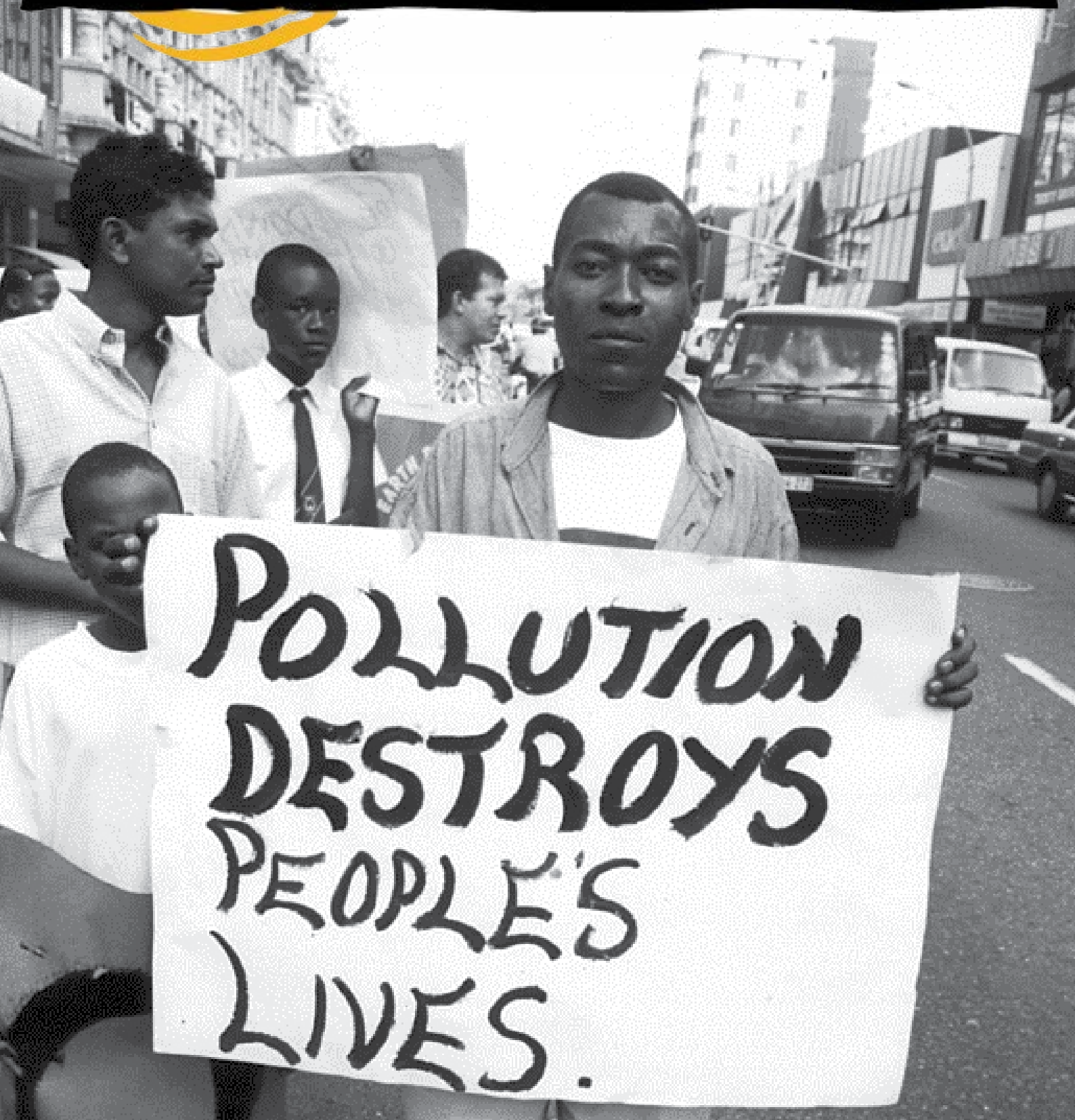




GROUNDWORK



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.

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

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International POPs Elimination Network

Basel Action Network

Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

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

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SDCEA's archives depicting Mandla Cele and Mervyn Kale during a protest against pollution during UN Environmental Day



From the Smoke Stack



Photo by FoE

by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

I am writing this smokestack while at the Friends of the Earth International Biennial General Meeting (BGM) in Lampung, on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Just kilometres away is the volcanic island of Krakatoa, which was the source of the largest volcanic event the world has known. The island was “obliterated in a cataclysmic 1883 eruption, unleashing huge tsunamis (killing more than 36 000 people) and destroying over two-thirds of the island”. Today, we have thousands of deaths also by “natural” events, just not as natural as Krakatoa but because of anthropogenic induced climate change. It is said a life is lost every second of the day because of the impacts of climate change.

As I sit here with more than a hundred people from over sixty countries from every continent, climate change, human rights and planetary emergency is on everyone's lips. The violence of climate change is accompanied by the violence of the state and corporations as they choose to ignore climate change and its impacts. And if you as a community member try to defend your land from being devastated because of activities such as mining, plantations and large dams, you are killed. Our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and children are killed as they seek to defend their lands – or, as it is said in some parts of the world, their territories; territories, for it is not only land people defend when they resist. People defend their culture, their livelihoods and their way of life. In this defence they are murdered. This year two such defenders were Bazooka Radebe from Xolobeni, South Africa, and Berta Caceres from Honduras, both of whom were murdered. In this BGM space we remembered them and the very many people who suffer daily and who also have died this year.

Gustavo Castro Soto, from FoE Mexico and who was with Berta on the night of her murder and was wounded and left for dead, has been in Spain in exile since Berta's killing. The murderers have not been brought to justice, and in the absurdity of the situation the state of Honduras accuses him. He shared his painful story with the meeting, along with very many other stories from other people. The room was silenced by his detailed account of the evening and the aftermath of the murder. We all cried. The young, the old, women and men. It was emotional and painful.

In listening to the stories we recognize how powerful people's resistance is. When you are prepared to put your life on the line for the defence of your territory, power is built. It is not always easy. People are defending with their lives every day. As NGOs we must remember this.

We are fortunate and somewhat privileged in groundWork to have the opportunity to be part of such resistance by people – to be able to work with people on the ground. To be able to help build resistance for the defence of our lives, lands and the earth is something we must not take lightly. We need to dwell on this space that we are in daily, and hold it dear to ourselves – for we are doing the right thing. Too often we forget. In deep reflection on the events of 2016, and especially the cases that were presented by people at the BGM, people's thoughts were anonymously put on paper, collected and shared. I ended up getting the following thoughts: “I will remember and draw on your (Berta Caseres') inspiration when I fear or doubt my own actions, and the actions that we must take to protect our sacred planet.” Let us remember that, not only when we feel fearful but also when we feel that the



road is too long and the demands seemingly too high. This is when we must draw strength from the actions of others.

Was 2016 a tough year? You're damn right it was. It was as intense as ever. I know that often in groundWork people talk about the pace of the work. I sometimes wonder, are we just complaining? Hell no. Ask the groundWork people and they will tell you it was hectic – but exciting. In the last three months people were on the frontlines in communities resisting incineration and fracking. Visiting coal-affected communities in Mozambique and KwaZulu-Natal to share solidarity. Working with local and international health people from all sectors – private and government – convincing them that the health care sector will have to change to respond to climate change and people's health issues effectively. Engaging with government and producers to convince them to move beyond mercury. It was also the time when our annual report – this year being *The Destruction of the Highveld* – was launched.

In all the work we do, we depart from the premise that only movement-building can lead to system change. And system change is what we need for the world and people's territories to be saved. So, to end off November with the waste pickers in their annual exchange, to lend solidarity and to work on real practical issues of movement building for system change, was fitting.

As we reached this crescendo in the last quarter, it has also been a time when we had to say sad good-byes to people we have known and loved. Megan Lewis, who was with groundWork for five years, said good-bye to us to start the next chapter in her young life. Megan, we will always remember you and miss you. Thanks for giving groundWork and the people we work with five years of your life.

May you always be a groundWorker in spirit and in your private resistance to power.

Over the last five months of the year we also had Shanar Taleb-Tabrizi with us from Sweden. It was fun having her in the office. She brought the spirit of youth to the organization. Shanar, I will never forget our selfie-instagram. It will remain with me forever. I hope that you will take a small bit of groundWork with you wherever you go.

For me personally, it was a tough time – but also a very rewarding time. As we grow we realise that our systems have to be held and that only with these systems will we survive the frenetic pace of groundWork. groundWork will never slow down for there will always be too much to do, I believe – so we have to make the systems work.

It was also a time where I took my family with me for work – which I've never done *en masse* before. It was great. At the national gathering to resist fracking in Matatiele, we pitched our tent and this was home for four days. No one warned us that it was going to be -4°C. I was down for nine days after this with bronchitis, but we survived Matats. What I can say is that the people of Matatiele will resist and save their land, their territory. The result was the Matatiele Manifesto – which you can read about in the newsletter. But also, as I write this today, on the 1st December, our national parliament is discussing fracking because of that meeting and the demands from it. Matatiele – you have been heard!

There is much more I can write about in reflecting on 2016. Sadly, we lost many people, including Fidel Castro. Forever I will hold dear the images of him and Mandela together. May his soul rest in peace. A Luta Continua.

Till 2017. ✕



The uncounted costs of our energy

by Rico Euripidou

The human health costs of energy-related air pollution in South Africa...are we finally on track towards really understanding and quantifying the costs of air pollution in South Africa?

"Vulnerability due to high rates of TB and HIV and AIDS infection, suggest there is a critical need for South Africa-specific studies on the association between air pollution and mortality". This is according to researchers Altier and Keen. Ignoring this factor in the way that we have historically done is costing us money – lots of it – and, more importantly, it's costing us human lives.

Recently I read an excellent blog post on the human health costs of energy-related air pollution in South Africa. This study was undertaken by researchers from UCT, Oxford University and the London School of Economics and is available on their IGC site. This type of research is critical because since 2012 the World Health Organization estimates that globally approximately 4.3 million deaths occur from exposure to indoor air pollution and 3.7 million deaths are attributable to outdoor air pollution – for outdoor air pollution this is more than the global deaths from HIV and AIDS, TB and malaria combined, and for this reason there is now a particular interest in quantifying and calculating the costs associated with air pollution.

So, in this study the researchers set out to calculate the number of premature mortalities due to the actual air pollution levels in South Africa, and to quantify the associated economic costs. To do this they used a model called the BenMAP-CE model which was developed by the U.S. EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) which routinely quantifies the health benefits of improved air quality in the USA since the adoption of their Clean Air Act in the 1970s. In a nutshell, the model estimates the human number and economic value of health

impacts resulting from changes in air quality – specifically, ground-level ozone and fine particles which are universally accepted in the published health literature as having a well-documented and measurable impact on public health.

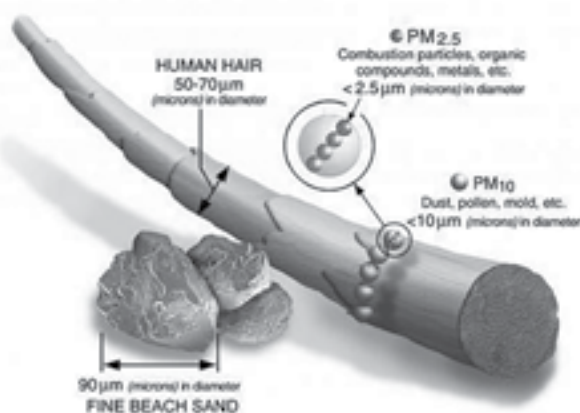
Below are two graphics showing the size comparisons for particulate matter (PM) particles and how they affect our bodies. PM sometimes consists of a mixture of solid particles, toxic chemicals and metals, and liquid droplets found in the air. Some particles are so small they can only be detected using a microscope. Once inhaled, these microscopic particles can enter the bloodstream and affect the brain, heart and lungs and cause serious health effects.

Generally, the smaller the particles the deeper they can penetrate into our lungs and enter our bloodstream. If toxic metals such as lead, cadmium or mercury are also part of the mixture, then the potential health effects are made greater. In South Africa's polluted heartland these "particles" arise mostly from industry and in particular Eskom because Eskom burns millions of tonnes of coal each year in its coal-fired power stations. In 2014, Eskom argued that it was unable to comply with air quality standards and that the health impacts of its emissions should be given less weight than the costs it would have to incur to comply with these standards. For a country like South Africa, which relies on coal for over 90% of its primary energy source, the associated economic costs can be high. The economic burden of air pollution can then be estimated as a percentage of our GDP.



Lead

These figures show the microscopic size of pollution particles that are able to enter our lungs and affect various systems of our body.



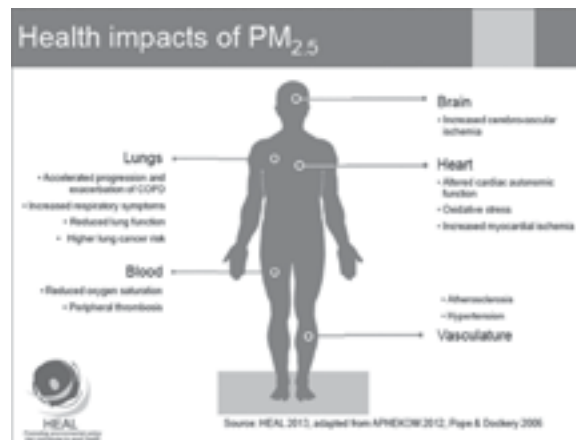
The researchers then used the BenMAP-CE model to estimate health impacts by using four key sources of data called "health impact functions" that are constructed using information from the published epidemiology literature. These include:

1. modelled or monitored air quality changes;
2. population;
3. baseline incidence rates; and
4. an effect estimate.

Based on this information BenMAP-CE then calculates economic values using both a "cost of illness" and "willingness to pay" metric. The cost of illness metrics incorporate medical expenses linked to air pollution-related hospital admissions and visits, cost of medical expenses and lost work, and the willingness to pay metrics take into account the value that individuals place on pain and suffering, loss of satisfaction and leisure time.

Key results for South African

The researchers found that measured PM values in South Africa are three to four times higher than the WHO Global Burden of Disease study findings which estimated that South Africa had 1 800 deaths in 2012 attributable to fine PM. This original number was based on global satellite and modelling views on the severity of air pollution in the country. Furthermore, only one ambient air quality station met the PM health guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization.



The BenMAP-CE model calculated that 27 000 premature mortalities across South Africa are currently due to high levels of fine PM. "This work indicates that 7.4% of all deaths in South Africa are due to chronic exposure to fine PM."

Altier and Keen's research also showed that;

Densely populated regions such as Cape Town, Durban, and the Johannesburg-Pretoria metropolitan area suffer the largest loss of life and these premature deaths cost the economy \$20-billion (2011 International \$), or 6% of South Africa's 2012 GDP. This is the first estimate of the significant economic costs incurred by the air pollution health burden in South Africa.

Recently environmental and public health researchers affiliated with the Public Health Association of South Africa decided to form a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Climate, Energy, and Health. The main purpose of this SIG is to bring together public health experts, climate modellers and experts, and also experts from other relevant disciplines to understand the intersection of climate, energy and health in southern Africa, in order to facilitate multi-disciplinary research and provide evidence for informed policy development and decision making across the region.

Based on these developments I am now optimistic that we have reached a critical position on the track towards really understanding and quantifying the costs of air pollution in South Africa. ✎



Some for all, forever!

The Matatiele Manifesto – the statement of the participants from a dialogue on fracking and the expansion of fossil fuels.

The dialogue hoped to build unity, solidarity and learning, and was held in the Eastern Cape town of Matatiele on the 3rd and 4th of October 2016.

We recognise the growth of fracking for extraction of unconventional gas globally. We also witness the worldwide resistance to this expansion of the fossil fuel industry. In South Africa, people's resistance to the fossil fuel expansion is evident in various corners of our land. We have gathered in this critical water factory of Matatiele because the applications for exploration for gas, oil and coal with future fracking are most advanced here.

We reconfirm our commitments to the outcomes of the people's gatherings in the Karoo towns of Steytlerville in May 2013 and Graaff Reinet in August 2014. The struggle against fracking is embedded in responding to three challenges: ensuring an agro-ecology base on land reform and food sovereignty; securing our scarce water resources; and ensuring that people have a direct say in how energy is produced and used through the principle of energy sovereignty. Critically, the people's voices of this gathering were clear: "We say no to fracking". This we reconfirm as an outcome of our dialogue.

Several transnational and local corporations – including Rhino Oil and Gas, Afro Energy, Sungu Sungu and Motuoane Energy – currently propose exploring for unconventional gas in our region, which, if discovered, will result in fracking in the shale and coal seams. The global track record of the fracking and extractives industry is one of destroyed lands, polluted water and air, harm to people's health and devastation of livelihoods. Fracking has been banned in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, the Netherlands and most recently in Germany. It has also been banned in various US States, including Maryland, New York and counties of California, Texas and Ohio. We in South Africa must do the same.

In our dialogue we have shared our experiences with these corporations and the Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA) and noted the critical absence of relevant government departments and elected political leadership at public meetings where the exploration proposals are being pushed. We are concerned that our democracy is being outsourced to consultants and corporations. There is only a veneer of public participation which ignores our constitutional livelihood rights.

We shared experiences on the following:

- the undemocratic and divisive tactics used by corporations and government in our communities to push their version of a development agenda;
- the communities living on the edge of mines experiencing the impacts first hand;
- the voices of the women who are being silenced in many rural areas;
- our traditional leadership has often been captured by false promises and then becomes unresponsive to the communities they serve;
- the brutality of the process of fracking for unconventional gas and other mining where our community people have been murdered, the environment trashed and their property destroyed, as in the case of Marikana, Xolobeni and Somkhele;
- the false promises of the extractive industry in South Africa, as the projects are sold as "development" plans which are needed for the community;
- profits are sent overseas, not remaining in South Africa through using global financial systems that extract money from the South;
- decisions for invasive development such as



for fracking and other extractives are taken in forums where local community representatives are not present so the outcome is imposed on them;

- the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, critical to environmental justice, is a system that is now being used to rubber stamp extraction rather than seriously consider community voices and protect the environment which supports our lives and livelihoods;
- public participation is seldom meaningful, and often because of language, technical complexity and non-traditional ways of dialogue, people do not understand what is being presented and subsequently imposed on them; and
- land reform must take place now, as it is integral to this process.

There are alternatives in terms of the energy needed to power us and the ways to improve lives and livelihoods. These are sustainable and successful in many places, including Matatiele.

We recognise that Eskom:

- is a state-owned enterprise – meaning it is ours, and it is meant to service people first;
- is continuing to invest in coal-fired power stations, which is an outdated technology for providing energy to the people;
- is pushing nuclear energy which is costly both financially and in terms of the cost to the health of people and the environment which supports our lives and livelihoods;
- does not want to enable independent renewable energy projects to be further established in South Africa; and
- does not provide those who need energy the most, the poor in South Africa, with meaningful, affordable energy, as Eskom's systems, dependent on coal, do not make locally owned, decentralised renewables possible.

We heard from the local municipality that agriculture, tourism and nature come first in the Matatiele Integrated Development Plan (IDP), so we find it difficult to understand how the Rhino Oil and Gas application to frack in the uMzimvubu

Catchment could be considered, let alone allowed to proceed by PASA.

We visited homesteads using alternative energy sources including biogas, the sun and the wind in the rural areas of Matatiele and noted the local innovation and innovators. We have discussed the alternatives and affirmed that we can have energy without burning coal and fossil fuels. Critically, there is "Life after Coal". We have seen this in Matatiele with our own eyes.

We have also witnessed gentle land use by local people who live with the land, restoring and nurturing the landscape to provide what is needed for themselves now, and their children in future. These sustainable livelihoods are improving with time through the uMzimvubu Catchment Partnership, an alliance worthy of duplication for sustainable development in our rural areas.

We have watched documentaries about the environmental injustices and impacts of fracking and extraction on communities and our hearts were broken again by the images of the brutality of the state and private companies in the pursuit of our country's wealth extracted from the ground.

We also understand that extraction and burning of fossil fuel leads to climate change and that Africa is and will be worst affected by the impacts, and that fossil fuels extraction and burning damages what very little arable land, clean water and air we have left for adaptation. We have to adapt and become resilient to what is in store for us in terms of climate change impacts. We have no choice but to move away from fracking and fossil fuel extraction if we want to survive. We will work with our municipalities to ensure that, at the local level where we use energy, we are in control of generating and sharing local, safe, renewable and affordable energy for all.

Based upon our experiences, on our dialogue, and on what we have witnessed in Matatiele, we reaffirmed that our lives and livelihoods are supported by the ecosystems we are destroying, so we will do all it takes to safeguard them for future generations. We say no to exploration and extraction!

Mawubuye umhlaba wethu – Bring back our land
Some for all, forever! ✕



Organized by:

FrackFreeSA and groundWork (Friends of the Earth South Africa), with local organizer and host Environmental Rural Solutions

Attended by representatives from:

African Conservation Trust
Alfred Nzo Community Radio
Bakoena Traditional Council
Church Land Programme
Concerned Residents of Msinga
Conservation South Africa/Xolobeni
Dusi Mngeni Conservation Trust Enviro-Champs
E. Cape DEDEAT
Eastern Cape Parks and tourism Agency
E. Cape Provincial House of Traditional Leaders
Endangered Wildlife Trust
FrackFree Matatiele
Fuleni Environmental Justice Youth Development
Karoo Environmental Justice Movement
Machibini Residents Association
Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park

Matatiele Local Municipality
Methodist Church
Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organization
Moshesh Traditional Council
Mpophomeni Conservation Group
Mpukunyoni Community Property Association
Nature Stamp
Nkosana Traditional Authority
Royal Bakoena Community Development Trust
Rural Network
Sibi Traditional Leader
South Durban Community Environmental Alliance
Southern Cape Land Committee
Ubumbano Youth Organization
UKZN Centre for Civil Society



groundWork's
Niven Reddy
with Matatiele
Frack Free
workshop
participants
Credit:
groundWork



Coal kills - everywhere

by Robby Mokgalaka

Coal affected communities are living in inhumane environments in Mozambique

groundWork, in collaboration with Earthlife Africa-Jhb (ELA), brought together coal affected communities from Botswana and South Africa, particularly the Highveld, Lephalale, Newcastle and Fuleni, to join the Mozambican coal affected communities to discuss their coal struggle in solidarity

with the Mozambican event hosted by Justiça Ambiental! (JA!) Mozambique, groundWork's sister organization in Mozambique. groundWork and JA! are part of Friends of the Earth International (FoEI), which seeks to build solidarity and learning globally and across borders. The visit was also attended by representatives from the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). SSNC is one of the groundWork's funders and a supporter in the environmental justice struggle.

Our mutual experience

Before arriving in Tete, we all believed coal injustice experienced by the South African communities was worse than any other recorded case in the world. Witbank in South Africa, in the Highveld area in the Mpumalanga province, is notoriously known as the dirtiest town in the world because of its inhumane level of pollution caused by the coal mines and coal-fired power stations and other polluting industries. It has thus become the hot spot for visitors from outside the country to experience the toxic environment people are living in. Tap water in some parts of the community is not suitable for drinking, which forces even the poorest people in the community to buy water.

Our visit to Tete revealed another gruesome side to environmental injustices caused by the coal mines. The Vale coal mine, the largest open cast coal mine in the world and owned by a Brazilian company, Vale (Mozambique), has relocated more than seven hundred families in the Cateme region. The

Obolokile Nthase from Botswana, Cassoca Community and International Coal Exchange Participants gather to analyse polluted water.
Credit: groundWork



Moatize District of the Tete province moved them to desperate lands without water and food to support themselves. The conditions are worsened by the current drought. Although some of the community resisted the relocation, unfortunately they were left with no choice as the government forced them off the land and to take the offer – a result of the company's conniving shenanigans of "good development".

Some community members were made to live on the fenceline of the coal mine. They breathe dust every day and experience blasting from the mine that leaves their houses cracked. This is something that is common in South Africa and throughout the world. The communities complained about the dust and cracked houses to both the mine and government, but to no avail.

Death and impunity

When we visited one of the remaining communities, living just a stone's throw away from the Vale coal mine, we were informed about the tragic death of two young boys, **Alberto* and **Joao*. Their lives were taken when a coal waste truck offloaded waste on them. The boys died instantly. The families received no assistance with the funeral arrangements and were never compensated. Both government and the company sent the bereaved families from pillar to post, avoiding accountability. Finally, the families felt helpless and painfully aborted their quest for assistance and justice. The deceased boys were eight and seven years old. They had crept under the company fence to play in the shallow coal waste pit and the company truck full of coal unloaded on them, leaving them to die. The truck had discard coal and overburden which constituted waste. The small bodies of Joao and Alberto were excavated to be recovered for a proper family burial.

Violent response by the State

In 2012 the community protested against the constant violation of their rights and the diminished living conditions to which they have been subjected by Vale and the Mozambican government since resettlement in 2009. In response, the government attacked them, silencing and limiting them from demonstrating against poor living conditions caused by the mine.

Prior to the massive protest, the resettled families, through leaders and civil society organizations, requested various meetings with the company. The community's efforts were met by undesirable responses. Various letters and complaints were submitted to the Mozambican government, but these also fell on deaf ears.

Creating poverty

The mine built small, low quality houses for the relocated communities on arid and infertile lands. These conditions exacerbated poverty in the communities and drove people to sell the roofs of their houses to get money for food, as some of them spend days without food. In this shocking and devastating condition, the communities depend on small wells for water, which are also used by animals.

During our toxic tour community member **Paulo* informed us that he has about thirty cattle living within the fence of the mine, and he has been prevented from reclaiming them. He further told us that he has been fighting the battle for more than six years without victory.

Jindal – creating no go areas in your own neighbourhood

Jindal, an Indian company, owns a coal operation in the same province, and is also creating an inhumane atmosphere by fencing off the Cassoca community of about seventy-six families. Their movements are being limited and monitored; any person in the area is subjected to this surveillance. This type of treatment and violation of human dignity is a resemblance of the colonial and slavery legacy, which saw black people and their land treated purely as commodities. When we arrived at the boom gate of the mine to visit the community inside the mine fence, we met with a conspicuous board on the gate on which was written, "Unauthorized visitors not allowed". Before entering the gate one has to explain the purpose of the visit. Even then, visitors are seldom permitted in. As we drove in, we saw security forces armed with heavy rifles, sending a clear message that we were not welcomed there.

The community sits on an abandoned mine, made up of people who were promised relocation to a safer place. The promise was never fulfilled. The mine was abandoned when operations were negatively impacted by underground water. The



Coal Campaign

Nomcebo Makhubelo from Highveld Environmental Justice Network (HEJN) addresses the International Coal Exchange participants

Credit: groundWork



water has turned into acid mine drainage, as it is mixed with coal. Cattle from the community drink from an unfenced open pit.

The mine's failure to fulfil its promises drove the community to the point of desperation and as a result the community protested against the mine. The government reacted by sending military troops to quell the protest. People were manhandled and some were seriously injured from the attack by the military troops. The violence was an attempt to demobilize the community but, to the contrary, the attacks strengthened unity in Cassoca.

The Mozambican government sent letters to all coal mine affected communities, forbidding them to organize without government permission. The media is also heavily under surveillance and can only visit the communities in the company of government officials who control the information gathered from the community.

Rio Tinto

Rio Tinto, a British-Australian mining company, has also relocated about three hundred families of the Mwaladzi community to dry land. Many farming households previously lived near a river and could walk to the market place in the district of the capital to sell their harvested crops. Now the community lives in sites roughly forty kilometres away from agricultural lands, with unreliable water supplied by the company. The families are left without burial land, making burial processes expensive for them. Rio Tinto has refused to assist by providing land for this purpose. Out of desperation, some families have started relocating back to stay near the coal mine so that they can continue farming because their survival depends on it.

We all learnt that corporate accountability and respect for human life is a myth in Mozambique and many other communities affected by coal mining.

The living conditions in underdeveloped communities are always exacerbated by coal activities for so-called "development", which creates false hope, and superficial or no development, while the pockets of the rich get fatter. It was also painful to learn that elsewhere coal mines, just like in South Africa, never benefit the communities living next to them: the poor get poorer and even more desperate to survive. ✕

**Community members living in conflict areas have been provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity.*



The other end...resistance rising

by Thomas Mnguni

Communities confront workers at Ntshovelo Coal Mine, demanding the mine be shut down until their concerns around blasting, water and dust are addressed.

From early this year, I have experienced and witnessed new challenges around the country. I have witnessed the KZN and Highveld communities rising up against mining and becoming more concerned about their health and the impacts of mining. Most of these communities are beginning to be vocal about the destruction caused by mines and this leads them to lose their livelihood.

The people in Fuleni and Somkhele work collectively to oppose any new developments to mining as this has displaced community members and led to poverty, since they cannot cultivate land and keep their livestock once mining has destroyed their lands. And what they have also witnessed is how quickly the Umfolozi river dried up after the mine started operating in the area. These experiences have motivated them to continue the fight against mines, and they are beginning to share their stories with everyone.

Several communities in the Highveld are also fighting further developments in mining, as mining not only compromises their health, but also leaves a legacy of oppression in the area. Communities in Senotlela are rising up against Canyon Springs mine and have voiced their concern as to how the development will impact on their livelihood and the water.

Then there is the case of Arbor where communities woke up to a huge blast that led to rocks destroying their households. They decided to confront the mine by closing its gate and demanded that the mine deal with their concerns immediately before it could continue with normal operations. The mine retaliated by obtaining an interdict preventing the community from exercising their rights to protest. With the assistance of CER, the mine agreed to mediation, and has to report back to court in February 2017.

The mediation process shows how far the communities are pushing to hold mines accountable. In doing so, they are turning into active agents, protecting the rights and liberties of the community. I also recognise that this – using legal action – is something new to most of us and deserves special attention. I also hope this is one way of getting the mines to make proper commitments that can be directed and monitored by communities, therefore enabling them to hold the mines accountable.

Climate change ... Energy Sovereignty ... Youth!

In November, the Highveld Environmental Justice Network had their climate sessions in Arbor and Witbank. This was supported by groundWork. Following this, groundWork hosted an Energy Sovereignty meeting in Middelburg. One of the successes was the huge turnout of young people at all sessions. This is a positive development, as most young people think mines provide employment.

The energy sovereignty dialogue is very important in that it gives continuity to the *Talking Energy* report, but also gives communities the broader understanding of their energy needs and how they can influence decisions around how their energy is generated. The process will also provide local municipalities with an opportunity to be directly involved in energy provision and address energy backlogs.

In the end, what these experiences and challenges mean is that we have to prepare ourselves to engage with communities; to not only deal with the problems but, where possible, provide solutions that could encourage people to be less reliant on coal. ✕



The conflict in Revolutionary Politics

by Nombulelo Shange

The new Media, Information & Publications Manager considers the place of the media, organizations and individuals in the politics of revolution

groundWork as an environmental justice organization works a lot with the community on human rights violations related to environmental degradation. We're more than just tree huggers and rhino fanatics. We deal with relatable human issues which are vast, complex and crosscutting. We work with those who are most affected by environmental injustices, but are least responsible for it; those who are the most disenfranchised members of society: women, children and people of colour. We work with people who live right next to coal mines and power stations and suffer the impact of dust pollution and poor water quality as a result of mines polluting community resources. We work with communities who suffer from respiratory issues and high unemployment because their health issues mean they are unfit to work in the mines or elsewhere. They are often stripped of their land for the purposes of mining and those with food gardens struggle as the soil quality worsens and plants die. Their homes are frequently destroyed by blasting and rocks coming from the mines. There are mountains of issues relating to gender, race, food security, education and just about every major political issue that has received coverage this year and beyond.

groundWork uses many methods to create awareness about the many issues faced by mining towns. We run workshops, national and international exchanges, and use various forms of media and social media. But I think one of the most important tools we use to push back is joining community organized protests. But mobilising has increasingly become more challenging and dangerous. From Marikana to #FeesMustFall, we have seen the might and brutality which the state,

academic institutions and big capital use to respond to disobedience.

South Africa has recently been plagued by many protests, each more violent than the last. And, with every protest, the media and public scrutiny follows. The all too familiar tallies on the destruction of infrastructure make front page news and of course those privileged enough to vent on social media take to the various platforms to share their outrage in a "there goes the neighbourhood" tone.

We're so quick to castigate those who take to the streets to fight for their lives and their rights, but we're silent when their human rights are violently violated by the state and white capital, violations which I would argue, cost far more than the destruction of infrastructure: violations that cost human lives. This is something that most South Africans refuse to see because black lives are cheap in this country and because the overwhelming view of the privileged public is black "rebellion" trumps past and current capital and state crimes. We are often outraged by protesters disrupting privilege by trashing city streets with litter to make a statement about the conditions they live in, but we are silent when a UKZN student raped by a police officer is made to wait hours for an ambulance. We ignore the likes of Mam Glory Mabuza from Vosman who lives right next to a blocked sewerage tank which overflows with polluted water and human waste. She receives no assistance from her municipality, which is more concerned with providing water and services for mining use, while community taps dry out.

We further ignore and silence the voices of the likes of miners like Vusi Mabasa, who have to gamble



with their health and lives in order to make an income.

"I think those people [referring to job seekers] are not well informed. Because if they were well informed, they would know that coal doesn't just give you money, that money comes with a death sentence. At the end of the day, you face premature death and leave loved ones behind."
– Ex-miner, Vusi Mabaso

Ex-miner, Vusi Mabaso (Credit: groundWork)



Plans to build coal-fired power station Kusile continue despite renewables being 40% cheaper and being better for the environment. This is according to a 2016 report by CSIR's Energy Centre. Greenpeace's 2012 *Coal's Hidden Water Costs to South Africa* report shows that "Kusile will be one of the biggest in the world and will need a steady supply of water to turn its turbines with steam and cool its towers. It will use 71 million litres of water a day." South Africa can't afford this station, not just because coal costs more, but also because it threatens our already scarce water resources. Where is the media and public outrage on the injustice of government and big business wasting money that could be

better spent on education, health or renewables which will see the people of Mpumalanga enjoying healthier sustainable futures?

The numbers and the stories speak for themselves, yet every time meaningful mass action takes place, we'll still go off on random outbursts about "barbaric protestors" and the "these people" dialogue that makes its way to the comment sections of articles and social media platforms. The media experts will tell us just how unreasonable "these people" are for fighting for their rights and provide their "expert" opinion on why they're making it worse by burning busses and buildings. These badly written, poorly researched pieces will masquerade themselves as "news", while offering no protestors' voices. These pieces will fail to ask the crucial question, "Why?". Why are protestors uniting? Why are they so frustrated and angry that they'd destroy the few resources that are there to help them? And are these resources actually that valuable or are they just "white elephants" set in place to make it look like there's development.

This isn't to encourage the destruction of infrastructure. Instead, it's to understand why it happens. I think, if the media asked these questions, then we might find the answers to them are more understandable than we'd all like to admit. We don't ask these questions because we're all trying to cling onto our privilege, especially those of us with lots of it. Asking these questions will force us to admit that we're part of the problem. We contribute to it by directly and indirectly benefiting from the pain and human rights violations of the poor, and because standing up with the poor will require us to give up some of our privilege. We'd also have to admit that our silence is a problem, when our privilege means that our voices will be heard far louder than those of the poor.

The media plays an important role in dividing us by solely focusing on the narrative of violent protests, while neglecting other important angles. This leaves room for big capital to conquer or to at least maintain the status quo. The so called "educated" middle class is blind to this decades-old strategy and continues to misplace their outrage on the poor who try to fight for their rights. The victories of those who give up their lives often end up benefiting those who stood idly by and watch. This



Communities confront workers at Ntshovelo Coal Mine, demanding the mine be shut down until their concerns around blasting, water and dust are addressed.

Credit: groundWork



has even been the case with the end of apartheid, which has opened up African borders for white South Africans to continue “exploring” and getting rich off the African continent. Other races have, at best, gained a tiny, power-obsessed middle class which often does more harm than good by falling into the greedy hands of big capital and further perpetuating human rights abuses.

We all have a moral and social obligation here as South Africa continues to face political and economic uncertainty. I include groundWork in this obligation. While we do a lot, we should and we plan to do more, especially through the media campaign. It was Walter Benjamin who said: “History is written through the eyes of the victor”. Black South Africans believed they were the victors in 1994 when they cast their first votes, but our history and our stories are still told and controlled by our oppressors. Media and information needs to go back to the hands of the people. groundWork hopes to facilitate this transfer of power, as media in South Africa faces an uncertain future and as our

news gets diluted more and more every day. We hope to provide a platform through our community communications strategy that will see communities create and share their own stories through writing, video blogging and mini documentaries, images and even art. We hope to show you the unedited, unbiased accounts of “the other side”, the side that has been repressed.

So, next time while we sit in our posh cars and comfortable homes, complaining about how our lifestyles are being affected by people fighting to survive, let's also consider and criticise the structural violence of white capital, academic institutions and the state, that starves people to death, steals land and destroys self-reliance, all while brutally beating down any kind of revolutionary action. Better yet, let's give up our armchair politics and superficial outlook and think about being real change agents. And, let's face it, the corrupt and unjust way government and corporates conduct themselves hurts our pockets more than a trashed city street. ✕



Turning livelihoods to ashes

by Musa Chamane

Municipal waste incinerators are a hazard to people and their environments

The South African government has finally recognized waste pickers in this country. The Minister of Environmental Affairs has announced that waste pickers need to be integrated into waste management systems of the municipalities because this creates employment. Despite this announcement, some municipalities are still considering incinerators that will threaten the livelihood of waste pickers and pollute the environment. A number of waste pickers operating in the streets and on landfills were ignored until 2009. Their recognition came after they made a decision to form an association they called the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) and through this movement campaigned tirelessly for recognition by government. The recognition means that SAWPA is closer to its goal for waste pickers to be integrated into municipalities as

recognized workers. Despite this pronouncement we still see other methods, such as waste to energy and incineration projects, being adopted. These methods are often backed by government and business and are notoriously known for displacing waste pickers. Incinerators are killing informal jobs and are polluting the environment.

Interwaste incinerator proposal in Wellington

The proposed Enviroserve Waste Company municipal waste incinerator was met by a lot of conflict in Chloorkop, Gauteng. Waste pickers challenged the incinerator that threatened their livelihood and took to the streets in protest in 2013. The waste pickers even went as far as putting down their grievances and sharing them with Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa. This mass action saw the proposed incinerator being placed



Waste pickers' messages against wellington incinerator

Credit: groundWork



Waste

on hold and the proposal finally being disbanded for economic reasons.

Interwaste is another waste company known for its environmental violations in places like Midrand, where communities are complaining about the air quality and the pollution caused by the landfill. The communities in Tembisa, Olifantsfontein and Midrand are against the existence of the site next to the community, while Interwaste claims to be operating within the conditions of their license. Instead, they blame the poor air quality on the smaller plants located around the landfill. There is a pending case against Interwaste, where the Green Scorpions are taking the company to court over their poor operation practices and lack of regard for the environment.

Incineration is not a real solution

Despite poor landfill management in Midrand, Interwaste is now proposing an incinerator in the town of Wellington in Western Cape Province. The community of this town was shocked to wake up and hear the news that their domestic waste, and waste from other nearby towns, will be incinerated in their backyard. The municipality

has been convinced that waste incineration is the modern way of handling waste. Poor and lazy waste management practices have resulted in filled-up dumpsites and land availability for new sites is another challenge the municipality faces. There is a false hope that incineration will solve the waste management problem for this small town in the Western Cape. Community based organization, Drankenstein Environmental Watch (DEW), has been clear and vocal about rejecting the proposed incineration project. This organization, made up of teachers, farmers and community members of all races, also played an active role in a recent meeting that saw the community tackle waste management issues in Wellington.

Community says No! to Wellington Incinerator

A public meeting was held on the 16th of November 2016. It started at 6PM and powered on until midnight. Waste pickers, businesses and community organizations raised their concerns regarding the proposed waste incinerator. The manner in which people opposed incineration was passionate and it will be a surprise and a clear violation of democracy if the proposed incinerator is approved.

Marrianhill,
Durban landfill
Material
Recovery Facility

Credit:
groundWork



The community also opposed the bilateral nature of this agreement, signed between waste companies and municipalities, leaving no room for community involvement. Some of the issues groundWork and DEW raised were: Has the municipality considered recycling and composting of waste? Why has it decided to bring vast quantities of waste (up to 300 tonnes per day, the equivalent of sixty truckloads) into Drakenstein, waste coming from other municipal areas, to be burnt on the doorstep of the Western Cape's town of the year? And finally, what is going to become of the huge stockpiles of contaminated ash residue that will flow out of the incinerators on a daily basis?

Waste Act 2008 undermined

The proposal of harmful municipal waste projects is becoming a common occurrence in South Africa. One such project has also been proposed in the Nelson Mandela Metro, Eastern Cape. These projects are very financially intensive, and see municipalities tied to waste companies for years. If the municipality fails to comply with the agreement there are penalties that they have to pay the company. These plans contravene the Waste Act 2008 that encourages waste minimization. When planning these incinerators there are many steps that overlook the 2008 Waste Act, such as, how will companies find enough waste to feed the incinerators? Incineration is a process that increases waste, instead of reducing it. Waste incineration is not needed when steps like waste minimization – reduce, reuse, recycle – are viable options. Municipalities often fail to explore these alternatives, making clashes and conflict a norm between frustrated communities and municipalities. The DEW court action against their municipality comes as no surprise, as the municipality has failed to comply with various pieces of legislation regarding the proposed incineration project.

Environmentally, economically and socially unsafe

Incineration does not deal with the issue of waste holistically because developers do not consider the external costs to the public. Waste incinerators are known for being dirty emitters of cancer-causing pollutants like dioxins and furans, mercury, as well as cadmium. The solution to the waste issue

should not come at the expense of human and environmental health. Burning waste and recyclable material also results in toxic ash which should be disposed of at a hazardous landfill, which is more expensive than a general waste landfill. The ash has got high concentrations of chemicals and metals that are more likely to leach into the environment. These contaminants will enter the food chain, thus impacting human health. All the risks involved show that incineration is a false solution that will create even grander challenges than those we currently face.

Zero Waste and Materials Recovery Facilities (MRF) as a solution

A safe alternative to incinerators is through introducing zero waste that should run parallel to waste separation at source. If the Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP) of the Drakenstein Municipality could prioritize recycling that would mean more jobs created through recycling. The municipality needs to create a conducive environment for recycling to occur in this town. Drakenstein is a relatively small community, where a recycling project of this nature could see great success.

Conclusion

Municipal waste incinerators have posed challenges for both municipalities and communities that reside next to them. Incinerators are known to increase the prevalence of respiratory diseases such as asthma and sinus, as well as cancers. South Africa should not consider municipal waste incinerators, as these proposals compete with the livelihoods of waste pickers. South Africa is a job-scarce country facing uncertain political times: we've seen this through resistance movements led by workers, students and civil society as a whole. Job creation and building self-reliance should be at the centre of everything we do, including policy changes, new projects and environmental protection. People after all form an important part of the environment and their needs also need to be safe guarded. Incinerators only create a few technical jobs that will need professionals and fail to address the job need of the poor, and therefore the building of incinerators goes against the nation-building goals we should be working towards. ✕



Mercury: the silent killer

by Samuel Chademana

The man in the street does not know enough about the deleterious effects of mercury

Increasingly, studies have come to the fore indicating the neurotoxicity of mercury and its compounds, particularly methylmercury. Mercury easily makes it onto the World Health Organization's (WHO) top ten list of chemicals of major public health concern. Mercury's neurotoxicity is medically known and acknowledged. Consequently, a UN driven international treaty on mercury, the 2013 Minamata Convention, has been signed and ratified by a number of countries and is soon expected to come into effect in the first half of 2017. There's an increasing buzz among technocrats and relevant government officials about the tenets of this convention; the youngest of the ever-increasing suite of conventions in the UN arsenal against chemical pollution. However, there is a deafening silence and a tragic indifference among laymen. The general public seems somewhat oblivious of this treaty and the toxicity of mercury. This clearly indicates that the buzz in the ivory towers of the policy bureaucrats around the world hasn't trickled down to the masses or sunk in yet with the common man. What it tells me as an anti-mercury advocate is that we have our work cut out to educate the public on the dangers of mercury and letting it be known that it is not a futuristic threat but an immediate one – mercury is killing us silently, right now.

Toxicological and Epidemiological studies have proven the causal link between mercury and neurological disorders in children and adults. Through maternal-foetal transmission mercury adversely affects the brain and physical development of the child in pregnant women and impairs neurological and metabolic processes in adults.

Toxic effects, in humans, spread across a broad spectrum of diseases including autism, Alzheimer's disease, ALS, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, neurodevelopmental diseases in children, nephrotoxicity, and cancer. Among those less known to be caused by a mercury burden are sleeping disorders, headaches and migraines. Autoimmune disorders such as Hashimoto/Thyroiditis are also linked to mercury intoxication. In South Africa, by 2010, about 240 000 people were reported to be affected. Mercury is in the water we drink, the fish we eat, the cosmetics we smear on, the batteries we use, the energy saver light bulbs that illuminate our homes and even in the metal tooth fillings we get at our local dentist. Consequently, as a matter of fact, almost all of us retain a trace amount of mercury in our body systems, reflecting its persistence in the environment as a bio-accumulant.

Unfortunately, however, the general global trend is that it's usually the poor and disfranchised who are more vulnerable and often the most exposed to mercury pollution. It is the world's poor, who often subsist on fish and, in many countries, make use of mercury in artisanal gold mining and other practices that are part of the so-called "informal" sector, for whom the risks of mercury pollution go largely unrecognized.

While the health implications of toxic exposures are direct, their scale is often under recognized – too many contamination related illnesses are not in the same league as diabetes or hypertension – but a detailed analysis of 373 contaminated sites in India, Indonesia and the Philippines calculated that the amount of disease caused by toxic exposures



was similar to that of malaria or outdoor air pollution in those three countries.

In fact, occupational physicians have difficulties accepting that chronic exposure to relatively low amounts of toxins creates another category of health problems, namely the environmentally-caused chronic diseases. Globally, these are on the rise. Mercury contamination related illness are therefore as much a public health issue as any of the chronic diseases and need to be given similar attention and investments.

So it's no longer a matter of whether mercury is killing us or not. Instead, it is a matter of how many of us actually know that it is killing us and are doing something to combat the effects of mercury. The age of a more vigilant consumer has come, because this is now a consumer rights issue and there is need for concerted efforts to educate the general public and mobilize relevant structures of society such as civil society organizations to embark on grassroots programmes to inform our people. We need to make the public more aware and assemble a sufficiently critical mass of informed consumers to begin to lobby both government and private capital for better accountability and transparency as well as for stringent penalties to polluters under the polluter pays principles. We need better labelling of products and screening of our food, particularly fish, to constantly guarantee safe thresholds. Public awareness therefore forms the tip of the spear in our fight against chemical toxins and particularly mercury contamination. ✕



Picture taken in Durban CBD, showing the informal cosmetic market, where dangerous products containing mercury and hydroquinone are often sold. These products are also readily available in supermarkets and pharmacies.

Credit:
groundWork



GGHH: Africa meets the world

by Luqman Yesufu

Recruiting health institutions in Africa into the Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) network is one thing, but actually organizing a regional event for the GGHH network that will have a global outreach is a challenging task, to put it mildly. I actually had no idea what I was getting myself into, but I was confident that I would see this through because I had the groundWork and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) teams behind me. I was also motivated by the fact that this was a huge opportunity for the GGHH members in South Africa to showcase their achievements to the world. I wanted to facilitate a unique and rare event, where Africans led the discussion on sustainability in healthcare and created an important space for knowledge sharing. The opportunity to do this presented itself in the 40th World Hospital Congress, under the International Hospital Federation, a platform where

hospitals and other health institutions from around the globe planned to gather.

The International Hospital Federation's (IHF) 40th World Hospital Congress (WHC) took place at Durban's International Convention Centre from the 31st of October to the 3rd of November. This was the first time this event took place on the African continent. The participants were reflective of the IHF's membership, a globally representative group that included members from around the world. The aim was to bring together key drivers of national and international policy, management, financial trends and solutions in healthcare management and service delivery. This year's IHF forum played a crucial role in encouraging multidisciplinary exchange of knowledge, expertise and experiences, facilitated through dialogue. Attendees shared ideas on best practices in leadership and healthcare management and delivery of services. The IHF members gathered on the congress theme: *Addressing the Challenge of Patient-centred Care and Safety*". This theme was within the scope of the overall GGHH objective of encouraging best practices, promoting environmental health and reducing the environmental footprint of the health sector, all in a bid to ensure patient care and safety. With such great links between GGHH goals and the congress theme, we had to take full advantage of the opportunity to host a GGHH side event alongside the WHC.

The side event, *Global Green and Healthy Health Systems*, brought together hospital leaders from Africa who have voluntarily joined the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Network (GGHH) as well as other leading international health care experts to share approaches to low-carbon, sustainable health care ideas and systems. The aim was to spread the word about what our hospitals were doing, consolidate our efforts in the region, as well as recruit more members into the GGHH network.

IALCH's CEO,
Dr Khanyile
addresses GGHH
side event
participants
Credit:
groundWork



The turnout was amazing. Over a hundred IHF delegates registered for our GGHH side event. These delegates included all the chief executive officers of thirty hospitals in the KwaZulu-Natal province, twenty-six from the Western Cape and thirty spread across the remaining seven provinces in the country. Other delegates included representatives from parliament, Netcare Hospital Limited, International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), New York University and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The side event structuring allowed and encouraged the active participation of the audience. We had two panel discussions, made up of GGHH member hospitals. Each discussion focused on thematic areas that reflected the goals that the sustainability champions had adopted. The themes were spread across leadership, waste, water pharmaceuticals and energy. These were seen as problematic areas in the hospitals and were addressed by the sustainability coordinators who presented their findings and accomplishments. It was inspiring to listen to coordinators share their experiences and the reasons why they, despite all the challenges, embarked upon this sustainability journey. Shireen Arends who is a quality assurance manager by profession and the sustainability coordinator for Greys Hospital said:

After our GGHH baseline assessment, it was interesting to note those areas we as a hospital were negligent in, mainly our waste management practices. Our actions were harming the very people that we swore an oath not to harm. This was an eye opener for me as a quality assurance manager and the reason for us to join the GGHH Network

For Denton Smith, who is the Head of Engineering at Groote Schuur Hospital and also the GGHH Coordinator at the hospital:

It's all about savings. The more savings we make on infrastructure the more we have to divert to patient care and staff safety. Since we joined GGHH and initiated the changes to the infrastructure of the boiler house and the steam lines we have managed to effect a saving in the hospital coal consumption of 48% from 2009 to 2015. This has reduced our environmental footprint remarkably.

The fact that these were real life experiences from hospital representatives made it worthwhile for the audience to engage with them and see through their lens.

Furthermore, part of the set of activities organized for the IHF delegates was the hospital visit. This was also an opportunity for the chosen hospital to share their best practices with the world. Our GGHH hospital – Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital (IALCH) – was picked for the hospital tour. This is an 846-bed hospital, serving the needs of 3.7 million people. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr T Khanyile, who also spoke earlier in the week at the GGHH side event, gave the welcome remarks and spoke about being chosen by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health to be a pilot GGHH hospital. She emphasised that there were two important reasons for her motivation to join this initiative: *The immediate cost savings associated with sustainability initiatives and the responsibility as a care giver to act due to the impacts of global warming on health*

The hospital's presentation featured their case study of good environmental health practices to save energy and water and reduce the amount of chemicals used in cleaning. They also had posters illustrating and reinforcing these good practices which were visible throughout the hospital. They even had a slogan at the entrance of the hospital: *Inkosi Albert Luthuli central Hospital (IALCH) has gone green, have you?*

GGHH activities and posters were highlighted throughout the hospital during the tour attended by delegates from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. These posters emphasised sustainability initiatives like saving water and energy through switching off taps and lights.

Overall the visit to IALCH was a fantastic way to end a successful week of GGHH involvement in the 40th World Hospital Congress. Both the side event and the tour inspired and motivated GGHH members and led to a large number of new recruits who are passionate about creating sustainable futures. Members left feeling energized and recommitted to their oath to first do no harm. ✕



Missing Marrakech

by Greenfly

The hurricanes are named. Katrina crashed New Orleans' sea defences, drowned the city and killed 1 400 people. That was 2005 with global warming at 0.76 degrees. In 2012 at 0.85 degrees: Hurricane Sandy, Caribbean and US east coast, 230 dead; Typhoon Bopha, Philippines island of Mindanao, 1 900 dead. In 2013, still at 0.85 degrees: Typhoon Haiyan with the highest wind speeds ever recorded, Philippines city of Tacloban, over 10 000 dead. In 2016 at 1.2 degrees: Hurricane Matthew, Caribbean, 1 600 dead in Haiti and 49 dead in the USA.

Droughts are not named. They are called by location and date. A fifteen-year drought, starting about 1998, is the worst ever in the eastern Mediterranean area. In Syria, over a million people migrated from country to city as crops failed year after year. In the US, California's five-year drought is the worst ever. A three-year drought in south east Brazil, the worst in living memory, left Sao Paulo, a city of 18 million people, running on empty. Southern Africa's three-year drought is also the worst in living memory. It has affected every country in the region and left millions of people short of food.

Is this dangerous yet?

Drought does not absolve Messrs Bush and Blair for the wars in Iraq and Syria. Nor does it absolve Mr Assad and his father for fifty years of authoritarian misrule coupled with a blind devotion to agricultural modernisation and expansion. In Southern Africa, lousy politics also multiplies the effects of drought. Lousy includes Angola's petro loot, Zimbabwe's gerontocracy and South Africa's Zuptocracy. Lousy is colonial plunder turned post-colonial plunder. Lousy is dependency on tobacco, sugar, coal and gold to the profit of imperial corporations. Lousy is debt and structural adjustment on Washington's order.

Lousy was in Marrakech this November for the 22nd Conference of the Parties (CoP 22) to the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the 12th Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 12), and the first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 1). Got that? Never mind.

The Paris Agreement was hatched last year at CoP 21. Most of the countries responsible for most of the emissions ratified within the year. So the PA (get used to it) has now "entered into force". Except that it is without force and this is the very basis of agreement: each party says what they will do but, if they don't, it really won't matter. Nor, indeed, will it matter much if they do since the sum of their promises scarcely retards the pace of climate change.

The Convention says the parties will avoid "dangerous" climate change. The PA says the parties will keep the global warming to "well below" 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels and will even try to keep it below 1.5 degrees. Except none of them need act as if they mean it. And that is the real agreement: they agree to say it but not mean it.

Indeed, they finally agreed 1.5 degrees just as the possibility of 1.5 went up in smoke. And they agreed that they would not notice that. Nor would they notice that 2 degrees requires them to sharply cut emissions now.

At Marrakech, they focused on "the Paris rule book". These are the rules for counting carbon, trading the nothing that is "avoided carbon", and finding value from that nothing in corporate plantations and slower forest destruction. These are the rules for how much colonial plunder is needed to keep the books in order. These are the rules for a gripping narrative in virtual reality as dangerous climate change turns catastrophic. ✂



Viva! Acción Ecológica lives to fight on



Dearest friends,

We want to publicly acknowledge the thousands of letters, embraces and messages that we have received from every corner of the world. We have, indeed, received an answer that for many, was unexpected: the Ecuadorean government has desisted in its intent to close Acción Ecológica.

We have known (between you and us) how to defend our right to solidarity, to participation, and to denounce the aggressions against nature. Even though it might seem strange to celebrate this, we do, because the risk of losing those rights approached, and it was terrifying.

Our defence of nature might be uncomfortable for groups of power, and to the transnational companies,

and perhaps especially to the Chinese, as their companies are present in all of our national territory with their extractive projects and construction of mega-infrastructure. But we recognize that our organization is also profoundly loved and respected by communities and individuals with whom we have worked. And, put in the balance, their lack of comfort on the one hand and the love and respect on the other, the latter weighs more.

We live in a country marked by socio-environmental conflicts, oil exploitation in areas such as the Yasuní, mining in the Cordillera del Cóndor, and agrofuels in our dry and tropical forests. With such assault to territories, custodians of nature have called on us to participate, to be in solidarity, and to denounce such aggressions. We will continue to do so, with our intellectual and political support, with our presence in the streets, and through the construction of shared work – in order to confront the different causes and forms of aggressions against nature.

In accordance with our vision and mission, we commit to continue working so that the intelligence respects the Earth, and so that the Earth can sustain humanity.

We thank all of you for being there, and for giving life to and amplifying our voice, and for touching us with your loving drumbeats of peace, with justice and dignity.

ACCION ECOLOGICA

Together we are the inextinguishable fever, the little light that leads, and the expanse that crosses the night. ✕



The Return Intern

by Shanar Tabrizi

Shanar Tabrizi, intern at groundWork, reflects on her time in South Africa and what she will be taking home with her

I'm not really supposed to be here.

When I applied for a five month internship with groundWork I had just finished my engineering studies. Everything (my parents) pointed towards me applying for a job back home in Sweden and start trampling the wheel of labour. I even left a hubby behind to go and learn about sewage systems and air pollution on the other side of the world. Having grown up with an engineering father and a bohemian artist mother, this has left me conflicted and torn between responsibility and adventure. I'm glad the other half won this time. For, not only did it make my reality a little bigger, it also turned out to be the responsible thing to do.

groundWork has reminded me that being responsible is about making a positive impact and working and learning from those unjustly treated by society and greed, those least responsible but most affected. Environmental impacts are not only on paper and in reports; they are lived, experienced, inhaled and paid for in hospital bills. This on account of corporations and power holders not being willing to give up some of their financial privileges in order for people to live healthy lives free from pollution. I guess when you're used to privilege, the freedom of others starts looking like oppression in the eyes of the privileged, because the freedom of others threatens their cushioned lives and the privilege they cling so tightly to.

I believe the strength and motivation of an activist comes from different places, be it anger, curiosity, empathy or even a feeling of responsibility. I have seen them all during my time at groundWork.

For me it's a combination of frustration, scientific interest in environmental issues, and the joy of working with something that aims at doing no harm.

But when I first came here I was mostly focused on finding my feet. Have you ever seen that movie where a woman gets dropped down on earth inside of a bubble and she tries to break through and join the party on the other side? Okay, it doesn't exist, but that is how I felt when I first arrived. But groundWork staff quickly took me under their wings and helped me navigate through a world of boerewors, blessers, gatvols, braais, eishes and poepols.

I must say it was a little confusing at first. A corn cob was not a corn cob, it was a mealie. And fries were not fries, they were chips. And a bunny chow did not mean chowing down on a cute furry animal with long ears. But even though groundWork people do love to eat, the things I have learnt and had the privilege to experience are, of course, related to more than food.

In Somkhele I saw how coal affected communities who shared similar stories of displacement, disease and drought. But I also saw activists from all over the country find strength and unity in these similarities.

In Vosman I smelled the sewage running through the neighbourhood from the leaking pipes and lack of service delivery. But I also felt the determination to create awareness and put pressure on those responsible.





In South Durban I was moved by the resilience and diversity of people coming together for their community.

At the hospitals, working with Global Green Healthy Hospitals, I experienced an example of a different form of activism. One less focused on resistance but more on opportunities and problem solving. I believe both are necessary and important.

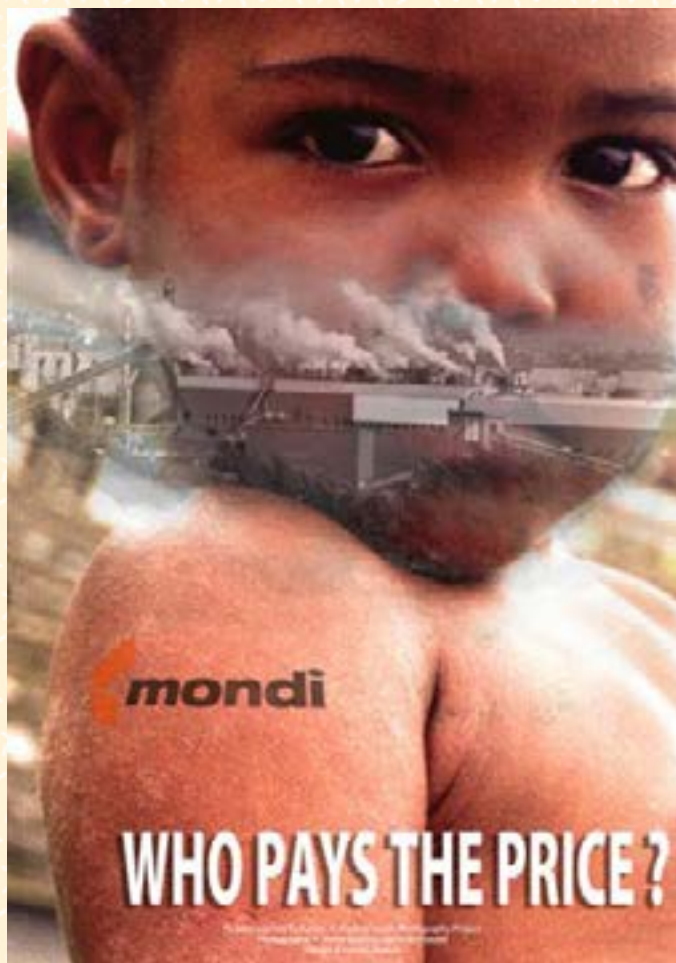
And at the office I was inspired by the warm office culture. Bobby once said that you know that an organization is good if the staff cooks meals for each other. Now, as I move on to work with climate technology in Copenhagen at a small organization, I will try my best to look for those traits that I feel makes groundWork so special, and I will try to nurture those. ✂



Who pays the price?

This documentary is a glimpse into the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance's (SDCEA) twenty-one-year struggle against environmental racism. Their close proximity to dangerous industries remains an apartheid hangover that the new government has failed to address. The toxic mix of industry includes oil refineries, plastic, paint and paper companies, as well as chemical storage areas. Though SDCEA was founded in 1995, their struggle for environmental justice started during the apartheid era when the National Party government was window dressing the toxic industries as development and job creation. *One Voice Aired* retells us the story of how this community managed to touch Mandela's heart at the start of the new democracy, when they shared their stories of children suffering from asthma and people dying from leukaemia as a result of industrial pollution coming from Engen and many other companies. This was the first time these issues received national recognition and the first time industry was forced to engage with communities.

Today SDCEA is one of the few remaining environmental justice movements of the many that sprung up in 1995. They continue to keep toxic industries in Durban accountable; they are still the protectors of the community, applying social pressure backed by science to win their battles. They have achieved many successes, including: forcing Shell and BP to change their leaking underground fuel pipelines; making Engen oil refinery reduce its toxic pollution; shutting down toxic dumps in black neighbourhoods; and exposing corporate lies. Their work continues as they grow and mobilize different communities and individuals including farmers, fishermen, people fighting for land, gender groups, youth and even the unemployed members of the community. They continue to groom the youth and future leaders in environmental activism and social justice. ✎



<https://vimeo.com/193837482>

