

GROUNDWORK



Coal is a bad neighbour

In this issue

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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Director: Bobby Peek

Deputy Director: Gill Addison

Administrative Assistant: Bathoko Sibisi

Waste Campaign Manager: Musa Chamane

Coal Campaign Manager: Robby Mokgalaka

Environmental Health Campaign Manager: Rico Euripidou

Campaign Research and Technical Assistant: Niven Reddy

Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) Network Campaign Manager: Luqman Yesufu

Community Activist: Thomas Mnguni

Media, Information and Publications

Campaign Manager: Nombulelo Shange

Researcher: David Hallowes

Bookkeeper: Gill Waterworth

HOW TO CONTACT US:

6 Raven Street

Pietermaritzburg

P O Box 2375, Pietermaritzburg, 3200

Tel: 033-342-5662

Fax: 033-342-5665

e-mail: team@groundWork.org.za

Web: www.groundWork.org.za

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Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

International Coal Network

Break Free from Plastic

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

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Cover: In Somkhele, many of the buildings in Mrs Dladla's homestead have been destroyed as a result of Somkhele Coal Mine's blasting. Her yard is now scattered with heaps of rubble and debris. Credit: groundWork





Credit: groundWork

From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

As you read this newsletter, we are celebrating nineteen years of existence. As a social justice slogan goes – “we exist to resist”. I believe this is what drives us. It has been an exciting time. After the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, many thought the environmental justice movement was dead. Indeed, it nearly was during the Mbeki era, an era which saw “development on steroids”, as is it often referred to in groundWork, as a way to silence critics of maldevelopment and injustice. I am sure Mbeki and his cohorts welcomed this. But nearly two decades on we remain excited by and committed to environmental justice. And it is not only the people in groundWork who feel this way. It is also the various environmental justice groups that are springing up throughout the country, working on justice issues through an environmental justice lens. It has not always been an easy road, and victories are never immediate. It takes time to grind out. But there have been many, the most recent one being Makoma Lekalakala and Liz McDaid receiving the 2018 Goldman Award for Africa for challenging and killing the nuclear energy deal that ex-President Zuma was pushing.

Let me reflect on some others which indicate that there is still hope for environmental justice and democracy in South Africa.

Firstly, the Shongweni Toxic dump in Durban has now remained closed for more than a year. The Upper Highway Air Association, together with various community and NGO parties, challenged government and Enviroserv and forced the site to close. Sadly, despite the site being closed, the area still smells. But, with the site closed, Enviroserv loses millions weekly. They are back in court in June again, and it is said that they are going to push the labour issue versus environmental justice. Well, it is not as bad as the Somkhele Mine, which is transgressing various legal requirements and claiming jobs are at stake. Are they saying jobs are more important than

legality? So it is okay to have jobs where companies are flouting the law?

Secondly, groundWork was recently called out by community members from the KwaMbonambi, Sokhulu and Enhlanzini area near Richards Bay who are affected by waste dumping. It was reported to the Green Scorpions and within a few days they decided to investigate Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) for environmental violations. We look forward to the outcome of this investigation.

groundWork is known for challenging waste incineration, not only in South Africa but globally. Often it is said that where there is a chimney you will find groundWork. The next victory has been an important policy victory that took more than a decade to carve out. For all our nineteen years of existence, we have resisted all incineration and in particular health care waste, also known as medical waste, incineration. We have protested, been to court, exposed malpractice and written extensively about it.

Over the years, we have even shared platforms with senior political environmental leadership denouncing this practice but seemingly little was actually done as they “talked left and walked right”. But maybe I am too quick to criticize for, in April this year, the Department of Environmental Affairs published regulations for comment on: *Health care risk waste management regulations and draft norms and standards for validation of the treatment efficacy of a non-combustion treatment technology used to treat health care risk waste*. A mouthful, but what it essentially means is that government – after years of denial – has come to a realization that alternatives to waste incineration do exist.

While we have fought in the trenches to resist each incinerator as it has appeared, from Aloes to Bloemfontein, from Midrand to Wellington,



from Pretoria to Durban, we have also worked on ensuring that we relentlessly push the policy process. Nobody said it was going to be easy and certainly not quick, and a strategic approach is always needed for victory. Considering that the law now calls for only pathological waste to be burnt, and this constitutes less than 5% of health care risk waste, it will not make financial sense to create incinerators for such small volumes. With this reality, at most we need one incinerator to service this need. And soon, maybe no incinerator at all. And as I finalise this article, we have just heard that the proposal to build a waste incinerator in Wellington, in the Western Cape has been defeated.

Challenges do remain for environmental justice activists. However, far and wide people continue to challenge and resist maldevelopment. The key moment of the last few months has been the #Right2SayNo challenge by the people of Xolobeni who do not want mining in their community. In April, the North Gauteng High Court sat to hear the people of Xolobeni requesting the court to grant them the right to say no to mining. Advocate Ngcukaitobi delivered his argument for the Amadiba Crisis Committee like a "well constructed musical composition". Judge Basson who, was hearing the case, stated that she would have to get advice from other judges before making a decision. This is indeed a positive sign. The principle of "prior informed consent" and "the right to say no" has been a long struggle for global movements such as Friends of the Earth International with whom groundWork campaigned back in the early 2000s on this issue.

As we now face a Ramaphosa presidency, which will push mining as a development option, we face a bigger challenge. The mining bosses are not sitting idle. The Chamber of Mines, the bastion and base upon which apartheid capital was built and which exploited, maimed and killed workers and destroyed the social fabric of Southern Africa, is trying hard to write that out of their history. On Wednesday the 23rd of April the Chamber rebranded itself as the Mineral Council of South Africa, trying to neutralise its predatory and destructive nature under bland wording. They now sound like a bunch of academics rather than predatory capitalists. "This change signals our desire to move forward, building a new legacy, and creating a future of which all

South Africans can be proud," said Minerals Council president Mxolisi Mgojo. Move forward – yes, this is needed, but the slate is not clean. It is full of blood, pollution and social destruction. Those who suffered in the past must not be forgotten in the push for a new wealth for a new elite. As business people see a bright future in a new capitalism let us make sure that we cannot forget the past.

In May we also had the International Association of Impact Assessors', aka IAIA, meeting in Durban. Local communities and their representatives were not included among the government officials, experts and others from around the world who converged on Durban. It was a great irony that they were excluded as the conference delegates discussed the theme *Environmental Justice in Societies in Transition*. Who better than those living daily with polluted industries, mines and toxic dumpsites in their neighbourhoods to make input at such a gathering? But there is no way that the IAIA could call community people into the same room, for it is these very same assessors who have failed the public in South Africa dismally, as they have worked with government to withhold information, restrict meaningful participation, present incorrect information as fact and support developments that they know will cause environmental injustices. In 1995 the same participants in this meeting advised our struggles, today we are ignored. The times they are a changin'.

So, it is both on a positive and a cautionary note that we enter our twentieth year. Let us hope that this year is not the beginning of another Mbeki era of "development on steroids". Let us hope that President Ramaphosa, who has recently donated half of his salary to charity, takes bolder steps that challenge all South Africans to move more slowly, more empathetically, in a way that is less focused on accumulation and more on solidarity and equity with each other. We can start in very practical terms, Mr President, by not allowing Sasol to destroy our fishing resources by drilling for oil and gas, giving us an integrated resource plan that speaks to energy justice and to say clearly no to nuclear energy, rather than being diplomatic and misleading and delivering "development on steroids". Yes, this is the third time I have used that phrase.

Till next time. ☺



The Wizards of Toxic Waste

by Niven Reddy and Rico Euripidou

Abracadabra! and the toxic waste is gone

The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) is planning to exempt some streams of toxic waste from regulation, which is likely to have further negative impacts on surrounding communities of the waste generator. According to the 2012 SOUTH AFRICA ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK, "South Africa produces around 450 million tonnes of waste annually, with **70% of this generated by the mining industry**. Gold mines on the Witwatersrand Basin alone produce 105 million

tonnes per annum (23% of the total) with about 200 000 tonnes of waste generated for every tonne of gold produced." Much of this waste is deposited onto slag dumps and into tailings dams. However, what government now has in mind is to pass a law that effectively makes most of this waste available as raw material. These regulations plan to exclude potentially harmful wastes such as manganese slag and coal ash from the application of the Waste Act



and from the requirement for a waste management licence, and allow these wastes to go unregulated.

The draft regulations would allow for unacceptable automatic blanket exclusions of certain waste streams that are harmful and potentially hazardous from the definition of waste under the National Environmental Management: Waste Act, 2008 (NEMWA). Put simply, these draft regulations would allow for the storage, transport and use of potentially hazardous waste to go completely unregulated and unmonitored and this simply cannot be permitted.

Already we are seeing instances where unregulated waste is having devastating impacts on communities and the environment in South Africa. In Cato Ridge in KZN, over a million tonnes of Manganese slag from the Assmang Manganese Works has been “recycled” into cement and building materials by unlicensed users. This includes over 100 000 tonnes of hazardous slag waste, which has been transported off site by unauthorized companies since 2015. groundWork has repeatedly brought this to the attention of the DEA, which has taken more than eighteen months to respond to queries of how and why the slag is being removed. Assmang claimed it has the right to recycle this slag waste, which is a positive step, but neither groundWork nor the DEA have seen the monitoring results that could explain if the slag leaving Assmang was toxic or not.

Any decisions to exclude waste streams must be based on sound science and guided by the precautionary principle and an open and democratic process. The implementation of such exclusions has to be closely monitored and enforced to ensure that waste generators do not simply utilise these regulations as a means to avoid the strict and proper management and regulation of their waste streams.

Our recommendation is that any regulations for the exclusion of waste streams should be put on hold until SA's waste management system is

under control and implemented better. If these regulations are going to be implemented despite our recommendation, these regulations should be completely redrafted to require a much more robust exclusion process of only non-toxic wastes and by application and approval with strict waste management plans. Alternatively, if the regulations are going to be published as they are, the regulations should be amended in accordance with the suggestions in the submission. We also reserve our rights to still challenge their constitutionality.

The regulations are poorly conceived and support an industry agenda. It is well documented that coal ash, ferro-metals slag and other industrial and mining wastes are known to contain concentrated toxic metals such as lead, thallium, barium, cadmium, chromium, mercury, nickel, as well as harmful trace metals such as arsenic, cadmium, chromium, lead, antimony and selenium. These toxic substances can easily be released into the environment. These and other toxicants in coal ash and industrial slag can cause pollution of soils, windblown dust, surface waters and groundwater, which in turn can cause cancer and neurological damage in humans. Such pollution can also harm and kill wildlife, especially fish and other water-dwelling species.

It would be unrealistic to assume that, without express regulation, government and industry can simply make toxic waste disappear through reuse, without any harm to the environment or human health. This is simply not correct.

If the draft regulations come into effect they will allow for dangerous waste to be used for the production of cement, concrete products and roofing granules for example, without regulation or any form of prior approval required for the use of the waste. The toxic waste would in all likelihood be used to make low-cost building materials for RDP houses, with the material leaching its toxic constituents over time with untold unintended consequences. ☺



Politics of failure in waste management

by Musa Chamane

The recently tabled state of waste report falls somewhat short of the truth

The state of the Waste in South Africa.

The state of the waste report was tabled by Department of Environmental Affairs in collaboration with Savannah Environmental Consultants on the 10th of May 2018 in Pretoria. The report comes after the review process of the National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS). A small fraction of municipalities in the country are keen to increase their recycling rates through integration of waste pickers into their waste management systems. There have been some projects/campaigns that have been initiated in different municipalities such as Jozini, the Big 5 as well as Matjhabend Local Municipality.

Savannah consultants have not drafted a convincing report since they have failed to look at the baseline report developed in 2011. There are a

number of deficiencies in the current report since it failed to consider hazardous waste import and export quantities. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has done some great work in researching this issue, but the consultants have just ignored all the reliable data and statistics. A waste classification report was also omitted since the report indicates that out of 108 million tonnes produced annually, 49 million is unclassified while 59 million is classified as general waste (Savannah consultants, State of Waste Report, 2018).

National Waste Management Strategy Review

The Waste Act 2008 was promulgated and with that brought hope that waste-related issues will easily be dealt with using the law. The passing of the law has had some positive and negative implications. We have seen the Shongweni Landfill

Separation at source would go a long way towards a zero waste society.



licence being challenged by government, and communities taking Enviroserv to court due to poor landfill operation. It's good to see government and communities collectively challenging the waste company. We have also seen municipalities gearing up to have waste recycling projects that aim at increasing their recycling rates. The time for collection and dumping is over, as legislation requires municipalities to recycle.

Initiatives by Local Municipalities

Jozini, the Big 5 and Matjhabend Local Municipalities want to start recycling projects in their jurisdiction and they have called in groundWork and SAWPA to come and assist. These municipalities have been helped by us to apply to the Department of Environmental Affairs for bins and trolleys to drive separation at source, which will make the recycling process easier. Recycling initiatives in Mooi River, Sasolburg, Tshwane and Butterworth are still ongoing and it's good to see other municipalities joining the fray.

Tshwane Metro change the tune

The City of Tshwane and New GX Enviro have opened the gates of their Atteridgeville Recycling Park (ARP).. This is a Public Private Partnership project between the City of Tshwane and New GX Enviro. The ARP is situated next to the closed Kwaggasrand Landfill site and forms part of the City of Tshwane's commitment to a green economy which delivers value to the city's residents.

The city claims that ARP represents a significant township economy, industrialisation and revitalisation initiative, bringing jobs and SMME development opportunities to a township area. However, the project failed to protect informal jobs that existed before the ARP project, and more than 150 waste pickers were displaced by the ARP project. They were promised jobs by Mr Mthobeli Kolisa, who is a head of Environmental services. This is one of the scandals against the poor. The city officials have been attending waste meetings and have promised to employ more than 261 waste pickers, but this has not happened: the waste pickers are still waiting for their new jobs after their old jobs were taken from them.

South African Local Government Association (SALGA) failing municipalities.

SALGA is aware that municipalities are struggling to perform their waste management duties, yet there is not enough help being given to the municipalities by SALGA or national government. Waste recycling in municipalities is happening at a very slow pace due to lack of skills, together with no real political desire to do anything. SALGA is not playing an active and constructive role in supporting local municipalities. The problem with municipalities is due to political appointments of people who do not qualify. You find unqualified people occupying important positions, such as waste manager. The other challenge is the lack of finances or capability to raise funds to implement projects.

South Africa is still incinerator free.

Due to the lack of knowledge in municipalities, we see unsuitable incinerator projects being pushed by companies and agreements being made between councils and companies. But what people forget is that environmental impact assessments need to be done for these processes. The Wellington Municipality in Western Cape is considering building an incinerator to burn waste and "solve" their waste problem. Little do they know that the incinerator can bankrupt the municipality. We have shared with them the dangers of adopting false solutions such as an incinerator and have suggested that they should start projects that have direct benefit to communities instead. There has been strong local resistance by DEW and WAIA on this project. It seems their resistance is not futile.

The communities and the municipalities are always at loggerheads regarding these kinds of projects. In Tshwane, the incinerator was successfully stopped by communities in 2013 and we hope the same for Wellington. Waste problems should be dealt with through zero waste projects that are pro reduction, reuse and recycling. This has been confirmed by Edna Molewa, South Africa's Environmental Minister who says that waste pickers' work has to be dignified by municipalities. That is why municipalities are encouraged to review their landfill licences so that they can start waste recovery in an organized, formal manner through the establishment of Materials Recovery Facilities (MRF).



Karma is a beach!

by Niven Reddy

Plastic producers, It's coming back to you!

Have you noticed how many beach clean-ups we see going on? While these are great initiatives and I fully commend the volunteers for sparing their time to do this, shouldn't they be helped by the companies producing this waste?

For a long time, companies have been producing plastic packaging and then sitting back without concern, shifting the responsibility for the disposal of the product to the consumer. I think it is time that we made a few demands from these companies to clean up their mess. We will be looking at partnering with other groups who are running fantastic beach clean-ups and attaching a brand audit to this. This will likely involve a series of clean-ups and, from the materials that are recovered, we will sort the items by brand to tally up who the most popular polluters of our beautiful Durban beaches are. I know it sounds like a lot of work to conduct a beach clean-up on a regular basis, but it is for a good cause and Game of Thrones isn't until next year anyway, so we might as well use the time to slay some corporate dragons.

This process will be sampling the methodology used in the Philippines by Asia Pacific members of the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), along with other groups such as Greenpeace, who operate in collaboration under the #breakfreefromplastic banner.

The activities we are hoping to complete for this year are in line with the regional campaign of GAIA, where members from various countries are actively adding brand audits to their beach clean-up activities to identify a common polluter. groundWork, as a member of GAIA in South Africa, hopes to elevate these amazing initiatives to a regional level by fitting

this into the regional African campaign, also adding an African element to the corporate campaign of the #breakfreefromplastic movement. Once a common polluter is identified, the joint campaign will seek to push for the end of single-use plastics. There has been a major demand for a redesign of packaging which cannot be recycled. The idea is to partner with as many stakeholders as possible and have the sorting of waste into different categories led by the South African Waste Pickers Association.

So, to the various polluters who think that they can continue to produce without any extended producer responsibility, guess what? Your waste will be coming back to you! ☠



Credit:
#CleanBlueLagoon



Toxic free procurement a real possibility

by Luqman Yesufu

Even in Africa it is possible for hospitals to adopt a toxic-free procurement policy

"The Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) initiative aims to assist hospitals to purchase safer and more sustainable products. In response to climate and health issues, this is one of its main goals. Health leaders in South Africa, Zambia and Tanzania have taken the lead and have joined a global call to action on sustainable procurement in the health sector.

It was all excitement when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in collaboration with groundWork's strategic partner, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), officially launched its new program called the Sustainable Health in Procurement Project (SHiPP). An inception

workshop took place on between the 17th and 19th of April, in Istanbul, Turkey. Participating countries included Guatemala, Moldova, Ukraine, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zambia, China, Brazil, India and South Africa. The aim is to reduce the harm caused by the manufacture, use and disposal of medical products to people and the environment, and by the implementation of health programs.

The SHiPP is a four-year project that aims to promote sustainable procurement in the health sector, in the United Nations Agencies, and in key project countries. The goal is to reduce the toxicity of chemicals and materials in health products, the reduction of greenhouse gases in the supply chain

Participants of
the Sustainable
Health in
Procurement
Project (SHiPP)
Inception
Workshop
Credit:
groundWork





and the conservation of resources. Sustainable procurement can drive positive health impacts for patients, communities and the environment. Public procurement has been identified as a key entry point for promoting more sustainable production and consumption patterns. The role of procurement in influencing the environmental impact of health sector operations is well acknowledged, and sustainable procurement practices have the capacity to reduce a significant proportion of the health sector's greenhouse gas emissions.

The SHiP project comes at a very important time, with GGHH members in South Africa often complaining about the increasing cost of treatment and disposal of healthcare waste, which usually exceeds the hospital budget. Therefore, there is a huge opportunity for our existing GGHH members and the rest of the health sector in the country to utilize their tremendous purchasing power to compel manufacturers and suppliers to provide safer, environmentally friendly and sustainable products, without having to deal with the financial burden of disposal and treatment.

Officially opened by Mr Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Assistant Secretary-General UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme, the SHiPP inception workshop marked the official launch of the project and was delivered to the Ministries of Health, procurement officers, UN Agencies and Health Care Without Harm staff from sixteen countries. Participants learned about the UNDP and HCWH Sustainable Procurement approach and discussed what opportunities and entry points exist to increase synergies with SHiPP. Participants also gained knowledge on an evaluation of health procurement policies, tender documents and processes, as well as effective engagement with suppliers and manufacturers of health commodities.

By adopting sustainable procurement policies, strategies and practices, health systems, governments and international development actors can, therefore, be drivers for a significant shift towards inclusive, green economies by requiring products and services that are compliant with environmental and social standards throughout their life cycle. ☺



IRP could mean RIP for coal

by Rico Euripidou

Eskom says coal IPPs not needed

Let's begin with a truism: there is no such thing as clean coal! Coal is filthy from the time it's dug out of the ground, and while it is being transported, washed, blended and ultimately burned and discarded in ash dumps that invariably leak into the receiving environment. The environmental, climate and health impacts are similarly staggering all along the filthy life cycle of coal. If we were honest and counted the true costs all along this dirty life cycle, we would probably dump it as an energy source faster than you could say renewable energy.

Before we continue, I think a fundamental principle we all have to agree on is that South Africa's development and energy future has to be grounded in the needs of its people and the mandates given by its Constitution. Similarly, the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) has a legal obligation to make decisions in the public interest and in accordance with the Constitution.

The leading proponents for "new coal" in South Africa are the international companies ACWA and Marubeni, who have successfully submitted bids under the Coal Baseload Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (IPP) to establish the Thabametsi and Khanyisa power stations. Recently they were required by NERSA (at their hearings in March 2018) to showcase their credentials to the public and, amazingly, they began by boasting about their gold standard renewable energy (RE) projects around the world. As we all stared in disbelief, we were wondering why on earth they propose to develop dirty, inefficient, "discard coal" coal-fired power stations in South Africa, where we have an abundant potential for RE. This was mind boggling to say the least.

Dirty NERSA

To give context, during the NERSA hearings the chair stated something along these lines: "Now that the RE contracts have been signed, let's give the coal IPPs a chance". Coincidentally, only one NERSA commissioner oversaw the hearings so this should bring into question the basis of their

decisions. However, herein lies a massive conflict of interest: the NERSA/IPP office can't make objective decisions because their funding models depend on revenue from dirty energy. The IPPPP partnership is funded by a Project Development Facility (PDF) financed through bid registration fees payable by all bidders and the Development Fee paid by selected bidders (<https://www.ipp-projects.co.za/Home/About>).

The RE preferred bidders are required to pay a development fee equal to 1% of their total project costs to the DOE's Project Development Fund within ten business days of the IA signature date. This assists with programme sustainability, as funding is made available for transaction advisors and running future tenders. http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/files/EberhardNaude_REIPPPPReview_2017_1_1.pdf. What is apparently not in the public domain is that for coal the development fee was 1.75% and for gas there were talks of 2% or higher. So, 1 GW coal estimated at a R35 billion investment translates into a R612.5 million development fee to the IPP Office! We have also heard rumours that Marubeni was fined \$88 million for bribes to officials and politicians (supposedly routed through consultants in Indonesia in 2012-14).

The "un-economics" of discard coal

Both Marubeni and AQUA propose building "clean" circulating fluidized bed (CFB) power stations. They are put forward as a solution to dealing with our discard coal problem. In South Africa, massive quantities of water are required for coal cleaning (approximately 170 litres of water per ton of raw coal), with 0.35 tons of discard coal generated per ton of raw coal. South Africa's production of 250 million tons per year of washed coal therefore requires about 42.5 billion litres per year of water, and results in the production of about 85 million tons of discard coal.

CFBs can indeed process lower quality coal, including discard coal, and may be able to meet the new plant SA SO₂ Minimum Emission Standards using direct injection of lime into the furnace.



However, they don't solve the problem of discard coal for the following reason. Assuming coal consumption of 1 000 tons per hour, the resultant ash and spent sorbent will be produced at a rate of 660 tons per hour. If discard coal is used, the relative amount of ash and sorbent is likely to increase. This discard coal problem now becomes a toxic waste challenge. This will not solve the discard coal problem. Similarly, relative GHG emissions from CFBs will be approximately 1.23 tons per GWh, which is just as carbon intensive as the current fleet of ageing power plants in South Africa.

In fact, the EIA climate impact assessment for the proposed Thabametsi power station found it would emit significant GHG emissions and highlights the fact that water scarcity will "pose a high risk to the power station's operations". Needless to say, the Department of Environmental Affairs, even with this evidence available, decided to grant the go ahead for this. We remain, however, vigilant and our legal team are confident of a successful appeal.

Eskom itself has shown its cards and has stated categorically that, given the surplus energy supply

in South Africa and the RE trajectory we are on, these projects no longer fit into their business model.

On the global stage the economic factors undermining both new and existing coal plants continue to accelerate. Just in the last week or so global insurance powerhouses Allianz of Germany and Dai-ichi Life of Japan, as well as KBC Bank of Belgium, have announced they will no longer fund new coal plants.

The Life After Coal Campaign are working to realize a right to a healthy environment when planning South Africa's energy future, taking into account all the external costs associated with our energy choices. As things stand, there is no question that new-build solar and wind energy are cheaper than coal, but we also need to take into account the external cost of these technologies to human health and the environment including the costs of the health, water, and the climate impacts of each energy source, against the benchmark of our Constitution. ☺



Credit:
Earthlife Africa
Johannesburg



Working for a just transition from coal

by Bobby Peek

In 2005, reflecting on big oil in Africa, the *groundWork Report 2005: Whose Energy Future* concluded with a warning that we have to struggle for a "deep transformation of the way the world works". And even if we do not succeed against the powers and there is chaos, it is the spaces of our struggles for self reliance and democratic practice that will allow us to rebuild the world, equitably and democratically. Fast forward twelve years to 2017, and the *groundWork Report 2017* concludes with the need for a just transition based upon the a set of key principles the build from *groundWork's* deep history to make another world possible, for it is possible.

When we speak about a *Just Transition* we want a just and democratic future: one that is not violent. We are not only talking about the violence that is often portrayed on the news, but also of the violence that goes undocumented, the violence of a capitalist state that destroys people's livelihoods and environments in the name of "development". *groundWork* proposes a change based upon a just

transition that is built upon the following principles, which support the concerns of communities, organized and unionized labour, as well as the more than 70% of labour that is not unionized.

We suggest that some starting points can be identified in a more equal and ecologically sustainable economy, based on people's solidarity and, and one that serves people's needs, not profit, such as:

- a new energy system, based on socially owned renewables;
- new jobs in renewables;
- large scale restoration and detoxification of ecosystems injured by the fossil fuel economy on the Highveld;
- a new and healthier food economy;
- healthier and climate wise housing;
- a new and healthier transport economy;
- a reorientation and expansion of municipal services;
- a basic income grant for all.



A just transition requires a programme for rehabilitating not just individual mines but the coal mining regions as a whole. This is a process that would employ thousands of mineworkers and others. Rehabilitation of mines must go hand in hand with rehabilitation of wetlands and rivers.

There is much work to be done just fixing things. But there is also a need, and an opportunity, to design urban space and infrastructure in anticipation of the intensified storms and droughts that climate change will bring.

The quality of housing affects people's comfort and their energy use. Many people are living in tin shacks, which bake in summer, freeze in winter and leak when it rains. RDP houses are not much better. The need for large scale programmes to upgrade people's homes and settlements is already urgent and will become more so as climate change intensifies.

Across South Africa, many people walk to work and school but our towns are planned as if everyone has cars. We need "active transport", as the Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change calls it, for short trips. For longer trips, people need a good, low cost public transport system. It needs to be safe and reliable and to serve everyone. It needs to get the middle classes out of their cars as well as give the working classes freedom of movement.

Municipal systems also need reinvention. For example, working towards a zero waste economy would involve separation at source, high levels of recycling and composting of organic wastes. Such an initiative would need the participation of waste pickers, municipal workers and communities. Where there are broken sewage plants, these must be replaced. Municipalities could introduce bio-gas digesters to produce energy, even as they treat sewage. Renewable energy technologies, particularly solar PV, are suited to decentralising the energy system. Large utility scale solar farms might also be constructed on old coal fields, which remain barren even after the best efforts of rehabilitation.

As noted above, a fully renewable national energy system costs less and provides more jobs than a system that remains reliant on coal-fired "base load". At present – and unless the robots are allowed to take over altogether – a significant proportion

of renewable jobs are in manufacturing. Much of the equipment for the REIPPPP has been imported – as is also the case with Medupi and Kusile. But factories will locate in South Africa if there is a large and reliable line up of renewable projects. The Million Climate Jobs has worked on the job numbers of more than 300 000 in the renewable sector. Eskom at present employs 48 000 people.

And there is still some use for the old power stations in a renewable system. After the coal-fired boilers are decommissioned, some of the generators at well-maintained plant can be used as flywheels for energy storage and grid stability in a grid powered by renewables.

Food is energy for people. So long as the food system is controlled by the market, food prices will be increasingly volatile while trending higher. Of course, making food gardens under a polluted sky is not necessarily a good idea, since toxins are taken up in the food itself. But the air cleans up very quickly when the polluting plants are switched off. This is why the Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change says that "tackling climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of this century". On the Highveld, the rapid phase out of coal burning would lift a burden from people's bodies.

Given very high structural unemployment in South Africa, a million climate jobs would surely make a difference but might not end unemployment. Nonetheless, a million climate jobs is something to be fought for, but it is not on government's agenda as yet. In 2002, the Taylor Committee on social security noted that "South Africa is characterized by a labour surplus economy that is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future". The adoption of a Basic Income Grant (BIG) is therefore recommended, "provided ... without a means test ... as a social entitlement for all South Africans" [61]. Everyone would get it but those with jobs would pay it back in taxes and the rich would pay more than they got from it. In this way, it would be administratively simple and would avoid stigmatising poverty by defining recipients in Victorian terms as "indigents".

Another world is possible. We must start now and take some bold steps away from past practice into new approaches. 



Demolished homes and broken promises

by Robby Mokgalaka

Forced evictions not only a think of the past

Poor community people continue to suffer at the expense of a corporate-led model of development that entrenches environmental, social and economic injustices. The month of March was a celebration of Human Rights Day and acknowledgement of the struggles by the Sharpeville residents against the apartheid state which resulted in the death of at least sixty-nine people during a peaceful protest. Ironically, a Newcastle community was facing a forceful relocation issue to make way for a coal mine, instead of celebrating this monumental day.

In December 2017, the Dannhauser community of Newcastle had to face a ruthless push of forceful relocation from the land they have occupied for almost a lifetime. The mine approached the community only to inform them that they had to relocate in order to make way for the proposed Ikwezi coal mine, which allegedly did not have a mining licence at that time. The mine did not bother with community consultation. Consultation with the potentially affected parties is a requirement of any mine in terms of the environmental regulatory procedures. It is done in observation of the provisions of Section 24 of our country's constitution. This is supposed to be an opportunity for the mine and potentially affected parties to find ways to meaningfully raise and address concerns between the parties pertaining to the proposed project.

On the 13th of December 2017, the mine decided to approach the Pietermaritzburg high court, seeking an order to forcefully remove the community from the land, taking them from solid, strong formal houses, into informal, weak rhino steel structures as a "temporary" measure. Unfortunately for them, the court did not see any urgency in granting such an order. It also indicated that it would be an

abuse of justice to grant such an order under the circumstances. The mine was granted a suspended order on condition that the community is relocated into properly built houses rather than rhino steel houses. The mine was given until the end of March 2018 to complete building the houses.

The community was still appealing and demanded to be adequately consulted, especially on issues of relocation of graves and the provision of alternative grazing land for their livestock. In March 2018, the community was forced to move off the land into the Rhino Steel house. TLB machinery was brought in to demolish their houses, forcing them out of the area. Some part of the community stood firm and refused to leave until proper consultation was done. They chose to build their own shacks in protest. groundWork worked with the affected community in order to make sure that such horrible news received the attention of the public in order to expose the hideous acts of the mine.

Their protest action did not last long. Red Ants and police were brought in to remove them from the area and their shacks were also demolished.

Coincidentally, the Department of Mineral Resource decided to hold a KwaZulu-Natal Mining Indaba in Newcastle to encourage investment in the mining sector. The event was attended by the newly-appointed minister of Mineral Resources, Mr. Gwede Mantashe, the premier of the province and other dignitaries from the province to fast track the so called radical economic development in the mining industry.

The relocated community, with support from the surrounding community members, made use of the opportunity to ensure that their relocation woes received the attention of the dignitaries.



groundWork worked with the community to mobilize and stage a picket outside the venue of the event. The plan was that, while groundWork made a presentation at the meeting, we would state the reasons for the picket outside. The strategy yielded good results as the news received the attention of the minister, to the extent that he took it upon himself to visit the affected community and learn of the injustice for himself. The officials from the Department of Mineral Resources came to receive the memorandum from the protesting community and it landed in the hands of the minister and the Department promised the community that the issue will be addressed.

Gwede Mantashe promised to come back on the 22nd of May, but the meeting, even after all the planning, was called off. More than seventy community people had come to attend the meeting. So sadly, Minister Mantashe let them down again. Just another broken promise. ☺



groundWork's Robby hands over a memorandum to Gwede Mantashe, Minister of Mineral Resources during the mining charter. Credit: groundWork



Health workers mobilize against coal

by Thomas Mnguni

Health workers meet to discuss the externalized costs of coal

South Africa has declared three areas as priority areas – namely the Vaal Triangle, Waterberg – Bojanala and Highveld Priority Area – and special interventions had to be put in place to bring air pollution in compliance with Ambient Air Quality Standards (AAQS). While we acknowledge the failures in terms of Air Quality governance, we also recognize the absence of the voice of the health care sector, which is critical in ensuring that we fully understand the impacts of air pollution and the health of people.

It is for this reason that we held a meeting with health professionals in Middelburg on the 18th of May 2018. The objective of the meeting was to encourage the health professionals to respond and advocate for changes on environmental health/justice in public and with the Department of Health. We also wanted to begin a dialogue between professionals on air pollution and how it affects health and finally to begin a process to raise awareness among professionals and the community at large. The meeting was also intended to introduce the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals campaign and get local institutions to work with it.

On the day of the meeting, we had representatives from the local clinics, district health department, local hospital, private general practitioners, community delegates and Councillor J Matshiane, MMC for Health and Environment at Steve Tshwete Local Municipality. What came out of the discussion indicated that even health facilities like clinics are experiencing challenges, as there are various health hazards that they need to deal with but they don't have any idea of how to go about it.

After Dr. Mashifane made a brief presentation, it was apparent that there are big problems with air pollution and most health professionals are fully aware of this: some even have statistics thereof. He also made a strong and urgent call for GPs and

health professionals to begin to act on and deal with air pollution and its related health impacts.

In conclusion, there seems to be a need, as identified by attendees, for further workshops in clinics and hospitals, and some even committed to assist in setting up the workshops. The debate around the just transition should be brought to the fore as Middelburg and Witbank are mainly coal mining towns, and there are concerns about the future if we move away from coal. ☺



False solutions

by Greenfly

2015 ... in Paris. The world's leaders agreed to keep global warming below 2°C providing there is nothing to hold them to it. For extra effect, they said less than 1.5°C would be a better idea. Indeed, it would be. Saying so provoked much cheering and grabbed lots of headlines. Pity that it was too late already.

Carbon emissions by 2015 were already enough to take the world's temperature over 1.5 – except for the future magic of net negative emissions. The climate models show that you can get to 1.5 if you remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Climate models are complex mathematical constructs. Maths doesn't have a problem with negative numbers. So, when the modeller says "give me 1.5", the model responds with minus 15 billion tonnes of carbon per year some time after 2050. It says nothing about how that can be done. But, for the world's leaders (otherwise known as politicians), that means Business As Usual In Our Time.

As everyone knows, the Paris Promises – each country promised to reduce or at least manage carbon emissions – will scarcely interrupt climate change. Instead of 3 or 4° warming by the end of the century, we'll get 3 or 4° warming by the end of the century. That's if everyone keeps their promise. If they don't, we'll get 5 or 6°. So what we need is Greater Ambition.

2018 ... in Bonn. Greater Ambition is promised through the Talanoa Dialogues. Everyone is invited to tell stories. And many a good porky was told. But anything "confrontational, threatening, abusive, defamatory, obscene, offensive, or otherwise unlawful" was excluded. Evidently, it was very rude to actually name a country and point out the gap between its Paris Promise and its fair share of reductions. Particularly if that country is responsible for a goodly dollop of emissions. Greater Ambition requires that everyone feels good about themselves. The emperor wears clothes.

Meanwhile ... in America. More dangerous than Trump! More deluded than Tillerson! Madder than

Strangelove! A coterie of billionaires and scientists are making a bid to privatize the response to climate change through geoengineering.

One or two have already tried making a bent dollar or two by dumping iron filings in the sea and selling carbon credits on the carbon offset markets. The iron is supposed to increase the uptake of carbon in the ocean but there is no evidence that it stays there. Moreover, the ocean is already made acid by the excess of carbon absorbed from the atmosphere. More carbon will mean more ocean acidification. As to the offset market, it allows pollution elsewhere which cancels out the supposed benefits. In short, a marriage of false solutions. A lose-lose strategy. Apart from the money, of course.

Others are taking out patents in anticipation of the moment when a desperate world will go down on its knees for whatever story-telling is on offer. Bill Gates holds the money bag. A man who believes in a technical fix, he also funds the push to make Africa adapt to climate change by adopting genetically modified crops. That promises a good return on investments. In geoengineering, he funds investigations of how to spray sulphur dioxide – another dose of acid – into the upper atmosphere and so reflect sunlight away from the earth. And he's invested in how to suck carbon dioxide from the air.

Everyone's favourite method of taking carbon out of the air is bio-energy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS). That means planting lots of trees to absorb the carbon, then cutting them down and burning them in power stations, then separating the carbon from the rest of the exhaust and burying it deep. CCS – without the BE – has been tried several times at vast cost with minimal success. Amongst other things, the stuff keeps leaking even when it's just a million tonnes or so. To get 15 billion tonnes a year from BECCS, they'd need to put sub-Saharan Africa down to plantation trees. Never mind the people.

But then, the world's leaders never really did mind the people. ☺



Cemetery or Landfill Site?

by Nombulelo Shange

Waste Pickers left for dead at Pietermaritzburg waste dump site

Panic and chaos struck the New England Landfill site on Saturday the 5th of May 2018, when waste pickers discovered the body of an unknown man they believed to be dead. While trying to contact the police, they realized that the man was still alive, so they immediately tried to contact the ambulance instead. Several calls and pleas for help were made between 6:00 in the morning, but by 12:00 midday the ambulance still had not arrived and the police had made no effort to come to the scene to assist.

Upon realizing that there was no help on the way, waste pickers eventually contacted groundWork. I rushed to the site and arrived to chaos. A municipal staff member tried to stop me from entering the landfill site, fearing that I was a journalist. He didn't believe me when I said I was only there to take the man to hospital. Sadly, he had not taken any action to deal with the issue at hand.

He eventually agreed to take me to where the sick man was in his municipal car. I arrived on the scene, and rushed the man to Edendale Hospital. I was accompanied by two waste pickers. The hospital staff tried to keep us at the hospital, stating that if they were able to stabilize him, he would be released back into our care, despite countless explanations that we did not know the man.

This is not the first time the town has let the waste pickers down. Earlier on this year, Ntshwati's dead body was left on the site until after dark, after she had been crushed by a truck earlier that morning. Hazardous medical waste often makes its way into the landfill site.

The likelihood of these and similar incidents recurring will increase if Msunduzi Local Municipality continues to ignore the call for a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), which would allow for better recycling and a safer working environment for waste pickers.

groundWork and South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) have been telling Msunduzi Local Municipality about the danger that they expose waste pickers to by delaying the building of an MRF. In 2010, MRF funding was approved at the district level, but the MRF was never built due to political clashes between the district and local municipality. In the meantime, waste pickers are left vulnerable and abandoned by structures that do not adequately respond or assist when there is a crisis at the landfill site.

The story isn't all doom and gloom. Waste pickers had tried by all means to keep the man conscious before I arrived on the scene. They did this by asking his name, surname, where he's from and how he got there. While the man struggled to talk, he was able to share his surname and the name of his community. One of the waste pickers lived in the same area and when she got home she told neighbours about what she had witnessed and enquired about any missing persons. Through her investigation, she was able to locate the man's family and they were eventually reunited.

It is urgent that the Mzunduzi Municipality actually take their head out of the sand and deal with this challenge. The waste pickers are not going to disappear: Work with them. ☺





A 2015 waste picker protest, where waste pickers were challenging the delays in the building of the Materials Recovery Facility. They also challenged the dangerous work conditions.
Credit: groundWork



No incinerator for Wellington

by Niven Reddy

Community groups in Wellington have managed successfully to stop a proposed incinerator

Communities of Wellington, in the Western Cape of South Africa, have successfully pushed against the Drakenstein Municipality's plans to build a Municipal Waste Incinerator. It comes after the Wellington Association against the Incinerator (WAAI) and the Drakenstein Environmental Watch (DEW), both community based organizations, worked tirelessly to campaign, resist and legally challenge the proposed incinerator.

The Drakenstein Municipality recognized in their official statement "complaints and resistance by certain interest groups – especially against the proposed inclusion of an incinerator component – as well as legal processes" as part of their decision to terminate the proposed project.

We have been working with these community groups in Wellington in this struggle over the past few years. This victory highlights the importance of communities organizing to fight for environmental justice. Challenging these projects from different angles is crucial to stop these kind of proposals. One cannot bank on one single stream of campaigning bringing down these mega projects, so it is important that, as in this case, the communities identify different routes in challenging a project such as this.

Keith Roman of WAAI said that their strategy was to intervene using the legal route to highlight the administrative flaws of the process conducted by the Drakenstein Municipality. Caron Potocnik of

DEW identified the human rights violations related to this project as their main concern.

It is clear that the municipality has identified an issue with waste, which is why there was a perceived need for an incinerator in the first place. Now that this horrible idea has passed, there needs to be a sustainable alternative and zero waste is exactly that. It is great that the incinerator plans have been terminated but now we need to think of how we use these sustainable methods of dealing with waste and both WAAI and DEW are keen to make Wellington a model zero waste town.

It is a much needed victory. Just two years ago we held a workshop to raise awareness in Wellington, and are now delighted that this proposal has been defeated purely because people have the power to challenge anything that will negatively impact their lives. This, along with the victory of defeating the Chloorkop incinerator proposal a few years ago, when thousands of waste pickers from the South African Waste Pickers Association stormed the streets to make their voices heard, proves that communities do have the power to shape their own futures.

Congratulations to all involved, especially to WAAI and DEW, for all the hard work and for proving once again that community based resistance is how we create real change.

People Power! ☺





Goldman Award Winners

By Bobby Peek

groundWork and all of us in the environmental justice sector are celebrating this year, for once again those challenging power have been recognized. Grassroots activists and comrades in the environmental justice movement, Makoma Lekalakala and Liz McDaid, built a broad coalition to stop the South African government's massive secret nuclear deal with Russia. On the 26th of April 2017, the High Court ruled that the \$76 billion nuclear power project was unconstitutional – a landmark legal victory that protected South Africa from an unprecedented expansion of the nuclear industry and production of radioactive waste. For their long struggle built from below, they received the Goldman Prize for Africa on the 22nd of April 2018, in San Francisco. It has been twenty years since the Prize first recognized environmental justice in South Africa by granting the prize to the struggle in south Durban. Since then, South Africans have received the prize on four occasions. Environmental justice is alive in South Africa.

These two powerful women have been longtime activists on social and environmental justice issues and have led by example by maintaining a consistency and "never say die" attitude. They have worked for decades on the resistance to nuclear energy, exposing corruption and seeking a just energy future.

The landmark legal victory protects South Africa from the drastic development of nuclear infrastructure that would have had devastating environmental, health and financial impacts for many generations to come. As they have noted: "It was never about energy. It was about the greed of a few individuals."

The size of their achievement is immense for South Africa. Today, any attempt to revive a nuclear deal in South Africa would certainly face strong public opposition and legal precedent thanks to Lekalakala and McDaid's work. ☺

