

# GROUNDWORK



## Deadly Capitalist Monuments

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

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Health Care Without Harm

International POPs Elimination Network

Basel Action Network

Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

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

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# From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, **Bobby Peek**

The first three months of 2019 has been brutal. I can say that for most of us in groundWork, the summer vacation is a very distant memory.

As we put this newsletter to bed, we heard sad news. On Thursday afternoon, the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, Jon White, long time resident of Pietermaritzburg, lawyer, activist, and founding groundWork board member and decade-long chair, passed away peacefully after a year-long battle with cancer. As a father of three and a grandfather, Jon invested a great deal of love and care in family. During this week we also lost Denny Larson, the comrade who brought the Bucket Brigade to South Africa and the pressure that informed the new democratic law on air quality management. We will say more in our next newsletter

These are disturbing times in South Africa. There is lots of talk, but no real open democratic practice. As we move from one crisis to another, more WhatsApp groups are started to define the narrative but become echoing chambers for themselves, instead of those in these groups engaging with the real democratic practice of talking and listening to the people who are most affected by the present crises. Yes, I am being harsh to my many colleagues who are on these groups, but the reality is, "comrades", nothing can take away the real need to meet and sit with and talk to people; to understand what people are thinking about in terms of their own future.

I must admit, that, as groundWork gets more complex and busy, I find very little time to do this myself, but on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March I spent the day with Thomas Mnguni, who works out of the groundWork office in Middelburg, and 14 other international people working on coal transitions: a journalist, a union think-tank researcher and our friends from CER driving through the Mpumalanga Highveld. We stopped and met up with workers and people living around the Hendrina and Arnot coal-fired power stations where we spoke about

their future. These are strange small towns adjacent to each power station. They are "company" towns and it is still evident from the surroundings that the company – in this case Eskom – maintains the area. But you can see the imminent collapse and decay in many places. It was sad to hear workers saying how they bought houses in these small corporate towns when democracy allowed this, not knowing these power stations were going to close. Some of these folk work on mines in the area, some of which, like Arnot, are now closed.

On this Friday afternoon, we stumbled into these towns and the image that came to mind was of how these places were in the 70s and 80s. Small towns, bastions of white workers, with their children playing rugby on lush fields, other practising in the community sports centres while mummies pushed babies in prams to the local small grocery store. These were and are quaint towns. In a way, one is reminded of small-town Europe.

Then something happened. It was not only democracy, it was something more – the unintended consequence of democracy – and this is found in many places around the country. This is working-class white folk selling up, making a profit and leaving black families with the legacy of polluted lands, a dying Eskom and dying towns. I know that this might be a simplistic explanation of a more complex problem and that a deeper political economic thinking might outline it in another way. But for me it is brutal and clear.

We met workers who had not been paid since October 2018. Some do not have jobs. Stories of cars being repossessed and the fear of people's homes been taken away by the banks are real. We spoke to workers who, after working on the local mines for decades, have lung disease but no medical aid anymore. Workers were given packages when they became ill, but once they had no job, workers and their families lost their medical benefits. Many



have gone home to the rural areas to die. For, once you are laid off because of ill-health you go back to where someone will look after you – and that in many cases is a rural area. Not only do you lose your benefits, your union membership goes as well, for you now are no longer paying union stipends.

This is what the transition is for the people on the Highveld. This isn't just. It is happening now, and the narrative that abounds is that, according to Koko, Eskom's ex-boss, the plants will not close. Asked about what people are going to do when these plants close, very little response was received beyond the fight to keep these plants open. Yet, as we spoke various units were not operating in these facilities. Workers tell a story of units been scavenged for spare parts.

Daily, I pass Rainbow Chicken, South Africa's once biggest chicken producer. Their chicken units are now broken walls and rubble on the ground. As the chicken industry collapses in SA it is estimated that up to 130 000 workers and their families will be affected. Beyond Rainbow we read of South32's Richards Bay Hillside Smelter about to retrench as many as 500 people, thus affecting 30 000 people. We read of how the cement industry is in crisis and that, because of imports – as in the case of the chicken debacle – the cement industry is thinking of closing plants and retrenching workers. We are in crisis all round and a hard discussion is to be had with communities, workers and unions about what the future holds for people on the ground.

What government is doing now is the question. I wrote to President Ramaphosa in December 2018, asking him what his government plans for the imminent closure of Hendrina. Till today, no response.

We need to be worried about how government has spun us and played us during the electioneering period, and the recent big promises in the State of the Nation Address and the budget speech. The ANC election manifesto claims that they will: "Reposition Eskom to play an active role in the renewable energy sector and promote public ownership in renewable energy infrastructure". These are great words, but clearly there is no substance to them.

Then there was the State of the Nation Address in which President Ramaphosa sought to "imme-

diately embark on a process of establishing three separate entities – Generation, Transmission and Distribution – under Eskom Holdings". There was complete uproar from the unions, who are screaming privatization, something we have to be worried about. Emphasis is added further in the president's speech: "Of particular and immediate importance is the entity to manage an independent state-owned transmission grid combined with the systems operator and power planning, procurement and buying functions". I can understand the legitimate fear of privatization when you now speak of "independent state-owned" only in relation to one part of this split.

Then, finally, new Finance Minister Mboweni stated that "pouring money" into Eskom is like pouring water into a sieve and that national government is not taking on Eskom's debt. Then who is, Minister, I ask? The poor in the street who do not even have Eskom electricity? Minister, lest you forget, Eskom is owned by you and the state! As labour has indicated and which view we support, the ANC (government) is punishing the workers for the ANC (government's) failure in relation to Eskom. A Just Transition is a must, and must be led by community people, non-unionised workers and the unions. It cannot be left up to government and corporates. We know from experience that this will lead to corruption as in the case of government allowing industry to continue their pollution and make huge profits under the guise of saving jobs for the workers.

Finally, let us look at another transition gone wrong. It is the 30-year anniversary of the debacle at Thor Chemicals, where imported toxic mercury waste from around the world ended up in South Africa leading to the death and maiming of the workforce at Thor Chemicals. This was imported with the permission of the apartheid government. Thirty years later, workers are still questioning why, after being injured and losing their jobs, a new democratic government has not looked after them. This is because they placed their hope in government. The waste is still in situ, workers are still sick and unemployable and Thor Chemicals is long gone. Another transition gone wrong.

I hope that by December, when I do my final Smokestack for the year, I can be more positive with good news. For now, a luta continua! ✊



# MES 101

by Rico Euripidou

## *The Minimum Emission Standards are being undermined, to the detriment of all*

In 2014, when the National Air Quality Officer granted Eskom permission to be exempt from meeting the requirements of our air quality laws, we warned the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the Minister in particular that she would open up the floodgates of non-compliance with our environmental laws and in so doing she would be complicit in the deaths of thousands of ordinary people living in the Highveld and Gauteng.

### **What is MES?**

The Minimum Emission Standards define maximum allowable emissions to the atmosphere for specific pollutants from specific activities – or, in simple terms, they are laws that set the limits for pollution coming out of the smokestacks of factories such as coal-fired power plants. Existing factories that were legally operational before the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2010 (prior to the publication of the Minimum Emission Standards) were required to comply with the minimum emission standards for existing plants by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2015, unless otherwise specified or subject to a postponement. Existing plants are then further required to comply with the minimum emission standards for new plants by the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2020, unless otherwise specified or subject to a postponement. New facilities are required to comply with the minimum emission standards for new plants immediately.

### **So why do we have Minimum Emission Standards (MES) in the first place?**

To use a simple analogy, we can compare Minimum Emission Standards to the national speed limit that applies on our roads. The national speed limit is to prevent us all travelling too fast so that we do not kill each other on the roads. In much the same way, we have to limit the amount of pollution coming out of industry smoke stacks because too much

of this is harmful to our health and well-being. Most of us are familiar with the "Speed Kills" understanding of this: exceeding air quality standards also literally kills us! And it's not just NGOs that are saying that exceeding air quality limits literally kills us. The World Health Organization (which is mandated by member governments (including South Africa) to make recommendations on health) is loud and clear about the "speed limits" for air pollution and the level at which it is literally killing us.

In fact, WHO estimates that one third of deaths from stroke, lung cancer and heart disease are due to air pollution. This is an equivalent effect to that of smoking tobacco, and much higher than the effects of eating too much salt.

By mid-February 2019, most of Eskom's power plants (located in the Vaal Triangle and also the Mpumalanga Highveld), Sasol (in Sasolburg and also Secunda), the NATREF oil refinery, ArcelorMittal Works in the Vaal Triangle, NPC InterCement, Nampak Glass in Ekurhuleni, Pretoria Portland Cement, and Hillside Aluminium to name only the ones we are aware of, have applied to be exempt from the 2020 new plant minimum emission standards for various pollutants listed in the atmospheric emission licences. In many cases these factories and power stations have been breaking the law since 2015 anyway, and now seek exemption until 2025 and beyond.

For those in the know (or who live on the fenceline) these companies represent the largest sources of toxic air pollution in South Africa and in some cases their plant emissions drive the regional air pollution exceedances of the ambient air (the air that we all breathe and about which we don't have a choice).

So why is this allowed to happen, you may be asking with tears in your eyes?



To be brutally honest, this is happening because we allow big industry and government to hold us to ransom and bully us into believing that there is no other choice and that our economy would suffer if we did not make these societal sacrifices. Big industry and the capitalist model routinely pollute our environment, which is needed for good health, with their waste from burning fossil fuels such as coal for their energy and production needs. This is called externalization and, to use a simple example of Eskom and electricity, the costs of making electricity the Eskom way with coal is largely externalized onto society (whether these be health costs from air pollution, the cost of water pollution, deaths on roads from coal trucks, and so on). We have proved to Eskom that their pollution of PM<sub>2.5</sub> costs SA more than R32 billion Rand a year. This is a cost to society. Alongside this comes the exclusion of affected communities from decision making that would consider alternative models of making electricity or, in the case of our air quality laws, meaningful participation in the process to determine whether the exemptions are granted.

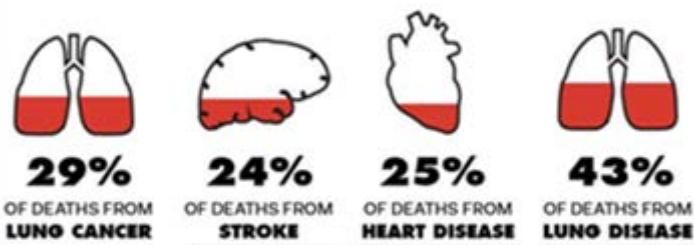
Air pollution is interlinked with the climate crisis, environment and health issues. We cannot

continue to think of environmental pollution issues in isolation. Now is the time to start putting people first and to address big industry and in particular Eskom's environmental compliance in terms of a Just Transition that addresses climate change, the scale of the health crisis caused by air pollution and the scale of the ground level environmental destruction caused by mining and burning fossil fuels such as coal (to land, to water, to biodiversity and the climate). To address air pollution we urgently require a Just Transition towards a sustainable, low carbon and equitable energy system (which includes affected people in democratic decision making) from coal-generated energy and electricity to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. Our very existence depends on this! It is scandalous to allow any further exemptions to the law that was created to protect our health.

Well, maybe that is the norm in SA, as breaking the speeding limit is something commonly practised by the blue light brigades and politicians. So, if they are breaking the speeding limit, why should industry comply with their limits? ☺

## THE **INVISIBLE KILLER**

Air pollution may not always be visible, but it can be deadly.



**BREATHE LIFE.**  
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World Health Organization  UN Environment  CLIMATE & CLEAN AIR COALITION 



# The REDISA debacle

by Musa Chamane

## *R150 billion wasted*

We all rejoiced when the first South African tyre plan was introduced by Recycling and Economic Development in South Africa (REDISA) back in 2010. The plan was a response to the call by the Minister of Environmental Affairs. Tyres have been a challenge for most municipal landfills. There was no shredding or cutting, therefore they occupied too much airspace at the landfill, and the plan promised to deliver the best solution.

The plan approval came after a tight competition with the SA Tyre Recycling Process Company (SATRP) plan which was the original plan and which relied on incineration as a method of tyre disposal. The REDISA plan had many positive aspects which convinced the minister as well as the public that it was the plan that we require for South Africa. groundWork was even informally approached to sit on the REDISA board. We declined, as we felt that we could engage meaningfully in other ways. The plan had all the ingredients such as job creation, recycling, as well as mitigation of climate change impacts. Finally something was going to be delivered, we believed.

The tyre industry is worth R30bn per annum. Therefore, the levy/tax collected from consumers should have been enough to address the issue of used tyres in South Africa. But, as the saying goes, "money is the root of all evil". The bigger the money, the bigger the evil – and in this case evil can be interpreted as corruption.

If you owned a car in 2013 and you happened to buy new tyres then, the levy for disposal was R2.30 per tyre. That money was set aside to deal with safe tyre disposal. REDISA, as the appointed service provider, indicated that with this they had enough money to make a good plan. In the contract

between REDISA and Department of Environmental Affairs there were obligations or conditions, such as quarterly reports to the minister.

The implementation took off promisingly, following meetings that REDISA management held with various role-players such as tyre collectors, many of whom are waste pickers. What perplexed me in the early days of implementation was the jobs that were being claimed to have been created. Waste pickers collected large numbers of tyres that REDISA picked up during their time. The plan had made a commitment that there would be only a small fraction of tyres that would go for burning or incineration in cement kilns, and that real recycling methods would be used on the balance. The shredding plants that were part of the plan have never materialised, despite the levy having been collected, and thus alternative uses for tyres, other than burning, have not been fully explored and exploited. Instead, large volumes of tyres have been sent to cement kilns to substitute for coal as an energy source. Remember, South Africa committed itself to decrease the production of carbon and therefore massive combustion processes have to be avoided, but this was ignored by REDISA. As we know, the SATRP plan that was not approved had proposed incinerating tyres in cement kilns, and the Minister did not like that. But the money kept pouring into REDISA's account despite their failure to write reports to the Minister based on the conditions in the approved plan.

Collectors were not completely happy about REDISA and the Minister was informed of this more than once. The plan started to deviate from what it was meant to achieve. Then the Minister decided to file for the liquidation of REDISA, which was granted in high court. This liquidation application



## Waste

Stack of old tyres.

Credit:  
Phanuwat  
Nandee



was never made public by the minister, although it should have been the logical thing for her to do as part of open democracy.

Until government and corporates become transparent about how public resources are used, and we do not have to rely on the Public Access to Information Act (PAIA) to find things out, we will never have a meaningful democracy. Maybe the rallying call is: "Phansi PAIA, Phansi". This is not what the freedom struggle was about and people in different places can attest to that. People are not ignorant and one day we will see a South African revolution. We have witnessed the spring uprising in North Africa where a corrupt, non-transparent government was overthrown by fed up people in Tunisia. This is not far from our beloved South Africa, unless the government of the day changes its ways.

Liquidation was granted and REDISA was no more for a couple of months. The minister went overseas and she mysteriously died a few weeks after coming back. We had requested the department to meet with us so that we could unpack the REDISA performance. We as civil society were ignored. REDISA picked and chose what information to release. Then in January 2019 the Supreme Court of Appeal "overturned final liquidation orders of the Recycling and Economic Development Initiative of SA (REDISA), granted in 2017 at the behest of then environmental affairs Minister Edna Molewa". But there was one dissenting judge who disagreed with the four other judges and believed that there is room for concern considering the salaries paid and conflicts of interest. The DEA is still considering their next move. And we are still waiting to hear



back from them about our request to meet. So is the REDISA plan back on? Let's wait and see.

On the ground, there was an outcry from registered suppliers about being paid unfairly. Some of them were not ever paid for the work done. Many waste pickers we spoke to indicated that they collected tyres but did not get money despite REDISA having promised payment. REDISA even at one point hosted an award ceremony for the people they worked with, including one or two waste pickers. But in hindsight this was clearly some good old greenwash! All looked good, but something foul was brewing. The plan was good on paper but when it came to implementation it was disaster. Evaluation performed over a period of time indicates that there has been poor governance of the plan. According to the DEA, there were mismanagement related matters that were raised in court papers and led to the provisional and final liquidation orders of REDISA being granted.

In 2019 we are waiting to see what is going to happen about a new tyre plan, considering that there are other industry plans that are being considered by the department. It is high time that the industry cleans up their Act. If we are to go by the failure of REDISA and Buyisa-e-bag, the future of waste management in SA is grim. It has always been grim. The new industrial plans for the packaging, lighting and electrical – including e-waste – industries, must review this history, and government, the industry and ourselves must make sure that these failures are not repeated.

Accountability and transparency are still needed on the REDISA plan. We need government to inform us what actually led to the liquidation application. We need all the facts, so that future plans can learn from these scandals. The REDISA plan really needs a second round of public reviews so that we can correct what went wrong with it. Honestly, the new tyre plans that were called for by the Minister a few months before her death leave much to be desired and none of those plans could make a proper national tyre plan. Most of those plans were

too localised. We require a national plan; and local and provincial plans do not demonstrate that the plan can be replicated nationally. We are yet to hear from the new minister on what is going to happen with all the waste plans on the table.

There should be lessons that the department should have learnt from the tyre plan and plastic bag levy initiative. We need to have an inclusive national dialogue and look at all these waste minimization initiatives and see where we went wrong before we move forward. This dialogue must start with the people who are most affected by waste, the waste pickers who work throughout the country relying on waste as a means of a legitimate livelihood struggle.

Whatever new plan emerges going forward, groundWork and SAWPA will insist on being on any new board, and we encourage that labour also gets involved. Never leave the management of such huge amounts of public money to corporates and politicians. It is a great recipe for corruption. ☺



Old tyres used in a vegetable garden.

Credit:  
Phanuwat  
Nandee



# Kendal

by Tsepang Molefe

## *Air pollution and health in the Highveld. The Deadly Capitalist Monument: Part 1*

The struggle against tobacco companies took decades to yield results. For over 40 years cigarette makers denied the health risks associated with smoking. But behind closed doors they debated how to deal with the very same risks they were denying. The evidence associated with the health risks piled up, while tobacco companies pointed blaming figures at others, defended court actions, and played hide and seek. Meanwhile, astute research paper after research paper came to the same conclusion: tobacco smoke is dangerous.

The destruction of fertile land, clean air, fresh water and the poor is perhaps a daily activity in the Highveld. It is, however, a brutal act of capitalism which we can no longer absorb or normalize.

Kendal power station is known for emitting toxins with steady consistency. From the N4 highway

between Witbank and Middleburg, one can clearly see giant tubes spewing the thickest of smoke into open air. It engulfs the air, and then goes down the pipes of unsuspecting residents and citizens. Right at the doorstep of the power station is the community of Khayalethu. The community was relocated to this area from their original dwelling place due to mining activity.

The people were relocated in 2009 from land nearby to give way to mining operations. As part of the relocation agreement, they were promised all the services – water and electricity – but before any of the promises could be fulfilled the mine switched hands; at least that is what they were told. They do have electricity but it's not subsidized, so it's too expensive to use. The community does not have running water, but there are water pipes that run through the locations to the power station.

*Nathi Masilela outside his home next to Kendal power station in Khayalethu, Mpumalanga.*  
Credit: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville



Two brothers Zakes Masilela (30) and Nathi Masilela (28), are full time residents in the area, both unemployed.

"Last week was very windy and the dust from the coal plant went everywhere. I get a dry cough when the wind is strong. The mine doesn't hire anyone from the community. The mines and plant don't hire locals because of lack of training. They don't train us locals, but bring workers from outside. There's only part time maintenance work, general labour during shut down, but we have to travel for it and we last worked more than six months ago. They use the same people for maintenance work so it's hard to find work", says Nathi.

"Other challenges are that we can't consult doctors so we don't know our health status. When the dust comes down it makes me feel dizzy. Houses shake when there's blasting, there are cracks inside and the roof tiles have fallen off. The municipality fills the water tanks but it's never enough. We aren't hired because we lack skills", says Zakes

According to Mandla Mabuza, a community leader in the area, last year they tried to engage with the mine and the power station. They facilitated a meeting but there was no management.

"Our concerns in this area are that the mine is blasting and these houses are cracking. They don't notify them when they blast. They have old people and kids here. The houses are becoming dilapidated. There are trucks coming in and out of here. Especially when there's wind the dust affects us. We are suffering. There's a borehole here but it's broken. We were promised it would be fixed but they never did; they said it was too expensive. We are suffering when it comes to water," says Mabuza

They use a contaminated pit of water (very deep) for water for domestic use like laundry. Frustrated by lack of access to water, the community saved up for Jojo tanks, just to fulfil a basic need for fresh water. Mabuza coughs now and then but has never been to a doctor. And in his mannerism he portrays a man focused on the cause but at the same time defeated by the powers that be.

"I'd like to go to the doctor and check my health, but cannot afford it."



Mandla Mabuza a community leader from Khayalethu which is at the doorstep of Kendal power station.

Credit: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville

The three men speak of a number of other people who have serious health issues due to the toxic pollutants they inhale daily.

Another problem is they don't have title deeds for their homes. "We spoke to them and they said they'd come, but they haven't. Another issue is they took us from another part of the farm, Heelwefontein." Various people were moved from different places to this area. Their graves were dug up and relocated but have not been fenced. They have engaged with the mine about the issue but all has proved fruitless.

"There's a lot I'd like to achieve. Electricity is very expensive because we buy it directly from Eskom. We don't have proper toilets. Their pit toilets are dangerous for our kids. I'd like them to provide proper toilets."

By the time Kendal burns its last stack of coal, more people will have lost their lives, and even more will have to deal with respiratory and other health issues. One needs not to be psychic to know that in the not so distant future someone will have to account and take responsibility for such injustices. ☰



# Just Transition = Fair Change

by Robby Mokgalaka

## *Highveld communities in a Just Transition debate*

For the very first time, the Mpumalanga Highveld communities (Ogies, Witbank, Ermelo and Middelburg) felt confident enough to discuss the concept of Just Transition with a convincing understanding, relating the concept to their own local context. groundWork was closely involved in facilitating the process of discussing the concept for better preparation for the consultation meeting with the National Planning Committee (NPC).

The NPC was appointed by the Cabinet to consult with different stakeholders around the country in discussing the Just Transition in the context of climate change for better policy implementation. During the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of 2019, the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, stated the need for a Just Transition, making clear the urgent need for discussion around the concept.

Currently the idea of a Just Transition is interpreted in various ways by different sectors. According to the government, Just Transition means a better energy system for all, while to the unions on the other hand, a Just Transition means saving jobs for those employed. Sadly, South Africa's unemployment rate is 37% and growing, so many more people need jobs and we cannot only hope to save those who already have jobs. The communities believe that the concept should be inclusive of many social issues affecting their lives on a daily basis.

The divergence of the interpretation of the concept shows the need for a converging point for better implementation in order to benefit all South Africans. The consultation process run by the NPC is also aimed at assisting in doing just that.

Of the three day's of meetings, the first meeting was a loose and casual approach in discussing the concept. groundWork saw the need for community people to discuss the concept alone and in a loose manner in order to allow a flexible atmosphere to

facilitate a better understanding; hence groundWork arranged a special day for only the community people. This was a building up process towards the NPC consultation day with different stakeholders. The discussion was very fruitful as the concept was broken down and discussed thoroughly in relation to community issues on the ground. The word was paraphrased as "fair change", which made a lot of sense to the community people.

On the second day, the meeting was between the communities, groundWork staff and the NPC team. The meeting was chaired by the NPC with assistance from groundWork. Amongst those who attended this meeting was Tasneem Essop (NPC Commissioner), who was, together with her team, very impressed with the manner in which the community people confidently participated in the Just Transition discussion. The inputs made by community people were recorded by the NPC team, in order to include them in the consultation notes.

What made it even easier for the community to engage in the discussion was the fact that they were allowed to speak in their own vernacular in order to express themselves better.

The issue that was raised by the community people in the discussion were that there has to be a move away from coal as source of energy as it has negative impacts in the communities. The coal mines which supply coal-fired power plants are causing grievous damage to the health of the people, polluting water sources and destroying the environment. The pollution coming from Eskom's power stations is already killing people and this has to stop. The corporates are polluting with impunity and the poor have to suffer as a result, without any benefit. For the communities, this means corporates have greater rights than people do. Community



people are left with sickness and also to fend for themselves for their own health. Pollution from industries increases the load of patients in hospitals and clinics, which compromises proper service delivery.

According to the communities, a Just Transition has to include healthier and more affordable electricity because so far the communities are battling to afford it; hence illegal connections at the local level. It was also the communities' view that the government needs to create an electricity system that is not ripping off poor people because at the moment people pay almost double for one unit of electricity from the municipalities. Eskom needs to be allowed to sell electricity directly to the public. The government must stop allowing polluting industries in the Highveld as the area is already choking people to death with pollution.

The last day of the meeting, which included different stakeholders with fewer than expected labour unions, was more formal. Regardless of the presence of various stakeholders, the communities voiced their own input in the discussions. Some of them even reported back from their separate group sessions with other people. Their positive attitude was a clear consequence of the preparatory meetings held prior to the main session.

The manner in which the communities engaged in the just transition concept was satisfying and they had a good idea and clear understanding of what a Just Transition is. We have no doubt that they will be able to engage on the topic in various meetings with confidence. It was pleasant and fulfilling to see communities articulating and voicing their need for a fair and balanced change towards a better future. Amandla! ✊



Thomas Mnguni and Robby Mokgalaka in the Highveld during a Just Transition discussion with activists.

Credit  
groundWork



# Clean air champions

by Luqman Yesufu

## *Health Sector or Hospitals can be champions for clean air*

Air pollution remains a major cause of death globally, with an estimated 4.2 million premature deaths per annum globally linked to air pollution, mainly from heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer and acute respiratory infections in children. In South Africa, many residents are being exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution on a daily basis, with significant impacts on their health and wellbeing. Even though there are many sources of air pollution, industry remains the major source of air pollution in South Africa, with Eskom and Sasol being the biggest polluters. This is a major concern for the health and well-being of many South Africans and thus the health sector whose mandate is to prevent and cure disease has a significant role to play in this debate.

Over the past five years, groundWork has rolled out the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) network in South Africa, which is a worldwide environmental health network of more than 1 000 institutions representing 32 000 hospitals and health centres in 51 countries. In South Africa, our GGHH network has reached 54 health institutions located across the country. Therefore, strategically chosen members of this network in South Africa can play a leading role in addressing the health impacts of air pollution. This will involve several activities such as hospital air pollution monitoring and communications. These activities will be designed to educate, engage and mobilize health care as a leading protagonist in the air pollution debate, while educating the public and informing policy makers.

In South Africa, we have identified three hospitals – Sebokeng, Middleburg and Emalahleni Private Hospitals – based on their strategic locations in terms of air pollution hotspots in the country (Vaal,

Mpumalanga Highveld area) to become leading communicators and advocates on the health impacts of outdoor air pollution. We approached the chief executive officers (CEOs) of the hospitals to get their blessing and collaboration for this project. So far the responses have been very positive. For example, the CEO of Sebokeng Hospital, Mrs. Makibiti Madolo, said:

*"Our hospital is in the hotspot of air pollution, particularly from industries, and we owe it to our community and patients who come here for treatment to inform them of this. We also need to be involved in those municipal meetings to share our inputs on the health impacts of air pollution in our municipality."*

Following our meeting with Mrs. Madolo, the GGHH champion, Mrs. Ayanda Sibisi, was instructed to set up a committee involving the clinical manager, doctors, community representatives, environmental health practitioners and someone from media and communications, to think of an awareness-raising strategy for patient and community on air pollution and health. This was a huge success and it will set a precedent for other institutions to follow to roll out the project.

Once these air quality monitors have been set up in the various hospitals, we would like to set up a set of activities which will position these institutions as support structures for communities that are dealing with air pollution, adding their voice and highlighting the health impacts of air pollution. These activities will involve:

- Setting up networks of high-tech, low-cost air pollution monitors on hospital roofs
- Obtaining data on air pollution and establishing these hospitals as trusted sources of public



information on air quality and its health impacts, making our push for open democracy real.

- Educating hospital staff and patients on the health impacts of air pollution and its sources.
- Conducting training for hospital staff and health professionals on the health impacts of air pollution, health implications of air pollution data, and communication with patients and the public. Conducting training with the local and national media on the health impacts of air pollution and its sources.

In conclusion, this project will allow for leading hospitals and health systems around the world to become champions of clean air and a healthy climate. The project will result in a greater understanding among health professionals, patients and the public on the health impacts of air pollution. It will also turn out an increasingly active health sector that works with other sectors to advocate for policy solutions that foster a transition away from coal, oil and gas to clean, renewable and healthy energy sources. ☺



GGHH  
champions  
from Sebokeng  
hospital:  
Ayanda  
Sibisi, Nande  
Matshoba and  
Nonhle Mkhize.  
Credit:  
groundWork



# Greenfly behind the curve

by Greenfly

*When it comes to the news, Greenfly stays determinedly behind the curve. So we'll start in December and go backwards and forwards from there. Confused? You will be.*

## **3 December 2018, Katowice, Poland.**

In the heart of Poland's coal country, the big coal and gas corporations have got together with the government to host a major conference and showcase Poland's commitments. The conference opens to a buzz of boredom. It is the 24<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (CoP 24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It will serve no purpose other than to show who's in charge.

## **8 October 2018, Incheon, South Korea.**

It's not if, but when the last of the species runs out of bully beef and bottled water. The world's leading scientists gather to tell us that global warming of 1.5°C will be really bad but a whole lot better than 2°C. The good news is that we could just make it under 1.5 – if we really, really try. The bad news is that we won't. Nor under 2 neither.

## **13 August 2018, Johannesburg.**

Eskom says all its power stations are too dirty to meet new pollution standards. And it'll cost too much to come clean. So the law should be suspended or amended. Eskom didn't meet the old pollution standards either, so it's dirty business as usual with environmental affairs in a state of suspension.

## **21 November 2018, Cape Town.**

Finance Minister Tito Mboweni introduces the Climate Tax Bill in parliament with the stern warning that climate change is the greatest threat facing humanity. The members look grave, as if to pose with the weight of history on their shoulders. Fortunately, they don't believe it and neither does

he. Treasury has taken eight years to produce a Bill designed to produce the appearance of action. The Bill is hotly followed by the Draft Carbon Tax Offset Regulations. It works on the principle that the way to fix a fixed market is to fix another market. Greenfly recommends betting on the 2.30 at the race track instead. They have real horseshit.

## **13 November 2018, Cape Town.**

The parliamentary energy committee are lost in deep thought as they assess public comment on government's latest draft of the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2018). Electrifying it is not. Having heard all about climate change and the impact of mining and burning coal on neighbouring communities, committee members dredge wisdom from the deep to conclude that coal is "our prestige" and "will go on forever". Which is a lot longer than humanity will go on for.

## **8 October 2018, London.**

Pravin Gordhan, South Africa's minister in charge of Eskom, tells Reuters that Eskom's has cash to burn coal for another year. Everything is just fine and dandy. No need for government to stump up.

## **19 November 2018, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and everywhere**

Eskom sheds the load. Stage 1.

## **6 December 2018, Johannesburg.**

Another day older and deeper in debt. Pravin says Eskom's debt is R420 billion and heading towards R600 billion. Not so dandy then. Someone must



stump up. And what they must stump up for – Medupi and Kusile – are 'underperforming'. Eskom sheds more load. Stage 2.

#### **14 January 2019, Cape Town.**

Eskom's income does not cover its debt payments, CEO Phakamani Hadebe tells the energy regulator. Electricity users must stump up. Demand is down because prices are up. Prices must go up because demand is down. Industry wants a special deal to boost demand. That leaves shops, offices and people to pay. Shops and offices are loading their roofs with PV panels. That leaves people to pay. Rich people are putting PV on the roof. That leaves poor people to pay.

#### **31 January 2019, Cape Town.**

We'll be doing clean coal says mining minister Gwede Mantashe. At no extra cost. And no stretch of credulity.

#### **1 February 2019, Soweto.**

Four years after it fired up the first unit at Medupi, Eskom admits to 'discovering' that the boilers don't work properly. And nothing to do with burning coal and bagging ash works. And the plants are over-heating. And the world is over-heating. Medupi and Kusile are dirty duds. But Eskom has a plan. Starting with upping the price even higher.

#### **6 February 2019, Cape Town.**

We are doing clean coal says energy minister Jeff Radebe. Don't mention cost.

#### **7 February 2019, Cape Town.**

President Cyril Ramaphosa tells the nation that government will fix Eskom. It will be split into three

divisions – all state owned. He will leave the small matter of the debt to Tito. Meanwhile, O happy days, French transnational Total has discovered oil in the south seas. The nation is saved. Stuff the climate. We're going to be rich! Or at least Total is.

#### **11 February, 2019, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and everywhere.**

Eskom sheds the load. Stage 4. National panic.

#### **15 February 2019, Cape Town.**

Ramaphosa says he will not privatize Eskom. Repeat three times and say two Hail Marys. And it will still burn coal. Besides, he warns sternly that climate change is a grave threat to humanity. Some MPs nod sagely. Some think climate change is part of the plot to privatize Eskom. Or a Chinese hoax perhaps.

#### **20 February 2019, Cape Town.**

It is confirmed that Eskom has been polluting liberally in defiance of the law. Management tried to keep the data that leads to that conclusion secret. Commercial confidentiality and all that. They released it only when scandal threatened. The environmental authorities are supposed to examine the data but didn't. So it's dirty business as usual. And thousands of people get sick and die.

#### **20 February 2019, Cape Town.**

Eskom's debt has "ballooned" to R475 billion. If it could be trusted, it could get out of the hole with R150 billion. But Tito doesn't trust it. He wants his person on the inside. With that, Treasury will stump up R23 billion. Ching. Every year. Ching. Till the end of time. Ching. Fortunately, that's not far off. Climate change is real. Coal is real. We must burn ... clean coal. ☺



# Leading the Transition to Zero Waste

by Niven Reddy

#GoForZeroWaste

As the GAIA network grows in Africa, we have begun working with many new organizations and have further developed existing relationships with organizations to advance inclusive, bottom-up strategies to address waste and pollution, grounded in the principles of environmental, worker and social justice.

Our colleagues in the Philippines have developed a Zero Waste Academy, which is aimed at capacitating members and other stakeholders on how to implement a Zero Waste program in their respective cities and communities. Since the call was opened up to GAIA members from other regions too, the interest from African members was immense and we were fortunate enough to have five members from different countries participate.

Having this kind of exposure to existing zero waste models is an important step in developing something similar in Africa, hinging on similar methodology as seen in Asia. The course covered a mix of lectures, from understanding what Zero Waste is, to waste management laws, to false solutions such as incineration. There was also a variety of practical exercises such as composting techniques, waste assessment and brand audits.

Miko Alino of GAIA Philippines believes that "the Zero Waste Academy has opened opportunities for GAIA member-organizations across regions to learn from each other's experiences in implementing Zero Waste programs. Based on previous Academy sessions, we have observed that participants have applied composting techniques or another new education tool that was shared by their co-

participants from another country. Moreover, the Zero Waste Academy has kindled a sense of solidarity among attendees. It is helpful to see that your organization is not alone in facing waste issues, but rather is part of a bigger network that shares the same fervour to promote Zero Waste solutions."

One of our partners from South Africa who has been working to establish Wellington as a Zero Waste town attended the academy in Manila. Keith Roman from the Wellington Association Against the Incinerator (WAAI) felt that the Academy was inspiring and has since commenced preparations for a scientific waste characterization study, including a brand audit, to be undertaken at a local municipality in March 2019. The waste audit will constitute one of the foundation stones for the development of the Zero Waste model. WAAI have been challenging the incineration proposal in Wellington and since then have developed their campaign towards promoting a Zero Waste approach as the alternative waste management system to incineration.

Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO) in Ghana are developing a sustainable communities project and attending the academy is something they found to be a necessary starting point. Desmond Alugnoa of GAYO felt it was interesting to learn how to convince district officials and other government representatives to believe in and support a Zero Waste project. "This was a challenge to me prior to the academy but after learning how to research and communicate Zero Waste results effectively,





GAIA Africa participants from South Africa, Tanzania, Morocco, Tunisia and Ghana at the Zero Waste Academy in Manila

I recently got the Adansi South District Assembly which was quite reluctant last year to pledge their complete support for our Sustainable Community Project in the district".

Ana Rocha from Nipe Fagio, who are also about to implement a Zero Waste project in Tanzania, found that these examples from the global South make it more relatable to our African context. "We

are currently selecting communities to implement the project and sharing experiences knowing what we are actually looking for has made work more effective. Above all, seeing low income communities participating in the project and being engaged with care and respect was a very inspiring experience".

#GoForZeroWaste



## Boom and Bust in the Waterberg

# Boom and Bust in the Waterberg

A history of coal mega projects



**Boom and Bust in the Waterberg**

The groundWork Report 2018

[https://www.groundwork.org.za/reports/gW\\_Report\\_2018\\_-\\_Boom\\_or\\_Bust\\_in\\_the\\_Waterberg\\_-\\_A\\_history\\_of\\_coal\\_mega-projects.pdf](https://www.groundwork.org.za/reports/gW_Report_2018_-_Boom_or_Bust_in_the_Waterberg_-_A_history_of_coal_mega-projects.pdf)

