



GROUNDWORK



Simon meets the Pope

In this issue

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, Coal, Waste and Environmental Health.

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Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

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

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From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

Dear Friends

I am penning this reflection of the year 2014 after having returned to work in January. Yes it is late, but considering the past year I do not feel that guilty about having had to close the office and take a break before getting down to reflecting on the year.

It was a phenomenal year, with groundWork starting and building on two new campaigns, the Global Green Healthy Hospital (GGHH) Campaign and the Coal Campaign respectively. Both the campaigners for these campaigns started with groundWork in the first quarter of the year. It has been a learning curve for them, and as the year came to an end they knew full well that they were in the middle of an organization that feels deeply about the work it is doing; an organization that sometimes does not know when to stop. Often I am pressed about why we at times just say no to certain opportunities as we seek to advance environmental justice: the reason is that we cannot take on everything. Then I reflect upon the very many people who have influenced groundWork and me, and recognize in them the desire to leave no stone unturned in pushing for environmental justice for the poor.

Importantly, 2014 also provided us with the platform to work on gender and the understanding of that within the organization. We believe strongly that we cannot claim to work within a gender framework outside of the organization if we are not already working with this inside the organization. So, throughout the year we had some meaningful debates within groundWork as we searched deep within our souls and histories to understand how

we as individuals have been formed. Through this process we then sought to understand gender and the challenges that it brings to our work. Well, let me rephrase, not challenges, but indeed the possibilities of doing things in a different and more meaningful way.

It was a big year for renovations and the start of 2015 will see all the campaigners sharing one big office, which I guess we can call the engine room of groundWork. It is bright orange and has space for another two campaigners, something that we have seriously considered in light of the fact that we have not replaced our Climate and Energy Justice Campaigner after the departure of Siziwe Khanyile.

Sadly, with Siziwe going our work within Friends of the Earth Africa has been curtailed, for she was the person set as the Africa coordinator. It has been difficult not having a specific person to deal with the coordination and we will no longer be doing it going forward. At the Friends of the Earth International biennial general meeting in Sri Lanka, despite the ebola challenges Africa had to face, a good African representation was present and as an old person within the Federation it was good to see young blood come through. This has been my criticism of the Federation since day one, and I am comforted by the fact that there is loads of new blood in Friends of the Earth Africa.

Besides the work demands, the political demands and pressures that are brought to bear on campaigners, communities and NGOs are ever greater. The administrative spaces to question poor political decisions are being closed down rapidly. One only has to reflect on the Infrastructure Development



Act, which seeks to limit how community people respond to attacks on the environmental space. What it in fact means is that any development that government – and their financial elite connections – wants developed, will be pushed through with very little meaningful engagement from the public. Indeed, this will bring great pain to South Africa in future as people realize that this act is there only to facilitate the accumulation of wealth by a few, while leaving the majority of people destitute.

The other political assault on society has been the fact that industry (all lined up after Eskom) has chosen to seek exemptions from the air pollution standards that protect society. groundWork, together with Earthlife Africa (Jhb), the Centre for Environmental Rights, the Legal Resources Centre, community groups from the Highveld, the Vaal, south Durban and various other places around the country, has sought to oppose this. They would have not tried this stunt if there was no political backing for it somewhere in the system. Indeed, what comes to mind is what Joanne Yawitch, ex Deputy Director General of the Department of Environment, said in 2006: "Lousy air is not illegal air". Indeed, in hindsight, in the deep discussions we had in 2004 to develop the air quality act, we should have been stronger and more forceful in saying no to postponements and or exemptions. For indeed, twenty-one years after democracy, adulthood is far from being achieved as government continues, through the law, to facilitate the legality of lousy air. As the people of south Durban will tell you, it is not only about the smell and lousy air, it is about toxic chemicals in their air. It must not be forgotten that this debate for clean air is about politics, not about technical possibilities.

As I write this piece, the oil and coal price has dropped severely since its heyday in 2008 of nearly \$140 per ton for thermal coal. This is coupled with

the drop in price of crude oil. It seems we are in a bust period now. But despite the drop in the coal price, and China putting on tariffs for imported coal – barring Australia most likely – let us not kid ourselves that this is the end of coal. While such a message might be something many people want to hear, walking around the expanded developments in the Mpumalanga area and speaking to big commercial farmers in the area, it is obvious that the end of coal from where we are is far from near. Chinese and Indian money is floating all around us, lots of it being pumped into expanded coal operations in the areas.

Despite the effective push back on Coal 3, the Fuleni mine, the Coal-to-Liquid proposals and various Independent Power Producers (IPP), major work still needs to be done. New coal power stations and mines are being planned in KwaZulu-Natal, which is opening up the original coal fields of South Africa. So now a new front is facing us, beyond the Waterberg and Mpumalanga. And when you have a company going to a village that was originally a coal village, which has suffered because of the Dutch disease that the original coal brought with it, such as high unemployment and false developments, it is going to be very difficult to speak to people now and ask them to be cautious about coal and its false promises. The development that democracy promised them has yet to arrive and thus coal – with all its ills – is a better bet for them.

So, with these challenges 2015 is going to be a busy year and our responses will have to dig deep into the real politik of what we are facing. We have to be clear about our political messaging and approach. In 2014, much change happened in groundWork and we seek to build upon this change in 2015 as we plan towards 2020. ☺



Is the AQA going up in smoke?

Bobby Peek

Breathing is the most basic process of life. *Slow Poison: Air pollution, public health and failing governance*, is a new report published by groundWork, the Centre for Environmental Rights and community partners from the Vaal (Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance), Highveld (Highveld Environmental Justice Network) and south Durban (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance) on the fatal state of air quality in South Africa. It was released on the 15th of September in Durban and Johannesburg, and then shared with community people from the Waterberg Area in a community training and learning meeting at the end of September. The Waterberg area is facing an onslaught of new coal mines and the infamous Medupi power station and thus the learning from other polluted areas around South Africa is critical for local people.

Slow Poison outlines the history of regulations governing air pollution – a story of collusion between the State and industry – and of people's struggles to secure an air quality regime that protects people's health, as outlined in Section 24 of the Constitution.

Despite being declared the first air priority area in the 2007, the Vaal Triangle has yet to meet any of the requirements set out in the area's Air Quality Management Plan and exceedances in particulate matter of 2.5 and 10 micro-millimeters for twenty-five days and over have been numerous.

eMalahleni is known today to have some of the dirtiest air in the world, even though the Highveld was declared an Air Priority Area in 2008. It shows similar exceedances that are, like the Vaal, far above the World Health Organization's standards and higher even than South Africa's own, less stringent, prescribed air pollution standards .

While not formally declared an Air Priority Area by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), the South Durban Basin has grown into a major industrial hub with two petrochemical refineries in amongst other polluting industries. With total disregard for the Multi-Point Plan (2000), in 2011 the

Metropolitan municipality dismantled the pollution control and risk management unit, and today air pollution is still not taken seriously. eThekwin continues to ignore the recommendations of the South Durban Health Study published in 2006, which found that even modest increases in air pollution levels affect those already vulnerable to lung diseases and increases the number of people that will become vulnerable.

The report details government's failure to enforce the law or to maintain proper air quality monitoring and information systems while industry disdains compliance with the law. Critically, it concludes that government is once more allowing the air quality regime to collapse.

Government's response

The report received a positive media response and in October community groups, together with groundWork, were asked to present the report to the national Portfolio Committee on Environment. We shared the platform with the Minister of Environmental Affairs, but sadly the community was given very little time to air their views. What is of further concern is that when community people engage robustly with government it is interpreted as personal. Outside the confines of the meeting, community people were approached by the Minister and "warned" not to threaten the DEA staff people. Community people have never threatened DEA staff, but have rather called a spade a spade, and this was not enjoyed by the DEA. The fact that government interprets this engagement as threatening underlies how heavy-handedly government comes down on community people. This is a really strange approach, considering that government is being supported by community in the case where Sasol, a major polluter, is taking government to court because Sasol believes air quality standards should not be applicable to them.

But the positive that came out of the Portfolio Committee meeting was that government visited the community people in the Vaal and Highveld at the end of November to understand better the



challenges people are facing in these areas. This outreach must be welcomed and we call on the Portfolio Committee on Health, and Energy to come and visit community areas to understand for themselves the health impact of the bad energy choices that government has made. So the report opened some minds within the political fraternity. It is hoped that the Portfolio Committee members think more carefully about how to approach the challenge of air pollution in 2015.

Crying Eskom

While Eskom cries that they do not have money, the reality is that South Africa has to make hard political choices about protecting people's health now, as guaranteed by Section 24 of the Constitution. If we do not, we are firstly failing to deliver on this Constitutional commitment and democracy and, secondly, the ill health that will result from Eskom and industry being given carte blanche to pollute will mean that the tax payer will have to fork out more for the increased health cost resulting from Eskom and industrial pollution.

This is known as externalisation or, for want of another phrase, toxic dumping on the poorest. As in the case of toxic waste being regularly dumped in Africa, we are going to have poor communities being dumped upon now by severe air pollution. These are mostly communities that are impoverished and already ill, and that will only become sicker communities, particularly as their reality as marginalised communities will mean they will not get the necessary medical services from government. The fact that government allows

pollution, ignoring the real cost of human health is tantamount to AIDS and HIV denialism.

The solution is that Eskom should shut down its poorly-operating power stations that are to be decommissioned earliest, invest in improving those that have a longer life span to meet the standards and spend money on renewables at a local level, supported by local municipalities and communities. The last point will mean that people get access to clean energy rather than waiting for the Eskom connection, which will probably be too expensive when it gets to them.

Simply: we veto postponements of substantial issues within the Air Quality Act such as the Minimum Emission Standards.

It is surprising that government did not see this coming. We hope that as a result of Sasol's action government understands now who the real enemy is: not people fighting for and demanding clean air, but rather those who seek to counter that demand for no other reason than the motivation of profits at the expense of the poor.

The future of the report

The report gives community people and society in general a good benchmark about the status of air pollution in South Africa. The conclusion of the report will be shared widely and strategies must be jointly developed with community people and NGOs to hold government accountable. We cannot just give up twenty years of hard-fought-for victories for good air quality just because industry wants to ignore the new air pollution standards. ☺

Conclusion to the Air Quality Report, Slow Poison

In 2011, the WHO compiled air quality data from 1 100 cities in ninety-one countries and found that people living in many urban areas are exposed to persistently elevated levels of fine particle pollution. The report states, "In both developed and developing countries, the largest contributors to urban outdoor air pollution include motor transport, small-scale manufacturers and other industries, burning of biomass and coal for cooking and heating, as well as coal-fired power plants. Residential wood and coal burning for space heating is an important contributor to air pollution, especially in rural areas during colder months." Evidence of the harm from coarse particulates (PM_{10}) is equally well established. Even short-term exposures increase mortality by about 0.5% for each $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in the daily concentration. An increasing range of adverse health effects has been linked to air pollution, and at ever-lower concentrations – particularly for airborne particulate matter. For both PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$, it is unlikely that any standard will fully protect people from harm. Nevertheless, by reducing PM_{10} from 70 to $20\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, air quality-related deaths can be decreased by about 15%.

The standard-setting process should therefore aim for the lowest possible concentrations and, in our view, this should not be higher than the levels advocated by the WHO. But tough standards are not much good unless they are enforced and this in turn relies on reliable monitoring data. That government has allowed the air quality management system to deteriorate to the point of collapse indicates a level of indifference to people's health and well-being.



The politics of climate

David Hallowes

Climate politics and learning from pollution hotspots

Climate change is coming on fast. People have known droughts and floods since the beginning of time, but many people in Africa and around the world are now seeing such intense and extreme weather that it is outside their previous experience. Around the world, people's livelihoods are already being destroyed and hundreds of thousands have already died from extraordinary heat-waves, droughts and storms. And as the world heats up more, the storms and droughts will get worse and more and more people will be affected.

Poor people are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. And people who live on the fencelines of polluting industry get a double hit. The greenhouse gases that result in climate change are emitted along with all the other gases that pollute the air they breathe and bring them ill-health, so making them even more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

In November 2013, people from the pollution hotspots in KwaZulu-Natal, the Vaal Triangle and the Highveld, together with people's movements and organizations, created a climate camp in south Durban – within sight of the big old dirty oil refineries. They declared that they will resist the imposition of more dirty energy projects and called for their environments to be cleaned up. They concluded:

We commit ourselves to working together in solidarity to build our common capacity and develop our skills to monitor and resist destructive development and to restore ourselves and our Mother Earth. We will learn together to strengthen our struggles, for it is the struggles of the people that will shape the possibilities for justice.

This commitment to a common process of learning and action reflected proposals made in the workshops preparing for the climate camp. People said they wanted to take ownership of the debate by sharing information and initiating deeper

discussions on climate change within their own communities and in the people's own language.

They proposed that groundWork should support this by setting up a small community working group on climate change. The members of this group will be nominated by the community formations – initially from the Highveld, Vaal and south Durban – and will participate in a series of workshops to unpack how climate change works and to examine climate politics. They will then initiate discussions within their communities and bring back to the working group questions raised by community.

They will also bring back community views on the response to climate change at local, national or international levels. In this way, it is hoped that the working group will enable communities to define their own politics of climate change and to engage with the wider debates from that base.

On the one hand, people are looking for deep change in the way that the economy works and particularly the economy of energy. So the workshop process will look for opportunities at local level to begin to create energy sovereignty – producing clean energy for everyone's needs under democratic control.

On the other hand, a new international agreement is being negotiated by governments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and is supposed to be concluded in Paris next year. At the climate camp, people declared that they do not have faith in this process. Those who are called the world's leaders will not produce a credible response to climate change because that is not their intention. Their intention is rather to protect the interests of the global and national elites. They are putting corporate profits before people and the earth itself. The community climate process will be looking to participate with others all around the country and the world in a people's response to Paris. ☺



The groundWork Report 2014

David Hallowes

The plan, the port and the infrastructure of destruction

The National Development Plan (NDP) has had a good press. It was adopted by the ANC at its Mangaung Conference in 2012, it was the central plank of its election campaign in 2014 and it is now promoted as defining government's agenda.

Corporate business loves it. President Zuma took no less than seven ministers to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to pitch it to the global ruling class and government holds it aloft in all its engagements with local business. For their part, the corporate oligarchs are fulsomely quoted in the business press expressing their support for it but worrying that government won't implement it.

Labour hates it. It is one of the reasons why the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) is breaking up. The union federation vehemently criticised the plan but, led by Zuma's allies, still supported the ANC's election campaign. This looked like a rerun of the imposition of GEAR, government's neo-liberal economic policy, eighteen years ago. Business loved that too, labour hated it but stayed loyal. Except this time, the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa), Cosatu's largest affiliate, refused to support the ANC election campaign unless it ditched the NDP.

On the 7th of November 2014, Cosatu's executive committee retaliated by expelling Numsa, having avoided calling a special congress to get a mandate from its possibly unreliable members. Numsa is contesting its expulsion while also working for a new political alignment with movements and organizations critical of the ANC and the present economic order.

The NDP is thus central to a national debate that is overturning the established post-apartheid political order. The groundWork Report 2014, *Planning Poverty*, shows that it is not only bad

for labour but also for people who live with the polluted environments created by big industry. It is South Africa's ticket for the "race to the bottom", the hollowing out of labour and environmental standards to attract foreign investors and boost national competitiveness.

In November 2013, community groups from the pollution hotspots of the Highveld and the Vaal Triangle joined people from KwaZulu-Natal to create a people's climate camp in Durban. South Durban was chosen for the camp both because it is heavily polluted, primarily by petrochemical industries centred on two large oil refineries, and because plans for the expansion of the port and petrochemicals make it the ground on which one of the most significant environmental justice struggles is being fought.

The port expansion includes the digging out of a brand new port in south Durban. This will be the biggest mega-project in the second of government's grandiose strategic infrastructure projects (SIP-2) which aims for a makeover of what it calls the "Durban-Free State-Gauteng logistics corridor". And, even as SIP-2 expands the infrastructure for petrochemicals, government is allocating oil and gas exploration blocks to the likes of ExxonMobil off-shore of KwaZulu-Natal. These expansion plans are thus nested within South Africa's national plans for infrastructure development and economic growth.

Planning Poverty examines the NDP and outlines the eighteen SIPs before zoning in on the plans for south Durban. It argues that these plans represent an assault on people and their environments in the interests of corporate profit. They will reproduce poverty and inequality, not end it as the NDP claims. And the promise that it will address climate change is as vacuous as Eskom's or Sasol's. ☺



Mighty victory for Vaal communities

Press statement by groundWork, CER and VEJA

In a hard-hitting judgement handed down on the 26th of November, the Supreme Court of Appeal ordered ArcelorMittal South Africa Ltd (AMSA) to release various environmental records to the Vaal Environmental Justice Organisation (VEJA), and to pay the communities' costs.

The Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) refused AMSA's appeal against the September 2013 High Court judgement ordering AMSA to release its environmental "Master Plan", as well as documents relating to its Vaal Disposal Site, and unanimously upheld the High Court judgement. This means that AMSA must make the documents available to VEJA by 17 December 2014.

The SCA made a number of critical findings in relation to AMSA's lack of good faith in its engagement with VEJA and the discrepancies between AMSA's shareholder communications and its actual conduct. The SCA also emphasised the importance of corporate transparency in relation to environmental issues, stating that "Corporations operating within our borders... must be left in no doubt that, in relation to the environment in circumstances such as those under discussion, there is no room for secrecy and that constitutional values will be enforced".

VEJA has been fighting for access to the Master Plan for more than a decade. AMSA has consistently refused to release it. This comprehensive strategy document contains the results of numerous specialist environmental tests for pollution levels at AMSA's Vanderbijlpark facility, as well as its plans to address this pollution and rehabilitate its sites over a twenty year period.

Through its attorneys, the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), in late 2011 VEJA requested access to the Master Plan using the Promotion of Access to Information Act. In February 2012, VEJA also requested records relating to the closure and rehabilitation of the company's Vaal Disposal Site,

situated in Vereeniging, after the company had illegally dumped hazardous waste here. AMSA refused both requests, arguing that VEJA had no right to access the documents. VEJA then applied to the High Court, which, in 2013, upheld VEJA's arguments and ordered AMSA to release the documents. Instead, AMSA appealed to the SCA.

The judgement highlighted the "dangers of a culture of secrecy and unresponsiveness" and berated AMSA's "obstructive and contrived", "disingenuous" approach in which it had "feigned ignorance" of the existence of the Master Plan. The judgement points to AMSA's history of environmental impacts, pointing out that such impacts are of public interest and importance, and do not only affect persons and communities in the immediate vicinity of its facilities. It was pointed out that AMSA's approach contradicts its publicly-stated commitment to engage with environmental activists, calling "into question [AMSA's] stated commitment to collaborative corporate governance in relation to the environment, as well as its bona fides in resisting the request for information".

The judgement recognises "the importance of consultation and interaction with the public. After all, environmental degradation affects us all". As an "advocate of environmental justice", VEJA is entitled to the information sought and "to monitor the operations of [AMSA] and its effects on the environment".

Samson Mokoena, Coordinator at VEJA, is relieved as "This has been a long struggle. This judgement confirms what we have known all along - that we have a Constitutional right to know what AMSA's impacts are on our health and the environment. Polluting companies like AMSA can no longer try to hide this kind of information."

The full judgement is available here: <http://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/VEJA-v-AMSA-SCA-Judgment.pdf>



Govt playing politics on the wrong turf

Robby Mokgalaka

*Speakers at the National Climate Change Dialogue were
disingenuous about coal's role*

The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) organized a four-day National Climate Change Dialogue which took place from the 10th to the 13th of November 2014.

According to the department, the purpose of the conference was to provide a dynamic and vibrant space for demonstrating that South Africa is a country in transition to a lower carbon and climate resilient economy. The conference was structured to also provide a platform to facilitate discussions and engagement on issues of climate change.

In contrast to the overall objective of the event, the conference clearly appeared to be a well structured and planned strategy for some political agenda unknown to all participants. This was unambiguously demonstrated in the minister's opening speech.

She sang praises of the department's good work towards mitigation on climate change and the government's commitment to international targets. The presentation was one-sided, citing nothing about the practical tragedies we are living with daily in our country, especially the impact of coal on climate change in the air pollution priority areas such as Highveld, where pollution emissions are a daily challenge for people. In her speech, she further mentioned the evidence of their good work was the Green Star Award received by the DEA.

My question is: who gave the award and based on what criteria? Was it considered in the awarding process that the department is busy granting environmental impact authorizations for new mines

and power stations in the Highveld, the very same area the department declared an Air Priority Area, while it was supposed to be doing the opposite? Has it also been considered that the very same department is failing to take necessary punitive measures against the non-complying companies (such as Sasol and Eskom) in terms of Minimum Emission Standards?

The situation was made worse by the professors and doctors from the respective universities who also made presentations on climate change without mentioning the drivers of the climate change. The questions emerged from the floor about the position of the mines on climate change and they gave dodgy responses, acting disingenuously by saying, "If the mines were the cause of climate change, we would certainly be saying so". Their approach seems to be confined to some business agreement with government, hence their invitations to the workshop. A specific question emerged from the floor, asking why drivers to climate change were not mentioned in the presentations as they are significant in rectifying our behaviour towards achieving our goal of mitigating climate change. The question was deliberately not attended to by the panel.

The collective behaviour of the dignitaries forming the panel, and that of the Minister, sent a message that there is more behind the face of the event than what we are told. There was an undefined and undisclosed agenda which left a visible enough trail to create suspicion in the mind of the unsuspecting floor members.





*Coal dust
from a mine in
Masakhane*
Credit:
groundWork

It was clear that the strategy was to shape our responses to suit their hidden objectives. When you asked relevant question of a particular importance you would either be dealt with with silence, or be told it is not relevant, or be told that the person able to answer the question is not at the conference but would respond to you through email if you would leave your contact details.

The only positive I have drawn out of the function is that I have learnt about the "don't care" attitude of our government on issues of environment and the health of the very same people who voted them into power.

It is a saddening situation to see our government adopting a "don't care" attitude by turning a blind eye on the dire health hazards in the Highveld, where people are suffering from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases such as asthma, sinus and heart attacks, caused by the continuous breathing

of exceedingly bad air, polluted by coal mines and power stations. The coal mines and power stations contribute intensively to the carbon and pollution footprint in the Highveld, as a lower grade of coal is being used to generate electricity. It is common knowledge that CO_2 is the main contributor to climate change, hence strategic conferences on reducing carbon emissions are held globally.

The most vulnerable and affected people are young children, as their systems are susceptible and too weak to defend themselves. I wonder if our government is really intending to breed a sick nation in the name of economic development for the benefit of the people?

We fought for our government to be in power. Now the question is: do we have to fight against the same government for our own health interest, or will the government fight for our interests?



SAWPA gaining momentum

Musa Chamane

During the SAWPA provincial meetings it became apparent both that SAWPA is coming of age, and that waste pickers are committed to recycling issues

The South African Waste Pickers' Association (SAWPA) held the second round of provincial waste picker meetings in the last quarter of 2014; seven provincial meetings have been held so far. The objectives of these provincial meetings was to report back on the progress SAWPA has made to date. Report backs from various projects happening in different towns were also given at these meetings. The municipal waste incinerator proposed for the Chloorkop landfill site is also high on the agenda for most waste pickers, and this is being discussed and a petition lobbying for disapproval has been distributed to every waste picker affiliated to SAWPA. New and old SAWPA members are attending these meetings and it's good to see their energy and commitments to recycling issues.

Successes

Since the Chloorkop march in November 2013, the Minister of Environmental Affairs has responded to SAWPA saying she is aware of their existence and the contribution that they are making in waste management issues. Various studies are being conducted due to this march, and she encouraged SAWPA to play a role in making sure that they attend public participation processes to raise their issues. Receiving such a response from the minister has been counted by SAWPA as a victory, particularly after having had a number of marches that were not responded to.

There are at least four projects that have got off the ground in different places since SAWPA's formation. Waste pickers in these pilots or demonstration projects had been working in poor conditions and there was no relationship between themselves and the municipality. This changed when SAWPA came into existence, making sure that waste pickers have

good and healthy relationships amongst themselves and with municipalities. The working conditions have improved tremendously.

Waste pickers are now united and are speaking with one voice. Since its formation in 2009, they have been very clear where SAWPA is going, and are becoming a more independent organization. They have made it clear that groundWork may assist them but there will never be a time where groundWork could take a decision on their behalf. This is very important for a new movement, because this shows maturity.

Solidarity, learning exchange and meeting the Pope

Four SAWPA members have been on an exchange to Spain. They also attended an international organics workshop so that they can understand what can be done about South Africa's organic waste stream to really achieve zero waste. They have been exposed to different models of dealing with recyclables. They voiced that some of the learnings have to be implemented in new projects that are being launched, like the project in Sasolburg. They also went on to learn about other recycling cooperatives in Spain and they have learned important lessons from those projects where there are divisions between Spanish waste pickers and refugee waste pickers. South Africa is also facing a similar situation where there are local as well as foreign waste pickers operating in one town. There are divisions amongst them, but the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers is denouncing the act of discrimination based on nationality.

SAWPA is being recognized since they even received the Pope's invitation to a meeting of grassroots movements. The invitation on its own is a huge



victory for SAWPA – who would have known that the Pope is aware that SAWPA exists? Recognition is steadily being given from all quarters, both local and international. At the Pope's meeting, SAWPA got a chance to meet with other fellow movements to share ideas and campaigns. This shows that we have a down-to-earth Pope.

Challenges

Projects are stalling in some municipalities due to a lack of political will in implementing the projects, such as in Pietermaritzburg at the New England Road landfill. Both local and district municipalities are not prepared to resolve this issue of the Material Recovery Facility's (MRF) delay, which has been almost three years now. SAWPA and groundWork have written letters to both municipalities and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA). There has been no clear response to our letters, and no directive forcing municipalities to honour their promise of constructing an MRF, despite the money already having been allocated by CoGTA.

Some municipalities are still not taking recycling seriously because this requires a change in mindset, which is still a challenge for most. Some municipalities still believe their role is to collect and dispose of waste, despite the existence of the Waste Act 2008. Legislation is formed at a higher level, but it takes time to filter down to municipalities, which is a problem because implementation takes place at the local level. This legislation is done at that level and there are no workshops or training targeting those in the municipalities who should implement the law.

Waste pickers themselves are not united enough because whenever more than one person works together divisions are possible, therefore SAWPA should not be looked upon as a movement that is perfect and without any internal challenges. There are different ideas when it comes to movement building, and therefore people will have different views. Nevertheless, SAWPA members have agreed to follow particular route.

Next steps

SAWPA has made it clear that it intends becoming a formal entity that will be independent and have its own voice, fighting for the rights of waste pickers

nationally and even internationally. Member registration is something that is being looked at for 2015. The members will continue voluntary affiliation to SAWPA. The referendum will still be held regarding some of the more important issues such as who can join and the model that will suit the majority of waste pickers' cooperatives. The decisions regarding the above issues are not yet clear and therefore discussions still need to be held. Member registration will happen immediately once SAWPA is formally registered and their constitution has been finalised.

The struggle against incinerators and cement kilns continues in 2015. Cement kilns and incinerators pose a danger to the livelihoods of waste pickers. Anti-incineration is not only supported by waste pickers, but also by most of civil society because incineration results in unclean air and ends up polluting the environment. In 2015, the push to mobilise communities living next to existing incinerators or where incinerators are proposed will be motivated by the waste pickers' need to retain their livelihood of recycling and by the health costs of incineration.

Some waste pickers at the local level are still discussing various issues such as the SAWPA constitution or whether to form cooperatives or not. SAWPA still needs projects that will show how waste pickers can be incorporated into the waste management systems of municipalities. Demonstration projects are still very much on the cards for 2015; this is so that municipalities can see that waste pickers can successfully manage themselves while earning a livelihood.

SAWPA intends working more with other movements; working in solidarity with other movements. Members of SAWPA are not only involved in waste movements, but some are involved in housing struggles or service delivery issues in their communities. We have seen SAWPA working with the south Durban communities, the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance and the Highveld Environmental Justice Alliance in making sure that injustices amongst our communities do not only affect and have to be dealt with by a single organization, but by all those involved in changing society. 



GGHH Programme going strong

Luqman Yesufu

The GGHH Programme is beginning to show real value for the organizations that are involved with it

African hospitals going green

Over the past two months, the Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) Programme, with the facilitation of groundWork, has welcomed more new members into the initiative in Africa. These hospitals are beginning to recognize and understand the impact some of their activities have on climate change, and have therefore decided to not only change their practices and policies, but also become advocates for change within their respective communities.

As membership grows in Africa, the Internet platform called GGHH Connect is becoming more and more useful. This is a powerful, multilingual

Internet platform, built in collaboration with the Cisco and Skoll Foundation, that provides a hub to catalyse and accelerate large-scale change in the health sector. Members are encouraged to go on this platform, teach, learn and share experiences in a borderless online environment.

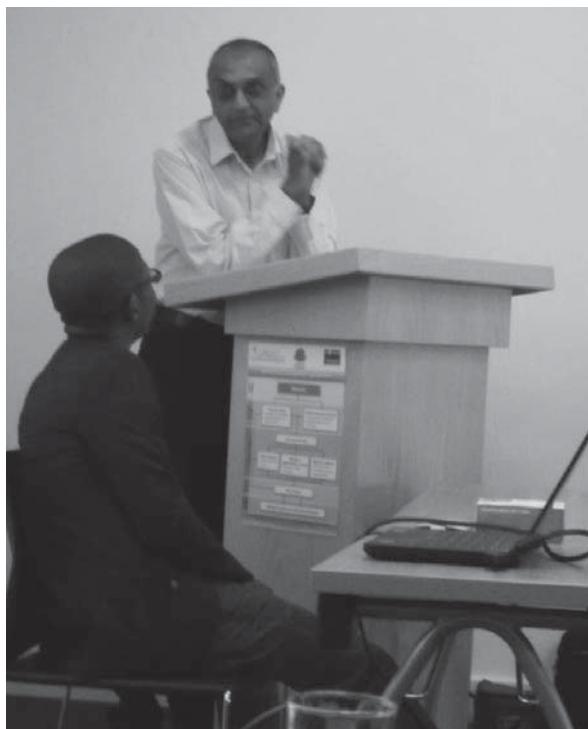
To help facilitate the continuous engagement and participation of GGHH members in the Western Cape Province, groundWork organized a workshop on GGHH Connect for member hospitals being represented by their sustainability coordinators. These coordinators act as environmental champions within the member hospital, ensuring the implementation of the goal chosen by the hospital. They can be described as "my eyes on the ground" and therefore their knowledge and use of GGHH connect is essential in the reduction of the environmental footprint of the member hospitals.

The GGHH Connect workshop was aimed at developing the technical skills of members by showing them how to log in and get feedback from questions asked. This was a fascinating experience for members, as they were able to go live on Connect and interact with other health care workers around the globe, discussing their challenges and finding solutions to their common problems or issues. The issues raised were input into Connect and answers were obtained almost immediately. The sustainability coordinators were intrigued by this and started to generate some very exciting questions, the answer to which they feel will aid their various efforts in ensuring environmentally sustainable health care.

The sustainability coordinator for Stellenbosch University, who is actively involved in integrating the principles of GGHH into the curricula of

CEO of
Mitchells Plain
Hospital – Mr
Hans Human
giving opening
speech at
the GGHH
Workshop

Credit:
groundWork



medical students, was interested in learning about green laboratories. Green laboratories have been shown over the years to have numerous benefits, such as reduced environmental impacts, reduced operational costs, special focus on health and safety and increased productivity. The sustainability director was quick to point out the challenges involved in setting up a green laboratory within the university, such as high initial costs, especially for the design and construction of the labs, but the opportunities are numerous, and include the environmentally preferable purchasing and optimized building systems. Therefore, there will be an inclusion of the development of green laboratories into the work plan for 2013 to 2018 that would serve to promote environmental health and encourage hospitals and health systems that the institution works with to join the GGHH network.

Another interesting conversation during the workshop was building a "carbon neutral hospital". This would involve shifting the source energy of a hospital building from fossil fuel to zero-carbon renewables such as solar and wind. The Chief Director of Infrastructure, who is responsible for the design and construction of hospitals within the Department of Health at the Western Cape, was really interested in getting suitable case studies showing where it has been achieved and how to go about it. She was keen to improve on some of her existing building projects, learning and sharing some of her experience. This has motivated the need for a webinar from carbon neutral hospitals in Chile, which should be on GGHH Connect soon. Furthermore, through Connect the Western Cape's Chief Director of Infrastructure would be able to communicate with the CEO of Gunderson Health System, who, in July 2013, was named one of the "Champions of Change" and recognized for his leadership in environmental stewardship for healthcare organizations. He recently commented in a news release that the health system is poised to be completely energy independent.

Overall, the GGHH Connect workshop was very interactive and educative, as participants and sustainability coordinators were able to take a tour of Connect, learning its features and asking questions about the challenges they face.

Summary Case Studies from African GGHH Members

Case studies written by GGHH members serve to celebrate their work and document what they have achieved. They can also serve as the basis for generating publicity that highlights what is possible in order to motivate others to join the effort. Recently documented case studies emanating from hospitals in Africa are encouraging, as they show the desire and effort made towards environmentally sustainable health care. Health care professionals are beginning not only to be concerned with their patients, but also about the larger community and environment as a whole.

One of the recently published case studies from one of our member hospitals in Africa revealed very interesting findings. The hospital sustainability coordinator decided to engage mentally ill patients through tree planting and garden development within the hospital environment. Due to the difficulty these patients face in re-integrating themselves into the society, this project was meant to give them a sense of hope while at the same time reducing the carbon footprint of the hospital. The implementation process involved the training of interested out-patients on farming techniques. This was done in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, while Kelpak supplied the garden with kelp.

At the end, the hospital has developed beautiful gardens which produce fruits regularly and when community people come and visit their loved ones in the hospital, they end up leaving with a basket of fruits. This shows the powerful symbolism of hope and a regeneration of the hospital in the eyes of the community. Furthermore, the training of out-patients provides them with a skill, one they can rely on once they go back to their various communities. In addition, tree planting improves the atmospheric oxygen while also depleting the carbon dioxide which is a greenhouse gas. In this context, Lentegleur Hospital has transformed itself to be a force of greater healing, through the provision of care to patients, community and the environment that sustains us all.



Another recently completed case study was on developing an environmentally friendly strategy for controlling rodents through the introduction of predator birds within the hospital vicinity instead of using poisonous chemicals. The aim was to attract and promote the nesting of birds of prey around the hospital, creating a natural control of rodents. The main objective was to encourage the diurnal and nocturnal raptors to breed within the grounds of the hospital, effectively increasing natural predation pressure on populations of avian (mainly pigeon and starling) and mammalian (mainly rodent) pests, and providing an environmentally friendly and sustainable alternative to poisoning as a means of pest control.

This project involved identifying a raptor community that would be supported on the site and suitable locations for nest boxes to support the requisite number of pairs of owls such as the Spotted Owl and/or Barn Owl and falcons like the Peregrine Falcon and/or Rock Kestrel. Overall, the project should reduce the level of toxic chemicals released into the environment through spills and rat deaths at the same time maintaining the natural food chain while supporting eco-balance in the environment.

Some other exciting case studies coming up include renewable energy production from wind turbines, bicycle empowerment projects, rain water harvesting and storm water retention, as well as installation of bio digesters and autoclaves as part of the pilot projects to commence in 2015. ☺

Participants of
2014 GGHH
Workshop,
which included
Directors
from the
Western Cape
Department of
Health, CEOs
of Hospital and
Sustainability
Coordinators.

Credit:
groundWork



Minister supports hazardous trade

Rico Euripidou

To trade or not to trade in hazardous waste: Environment Minister Molewa will not ratify African waste treaty

During a recent parliamentary question session, the Minister of Environmental Affairs (DEA), Edna Molewa, sent alarm bells ringing when she replied to a question raised by a COPE MP and stated that the South African government does not intend ratifying the Bamako Convention because we need to protect our hazardous waste disposal industry. What exactly did she mean by this and what are the implications for Africa – a continent beset by imported environmental issues that negatively affect the health and wellbeing of our people?

South Africa is a signatory to the Basel Convention on the Control of Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. The purpose of the treaty is the sound management of waste to safeguard human health and the environment. Parties to this Convention are mandated to: prohibit the export of waste to countries which have prohibited the import of such waste; prohibit the export of waste without prior notification and consent from the state of import; and prohibit the export of waste if there is reason to believe the waste cannot be managed in an environmentally sound manner. Illegal traffic in hazardous wastes or other wastes is a criminal offence and each state party is obliged to take “appropriate legal, administrative and other measures to implement and enforce the provisions of [the] Convention, including measures to prevent and punish conduct in contravention of the Convention.”

The Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Trans-boundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa was negotiated by twelve African nations of the Organization of African Unity in Mali in 1991, and was eventually ratified in 1998. The rationale for this African Convention arose from the ongoing failure of the Basel Convention to prohibit trade and dumping of hazardous waste in Africa.

Currently, there are still many important matters facing the African continent with respect to North-South hazardous waste dumping such as electronic waste, second-hand near-waste goods importation, shipbreaking, abandoned ships and so on, as is evident in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, where e-waste from the West – labelled as “near end of life goods” – is being dumped with impunity. This highlights ongoing profligate international trade in hazardous waste and is evidence of the Convention’s ongoing failure as an international treaty.

The Bamako Convention uses a format and language similar to that of the Basel Convention,

Africa: The world's dumping ground

Over the past twenty years, the African continent has continued to be the cheapest and least controlled dumping ground for hazardous waste arising in the global north. This is highlighted by many recent toxic waste dumping scandals, including the tragic case of the toxic waste illegally dumped in the Ivory Coast by the tanker *Probo Koala*, following which, according to official records, seventeen people died and more than 100 000 people were treated, although it is likely that the number affected was higher as records of the total who had suffered adverse health effects are incomplete. Amnesty International and Greenpeace aptly described this case study in a report as one which “*is a story of corporate crime, human rights abuse and governments' failure to protect people and the environment. It is a story that exposes how systems for enforcing international law have failed to keep up with companies that operate trans-nationally, and how one company has been able to take full advantage of legal uncertainties and jurisdictional loopholes, with devastating consequences.*”



but is much stronger in prohibiting **all imports** of hazardous waste. Additionally, it does not make exceptions on certain hazardous wastes (like those for radioactive materials) made by the Basel Convention. The purpose of the Convention is to:

- Prohibit the import of all hazardous and radioactive wastes into the African continent for any reason.
- Minimize and control trans-boundary movements of hazardous wastes within the African continent.
- Prohibit all ocean and inland water dumping or incineration of hazardous wastes.
- Ensure that disposal of wastes is conducted in an "environmentally sound manner".
- Promote cleaner production over the pursuit of a permissible emissions approach based on assimilative capacity assumptions.
- Establish the precautionary principle.

The current status of the Bamako convention is that twenty-nine countries are signatories, and twenty-five countries are parties. Additionally, and importantly for Africa, products that are banned, severely restricted or have been the subject of prohibitions are also covered under the Convention as wastes.

In terms of the general obligations, countries should ban the import of hazardous and radioactive wastes as well as all forms of ocean disposal. For intra-African waste trade, parties must minimize the trans-boundary movement of wastes and only conduct it with consent of the importing and transit states among other controls. They should minimize the production of hazardous wastes and cooperate to ensure that wastes are treated and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. The Convention also covers national definitions of hazardous waste. Finally, products that are banned, severely restricted or have been the subject of prohibitions are also covered under the Convention as wastes.

In her parliamentary reply, Minister Molewa went on to state that the hazardous waste industry had great potential to create jobs. *"It is for this primary reason that South Africa does not intend to ratify the Bamako Convention, in order to ensure that South Africa's recycling industry is protected and encouraged to grow."* Have we forgotten Thor Chemicals, and the workers who died

because of recycling mercury catalyst, Minister? She went on to say that South Africa accepted hazardous waste from other Southern African Development Community countries destined for our licensed facilities, due to the lack of capacity in those countries to dispose of such waste in an environmentally acceptable manner. She also stated that because we are signatory to the Basel Convention, *"the proximity rule is applied, where wastes are to be treated as close as possible to the source of generation. Furthermore, the recycling of hazardous waste in an environmentally sound manner is also encouraged."*¹

However, as the Basel Convention advances towards its third decade, there is now much advanced discussion about making "environmentally sound management" (ESM) the centrepiece of the Convention. Indeed, previous Conferences of the Parties adopted a Ministerial Declaration asserting a vision of ESM with an emphasis on waste minimization being available for all. The Basel Ban Amendment must be seen as the first and crucial step toward achieving ESM and South Africa has not yet ratified the amendment. Additionally, positioning South Africa as a destination for SADC hazardous waste is counterintuitive to the very intention of the Convention, which is hazardous waste prevention in the first place!

The idea that the Minister intends to encourage hazardous waste trade for job creation and enterprise development is both misleading and misguided. We simply cannot continue to mischaracterize ESM as being simply a matter of downstream responsibility of potential waste recipient countries. This interpretation is one-sided, dangerous and in contradiction to the objectives of the Basel Convention. Rather we submit that ESM is primarily the upstream responsibility of the waste generating country, in its fulfilment of the basic obligations of the Convention.

Minister, Africa is not a dumping ground for the world's toxic waste. For when this happens it is the poor who suffer, not those of us behind computers and in ministerial offices. Do not let the past haunt us again. Do not open up new avenues for the elite to dump upon the poor. ☺

¹ <http://businessday.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/showarticle.aspx?article=1333f580-4a6c-4e0e-b856-59441fc0cd39&key=U5V9wwKGDJAm29%2fT09Orw%3d%3d&issue=11062014111100000000001001>



Buzza Green. Hurra Green.

Megan Lewis

Talk green. Listen green.

This is the slogan of the Green Community Radio (GCR), which started four months ago as an initiative by the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) or Friends of the Earth (FoE) Uganda and feeds directly into NAPE's Sustainability School (SS) project, which has been running for four years. Representatives from various FoE Africa member groups travelled to the "Pearl of Africa" in November to learn about the basis and functionality of Uganda's SS and how it could be replicated in the African region. While the focus of the meeting was about Uganda's school project, I was given a formal platform to present groundWork's first Environmental Justice School and others spoke about initiatives in other spaces.

The meeting and field trip was about looking at the school/s as a model for an activity type that can build on member groups' national work and, critically, the possibility of having an annual regional meeting like this one to continue an informal engagement that lends itself more to seeing what work hosting groups are doing and sharing experiences across the region. Potentially, we could have a regional school, as the FoE member groups have had in Latin America since 2007, which moves around to one of the member countries each year. While the concept of sustainability is broad and can be used in many different ways by many different stakeholders, FoE has a rich and deep understanding of the term, which its positions feed into.

The structure is very different to groundWork's school. NAPE, together with affected communities across the country, maps out sustainability issues critical to the local context. By doing this they assess what the overarching challenge is – say, for example, palm oil plantations – what the resultant issues are or which could be faced by the community, and lastly what the solutions are. This they do over many sessions and it is fantastic to see how they work from the outset from the community's agenda and not their own. They have about five thematic

areas that guide their work and they obviously capacitate community members to become more organized. They then train Educators, many of whom are women, amongst the community groups and these Educators continue this process and see that the SS as a structure takes place in practice. They then become Sustainability Villages and NAPE facilitates exchanges amongst the different villages to enable communities to exchange experiences and learnings.

Government oppression – a gathering of more than three people is considered a crime – also plays itself out in the restriction of radio, impacting upon GCR. No radio stations in Uganda are broadcast nationally, and therefore GCR is only heard by those in the Hoime District. GCR is based on what communities want to talk about and hear, as well as what NAPE feels will help them in their on-going sustainability projects. Its primary role is to amplify the voices of the people. GCR cannot be too politically subversive or else the government will shut them down. They do not air views opposite to FoE's or NAPE's positions, but the affiliate or hosting radio station may do so and this, they feel, is problematic. They have strategic debates about critical issues by inviting government officials to be part of the discussion with a community member on the panel.

Our field trip was to the district of Hoime, an area where oil has recently been discovered and exploration has already taken place, with oil wells having been drilled and tight security protecting these areas. We visited two Sustainability Villages, where NAPE has rolled out its SS and there are designated Educators who drive the school in each of their villages.

The first was the village of Butimba and they were joined by members of a neighbouring community called Chingirwa which, it seems, has recently become involved in NAPE's school programme. We were addressed by the Reverend and leader of the SS here. While Butimba is concerned about the oil that has been discovered, they are also immediately



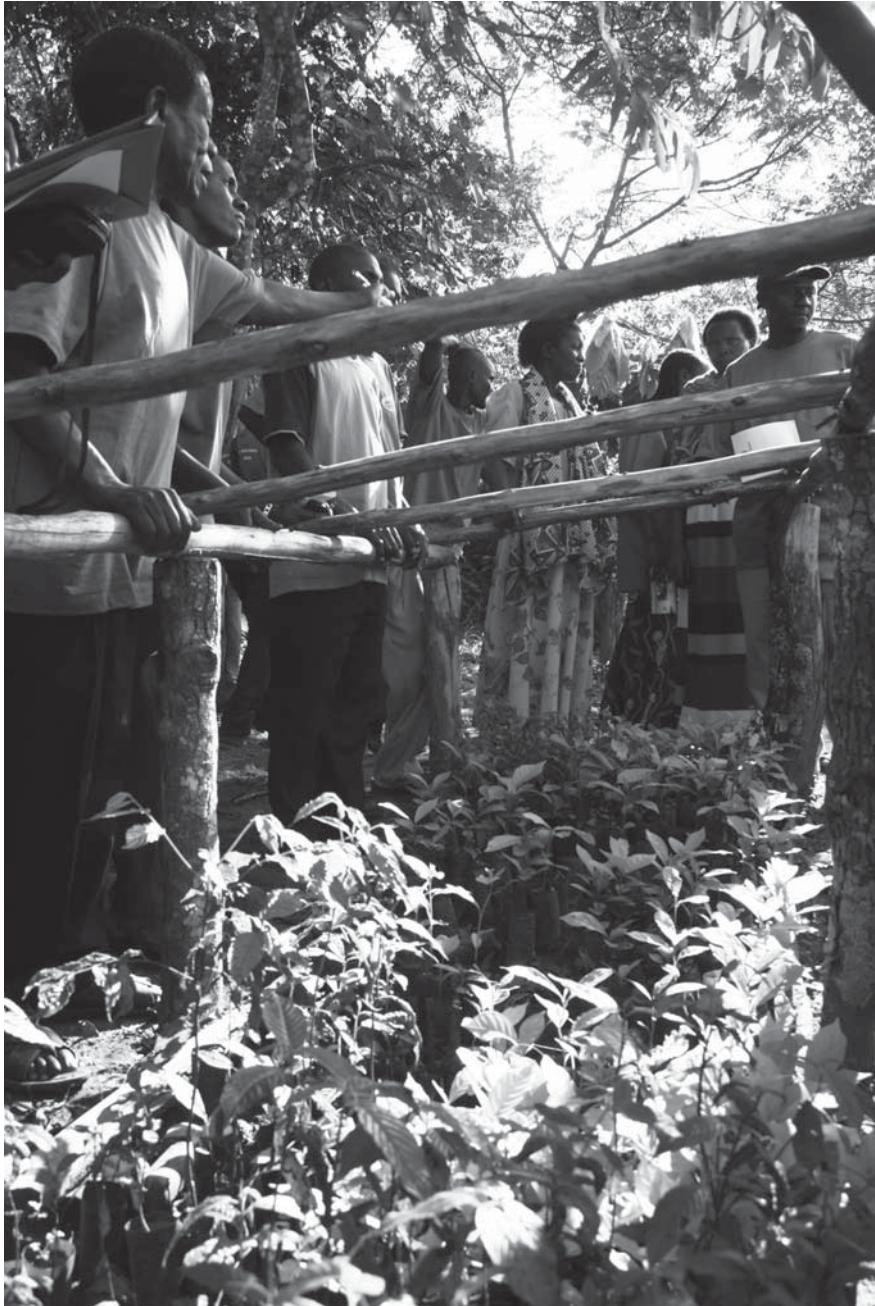
Media, Information and Publications Campaign

impacted upon by plantations of eucalyptus and pine. Butimba's strategy, as worked out through the school, is to have a rudimentary but highly functional nursery where they plant seeds of indigenous trees. These seedlings eventually are planted next to the little natural forest left and they feel this is a way to claim back their land and also to prevent more land from being taken. Interestingly,

they plant a small amount of eucalyptus – not pine as they have learnt it is comparatively more invasive – for building homes and other such needs; they do not want to cut down the indigenous trees for this purpose. They also do bee-keeping, and grow maize, cassava and plantain/bananas. Regarding creating awareness and teaching the broader community, the SS's driver is conservation of land and the environment.

The Butimba Sustainable Village group.

*Credit:
groundWork*



We then moved down through the Rift Valley to Lake Albert where the fishing village of Kaiso-Tonya is found. Right next to the village is a square fenced-off area, protecting one of the wells. The main proponents of oil exploration – and most likely extraction in the near future – in Hoime are Gallo and Kingfisher. The Sustainability Village here uses drama and dance to create awareness about the importance of conservation and defending the land. They are seeing the effects of the drilling of oil in Lake Albert on the fish quality and quantity of the catches. The women also make crafts and blankets in order to make an income in light of the increasing problems with fishing. What was a really meaningful input from FoE Africa at both villages was the representative from Nigeria giving his country's history of oil exploration, the tactics corporates will use to get into a community and the devastation it causes to the social fabric and environmental health of a community.

A statement to the Ugandan government regarding these issues will be released by FoE Africa in early 2015. ☺



C@!\$ and lavender

Greenfly

Please don't use the c-word

The national climate change dialogue in Midrand highlighted all sorts of good things South Africa is doing. It had green growth and the journey to a low carbon economy, the journey to a climate resilient society and water security, the water-food-energy nexus, transition technologies, carbon sinks and carbon sequestration, ecological infrastructure, the replicability of the renewable energy independent power producer procurement programme (yes, that's the REIPPPP) and much, much more.

Replicability is a fine thing. It's one of those words which trips off the developmental tongue just before scalability. There you have it. We can repeat it endlessly on a scale to change the world. So, nice to see the replication of renewable energy (RE)... No. My mistake. It's not the RE that's being replicated but the IPPPP. So the Department of Energy (DoE) is now bringing us the Base Load IPPPP or the BLIPPPP. Base load? Say it softly. That's coal.

At the national climate dialogue they did not say it softly. They did not say it at all. Not on the programme and not in the presentations. Eskom was there. Sasol was there. The mining houses were there. But of coal there was no word. When someone from Witbank said it – this in polite society mind – there was a hush. Huh? Um ... moving on.

And it is best not to mention that South Africa's famous Copenhagen offer, according to which greenhouse gas emissions will peak, plateau and decline, is already bust since we are now emitting above the level for 2020. And the DoE plans that they go a good deal higher yet. And between now and 2050, it is said that Eskom must burn four billion tonnes of ... Huh? Sorry ... moving on.

If coal is impolite in mitigation, it seems incomprehensible in adaptation. Something from an alien world. Are toxic environments resilient? Are people with damaged lungs resilient? These

questions are not making sense. We were talking bio-diversity and ecological infrastructure here. Huh? Um ... moving on.

We could do better than to be moving on to Beijing. But all roads lead to Washington and you can't do worse than that. Even as the South Africans talked politely in Midrand, Presidents Obama and Xi signed the breakthrough deal of the century. It certainly broke through the two degrees they agreed in Cancun. It's the real deal for four degrees. Stick that in your coal stack and smoke it. Drill it deep and frack it hard. Put it in your pipeline, baobei, let's go burn some gasoline.

This, we can be sure, is the basis for the Paris agreement coming up in 2015. If you were paying attention in Durban around 2011, you will know that the climate negotiators agreed to agree in 2015. In Paris, and I quote, they "will adopt a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties". So there! What will have legal force is not decided. Nor will the legal force be onto you. This, after all, is not trade law. Climate law will speak softly and carry a sprig of lavender to offset the smell.

So there's really not too much to worry about as the climate negotiators head for the Peruvian capital of Lima this year. Lima was to lay the basis for Paris but the US and China have already done that. It's a done deal: four degrees and a sprig of lavender. No need for the South Africans to worry about the DoE's coal burning plans.

If the delegates in Lima lift up their eyes to the Andes, they will catch the last rays of the setting sun reflecting off the last of the melting glaciers. In a decade or two, no-one will see that again. And Lima's water supply will run dry. ☹



In Brief

Minister tells Eskom and Sasol "NO"

While Sasol and Eskom have been seeking exemption from law that requires them to cut down their emissions, Environmental Minister Edna Molewa has said that she "cannot do anything that is not within the law", and that the law makes no provision for exemption. Meanwhile, Sasol and friends have made a High Court application to have some of the regulations that govern emissions set aside, essentially seeking to make some provisions of the National Environmental Management Act declared unconstitutional. If they were to succeed, this would set South Africa's environmental programme back by twenty years, according to the DEA.

New report tell us what we already know

A new report that claims that multinational companies like Anglo American deliberately undermine important climate policies and knowingly promote solutions that don't work, in order that they profit from the climate crisis, was released on the 8th of December 2014. Companies like this profit from "solutions" like carbon trading and carbon capture and storage. These solutions benefit the companies, but do not benefit the world at large. Anglo American in particular is expanding its dirty business model by using green funds, offset mechanisms and false techno-fixes, thus pretending to be green.

In the report "Anglo American's dirty energy lobby and its false climate solutions", released at the "Peoples Summit against Climate Change" in Lima, Pascoe Sabido from the Corporate Europe Observatory said that Anglo American has lobbied against subsidies for renewables so aggressively because it makes more money out of coal and shale gas. Corporates consistently put profits before the common good, and sadly governments are paying more attention to them than to the needs of the people they represent.

Denton, Texas is Frack Free

The citizens of Denton have prevailed upon their city to become the first in Texas to ban fracking. The Frack Free Denton President had this to say:

This is a victory for the citizens of the city of Denton - for our families, for our health, for our homes, and for our future.

What does this fracking ban mean? It means we don't have to worry about what our kids are breathing at city playgrounds. It means we can cheer on the Mean Green without fracking pollution blowing over the football field. And it means we don't have to worry about our property value taking a nose dive because frackers set up shop two hundred feet away...

...To those in industry and government who are concerned by the success of this ban, rather than try to overturn it, address why we had to pass it. Because the ban was our LAST RESORT. We tried for years to get government and industry to work with us. And they wouldn't. This was the only way left open to us. And so we took it.

If you want to prevent more bans, especially in towns that know drilling best, do yourselves a favour and listen to concerned citizens. Because if you don't, you may wind up reaping what you've sown...

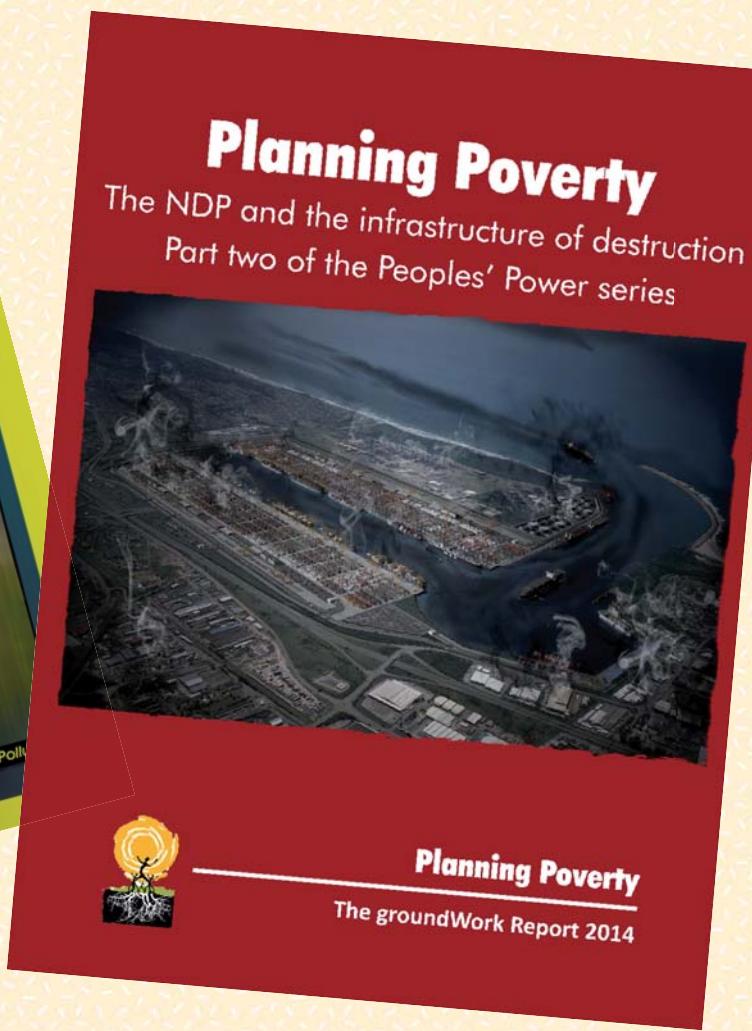
...We know the oil and gas industry is going to sue to try to overturn the fracking ban...

...We know the oil and gas industry is going to try to use our own state government against us by directing its paid flunkies to overturn the ban in the legislature...

To them I say, if you vote to overturn this ban, never again say you're against big government, because politicians didn't pass this ban.

This ban is the voice of the citizens of Denton speaking directly to the fracking industry, and local, state and national government: WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH.





Two of the hard-hitting publications published by groundWork in 2014 (see pages 5 and 8 for more information)



Shell: Don't frack the Karoo

Shell: Don't frack the Karoo is aimed primarily at those living in the Karoo and was formed in reaction to the government's, but more critically Shell's, propaganda, which sells communities with the idea of economic prosperity and jobs. Commissioned by the Southern Cape Land Committee, which works at a grassroots level with people in the Karoo, groundWork, which supports this process, and Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands), representatives of which visited in August, the report speaks to all the negative impacts of shale gas fracking and particularly to Shell's bad reputation, based on its operations' environmental and social negligence, known all over the world.

Author, environmental expert and activist, Dr David Fig, takes the reader through the technical facts of fracking, as many people who are going to be affected if fracking is allowed to occur do not know what the word means. Fig then goes on to discuss the various impacts. The first one he outlines dispels Shell's myth; fracking will bring neither jobs nor development to the area. He highlights the major pressure it will place on South Africa's already scarce water supply and how it will affect people's health, citing research conducted in the United States which indicates that people begin falling ill in various ways after fracking commences.

This is, of course, looked at in the context of South Africa's already weak implementation of regulations relating to the environmental and social aspects. Although much has changed and is continuing to change regarding legislation around fracking, what prevails is the narrative that the Minister of Mineral Resources is arguing for the mining and petroleum/gas law to be separated out into one law for mining and another for petroleum and gas. What this means is that companies would be given licenses to drill horizontally for the mining process, possibly before legislations has been penned for fracking. The report provides a fairly detailed idea of the legislative uncertainty that South Africa is sitting with.

In the concluding chapter, Fig motivates for strong local struggles to push back on fracking, as he states:

"The movement to stop fracking needs to develop a strong, large membership before it can become effective. It needs to be able to command support in order to convince a range of people – from unemployed workers in the Karoo to the president in the Union Buildings – that there are better alternatives and that the price to our people and environment is too high."

