthcare waste management has always been an issue for groundWork, especially with the use of medical waste incineration, which produce significant amount of greenhouse gases. George hospital applied the Proximity Principle of Waste Management by procuring and installing medical waste treatment equipment on-site to deal with hospital infectious waste at the point of generation. The new equipment allowed for the mechanical destruction of the waste by using sterilising heat. This model has elicited great interest from other regional hospitals, like Khayelitsha Hospital which are also implementing this technology



The UPL Cornubia Fire Civil Society Action Group formed to hold UPL and government to account!

It's now more than six months since the UPL warehouse packed with over 6000 tonnes of over 1600 agricultural chemicals was set alight during the July 2021 unrest cloaking the residents in the northern suburbs of Durban for over 12 days in a toxic cocktail of chemical smoke, and ultimately resulting in poisoning the tributary of the Ohlanga tributary, the Umhlanga river and lagoon and the ultimate closure of beaches stretching from Salt rock to the Umgeni River mouth.

Very early on in the incident a rapid convening of a volunteer grouping of academics, local activists, concerned residents and NGO's realised that in the midst of corporate secrecy and government department's passing the buck, that disclosure of the poisonous substances released into the environment was not happening along with poor public health messaging. In fact, UPL refused to release the inventory of agricultural poisons to the public, and it was only through the investigative journalism of amaBhungane that eventually made this information public.

Since mid-July 2021 the civil society group has continued coordinating and promoting a civil society response to the public health and environmental impacts of this deadly toxic fire. Neither UPL nor any government departments involved have responded satisfactorily and it is only from the activities of the civil society group that the South African Human Rights Commission's national investigative hearing into the July 2021 unrest heard testimony from civil society experts and affected community people about rights infringements.



EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, or actually because of them, two significant things were achieved in 2021.

A tracer study was undertaken to evaluate how our past EJS students felt about what they had experienced and learnt at our schools over the five years' groundWork has run them. The report that has resulted draws on the contribution of forty past students who have contributed to our knowledge about the school and its relevance. Our thanks to them for their valuable contributions which will inform our future work.

Also, the time was used to develop teaching resources to support the EJ students learning at the school and to serve as reference for their own awareness raising in their communities. We now have some great posters and booklets for the school next year, these include the *Lifecycle of a Cellphone* educational materials.

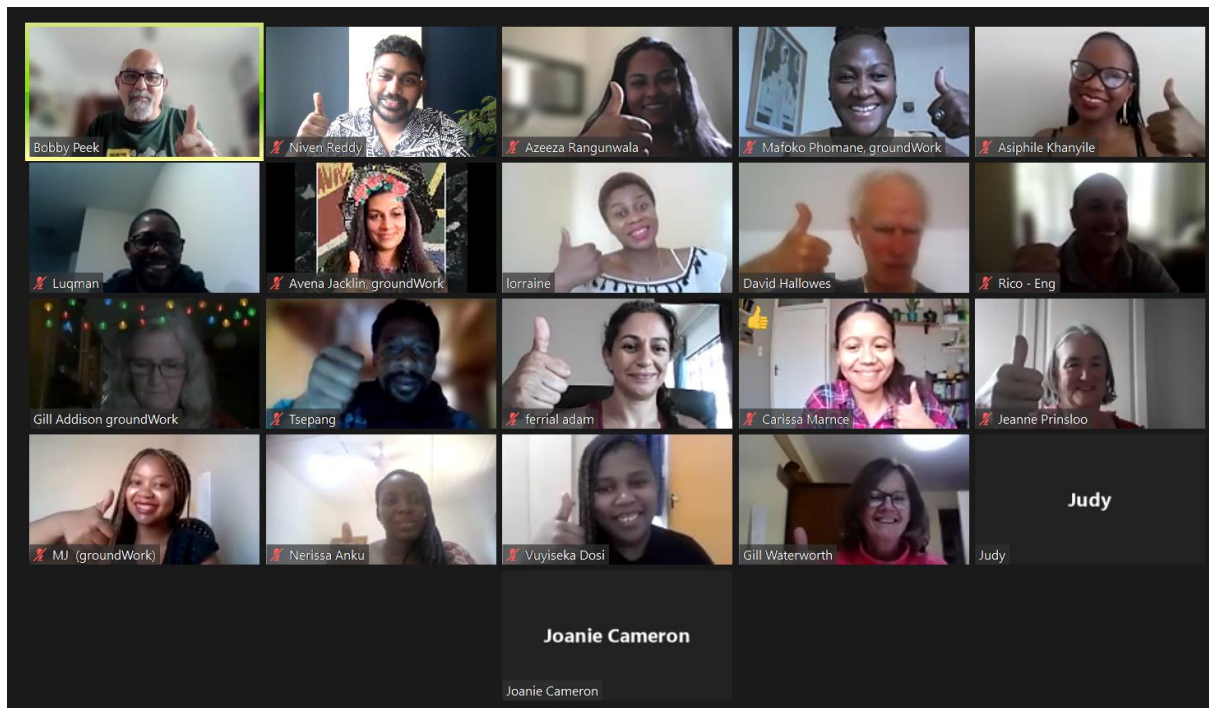
South African Human Rights Commission vs Msunduzi Local Municipality

The Pietermaritzburg High Court has found the Msunduzi Municipality in violation of the Constitution for the poor management of the New England Road Landfill Site. Last year during Level 4 of the lockdown, fires at the Pietermaritzburg landfill site burned for several days causing impacting residents with toxic air pollution. This prompted South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to take the municipality to court over the mismanagement of the site. Environmental justice activist warned that poor management has been resulted in several fires that have engulfed Pietermaritzburg in recent years. The emission of strong toxic fumes poses a severe health threat to the people of Pietermaritzburg. Advocate for the SAHRC in KwaZulu-Natal, Lloyd Lotz, says their focus was to fight for the people living in poor environments which impacts on their health and living standards. "Everyone has a right to a healthy environment and our focus was to fight for the communities who live in that environment, it's a very important judgement because it holds the municipality to account and now they have to give a detailed report on how they going to do that in court with all parties again."

Corona Virus Relief Fund

In 2020 groundWork established the COVID-19 Relief Fund, which has also been maintained throughout 2021 and it continues to offer much needed relief for activists in communities we work with. About 167 beneficiaries have been assisted by the fund from January to October of 2021, to address the challenges brought by the global pandemic. The support is meant to meet the basic daily needs and requirements of impacted individuals and groups within the environmental justice space.

[COVID-19 Fund Appeal Details](#)



HERE'S TO 2022!

groundWork