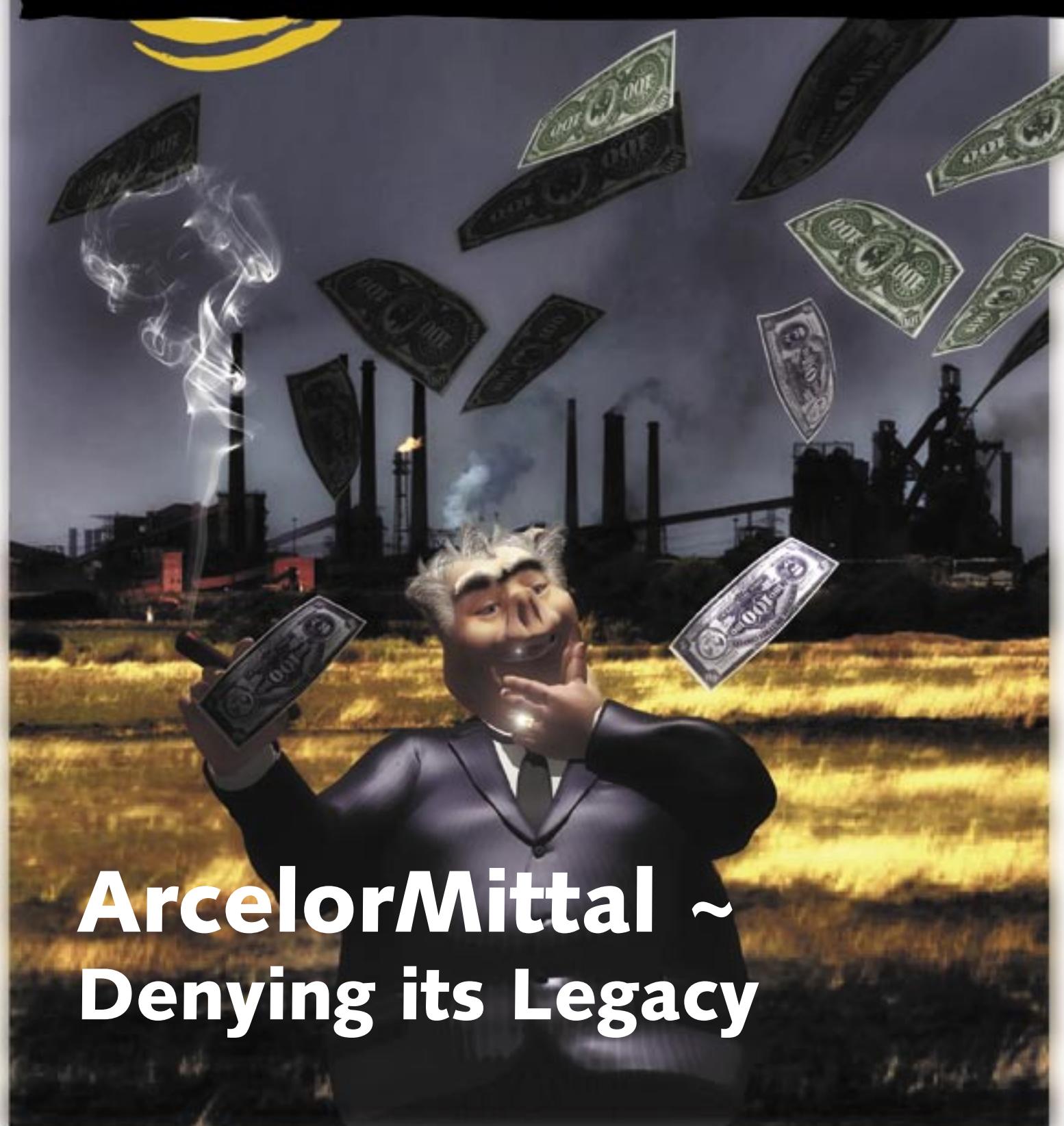




GROUNDWORK



ArcelorMittal ~ Denying its Legacy

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 campaign areas are: air quality, waste and environmental health.

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

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AFFILIATIONS:

groundWork is affiliated to the following international organisations:

Health Care Without Harm

International POPs Elimination Network

Basel Action Network

Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

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

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A cloud covered ArcelorMittal South Africa from a sunny but deserted Steel Valley, where community people have been forcefully relocated due to pollution. Photograph courtesy Stanislav Solansky. Cover design by Barry Downard.



From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

Dear Friends

Our newsletter has changed. We have a new groundWork image!

After ten years it has been quite a mindset challenge to look into 're-branding' groundWork – to steal from corporate jargon. We believe however this was needed to get people to realise our deep interconnectedness with Africa and South Africa specifically.

The logo is about growth, communities, individuals, action, solidarity, empowerment, aspiration and environmental justice that is rooted in Africa and the Earth. We are looking forward to working with this and presenting it to the world.

Newsflash – as we were going to print the evergreen medical waste catastrophe in the country erupted again. Joanne Yawitch and the Department of Environmental Affairs please take your heads out of the sand - you have a crisis! groundWork believes a full public enquiry is needed into the health care waste industry and lack of governance.

Often we are criticised by government for being negative about their actions or inactions, but I must say at the outset of this newsletter "well done to the Green Scorpions". The unit has just released their annual report and despite prosecution being down compared to last year, they have done investigations into the petrochemical industry, the cement industry and the smelting industry, all because of community pressure. They have found numerous contraventions of permit conditions at various plants, with the ArcelorMittal plant in Newcastle having sixty cases of non-compliance. We need to recognise that the present permit conditions are extremely weak – the cement industry's only permit parameter is dust, while their pollution includes metals such as

mercury and volatile organic compounds – and that these industries have contravened even these weak commitments. Well done to the Green Scorpions! One request however is that the Green Scorpions must communicate with local communities who live adjacent to these facilities and they must keep the complainants informed of their actions.

Talking about being rooted in Africa, Kumi Naidoo, a local anti-apartheid activist from south Durban is the new Executive Director of Greenpeace international as of the 18th of November. What a momentous occasion this is for the environmental movement and the people of South Africa and south Durban in particular. He is the first African and person from outside Greenpeace to take the wheel of the organisation. Considering our "dirty energy" fixation it is groundWork's hope that this appointment will bring home to politicians in South Africa the crisis of climate change that South African elites are responsible for. In speaking to the SA public on SA FM in the run-up to the big jamboree in Copenhagen, Kumi's turn of phrase – sleepwalking into a crisis – was apt when he spoke about those sectors of society not recognising that climate change is a present crisis that needs an urgent response. Let our politicians not sleep walk into this crisis.

Talking about a crisis, how does one respond to the debacle of Eskom? For months now we have consistently heard about the impending increases in our electricity tariffs. These debates have been so oft in the media that I have started questioning whether this was just a ploy by Eskom or whether it was real. I was even questioning myself as to whether I and the public were becoming immune to these utterances. Then we get the 'Godsell vs Maroga' saga. Confusion supreme! Who has resigned, when and why? Shockingly, the vanguard of the mining labour movement, the National



Union of Mineworkers, supported Bobby Godsell, an individual who was once at the helm of Anglo American which raped South Africa's resources and which "had flagrant disregard towards the health of the workers at the expense of profit", according to Richard Meeren, who has filed a lawsuit against Anglo American on behalf of workers suffering from silicosis.

Then you get the ANC Youth League and the Black Management Forum claiming that race was an issue when Maroga was asked to go. Pardon me?

Let us not forget two issues which are pertinent to the general public in South Africa today, sixteen years on from 1994. Race is still an issue which cannot be ignored, and apartheid capital that exploited black people to the point of death, reinvented itself as "democratic capital". And within the ANC there is deliberate confusion on the memory of these realities.

Am I saying that racism was the cause of Maroga's downfall? No! What I am saying is that race is often misused and that our memories of our past are fading as people such as Godsell are seen as saviours in a world that at times is just as exploitative as the apartheid state was.

Then, to make the crisis more interesting, government has decided to strip Eskom of its right to assess South Africa's energy needs. Government is now talking about energy saving rather than new power stations. This has a taste of pre-Copenhagen spin!

During this period the new Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs was rolled out to the NGOs in a meeting on the 3rd of November. It was the first time that we had an opportunity to speak to Minister Sonjica face to face. Expecting a small intimate meeting, I was looking forward to having the chance to engage in dialogue with the Minister. However, upon my arrival I was taken aback to be in an auditorium that probably could have fitted more than a thousand people.

Every conceivable entity that could call themselves an NGO was there. Even industry reps were

present. It was a missed opportunity, for I am sure that the Minister did not walk out of that meeting with anything that she could not have gained from reading websites about the organisations present.

The contentious issue of the dune mining in the Eastern Cape was on the agenda. Sadly, her response was no more illuminating than the debates presented by herself as Minister of Minerals and Energy. The old debate of sustainable development was presented, but we clearly do not all agree on the criteria to understand sustainable development. Her response was clear that while being Minister of Minerals and Energy she had scrutinised mines to pursue mining sustainably. Show me a mine that is operated sustainably and does not impact upon peoples' livelihoods in a negative way, and I will work for Shell!

Sadly, when I asked the officials after the Minister left if the questions raised are going to be responded to in writing, they said no. There will only be minutes of the meeting. So the questions that were asked and were never responded to will never be answered. What a waste of our time and money. If we ever get into these situations again we need to be clear about our concerns and our demands and ensure that we attain a response. Our democracy has become so bureaucratic that one has to start resorting to 'parliamentary' approaches of heavy bureaucracy when one wants answers from political leadership.

This was evident in the recent gassing of the Gitanjali School which is near the Wasteman Bul Bul hazardous waste site bordering Chatsworth and Umlazi in south Durban. Here the officials of Wasteman were quick to claim that it could not be that company that caused the gassing of the children, but when pushed by the residents of the area to respond to questions of concerns about the report there were various delayed responses that were meaningless.

On this note, we say farewell to 2009, and as we enter the second decade of the 21st century it is my hope that our politicians will soon wake up from their sleepwalking!

Aluta continua! ☮



Toxic Shoes - Missing the Point

By Rico Euripidou

Over our winter in 2009 groundWork, in partnership with the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation¹ (SSNC) and other global environmental justice partners², undertook a study into plastic shoes produced and sold all over the world. The SSNC generally conducts product surveys every year and in recent years has investigated, for example, the presence of chemicals harmful to health and the environment in sun protection products, T-shirts, hand towels and sprays that impregnate chemicals into various products. On this occasion they investigated plastic shoes. Four pairs of shoes were purchased in South Africa from the following outlets: The Hub, Woolworths, PEP Stores and Selfast Da Fashion Fibre Zone. These shoes were then shipped to Sweden where they were tested for a variety of chemicals according to the most recent EU standards and, not surprisingly, the analyses found high levels of environmental toxins in plastic shoes.

Analyses of several different types of chemical with properties that are harmful to health and the environment were carried out on twenty-seven pairs of shoes (which had been manufactured in various countries). The overall results showed that seventeen of the shoes contained one or more phthalates, which are used as softeners in PVC plastic. Some phthalates are associated with serious health risks³. Animal experiments have shown that some phthalates can result in harm to a foetus or change its gender, as well as causing reduced fertility, damage to enzyme systems and cellular damage.

Of particular concern in South African-purchased shoes were elevated levels of the phthalate DEHP

(diethyl-hexyl phthalate). In one shoe tested, purchased from Woolworths (Ipanema flip flops imported from Brazil), the concentration of DEHP was the highest found of all the shoes tested and formed 23% of the total weight of the shoe. DEHP is one of seven prioritised substances on the EU's candidate list for particularly harmful substances, known as SVHC (Substances of Very High Concern). DEHP does not occur naturally.

Furthermore, phthalates are not chemically bound to PVC plastic to which they are added to soften, which ultimately means that over time, as the product they have been added to degrades, e.g. in a landfill site, the phthalates leach out into the soil and water, or evaporate from the plastic into the air.

Additionally, the Selfast children's shoe (manufactured in South Africa) tested positive for the toxic metals arsenic, cadmium, chromium, mercury and lead. Of particular concern is the fact that the mercury and lead levels were the highest globally among all the shoes tested. These heavy metals are known to be toxic, especially to children. Lead affects the nervous system and can result in impaired intelligence. Lead compounds are officially classified as being able to harm the unborn child.

What does this all mean?

It is becoming increasingly clear that many diseases have both an environmental and a genetic component⁴. Scientists now believe that even very low "environmental doses", i.e. the very low doses at which chemicals are generally found in the environment, can cause health impacts if these are endocrine disrupting chemicals. Of particular

¹The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation is a non-profit environmental organisation with the power to bring about change. They spread knowledge, chart threats to the environment and create solutions, as well as lobby politicians and agencies at both national and international levels. www.naturkyddsforeningen.se

²The investigation has been carried out in collaboration with environmental organisations in the Philippines, India, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania and Indonesia, and indicates that the risks of being exposed to substances that are harmful to the health and the environment, from a common consumer product like shoes, are the same regardless of where the consumer lives.

³Phthalates are a group of chemicals that are primarily used as softeners in polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic. The phthalate DEHP is classified as toxic to reproduction and can harm the unborn child. People are exposed to phthalates from the foetal stage and throughout the rest of their lives, via the food we eat, the air we breathe and through direct skin contact.

⁴WHO (2006) Preventing disease through healthy environments. Towards an estimate of the environmental burden of disease. A. Prüss-Üstün and C. Corvalán. ISBN 92 4 159382



Number	9	10	11	12
Producer/ Agent	Reebok	Ipanema	Lollipop	Elegance
Country of purchase	South Africa	South Africa	South Africa	South Africa
Shop of purchase	The Hub	Woolworths	PEP stores	Selfast Div Fashion Fibre Zone
Name of shoe	Reebok Toe thong #BKKNY	Ipanema glitter	Lollipop	Elegance, Kathy fluffy
Type of shoe	Men's slipper	Ladie's flip-flop	Children's sloper	Ladie's slipper
Colour	Blue	Gold	Pink	Pink or black
Country of manufacture	Lesotho	Brazil	China	South Africa
Price, Domestic currency	R99	R99,95	R34,99	R 19,99
Price, US Dollar	12	11	4,3	2,5

importance, however, is the timing of exposure – critical windows of development in humans, such as the foetal development stage, infancy and puberty, are particularly vulnerable stages for humans to be exposed to these endocrine disrupting chemicals.⁵.

The most common route of human exposure to DEHP is through food contamination. The average daily exposure from food in the United States is estimated between 0.3 and 2 mg/day per individual^{6,7}. DEHP has been found at generally low levels in a broad variety of foods, including milk, cheese, margarine, butter, meat, cereals, fish and other seafood and it can originate from PVC wrapping materials, manufacturing processes or from the animals which produced the milk or meat^{8,9,10}. The highest levels of DEHP have been measured in milk products, meat and fish as well as in other products which have a high fat content. Because of

the widespread use of DEHP in plastic containers and its ability to leach out of PVC, humans are exposed to this substance on a regular basis.

The aim of this research is to demonstrate that many everyday consumer products, like shoes which appear inert, can potentially contain dangerous chemicals that may cause problems from an environmental and health perspective. Shoes purchased from all over the world contained substances such as softeners that are harmful to the reproductive system, toxic tin organic compounds, as well as the heavy metals cadmium and lead.

This study also clearly demonstrates that in South Africa and globally too few controls exist to protect the consumer from potentially toxic substances. Alarmingly, these shoes are affordable to all South Africans and they are generally purchased and discarded on short fashion cycles. It is therefore critical that the South African government and retail sector take an urgent look at chemicals in everyday consumer products and start a process of evaluation and monitoring towards phase out of toxics in everyday consumer goods, especially those discarded over short horizons – these invariably pollute the natural environment and, through environmental exposure, ultimately us!

We need to use this research to broaden discussions about chemicals that are harmful to health and the environment and which are present in everyday consumer goods, and to spread the use of consumer power to bring about change. In South Africa and many other countries in the global South we need a chemicals management framework for regulating and restricting the use of hazardous substances in products. The consumer or retailer, must have the *right to know* if a hazardous substance is present in a product. To date, the industrial, manufacturing and retail sectors have not shown themselves able to assume responsibility for the health of consumers and the best interest of the environment. ☺

⁵ WHO (1992) *diethylhexyl phthalate* (Environmental Health Criteria 131), Geneva, International Programme on Chemical Safety

⁶ The Endocrine Society. 2009. Position Statement: Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals. <http://www.endo-society.org/advocacy/policy/upload/Endocrine-disrupting-chemicals-position-statement.pdf>

⁷ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (1993) *Toxicological Profile: Di(2-ethylhexyl) Phthalate*, Atlanta, GA, Department of Health and Human Services

⁸ Giam, C.S. & Wong, M.K. (1987) Plasticizers in food. *J. Food Protect.*, **50**, 769–782

⁹ Gilbert, J. (1994) The fate of environmental contaminants in the food chain. *Sci. total Environ.*, **143**, 103–111

¹⁰ Sharman, M., Read, W.A., Castle, L. & Gilbert, J. (1994) Levels of di-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate and total phthalate esters in milk, cream, butter and cheese. *Food Addit. Contam.*, **11**, 375–385



Our Approach to Climate Change

By Siziwe Khanyile

Climate and Energy

Climate change is recognised as a global threat. It has implications for our environment, our livelihoods, our health and our future.

groundWork works in three areas: air pollution, waste and environmental health. In all these areas, climate change plays a significant role in the work that we are doing. Traditionally groundWork has not focused on climate change per se, but increasingly it has become apparent that we have to consider it and frame our work accordingly.

groundWork's focus on Climate change has been on energy, the consequences of the energy choices made in South Africa over the last century and how the 'quest for energy' is taking us down an unsustainable and destructive path. In 2003 groundWork laid the principles for equitable development and climate justice in its report: "Forging the Future: Industrial strategy and the making of environmental injustice in South Africa". Since then several of our publications and, critically, "Whose Energy Future" and "Peak Poison" have laid the basis for our climate change work.

Even though South Africa's energy-intensive industry is hugely implicated in environmental harm, government's industrial strategy does not address excessive energy consumption by industry. For workers and the poor, as well as for the environments we all share, this signals that health and quality-of-life remain subordinate to the profit-making of a small and wealthy elite.

South Africa has one of the most energy intensive economies in the world and the distinction of being amongst the top global greenhouse gas emitters. We have the second cheapest electricity production globally for industry and therefore there is no incentive to move away from energy intensive industry and mega-projects.

As part of this broad problem is the role of large fossil intensive corporations such as Sasol, Eskom, Shell, ArcelorMittal, and aluminum smelters, as they shape unsustainable production and consumption in South Africa. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank are responsible for funding and supporting our government policies that allow for unsustainable fossil fuel development patterns, by approving the further development of coal fired power stations, refineries, and other fossil fuel energy intensive growth as well as coal and wood utilisation for household space heating. Together, government, IFIs and corporations promote destructive policies that deepen the environmental, health and climate crisis that we face.

Rather than finding a new path enabling people to define an energy future that satisfies their needs, our government continues to capitalise on fossil fuels as a means of energy. As a country, we need to abandon the mistaken dichotomy between "development and environment" and urgently move away from fossil fuel driven development.

groundWork's call for climate and environmental justice requires a radical shift from the current methodology of "business as usual" to one where empowered people live in relations of solidarity and equity with each other, in non-degrading and positive relationships with their environments and the achievement of a decent standard and quality of life for all is prioritised.

The impacts of our current intensive fossil economy (for example floods and desertification) will have many devastating results which will be felt disproportionately first and foremost by the poor who have least contributed to the crisis. Addressing the climate and environmental challenges should, therefore, take on the form of a rights-based, people-centred, sustainable approach.



This would entail basing our national strategy to reverse climate change on the following principles:

- People receiving reasonable remuneration for engaging in productive and creative livelihoods, where the work they do is not demeaning or exploitative but is safe, rewarding and secure;
- Communities enjoying decent levels of affordable basic services and infrastructures to be enjoyed by all in society as a basic human right – and not only by “consumers” who can afford them;
- Individuals and families able to access, at minimum, the basic goods of human life starting with the most basic levels of goods like nutritious food and safe and comfortable accommodation; and
- Clean healthy environments, where people live and work, that are nurtured by the very way in which people live and work;

This would entail:

- Access to sustainable, suitable and sufficient energy sources where communities have informed and democratic control over their energy needs for a dignified life;
- Energy generation, administration, management and supply that is decentralised and decision-making processes that happen at a local community level;
- Large scale investment in mass transport systems that prevent the “one person, one car” situation in our cities and, through local economies, the movement of people for economic reasons will be minimised;
- The protection of domestic production that offers value for local markets through the development of rural and local economies whose production is defined and controlled by communities through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. This would involve a mix of private, cooperative and public enterprises that deliver the goods for such a domestic market at scale, underpinned by supportive policies which reverse the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich;
- The cessation of International Financial Institution subsidies for a fossil fuel economy;
- The support of communities calls to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Such voices are rising in South Africa’s coal mining areas like

Mpumalanga where communities are calling for government to keep coal in the hole!

- The creation of a more appropriate energy pricing regime, which is urgently needed, where large-scale, energy-intensive users are penalised with much higher prices and poor, domestic users are substantially subsidised to ensure sufficient, reliable and affordable access to energy;
- Large scale investment in sustainable productive activity such as solar, wind and small scale hydro to create a positive relationship to the environment;
- A recognition of local community rights to their land and resources where communities, rather than corporations, maintain control over the natural resources. This will prevent state abuse and forced removals of people to make way for polluting industry.
- Developed countries should fulfill their obligations to reduce their emission and ensure a transfer of the required resources to ensure that developing countries are able to adapt to climate change and climate victims receive compensation.
- Ensuring that local communities that are recycling waste informally are encouraged to continue and that projects such as incineration, gas to energy, refuse derived fuel, pyrolysis, gasification and plasma is not promoted as climate change positive projects, for these projects result in an increase of resource extraction linked to destroying the reuse and recycling market.

Real solutions to climate change for us mean achieving low carbon economies where there is a reduction in emissions, production and consumption and which aim to eliminate the production of greenhouse gases which lead to climate change. A more appropriate strategy would aim to realise real value for ordinary South Africans where production services the basic needs and fundamental rights of the people.

groundWork believes that when the above is attained society will be able to live in equity and solidarity with each other and in a positive relationship with the environment. 



Climate Justice Now! South Africa

South Africa has formed its own chapter of the Climate Justice Now! movement, the broad-based international group committed to finding equitable solutions to the problems of climate change

In October 2009, Climate Justice Now! South Africa had its launching meeting at Marianhill, outside Durban in South Africa. Below is the founding statement of CJN!SA. Long may it have strong impact on climate politics in South Africa and beyond.

About CJN! SA

CJN!SA is an alliance of organisations, communities and individuals in South Africa who are united in promoting just solutions to the impacts of climate change. Its mandate is set by its partners from social, environmental, labour and community-based movements and it works in close association with partner members in Climate Justice Now! International.

CJN!SA was initiated in early 2009 to address specific issues around the promotion of climate justice in the South African context. It was launched in October 2009 following seven months of consultations amongst grassroots organisations across South Africa. It believes that any shared vision on addressing the climate crisis must start with challenging the dominant development model, exposing false solutions to climate change, such as carbon trading, and encouraging positive solutions. The coalition recognises that the threat of climate change integrates old and new struggles and thus the call for climate justice is the same as struggles for land, water, ecosystems, agrarian and urban reform, food and energy security and rights for people and nature.

CJN!SA follows the emergence of Climate Justice Now! at the Climate Conference in Bali in December 2007 which was a response to the destructive and distracting "solutions" that were being negotiated at the international climate change talks. The exclusion of poor and marginalised communities

most affected by the impacts of climate change from these talks was motivation for a group that could hold the space for their voices. It has built significant momentum and recognition as a broad-based alliance of organisations and movements across the globe that are committed to building a diverse climate justice movement, locally and globally, for genuine solutions to the climate crisis.

CJN! is an alliance of more than 160 organisations and movements from across the globe committed to the fight for genuine solutions to the climate crisis, to building a diverse movement - locally and globally - for social, ecological and gender justice.

CJN!SA and CJN! are united in calling all people to raise the voices of the global South, defend the rights of people and nature, and strengthen solidarity in the fight for climate justice.

Vision

A world where people live good lives in solidarity, with equality, and in a healing and respectful relationship with each other and the Earth.

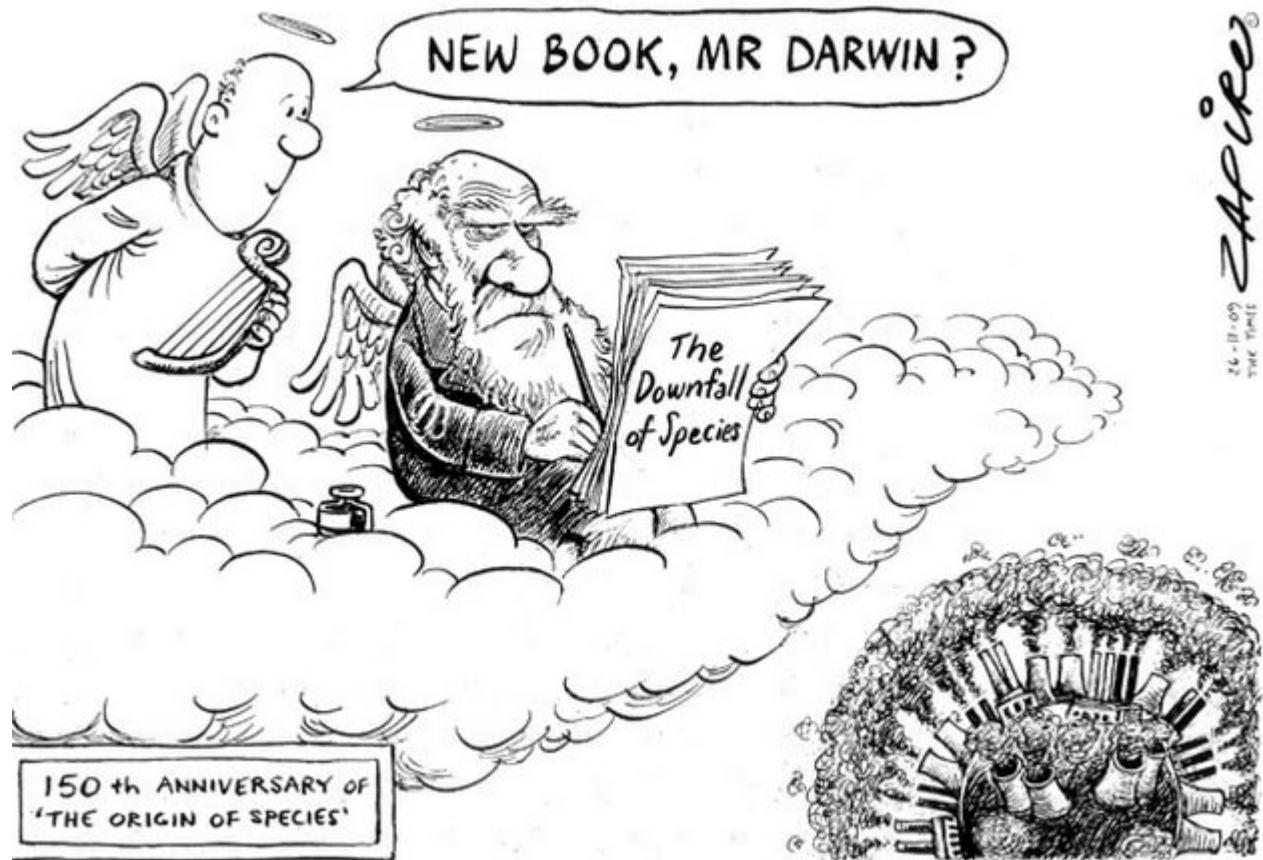
Purpose

To enable and facilitate solidarity amongst and with those affected and most vulnerable to climate change.

To challenge and expose unsustainable practices and false solutions to the climate crisis such as trade liberalisation, privatisation, carbon markets, Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CCS) and agrofuels.

To seek out, promote and facilitate genuine solutions to the climate crisis that meet the rights of people to live a good life while ensuring the rights of nature, culture and peoples.





Principles

Communities across the world in rich and poor countries who are most affected by the worst impacts of climate change are also the communities least responsible for the excessive levels of carbon in our atmosphere. They bear the burden of fossil fuel extraction and use and the destruction of nature.

Inside the global climate negotiations, rich industrialised countries have put unjustifiable pressure on Southern governments to commit to emissions reductions. At the same time they have refused to live up to their own legal and moral obligations to radically cut emissions and support developing countries' efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Rich communities, industries and government in the South also show reluctance to commit to a change in lifestyle and to production mechanisms that are sustainable and respectful of the earth.

We will take our struggle forward not just in climate talks, but on the ground and in the streets, to promote real and just solutions that include:

- Leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing instead in appropriate energy efficiency and safe, clean, community-led renewable energy;
- Radically reducing wasteful overproduction and associated over consumption and promoting sustainable livelihoods over profit;
- Massive transfer of resources both globally and nationally that acknowledges and settles the ecological, social and climate debt owed by all countries; both industrialised and industrialising
- A just and equitable resource conservation that enforces and promotes peoples' sovereignty (control over and access to) over energy, ecosystems, land, food, air and water.

Climate Justice Now! ☺



Renewables in Mozambique?

By Anabela Lemos

While Mozambique exports its electricity to South Africa, 80% of its population are sitting in the dark

Mozambique is a land of contradictions, especially when one looks at the energy sector. It produces more than double the energy required to supply energy to every single Mozambican citizen, it is one of the main energy exporters in the region and owns one of the largest hydro dams in Africa. However, only about 20% of the population has access to electricity and the capital still relies on electricity imported from South Africa. Ironically, this power comes from Mozambique, but is imported back from South Africa at a higher price.

Currently, Mozambique is reliant on large-scale centralised energy production, mainly hydropower, but has a very weak national grid system. This setup is not well adapted to deal with the country's realities. The majority of Mozambique's population lives in small, scattered rural communities, and subsists on less than a dollar a day. This situation is not well-served by the centralised energy system we now have.

Unfortunately, the current administration and its energy sector continue to focus on foreign and industrial needs (which are well-served by centralised mega infrastructure), rather than emphasising the needs of the rural majority. Currently, the main energy sector developments focus on coal and more big-hydro. With the reality that climate change will likely reduce our rivers' flows, and the recognised need to reduce greenhouse gases, Mozambique's energy sector is still stuck in the past.

For many years Justiça Ambiental (JA!) has been advocating for Mozambique to address these contradictions and diversify its energy sector by investing in green energy sources. At present, green energy is basically nonexistent in Mozambique's energy plans and the country doesn't even have an alternative energy policy/strategy or information of its potential. Therefore, in partnership with California-based International Rivers Network, we

contracted Mark Hankins, a top expert on African renewable energy, to develop "a renewable energy plan for Mozambique".

His study shows that Mozambique is energy-rich with a vast potential for decentralised, clean electricity and fuel production. It has virtually unlimited solar power across the entire country and large biomass resources that could be used for electrical production in strategic areas. It has over 1000 MW of mini-hydro potential, much of it in areas that are currently electricity-starved. It has the second largest coastline in Africa, with unexplored wind resources that could contribute to the national grid.

Green energy is being quickly developed all around the world, even in places with much less potential than Mozambique, but sadly this exciting new report was received with hostility, exposing the government's unwillingness to even discuss greener energy at a time when they are anticipating lucrative contracts for dirty projects like coal and big dams.

Although Mozambique has received strong funding to develop alternative energies, it has amongst the lowest production of alternative energy in the region, despite its rich resources. Hankins' report found clear evidence exposing the reasons for these discrepancies but, rather than address these problems, government officials warned our team to remove all references to the energy sector's lack of leadership and poor capacity. More shocking were some of the misstatements coming from the energy sector at the October launch of our report, such as stating that solar energy was not clean because of supposedly extensive pollution linked to the production of photovoltaic panels, or that wind turbines required a much larger amount of energy to produce than they actually create, etc. Not only have studies shown these comments to be unfounded, but it's very hypocritical given the far



more polluting options currently being developed.

For example, the hydropower coming from Cahora Bassa cannot be called clean, as it has left a sad legacy of social and environmental impacts all the way down to the Zambezi Delta. Some experts consider it to be one of the most destructive dams in Africa. The Zambezi Delta is the largest delta in east Africa, and a conservation area of global importance. Now the government is planning to build more dams, starting with the Mphanda Nkuwa dam, just 70km downstream of Cahora Bassa. Mphanda Nkuwa dam will further exacerbate the social and environmental impacts caused by Cahora Bassa and, further upstream, Kariba, and make it even more difficult to resolve these problems with a more natural flow-regime, placing the future of many ecosystems at risk. In addition, recent research on the impacts of climate change to the river flows suggests a negative impact for hydropower production. There are also concerns around the investors involved. For example Camargo Correa, the Brazilian company that is one of the shareholders for the Mphanda Nkuwa project, has been involved in corruption and in the last case that was exposed this year ten workers, including directors, were accused and charged of giving bribes to the government and "donations" to political candidates in Brazil.

Unfortunately, the other option being prioritised by the government is mainly coal power stations that will use low-quality "brown" coal recently discovered in the Zambezi basin. Most of the mining is occurring close to where the hydropower is and also has major impacts on the Zambezi River ecosystem. Impacts include the large amounts of water used in coal operations, plans to dredge the river for transport of the coal, and the emissions of numerous chemicals and pollutants typical of coal mining. Environmental Impacts Assessments are done, but at best give non-binding recommendations and, in effect, just rubber-stamp the projects. Public participation is limited and disingenuous, with recommendations, issues and concerns raised by civil society left out of the decision-making process and the conclusions of the environmental studies. Assessments are done without any analysis of similar projects that have already been implemented, meaning that the cumulative impacts are not assessed. In general, the projects that are in place or in the pipeline for the

Zambezi River will surely destroy the river and the ecosystems and the livelihoods of the communities dependent on the river for their subsistence. Based on the dirty nature of Mozambique's current energy developments, the unfair and hypocritical approach that alternative energies are receiving is particularly shocking.

It all comes down to a question of priorities, and leadership. Remember those statistics we mentioned at the beginning? Only about 20% of Mozambicans have access to electricity, and more than 80% of Mozambique's population is off-grid. Most people rely on traditional wood and charcoal for all their energy needs, causing major deforestation and environmental and social impacts. These are rural farmers, with no way to store or process their crops because there is no electricity for grinding, drying or storing. While being such a poor country, Mozambique is really rich: it has a huge untapped potential of "market-ready" renewable energy technologies that are well-suited for both urban and rural energy development.

This situation is beyond my understanding. The reasons that move decision-makers in Mozambique, who are willing to risk so much on mega-dams, and who are investing in coal at a time when many countries are looking for cleaner alternatives, appears to show a sector that is unable to see the forest for the trees. How can they be ready and willing to destroy the country's critically important natural resources, and at the same time decry the "risks" and "costs" of renewable energy? How can they discount the huge opportunities to diversify our energy sources, bring energy to more parts of the country, and help us to be better prepared for climate change?

Is it a lack of political will? Insufficient strong policies in place? One thing is sure, when political will is present, policies, regulations and strategies are developed and approved in no time – even if sometimes behind closed doors. But when there is no political will, change seems to happen at a snail's pace.

But we no longer have the time to waste. We need an energy revolution now. ☺

Anabela Lemos is head of Justiça Ambiental, an NGO in Mozambique.



Sasol Angers the Mermaids!

By Tristan Taylor

At the Climate Change negotiations in Copenhagen, Sasol was amongst the "elite" companies when it was nominated for the Angry Mermaid Award. The Angry Mermaid Award has been set up to recognise the perverse role of corporate lobbyists and highlight those business groups and companies that have made the greatest effort to sabotage the climate talks, and other climate measures, while promoting, often profitable, false solutions. Sasol was nominated by Earthlife Africa Johannesburg and groundWork.

Sasol was nominated for its national and international lobbying campaign to promote Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) as a clean solution to the dirty business of producing liquid fuels from coal and gas.

Background

Sasol is a South African company involved in mining, energy, chemicals and synthetic fuels (synfuels). It produces petrol from coal – known as coal-to-liquids (CTL) – which is a dirty business that produces twice as many greenhouse gas emissions as the standard refining of petrol from crude oil.

Given that this is Sasol's core business, it is not surprising that the company is one of the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide (CO2) on the African continent. Sasol's Secunda plant in South Africa is the world's single biggest emitter of CO2. The company knows that climate change could threaten its future and concedes in official documents that international efforts to counter climate change could have a "material adverse effect" on its business and "financial condition".

In recent years, Sasol has been on a major public relations and lobbying drive to sell CTL technology to the world, using carbon capture and storage (CCS) as the panacea for this dirty product. As Time Magazine reported last year: "Imagine the public relations nightmare facing an oil company that uses technology responsible for powering Nazi Germany,

that propped up apartheid for decades and that operates a plant with the dubious distinction of being the world's biggest single-point source of carbon dioxide."



The Angry Mermaid Award is organised by ATTAC Denmark, Corporate Europe Observatory, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, Oilchange International and Spinwatch.

This image comes from the Angry Mermaid web site and is by Polyp.

Despite its dirty product, the company's CEO, Pat Davies told the magazine "We are an innovative company. We can be part of this solution too."

Lobbying Activities

In order to convince politicians, the public and regulators that Sasol is part of the "solution", it has embarked on an intensive domestic and international lobbying campaign. Sasol's lobbying strategy is multi-pronged: it aims to promote the acceptability and use of CTL technology around the world, and to create a wider market for its activities,



whilst at the same time promoting CCS technology as a potential way of reducing emissions from its activities.

At home, the once state-owned company enjoys a close relationship with the government. It has played an influential role in the development of South Africa's Long Term Mitigation Scenario, the most recent key government document which sets out plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. South Africa has not ruled out future new plants for converting coal-to-liquid, despite the high levels of emissions generated. Sasol has also promoted CCS through its involvement in policy talks.

Active on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

As Sasol's 2008 Sustainable Development Report says: "To advance our appreciation of the causes, Sasol plays a role on the international stage via the UN's Global Compact and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In support of CCS solutions, we are on the South African delegation to the multinational Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum."

Sasol has also succeeded in having one of its scientists, Fred Goede, sit on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the scientific body responsible for identifying the level and nature of the risk posed by climate change. Goede is not only a member of the IPCC; he also wrote a recent IPCC report on CCS – the technology promoted by Sasol.

But as WWF South Africa has pointed out, even if technological advances allow Sasol to reduce the emissions generated by producing synfuels, CCS will not reduce the level of emissions of the vehicles running on the resulting synfuels. Moreover, at the present time, CCS remains an unproven commercial technology.

Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum - burying the problem internationally

Sasol is an active player in the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum (CSLF), an organisation through which it is successfully lobbying for CCS technologies.

In October 2009, the Forum, which comprises twenty-three governments as well as the European Commission, held its latest meeting in London to promote CCS technology "in an effort to stay ahead of the December climate summit in Copenhagen".

At the conference, Christine Ramon, the chief financial officer of Sasol, was on a panel discussion on "the priority and urgency of actions required for near-term deployment of CCS". This would then be formulated as recommendations to be delivered to the Ministers attending the Forum.

Sasol got what they wanted. At the end of the Forum, the participating Energy and Environment Ministers from the member nations "endorsed CCS technologies as a key component of international plans to combat climate change."

\$100,000s spent lobbying Washington

Meanwhile, in the US Sasol is keen to expand its business and has been an active player in the Coals to Liquids coalition, lobbying Congress on bills promoting "alternative fuels" and securing support from former President George Bush and Senator Barack Obama prior to his election as President.

A 2008 report by groundWork summarised the company's lobbying effort, saying that Sasol "paid the Livingston Group \$320,000 last year to lobby Congress to support building CTL plants in the United States. With congressional members and the White House promising to promote alternative fuels, a number of other alternative-fuel companies have joined Sasol in hiring firms to lobby for tax breaks and other incentives to ease their entrance into the market dominated by oil companies."

In 2009, Sasol paid the lobbying consultancy, the Livingston Group, a further \$220,000 for lobbying purposes. Through the Livingston Group Sasol has also sought support from the US military for coal-to-liquids fuel. With concerns about energy security high on the US agenda, and easy access to large supplies of coal, Sasol has pushed the case for using coal-to-liquid technology to ensure supplies of transport fuel.

Sasol was asked to comment on its nomination for the Angry Mermaid Award but did not respond. ☺

Tristan Taylor is Project coordinator for SECCP, Earthlife Africa



A Trip of a Lifetime

By Musa Chamane

Musa found his attendance at the Sustainability of International Poor Communities: Egypt Conference 2009 to be very enlightening

Egypt is one of the most beautiful countries on this continent with so many amazing stories. It has the Pyramids of Giza, camels, the Nile River and the national museum. Pyramids are very amazing: it is unbelievable that those big rocks used to construct the pyramids were transported by the Nile River. Imagine the river course being rechanneled with an aim of using it as a transport mode. I can believe the story of diverting the river, but I cannot believe the one of carrying massive tons of rocks by hand to a height as great as 186 metres. Then there were no cranes, which we use today, which the Egyptians could have used in constructing the pyramids. Even the Egyptians are not sure how the pharaohs went about constructing the three massive pyramids.

Egypt is actually a desert because it is a dry sandy environment. The Nile River is being utilised dearly as a main fresh water supply. The size of the river is astonishing, with boats with every colour displayed every night. The welcoming mood of the Egyptians made me think: how well do we as South Africans welcome our foreign visitors? I remember roaming the streets of Cairo and they would ask us where we are from and they would respond by saying *Bafana Bafana* or *Goeie More*.

Christianity and Islam

When we got to the airport in Cairo one of our delegates was detained for questioning. The Egyptians have their own accent, so it became very difficult for our delegate to make sense of questions posed by an Egyptian official. I could not understand why he was singled out from us. I tried to get into the interrogation room to assist but I was refused entry. He finally decided to hand them a letter of invitation to the meeting and then they let him go. An overgrown beard in Egypt is associated with a person of high authority. They were not sure whether he was a king or a chief in

South Africa. Seemingly, the Shembe Church is not known in Egypt!

I like the idea of seeing Islams and Christians living side by side. I did not know that Islam is very close to Christianity, with the only difference being how Jesus and Mohamed are viewed. I liked the saying in Islam: "do whatever you can to make an honest living". I thought of us as South Africans and wondered how many of us are making an honest living, be it in government offices or in factories and or industries. I can now say *salaam* to my fellow South African Islamic people.

The conference

On the 26th to the 29th of October 2009 CID, a community development NGO based in Cairo, organised a conference on sustainability of international communities. Different community representatives attended the meeting from India, South Africa, US and Europe. Seven from the South African Waste Pickers Working Group attended the meeting and Slum Dwellers International from Cape Town were also delegates from South Africa. The time limitations were tough but it was, nevertheless, worth it since there are millions of lessons learned from each other during discussions. For me as an organiser based in South Africa the meeting extended my horizons in terms of organising communities that are affected by environmental injustice. Poor communities are normally the unemployed such as waste pickers and are normally residing in shacks and it was good to see the link between the two issues being discussed in greater depth.

Story of Stuff: Annie Leonard

Annie Leonard of the "Story of Stuff" fame was one of the high profile delegates of the meeting. She made a presentation of her own directed story. She talked about various issues relating



Waste

to unsustainable production methodologies. Production and consumption that result in hidden ecological degradation and social costs were the main issues covered by Annie in her presentation. As an international waste specialist she told the meeting that by 2050 we may need four planets to live on because the one we have may not be sustainable if we continue with being a throw away society.

Members of the groundWork delegation, distinctive in their caps and T-shirts, pose in front of a pyramid during their visit to Egypt.

Photograph by groundWork



Waste Pickers uniting internationally

It was good to unite waste pickers nationally and provide them with a platform of uniting internationally. Waste pickers, with the assistance

of NGOs, had their own meeting, sharing ideas. It was clear that waste pickers from South Africa are still new in the game because the problems they are encountering have long been faced and solved by other countries, which have united waste pickers. The sharing of methodologies and ideas took place and waste pickers from different countries would share a room and even a seat in the bus during field visits. This afforded them an opportunity to talk further and to get to know each other. In countries such as India, Brazil and Mexico waste picking is a formal job, unlike in South Africa where waste picking is still regarded as a "hobo" (someone who does not have a home, sleeping in the wild) job. We forget that some of the professions started the same way as waste picking in South Africa, such as street trading.

Revolution for a better world is looming

We voted in 1994, with a hope of a better life for all and the government was supposed to be for us, by us, but the reality is contradictory. Our South African government was voted in by the lower class but when it comes to the basic needs of the poor, the poor are the last to be considered or consulted. The NGOs and activists who organise the poor to fight for their rights get labelled as if they were not part of the struggle for a better life for all. South Africa is not a very poor country since the country is a leader in the continent and has a big voice internationally, but the gap between the poor and the rich is exponentially expanding. Our very own government has turned against us (the poor). At meetings that one normally attends that involve communities, one can hear in the voices of the poor that

they are angry and that they despise the system or government. The government is now disjoined to the masses, which poses a serious threat to the peace of the country, mark my words. ☮



Waste Pickers and Waste Recycling

By Musa Chamane

In April 2009, Makana Municipality in Grahamstown asked groundWork to assist in terms of a waste recycling system that would involve waste pickers. At the beginning of the year groundWork had a provincial meeting of waste pickers in King Williams Town, where more than 100 waste pickers from East London, Port Elizabeth, Komqa and Mthatha convened in one meeting to discuss issues pertaining to waste reclaiming. A number of issues were discussed and one of these was for waste pickers to introduce themselves to the waste managers of different municipalities.

Waste pickers from Makana introduced themselves to the environmental manager and this resulted in the manager calling groundWork to a meeting in Grahamstown. The feasibility study was an outcome of that meeting between the municipality, groundWork and waste pickers. The "pre-feasibility assessment for resource recovery potentials at Makana" was commissioned by groundWork and produced by Mark Wells and Owen Ndidi.

On the 12th of November 2009, groundWork tabled a report of the pre-feasibility study at the council chamber of the Makana Municipality. The municipal officials received the report with warm hands and it is now up to them as to what do they do about it. We hope it is not going to be one of the reports that is going to be kept on the shelf. The meeting was well attended even though there were few councillors who attended the meeting.

The report made some useful recommendations and there is the potential of creating more than 400 jobs if Makana could work towards diverting waste off the landfill. Waste separation at source has proven to be a job creation technique for the developed world. We believe that South Africa can also adopt this technique since government is struggling to create employment for the majority of the poor people. If waste separation at source could be adopted people who work as reclaimers need to be incorporated into the system and that will create jobs and at the same time government will save money by saving space at the landfills.

It is very encouraging to see a municipality taking waste seriously and willing to involve every stakeholder, including the waste pickers, in their waste management systems. Waste pickers are waiting for the municipality to take a decision regarding their future. The waste pickers are not only concerned about waste separation at source but also need a green light from the municipality to say that they can legally reclaim at the landfill itself.



Sorted waste at the Makana landfill site.

Picture by groundWork

Some municipalities are already prepared to work with waste pickers in their waste management systems. Municipalities such as Mpofana in KwaZulu-Natal and Mafikeng in North West really understand the importance of waste pickers in the system of waste management. Mpofana Municipality has agreed to the plea of waste pickers to fence the landfill site so that it keeps off the livestock and they are busy negotiating how they could work together. Mafikeng also has had a series of meetings with waste pickers because they understand the service that waste pickers are providing. Besides a service that they are providing, it is good to see the youth trying to do something with their lives without resorting to crime, which will cost more to the society.

I think municipalities in general have a lesson to learn from each other. If waste recycling could be a norm in South Africa waste management would not require huge budgets as it does today. Let waste recycling be handled by the poor who understand waste better than anyone. Only a waste picker can tell you if certain type of waste has value. ☺



PAIA - What a Joke!

By Mawande Mazibuko

Mawande's experiences with the PAIA process have left her doubting government's commitment to our constitutional rights

The Promotion of Access to Information Act. A title such as this to a piece of legislation in a democratic South Africa just speaks volumes about South Africa's past. A past that was dark, secretive and violent. In this title we have a new paradigm of governance, one where information will not be withheld from its citizens, one that will not have secretive meetings about "eliminating threats". Or do we?

The Preamble to the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) reads:

"To give effect to the Constitutional right of access to any information held by the State and any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights; and to provide for matters connected therewith."

It goes on to say: *"Recognising that the system of government in South Africa before 27 April 1994, amongst others, resulted in a secretive and unresponsive culture in public and private bodies which often led to an abuse of power and human rights violations".*

Wow! It feels as if we have arrived? Or have we?

The drafters of this statute had noble intentions but unfortunately the very governance system they intended to move away from is the very place they find themselves today.

In our struggle to get to understand the exact challenges at the ArcelorMittal plant in Vanderbijlpark, groundWork and the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance have tirelessly tried to gain access to various permits and the environmental plans from certain government departments, information critical to

the protection and recognition of fundamental human rights. We have politely done everything short of banging down doors and in most instances we were told to submit our requests through a "PAIA application". As a formal procedure, this application is meant to facilitate a process whereby our requests are specifically considered and an official response is provided within thirty days. On paper, this formula is a truly democratic and fair practice but unfortunately in reality what is codified is not always followed.

These words are not loosely spoken but are a reflection of the consistent rejection we have received for the requests we have submitted. In the instances where we have submitted requests for information we have either received inadequate, one-line responses of "sorry we cannot disclose this information" (with no reasons) or simply no response at all (after waiting the thirty days and more). This even after the Department of Environmental Affairs in personal communications with myself indicated exactly who I needed to write to and even how I should construct the request.

The government departments have proven to have closed doors, contrary to its openness, transparency and accountability policies. After endless communication and still no decent response, it becomes more apparent that the secretive and unresponsive culture of the past still prevails today.

Sadly, the only conclusion we can come to is that: the right to access to information is one not readily realisable and only possibly available through serious litigation and therefore resources and money. So, to be clear, we have not arrived! Government is making a mockery of 'democratic law'. ☺

Mawande is an intern at groundWork.



A Trip to Mogale City

By Nomcebo Mvelase

Incineration is not the only issue being faced by the communities of Mogale City

A trip to Mogale City, West Rand, reveals yet another load of environmental health issues besides the ongoing issue of incineration.

After groundWork has struggled so long and hard to try to raise awareness around the dangers of medical waste incineration, I did not expect to see yet another EIA document for the proposed installation of a medical waste incinerator in Luipaardsvlei, Gauteng Province. I say this because it is known that all the incinerators in Gauteng and, in fact, according to the Portfolio Committee on Environmental and Tourism (8 August 2007), "all South African medical waste incinerators are non-compliant with international standards."

Having received this EIA we first thought we should submit our comments as a matter of urgency and put all the reasons why we are opposing this process. This was done on the 8th of October, 2009. The reality is, however, that we cannot fight this battle alone. We need people on the ground to be the ones to have a greater understanding of the impacts of incineration, to be the ones that say that they are opposing incineration. That is what groundWork is all about: making sure that the affected communities have a greater voice in environmental governance.

As far as I am concerned, this is still not properly done by government. EIA processes are meant to actually give all the information to the affected parties for them to make an informed decision about whether or not to approve that particular process.

Colleen Mes, who is a councillor in Mogale City and who was also part of the initial meeting of this process, feels as though community people were not given sufficient information about incinerators. She goes on to say that the content of the presentation was too scientific and this alone could have been a

barrier leading to misunderstanding and a failure to have appropriate judgement about the technology.

As if this alone was not enough, Colleen went on to discuss the fact that there are a lot of other environmental issues that they are suffering in West Rand and there seems to be not much that gets done about it. Communities suffer illegal dumping of waste from the abattoirs and also from the mines. This poses environmental and public health concerns.

She mentioned that a big dam called Donaldson is heavily contaminated with heavy metals and reports of scientific studies done are available. As it is close to the informal settlement, people from the neighbourhood rely on this dam for the water which they consume. The Green Scorpions have been involved, but to no effect; as a matter of fact even animals from the close-by game reserve are suffering. They abort or sometimes give birth to deformed offspring.

Thank God there is a dedicated environmental activist like Marriette Lieferink from the Federation for Sustainable Environment who has tirelessly tried to bring together all the relevant stakeholders in a boardroom to discuss ways and means of how the environmental challenges faced by communities of West Rand can be addressed. Just recently, on the 13th of November, she organised yet another meeting in Johannesburg, where all the stakeholders, including the mining companies, had their planning meeting to discuss the need for cleaning up in this area, especially in the dams which are highly polluted.

groundWork will continue mobilising and creating resistance to any further progress of the proposed incinerator in Luuipasvlei. As it is, these people have been exposed to so much environmental injustice and to have a medical waste incinerator on top this would really be a disaster! ☺



Malaria vs DDT... The Two Evils!

By Nomcebo Mvelase

Malaria

Malaria is one of the world's deadliest diseases. The mosquito-borne illness kills about a million people every year, mostly children and pregnant women, in the developing world. In South Africa, particularly, statistics from the Department of Health show that a total number of 209 602 cases and 1 497 deaths were reported between 1999 and 2007. The highest number of cases (61 934) was reported in 2000, with KwaZulu Natal being the hardest hit province. There is a breakdown in malaria control efforts, as environmental changes such as the increase in temperature on the earth's surface (global warming), growing drug and insecticide resistance and increased population movements favour malaria transmission

DDT (dichloro- diphenyl- trichloroethane)

DDT is an organochlorine insecticide with a weak chemical odour and no taste. It has good solubility in most organic solvents and in animal fats. Amongst the poisonous substances, DDT holds a special place. Like some sort of rap star, it is known just by its initials. It's the notorious B.I.G of synthetic organic pesticides.

Why debate about DDT use?

The United Nations Environmental Program has identified DDT as a persistent organic pollutant that can cause environmental harm and lists it as one of a dirty dozen whose use is scheduled for worldwide reduction and elimination. Some people accuse the environmental activists of having "blood on their hands" and causing more than fifty million "needless deaths" by enforcing DDT bans in developing nations. Michael Crichtons, an anti-environmentalist, writes in his book "State of Fear" that banning the use of DDT to control malaria "has killed more people than Hitler".

Such statements make good copy but, according to the scientific research that was done in Limpopo, women living in villages sprayed with the insecticide DDT to reduce malaria were more likely to give birth to boys with a 33% higher incidence of urogenital birth defects (this was a two year study published

in the British Journal of Urology International). The study found that women who stayed at home in a sprayed village, rather than leaving their houses at times to work, had a 41% higher chance of giving birth to a boy with urogenital birth defects such as missing testicles or problems with their urethra or penis. Swiss scientists discovered that the pesticide could harm human health by damaging the developing brain, causing hypersensitivity, behavioural abnormalities and a suppressed immune system, besides many other health problems. In 1972, DDT use was thus banned in many countries as a result of such complaints.

I would like to bring it to the attention of all who are concerned about the environment that what we need the most is a recognition of the problem's complexity and a willingness to use every available weapon to fight disease in an informed and rational way. Remember, the time to translate knowledge into action is... NOW!

As part of dealing with the impacts of DDT, groundWork has proposed to meet with the provincial Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal, to have an overview understanding of exactly how much DDT is still used in our province, whether or not there have been any health studies done to assess the health impacts and lastly to find out if they have any intention of exploring other less toxic alternatives to control malaria. We hope this meeting will also shed light on whether or not there is a correct understanding of precautionary principles, a presentation of cost-benefit evaluation of DDT use as a malaria vector control strategy. We also hope that the meeting will highlight some environmental mitigation measures, including South Africa's obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants to manage DDT in an environmentally sound manner.

In addition, we will have a national pesticide workshop on the 8th and 9th of December in Midrand, Gauteng, which is aimed at raising awareness about the broad toxicological impacts of pesticides.



Beyond All Doubt

By Andy Birkinshaw

It can now be said, beyond all doubt, that communities are affected by Chevron's emissions

Right now affected communities across South Africa are being poisoned by the toxic chemicals released into the air from industries which belch fumes continuously day and night.

Is there any protection??

One would think that there are rules and regulations which protect our people and their children from this attack by industry on our communities, but sadly there is, in reality, very little protection and enforcement of regulations by the government departments concerned with these industries.

Jobs, job creation and taxes loom high on Government's agenda.

Profits and costs are prioritised on Industry's agenda.

Yet the medical costs and productivity of the neighbouring communities is neither considered nor accounted for. Studies elsewhere in the world show that associated medical costs can run into billions. (*Mail & Guardian 12th October 2009: "Healthcare costs associated with the burning of fossil fuels amount to R4-billion," the department's national air quality officer Peter Lukey told reporters in Vanderbijlpark at the Air Quality Governance Lekgotla.*)

Tests taken of ambient air at our industrial hot spots have proven that there are grounds for concern. sulphur dioxides, nitrogen dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, benzene and toluene all add up to a poisonous atmosphere - which our communities are forced to breathe.

My personal involvement began in 1994 as a resident of Table View, a suburb in close proximity to the Chevron Refinery, situated in the northern part of Cape Town. I was tasked with the role of acting

Chairman of Table View Residents Association and had received a long list of complaints from our community, in particular regarding emissions from the refinery.

That polluted air can cause sickness and even death is well documented - but how best can we negotiate with Industry - and how do we get government to recognise that steps must be taken to both reduce and regulate poisonous pollutants?

In initial talks with industry it was stated that the "problem was not with them..." and in Initial talks with government departments claims were made that "other issues" plus lack of funds took higher priority...

Regulations governing the release of these poisons into our atmosphere were way out of date (*Atmospheric Pollution Protection Act, 1965*) although now the *National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act (No. 39 of 2004)* (NEMAQA) has replaced the outdated APPA.

As a community association we put a team together to lobby both industry and government for better air quality. We were helped by groundWork, the Bucket Brigade and the Legal Resources Centre, and also liaised with other affected communities throughout South Africa.

However, in addition to our lobbying of parliament, demonstrations, meetings and research of worldwide Air Pollution studies, we still needed proof that pollution from Chevron Refinery constituted a threat to our health - and of that of neighbouring communities.

The Northern Community Air Monitoring Task Group (NCAMTG) is a community initiative set up to monitor air quality and to discuss issues and



One of the
protests held
outside Caltex
(now Chevron)
- this one in
February 2004.
Picture courtesy
groundWork.



plans for the reduction of air pollution in our area. Members include representatives of communities, of industries, (including the Chevron Refinery) and of local government, (ward councillors, the Department of Air Quality Management and Scientific Services). This task group investigated the possibility and feasibility of conducting a health study in our area.

Experts were invited to address the task group and we were told that a valid (health) study should be conducted in a scientific manner and be comparable with other international studies; otherwise results could not be generalised to other communities.

Professor Neil White, Senior Specialist at the Occupational Medicine Clinical Research Unit at UCT's Lung Institute, utilised this study - *The International Study of Asthma and Allergy in Childhood (ISAAC)*.

The study, confirming our concerns, has since been published and concludes:

"The results support the hypothesis of an increased prevalence of asthma symptoms among children in the area as a result of refinery emissions and provide a substantive basis for community concern."

Table View and neighbouring communities consequently see these results as validating the evidence supporting our suspicions to the cause of local respiratory problems. We call on Government to protect us according to our constitutional right from the attack on our people and our children from the poisonous pollutants emitted from this Chevron Refinery. ☮

(Andy Birkinshaw, an environmentalist and resident of Table View, is currently Chairman of the NCAMTG).



ArcelorMittal - Denying its Legacy

By Sunita Dubey

The stories of the families living around the ArcelorMittal plant in Steel Valley were heart wrenching - a family marred by myriad cancers and a lifetime of savings lost on polluted land and dead cattle. Such stories made international news headlines in September of 2009, when a visit by journalists from European countries was organised by the collective effort of groundWork, Friends of the Earth Europe, VEJA and other local groups.

This visit proved to be an eye opening experience for many visitors as the company, which is Europe based and claims to be following the highest standards, was seen violating lands and communities. A thriving community of nearly 500 families on the farmlands around the plant has been reduced to just four, and they are fighting for their survival and dignity. The groundwater surrounding the Vanderbijlpark plant of ArcelorMittal has been contaminated by reckless waste dumping. According to experts there are many toxins in the groundwater including some that are cancer causing.

This visit took us to peoples' houses and workers' apartments and everybody we met on this journey had a story to tell about how their lives were affected and destroyed by the erstwhile ISCOR and now ArcelorMittal. Sitting under the shed of Strike Matsep's house we heard how his dream of owning land and cattle got shattered by the pollution, as he lives right across from the huge waste dump of ArcelorMittal. Under the same roof we also heard about the miseries endured by the Cock family, who lived in that area for fourteen years. Mrs Joey Cock told the team about her daughter who has been suffering because of the cancer and even her grand children have learning disabilities and mysterious aches and pains. Her own health, too, is in peril as she is not able to sleep at night due to pain in her bladder and kidneys. This family has invested all its money in doctor's visits and medicine and there is still no hope of recovery.

Given that there were so many people who are affected by the environmental pollution in Steel Valley, our logical next step was to meet with the

government to figure out their role as a regulatory body. But many of our meetings with the various departments were cancelled at the last minute and only junior officials from Department of Water Affairs met with our delegation. They would not speak on record for they did not have permission to talk to the media. The cancellations of the meetings by the government departments were very disappointing as we never got the answers as to why a company like ArcelorMittal was allowed to pollute peoples' lands and bodies despite the fact that access to a clean environment is a fundamental right in the country's constitution. It felt to us that the government was protecting the company over its own people. What else could explain such last minute cancellations?

Our next stop was meeting with ArcelorMittal's current and ex-workers and they also told us how their fates changed since ISCOR was taken over by Mr. Lakshmi Mittal. Retrenchment without any explanation has become a norm and worker's benefits have gone down. Our first stop was at the ArcelorMittal plant in Pretoria where people tried to explain the whole legal juggernaut of how their company-supported housing was sold by the company to a third party. The previous as well as current workers have been living in this housing complex for many years and were assured by the previous owner, ISCOR, that once the money for the housing is deducted from their salaries these apartments will be legally theirs. However, ArcelorMittal decided to sell this housing complex to a real estate agency which started kicking many families out of their apartments. Even on the day of our meeting we saw two families sitting on the roadside with all their possessions as they were forced out of their apartments.

Similarities between the plight of Pretoria workers of ArcelorMittal and Steel Valley workers in Sebokeng were apparent. In Sebokeng the families were living in filth and without electricity as these basic amenities had been stopped to force the people out of their apartments. Children playing in the sewer water and a web of illegal electricity wires were



a common sight in Sebokeng. There has been a complete breakdown of basic infrastructure which has been totally ignored by ArcelorMittal and the government.

Our last and final meeting was with the management of ArcelorMittal South Africa, which was attended by the South African CEO Nku Nyembezi-Heita and other senior staff. Our day started with a tour of the Vanderbijlpark steel plant which was organised by the company. The journalists, as well as other member of the fact-finding group, were told not to take any pictures and were also not allowed to get off the bus. ArcelorMittal used apartheid-created legislation, the National Key Points Act, to enforce this. This tour took us to their huge toxic ash dump and from there we could see the ash being carried to the community lands by the wind. We also saw waste water dams and some of them were unlined.

ArcelorMittal South Africa boasts of taking care of many legacy issues from the past when it came to pollution remediation but all their remediation has been limited to just within the boundaries of the steel complex. The water and air does not know these boundaries and therefore claiming that the pollution outside of their legal boundaries is not their responsibility is equivalent to shunning their obligation towards environment, and the community living in the vicinity. Most of the

arguments put on the table by the ArcelorMittal South Africa management were either denying the problem or calling it a legacy issue. Despite the fact that ArcelorMittal South Africa has made huge profits in the past years very little has been done to improve the lives of communities and to clean up the environment. Though some measures are being taken within the premises of the plant there are no visible signs or efforts to do the same for people who are living just outside the boundaries of their steel plant.

It was a somber retreat from Steel Valley for all of us after spending three days there and interacting with communities and workers. Sadly the communities are left to fend for themselves with ArcelorMittal on one hand, interested only in making profits, and the government on the other hand trying to lure business and not to offend the big corporations. This results in cancer in Steel Valley and, in the absence of any redress and government provided protection, people are left with only the option of defending their rights in the courts. The only glimmer of hope is in the fact that communities affected by ArcelorMittal are coming together, both in South Africa and at an international level. This fight is going to continue and it is the will of the Steel Valley people, which is much stronger and longer lasting than any steel made by ArcelorMittal and which neither the corporation or the government can break, that justice be served. ☺

The ArcelorMittal plant dominates the landscape which has become too poisonous to support human or much animal life.

Photograph by Stanislav Solansky.



The European Speakers' Tour

By Samson Mokoena

Samson Mokoena has recently returned from a gruelling tour of Europe during which time he promoted the plight of the ArcelorMittal fenceline communities in the Vaal Triangle

One needs to thank the organisers of the European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ) European Speakers Tour, which started in Geneva, Switzerland on the 4th of October and ended in France on the 17th of October. To be hosted by different organisations in Europe, thanks to ECCJ and its partners, was a fulfilling experience.

During this tour I was travelling with Omar Mendivil Guzman, a Columbian who is the coordinator of the Red Caribe De Usuarios. One of the funny things on this tour was the language barrier, because I speak English and African languages and my new friend Omar speaks only Spanish so, as we had to communicate as we travelled from one country to the other, we mainly used sign language.

I left South Africa on the 3rd of October for Paris and the next day connected to Geneva where the tour was starting in the United Nations Human Rights Council, where the consultation on operationalising the Framework for Business and Human Rights was happening.

Professor John Ruggie's mandate is to consult and bring together all relevant stakeholders and representatives of victims of corporate abuse. The framework that Prof Ruggie is using has three Pillars: the State's duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including business, through appropriate policies, regulation, and adjudication; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, which in essence means that they should act with due diligence to avoid infringing on the rights of others; and greater access by victims to effective remedy, both judicial and non-judicial.

In these important consultations by Prof Ruggie, which try to operationalise the Framework, civil society from both the North and the global South, especially from Latin America, Asia and Africa, was represented. We managed to bring strong submissions, especially when it comes to greater access by victims to effective remedy.

In South Africa we know that most of the victims of corporate abuse have difficulty in bringing their cases in front of the courts, especially when they don't have recourse to financial support and good lawyers to take their cases.

The civil society groups had their meetings a day before the consultation to put together a strategy on how we were going to deal with the submissions and we agreed to work as groups inside the conference to push for good submissions. The two day conference started on the 5th of October and there were side events organised by different organisations. I was invited to speak about the South African experience of ArcelorMittal South Africa by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Watch. The session was chaired by Richard Howitt, the European Member of Parliament for the Labour Party of the UK. The OECD debated cases that were brought to the National Contact Point, one from India and one from Argentina, but these cases were not resolved by the NCP.

On the 6th of October we flew to Vienna where we were welcomed by Dr. Petra Kreinecker of the Netzwerk Soziale Verantwortung.



In Vienna the agenda changed a little bit because of the language. I was scheduled to debate corporate social responsibility at the Standard Newspaper roundtable discussion.

On the panel were myself, OMV – one of Austria's and Europe's largest industrial energy companies – Corporate Responsibility Manager Hilmar Kroat-Reder, Petra Kreinecker of Austrian Network Social Responsibility (NeSoVe) and Barbara Linder of the Ludwig-Boltzmann Human Rights Institute. The debate centred around corporate social responsibility, so I had to argue around ArcelorMittal South Africa's Social Responsibility document, which they handed out in a meeting with European Journalists on the 25th of September. In this document the company claimed to implement the corporate responsibility three-pillar strategy of Ruggie's Framework and the company makes claims that they comply with legislation and that they are a transparent company. They have, however, failed to make key documents available. The OMV representative wanted to convince the panellists that his company is implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR). As the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA) we don't agree with the CSR concept because companies like ArcelorMittal keep shifting the focus, especially when it comes to the disclosure of key documents.

Omar Mender had a separate meeting at the Austrian Trade Union, and on the evening of the 7th we had a joint dinner with other Austrian Network Social Responsibility member organisations. The dinner was an opportunity to meet with other Austrian civil society organisations, to develop networks and to share experiences.

In our discussions with other members of the network I found out that other South African companies are operating in Austria: Mondi Paper and Sappi. In the discussion Petra showed an interest in monitoring Mondi Paper and other organisations showed an interest in the ArcelorMittal campaign. Daniel Bacher is the coordinator for DKA, a catholic based youth organisation and is responsible for the South African office. It was important to network and establish new contacts in Austria.

The next stop from Austria was Milan, Italy, where we had a short stay of only one day. On the 9th of October we were welcomed by Paola Piraneo at the Milan airport. We went straight to the meeting at the Milan Chamber of Commerce. The meeting was to inform and engage with the Chamber around the companies that we are campaigning against in South Africa and Colombia.

The next meeting was with the members of the civil society organisations and the member of the Parliament for the province of Milan, Gatti Galeotti. His interest was more on raising awareness in the Province of Milan on the goods that come to the province, in order that trade they are involved with is not the cause for human rights abuses.

We had to travel in the morning of the 10th of October and spent the weekend in Brussels. As it is the beginning of winter in Europe, the weekend was cold and we had to be indoors. The program in Brussels was interesting because for the first time I had to do the lobby work with ECCJ staff, Ruth Casals and Friends of the Earth Europe staff member Daniel Pentzlin. The first meeting was with Pascal Canfin – Greens Member on the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee and Member of the Special Committee on the Financial, Economic and Social Crises.

We had to put a very strong case. Mr Canfin was most interested in the ArcelorMittal case because he comes from France, where ArcelorMittal have one of the European plants. He wants VEJA to develop a set of questions so that he can question ArcelorMittal in Europe.

The other Member of Parliament who showed interest was Diana Wallis from Liberals UK, Vice President of the European Parliament and Member of the Legal Affairs Committee. She represents the constituency where ArcelorMittal is based in the UK.

The meeting with the European Commission, Directorates-General Internal Markets and Trade, and Employment Enterprise External Relations was held at lunch and it was a useful engagement with these Commission officials



We had fifteen important meetings with various members on the European Parliament in three days. It was hectic!

All these meetings were to lobby for more binding regulations for the EU Companies and their subsidiaries which violate Environmental and Human Rights abroad. These companies, like ArcelorMittal, have double standards particularly in the South where corporations outsource, contracting work to companies that are not complying with the National or International standards on the Environment Human Rights

ECCJ is proposing direct liability of parent companies, establishing a parental company duty of care and establishing mandatory environmental and social reporting.

The two cases of ArcelorMittal and Union Fenosa Electricity are examples which we presented in Europe to civil society groups, Members of the EU Parliament and the EU Commission.

The last stop was in France on the 14th of October and we were hosted by Les Amis De la Terre. One

of the things that was interesting was a public meeting on the evening of the 15th of October, which members of the public, trade unions and other members of civil society in France attended. There was strong solidarity with what is happening in the South, particularly around ArcelorMittal because workers are being laid off in numbers in France and other European countries where the company is operating. CCFD – an association comprising twenty-eight movements and services of the Catholic Church - is one of the organisations that has shown interest and their South African Officer, Charlotte Boulagei, is planning to visit the Vaal on her next visit to South Africa.

I hope that ECCJ will succeed in their work and thank all the people that welcomed us and hope that the new friends that we met and came to know will continue monitoring the transitional corporations on how they do business in the world.

The tour was the beginning of long and hard work that VEJA and its partner organisations will have to do to make sure that the power of corporations is dismantled and to ensure that all human being are treated equally, no matter where they live. ☺

From the left:
Omar Guzman
from Colombia
Daniel pentzlin
from Friends of
the Earth Europe
Josephin from
ECCJ
Daniel Morisen
ECCJ
Ruth Casels
ECCJ
Samson
Mokoena VEJA
Picture courtesy
ECCJ



It's not only Waste that Gets Dumped...

By George Monbiot

*...and from toxic waste to toxic assets, the same people always get dumped on**

Trafigura is just another case of global fly-tipping. It's all too easy for firms to protect profit and pass risk to the poor world

It was revolting, monstrous, inhumane – and scarcely different from what happens in Africa almost every day. The oil trading company Trafigura has just agreed to pay compensation to 31 000 people in Ivory Coast, after the Guardian and the BBC's Newsnight obtained e-mails sent by its traders. They reveal that Trafigura knew that the oil slops it sent there in 2006 were contaminated with toxic waste. But the Ivorian contractor it employed to pump out the hold of its tanker dumped them around inhabited areas in the capital city and the countryside. Tens of thousands of people fell ill and fifteen died. While the settlement says that the slops could at worst have caused a range of short-term low-level flu-like symptoms, and anxiety, it is one of the world's worst cases of chemical exposure since the gas leak at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal. But in all other respects the Trafigura case is unremarkable. It's just another instance of the rich world's global fly-tipping.

On the day that the Guardian published the company's emails, it also carried a story about a shipwreck discovered in 480 metres of water off the Italian coast. Detectives found the ship after a tip-off from a mafioso. It appears to have been carrying drums of nuclear waste when the mafia used explosives to scuttle it. The informant, Francesco Fonti, said his clan had been paid £100 000 to get rid of it. What makes this story interesting is that the

waste appears to be Norwegian. Norway is famous for its tough environmental laws, but a shipload of nuclear waste doesn't go missing without someone high-up looking the other way.

Italian prosecutors are investigating the scuttling of a further forty-one ships. But most of them weren't sunk, like Fonti's vessel, off the coast of Italy; they were lost off the coast of Somalia. When the great tsunami of 2004 struck the Somali coast, it dumped and smashed open thousands of barrels on the beaches and in villages up to 10km inland. According to the United Nations, they contained clinical waste from western hospitals, heavy metals, other chemical junk and nuclear waste. People started suffering from unusual skin infections, bleeding at the mouth, acute respiratory infections and abdominal haemorrhages. The barrels had been dumped in the sea, a UN spokesman said, for one obvious reason: it cost European companies around \$2.50 a tonne to dispose of the waste this way, while dealing with them properly would have cost "something like \$1 000 a tonne." On the seabed off Somalia lies Europe's picture of Dorian Gray: the skeleton in the closet of the languid new world we have made.

The only people who have sought physically to stop this dumping are Somali pirates. Most of them take to the seas only for blood and booty; but some have formed coastal patrols to prevent over-fishing and illegal dumping by foreign fleets. Some of the vessels being protected from pirates by Combined

* This article was originally printed in the Guardian (UK) on 21 September 2009 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2009/sep/21/global-fly-tipping-toxic-waste>)



Task Force 151, the rich world's policing operation in the Gulf of Aden, have come to fish illegally or dump toxic waste. The warships make no attempt to stop them.

The law couldn't be clearer: the Basel convention, supported by European directives, forbids European Union or OECD nations from dumping hazardous wastes in poorer countries. But without enforcement, the law is useless. So, for instance, while all our dead electronic equipment is supposed to be recycled by licensed companies at home, according to Consumers International around 6.6m tonnes of it leaves the European Union illegally every year.

Much of it lands in West Africa. An investigation by the Mail on Sunday found computers which once belonged to the NHS being broken up and burnt by children on Ghanaian rubbish dumps. They were trying to extract copper and aluminium by burning off the plastics, with the result that they were inhaling lead, cadmium, dioxins, furans and brominated flame retardants. Tests in another of the world's great fly-tips, Guiyu in China, show that 80% of the children of that city have dangerous levels of lead in their blood.

In February, working with Sky News and the Independent, Greenpeace placed a satellite tracking device in a dead television and left it at a recycling centre in Basingstoke run by Hampshire county council. It passed through the hands of the council's recycling company, then found its way first to Tilbury docks on the Thames then to Lagos, where the journalists bought it back from a street market. Under EU law, used electronic equipment can be exported only if it's still working, but Greenpeace had made sure the TV was unusable. A black market run by criminal gangs is dumping our electronic waste on the poor, but since the European directive banning this practice was incorporated into British law in January 2007, the Environment Agency hasn't made a single prosecution. Dump your telly over a hedge and you can expect big trouble. Dump 10 000 in Nigeria and you can expect to get away with it.

If the mafia were to establish itself as an effective force in this country, it would do so by way of the waste disposal industry. All over the world the cosa nostra, yakuza, triads, bratva and the rest make much of their fortune by disposing of our uncomfortable truths. It suits all the rich nations – even, it seems, the government of Norway – not to ask too many questions, so long as the waste goes to far away countries of which we know nothing. Only when the mobs make the mistake of dumping it off their own coasts does the state start to get huffy.

The Trafigura story is a metaphor for corporate capitalism. The effort of all enterprises is to keep the profits and dump the costs on someone else. Price risks are dumped on farmers, health and safety risks are dumped on subcontractors, insolvency risks are dumped on creditors, social and economic risks are dumped on the state, toxic waste is dumped on the poor, greenhouse gases are dumped on everyone.

Another story that broke on the same day was the shifting, by Barclays, of £7bn of residential mortgage assets and collateralised debt obligations to a fund in the Cayman Islands. These were universally described by the media as toxic assets. Some traders also call them toxic waste. Everyone understands the metaphor even if they haven't thought it through: the banks seek to dump their liabilities while clinging on to their assets. Perhaps it comes as no surprise to find that Trafigura also runs a hedge fund, or that Lord Strathclyde, leader of the Conservatives in the House of Lords, is a non-executive director of that hedge fund.

That party, like New Labour, advocates the continuing deregulation of business. The Trafigura case, like the financial crisis, suggests that in business there are people ruthless enough to shut their eyes to almost anything if they think if they think they can make money. Business without regulation is scarcely distinguishable from organised crime. Regulation without strict enforcement is an open invitation to mess with people's lives. Tedious directives, state power and bureaucratic snooping – the interference that everyone professes to hate – are all that stand between civilisation and corporate hell.



Times Magazine Environmental Heroes

Every year Times Magazine publishes a list of "Environmental Heroes" - people who have made a difference to the world in which they live. This year, two of these heroes are also members of the Friends of the Earth Executive Committee.

Nnimmo Bassey, Chairman of Friends of the Earth and head of Environmental Rights Action (ERA), was chosen because of his work in the fight to ensure that the Nigerian people are not compromised by the oil which has caused so many violations against the population. "Oil has been the destruction of the Nigerian economy," says Bassey. "It destroys the relation between the people and the state."

In a country where 85% of government revenues rely on oil money, Bassey's positions often pit him against the authorities. Under the dictatorship of the 1990s, he was stripped of his travel papers and detained without trial several times. As the battle over Nigeria's oil wealth has turned into full-blown militancy, he has found himself on the same side as the armed rebels who have taken on the now democratic government in Abuja. While Bassey disagrees with the militants' tactics — kidnapping

Left column:
Nnimmo Bassey
as depicted by
Andy Ward for
Time Magazine.



Right Column:
Syeda Hasan
as Illustrated
for Time by
Jonathan Burton;
Shipbreaker
Photos (digitally
altered) from
left: Andrew
Biraj / Reuters
(2); Andrew
Holbrooke /
Corbis

of oil workers, attacks on infrastructure, clashes with the military — he stops short of condemning them. "Any society that uses violence against its own people will eventually have a segment that



stands up against it."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan was selected because she is one of the few advocates for the workers in Bangladesh's shipbreaking zone. Given little protection or guidance, some estimates are that one shipbreaker is killed every day by the explosions, fires, or falling metal of South Asia's shipyards. Those who survive face a high risk of cancer and other illnesses. Most shipbreakers work five or six years before they return to their villages, young old men, too worn out or sick to make a living.

As chief executive of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Hasan has struggled to bring better environmental and labor regulation to Bangladesh's thirty-six shipbreaking yards. While the 150 or so ships that go through the yards every year generate much needed revenue and jobs for Bangladesh, Hasan says the government has not "taken into consideration the other argument: It's better to be jobless than to have a job that gives you cancer."

Hasan has many opponents and often her victories are overturned by the courts, but she fights on. "I don't want the outside world to think of Bangladesh as a dumping site," she says. "It is against my dignity. It is against the dignity of my nation and the dignity of the people." ☺

Read more about Nnimmo: http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1924149_1924153_1924211,00.html#ixzz0YYOovGQn

Read more about Syeda: http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1924149_1924153_1924207,00.html#ixzz0YYPeyaCS



In Brief

Get rid of e-waste responsibly

Are you stuck with an old computer or other disused electronic gadgets and don't know where to dump them without harming the environment?

Good news is that retailer, Incredible Connection, is offering special disposal facilities for end-of-life consumer technology items (e-waste) at each of its 55 stores nationwide from the end of October 2009.

The service, known as EnviroConnection and offered in partnership with accredited electronic waste disposal company, Desco, will enable consumers to get rid of obsolete items of technology in an environmentally safe way - whether or not they were bought at Incredible Connection.

Special disposal bins designed by Desco to be easily loaded into trucks have been distributed to each Incredible Connection store. The bins are quite large so, depending on the size of the store, they'll either be on display within the store or be placed in their workshops at the back of each store. Just ask in store for details!

Constitutional Court Fails the Poor

After six long years of litigation, the Constitutional Court has handed down judgement in the Phiri Water Case, which judgement is summarised as: "[Johannesburg's] Basic Water policy falls within the bounds of reasonableness and therefore is not in conflict with either section 27 of the Constitution or with the national legislation regulating water services. The installation of pre-paid meters in Phiri is found to be lawful."

The applicants, the Coalition Against Water Privatisation, Phiri residents and no doubt millions of poor people across South Africa are extremely disappointed by what is a shocking judgment. The court's ruling, written by Justice Kate O'Regan (now retired from the Court) and supported by the eight other judges sitting in the case, is a classic example of a lazy legalism as well as wholly biased and contradictory reasoning.

National mercury free policy process – finally kicking off in SA.

We are very pleased indeed to announce that the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the National Department of Health (DoH) have taken on board both our and international concerns on the continued use of the toxin mercury in health care. We have over the past five years tried to persuade the DEA and DoH to make the switch and we have just learned that they have prepared a short term technical assistance request for a consultant to assist them to identify the status quo of mercury use in the Health Care industry. This work will assist in the finalisation of the Health Care Risk Waste (HCRW) regulations and help the Department of Health to identify if there is a need to critically look at procurement issues around mercury-containing appliances within the health care sector.

Slums act rendered ineffective

After being the subject of political violence for sometime, the Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement (AbM) had something to celebrate when, on the 14th of October, 2009, the Constitutional Court (CC) declared the provincial KwaZulu-Natal Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act (Slums Act) unconstitutional.

Specifically, the CC declared section 16 of the Slums Act is unconstitutional and invalid. This section makes it compulsory for municipalities to institute proceedings for eviction of unlawful occupiers where the owner or person in charge of the land fails to do so within the time prescribed by the MEC. The applicants argued that section 16 of the Slums Act is in violation of section 26(2) of the Constitution in three ways: it precludes meaningful engagement between municipalities and unlawful occupiers; it violates the principle that evictions should be a measure of last resort; and it undermines the precarious tenure of unlawful occupiers by allowing the institution of eviction proceedings while ignoring the procedural safeguards inherent in the PIE Act. Without section 16, the Slums Act is rendered ineffective.



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The Corpse Awards will be “presented” to “the winners” on the 6th of May, 2010, at a glittering ceremony in Durban.

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