



GROUNDWORK

2020 **VISION**
JUST TRANSITION



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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. These campaigns are supported by the Media, Information and Publications Campaign and the Environmental Justice Education Campaign.

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.

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groundWork is affiliated to the following international organizations: 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

groundWork's STAFF ARE:

Director: Bobby Peek

Deputy Director: Gill Addison

Administrative Assistant: Bathoko Sibisi

Waste Campaign Manager: Musa Chamane

Coal Campaign Manager: Robby Mokgalaka

Environmental Health Campaign Manager: Rico Euripidou

Campaign Research and Technical Assistant: Niven Reddy

Community Activist: Thomas Mnguni

Media, Information and Publications Campaign Manager:

Tsepang Molefe

Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) Network

Campaign Manager: Luqman Yesufu

Researcher: David Hallowes

Bookkeeper: Gill Waterworth

HOW TO CONTACT US:

8 Gough Road

Pietermaritzburg

P O Box 2375, Pietermaritzburg,
3200

Tel: 033-342-5662

Fax: 033-342-5665

e-mail: team@groundWork.org.za

Web: www.groundWork.org.za



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From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



This has been a sad time for us in groundWork and the environmental justice movement, especially in south Durban. We bid farewell to Brenda Pratt, the founding member and longtime Steering Committee member of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance. Then, as we were about to finalize the newsletter, we received more disturbing news. Joy Kistnasamy, our Chair and the Alliance's first staff member, passed away in her sleep. We are gutted. Joy was more than our Chair – she was a friend to many. Both have their roots in environmental justice in south Durban. We might feel weaker without you, but we know we are stronger for having you with us all these years

Meanwhile, the next decade is with us. 2020 Vision for a Just Transition. Okay, it sounds corny, but this is the challenge we have in 2020. We have spoken for too long about the Just Transition: now we need to act. We know what we understand by a Just Transition, and *The groundWork Report 2019 – Down to Zero: The politics of a Just Transition*, launched on the 1st of March on the Highveld under the plume of Eskom's power stations, clearly articulates this.

We understand that we have to start doing it for ourselves. We see a glimmer of hope in how the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries is responding to issues, including the precautionary suspension of a senior official, and how Minister Creecy has promised to put people's human rights concerns on the agenda of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment – it is a glimmer. Now we need to shine the light on it, to ensure that government does more. This must be the year of action, rather than a year of talking about what can be done.

Talking about talking, I feel for President Ramaphosa. His State of the Nation Address, aka known as SONA, can be described as nothing more than words. But a spirit of encouragement of something being done is what he needed to deliver upon. Sadly, it did not feel like something I could have

faith in. And I have sympathy for him when he says, “We will not surrender our future to doubt, or despair, or division”. But we need more. We have heard about the “divisionalising” or unbundling of Eskom and its three operating activities – generation, transmission and distribution. But we need to move on this to ensure that Eskom's functionality improves and that it is not gutted by the private sector, leaving ordinary people with a slum energy system.

As I write this I am meeting with people living in the shadow and toxic plumes of Eskom, who do not have electricity, but who do have the negative impacts of cheap electricity for corporate profit for the likes of South 32 and BHP Billiton. Yes, you have heard all of this before. In the room we have local government from Nkangala District and Emalahleni Local Municipality, Eskom representatives and the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries and local community people who do not have energy, water and normal services. This is the case for the majority of people in South Africa, and they need more than words, Mr President. The glimmer of hope – and frustration – is seen amongst local governments working with residents in their areas to ensure that they move out of the debt and the environmental quagmire they are presently in. At a local level we can do it for ourselves; we can control our energy system. We can have socially owned renewables.

People are crying out: no more pilot projects. We need implementation, Mr President. We are in a climate emergency and energy emergency and we need emergency action now, starting on the Highveld where coal has damaged people's lives and land.

We recognise that there was some good in your words, Mr President.

The positives were climate and Eskom getting prominence and the connection made between them. As #lifeaftercoal put it: “... the acknowledgement of the existential threat of #climatechange, and



@cyrilramaphosa's commitment not to leave behind any African child in the transition to a 'low-carbon, climate resilient and sustainable society'" is positive. But how do we make this happen, Mr President? By getting people, the millions of poor living in small township houses throughout the country, to be part of the energy system via rooftop solar PV – this is real social ownership of renewable energy. While the speech talks about renewables getting a boost and municipalities are allowed to procure from private power producers, we need municipalities to take control themselves and not just facilitate the privatisation of electricity generation in their municipalities.

There was also the bad, Mr President. What we did not see was commitments to local, social and community-owned renewable energy generation, and a call for concrete plans to support such local capacity for #peoplespower – essential for a #justtransition. And we are dismayed that government still believes in fossil fuels and coal in particular, when there is ample evidence that it kills people and destroys the environment. Rushing through water use licences will not solve the problem of polluted water and mining in sensitive areas. In fact, it will facilitate and legalise the destruction of our limited water resources, for the State cannot manage the present system. We do not need anything new – we need the system to work, and we need the president to speedily build a capable state, as is called for by academic Klaus Kotze.

Comparisons abound between President Ramaphosa and our founding father Tata Madiba, but the challenge now is that people are tired. They do not have the patience to wait. The challenge is how does President Ramaphosa convince people that they must be patient while building a state that can deliver? We cannot accept his position that he'd rather be seen as a

weak president – who does not deliver – than split the party. We need 2020 vision – we need clarity. We need the president to act speedily, for we are in a climate emergency now.

While the president fiddles, corporates are ditching coal, handing mines over to workers as Exxaro has done, and leaving workers and the people of eMalahleni with the toxic legacy. At the same time South 32 is trying to get a better deal for its coal from Eskom, so they sell to Sereti; and in the gold sector Anglo-Gold offloads to Harmony Gold. We are being left with the legacy as government does not take action against the polluters that have reaped the profits.

But let's move on and focus a bit on groundWork. We welcome into the fold Avena Jacklin who worked with our partner organisation the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance in the early 2000s, then went to do agro-ecology for more than a decade, then undertook mining compliance for mines, and worked with us in 2018 on a just energy transition. We welcome her and look forward to strengthening our food sovereignty work as part of our push for a Just Transition.

In early February we had our community and NGO partner planning session. Twenty years on, we were more than 40 people in the room coming from throughout South Africa. Our work has grown. After three days we agreed on three joint strategies for 2020. We will focus on the Just Transition, human rights defenders and open democracy, and renewable energy – along with all the other work.

Finally, through the blurred eyes of sadness we have 2020 vision of where we want to go to as a community always challenging for environmental justice. 🌱

The polluting Kendal coal-fired power station that has not had functional pollution abatement equipment for more than four years. Credit: groundWork, Bobby Peek





2020 vision

by Thomas Mnguni & Avena Jacklin

There are glimmers of hope in a sea of incompetency, monopolised power, corrupt leadership and failing infrastructure. People everywhere are starting to do it for themselves.



A local hair salon in eMpumelelweni, Emalahleni, Mpumalanga. Credit: groundWork, Bobby Peek

After decades of dependence on the coal sector and big polluting industries to fight poverty, many communities have realised that the answer to poverty and inequality is in their own hands. The communities realise that another world is possible and are calling for government to support socially-owned initiatives that seek to address their basic needs, like access to water, electricity and sustainable livelihoods. They are coming up with their own initiatives to address the social injustices that have been created by our economic development process, which favours the elite.

We look to the communities of Matatiele boosting their livelihoods in a water-scarce area and organising themselves to supply new markets while dealing with the threat of fracking and new gas developments

on their tribal lands. Communities along the Vaal River spark new vibrancy to their surroundings with beautiful, life-giving sustainable food gardens. Communities in the highveld will experience cleaner power sources with solar energy installations while dealing with the impacts of a dying coal and fossil fuel dinosaur. People in Umlazi have innovated ways to store rainwater in underground water tanks, water that is filtered, clean, cool and can last them throughout water cuts and for a few weeks after each rain. Standing in solidarity, waste pickers organise themselves and mobilise for their rights to be heard and recognised, and are becoming part of decision-making processes that are shaping waste management in the county, including the legislative environment.



People everywhere are starting to learn how to take ownership of their struggles and find the solutions that are right for them and the communities they live in. The landscape is changing, from the ground up. We are transitioning towards a future that is indeed brighter. Our approach and systems are changing, and are challenging the powers that be to support us in this change.

This change we term a Just Transition at groundWork is sustainability founded on economic, social and environmental justice. As we transition from an unequal society and push for access to clean air, water, land and resources to sustain healthy lifestyles and livelihoods, we ensure that everyone is included. The change is driven by communities, workers and supported by government. It is a clean transition including socially owned affordable renewable energy creating new sustainable livelihoods. These can be in manufacturing, construction, maintenance, repair, recycling and creating zero waste economies that are beneficial to our health. It is about rethinking the way we understand and use our energy and water.

The Just Transition includes rehabilitation of mines and reduction of industrial impacts by cleaning our air, water and land. We grow our own food free of harmful pesticides and fertilisers, independent of the cold chain, reducing fuel miles and keeping plastics and styrofoam out of our food supply networks. We create livelihoods and amenities within people's reach. A Just Transition is about learning from each other and the mistakes we have made. It is about promoting a circular economy, one of continuous improvement, that continuously identifies the problems we face and continuously seeks to address them within our communities. This is the community that we create, that we want to live in.

This is the future that must be. There is no choice. It is clear from the evidence that government and corporates treat the Highveld as a sacrifice zone. But the people can still save themselves, the land, the water and the air and make a just future. To do that, the people who live and work on the Highveld have to engage to create local democracies to deliver a Just Transition.

We believe that the central organising principle of economy should be sustainability founded on economic, social and environmental justice. This

means a commitment to growing human solidarity and equality as well as a relationship to the environment which enhances rather than degrades the functioning of ecosystems both for their intrinsic value and for the eco 'services' they provide. The Constitutional justification of such a redefinition is found in the Environment Right. This does not imply that economy and production are unimportant, but that the economy must serve people rather than people serving the economy. This would create the basis for a Just Transition. ☀

The Just Transition (Coal Kills – reference)

- Building a new energy system based on socially owned renewables with jobs in manufacturing as well as construction and operations;
- Rehabilitating individual mines and the mining regions as a whole to restore and detoxify damaged land and ecosystems and using these lands to build utility-scale solar farms;
- Making people's food gardens as a first step towards creating a healthy food system under democratic control, based on ecological agriculture and ensuring enough for all;
- Reconstructing settlements in anticipation of the intensified storms and droughts that climate change will bring, fixing the broken roads, water and sewage pipes, and providing proper municipal and health services that respond to those who are in most need and ensuring that people's health improves;
- Building good, energy-efficient homes supplied with solar water heaters (with servicing after installation) so that people stay comfortable with minimal energy use;
- Planning to put work and amenities within people's reach and to make walking and safe with reliable public transport for longer trips;
- Creating a zero waste economy, eliminating built-in redundancy and throw-away products and developing high levels of recycling and composting of organic wastes;
- Introducing a basic income grant for all, to enable poor and unemployed people, who are most vulnerable to climate change, to participate more actively in all areas of life.



Africa:

Prioritising action on air pollution will benefit health, the climate and the economy

By **Dr. Aschalew Worku**, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Department of Medicine, Addis Ababa University School of Medicine/Tikur Anbessa Specialized Hospital, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and **Dr. Neil W. Schluger**, Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology and Environmental Health Science, Columbia University and Senior Advisor for Science, Vital Strategies

Everyone around the world shares the same right to a healthy environment. Indeed, during the United Nations General Assembly and the Climate Action Summit, leaders from governments and civil society, most notably youth leaders, reminded the world that the founding UN principle of justice applies to climate as much as any other issue facing humanity. Yet, as physicians who specialise in treating people with lung disease, we were disappointed to see that this principle was not honoured through meaningful and decisive action at those meetings or at CoP 25 in Madrid. This will have devastating consequences for the health and lives of billions of vulnerable people.

Preserving the environment and combating climate change is an imperative in its own right, but the pollutants that are causing climate change also cause death and disease. Poor air quality poses a threat across the life course, beginning in-utero and continuing as a significant cause of lung and heart disease in children and adults. We have seen first hand the effects of poor air quality on our patients, young and old. In too many parts of the world, breath that should symbolise life and health brings harm instead.

People in Africa are already among the most vulnerable. According to the Global State of the Air report from the Health Effects Institute, nearly every person in Africa breathes air that exceeds health standards set by the World Health Organisation. Between one quarter and one half of all deaths from heart disease, chronic lung disease, lung cancer and

pneumonia in Africa are attributable to air pollution. And, as air quality continues to decline, the resulting health impacts are offsetting the gains achieved by better control of diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and HIV.

The UN's commitments to gender equality and women's health also demand that attention be given to this issue. Women experience the highest exposures to household air pollution, caused by cooking with polluting fuels such as wood, dung, charcoal or kerosene, often with their young children nearby. As a result, it's not surprising that in Africa's most populous countries, such as Nigeria and Ethiopia, 40-50% of the burden of chronic lung disease in women is caused by poor air quality, and more lung cancers are from breathing than from tobacco use.

By 2050, when 1.3 billion more people will be living in Africa, the scale of the problem – in the absence of targeted strategies to address continued increases in pollution and vulnerable populations – will get worse.

One myth promoted by many governments and self-interested industries is that air pollution is an inevitable consequence of development. Rapid economic development aided by access to cheap labour and subsidised fuels will certainly result in increased air pollution, but this is not the only pathway available and certainly isn't the most desirable from a health or economic perspective. In fact, addressing air pollution by developing and enforcing policies to tackle leading sources of pollution, including household energy and industrial and vehicular emissions, will have a significant return on investment, with benefits to the



public, lower costs to health and social systems, and measurable improvements to air quality and climate.

In contrast, failing to act urgently on climate-changing emissions will not just result in long-term risk to the planet; it will affect the health of millions, condemning generations to illness and lower life expectancy while hindering the sustainability of their environments.

The good news is that scalable, proven solutions to these problems are available. We've seen health improve in parts of the world where the air has been made cleaner through effective regulations on industrial pollution and vehicle emissions. For example, Nigeria has adopted standards for vehicles that other countries should follow to prevent much of Africa from becoming a dumping ground for old and dirty diesel-fuelled cars and trucks. Access to clean household energy is also becoming more widespread in urban areas across the continent.

But significant gaps remain. There is an urgent and yet unmet need in Africa and elsewhere for better and more transparent air quality monitoring and reporting, increased engagement of civil society to demand safe healthy air, and accountability of governments and political leaders to exercise one of their most important responsibilities: preventing harm to their citizens.

Members of INSPIRE, a global coalition of health advocates and an initiative of Vital Strategies, are working to bring attention to this issue through our role as physicians charged with safeguarding human life. In our opinion, climate action commitments should aim first at reducing the world's dependence on dirty solid fuels and the elimination of coal burning so that we can realise the near-term goal of improving air

quality and health. Cleaning the air also makes good economic sense – lives are saved as soon as air quality improves.

Though the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters – China, India and the United States – failed to commit to more aggressive climate plans at the Climate Action Summit, all hope is not lost. Approximately 70 countries did outline more aggressive plans and several wealthier nations announced more money for programs like the UN's Green Climate Fund. We urge countries and governments to follow their lead and prioritise actions to promote clean air to achieve health and climate co-benefits within their national plans to combat climate change. And, we want clinicians and civil society to hold them accountable.

In Africa and around the world, the issue is urgent, the need for action is great, and the stakes are high: nothing less than life and death. 🌍



*This article is endorsed by members of **Inspire: Health Advocates for Clean Air**, a collaboration incubated by the global health organization **Vital Strategies**.*

Health Advocates for Clean Air was launched by members of the working group on air pollution and lung health at the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. They aim to mobilise a global coalition of clinicians, public health professionals and organisations to advocate for clean, healthy air. By engaging the world's health community to address the adverse effects of unhealthy air, Inspire aligns with the World Health Organisation's road map for enhanced global action on air pollution. <https://www.inspirecleanair.org/who-we-are>.

***Vital Strategies** helps governments strengthen their public health systems to contend with the most important and difficult health challenges. We bring the best of public health thinking to design solutions that can scale rapidly and improve the lives of millions of people. <https://www.vitalstrategies.org/about-us/>*





Coal mining and the escalating rot of violence

by Robby Mokgalaka

We all need nature in order to exist and live well with each other and the earth. Thus the obligation to respect and protect it is of great importance. Many economic developments seem to lose sight of this collective responsibility to ensure that our environment is safe. Instead, those in power are quick to label activists who take the lead to protect the environment as anti-development groups. Their vision clouded and overwhelmed by capitalist greed and the love of money, authorities often ignore the very source of our own existence. In their pursuit of 'economic development' they always forge ways to ensure that whoever stands in the way of their path to achieving their desired interests feels unsafe. At times, people are murdered in order to protect economic interests.

In Africa, mining-related intimidation and violence, which at times results in death, are increasing and are becoming the norm, and there is very little accountability for it. This leaves environmental activists feeling vulnerable in their efforts to protect their rights and their communities, which are affected by the mining development.

In Mozambique, the Vale coal mine situated in the Tete province of the country has relocated about 1 313 families without proper compensation for their resettlement, while some families are still living very close to the mine, breathing dust on a

daily basis, and their houses are cracked from the mine blasting. In 2013, **Hussen Antonio** died fleeing from the police when the resettled group protested. The Moatize community still lives in fear as the Mozambican government is protecting the coal mine instead of its own people, who voted them into power. The communities are living in fear and government is not allowing them to speak negatively about the mine. They are left with no one to voice their grievances to, except the environmental NGOs that work closely with them.

In Mexico, in February 2020, **Raúl Hernández**, an environmental activist, was also killed – just a week after **Homero Gómez González** was killed. He disappeared three days before his body was discovered. He was denouncing not just illegal logging by criminal groups, but also the collusion of some local authorities with these groups. It is documented that in 2019 alone at least 12 environmental defenders were killed in different parts of the country and impunity remains the norm.

Recently, in January 2020, in the Dannhauser area of the KwaZulu-Natal province, two well-known community activists opposed to the proposed mining in the area were brutally murdered. It is alleged that one of the traditional leaders known for advocating for the community to benefit from the mine, has fled the village, fearing for his life as he is being hunted down by the pro-mining group.

*Somkhele, a community affected by mining.
Credit: groundWork*





Environmental activists protesting against the violence directed at them. Credit: groundWork

In the Eastern Cape area of Xolobeni on the Wild Coast, the death of **Bazooka Radebe** still remains an unresolved mystery.

According to a recent report by *The Guardian*, the killings of environmental defenders globally have **doubled** in the past 15 years and can be directly linked to corruption, abuse of power and weak laws. The year 2016 saw a record 200 killings of people defending their land, forests and rivers against destructive industries.

Last year, international organisation Human Rights Watch – along with groundWork, EarthJustice, and the Centre for Environmental Rights – released a report titled *We Know Our Lives are in Danger: Environment of Fear in South Africa's Mining Affected Communities*.

The rise in brutal, violent behaviour directed towards environmental activists is also complemented by what is known as SLAPP suites (Strategic Litigation

Against Public Participation), which is basically the misuse of our legal system in an attempt to intimidate and discourage activists from doing their work.

The reality is that in the light of unethical behaviour fuelled by greed, the lives of environmental activists have become cheap. The people who are protecting the very same environment we all need in our lives are not protected by any government – they are left to fend for themselves. The question remains: if we are living in democratic societies why are people victimised? Why must they live in fear? Why is our democracy not protecting us? Or does our democratic right begin and end at the ballot box?

Minister Barbara Creecy, President of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment for 2019-2020, has indicated that she will take these human rights concerns protesters raised in November 2019 to the next gathering of ministers. We hope that a year from now we can write something positive in this regard, and stop living in fear. 🌞





Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Conference 2019



by Lukman Yesufu

Building a climate change response for healthcare

After a long year of very successful stories and achievements from Global Green and Healthy Hospitals members in Africa, groundWork, together with Health Care Without Harm, hosted a Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) conference in Durban on the 7th and 8th of November 2019 for a first regional conference in Africa. This conference aimed to bring together GGHH members from different parts of the continent to share their experience and successes, and also to discuss and come up with strategies to encourage a climate-smart and sustainable healthcare. We had about 100 participants from private and public hospitals. These participants included different professionals from chief executive officers, chief directors, doctors, environmental health practitioners, engineers and architects to supply chain managers, professors and many others. All these professionals are from different countries in Africa (South Africa, Madagascar, Zambia, Tanzania, Ghana, Morocco, Kenya, and Cameroon).

During the conference, we had many presentations and panel discussions that focused on learning and teaching about healthcare resilience and sustainable procurement. These presentations were delivered by different professionals based on the work they do and the successes they have had over the years. The panel discussions created a space for the health professionals to learn and share experiences, while finding solutions to the challenges they face as they

implement their sustainability goals. The main focus of the presentation were the GGHH goals: Energy, Water, Waste, Chemicals and Purchasing.

The focus of day one of the conference was waste and water. We had a formal presentation about each topic and the challenges, presented through case studies, and later discussion with the participants of the conference as the floor was opened for questions and discussion. The sessions about each GGHH goal were presented by two GGHH members who had written a case study relating to it. The floor was then opened for all the participants in the room to discuss and ask questions about the cases presented. This was also done on day two of the conference with the energy and chemical case studies. In addition there were presentations about sustainable procurement.

This conference also aimed to encourage the members to continue doing great work. This is why we had an award ceremony to celebrate the GGHH members who've signed up for the GGHH challenges and who are active in committing to the challenges. The GGHH members who did not receive awards were also motivated to do more work, as they saw that it is possible to commit to the goals and challenges.

At the end of the conference, the participants made commitments that will help the network grow and also make the GGHH goals achievable. Some of the action items included:



- establish a healthy GGHH competition. This will give the members room to grow and improve.
- create a GGHH platform that will allow an exchange of ideas.
- GGHH members join and support other local rights and health groups working on climate. Health workers challenge government to act to protect human health from pollution.
- encourage GGHH members to adopt other GGHH goals and sustainable practices.
- develop GGHH job descriptions as part of routine performance assessment.
- create a link between GGHH communities and academia and other institutions to encourage inclusion of climate and sustainability topics in curricula.

These are just a few of the calls to action items agreed upon at the conference. Overall, the conference was a success as we achieved what we aimed to focus on. All the members got to meet and showcase what they are working on and to share solutions for the common challenges they face. This GGHH conference highlighted that climate change is not a story of tomorrow but a reality we must deal with now. As Bobby Peek said, “We cannot have healthy people on a sick planet”. That is why it is important to act now. 🌍



Rico Euripidou speaking at the GGHH Africa conference

Broken Land: through the eyes and lens of Daylin Paul

by Tsepang Molefe



The rough and gory side of the transition from the apartheid state to a democratic setting is often downplayed as a minor political skirmish, as opposed to the full-blown war that it was. The period is best captured in still images by a group of photographers known as the Bang-Bang Club. In the late eighties and the early nineties, a group of photojournalists confronted danger by going deep into what were then known as no-go areas in South Africa. What exists now is documentation of what could potentially be the lowest point in our country but is still undoubtedly an important lesson in history.

Broken Land is a photographic documentary by photojournalist Daylin Paul, set in the Mpumalanga Highveld. It illustrates the ongoing impacts of coal mining and coal-fired power stations. Paul has captured the ugly realities in Mpumalanga, documenting his discoveries and exposing both environmental and human destruction. The Pietermaritzburg-born and Johannesburg-based photojournalist has successfully created a body of work powerful enough to place one right at the centre of capitalism's inconsiderate, harmful and disregarding nature.

From images depicting coal-fired power stations spewing toxic emissions to the everyday life of people already affected by pollution, economic exclusion and social neglect, the collection of images echoes the sentiments of many voices nationally and worldwide – voices that have actively called for a move away from fossil fuels into renewables, challenging the status quo.

Facts

- The South African government admits that its major coal region – Mpumalanga on the Highveld – is one of the worst air pollution hotspots in the world.
- Daylin Paul has a Bachelor of Journalism degree from Rhodes University, majoring in English Literature and Photojournalism.
- South Africa's outdoor air quality standards are much weaker than the World Health Organisation's – but the Highveld does not meet even those low standards. Nine million people die globally because of air pollution.
- Daylin Paul's work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, *Financial Times* and *Huffington Post*
- Pollution causes people to die from lung cancer, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, strokes and lower respiratory infection. Thousands more who don't die early suffer from bronchitis and asthma.
- Government and independent studies estimate Eskom's air pollution costs SA between R18-billion and R33-billion a year in health costs and lost productivity



After two years on the ground I can testify that the scale of destruction in Mpumalanga is wholesale. From the highways and major roads, it is difficult to get a sense of how vast the torn-up landscape is because it is often hidden behind tailings, piled close to the side of the road. It is easy to get mesmerised by the sheer size of the mines, machines and power stations that fuel South Africa's addiction to coal. It is easy to forget that this affects human beings whose stories are even more beautiful and tragic than the landscape that mirrors their lives. - Daylin Paul

The images are all in monochrome, which gives the subject a true feel of the reality of things. The greyscale approach captures the objects, landscapes and people with all the sadness and gloom that is part of the everyday life in the area. The images of people are complemented by testimonials as captions

Last year, environmental justice group groundWork and Mpumalanga-based community organisation Vukani Environmental Movement, with the assistance of the Centre for Environmental Rights, filed a landmark case, now known as the *Deadly Air Case* against the South African government for the dire state of air pollution in Mpumalanga.

Mpumalanga accounts for about 83% of South Africa's coal production, and Eskom owns the 12 coal-fired power plants located in the vicinity in and around the HPA. The area has been plagued with deadly air quality for decades, because of the high concentration of coal-fired power plants in the province. Section 24 of SA's Constitution says: "Everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being".

Paul has used his lens to give a voice to people whose health and social well-being is negatively affected by the coal activities in the Highveld. His dedication to raising awareness about the realities of coal won him the 2017 Ernest Cole award. This award is named after South African documentary photographer Ernest Cole, who risked his life to share his imagery with the world and died in exile in New York in 1990.

Broken Land is not only a documentation of the destruction of people, land, water and the basic human necessities like clean air; it is also a testimony of commitment to telling the stories of ordinary people affected by pollution and environmental degradation. While it's not meant to give solutions, it escalates questions that sit heavily on the conscience of those who continue to feed the never satisfied appetite of capitalism's greed at the expense of ordinary people. 🌍



Not in our backyard. Not anywhere!

by Niven Reddy

When China took action to protect its borders from foreign plastic pollution by effectively shutting its doors to plastic waste imports at the beginning of 2018, it threw the global plastic recycling industry into chaos.

Wealthy countries had become accustomed to

Global South countries simply don't have the policies, capacity or infrastructure to safely manage their own waste, let alone the deluge of plastic and hazardous waste that the Global North has thrown at them.

As we see more and more Asian countries closing their doors to the dumping of plastic waste, Africa is



Waste burned in the Egyptian desert.

exporting their plastic waste problems, with little thought or effort to make sure that the plastic they were exporting actually went towards being recycled responsibly and did not end up harming people or the environment in less developed countries. In particular, North Americans and Europeans exported not just their plastic waste, but the pollution that goes along with getting rid of it. However, like most structural problems countries face, the plastic waste once exported did not just “go away” – inevitably mismanaged in poorer countries, it ended up clogging public infrastructure, causing public health problems and most visibly circulating globally in our oceans.

A recent report by GAIA found the impact of plastic waste exports to Asian countries to be quite alarming.

now in a position of threat. Recent reports have shown that Senegal has been receiving waste from the USA and more recently Liberia has received waste from Greece.

This leaves us in a difficult situation. Undoubtedly, any plastic waste dumped into African countries will, to begin with, be burnt as a means of treatment and disposal or designated as a secondary fuel source for industries such as cement plants, which were never designed for such a purpose.

Open burning of waste is common in Africa and is among the least desirable waste management practices globally because of severely dangerous health impacts. 🌞



Our Recommendations

Governments should take collective action through the United Nations and binding international agreements to address the production, export, recycling and disposal of plastic.

Developing countries should impose bans on importing plastic waste to prevent the dumping of waste from high-income countries on poor and under-resourced communities.

The private sector, having created the plastic problem, is in the best position to quickly address it.

Redesigning products, packaging and delivery systems to eliminate the use of single-use plastic products and packaging is the ultimate solution to plastic pollution.

Local and national governments must prioritise source reduction through bans on problematic plastic products and packaging and by mandating Extended Producer Responsibility.

Governments should make rights for waste pickers and recycling workers central to system reform. The economic incentives to accept plastic waste are a pervasive force that speaks to a larger failure to address poverty and ensure decent livelihoods for everyone.

Governments must prohibit the burning of plastic, whether in the open, in waste incinerators, in cement kilns, in plastic-to-fuel operations, in makeshift furnaces as fuel, or in landfill fires. Shutting off the plastic waste trade by itself is insufficient if poor and marginalised communities continue to host polluting disposal technologies.

Exporting countries must take responsibility for their plastic reduction and recycling domestically. Investment in domestic recycling infrastructure should achieve high environmental and social outcomes and prevent further exports. However, plastic recycling should not be used as justification for further single-use plastic production but as a pathway towards zero waste.
wastetradestories.org



Photo Credit: Ecoton





Just means Slow

by Greenfly

What was the Chamber of Mines is now the Minerals Council of South Africa. The difference between a Chamber and a Council seems so subtle as to escape notice. Perhaps it has something to do with erasing a colonial history of dispossessed people, coerced labour and ruined land. But what was rubbed out seems to seep through into the rebranded colours of the Council, like a stain of oil or blood that won't wash out. Whatever the branding, extractives are extractives and require that people and land be bulldozed aside and wasted.

Which is why Gwede Mantashe, the minister for Coal, Minerals and Coal-Fired Energy, keeps telling them to be nice to communities – and why they now want protection from communities who say 'No' to mining. The song of corporate support for the community is as loud as is needed to drown out the 'No'.

For coal, of course, there is the next dimension – the final destruction of the conditions for human life on earth. If coal is extracted, it must be burnt. And burning coal is still the biggest source of carbon emissions. Yet, as the Council reminds us, the economy can't do without it. Or rather, the mining industry can't do without it. Or rather, the coal industry can't do without it. Whatever.

The Council is not a climate denier. But it did choose a name to be in sync with the Australian Council of Mines. The Australian Council has also come round to avoiding climate denial. Instead, it funds the election of delusional prime ministers to lead on climate denial for them. And they come with a bunch of bonus points: misogynist, racist, anti-gay, anti-worker, anti-environment and pro-business. What's not to like? The latest news from the burning country is that its government is handing out another R40 million or so in subsidies to the coal industry.

The South African Council is aware of climate change. Or rather, of bad publicity for coal. And it has even come out in favour of a 'just transition' from coal to 'cleaner energy'. And has told us what that means.

"When we refer to a Just Transition we mean that there are technical, social and economic grounds for a gradual, rather than an immediate move away from coal." And just to clarify, 'cleaner' includes cleaner coal. And just to clear the air a bit more, we'll need coal for base load for the foreseeable future. And by then, the cleaner coal air will be so clear we'll see for ever.

Which is what the Department of Coal said already in its Integrated Resource Plan. So there you have it, business and government in harmony, singing from the same hymn sheet and talking the walk to kick start the economy. And the economy, as everybody knows, requires its own destruction for success.

Meanwhile, in other news, Peabody Coal, the once upon a time Biggest Coal Miner on Earth, is going bust again a mere five years after it went bust last time. Going bust is, of course, best business practice for leaving debt and environmental liabilities behind. Peabody follows Murray Coal down the tubes and both put their money on delusional Donald to wash away their environmental liabilities. Donald, readers may remember, loves the environment and has therefore declared that America's air and America's water are the cleanest in the world. So there's clearly no need to spend money on cleaning up after Murray and Peabody.

Meanwhile, in the world as advertised, South32, successor to BHP Billiton, successor to Gencor, wants us to live responsibly and change the world. That's what it has been doing for 50 years in the "quaint coastal town of Richards Bay". That's a real quote. The quaintly vast Hillside aluminium smelter looks down over what used to be the quaint Bayside smelter. Across what used to be the bay, is the biggest coal terminal in the world. And very quaint too. Hillside uses up 5% of Eskom's electricity production. South32's Mozal plant in Maputo uses another 3.5%. And they get it at a fraction of Eskom's cost of production. Now that's real quaint! 🌀



A Tribute to an Environmental Activist, Mentor and Teacher: Brenda Pratt



Brenda Lynn Pratt was instrumental in the development of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance for over 23 years. Within the SDCEA she played an important role of oversight as the treasurer of the finances. Brenda took her role as treasurer very seriously and imposed stringent rules to safeguard the organisation's money as she genuinely cared about and believed in SDCEA's cause.

She played a crucial role in meeting with funders and urging them to assist the organisation with much-needed funds for our essential work. The work SDCEA does is not pleasing to government and big polluting corporations, and both government and polluting corporates have been dead against the SDCEA exposing the pollution which affects the health of the residents of South Durban.

Brenda did a great deal of editing for the SDCEA newsletters, and of the booklet we produced when we celebrated 21 years of existence. Many of the SDCEA's publications bear her editorial comments.

Brenda's name is synonymous with the SDCEA as she attended most of the protests, whether they were against Shell, Engen, the expansion of the port or the hazardous trucks that traverse our community roads. Brenda crossed the racial divide and she did not see colour in people, ensuring that no matter where you came from you had her support.

Brenda was a monumental defender not only of the SDCEA but also of the people of South Durban. She was hell bent on challenging the government for failing to do their job in holding corporates accountable. Brenda was very persistent in her argument that government should do more to reduce the impact of toxic pollution. Her resolve never wavered and this gave her inner strength to continue her work as a trustee for South Durban Environmental trust.

Brenda worked as a teacher at Grosvenor Girls High School and went on to be the Head of Department of English at Crawford College, La Lucia. Brenda was a great teacher and mentor, and a committed activist who played an important role in SDCEA. We are at a loss how to say goodbye to such a staunch and strong member of the SDCEA family and we are honoured to have known and worked with her.

Hambe Kahle. 🌞



Left to right: Bobby Peek, Brenda Pratt, Desmond D'Sa and Vanessa Black Credit: SDCEA





Ode to Joy: Joy Kistnasamy

by Bobby Peek

In the early hours of Wednesday, 11th March, Joy Kistnasamy, groundWork's chairperson and friend to all, passed away peacefully in her sleep. Joy, as her name pronounced, was a happy person. Even in times of stress and pain, she was always upbeat, exuding a positivity that was infectious.

My life has intersected with Joy's since 1988, even before we became immersed in the environmental justice struggles in our neighbourhood of south Durban. Brother John, as her dad was known, supported my father and myself during the painful period of my mother's death.

The 90s rolled along and with it democracy and environmental justice. It was around this time that I got a call from one of the founding members of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, the late Dr Mark Colvin, saying he had "this crazy intern in his office", Joy, the sister of Dr Barry Kistnasamy, and he was blown away by her enthusiasm – and somewhat bewildered by this as well. It seemed that Mark had met his match, for here was someone loved life just as much as he, the party animal, did.

Between Mark, Barry and Joy, they defined the basis of the environmental justice struggle in south Durban. Barry was doing his early research on children's health and the oil refineries in south Durban, Mark was pushing this research to motivate for the creation of the Alliance and Joy took Barry's research and built upon it, and finally linking, without doubt, the world's highest recorded rate of asthma to industrial pollution, here in our back yard in south Durban.

Joy was also the Alliance's first staff member in 1998. Her first office was out of my house in

Wentworth, overlooking the Engen, Shell and BP oil refineries. She worked closely with the Alliance's partner organisation in Denmark to set up the institutional systems of the Alliance, which this year is a quarter of a century old. It was tough working with some staid Danes, but in true Joy style she eventually got them dancing in the streets.

In groundWork, Joy was our chairperson for the past decade and she has been with us during a period of growth, a period we never thought possible when we started groundWork in 1999. On our Board, as in many parts of her life, Joy was the one that brought a laugh and lightness to the sometimes very difficult work of challenging environmental injustice. As the Board of Trustees we will miss Joy.

Joy was always keen to draw groundWork staff into her work, from our annual trek to DUT to deliver our environmental justice and health lecture, to attempting to introduce Zero Waste into DUT and bringing our environmental health work into the faculty. She was adamant that students should think critically and needed to experience environmentalism through the lens of environmental justice and the work of SDCEA and groundWork.

I will miss my annual lunch with Joy, where we would consider the work groundWork and I did and try to make sense of my own achievements and delivery of groundWork's objectives. Finally, Joy introduced me to what has become one of my favourite meals, when one day in her parents' garden she introduced me to the drum stick from the moringa tree which today is one of my favourite meals with dhal.

The groundWork team and board express our heartfelt condolences to the extended Kistnasamy family and friends of Joy. We will miss her greatly. 🙏



Down to Zero:

The politics of a Just Transition

The climate crisis is upon us. It is the final expression of the extraordinary damage done to the earth by the system of imperial capitalism fired up by fossil fuels. This is the context in which people call for a just transition, knowing that a failed transition will result in the ultimate injustice of mass deaths, starting with the poorest people, if not extinction.

A just transition is not only about energy. It is about settlements, housing, water, sewerage, land, food, transport and pretty much everything else. It is about the workers in fossil fuel industries but also about communities polluted by those industries and about everyone whom the system makes poor. Most of all, it is about changing relations of power between people to create a more equal society where people can live well with each other and with the earth. This is the vision of environmental justice organisations on the ground: in the coal fields and on the fencelines of polluting industries in South Africa.

But it is all to fight for. There is indeed a transition under way in South Africa but it is unplanned and certainly unjust. It is driven by the breakdown of Eskom which is itself a symptom of the wider decline of the minerals energy complex that has shaped South Africa's unequal development for over a century. This groundWork Report picks a path through the politics of decline and takes a close up look at the chaotic transition now under way on the

Highveld. It also looks at how the systems that people need to survive are failing along with the institutions of government meant to develop them.

It concludes with a to do list – an urgent if incomplete agenda for people to reclaim the power that will be essential for survival. 🌞

Down to Zero

The politics of just transition



Down to Zero

The groundWork Report 2019

