

GROUNDWORK



**NOT THE
FUTURE
WE WANT**

PEOPLE'S CLIMATE CAMP



For a People's Future...
Not a Corporate Future
Durban 2013

groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental 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, Air Quality, Waste and Environmental Health. groundWork is constituted as a trust. The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is Joy Kistnasamy, lecturer in environmental health at the Durban University of Technology. The other trustees are: Farid Esack, Patrick Kulati, Richard Lyster, Thuli Makama, Sandile Ndawonde and Jon White.

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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

CREDITS:

Printed on recycled paper from Sappi Fine Papers

Layout by Boutique Books – Printing by ArrowPrint

The People's Climate Camp banner.



From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

Tata Madiba is no longer with us. This inevitability was something few of us wanted to think about. We will miss our father of the Nation. How inspiring it was to witness his life being revealed over various news channels throughout the week. First the story was one of being the statesman who spent twenty-seven years in jail. His history before the Rivonia trial was not mentioned. He was portrayed as the soft, all-embracing statesman. But within forty-eight hours of his final sleep, the full story of Mandela started emerging, as the freedom fighter we knew he was, until the end. May his soul rest in peace!

The year 2013 is about to end. It's been a year of intense onslaught by government calling for major developments. From the proposed Durban dig-out port that will result in the reshaping and destruction of south Durban as we know it, to the announcement that we are due another coal-fired power station. All of this is to be facilitated by the Infrastructure Development Bill, which will speedily advance South Africa's bankruptcy. This made for a very busy year for groundWork and our allies on the ground. For me, the year went even faster, for I had a two-month sabbatical break in July and August.

This year we also bid farewell to friends and comrades. Too many, but I am sure that we will remain in contact.

We say goodbye to Sunita, Heeten and groundWork US, as the groundWork US office closes. Since groundWork started we have worked with groundWork US, previously the South African Exchange Programme on Environmental Justice, for a strengthening of environmental justice both in the US and in South Africa. More on our history later in our newsletter. Guys, we will miss you!

We also say good-bye to Sarah-Jayne Clifton, working out of London, who worked for Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) as our climate

campaigner and who is now with the Jubilee Debt Campaign. Lucky demons! I was fortunate to work with Sarah-J in three roles: when she was an exchange staff member to groundWork in 2007; as part of the FoEI Executive Committee; and as part of the Climate Justice and Energy (CJE) steering committee for FoEI. Sarah-Jayne, we are going to miss your integrity and ability to hold and juggle difficult positions equitably in FoEI's contentious CJE campaign. Your understanding of the various pieces that make up the whole, and having to service and support all of these, was unique.

This year also marks the year that Professor David Wiley bids farewell to the Michigan State University Department of Sociology and African Studies Centre, when he retires after more than forty years of dedication. David has a long and intimate connection to Africa, and he has connected me to Africa, my land, like no literature or other person has. When Dave speaks about Africa you feel as if you were there with him during his experiences on the continent. I am not the only voice from Africa that can attest to this. I have heard very many personal stories from David about his work and life with people in Africa and the sadness he expresses when African friends pass away. Knowing David, retirement does not exist in his vocabulary.

Another great person to pass away this year, in November, was Reginald September who, since the age of fifteen, as a "coloured" person questioned the unjust practices of the colonial and apartheid government that attempted to take away from him his full citizenship of South Africa and determined that he would be "coloured", a person of mixed heritage. His quest throughout his life was to make sure that "coloured" people see themselves foremost as South Africans and Africans. Oom Reg, I am sorry I never visited you more often in parliament, but I'm forever grateful to you for allowing us the space to share our thoughts and



concerns on environmental justice with you. Your stature is measured by the presence of both Mbeki and Zuma at your funeral.

At this time of the year, we have the usual United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Conference of the Parties (CoP) meeting. This year it was in the cold of Warsaw, two weeks earlier than the normal date of the end of November. I guess, after the snow and cold of Poznan, Poland, in 2008, people needed a bit of warmer weather.

The UNFCCC gathering this year was notorious for its link with corporations that are some of the top emitters of greenhouse gases. As FoEI (and many allies put it), "Warsaw CoP 19 is one of the most corporate-captured CoPs ever, where the Polish hosts officially listed their corporate partners at the CoP, including corporations pushing destructive dirty energy across the globe." This corporate capture and moribund state of affairs finally led to a walk-out of a broad sector of civil society organizations before the end of the CoP. It was estimated that more than nine hundred civil society delegates walked out, a position groundWork has been calling for for many years. We need to seriously consider what criteria and commitments from the process we as civil society will need before we go back. Let this walk-out not be merely a "cry wolf", something that many critics are pointing to.

But in south Durban we did not have to walk out. We gathered and defined our own future with our own actions. Based upon the outcome of our 2011 Dirty Energy Week (visit our website for the report), where people shared their struggles, we built upon our position that the UNFCCC is not delivering for the people and, as people who suffer, we have to make the changes we want ourselves. Based upon this, and working in solidarity with others, the People's Climate Camp took place in Durban, where community people from Eskom-impacted areas (the Vaal Triangle and the Highveld) came together with local Durban and KwaZulu-Natal people to consider a peoples' agenda on energy and climate change, and to work in solidarity with the farmers and the people of south Durban who stand to lose their land for the proposed major dig-out port. Transnet, the port proponent, is riding roughshod over people. It is made clear, through their having no alternative for the farmers, as well as drilling on

the neighbourhood beaches for their preliminary geotechnical investigations without speaking to the people and organizations concerned in the area, that they have no intention of actually listening to the people of south Durban. No matter how Malusi Gigaba waxes lyrically on about participation, Transnet, and indeed government, has little regard for local people. They need this expansion of the port (and petrochemical industry), and they are going to do it. "Stuff you!" is what they think of the communities set to be impacted upon.

But it is not all gloom on the port expansion process, and there might be a sad, sick twist to this tale.

A letter dated the 2nd of October, from the Department of Environmental Affairs, rejected Nemai Consulting's environmental impact assessment (EIA) of Transnet's proposed expansion of their terminals in the Durban harbour, on the grounds that the damage to the Durban harbour sandbank is unacceptable and that the analyses of the implications for climate change were not appropriately considered. This rejection was not sent to the public until it was leaked out. The south Durban community has criticised Nemai Consulting for their lack of review and consideration of the climate impacts of the port expansion. They have been accused of promoting "the analysis of climate denialists at the CSIR", which one cannot help but agree on, considering the scant space this was given in the berth proposal. But looking at this from another perspective, is this "victory" merely a front for the facilitation of the fast tracking of the dig-out port?

One of the key things not done this year has been to get a coal campaigner into the office to work on the new groundWork campaign on coal. South Africa needs a new energy future, and it is not tied up in coal, no matter how government tries to spin this issue. Eskom is morally bankrupt after spying on people, it is bankrupting the country by not moving to alternatives fast enough, and it is bankrupting our health care system that has to take care of those who live with ill health as a result of Eskom's addiction to coal.

So friends, we say goodbye to this year and some close comrades, and we look forward to a coming year that will be even more exciting, especially considering our plans to launch the Environmental Justice School in April 2014! ☺



Something happened in Warsaw...

by Siziwe Khanyile

...but something even bigger, the People's Climate Camp, took place in Durban!

Out of the energy sovereignty project within the Climate and Energy Justice Campaign came the groundWork Report *Talking Energy* (part one of a three part series on the issue of energy sovereignty), a report that came from many conversations with people in the Vaal, Highveld and south Durban about their energy use, their thoughts on the energy system of the country and their ideas for an alternative system.

Following the dialogues and the publication of the report, the campaign, with the assistance of two facilitators, David Hallowes and Vanessa Black, continued the dialogues within and between people's organizations to explore the practical

meaning of energy sovereignty as a way of resisting elite power and of giving effect to people's control of their own energy future. This involved a series of workshops in the Vaal and Durban, which explicitly looked at the possibilities of organizing a camp in south Durban, where a major dig-out port will take over sixteen local farmers' land and change the face of the entire community.

The workshops were both discussion-based and practical. They comprised of dialogues reviewing the politics of energy, climate and environment. There was an opportunity to engage with the *Talking Energy* publication, to connect people and technology by looking at what it takes to build



Marchers in the Prospecton Farmer's march make no bones about their concerns.

Credit: groundWork



Lead

groundWork director, Bobby Peek, addresses attendees of the People's Climate Camp.

Credit: groundWork



people's energy in practical terms, to discuss the relationship between food and energy sovereignty, issues of waste minimization and recycling and broad sustainability issues. There was also common planning and allocation of responsibility for the occupy camp, which included construction and dismantling of the camp, food arrangements and commitment to zero waste.

The People's Climate Camp and associated events were linked to the Global Day of Action on Climate Change and this was an important building block for the possibility of a larger action in 2014, when it will be one year ahead of the next big deadline in the annual international climate change negotiations; 2015 is the date by which the parties will agree on a new treaty.

In contrast to the climate negotiations which took place in Warsaw, Poland, this year, the aim of this civil society camp out was to create a democratically organized space which combined an assembly of

people debating and defining common positions on climate and energy justice with the occupation of a local site of resistance in the struggle for justice. The camp also aimed to articulate and build capacity for the alternative people's energy sovereignty.

Critically, the site of the camp was originally planned to be on one of the farmer's land in Prospecton. However, due to Durban's notorious heavy summer rains, this became impossible and instead we camped at an eco-park on the Bluff, not too far from the farmers' land. Although we did not "occupy" the farmers' land, about one hundred people marched to the site and a press conference was held there to highlight their plight.

The significance of this land, which the farmers are leasing on a monthly basis from Transnet, is that it is alongside the old airport and the farmers are now facing removal. Transnet plans to remove them in 2016 for the purpose of digging out a massive new container port. This will destroy the farms and the unique eco-system, while farm workers will lose their jobs and farmers their source of income. In addition, the destruction of this farm land will affect a link that connects the farmers to the local food economy in Durban.

The land that we occupied over four days in November, together with activists and comrades from Durban, Vaal and the Highveld, where there is a strong community resistance to dirty industry, was significantly located near BP and Shell's Sapref refinery and the Petronas Engen refinery. People built their own accommodation, cooked their own meals, and watched demonstrations of alternative energy uses and alternative lifestyles and livelihoods.



A glorious display of locally produced vegetables.

Credit: groundWork



During our walk to the farmers' land on the first day of arrival, we were demonstrating solidarity with the farmers and workers, and the people of south Durban who will be affected by the expansion of the port, which will result in increased trucking traffic through community residential areas, logistics parks, and the further expansion of the petrochemicals industries on their doorsteps. The protest was a demonstration of resistance to the further expansion of a development system that will be climate-destructive, health-eroding, and environmentally destructive. Already, the Sapref and Engen refineries, their associated pipelines and their storage tanks, have a terrible record of pollution from normal production and from the frequent explosions, fires and spills.

We stood in solidarity with this ravaged community and sent a message that they are not alone. They have fellow fighters who are empathetic to their struggles from other parts of the country. This message came out strongly in the climate assembly that took place on the second day of the people's Climate Justice Camp.

The assembly was attended by over one hundred people from civil society who are concerned and affected by developments for profit and not for people. A kind of development for the rich against the poor where local economies are destroyed and replaced with the globalised economy of transnational corporations and which does not take seriously climate change, pollution and health effects caused by such corporations.

The assembly was about being in solidarity with the people of Durban, whose resources are being siphoned by transnational corporations, and to say no to the project to dig out and dump south Durban's people and land. The assembly also created a space for people to highlight the climate and energy challenges that they face in their communities, to debate climate and energy issues and share these within the assembly space.

The assembly culminated in a declaration which was signed by almost thirty community organizations, people's movements, faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations and other civil society formations*. It made a strong statement against false and destructive developments in the form of coal and coal-fired energy generation,

unconventional energy sources such as fracking, false solutions to climate change like carbon capture and storage, and false solutions to food security such as GMOs.

The declaration made a strong statement calling for a stop to burning fossil fuels, the reduction of greenhouse gas and other polluting gas and particulate emissions, the protection of our rivers and waterways, food and energy sovereignty where people have democratic control over their production and consumption of their food and energy without the interference of those seeking large profits.

Those present made a commitment to work in solidarity, to strengthen their struggles in order to resist destructive development and to bring about a restoration of people and the earth.

We look forward to another year to mobilize, resist and transform within our communities. ☮

*If you have not yet read and signed the People's Declaration, please email megan@groundwork.org.za for details on how to go about doing this.



Siga Govender, one of the farmers who stands to lose his land, was overwhelmed by the show of solidarity.

*Credit:
groundWork*



Introducing the Coal Campaign

by Bobby Peek

groundWork's very successful Air Quality Campaign is refocusing on the coal industry and its myriad negative impacts

Air pollution is what groundWork cut its teeth on. From the oil refineries in south Durban to Sasol's chemical plants in Sasolburg, this is where groundWork, together with local people, challenged the status quo of lawlessness in relation to industrial pollution. It was in these areas that we questioned corporate impunity as they spewed out their toxic gases and killed people and workers in industrial accidents because they want to do things on the cheap in Africa. It was, and still often is, said in groundWork: Where there is a chimney, you will find groundWork – and Bobby!

It was in this area of work that groundWork and local people campaigned for government to hold corporations accountable and to ensure our democratic right to an environment that is not harmful to our health and well-being. The groundWork campaign on "Air Quality" broke ground on making sure people in South Africa had a handle on air pollution.

The monitoring of air pollution was always a "private" affair between industries and government and, bluntly put, the monitoring was a micky mouse operation. Industry would only monitor – or allow government to monitor – the air pollution they felt comfortable with. The substances that were problematic, such as the benzenes and other volatile organic compounds, were purposely not monitored in community neighbourhoods or on the fenceline of industries. If any monitoring was done that exposed their pollution, it would be never be shared with the public. Or at least not until groundWork took the first Bucket Brigade air

pollution samples in 2000, and exposed industrial pollution in residential neighbourhoods in Durban, Sasolburg and Cape Town. We set the cat amongst the pigeons and as a result, four years later, we got our first legislation to govern air pollution.

As the years progressed, groundWork moved beyond the petrochemical industry as we know it and was forced to deal with industries such as ArcelorMittal – and the smelting industry in general – and Eskom, who are the top polluters because of their reliance on coal as a cheap energy source. Cheap, because government has allowed users such as major corporations and Eskom to knowingly ignore the externalities of their reliance on coal.

Our research pieces over the years have clearly raised concern about coal, and South Africa's corporate and political reliance on coal as a measure for creating elite wealth, while making poor South Africans poorer.

Following the local Eskom World Bank saga, and working in the Highveld and Lephalale, it became evident to groundWork, after hearing from communities about the legacy of coal mines and the coal-fired power stations, that coal needed to be tackled in a more coherent manner. It is because of South Africa's abuse of coal that we are one of the top greenhouse gas emitters in the world. Coal needs to be tackled because of local impact, as well as its global impact.

The inevitable conclusion was that our air quality campaign, which has had tremendous success in supporting community mobilization, with sound



technical and corporate information to challenge for environment justice, has been refocused to become a campaign that will support community people who are challenging the negative impacts of coal. This is so that we can have environmental justice on the ground, while we take carbon emissions out of the air, by seeking to close coal-fired power stations to ensure the protection of health and to move towards alternative technologies that are more accessible to the poor.

There is ample evidence that coal is harming people, the country and indeed the world. To rely on coal in a water-scarce country makes no sense. The resulting acid mine drainage and the requirements of huge amounts of water for coal-fired power stations is driving South Africa to a critical point, where water, already a political issue for the very many South Africans who do not have access to meaningful potable water supply, will be even further threatened when water goes to coal-fired facilities rather than to people. How can we honestly agree to billions of litres of water for coal-fired power stations for energy for major corporations while people living next to the coal mines and coal-fired power stations do not have water?

Air pollution from coal mines, coal-fired power stations, and the burning of underground coal fields and coal dumps, makes the Witbank area a place close to biblical hell. Instead of recognising this, and moving toward a new energy paradigm, more coal-fired power stations are being built in the Mpumalanga area. The Waterberg area, in Limpopo Province, is facing the same challenge, and the future of the area can be witnessed in the visual desolation in Witbank and surrounds presently.

Already our focus on coal has delivered dividends. Eskom in another era would have ignored the public and forced the Department of Environmental Affairs to allow them to gain exemptions from the air pollution standards we have fought for and

gained over the last decade. They want to operate outside the law, and to use the present legal process to make air pollution that is harming people's health a lawful process. If the DEA disagrees, no doubt they will seek an intervention from Cabinet, to allow them to operate with impunity. But, as a result of the focus on Eskom and its exploits on coal over the last years, Eskom now has to engage with the public on the request to be exempted from meeting the new air quality standards. If we were not vigilant, Eskom would have done this behind our backs.

Other private coal-fired ventures, such as Kipower and Vedanta, are also being challenged. The health fraternity is engaging on coal now, and the Department of Energy wants to understand what impact their energy choices could be on health. So, in the policy processes such as the Integrated Energy Plan, the DoE is asking how they can be assisted in understanding the health impacts of the energy choices that we make. Financially, coal is sinking South Africa further into debt, so we have to rethink coal.

Finally, the areas where groundWork assisted community people with air pollution are the same areas where coal is heavily exploited and burnt. We continue to work with the local community people with whom we have long and strong relationships and we work closely with Earthlife Africa Johannesburg and the Centre for Environmental Rights as partners in the coal struggle.

Let us show the world that South Africa can do without coal, and develop a prosperous nation for all. This is the challenge: to get the South African government and middle classes to understand that the over-consumption of energy by foreign industry and the wealthy is what is making South Africa poorer.

Phansi coal, phansi – a just transition for all to a new energy future! Where there is coal let there be groundWork! ☺



Leave the oil in the soil...

10 November 2013

Subject: Leave the oil in the soil; leave the coal in the hole

Dear President Obama,

We are African organizations working for the realisation of a healthy and just environment for the people of our countries. We believe that every person has the right to a dignified life of quality on a liveable planet. The climate crisis – brought on by developed countries – poses a monumental threat to this basic human right.

It is with this in mind that we write to you concerning the Power Africa initiative, as well as congressional legislation apparently meant to operationalise your initiative, including the Electrify Africa Act of 2013. Like you, we feel a great sense of urgency to address the pervasive energy poverty found in most African countries. It is shameful that, in 2013, more than two-thirds of sub-Saharan Africa's population lacks electricity, with that number growing to more than 85% in rural areas.

We are therefore working hard to bring decentralised, truly clean, community-controlled renewable energy to all of our people. We do not need to poison communities in Africa in order to develop sustainably. Consequently, we reject any further extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels, including natural gas, oil, coal, and unconventional fossil fuels. These dirty fuel projects cause devastating impacts on local health, communities and the environment. We similarly reject large hydropower projects, and other "false solutions" such as carbon trading and offsetting. Smaller scale solar, wind, geothermal and mini-hydro projects can provide us with sustainable lives and livelihoods, without impacting on our health, along with that of the continent and the planet.

When we read statements from the White House about "new discoveries of vast reserves of oil and gas", and that "The recent discoveries of oil and gas in sub-Saharan Africa will play a critical role in defining the region's prospects for economic growth and stability, as well as contributing to

by Friends of the Earth Africa

broader near-term global energy security"¹ – our response is to say, "Leave the oil in the soil; leave the coal in the hole".

It is simply impossible to continue to exploit fossil fuels if we want to avoid climate catastrophe. And we want to avoid climate catastrophe. So do you. Climate change is already having a heightened impact in Africa, with increasing temperatures, more floods and droughts, and failing agriculture, which is increasing conflict and threatening the lives and livelihoods of many millions.

Furthermore, we know from many decades of direct experience that the World Bank-driven development model, pushing large-scale infrastructure and power projects, rarely, if ever, alleviates poverty. Instead, such projects exacerbate inequality and conflict, devastate the environment, and frequently involve human rights violations (that is, the well-documented "resource curse"). These projects do not help us at home but rather are for export and to line the pockets of multinational corporations and local elites.

But even more troubling is how African poverty has historically been used to line the pockets of U.S. corporations and "experts". Much of the money given as "aid" to African and other countries actually returns right back to the "experts" and consultants of donor countries.² It thus troubles us tremendously that Power Africa has been advertised to U.S. audiences as an initiative to benefit U.S. corporations. For example, upon Power Africa's launch, Forbes wrote that it "greases billions in deals for General Electric", saying the firm is "perhaps the biggest beneficiary" of the initiative, noting the U.S. Export – Import Bank's central role

1 The White House Fact Sheet: Power Africa, 30 June, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/30/fact-sheet-power-africa>.

2 Timothy Mitchell. Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity, University of California press, 2002

3 See <http://www.forbes.com/sites/christopherhelman/2013/07/01/with-power-africa-plan-obama-to-grease-billions-in-deals-for-g-e/>.

4 We note that the U.S. Export-Import Bank has gained notoriety for its skyrocketing financing of fossil fuels, including the 4800 MW Kusile power project in South



in financing its ambitions in the region. Indeed, the chair of the Export-Import Bank was quite frank about this over Twitter, referring to Power Africa as a “\$7B plan to power up @General Electric”, and he posted a picture of President Obama's speech on the initiative in Tanzania with a GE logo more than twice the size of the presidential seal.

We therefore urge you to re-think any support for large scale power and infrastructure projects in the name of increasing energy access for Africa. We know that this hasn't worked in the past, and it won't work now. What will work are small-scale, decentralized, community-owned renewable energy initiatives throughout the African countryside and cities. Even the International Energy Agency has said as much. Its 2010 World Energy Outlook found that for universal energy access to occur by 2030, 70% of rural populations will need to be served by decentralized renewable energy, and that electrification strategies should focus heavily on decentralized renewable energy systems, such as small-scale, democratically controlled wind, solar and micro-hydro co-operatives that meet local needs and end peoples' reliance on the corporate-controlled energy system. Advances in distributed renewable energy in recent years have made this technology more cost effective than outmoded grid extension from centralized fossil fuel projects; much like cheaper mobile phone technology has made extension of phone lines obsolete. When the externalized cost of fossil fuel projects is factored in – including the cost of harmful health impacts, loss of land, environmental and agricultural damage, and conflicts – distributed renewable energy solutions become even more cost effective than fossil fuel projects.

Unfortunately, to our dismay, we have learned that fossil fuel companies, the ONE Campaign, and even some in the Obama administration are using Power Africa and the Electrify Africa Act to try to weaken crucial gains in U.S. development financing at the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). OPIC's landmark climate and development policy, which is already having a positive effect in directing the agency's portfolio toward renewable

Africa, which is exacerbating energy poverty and causing tremendous local and climate pollution. Indeed, we vociferously protested the Export-Import Bank's financing of Kusile.

energy, requires the agency to reduce its fossil fuel financing and increase its renewable energy financing, bringing cleaner energy access to the poor. **OPIC's cap on greenhouse gas emissions must not be tampered with, most certainly not in the false name of supplying power to Africa's poor.** Weakening this policy will mean more polluting energy for Africa. What's more, it may result in increased numbers of large centralized fossil fuel power projects that serve industrial customers but do not increase energy access for the poor, particularly in rural areas.

We thank you for your attention to these most important matters as we all move boldly toward sustainable livelihoods in the face of the climate crisis.

Sincerely,

Abibiman Foundation, Ghana
 ADEID, Cameroun
 African Alliance for Rangeland Management and Development, Kenya
 African Biodiversity Network, Kenya
 African Biosafety Centre, South Africa
 African Research Association managing Development in Nigeria
 AME, Cameroun
 Association Nigérienne des Scouts de l'Environnement, Niger
 ATTAC Burkina, Burkina Faso
 Caravane D'Animation Culturelle Pour Le Development Durably, DRC
 Center for Secured Health and Environmental Development Initiatives, Nigeria
 Centre for 21st Century Issues, Nigeria
 Centre for Civil Society, South Africa
 CIKOD, Ghana
 Climate Change Network Nigeria
 Committee on Vital Environmental Resources, Nigeria
 Daughters of Mumbi Global Resource Center, Kenya
 Direction Générale des Forêts et des Ressources Naturelles, Bénin
 Earth Peoples, Africa
 Earthlife Africa Durban, South Africa
 Earthlife Africa Jhb, South Africa
 Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria
 Friends of Lake Turkana, Kenya Friends of the Earth Africa Friends of the Earth Ghana
 Greater Middelburg Resident's Association, South Africa
 Greenpeace Africa
 groundWork, Friends of the Earth, South Africa
 Growing Power NPC, South Africa
 Health of Mother Earth, Nigeria
 Host Community Network Gwagwalada-Abuja, Nigeria
 Host Community Network Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
 Host Community Network Chika-Lugbe, Nigeria
 Host Community Network Karimo, Nigeria
 Host Community Network Mape, Nigeria
 Institute for Sustainable Development, Ethiopia
 Irrigation Training and Economic Empowerment Organization – IRTECO, Tanzania
 Jamaa Resource Initiatives, Kenya
 Jeunes volontaires pour l'Environnement de la RDC (JVE-RDC), DRC JFE, Cameroun
 Johannesburg Anglican Environmental Initiative, South Africa
 Justiça Ambiental/ Friends of the Earth Mozambique
 Kenya Debt Relief Network – KENDREN, Kenya
 Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre, Nigeria
 Les Amis de la Terre-Togo
 Maendeleo Endelevu Action Program, Kenya
 National Association of Professional Environmentalists, Uganda
 Never Ending Food, Malawi
 Newcastle Environmental Justice Alliance, South Africa
 Next Generation Youth Initiative International (NEYII), Nigeria NGO
 Coalition for Environment (NGOCE), Calabar, Nigeria Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Nigeria
 No REDD in Africa Network
 Ogoni Solidarity Forum, Nigeria
 Organization de Bienfaisance et de Développement, Djibouti
 Project 90 by 2030, South Africa
 Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC), Nigeria
 RAINS, Ghana
 SAFCEI, South Africa
 South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, South Africa
 Southern Cape Land Committee, South Africa
 TCOE, South Africa
 The Rules, Africa
 The Young Environment Network, Nigeria
 Unemployed People's Movement, South Africa
 União Nacional de Camponeses (National Farmer Union of Mozambique), Mozambique
 University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa
 Wise Administration of Terrestrial Environment and Resources (WATER), Nigeria
 Women Environmental Programme Burkina, Burkina Faso
 World Neighbours, Africa
 Worldview – The Gambia
 Young Volunteers for Environment, Ethiopia
 Youth Volunteers for the Environment, Zambia YVE Ghana
 350.org Durban, South Africa



An incinerator is always hungry

by Musa Chamane

Waste pickers take to the streets to say “ban the burn”!

“Waste incinerators lead to people losing their jobs. People working collecting waste provide livelihoods for their families, so if one loses such a job, it means the family is going to suffer, and there will be no bread on the table,” says Simon Mbata, spokesperson of the South African Waste Pickers’ Association (SAWPA). At the beginning of November, SAWPA organized a march against waste incineration in South Africa generally, but used Enviroserve’s proposed waste-to-energy facility in Chloorkop, Kempton Park, as a specific example. During their first meeting in 2009, SAWPA agreed that, as the national movement of waste pickers, waste incineration would be opposed, as it directly competes with their job stability.

South African waste giant Enviroserve has proposed closing the landfill in Pretoria and substituting it with a general waste incinerator, which would mean that all waste materials that are currently being taken to the landfill and recycled by waste pickers will now go to the incinerator to be burned. This particular project uses recyclables to burn to produce energy, making it seem like a more “green” solution. It is, however, clearly another false solution that masks the fact that it is actually a source of dirty energy: it not only takes away people’s jobs and burns up reusable resources, but waste can never be completely destroyed, and toxic ash and air pollutants are by-products of the supposedly climate-friendly process.

The reason why recyclables specifically are used in incinerators is due to their high calorific or heat-generating content, and therefore recyclables like plastics, which are petroleum-based, are particularly valuable to incineration companies. However, in South Africa, a waste picker can earn up to R50 per kilogram of plastic; incinerators do not create work but instead rob people of their employment. South Africa is a job-scarce country. Waste pickers have found a niche in the job market by employing themselves, and incinerators are about to put this all to an end. SAWPA is both angered and

But they keep telling us incinerators are green!

The incinerator industry often promotes incinerators as having “zero emissions” and being safe for community health. The truth, however, is that even the most technologically advanced incinerators, like those found in Sweden, emit thousands of pollutants that contaminate our air, soil and water.

Identified emissions include heavy metals such as lead, cadmium, arsenic, chromium and mercury, halogenated hydrocarbons, acid gases, particulate matter and volatile organic compounds such as dioxin and furans. Even small amounts of these toxins can be detrimental to human health and the environment; mercury, for example, is a powerful and widespread neurotoxin that impairs motor, sensory and cognitive functions. Emissions from incinerators have been positively identified as a cause of cancer.

The other challenge with incinerators is the ash that remains as a residue after the process. The ash is highly toxic and has a high potential to contaminate water and land. Incineration is not the right technology to deal with the waste problem because there is this waste by-product that remains after the process and has to be disposed of at a hazardous landfill, with high disposal fees paid for by the public.

terrified by the idea of a municipal waste-to-energy incinerator in South Africa because, even though it is proposed in one city, there is a possibility that other municipalities will take up the same idea.

Experiences in other parts of the world have been that a company will approach government with a waste solution – incineration. Government will normally buy into the idea of an incinerator – it supposedly gets rid of waste and is green – but will



have to make sure that a specific tonnage of waste is reserved for the incinerator. Government and the company will sign agreements to confirm that those tonnages will be available and, should government fail to provide those tonnages, the government pays a penalty to the company. These kinds of agreements have bankrupted municipalities and even states such as Detroit.

Incinerators burn many valuable resources that can be recycled and composted, and incinerators compete for the same materials as recycling programs. Due to the extremely high cost of constructing and operating an incinerator, spending taxpayer money for an incinerator means that there are significantly less funds to invest in more affordable solutions. More than two thirds of the materials we use are still burned or buried, despite the fact that we can cost-effectively recycle and compost the vast majority of what we waste.

Ultimately, incineration is contrary to the waste hierarchy, which promotes minimization of waste. If we fail to minimize, the next best options are to re-use or recycle such waste material. It also means that finite, fossil fuel-based resources need to be extracted and manufactured in order to produce more goods. Lastly, they are a source of

greenhouse gases which means they contribute to climate change.

"Viva SAWPA, viva!", "No to incinerators, no!", and "Forward with recycling, forward!". The marchers were a handful, and I realised that I had never convened such a big march in my life. I was also intimidated about marching in the capital of the country, as I expected much attention from state security and the media. The march showed me that if SAWPA could have a national march it would be one of the largest in the country. A memorandum explaining the above concerns was handed over to a Department of Environmental Affairs' official, to be handed on to the minister.

The march was not only against the Chloorkop incinerator, but against any incineration proposal in the country. Chloorkop was just one example. More than six hundred waste pickers from all over Tshwane marched the streets of Pretoria in protest against the proposed Chloorkop incinerator. Waste pickers came out in solidarity with those at the Chloorkop landfill and also to make their voices heard to a government that needs to spend money on zero waste solutions rather than toxic technologies.



Minimata Treaty: a story of courage

by Rico Euripidou

In different ways, the storytellers at Minimata and the South African government have made an impact

Arriving in Minamata, as part of a Diplomatic conference delegation to sign and seal the new Minamata Treaty on Mercury, we drove past the factory that was the epicentre of this human tragedy to get to the memorial site. More than sixty years on, this Cisso Corporation factory site has been renamed and rebranded and I was struck by how nondescript, green and clean this little town appeared. This was not what I'd expected the town of one of the world's landmark pollution and human health tragedies to look like.

However, a little later, during the memorial program, we made a visit to the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum and were introduced to the storytellers of Minamata. Called *Kataribe*, they are the survivors and family members of ordinary folks affected by mercury contamination. They profoundly changed my state of mind and hurtled me onto an emotional

rollercoaster as they narrated their personal stories of the profound impact of mercury contamination, shared their history of Minamata disease and allowed us to speak with those who have been affected by it. These are mainly stories of human tragedy and struggle, but also of the courage of those impacted and who endeavoured for the truth to be told, struggling for justice over many decades.

These stories were told without judgement or malice. They are simply stories of how families experienced Minamata disease from a very personal perspective. The storyteller I listened to was Rimiko Yoshinaga. She has been a storyteller at the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum since October 2007. Ms. Yoshinaga's father developed acute Minamata disease when she was just three years old, in 1954, and died two years later. Her grandfather, a fisherman, died in 1956, after he had been bed-ridden for nine years. She narrated her experiences as a family member of Minamata disease patients and articulated all of the dimensions of Minamata disease, including stigmatization and victimization by fellow citizens in Minamata at the time of the disease outbreak.

Initially, because of the localised nature of the disease outbreak among mainly fisher folk communities, the disease was suspected to be infectious and as a result precautionary measures were based on this concern, isolating affected homes from their communities and townsfolk. Even when the cause of the disease was later discovered and proven not to be communicable, the social exclusion and stigmatization of those affected persisted. The extent of this meant that some families, especially those involved in fishing, had to move away from Minamata altogether because they were ostracized as being tainted. For example, young women had to hide the impacts on their families so that it would not affect their marriage prospects. However, not disclosing the impact of the disease meant that



Statue to remember those who have died and continue to suffer from Minamata disease

Credit: groundWork



they were never compensated by Cisso and the government of Japan, putting them at a serious economic disadvantage. Most profoundly, she told us the importance of having courage.

South Africa, along with ninety-three governments, signed the Convention. By signing the Minamata Convention, South Africa has demonstrated its commitment to implementing the controls and reductions of mercury identified in the Convention.

What does the Minamata Treaty mean?

The text of the "Minamata Convention on Mercury", which was agreed in Geneva at the concluding leg of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to prepare a global legally binding instrument on mercury, was presented for adoption, and opened for signature, at the Conference of Plenipotentiaries Diplomatic Conference. This took place in Kumamoto and in Minamata, Japan, from the 9th to the 11th of October 2013. Governments from 139 countries adopted this Convention text.

The Minamata Convention broadly provides for controls and reductions in mercury across a range of products, processes and industries where mercury is used, released or emitted. The treaty also addresses the direct emissions of mercury from coal combustion, mining, supply and trade, export and import of mercury, as well as safe storage of waste mercury.

More importantly, this treaty is the first new global convention on environment and health for almost a decade, coming at a time when multilateral negotiations face serious challenges; the failed climate change negotiations are a case in point. However, the Mercury Treaty give us new hope on intergovernmental cooperation on global environment issues. Nevertheless, many have expressed that the devil may lie in the details and add that reducing mercury use and environmental levels won't be a quick or easy process.

The WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, stated that "With the signing of the Minamata Convention on Mercury we will be going a long way in protecting the world forever from the devastating

health consequences of mercury. Mercury is one of the top ten chemicals of major public health concern and is a substance which disperses into and remains in ecosystems for generations, causing severe ill health and intellectual impairment to exposed populations."

In South Africa, Eskom's power generation accounts for some 75% of the total mercury emissions, with power generation in the Highveld making a significant contribution. In relation to mercury in particular, Eskom is estimated to release approximately thirty to forty tonnes of mercury emissions from the Eskom's coal-fired electricity sector.¹ A conservative estimate of annual health benefits is some \$39–\$47 per gram of atmospheric mercury emissions eliminated.²

More recently, a new study in the EU considered lost IQ costs due to mercury exposure.³ The IQ benefits from controlling mercury pollution were translated into economic impacts based on the calculated current life-time income benefits from a higher IQ level. The report states that there is little doubt that global benefits substantially exceed \$20 billion.

Now that the global Mercury Treaty has been named the Minamata Convention on Mercury we have a duty to the people of Minamata to ensure that their tragedy and their determination, which inspired the governments of the world to agree the Minamata Convention last January, was not in vain.

Achim Steiner, the executive director of UNEP, succinctly sums this up thus: "The faster the international community signs, adopts and ratifies the Minamata Convention on Mercury – beginning this week in Japan – the faster its provisions will come into force and the greater the tribute to the extraordinary people of this remarkable city". ☺

1 Pirrone, N et al. 2010, "Global mercury emissions to the atmosphere from anthropogenic and natural sources". *Atmos. Chem. Phys.*, 10, 5951–5964, 2010

2 Pacyna, J et al. 2010, "An assessment of costs and benefits associated with mercury emission reductions from major anthropogenic sources". *J Air Waste Manag Assoc* 60 (3): 302-315.

3 Bellanger, M et al. 2013, "Economic benefits of methylmercury exposure control in Europe: Monetary value of neurotoxicity prevention" *Environ Health*. 2013; 12:3. available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3599906/>



Making our agenda the news agenda

by Megan Lewis

We need new strategies to ensure that what we are fighting for is made important enough to the media for it to make headline news

There has been this resounding statement coming at me from a number of journalists and senior staff of media houses that energy and climate change stories (read environmental justice stories in general) are either put at the bottom of the newsroom agenda or shoved off the table completely. Of course, my response was firstly shock and dismay, but by the third time I had already begun thinking about how we – the “we” in groundWork and the “we” in grassroots environmental justice organizations – were going to change this and make the news agenda the real people’s agenda. The evidence is there when you pick up any newspaper, flip to any news channel on TV or turn on the radio: it seems that people want to read about politics, corruption and scandal – and often they get all that wrapped up in one story.

It might not be so much that people want to read this, but that they are not necessarily given the choice. Is the average citizen’s reality reflected and relatable in what they read? I would say no. It is more likely that the financial backing behind media houses pushes for certain stories. One wonders whether this is a diversion tactic to make people “forget” about their daily concerns of lack of access to basic services, pollution and health problems – perhaps that is just a sceptic’s, or even conspiracy theorists’, take on things!

Whatever the case, we need to rethink our strategy to make what we are fighting for important enough to make front page news, not once or twice a year but on a regular basis. I have been told by these same media staff that what they want is stories that

include people’s concerns; well this is what we want too, so where are we going wrong? What they mean, however, is something very specific to how we frame our articles and how the media then goes on to frame it for the public. These are referred to as “Johnny” stories, where there is an affected person and we learn what the context is from their story. Watch eTV / eNCA news and you’ll see what I mean. Nearly every other story starts with a “Johnny”. This is the standard template for eTV news in particular.

The People’s Climate Camp proved that it works beyond television. Making Siga Govender, long-time farmer on the old airport land in Prospecton, the “Johnny” of the press work we did has made him the face of the farmer’s struggle in newspapers and online. Journalists were begging to speak to Siga, to get the story from his mouth, something so fundamentally important to good journalism and ensuring that groundWork – or other NGOs – do not speak on behalf of the people we work with.

We are taking this new learning forward with us into our media work. We also recognise that for some journalists, reporting on these issues might be difficult, particularly for those who are new to the game. So one of our goals for next year will be to hold a training workshop for journalists who are interested in learning what environmental justice is, what the main issues are and how best to report on these. ☺



Greenfly was not in Warsaw

by Greenfly

*It appears that the new CoP strategy is:
Burn more coal and save the world!*

History used to repeat, first time as tragedy, second time as farce. Now we get tragedy and farce both at once. The tragedy is in the Philippines, hit for the second year in a row by a typhoon – this one the most powerful storm on record. Over four thousand people were killed. The official figures are still rising, and millions have had their homes, neighbourhoods and fields destroyed.

The farce is in Warsaw at the 19th Conference of the Parties (CoP19) to the climate negotiations. The Polish government is making this the Corporate CoP. They kicked off with a “pre-CoP” meeting between government and corporate representatives to frame the issues for CoP 19. Then they invited some 150 corporations to bid for the status of CoP19 partners. Eleven were chosen and they were all declared green by the grace of Donald Trump. Sorry. Donald Tusk, Poland’s Prime Minister.

Car makers BMW and General Motors are green. Emirates airline is green. Lotos, Poland’s oil and gas corporation, has a very green plan to frack Poland. Iron and steel corporation ArcelorMittal is well known as the greenest thing in Vanderbijlpark and everywhere else in the world where it has a plant.

But the greenest thing of all is coal. Readers will be familiar with Alstom, the French corporation that is supplying the turbines for South Africa’s super green new coal plants, Medupi and Kusile. Medupi is so green that Eskom won’t be able to switch it on unless it is exempt from air quality standards – that is, unless it is allowed to ignore the law. Poland’s coal and lignite (even greener than coal) stations are notoriously green and Alstom built most of them. The power utility that operates them is Poland’s own PGE, well known for making Poland the most polluted – sorry, green – corner of Europe.

Coal is so green that the Polish Ministry of Economy partnered with the World Coal Association to produce “The Warsaw Communiqué”. This trenchant document points out the obvious solution to climate change: BURN MORE COAL. Why didn’t we think of that? These partners followed up with the International Coal and Climate Summit, held in parallel with CoP19. With that compelling message, it is no surprise that some familiar corporations were there: Eskom, Anglo American, BHP Billiton, Glencore-Xstrata, Sasol.

More or less the bunch that writes South Africa’s energy policy. And not too different from the ones that write Poland’s policies. And Australia’s. And Canada’s.

Donald Tusk has some good mates in Tony Abbott and Stephen Fraser. Fraser made a tough guy show of tearing up Canada’s carbon reduction commitments a couple of years ago. Abbott is setting fire to Australia’s commitments now and Fraser rushed to congratulate him. They are probably missing George Bush. It’s not that Barack Obama has abandoned the US policy on leading to disaster. It’s just that he ain’t a good ole boy like George. The extractives boys like to strut with aggression. So they won’t be taking a photo op with Shinzo Abe either. Japan is also binning its commitments, but it does it with less of the vacuous swagger now fashionable in Anglo countries.

Back at the negotiations, the halls are stamped with the corporate logos and the corridors saturated with advertising. Whatever they are talking about, it is the biggest conference of the year, every year, and starting to look like FIFA’s World Cup. Never mind the bread, bring on the circuses. ☺



Addressing climate change and jobs

by David Hallowes

The Million Climate Jobs campaign national conference in early November kicked off with a key note address from Nnimmo Bassey. He spoke as Typhoon Haiyan approached the Philippines. He showed the climate crisis intensifying, with weird weather around the world. In 2012, half a million people in Niger and two million in Nigeria were displaced by floods and the impact of droughts in the region is as severe. "Each such impact from climate change leads to a loss of jobs," he observed.

Meanwhile, extractive industries responsible for climate change are ruining Africa. In the Niger Delta, there is an oil spill every day and life expectancy is down to forty-one years. On the anniversary of Ken Saro-Wiwa's murder we should remember his precise description that this is ecocide. The corporations dispossessing communities are the same as ones that are grossly exploiting workers and it is their economy that creates extraordinarily high unemployment. Bassey emphasised that bringing unions and social movements together is critical to resisting corporate power.

The Million Climate Jobs campaign has a simple premise: There is a great deal of work to be done if we are to address climate change.

For mitigation, we need to reduce carbon emissions sharply. That means switching from coal to renewables, getting out of cars and onto buses and trains, changing patterns of production to make more things locally, changing the patterns of settlements to make work closer to home, saving energy by insulating badly built homes – or rebuilding them – and building new homes to better standards, and implementing zero waste as if we meant it.

For adaptation, we need to make eco-systems, agriculture and settlements more "resilient", as the jargon has it. That means that we have to stop fouling the environment and do a lot of restoration work, convert from high input industrial agriculture to ecological agriculture, including urban agriculture, and rethink and re-do urban planning and infrastructure. Water is critical. Climate change

will bring more floods and more droughts and industrial agriculture and paved-over settlements amplify the effects of both.

The Million Climate Jobs campaign started in 2010 with the aim of bringing unions, social movement and environmental and faith based organizations together to build the campaign. It started off with research that looked at how many additional jobs were needed in different sectors. But it also paid attention to how many jobs would be lost, for example in coal mining. In the end it showed that there would be a lot more than a million jobs.

These jobs must be "decent" – properly paid, safe and with healthy working conditions – and founded on ecological sustainability and social justice. They must be "publicly driven" by the people with state intervention, either as employer, for example in building renewable energy and retrofitting houses, or as enabler, for example in redistributing land to small farmers and ensuring fair prices for their produce. This is because the profit driven private sector will not do what's needed to address climate change and has no interest in justice.

Finally, the research looked at how much it would cost to do the work and where the money might come from. Doing it is not cheap, but costs less than Medupi and Kusile and much less than the proposed nuclear build. Using conventional means, such as increasing taxes on the rich, and innovative means, such as a tax on trading shares on the stock market, would raise around R250 billion a year.

The immediate business of the Climate Jobs Conference was to elect a steering committee to direct the campaign, adopt a platform statement and outline a programme of action. The committee has nineteen people on it, with representatives from the unions, social movements and environmental justice organizations. The campaign web-site is www.climatejobs.org.za and it contains a wealth of accessible documents on the campaign and on climate, economy and employment.

David Hallowes is an independent researcher and associate of groundWork who focuses on issues of development, energy and climate change.



Delmas must say NO!

by Xolisile Ngxowa

It is imperative that communities in the Highveld begin to push back against a proposed private coal-fired power station

To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, including widespread drought, flooding and massive population displacement caused by rising sea levels, we need to keep the global temperature rise below 2°C (when compared to pre-industrial levels). To do this, global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2015 and from there go down to zero.

A third of all carbon dioxide emissions come from burning coal. It is used to produce nearly 40% of the world's power and, if industry gets its way, hundreds of new coal plants are planned over the next years. Apart from climate change, coal also causes irreparable damage to the environment, people's health and communities around the world. While the coal industry itself isn't paying for the damage it causes, the world at large is.

What makes things even worse is the fact that, certainly in Delmas in the Highveld, no one seems to care, except for the power-hungry individuals, the farmers and the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) who are making millions out of the situation. KiPower, a private subsidiary of Kuyasa Mining, is proposing a coal-fired power station in the already heavily polluted area of Delmas, to burn very low quality coal. If this goes ahead, we as civil society are likely to see major impacts in the Highveld region. However, no matter how much we talk to the DMR and the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) to try to persuade them against this, all they do is arrange and then postpone meetings. Not a single mine has been closed for not having proper water use licences; not a single mine has ever been charged or closed down for not implementing its Social and Labour Plan or SLP.

The world has enough technically accessible renewable energy to meet current energy demands six times over. We need an energy revolution that substitutes wind and solar power, energy efficiency and other modern technologies for dirty energy sources like coal. Unfortunately, the South African government is allowing industry to spend hundreds of billions of Rand to build this and other new coal-fired power stations in Delmas. If they are built, CO₂ emissions from coal are expected to rise 60% by 2030. This will undermine any international agreements to tackle climate change. The South African government has, in part, been seduced by an illusion of "clean coal", the result of a major public relations offensive by the coal industry, including a number of dubious "technological fixes" that they claim make burning coal safe for the climate.

Local people are forced to live in poverty in Delmas, surrounded by more than thirteen mines, and yet it is one of the areas with the highest levels of unemployment. There are investors who clearly indicate that they have no interest in changing people's lives, and that only the few are to benefit. In Delmas, we are being exploited because of its minerals – and then waste and pollution are dumped in our backyards. Yet, our government, through its agencies DMR and DWA and other responsible departments, remains very quiet.

It is still up to the communities of Delmas to stand up and work together to curb this mushrooming of mines and let our collective voice be heard. Let us for once stop complaining and start saying, "We demand a safer and cleaner Delmas!" 

Xolisile Nkosi Ngxowa is a founding member and coordinator of the Greater Civic Movement based in Delmas, Highveld.



Farewell to groundWork US

by Bobby Peek

It's goodbye to groundWork's US office, although not goodbye to the people who have manned it

In 1996, while working on the Thor Campaign, assisting workers and the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, I hosted, on behalf of the Network and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), a group of United States environmental justice activists visiting South Africa to better understand the links between environmental justice in the US and South Africa. The person holding this larger-than-life US delegation together was none other than Heeten Kalan, a South African from "LT", now known as Makhado, living in the US. From that visit in 1996, started a friendship and partnership that continues to grow and build linkages between the US and South Africa.

To hold such a delegation together needed a strong person, who had to be just as robust as these hard core activists. Heeten was and is such a person. Navigating the terrain of environmental justice and racism in the US is not an easy process. It is complex in not only the varied geography of the US, but also the varied history of people of colour there. From Africans to Laotians, from Indigenous First Peoples to Latinos, the US environmental justice movement is steeped in rich, complex and varied politics. It is from this very rich collection of people and politics that the SA environmental justice movement learnt in the early years of democracy.

The environmental justice movement traces its tributaries to the fight for Native sovereignty, the strong civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s, the farmworkers struggles of the 60s and 70s, and even elements of the anti-Vietnam War and the anti-apartheid struggles. By the 1990s, the movement had consolidated into a force and today you see that evidence in the vibrant struggles for

climate justice, clean transportation and good jobs and housing.

In South Africa, we were just tasting what it meant to be free from the shackles of apartheid and dealing with its multiple legacies. At the time, we felt we had a lot to learn from our counterparts in the US. This learning was facilitated between the Network and the South African Exchange Programme on Environmental Justice (SAEPEJ), an organization that was built out of Heeten's history in the National Toxic Campaign Fund in the US, and his roots in South Africa. When groundWork was born in June 1999, SAEPEJ and Heeten were there to welcome us into the world of environmental justice. Knowing the collective passion of Gillian Addison, Linda Ambler and myself for environment and the truth, Heeten supported the idea of groundWork.

Immediately we got stuck into making connections and working together. Heeten assisted us in laying the foundation for a strong local and connected groundWork when SAEPEJ facilitated the US-based Communities for a Better Environment's (CBE) Bucket Brigade visit to South Africa, hosted by groundWork in May 2000 – merely a year after groundWork was born. Together, Denny Larson and Shipra Bansal of CBE tackled our oil industry and the refineries in south Durban, Cape Town and Sasolburg. Taking air samples and working with local people living next to these facilities, this exchange was part of groundWork's foundation for tackling corporate power with community-based information on health and air quality. This was an approach that corporations such as Shell, BP, Sasol and Chevron-Texaco all tried to refute, with a resulting backfire that mobilised people for the movement, calling for new legislation on air



pollution, with binding standards on air emissions from industry, which Eskom and Sasol are trying to duck out of today, fourteen years later.

Building movements and empowering people were important to both SAEPEJ and groundWork and, in 2001, groundWork sent five community activists on a three-week exchange to the US to meet, learn and share solidarity with struggles in the US. This was reciprocated in a US activist visit to South Africa the following year, where US-based activists of colour visited communities who were fighting for environmental justice in places such as south Durban, Sasolburg and Cape Town.

Heeten, who had always been working with SAEPEJ in a part-time role, realised that he needed support to make the relationship grow meaningfully, and hired Ravi Dixit, a freshly graduated and passionate young activist, in 2000. By 2003, besides the exchanges, groundWork and SAEPEJ were working more closely, beyond exchanges and on more immediate activities and research that responded to the needs of groundWork. In this year, it was also agreed that SAEPEJ and groundWork would work more closely in order to respond to the growing international demands on groundWork. We were involved in strengthening links between the US and South African environmental justice work, collaborating on research, receiving technical support, showing solidarity, and fostering links with US funders. One of the early and key processes in the new groundWork relationship was to navigate the growing community-based movement, along with NGOs such as Friends of the Earth members, that was seeking to challenge Shell internationally. This work emerged out of south Durban, amongst other places, in November 2002. This global campaign, led to direct responses that Shell was forced to make, such as replacing their leaking pipelines in south Durban and responding to the atrocities in Nigeria – which is now being battled out in the Dutch courts.

After dedicating his time and energy to this work, Ravi decided to study medicine and Toussaint Losier joined groundWork US. Another promising young activist, Losier cut his working teeth with groundWork US, travelled extensively on behalf of groundWork, including a Nigeria visit to the Niger

Delta and Ogoni Land. In 2007, Toussaint went on to do a Ph.D programme in Chicago.

Sunita Dubey, now a resident in the US but originally from India, joined groundWork US after Toussaint and, with her experience in India, came with a Southern politic that proved to be beneficial in navigating the US and international terrain. Strong links were forged with Indian struggles, and Sunita supported groundWork's environmental justice exchange to the US in 2009. Sunita moved from Boston to Washington where her partner started working. One of her early challenges was building on the Shell experience and managing the network of local and NGO activists globally who sought to challenge ArcelorMittal on their global atrocities.

Her strength in being grounded in the global South assisted groundWork immensely in navigating the big NGOs in Washington, and institutions such as the World Bank, as they supported South Africa's growing addiction to coal through providing a last minute loan of US\$3.75 billion to the South African energy utility that was losing international credibility as it could not manage aging South African coal-fired power stations. Instead of seeing this "crisis" as an opportunity to move South Africa beyond coal, Eskom was briefly resuscitated. Tackling the World Bank and other financial institutions became the main focus for groundWork US. More recently, climate and energy played a key role in Sunita and groundWork's support of our work in South Africa.

During this campaign, groundWork recognised the importance of bringing the energy debate closer to home. We have grown as an organization that has links throughout the world, and much of the work now happens in groundWork, South Africa. Based upon this, we have agreed that, rather than have a full time office in the US, we will link up with Sunita when specific support is needed.

We can look back on our history and say that SAEPEJ, Heeten, Ravi, Toussaint and Sunita, and the South African Development Fund with Judie Blair at the helm, where for many years SAEPEJ was housed, all made groundWork a stronger organization, an organization that ensures that people's voices and struggles are recognised globally as well as locally.

A Luta Continua! ☺



Rest in peace, Tata Madiba

by Bobby Peek

Nelson Mandela has been a role model that the environmental justice movement holds dear

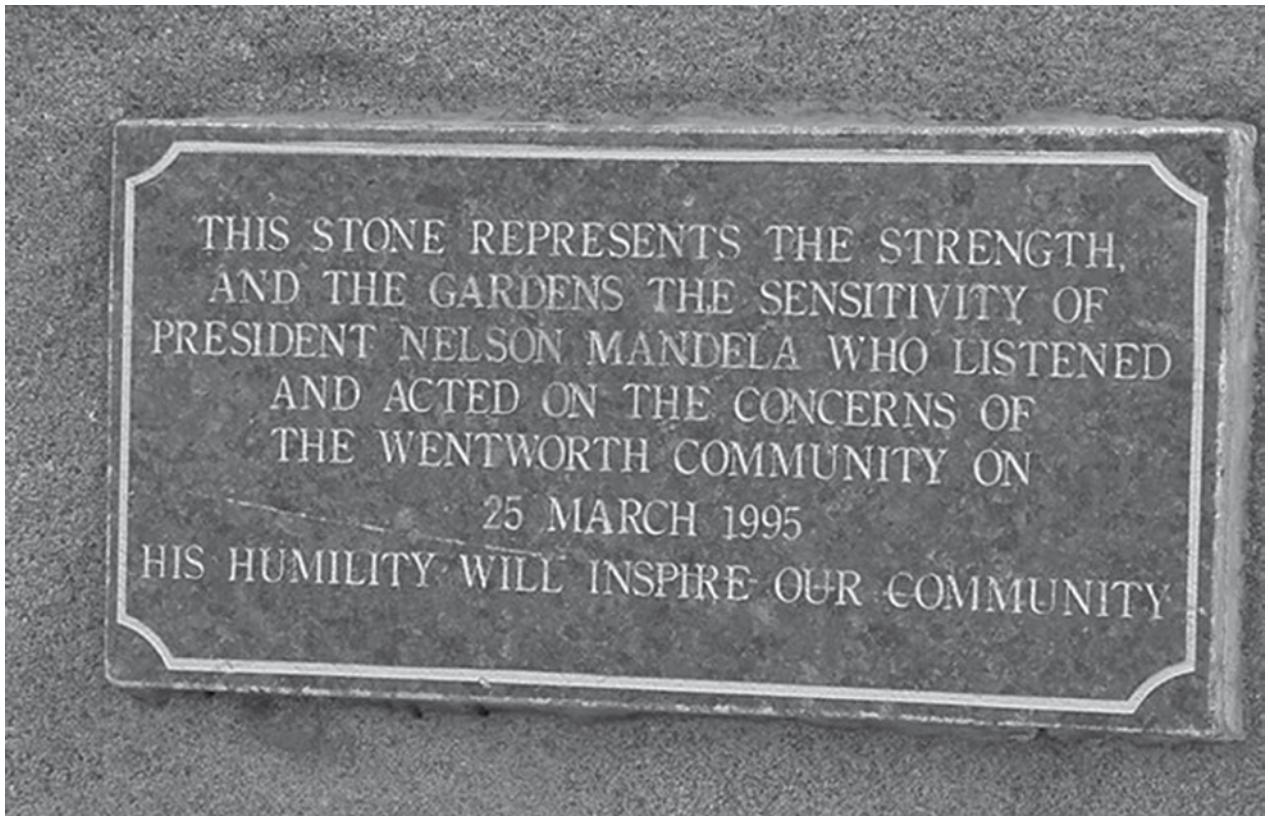
The environmental justice movement, and indeed my own environmental justice activism, is grounded by the experience of working with Madiba to ensure that South Africans achieve the promise of a life that was enshrined by our Constitution, a life where people live in relations of solidarity and equity with each other, and in non-degrading and positive relationships with their environments.

I entered university in the 1980s at a time of great political turmoil. As a young student, I had a very limited political awareness, but was immediately immersed in a student politic that built my personal

social justice struggle, a struggle that was to be cemented in the environmental justice movement on the 25th of March 1995. On that day, in a protest outside the Engen (previously Mobil) Oil Refinery, President Mandela stopped and got out of his motor vehicle and asked us: "Why are you protesting?" That intimate process of a powerful person willing to listen and hear people's concerns first-hand, and then act on them, is an experience of ultimate humility that can only draw one closer to the ideals of democracy. It was a time of idealism, but with a sobering dash of compromise, which

A plaque that was placed to commemorate Nelson Mandela's involvement with the community.

Credit:
groundWork



Madiba reminded us of four days later on the 28th of March when he met with us, representatives of the protestors, at the same table with his senior cabinet Ministers and the Engen CEOs and managers and insisted, in the way only Mandela could, that Engen dealt with their pollution problem. But in this he also reminded us that a good leader knows when to compromise.

Mandela, unlike any other statesperson in South Africa since, spent much time trying to understand the emerging environmental justice movement in the 1990s that brought together black and white, the rural poor and urban wealthy, the communities and the workers, the gender activists and the churches. In 1993, Mandela's hospital visit to the poisoned workers from Thor Chemicals, (who were dying from mercury poisoning because the former apartheid state had allowed the import of toxic waste and failing recycling technology from Europe), made the worker struggle an environmental justice struggle.

The environmental justice movement has now grown globally to fight for climate and energy justice and to seek political solutions to the planetary emergency we are facing because of corporate power and greed that impacts upon communities and workers. Climate change is visibly affecting people now: people from the flood plains of Bangladesh to the toxic neighbourhoods in south Durban where oil refineries continue to dump their toxic gases together with their greenhouse gases on communities; from the growing number of refugees in Africa, made homeless because of unprecedented drought followed by floods, to those losing their land in the insatiable corporate demand for further extraction of fossil fuels and minerals. These are the people who still need the ideals of Mandela so very much. Somewhere deep down I feel that, had Madiba been active over the last decade, we would be in a different space regarding our climate change dilemma – one of continued stagnation and inaction. We would instead be on the inside, talking at rather than walking out of, what should be functional democratic spaces such as the United Nations.

Tata Madiba had a tough life, as many South Africans did when challenging the colonial and apartheid state. He was an active member of



Nelson Mandela addresses the crowd outside the Engen Refinery.
Credit: groundWork

Umkhonto weSizwe and the African National Congress Youth League; he was a freedom fighter. He now is at peace, his work done in the world. His work was not only the grand politic that liberated South Africa and allowed us a forgiving peace, but it was also one that touched intimately the local struggles throughout South Africa.

Our father Madiba recognised that all of us are critical in a struggle for a new South Africa. To him, it was not only those who wielded corporate power in South Africa who were important. All South Africans were equal for Madiba. All were powerful. All were weak. All were human.

Madiba was not a saint, he was only a human who made mistakes and learnt from them. He made mistakes and grew stronger from those mistakes. He was human like all of us. He was prepared to fight for a dignity that must be afforded to all. He was prepared to suffer and fight, like the very many others who did and died nameless. He believed in himself being one of those who had to struggle, not one of those who by their struggle deserved a higher position.

May we never have to compromise our fight for a true and just world, for that is the compromise that Madiba would not want us to make. He would want us to continue to speak truth to power, as he always did. And may we honour his memory by holding his values and passion for justice dear.

Rest in peace Tata Madiba ... ☺



Good energy, bad energy



Friends of the Earth's latest report *Good Energy, Bad Energy* illustrates the horrible realities of what our current energy system is doing to people and the planet globally, and why a change in this system is so critical now. Our current energy system is unsustainable, unjust, and harming communities, workers, the environment and the climate. This is fundamentally an issue of power: of corporate and elite power and interests outweighing the power of ordinary citizens and communities.

The destructive energy sources on which the world currently relies are driving climate change, and resulting in many social and environmental problems and conflicts, including land grabbing, pollution, deforestation and the destruction of ecosystems, human rights abuses, health problems and premature deaths, and unsafe, insecure jobs and the rupture and collapse of local economies.

Friends of the Earth International believes that it is possible to build a climate-safe, just and sustainable energy system which ensures the basic right to energy for everyone and respects the rights and different ways of life of communities around the world. To get there we need to challenge corporate power and exert real democratic control over the energy decisions of our governments.

We urgently need to invest in locally-appropriate, climate-safe, affordable and low-impact energy for all, and reduce energy dependence so that people don't need as much energy to meet their basic needs and live a good life.

We need to end new destructive energy projects and phase out existing destructive energy sources, all the while ensuring that the rights of affected communities and workers are respected and that their needs are provided for during the transition. To make the transition happen, we also need to tackle the trade and investment rules that prioritise corporations' needs over those of people and the environment.

Our vision is guided by an idea called energy sovereignty. This is the right of people to have access to energy, and to choose sustainable energy sources and sustainable consumption patterns that will lead them towards sustainable societies.

The report can be downloaded from Friends of the Earth International's website at <http://www.foei.org/en/good-energy-bad-energy>

