

GROUNDWORK

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groundwork



Kennedy Road Burns again

environmental justice action in Southern Africa

groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental organisation 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 project areas are: air quality, waste (including health care waste, industrial landfill waste and incineration) and corporate accountability.

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AFFILIATIONS:

groundWork is affiliated to the following international organisations:

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International POPs Elimination Network

Basel Action Network

Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

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

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Cover photo: This picture is of the 7th of eight shack fires that have occurred at Kennedy Road this year. Abahlali baseMjondolo have made a direct link between the fires and the lack of electricity within the settlement. See page xx. Picture by Richard Pithouse, courtesy Abahlali baseMjondolo.

From the smoke stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

Dear Friends

As I write this, we have just completed a workshop bringing people from East and Southern Africa together to discuss the future onslaught of oil in the region. In many places it is not the future, it is already happening, but without community people understanding what is going on as oil rigs and machinery move into their area. This workshop, a first of its kind in the region, will be reported on in detail in the next newsletter. To be with fishermen from Mauritius, the Diaspora of the Horn, local people from Ethiopia and people from the border regions between Mozambique and Tanzania was exciting and invigorating. I look forward to the action that awaits us.

The extractive industry debate is a critical one. Besides the oil issue above, there are serious challenges around mining and it is playing itself out in a very divisive manner in the Eastern Cape, where local community people along the Wild Coast are up against each other and government, depending on which side you are on. What is alarming, however, is how government is responding to the challenges using race as a card, when people are calling for their lands not to be mined.

"Rich whites are to blame for dividing people in the Wild Coast area, where an Australian company wants to mine for heavy titanium minerals, says Minister of Minerals and Energy Buyelwa Sonjica," reported Fred Kockett in the Sunday Tribune on 8 September. This is a sad statement when people are fighting for their lands not to be destroyed by mining. Are these people going to get 51% of the royalties from what is rightfully theirs? But, more importantly, do they want to exploit it in the first place, considering the legacy such mining entails. Jody Kollapen from the Human Rights Commission was scathing of using racism in

the response to the challenge, and indicated that: "The fact that white people might be involved in providing assistance, information and legal advice should not detract from the problem we have to deal with - that the communities maintain they have not been adequately consulted about the impact of the mining and decisions to allow it." Sonjica did indicate that she fears that the St Lucia area has been lost to 'rich, white people'. I might have some sense of understanding with her on this in that it is noteworthy that it is mainly rich and white people that do visit these important untouched parts of our lands. This is not a function of racism but rather a function of class, which is perpetuated in a new South Africa

It is critical to recognise that the evidence base that we have on mining is that it is an extractive process that takes wealth out of the community rather than brings wealth into the community, unlike ecotourism which evidence base is St Lucia. Sonjica has subsequently admitted that the consultation was flawed.

Questions have to be asked of our government. One is how does one break the class divide, and more importantly how does one ensure that we all share in the heritage of our land rather than just those that are wealthy, and those that are white? At a local level, all people are asking is that they are just left alone, and that their government provides them with long term livelihoods.

Finally, as the fishermen said from Mauritius, when you take oil out the ground, you are dealing with the Devil's fire. So leave it in.

Till next time!

Bobby



Eskom and government are ignoring reality

By Bobby Peek

The energy crisis should be viewed from a rights basis, and not from a technical or managerial perspective

I was asked to give a response to the 'energy crisis' at the seventh annual Ruth First Memorial Lecture. This response was to the issues raised that evening by Hilary Joffe, Senior associated editor of the Business Day in her writing on 'Power and Powerlessness: The South African Energy Crisis'.

Sadly the energy crisis in SA is not being viewed from a rights perspective, but rather from a managerial and technical perspective, i.e. the apartheid government together with our new democratic government have made some poor decisions that have got us to the crisis. This is the general thesis of Joffe's response. Little is said about the real broad political systemic reasons that have got us to where we are today.

For groundWork the lens through which to view the energy crisis is one of environmental justice which is a rights or values based discourse which locates environmental degradation within a socio-political context. While 'environmental justice' might be said to have emerged as a more or less distinct discourse on environmental management, for the most part it has been defined and understood through examples of environmental injustice rather than a positive statement of the 'ideal' of environmental justice.¹

Environment is an expression of a set of relations – it is not something 'out there'. This means that understanding 'development' is concerned with understanding how relations are established and maintained, what powers and interests they express and serve, and how they enhance or distort the possibilities of 'a better life for all' within the various environments where people live. From this it is evident that environmental justice is about equity and a set of power and political relationships that secures development that is, as our Constitution promises, 'not harmful to one's health and well-being'.

The groundWork Report 2007: "Peak Poison, the elite energy crisis and environmental justice"² is the

basis of how one should respond to the energy crisis that we are now facing.

In understanding the state of Eskom and energy in South Africa it is important to reflect on the global triple crisis that we face today. The energy crisis is defined by 'peak oil' where we are at the moment when half of what can be pumped from the earth has been used. It is, more importantly, also the point of maximum production. We are now entering a phase where the demand is greater than the supply and production. Consumption must be reduced – and it's going to be done forcibly no doubt – but who will be impacted upon?

The Imperial crisis is one where we witness the hegemony of the US being broken as the US stutters in the middle east as it tries to make its 'war on terror' a legitimate mechanism to keep access to oil reserves in the area. The US however is in a terminal crisis that emerged after their defeat in the Vietnam War, and the Iraqi and Afghanistan challenge is the next step towards the US loss of domination of the world. It is not, however, giving up easily. It cannot when it needs more than 2.5 billion dollars a day from the rest of the world to make its system operate.

The environmental crisis is ever so stark in the reality of climate change. We are changing the world in a manner that makes rehabilitation impossible. The scale of change is such that Steffen et al conclude that "a new geological era, the Anthropocene, has begun" [2004: 6]. That is, it is an era in which the basic functioning of earth's ecological systems is decisively influenced by human actions. As we are going now, there is a strong probability that environmental systems will 'flip': the environment absorbs a variety of pressures until a threshold is reached at which point very abrupt change takes place. In this case rainfall patterns are likely to change dramatically. But it is not only climate change that is challenging humanity, it is also patterns of land-use changes since the 16th

¹ Butler and Hallowes, 2000, in a review for groundWork on how to understand and report on the state of environmental justice in South Africa.

² See <http://www.groundwork.org.za/Peak%20Poison.pdf>



century with mechanisation and clearing of lands and crude-based chemicals in the form of fertilisers and pesticides.

The SA Eskom Crisis

The crisis of Eskom is one that must be viewed in relation to the above systemic crisis that we are facing globally. In Eskom's 'emergency', JP Purshotam, an attorney now in private practise but who worked for more than a decade with the Legal Resources Centre, is of the opinion that Eskom is acting illegally: "Everything related to electricity – its generation, supply and pricing – is minutely regulated by the law. The difficulty is that Eskom has ignored the law with impunity." Further he indicates that: "Load-shedding has had an exceptionally heavy impact on many vulnerable institutions, and it is just a matter of time before people start dying on the operating tables or when vital life-saving equipment goes on the blink. Also of concern are the thousands of workers who will be rendered unemployed by the load-shedding. Social unrest cannot be far behind."

Eskom and government are not seeking to change the way they go about business in order that our society is not impacted upon negatively. What they are doing is planning more coal based power stations such as in Medupi to be built without pollution abatement equipment while coal demand is pushing mining in the catchment of three major river systems and it will result in acid mine drainage and trash those rivers – even more than they are already trashed. People living next to our big energy plants – Eskom's power stations, Sasol's coal-to-liquids and coal to chemicals plants, and the crude oil refineries – already know what lies ahead for the people of Marapong next to the Medupi site. Those living where government is threatening to build new nuclear power stations are starting to question what it will mean. This means energy for further industrial expansion rather than energy for the poor.

Everyone else is being told what will come to them and how they can save electricity. Eskom has come up with its free life line provision – a meagre allocation accompanied by technologies intended to discipline their consumption. Curiously, official concern for energy conservation was expressed only when they talked about delivery to the poor. At the same time they were doing deals with corporations like Alcan who, you will recall, was the first beneficiary of

the Developmental Electricity Pricing Programme – there's delivery for you! Then there is the reduction requested of 10% by all role players. This demand does not recognise the fact that industry uses 83% of all electricity produced in SA. This is nothing more than the grandfathering of rights, where those that used more in the past will continue to use more in future.

Also, SA has released its Long Terms Mitigation Strategy (LTMS) in response to climate change. It is a little too late. Peak Poison can be the used as a framework to assess whether it is meaningful.

On the evidence before us, SA should have aimed to peak at no later than 2015, and not between 2025 and 2030! The LTMS misses this and it had to, as it worked within the framework that supports the Eskom production increases for industrial consumption. The LTMS also fails to recognise the political and economic turbulence associated with a declining US hegemony, and it failed to make full sense of the depletion of fossil fuels and oil in particular.

We need to redefine what is meant by development to a process that moves us towards economic, social and environmental justice, a shift to economic localisation, an urgent review of energy systems. Such a review should start with the new build programme and a focus away on energy intensive industries and development, and the acknowledgement that a different energy system is needed; investments that go into the declining system fossil fuel system represent a permanent loss. The most basic form of energy for people and food systems must be thoroughly transformed to enable people to define and take control of production and consumption and hence of their own futures.

And so, what are we going to do as society?

The active resistance that is taking place against trans-national corporations and government as they collude to enclose, exclude and externalise means of production must continue, be it in the Limpopo Province against mining or the Niger Delta against oil. We need to collectively resist. Indeed, would this not resonate with Ruth First – a white woman who struggled for an equitable society – who saw struggle with the people, not for the people. It is this challenge that we face in a society where energy provision is so politicized and corporatised!



VEJA and HEJA organise

By Siziwe Khanyile

The Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA) and Highveld for Environmental Justice Action (HEJA) have come into their own

groundWork focuses on providing support to communities faced with environmental threats. In the air quality project we aim to build community awareness on environmental issues and to support communities affected by industrial air pollution to be better able to defend and promote their environment.

In order to realise groundWork's objective, which seeks to see civil society having a greater impact on environmental governance, there is a long term commitment to developing local capacities to negotiate and entrench their environmental rights.

Hence, over the past nine years, the Air Quality Project has sought not only to support communities around air pollution monitoring, awareness and capacity building for action on local air pollution issues, strategic and technical advice and information, building the community voice by facilitating links between communities faced with similar environmental problems, supporting community campaigns including negotiations with industry, facilitating access to government decision makers and officials, and access to the media, and linking communities with national and international civil society campaigns, but also movement and organisation building.

After several years of working with a vast array of community based organisations in the Vaal Triangle and Secunda, agitating, negotiating and resisting on air pollution matters, it became apparent to these organisations and to groundWork that working in a unified manner not only strengthens their voice but it also allows for better coordination of work and issues, particularly as these organisations relate with government and industry, be it to lobby, advocate, or for any manner of action.

Formation of the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA)

One of the reasons for the founding of VEJA was the need for sharing information and providing support and coordination of environmental justice work in the Vaal Triangle. The desire to create a common platform with common strategies led to the establishment of the organisation as an alliance.

VEJA formed as an alliance of 13 community organisations in the Vaal Triangle working with the aim of fighting for the constitutional right of residents of the Vaal to live in an environment that is not harmful to their health and wellbeing. Their main objectives are stopping pollution in the Vaal, getting polluters to clean up past pollution and gaining compensation and assistance for the victims of pollution. In the past couple of years they have monitored air pollution in the area, and have engaged and made input to the various government processes to improve the air quality in the Vaal. They have challenged government's unsustainable strategy for energy provision in poor domestic households in the Vaal. VEJA has taken on ArcelorMittal in support of the Steel Valley Crisis Committee whose members are neighbours of Arcelor and whose land, water and livestock were contaminated by pollution from the company. They have marched at a local level outside the gates of Mittal, but they have also internationalised their concerns in Luxembourg at the AGM of ArcelorMittal.

This success did not come independent of several challenges and growing pains. As an organisation that has now been in existence for four years, they crawled before they could walk, learned valuable lessons in trust, and fine tuned their systems and coordination and, while putting in place the systems, fundraising and employing a staff member, they did

so without losing touch with their activism and they continue to affectionately call each other comrade!

Voice of the Voiceless

groundWork began working in Secunda with a community based environmental organisation called The Voice of the Voiceless (VoV). The organisation was founded to balance the environmental discourse in Secunda. People experienced a situation where Sasol's stories were always regarded as right. A platform was needed for the community to express their ideas and perceptions. The organisation has grown to the extent that it has influenced others in the area to come together and work on joint initiatives. Over the years, the Voice of the Voiceless worked supported by groundWork to monitor and agitate against Sasol and the problem of air pollution in the area. They have made input to policy through submissions in parliament regarding pollution in their area. They have mobilised to resist any environmental discourse deemed unacceptable to the community and started a legal process with the assistance of the Legal Resource Centre to see that government addresses the issue of domestic coal burning which is also responsible for many respiratory illnesses in the community. The town of Secunda, along with other areas like Ekurhuleni and Witbank, have now become a part of what the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism call a priority area, called the Highveld, which, as the second area after the Vaal Triangle to receive such a declaration, means that pollution levels are unacceptably high and need government's attention.

HEJA brings together Highveld organisations

It is therefore timely that this year, organisations working in that area have formed a structure called the Highveld for Environmental Justice Action (HEJA). This group of five environmental organisations are passionate about environmental justice issues. Their aim is to tackle water, air and waste pollution related issues. Their vision is to build a partnership of environmental justice organisations towards a healthy and sustainable environment that is not harmful to people.



The HEJA steering committee
Picture by Siziwe Khanyle

The structure takes its composition from similar structures in South Durban (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance) and the Vaal Triangle (Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance)

They would like to advance the struggle for EJ and to unite EJ organisations within the Highveld area to challenge industries and to work to protect the communities they come from.

In the work that the air quality project has done in various communities over the years it is very exciting that VEJA and HEJA are on a growth spurt towards independence and sustainability, both in activism and organising, but also in being administratively sound.

One of the residents of eMbalenhle and chairperson of one of the organisations called on residents to organise for a safer environment. Lucky Methula, present at the meeting, says "what happened today, which is to form an alliance, is a first step to tackling the pollution challenges we are faced with in the community. We would like to see the Alliance going full force because the work on the ground is huge especially waste issues which are a huge problem."

The alliance has started in Secunda, but the intention is to spread to other areas of the Highveld.



The Ban Amendment still on hold

By Musa Chamane

Decision on the controversial Basel Ban Amendment has been deferred until the next conference of parties

The Basel Convention conference of parties (COP9) was held in Bali, Indonesia, from 23-27 June 2008. The convention's main goal is the control of trans-boundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal. The Convention has 170 Parties and aims to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects resulting from the generation, management, trans-boundary movements and disposal of hazardous and other wastes. The Basel Convention came into force in 1992. The decisions are taken on a consensus basis. Each subject must be discussed thoroughly until a satisfactory consensus is reached. Compromise and convincing plays a very important role in the discussions. South Africa is a signatory of this convention and had an active delegation at the conference.

The Ban Amendment

The Ban Amendment is a clause that has yet to be adopted by parties. It is about movement of waste from developed to developing countries. The Ban Amendment intends to prohibit this activity following illegal waste dumping in Ivory Coast and Nigeria in the past years. The Ban Amendments was discussed but parties are not on the same page on this subject. The more developed countries, such as China, are thrilled with the loophole within the convention as this gives them the opportunity to continue sending hazardous waste across the borders. The current status of waste trade is that the exporting and importing countries need to agree on a trade agreement and inform the Basel Convention secretariat about the agreement - then trade can take place. The ban amendment intends to reverse that. The hazardous waste crossing borders from rich to poor will be illegal should ban amendments be adopted.

Africa divided by Ethiopia

Other countries, especially the rich ones, believe that waste trade to the poor countries is good for them because what is waste to them could be a resource for the poor. The majority of the less developed countries are not satisfied with the abuse of their status of being poor. Parties are playing their cards close to their chests and it is not obvious who says what with regard to the Ban Amendment and others are very diplomatic on this subject. Ethiopia was a very controversial country amongst the less developed countries because they did not support the Ban Amendment, while other African countries like Tanzania, South Africa, and Nigeria were prepared to adopt it. At a point countries that felt strongly about ban amendments tried to push for elections. The secretariat had even brought the ballot boxes expecting that there could be a vote. Unfortunately for the less developed the issue was deferred to the next COP.

EU domination of discussions

My own observation of the convention was that the EU dominated the discussions. The EU sent a representative to each working group and the EU kept on sabotaging the discussions by taking the discussions back to points that had already been agreed upon. In some instances the EU representative left the meeting room for further consultation. Other regions ended up compromising more than they wished in order to accommodate the EU. The EU was blackmailing poor regions by trading compromises. For instance, it was suggested that the COP 10 should take place in 2011 instead of 2010 in exchange for a compromise to be made for poor regions such as Africa. The EU mostly protected the secretariat by removing some crucial activities, like fund raising and technical support, from the secretariat to the BCRC

host countries. The other frustration I noticed was that in the narration of the decisions of the convention the discussions would be dragged out with synonymous terminologies. It was very frustrating seeing non-English speakers trying to work on the wording of the document in a language that they barely speak.

The less developed countries have serious challenges, which are disregarded by the rich nations. Third world countries are thrown in the deep end by the convention. For instance, without financial resources there is no way of implementing the Convention. Funding sources for third world countries to support the Basel Convention are very scarce according to the report made by members from less developed economies. The less developed economies feel that the secretariat must assist them in trying to get more funding for the implementation of the Convention.

The Ban Amendments are also being delayed by developed countries. The rich countries still want to take advantage of the opportunity opened by trade legislation. The Ban Amendments will be adopted once all rich members are willing to adopt. Poor

regions are still dependant on the waste exported to them. Africa needs to mobilise more EU countries in supporting the Ban Amendments.

Conclusion

The convention was a success, decisions were made and it is now up to the members to implement them. The Basel Convention has good motives but there is a lack of will by all members to implement it for the protection of human health and the environment. It feels like there are members who are gatekeepers, who follow discussions closely and disrupt the proper implementation of the convention, especially if it's going to affect them financially and otherwise. Some members have less power to talk for themselves. Not every member who was represented made inputs. Some governments sent delegates who did not properly comprehend this convention; it was just for the sake of being there. This Convention needs political buy-in by the global community and needs financial commitments before implementation will be possible in poor regions. Without financial support there will be no implementation.



The GAIA African Network is launched

By Rico Euripidou

The Global Anti Incineration Alliance (GAIA) is strengthening its philosophy in Africa

GAIA is a worldwide alliance of non-profit organisations and individuals who recognise that our planet's finite resources, fragile biosphere and the health of people and other living beings are endangered by polluting and inefficient production practices and health-threatening disposal methods.

The GAIA Mission Statement, adopted in December 2000 in Johannesburg, South Africa, states a collective non-negotiable opposition to incinerators, landfills, and other end-of-pipe interventions with the ultimate vision of "a just, toxic-free world without incineration". The ultimate goal of GAIA is "the implementation of clean production, and the creation of a closed-loop, materials-efficient economy where all products are reused, repaired or recycled back into the marketplace or nature".

On the 7th to the 11th of July, 2008, the first GAIA African Regional Meeting was held in Durban, South Africa, with the following main aims:

- To work on building the GAIA network in Africa;
- To provide training about various Multilateral Environmental Agreements, toxicology, chemical and waste policies;
- To share and promote zero waste case studies in the African region;
- To keep the Sub Saharan African Region free of municipal garbage incineration.

The meeting was attended by 23 delegates from 9 different African countries including Mozambique, Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, Morocco/Tunisia, Tanzania, South Africa, and Senegal.

The first day was dedicated to sharing information about the GAIA status of affairs in different countries. Delegates were asked to make presentations of local problems and action and generally to include

summaries of: their specific country challenges, country experiences of CSO strategies for advocacy, their relationships with the regulatory authorities, the level of participation in the implementation of the Stockholm Convention and specifically how dioxins and furans are being addressed in the national implementation plans, general chemical waste management, and whether emission standards exist for POPs in their countries.

Following this introductory session delegates received training about regional zero waste initiatives, particularly focusing on the experiences of Laila Kamel showcasing the various actors in the informal recycling economy in Egypt where re-use, recovery and recycling rates have reached almost 95% in parts of Cairo where the traditional waste collectors (Zabbaleen) provide a service and approximately seven new jobs are created for every ton of non organic waste recovered. In stark comparison, where the Municipal waste service is outsourced to multi-national waste corporations, less than 25% of recycling, recovery and composting is achieved and waste is littered throughout congested city streets as collection occurs only once per week. Worryingly, frustrated Cairenes have resorted to open burning of waste in street skips to mitigate vermin infesting the waste.

Laila also shared how social and environmental projects with garbage collectors can create non-formal educational models of learning in the context of recycling, helping the garbage collectors break the cycle of exploitation and receive proper compensation for their valuable work with an emphasis on health and hygiene. In one project over 200 Zabbaleen households bring organic waste to a neighbourhood composting plant. The garbage collectors refine the waste into high grade compost which is then sold to agriculturalists engaged in reclaiming Egypt's desert.

Many delegates agreed that many elements of this model were highly relevant and could be generalised in the Sub-Saharan African context.

The focus of the meeting then shifted to energy from waste, focusing on composting and bio-digesting. Mark Wells from the Gaia Cooperative based in the Eastern Cape shared his experiences and recent successes in the implementation of integrated biogas and algal systems, outlining the opportunities for far more profitable agricultural development models than the present plans for a pesticide intensive green revolution.

Day two began with a training session on Multilateral Environmental Conventions (MECs) focusing on what governments' commitments were under the Stockholm and Basel Conventions. Paul Soake,

director of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) based in Kenya shared his views on the Stockholm Convention, dioxins and furans, the concept of *de minimis* (Chapeaux of Article 5), the Stockholm Convention and public participation in decision making and implementation Article 9 and the right to information Article 10. Delegates then shared their experience of National Implementation Plan progress and discussed the gaps in implementation of these MEC commitments with an emphasis on what civil society can do about addressing these gaps.

The implementation of the Africa Stockpiles Program (ASP) continues to be a major concern among African GAIA members and a session led by Jamal Kiama from Agenda (Tanzania) and Musa Chamane on the ASP covered the ASP Disposal Technologies Options Study recently undertaken by the World Bank



Delegates at the
GAIA conference



and WWF as well as a review of disposal technology standards, health impacts, best practises and anti-incineration alternatives. The delegates agreed that a moratorium on all POP and pesticide incineration must be implemented until a safer disposal technology is discovered. A statement on ASP disposal was then drafted by African delegates.

The focus then shifted to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and chemical safety. Discussions centred on key chemicals that pose toxic hazards to humans and the environment and the health effects of dioxins and furans – including a paper presentation summarising the latest research. Hemsing Hurrynag from the Development Indian Ocean Network (DION) based in Mauritius then reported back on a workshop on Public Health and Mercury for the Indian Ocean Islands Region of Africa. This was followed by an update on global actions for heavy metals e.g. lead, cadmium and methyl mercury focussing on the UNEP Mercury Program update, a short presentation on particulate matter and nano-particles as by-products of emissions, a summary of the WHO POP's bio-monitoring program and a general discussion on SAICM activities to round off the day.

The meat of the meeting took place on the third day when discussions and presentations centred on the incineration of waste. Manny Calonzo from the International GAIA Secretariat based in the Philippines revisited the GAIA anti-incineration principles for the group. Following this, discussions then focused on municipal garbage incineration, particularly undertaking a situational analysis and status quo on the African Continent. From this session it is understood that no dedicated municipal garbage incinerators exist in sub Saharan Africa and delegates agreed that a focal point for the sub Saharan African Region is to keep this so. However, an incinerator is planned for Mauritius and members agreed to provide assistance and solidarity with colleagues fighting this proposal. Further discussions included co-processing of waste in cement kilns, available campaign tools and a brief presentation on non-incineration medical waste treatment technologies (being developed under the GEF Project) in Tanzania.

The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to agreeing a way forward and how to build a strong,

cohesive and coherent GAIA network in Africa. We discussed the structure of a regional secretariat (roles and responsibilities), coordination support, possible synergy with other regional networks (FoE Africa, and others), how to share information etc.

To this end we have agreed to set up an African Regional List Serve which is operational and subscribers can request membership once they have become GAIA members at <http://www.no-burn.org/join/index.html>.

Furthermore, the GAIA African Regional Secretariat will be hosted by groundWork for the period August 2008/2009 with the following roles:

- 1) build, consolidate and expand a network of public interest groups subscribing to the twin missions of GAIA of ending all forms of waste incineration, and promoting ecological, socially-just and sustainable waste prevention and discard management practices.
- 2) extend support and solidarity to groups and communities resisting waste incinerators, landfills and other polluting and destructive disposal methods, and/or those campaigning for real solutions to the waste challenges.
- 3) recognise and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration and synergy with members in Africa as well as with other allied networks and groups.

Additionally delegates agreed to

- organise key core working groups (sub-regional) to help GAIA members deal with specific challenges as they arise
- Increase the scope of GAIA activities
- Explore synergy with other regional networks (Friends of the Earth (FoE), Climate Action Network (CAN), Pesticide Action Network (PAN) to begin with!)

For more information on planned activities and how to become a member of the GAIA African list serve please contact me at rico@groundwork.org.za or go to www.no-burn.org and click on Africa.

Training is not an optional extra

By Nomcebo Mvelase

When training is sidelined, healthcare is compromised

I cannot think of a more effective way to explain the word "Training" than through its synonyms "guidance" and also "preparation". I am reminded of the workshop I attended not so long ago which was called "Seven steps for highly effective people". Amongst all the other important steps the trainer mentioned something that he called "sharpening the saw", which refers to training and development. This to me proves how important training is for every organisation. It is imperative that enough time and budget is set aside to ensure that staff is adequately trained to do what they do and to do it excellently.

Unfortunately, the impression that I have from our government (the Department of Health in particular) is that they do not view training as a fundamental thing but rather as a luxurious thing for those who have more than enough funds and time to waste! The reality is, even if there are financial constraints, training is still imperative. It is not only about experience or period of service, but also about acknowledging the fact that information changes every now and then and the best way to keep up with the current trends is by opening up to new information or even getting the same information revised and re-enforced over and over again.

I have more than enough reasons to support my statement as to why I say this about government.

In October last year groundWork hosted an international mercury conference. This was a world class conference with highly experienced speakers who were sharing with us their successes in eliminating the use of mercury items in their institutions. When the DoH was invited, the outcry was about funds. They did not have a budget for staff development and we were left with no option but to cover all the expenses for them. This included food, registration fees, accommodation and even the travelling

expenses. Where on this planet can you get a three day conference such as this absolutely free! Knowing our goal, which is to have an environment that is safe from harm we had to cover all those unplanned expenses in order to make that workshop a success.

Towards the end of last year in December almost every newspaper had articles covering the crisis we face in South Africa regarding the management of health care waste. In response to this, the Institute of Waste Management organised a workshop on health care waste management. This workshop was held in May this year. As a health care waste campaign manager, I realised that this was an opportunity for me to renew and acquire more knowledge regarding this concept so I was part of this process. It was unbelievable for me that for not one of the three days that the workshop ran was there even a single person from department of health! When I asked the facilitator if perhaps they were not invited, she indicated that the invitations were sent through to all the districts in KwaZulu-Natal but not a single person could come. This to me makes no sense. If people from other departments like DAEA could drive from as far as Dundee to be part of the workshop surely the very same people who generate this problematic waste should be motivated enough to come?

The issue of medical waste is a serious problem, which is still not getting as much urgent attention as it should and this is from both ends, from the health care institutions and also from the communities.

Every now and then you read that medical waste has been dumped somewhere, posing a risk to the vulnerable children, and it makes you wonder if all this concerns the department at all. On the other side you find diabetic patients who are given syringes to use at home to control their sugar levels. These patients are not educated as to how to safely dispose of these



once they have been used. It goes without saying that they also contribute to the amount and type of waste that ends up anywhere in the environment. It could be in the municipal landfill sites, it could be in the fields where children could have access to it and use it and at the same time put themselves at the risk of acquiring a lot of illnesses and infections. So, really, if we want to see our statistics for HIV and Hepatitis infections dropping, I think the government has got to meaningfully look at all these factors that are proving to be loop holes. In fact, according to the WHO report, it is estimated that approximately 30% of illnesses are due to the effects of the unhealthy environment that we live in.

Again, not so long ago I was phoned by the infection control nurse who is working in one of the institutions. She was sounding very distressed and wanted me to recommend a good company for them to treat and dispose of their waste as their existing company had just dissociated and left them in the middle of nowhere and now they have a crisis with their medical waste. Firstly, I frankly told her that my job is not to work as an advisor nor to promote any company, but rather to make health care institutions understand the important factors that they have to consider before signing up with any company: the importance of knowing more about each and every potential company that they take on. They need to understand the method that they use to treat their waste, their sustainability in terms of ensuring that they will be fit enough to deal with their waste in good time without having it stockpiled for decades in warehouses and, most importantly, the health institution itself should be doing regular audits to assess if the service provider is still operating according to the required standards and to assess how environmentally sound those standards are. She did not even know what they were doing with their waste. All that was explained to her was "we will take all your medical waste away!" I first had to make her understand that with waste there is "NO AWAY" and as the generator of waste you have a responsibility for that waste even when it has left your institution. By the way, this is the information that I, myself, got from the very workshop that was not attended by anyone from the department of health.

Lastly I would like to share with you that I have also recently had an interview with one of the sisters from



Grey's hospital trying to make sense as to how far they have gone with making a shift from mercury to mercury free products. Her response was that no matter how they wish to make that 100% shift, some of the staff still do not know how to operate the new thermometers, as they are electronic and digital. They are still experiencing challenges and sometimes the nurse will have the same temperature reading for almost all the patients admitted in the ward. Can you imagine the quality of nursing care in that situation? Obviously there is a lot of misdiagnosing and even mismanagement of patients. There is no magic or miracle in resolving this situation. All that it costs is a dedicated budget, time and highly knowledgeable people to come and shed the light so as to ensure that people are equipped and empowered with sufficient and current information that they need to deliver the best nursing care.

I think from sharing these scenarios with you that you can see for yourselves that currently it does not matter which time of the year, whether beginning, middle or towards the end, the government is not fit enough to make their staff better. And the question that remains is "how much can the department do and achieve if they are using a blunt, unsharpened saw?"

The answer is simple: as long as training and development are sidelined, health care will remain compromised.



CSR at ArcelorMittal – Myth or Reality?

By Sunita Dubey

ArcelorMittal's Corporate Responsibility Report gets a critical reading

ArcelorMittal has come out with a Corporate Responsibility report and the question is whether it is another piece of rhetoric or a genuine effort to change the way the world's largest steel company does business. The track record of the company does not provide much support to the claims and effort enumerated in the report. This article explores and exposes some of the lofty claims made by ArcelorMittal, juxtaposing it with the ground realities at some of its facilities.

ArcelorMittal has industrial presence in 28 countries and a commercial presence in 60 countries, with over 320,000 employees. It has an industrial presence in Europe, Asia, Africa and America, which includes emerging to mature markets. ArcelorMittal is also looking to develop in the high-growth Chinese and Indian markets. ArcelorMittal key financials for 2007 show revenues of US\$ 105.2 billion, with a crude steel production of 116 million tonnes representing around 10% of world steel output.

Brand name game

The recent "report" is part of the brand building of ArcelorMittal as the largest steel company in the world. The report claims the company's commitment to the highest standards of corporate governance, ensuring the equitable treatment of all shareholders, an independent board, clearly defined roles and responsibilities for directors and senior management, and ethical behaviour at all levels. They also say that they are committed to the fullest possible disclosure of all material matters relating to management processes, which is part of their transparency and good governance policy.

The report says that the company takes its reputation for honesty and integrity seriously. To ensure this a number of policies and procedures are in place to encourage the highest standards of behaviour in

all of their dealings throughout the company. They are, however, scouring the globe for deposits and plowing \$6 billion into nations such as Senegal and Mauritania with histories of civil strife. Greenfield projects exist in India in states with considerable indigenous population, with almost negligent political voice. According to Mr. Laxmi Mittal, "one of the important steps in their strategy is to create West Africa as a mining hub for iron ore supplies to their steel plants around the world. They are confident that Senegal will prove to be a strategic location to extend their existing footprint in West Africa." Liberia is the center of ArcelorMittal's strategy to boost profits by producing its own ore.

"Corporate responsibility plays a key part in the sustainability of ArcelorMittal. The leading companies of the 21st century must rise to the challenge of an increasing focus on how business is done. No longer is it good enough to say you are making profits. Stakeholders – whether employees, customers, governments, communities or shareholders – want to know how a business is run. Engaging with our stakeholders is essential to improving the transparency of our operations."

Laxmi N Mittal

Profits in the war zone

Exploiting the situation in war torn Liberia, Mittal signed a contract with the then transitional government that gave his company virtual control of the vast Nimba concession area, which included the country's longest rail line and the port facilities in the town of Buchanan. In return, the company was tasked with providing services like schools and health facilities for people in the area. The deal was later renegotiated with the elected government, due to pressure by some international groups like Global Witness.



The company also plans to develop its 30 percent stake in the Mauritanian El Agareb iron-ore mine, which contains an estimated 1 billion tons of ore. Mauritania's Societe Nationale Industrielle et Miniere, controlled by the state, will hold the remaining 70 percent of El Agareb. This country is also plagued with slavery and a growing terrorist threat, according to the United Nations.

Mining giant Anglo American's Kumba Iron Ore accused Senegalese authorities of "culpable behavior" after its contract to explore the resources with a view to creating and operating an export-orientated iron ore mine at Falémé was severed in favour of an agreement with ArcelorMittal in February of 2007. The steel giant agreed to pay the Senegalese government a five percent royalty on iron ore from the Falémé mine despite Senegal's mining code dictating a royalty of only three percent.

In keeping with the shady past of Mittal Steel, in 2004 the company signed a joint-venture agreement to establish a new company, the New Ljubija Mines in Bosnia Herzegovina. According to the Amnesty International report, "Human Rights And Business", the local Bosnian Serb management of the Ljubija mines systematically discriminated against at least 2000 non-Serb workers by dismissing them en masse, solely because of their ethnicity. Thousands of Bosnians and Bosnian Croats in the area, reportedly including former workers at the mines, were taken to the Omarska detention camp, which was situated in the Ljubija mines complex. In Omarska torture and mass killings were carried out. Unfairly dismissed Ljubija workers have not been reinstated in their jobs, nor have they received other forms of reparation.

ArcelorMittal said it also was looking at expanding iron ore mining in Ukraine, Liberia, Senegal and Mauritania to be able to control at least three quarters of all its supply needs by 2015.

Pollution at
ArcelorMittal
Plant at
Zenica, Bosnia
Herzegovina



Killer Mines

The report says that the "Health and Safety" of their workforce ranks high in company's consideration of their business, and that this is reflected in the recent restructuring of Health and Safety management. Claims are also made about an investment of US\$262.8 million in 2008 to cover not only new equipment, together with safety consultancy and training, but a programme of work to investigate the feasibility of a methane degassing programme. Despite these efforts there have been two major accidents at Mittal's Kazakh mines, bringing the total number of deaths in Mittal's Kazakh operations to approximately 200 since the company took over the Temirtau steelworks and associated mines in 1996. In April 2008 the General Prosecutor's Office warned that the company risks having its mining activities terminated if it does not do more to improve its safety standards. Concerns about health and safety are also rife at the company's steelworks, for example in Galati, Romania, and Kryviy Rih, Ukraine, with members of the Solidaritatea Union at Galati alleging that the plant's management is engaging in a wide range of tactics to suppress the union's activities.

"We are committed to the development of a constructive partnership with trade unions, based around continuous and open dialogue at multiple management levels, mutual respect and the free flow of information. We regard our employees as key stakeholders in the business and subscribe to the process of collective bargaining."

Corporate Responsibility report –ArcelorMittal

Community marginalisation

Three of their major Greenfield projects are in India, Liberia and Senegal and, according to the report, ArcelorMittal's plans to build two large steel plants in India for a combined investment of US\$24 billion. These two plants are a test of their commitment to Corporate Responsibility and sustainable investment. The two Greenfield sites chosen for the plants are in the states of Orissa and Jharkhand. The projects will require the Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) of local people and are expected to displace thousands of families belonging to the small farmer and tribal communities from their lands. According to the report the company is committed to acting sensitively and

responsibly towards all the communities involved, as well as to undertaking their activities with complete transparency. There has been local protest in both states where the protestors have said that they would lose more than 800 acres of agricultural land on which they are dependent. They argue that the plant should be set up on barren lands. Even the Jharkhand project may hit a roadblock with local villagers deciding not to give away an "inch of land" to the company for setting up the Rs40,000 crore greenfield steel project.

"It is imperative that ArcelorMittal be a partner with and invests in the communities in which we operate."

Aditya Mittal, Member of ArcelorMittal Group Management Board,

"Our local and regional operations have formed relationships with local stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and this process is being formalised through ArcelorMittal's standards on stakeholder engagement. Dialogue with NGOs is a critical part of our corporate responsibility strategy."

Corporate Responsibility Report

Hollow claims

Despite big claims in ArcelorMittal's "Corporate Responsibility Report", the ground realities tell us a very different story. A lip service to CSR policies in Liberia, intimidation of local activists opposing their project in India, refusal to provide documents concerning an environmental rehabilitation plan in South Africa, ignoring community requests to start a dialogue in USA and suppression of trade unions in Bosnia do not fit in the realm of corporate responsibility.

These glossy reports will only give short-term publicity to the company but will not change the lives of people affected by the activities of ArcelorMittal. The action has to speak now, as communities and workers have lived long enough with false promises and hollow words.



Lies, damned lies and sustainability reports

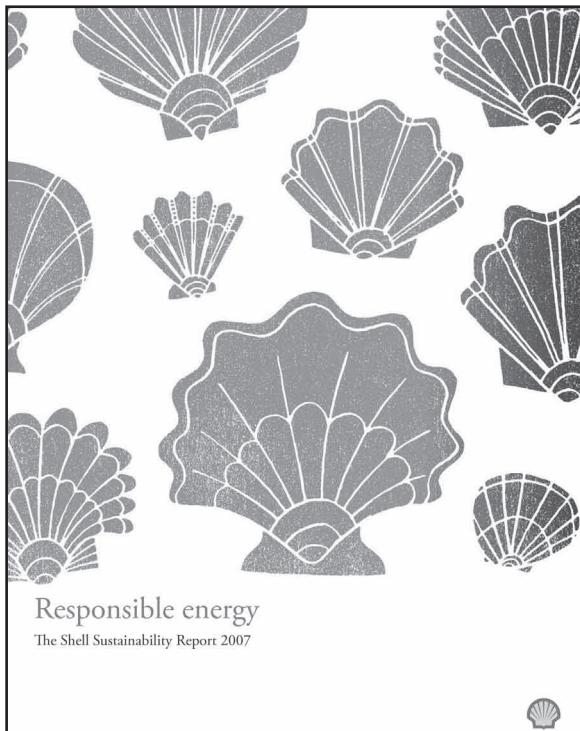
By Jane Harley

Annoying as they may be, there is little point in bursting a blood vessel over the contents and presentation of corporate sustainability reports

Shell's sustainability report for 2007 recently crossed my desk. Before I'd even opened it I was aware that it stank, and I mean this literally as well as figuratively. They have used a heavily coated paper (produced from "well-managed forests, controlled sources and recycled wood or fibre" – they did make a token gesture here) which exudes a foul, chemical stench. It seems that they are intent on polluting us all, even if they have to send it through the mail.

Reading the report was sickening – and again I mean literally as well as figuratively. I'm pretty sure that it was the chemicals that gave me the headache and queasy stomach. The content was certainly what caused the high blood pressure.

Perhaps Shell's PR advisors realised that greenwash pictures of deer and surfing were annoying to some because since 2002 cover of the Shell sustainability report has had various representations of shells.



Corporate sustainability reporting started in the late 1980s, although then it was called environmental reporting. The first reports were put out by companies in the chemical industry which had dreadful image problems and needed to clean them up. Sadly, this kind of reporting appears generally to be motivated by a need to clean up the corporate image rather than the corporate act.

Because big industry knows that their reputation for truth-telling is somewhat tarnished, there are a number of organisations set up to monitor and endorse sustainability reports, and a number of organisations making awards to those organisations adjudged "most sustainable". It seems that this external endorsement has become an industry in itself.

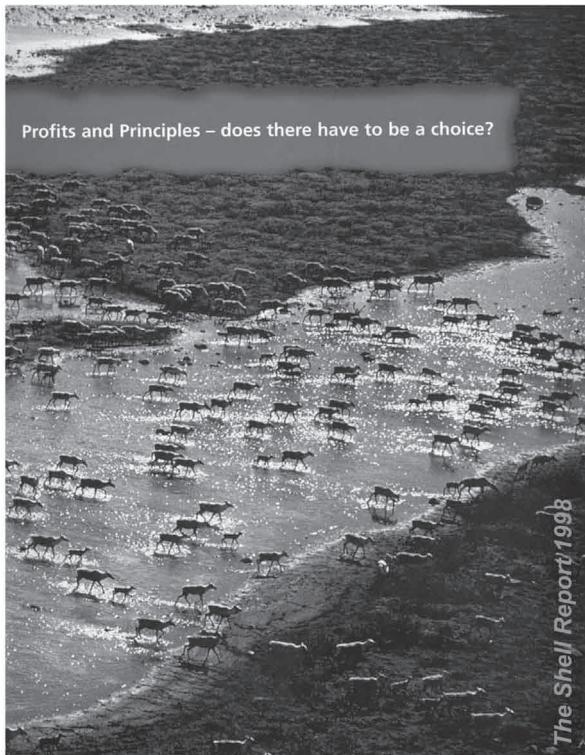
Shell's report, for example, is endorsed by FTSE4Good and Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes. FTSE4Good measures the performance of, and facilitates investment in, companies that meet "globally recognised corporate responsibility standards". The FTSE4Good Index is apparently used when creating Socially Responsible Investment products. Similarly, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index "provides asset managers with reliable and objective benchmarks to manage sustainability portfolios". Shell is on the Global 100 list of the Most Sustainable Corporations,

To make it quite clear that they're not trying to cheat us in any way, Shell and other corporations also feel the need to have an external review committee, made up by people from organisations with names like Business for Social Responsibility, Transparency International, Living Earth and so on. This year they "applaud Shell for its... commitment to contributing

to a sustainable energy future" and generally indicate that the report is true, fair and transparent.

Which, in my opinion, it is not.

And here lies the rub. In general, sustainability reports are masterpieces of greenwash. They are written by specialists in sustainability report writing (another little industry). They are not widely disseminated, but are sent to stakeholders such as shareholders, suppliers, contractors and staff, all of whom are disposed to hear the best and are not particularly open to hearing the other side. The report's function is to make everybody feel nice and warm and fuzzy about the good things that the corporation is doing.

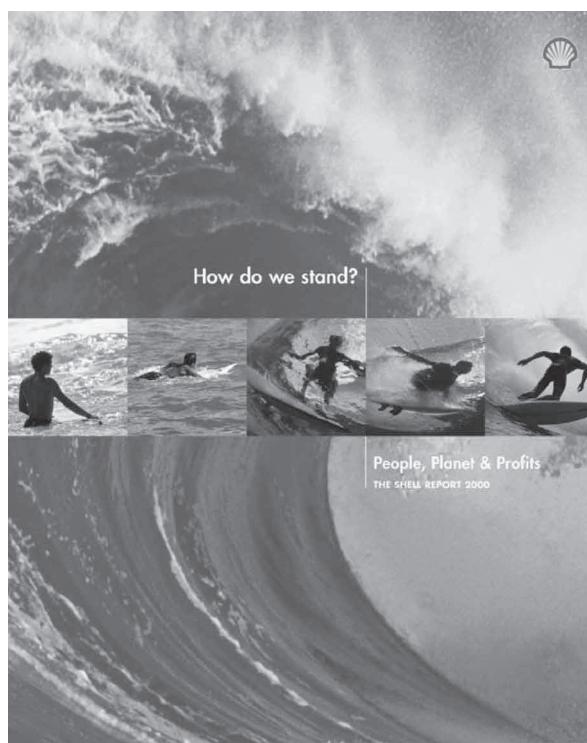


But this kind of reporting obfuscates the reality. Shell, for example, can never be sustainable for as long as it takes non-renewable resources out of the ground, even if they did this in the friendliest, fairest, nicest way possible. Their real investment in renewable technologies is minute (and growing smaller as they disinvest from many of the projects that they have been involved with) and their commitment to greenhouse gas reductions is laughable. Their lack of regard for people, animals and the environment is

legendary and their operations provide wide ranging issues for us to be indignant about in the groundWork newsletter. They are not and, as they are currently focused, cannot be sustainable.

And what are we to do about it? My instinct is to go through these reports, pointing out the way in which they have used spurious pieces of information to create a false idea, pointing out where they have left out key pieces of data, pointing out how they have carefully re-created the truth... But to what end? Who would care? Shell already knows the damage it is causing, and the readers of the report either don't want to have this pointed out to them, or already know what I know.

Sustainability reports are primarily public relations exercises. It is probable that along the way some companies make some small attempts to change their practices in order to be more sustainable, but in the main, as Morris Wolfe, a PR consultant, has said: "It is easier and less costly to change the way people think about reality than it is to change reality".



Refining oil at the source of the Nile

By Geoffrey Kamese

Uganda is soon to be facing the realities of oil and worries that it might be the new Niger Delta

In a mountainous region bordering Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lake Albert sits peacefully and until 1864 was untouched by Europeans. This is just around 150 years ago. Since then, as with many of the natural lakes within the central African region, Lake Albert has undergone immense changes in its ecology, and it is now facing its most devastatingly brutal challenge, the onslaught of big oil, as Europeans, the West and China become more desperate for fossil fuel energy. Oil is now planned to be exploited by Tullow Oil after being discovered under the lake. The people of Uganda are about to have their first oil refinery built on the shores of this pristine piece of 'the garden of Eden'.

A series of Ugandan NGOs have got together to challenge this and have submitted comments to the proposed development raising serious concerns about the development and associated process. These are Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment, Kitara Heritage Development Agency, Scarface Limited, Transparency International, Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda, Africa Institute for Energy Governance, Earth Savers, National Association of Professional Environmentalists, World Wide Fund for Nature, Budongo Community Development Organisation and the Uganda Rural Development & Training Programme. This network of civil society organisations is critical in this time of challenge. This piece is drawn from their submission to the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA).

Their position is that they 'contest the location of the Early Production Scheme (EPS), particularly in

its present form. Based on the scanty information available to us concerning petroleum development in Uganda'¹, here are some of the concerns that have been raised in response to the proposal.

Wildlife Area

Tourism associated with wildlife is a large revenue source for the countries in central and eastern Africa. Sadly, the EPS is proposed to be established in a gazetted wildlife area, and mention is made of de-gazetting other areas as more oil is found. The implications of this are phenomenal in that there is no guarantee that places will not be untouched in the search for more oil in future. The implications of this are disturbing. The submission highlighted that, 'the location of the EPS inside a protected wildlife area sets an unacceptable precedence, in particular as petroleum development activities are ongoing or planned in other protected areas...which may require a majorly different size or location of such facilities.'

Access to information

Access to information is a critical tool of an effective democracy. 'The Public is being requested to contribute to the designing of the project in an information vacuum,' and 'the public did not have access to the Production and Revenue Sharing Agreements; Memorandum of Understanding between government and Tullow; Environmental Management Plans and how the revenues accruing from the sector will be managed'.

Are people being heard?

As in many places in Africa and indeed globally, EIAs are often seen as nothing more than managing

¹ Letter by Acode to National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) on proposed Early Production System, 7 August 2008. This can be found at: http://assets.wwf.no/downloads/csoe_letter_with_comments_to_nema_070808.pdf

dissent, i.e. let people have a space to say what they want to say, and then the developers can say people were allowed to talk without actually responding meaningfully to the concerns raised. This is indeed the case with the EPS development where, according to Mr. Peter Javis, senior manager of Tullow Uganda, indicated that: "One square kilometre oil refinery will be built in Kaiso-Tonya Wildlife reserve, Hoima district before the end of the year despite concerns by environmentalists" (New Vision, Thursday, July 31, 2008). These kinds of actions do not only affect public confidence in the proposed development, but also undermine the essence of the EIA process as a process to inform sound decision making in the interest of society as a whole.

Air pollution and health

The EIA is very scant on critical information on air pollution and health. Being an oil production facility it is internationally recognised that these facilities will produce volatile organic compounds and persistent organic pollutants which are carcinogens. Yet these pollutants were not captured in the EIA review. Aligned with this is the fact that the information on pollution abatement equipment is not presented in any meaningful way. "There is a vague reference in the EMP about the introduction of gas cleaning equipment to reduce air pollution without mentioning the type of equipment that will be used. It is important to specify the types of abatement technologies that will be deployed."

Incineration through the back door?

The information on how waste is going to be managed is vague. Incineration of waste is known to produce dioxins and furans, which are persistent organic chemicals that are restricted under the Stockholm Convention. It is important that whatever treatment for waste is proposed, it be subjected to an independent EIA and not be "smuggled in through the back door".

Can the Ugandan government protect the people?

Governments in Africa face a real challenge of poor environmental capacity to monitor and enforce environmental laws. It is all too evident from various places in Africa - Nigeria, South Africa and Angola - that the oil industry does pollute local environments

and impacts upon peoples' livelihoods, but at the same time companies that are responsible for these impacts are not held accountable by governments. In the EPS the NEMA vests significant responsibility in Tullow and its associated contractors to undertake the monitoring and evaluation. This is a recipe for conflict of interest, corruption and manipulation. Such an approach is self defeating, limiting, centralist and open to being abused by the corporations who will hold knowledge and the right to technology and will be able to hold government to ransom whenever government does not agree with the future interests and proposals of the corporations. In such a case, Tullow becomes "the explorer", "the Producer and supplier", "the Judge", "the Jury" and "Counsel".

Information on impact on peoples' environments

There is some concern that future impacts of the EPS will not necessarily be made available to the public who are affected and interested. It is indicated in the EIA that 'the project will have internal reporting on environmental and socio-economic issues, but will only have public reporting of the implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy as it relates to local communities.' This is indeed a violation of people's right to information of impacts to their environment and health.

Recommendations

In order that society is protected the coalition recommended a series of actions a few of which are that a geographically and thematically wide ranging SEA is undertaken to understand broader impact, the Production Sharing Agreements to be made public, and access to information be improved and capacity to understand and make use of such information enhanced in a manner that makes wider and meaningful participation in such important processes for Uganda possible for a much wider audience.

What will the future of Lake Albert and Uganda be in the oil era that it seeks to enter? Hopefully, this area is not a new Niger Delta. 



U.S. Government workers in oil industry sex and drug scandal

Between 2002 and 2006, 19 workers at the U.S. Minerals Management Services were involved in a "royalty-in-kind" program with oil companies Chevron, Shell Oil, Hess Corp and Gary Williams Energy Corp. The department's Inspector General said that the workers displayed no remorse, and that he had discovered a culture of substance abuse and promiscuity amongst them. He said that they socialised with and received a wide array of gifts and gratuities from the oil companies. Many of the employees did not believe that federal government ethics and standard departmental policies applied to them because of their unique role. Instead they felt that in order to effectively perform their official duties they needed to interact in social settings with the industry in order to obtain market intelligence. In so doing it was necessary to drink and use drugs.

World Bank quits 'model' Africa oil project

The pipeline project in Chad was supposed to serve as a model for Africa's fast-growing oil industry, but the World Bank, which initially championed it, has now withdrawn. The bank had hoped that a scheme that was meant to ensure that much oil income would be devoted to fighting poverty would show that it was possible to avoid the corruption, political instability and unrest suffered by many of Africa's other oil producers. However, President Idriss Déby sought to devote large amounts of oil income to equipping his army to fight Sudan-backed rebels, and this led to acrimonious dispute with the bank.

Anti-poverty campaigners had criticised the plan from the start, saying that the mechanisms set up to ensure the transparent use of oil income could not survive under Chad's authoritarian government and the country's history of civil war.

The World Bank issued a statement on 9 September 2008 saying that it was halting its participation. Its investment was crucial to the consortium of ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco and Petronas to go ahead with the project.

Coal Protesters cleared of criminal damage

Six Greenpeace UK activists were cleared of causing criminal damage at a coal-fired power station. This was the first case in which acting to prevent climate change formed part of a 'lawful excuse' defence. The activists had attempted to shut down the station, and justified their actions by saying that they were trying to prevent the Kingsnorth station, which emits the same amount of CO₂ as the 30 least polluting countries in the world combined, from causing further damage to the world through its contribution to climate change. The communications director for Greenpeace said "[The] acquittal is a potent challenge to the government's plans for new coal-fired stations from jurors representing ordinary people in Britain who, after hearing the evidence, supported the right to take direct action in order to protect the climate".

Emily Hall, one of the accused, said "It wasn't only us in the dock, it was coal-fired power generation as well. The only people left in Britain who think new coal is a good idea are business secretary John Hutton and the energy minister Malcolm Wicks. It's time the Prime Minister stepped in and embraced a clean energy future for Britain".

Philippine health system to be mercury-free by 2010

An Administrative Order has recently been signed that will make the Philippine health care system mercury free by 2010. The order mandates all hospitals to discontinue the distribution of mercury thermometers in the patient's admission/discharge kits and requires all hospitals to follow guidelines for the gradual phase-out of mercury in two years. All other health care facilities must also adopt a mercury elimination programme.

Health Care Without Harm, which has been actively campaigning against mercury in health care all over the world, has welcomed the move.



Victory for Bhopal Survivors

The government of India has announced that it will take legal action on the civil and criminal liabilities of Union Carbide and Dow Chemical for the ongoing disaster in Bhopal. This comes after many years of campaigning by Bhopal survivors and their supporters. The campaign culminated during the last five months with a 500-mile march and a 130 day sit-in on the streets of Delhi by survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster. After 50 survivors endured a month long walk from Bhopal to Delhi, they were joined by others, along with their children, many of whom have terrible birth defects. Children born to survivors often suffer from growth retardation, cleft palates, mental retardation and cerebral palsy at higher rates than children born to unexposed parents. After 70 days of sitting-in in Delhi with no response from the government, nine Bhopalis launched an indefinite fast. 800 people joined them in solidarity.

The government's announcement brings another roadblock to Dow's plans to invest in India. The government also announced that it will block any further sale of Union Carbide's patented technologies.

Desmond Tutu backs UK call for tough action on climate change

The UK-based World Development Movement (WDM) has called for the UK government to stop the growth in air flights and to put in place an 80% CO2 emissions reduction target by 2050. Archbishop Emeritus, Desmond Tutu, has backed this call in a video message. He says "It is the countries which are the least responsible for causing climate change that are paying the heaviest price. The average UK citizen produces nearly 50 times as much carbon dioxide as the average citizen in the developing world. This is a serious injustice. Do not fly in the face of the poor by allowing the emissions produced by endless and unnecessary business flights to keep growing. Insist on an 80% cut in your national emissions, and hold your governments to account. As an African, I urgently call on ordinary people in rich countries to act as global citizens, not as isolated consumers. We must listen to our consciences, and not to governments who speak only about economic markets. These markets will cease to exist if climate change is allowed to develop into climate chaos. This is a message to people everywhere who challenge the causes of poverty around the world. Climate change is for real."

In the Pipeline

Abahlali baseMjondolo to host a Fire Summit

On 22 September 2008, Abahlali baseMjondolo are calling a Shack Fire Summit. They are doing so because shacks burn every day, and people die in these burning shacks every other day. In their press release they say:

While they do not claim to have all the answers to how to stop shack fires altogether, they do make a strong connection with the fires and the lack of electrification in shack settlements. In their report released ahead of the summit, they make the following demands:

1. Every settlement needs taps spread through out the settlement as well as hoses and fire extinguishers and every settlement needs these immediately.
2. The City must immediately reverse its 2001 decision to stop electrifying shacks.
3. People who have not been connected to electricity by the City must be supported to connect themselves.
4. All settlements must, where ever possible, be upgraded where they are with proper houses and this must be done with democratic and not top down planning methods.
5. While people are being connected to electricity the City must ensure that everyone gets good service from the fire brigade and that all settlements get good building materials after fires.
6. Because the fires are the result of the failure of the City to continue to electrify shacks after 2001 they should pay compensation to all the people that have suffered in the fires from 2001 till now.

They have invited a wide range of people and organisations to the summit and say: "... we will take the views of everyone at the summit. Everyone that comes will have the same right to shape the summit.



WE THOUGHT IT WAS OIL, BUT IT WAS BLOOD

The other day

We danced on the street
Joy in our hearts
We thought we were free
Three young folks fell to our right
Countless more fell to our left
Looking up,
Far from the crowd
We beheld
Red hot guns

**We thought it was oil
But it was blood**

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

Heart jumping
Into our mouths
Floating on
Emotions dry wells
We leapt with fury
Knowing it wasn't funny
Then we beheld
Bright red pools

**We thought it was oil
But it was blood**

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

Tears don't flow
When you are scarred
First it was the Ogoni
Today it is Ijaws
Who will be slain this next day?
We see open mouths
But we hear no screams
Standing in a pool
Up to our knees

**We thought it was oil
But it was blood**

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

Dried tear bags

Polluted streams
Things are real
Only when found in dreams
We see their Shells
Behind military shields
Evil, horrible evil gallows called oilrigs
Drilling our souls

**We thought it was oil
But it was blood**

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

The heavens are open
Above our head
Toasted dreams in flared
And scrambled sky
A million black holes
In a burnt sky
But we know our dreams
Won't burst like crude pipes

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

This we tell you

They may kill all
But the blood will speak
They may gain all
But the soil will RISE
We may die but stay alive
Placed on the slab
Slaughtered by the day
We are the living
Long sacrificed

**We thought it was oil
But it was blood**

**We thought it was oil
But this was blood**

---Nnimmo Bassey

