

# GROUNDWORK



**Desmond D'Sa:  
Goldman Prize Winner 2014**

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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, Coal, Waste and Environmental Health.

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*International POPs Elimination Network*

*Basel Action Network*

*Oilwatch International*

*Global Anti-Incineration Alliance*

groundWork is the South African member of Friends of the Earth International

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Cover: Desmond D'Sa of SDCEA was one of the 2014 winners of the Goldman Environmental prize  
Photo credit: Goldman Environmental Prize



# From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

Dear Friends

June is always an exciting time for groundWork as we were born this month way back in 1999. Fifteen years later we are stronger and have undertaken interesting work through various campaigns and struggles – some successfully, some not. But as I sat down to think about the past few months, there was much more on my mind than the fifteen years of groundWork.

South Africa is at a very difficult and important time in our democracy. Twenty years after voting in our first democratic elections we are witnessing the longest worker strike this country has ever had, as the workers on the platinum mines, who stopped work on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, refuse to go back to work until their requests for a better and human salary are met. In May, Gift of the Givers, a humanitarian organization based in Pietermaritzburg and known for its global work in areas of war and natural disasters that impact on the poor the most, sent in doctors and provided food, medical care, warm clothes and blankets for more than three thousand families in the Platinum Belt.

For me, Gift of the Givers was always a name I associated with situations that were desperate and at times hopeless. Indeed, Marikana has become desperate, but as South Africans let us not make it a hopeless struggle. South Africans need to carefully consider what the implications for us and labour are in this standoff between the workers and corporate executives and the shareholders that they represent. While workers are striking, the executives of these companies are taking home record earnings.

Despite this, in recent news reports mainstream economists bemoan the fact that the striking workers are asking for too much and that the strike is having a severe impact on the workforce

who supply the mines with the equipment and services that allow mining to happen, as well as the workforce that depends on platinum to make various products such as motor vehicles – which I assume are mainly for export. If this is indeed the case, the workers of Marikana and their solid stoic resistance must be commended, for they are indeed having an impact on the South African economy that has made the elite rich through the labour of mineworkers. In the good old days of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), the country would have seen a solidarity mass action that would have crippled the country for days but, sadly, because Cosatu and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in the main are at loggerheads with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, such solidarity is not being witnessed.

This is why workers of Marikana must be supported. They are not doing this for themselves; they are doing this for all those who work in inhumane conditions and are undervalued and poorly paid for their hard labour. As a privileged student, I spent time underground working at a Western Holding Shaft 1 in Welkom, and I have witnessed first hand these conditions. Underground work is brutal and it is not a job any parent would wish for their children. This is not decent work!

During the last four months of this strike, we have noticed a paralysis of political leadership on this issue. We hear very little from President Zuma on Marikana. It was even suggested in the Mail and Guardian on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, the day before our elections, that "Zuma avoided Marikana on purpose" and that his general response has "been to condemn the miners for 'agitating' the police, as well as the police for using excessive force". Blaming the workers and the police will not solve the problem. I am reminded of Bush when planes



were flown into the twin towers. When Bush was given the news he reacted with a stunned silence on TV. He did not know what to do, but he soon kicked into gear in a typical brutal imperialist manner. Is Zuma a "stunned president"? So it seems since at least August 2012, when the bloodshed started.

For all this, Zuma delivered the African National Congress (ANC) to an electoral victory. But this victory needs to be carefully analysed and considered for what it really was. Dale McKinley gave a shocking overview of the numbers with regards to the elections. In 1994, during the euphoria of a new democracy, of the 23 063 910 eligible voters, 85.53% voted while the remaining 14.47% stayed away. The ANC received support from 53.01% of the eligible voting population. In 2014, of the 31 434 035 eligible voters, 59.34% voted while the remaining 40.66% stayed away. The ANC received support from only 36.39%. McKinley focuses on two issues, one "highlighting that, at the same time that South Africa's eligible voting population has increased by 8.4 million in twenty years of democracy, the amount of that population which has chosen not to vote has increased by 9.4 million. Simultaneously, electoral support for the ANC, as a percentage of that voting population, has declined precipitously from 53 to 36%."

What could this mean for governance over the next five years? The ANC understands these figures and they must be getting them worried. The result would be that government becomes even more draconian in how it develops law to keep critical voices out of our democracy. Already this has happened with the Secrecy Bill, the Infrastructure and Development Bill, and the Mineral Petroleum Resources Development Act Amendment Bill, which cuts out "interested parties" from its democratic process: only if you are affected by mining directly can you be part of the "democratic" process to respond.

This is going to be a government of the elite. This is not a surprise, and the Sunday Tribune newspaper (25<sup>th</sup> of May) summed it up well when it indicated that the development of Zuma's cabinet was part of a series of interest groups jostling for their preferred people to get in. One of these interest groups was business. So, must the masses, having voted, now watch as decisions on key leadership are taken by big business and other interest groups? Needless

to say, there were sacrifices at the altar of the Union Building. Some chose to exit sooner, before the political sacrifice was made. Tito Mboweni, ex-Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, jumped ship when he realised he would not get the Finance Ministry, or so they say. Martinus van Schalkwyk left after he did not get the Tourism Ministry. Max Sisulu walked out. Many say he was chopped because of the way he dealt with the Nkandla issue as the Speaker of the National Assembly. He did not squash it; he allowed it to be investigated in a parliamentary process. But the most interesting was former Minister of Correctional Services, Sibusiso Ndebele. He did not get a cabinet post and his response to The Mercury newspaper while he was still considering his resignation was that his income as a normal MP might not be sufficient to meet his lifestyle. The ANC endorsed this line of thinking in their 30<sup>th</sup> of May statement on these resignations. Comrades, if I may call you this, what happened to serving the people and accepting re-deployment by the party as it sees fit? I would expect all parliamentarians to be there for the people and to argue in the interest of the people, not whether they get positions. Clearly this is not the case.

On the political side, we have to reflect on the fact that one of South Africa's main business people, ex-NUM General Secretary and major businessman in the democratic era, Cyril Ramaphosa, has announced his "complete divestment" from Shanduka and other business interests. Now, this must be commended. But in the powerful but murky world of politics and corporate power I doubt this is going to make a difference to how corporations are favoured in extracting wealth and creating poverty.

Finally, let us reflect on Marikana once more. Are the rich and middle-classes worried enough about Marikana? Sadly no, for they will just disinvest and put their money in the next big thing that makes workers slaves and investors laugh all the way to the bank.

Most of us are in the fortunate position not to be amongst those who are suffering in Marikana. The question is: how do we share a solidarity with them that is meaningful, now and into the future.

From a troubled land, till next time! ☮



# Rocking and rolling Goldman!

by Bobby Peek

*Desmond rocked, the award rocked and the struggle to save south Durban and Durban will rock*

We all know by now that Desmond D'Sa from the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) received the Goldman Environmental Prize for Africa for 2014. It is the first time that the same struggle has received the award twice. An important lesson to be learnt is that, in these community battles to push back the corporate onslaught, there are victories that are often greater than the offensives by corporates to extract more profit at the expense of communities and their territories and neighbourhoods.

I was fortunate to receive the Goldman Prize in 1998, and indeed it was an experience that I will never forget. But even more exciting was being in the audience when Desmond got the award, along with fellow community environmental justice campaigners who live their campaigns. A rare privilege! As the Goldman Prize website so crisply puts it: "The San Francisco ceremony is held at the War Memorial Opera House, the historic and beautiful home to the San Francisco Opera and Ballet, built in 1932. Over three thousand people attend the always-packed, emotion-filled event." And indeed, it is emotional and a great venue. The giving of the award, often equated to the Nobel Peace Prize for community people challenging for environmental justice, is a mind-blowing experience.

For a week or more, Desmond and other recipients hob-nobbed with the famous and those who, with this power, care about local struggles and the environment. Just before the ceremony, backstage, we got to mingle with Bonnie Lynn Raitt (US based blues artist), Graham Nash (Crosby, Stills and Nash band) and Robert F. Kennedy, who mentioned the Koch Brothers three times in his rousing speech against the petrochemical corporations. Listening to these folk perform and speak was an amazing privilege, but the greatest part of the evening was

when Desmond and the others recipients stood holding the Ouroboros aloft. When Desmond held the Ouroboros I could feel that he was, for once in his life, just with himself, thinking only of that moment and not of what to do next. It was indeed a peaceful moment for me and, I am sure, for Desmond; a moment where only he and Beatrice, his wife who was with him, mattered. Well done Comrade Desmond!

During the after party, the three thousand people gathered – and indeed the Goldman family can throw a party. It is clearly a highlight of the San



Desmond D'Sa is welcomed at the airport when he returns from receiving the Goldman Environmental Prize.  
Credit: groundWork



Francisco calendar. The prize has gone through a tough period trying to get to grips with the passing of Richard, but it is clear from spending time with the family and the staff that there is a new, exciting buzz about the future of the prize. Well done to John, Susan and Douglas for continuing the tradition of Richard and Rhoda.

As John Goldman mentions often, after the first few years Richard thought they would run out of candidates who could be supported with the prize, but every year the recipients are more deserving of the award and indeed it is becoming more difficult to choose. There are so many struggles against corporate abuse and the destruction of

the environment, and so many more community people fighting and pushing back on this.

Desmond returned to Durban after one month of being on the road and was greeted by a busload of people at the King Shaka Airport shouting "Dez for Prez". It was a warm welcome on a warm Durban morning and, despite having been on the road and being visibly tired, he was not stopped from calling for all to resist the port expansion and to call government on their failure to listen and talk with the people of south Durban.

A luta continua! 

Desmond was awarded for rallying south Durban's diverse and disenfranchised communities to successfully shut down the Bulbul Drive landfill – a toxic waste dump that exposed nearby residents to dangerous chemicals and violated their constitutionally-protected right to a safe and clean environment. In 1996, he co-founded the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), where he started as an unpaid volunteer.

"As activists, we all work tirelessly, against extreme odds and in frustrating circumstances, to achieve our goals, and we don't expect accolades for this work. So I am really humbled and honoured by the acknowledgement this award provides, not only for me but for the people I work with and the communities who have benefitted from the closure of the Bulbul landfill site. As an international award it reminds us of the global fight we have against exploitation of the poor and the duty we have to the environment. The closing of the Bulbul Drive landfill is a remarkable triumph and a deserving victory for the hundreds of tenacious and brave residents who campaigned tirelessly for years to close down the landfill."

"A large percentage of South Africa's industry is in south Durban, home to more than three hundred industrial-scale facilities such as oil and gas

refineries, paper mills, and agrochemical plants. It is also home to 300 000 residents, who were forcibly relocated here by the apartheid regime to create a cheap labour pool for the emerging industrial economy. They bear the brunt of industry's toxic chemicals, leading to the basin's infamous label of 'cancer valley'."

In 1990, Wasteman, a large waste management company, opened a landfill – without consultation with or input from local communities – to accommodate hazardous waste from nearby plants. By 2009, the Bulbul Drive landfill was approaching maximum capacity and Wasteman submitted an application to expand the lease on the landfill to 2021. When Wasteman's lease came up for renewal, local groups tapped D'Sa and SDCEA to reinvigorate a long-standing campaign to shut down the toxic waste dump for good. D'Sa began organizing the south Durban community to unite in opposition of the landfill. A vigorous, participative, public, multi-pronged campaign followed.

Facing growing community opposition, Wasteman announced in August 2010 that it was withdrawing its application to expand the toxic waste dump. In November 2011, the landfill officially closed and ceased all operations.



# Bobby receives honorary doctorate

*groundWork's very own Bobby Peek was recently the recipient of an honorary doctorate from the Durban University of Technology, making the staff and friends from around the world immensely proud. What follows are the words of his close colleagues, who speak of why Bobby is so richly deserving of this award*

**Joy Kistnasamy**  
**Chairperson of groundWork's Board of Trustees**

I have constantly witnessed his untiringly passionate and compassionate endeavours to empower affected people, unite impacted communities and proactively engage with academia, industry, the media, NGOs and various governments at many levels, inclusive of Parliament.

At a local, national and international level, he has shown outstanding leadership, and ethical administrative and socially responsive skills in bringing to the fore environmental justice challenges and their associated public health impacts. Further, together with groundWork, he has valiantly sought to find feasible solutions to these challenges.

Under his able leadership, groundWork has interacted with academic departments of many national and international universities in order to help staff and students obtain a better, more holistic understanding of real world dynamics and how best to apply their theoretical knowledge to practical-on-the-ground situations, in the midst of various social, political and financial constraints.

These interactions have, in turn, produced community engagement projects, research outputs and technical reports which were presented to various stakeholders and at numerous fora.

Therefore, the embodied ideals of the Durban University of Technology's Faculty of Health Sciences Vision and Mission Statements, and core

Faculty goals were met *par excellence* by Bobby and are inclusive of, but not limited to, ensuring the offering of leadership skills, developing community based projects to foster social responsibility through collaborative practices and developing applied research to community needs.

On behalf of the groundWork Board of Trustees, groundWork staff and empowered communities worldwide who have had the pleasure of working with such an energetic, dynamic and consummate professional: WELL DONE, DR PEEK. The Environmental Justice world salutes you!

**Gillian Addison**  
**Deputy Director of groundWork**

The groundWork team is extremely proud of our Dr Fearless Leader. I can't help thinking back to the rough, tough young activist I met in the mid-nineties and then picturing the very serious, dignified, grown up man on the stage at DUT receiving his honorary doctorate and thinking of how life's journey moulds a person.

Bobby's parents sent their precious young son off to school in Aliwal North to save him from the poisonous air in south Durban. Here it seems Bobby got toughened up by the nuns and the weather, but also got in touch with his spiritual side serving as an altar boy. This was fortunate, as other products of this very school have become pillars of the capitalist regime in the new South Africa. At high school, back in Durban, Bobby got in touch with his physical side, playing rugby and losing



some important teeth. He was also back under the wing of his father, who has always supported and grounded Bobby.

Bobby must have also done some work at school, because he ended up at the University of Durban Westville in its highly political heyday and got in touch with his activist side, making lifelong friends with some serious trouble makers of the very best kind. Here he fell under the mentorship of Prof Brij Maharaj, who set Bobby on a path that found him back in south Durban after graduation and questioning the fact that far too many people died far too young when living in south Durban's industrial basin. These included his mother and some close friends.

In south Durban he came in contact with likes of Mark Colvin and David Hallowes and found his calling as an environmental justice activist, instrumental in forming the SDCEA and fighting the oil refineries and other heavy industries who were causing the deadly pollution. This in turn led him to EJNF and several years under the intense mentorship of Chris Albertyn. In 1999, groundWork was born and Bobby was very well prepared to take on the mantle of leadership.

All this could have gone horribly wrong without some strong female influences, but fortunately Bobby is the son of a very strong woman and Vennila Yoganathan agreed to marry him and so he is fully in touch with the feminine and his children remind him of the importance of play all the time.

This all makes for a very well-rounded and grounded, passionate and confident leader who is now a mentor in his own right to the staff of groundWork, and also to Des D'Sa and the staff at SDCEA, who hold a very special place in his heart. And in July this year, groundWork will launch its Environmental Justice School, where a whole new generation of activists will benefit from Bobby's mentorship.

Well done, Bobby, the world is a better place because of you.

### David Hallowes

#### Associate Researcher at groundWork

Contested knowledge is central to the fight for environmental justice. From the first, Bobby understood well that science is already political and the question of who produces knowledge for what purpose is integral to the struggle. On the complex terrain of industrial pollution, he led the way in bringing science into people's struggles.

The bucket brigade was one of groundWork's first campaigns and used a simple technology, developed through people's struggles on the fencelines of oil refineries in the USA, to enable local community groups to participate in producing scientific knowledge to verify what they knew from experience. The campaign had an electrifying effect. It showed a cocktail of harmful chemicals in the air around the big refineries in Durban and Cape Town and the chemical plants in Sasolburg. Readings for benzene were extraordinarily high and the bucket samples showed several toxic pollutants not previously identified in South Africa.

The campaign set in motion the events that led to the new Air Quality Act. Under the regulatory regime inherited from apartheid, air pollution officers negotiated permits in secret with industry and relied on what industry told them. They produced no credible information on pollution but both industry and the regulators used this lack of information to dismiss the concerns of neighbour communities as uninformed. Industry, left to monitor its own emissions, represented itself as the only reliable source of knowledge but ensured that its knowledge was untroubled by some very basic questions. The bucket brigade upset this purposeful ignorance.

The AQA promised a more open regime. This does not suit the state and corporate interests that define SA Inc., however, and characteristics of the old regime have been infiltrated into the new: purposeful ignorance, negotiated non-compliance and corporate immunity from liability. The battle over knowledge is renewed as the state and corporate secrecy agenda darkens the land. Bobby's intelligence, experience and courage remain critical assets to the environmental justice movement.



# WHO: Jo'burg air 10 X above safe limit

*Joint press release issued by groundWork and Earthlife Africa JHB in May 2014*

The World Health Organization (WHO) have released a comprehensive database of air quality standards from cities around the world. Although air quality was not an issue that political parties addressed, perhaps it should have been, given the WHO database which places South African city pollution as well above internationally accepted levels. In fact, the air in South African cities is so bad that it is comparable even to the mega-polluted cities of China.

The WHO database collected data on the outdoor (or ambient) air quality of 1 600 cities from ninety-one countries. The database revealed that Johannesburg, in particular, has very poor air quality resulting from coal-fired power generation and poor environmental governance. A situation, which according to Dominique Doyle, Energy Policy Officer at Earthlife Africa Johannesburg, "is jeopardising the Constitutional right of citizens to an environment which is not harmful to their well-being and is placing increased pressure on the already overburdened health system".

The WHO database made use of South African data sourced from the South African Air Quality Information System (SAQIS). SAQIS collects constantly-measured air quality data from local monitoring stations and is managed by the South African Weather Services. The database included data on levels of particulate matter of the size 10 and 2.5 ( $PM_{10}$  and  $PM_{2.5}$ ) for Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Tshwane, the Highveld Priority Area, the Vaal Priority Area and the Waterberg.

PM is further known to affect more people than any other pollutant. Some particles of PM have a diameter of 10 microns or less ( $PM_{10}$ ), which become lodged deep in human lungs and lead to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as lung cancer.  $PM_{2.5}$  are much finer particles that can pass into the human blood stream and also lead to respiratory diseases and certain types of cancers.

According to the WHO, there is a close and measurable relationship between human exposure to high levels of  $PM_{10}$  and  $PM_{2.5}$  in ambient air and increased illness and related mortality over time. In other words, there is a strong correlation between improving ambient air quality and an increase in the quality and length of human life. PM is understood by the WHO as such a grave threat to the quality of human life, that it actually claims that there is no level of PM that is deemed safe for people to be in contact with. However, the WHO has developed guidelines for countries and cities on acceptable levels of PM, given that PM's release into the atmosphere is an inevitability of modern life. For  $PM_{2.5}$ , the WHO annual guideline is a mean  $10 \mu g/m^3$  and a mean of  $20 \mu g/m^3$  annually for  $PM_{10}$ .

Of the South African cities included in the WHO database, Johannesburg was listed as having the highest levels of both  $PM_{10}$  and  $PM_{2.5}$  with a yearly average of  $98 \mu g/m^3$  for  $PM_{10}$  and  $51 \mu g/m^3$  for  $PM_{2.5}$ .

Additionally, these levels are also reported to be higher than in both the Highveld Priority Area and the Vaal Priority Area. The Highveld and the Vaal Priority Areas are both well-known pollution hotspots in South Africa because of their high concentration of Eskom coal-fired power plants and other polluting industries such as Sasol. Although Durban has the healthiest air, according to the WHO study, even here concentrations of  $PM_{10}$  and  $PM_{2.5}$  are above WHO guidelines at  $26 \mu g/m^3$  and  $14 \mu g/m^3$  respectively.

In South Africa, areas which are known to have high levels of ambient air pollution should be declared as priority areas. Priority areas are required by Section 19 (1) of the National Environmental Management Act (Act 39 of 2004) to develop an Air Quality Management Plan that will enable the area to improve its ambient air quality and maintain compliance with the air quality standards that the South African government has set. ☺



# Delmas farmers ploughing acid

by Robby Mokgalaka

*Acid mine drainage cuts off food security for the people of Delmas*

In the Mail and Guardian newspaper (7<sup>th</sup> of February 2014), it was reported that a group of farmers were complaining about acid mine drainage caused by the mines around the area of Delmas in Mpumalanga, on the Highveld. The quality of their crops was being affected and therefore incurring a loss of profit. I decided to arrange an appointment with one of the farmers to find out more. The farmer is known to be benefitting the community of Delmas and surrounding areas through employment, as well as by providing vegetables to the business community, so he is a lifeline to the community at large in many ways.

The farmer mentioned that previously farmers used to rely on stream water for irrigation. The rivers that were commonly used by the farmers as a source of water in the Highveld are the Olifant and Wilge rivers. The farmers were growing healthy crops and business was thriving. The construction of so many coal mines in the Highveld began to pollute stream water to an extent that it is no longer good for irrigation. The farmer mentioned that one can literally see the presence of foreign particles in the water. He said the top level of the water has a shiny layer which seems to be a sign of metal deposit and other remnants of mine operations.

The farmers resorted to underground water to continue with their agricultural businesses. Now the building of the Exxaro mine and other mines in their area has continued to further contaminate the underground water. The farmers now are left with absolutely no option. The farmer indicated that approaching the media was a desperate cry for help, because the quality of their crops is deteriorating. The poor quality of their crops may lead to the loss of their accreditation to export their crops, and this

will affect their businesses dramatically. When their businesses are affected, it automatically will mean a loss of jobs to the farm workers and this plays an adverse role in the fight against unemployment.

If the farmers were to lose their licences to export their crops, the crops could then only be sold on our local turf and will be consumed by our local community. Isn't it ironic that the European public is protected against contaminated produce, but the South African farmers and consumers are not!

This is a clear indication that mines are being careless in their mode of operations and their activities are not adequately monitored by the relevant government officials for proper running of the business, with less health impact.

The farmer also talked about the affected wetlands in the area. He informed us that wetlands are natural water purifying systems. They are part of our useful natural resources. Since the establishment of so many mines within the Highveld, almost all the wetlands are drained dry and the remaining ones are contaminated beyond use.

The farmers even convened the support of the Agri-Union to fight the mining battle. They joined forces to oppose the construction of any other mine within the area. The team is in the process of taking the legal route to end this current disaster.

The farmer expressed his interest in joining with us and our affiliates in the area. He promised to inform his fellow farmers about us and thereafter invited us to present the focus of our campaign to all the farmers.



# From SA to Germany, we say no coal

by Katrin Ganswindt

*We say goodbye to our intern from Germany but continue our joint global fight against coal*

The last part of my stay with groundWork in South Africa saw me gathering as much information as possible about the Makhado project – the new mine Coal of Africa Limited (CoAL) intends to open in the Vhembe district of Limpopo. I met with the lawyer collective of the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS (CALS)) as well as with journalists and farmers in Johannesburg. After that I travelled to the region myself, together with Robby Mokgalaka, groundWork's new Coal Campaigner. When travelling to Vhembe I witnessed the beauty of the land, which the mining projects will destroy, and learned about the importance of the region as South Africa's "fruit basket".

We had the great opportunity to meet with Phile van Zyl – one of the biggest farmers of the area – and with the chief of Mudimele, the community which is situated right in the middle of the Makhado project. A highlight of my stay in South Africa was definitely the flight above the prospected mining area with Phile van Zyl who took me in his little airplane. I'm thankful to have had that opportunity to see the communities, agricultural fields and nature from above!

I was flattered to meet Mphatheleni Makaulule, the founder of the Mupo Foundation, or *Dzomo la Mupo*, who recently received the Global Leadership Award in New York. She and her husband are also two very impressive personalities who have dedicated their lives to carrying on the knowledge about indigenous plants and nursing old seed varieties, thereby preserving the sacred sites of the vhaVenda that would be at risk as well if the mining project is to proceed.

A challenge for me was to get ready for talks with members of the provincial parliament in Mpumalanga. In order to do so, I went to see two professors at WITS, accompanied by Sboniso

Dhlamini and Nomcebo Makhubelo from community-based organization Mpumalanga Youth Against Climate Change (MYACC). Terence McCarthy, a geoscientist, explained why further mining activities will put the fresh water of the local people and agriculture in Mpumalanga at risk. The Kruger National Park would also be affected, thereby impacting upon the country's tourism industry. Most concerning, though, was the forecast for the drinking water of Gauteng if mining is to proceed, as sulphate levels might make the water of the massive Vaal Dam as unsuitable for drinking as Witbank Dam's water already is. After our insight into natural science, we had an interesting discussion with Victor Munnik on social movements on the ground.

Last but not least, Nomcebo and I were busy preparing for her trip to Germany shortly after I left South Africa. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April she arrived in Dusseldorf, Germany. Together we informed interested groups, such as members of parliament and people from the local German struggle, about her work in Mpumalanga. The group responsible for the Mpumalanga North Rhine-Westphalia partnership was very interested and will definitely stop in Witbank during their next tour in South Africa to meet people from the local struggle and see the impacts of coal in South Africa with their own eyes.

Finally we went to the shareholder meeting of RWE, one of the biggest energy companies in Germany. We were able to give them a short impression of the situation on the ground and answer questions. Thereafter, their CEO stated that they will meet with the local struggle during their next mine-audits some time this year. We will follow up closely to see that he sticks to his promise – I swear! ☺



# Re-inventing the wheel

by Musa Chamane

*REDISA's plan is already in motion*

The Recycling and Economic Development Initiative of South Africa (REDISA) has been tasked by government to deal with waste tyres. Tyres are a problematic waste stream as they take up a huge amount of space at waste landfills and dumps. Besides this, due to methane gases released by decomposing waste, landfills are prone to catch alight, causing fires that can continue for days. So now, just like a plastic bag at a supermarket, each tyre bought has a levy to facilitate disposal at the end of the life cycle.

South Africa produces more than 200 000 tonnes of waste tyres a year and currently only a small fraction of that is being recycled or re-used. In previous newsletters we outlined REDISA's plan to

reduce the impact of tyres to the environment and create employment by recycling or reusing them in different products, for example rubber crumb that can be used to build roads or for repairing them. At some point, however, tyres need to be disposed of and the levy the consumer has to pay therefore helps in making sure that this waste stream is safely disposed of.

Tyre recycling is bound to create many jobs because organizations and individuals can register to be tyre collectors, transporters or tyre recyclers. All these stages need employees who register with REDISA to access the employment benefits. If an unregistered person or organization decides to take old tyres to the recycling depot there will not be any payment

Waste tyres at a recycling depot in Midrand.

Credit:  
groundWork



given to them as they are not a registered supplier to REDISA. This plan is very much pro-job creation – there are thousands of people who will earn an income as a result of REDISA's approach.

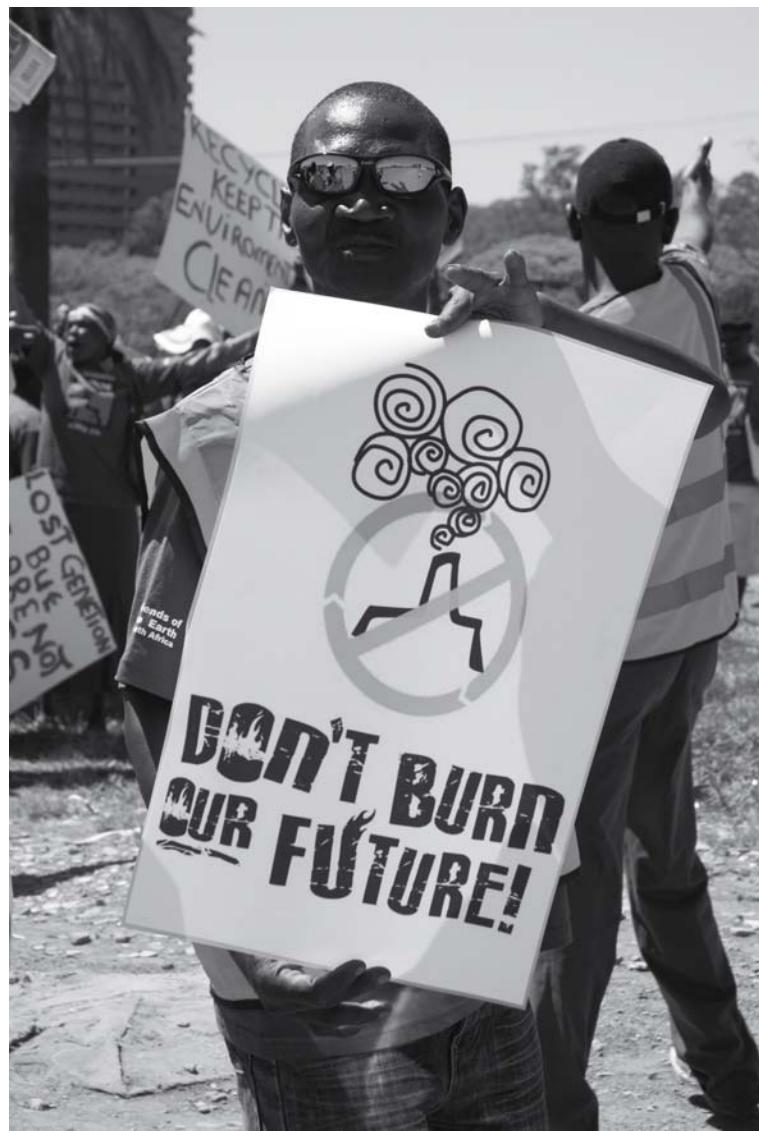
The South African Waste Pickers' Association (SAWPA) are in the process of registering with REDISA as tyre collectors and/or transporters. Waste pickers are already in the business of recycling and this plan is just adding one more waste stream to collect. The main towns will have a recycling depot. The depots will be used as temporary storage before they are taken to the manufacturers. Tyres will be collected by collectors, who then pass the tyres on to transporters, who drop them at the depot for collection by the manufacturers. We have seen the Midrand depot where this process is being implemented practically. So far REDISA's pilot project in Midrand does not have many challenges, and this is really promising.

The only challenge is that the country does not have a big enough tyre crumbing industry to recover rubber from tyres. REDISA will have to take some tonnages to cement kilns to be incinerated until the manufacturing industry is ready to take the bulk of the tyres. Incinerating waste, and in particular tyres, in cement kilns has been a long-standing issue for groundWork, which has fought against government and cement companies, as cement kilns have proven to be the cause of so many challenges, including poor air quality. REDISA had promised to only burn those tyres that cannot be recycled. At the depot this is not happening as all the tyres that come through are headed for cement kilns.

The waste hierarchy is being recognised in this plan and so it is a good one, and it could end up being the model for dealing with all other waste streams in the country. If this plan is not carefully thought through, though, it might end up just like the plastic bag recycling company that failed, despite all the millions of Rands it collected from tax payers. The plastic bag recycling initiative failed due to a number of things,

including financial mismanagement, and it ended up shutting down its offices and is now managed by the Department of Environmental Affairs.

While it is positive that REDISA and SAWPA are busy registering waste pickers as collectors and transporters in different towns and regions, the plan has to move away from burning tyres in cement kilns because we cannot solve the problem by creating another problem of toxic air and ash. Rubber crumpling plant should be funded by REDISA and rubber should be recovered. ☺



SAWPA anti-incineration march in Pretoria in October 2013  
Credit: groundWork



## Job-creation project on back burner

*The Msunduzi Municipality's failure to proceed with a job-creation project is highlighted in a press release issued by groundWork*

Umgungundlovu District Municipality was, in 2011, awarded R21 million by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) for implementation of a waste recycling project that would create two hundred permanent, sustainable jobs. Due to the local municipality not signing off on the construction of the formal recycling centre, the cooperative of waste pickers already working at the New England Road landfill site have been kept waiting for three years.

Not only are the waste picker cooperative, Hlanganani ma-Africa, and small recyclers tired of waiting, so too is CoGTA, which is threatening to withdraw funding if the project is not completed. The project will be the construction of a Materials

Recycling Facility (MRF), a buy-back centre and a composting facility next to the landfill site. It will mean waste pickers will no longer be subjected to the dangerous working conditions of a landfill, but will divert recyclables to be sold. By not signing the Memorandum of Understanding, Msunduzi Local Municipality is losing out on creating jobs and on increasing the lifespan of the landfill.

Critically, this project would mean Pietermaritzburg would become the first zero waste city in Africa. Diverting recyclables off the landfill site is not only a source of employment for people who would otherwise be impoverished but also means that waste is recycled and less methane is produced on the landfill during waste decomposition. It would also be the first project of its kind, as it would fall under management of the cooperative, a formalisation amongst waste pickers on the landfill that groundwork and the national movement, the South African Waste Pickers' Association (SAWPA), have helped facilitate.

Instead of supporting the local social economy, Msunduzi Municipality has signed an agreement with Wildlands Conservation Trust to take all recyclable waste from Pietermaritzburg. Wildlands approaches waste recycling by paying waste pickers with vouchers for the recyclable materials they collect. This creates dependency and does not promote true entrepreneurship, as it does not put control in the hands of the waste pickers. Also, Wildlands is by-passing paying waste pickers the market rate for the kilograms of recyclables they collect and we are unsure whether the food vouchers are an equivalent amount.

Choosing this over the proposed CoGTA and Umgungundlovu District Municipality project means Msunduzi Municipality is actively promoting bigger profits for the Trust and, at the same time, killing all small recycling initiatives in Pietermaritzburg. Hlanganani ma-Africa, SAWPA and groundWork demand an answer from Msunduzi Municipality by the end of June. 



A waste picker runs the gamut on the New England landfill site

Credit:  
groundWork



# The beginning of the end for EDCs

by Rico Euripidou

## *The World Health Organization agrees that Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals need a global response*

Amid growing global concerns and a very public spat among health regulators and chemicals-industry-backed scientists, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recently published an alarming report on the risks of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDC)<sup>1</sup>. According to the WHO, these chemicals, which can interfere with any aspect of your body's normal hormone action, pose, in particular, a threat to small children and the developing babies of pregnant women.

The WHO report concluded:

*"Exposure to EDCs during foetal development and puberty plays a role in the increased incidences of reproductive diseases, endocrine-related cancers, behavioural and learning problems, including A.D.H.D., infections, asthma, and perhaps obesity and diabetes in humans."*

In addition, two hormone-disrupting chemicals have also recently been linked to more autistic behaviours in children exposed in the womb to higher levels of a flame retardant and a chemical in a banned pesticide<sup>2</sup>.

EDCs are all around us and in just about everything we use day to day. For example, they are used in plastics as softeners, in preservatives, in pesticides on our food, in everyday electronics and children's toys, in healthcare products and in cosmetics. Known examples of EDCs include phthalates (a plastic-softener), brominated flame retardants (often used in household textile or furniture) and metals like lead and mercury. Phthalates are found

in hundreds of consumer products, including vinyl flooring, garden hoses, shower curtains, inflatable toys, adhesives, detergents and raincoats.

They can escape from products into dust and the air, entering the body through breathing, eating and skin contact. Some studies have found that phthalates can disrupt male hormones early in life, while others have tied them to slowing brain development and creating immune system problems. By reducing testosterone and thyroid hormones, phthalates particularly threaten early childhood development, but also pose risks to teens and adults.

Fortunately, alternatives to these chemicals are widely available.

While some countries are curtailed from taking meaningful action by a powerful industry lobby, countries like France, Belgium and Denmark have begun to take meaningful measures to ban or prohibit these chemicals on the back of the emerging evidence base that they are directly linked to adverse developmental outcomes and are harmful to health. Industry continues to maintain that the hazards of these chemicals are not fully substantiated – unlike the compelling scientific evidence of risk related to smoking and lead poisoning. They go on to say that to suggest that this uncertainty is an intentional effort to misinform the public is inappropriate.

However, the duplicity of industry is well documented from when they fought regulation for lead in paint decades ago. "Lead helps to

1 Global assessment of the state-of-the-science of endocrine disruptors. WHO/PCS/EDC/02.2. [http://www.who.int/ipcs/publications/new\\_issues/endocrine\\_disruptors/en/](http://www.who.int/ipcs/publications/new_issues/endocrine_disruptors/en/)

2 Braun JM et al. (2014). Gestational exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals and reciprocal social, repetitive, and stereotypic behaviors in 4 – and 5-year-old children: The HOME Study. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1307261> <http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/science/2014/mar/autism>



guard your health" was a marketing slogan used by the National Lead Company to sell lead-based household paints in the USA. We now know that lead was poisoning millions of children and permanently damaging their brains. How many tens of thousands of children died, and how many countless millions were left mentally impaired by this industry as they fought regulation every step of the way, alongside the tobacco industry of the time.

The European Commission planned to publish a definition of endocrine disruptors in December 2013 as part of the process towards greater regulation. The definition was, however, delayed by the EU Commissioner, who requested an impact analysis first. This led the Swedish environment minister Lena Ek to threaten to sue the Commission for breaching the bargaining agreement.

The editor of *Endocrinology*, a leading health journal, published an editorial asserting that corporate interests are abusing the scientific evidence in the same way as they manipulated the health data linking lead and tobacco to adverse health outcomes. She added that the evidence is "undeniable: endocrine-disrupting chemicals pose a threat to human health."

To protect public health and the environment, and in accordance with the precautionary principle, we need an approach that results in the dramatic reduction of exposure to known EDCs, alongside improvements in the chemicals regulatory system. Chemicals with endocrine disrupting properties are manufactured in volumes of millions of tonnes per year and are widespread in consumer products. Several EU member states have already banned or announced intentions to ban certain uses of EDCs. These decisions to protect public health have been made on the basis of existing science.

African countries have been calling for a global approach to address EDCs under the globally agreed Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), consistent with SAICM's inclusive and participatory nature, to meet the objectives of the Overarching Policy Strategy with respect to EDCs, namely: risk reduction, access to knowledge and information, capacity building and technical cooperation.

Alongside these activities, robust awareness-raising activities are required in the African region, as well as an effort to develop case studies from certain priority sectors – such as pesticides, children's products, textiles, electronics and building materials – and a concerted effort to gather and provide access to information to information on EDCs. Once we have all of these measures in place we can begin the business of protecting the public and mitigating the externalised costs of the chemicals industry.

At the African Regional SAICM meeting in November 2013, over fifty African countries, industry and civil society passed a resolution on EDCs. The resolution calls for action by UNEP and WHO on the situation in developing countries, to:

- Identify priority EDCs and sources of exposure for African countries including, *inter alia*, products, food and water, wastes, and pesticides;
- To begin a process of bio-monitoring and gathering other available information regarding current levels of exposure to EDCs to identify information gaps;
- To examine available sources of data on substances with endocrine disrupting properties, and challenges faced by all stakeholders with respect to accessing and using available data;
- To examine existing legislation and policies by governments and entities engaged in development finance, as well as gaps in measures to protect human health and the environment from EDCs, especially workers, women and children;
- To identify stakeholder needs on information regarding EDCs in products throughout their life-cycle, including research carried out in the Chemicals in Products Project under the Strategic Approach;
- To make available examples of best practices in reducing the use of EDCs, including safer substitution, non-chemical alternatives and risk-management, if any; and
- To identify capacity needs for reducing the risks of EDCs.



# What is GGHN?

by Luqman Yesufu

*Hospitals also have ecological footprints that prevent them from fulfilling their mandate. The Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Network aims to help healthcare facilities to minimise their negative impacts*

For many, the words climate change conjure images of polar bears and melting ice-caps, but one of the biggest impact is the “threat to our (human) health”. Over the years, healthcare professionals globally have addressed health problems in isolation, leaving out several other key contributors to diseases, such as socio-economic and environmental factors, stress, food consumption and chemical exposure. Climate change, an environmental factor, has been described by The Lancet, which is the world's most influential medical journal, as “the biggest global health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. This is because the contribution of environmental factors to the burden of disease will be magnified and increased with the growing health-related impacts of climate change: for example, the shifting patterns of disease, water and food insecurity, vulnerable shelter and human settlements, extreme climate events, heat related illness and population migration.

The health sector's mandate is to prevent and cure disease. Yet the delivery of health care services, most notably in hospitals, often inadvertently contributes to the problem. Therefore the health sector has a key role to play in reducing its own ecological footprint, while promoting public environmental health. Hospitals and other health organizations generate significant environmental health impacts, both upstream and downstream from service delivery, through the natural resources and products they consume, as well as through the waste they generate. They have completely missed the context that makes up healthy people and contributes to disease. This was the major driver for the formation of the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Network (GGHN), a project of Health

Care Without Harm (HCWH), which is a global network of hospitals, healthcare systems, health professionals and academic organizations dedicated to reducing the ecological footprint of healthcare operations, while promoting environmental and public health in their communities.

The GGHN will serve as a virtual global community for hospitals and health systems seeking to implement the ten interconnected goals of the GGHN Agenda, while sharing best practices and finding solutions to the challenges they share. These ten interconnected goals form a framework for implementation by hospitals:

- Leadership – Prioritize environmental health;
- Chemicals – Substitute harmful chemicals with safer alternatives;
- Waste – Reduce, treat and safely dispose of healthcare waste;
- Energy – Implement energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy generation;
- Water – Reduce hospital water consumption and supply potable water;
- Transportation – Improve transportation strategies for patients and staff;
- Food – Purchase and serve sustainably grown food;
- Pharmaceuticals – Safely manage and dispose of pharmaceuticals;
- Building – Support green and healthy hospital design and construction; and



- Purchasing – Buy safer and more sustainable products and materials.

The health sector in any society in the world is one of the most trusted, as individuals are always keen to adhere to advice from doctors and nurses about their health. The members of the GGHHN recognizes this power it has and therefore tries to model healthy buildings, healthy operations and sustainable procurement so that it can play an enormously important role in the society while reducing its ecological footprint. If you want individuals in society to adopt a healthy lifestyle by stopping smoking, breaking addiction to toxic chemicals, giving up eating fast food and reducing fossil fuel use we simply model this transformation in the healthcare system. This is achieved through mobilizing the health care community around the world to work together and advocate for greater environmental health, locally and globally.

In Africa, we currently have two members, one in Kenya (Kenyatta National Hospital) and the other in South Africa (Lentegeur Hospital). The network is growing rapidly globally and a platform for collaboration, information sharing, and discussion to improve sustainability at hospitals worldwide has been created, called the GGHH Connect. This platform also provides expert advice and tools for implementing GGHH goals.

groundWork is currently working on encouraging South African hospitals to join the GGHHN, as we are HCWH's South African member.

The GGHHN currently consists of 269 members, constituting 213 hospitals, twenty-seven health systems and twenty-nine health organizations. Any hospital can be a member and it's very easy to join the network. The following steps need to be taken to join the network:

Step 1: Choose your membership category (hospital, health professional or academic organization).

Step 2: Send a letter of intent, indicating support for the GGHH Agenda and commitment towards working towards two goals. A sample letter can be downloaded from [www.greenhospitals.net/join-the-network](http://www.greenhospitals.net/join-the-network) and then emailed to [globalnetwork@hcwh.org](mailto:globalnetwork@hcwh.org).

Step 3: Keep GGHH informed as your work evolves by sharing your progress through case studies (at least one case study per goal).

A project within groundWork is to engage the South African and increasingly the African healthcare fraternity with an agenda to promote GGHH. I was recruited solely for the purpose of membership outreach and engagement in Africa, starting from South Africa. My responsibility involves engaging hospitals to join the network and providing assistance to help them implement at least two goals. These achievements will be written up as case studies and published on the GGHH website annually. I will also work closely with the global team to build correspondence in Africa.

Recently, I was invited to present the GGHH Agenda at a climate change seminar in Cape Town. The target audience was senior management, CEOs of large hospitals and district managers and emergency medical services within the Department of Health in the Western Cape. It was an amazing opportunity to inform these people about their contribution to climate change in the name of providing care and getting them to sign up as members of the GGHHN.

The climate change seminar was very enlightening as the audience was made aware of human contribution to the environmental footprint. It laid a very good foundation for my presentation on GGHH. Due to the type of audience and the concerns of many hospitals and the healthcare establishment with costs, I decided to focus my presentation on the cost implications of going green, citing three examples. Hospital management has always been concerned about inadequate financial resources to carry out some healthcare activities, so I had to make them aware that shifting their practices and policies towards environmental sustainability would save them a lot of money, making such hospitals or health systems economically viable.

During the discussion session, questions and concerns were highlighted. Many felt the leadership within the healthcare sector has failed miserably to address issues on climate change and its impacts. I encouraged them to embrace this GGHH platform which has leadership as one of its goals and to challenge themselves to achieve this goal. In fact, GGHH recognizes the importance of leadership in



the health care sector, because it's incumbent upon us as healthcare leaders to change our own practices to eliminate these environmental pollutants, thus reducing our environmental footprint and also leading other industries to change.

At the end, many hospitals were eager to join the GGHHN and they were put through the procedure for joining. Of particular interest were two newly constructed green hospitals in the Western Cape, namely Mitchell's Plain and Khayelitsha Hospitals. These hospitals were constructed as part of the greening project embarked upon by the Western Cape government. Both hospitals have been described as being amongst the greenest buildings in the South Africa. We had the privilege of having a guided tour around both, and it was an amazing experience.

Both hospitals were designed to maintain natural conservation of animal and plant. Mitchell's Plain Hospital is characterized by the presence of Fynbos;

the indigenous plant species of the Western Cape at the entrance of the hospital in a garden. Both hospitals were designed to provide a kind of sensory healing to patients. In terms of renewable energy, both hospitals have installed solar panels and were making significant monetary savings by using that energy source. Khayelitsha Hospital has very big internal courtyards where patients can relax and get fresh air. Colorful signs and artwork within and outside both hospitals were a beauty and aided mood upliftment.

At the end, I was fascinated by the fact that hospitals have already started to green their operations and practices in South Africa. This is key to the GGHH campaign, and getting these two hospitals on board the network will encourage hospitals and health systems within Africa to join and, by sharing their experiences and challenges, other hospitals within South Africa and Africa can replicate their achievements. ☺



One of the goals hospitals can take up through GGHH is to grow food gardens and trees on site.

Credit: GGHH



# ExxonMobil do it for the poor

by Greenfly

Climate change already looks dangerous, with the heat turned up just a bit over 0.8°C above pre-industrial temperatures. At Cancun in 2010, the world's governments agreed to aim at limiting warming to under 2°C. That's a degree of warming that will prove disastrous; and beyond that lies catastrophic.

Various climate boffins have since calculated how much carbon can be emitted to have a reasonable chance of coming in under 2°C. This is known as the carbon budget. If you want a better chance or a lower target – say 1.5°C – the budget is reduced.

The sharp-eyed folk at Carbon Tracker immediately noticed that fossil fuel reserves – the stuff that Big Oil and Big Coal have already booked and can extract at a profit – contain three or four times more carbon than is allowed by the 2°C budget. They concluded that between 60% and 80% of Big Fossil's reserves are "unburnable" and will become "stranded assets" of no value. Canny investors would do well to dump their shares. This, of course, assumes that nation states, or the governments that preside over them, want to survive the next fifty years or so.

Clearly some investors got a bit wobbly, so provoking ExxonMobil to respond at the end of March – just as the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued reports showing how bad it can get and how little of the carbon budget is left. Exxon reckons it is "highly unlikely" that governments will "restrict hydrocarbon production". The world, it says, "will require all the carbon-based energy that ExxonMobil plans to produce" and "we are confident that none of our hydrocarbon reserves are now or will become 'stranded'". Ever.

Rebecca Solnit, an independent writer, comments: "Exxon has decided to bet that we can't make the corporation keep its reserves in the ground, and the company is reassuring its investors that

it will continue to profit off the rapid, violent and intentional destruction of the Earth."

She obviously just didn't get it that Exxon is doing this for the poor. Abundant energy is required to fire up economic growth – tripling the size of the global economy by 2040 – and "the poorest and least developed of the world's countries benefit most from this anticipated growth". Further: producing the not-to-be-stranded assets will prevent "consumers – especially those in the least developed and most vulnerable economies – from themselves becoming stranded in the global pursuit of higher living standards and greater economic opportunity". And again: societies, "especially the world's poorest and most vulnerable", will not be willing to bear the costs of keeping within the carbon budget.

So, Exxon will "deliver results to shareholders" and energy to consumers AND it will do it in a "safe and environmentally responsible manner". Stick that up your budget.

And what is "responsible"? Exxon echoes the World Coal Council at CoP 19 in Warsaw last year. It echoes Eskom, Sasol and Anglo Coal. It echoes South Africa's Coal Road Map and our own departments of energy and mineral resources: burn it all. But use our shiny new efficient technologies to do it. Climate change, as Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson likes to say, is an engineering problem to which the answer is innovation.

Obviously, modernisation theory still works for Exxon. The market allocates resources efficiently and delivers to all in time. The poor will get rich enough to rise to the status of consumers in their turn. Greenfly hopes they survive that long in the poisoned waters of the Niger Delta or the burning coal pits of Emalahleni. Those left can try their luck with climate change since, as we all know and as the IPCC confirms, poor people get fried first. ☺



## In brief

### Unsold cars using all the world's parking spaces

Wonder why you can never find a parking space? According to the article at <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2014-05-16/where-worlds-unsold-cars-go-die>, it is because car manufacturers are continuing to make hundreds of thousands of cars that are not being bought and that need somewhere to park. Illustrated with many pictures of acres of parked brand-new cars, the article claims that, in order to prevent a total economic melt-down, cars have to keep on being made – even if no-one is buying them.

### Community action in Papua New Guinea wins back land

After a long struggle, the Collingwood Bay community of Oro Province in Papua New Guinea have wrested land illegally acquired by Malaysian Oil Palm giant, KLK, and intended for the planting of oil palms. Despite having tried to engage with government authorities, nothing was achieved until the community, with support from FoEI, took the matter to court.

To date, PNG customary landowners have lost over five million hectares of land to land grabbers, who claim title under a system called the "Special Agriculture Business Lease". The PNG communities have vowed to continue the fight.

### Ivanhoe Mines granted mining right despite objections

Lawyers for Human Rights have issued a press statement telling that the Department of Mineral Resources has granted a mining right over the communal area of a number of villages in Mokopane. This gives Platreef Resources, a subsidiary of Ivanhoe Mines, the ability to develop one of the world's largest platinum mines inside an area of significant cultural, historic and livelihood importance. LHR and the Mokopane community will monitor the mine to ensure that it remains within the law.

### CER asks for investigation into contaminated drinking water

It has been frequently reported in the media that, as a result of drinking water in the Bloemhof area having been contaminated, there have been hundreds of hospital admissions, as well as the death of at least three babies.

In response, the Centre for Environmental Rights has asked the Northwest Police Commissioner and the Northwest Director of Public Prosecutions to investigate the criminal liabilities of parties involved in these deaths.

CER requested that the investigation consider the potential criminal liability of the municipal manager, contractors and employees with responsibility for fixing the broken sewerage pipe, and any other party who had a legal duty to advise residents of steps they could take to avoid becoming ill.

CER Executive Director, Melissa Fourie, said: "While millions of South Africans live with violations of their environmental rights every day... in this case these violations resulted in the death of innocent children. These deaths were preventable, and unnecessary. The least we can do for the memory of these three lost lives and their families is to investigate whether their deaths were the result of criminal negligence."

"We need municipal managers across the country to understand that, while there are many pressing needs in municipal management, sewage treatment and the delivery of safe drinking water have to be prioritised above everything else. If these things are not in place, people die.

"We also want to see the new Department of Water and Sanitation impose early and effective community warning systems so that the mothers of babies, so vulnerable to dehydration from the symptoms of drinking contaminated water, have the information and access to alternative sources of hydration for those children."



# The lost village of Masakhane

by Megan Lewis

*While on a filming trip, Megan had the opportunity to visit an almost-forgotten community on the fenceline of Eskom's Duvha power station*

There is a humming, an incessant buzzing, but no bees. Ah, the electricity wires connecting pylon to pylon beyond the houses over which they pass and into the hazy distance, forever buzzing with current. The sunshine bounces off the tin roofs of the houses, the shacks and the people; people who are waiting on an open patch of land. Some, however, have managed to find a little shade on the periphery. Surely all those people can't fit into such a small number of houses. They are waiting. More continue to join them. They are waiting, some in wheelbarrows, some on the ground. There are children who wait too, with runny noses and eyes that look too tired to play. Why are they not at school? Some people greet each other; others cough loudly and for a long time. Strewn next to a tap on the street are large, colourful bottles. The tap simply drips, it does not run with water when opened. People wait here too.

Big black hills form the close backdrop where people wait. A blast goes off nearby, but no one flinches. There is a strange sour smell that fills the air. No one notices or, if they do, they don't complain. Plumes of smoke waft out behind these black hills, some from round boilers and others from one tall chimney stack – the other one seems to be out of order. A power station, Duvha, part of Eskom's large family of electricity-producing machines. With the idea to build a power station here, came the need for a mine, no, in fact several mines from where coal would be extracted to fuel the power station. With this came people, so desperate for work to feed families that they built make-shift houses here, hoping either the mine or the power station would employ them.

But twenty years have passed and nothing has changed. They are forgotten. This is the lost village of Masakhane. They wait with wheelbarrows to collect coal that Eskom has mandated the nearby mines supplying Duvha to provide to this community. Ah, so they are not forgotten, you say. They wait by the one communal tap for the municipality to fill the tank with water. Again you will say, they are not forgotten. No, perhaps they are not forgotten. They are herded like cattle – sixty people at a time, allowed only one wheelbarrow per household – up a ramp to scrabble at the black mounds to fill their wheelbarrows with coal to cook and heat their homes. It is more like sand than coal. Water in Masakhane, like most villages and towns in the Highveld region, is so polluted and racked by acid mine drainage that illness and sometimes even death can come to those who drink it.

That irritating buzzing never stops. Where is it going? Not to Masakhane. The steam that comes out of the boilers must come from water not acidic or else the power station wouldn't work. So there is drinkable water somewhere, although the people of Masakhane have to wait every week for water to be driven in, just like they have to wait for their weekly wheelbarrow of coal. The power station works throughout the night, but most people are not employed there or at the mines. They have lived there too long; they do not pass the health test to work.

A woman bends down at different points along the sandy path. She picks up the pieces of coal that have fallen out of wheelbarrows. She does this every week. She has been forgotten. ☺





## Atomic Africa

Released as a TV movie, *Atomic Africa* recounts the hidden agenda of the nuclear industry in Africa and the alarming consequences for people and the environment. In collusion with corrupt governments and questionable business partners energy companies source uranium for their domestic markets. And – faced with an apparent “sales problem” of nuclear technology in the Western world – they also lobby African governments to buy nuclear power plants.

Despite the horror of Fukushima, showing how disastrous the effect of nuclear energy can be, otherwise well informed high-level decision makers in Africa seem oblivious to the risks of nuclear power. They happily welcome the prospect of a seemingly endless, cheap and clean energy source. And their national pride is fuelled by the fact that the radioactive raw material for the new reactors doesn't need to be imported from other countries – it's hidden in the African soil.

Anti-nuclear activists in Africa are intimidated, persecuted and sometimes killed. In this film, critics of the nuclear industry speak out against the injustice and reveal the dubious activities of nuclear enterprises – from the illegal exploitation of the mines in the Congo to the controversial mining operations in the Sahara region. The film shows the “Uranium Highway” and how the current war in Mali is related to fifty years of uranium mining that have destroyed people's livelihoods and pushed them into the hands of Al-Qaeda terrorists.

The film shows the dilemma of the African continent: it desperately needs cheap and reliable electric power for its development but, instead of being able to use its own resources, Africa is forced to sell off its riches to corrupt multinational enterprises. The sobering conclusions are that, in the future, African governments will need to give up their unrealistic nuclear ambitions and develop appropriate technologies to free themselves from their technological dependence on Western enterprises, as well as making sure the energy they do invest in provides power to all.

