

GROUNDWORK



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PROMISES

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groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental organization working primarily in South Africa, but increasingly in Southern Africa.

groundWork seeks to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in Southern Africa through assisting civil society to have a greater impact on environmental governance. groundWork places particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people who are most affected by environmental injustices.

groundWork's current campaign areas are: Climate Justice and Energy, Air Quality, Waste and Environmental Health.

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CREDITS:

Printed on recycled paper from Sappi Fine Papers

Layout by Boutique Books – Printing by ArrowPrint

Despite the hype around the ANC's election conference in Mangaung, South Africans can expect little real change to happen on the ground.
Cartoon by Dov Fedler



From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

We come to the end of a tiring year, a year in which we had to deal with the post-organizational impacts on an organization (which was then only six people) of the Durban climate change meeting of the United Nations in December 2011. It was a gathering that failed – as it has in Doha again – but which drained organizations such as ours, which were central to organizing in Durban. Most of groundWork's campaign activities had to be funded by core funding, as campaign-specific funding was scarce. Despite this, 2012 has been successful; from working with waste pickers to African governments, groundWork as always been broad in its range of organizing and campaigning for change.

As this goes to print, the African National Congress (ANC) will be holding its 53rd National Elective Conference, in its centenary year. It is a conference that has gripped the attention of the South African media and public for the last year – many would say wrongfully so. There is very little different that is going to emerge out of the deliberations in Mangaung. Steven Friedman, commentator and academic, warns that South Africa must not expect that in Mangaung there will be a shift to the left. He sums this up in his opening paragraph in an opinion piece in the Business Day (on the 11th of December 2012) that “It is almost certain that the economic resolutions at the ANC's Mangaung conference this month will be reported as very important and a shift to the left. It is entirely certain that they will be neither.” This is in line with what we have heard many times, often from fellow academic Patrick Bond, that there will be much “talking left, walking right”. Friedman goes on to explain that the National Executive Committee has large business interests and “it is impossible

to lead a movement with a left-wing history in a country with serious inequalities, if you sound like a defender of the rights of owners... so it is important for ANC leaders to say they are moving left when they are not.”

Having referred to two academics – and white males at that – I might be accused of quoting armchair critics, based in ivory towers. But there is nothing wrong in quoting them if the truth is evident for all to see, and actually any person in the street who has been in SA over the last eighteen years of our democracy will be able to articulate the exact same sentiment. This is a reality on the ground. Inequality is increasing.

This “talk left, walk right” was very evident in a meeting that was hastily called by the Minister of State Enterprises, Malusi Gigaba, on the 5th of December, as he was to take ownership of the old Durban airport land from the Airports Company of South Africa. After a successful peoples’ protest on the 1st of December, against the extension and the development of a new dugout port on the old airport land which will result in peoples’ homes and neighbourhoods changing for the worse, Malusi had to manage the growing dissent. So, on the evening of the 4th of December, his machinery frantically called people to meet. We obliged, only to witness the ultimate contradictions of government rhetoric.

Gigaba, in a speech that was recorded, tried to appease people, saying consultation will occur and that the plans for the dug-out port remain conceptual. However this is not the case according to Transnet, who after Gigaba presented plans as fact, without any meaningful room for negotiation. These plans have been in development since at



least 2006, but at no point have the South African public or the directly affected communities been asked if this is the development they want – despite there being clear positions from the south Durban people for alternative developments to those that will destroy people's social infrastructure. The first terminal of the dugout port is to be in operation by 2020, making the 2016 goal for the start of development a not-so-far-off reality. Consultation? Come on Malusi, who are you kidding?

So, coupled with this rhetoric, an increase in society protest against failed delivery – from houses to environmental governance – and the continual conflicts in the ruling party, I have heard from the rank and file of the ANC that while Bloemfontein was the birthplace of the ANC, it could be here that it will die – in Mangaung. Disgruntled comrades who did not get deals? No, this is also a real assessment and feeling that was articulated by Zwelinzima Vavi just prior to the Conference. In an article in The Star (on the 3rd of December 2012), he warns that "One of our biggest fears is that the conference may just become the place where we kill ourselves as a movement – instead of the place where we resurrect and move in the direction of radical transformation." This is indeed a period of momentous change for South Africans.

Now, moving on to an age-old debate in the environmental justice discourse, we continue to have the continual transfer of dirty industry from the North to the South. As power companies are finding it more difficult to develop coal-fired power stations in the North, because of strong local resistance based upon local impact and people questioning greenhouse gas emissions – which are backed by local strong legislation – power companies are looking for markets in the global South where they can ply their trade. E.ON, a German-based power utility, has decided to shelve the 1 100 MW hard coal plant "Staudinger" near Frais and is now "looking for opportunities in Turkey and India. They are seeking worthwhile investments in so-called 'independent power stations', which can produce electricity in poor and poorly developed regions without needing sophisticated infrastructure". This sounds like toxic dumping in the South. It sounds like environmental racism. It is interesting how blunt and honest major corporates are at times.

Turning to Sasol, South Africa's apartheid-created coal-to-liquid corporation has been in a confused situation recently – are they in or out of Iran, are they in or out of the US? Sasol is planning to turn natural gas in the United States into chemicals, diesel and other fuels in a development that will be the biggest in the US, and the second-biggest gas-to-liquid plant in the world, producing 96 000 barrels a day of diesel and other liquids. The facility is projected to cost Sasol about \$21-billion. But, at the same time they have been fingered by the United States Government Accountability Office for operating in Iran. While my opinion on sanctions led by the US is that it is always a questionable strategy, let's see if the US will kick them out. I don't think they will.

The struggle of the people in the Vaal, and the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance, has borne fruit with ArcelorMittal closing the electric furnaces when they decided that they would not place pollution control equipment on them. The pressure placed on ArcelorMittal and government by the people has resulted in the Green Scorpions calling for ArcelorMittal to step up. The fact that they decided not to invest in improving their furnaces is an indictment on where their commitment lies – not in South Africa and job creation, but rather in maximum profit!

Finally, we close out the year on a positive note. Despite the calls early in the year to the Pietermaritzburg/Msunduzi's Municipality to repair the effluent pipeline over the Baynespruit River, the pipe sprang a leak again in November and Dystar-Boehme's effluent, which contains benzene, flowed freely into the river. Having lost faith in the Municipality to deal with this issue, we knocked on the Dystar-Boehme door unannounced. Twenty-four hours later, with corporate pressure on the Msunduzi Municipality, the pipeline was repaired and is to be replaced shortly. I am speechless!

On this note, all the best in 2013 to those we struggle with and those who follow and support our work.

Peace,

Bobby 



Who's looting Africa now?

by Bobby Peek

In early November, I had the opportunity to address more than 500 central American community people who gathered for the "Climate Change, Territories and Social Movements Conference" in El Salvador. For two days, environmental and social justice activists from around the globe gathered for passionate presentations, calling for solidarity and resistance to transnational corporations and for increased sovereignty for local communities.

The conference was organized by Friends of the Earth El Salvador (Cesta) and The Movement of the Victims and Peoples Affected by Climate Change, a peoples' movement which aims to increase the power of communities to defend their territories and to demand climate justice. The focus of my presentation was not on how much is taken from Africa, but how it happens and who facilitates it, what it means for "development" and how resistance is violently crushed.

Colonialism and militarism!

Europe's conception of Africa was always negative. Africa was "brought into the world" system by the military force of colonialism. Africa's first "modern" colonial institutions were armies, police, prisons, courts, and central intelligence agencies used in the slave trade and then to manage local people during the height of colonialism. When independence came in the 1960s, these institutions dominated. This resulted in the under-development of key service institutions to deliver social justice.

This type of development resulted in Africa immediately being drawn into the East-West competition and armaments races of the Cold War post colonialism. Across the continent, from the 1960s to today, this resulted in strengthening military dictatorships and the increased dominance of the military that suppresses democracy.

There is a continuing militarization of Africa today, and the United States' "War on Terror" is contributing to this. This has a strong historical context. There was direct US involvement in efforts to assassinate Kwame Nkrumah, first president of Ghana; to create an anti-Cuban civil war in Angola;

in installing Idi Amin in Uganda; in extending Rhodesian white rule in Zimbabwe and extending apartheid in South Africa and in the imprisonment of Mandela. And, after the Cold War, in the 1980s and 1990s, the US became the largest exporter of small arms to the world.

The west, and the US in particular, have been very open about their interventions in Africa. Walter Kansteiner (2002) US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs stated: "[African oil] has become of national strategic interest to us". Today, when you hear of oil and gas finds in Ghana, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda, the US and western corporations are close by to begin the extraction process.

But beyond the US there is an emerging China, with strong links to various African governments and which has in the recent past funded mega-infrastructure projects in Africa to ensure that Africa's resources are pointed East rather than West. Countries such as South Africa and Brazil within the BRICS – the powerful global lobby of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – play a sub-imperialist role to facilitate further extraction of wealth from Africa.

Extractives: Making Africa poorer

The resource curse has been a common phrase used about how African countries have suffered through the period of great mineral extraction. Even the World Bank has recognised that foreign direct investment and extraction is not working for Africa or its people.

The World Bank's own book, "Where is the Wealth of Nations?", published in 2006, states that "Genuine saving provides a much broader indicator of sustainability by valuing changes in natural resources, environmental quality, and human capital, in addition to the traditional measure of changes in produced assets. Negative genuine saving rates imply that total wealth is in decline." Taking this into consideration, when one subtracts depreciation of fixed assets, minus depletion of natural resources, minus the pollution damages, the



positive saving we have in various African countries is severely eroded.

Africa's major infrastructure development is there to facilitate extraction and is focused on getting resources to the coastline in order that they can be exported. Even Africa's renewable energy projects, which will harness renewable energy products from the Sahara desert, are destined for Europe through projects such as the Desertec.

Comprador: Facilitating poverty!

The creation of western wealth did not happen without the support of local people, and that is why we have the term "comprador" emerging. The challenge for most people in Africa is that the state protects wealth and its accumulation rather than distributing wealth evenly. In SA we have the "Property Right" within the Bill of Rights which guarantees the existence of "white capital" and its accumulation post 1994. This was done through a negotiated process towards democracy, going against the needs and calls of the majority of people – which was the redistribution of apartheid-accumulated wealth.

There is also an on-going narrative by African elites that Africa is there to be of service to the world rather than of service to the African people. At the 18th World Petroleum Congress, Imogen Mkhize, of Sasol – the apartheid created oil company – stated that "Although the African energy sector has its own challenges, supplying the world with its future energy needs is the ultimate goal."

This facilitation of the looting of Africa's resources for the world is evident in how our governments are prepared to give away our resources and services to large corporations. Below-cost electricity to BHP Billiton, which is an Australian based company, cost the South African State \$1.2 billion in 2009, and in 2013 it will cost us \$0.7 billion. Even conservatives such as Moletsi Mbeki, brother to Thabo Mbeki, have raised concern that wealth extraction is a risk to economic freedom.

Murder at Marikana

SA holds 88% of the world's platinum reserves and accounts for over three quarters of global platinum production. The African National Congress (ANC) has identified mining as central to its new resource-based development strategy.

While the unions have historically been strong and have been the basis for much of the change in SA, it is a concern that they are now too close to government to bring meaningful change for workers and the community. Gavin Capps, a researcher who has spent much time with workers in the platinum belt, has lamented that the union movement has "been central to dampening and deflecting struggle since it became deeply embedded with management. Since 1994 it has effectively worked for the government." This was sadly evident in the week of the 12th of August 2012, which no doubt is the most significant date since the 27th of April 1994, when we achieved our democracy.

The British company, Lonrho – established in 1909 – was renamed Lonmin to hide its history of grabbing mining rights in Zimbabwe, then called Rhodesia. In August, a tragic event added new violations and highlighted old ones on the list of incriminating evidence against this company. In this week forty-four people (including two policemen) were killed – thirty-four on the 16th of August at the hands of a police service going on a mad shooting spree.

While fingers were pointed at the State and the unions, very little responsibility has been placed on Lonmin. They called the South African Police Service in from the beginning and escalated the situation towards violence without sitting to meet with the workers themselves. Essentially, they took advantage of this union rivalry by giving preference to the docile union, the National Union of Mineworkers, over the "militant" union that was supporting the miner's demands.

Sadly, this process had its own "comprador", Cyril Ramaphosa, the former National Union of Mineworkers and ANC general secretary. He emailed Lonmin in the wee hours of the morning of the 16th of August: "The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labour dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterised as such. There needs to be concomitant action to address this situation".

The deaths of those in Marikana have given us a graphic depiction of the crisis of capital. Simply put, the workers were demanding more for toiling in the bowels of mother earth, and they were prepared to change alliances for this. And this, the ruling class could not contend with. ☺



On the UNFCCC

by Siziwe Khanyile

Engaging with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process gives a false sense of this being a sincere attempt to address the real issues

Due to corporate capture of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) it is clear that the Parties are not serious about addressing climate change. Their primary purpose has been to defend their interests in capital accumulation and economic growth which is why it serves their interest to have a dysfunctional climate regime.

The credibility of the UNFCCC as a space to tackle climate change is lost. Northern countries are more concerned about preserving imperial and market dominance, and big Southern country elites "hide behind the poor" to justify carbon space for economic growth, but have no real interest in economic justice, which leaves the space with no potential for defending or promoting justice.

groundWork has recognised that our continued engagement in a space such as the UNFCCC gives it legitimacy and sends a message to communities and to civil society that the Conference of the Parties (CoP) is where the solution lies.

The 18th CoP of the UNFCCC is currently underway and the biggest polluters from the Annex 1 countries have not even begun to deliver on their commitments to urgent, binding and deep emissions reductions and instead are playing the blame game with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa)! There is still no finance for climate adaptation and fossil fuel corporations continue to be protected by the big industrialised countries.

I sense despair emanating from the Doha talks, just as it was with Durban, Cancun and Copenhagen before that, and the climate is worse off than ever.

How long will it take for civil society groups to realize that our role in trying to influence decisions in the UNFCCC has its challenges? The question is *who* are we influencing? Negotiators? They have to toe the line of their political masters, no matter how good their intentions!

As civil society, we need to be reflective about what we can *actually* achieve, despite our good intentions. The climate is at a point of no-return. We are headed towards catastrophic, run-away climate destruction. So how much can we achieve with lobbying, influencing and "pushing back" on bad decisions?

groundWork suggests that if the following are not present in this space, it is effectively a "dead space":

1. at least a handful of countries (not just Bolivia) who are actively promoting a People's Agenda rather than a corporate agenda;
2. more countries negotiating for climate rather than economic advantage;
3. credible emissions reduction targets, in line with science;
4. negotiations focused on a credible global carbon budget and consequent distribution of that budget;
5. market solutions are disavowed; and
6. corporates (including state owned) not having a free run of the UNFCCC.



The negotiations are simply no longer about protecting the climate, and continued participation in the UNFCCC gives the false impression that the talks are really about what they should be, which is addressing climate change.

Civil society engagement in the process should be to denounce, criticize and condemn the process and decisions that result from it.

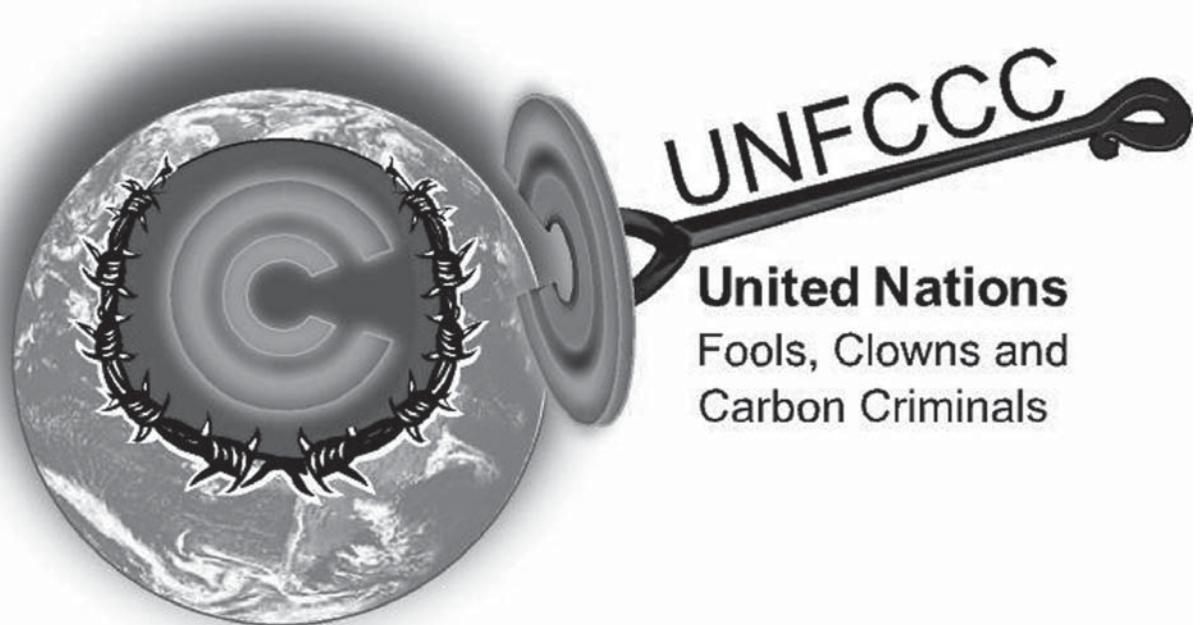
As the talks have demonstrated repeatedly, they are not the solution. The solution lies in a groundswell

of communities, movements and workers making demands on their national governments and making climate change a deciding factor at the ballot. It will take local municipalities and local communities making changes in the way they produce and consume goods and energy. It will take a consistent and painstaking resistance to fossil fuels, while demonstrating the energy solutions we want to see. It will require an understanding and recognition that we are all equal parts of the ecosystem and none is more equal than another. ☺

Picture: Latha Ravjee



United Nations
Framework Convention on
Climate Change



Eskom's tariff hike plans

by Siziwe Khanyile

Eskom wants the general public to subsidise the shareholders of foreign companies

Over the past two years, groundWork, communities, and other NGOs have fought the development of the world's third and fourth largest coal-fired power stations (CFPS). These have gone ahead in spite of combined civil society effort to block them. The CFPS were developed under the pretext of energy provision for the poor when, in fact, they are to power the "development" and "growth" of our industrial and mining sectors.

As a result, the South African public is faced with proposals from Eskom for further tariff hikes.

Eskom has put in two applications to the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) and the Department of Energy, namely:

- A formal application through to 2018 and the completion of the current "new build". In this application the "standard tariff" rises by 16% a year from 61c/kWh now to 128c/kWh in 2017/18. In real terms (in 2012 Rands without inflation), that would be a rise from 61c to 96c/kWh (VAT not included).¹ This, says Eskom, is what we should be paying now. It is the "cost reflective" price allowing for operating costs, fuel costs and capital costs for replacing and expanding the system. It says that bringing in the price rise over five years will "smooth the impact of these increases" particularly on "energy-intensive and low-margin businesses".
- An Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2010) application that takes account of the expansion of the power sector beyond the third Multi-Year Price Determination (MYPD 3) and includes building a fleet of six nuclear power stations totalling 9,600 MW. In this case, Eskom says it needs 20% increases in each year from 2013 to 2017, followed by 9% rises in each of the

following five years. This would bring the "standard" tariff to over 150c/kWh in 2017. Eskom argues that government must make decisions on expansion beyond the current new build soon. If Nersa considers only the formal 16% application, Eskom says it will have to ask for more when those decisions are made.

Eskom says its application aims to create the basis for a sustainable electricity industry but it shows, to the contrary, that the model of building big coal-fired base-load to supply "cheap and abundant" power to energy intensive industries is collapsing. This is not just Eskom's model. It is the model of the "minerals-energy complex" that has shaped South Africa's development for over a century. It is unsustainable economically and is socially and environmentally catastrophic.

Eskom's prices have tripled over the last six years and, with this application, will double again in the next five years. This is essentially to pay for the expansion of the energy model: more coal mines supplying more big power plants to supply more big industrial users. All South Africans are thus to pay for a system that is primarily designed for the benefit of large minerals corporations. These beneficiaries, however, now balk at the costs of what they have demanded and look for someone else to pay for it. The biggest consumer of electricity, BHP Billiton's aluminium smelters, is exempt from the tariff increases. What it does pay has been kept secret at Billiton's insistence but it is thought to be less than one tenth of what Eskom says is the real cost of producing electricity.

groundWork made a submission to Nersa and:

- rejected Eskom's proposed residential tariff restructuring and called for the implementation of a revised inclining block tariff with a wider lower band for which the tariff is set at 0c/kWh and more bands at the top;

¹ Eskom doesn't say what it means by a "standard" tariff but we assume it is the average. Some residential users will pay more than twice the standard.



Climate Justice and Energy

- called for the repudiation without compensation of the special pricing agreement with BHP Billiton;
- proposed that the cost of base-load new build be attributed to energy-intensive industrial corporations in proportion to their consumption;
- called on Nersa to consider the externalised costs of construction and operation to the environment and to people's health and well-being – which makes the price hikes even more burdensome;
- called for the closure of equivalent capacity in Eskom's old coal plants as Medupi and Kusile are brought on line;
- called for the wholesale revision of IRP 2010 before any consideration is given to funding further construction;
- proposed that the 2013 price determination should be for one year only to allow time for the revision of the IRP; and

- called on the South African government to turn away from fossil and nuclear technologies and focus national capacity on building a sustainable energy system under people's control and based on energy conservation and efficiency and renewable generation technologies.

Civil society is bracing itself for a fight early in 2013 during the Nersa hearings and beyond. Hopefully this pinch in the pocket is a fight that will unite the various sectors of our society from small businesses, to labour, to social and environmental justice actors as we challenge this price hike. Undoubtedly, the poor will be hit hardest.

Should Nersa grant the increase, nationwide campaigning and legal challenges will ensue.

Let's hope that, unlike during the previous tariff hearings held by Nersa, the concerns of South Africans will be heard. ☺

While Eskom might be proud of Medupi, it will simultaneously benefit big industry and cost people and their environment.
Photo: groundWork



Victory for the Vaal

by Robyn Huyo (CER attorney) and Samson Mokoema (VEJA Coordinator)

ArcelorMittal South Africa (AMSA) is the largest steel producer on the African continent, with a production capacity of 7.8 million tonnes of liquid steel per annum. The parent company, ArcelorMittal, is the world's leading steel company, operational in sixty countries globally. The Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA) is an environmental justice organization that aims to promote a culture of environmental awareness and sustainable development. Its members are non-profit, non-governmental and community-based organizations and volunteers operating in "the Vaal Triangle" – an area of heavy industry and mining in the south of Johannesburg in Gauteng, South Africa. VEJA has consistently placed pressure on AMSA to comply with its environmental obligations, including in relation to air quality and its severely negative impacts on human health.

AMSA was recently forced to close down its electric arc furnaces because they failed to comply with environmental legislation. The Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) issued AMSA with a compliance notice at its Vanderbijlpark plant for contravention of Atmospheric Emission License (AEL) standards. This was done in terms of section 31L of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998. AMSA was given thirty days (until the 16th of October 2012) to comply with the notice and implement a de-dusting solution.

But the completion of a R230 million dust-extraction system at its Vanderbijlpark plant to abate emissions that escaped from the electric arc furnaces was scrapped because it was seen by AMSA as being "too costly". Instead, AMSA took the decision to close down the plant's three electric arc furnaces, as this would be more "economically viable". AMSA has lodged an application to suspend the compliance notice, after which an appeal process will follow.

VEJA had raised these matters with the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) in a Multi Stakeholder Meeting in August 2012, raising

concerns that, despite the fact that AMSA – along with other companies in the Vaal Triangle, like Sasol, Eskom and Natref – has been promising to invest in emissions reduction technologies, little change in this regard has been seen over the last five years. VEJA urged the DEA to act to ensure that there is adherence to these companies' AELs. Therefore, VEJA welcomed the decision by the authorities to close down these furnaces.

Units also cited for non-compliance in GDARD's notice included the coke battery, bag-house and sinter plant. ArcelorMittal CEO Nonkululeko Nyembezi-Heita contended that the environmental degradation occurred at the sinter plant only when AMSA tried to fit the plant with new equipment.

The coke battery at the Vanderbijlpark plant – also cited as a problem in the notice – is apparently to be upgraded in 2013. The plant's Blast Furnace 3 would, she said, be restarted before Christmas 2012 and is currently shut down for repairs. Nyembezi-Heita said that a lightning strike at its coke batteries plant in March 2012 led to erroneous readings from monitors, and that the faulty meters were subsequently replaced. It appears that AMSA disputes the accuracy of the readings. It is not understood how AMSA intends to address the impacts of future lightning strikes.

The blast furnace at Newcastle is apparently also an issue for AMSA because of the imminent re-lining of the furnace. The time of the re-line was only scheduled for 2014 and would, according to Nyembezi-Heita, remain a concern throughout 2013.

This is not the first time in recent years that the AMSA plant in Vanderbijlpark has been investigated. In 2008, the Environmental Management Inspectorate conducted an inspection which revealed non-compliance at waste management facilities and severe dust emissions. This kind of mismanagement and blatant disregard for the health of South Africans in the Vaal Triangle means that the communities in this area have been living



with poor air for more than six decades. This is why VEJA, together with groundWork, has, for the last ten years, been campaigning for clean air in the Vaal Triangle and demanding that government implement legislation to protect human health.

AMSA claims it is fully committed to maintaining and improving its environmental performance and that the recent completion of various improvement projects is evidence of this. AMSA has recently completed the installation of a R250-million abatement system for the sinter plant, which would aim to reduce particulate emissions from the facility by up to 80%. Although problems with the sinter plant were also highlighted in the notice, its commissioning faults had, according to Nyembezi-Heita, already been ironed out by the time the compliance notice was issued.

The effect of closing down the furnaces is that Vanderbijlpark's production capacity has been reduced by between 500 000 and one million tonnes per year. AMSA has indicated that, should present day market conditions prevail, AMSA would have to make further capacity cuts in the foreseeable future. Critically, communities must be on their guard when big-businesses allege that they are closing down because of environmental pressure. AMSA is in trouble generally, as is attested to by the figures below. They have closed this facility not only because of environmental reasons, but because the profits derived from this ageing plant, even if it is upgraded, will be much smaller than they were in the past.

AMSA's headline loss for the quarter was R168 million and its previous quarter loss was R177 million. Total steel sales were 152 000 tonnes lower quarter-on-quarter at 1.1 million tonnes, with the domestic component declining by 42 000 tonnes to 802 000 tonnes, while exports were 110 000 tonnes higher at 295 000 tonnes. December presents a seasonal slowdown for the domestic demand, which is aggravated by the extended tap-hole repair of the Newcastle blast furnace. This has led to speculation that the fourth quarter results would be significantly lower than the third quarter's results.

This demonstrates the crucial role that community pressure from organizations like VEJA plays in the pursuit of environmental justice. It is imperative

that civil society organizations continue to call polluting companies to account for non-compliance with environmental legislation. This is especially so in the current difficult market conditions, where companies might try to cut costs by avoiding environmental obligations.

The Master Plan: Will it ever be released?

More pressure has recently been brought to bear on AMSA by VEJA's institution of legal proceedings against it in the South Gauteng High Court. VEJA used the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (PAIA) to request the controversial Master Plan. The Master Plan is a comprehensive strategy document, developed by AMSA between 2000 and 2002 (and apparently since updated or amended), which details the results of numerous specialist environmental tests for pollution levels at AMSA, and sets out its plans to alleviate pollution and rehabilitate its work sites over a twenty-year period. This was a crucial framing document in the AMSA approach to tackling the pollution in and around its Vanderbijlpark plant.

But AMSA refused to make this record available to VEJA, arguing that it had not demonstrated that it had a right to access the Master Plan. This despite the fact that VEJA had relied on its Section 24 constitutional right to an environment not harmful to people's health or wellbeing and that the documents were requested in the public interest. Access to the Master Plan would enable VEJA to better fulfil its mandate, and to ensure that AMSA's operations are conducted in accordance with the law, that pollution is prevented, and that remediation of pollution is properly planned for and correctly and timeously implemented.

As a result of AMSA's refusal to provide the Master Plan, VEJA has now launched legal proceedings, seeking a court order that the Master Plan be released to it. In its answering affidavit, AMSA has indicated that VEJA has no right to monitor AMSA's compliance with environmental legislation and to hold it accountable to the public for harmful pollution.

VEJA hopes that the authorities will not be intimidated by AMSA or other companies, and that they will do what is necessary to protect the environment and the health of people living in the Vaal Triangle. ☺



Port expansion has sloppy side-effects

by Rico Euripidou

Apart from the myriad other environmental effects that the proposed port expansion plans will have, increased shipping will increase marine slops, already a problem to south Durban residents

Over the past two years, residents of the Bluff and general south Durban basin (SDB) have been plagued by an industrial noxious odour so pungent that it has caused some longtime residents to become physically ill and consider it as a major health risk. Health effects experienced by residents included: difficulty breathing, sinus-related issues, increased experience of asthma, headaches, nose bleeds, worsened hay fever, dizziness, chest tightening, skin-itching, vertigo, nausea, and flu-like symptoms.

Twenty-four months on, the industrial emission that creates this pungent "cat-urine-like odour" has yet to be meaningfully addressed, even after numerous community meetings, countless complaints and investigations by an eThekweni City Health Task Team all point towards a smoking gun at Fuel Firing System (FFS) refiners who, among other activities, "treat" ship slops at their Teakwood Road refinery. This odour is still plaguing the community and, although the local residents complain regularly and through the right channels, it remains a major public health threat affecting an already at-risk population who have disproportionately borne the pollution from industries in the SDB for decades.

Against the backdrop of the public health crisis that people in the SDB are experiencing as a result of heavy industrial development in their neighbourhoods, Transnet and the eThekweni metro are steamrolling their various EIAs to increase the size of the Durban port and proposed Back of Port capacity, alongside their overall objective to increase the volume of freight containers trafficked through the SDB annually by ten-fold, from two to twenty million by 2040. What the planners and environmental consultants don't, however,

articulate is what the environmental and human health burden of such development might be.

In the context of the ongoing "cat-wee" odour crisis this would definitely mean more emissions and waste such as ship slops that come with such development.... but why should this be of major concern to everyday residents of the Bluff and south Durban?

Marine slops are waste mixtures of residual fuel oils and water which are produced by the fuel handling systems employed on large ocean-going vessels. In some places, good systems have been developed in parallel with their industrial progress to deal with such a highly hazardous waste stream – because tankers often have to clean their holds after they unload their cargo, frequently producing hazardous liquid waste.

However, a new report, titled Toxic Truth, by Amnesty International and Greenpeace¹, a story of corporate crime, human rights abuse and governments' failure to protect people and the environment, has found that more than six years after the dumping of toxic waste in the Ivory Coast, a public health crisis that affected more than 100,000 people, causing health effects (including breathing difficulties, nausea, stinging eyes and burning skin), too little has been done to strengthen global regulations on toxic waste dumping and that there is still nothing to stop a similar disaster in other developing countries because politicians and courts have failed to learn from the lessons. Furthermore, Greenpeace and Amnesty demanded that protection from toxic waste dumping should be considered a human right, along with the benefits

¹ <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/Campaign-reports/Toxics-reports/The-Toxic-Truth/>



of such a right including compensation for victims of toxic waste dumping and legal recourse through national and international courts. Currently, the Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal has recently been re-negotiated under opposition to include a key provision to mitigate toxic waste dumping. The Basel Ban Amendment prohibits the export of hazardous waste from a list of developed (mostly OECD) countries to developing countries, including for recycling. The Toxic Truth report also found that it was relatively easy for companies to sidestep regulations on toxic waste movements.

In countries with good environmental systems, at places like Holland's Amsterdam port, the disposal of this liquid waste is the task for highly specialized teams and specialized barges with purpose-built equipment for additional safety. Teams of these units must know the type of waste that is being unloaded from the ships from the moment the ships moor. All ships have bilge water and sludge to dispose of, and sometimes there is cleaning water from the hold, often contaminated with chemicals. For every load of slops taken for treatment, two labelled samples are taken (one for the team and one for the captain of the ship unloading). Slop disposal checklist forms are checked and signed by the captain and the cleanup crew. Every litre of load is accounted for. Then the waste load gets delivered to a slops treatment/recycling plant. There the plant also takes samples. The samples are taken to an on-site lab to be analysed. At the same time the paperwork gets taken care of, and the load is officially handed over. At the lab every chemical is isolated – no risks can be taken because the purification system uses living bacteria to treat some aspects of the oily water waste. Once free of toxins, the water goes to a standard water purifying plant and is then released into the ocean.

However, in jurisdictions such as eThekwi's, with a history of poor and neglectful environmental governance and sub-standard licensing which neglects to consider the wider environmental and human health costs of pollution, no such system exists to safeguard human health. Ship slops collection is coordinated by marine agents who have contracts with used oil recycling companies, no laboratory samples are taken (before or after) and chemical analysis is limited and controlled by

the recycling company. Similarly, the environmental authorities are understaffed, ill prepared and have limited means to investigate fugitive emissions of toxins into the environment. Alongside poor public health surveillance systems to adequately capture and map public health impacts from pollution and substandard licensing, with limited emission limits in place to mitigate dumping toxic waste into the atmosphere, we have, in effect, the perfect environment for any global trader wishing to exploit the good name of recycling with the intention of making good money in the process.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) "proper environmental management is the key to avoiding a quarter of all preventable illnesses which are directly caused by environmental factors". Environmental factors such as physical, chemical and biological risk factors can influence our health directly or through related behaviour change. The WHO estimates that "thirteen million deaths annually are due to preventable environmental causes. Preventing environmental risk could save as many as four million lives a year, in children alone, mostly in developing countries"².

Unless development is considered holistically in the context of interrelated economic, social, environmental and public health costs and benefits we will never develop the means to make the right choices about such development. From the case above it seems a no-brainer!

I have to close out with the oft quoted Larry Summers, ex-World Banker and Obama confidant, who in 1991 wrote an internal memo that was leaked to the environmental community in which he gave three reasons why it made perfect economic sense to dump toxic waste in less developed countries. He said, "I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that". Mr Summers was appointed the U.S. Treasury Secretary in 1999, and served throughout the Clinton Administration. He was also named president of Harvard University.

Sadly, our government agrees with Mr. Summers's insane logic and social ruthlessness. ☺

² <http://www.who.int/phe/en/>



Word Bank – practise as you preach!

by Sunita Dubey

We're waiting for the World Bank to recognise the dissonance between what it says and what it does - but we're not holding our breath!

A new report issued by the World Bank warns that, based on current climate models, the world can expect extreme heat waves, declining global food stocks, loss of ecosystems and biodiversity, and a life-threatening sea-level rise. The report says today's climate could "warm from the current global mean temperature of 0.8°C above pre-industrial levels, to as high as 4°C by 2100, even if countries fulfill current emissions-reduction pledges".

Turn Down The Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must be Avoided summarizes a range of the direct and indirect climatic consequences under the current global path for greenhouse gas emissions. Key findings include:

- Extreme heat waves that, without global warming, would be expected to occur once in several hundred years, will be experienced during almost all summer months in many regions. The effects would not be evenly distributed. The largest warming would be expected to occur over land and could range from 4°C to 10°C. Increases of 6°C or more in average monthly summer temperatures would be expected in the Mediterranean, North Africa, Middle East and parts of the United States.
- Sea-level rise by 0.5 to 1 metre by 2100 is likely, with higher levels also possible. Some of the most highly vulnerable cities are located in Mozambique, Madagascar, Mexico, Venezuela, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam.
- The most vulnerable regions are in the tropics, sub-tropics and towards the poles, where multiple impacts are likely to come together.
- Agriculture, water resources, human health, biodiversity and ecosystem services are likely to be severely impacted. This could lead to large-scale displacement of populations

and consequences for human security and economic and trade systems.

- Many small islands may not be able to sustain their populations.

The report states that the science is unequivocal that humans are the cause of global warming, and major changes are already being observed. The global mean temperature has continued to increase and is now about 0.8°C above pre-industrial levels.

While a global warming of 0.8°C may not seem large, the report notes that many climate change impacts have already started to emerge, and the shift from 0.8°C to 2.0°C warming or beyond will pose much larger challenges. But a global mean temperature increase of 4°C approaches the known historic level of change for the planet, which harks back to the last ice age when much of central Europe and the northern United States were covered with kilometres of ice and global mean temperatures were about 4.5°C to 7°C lower. And this contemporary human-induced climate change, the report notes, is occurring over a century, not millennia.

While these dire warnings by the World Bank make a lot of sense, we have still not forgotten their loan to Eskom to build the largest coal-fired power plant in South Africa. In practice, the World Bank's investments in fossil fuels around the world are turning the heat up. The looming loan by the Bank in Kosovo to build a lignite-based power plant is another example of such a dual approach.

According to the Bank's Information Centre, the World Bank's funding has increased forty-fold over the years. Another report on the Bank's carbon projects in the Asia-Pacific region (1949-2010), produced by the NGO coalition Jubilee South Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development, has highlighted that the bank has financed 745 such



projects over sixty-one years in the Asia Pacific region, at a cost of \$70 billion. About \$20 billion of this was invested in the past ten years.

In a statement before the launch of this report, Mary Barton-Dock of the World Bank made a comment about "leaving the question of fossil fuels to energy colleagues". It is quite jarring that one department of the World Bank sends countries like South Africa on the path of a coal binge by providing a \$3.75 billion loan to build one of the largest thermal power plants, and another department comes in to provide the cure for the festering wound created by their own people.

The responsibility of not having a robust Energy Strategy lies with the World Bank management as well. They very much like this limbo on the question of coal funding, and would be willing to fund coal power plants and infrastructure in the near future. They have lots of interest in Southern Africa, especially in Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia, to fund coal infrastructure.

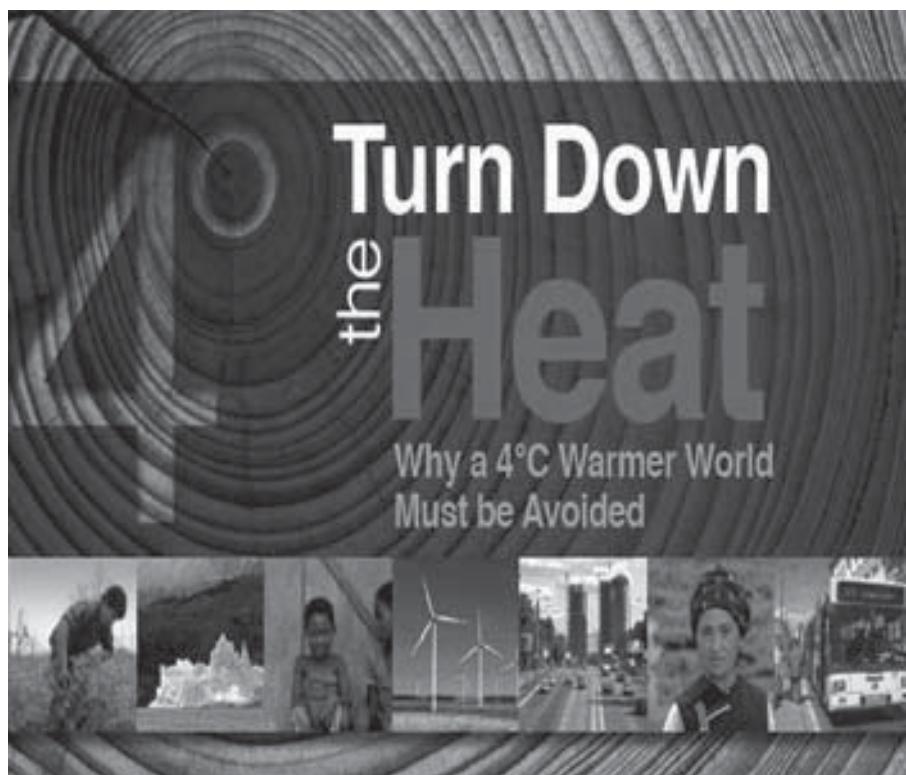
It seems too easy to blame everything on India and China these days. Yes, they have an important

role to play, considering their emissions, which are based on elite wealth creation rather than responding to the needs of the poor, but the Bank management as a whole has also not shown any leadership in curbing coal funding. They bailed out Eskom in South Africa when the Medupi coal-fired power plant was on the verge of collapse due to lack of funds, and today South Africa is heading towards two more mega coal power plants because the Bank revived Eskom's coal projects.

Last month, the World Bank announced that it would provide insurance for a new project in North Africa: a huge expansion of Egypt's oil and gas sector. Rather than being an indication that it will change its ways, the Bank's "Turn Down the Heat" report has more to do with public relations. In spite of the climate and economic crises, the World Bank continues to finance fossil fuel projects at an alarming rate, to promote false solutions to the climate crisis, and to use funding instruments that increase the indebtedness of developing countries. ☺

This report provides the facts, but demands no change in its author's action

Credit: The World Bank



Back of Port has too many questions

by Alice Thomson and Vanessa Black

Earthlife Africa eThekwini has an important question to ask the eThekwini Municipality...

Is it appropriate to increase already huge state subsidies for capital-intensive, high-carbon industries – shipping, freight and petro-chemicals – which will pollute the whole of Durban and destroy neighbourhoods, in a chaotic world economy that makes such mega-investments highly risky?

We think that the rest of the city should be asking this and many more questions during the public participation process that the eThekwini Municipality is running regarding its "Back of Port" plan. This plan involves R250+ billion developments in south Durban including expansion within the harbour, a new Dig Out Port at the old airport, a dig out extension into Bayhead and a Link Road. These plans begin with the extension of berths 203 to 205 within the harbour to accommodate Post-Panamax ships, which will remove a portion of the last remaining sandbank. All together, expansions could lead to container handling capacity growing by from the Port's present capacity of 2.7 million twenty foot equivalent units (TEUs) to 23.2 million TEUs. This eight-fold increase in capacity will have an enormous impact on the environment and the people of Durban, in particular the people of South Durban from Congella/Umbilo/Rosburgh to Clairwood, Austerville, Jacobs and Mobeni.

Community members attending the public participation meetings have objected strongly to the manner in which this process has been conducted. These plans have been in the making since at least 2006 and yet it is only now, when the plans are completed, that an attempt at public consultation is taking place. Communities should have been involved from the beginning. Information documents were only given to community members at the consultation meetings. Communities have demanded that the municipality

hold additional meetings in each area, which the public should look out for.

The document makes no reference to the biggest challenge facing our planet: climate change. If these plans go ahead, the capacity of the port will increase by 8.5 times. This will mean eight times as many ships, containers, trucks and therefore eight times the emissions responsible for global warming. As we all know, this will result in more storms, droughts, floods, extreme weather events, crop failures, famine, death and extinction of species. Even more worrying for Durban is that the port developments will cut through the Bluff dune and remove most of the remaining marsh system in the basin, exposing the area to greater flooding and damage in the extreme weather events we can expect with climate change. We may yet see the catastrophic spectacle of thousands of the city's poor trapped industrial debris and toxic-laden flood waters, as happened around New Orleans with hurricane Katrina.

Transnet concedes that 80% of the goods in the containers leave eThekwini; as much as 60% is destined for Gauteng. Thus this investment is primarily to facilitate the importation of goods to feed consumerism inland. As responsible humans we should consider the impacts of this consumerism on livelihoods, health and other species that are destroyed by the resource extraction and pollution resulting from the manufacturing and eventual land-filling of these goods.

ELA eThekwini believes that a system of ever-expanding economic growth which relies on finite natural resources is unsustainable given that we live on a finite planet with finite resources. Measuring the success of an economy by GDP growth does



Opinion Piece

The Durban port before and after the proposed expansion

Photos: Transnet



not take into account the costs to the environment, health, communities and the loss of natural resources. We need other indicators of success such as the Millennium Development Goal Indicators which measure poverty reduction or the "happy planet index" which measures a country's ability to produce happy healthy citizens with minimum impact on the environment. The failure of GDP to direct our economy in the appropriate way was recognised by the South African Environment Minister Edna Molewa in May 2012 when she signed the "Gaborone Declaration", which means our government is officially committed to measuring pollution of the sort South Durban will emit. If what is called "natural capital accounting" – including the damage from climate change to our society, and emissions in South Durban neighbourhoods – becomes part of revised harbour, shipping, freight and petro-chemical complex planning in Durban, as

the Gaborone Declaration commits us to,¹ then we are convinced the costs will be seen to far outweigh benefits.

Given our city's hosting of the COP17, Durban should be the first municipality to implement the Gaborone Declaration when considering vast projects such as the South Durban Basin infrastructure. This would rapidly push us into a more rigorous assessment of whether ongoing export-led growth strategies are optimal in economic, social and ecological terms. We firmly believe that more transparency on the full ecological costs of the South Durban investments would compel a very different strategy, towards locally-oriented production and more appropriate consumption. By localising the economy we can produce what we need locally and reduce the distance that goods have to travel, thereby reducing emissions and creating local jobs.

The government intends spending R250 billion on all these developments, which will be paid through our rates and taxes. What can we learn from several "white elephant" capital investments in the country that ran over budget, lined the pockets of corrupt politicians and squandered our taxes with little benefit to ordinary citizens? Who really stands to benefit in this case? Large multi-national companies, and their share-holders, will benefit by making it easier for goods to flow in and out the country. Were the port expansions to go ahead, this would be a subsidy for big business – welfare for the rich. The corporate elites and the political elites are teaming up and stealing from the common purse for their benefit – but they can only do this if we allow them to.

The plans boast of creating 130 000 permanent jobs but it is unclear how this figure is reached. Even if this were correct, the project is extremely capital-intensive, coming out at R1.9 million per job created. Far more jobs could be created spending the same money on housing, education

1 The Declaration concludes that signatories will:

- Develop institutional arrangements to strengthen the implementation of natural capital accounting;
- Develop science-based methodologies on an experimental basis for ecosystem accounting as a complement to GDP and corporate performance;
- Pilot and demonstrate the economic, social and environmental aspects of scaled up and integrated approaches to natural capital accounting.



(textbooks!), renewable energy, public transport and environmental remediation to create the society we actually want rather than relying on some of the wealth to “trickle down”.

ELA eThekwini objects to eThekwini Municipality commissioning Graham Muller and Associates to co-ordinate the “back of port” plans. This company has a history of doing business with big polluting industries in South Durban, for example, the Engen expansion in South Durban, and the Mondi paper mill expansion in Merebank amongst others. We believe this represents a conflict of interest, as these are the very companies which are responsible for pollution and the resulting health impacts on communities in South Durban. The “Back of Port” plan shows callous disregard for the people of South Durban and our environment.

Who stands to lose from these “developments”?

The consultants drafting the Back-of-Port plans have looked at every area from Congella/Umbilo/Rosburgh, Clairwood, Jacobs, and Moberni. They have analysed the use for each area, its potential for logistics for the port (i.e. trucking, warehouses, packing), who owns the land, and the land value per m². This is not surprising – after all, the expansions would need an extra 878ha of land for TEU space requirements. Working through this document, one realises that any land which is government owned or owned by Transnet is viewed as potential land for logistics. Furthermore residential areas with “low value” are being targeted for rezoning.²

² For Umbilo it recommends that the area from Umbilo Rd to Frere Rd be converted to logistics and interface zones, the area from Sydney to Umbilo be rezoned for General Industry, Office and logistics, and that the area from the Southern Freeway to Sydney Rd remain zoned for noxious industry.

Regarding Jacobs it states that “there is a large area on Balfour Rd and Quality Street which is used for residential purposes and offers the opportunity for rezoning. There are 2 sites owned by the state (army store and barracks) that offer opportunity for back of port activities.”

Regarding Moberni, it states that “There is a South West wedge which is residential hostel facilities. It is a strategically valuable site due to the direct access that the site affords to the N2 national route and could be considered for rezoning for logistics activities....The South West wedge is state owned. The municipality owns 2 large sites at the southern extremity. The hostel site and the municipal owned sites offer opportunities for logistics. The wide roads accommodate trucking.”

The suburbs between the harbour and proposed dig-out port will be hardest hit. The residents of Clairwood stand to lose their cultural amenities and homes – whether formal houses or shacks – as the plans clearly state that Clairwood is to be rezoned for logistics.

It recommends that land occupied by the Fresh Produce Market as well as adjacent sport facilities (owned by the City) and land on the eastern side of the suburb (owned by Transnet) “offer opportunities to be assembled and reused for implementation of a logistics platform.” It states that the current low property values in Clairwood residential zone make this land attractive for site assembly. It outlines the principles underpinning the conversion of land use including the Expropriation Act.

Merebank and Isipingo residents will suffer a vast increase in pollution, as well as the negative factors (e.g. crime and prostitution) that are associated with local economies in the vicinity of ports. Wentworth will suffer even worse from traffic and associated industry, in what is already one of South Africa’s most pollution-saturated sites.

“It is vital that the public at large as well as residents of the affected areas attend the public meetings and study the relevant documents which can be accessed on http://libraries.durban.gov.za/Resource_Centre/Current%20Projects/Back%20of%20Port/Forms/AllItems.aspx If these plans go ahead we will have to ask what kind of legacy we left for our children and the planet – more pollution, emissions, climate change, national debt, wasteful expenditure, social upheaval for communities, or did we play a part in stopping the plans and creating a cooler planet? We believe that enough public opposition will stop the rape of our planet by political and corporate elites.”

Alice Thomson and Vanessa Black are from Earthlife Africa eThekwini

First published on page 8 of *The Mercury* on 04 September 2012



Mangaung via Doha

by Greenfly

In the US, Barak Obama and Mitt Romney went head to head in the presidential elections with the same chant: Drill Baby, Drill! In China they don't do election slogans – Xi Jinping's succession to Hu Jintao was wrapped up in 2007 – they just do more of everything than everyone else: more renewables, more coal, more nukes. In South Africa, the next president is to be elected at the ANC's Mangaung conference. The press has desperately tried to convince us that Kgalema Motlanthe will prove a real challenge to Jacob Zuma because no challenge is no story. Either way, the energy mantra is the same: Big Base Load, Baby!

And wherever you are – north, south, east or west – and whether you are talking energy, Hummers, Boeing Dreamliners or perfume, the basic slogan is: more, more, more ...

On the way to Mangaung, several South African ministers will have some distracting business in Doha. That's where the 18th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is opening even as Greenfly writes. They have an important task to perform there. Last year, CoP 17 in Durban resulted in a public-relations coup. In 2007, the Bali Action Plan defined two negotiating "tracks" focusing on the Kyoto Protocol and Long Term Cooperative Action. CoP17 got a third track going: the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action.

Never mind the "enhanced action". That is supposed to be about less carbon and is therefore not about more. No-one wants that. The important business concerns the public relations coup of getting the name of Durban on the title track of negotiations. That puts Durban on everybody's lips at every climate meeting all the way through to CoP 21 in 2015.

In 2015, the parties are supposed to agree something new. What that will be is anyone's guess but France has already volunteered to put the name of Paris to whatever it is. That shows just how much

value is put on the name. Beyond that, if the South Africans play their cards right they may keep the name of Durban on the proceedings all the way through to CoP 26 in 2020.

For the actual climate negotiations, South Africa has nothing to add to the joint statement of the BASIC countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China. They note that the Northern countries are evading their responsibility to cut carbon emissions and trying to dump it on the South. Too true. And a great opportunity to keep the media happy with the drama of North-South combat while no-one does less.

Meanwhile in Doha the South Africans can do luxury shopping. That should get them in the mood for Mangaung where they will be thinking big base load. Coal and nukes: that's the real load, the real expensive load, the real expensive load of opportunity. Opportunity for coal miners with political ambition, opportunity for deal fixers, opportunity for Chancellor House, opportunity for the party, opportunity for all the president's horses and all the president's men. That's the way to do more.

Even so, South Africa's more is not quite as much as some, if only because South Africa is just not that big. Add Russia to the partners in BASIC and you get BRICS. And the BRICS are steaming away with plans to expand coal-fired power. According to the World Resource Institute, China plans to add 557,938 MW, India plans on 519,396 MW and Russia wants to add 48,000 MW to its capacity. They rank 1, 2 and 3 in the race for new coal plants. Then comes Turkey and Vietnam, and South Africa comes in sixth with 22,633 MW. It is followed by the United States and three European countries – Ukraine, Poland and Germany. Add up all the world's plans for new coal power and it comes to 1,401,278 MW capacity.

Ain't no-one planning on less. ☺



Presenting the facts... with a punch

by Megan Lewis

Junior campaigner, Megan Lewis, reflects on the information landscape in groundWork and beyond

Through the work the team has undertaken over the past thirteen years, and the many inroads made towards achieving environmental justice, groundWork has made a strong name for itself in the media. I am often told, "it's not that government and corporations dispute the facts, but rather that the way we present them makes them uncomfortable". And since information is regarded so highly in groundWork, the facts are ninety-nine percent of the time accurate, therefore leaving little or no room for any repercussions – except, in some cases, some highly perturbed corporate leaders and government officials. The facts and the nuances of how information is presented are held as important.

Social media and the website

At the time I began as an intern at groundWork, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 17th Conference of the Parties (CoP17) in Durban was happening, and the public seemingly could not get enough of what groundWork was saying on the topic. Not only were groundWork staff interviewed by local and international print, radio and television media, but those surfing the web made sure they linked with what groundWork was saying online. Interactions with the website before, during and immediately after the conference were at a record high, averaging at 8 000 visits and 75 000 hits between November and January.

Unfortunately, the website has since seen a decline in visits and hits, and we are left questioning what could possibly cause a website that was once seen as a portal of information for many to now no longer be viewed as useful or interesting? Or is this the anti-climax that should be expected after a huge media-frenzy such as was seen during CoP17? Issues of strategy, target audience and content are all questions that will need to be answered in the new year. Underlying all of these questions is the understanding that the website needs to remain a critical space for groundWork's – and our

community partners' – work to be presented, but that the interactivity and aesthetic of the website may need a face lift!

Online media is all about increasing the lines of connection. groundWork's website is linked to our Facebook and Twitter pages, and these in turn are connected to each other. The Facebook page was created during the CoP17, but surprisingly did not receive the kind of attention that the website did over this period. At the moment, the Facebook page sits with just over a 100 "likes", and this has not been a consistent process. The content shared is different from the website, focusing on media articles and photographs and acting as a conduit for access to more information on the website. It enables us to connect and interact with individuals in the communities we work with, and with affiliate local and international organizations, as well as the general interested public. Its immediacy tends to be greater than the website, but not as effective as Twitter.

"Power for industry, pollution for people. @ExxaroResources jumps on the bandwagon with another coal-fired power station in Lephalale". With a "take no prisoners" attitude, groundWork entered the 'twitterverse' with this tweet and has since tweeted over 140 tweets that often have the potential to make some people uncomfortable while informing our followers – some of whom include local media and global partners – of environmental injustices across the board and how those that are living them continue to resist them.

There is definitely a risky element to Twitter, and when tweeters think they can say anything there are often serious repercussions, as was evident when the Hawks' – the investigative unit of the South African Police Services – spokesperson McIntosh Polela was recently suspended after making controversial comments on Twitter regarding convicted murderer Molemo "Jub Jub" Maarohanye and prison rape. And so, while groundWork sometimes does make



Media, Information and Publications

strong statements on Twitter, we make sure that the facts are always there to substantiate them.

The height of groundWork's Facebook and Twitter interactions was during the joint action with Greenpeace Africa and Earthlife Africa (Johannesburg) where Eskom was "put under new management" which called broadly for clean and affordable energy for all South Africans. Nevertheless, Twitter in particular enabled the public and the media immediate access to and engagement with the event and the message that the three organizations were making.

Media

Community media, and in particular newspapers, has become an important part of groundWork's media strategy. Community newspapers thrive on local stories, and being able to present media with an important and relevant issue that is affecting their readership is hugely meaningful. In Pietermaritzburg, issues relating to the waste pickers have been picked up by local newspapers and a future story project may see waste pickers' stories being told in vernacular.

Of course, big media grabs have been around Eskom, and the action mentioned earlier received huge media attention. Other than this, newspapers, radio and television have all picked up on our work throughout all of the campaigns. It is interesting to note that print media remains a focus of our media campaign and is where we receive the majority of our coverage, with radio coming in second and focusing predominantly on a few main talk shows that look to groundWork staff for opinion based on knowledge and experience.

The most recent action groundWork has been involved in was around the community in Olifantsfontein who have, for many years now, been affected by the toxic waste disposal company, Thermopower Process Technology, the directors of which once again got their court case postponed – this being the sixth time in three years (turn to page 23 for more information on this). Extensive research was put into compiling a sound media package, which was unfortunately picked up by only a few newspapers and radio stations. While the people in Olifantsfontein continue to live with the environmental health impacts of this extremely negligent company, the resounding feeling from the media was that the story was old! While this is alarming, it makes it clear that we need to rethink our media strategy in cases like this.

In a recent workshop I attended, organizations dealing with various kinds of injustices spoke about the challenges that come with movement building. Mine came from a specific incident that had recently happened where I had felt that more could have been done to include the community in putting together the information output to the media. This brought up for me the notions around speaking on behalf of communities, speaking with communities and communities speaking for themselves. The idea of "what is ours" and what is "theirs" with regards to information and the way it is used and presented is something that I will take forward in remembering that holding or presenting information on *behalf* of the people you work with is never an ideal situation. ☺

groundWork's
first Tweet.
Credit: Twitter



Thermopower still not brought to book

by Kgomotso Modiselle, Olifantsfontein community leader

Eighteen years after democracy, and over twenty years after the Thor Chemicals toxic waste import scandal, the impact of unlawful toxic waste management is still a harsh and personal reality for residents of Olifantsfontein and workers at Thermopower Process Technology. Kgomotso Modiselle, Olifantsfontein resident and Thermopower campaign leader, tells of the history of Thermopower in the community and resistance by those most affected.

Air and water pollution are environmental issues facing the Olifantsfontein community in the Gauteng Province. Since 2005, we have been battling an uphill fight against the toxic emissions from the waste disposal company Thermopower, now operating as A-Thermal Retort Technologies.

We are up in arms about fumes that already cause burning eyes, sore throats and various other illnesses. We cannot shy away from the fact that the challenges we are facing highlight corporate greed. It seems Thermopower is more concerned with super-profits and cares less about damaging people's lives and environment. And we want to stop this!

Thermopower's bosses do not seem to think about the damage they do. They seemingly are not concerned but instead went to the extent of intimidating and threatening us with attorneys. We are facing the company's bosses who are very arrogant and have no conscience but boast of having Luthuli House friends who are willing to use their influence in the government to protect them.

We have sensitized the Gauteng Parliamentary Environmental Portfolio Committee and government authorities about the danger of the plant close to our residential area. The study by Dr Gwen Theron, an independent environmental expert, has highlighted that our homes are not safe because of the very air we breathe. We are talking about almost half-a-million people in Olifantsfontein, Tembisa and surrounding areas, who are exposed to the danger of Thermopower. The entire water supply of Tshwane's two million people is also threatened by Thermopower's activities.

Actions taken by the community

In 2006 to 2008, the local community experienced increased respiratory and other unusual health problems, such as severe headaches, on-going skin rashes and burning eyes.

In May 2009, the local community approached Dr Gwen Theron to comment on the EIA submission – yet to be issued – to expand the Thermopower plant which was to be submitted to Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD). This was followed by a presentation to the GDARD MEC to explain the legal and technical aspects of the Thermopower's activities. The local community then lodged an appeal to the KZN MEC for the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) on the issuance of the mercury disposal license for Thor Guernica Chemicals in Cato Ridge to Thermopower in Gauteng.

At the beginning of 2010, the local community met with the GDARD MEC to discuss actions that the community required from Thermopower. Submission was then made to the Gauteng Portfolio committee and visit to the Thermopower plant to sensitize the committee to the danger of the facility's proximity to residential areas. An appeal was then made to the DEA after it was discovered that Thermopower had received three waste licences.

In 2009, a PAIA application was submitted to gain access to the non-compliance notice to Thermopower after they had promised to give it to us, but did not. Through PAIA this notice was received and analysed, and the non-compliance notice proves everything the community had been saying over the past six years. This was then submitted to the Head of Department of DEA.

In August 2012, the Olifantsfontein community embarked on a health survey to gauge the extent of community health problems since 2006. This was followed by attendance and media work around the Kempton Park Magistrate's court case where the directors at Thermopower were seen at court for the fifth time. And the case was postponed once again, to be heard in May 2013. ☺



Global Warming's terrifying new math

Picture: Edel Rodriguez



Three simple numbers that add up to global catastrophe - and that make clear who the real enemy is

Some context: So far, we've raised the average temperature of the planet just under 0.8 degrees Celsius, and that has caused far more damage than most scientists expected. (A third of summer sea ice in the Arctic is gone, the oceans are 30 percent more acidic, and since warm air holds more water vapor than cold, the atmosphere over the oceans is a shocking five percent wetter, loading the dice for devastating floods.) Given those impacts, in fact, many scientists have come to think that two degrees is far too lenient a target. "Any number much above one degree involves a gamble," writes Kerry Emanuel of MIT, a leading authority on hurricanes, "and the odds become less and less favorable as the temperature goes up." Thomas Lovejoy, once the World Bank's chief biodiversity

adviser, puts it like this: "If we're seeing what we're seeing today at 0.8 degrees Celsius, two degrees is simply too much." NASA scientist James Hansen, the planet's most prominent climatologist, is even blunter: "The target that has been talked about in international negotiations for two degrees of warming is actually a prescription for long-term disaster." At the Copenhagen summit, a spokesman for small island nations warned that many would not survive a two-degree rise: "Some countries will flat-out disappear." When delegates from developing nations were warned that two degrees would represent a "suicide pact" for drought-stricken Africa, many of them started chanting, "One degree, one Africa."