

# GROUNDWORK



**Ayihlale phansi ibambe umthetho**  
**We will not be moved**

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

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

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

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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

## CREDITS:

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2012 SDCEA Blocks the Port! The KZN Subsistence Fisher Folk (KZNSFF), together with the residents from across the city, marched under the SDCEA banner to block the Durban harbour entrance. The blockade forced Transnet and the Minister for Public Enterprise, Malusi Gigaba, to meet the SDCEA, groundWork and other groups to hear stakeholders' concerns. Access to the Durban harbour has since been opened to the KZNSFF members using a Transnet permit system, while the Port Expansion plans have been put on hold.



# From the Smoke Stack



Photo by FoE

by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

We are living in troubled times. Trump, Modi, Zuma, Museveni, Mugabe and Putin...and I am sure readers can mention many more. How have we managed to get ourselves into such a state of global affairs? Even leaders whom we held in great regard in the past – such as Morales, Lula da Silva and the late Chávez – are having the legacy tainted by a variety of factors, most of all the questioning of the democracy they presided over, the manner in which they did not plan for a different tomorrow as they clung onto resource economies with its boom and bust realities.

But before I digress, let me spend a few of my limited words on Trump. Over the years the politics of the US has been one of a declining "Empire". Much has been written about it, and there is no doubt that with the Trump presidency the final nails are being banged into the "Empire's" coffin. In January, I spent two weeks in the US, arriving just after the inauguration of President Trump. I arrived on a plane that was probably 90% people of colour from Southeast Asia and Africa. A full plane disembarked and went through customs without a problem – more than 300 in less than an hour. Many of the immigration staff were immigrants themselves, or at least were children of immigrants. Yes, there were also burly Caucasians in the mix. But life went on. I arrived to no fanfare. A few days later Trump attempted to close the gates. He failed, and continues to do so.

Much is being written about the Trump presidency. Thanks to Trump – and Zuma – Trevor Noah is a hit in the US. But the reality is that the US public, with whom we work daily, have through this hard cold reality of a Trump presidency no doubt recognised the deeply embedded problems within the US

system. I do not have the exact numbers of Black US citizens who voted, but it was low compared to the population. Our friends we work with in the US have always recognised the collective nature of the people of the US, not based on colour, class or creed. However, now they must realise that to break down these barriers, and to ensure that a Trump-like disaster does not happen again, people must work constantly at breaking down barriers. I believe that, no matter what Trump does, the resistance to him and the US hegemony will be a battle fought by all. The solidarity with those who have suffered under corporate US hegemony will now grow stronger globally as the crass Trump highlights the true colours of US conservatism.

As part of our solidarity with our sister organization, Friends of the Earth US, we pushed back on Tillerson – Ex Mobil CEO – on becoming the new Secretary of State. Tillerson was nevertheless appointed. Friends of the Earth US President Erich Pica had this to say:

"Trump and Tillerson are cut from the same cloth – driven by greed and devoid of a moral compass. Only a morally bankrupt president would want his secretary of state to be a man who made his career and his many millions off of vast human suffering, environmental destruction, and climate denial. And only morally bankrupt senators would vote to put him there."

Many are resisting Trump. The question is: Will the resistance to Trump galvanize the US left to mobilize? Time will tell.

Enough on Trump. We have our own debacle at home. The ANC continues to reel after what must for the party seem like a loss in the local government



elections in 2016 – despite their majority. Losing four big metros to the opposition party has left the ANC in chaos. Splits in the National Executive Committee (NEC) are open for the media to report on. The stalwarts of the ANC are speaking out against the President and the leadership. Senior active members in the ANC, Phosa (Ex-Premier of Mpumalanga) and Mtembu (ANC Chief Whip), both NEC members, have voiced concerns openly. In a recent opinion piece Phosa was scathing of the ANC when he said:

"We are perilously close to a situation where we have become irrevocably intellectually and emotionally fat and lazy, and where we will revert to military and security interventions to hide our glaring inability."

This was in his response to the debacle at the State of the Nation Address. When the ANC could not give a minute of silence for the ninety-four Esidimeni patients who died because the state wanted to save money and could not find another way to care for these people.

It is in these desperate times that we have to question our politicians. For, if we are afraid to do so, we will lose whatever democracy we gained through many decades of suffering. Recently, my son and I had a brief encounter with an army chaplain, who was integrated from the Azanian People's Liberation Army into the South African Defence Force. I was proud to explain to my son the rich history of the Pan African Congress, African National Congress and the differences. We are fortunate to have this rich history.

In Latin America, various left governments have toppled over the last few years for various reasons. But one underlying reason is the failure of the citizens to question. By believing that left governments must not be criticized, you weaken

the movement that pushed for democracy. Two routes remain when this happens. The political leadership chooses to remain in power forever or they lose out to conservative forces. Either way people suffer. Jorge G. Castañeda, Mexico's ex-Foreign Minister, stated:

"The causes of corruption across the region – a lack of accountability, a culture of lawlessness, weak institutions and civil society – can affect politicians of the right and left alike."

groundWork will continue to exercise democracy by questioning government's decisions that undermine environmental justice. We will do this directly with people on the ground, with the goal to engage the officials and politicians. If this all fails – as it seemingly is now as government ignores reason – we will turn to the courts and defend the constitutional rights of our community partners.

As I write this, I am scrolling the web and find that Lenín Moreno, from Ecuador, is holding a majority over his right wing rival Guillermo Lasso. It is my hope that by the time this goes to print, Moreno will have prevailed. But his government has not come without criticism. Just in January 2017 his government tried to close down Acción Ecológica, one of groundWork's early partners in environmental justice activism. We all resisted this through global solidarity.

We must remember that we cannot remain silent. For "silence is connivance", as Phosa reminds us. Finally, I cannot end this off without once again referring to Sachs: "When we breathe the air of freedom, we do not wish to choke on hidden fumes".

Indeed these are interesting times.

Till next time – A Luta Continua. ☮



# Do hospitals do more harm than good?

by Luqman Yesufu

*The members of the Global Green and Healthy Hospital network aim to ensure that they do no harm while providing health services*

The prevention of illness, injury and disease is an essential part of healthcare. We engage in healthy life style habits such as exercising and not smoking to prevent obesity and lung cancer. We vaccinate our children regularly to stimulate immunity and thus protect them from disease. We educate young boys and girls in order to promote safe sex and thus prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. On the basis of this, there is remarkable evidence to show that prevention works better than treating a disease. If this is the case, the health care sector must lead by example by engaging in more sustainable practices that are aimed at preventing disease and promoting good health without compromising patient care and safety.

Hospitals produce enormous amounts of waste, but only a small portion (about 15%) is actually infectious or poses high risk; 75% – 85% of the waste is categorized as normal municipal waste which has low risk to ill health, except of course if it is burnt. This should be music to the ears of hospital administrators, especially as the bulk of the money spent on treatment and disposal of medical waste is actually spent on the infectious waste. So, since you produce less, you should spend less. Unfortunately this is not the case, as hospitals in South Africa pay over the odds to get their waste treated and disposed of. There are two main reason for this: poor leadership and poor waste management practices.

The acceptable form of treatment and disposal of medical waste in South Africa is to burn it using incineration. This often leads to toxic fumes being released into the atmosphere at concentrations that are harmful to health when inhaled. Often, the incinerators cannot deal with the amount of waste

coming, so it is turned away at the gate if it cannot be burnt immediately. Which is how it ends up in a residential area – as in the case of Roodepoort – or on the beach front – as in the case of Durban. The recent discovery of tons of medical waste, packed floor to ceiling in a suburban west Johannesburg house, as well as the tons of medical waste spread across Durban beach last year, has drawn attention to the problems experienced in the disposal of this waste stream. Hospital management needs to take up leadership responsibilities to ensure that waste is properly segregated to ensure that what gets to the incinerator is actually very little.

Those charged with the responsibility to ensure hospital waste is managed properly are the health care waste officers. They are not only trained in managing hospital waste but they are even mentioned in the Health Care Waste Regulations as "A health officer who is registered and qualified as an environmental health practitioner". This group of professionals needs to be supported by hospital management so that they can do exactly what they are trained to do, which is ensure that health care waste is managed in such a way that it does not cause harm to the patient, staff and the community.

The idea of prevention of injury and disease is a key reason why health care waste management should be a priority in health care institutions. We don't want to cause harm to a person in the name of providing care. In fact, it should be considered a violation of a person's human right and a crime against humanity if the public is still exposed to infectious or hazardous waste from hospitals. Hospital management therefore needs to take more responsible and sustainable actions in dealing with their waste and the people responsible should be given the proper mandate and support to do this.



## Lead

Just some of the Global Green and Health Hospitals heroes doing amazing work to make their health facilities sustainable, gathered in Pietermaritzburg during groundWork's community planning meeting.

Credit: groundWork



We recently sat down with \*Dineo to discuss some of the issues and challenges faced by health facilitators. This is what was discussed:

**Luqman:** What is your role as a health facilitator and what are the challenges that limit you from adequately doing your job.

**Dineo:** My role is to develop waste management policies, train the staff and advise management on how to improve our waste systems, better the environment and protect the public. I also do inspections to find out about the hazardous tools we use and I develop corrective action plans. The challenges I face include staff. I was just recently employed and I have no staff to train. If I want to implement a recycling project, I can have all the ideas, identify proper disposal areas and find boxes, but there's no one here to actually do the proper separation and disposal. I feel there is also lack of support from management. Maybe it's

because they don't really understand my role, the post is fairly new, maybe it wasn't introduced to them properly. You find that your immediate supervisor is supporting you, but when you get to finance managers or CEOs, your plans get turned down. They feel support components are not that important.

**Luqman:** How do you overcome these challenges?

**Dineo:** Trying to get through to management is very difficult. You can only write reports, invite them to meetings and try to communicate with them, but changing their minds is up to them. I just keep writing to them, expressing the challenges that I am facing and recommending that they give me a team to work with. When the feedback is negative, everything comes to a standstill. At some point, you have to go out yourself, because you see that your duties aren't being carried out. I end up going out to the garden services people, who



are contractors and not directly employed by the facility. I ask them to do collections for me. I give them small incentives for this work, like buying them cool drinks or cigarettes. Clinical orderlies are supposed to be doing this job in the interim: this was the decision taken by management. But they don't see waste management and collection as their duty. So they feel like they are doing it as a favour to me. If one person doesn't feel like collecting or transporting the waste that day, they don't do it.

**Luqman:** Why is it problematic for the garden services people to be doing this job?

**Dineo:** I think it's problematic because they are contracted to do other work. They might not be immunized, they are not given proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to do such duties. It's just not the right thing to do. You have not protected the people but have asked them to do dangerous work. They are also not trained to do this job. I have trained them on a basic level, but I still have fears because they aren't mandated to do this work. But dangerous medical waste would pile up everywhere if I didn't have their assistance.

**Luqman:** Why is it important for there to be better waste management facilities in hospitals?

**Dineo:** People don't see the value because it's things we don't see with our eyes. People don't understand that waste can make us sick. The waste generated from health institutions is full of bacteria, bodily fluids, blood; there's a lot of infected people with HIV or TB. If we don't manage this waste properly, any person can come and touch this waste and infect themselves. There's a risk of health workers being infected and there's also issues of cross contamination. The waste sometimes ends up in general waste and this increases the possibilities of needle prick injuries. Again, we're trying to look after the environment. We don't want to pollute the environment, the ground water. We don't want our waste ending up in our communities and affecting our children and the public. These days you find children playing in dump sites. They might come

across needles. If we don't take care of our needles, our children will play with them and infect each other. Even the workers and the patients here have to be protected. We are also trying to decrease the spread of infectious diseases and the mortality rate.

**Luqman:** How many needle prick accidents have you had as a result of poor waste disposal?

**Dineo:** In our hospital, we have near misses. Sometimes when the needle buckets are full, the nurses will remove them from their work-spaces and place them in the passage way. Sometimes you find no one is collecting in the passage; maybe I'm not at work or I'm attending a meeting. Our institutions also have kids. Sometimes you find that they come and fiddle with the needles. Sometimes we find needles in the general waste, but so far we haven't had any injuries. On average we have about two near misses a month. Last year we had more staff to deal with collection, but we've lost those staff members, so the number of near-misses is rising. The near misses are usually reported by the cleaners. Sometimes they find a needle on the floor while they are cleaning. Other times we catch kids while they are playing with medical waste.

**Luqman:** What would you like to see done differently

**Dineo:** It would be nice to have waste handlers in our structures and to work with management that understands the importance of waste management. We don't have people who can be our power when it comes to operations. We have a well-structured waste area but it is not overseen by anyone. It's not being cleaned. 

*\*The name of the health officer has been changed, to protect the identity of the individual*



# Medical Aid: survival of the richest

by Samuel Chademana

*National Health Insurance will challenge the racist nature of current healthcare provision*

This article will be the last that I will write as groundWork's Mercury Campaign Manager. As of March 2017, I will be wearing my Climate and Energy Justice campaign manager hat. So, I figured it wise to deviate from what has been my core work and reflect on a very important human rights topic that has graced our policy terrain aimed at redressing our past as a country.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February I attended a National Health Insurance (NHI) public engagement meeting organized by the Foundation for Human Rights. It aimed to inform the general public on the provisions of the NHI policy document, which proposes state driven and comprehensive medical aid cover. The Foundation invited a formidable lineup of experts who spoke both passionately and knowledgeably, highlighting both the benefits and the shortcomings of the proposed scheme. Nonetheless, I should note that I left that auditorium rather disillusioned by the grand scale of pussyfooting still being exhibited by our government and as a nation in general in addressing health care disparities in South Africa. By this I refer to the continued commodification of a basic human right – health care – within a so-called free-market system where the quality of health care dispensed is now dependent on affordability.

Since the 1980s, following recommendations from the Brown Commission that introduced medical aid schemes based on a free market model, there has been a shift in the quality of medical care from the public to the private sectors. In SA, apartheid did not give black people meaningful health care, and this shift was characterized by a drop in the quality of care provided in public hospitals and an increased association of good health care with privately run hospitals. While this decline in

quality in the public sector can be attributed to many other factors, including poor and inefficient management, Dr Kgosi Letlape, one of the speakers at the meeting, insightfully presented a compelling argument of how this move was an apartheid-era attempt to ringfence quality medical care for the white population post-independence, when it became apparent that handing over power to a black government was inevitable. Encumbered by sanctions and a declining economy, the apartheid government allowed an American-inspired system to be introduced into the country, abandoning its forty-year policy of provision of **quality universal health care for all** – although which "all" is the question.

Dr Letlape, argued that medical aid schemes were introduced knowing that mainly whites in the country would be able to afford medical aid rates and that therefore they would not have to share hospitals with black South Africans. Current statistics released by the Institute of Race Relations show that out of over 54 million people in SA, only 17.4% are covered by a South African medical scheme. According to this report, only 10.5% of black-African people are covered by private medical insurance, compared to 72.7% of white people. This means that only 9.5 million South Africans have access to private medical care while more than 44 million don't. Furthermore, before the introduction of medical aids, white South Africans had enjoyed free and quality health care rated amongst the best in the world, not only in the quality provided but also in the capacity of health care institutions, in staffing and technology.

It was in a government run hospital, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1967, that a locally trained South



African doctor, Dr Chris Barnard, and unsung hero Mr Hamilton Naki, performed the world's first human to human heart transplant at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. This extraordinary event pushed the boundaries of science into the dawn of a new medical era.

Informed by this background, Dr Letlape declared Medical Aid Schemes a "crime against humanity" that should be abolished because they cannot co-exist with the government's proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme. Medical aids are a business and hence are profit driven and are not socially or ethically aligned. Their increased inclination towards viewing patients as clients has changed the concept of healthcare from a caring, social function, provided through universal access as a social duty to all citizens, to a profit-driven commercial enterprise run by a medical care industry only interested in profit. The result is that healthcare professionalism has been eroded to the extent that emergency cases are denied services because of lack of medical aid or means of paying.

This shift from a socially valued service to a marketable commodity, coupled with a lack of accountability and oversight, has also led to steep increases in the costs of healthcare due to escalation of medical insurance premiums and progressive reduction of benefits even for those currently insured. Those currently covered increasingly pay more for less and often exhaust their annually allocated benefits before closure of the financial year due to high rates. Furthermore, since the 1980s there has been an exodus of trained professionals from the public to the private sector because it is more lucrative: 79% of qualified doctors work in the private sector. The patient doctor ratio in the public sector as of 2015 was **4 024 patients to 1 doctor**. The public system serves the vast majority of the population, but is chronically underfunded and understaffed.

It is my humble opinion therefore that the apartheid-era medical system of the 60s to the 80s provides a possible blue print for universal health care in South Africa – if applied to all. I'm aware that such talk of universal health care is quickly dismissed as madness

by many scholars and practitioners. It has also been relegated to the socialist and communist dustbins of centuries past. But I hold and support Amartya Sen's assertion that universal health care for all is not an idealistic goal that remains out of reach of all but the richest nations. Recent case studies from countries such as Rwanda, Thailand and Bangladesh show it's doable. Sen also provides ample evidence of the big contribution that universal health care can make in advancing the lives of people, and also in enhancing economic and social opportunities essential for sustained national economic growth.

The main arguments being levelled against the proposed NHI are in the areas of exorbitant costs of the bureaucracy and inefficiency, alluding to the fact that the estimated annual cost of the NHI, at over R300 billion post 2026, are unrealistic. Arguments are further made that fraud, corruption and sheer incompetence that is currently endemic in the public medical system will render this dream unattainable – something we need to seriously consider and not brush aside. Critics also argue that the inefficiencies in payments by government when brought to bear on the health sector will trigger a mass emigration of qualified staff in search of greener pastures and better run systems elsewhere in the world. It is also argued that the universal access for all will increase waiting times for patients due to the high patient to doctor ratios and that this will be compounded by the fact that not all health institutions will qualify for accreditation participate in the NHI System. While these and many other concerns are valid, there is undeniable evidence that in our efforts of nation building we cannot continue with business as usual. The cost of continuing with the current modus operandi is high and is a ticking time bomb for the majority poor who increasingly find themselves marginalized.

Basic health care for all can be provided at a remarkably good level, at very low costs if society, including the political and intellectual leadership, can get their act together. So, I say let's put our privilege aside and collectively pursue social justice no matter the discomfort that such a change will cause some of us. ☺



# The Hawerklip story

by Robby Mokgalaka

*We're killing the promised land, one coal mine at a time*

The Hawerklip community situated near Delmas in the Mpumalanga province is now facing a challenge which is a new coal mine, Shiva Colliery owned by Brakfontein (Thermal Coal), with the Guptas as shareholders. The new coal mine started operating in mid-2016, just weeks after we last visited the area. We were also deeply disturbed by its existence and that it was located less than 300 metres from the Hawerklip settlement.

There was no consultation done with the community, as per requirements in terms of National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) regulations. The community is subjected to dangerous daily blasting, which destroys their homes, leaving them with cracks. Their homes thunder and vibrate during the blasting and could potentially collapse on family members. The community people are made unhappy by the lack of consultation as they were not given an opportunity to voice their concerns. The community formed a small committee to hold some discussion with the new mine to discuss mainly employment benefits for the community. The outcome of the negotiation was minimal as only one person was employed by the mine in the process.

The Guptas have done more than capture the state. They also threaten our environmental health and South African's future politically and otherwise. Brakfontein Coal also owns another operation less than a kilometre away from the Hawerklip community. The arrival of the new mine has compounded the difficulties already experienced by the Hawerklip community.

Hawerklip, sandwiched between the railway and a dust road used for transporting coal, consists of about fifty households. The community is surrounded by a huge Delmas coal mine, coal siding

and a railway line that screeches when transporting coal. This is also the same area where the proposed KI Power station is said to be planned. In 2015, groundWork worked with the community to solve the dust problem caused by the trucks unloading coal on the Hawerklip siding, but the endeavour was in vain.

The community is continuously affected by dust and fear for the safety of their children. Around 2011,\*Themba, a primary school kid, was run over and killed by a truck transporting coal when he was coming from school. The incident left the community feeling vulnerable and enraged. The community, along with groundWork, wrote a letter to the siding officials, urging them to address some of the concerns by constructing a fence and a tarred road to minimize the dust coming from trucks transporting coal on the dirt road. Hawerklip community voices went unheard. The siding management shifted the blame to Delmas Coal, which uses the same road. The siding management also mentioned that they were trying their best to reduce the dust by watering the road, a non-solution considering critical water shortages. The community refuted these claims.

On our way to visit Hawerklip community, we heard deafening blasting coming from a coal mine. It sounded like a battlefield with machine guns and grenades going off everywhere. The blasts were followed by a big black cloud of smoke. The explosion was coming from Leeupan Colliery, owned by Exxaro Coal, and while extremely dangerous and disturbing, it is standard operation in all coal mines. This operation and many others have been reported to government and the media for violations of environmental regulations, sadly with little positive change. In May 2012, the Mail & Guardian interviewed a Delmas farmer, Peet





groundWork's Thomas MNGUNI taking a picture of newly established coal mine, Shiva in Hawerklip, on the outskirts of Delmas.  
Credit: groundWork

Bezuidenhout, who was lodging a complaint to the Blue Scorpions against Exxaro for mining on a wetland. The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) had sent staff to investigate the alleged transgression. The allegations were confirmed to be true and the Department suspended the mine's license. The mine won the case on technicalities due to a delay from the DWS. The coal mine was therefore granted a licence to pollute our water body. It is known that wetlands are significant for water purification. This was a deadly ruling to environmental justice, considering the drought that would soon follow.

South Africa has always been a water scarce country, but the recent drought has seen government place restrictions on South Africans, while giving the main culprits a pass. Big business, mines and power stations continue to pollute and overuse, while poor black women and children go without water. The constitutional right to safe water has been trumped by profit and the needs of big business.

The Highveld area is well known for being the most targeted place for digging anywhere, everywhere, by anybody, in any way they see fit; without following proper environmental regulations and with less regard to the environmental justice impact

it has on people. Some private companies making coal their speciality are owned by government officials operating incognito or in coalition with private individuals. They operate with impunity in a manner that breaks the law, with no consequences, mainly because, while these individuals are responsible for breaking the law, they are also responsible for creating the law and regulating it. They effectively exempt themselves, avoiding any form of punishment.

Emalahleni, the new name for Witbank, dubbed the "place of coal", is one of the many coal affected areas in the Highveld. Emalahleni and the greater Highveld are coal rich areas. The environment and the people have been overly exploited, all in the name of coal. The area was declared a priority area by the Department of Environmental Affairs in 2007. The ambient air quality is toxic to human life; few outsiders can move into the Highveld area and leave before getting sick. When you move into the Emalahleni area, you can smell the pollution in the form of sulphur dioxide and other particulate matter from the coal mines. The tap water is undrinkable. Polluted water is completely wasted beyond recovery because the pollution is toxic. Our



government is deliberately turning a blind eye to the harsh reality people have to live under.

Although the area has been declared a priority area, to the contrary it has never been given priority in resolving the environmental issues experienced by poor communities caused by coal infrastructures.

groundWork and the Hawerklip community are in the process of arranging a meeting with the purpose of taking a mandate from the affected community to ensure that environmental justice is realised. The community hopes to seek justice from this

unjust process. The struggle for freedom, and basic human rights that we all take for granted, takes place every day in communities such as Hawerklip. groundWork hopes to mend relationships the people of Hawerklip, and fight with everything we have to make sure their struggles aren't in vain. Amandla! ☮

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

Communities most affected by coal pollution go without electricity and have to rely on burning dirty coal in the homes.

Credit:  
groundWork



# A toxic trek through suburbia

by Rico Euripidou

## *Shongwenians take to the streets in protest over waste*

During the month in which "extraordinary" levels of persistent cancer-causing pollutants from the 1950s have been found in the ten-kilometre-deep Mariana ocean trench, the mostly middle class residents of Shongweni culminated their yearlong community mobilizing and organized a toxic trek through Hillcrest to demonstrate for their right to a healthy environment. Over 3 000 people took to the streets, led by a rumble of leather-clad Harley Davidson riders, and were cheered on and encouraged by hooting commuters and motorists, regardless of the inconvenience they were causing.

As contradictory as it sounds, in our democratic age of corporate dominance and regulatory malfunction, the mess that is left over from our predominant model of development and dumped into landfill sites is now spilling over. The waste ends up in once healthy living environments. Ask any Upper Highway, Assagay, Kloof, Hillcrest or Shongweni resident – middle class comfort counts for absolutely nothing unless you have your health and clean air to breathe!

So how did we get here in the first place? The trash corporate EnviroServ Waste Management (Pty) Ltd, who own and operate the Shongweni dump site on the outskirts of Durban, have over the past year or so experienced an exponential increase in complaints from the public...in fact they have received on average 800 complaints per month, over a seven-month period between May and November 2016.

Residents say that their constitutional rights have been violated by EnviroServ through their operations and waste streams being accepted for disposal at the Shongweni dumpsite. This has caused excess pollution in their neighbourhoods

and, furthermore, EnviroServ have knowingly refused residents information concerning what is being dumped at Shongweni. Human health and environment health have been completely disregarded.

In a memorandum to EnviroServ residents stated;

*"We believe that EnviroServ is ignoring our constitutional rights and the increased incidence of illnesses apparently related to the foul odour, not to mention the psychological effects living in the stench of a toxic landfill is having on us. By refusing to tell us what is going into the landfill and what its possible toxic effects on humans are, you are only serving to increase our fear that the health effects are being caused by the hazardous, ineffectively or untreated waste being accepted at the landfill".*

Residents went on to say that they and their families and sometimes listless children routinely experienced headaches, respiratory related illnesses, nosebleeds, chronic sinusitis, asthma attacks, new asthma diagnoses, nausea, vomiting, eczema, bronchitis and pneumonia. They attribute these to the gases emanating from the Shongweni landfill. These symptoms are recorded in over 500 affidavits presently with the Green Scorpions and additionally in over 1 300 interested and affected party statements.

EnviroServ in response are saying that it's not them that is responsible for the odours. They say that they have been legally compliant with their permit conditions and that they have been providing an essential service to industry in KwaZulu-Natal and are inextricably linked to the specialised supply chains



that supports industry. Effectively they are saying that it's not their fault that big industry in KwaZulu-Natal is so toxic, adding that they provide a solution to deal with this inextricable situation. To ease community concerns, EnviroServ commissioned air quality monitoring by "independent consultants" to conduct "highly scientific surveys", to prove to communities that they were not solely responsible for the foul odours. They also want to prove that the measured toxic off-gases from the site were at a very low concentration, meaning they're "non-harmful" to human health! In their exact words they stated that

*"they [said consultants] also revealed [that] levels of contaminants were well below the acceptable level and could not be responsible for the many claimed ill-health effects".*

John Pilger, a well-known journalist for the Mail & Guardian newspaper, writes about the struggle of

people against power. He observes how nowadays we have to breathe the hot air of these corporate "pseudo ideas with their corporate pseudo truths and pseudo experts" that set the limits of public debates. It is these corporates that try to determine the public debate about who the good guys are and who the bad guys are!

The threat to our clean living environment is the terrorism of powerful corporate greed that has as its overriding mandate a responsibility to its global shareholders who hold us to ransom relative to their bottom line!

The situation we face at Shongweni we believe is more deep rooted. The Department of Environmental Affairs' directorate of Chemicals and Waste Management has simply failed to take a systemic and long term approach to the challenges of toxic waste management in KwaZulu-Natal. This is evidenced in their refusal to respond to the call

Shongweni residents gathered in protest on the 4th of February 2017.  
Credit: groundwork





The Shongweni EnviroServ Landfill site, the thorn in the foot of the Shongweni community.  
Credit: groundWork

made in September 2016, when people of south Durban, in solidarity with the people of the area around the Shongweni site, voiced their discontent caused by EnviroServ dumping millions of litres of toxic leachate via the southern sewage treatment works sea outfall. They stated that:

*"It is an injustice that they (the community of Shongweni surrounds) have to suffer the consequences of increased toxic waste production in KwaZulu-Natal, the mismanagement of waste by corporations in general and EnviroServ in particular and the failure of all government departments to protect the residents of the area by allowing this practice (EnviroServ's dumping of toxic waste) to continue."*

If the bulk of Durban's hazardous waste goes to Shongweni this is a very worrying scenario indeed. To begin with, the generation of hazardous waste needs to be addressed as a root cause. Waste policy should work to systematically reduce the amount of hazardous waste in the first place. This is in line with our National waste framework, which demands a long term zero waste scenario and planning.

By the time of writing this article the Department of Environmental Affairs had issued EnviroServ a notice that it intended to suspend operations or close down the company's landfill site in Shongweni. This was in response to ongoing community complaints and alleged breaches of the site's operating conditions, which could result in charges being laid. EnviroServ in response accused the department of having "succumbed to public opinion" and continued to deny that they were responsible for the odours and health effects.

Which brings us to the most pertinent question in all of this: why now – after fifteen years of long suffering by the KwaNdengezi and Dassenhoek residents directly downstream of the Shongweni landfill site – are the cogs of regulatory oversight moving? One could easily assume that just because the middle class is complaining, issues are being dealt with more immediately and more effectively. Especially when the middle class has the ability to put pressure on industry and hurt their bottom line, as EnviroServ faces criminal charges for their toxic habits. ☺



# Waste to energy plant in Athlone

by Musa Chamane

## *"Beautiful Project" has its dark side*

Environmentally sensitive projects are normally swept under the carpet, with public participation meetings advertised in few newspapers. Many of those who get to know about them hear of them by chance. When I first heard about the Athlone waste-to-energy plant, I thought; "Oh God, no! Municipal waste incineration has finally arrived on our shores." These kinds of projects are often given fancy names like waste-to-energy as a green washing strategy to sneak in incineration. Luckily, that was not the case this time as it was biogas extraction, which is sustainable because it turns biodegradable waste into energy without burning it. The launch took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> January in Athlone, Cape Town.

### Biogas Plant launched

Arriving in Cape Town was chaotic: mixed up venues, finding out the launch was by invite only and the daunting possibility that the launch might be postponed. I finally managed to get the right address for the project. Upon arrival it looked like it was a big sporting event, I spotted about 100 people in reflective lime bibs and white "makarabas", overly embellished fan helmets often worn at sporting events. I thought to myself, "What the hell?" I approached the entrance and there was a registration desk, where the same over the top gear was given to me.

### From cement Kilns to green energy

The first familiar face I spotted was Egmont Ottermann who is a specialist in High Thermal Treatment Technologies in cement kilns burning toxic waste, incineration by another name. In the last fifteen years he has been working for Pretoria Portland Cement (PPC) and he has tried to secure funding for five PPC cement plants in South Africa. The funding was intended for retrofitting the cement kilns so that they could take hazardous waste, especially tyres. Civil society pushed back regarding the proposed plan. The plan was rejected

by Department of Environmental Affairs Minister, Edna Molewa.

### Political support

At the launch there were about 200 people. They were mainly from business, politics and the public. Mayor of Cape Town and Premier, Patricia de Lille, delivered a speech that made it clear that landfills will be discontinued in the coming years. Landfill space and landfill disposal fees are expensive in Western Cape, making this waste-to-energy project a welcome solution. The Mayor commended the company by saying it has been very innovative and has brought much needed technological advancement. This project enjoyed political support which makes a difference when implementing these kinds of projects.

### Athlone Biogas plant process

The biogas plant receives waste that should be going to Muizenberg or Vissershoek landfill. The waste materials come in trucks. The waste is off loaded over the conveyor belt and it gets separated. The non-biodegradables like plastic, are reserved for recycling. So far they have not yet sold the bales: they have been stored inside the plant. The biodegradable waste materials are then transferred to the tanks for anaerobic digestion which then produces methane, CO<sub>2</sub> and other gases that are purified and sold to different industries like Afrox.

### Gas and natural fertilizer

The remaining gas is flared. The other interesting component of the plant is the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). The MRF intends to employ line workers whom we call waste pickers. They will pick the recyclables for recycling. The plant was not in full operation during the launch and some of the activities were not demonstrated practically since there were no employees yet. Biogas has been a technology that is both present in many rural areas in the world as well as in technologically sophisticated countries such as Sweden and Germany. There are



no emissions that come out of this plant because the waste residues are taken to a landfill, but in a very small quantity. This plant also produces natural fertilizers. Because the biogas production process is natural, farmers will be able to access good natural soil conditioner.

#### Dark side of the project

On the flip side, phase two of this project will be a gasification component to the plant, where heat and pressure will be used in waste materials to recover energy. The process will emit dioxins and furans which are cancer-causing chemicals. This is incineration in another guise. This plan left me very surprised. They invested R400 million in this project, only to reverse the beauty for an environmentally unfriendly component. The gasification Environmental Impact Assessment is ongoing. groundWork intends opposing the gasification due to its environmentally unfriendly nature and because it will threaten the livelihood of waste pickers, since it needs the very plastics that waste pickers rely on for recycling.

#### Western Cape incinerator heaven

Western Cape might be the first province to have a municipal incinerator or thermal treatment of municipal waste. Gasification, pyrolysis and incineration are similar processes when it comes to emissions. Communities in other parts of the world that reside next to incinerators will attest to the challenges faced by them due to waste thermal treatment technologies.

Wellington, less than 100 kilometres from Cape Town, is also considering putting up a municipal incinerator and people are really not happy about the council's resolution of having a municipal waste incinerator in the beautiful wine lands' town. There is fear that, should the incinerator get the nod, the agricultural produce from this town might not qualify in the international markets due to the likely high chemical content of the products. The community is aware that this might affect them forever because these chemicals can be stored in the soil for a great many years. Communities say that no incinerator will

be built in their town and they are prepared to fight it until the plan is withdrawn.

#### Conclusion

The biodigester plant is hope for this country, proving that we can do things differently and in an environmentally sound manner: in a manner that would create jobs and protect the environment. The gasification plant and incinerators kill that hope. Thanks to Industrial Development Cooperation (IDC) for funding Clean Energy Africa to implement the biodigester project. We hope there are many lessons to be learned from this project. This project can be replicated in other parts of the country and it can also be improved upon, not through gasification but through zero waste and by having separation at source, reduce, reuse and recycle cooperatives of waste pickers. ☺



Athlone tank that waste is deposited into to make gas

Credit:  
groundWork



# Energy planning

by David Hallowes

## *The DoE's energy planning documents leave much to be desired*

In late November 2016, the Department of Energy (DoE) presented two key energy planning documents:

- The Integrated Energy Plan (IEP) is the overall energy plan for liquid fuels (petrol, diesel, paraffin), gas and electricity.
- The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) 2016 is the more detailed plan for electricity and the DoE presented a "base case" which is supposed to reflect real, up to date data and make plausible assumptions about the future.

The DoE's presentation of these plans – particularly the IRP – was met with dismay bordering on disbelief. First, they asked for comment at public hearings within eight days of publishing the documents and before publishing some of the annexures.

Second, the IRP base case inflated the known costs of renewables while depressing the costs of coal and nuclear power. It also put an arbitrary limit on how much renewable energy could be added each year. At the same time, Eskom sabotaged existing renewable projects by illegally refusing to sign power purchase agreements. So it looked like a double act. Most observers concluded that the DoE had distorted the data to favour coal and nuclear – which have no future unless renewables are hobbled – and were steamrolling the process to limit debate.

During the consultation workshops, the DoE repeatedly said that this was not their intention. They have subsequently extended the period for written comment to the end of March but they have not held hearings in the areas most affected by the energy system – the Highveld, Vaal and

Waterberg. They have also said that they will revise the document. That revision will need to prove that they have dropped the bias.

### **Background to the controversy**

Both IEP and IRP make projections of energy / electricity demand through to 2050. The IRP 2016 "base case" uses electricity demand projections developed by the CSIR and then models how that demand can be met using different technologies. A number of other scenarios – or test cases – are then to be developed as variations on the base case. They may, for example, test what happens if one assumes lower or higher demand, or if lots of people install PV panels, or if a limit is imposed on greenhouse gas emissions.

A final "policy adjusted" version of the IRP is to be approved and promulgated by cabinet. It represents a political choice and provides the legal basis for "ministerial determinations" on what capacity should be added to the electricity system in the following years. The new plans have been much delayed. At present, the IRP 2010 provides the legal basis for decision making. The very first paragraph says:

The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is a living plan that is expected to be continuously revised and updated as necessitated by changing circumstances. At the very least, it is expected that the IRP should be revised by the Department of Energy (DoE) revision in 2012.

In 2013, the DoE produced a draft of the first IEP and an "IRP 2010 update" and invited public comment. The "changing circumstance" noted in the "update" was a substantial reduction in forecast energy demand. In consequence, new



nuclear power should be delayed for a decade if not forever. (In 2010, groundWork observed that the forecast was grossly exaggerated and in 2013 we said the forecast was still way too high.)

Following public workshops, however, the 2013 process disappeared. The DoE made no announcement that the process was delayed or suspended or terminated. It said nothing at all. Over the next two years, the circumstances kept on changing. Not only did demand grow less rapidly than forecast, it shrank. It is still shrinking – so much so that Eskom now has surplus capacity – but the new IRP still exaggerates forecast demand.

At the same time, the cost of renewables declined faster than was expected and is now the cheapest as well as the cleanest option. Renewable projects also have the shortest lead times – two years to completion compared with fifteen for Medupi – which reduces financial risks and the risks of building more than is needed.

Meanwhile, it leaked out that President Jacob Zuma had led secret negotiations with President Putin for Russia to supply a fleet of nuclear power stations. This confirmed suspicions that the 2013 process was stalled because it was likely to result in nuclear power being deleted from South Africa's energy plans. The IRP 2016 includes nuclear only by using an unrealistically low cost figure – about 50% below realistic estimates.

Our demands of the planning process now are first, that it should be honest, second, that greenhouse gas emissions must be limited in all scenarios including the base case – not just in one or two "test" cases and third, the costs of all externalities should be counted.

Finally, a world that is seriously addressing climate change is a world which changes the economic and associated energy system. We propose that energy planning be made compatible with this world. Alternatively, it must anticipate catastrophic climate change. The IEP/IRP 2016 does neither.

We conclude that, if SA wants to 1) supply the energy needs of its people, 2) avoid catastrophic climate change, 3) clean up air pollution to let people breathe, 4) conserve water and prevent the further destruction of whole watersheds, and 5) avoid bankrupting itself, it is imperative to focus national resources on developing renewables under democratic control while shutting down coal plants.

As we head for the closing date of submission on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2017, things are hotting up. The Thabametsi coal-fired power station proposal in Lephalale is being challenged in court, trucker bosses are protesting, saying the renewable energy developments are killing coal transport jobs and some community people in Wakkerstroom are saying mining must go ahead. So coal is not going to go away easily. Some say coal is development – ask the unemployed in Mpumalanga. They want jobs. The industry promises jobs, but ever more people are unemployed. So what the final IRP will look like is anyone guess. We have heard rumours that even big business does not want coal. ☺



# Some for all, forever!

by Niven Reddy

## *The Matatiele Manifesto debuts in parliament*

*Matatiele, home of beautiful mountain views, good food, -6 degree mornings and unfortunately the prospect of Rhino Oil & Gas.*

Community members, along with Civil Society Organizations, gathered at Matatiele in October 2016 with one thing in common: resisting fracking. The aim was to bring together community members affected by mining, as well as those who would be impacted by the numerous applications for exploration licenses by companies seeking to explore and exploit potential unconventional gas reserves. The three-day solidarity event both highlighted the failures of mining and explored successes and alternatives in the form of renewable energy.

The Chief Whip for Matatiele reminded everyone that nature conservation, tourism and agriculture are Matatiele's gems and should be protected. In addition, the event was attended by media, as well as Cheryllyn Dudley, who represented various political parties and successfully took the debate to parliament.

We visited a homestead in Matatiele that is completely off the grid, reliant only on solar and wind energy. We were amazed and impressed when we saw a home-based biogas mini system in Nchodu Village, near Maluti. The biogas design relied purely on plantation and animal dung for energy, perfect for rural areas because it is cheap, accessible and only dependent on natural resources. The mood was dampened during our wetlands visit. The wetlands fall in the exploration study area and at this moment we realized what was at stake: water, food sources and an eco system that will be destroyed by fracking.

On the third and final day, a manifesto was drafted. The full document can be found in our December 2016 newsletter (<http://groundwork.org.za/newsletters/December%202016%20for%20web.pdf>)

The gathering has had many intended and unintended positive outcomes. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2016, Cheryllyn Dudley fulfilled her commitments to take the debate to parliament and there was a debate about fracking in the National Assembly. The Manifesto was mentioned numerous times throughout the debate and the politicians were made aware of the impacts, as they are far removed from the reality of those affected by the decisions they take. It is one thing to say that mining is the cornerstone of the economy – we need the jobs and the foreign exchange – but the true cost is not being considered. The benefits accrue to a few, but the costs are human lives and a threat to our environment. The costs are suffered by those least responsible: the poor, people of colour, women and children.

Judy Bell of Frack Free SA mentioned that the debate had some interesting moments, but the use of dodgy statistics to sway the case of the economic benefits was astounding. The Strategic Environmental Assessment undertaken for the Karoo Shale Gas proposals has shown that the economic benefits of mining are far outweighed by the negative impacts that the local communities will have to bear. The number of jobs created will not be enough to make up for those existing jobs and livelihoods lost and affected by extraction of the gas.

The parliament fracking debate provided national awareness on the issue. Afro Energy, Sungu Sungu and Motuoane Energy have all withdrawn applications for prospecting rights. While they will never admit that it was strong resistance from the people on the ground that influenced their decision to withdraw, we are fully aware that when people stand together in solidarity and resist collectively, anything is possible. ☺



# Palm oil with a side of land grab

by Niven Reddy

*Most products we use contain palm oil – from ice cream to margarine to lipstick – but at what cost?*

The people of the Blayah Town located in Grand Bassa County in Liberia completely submerged by kilometres of Palm Oil plantations found themselves on the verge of losing their land to Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO), owned by an Indonesian group. With strong leadership and persistence from their chief and help from the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), they resisted and pushed back on EPO's advances.

A journey to the Blayah Town Community to visit the Joghahn clan formed part of a regional meeting held in Monrovia that brought together youth from six African member countries of Friends of the Earth International. This meeting was the African launch of the Erasmus Plus project. We shared environmental justice success stories and addressed issues of gender and youth inequality. After some

deliberation among the participants, there was a decision made to have a Young Friends of the Earth Africa. This process would need to take a few pages from the book of our European comrades on how to successfully create a platform for youth campaigning. While it will not be an independent structure, it will be supported through the various African member groups while thinking of ways to collectively campaign against various environmental and social justice issues.

Joseph Cheo Johnson, Chief of the Grand Bassa County, warmly invited us into his home and we were then gathered in a large hut where he shared his views with the youth, retelling stories of how they resisted losing their land to an expansion of palm oil plantations. He spoke of the togetherness of his community and how their chief would not



FoEA's Ekue Assem interviewing Reuben Siakor on how people resisted the 2013 land grab attempted by Palm Oil company, EPO – Blayah Town.  
Credit: groundWork



Just some of the Friends of the Earth Africa Youth crew. Standing (left to right) – Peruth Atukwate (Uganda), Darius Assem (Togo), Niven Reddy (SA). Sitting (left to right) – Gleadae Harmon (Liberia), Emily Dorsue (Liberia) & Mireille Tchiako (Cameroon).

Credit: groundWork



entertain the idea of displacing his people for even a second.

EPO did not take the word of Chief Johnson as the final say, proceeding with their efforts. The chief then sent 250 Jogbahn men to surveil EPO's process. The Jogbahn men returned to the community a few days later. The Jogbahn men marched to the nearest town, Buchanan, but were halted by EPO security on their way. Rueben Siakor shared with us what happened next and how they resisted the company and achieved victory:

*"This was in 2013. The company and government came and forcibly said they are conducting a resurvey on 35 500 acres of land. We marched to this land, we say to them that if we leave this place, that means we have no other place, no other home. Immediately after that, we contact with the Sustainable Development Institute, we told them that the company will never move us from this land. Immediately we agreed, we advocated that we get this land before anything happens. They stood by our side when the government of this country arrested and beat us for peaceful marching. We said that there has been no crime that has been committed, this is a peaceful march, so set the people free.*

*We later met with government and the company and they told us the survey had to continue because government have already signed certain documents, they said, let the survey finish, they will never take your land. The global community stood by our side, saying this is wrong and that people should get their land back. It immediately happened. Round Table Sustainable Development and other international institutions all assembled here. Finally, the company agreed to forget about the land."*

Though the community was successful in pushing back against the proposed 2013 plantation, the company still has plantations surrounding Blayah community. The company offers no assistance and employment to community members. Rueben adds "They don't bother with helping us. They do what they do and we look after ourselves". Whilst the community is self-reliant and relies heavily on agriculture, like many African communities, development and building or schools and infrastructure is of utmost importance. EPO still operates in this community, polluting and exploiting without contributing meaningfully to the development of the community. ☺



# Rolling coal

by Greenfly

Rolling coal is what they call it. Blowing out black smoke as if they'd put a dirty great power station on wheels. They do it in over-sized bakkies with diesel engines specially adapted to blow smoke on command.

It's a fitting testimony to Trump's America. Barack Obama wanted to be seen saving the environment – particularly when he wasn't. Before him, George Bush gave the nod to trashing it but left it to others to do it. Donald Trump wants to trash the environment and to be seen to be doing it. He started by cancelling an Obama law that says coal mines must not smother rivers with toxic waste. That's what makes America great.

And so it is that we come to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Obama ratified it. Trump is set to cancel it. In a bizarre moment – and all Trump moments are bizarre – he said climate change is a hoax put about by China. Twenty years ago, China said it was a hoax put about by America with the intention of preventing China from "developing".

That too was cobblers – and China has since got over it. But what they agree(d) on is this: "developing" or being "developed" needs a whole lot of smoke in the sky. Just don't talk about who took the money. And in Trump's America, don't talk about the bodies – who is killed by pollution and who is killed by extreme heat, drought or flood. And who is killed for trying to preserve themselves and their world from development.

It's not politically correct. It's not happening.

And just to make sure, the scientists who show that it is happening will be silenced and defunded. The evidence shall not exist. It's a Savonarola moment. Book burning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. That's progress. But this is not the first time in America. Bush tried to silence the scientists too – though he didn't actually brag about it. And in Canada, Stephen Harper did it. And in Australia, Crap Tony Abbott did it and now Malcolm Turnbull's doing it too. Were he still



around, fat fingered PeeWee Botha would surely have been with them.

Greenfly has asked the question before: what is it about white men in the settler colonies?

But Paris? The real Paris Agreement is to pretend like Obama. Ironically, it was handed down by the elder George Bush all those years ago at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The American way of life is not up for negotiation so let each country do as it will and someone else can pick up the tab. In Paris it was agreed that the planet isn't worth it but the pretence is.

Does Trump come like a breath of fresh air ending a pretence? Not he. He doesn't have the balls to say we're trashing it for good. We're the last generation and we don't give a shit. Watch life's end on planet trash. So he lies like a snivelling school boy: It wasn't me. It's not happening. It's a Chinese hoax.

In South Africa, we prefer to pretend. Climate change is most serious but God gave us coal so we must burn it. And if we can't mine it, we must frack it. And please God let us find gas. Let us find oil. We need more. Let us have more. We must have more. And we say that the poor are first to feel the lash of climate change and with more we'll save them. But let no-one ask how our more made them poor. ☺



# Climate change court victory

by Centre for Environmental Rights

*Victory! "Climate impacts are a big deal for communities and farmers..." says Makoma Lekalakala of Earthlife Africa.*

MARCH 8, 2017 AT 10:53 AM

Today the North Gauteng High Court ruled in favour of environmental justice organisation Earthlife Africa Johannesburg (ELA), and referred the appeal against the environmental authorisation for a new coal-fired power station back to the Minister of Environmental Affairs on the basis that its climate change impacts had not properly been considered.

In South Africa's first climate change lawsuit, ELA challenged Environmental Affairs' Minister Molewa's rejection of its appeal against the approval given to the proposed Thabametsi coal-fired power station in Limpopo. The approval was granted by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) even though there had been no comprehensive assessment of the climate change impacts of this new coal-fired power station.

The court ordered that the Minister reconsider the appeal, now taking into account a full climate change impact assessment report, and all public comments received. The judgement makes clear that the DEA and the Minister should have given proper consideration to the climate change impacts of the proposed coal-fired power station before a decision could have been made to allow it to go ahead.

Makoma Lekalakala of ELA says: "We welcome this judgement, which sends a strong message to government and to all developers proposing projects with potentially significant climate change impacts in South Africa that permission cannot be given for such projects unless the climate change impacts have been properly assessed. South Africa is a water-stressed country, and the Waterberg, where the power station would be located, is a particularly water-stressed area. Climate impacts are a big deal for communities and farmers who depend on the limited water available."

The Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) on behalf of ELA, submitted comments on Thabametsi's draft

climate change impact assessment on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2017. The final climate change impact assessment is due to be submitted to the DEA and made available for final comment, this month.

CER attorney Nicole Loser notes: "A climate change impact assessment requires far more than just an assessment of the proposed project's greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change is going to have significant impacts for South Africa's water availability and will result in extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. We are very relieved that the court has recognised the need for an assessment of the power station's contribution and exposure to these impacts."

Lekalakala says: "We now call upon the Minister to give full and proper consideration to Thabametsi's climate change impacts – which the project's environmental consultants have found will be significant – in making a decision on whether to uphold Earthlife's appeal."

Together with groundWork, ELA and the CER form part of the Life After Coal/Impilo Ngaphandle Kwamalahle campaign, which aims to: discourage investment in new coal-fired power stations and mines, accelerate the retirement of SA's coal infrastructure; and enable a just transition to renewable energy.

A copy of the judgement is available here: <http://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Judgment-Earthlife-Thabametsi-Final-06-03-2017.pdf>

The order of the court is available here: <http://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Judgment-Earthlife-Thabametsi-Final-06-03-2017.pdf>

The media release on these comments, as well as the comments themselves are available here: <http://cer.org.za/news/thabametsi-coal-fired-power-station-threatens-local-communities-water-security-and-poses-climate-change-risk>.



# Community voices rising

by Nombulelo Shange

## *First steps in telling community stories*

One of my biggest tasks as groundWork's brand new Media, Information and Publications Campaigner is to fulfil one of groundWork's objectives in a more meaningful way. The goal of the media campaign is to provide support to our coal, waste, environmental health and climate and energy justice campaigns. This we have done very well over the years and, while there have been ups and downs, our mainstream media coverage has been great across our various campaigns.

The main objective of the media campaign, and sadly the part of the campaign that sometimes takes the back seat when the work is mounting up, is community media. The goal of community media is to have people's movements making media to build identity and solidarity, while defending freedom of information. It's a huge task, one that I am both excited about and scared of. There is so much riding on this and I don't want to mess it up. I've come up with what I believe is a great plan, but I know it's the execution and my fear of failure that will kick my bum. The thing is that there will be failures – small and monumental ones – and while my plan is ready, I haven't quite figured out how I'll deal with the failures.

The idea is simple and one that people have been doing for centuries through folk tale, radio, TV and more recently through social media. Through a series of workshops, we hope to empower youth faced by environmental challenges to start documenting their stories through art, writing, images, videos and more. We hope to use the good relationship we have with media to give these stories centre stage, while also sharing their experiences on social media. The media industry is changing and is becoming more and more profit

and politically driven. We hope to change this, one community story at a time. Many are already doing this, sharing their stories and providing counter narratives to media propaganda. There are many global and SA examples of people taking ownership of their media.

Ten-year-old Janna Jihad reports on her community's social issues. She's been instrumental in giving Palestinian children a voice, highlighting conflict, human rights violations and political issues. She puts up short videos online, interviewing people and documenting clashes and human rights violations. The Fees Must Fall activists continue to challenge the "violent students" narrative one tweet and at time. Images and videos uploaded of Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, started a global revolution which largely played out on social media. In 2010, Bouazizi, a street vendor, set himself on fire in front of a state-owned building to protest unemployment, government corruption and monopoly capitalism that was making the rich richer at the expense of the poor. This act quickly sparked mass mobilisation in the form of Arab Spring, which then spread to the western world in the form of Occupy Wall Street, which challenged the 1%, the predominately white male population controlling most of the world's resources and economy.

Inspired by these and many other individuals, events and movements, I decided I couldn't wait for our first community media workshop and have started doing some of the documenting myself. It has been a challenge because I am not always in the "action" and the community members we work with are spread out across the country. My excitement wouldn't let these challenges stand in my way and I started interviewing community members during



planning meetings and workshops. One of the first people I interviewed was Mathapelo Thobejane and this is what we talked about:

**NS:** Please give me a brief description of yourself and the environmental justice work you do.

**MT:** I am involved in environmental justice as an activist. There are a lot of mines where I am staying. We are affected because of the violations of the mine; violations like water and soil pollution. Air quality is no longer the same as what it used to be before the mining came. All the issues we face are so disturbing, but water pollution is the worst one. The water pollution is hurting us badly. If you can imagine, we are from the rural areas and we are depending on farming, so if the water is polluted, our livestock dies in high percentages. Cows, goats, sheep, they're dying each and every single day as a result of the water coming from the mines and streaming into our main streams.

**NS:** What does it mean for people, when the cows die? How does it impact them?

**MT:** We depend on farming. Those cows that are dying, they were supposed to take youth or children to school and university. The other thing is we use cows to pay *lobola* in tradition. It's very frustrating and even the community are not happy about it. From my meetings with the herdsmen, I can see that they are very concerned. They no longer have grazing land, because all the areas where they used to take the cows to eat, have been fenced off [by the mines].

**NS:** What type of activism do you do? How do you push back against human rights violations?

**MT:** We work on different things, we have the climate change team and the river monitoring team, which helped us during the process of identifying which mines are polluting. We also have a team helping with organizing protests and we work with unemployment forums. We also assist those whose houses are cracking from the mining blasting and have received no compensation. We decided to do the river monitoring because of the livestock dying, we decided we can't just sit down and watch while our parents are suffering. Even though we don't have the all the equipment to do the water testing, we are trying to organize the municipality and Department of Water and Sanitation to come and do the testing for us. But you know how the government works. We've been waiting for a long time. The old people who are staying in the area have a history, they know what it was like before; they give us a story to say these things [referring to pollution] just started happening now.

**NS:** What would you say to civil society and people not aware of your struggles?

**MT:** Now is the time for us to unite and fight this mining industry. This is not for us, this is for the future, our children. Contributions like learning how to manage your household waste are also important, because improper disposal also leads to water pollution. If these things are happening to my village, they can happen to you; we don't know where these minerals are. Maybe if you are not affected by platinum, it might be oil, or something else: coal, diamonds.

To view the full interview, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dek0dX0OS5k>



## Media, Information and Publications Campaign



*Mathapelo Thobejane from Limpopo. She is part of a community monitors team already doing great work in documenting community struggles. She is also a member of Mining and Environmental Justice Network Community Network SA.*

*Credit: groundWork*



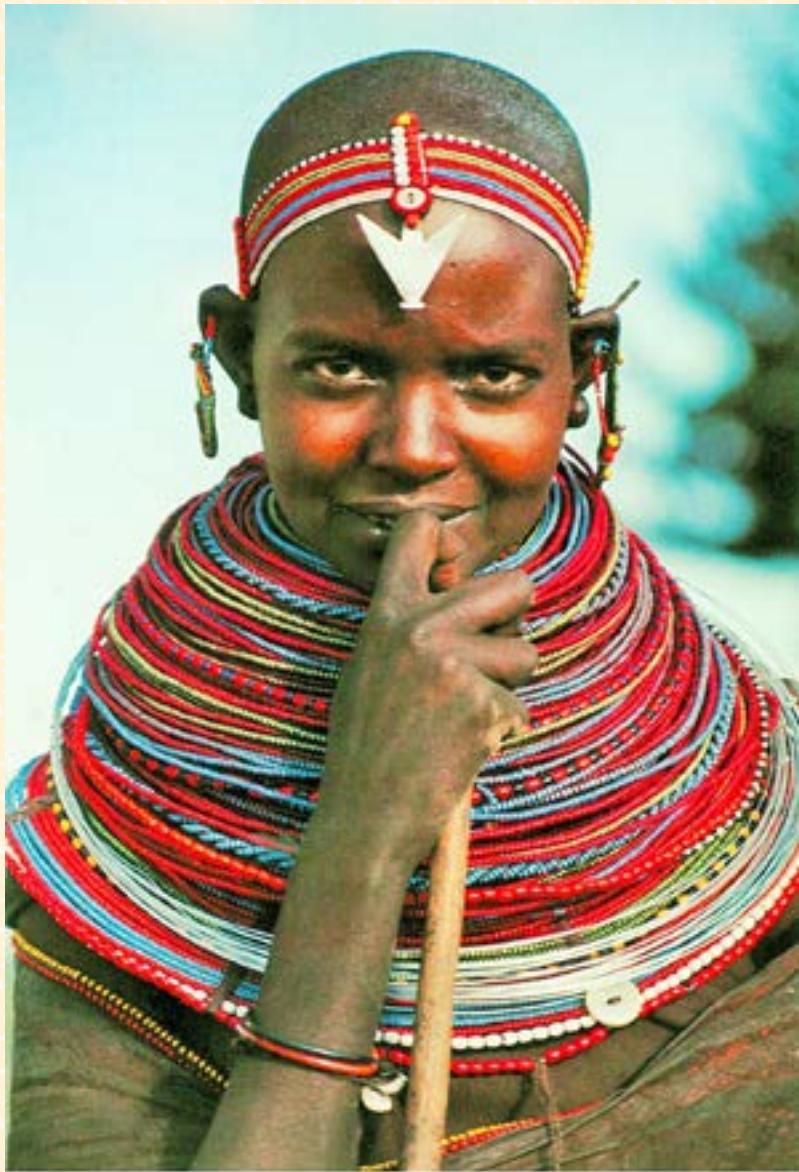
*Sizwe Shiba and SDCEA members singing struggle songs at an anti-nuclear protest.*

*Credit: groundWork*



## Phansi Museum

Masai Women  
image from  
Fisher, A. (1984),  
African Adorned.  
Collins: London



Phansi Museum, situated in Glenwood, Durban, is an historic and African treasure housing old artefacts, craft and art. Everything about the collections screams #blackmagic. The guided tour we went on was done by Mam Phumzile, whose passion and enthusiasm makes you miss and long for "home": a simpler and more beautiful time, when people understood the link they had with the environment and protected it accordingly, whilst

also benefiting from it. The museum tour is bitter sweet; emotional because it reminds you just how much we have lost as Africans when it comes to culture, art, science/health, wealth and innovation. It is also great because you feel a sense of relief that it wasn't all lost. The confinement and enclosure of the pieces is in some ways a metaphor for the African dream. While everything feels like it's crumbling around us, not all is lost. We have a rich, sustainable culture waiting to be reclaimed when we are ready.

The cleverly named Phansi Museum, knowingly or unknowingly plays around with words in a poetic and beautiful way. The direct translation of *phansi* is ground/floor, but the word also has multiple meanings in the Zulu context. *Abaphansi* also refers to the ancestors, who reside at *umsamo/ phansi*. *Umsamo* means center/core and is/was traditionally the floor centre of the kraal/house. It is the place where God and the ancestors reside. It is the space that people use to communicate with cosmic forces. All knowledge, ideas, the cosmos, people and nature come from *umsamo*. Our actions affect the environment and ancestors and are influenced by these elements. It is a cyclical continuous relationship.

*Umsamo* symbolizes harmony and unity between people, ideas, nature and the spiritual realm. Much of what the museum captures has great links to the notion of *umsamo* or *abaphansi*. It shows representations of the cosmic realm, nature, people and art, and gives you a glimpse of old African knowledge and cultural systems. The museum is well worth the visit and, while you are there, send our regards to Mam Phumzile, with love from groundWork. For more details visit <http://phansi.com/>

