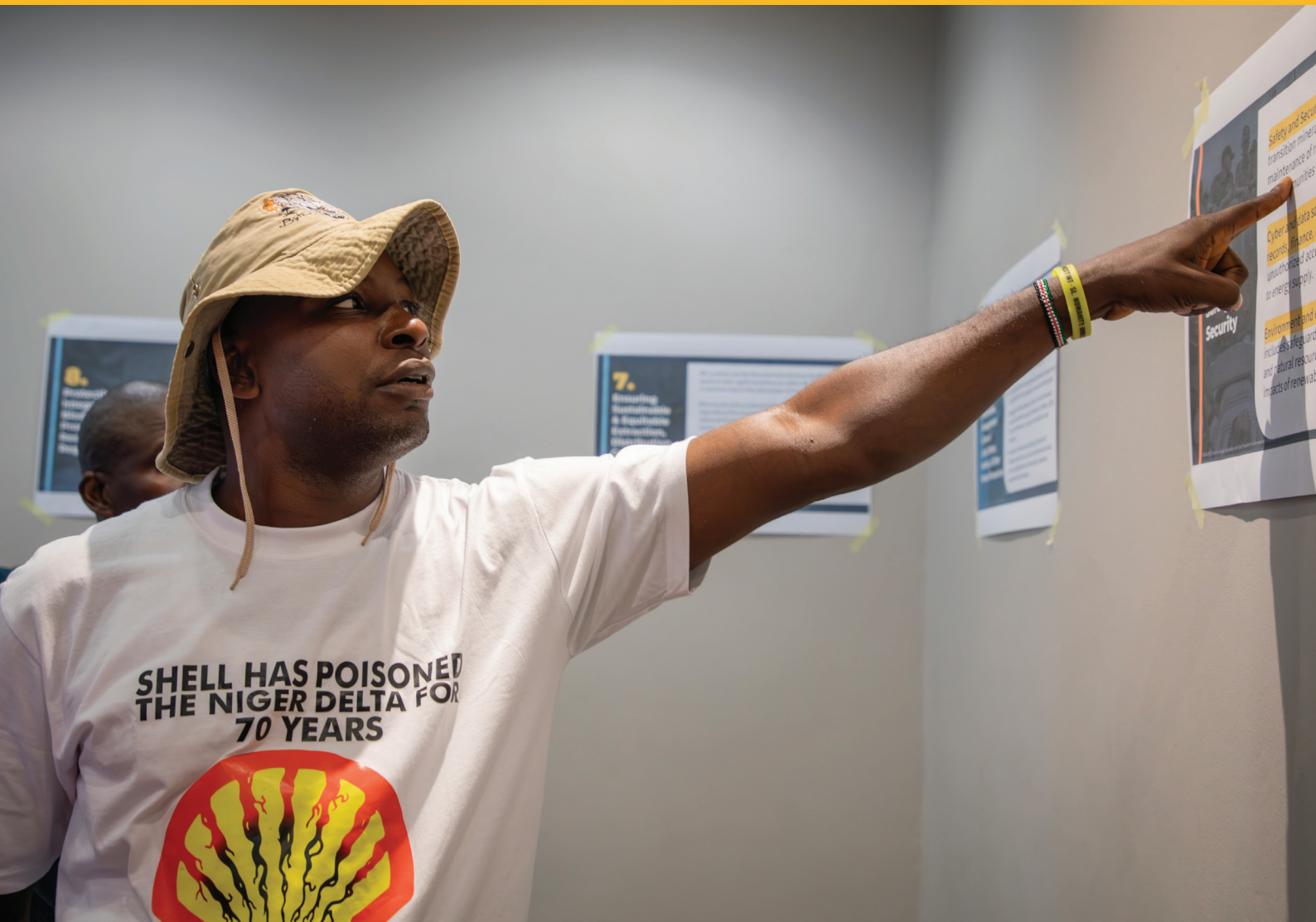




ground**Work**

Beyond Coal Beyond Oil and Gas



Towards a Just Transition

Cover: Nbani Friday from Lekeh Development Foundation in Nigeria at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Credit: Chris Louw

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Established in 1999, groundWork Friends of the Earth South Africa is a principles driven non-profit environmental justice organisation working towards a just transition and open democracy in South Africa and beyond. Its vision is that **people live well with each other and with the earth**. To realise this vision, groundWork partners with affected communities to resist dirty energy and toxic production, building solidarity and local alliances that advocate for open debate and democratic control over resources such as energy, waste and health towards a viable future.

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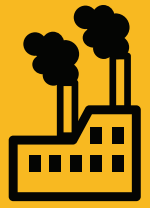
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From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork Executive Director, Bobby Peek



Dear Friends

A big shout out to Friends of the Earth members who have celebrated milestone anniversaries over the last while. Two of these organisations are Friends of the Earth Germany, otherwise known as ‘BUND’ – Bund für Umwelt und Natur. Interesting that our sister organisation started off from a perspective of thinking of the environment – which I would like to understand as the balance we need between the earth and people – and nature – which I will interpret as the Earth.

Then not far from BUND, we also have Friends of the Earth Bosnia and Herzegovina, known as *Centar za Životnu sredinu* (Centre for Environment) celebrating 25 years. Here again, *environment* is the framing that pulls us together as a family, rather than the separation of nature from people.

Congratulations to both organisations!

The adage that “time flies” cannot be ignored in groundWork. Just a few months ago we came off a month of celebrations, remembering 25 years of environmental justice work and now time has moved on and groundWork has been at it again. Sometimes, it feels like you never have time to catch your breath.

Straight after our May month of celebrations, we moved into our new Durban office. For the first time I have an office to myself. In the past I have shared with Linda, Gill, Jane, Robby, Rico, Niven, Asi and gang, and then more recently with Avena. Does this mean I’ve grown up? It is strange to be in a space all alone.

But the Durban office is full of people, and you will never be alone. It is an exciting space that has our history, which we brought from the exhibition in May, on the walls. A big thank you to Avena, our Ops Director, for making this happen. Believe it or not, despite the office size, we are still squeezed for space.

Staying on the theme of the office, we have already hosted various workshops and meetings in the office, but the most exciting one was hosting Friends of the Earth Africa communicators with us in July, which ended up in an office warming party on 25 July. We are always excited to host people but now, with a great meeting venue and office, and a beautiful garden, it makes hosting people even more pleasurable.

The last months have also been busy, with campaigns involved in work that demanded administrative back up to make it meaningful and real. As I write this, groundWork staff who work with the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) and Break Free From Plastic (BFFP) are in Geneva, pushing for an ambitious end to plastic production and pollution.

We are also undertaking critical advocacy on chemicals in plastic and the health implications with our partner, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), and working with Friends of the Earth International on pushing back on corporate power and shenanigans as corporates seek to use plastics as a loophole to continue “drilling, baby, drilling” for fossil fuels.

July kept us busy, supporting Justiça Ambiental’s (Friends of the Earth Mozambique) annual gathering on Corporate Impunity and Human Rights, which brought together about 200 people from Mozambique, Africa and internationally. As always, groundWork staff were present in solidarity, this year to support the communications work directly. Along with groundWorkers present, we supported the attendance of community partners that we struggle along with in South Africa in challenging for a just transition and environmental justice. I could not make it this year, but will be there next year in solidarity, to share struggles



and to learn from those on the fencelines of corporate impunity.

July also brought together the strong family of community organisations and NGOs we work with across Africa on the just transition, when groundWorkers and Africa Just Transition Network (AJTN) staff hosted their annual gathering for sharing, learning and planning.

It is always exciting to spend time with people from all parts of our continent – from Niger to Namibia. We are all trying to make sense of our resistance to false promises of fossil fuel, and indeed today the false promises of the renewable energy sector, who want renewable energy under the same exploitative conditions that fossil fuels are exploited, creating poverty as we know, juxtaposed with corporate and political elite wealth – profiteering off the poverty of society. The call from the Network is about justice in the ramp-up to renewables on the continent. Renewables for people, not for profit.

But, as always in groundWork, we are about learning from experience and sharing this with those we work with daily. In July, the groundWork GAIA team hosted Africans gathered for Africa's Zero Waste Academy in Durban – or, as one social media post put it, REVOLUTION. Again, from across Africa we welcomed people into our groundWork space at the Durban office and in shared spaces such as the Warwick Zero Waste composting environs. Social media updates were thumping out of the process. Well done, waste team.

Talking about waste, groundWork is working with the South African Waste Pickers Association on an exciting process that brings the work of waste, air pollution and health together. Through the Clean Air Fund, SAWPA is supported on a two year project to push back on open waste burning and to advocate for improved service delivery, so that waste management is not seen as the last process government will consider in their limited budgets, but rather waste management as job creation, pollution prevention, health management, all through a realisation of economic savings and better service delivery.

The wheels of justice turn slowly and sometimes as a fenceline activist I feel too slow. Which is ideal

for corporations who are always planning their next extractive venture. But two cases recently have brought us closer to climate justice. On 23 July, the highest court of the UN – the International Court of Justice – issued a landmark “[advisory opinion](#)”, stating that nations can be held legally accountable for their greenhouse-gas emissions and their impact on present and future generations.

This [dovetails](#) with the [#cancelcoal](#) legal challenge brought by the African Climate Alliance, Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action and groundWork. These legal cases, built on years of activism and resistance, serve as the building blocks to a world where climate justice is realised. It is a “long walk” to justice, as our Tata Mandela coined.

Finally, the government, through the Ministry of Fisheries, Forestry and Environment, released nothing more than a damp squib in the national determined contributions, aka the NDCs. groundWork is concerned that the latest NDC reaffirms South Africa's “priority for addressing poverty and inequality”, implying that this limits its capacity for climate mitigation. But we do not have any real policies to address poverty and inequality. This policy relies exclusively on economic growth, which is really a policy for protecting capital accumulation – that is, continued profits for the big corporate polluters.

The NDC mentions a range of government policies, which it says contribute to the country's climate response. It does not, however, mention the various policies that promote increasing production and consumption of fossil fuels. It is strange that there is such a disconnect between the UN's legal arm, the ICJ and what governments get away with under the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change.

On this note, we are in for another abusive two weeks at CoP30 in Brazil!

Finally, just as I was about to put this smokestack to bed, we received the news that our very own Niven Reddy, a groundWork intern, mercury trader – wink-wink – techno and now GAIA Africa Coordinator is one of 200 Mail and Guardian Young Influential South Africans for this year! Well done, Niven!

A luta continua. 🌀





Still burning: Africa's frontline fight against coal expansion

by Gugulethu Makhubo

This isn't just a battle against coal – it's a battle for sovereignty, dignity and the right to dream differently

Coal is not a relic of the past; it is alive and growing across parts of Africa, despite bold climate pledges and a shifting global rhetoric against fossil fuels. The Global Energy Monitor's "Boom and Bust Coal 2025" report revealed that the world's coal fleet grew, mainly due to China's aggressive expansion.

China's Footprint, Africa's Cost

Across Africa, coal development is not absent and, while countries have committed to prioritising renewables and gas, new proposals for coal development have emerged in countries like Zimbabwe and Zambia, with the backing of Chinese developers, despite the Chinese government's pledge to stop developing new overseas coal plants in 2021.*

Research conducted by the Africa Just Transition Network (AJTN)** in early 2024 captured this contradiction. Civil society leaders across 19 African countries described how Chinese-linked coal projects cause displacement, cultural erasure, health risks and gendered harm. Corruption, lack of transparency and refusal by Chinese companies to engage with affected communities have become the norm.

The research reveals that Chinese coal-linked investments in Africa encompass three key roles: ownership, financing and engineering. Chinese companies hold equity stakes in 37.5% of active



Participants during an energizer exercise at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chris Louw

coal plants, deepening their control over energy infrastructure. In terms of funding, China supports over 77% of active coal plants through loans, insurance and

* [Boom and Bust Coal 2025 Report](#)

** AJTN's Africa-China research report will be published later in 2025.



project guarantees – primarily via state-owned banks like the China Development Bank and ICBC.

China is also revealed to be deeply involved in engineering and construction, with 43.75% of active plants built by Chinese firms, which manage project design, procurement and delivery. Collectively, these roles reflect China’s entrenched influence in Africa’s coal sector, posing challenges to climate goals and just energy transitions. Despite a 2021 pledge to halt overseas coal financing, loopholes persist, especially for captive coal plants.

Furthermore, China’s current economic involvement reinforces fossil fuel dependency, using the promise of jobs and infrastructure as a smokescreen for unchecked exploitation. The *Boom and Bust Coal 2025* report found that the global coal fleet is growing again, driven largely by China. Chinese organisations remain deeply involved in Africa’s coal frontier. Environmental defender Richard Sekondo of Tanzania corroborated these activities:

If I were a politician, I would say that coal is dead ... but I’m not a politician. I’m one of the environmental defenders, so I will say that coal is not dead.

In Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, coal investments are accelerating, enabled by policy doublespeak, foreign financing – particularly from China – and development rhetoric that masks a deeper crisis. Far from being phased out, coal is entrenched in national energy strategies, sold as a path to energy security and economic growth. However, on the ground, communities are being displaced, ecosystems are degraded and civic voices are being suppressed.

Struggle and Resistance

A Boom in Displacement

Tanzania is estimated to hold over five billion tons in coal reserves* and total coal production increased by 1 901% from 2000 to 2020**. The government’s roadmap for electricity reform frames coal as part of a “balanced” energy mix, projecting a multifold

* Impact assessments for a coal mining project in Tanzania: sharing experience on resilience and adaptation to climate change

** Tanzania: International Energy Agency

increase in energy output by 2025. But this strategy, says Sekondo, obscures the lived consequences: water contamination, respiratory illness, loss of cultural sites and community displacement. Coal’s “strategic value” is not felt in improved livelihoods, but in heightened vulnerability.

Behind the Energy Security Façade

Zambia has seen a 1 605% increase in coal supply and a 1 350% jump in coal-related emissions since 2000***. The country positions coal as a reliable backup against energy shortfalls linked to fluctuations in hydropower****. Activists like Precious Kalombwana from the Citizens Network for Community Development in Zambia, argue that the long-term costs are often ignored: locked-in pollution, foreign corporate control and squandered renewable potential. The promises of economic growth and job creation fall flat when mining leads to toxic air, unsafe work conditions and marginalised communities. The illusion of “sovereign energy” masks dependency on foreign developers – primarily Chinese entities – with little reinvestment in local futures.

Green Lies and Black Dust

Zimbabwe ranks sixth globally in coal power capacity under construction or planned. In Hwange, coal expansion is layered with a lithium rush, ironically driven by the global shift to green energy. Chinese-backed lithium extraction, pushed to meet a 2027 raw export ban, has intensified land grabs, water theft and harassment of those who speak out.

“If you don’t mine, you die,” says one activist from Zimbabwe, interviewed by AJTN’s research team, capturing the fear-based compliance imposed on communities.

In this context, mining is framed as patriotic, and resistance is criminalised. The language of progress is weaponised to silence dissent and entrench extractivism.

From Fossil-Fuelled to People-Powered

The fight against coal isn’t only a rejection of fossil fuels. It’s a call to reclaim African agency, development

*** Zambia: International Energy Agency

**** Generation and importation of electricity





Africa Just Transition Network representatives at the AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chris Louw

and imagination. From the grassroots to the policy arena, five interlinked strategies put forward by the AJTN and its allies enable a bold path toward a just, regenerative transition:

Governance and Accountability: Governments must implement strong environmental laws, demand transparency in investment deals and ensure public consultation, particularly when foreign actors are involved.

Renewables and Technology Transfer: A shift toward solar, wind and decentralised systems must be backed by public and private financing, and supported by international technology-sharing partnerships that localise benefits.

Community Empowerment: Training local leaders, supporting strategic litigation and amplifying grassroots stories are essential to confronting propaganda and demanding justice.

Rebalancing Africa-China Relations: Engagement with China must be redefined, demanding accountability, sustainability and mutual benefit, not silence and sacrifice.

Regional Coordination and Solidarity: Through coalitions and networks like the AJTN, African civil society is mapping coal projects, unifying advocacy and pushing back against regional institutions that finance extractive futures.

From Resistance to Reimagination

A Zimbabwean activist interviewed by AJTN researchers captured the moment best:

We need our strategy, not their strategy. Many times we are forced to start speaking their language, rather than us devising a strategy that protects the people that we speak for, protects the commons, the environment and everything.

This isn't just a battle against coal: it's a battle for sovereignty, dignity and the right to dream differently. Across Africa, including Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the question is no longer whether coal will shape Africa's future but whether communities and activists will rise to shape Africa's future on their own terms. ☀️





Building a unified path beyond fossil fuels



by Kevin Munyoli

From 22 to 24 July 2025, members and partners of the Africa Just Transition Network (AJTN) gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa, for their annual general meeting. The event brought together climate justice activists, community leaders, policy advocates and partner organisations from across the continent. Held at the Premier Inn Quartermain Hotel, the meeting aimed to strengthen collaboration, refine strategies and reaffirm AJTN’s commitment to a people-centred energy transition beyond coal, oil and gas.

Day 1 – Setting the stage to unveil our new identity

The first day began with registration, a welcome from Network Coordinator Marina Agortimevor and Assistant Coordinator Ciza Mukabaha, and an introduction to the meeting’s facilitators. Michelle Cruywagen of groundWork explained the programme goals before participants began the day’s first thematic discussions.

The morning featured a Coal Landscape Review, including the AJTN Africa-China Report Summary, which unpacked Chinese investments in coal projects across the continent and their impact on communities. Richard Sekondo of the Organisation for Community

Engagement presented a case study on Tanzania, highlighting ongoing and proposed coal projects and urging regional collaboration to prevent further expansion of fossil fuels. Members then participated in a coal mapping session, identifying developments in their own countries.

Breakout discussions on the fossil fuel landscape followed:

- Khadija Famau from Lamu Women described the long-running grassroots resistance to the Lamu coal project, emphasising the role of women in environmental defence.
- Fidelis Chima of Greater Hwange Residents Trust detailed the social and ecological impacts of coal expansion in Hwange, Zimbabwe.
- Richard Sekondo outlined strategies to halt new coal investments in Tanzania and beyond.

Midday marked a highly anticipated moment: the official launch of AJTN’s new brand. Marina revealed the updated identity, symbolised by a honeycomb-inspired logo reflecting efficiency, regeneration, interconnection and harmony with nature. The reveal included branded banners, T-shirts, lanyards and programme materials. Communications Coordinator Kevin Munyoli explained the symbolism behind the logo and colour palette before distributing T-shirts and gathering everyone for a celebratory photo.

The afternoon sessions introduced the *Principles for a Rapid, Equitable and Just Transition to Renewable Energy Systems*, a set of guiding values designed to anchor Africa’s energy shift in justice, democracy and community ownership. Facilitators walked members through each principle, covering universal access, rights-based approaches, sustainable resource use, rejection of false solutions and prioritisation of local economies.

Participants reflected on how these principles could be adapted to national contexts, embedded into ongoing campaigns and used as a benchmark when



Kevin Munyoli and Marina Agortimevor from the AJTN unveil their new branding and t-shirt design at the AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chis Louw





Sifiso Dladla from groundWork speaking at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chis Louw

engaging governments, financiers and international partners. The discussion emphasised that the transition must not only replace fossil fuels with renewables but must transfer the systems of ownership and decision-making that have historically excluded African communities from the benefits of their resources.

A panel on Financing the Just Transition explored justice-driven, community-centred funding models. Paolo Pagaduan (APMDD) critiqued exploitative financing arrangements and underscored the need for debt justice as a foundation for effective climate action. Chantal Naidoo (Rabia Transitions Initiative) presented on innovative financing pathways rooted in local economies, ensuring that funds circulate within and benefit the communities they are meant to serve. Ferron Candice Pedro (350 South Africa) highlighted the importance of grassroots leadership in financial decision-making, emphasising that those most affected by the energy transition should have a direct say in how resources are allocated. Archieford Chembere (Action24) called for the creation of a continental finance working group to consolidate knowledge, coordinate advocacy efforts and strengthen the

movement's bargaining power in shaping equitable financing solutions.

The day concluded with a timeline mapping exercise that brought members together to visually document the network's collective milestones. Beyond celebrating past achievements, the exercise served as a strategic tool, helping members identify patterns, gaps and opportunities in their advocacy. It also provided a foundation for planning engagement in upcoming global events over the next year, ensuring the network's presence is coordinated, visible and aligned with its broader vision for a just and fossil-free Africa.

Day 2 – Human Rights Defenders and Critical Minerals

Reflections from Day 1, led by Alain Bertrand and Stella Amanie, opened a morning focused on Safety and Security for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). The day's first major thematic discussion was on Critical Minerals. Southern Africa Resource Watch and Farai Maguwu (Centre for Natural Resource Governance) unpacked the geopolitics of Africa's mineral wealth,



warning that the rush for lithium, cobalt and other minerals risked creating new sacrifice zones and fuelling inequality if extraction was not community controlled

Chulu Nkasela of Project90 Youth Hub introduced their Five Pillar Approach to youth-led safety in climate action. Mariya Matui (WATED) presented the AJTN HRD Working Group’s developing framework, while Sifiso Dladla (groundWork) outlined the “Defend Our Defenders” campaign, highlighting solidarity actions and legal support strategies. Breakout groups identified framework gaps, including the need for country-specific protocols, community surveillance systems, digital security training and integrating HRD safety into all AJTN thematic areas.

Members then turned to CoP30 and the People’s Assembly in Belem, with contributions from 350 Africa, Powershift, CAN Africa, FFNPT and GreenFaith. Discussions focused on ensuring African priorities, such as climate finance, energy sovereignty and resisting fossil fuel expansion, are front and centre.

A World Café followed with working group updates:

- The Finance Working Group reported progress on a just transition finance toolkit.
- The Renewable Energy Working Group shared case studies of community-owned solar and wind projects.

The afternoon breakout groups were an intense working session in which members of AJTN’s thematic groups came together to reflect on their achievements and challenges over the past year. Each group – Finance, Gender, Human Rights Defenders, Just Transition, Campaigns and Renewable Energy – presented updates and then moved into strategy mode. Discussions centred on refining their mandates, identifying priority actions for 2025, and agreeing on leadership structures, including tenure and ways to keep the groups active between meetings.

The day concluded with the Just Transition Exhibition Walk-Through, an interactive showcase by the organisations present at the meeting. Tables and display areas were filled with materials, posters, reports and photographs highlighting their work, from local anti-coal struggles to national renewable energy victories. Participants moved between



Archieford Cheshire from Action 24 in Zimbabwe speaking at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image Chris Louw

displays, engaging in one-on-one conversations with organisational representatives, exchanging lessons learned, and exploring opportunities for collaboration. The atmosphere was one of mutual inspiration, as members saw the breadth and creativity of campaigns being driven across Africa, reinforcing the shared commitment to a just and people-powered energy transition.

Day 3 – Defining the Road Ahead

The final day opened with reflections from Ornela Foudjo and Precious Kalombwana. Karabo from the Don’t Gas Africa campaign delivered a compelling presentation that went beyond caution; it was a clarion call for energy sovereignty and climate justice. Karabo warned that Africa’s growing reliance on gas infrastructure is not a path toward development, but rather “another fossil-fuel trap”, one that replicates colonial-era extractive systems rather than delivering for the communities. She emphasised that the continent



doesn't need to be a supplier of dirty fuels; it needs clean, decentralised and democratic energy systems.

Karabo highlighted how the campaign champions a transformative, community-driven shift to energy democracy, shifting power literally and figuratively into the hands of communities through renewable energy ownership and localised systems. She cited efforts across Kenya, Mozambique and beyond, where activists have successfully challenged LNG projects and offshore drilling by centring community rights, health and livelihoods. Her message resonated deeply: locking into gas infrastructure doesn't end energy poverty. Instead, it deepens inequality, environmental damage and climate risk, while overshadowing the continent's abundant solar, wind and community-based energy solutions

Participants then broke into campaign-design groups:

- No New Coal Africa Campaign – aimed at uniting country-level anti-coal struggles into a continent-wide movement, coordinating advocacy to stop approvals for new projects and pushing governments toward renewables.
- Resisting Critical Minerals Extractivism – focused on exposing harmful mining practices, advocating for community consent and promoting recycling and reuse of minerals to reduce new extraction.
- Just Transition Finance – intended to challenge exploitative funding models and promote accessible, community-owned financing channels for renewable projects.



Richard Sekondo from the Organisation for Community Engagement in Tanzania presenting at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chris Louw



Participants during a session at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chris Louw

One of the key outcomes from the campaign discussions was the reinforcement of the **No New Coal for Africa** campaign, which aims to decisively halt the expansion of coal on the continent. Participants agreed on a clear set of objectives: stop the issuance of new coal licences, end coal financing, review existing coal investments, and engage governments to ensure coal is excluded from national energy plans and NDCs. The campaign also emphasises accelerating renewable energy deployment as a pathway to phasing out existing coal use.

Strategies discussed included targeting industrial coal consumption in sectors like aluminium and steel, referencing existing data on coal projects, and developing a coordinated China engagement strategy to address coal-linked investments. This approach positions the campaign as both a defensive shield against new coal developments and a proactive driver of renewable energy adoption across Africa.

Report-backs converged on the need for shared research, coordinated messaging and cross-border solidarity. Sessions on in-country meetings and learning exchanges ensured national chapters would remain active and interconnected. The meeting concluded with a mapping of key moments for collective action, final thanks from Marina, and a shared commitment to carry the meeting's energy back into local and regional struggles.

Over three days, the AJTN Annual Meeting reinforced the network's role as a unifying force for climate justice in Africa. The gathering deepened connections, equipped members with strategies and set a clearer collective direction. With a new brand symbolising unity and renewal, AJTN left Johannesburg ready to advance a fossil-free, equitable energy future driven by the people most affected by the climate crisis. ☀️





Participants plotting their regions on a map during a session at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chris Louw



Participants during a session at the Africa Just Transition Network AGM in Johannesburg. Image: Chris Louw

And the Israel machine rages on, as the world watches



by Tsepang Molefe

A weak and fragile child, her eyes popping out and tummy bloated from starvation. Another dead body carried on the shoulders of men; men who themselves might be on the shoulders of other men before sunset. Wailing mothers, weeping grandmothers, whose tears mean nothing to the soldiers and the politicians, or maybe even the gods who are said to possess all powers.

A protest here, a march in another corner of the world, a social media post, another article, nothing seems to be getting through. Come day or night, the brutal war machine rages on around the clock, without even a pause to commemorate or observe an international day of what-what, along with the world around it. It knows no wake nor sleep, it has not the intelligence to distinguish between a newborn baby, a strong young man or a fragile elder. Whether a concrete building or a child, it applies the same force.

War and violence do not know how to distinguish the difference, no matter the rules under the Geneva Convention, which tries to make violence less violent, war less destructive, pain less painful. For heaven's sake! War is violent and violence is not supposed to be us – the higher form of animal on this blue planet.

The above is derived from the images we're seeing through the media coming from Gaza, the work of brave and fearless on-site reporters in protective vests boldly marked "PRESS". Raw footage of people telling their stories, in most instances Palestinians with their faces pale and lips cracked from dehydration and starvation.

As I'm writing this, reports of a planned and executed killing of journalist Anas al-Sharif and four other Al Jazeera staff are hot news. The five are now among the more than 230 media workers who have been killed by Israel since the start of Israel's war on Gaza. While the numbers still rise and more alarming stats are published, the Israel war machine, propped up by the US and European countries, continues to grind all that stands before it.

On Thursday 21 August 2025, 27 countries signed up to a statement calling for immediate and unrestricted media access into Gaza.

At a recent gathering organised by Justiça Ambiental in Maputo, Mozambique, representatives from 30 countries, made up of mostly civil society movements, issued a statement to call out the injustices in Palestine.

Abeer Al Butmeh, an activist from Palestine and a member of the Friends of the Earth Palestine, shared her story from a lived experience and presented on what daily life looks like for Palestinians. How access to basics like water is being used as a weapon against Palestinians. Abeer also highlighted the demolition of refugee camps in Gaza, giving details about the checkpoints that are currently active in Gaza and the West Bank to restrict free movement of Palestinians.

The environmental justice movement in South Africa, and globally, has shown its support for the people of Palestine. During a Friends of the Earth Africa gathering in Johannesburg, representatives from member countries joined a protest in Soweto, calling for an immediate ceasefire and peace in Gaza.

The killing of journalists and other media workers cannot be categorised as collateral damage. The high number of casualties suggests that this is deliberate targeted action from Israel to silence those who are reporting to the world about their crimes against humanity.

Beyond the killing of journalists, what makes this the lowest point of this war is what is now known as genocide by starvation, caused by blocking aid and supplies of basic items like food and medication. Where there is little aid made available, people are gunned down as they scramble for something for themselves and their families to eat.

And for Israel, it is not just enough to dehumanise the people of Palestine and strip them of their dignity and take their lives. They have resorted to doing it openly and freely for the world to watch, without



even giving it a second thought – it seems. It does this freely, by murdering the very people – the brave journalists – who have made the decision to tell the story of everyday Palestinians.

Calls of a ceasefire, peace and justice have been increasing and continue to escalate from all corners of the world. So far these calls have been ignored, gone unheard or dismissed to a point where we now call for at least a meal a day for all Palestinians. ☺



Representatives from member countries of the Friends of the Earth African at the Palestine solidarity protest in Soweto. Image: Tsepang Molefe





Sinan Eden from Portugal speaking at the Justica Ambiental's 9th Maputo workshop on corporate impunity and human rights. Image: Tsepang Molefe



Nqobile Ranela and Siphokazi Sigwebela from groundWork at Palestine solidarity protest in Soweto. Image: Tsepang Molefe



Abeer Al Butmeh from Friends of the Earth Palestine presenting during a session at the 9th Maputo workshop on corporate impunity and human rights. Image: Tsepang Molefe





Maputo Statement of Solidarity with the Palestinian and Sahrawi Peoples



Demand of the participants of the 9th Maputo Workshop on Corporate Impunity and Human Rights for the liberation of Palestine and Western Sahara, Maputo, 1 August 2025

As people and organisations who have convened from 30 countries to build international solidarity and strategise our resistance to the exploitation of our lands and seas by transnational corporations, we recognise their collusion in the occupation of territories of indigenous peoples across the world. This is evident in both Palestine and Western Sahara.

We stand firmly in solidarity with the *Palestinian* people who are experiencing genocide. The situation in Gaza has deteriorated to unprecedented levels. The Israeli occupation is using mass **starvation as a weapon of war**, and civilians are being denied access to essential food, water and medical supplies, leading to widespread malnutrition and preventable deaths. Residential areas, hospitals and schools have been subjected to relentless airstrikes, resulting in the deaths of more than **60 000** civilians, including women and children. Over 1.5 million people have been subjected to **forced displacement**, only to face further attacks, while a **silent war** is committed in the West Bank and Israel is proceeding with **annexation**.

As organisations committed to human rights and justice, we urge all governments, civil society organisations, institutions and individuals to take decisive action against the ongoing genocide.

Western Sahara remains as a colony in Africa, with the majority of its lands having been under the control of Morocco since 1975, after the sudden exit and uncompleted decolonisation of the territory by Spain, the former colonial power. The Sahrawi people have continued their struggle for independence and continue to face human rights violations, including torture and disappearance. Their lands and resources are being carved out by both Morocco and international companies, without the consent of the Sahrawi people.

For Palestine, Western Sahara and other occupied territories, we condemn all forms of colonisation and we denounce the complicity of transnational corporations. We call for recognition that those countries and citizens across the world who benefit from the resources plundered in occupied territories are complicit in these occupations and brutal human rights violations. We stand firmly in solidarity with the people resisting dispossession and destruction in their territories. We join forces to demand a future where life always comes before profit.





Boaventura Montana from Mozambique, Stefan Gua from Mauritius, Ruth Nyambura from Kenya, and Sifiso Dladla from South Africa, panelists at the 9th Maputo workshop on corporate impunity and human rights in Mozambique. Image: Tsepang Molefe

For Palestine:

1. **Immediate ceasefire:** An unconditional and permanent halt to all military operations in Gaza.
2. **Unrestricted humanitarian access:** Open the borders and allow for aid organisations to deliver essential supplies to the Gazan people, and for Gazan people to access supplies in safety.
3. **Accountability for war crimes:** Independent investigations into all war crimes and violations of international law, with perpetrators held responsible.
4. **Freedom and protection for the Palestinian prisoners** and an end to their inhuman treatment in Israeli jails.
5. **Free movement of Palestinians:** Recognise and ensure the right of Palestinians to free movement.
6. **End the occupation and affirm Palestinian rights and freedom:** We uphold the inalienable human rights of Palestinians to freedom, justice, return and self-determination, and complete withdrawal of foreign troops and illegal occupiers from Palestinian land.
7. **Boycott, divestment and economic sanctions:** We call for governments to cut diplomatic ties, and implement trade embargoes and economic sanctions on the Israeli occupation. We also call for academic and sports boycotts, as well as divestment in Israeli companies.

Furthermore, we believe that the only just and long-term solution is the establishment of a single democratic state from the river to the sea, where Palestinian refugees may return, Israeli settlements are dismantled and all inhabitants enjoy equal citizenship rights in a decolonised country that guarantees freedom and dignity for everyone through a truth and reconciliation process that addresses historical injustices and provides reparations for Palestinian dispossession.

For Western Sahara:

1. **End the illegal occupation:** We call for an end to the Moroccan occupation of the territories of Western Sahara.
2. **Freedom for the political prisoners:** Free all the Sahrawi prisoners unlawfully imprisoned by the occupying power.
3. **Protection of the natural resources:** End the plundering of Western Sahara's natural resources by the occupation and multinational corporations.
4. **Protection of human rights:** Ensure the monitoring and protection of human rights in the occupied territories by international independent bodies.
5. **Freedom of movement of all Sahrawis:** Guarantee and ensure the right of movement for all the Sahrawi people.

A luta continua! 🌀



Air quality, health and the people of Lephalale



by Mafoko Phomane



Thabo Sibeko from Earthlife, Vumile Sinene from Clean Air Fund, Stanely Koenaitse from the Waterberg municipality and Mafoko Phomane from groundWork during a panel discussion at the air quality and health workshop in Lephalale. Image: Jabulane Makata

We hosted our first **Air Quality and Health workshop** in Lephalale Limpopo in June through Life After Coal, in partnership with Earth Life Africa supported by the Clean Air Fund. The training aimed to raise awareness and build community advocacy around the serious health impacts of air pollution in the Lephalale area.

Lephalale lies within the Waterberg–Bojanala Priority Area that was declared a National Priority Area under Section 18(1) of the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act No. 39 of 2004, due to high levels of pollution from industry, especially coal mining and coal power generation. The region is home to the Waterberg coalfields, which fuel the

Medupi and Matimba power stations, which are the major contributors to air and water pollution.

As part of the training, community environmental activists were trained on how to use air quality monitoring devices known as AirBeams. These devices will help communities collect real-time data on air pollution levels that they can then use as evidence to demand accountability and change. We are convinced that the training will produce reliable, publicly accessible data that strengthens community advocacy for clean air and better health outcomes at local level.

Now equipped with relevant knowledge and information gathered from air quality monitoring, the communities of Lephalale will also receive mobile



media training in the next phase of this initiative, to support advocacy calling for accountability from polluters and local government, adequate health services that are fit for purpose in their context, and to ensure that their environmental rights under Section 24 of the South African Constitution are not violated. These two initiatives will give a much-needed structure to our Citizen Science and Citizen Journalism approach, which will strengthen our campaigning.

This workshop marked a critical moment in amplifying the voices of fenceline communities in this particular Priority Area. As climate justice, public health and environmental accountability become increasingly urgent, the Waterberg-Lephalale Air Quality and Health Workshop served as a powerful call to action for government, industry and civil society to prioritise clean air.

During the two-day workshop, community members gave moving reflections on what life used to look like before the coal-fired power stations infiltrated their land, when grazing land was adequate for farmers and indigenous people who depended on agriculture for survival.

“When industry came, we were forcefully relocated to make way for them. Medupi began to

employ youth that had not completed school. And now what we see today is that our local people are no longer being employed as they are failing medical examinations to qualify to work at the power stations due to being sick because of the same power stations,” said Francina Nkosi from the Waterberg Women’s Advocacy Organisation.

We were joined by an Air Quality Officer from the Waterberg District Municipality, who shared the role of his office in combating air pollution and undertook to work with community members. This community connection with local government is a critical part of realising people’s constitutionally enshrined rights into democratic local governance. Communities themselves are eager to participate in environmental governance, and for this to bear fruit, government officials need to come to the ground to collaborate in carving out effective interventions that speak to ensuring that people live in environments that are not harmful to their health and well-being.

The Department of Health was unable to honour our invitation to this workshop and their absence was a let down. However, we will persist in challenging them to step up to the responsibilities with which they are charged as civil servants. ☀️



Participants at the air quality and health workshop in Lephalale. Image: Jabulane Makata





Waste picker registration drive

by Musa Chamane

The South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) was formally constituted in 2009, with the aim to safeguard the rights and livelihoods of waste pickers. Since then, both SAWPA and groundWork as partners, alongside others, have done significant work towards the integration of waste pickers in the waste management sector of South Africa.

One of the biggest wins in the struggle was in 2014, when the late Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa recognised waste pickers formally through her parliamentary budget speech, where she spoke about the importance of waste pickers in our economy



Sphelele Mthethwa a waste picker in Durban during waste pickers registration drive. Image: Lunga Bhengu

and the environment. As a result of this, there are policies and regulations that are pro-waste pickers.

However, recognition has not always been easily handed over to waste pickers and they still face stigma, evictions, exploitation and, in some instances, brutality. Hence, the journey towards integration has been complicated and uneasy, but also victorious.

The successes are mainly reflected in the waste picker registration drives that have happened across the country. Despite the hiccups, there are still good stories to share about the waste picker movement in South Africa, which has been growing annually and has inspired others, even across Africa, to self-organise.

Registration database increases

One of the elements of waste picker integration is to know the numbers in each locality and to understand the context-specific dynamics of waste pickers in order to provide accurate and adequate support to the sector. In 2025 alone, SAWPA as an organisation has run registration drives in more than eight locations, including in far-flung areas in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape provinces. As a result, more than 2 400 waste pickers have been registered, and they are card carrying members of the association.

The SAWPA membership registration drive is a continuous process because, according to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (2022), we have between 60 000 and 90 000 waste pickers in South Africa. Registration helps to ensure that the rights of the waste pickers are not infringed upon, but it also serves to document their numbers and demographics. For SAWPA, organising waste pickers strengthens the organisation and the movement itself, both nationally and internationally.

As the first association of waste pickers in South Africa, SAWPA has been recognised by the government and industries. As partners on the ground, there are a



number of initiatives, such as recycling projects, that we as groundWork have initiated, trying to ensure that municipalities work with waste pickers, which is now happening, although the majority of municipalities have done little to promote the existence of waste pickers on their own.

While we have made gains across South Africa to get waste pickers recognised, and this has led to waste pickers having a voice within government and internationally, the majority of waste pickers' livelihoods and working conditions on the ground have not improved substantially. Some factors attributed to the slow improvement are: negative perceptions; the gap between integration guidelines and implementation; lack of awareness and understanding of the sector; and lack of payment for their work and funding to support their initiatives.



Waste Pickers show their registration forms during a waste picker registration drive in Durban. Image: Lunga Bhengu

Industries withholding money for interest

The registration of waste pickers in South Africa is two-fold: one is the registration as a member of the association and being registered on the South Africa



Mlungisi Jusi, a waste picker from Durban, shows off his pickings during a waste pickers registration drive. Image: Lunga Bhengu

Waste Picker Registration System (SAWPRS) for the payment of the packaging materials levy.

The second registration of waste pickers comes as a result of a government policy called Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), another form of waste picker integration. Due to this policy, the Extended Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs) were tasked by the government in 2021 to pay waste pickers their service fee, because the recycling industry exists due to the existence of waste pickers.

However, the PROs have not fully paid the waste pickers since 2021, when the EPR was approved by the government, and as a result SAWPA and groundWork organised a peaceful march on the streets of Johannesburg on 6 August 2024, to seek clarity and assurance of the service fee payment to waste pickers.

For an ordinary person to understand EPR, it happens as follows: when consumers buy groceries in any retail store, all the groceries are packaged. The price of that product has a fee added to it as a levy for the packaging, which then goes to PROs. Imagine that





The Zero Waste project team during the waste pickers registration drive in Durban. Image: Lunga Bhengu

consumers at various shops have been having their products scanned at the till points, and the PROs bank accounts have been receiving the recycling fee, 24/7, 365 days per year for the last three years. Imagine how those levies have been mounting up.

Some of the payment processes have started in some parts of South Africa, but it is not fully streamlined nor as well understood as it should be. The questions of delivery, accountability and transparency always get raised in the negotiations processes and even on the ground among fellow waste pickers. As another year is about to end, the question remains: How far will the implementation of EPR reach? because there are many waste pickers who need to be paid and be assisted with infrastructure such as machines and equipment to make their work decent and easier.

When this scheme was approved in 2021, it was agreed that a portion of the levy would be used to pay waste pickers a “service fee”, but this is not happening widely, nor fast enough. The waste pickers are a labour force in their own way. The slow roll-out of payment

due to them for their services is something personal to them as well.

The national registration drive is very much linked to releasing the right and access to the payment system, because it only recognises registered waste pickers. Industries cannot pay unregistered waste pickers because they have to account for whom they pay and how much they pay. Therefore, registration is crucial and compulsory for the proper implementation of the EPR scheme.

Unfortunately, this is becoming the classic tale of good regulations on paper, but minimal implementation on the ground. Also the government needs to do more to compel PROs to pay their service fee due; something that has not happened despite more than 12 000 waste pickers having been registered in the last three years.

The journey still continues with hope and uncertainty but, because waste pickers are essential to the waste sector, we will not stop seeking better and safer livelihoods for them. 🌱



A weak treaty would have been worse than no treaty!



by Rico Euripidou

INC-5.2 Outcome: Plastics Treaty negotiations collapse as the process is undermined by corporate interests

In the early hours of Friday, August 15, negotiations for the UN Plastics Treaty collapsed in Geneva after negotiators failed to agree on essential measures to address the key drivers of the global plastics crisis. These include key provisions for binding commitments to eliminate hazardous chemicals throughout the plastics life cycle, reduce primary plastic production, embed strong health protections and secure a dedicated fund to enable the implementation of key control measures.

A core reason for the failure to deliver an agreement at this stage is rooted in geopolitical and petro-economic divisions between the oil-producing nations (led by the Gulf Petro-States, Russia and the USA) in opposition to the rest of the world’s “high-ambition countries”, led by Rwanda and Norway, which includes the majority of African countries.

African civil society was represented by 33 GAIA and BFFP delegates from 12 African countries: Cameroon, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Senegal and South Africa.

Sadly, South Africa and the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has aligned itself with the low-ambition bloc of petro-states, buying into the fallacy that we can design and recycle our way out of the plastics crisis through waste management and narrow national solutions. This narrative is simply not supported by science.

Even more concerning, our negotiators appear to be swayed by plastics industry lobbyists (civil society analysis by CIEL found there were 234 registered industry lobbyists at the meeting, representing fossil

fuel and petrochemical industries) and they were misled into framing this as a false “jobs versus ambition” equation.

This short-sighted stance overlooks the reality that an ambitious treaty would not destroy jobs and drive down development but rather enhance innovation and create systems change and jobs, more decent jobs that will not result in worker deaths. By accelerating



The Thinkers Burden by Von Wong in Geneva, Switzerland during the INC 5.2 negotiations. Image: Supplied



the shift to a circular economy, South Africa could stimulate demand for innovative products, reuse systems and enhanced recycling infrastructure, building industries that are resilient, forward-looking and aligned with global environmental and economic goals.

At current rates, plastics production and waste are set to nearly triple by 2060, and no recycling system could keep pace. Less than 10% of plastics are recycled globally, while tens of millions of tonnes leak into oceans each year.

Another key factor contributing to the failed talks was the “process” that the Chair and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) repeatedly hammered down – a consensus-based decision-making process that enabled a minority of nations to block progress and the will of the majority. This procedural flaw essentially failed to set the stage for equitable and effective negotiations. Without a mechanism for democratic voting, the dissenters essentially dictated the outcome of many negotiating working groups, leading to paralysis.

Furthermore, a record number of fossil fuel and petrochemical lobbyists swamped the talks, while civil society was frequently shut out. What started out

as formal negotiations in previously agreed contact groups on upstream, mid and downstream measures, taking into account the Chair’s text, was quickly replaced by exclusionary off-the-record “informals” and even secret club “informal informals” meetings between the power brokers. This exclusionary approach meant that text on substantive matters was shaped “out of sight” and it further sidelined small delegations – particularly from the Global South – out in the cold, while totally side-lining observer groups.

At times, the Chair played favourites with the most vociferous low-ambition minority, often ignoring the will of the progressive majority, including from the Global South. This construct essentially killed the spirit of multilateralism and internationalism.

To their credit, a large group of countries dissatisfied with the proposed text refused to accept a weak agreement that fell short of protecting environmental and human health, as indicated by the science.

However, despite the lack of agreement, groundWork, together with some of our key global partners such as Health Care Without Harm, does not see this outcome as the end of our commitment to tackle plastic pollution, with or without a plastics treaty and, in particular, to address plastics in the health care sector. Over the past three years, we have

had success in changing the narrative and have formed strong coalitions with other key allies, such as the World Health Organisation.

These efforts have helped re-frame the plastics crisis as a public health emergency, on par with the climate crisis. As the new **Lancet Countdown on health and plastics** demonstrates, the health risks and impacts of plastics are no longer deniable and require urgent action, even while talks remain adjourned until further notice. ☺



GAIA INC 5.2 strategy meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Image: supplied





Meet Siphesihle Mkhize

Siphesihle Mkhize, aka KBZL (pronounced KhaBaZeLa), a legendary vinyl spinner from the red brick city of Maritzburg, joined the groundWork team as a clerk in the finance department. We were lucky enough to have him on board on the decks of our 25th Anniversary celebrations, spreading the spirit with legendary soundtracks from our shared history.

In his role as finance clerk, u'Sphe (as he is affectionately known) is directly involved in supporting and delivering the organisation's financial reporting requirements and adherence to regulations, thereby contributing to groundWork's overall sustainability and ability to fulfil its mission of a just transition and open democracy in the Republic and beyond.

With a robust background in human resources, finance and communications, Sphe's professional journey is shaped from a blend of expertise across the commercial and parastatal sectors. His career began in the telecoms sector, as a communications professional, where he cultivated his skills in a fast-paced, results-driven environment. He then transitioned into the parastatal sector at Transnet Port Terminals, where he further broadened his perspective, gaining first-hand experience in public service and policy implementation. This dual-sector background has equipped him with a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing organisations committed to social impact.

As a seasoned administrator, Sphe has experience in human resources, where he has been part of and managed diverse teams, streamlined processes and fostered inclusive workplace cultures. His experience in the HR space has been instrumental in driving organisational growth and employee engagement, ensuring that teams are empowered to achieve and perform at their best.

Sphe holds a qualification in Cost and Management Accounting from the Durban University of Technology and a suite of certifications, including a National



Certificate in Commerce, also from DUT. This strong foundation in finance and business management enables him to approach challenges with analytical rigour.

I believe in the magic of numbers and their power to tell compelling stories, guiding businesses towards prosperity, and in communicating 'the art of connecting the dots', which is akin to my professional development. groundWork presents itself as a new opportunity and catalyst to enhance and contribute skills attained from some of my past community outreach projects and social justice advocacy efforts to a team that shares in my greater passion for driving positive social and environmental change.

Cheers to new beginnings! 🌞





Introducing Immaran Kader



It is a real pleasure to have this opportunity to introduce myself to the groundWork family and friends. Those based in Durban or passing through may have already seen me buzzing around during our recent office relocation. Let me share a little about who I am, what has shaped me and why I am excited to be part of this organisation.

I was born and raised in Durban. For 27 years, I worked as a flight attendant at South African Airways, eventually becoming an Onboard Manager. That role took me around the world and introduced me to people from all walks of life.

What I enjoyed most during my years in aviation was the human connection: those moments when you could turn a stressful travel day into a positive experience for someone, simply by listening or going the extra mile. Over time, I realised that, whether you are on an aircraft or an office, people are at the heart of what we do.

Outside of work, I am a husband and a father of two. I come from a supportive, close-knit family who have always encouraged me to give my best to everything I do. I am also involved as a volunteer in a community-based Islamic institution, focused on serving humanity. This work has kept me grounded and deeply aware of the importance of gratitude and giving back.

Joining groundWork marks the start of a new chapter for me. So, what do I hope to bring to this team? In short, reliability and a willingness to roll up my sleeves. I have a fascination with learning, picking up new skills and staying curious.

Thank you for welcoming me into the fold. I am excited about what lies ahead, and I look forward to working with you. ☺





Hidden costs of gas – why the Free State must stand up

by Motlatsi Makhasane

The Free State is not a sacrifice zone



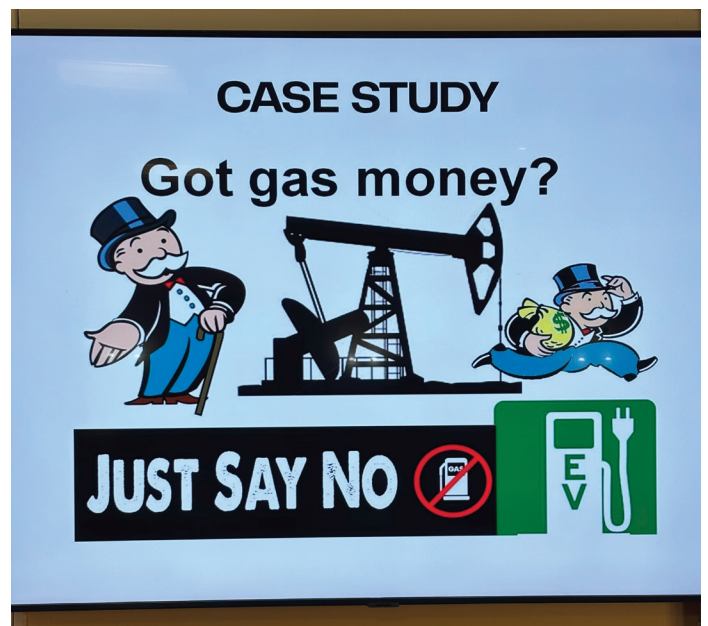
Siphesihle Mvundla from groundWork presenting at the Oil and Gas workshop in Bloemfontein. Image: Tsepang Molefe

As South Africa rushes to embrace gas as part of its “just energy transition”, the Free State is emerging as a quiet but critical front in the battle for environmental justice. From Kroonstad to Virginia, exploration and gas infrastructure proposals are being fast-tracked under the guise of development. But, as we’ve learned from communities on the ground and expert sessions in recent workshops, gas is not the clean bridge fuel it is marketed to be: it is a trap, both environmentally and economically, and it is local communities on the ground that will bear the costs of this destructive extraction if it continues.

Over the past few weeks, the Free State Environmental Justice Network brought together activists, researchers and frontline community members to understand the true cost of gas projects. What we’ve uncovered is alarming.

Let’s start underground. When gas is extracted, it leaves behind a vacuum – a dangerous void beneath the surface. This can cause subsidence, sinkholes and ground collapse. Our people are not told this. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) rarely explain the life-cycle damage in clear terms. What happens to a farm where the land becomes unstable? Who pays when a township road collapses into a gas-induced sinkhole?

Then there’s the science. Gas is a fossil fuel. A false solution. Its extraction, processing and burning release large quantities of methane – a greenhouse gas over 80 times more potent than CO₂ in the short term. Communities living near extraction sites risk air and



An image of a case study presentation at the Oil and Gas workshop in Bloemfontein. Image: Tsepang Molefe





Community activists in discussion at the Oil and Gas workshop in Bloemfontein. Image: Tsepang Molefe

water pollution, but they are also misled with false promises of jobs and local benefit. Most employment opportunities are temporary and technical, often outsourced to external firms.

We have also seen how the law is used to enable extraction. The Upstream Petroleum Resources Development Act gives power to companies while limiting the ability of communities to reject unwanted developments. Despite constitutional rights to a healthy environment and meaningful consultation, many rural and peri-urban communities are not even aware that projects have been approved near them.

But the tide is turning. In our workshops, participants mapped affected areas and identified key stakeholders. They shared strategies to resist extractive development and build alternative, community-led energy pathways. Young people, women and farmworkers – often excluded from formal consultation – are being trained in movement building, environmental monitoring and digital communication.

This is not just about gas. It's about reclaiming the right to decide what development looks like. It's

about moving from extraction to regeneration, from disempowerment to climate justice.

We don't need another toxic boom-and-bust industry, like gold. What the Free State needs is investment in solar energy, local agroecology and circular economies that create real, lasting jobs. We need to support waste reclaimers and waste pickers, protect water sources and build democratic energy governance rooted in the needs of the people – not the profits of fossil fuel companies.

As we define our work over the next ten months, the message is clear: ***the Free State is not a sacrifice zone***. We come from the injustice of gold; we do not want to go on to the injustice of gas. We refuse to be the ground gas walks over on its way to markets elsewhere. We are the land, and we are standing up for it. ☀️

Motlatsi Makhasane is an Environmental Justice Organiser, working for climate justice



Community activist Nthabiseng Makitiki speaking at the Oil and Gas workshop in Bloemfontein. Image: Tsepang Molefe



Green hydrogen: from Cape to Brussels, from Ermelo to Europe

by Yegeshni Moodley

The European Parliament presentations

Ons as Suid-Afrika gebruik nie groen waterstof nie, so hoekom moet dit hier geproduseer word? Hoekom word dit nie in Europa en ander lande wat dit nodig het, gedoen nie? (We as South Africa are not using green hydrogen, so why should it be produced here? Why is it not done in Europe and other countries that need it?)

A community member in the Northern Cape on proposed green hydrogen production in her local area.

Presenting to the European Parliament is no simple feat and, after jumping through several hoops, we were allowed to access the hallowed halls of Brussels on 9 July 2025. A successful collaboration with Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) in 2024, bore fruit in a documentary film, titled “The scramble for green hydrogen in South Africa”.

We screened the film to an audience of parliamentarians, who were prepped and ready to tackle the European Union’s involvement in South Africa. groundWork, together with Cosatu, formed the South African delegation, and additional presenters included Jacques Delors, a European think tank and a representative of the European Commission.

We discussed the historic roots of inequality and colonialism in South Africa, how these were further exploited by extractivism, and the heavy toll this places on our health and environment. The myth of development was unpacked, and how this is currently the same narrative of the energy transition, which is deeply linked to green hydrogen.

But there are critical flaws in this hypothesis – there is no empty land in my country, and energy is never free.

Yegeshni Moodley’s words to the European Parliament delegation to South Africa in their discussion on the EU’s involvement in green hydrogen projects in South Africa.

The history of land injustice, injuries to the indigenous people of the South in colonial times and Black South Africans during apartheid pre-date modern land grabs driven by green extractivism. Restorative justice and reparations for past harms are still taboo words amongst politicians, few venturing to explore these regions of power-sharing and equal relations. Starkly presented was the modern-day ‘transition’, which shows no signs of healing land and trauma, rather perpetuating broken systems through subsidies and public finance.

We made the request of decision-makers to put forward corporate accountability, due diligence, and justice-centred sustainability. This included the just transition open agenda demands of public money for public benefit, the restoration of land, protection of the vulnerable, universal healthcare and affordable energy. These are the purported benefits, or development, that ordinary South Africans, and truly people everywhere, aspire to. A lasting legacy of development that uplifts and upholds community values in the spirit of ubuntu.

Technocrats and political actors in the form of the think tank and EC representatives attempted to counter these arguments by pushing forward the ESG agenda of sustainability, and denying involvement in





Yegeshni Moodley from groundWork and other delegates virtually address the sitting of the European Parliament on Green Hydrogen. Images: Pascoe Sabido

local hydrogen projects. We debunk these proposed solutions as lacking foundation in experiences on the ground and people's knowledge.

Green hydrogen remains a threat to sustainable livelihoods, a crutch for corporate decarbonisation, and a sink for public money as governments bend over backwards to 'de-risk' extractive technologies that will, like the extraction of oil, gold and platinum, leave those on the fencelines in the Global South poorer and closer to death, still banking on the promise of development.

Development for whom?

It is a slow starter, despite attracting massive amounts of investment and showing very little demonstrated success at the scale purported to reduce carbon emissions. It is a distraction by fossil fuel industries and their partners in energy and other industrial sectors from the real work of emission reduction. It draws precious monetary flows away from countries seeking to mitigate carbon-intensive practices, while simultaneously adapting to recurrent climate disasters. It promises a clean energy future, capturing markets that should be doubling down on wind and solar energy instead. ☀️





Africa's path to zero waste



by Desmond Alugnoa and Ama Asiedu

For nearly a decade, the GAIA Africa team has been providing technical expertise to support the successful implementation of zero-waste models across Africa. Between June and July 2025, we hosted our first-ever Africa Zero Waste Academy.

Our goal for the academy is to empower individuals and organisations with the knowledge and skills to implement zero-waste solutions throughout the continent. It also aims to serve as a growing platform for the practical deployment of sustainable waste management in cities. This initiative builds upon

the pioneering work done by our colleagues in other regions, as well as the Africa-specific academies held in Tanzania and Morocco.

What a journey it has been! This was not just training; it marked the emergence of waste management changemakers.

A dream rooted in community

When we launched the Africa Zero Waste Academy, the goal was clear: to build the next generation of African Zero Waste champions. We knew the solutions



Participants at the Africa Zero-Waste Academy in Durban. Image: Supplied



to our continent's waste crisis already existed in our compost heaps, in the knowledge of our waste picker movements, and our traditional reuse practices. All we needed was to connect the dots through effective collaboration.

For six weeks, over 40 participants from 18 African countries met online to explore the foundations of Zero Waste. Using an online platform called Moodle, they completed structured modules, submitted real-time community assignments and participated in weekly live discussions guided by facilitators.

The learning was not just theoretical; participants audited their household and neighbourhood waste streams, mapped informal waste systems, explored composting and plastic reduction strategies, developed advocacy campaigns, and drafted project plans tailored to their local context. By the end of the online seminars, one could feel it: this group was ready for more.

Then came the in-person magic. From 7 to 11 July 2025, selected participants travelled to Durban, South Africa, for hands-on training, field visits and development of waste storytelling skills. The visitors were hosted by groundWork, Friends of the Earth South Africa and administrative home of GAIA Africa. Together, participants visited real zero-waste communities, learned from frontline waste workers, shared project ideas, received feedback, and celebrated their graduation with dancing, joy and unity. For some, it was their first international experience. For all of us, it was a life-changing opportunity that provided a learning platform.

Real people, real impact

The impact of the Academy lies in the stories participants told after the training. These are the seeds of systems change -local, tangible, unstoppable. Below are a few of them.

The Africa Zero Waste Academy didn't just teach me strategies. It gave me a community. I now have a network of passionate individuals across Africa I can rely on for guidance, collaboration and support in implementing real Zero Waste solutions. That kind of solidarity is priceless.

Sabrina from Namibia.

I've already started composting in my backyard. My neighbours are curious, and we're planning a training for the whole community.

Fathia from Ghana.

What comes next?

The Africa Zero Waste Academy 2025 may be over, but the journey continues because alumni will implement and scale their projects. We are grateful that we could collaborate with groundWork to host this event in South Africa and expand our horizons to work with other pioneering zero-waste implementers for future versions of the academy.

GAIA Africa will continue to provide mentorship and support, and we'll gather again: bigger, bolder, better! To the participants, facilitators, funders and partners, thank you for sharing your belief in this vision. You showed that Africa is not waiting to be rescued from waste: we are rising to lead. Keep following our work.

Our zero-waste future is African, and it's already here! 🌍





Bringing home the non-commitments

by Greenfly

Welcome to the next round of nationally determined contributions (NDCs), when the nations of the world pull the wool over their own eyes to face the future of global warming. NDCs under the Paris Agreement on climate change must be submitted every five years. Each country must pledge what it will 'contribute' to keeping global temperature warming 'well below' 2° and preferably below 1.5°. They talk of 'contributions' because the word 'commitments' sticks in their throats.

In 2015, they all said what they'd do in the period 2020-25. Most made it really easy. Think four or five degrees. In 2021, they 'updated' their contribution for 2025-30. They tried a little harder, with promises adding up to around 2.8° but, given uncertainties, anything up to 3.7°. Now, in round three – which for some reason known only to policy wonks is called NDC2 – they are saying what they will do in 2030-35. Promises, promises, promises. Most are doing less than they promise. So make that 3.1° and more likely edging towards four. Or more, if a less optimistic view is taken of the data.

Why be less optimistic? Because these numbers are based on modelling for the UNEP 2024 Gap Report and the models assumed 'strong reductions' in emissions from 2020. Instead, there have been strong increases. Moreover, they do not take full account of feedback loops – the way the earth system reacts to accelerate climate change. Moreover ... well, there are several more moreover, but let's leave it there for now.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has just ruled that limiting global warming to 1.5° is the primary temperature target of the Paris climate agreement. It says this is what countries must aim for in developing their NDCs. That is because climate impacts escalate between 1.5° and 2° and so does the risk of tripping

over 'tipping points' in the earth system that lead to runaway climate change. Never mind what happens after 2°.

The global 'carbon budget' for 1.5° will be used up within three years. But already, in the last two years the 1.5° limit has been breached in 22 of 24 months. This is a planetary scale political failure.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was signed in 1992. In the 33 years since then, the global market has pumped out more greenhouse gases than in the previous 150 years. And 29 Conferences of the Parties (CoPs) have presided over ever increasing greenhouse gas emissions and devised a host of false solutions as the Parties each work to protect the market and elevate their place in it.

This is no 'market failure'. It is a runaway market success. Big oil, gas and coal corporations, big agriculture, the moguls of waste, the PR innovators of misinformation and the captains of capital have made evermore profit. Big Oil alone made US\$ 52 trillion between 1970 – when they first knew that their business was overheating the earth – and 2022 – when Russia invaded Ukraine and drove petro profits through the roof. War makes good petro business. War makes good war business.

Also in 2022, over 540 people died in the KZN floods of 2022 with a rain bomb dropping over 300 mm in a day. At 2° about 20 years from now, assuming business-as-usual, a similar event will drop over 600 mm.

In Southern Africa last year, 60 million people went short of food because of an unprecedented drought and bad politics-as-usual. At 2° that will be mass famine.

In 2023 and 2024, drought and fire in the Amazon rainforest and wildfires in Canada contributed to the



failure of the ‘land sink’ (the absorption of carbon by living organisms), so squeezing out the next-to-nothing left in the carbon budget.

South Africa’s draft NDC claims a good chunk as its fair share of that zero. It says we can tip another 4.5 billion tonnes into the atmosphere between now and 2035. It gives a target range of 320 to 380 million tonnes of greenhouse gases (MtCO₂e) for 2035 as South Africa’s ‘fair share’ of the global carbon budget. This compares poorly with what the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) has recommended: a target range of 248 to 329 Mt for 2035. The PCC also suggests lowering the existing 2030 target range of 350 to 420 to around 320.

None of this comes close to what is needed to limit warming to 1.5°. By 2030, the carbon budget will be bust and every country will have a fair or unfair share of less than zero. Getting to less than zero globally or nationally is not possible in five years.

South African negotiators argue that the countries of the rich North should be doing ‘net negative’ emissions because they have overspent their fair share carbon budgets – by a long way. True. Except that ‘net negative’ at scale is not physically possible. And pretending it is will lead to large-scale land dispossession in the South.

Besides, South Africa does not do too well on historical emissions. Just as the North owes a climate debt to the South, South Africa owes a debt to rest of Africa. And in all countries, North and South, the rich owe a climate debt to those they make poor.

The NDC repeats that South Africa has a priority to address poverty and inequality, implying that this limits its capacity for climate mitigation. It also repeats that climate change will hit poor people, women and other vulnerable groups first and worst. But it does not

have real policies to address poverty and inequality. It relies exclusively on economic growth, which is really a policy for protecting capital accumulation: that is, the profits of big corporate polluters and their bankers.

The NDC mentions a range of government policies which it says contribute to the country’s climate response. Some, like the Climate Change Act, have been a long time coming. Others, like Treasury’s carbon tax, look like mere tokens. What it avoids mentioning are the various policies that promote increasing production and consumption of fossil fuels, starting with the Upstream Petroleum Resources Development Act and the latest Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for electricity, which goes heavy on fossil gas.

Despite busting the budget on 1.5 – or rather, since we have bust the budget – we need to do three big and difficult things, and we need to do them very urgently:

1. Phase out fossil fuels as quickly as possible – and stop making evermore plastics from petrochemicals and littering the world with it;
2. Restore the earth – the grasslands, wetlands, forests and water catchments ruined by mining and burning coal, oil and gas, by poisoning the land with agricultural chemicals, by manufacturing mountains of waste to keep consumption turning over and profits rolling in – and so restore the capacity of ecosystems to absorb carbon and help absorb the impacts of extreme weather;
3. Manage a just transition – not a transition with a few ‘justice elements’ – to an economy where all people have enough and can live well with each other and the earth.



Community Creative Workshops

by Sithobile Madiba

Creating stories, memories and environmental justice through art

“A picture tells more than a thousand words” but in these workshops, it told thousands of stories.

As an extension of the collaborative creative process that went into our legacy exhibition, the groundWork communications team ran three creative workshops over six days, spread across two weeks. Curator Vaughn Sadie facilitated the three workshops, each with one of groundWork’s long-standing community partners to create something memorable.

These weren’t just meetings: they were creative journeys, aimed at inspiring each partner to create a mini exhibition reflecting their unique story, history and impact using photos that they had collected for their own archives, supported with groundWork’s substantial photo archive that was developed ahead of the 25th anniversary exhibition.

In Mpumalanga, the Vukani Environmental Movement (VEM) gathered at groundWork’s Mpumalanga office. In the Vaal, members of the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA) met at their own premises. And in Durban, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) convened at the Merebank Community Centre.

From archives to art

Participants dug deep into their archives, uncovering photographs and personal memories from their past years of activism. Through collage-making, they put together these pieces of history to craft banners that speak of personal and organisational journeys. The beauty of the process was in its accessibility. People of all ages took part, from young activists to elders who had never attended school yet who confidently shaped their visual narratives.

Personal stories from the sessions

John Mthembu of VEM, Mpumalanga: “The workshop was fruitful. Revisiting our old archives rekindled a sense of purpose and sharpened our vision for the

future. The act of choosing the images itself was a journey. We saw where we came from, and where we want to go.”

Mduduzi Tshabalala of VEJA, Vaal: “The two-day workshop was important for sparking creativity. We learned how to use visual art as a way of storytelling. I walked away with a much deeper understanding of banner design and its power to communicate a message.”

Tristan Meek of SDCEA, Durban: “The workshop merged creativity with activism. It opened a personal space for us as activists and community members to express ourselves visually and verbally, while documenting how environmental issues affect our lives.”

One of the most exciting outcomes from the workshop was participants’ eagerness to take this activity back to their communities. The banners that will come out of this creative workshop are more than artworks; they will preserve and represent the struggles, victories and resilience of each organisation.

It is indeed true that history is not just something we record; it is something we make together. In the end, the Community Creative Workshops became spaces of connection, celebration, and reflection. They were a reminder that looking back helps to move forward, and that, when communities tell their stories creatively, they inspire change that lasts. ☺



Vaughn Sadie working with participants at the community creative workshop in Durban. Image: Sithobile Madiba



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