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# labour bulletin

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Taking charge of the  
**Just Transition?**

The *South African Labour Bulletin's* mission is to:

- Provide information and stimulate critical analysis and debate on issues and challenges that confront workers, their organisations and their communities; and
- Communicate this in an accessible and engaging manner.

In so doing the SALB hopes to advance progressive politics, promote social justice and the interests of the working class.

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# Taking charge of the Just Transition?

Much of this issue focuses on the Just Transition (JT). Depending on who you talk to or what you read, this can be a narrow transition just around energy to deal with the climate crisis or a much wider and deeper transition that transforms deep down to the very roots of the economy.

Are trade unions and communities taking charge of this narrative to ensure that there is deep transformation? Let us know what you think.

### The JT in energy

Navigating the JT means being aware of the rapidly changing structure of the electricity industry. [Dinga Sikwebu](#) questions whether labour is moving fast enough to deal with these changes.

The Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) is a new tripartite structure separate from NEDLAC that is tasked with getting parties to build a social compact around the climate transition. [Woodrajh Aroun](#) investigates where the PCC comes from, its tasks and who sits on it. He also grills [two PCC labour members](#), Mbulaheni Mbodi and Mac Chavalala, to find out their views of its work.

PCC executive director, [Crispian Olver](#), shares his hopes and vision for building a JT social compact and appeals to stakeholders to help find common ground.

[Ebrahim-Khalil Hassen](#) challenges trade unions to stop being caught up in disinformation peddled by various parties around the issue of the JT and instead to build alliances and alternatives and take control of the concept of the JT for the benefit of workers.

It's rare to hear the voices of those

that have lost jobs when coal-mines have closed or of those that live in communities (mostly in Mpumalanga) where coal is mined. In this [article](#) we reproduce a transcript from a webinar in which a retrenched coal-miner, a community environmental activist living in the same township and two union officials organising in the area spell out the challenges and hardships.

The Eskom Social Compact was meant to smooth the transition for those that lose jobs through coal-mine and power station closures. However, NUMSA Eskom shop steward, [Mbulaheni Mbodi](#), claims that it is not helping and that NUMSA was never a part of it.

Communities that resist moves by mining companies to mine in their areas are coming under increasing attack, reports [Jenny Grice](#). But a growing eco-politics movement could change all this.

Toxic capitalism is the cause of the climate crisis says [Jacklyn Cock](#) and only a complete overhaul of this system will lead us out of the crisis that we find ourselves in.

[Neva Makgetla](#) unpacks the intricacies of coal, its costs, benefits and who calls the shots.

Solar panels on rooftops fed into the municipal grid is the answer to the energy crisis, say [Patrick Brennan and Janet Cherry](#).

While many are full of gloom and doom over the expectations of COP26 and the realities of what was achieved, [Lebogang Mulaisi](#) and [James Bartholomeusz](#) report on some bright lights.

### The JT—more than just energy

Informal workers are often ignored in the climate crisis and yet they are affected just as much if not more so. [Renaldi Prinsloo](#) describes an initiative to empower southern African informal workers while [Chris Bonner](#) reports on research with informal workers in South Asia that clearly shows how climate change is detrimentally affecting them.

Every day reclaimers, most of them informal, collect millions of tons of waste that would otherwise end up in landfills. Reclaimer [Luyanda Hlatshwayo](#) appeals to the City of Joburg to work with them so that millions more tons can be reclaimed.

An unjust, unsustainable and unhealthy food system that contributes massively to carbon emissions and damages the land on which crops are grown, must be transformed, says [Brittany Kesselman](#).

There is much research showing that public transport can help in the climate crisis by reducing emissions. However currently as [Singqobile Akin and Andiswa Kona](#) report, commuters, especially women, risk their lives when they take public transport. More will have to be done to make it safer so as to entice more commuters and reduce more emissions.

Long time NUMSA trade unionist, [Christine Olivier](#), talks to Neo Bodibe, after her recent election as assistant general secretary of international trade union, IndustriALL.

[Khanya College](#) remembers the life of veteran labour activist, Oupa Lehulere.

Jenny Grice  
Guest Editor

# Briefs

## Trade Union news

### AMCU to appeal judgment declaring Mathunjwa's election as president invalid

The Association of Mining and Construction Workers' Union (AMCU) says it will appeal the judgment in the labour court that found the election of Joseph Mathunjwa as president in 2019, to be "unlawful, unconstitutional and invalid".

Acting judge Sandile Mabaso found that at the time of the 2019 elective conference, Mathunjwa was not employed by a company thus making him ineligible to stand for the position of president.

Mathunjwa claims that since he was a member in good standing at the time, he could therefore contest the position.

Nkosikho Joni, former AMCU deputy president, who was elected at the same conference, took the matter to court after the Union expelled him in 2020.

### LIMUSA swallowed up by NUM

Breakaway union, the Liberated Metalworkers Union of SA (LIMUSA) has merged with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

LIMUSA broke away from NUMSA in 2014 after a special NUMSA national congress in December 2013 had resolved to "call on COSATU to break from the Alliance" and to instead establish a United Front.

NUMSA president at the time, Cedric Gina, took some NUMSA members with him to form LIMUSA. It was soon accepted as an affiliate of COSATU after COSATU expelled NUMSA for its alliance stance.

## Strikes

### Clover workers stand firm

About 4000 Clover workers across the country have been on strike since November 22. Members of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa (Giwusa), they are striking against the company's restructuring plans.

These aim to save the company R300 million in labour costs. The company wants to retrench several hundred workers, cut pay by 20%, introduce a six-day work week with

compulsory work on public holidays and reduce the number of workers who offload dairy products to one per truck. More jobs could go if the company goes ahead with its plans to relocate one plant and close down three factories.

Meanwhile two days into the strike management announced that only non-striking workers would receive their 13th cheque.

["If we accept the 20% salary cut, please tell me, how much are we going to be left with after monthly deductions from our pay? Nothing!"](#) a worker told [New Frame](#).

### NUMSA settles after three-week engineering strike

Despite restrictions imposed by Covid-19, NUMSA pulled off a well-supported strike that culminated in workers winning a 6% increase for lower grade workers and 5% for high grades for the first year of a three-year agreement.

These increases are on the scheduled rates of pay. Those earning above the scheduled rates will receive a rands and cents amount equivalent to the amount payable on the scheduled rate.

The parties will push for the agreement to be extended to cover all workplaces that fall under the sector.



NUMSA's engineering members march through the streets of Johannesburg during their 3-week strike

(Pic: NUMSA)

## Key Congress resolutions from NEHAWU's 12th National Congress

- NEHAWU calls on COSATU, and SACP, to move with speed in practicalising the joint commitment to **building the Left Popular Front** to lead struggles of the working class and rural masses for land, housing, water, sanitation, basic income grant and general service delivery struggles.
- Congress resolved on the urgent need for the union to **campaign for a developmental state** that is fundamental based on a progressive model of development capable of driving our transformational agenda which amongst others includes; changing the semi-colonial economic structure, change the neo-liberal economic trajectory, and develop a systematic central planning to coordinated government action around economic priorities that would enhance economic growth and socioeconomic

development around a medium-term plan.

- Congress strongly **rejected any attempts of agencification, unbundling, privatisation of ESKOM and other state entities** and called for rolling mass-actions and the establishment of anti-privatisation broad front.
- Congress resolved on **strengthening workplace organisation** to remain the central focus for the national union in light of the total onslaught on collective bargaining and workers' rights by the government and employer across the sectors that we organise
- Congress resolved to continue working hard to **transform the healthcare and post-education school sectors.**
- **COVID VACCINES**—Vaccines have been proven to be safe and provide protection against severe illness,

death and hospitalisation. As NEHAWU we fully support the vaccination programme by government but not at the expense of people's constitutional rights.

Our Constitution protects and guarantees the individual right to bodily integrity under Section 12(2)] and also in Section 15 which protects their right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion. All South Africans have a choice to either vaccinate or not based on their individual reasons, be they medical or constitutional.

Send your trade union news to

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[tor@southafricanlabourbulletin.org.za](mailto:tor@southafricanlabourbulletin.org.za)

### INTERNATIONAL NEWS

#### Workers strike in the US

More than 10 000 workers at agricultural equipment manufacturer, John Deere, went on a 5-week strike in October for the first time since 1986 to demand improved wages and working conditions.

With reports of record company profits, workers sought to get some reward and recognition for their almost two years of risking their lives working in the midst of the pandemic.

Theirs was not the only strike. Thousands of workers in other companies (Kelloggs) and in other states across the US have also been on strike buoyed by a shortage of workers and a realisation that their hard work is not being adequately rewarded.

"Workers are on strike for a better deal and a better life," [Liz Shuler](#), president of the AFL-CIO, the nation's biggest labor federation, said.

Meanwhile "[68% of Americans now approve of unions](#)" - the highest percentage since 1965. 78% of those aged 18 to 29 are in favour of unions.

### COP 26

#### Climate culprits must stand up and be counted at COP26!

[Valli Moosa](#), deputy chairman of the Presidential Climate Commission, had a strong message for delegates at COP26. Perhaps the promise of R131bn funds by some western countries was in response to this?

*"Our atmosphere has been ravaged in the name of money. The rich and powerful have consumed our common atmosphere without paying for it. Taking what does not belong to you in plain language is called theft. The burning of oil and coal without paying for the resulting emissions has been one of the biggest drivers of economies in modern times. Therefore, much of the wealth of rich countries has been the result of the proceeds of crime, the crime of expropriating common property for private gain, the crime of destroying nature. We expect the climate culprits to stand up and be counted at COP 26, we expect them to show remorse, we expect them to tell the world exactly what they intend to do to right the wrongs which they have committed."* Valli Moosa.

#### Waste Pickers Launch Greenhouse Gas Calculator Tool at COP26

As world leaders considered concrete actions and climate finance mechanisms at COP 26, WIEGO launched the new [Greenhouse Gas \(GHG\) Emissions Calculator 2.0](#). [Watch the launch event](#) where waste pickers and researchers explain how the calculator works, and how organizations are already using it to quantify how they're helping mitigate climate change.

For example, in 2020, waste pickers from Colombia's Association of Recyclers of Bogotá (ARB) prevented the emissions of over 407 thousand tons of CO2 equivalent (eCO2), while India's SWaCH Cooperative mitigated the emissions of more than 211 tons of CO2. Taken together, the avoided emissions are equivalent to removing a total of 133 thousand passenger cars from the road each year.

# South Africa's power sector: unravelling for good?

*Labour needs to get on top of rapid changes taking place in the electricity industry and deal with the climate emergency for the sake of its members, says Dinga Sikwebu.*

Although clichéd, George Galloway's saying: 'decades where nothing happens and weeks where decades happen', (incorrectly attributed to V.I Lenin) is appropriate given recent changes taking place in South Africa's electricity industry.

Since cabinet's adoption of the [White Paper on the Energy Policy](#) in December 1998 as South Africa's energy blueprint, government has attempted with little headway to restructure the country's electricity sector.

Uppermost in the reform plans has been the break-up of the vertically-integrated electricity utility Eskom into separate generation, transmission and distribution entities companies. Introduction of competition and private sector participation in the power sector were identified as key steps to realise the White Paper's stated objectives.

After inertia of more than two decades, there appears to be some movement in the direction outlined in the 1998 policy document. Propelled by different drivers and not following steps sketched out in the White Paper, recent policy initiatives and regulatory reforms seem to be leading to an overhaul of the country's electricity industry.

With functional separation of generation, transmission and distribution complete, Eskom's unbundling appears to be proceeding as planned. The next big step is the licensing of the National Transmission Company as an Eskom subsidiary. The utility is also making bold moves to enter the renewable energy space.

## R131bn climate finance deal

Although details are still scanty and a lot must still be negotiated, something likely to have the greatest impact on the electricity industry is the R131-billion financing partnership that South Africa concluded with France, Germany, the UK, the US and the European Union (EU) on the sidelines of the 26th United Nations Conference of Parties (COP26). The aim of the transaction is to shift South Africa's electricity from its overdependence on coal. The funds will also be used to develop the country's green hydrogen sectors and capacities to manufacture electric vehicles.

## Regulatory changes

Other potential game-changers are the regulatory changes introduced in October 2020 which have opened the door for municipalities to procure new generation capacity. The move to allow organs of state at sub-national levels to generate and procure electricity takes place parallel to the entry of private sector players in electricity generation. Migration of wealthier residents and businesses off the grid through installation of photovoltaic (PV) systems on their rooftops, is also gathering pace.

## Key questions

With all these developments, important questions arise. Is South Africa's power sector unravelling for good? Are we witnessing an energy transition, where the country is moving away from its dependence on fossil fuels? How are workers, their organisations and communities re-

sponding to these changes?

## South Africa's Mineral Energy Complex

Historically, the abundance of cheap coal drove South Africa's economic development. On the basis of its coal endowment, the country built a network of energy-intensive industries, bringing the energy sector together with mining and associated sub-sectors of manufacturing.

**“Are we witnessing an energy transition, where the country is moving away from its dependence on fossil fuels?”**

**How are workers, their organisations and communities responding to these changes?”**

The existence of this network as the core site of accumulation made Fine and Rustomjee (1996) characterise South Africa's economic development as the 'Minerals-Energy Complex' (MEC). The interlocking sub-sectors of the MEC were the energy industry, mining, basic metals, smelting, synthetic resins, basic chemicals, quarries, fertilisers and pesticides.

Important MEC companies are the state-owned electricity utility Eskom and the South African Synthetic Oil Limited (Sasol) that uses both coal-to-liquid and gas-to-liquid technologies to produce petroleum products.

With a total nominal capacity of 46 466MW, Eskom dominates South Africa's electricity supply industry. It

generates around 90 percent of electricity in the country through its 30 power stations. The company also owns and maintains the national grid, including 310 123MVA of transformer capacity and the 399 546 kilometres voltage lines and underground cables (Eskom, 2021).

### Entry of the private sector in

tional 2 600 megawatts (MW) of private-sector generated electricity. This adds to the 6 300MW contracted since the launch of the renewable programme a decade ago. According to the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), solar PV and wind would contribute about a third of South Africa's installed capacity, or about 24% of an-

various stages of building plants, conducting studies, planning and applications for up to 3 900MW of renewable solar, wind and battery projects which could provide some of that much needed supplemental capacity”, said Minerals Council CEO Roger Baxter. He attributed the licence-free concession of up to 100MW for the rise in renewable projects in mining houses’ pipelines.

### Municipal energy generation

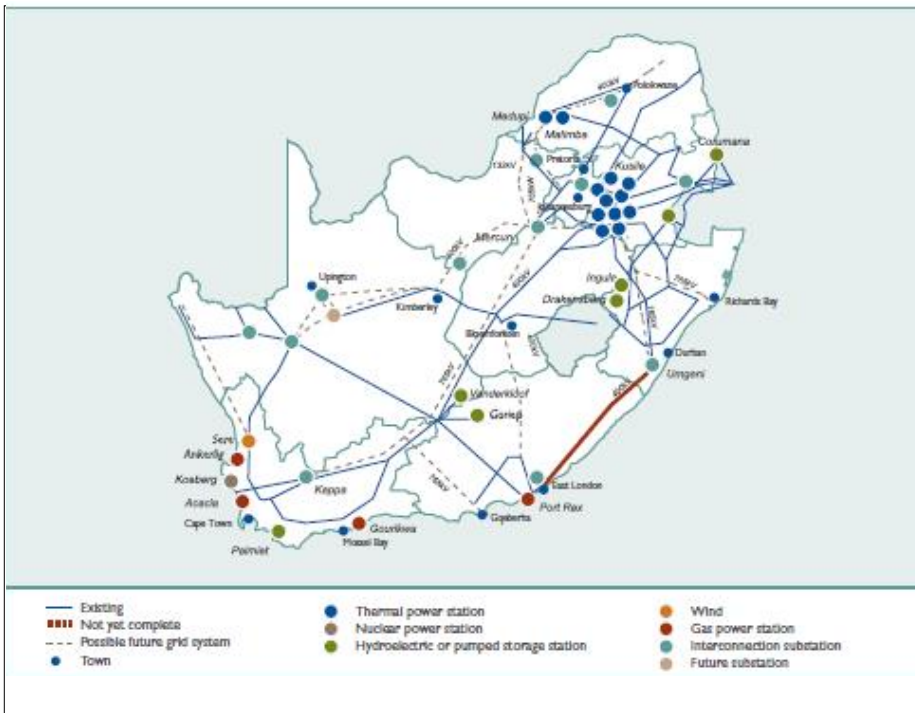
After a protracted legal battle with the City of Cape Town, the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Gwede Mantashe, gazetted amendments in October 2020 that allow municipalities to generate or procure their own electricity, under certain ministerial conditions.

The amendments followed an announcement that [President Cyril Ramaphosa](#) made when he opened parliament earlier in the year and promised that the government “will also put in place measures to enable municipalities in good financial standing to procure their own power from IPPs”. Until the changes were introduced, only organs of the state involved in the energy sector had the permission to procure new generation capacity.

Since the announcement last year, municipalities such as the City of Johannesburg, City of Cape Town and eThekweni have developed plans to wean themselves off Eskom.

In October, the Mayor of Johannesburg [Mpho Moerane](#), unveiled the municipality’s Energy Sustainability Strategy that will add an extra 500MW capacity of alternative energy to the city’s power sources. City Power, which the municipality wholly-owns, currently receives 90 percent of its electricity from Eskom and 10 percent from the privately-owned Kelvin Power Station.

“I am pleased that we are finally unveiling the 15-year Energy Sustainability Strategy that will see City Power



*Eskom's power stations and the national grid (Source: Eskom Integrated Report, 2021, p. 7.)*

### generation

In the Energy White Paper, Eskom’s dominance and monopolistic position was seen as a problem. Competition and private sector participation were identified as crucial for efficiency improvements in the electricity industry. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to lure private sector investors into generation, the government launched the renewable energy independent power producer procurement programme (REIPPPP) in 2011. Through this programme, the private sector was to provide new electricity capacity using renewable energy sources.

The latest go-ahead given to 25 solar and wind projects who were successful in the fifth bid window, when complete will bring on stream addi-

tional energy generation, by 2030. The amendment to Schedule 2 of the Electricity Regulation Act could also spur greater private sector participation in generation. The amendment makes it possible for users to generate their own electricity of not more than 100MW without having to apply for a licence from the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA). This electricity will be generated outside of the REIPPPP programme. The regulatory change also deals with battery storage, electricity trading and [wheeling](#) to multiple customers.

Since the announcement of these policy changes, the number of renewable energy projects to be undertaken have increased by 146 per cent in terms of generating capacity as compared to those announced for 2020.

“[The mining industry](#) is involved in

transitioning from an electricity distribution company to an energy service provider. This means City Power is set to be a ‘wires business’ that will not only continue delivering conventional power, but will also cover distributed energy generation and energy storage facilities as its core business”, said Moerane.

## Eskom enters the renewable space big time

Compared to coal, Eskom presently provides very small amounts of renewable energy to customers through the utility’s renewable energy tariff pilot programme and the use of the company’s accredited plants such as Sere Wind Farm and Run-of-River hydro facility. This is likely to change in the coming years.

The utility has identified renewables as a space that the company intends to play in. “With the requisite financing of around R180-billion, Eskom could build 7 400 MW of clean capacity, plus at least 244 MWh of battery storage, in the next five years alone,” [said Eskom’s chief executive Andre de Ruyter](#) when he delivered this year’s Dr Hendrik Johannes van der Bijl Memorial Lecture.

In its forecasts, Eskom has identified the need for energy storage as the national share of renewables in South Africa’s energy mix increases. At the end of October 2021, the [African Development Bank \(AfDB\) granted Eskom a US\\$57.67-million loan](#) to develop battery energy storage projects.

The projects entail the development of four-hour 200MW duration battery storage, with 800MWh capacity in seven sites across the country. The battery storage systems will be linked to solar and wind power plants. They will enable Eskom to store variable renewable energy that could be wasted, if not stored in batteries and dispatched at peak times. The utility will be involved in design, engineering,

supply, construction, installation, testing and commissioning of the projects.

During the same week that the AfDB loan was announced, [Eskom signed a memorandum of understanding \(MoU\) with Exxaro and Seriti Resources](#) to develop renewable energy projects. Cooperation between the three companies will see the building of solar photovoltaic facilities and wind farms to power the mines.

The companies also committed themselves to explore energy storage projects. Exxaro and Seriti are Eskom’s largest coal suppliers. Jointly, they contribute yearly close to 80 per cent of the electricity utility’s coal supply.

**“To effectively defend its members and their communities, the labour movement requires a new vision of the electricity industry that puts at the centre the livelihoods of its members and the climate emergency.”**

## Impact of changes

There is little doubt that the changes underway will restructure South Africa’s electricity industry. They will also have an impact on Eskom as a company. If the changes continue in an uncoordinated manner as they currently appear to be doing, we then have all the ingredients for the making of an unjust transition.

Without an industrial policy to create jobs through locally manufactured renewable energy components, the investments in renewable energy will flow out of the country as multinational corporations grab all the supply contracts. The migration of well-off households and industrial customers off the grid robs municipalities of rev-

enue that is necessary to cross subsidise other services and poor households. The amendments that enable municipalities with good financial standing to set up their own power generation projects, will further entrench the chasm between rich and poor municipalities.

## Labour needs a new vision

Unfortunately, the labour movement does not appear to be engaging concretely on the changes taking place in the electricity industry. It is preoccupied with the defence of Eskom and is mounting a rhetorical campaign against the unbundling of the utility. In many instances, this posture portrays unions as being in defence of coal. The calls for ‘clean coal’ and the use of carbon capture technologies entrenches the perception that the labour movement is aligned with fossil-fuel interests.

The changes that are unfolding have a direct bearing on the jobs of trade union members. As electricity security and availability is critical for economic growth and development, failure to provide alternative and concrete plans on the restructuring is short-sighted. To effectively defend its members and their communities, the labour movement requires a new vision of the electricity industry that puts at the centre the livelihoods of its members and the climate emergency.

**Dinga Sikwebu is an ex-NUMSA official.**

## Further reading

Eskom. 2021. *Integrated Report*.

Fine, B and Rustomjee, Z. 1996. *The Political Economy of South Africa: From Minerals-Energy Complex to Industrialisation*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.



# The Presidential Climate Commission – unpacking the details

*Woodrajh Aroun*

In December 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the establishment of a 22-person Climate Change Coordinating Commission (now called the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)) to advise him on responses required to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The PCC has secretariat support, consultants and a hefty budget (R10m DFFE; R24m funders). Included in the commission are four active trade unionists drawn from the country's three big trade union federations (COSATU, SAFTU and FEDUSA).

Although widely welcomed, the establishment of the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) was seen in some quarters as nothing more than Ramaphosa's knack for advisory groups and endless consultations. Having been in existence for a year, it is now crucial to look at the work that the commission has done and the direction that the body is taking.

## Genesis of the commission

The idea of a climate commission was first mooted in the Presidential Jobs Summit held in October 2018.

The [framework agreement](#) endorsed at the summit called for a statutory body in the form of a Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Committee “to coordinate and oversee the just transition ... understand the impact of climate change on jobs” and identify opportunities along the value chain for green jobs and green industries.

The [National Employment Vulnerability Assessment](#) (NEVA), and [Sector Job Resilient Plans](#) (SJRPs)

written by Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies ([TIPS](#)) before the establishment of the PCC, were seen as crucial reference documents. Briefly, these plans seek to identify and protect those whose jobs and livelihoods are threatened as a result of the harmful effects of climate change or by a transition to alternate energy sources leading to the closure of coal-fired power stations and subsidiary industries along the fossil value chain.

## What kind of an animal is the PCC?

Following Cabinet's decision to approve the establishment of the commission and by the President's own constitutional authority, the PCC is permitted to carry out its functions legally “as a [multi-stakeholder Presidential Advisory Body](#)” until such time that the Climate Change Bill currently before parliament is approved. Once enacted the PCC will remain an advisory body in spite of its newly acquired statutory status.

In addition to building the PCC as an institution and recruiting staff, the commission has been involved in intense discussions on the nature of the organisation. These discussions have culminated in a [draft charter](#) that sets out the objectives, functions, powers and duties of the PCC, Finance and Accountability, Delegation of Powers and Duties and Institutional Arrangements (Secretariat) guided by the “broad principles of institutional independence and impartiality”.

Section 13 of the [Climate Change Bill](#) allows for the PCC, at the request of the President, to report to government on matters relating to the reduc-

tion of greenhouse gases and steps to mitigate the harmful effects of human-induced climate change.

Although the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) approved the Climate Change Bill, the relationship between the PCC and NEDLAC is not clear and it remains to be seen whether the two institutions are in a position to complement each other's work as the transition to a low-carbon economy gains momentum.

The inclusion of several high-ranking Cabinet Ministers in the commission, including the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Minister of Public Enterprise and Minister of Finance might prove to be the PCC's litmus test. If they are all on the same wavelength their contributions could have a positive impact on the work of the commission and speed up the process towards the adoption of a framework for SA's energy transition.

However, with all the media attention around Minister Mantashe's bias towards coal, he could turn out to be the ‘cat among the pigeons’ and slow down the work of the commission regardless of its mandate to reduce SA's carbon footprint.

## Achievements so far

Since its establishment, the PCC has initiated a series of discussions on policy issues in an attempt to draw up a framework for a just transition (JT). According to the [Executive Director's Report](#) to the PCC October 21 2021, multi-stakeholder and constituency-based discussions on policy instru-

ments, coal transition, employment and financing were completed. Further reports on water security and governance are forthcoming.

More importantly the PCC's recommendation that the country adopt a more ambitious target range for its nationally determined contributions (NDCs) than those adopted in 2016, was approved by Cabinet on September 14 2021.

On May 7 the PCC had convened a public hearing with all stakeholders and social partners. After extensive discussions with experts around modelling undertaken by, amongst others, the Energy Systems Research Group (ESRG) at UCT, the commission agreed to propose a more demanding target range for emission reduction in 2025 (398 – 510 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> – equivalent) and 350 – 420 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> – equivalent by 2030 as against earlier mitigation targets set in 2016 (398 – 614 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq).

The [revised NDC](#) will allow South Africa to lower its carbon emissions earlier than planned. By 2050 South Africa hopes to achieve a net-zero carbon emissions target.

## Challenges

In 2011 SA signed a [Green Accord](#) with social partners and there was much talk of a green economy and green jobs amidst all the fanfare of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP17) in Durban.

Not long after that the country

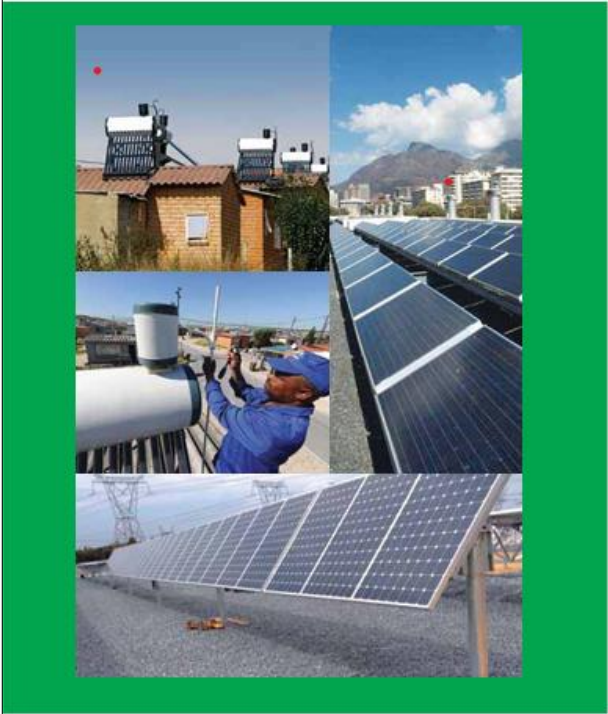
back-peddled on renewable energy (RE), and ditched its 1 million solar water-heater programme. Several RE companies (solar and wind) either closed shop or became dormant. Ten years down the line we are no closer to our goals of becoming the continent's pioneering industrial giant in renewable energy.

By June 2022 the commission expects to release its flagship report

anti-fossil fuel agenda ... It will be very irresponsible for South Africa to stop the use of coal.”

Instead of bombarding the labour commissioners with never-ending lists of technical reports and policy briefs, it would be prudent for the PCC to heed the words of Hameda Deedat from the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (Naledi), speaking at a PCC [Just Tran-](#)

NEW GROWTH PATH: ACCORD 4
GREEN ECONOMY ACCORD



**Commitment One: Rollout of Solar Water Heaters**

The parties to this Accord recognise that the installation of solar-water heating systems can help with climate-change goals and increase the number of South Africans who have access to hot water. It can create jobs in manufacturing of units and in their installation. Accordingly, the parties commit to the following:

**1. Increase the rollout to one million units**

The parties note the progress made with the installation of 140 000 solar-water heating systems to date at household level, particularly in poor communities. The scheme has been particularly successful over the past twelve months. In order to achieve the targets for SWG installations, it will require financing, enterprise development, training and policy coordination across all stakeholders.

Government commits to a target of ensuring the installation of 1 million solar water heaters at household level by 2014. Business commits to working with Government to develop, establish and then publicise a sustainable funding plan to support the installation of 1 million SWH systems.

Business, labour and community constituents welcome the legislative requirement that solar water heating or other forms of low carbon water heating method will be required in new buildings which is expected to be promulgated before end 2011 and commit to working with Government on an awareness campaign to promote compliance with the new legislation.

**2. Improve localisation of the components**

All parties commit to the drive to increased localisation of the components of the solar-water heating systems.

Source: [Green Economy Accord 2021](#)

on a Just Energy Transition. **Will its recommendations fast track the localisation of renewable energy sub-sectors so as to ensure a transition towards a low-carbon economy and include concrete plans to absorb displaced workers from traditional fossil-based industries?**

How will it deal with the process of decommissioning and repurposing coal power stations given recent concerns as reflected in a National Union of Mineworkers [press statement](#) issued on 11 November 2021?

In this NUM made it clear that they supported the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Gwede Mantashe, in his call for “Africa to unite against ‘coercion’ by the global

[sition Framework Engagement with Labour](#), October 29 2021: “for a discussion with a presidential commission to be engaging with labour, you need to hear us talk ... the voices of labour should be the priority ... it is a worker-centric perspective and it must be workers presenting, not presentations being made by people to us”.

Woodrajh Aroun is a former NUMSA Parliamentary Officer who also played an active role in the union's energy research group after it was formed in 2011.

# PCC Stakeholder Engagement – What does labour say?

*Woodrajh Aroun spoke to Mbulaheni Mbodi (NUMSA shop steward and National Secretary of Eskom Shopsteward Council) and Mac Chavalala (SAFTU president) to get labour's views on the PCC.*

## **What is your assessment of the PCC's first year of existence?**

Mbodi/Chavalala: Initially we were trying to find our footing. There have been online meetings that would be arranged as information sessions but there were always time constraints making it difficult to deal with the issues at hand. As trade unionists we were not used to this.

In some meetings we would have an overload of information and less than 10 minutes to respond, irrespective of how many pages we had to endure listening to. We have managed to talk to the Deputy Chairperson about a need for in camera meetings where we will talk solidly on the agenda prioritised for serious engagements. We also understand that the commission does not vote but tries to reach consensus. We do not agree to everything and have our differences. We reserve the right therefore to have our views heard even if they be contrary to what most would be saying.

## **Do you think that labour will benefit from the work that the commission is involved in?**

Mbodi/Chavalala: Indeed, there will be a benefit. There is a lot of information that ordinarily we would not even lay our eyes on if we were not on the PCC. In case anything is taking a trajectory that [would] have negative impacts to the trade unions, we would alert the trade

unions such that they may engage on the issue and within the PCC itself.

*“Through social dialogue we will seek to deepen engagement so that more people can be reached and participate in our sessions, share their concerns, ideas, etc. What is more important is to work collectively and bridge the gap between the shop floor and our communities.”*

## **In what ways will labour benefit?**

Mbodi/Chavalala: There will be time to process the issues that are in the PCC through the structures of the trade union movements. As trade unionists we will push for decent and sustainable jobs as part of a transition to a low-carbon economy.

## **What is your view on the options on the kind of institution that the PCC should be? Why? Please motivate.**

Mbodi/Chavalala: The PCC has to be transparent and open to ideas in so far as the work is concerned. Especially on the speed of the transition and to identify possible constraints. The commission should consider the

socio-economic challenges in the country and should be as inclusive as possible and have a bias towards the poor and the working class.

## **Is this the position of your union/federation?**

Mbodi/Chavalala: Yes.

## **Having been appointed as an individual how do you feedback to your organisation? Do you get mandates and do you report back?**

Mbodi/Chavalala: The mandating process is informed by organisational [union] resolutions and this provides an overarching guide so that we do not work outside the boundaries of the resolutions adopted by the union and its affiliates.

## **How can workers and communities contribute to the work of the commission?**

Mbodi/Chavalala: Through social dialogue we will seek to deepen engagement so that more people can be reached and participate in our sessions, share their concerns, ideas, etc. What is more important is to work collectively and bridge the gap between the shop floor and our communities.

COSATU and FEDUSA PCC representatives were also approached for comment but did not respond in time.

# Building a social compact around the climate transition

*Jenny Grice spoke to Presidential Climate Commission executive director, Dr Crispian Olver, to find out what the PCC aims to achieve as well as progress in regard to its important tasks.*

The [Presidential Climate Commission's](#) (PCC) major task according to the organisation's executive director, Dr Crispian Olver, is "to build a social compact around the climate transition".

A crucial principle in the climate crisis is the term the just transition (JT). Definitions vary widely. One of the PCC's first tasks is to "get the different social partners to sign on to a common meaning [of the] JT; they all say they support it, how do we define it, what does it mean substantively, and what are the responsibilities of the different social partners in that regard," says Olver.

They are doing this through wider dialogues with different commissioners that sit on the PCC, interested members of the public and different stakeholders. Many parties have each contributed their own [powerpoints and documents](#). Although there are as yet no powerpoints and documents submitted by trade unions themselves, "the lead input into each dialogue has been made by TIPS, who are more closely aligned to labour than any other stakeholder," says Olver. Moreover, in the ensuing discussions labour has participated actively, with labour commissioners often facilitating the dialogues, he says.

Wider consultations and meetings are also planned in the new year, Olver told labour representatives who attended one of the PCC labour dialogues in November 2021. The PCC plans to meet directly with those affected, like coal miners who have already lost jobs, workers in coal-fired

power stations who stand to lose jobs through decommissioning as well as those who live in the surrounding communities and are dependent on that mining activity to support their livelihoods.

The PCC will also seek input from rural communities, especially in rural areas and former homelands affected by catastrophic climate change. A multi-stakeholder conference will be held in March 2022; the PCC will adopt a final framework for the Just Transition ready for Cabinet by June 2022.

## Starting to secure agreement

Already there are some positives says Olver. There is agreement that "climate change is happening" and "that it is going to involve deep systematic change in the way we do business and that change has social and economic consequences and we need to proactively manage those consequences." The PCC he says, has to spell out "what are the implications of those changes for workers and communities and other vulnerable groups."

Just how deep the systemic change goes, will be a matter for debate. Consensus is going to be tested when expounding on the exact models for the economy and ownership in the economy. In the policy dialogues convened by the PCC some constituencies, such as labour and NGOs, have argued that the climate transition presents opportunities for changing ownership models in the economy.

"Certainly business are not opposed to different ownership models, but they're not going to sign onto the... kinds of socialist transformation that some of the partners would like to see [like] ownership of the means of production by the people." The depth and model of transformation "is an ongoing discussion", says Olver.

Urgent issues will have to be addressed and questions answered in areas where coal mines are downscaling and coal-fired power stations are being decommissioned, especially since the PCC has come out in support of Eskom's proposal for an accelerated decommissioning of their coal-fired power stations.

**"Urgent issues will have to be addressed and questions answered in areas where coal mines are downscaling and coal-fired power stations are being decommissioned"**

He believes that Eskom's proposal to decommission some of its old coal-fired power stations, is "quite carefully thought out". These power stations are "no longer economic to run, their utilisation rate is below 50 per cent, their maintenance costs are very high ... it's going to pay Eskom to pull those off the grid faster than the IRP."

Questions the PCC will debate are issues such as whose responsibility is it to fund such things as early retirement of those workers, their training and retraining and other labour market measures; whose responsibility is it to diversify and create an alternative economy in those areas?

to redress historical wrongs such as land dispossession.” And as mines and coal-fired power stations are shut down, land will be released giving rise to a “major opportunity” to right these wrongs. However, before releasing the land, it “needs to be rehabilitated, and water resource areas re-

carbon-emitting, those embedded emissions “make those products emissions-intensive.” Globally there’s a move to implement carbon taxes on any imports from 2023 onwards, especially in SA’s important export markets like the EU and the US. These carbon taxes will make our exports more costly than those of our competitors. “We cannot be left at the end of that pipe.”

If SA hangs on to the old technologies he warns, “in 10 years’ time we are going to be without the technological base to do the transition and saddled with a whole lot of outdated technologies that are now penalised in the global trading system.”

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### Finding consensus on the energy mix

Getting agreement on the energy mix both now and in the future in this transition is going to be difficult. There are deep differences between those pushing for the continued use of coal, nuclear and gas as against the strong grouping of NGO commissioners and others who are diametrically opposed to this and want instead an urgent move to renewables with no gas as a transitional fuel.

He agrees with Eskom that after investing so much in new power stations, Medupi and Kusile, they can’t just be shut down. Coal will inevitably form part of the energy mix for some time to come. The NGO grouping is

Table 4. Gaps to inform a framework

Area of policy	Gaps to be addressed
<b>Governance mechanisms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should provincial and local government structures be involved in a Just Transition Framework?</li> <li>• How will national departments (e.g. dtic, DFFE, DPE, DMRE) work in cohesion and what is the scope of responsibility for each department?</li> <li>• How will local stakeholders in impacted value chains (e.g. mining houses, Eskom, local small businesses) be involved in the process?</li> <li>• What will the frequency of the review process be in relation to consultation and project implementation?</li> <li>• What mix of state funding will be used and from which budget lines?</li> <li>• How will donor funding be leveraged?</li> <li>• How will existing initiatives across stakeholders (business, SOC, provincial and local governments) be integrated and aligned?</li> <li>• How will vulnerable stakeholders participate in decision-making – elected representative approach versus wide stakeholder engagement?</li> <li>• What mechanisms will be instituted to periodically monitor value chain trends and react to declines with just transition support?</li> <li>• How are impacts and successes measured?</li> <li>• How will adaptation and mitigation solutions intertwine with just transition thinking to co-prioritise sustainable development and the just transition?</li> </ul>
<b>Labour market policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will workers be prioritised for support and what basket of tools will be used for impacted workers?</li> <li>• What age cut-off will be used for early retirement among workers? Will certain classes of workers (e.g., underground miners) be given premiums?</li> <li>• How long will temporary income support be provided for workers during the transition towards alternate employment? Will this also cover housing and replacement costs?</li> <li>• What will be the role of job placement and training centres and where will these be located?</li> <li>• What existing funding streams (e.g. UIF/social support/EPWP) will be leveraged to support this?</li> <li>• What time horizon will be adopted for value chains – faster transitions with added support or natural attrition over a longer period?</li> </ul>
<b>Economic development/diversification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will industrial policy tools be leveraged to create new and sustainable value chains in affected regions (e.g. Emalahleni)?</li> <li>• How will basic infrastructure be rolled out in regions with poor infrastructure to incentivise new economic activities?</li> <li>• How will regions be revitalised to create a new cultural identity?</li> <li>• How will coordination between goals of the framework and existing initiatives be revitalised?</li> <li>• How will local business (including small businesses) be drawn in to suggest new economic opportunities/projects and value chains?</li> </ul>
<b>Social support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will social grants be leveraged to support communities?</li> <li>• What basket of existing social support mechanisms will be leveraged?</li> <li>• What new social support mechanisms need to be budgeted for?</li> </ul>

This Table spells out the types of questions that the PCC will deliberate on.

(Source: [Towards a Just Transition](#))

The PCC wants to “define very tightly what corporate responsibility is and what government responsibility is in the transition”, says Olver. In this way, different authorities can be held to account.

For Olver, the JT is not just about finding ways to lessen the impact on workers and communities when mines and coal-fired power stations close. The PCC he says, “supports restorative justice including measures

stored to promote long-term water security.”

### Decarbonising the grid

The absolute imperative for Olver is to “decarbonise the electricity grid” not just for climate reasons but also for economic reasons. Electricity from the Eskom grid powers the vast majority of our mines, factories and farms which produce exports. And if our energy mix on the grid is largely

strongly opposed to this and to the use of gas. “It will need to demonstrate how the grid can be stabilised without additional peaking capacity, given the scale of the renewable rollout. We don’t yet have battery storage at utility scale that can pick up the slack... there’s a strong argument for the South African hydrogen economy [to do this] later towards the -2030s and into the 2040s.”

To try and reach consensus, Olver says the PCC will have a series of dialogues at the beginning of 2022. Each party will have a chance to put forward their ideas on the energy mix, show how their proposal will reach the target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 (or carbon-zero emissions by 2050). “Energy security” must be central to each groupings’ proposals. From these, the PCC aims to come out with a technical report that makes recommendations on the energy mix.

### Renewables to mop up the job losses

There have been harsh criticisms of some proposals that look to expanded public works programmes (EPWP) as providing the jobs to ease the pain of workers and communities who are left stranded when coal mines close and coal-fired power stations decommission. Given the low rate of pay of EPWPs and their temporary nature, the criticism is understandable.

Olver instead favours a vision which sees renewable energy expanding massively at a rate of 3 giga watts per year up to 2040. At this level, there are economies of scale for local manufacturers to produce the parts for both wind and solar. This manufacturing can create real jobs – not just “intermittent jobs ... in the installation and construction... [but] serious, decent jobs linked to large manufacturing exercises.”

Manufacturers were doing this previously he said. “There were wind turbines being built in Gqeberha, ... most of the solar photo voltaic value

chain had started,” he says. It was government’s delay in opening Bid Window 5, that led to all those manufacturing companies going bust.

It’s not only the manufacturing sector that will benefit from a renewables manufacturing expansion. SA has many of the minerals needed in the renewables manufacturing process: iron and steel for wind turbines, copper, cobalt, rare earths, aluminium etc. “Mining as an industry is going to prosper under a low-carbon economy,” Olver says, but it must take place “in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.”

“renewable energy [must] expand massively at a rate of 3 giga watts per year up to 2040.

At this level, there are economies of scale for local manufacturers to produce the parts for both wind and solar. This manufacturing can create real jobs – not just “intermittent jobs ... in the installation and construction... [but] serious, decent jobs linked to large manufacturing exercises.”

### Answering the critics

The PCC is not without its critics. The [Climate Justice Charter Movement](#) (CJCM), has chosen so far not to engage with the PCC. One of its coordinators, Vishwas Satgar told [Daily Maverick](#), that the PCC’s recent targets that it proposed for nationally determined contributions (NDC) as well as net-zero targets don’t go far enough.

Olver is cognisant of the crucial

importance of correctly setting the pace of decarbonisation of our economy. Move “too fast and we devastate high-emitting economic sectors and jobs; too slow and we will stifle the transition to a green economy and lose economic competitiveness and jobs.”

Those arguing for a more radical approach to cutting out fossil fuels “need to demonstrate how the social and economic impacts can be ameliorated,” he says.

At the other extreme are those naysayers that say the PCC and its ideas have been captured by Western developed nations. Although not aware of this criticism, Olver says he is cognisant that some are saying that the recent [climate finance deal](#) announced at COP26 “is a tool of western nations”.

Olver believes the argument is often used to “argue against increased mitigation efforts to lower our emissions”. In his view such a “backward looking and defensive approach will cause serious long term economic harm to our economy.” To protect our national interests, “embracing and getting ahead of the climate transition is the correct thing to do.”

### Finding each other

Finding common ground in the PCC will require a lot of energy from all parties. Olver appeals to stakeholders to engage actively in the debates around the climate transition to try to find common ground.

“The climate transition has serious long-term development and economic impacts, and decisions about the path we follow have to involve everyone that is affected,” he says.

# Just another Transition or a Just Transition?

*If trade unions are to take control of the concept of Just Transition, they must re-frame the debate by building alliances and alternatives, says Ebrahim-Khalil Hassen.*

The Just Transition is a contested concept. In the mainstream media this has pitted the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) in one corner representing the interests of workers and mining in the coal industry.

In the other corner is the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and the Department of *Forestry, Fisheries* and the *Environment* (DFFE) representing the interests of renewable industries.

Framing the debate in this manner weakens the role of trade unions and progressive civil society. This article explores why trade unions are weakened by this framing and argues that trade unions must reframe the debate through building alliances and building alternatives.

## Mzansi Debate 101

A key feature of the debate on ‘just transition’ is that opponents frame each other in increasingly bizarre terms on social media platforms. DMRE is represented as ‘Luddites failing to make the transition’. DPE as ‘captured by finance capital’ and that reforms in the energy sector are meant to benefit President Ramaphosa’s companies and family.

In both instances, the debates are framed as proverbial ‘strawmen’ – depicting a position in incorrect terms so as to demean it. This form of debate poses a significant challenge to trade unions and civil society in leading the debate on the ‘Just Transition’.

The bizarreness of the debate is paradoxically commonplace. During the runup to Jacob Zuma becoming President, framing debates in ways that represent alternative positions as guided by invisible power brokers be-

came a potent weapon. Jacques Pauw argues that during this period Jacob Zuma had built a parallel intelligence structure. Could this be the source of disinformation?

## Disinformation

A more certain source of disinformation is the role played by Bell Pottinger in supporting the Gupta brothers. In these debates the trade union voices remained muted and muzzled out by noise. The trade unions neither shaped the debates nor were they able to build alliances in progressive civil society. A core reason is that the largest trade union federation (COSATU) threw its weight behind Jacob Zuma and with that lost its credibility amongst smaller actors in progressive civil society.

It would be foolhardy to argue that the noise on both sides of the debate is not supported through networks in business and government. Is it however not equally foolhardy to follow the parameters of this debate, especially when your job is to represent the interests of the working class

## Reclaiming the public sector

As South Africa emerges from a period of state capture there is another neglected but crucial insight. The process of state capture was facilitated by public service reforms that sought to deliver services through a ‘contracting state’.

The intent was to ensure performance through replicating aspects of markets in the public sector and through growing private sector involvement in the delivery of markets.

The insight is neglected because many see the only solution to public

service delivery as introducing private sector investment and know-how into private markets. In the 2021 Medium Term Budget Statement, the finance minister argued for increased private sector involvement. So this must leave one asking – is the solution really “more markets”.

“Winning this debate is about displacing opaque networks shaping public policy choices on social media and other platforms.”

Proposals developed by civil society coalitions point to a strengthening of public and community ownership as a possible outcome of a ‘Just Transition’. There is little doubt that convincing the broader society about more public ownership is a difficult sell. Winning this debate is about displacing opaque networks shaping public policy choices on social media and other platforms. An alternative narrative requires a return to a trade union tradition of building alternatives and alliances.

Ebrahim-Khalil Hassen is an independent public policy analyst.

# Speaking from the ground

*For coal miners that have lost jobs when their mine closes, there is very often fear and hopelessness. TIPS, GroundWork and NALEDI (funded by UK PACT) are involved with a project in Mpumalanga (eMalahleni and Steve Tshwete municipalities) to “co-develop a coherent just transition plan that is inclusive of communities that will be affected by the transition”.*

*On August 28 2021, the project organised an online dialogue to probe what mining closures mean for workers, their jobs and livelihoods and those in the surrounding community.*

*In this extract from the dialogue, Thembisile Mbethe from the Vukani environmental justice movement in action (VEM) and Sicelo Masina, a retrenched coal miner, both living in the same township, as well as two trade union officials from affected trade unions, Sipho Dhlamini, CEPPWAWU acting Mpumalanga provincial secretary, and Jabu Khambule, regional educator, NUM Highveld region, share their concerns and challenges.*

## **Thembisile Mbethe, Vukani environmental justice movement in action (VEM)**

We feel that there is a gap between the residents and the workers when it comes to the matter of just transition. When we talk about just transition, we normally raise awareness and teach people about what just transition is, especially when it comes to miners that work with coal. Miners that work for coal-fired power stations feel that we are destroying their job opportunities and this is how we are seen in the community. They don't understand us because they think that when we talk about transition, we are destroying work opportunities for them. Coal miners don't know and don't understand what just transition is because nothing is being done to educate them about it.

We as the community of eMalahleni feel the heat brought on by the legacy of coal because it's expensive for us, we can't afford it and it pollutes our water. Our water is polluted and makes us sick and it's hard to find and we often don't have water at all.

We feel the pain that is caused by the production of coal in eMalahleni and the respiratory illnesses it causes the community of eMalahleni; we are in and out of hospitals where we don't get help. Our clinics don't have the necessary medication and we are being constantly referred and we aren't getting the help we need.

The workers that work with coal are also sick with the same illnesses we

are complaining about as the community; it's just that people feel like there is no life without coal, they don't understand that just transition has everything, job opportunities and health.

What we see are job opportunities in other sectors like agriculture, if we can rehabilitate the land, we can do something with that land that is destroyed. If we can rehabilitate mines, we can create something greener in that space where coal was being mined.

## **Sicelo Masina, retrenched coal miner from Optimum Colliery, Pullenshoop, now unemployed**

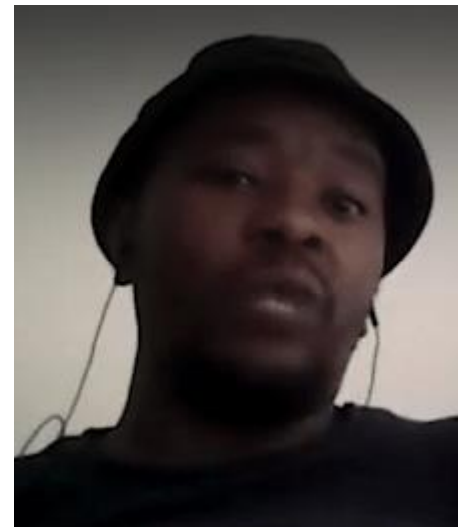
We were working [at Optimum], we had a good life mining coal, our family were happy. [Now] I feel like crying.

I feel like crying, when it comes to Optimum, I feel like there's a lot which we don't know. Currently we have one problem. We were working there, we had a good life, mining coal, our family were happy. Currently the closure affected a lot of people. We used to have house helpers and all those things, we had to retrench as well as the mine closed.

When you have a child at Laërskool immediately when they close Optimum I must remove the child to a public school; you wanted your child to get that education from Hoërskool, but at the end you must move your child because you won't afford to pay fees, you must change your diet.

Even now Eskom, we used to work there, it's shut down now, now you

must go back, stay at home. What about the 6 months you sitting at home? Now I don't know what to do, that's why I end up joining Thomas from Groundwork.



*“We were working [at Optimum], we had a good life mining coal, our family were happy. [Now] I feel like crying.” Sicelo Masina, retrenched coal miner.*

Eskom and Optimum make Pullenshoop a good town. Maybe the guy from NUM I believe maybe he is aware and he can assist me.

Optimum and the mine closure is a problem. Now Pullenshoop is starting to be a ghost town; people standing at the shop, nothing to do. Don't know what's going to happen to Pullenshoop..

Maybe they can open up a mine, try to work with them. I do my own research, Optimum is the heart of Pullenshoop, Hendrina, even Middelburg.



**Sipho Dhlamini, Ceppwawu, acting provincial secretary**



*“The whole issue of closing mines because of this air pollution; there was no retraining or reskilling of our employees if they are losing jobs, now we are starting to think of reskilling of everything but there is huge damage. That is the problem with us, we are so good in just talking, we are so bad in action that’s why we are here today engaging, trying to find a solution.” Sipho Dhlamini, CEPPWAWU*

The unemployment rate is at 34.4 per cent. I don’t think the idea of closing coal mines should have started before they had done research to see how unemployment was going to be affected; people around the coal mines, the unionists. But this closure has happened. We have families who have lost their jobs and the unemployment is very high. From us as CEPPWAWU, we don’t agree about the closing of mines in terms of coal, the air pollution. There is air pollution – there are tons and tons of coal going overseas but we are being told that coal is making a lot of damage. Why are we not improving the system? There are engineers.

Closure is going to change a lot of things. This is painful, especially for NUM and those unions who are affected; we need to engage thoroughly; this thing is going to affect a lot of things in the mining industry.

The whole issue of closing mines because of this air pollution; there was no retraining or reskilling of our employees if they are losing jobs, now we are starting to think of reskilling of everything but there is huge damage. That is the problem with us, we are so

good in just talking, we are so bad in action that’s why we are here today engaging, trying to find a solution.

**Jabu Khambule, regional educator, Highveld, NUM**

50 per cent of the youth are unemployed; 73 per cent of youth don’t have matric. Two mines have been closed because they lost the contract from Eskom. They each employed 500 employees; 95 per cent of those employees are black. The mine is between Delmas and Witbank. The taxi industry and transportation of coal were all affected because the contract was lost. This has a very bad impact on livelihoods of industrial employees.

Delmas is a mining community. One ward, Ward 7, has 22 mines within the very same ward, each mine employs approximately 600. That’s 13 200 workers in one ward. These are those employed in those mines. Delmas is dependent on farming and coal. Coal mining employs 90 per cent of the people in one ward. If one man is feeding 10 family members, that’s 132 000 people.

We’re not saying we must not invest in green economy. We’re not saying let it be a total phase out from coal mining to low-carbon economy but let’s address the current situation that we are facing now, 73 per cent of youth no matric. If we can manage because there are systems in place, negotiations, before we stop a mine, there will be a closure, but those are just agreements that are not being fulfilled. Many companies when they retrench don’t agree to go to reskilling of workers, the Act is saying it’s voluntary, we have agreements with DMRE but they are not followed so it will take us some years before we address the issue of skills, education and so on.

One mine that is not having a contract with Eskom is affecting the entire economy – transport, people selling food, accommodation industry – everyone is going to be affected.

I concur with Sipho. We know that we must engage and not reject but the issue of skilling and investing in technology so that we can produce a clean

economy must also be addressed.



*Delmas is a mining community. One ward, Ward 7, has 22 mines within the very same ward, each mine employs approximately 600. That’s 13 200 workers in one ward,” Jabu Khambule, regional educator, NUM Highveld*

How can the country have a youth that 73 per cent don’t have matric. There are many sectors outside that, when you look at MP it’s a province that grows crops, bananas, maize, veggies and so on that can be the same but is that sector going to sustain the standard of living when you close mines? The impact of closing the mines is going to be huge on members and family members.

**Response from Thembisile Mbethe**

Concerning Sipho Dlamini’s comment. He says that the challenge they are facing is that the workers need to be reskilled. Yes, it’s true and I am grateful that he knows that. So, we feel that there is a miscommunication or a communication breakdown between the union and the mineworkers because the mineworkers don’t seem to have information with regards to JET (Just Energy Transition).

So, there is information that the unions are keeping from the workers because if they were given that information then the workers wouldn’t be fighting with us on the ground.

We don’t feel safe anymore on the ground regarding JET because they say we are taking work opportunities away from them. We feel that they are not telling them the truth, coal will eventually come to an end, they can

run away from that but that's where we are headed.

It's important the mines are sealed so that we can continue with our lives. It's important that they tell them, 'guys there is something coming and we want to prepare you for it and not keep the truth from you'. They know the truth, but they are not explaining it to them.

### **Response from Sicelo Masina, re-trenched coal-miner**

I feel ashamed of the unions, I can hear they are talking about saving the mines and unemployment and stuff. I can see that the unions are failing the people, failing the mines, failing everything. And at the end they will come and say – No, we are still on a process. Now we are left without work, without everything because of the unions.

We are struggling and as much as we are struggling there is talk that after the mines, after coal what is going to happen? The comrade is saying that we can talk about skills, if you can take me now and say, 'Okay Sicelo we are going to a certain class to train you.' But as much as that process continues the way that it is, unions please let's comply.

Sisi Thembi is saying that they [the unions] are keeping things from us that they obliged to tell us at the mines. They know and they have had the information for a long time, but they are hiding it because they are benefiting on the side, comrades please let's be transparent.

### **Response from Sipho Dhlamini, Ceppwawu, acting provincial secretary**

I don't want Sicelo to have the understanding that the union is so bad. The

unions are not so bad. We didn't know anything, we cannot hide anything from our own members, we cannot hide from our brothers. We cannot do that.

The person you should blame is rather blame your government, you have put a white monopoly capitalist there, you can blame that one there, not the union, we have been fighting for so long, I don't want you to go with that perception.

You can watch the entire discussion, including inputs from the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), the Steve Tshwete municipality, Middelburg Chamber of Commerce and other parties on You Tube: <https://youtu.be/iF66K41MmC8>

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## **A compact that excludes key participants**

*Sandra Hlungwani asked Mbulaheni Mbodi's view on the Eskom social compact.*

### **What is the Eskom Social Compact?**

This was supposed to be a very inclusively negotiated document that included a social net when dealing with Eskom recovery to ensure a secure and affordable electricity supply. But sadly the NEDLAC process has not been as inclusive as it should have been. NUMSA and SAFTU were not included in this process and this can't be without a negative impact if other views are not considered.

### **How does it protect affected employees?**

The phrase that gets thrown around is Just Energy Transition, which remains largely academic and devoid of pragmatic and practical solutions for the employees in both the coal mines and Eskom. There need to be pathways that talk to energy democracy, decent jobs and livelihoods. All that is seemingly swept under the carpet because the speed of decommissioning of power stations is faster than that of developing pathways and preparing the workers for the transition. Transition is happening largely without

workers but with business, government and international communities in tandem (not forgetting some selected trade unions).



*Mbulaheni Mbodi*

### **What about surrounding communities?**

The Social Compact has not helped to introduce alternative economic activities. We run the risk of having some ghost towns in places where there was coal as the centre that held the local economy together. Elitism in these processes has a habit of filtering to high places, thereby starving the poor

and the working class from proper places to insert their input into what involves them.

### **What is missing from the Social Compact?**

- How loadshedding is being dealt with
- Protection of affected employees and communities
- Eskom debt
- Debt recovery more especially the Municipality Debt
- How the poor and the working class will live in the face of worsening economic challenges of unemployment, and inequality.

The above may be listed and a scratch on the surface approach attempted. What is not there are granular details talking resoundingly to these challenges in very clear terms.

### **Can the document be improved?**

Not by people who were excluded.

Mbulaheni Mbodi is a Numsa shop steward at Eskom and sits on the PCC. Find the full interview [here](#)

# Mining communities under attack

Jenny Grice

Communities resisting attempts by mining companies to dig deep in their areas are increasingly finding that their lives are in danger.

- **Xolobeni**, a rural community on the Eastern Cape coast where 12 villagers who opposed the foreign mining company's attempts to mine on their land were assassinated and leaders still fear for their lives.
- **Somkhele**, a rural community in north eastern KwaZulu Natal where Fikile Ntshangase, one of those refusing the coal mining company's attempts to expand its mine and displace 145 families was "[gunned down in her home](#)" at Ophondweni, near Mtubatuba, on the evening of 22 October 2020.
- **Mabola, Wakkerstroom** where those resisting a coal mining company's efforts to start an underground mine have been intimidated and threatened.

These are just three of many areas targeted. In many instances the communities suffer from high unemployment and little prospect of jobs.

## Mines shatter communities

At a SWOP [webinar](#) in November 2021, academic and environmental activist Jacky Cock spoke of how informants in these areas had told her of how the mines will often promise jobs to the local community where "everyone will own a motor car" and then "they look for fault lines in the community and then fill them with money and shatter the community."

## Existing mines cause harm

"[There is a mine in my area](#)," says attorney Matome Kapa, and head of the activist training and support pro-



*Environmental activist, Fikile Ntshangase, was gunned down in her home while cooking supper. Her 13-year old grandson and two friends were right next to her. (Pic: Rob Symons)*

ject at the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) and the national coordinator for the Mining and Environmental Justice Communities Network of South Africa.

"You might think that my village is well off because of it and that we have high employment levels, thriving businesses, good roads, schools and clinics," says Kapa.

The reality he says is very different. Runoff from the mine poisons streams and rivers; "fine dust causes respiratory illnesses and premature death".

Houses are damaged by daily mine blasts while fertile land has to be given up to mining. And the jobs that mining companies promised rarely materialise. And if community members dare to raise their voices, "they

are threatened, intimidated and silenced".

## Voices will not be silenced

But voices like the Xolobeni activists and Fikile Ntshangase will not be silenced. Others are taking their places right across the country.

"Eco-politics is present now in communities," Mazibuko Jara (executive director of a community-owned rural development project) told the same SWOP webinar.

What's critical now, "if we want to deepen the eco movement from below," he says, are alliances.

If there are no jobs and "we don't build alliances, it's very easy for a carrot to be dangled."

# Toxic capitalism has led to the climate crisis, says academic Jacklyn Cock

*The climate crisis isn't the problem; capitalism gone toxic is, says activist and academic Jacklyn Cock, who plots out where pushback in the form of new 'eco-politics' might offer some solutions. Ufieda HO reports.*

The thread connecting humans with the climate crisis joins in an especially tangled bind at the point where profit turns to greed and capitalism turns to tyranny.

The activist and academic Professor Emeritus Jacklyn Cock highlighted this during a [webinar](#) on November 9. The presentation of her research fo-

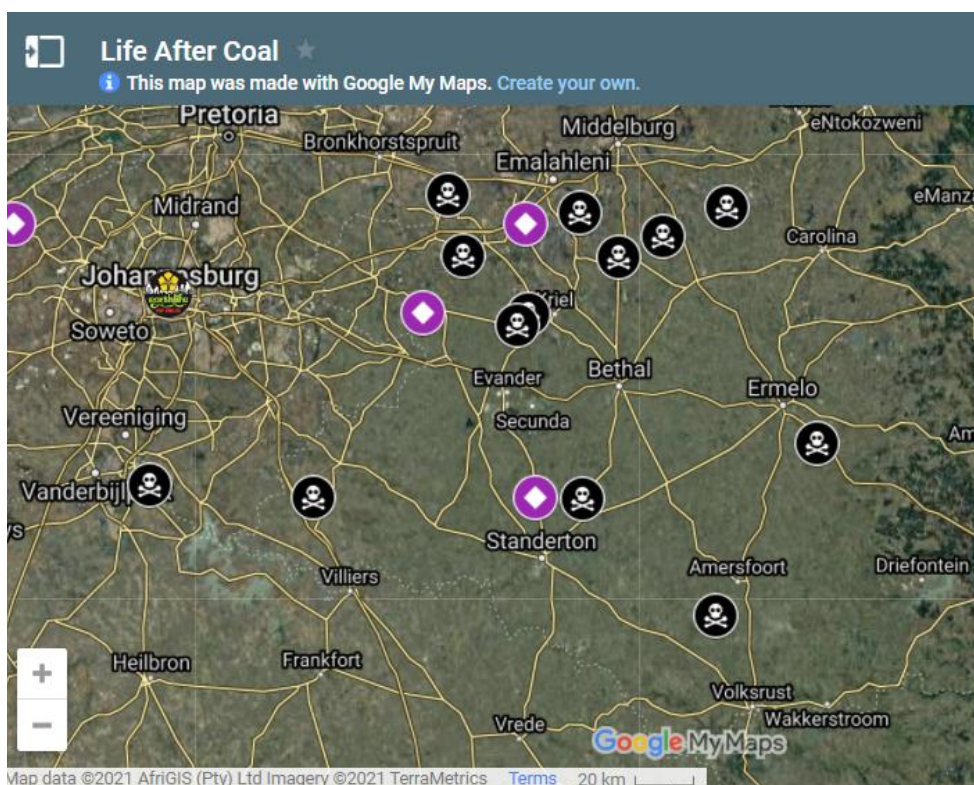
ocused on the impact and complexity in the ongoing legal wrangle over the controversial granting of mining rights in the Mabola Protected Environment, near Wakkerstroom in Mpumalanga, to the Indian-owned mining company Atha-Africa Ventures (now operating as Uthaka Energy) to do underground coal mining there in August 2015.

Cock said: "The driver of the climate crisis is the profit-driven nature of capitalism, and the disregard from people, especially towards workers and nature. Neoliberal capitalism and

the power of particular corporations is the real problem that is facing us in

climate change doom.

The Mabola region is regarded as a critical watershed and important fresh-water source for South Africa. It is also ecologically important for birdlife, especially several species of crane that are endangered. But the decision in 2015 by the then minister of environmental affairs Edna Molewa and the then minister of mineral resources Mosebenzi Zwane to allow Atha-Africa Ventures (now Uthaka Energy) to mine in the region has been called an outrage and challenged.



*The Mabola Protected Area near Wakkerstroom is an important water source for South Africa (Source: CER)*

terms of the immediacy of the climate crisis — not the Anthropocene.”

Her research was presented as part of Wits University’s Society, Work, and Politics Institute “Alternatives to Capitalism” web series.

Cock used the Mabola mining example to demonstrate what stands to be lost for communities and the environment, what props up toxic capitalism and how entrenched systems become society’s norm. In turn, toxic capitalism keeps cycles of consumption and fossil-fuel dependence spinning and with it a faster spiral towards

## Alliance

It’s taken an alliance of eight environmental and civil society organisations to fight the decision through the courts: Earthlife Africa Johannesburg, BirdLife South Africa, Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Bench Marks Foundation, groundWork, Federation for a Sustainable Environment and the Association for Water and Rural Development.

For Cock, the decision by the gov-

ernment to allow mining in an ecologically sensitive region takes South Africa further away from the transition from coal dependence, and deserves to be challenged.

Beyond the environmental impact on this region, which is one of 22 protected areas that supply half of the country's fresh water, there are other questions that need to be asked.

Cock said issues that need to be addressed include:

- Political interference;
- State Capture;
- False promises of jobs and prosperity;
- The deliberate breaking down of social cohesion in affected communities;
- The historical legacy of conservation equating to side-lining local communities through land dispossession and forced removal; and
- Increasing incidences of threats and intimidation to community activists.

“There is a very ugly picture of manipulation of people and resources and a toxic atmosphere linked to a barrage of threats and intimidation from mining corporations,” she said.

The power of corporate muscle, she added, has allowed the mining company to keep the process stalled in the courts — for six years already, also to use social media and PR campaigns to push its agenda and to win political favour that has included attempts to revoke the protected status of the region.

## Eco-politics

But, she said, encouragingly, the Mabola example has also shown key strengths of “new eco-politics”. The alliance of eight organisations has begun to shape new strategies as pushback against corporate bullying and the abuse of state power.

“The struggle and success of the alliance [in the Mabola case] raises important questions for resistance to

coal and other environmental justice struggles, because it involves mobilising the power of judicial activism, empowering local communities, challenging a corrupt and dysfunctional state, disseminating knowledge of coal's pollution of air and water, recognition of the desperation for jobs, especially in areas of high unemployment, challenging the hegemonic discourse of economic growth, combating the power of extractivism and connecting labour and environmental activists in strategic alliances,” Cock said.

In discussion with Cock was Mazibuko Jara, a former chief strategist for the South African Communist Party till 2010 and executive director of a community-owned rural development initiative, Ntinga Ntaba kaNdoda.

## Action needed

Jara said that along with an emphasis on building more ground-up civil society alliances, labour also has been brought into the fold by breaking the jobs and prosperity promises that hardly ever materialise.

Jara said local government had to be strengthened to be more accountable and robust in playing a bigger role in advancing communities in a way that is not dependent on extractive industries or foreign investment and funding.

He said: “Conservation has led to dispossession, so it's going to be very difficult to navigate without sustained organising in a way that really informs, empowers, educates and enables the local community to work out the options, including the implications of coal mining.

“And this is a challenge when the state is not going to look at other pathways to livelihoods or to jobs, or even just the basic question of food for people.

“At the same time, the local state, in theory, is a power to advance community-driven integrated development

planning.”

Cock's webinar presentation took place against the backdrop of COP26 coming to the end of its second week of negotiations in Glasgow. Delegates and their entourages were criticised for only reaching compromises, not fixed carbon-emission targets and consequences for non-compliance; and for doing little more than enlarging their carbon footprints by flying into the Scottish city.

It was also a week of load shedding in South Africa, which reached Stage 4, leaving a panellist unable to take part.

These developments and events, Cock said, speaking to *Maverick Citizen* after her presentation, show very real challenges for new eco-politics.

She said the real costs of putting on events like COP26 had to be counted. Load shedding also demonstrates the slowness in weaning off coal, which in the hands of a dysfunctional government is unable to be managed and transformed.

She added that even the announcement of \$8.5-billion from the US, UK and the European Union that was made at COP26 to help South Africa to make a quicker transition from coal to renewable energy has come with serious concerns that the money does “not end up funding someone's daughter-in-law's nail salon”.

“Ultimately we will have to learn to live more simply by consuming less and conserving more. We have to share what we have and learn to be in solidarity with others. We have to unlearn selfishness and the competitiveness that capitalism teaches us and we have to face up to the fact that we are complicit in the climate crisis.

“The issue of our time is neoliberal capitalism — the climate crisis is a symptom of this and because this is the problem we cannot look to neoliberal capitalism for the solutions,” she said.

This article first appeared in the [Daily Maverick](#) November 11 2021

# To abandon coal, first understand how it is governed

*Neva Makgetla*

Every woman has had visitors who sloganeer militantly in the lounge about women's oppression, but won't venture into the kitchen to help do the dishes. Theorising gender relations in the abstract is obviously necessary, but changing the world requires that we use the theory to diagnose the specific problems we face, and then act on the diagnosis.

Unfortunately, the discourse on South Africa's minerals-energy complex often seems mired in the abstract.

[Sam Ashman](#) usefully shapes a broad understanding of how collaboration between the state and big mining companies historically entrenched mining, especially coal. To inform practical policies today, however, we also need a more detailed understanding of the costs, risks and benefits of the minerals-energy complex for different socioeconomic groups. Even more, we need to analyse the public and private sector systems that secure its reproduction. Only then can we develop effective interventions to change direction.

Consider, for instance, the factors that promote continued dependence on coal. In many ways, the [coal value chain](#) is the core of the minerals-energy complex. It comprises the coal mines and refineries led by Eskom and Sasol, as well as the aluminium and ferroalloys refineries (including Mozal, the joint smelter project in Mozambique) that use around 15% of Eskom's electricity.

As a whole, the coal value chain contributes around 5% of South Africa's GDP and exports, although only

1% of its employment. But it fuels over 80% of the national electricity grid and is critical for four Mpumalanga municipalities – eMalahleni (Witbank), Steve Tshwete (Middelburg), Govan Mbeki (Secunda) and Msukaligwa (Ermelo).

These towns account for only 2% of the national population but 4% of the GDP, 70% of coal mining and almost 15% of electricity and petrochemicals.

## Cost versus benefit

This is the thorniest kind of economic policy: where the benefits of change – in this case, a shift to cleaner energy and development of more equitable, labour-intensive industries – are huge but widely spread and often intangible, while the costs are visible and concentrated.

Already, for most South Africans, the costs of coal outweigh the benefits. Those costs take the form of increasingly intense droughts and floods, the risk of tariffs on South African exports, and the escalating cost and unreliability of coal-fuelled electricity. Households and businesses that can afford it are fleeing to renewable generation, which promises lower costs and fewer interruptions than Eskom's coal-based supply.

Improving the competitiveness of the national electricity supply can go a long way toward supporting small businesses, greater employment and more dynamic industrialisation.

But the transition away from coal will also impose costs.

Most obviously, the new energy

systems require large up-front investments in transmission and grid management as well as generation. Like any shift to a more productive technology, the transition also entails a loss of capital and livelihoods in now-obsolete processes. The mining companies will have to write off both their capital investments and coal reserves. Most of the international mining conglomerates have already sold their coal mines pre-emptively to local interests. Downstream refineries may be able to avoid similar write-offs by investing in alternative energy sources and feedstocks.

“Four Mpumalanga municipalities account for only 2% of the national population

but 4% of the GDP, 70% of coal mining and almost 15% of electricity and petrochemicals...

In a decade or so, the 90 000

coal miners, almost all in Mpumalanga, will likely face downsizing. The coal towns will

lose their central industry, spelling trouble for small companies serving the mines serving

the mines and their communities.”

Starting in a decade or so, however, the 90 000 coal miners, almost all in Mpumalanga, will likely face downsizing. The coal towns will lose their central industry, spelling trouble for small companies serving the mines and their communities.

The costs of the transition have so far been higher than needed because government systems have long been skewed to favour coal use. This is a problem of both the structures of the state and its specific decision-making systems.

### Disjointed perspectives

Government oversight over the coal value chain is fragmented between a dozen departments, the provinces of Mpumalanga and Limpopo, Mpumalanga's coal towns and several state-owned companies. Of these, only the Department of Environmental Affairs has an explicit mandate to promote clean energy, and it has no direct authority over the pricing and use of coal.

This disjointed system inevitably leads to rifts between state agencies. Most notably, the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy insists that South Africa cannot afford to write off its coal reserves and that they are irreplaceable as a baseload for the national grid. Other government institutions generally see the phasing out of coal as unavoidable, given its loss of competitiveness and growing unreliability as well as the escalating cost of emissions for the economy as a whole.

The lack of coherence in state structures makes it harder to re-engineer decision-making systems that were structured historically to favour coal use. A few examples illustrate the problem.

### Energy department

When the energy department makes decisions on the national electricity supply, it does not have to show how

they align with national emissions targets. Nor does it have to publish evidence on the costs and benefits of different options for businesses and households.

That calculation should take into account not only the direct costs of generation and transmission, but also the cost of emissions and other pollution, the growing unreliability and escalating tariffs of Eskom's supply, and the impact of global technological trends on generation costs.

State-owned companies historically helped build the minerals-energy complex. To date, Eskom remains locked into coal because the energy department has barred it from large-scale renewable generation.

Meanwhile, Transnet reaps around a fifth of its revenues from its export coal lines. It has no incentive to move out of these investments as long as it does not have to pay the full cost of the related emissions.

Then there is the proposal to build a new 3.5GW, \$5 billion coal-fuelled power station at the Musina Makhado\* special economic zone (SEZ) in Limpopo. The SEZ will be owned by Chinese companies – the first private one in the country – and centre on metals refineries. It is endorsed by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and Limpopo's provincial government, ensuring that it will enjoy a range of government incentives.

### Ignoring national imperatives

Yet if the plant is built, it will effectively render national emissions targets impossible. Neither the mandate nor the key performance indicators of the trade and industry department or Limpopo province require them to help reach emissions targets, or contribute to a just energy transition.

Nor are they required to show the likely impact on jobs and equality of investing in capital-intensive refineries compared with putting the same resources into more labour-intensive

**“Transnet reaps around a fifth of its revenues from its export coal lines. It has no incentive to move out of these investments as long as it does not have to pay the full cost of the related emissions.”**

clusters and businesses outside of the minerals-energy complex.

An effective policy to diversify away from coal has to start with clarity around its governance. The first step would be to translate national targets for reducing emissions and improving economic equality into consistent mandates and performance indicators for all of the relevant state agencies. In the longer run, restructuring should ensure that the responsibilities for transformation are aligned with authority and resources.

More fundamentally, South Africans need to understand both the benefits and costs of depending on mining, and in particular coal. Too often, decision-making systems in both the market and government encourage officials to avoid the risks of innovation and ignore the costs of promoting capital-intensive minerals and energy activities rather than more labour-intensive and innovative industries. The ultimate price is that the soaring costs of emissions are criminally undervalued, even as the climate crisis intensifies.

[Neva Makgetla](#) is a senior economist at [TIPS](#).

This article first appeared in [New Frame](#) 31 August 2021.

[\*See the [story](#) in the Mail and Guardian, November 18 2021. The Chinese government will no longer fund the Musina-Makhado coal-fired power station and that instead it will fund a green energy power station—ed]

# Home is where the power is: The Saltuba Cooperative

*If every one of the 16 million households in South Africa put solar panels on their rooftops, they could supply all the electricity needed to power the country, say Patrick Brennan and Janet Cherry.*

At the COP 26 meeting in Glasgow in November 2021 it became clear that a transition away from fossil fuels – in particular coal and oil – is necessary. But there is widespread concern about job losses in the coal mining and other industries that are dependent on fossil fuels. So far, it is mainly the big ‘green energy’ companies that have benefitted from government’s energy procurement programme. Because electricity from PV solar is now cheaper to produce than electricity from coal, it is time to look at how workers and working-class communities can benefit from this transition.

Government regulations have changed recently to allow for municipalities to buy electricity from local producers, and for companies and institutions to generate their own electricity through solar or wind power. In other words, they do not all have to go through Eskom and the ‘grid’ (which is how electricity is transported and supplied to municipalities, homes and factories) can be decentralised. This provides a big oppor-

tunity for socially-owned and community-owned renewable energy projects which can generate electricity and sell it to municipalities or to local businesses and institutions like schools and hospitals.

## Starting small

One example of this is the Saltuba Community Primary Cooperative in Kwazakhele Township, in Gqeberha. This exciting pilot project is situated on a ‘gap tap’ in the old working-class

township of Kwazakhele. The ‘gap taps’ are municipal land which is zoned as public open space, in between the municipal houses that were built in the 1950s.

The Saltuba Cooperative was set up as a pilot of the Transition Township project, an action research project of the Department of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University. The idea of the Transition Township project is that existing land and infrastructure can be used by residents to

generate income and sustainable livelihoods. This includes using the roofs of the houses for water capture, the land for growing vegetables, and the electricity grid for selling electricity from PV solar panels which are put up in a distributed solar array.

The baseline research was conducted by a community research team funded by the NIHSS (National Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities) as a Catalytic Research Project. In the pilot project the renewable energy installation takes the form of a ‘car port’ structure with 15 PV panels forming a roof – but the panels can be put on the roofs of houses or bigger buildings like schools, or



*Saltuba co-op members erecting a food tunnel on the gap tap*



on the top of shipping containers. For the pilot project, a grant from a local trust, the Ezethu Trust, was raised to buy the solar panels and other inputs.

The residents of the houses around the solar array form a primary cooperative, in which they are all equal members and decide democratically on the distribution of income from the sale of electricity. While the cooperative is not an employer as such, and does not aim to provide 'decent work' to its members, there is some temporary work involved in putting up the structures and some ongoing work in maintaining them, providing security etc. The cooperative members decide themselves on who is going to do each job and what they should be paid.

This is a very small project with generating capacity of only 5 kW, mounted on a car-port structure and feeding directly into the municipal grid. The installation operated for 20 months and produced 8 800 kWh of electricity (average 444 kWh per month). At the current pre-paid price per kWh (R2.18) in Nelson Mandela Bay this amounts to R19 314 or approximately R966 per month. These numbers are despite the impact of load-shedding, which occurred at various times during the period (when the grid is down Solar PV production also stops unless there is a battery system in place). In terms of environmental benefits, it is the equivalent of removing 3.5 tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere or planting 104 trees.

## Challenges

However, there were challenges from the **municipality** side. It has been difficult to get a municipal account for the cooperative, even though it is registered, as it does not own the land (which is municipal land) and so the electricity department has to date not been able to install a smart meter to measure the amount of electricity generated.

While the residents have taken

ownership of the gap tap and production facilities on the gap tap space, and have voluntarily provided security, two of the solar panels were stolen in August 2021 which brought a temporary halt to the electricity generation.

A further challenge is that the municipality informed us recently that they have zoned some of the gap taps

community-owned renewable energy, which is decentralized production of electricity based on PV solar, and feeding into the local (i.e. municipal) grid, is the answer to the need for a 'just transition'.

If the gap tap at Saltuba had a 50 kW installation it would be able to generate approximately R10 000 per month for 25 years or more. If the



*The carport with 15 PV panels that generated 5kw of electricity that was fed straight into the municipal grid*

for housing development and plan to sell them off to private individuals or developers.

From the **cooperative** side, they have had challenges in opening a business bank account, an experience common to working class people who do not have a steady source of income. There are also unrealistic expectations of employment and income from the project. It has taken a long time to begin to give some benefit to the members.

## Community-owned renewables can ensure a Just Transition

But despite these challenges, there is a strong argument that this model,

whole gap tap area was used and a 100 kW system was installed, it could improve household incomes substantially. As the overheads for maintaining the system, once it is established, are very low, this money will go almost entirely as cash income to the members of the Saltuba cooperative.

There are 120 gap taps in Kwazakhele township alone, and the community researchers of the Transition Township project calculated that:

- Initial R1.5 million investment (R60 000 per household) generates approximately R600 000 per annum in revenue (R24 000 per household) for 25 years
- The model assumes that a portion of this amount (R125 000) will be

used to cover the marginal cost to run and maintain the installation and that a substantial surplus (about R18 000) will be available for distribution to each participating household (after fixed costs e.g. loan repayments etc.).

- Average household income in the area is approximately R30 000 per annum so once a payback period is completed this has the potential to raise average household income by almost two thirds.
- Note: this additional income is received as a dividend based on household ownership of a share in the co-operative which owns (controls) the means of production NOT in wages for employment (although there will be some labour required for the supply, construction, operation and maintenance of the installation).
- In this context improved productivity using new technologies becomes desirable as it leads to an increase in the surplus available for distribution or re-investment.

### Household production

Some critics think that this model is only going to meet a small part of the country's energy needs. Our research shows otherwise: in theory household production could meet 83% of the whole country's planned energy needs.

The current installed capacity (coal, nuclear, renewables etc.) is 52,104 MW. The latest Integrated Resource Plan proposes installed capacity rising to 77,834 MW by 2030 (with most of the increase coming from renewable sources). If all 16 million households participate in producing electricity, the installed capacity would be 64,792 MW – i.e. 124% of current installed capacity and 83% of planned capacity for 2030. The table below shows how much electricity can be produced by PV solar at each level (from the gaptap cooperative up to national level) and what its current value is in Rands. (See **Table** below)

### Sustainable economy

Moreover, we see this model as working in an integrated and sustainable local economy. Such an economy would use existing unused factories, buildings and infrastructure to promote a circular economy which prioritises localised production for local markets.

One example in Kwazakhele is the Swartkops Power Station, a coal-fired power station that was decommissioned over 20 ago. It could be the hub of new industries based on renewable energy, food production and processing, and manufacture from recycled materials. Such a development would provide employment to a working-class which is without work.

Patrick Brennan and Janet Cherry are part of the Transition Township project at Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha

	Households	Installed capacity (MW)	Production (kWh per annum)	Rand value of production per annum at current price
RSA	16,198,000	64,792	97,188,000,000	R184,657,200,000
Eastern Cape	1,667,000	6,668	10,002,000,000	R19,003,800,000
NMB	368,520	1,474	2,211,120,000	R4,201,128,000
KwaZakhele	25,000	100	150,000,000	R285,000,000
Ward 22	3,700	15	22,200,000	R42,180,000
Saltuba Co-op (assuming a 100kw system is installed)	25	0.1	150,000	R285,000

**Table:** Potential Community-Owned Renewable Energy PV Solar production and value

# COP 26 through workers' eyes

*There were some positives for workers at COP26, says Lebogang Mulaisi.*

COP26 in Glasgow was envisaged as the COP that would deliver on the needs of the world and make major steps towards implementing ambitious climate policies. 2021 was set to be the year for governments to align climate, economic, social, and labour demands. These aspirations have partially been realized with an agreement to reduce emissions by 45% by 2030 and the breakthrough agreement between the United States (US) and China. The two major emitters have committed to effective implementation in order to address the climate crisis. The two nations intend to cooperate on:

- regulatory frameworks and environmental standards related to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases in the 2020s;
- maximizing the societal benefits of the clean energy transition;
- policies to encourage decarbonization and electrification of end-use sectors;
- key areas related to the circular economy, such as green design and renewable resource utilization; and
- deployment and application of technology such as Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) and direct air capture.

More specifically for the African continent, South Africa has received support from the European Union, Germany, France, The United Kingdom (UK) and the US to move from its heavy reliance on coal to cleaner sources of energy. The countries, in a watershed climate finance agreement announced at COP 26, have pledged



*Lebogang Mulaisi with other trade union representatives at COP26*

R131 billion over the next three to five years in the form of grants and highly concessionary loans.

This partnership provides much needed finance, to finance pathways to a just transition. The centre of this partnership is the importance of a Just Transition, which includes support for workers and communities affected by the transition away from coal and enables the creation of quality green jobs. For the transition to be just, decarbonisation must be implemented in a manner that promotes and sustains employment, livelihoods and economic inclusion for historically marginalised communities and sectors of our society. Government will establish a joint taskforce that will be tasked to take forward the partnership over the coming months.

Climate finance is a key enabler for job creation in a just transition. Dealing with the climate emergency is an opportunity to create good and decent jobs. This means that policymakers not only need to talk about the jobs that will be created, but they also need to engage with the organisations that

represent workers in order to guarantee that labour rights are respected and decent work opportunities are created. Social planning for a just transition must recognise the past legacies of economic exclusion for youth and woman and persons with disabilities with job opportunities tailored towards those that have been previously economically excluded. Social plans must detail access to training and social protection guarantees for workers whose jobs are negatively impacted by the transition. Employment plans need to be a foundation of climate plans.

Access to finance and technology transfer for developing countries is essential to address climate change. COP 26 president Alok Sharma suggested that trillions of dollars were needed to meet developing countries climate goals and that a partnership between global leaders was essential to achieving this. Financing cannot become another form of indebtedness for the countries of the global south and access to technology a new form of dependency.

The commitments of developed countries must be effective and based on dialogue, respecting the autonomy of countries to define their policies. COP26 cannot ignore the systemic flaws of our current economic model, which jeopardises any effective climate policy. Providing climate finance should focus on changing the production and consumption model, not only on decarbonisation.

**Lebogang Mulaisi** is Labour Market Policy Co-ordinator in COSATU's Policy Unit and sits on the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)

# Public transport can reduce emissions and inequality

*While public transport was largely absent from the official conference programme of COP26, on the civil society fringe, trade unions, city mayors and allies were powering ahead. James Bartholomeusz reports on a rare glimpse of progress at the Conference.*

In the aftermath of the Glasgow climate summit, headlines around the world are doom-laden with the failure of national negotiators to reach a deal to limit emissions. While in many areas the outlook seems bleak, there is at least one where we can mark COP26 as a serious step forward. The emerging consensus on public transport is something for which we can be thankful.

Taken together, transport accounts for around a quarter of all global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Decarbonising the transport sectors is therefore a top priority in limiting temperature rises to 1.5°C, but this simple prescription can be misleading. Merely electrifying our existing transport system will not go far enough, and not only because there is no clear way of meeting the massively increased demand for electricity from renewable sources. All around the world, the transport *status quo* embeds severe inequalities – between women and men, ethnic minorities and majorities, working- and middle-class people. Capping our ambition at electric vehicles will just transpose today’s injustices into the age of net-zero.

That is why the [International Transport Workers’ Federation](#) (ITF), along with our affiliated unions and global partners like [C40 Cities](#), is putting forward an alternative vision. We are calling for a dramatic increase in public investment in public transport systems worldwide, ultimately to establish high-quality, efficient and integrated public transport in every city.

Expanding public transport will take us a long way towards both reducing overall transport emissions and closing the gulf of inequality between city residents.

New [research](#) produced by ITF and C40 in the lead-up to COP



*Local campaigners demonstrated for free public transport outside COP26 in Glasgow (Pic: Michal Rozporski)*

demonstrates that public transport investment can also be a substantial job-creator. Investment in just five major cities could create 1.3 million jobs directly and indirectly, both within cities and along supply chains. We want every one of those to be a good, formal, unionised job, providing opportunities for young and women workers and spreading wealth more evenly across our societies.

In the official COP proceedings, Transport Day was overshadowed by the publication of meagre draft decisions from the entire conference. Outside the secure zone, however, others were making their voices heard. Local campaigners demonstrated for free public transport.

ITF and C40 coordinated the launch of a [global coalition state-](#)

[ment](#) on public transport, in which mayors of 15 major cities – including Istanbul, Lagos, London, Jakarta, Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco – committed to supporting an expansion in public transport as a means to tackle the climate crisis. And at a virtual event hosted in the office of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, around 300 participants joined to hear workers, passengers, union leaders, mayors and campaigners discuss the changes required to make our public transport fit for the future.

This is clearly only the start – it will take much more than words on a piece of paper to effect the change we need. Nevertheless, an unprecedented coalition has come together to back practical steps to tackle environmental and social challenges together. Regardless the official decisions of COP26, that coalition of unions and mayors can now get to work in making public transport a social justice solution to climate breakdown.

Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town are already part of C40. We hope that South African unions will join us!

As Eric Phumlani, a SATAWU official says: “What most workers and the commuters in [South Africa] want is public transport that is reliable, that is sustainable, that is affordable, [and which provides] better and more jobs for the employees.”

James Bartholomeusz is Urban Transport Coordinator for the International Transport Workers’ Federation

# Informal workers empower themselves around climate change

*Renaldi Prinsloo*

The International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA) is running a 3-year on-line project for mainly informal workers on the effects of climate change on the poor.

In 2021, 33 participants from three organisations in three countries took part: the Malawi Union for Informal Sector (MUFIS), Alliance for Zambia Informal Economy Associations (AZIEA) and Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA). Fourteen of the participants are females.

The methods used enable participants to independently and confidently pursue campaigns relying on each other working collectively and taking collective action.

In the first year, participants learn about participatory learning methods and participatory research methods (in an online or offline study circle) and develop education materials for raising awareness on "The effect of climate change on the poor" within their constituency.

The following year, the study circles identify existing alliances and the potential for improving these alliances

through organising a concrete activity involving different kinds of organisations.

In the final year, they contribute to the campaign for climate change through lobbying or engaging a broader range of stakeholders and prepare statements, demands and/or host a forum for dialogue on solutions or improvements that need to be made.

In the process participants learn and understand different strategies for organising, online and digital tools for education, communication skills (how to talk with organisations and stakeholders) and participatory learning and research methods.

IFWEA supported the three unions with an online study circle guide including discussion points and online activities for participants to complete. In some cases, there was a big challenge due to the divide in digital skills, access and ability.

For many it was their very first online education experience ever. "In our study circle, young people trained old on how to use phones," said one participant.

Through participatory research

done in each of the countries, another participant said, "it became clear for us that climate change has affected many lives in Malawi, especially informal workers." Participants from the other two countries had the same experience and agreed that there is a major lack of education on climate change in their countries. Each study circle then came up with some popular education materials such as short video clips, poems (see the poem below) and articles to use as awareness raising tools.

They developed a plan of action to extend their awareness raising campaigns into 2022, especially through media channels.

Check [here](#) to learn more about the IFWEA study circle program and online course or contact [renaldi@lrs.org.za](mailto:renaldi@lrs.org.za)

Renaldi Prinsloo is an educator for IFWEA



*Some of the participants from the different countries*

## CLIMATE CHANGE

*June Chadenga, Zimbabwe*

Leading the fight against climate change  
Lots of obstacles that we will face  
Global warming is coming soon  
but you still have the Sun and Moon.  
What about our plants and trees?  
Mother earth needs some peace  
On top of trees are some honey bees  
Lovely birds sweetly sing

Global warming might be near  
Climate change is already here  
No one enjoys the burning Sun  
Avoid disturbing the natural balance  
There's a lot of things we can't resist  
The lovely earth that we should embrace and kiss

Let us save our mother nature  
Let us make it in perfect structure.  
Life is pleasant here on earth  
Don't let disaster become her birth

# Extreme weather batters home-based workers' livelihoods

*Trade unions cannot ignore the plight of informal workers who could face more threats to their livelihoods from climate change than formal workers, says Chris Bonner.*

Goma Darji is a middle-aged woman working as a piece rate garment worker from home. Today she's known as a home-based worker (HBW). An alcoholic husband, domestic violence at home and the passing away of her only son, her life has always been a struggle.

However, she used to manage somehow with her tailoring work earning between 10000 to 20000 Nepal Rupees (86 to 171 USD) per month. Now she faces a lot of challenges due to climate change.

*"Living in a semi pucca home with a tin-roof sheet, it is so hot inside that working in afternoons is very difficult in summers. And if I use fan more than [sic] the electricity bill will be a high, which I can't afford. Added to this is that we have now started facing frequent flooding in monsoons. My house is flooded and often damaged so I can't work much during that season too.*

*"The broker uses this as an excuse to further delay payments, always citing flooding as a cause of delay. In winters, we used to work outside but now there is a lot of haze due to pollution. Thus my overall productivity has reduced all-round the year. With more and more*



*Home-based workers Rookmani Ram Naryan (left) and her daughter, Kavita Harshresh Yemul, who live in Ahmedabad, India, spend many hours each day on the floor of their small home hand rolling Indian-style cigarettes called bidi. Rookmani, Kavita and Omar Darji, face dwindling incomes because of extreme weather such as monsoons and very hot temperatures (Photo Credit: Paula Bronstein/ Getty Images Reportage)*

*women taking up these works already the piece rate has decreased and now that my productivity has also decreased my earnings will also decline."*

## **Informal economy workers dominant globally**

According to the ILO, workers like Darji in the informal economy make up more than 60% of the global workforce, i.e. two billion workers.

Addressing COP26 delegates in

the Glasgow conference, Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary said,

*"We all know we are in a race against time for a sustainable future for both people and the planet.*

*Trade unions are committed to climate ambition designed as a Just Transition - there must be no stranded workers and no stranded communities."* (Emphasis added)

The Just Transition promoted by the international trade union movement, must not forget about informal workers like Darji. These workers and



*Bhavna Ben Ramesh lives in Ahmedabad, India and sews handmade purses out of her home. HBWs like her are finding it more and more difficult to work the same number of hours because of increasing high temperatures (Photo Credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images Reportage)*

their communities must not end up being “stranded”.

HBWs are perhaps the most vulnerable of all workers. They produce goods or services from within their own homes or in nearby premises. This working-poor workforce, a majority being women, often termed the “invisible workforce”, is largely unrecognised by governments and employers. Their work is insecure; they have low incomes; are excluded from most social protection measures and many live in poorly constructed homes with limited basic services.

During the pandemic, a study carried out by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) found that [HBWs](#) were the hardest hit group amongst a sample of workers in the informal economy including domestic workers, street and market vendors and waste pickers. Their incomes dropped dramatically and were the slowest to recover.

### Raising the visibility and voice of HBWs

Darji’s experience is just one of the stories that HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) - a regional HBW organisation comprising 60 affiliates across South Asia - has gathered. Through household surveys and focus group discussions (FGD) conducted with HNSA affiliates in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, they found that livelihoods of HBWs are already affected by adverse climate factors such as increased heat and extreme water events including flooding and droughts.

Their study titled, “*Impact of Climate Change on Urban Home-based Workers in South Asia*”, is HNSA’s first step to ensure that HBWs are included in a Just Transition by raising their visibility and voice in relation to climate change challenges they face now and potentially in the future.

The World Bank predicts ever worsening conditions for these countries: temperatures and annual rainfall

are expected to rise significantly in all three countries; tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal may increase with a likely increase in sea level causing flooding; in Nepal winters are projected to be drier and monsoon summers wetter resulting in more frequent summer floods and winter droughts.

Given that Asia and the Pacific account for 65% of HBWs worldwide and with HBWs accounting for 24% of total women’s employment in South Asia, the inclusion of this constituency in any climate change and just transition strategies is essential.

### HBWs’ observations about climate change

In HNSA’s research, 83% of the HBWs reported observing a rise in temperature over the past 10 years during summer months and that the number of hot weather days had increased.

More than half reported observing changes in rainfall patterns, including an increase in heavy and/or irregular

rainfall days and unseasonal rains. A participant in an FGD in Lalitpur, India, noted that:

*“Monsoon season usually starts from June/July but this year it started earlier in April/May and in excessive amounts compared to last year. This increase has resulted in flooding. Also, there is a high intensity of rainfall in short durations.”*

Additionally, 48% reported an increase in storms and cyclones, most distinct in Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Bhaktapur (Nepal). This data from Dhaka is not surprising considering that the city faces frequent storms and cyclones.

### **Impact of Climate Change on HBWs**

Adverse climate trends and events all have an impact on the livelihoods of HBWs. Most of them reported a decrease in income from home-based work in the last five-year period. While the impact of Covid-19 and the resultant lockdown has added to this, around a quarter of the responses attributed decreased productivity of HBWs as one of the major causes and climate change a key contributor.

The rise in temperatures during the summer months means decreased working time, *“Earlier I could make 10 pieces per hour but now I can make only 4 or 5 due to extreme heat inside the house,”* said an FGD participant from Bhaktapur, Nepal. Hot weather also leads to spoilage of goods, for example for HBWs producing food.

Unseasonal rains, flooding and water logging lead to loss of raw materials and finished goods.

Climate change, especially extreme heat, also affects the health of HBWs and their families. A number of HBWs reported that someone in the family had suffered from heat stroke in the last few years; and around one third reported that they or their families had been affected by water (diarrhea, cholera and typhoid) or vector (malaria, dengue) borne diseases. Being ill or caring for others who are ill, all reduce working time and

productivity.

### **Vulnerability**

A number of factors specific to HBWs increase their vulnerability to climate change: the key factor being that their home is also their workplace. Most live in inadequate housing like Darji, with homes that are vulnerable to flooding and water logging during monsoons. Flooding and leaking roofs cause damage to equipment, raw materials and finished products. Paying for repairs is difficult in the absence of a stable income. Houses lack insulation and are subject to extremes of temperature.

Inadequate services such as lack of water connections, regular waste removal, stable and affordable electricity connections all add to their difficulties. An FGD participant from Ahmedabad, India pointed out that *“The high need for electricity in monsoons, when they cannot work outside results in increased electricity bills up to INR200 to 250, thus half of the 500 per month that they generally earn from part-time work goes into paying for the same.”*

Working at home and being a woman means that unpaid care work reduces the hours available for paid work or extends the working day late into the night. Around 47% of the HBWs surveyed reported an increase in their unpaid care work, some of more than two hours a day. They cited an increased burden of caring for the ill, followed by time and effort to fetch water and manage food stocks as major reasons.

It is important not to forget that the global affects the local. HBWs are found at the bottom end of global garment supply chains. Many decisions in the garment sector are made based on weather forecasts, and climate change and abnormal weather patterns influence consumers' clothing behavior.

This affects production and sale of fashion products, making for quick design changes and short lead times.

The fluctuations in demand are immediately transferred to the bottom rung of the supply chain, affecting the HBWs directly. Work security and incomes are/will be affected by the impact of climate change in the source and market countries and along the product supply chains.

### **How to respond?**

Low incomes and lack of social protection measures make HBWs vulnerable to any kind of shocks and affect their ability to respond and recover. In order to cope with the effects of climate change many have had to resort to extreme measures such as changing their homes and/or changing their livelihoods. Some sold assets to cope with health care costs brought about by water and vector borne diseases.

The study found that knowledge of climate change adaptation solutions amongst home-based workers is low. It recommends that work be carried out in various ways and at various levels: communication and awareness generation, networking and multi-stakeholder partnership development, scientific knowledge transfer, exploration and promotion of adaptation solutions.

Different actors need to be involved: government, civil society organisations, academics and researchers, climate change advocates, networks and donors. Most important is the informed participation of HBW organisations. This includes local associations as well as regional organisations such as HomeNet South Asia, and the global organisation HomeNet International which have a critical role to play in the advocacy needed at regional and global levels.

Only in this way will HBWs like Goma Darji not be left stranded.

Chris Bonner is a Wiego Advisor and the former director of its Organization and Representation Programme



# Recognise reclaimers now!

*“No more coffee and futile engagements around a boardroom table,” says African Reclaimers Organisation’s, Luyanda Hlatshwayo.*

Reclaimer integration in South Africa comes at a time where reclaimers are starting to properly organise themselves. With the growing number of unemployed, which currently sits at 44.4% including discouraged job seekers, an estimated 85 000 working class people have been able to sustain their livelihoods through collecting recyclables across the country. As a result of Covid-19 and job losses, reclaiming has seen an influx of people collecting and selling recyclables to put food on the table.

The collection system is very informal: one only needs hard work and dedication to do it. No identity document is needed, no interview and no boss. To an outsider, the system seems informal and uncontrolled, yet it accounts for 80 to 90% of post-consumer packaging collected for recycling, according to the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). This is an indication that this informal system is a well-oiled machine that produces recycling rates that the formal systems have struggled to achieve.

For the average reclaimer, integration is a big gamble for us depending on how the rest of society defines the word integration. Policy-makers lack of consideration for the person on the ground can be seen through the unintended consequences of their integration programmes thus far.

For example, the City of Johannesburg and Pikitup’s Separation at Source (S@S) programmes employed EPWP workers in cooperatives. They knew nothing about reclaiming. This had dire consequences for reclaimers who were already working in those areas. These existing reclaimers had to compete with trucks, forcing them to sleep over in parks in suburbs so they could get to the bins first. This also

meant the incomes of reclaimers in these areas decreased by up to 60%.

The benefits of integration are abundant but it also has the potential to displace the reclaimers who have been doing this work for decades.

The best first step to stop this displacement from continuing is to organise reclaimers. African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) is a democratic, reclaimer-led organisation which was



*Part of the ARO team of recyclers involved in the pilot project*

formed by reclaimers. Through the organisation, reclaimers are able to define what integration means to them and start working towards this through direct collaboration with residents, communities, schools, local depots and industries.

Separation of materials by households, educating of residents on what is recyclable, provision of PPE to reclaimers, access to materials, sorting spaces, logistics and paying reclaimers a service fee for the materials have been a main focus of ARO’s work.

Through proper integration and recognition of the work reclaimers do, with provision of infrastructure, a service fee and logistic support, more can be achieved. This may sound optimistic but both government and industry have the capacity to facilitate. The only form of integration that is sustainable thus far has organically formed in communities with resi-

dents’ associations, industry and civil society.

## Pilot project

Through collaboration with these stakeholders, ARO is piloting a reclaimer integration model working directly with residents in Brixton, Auckland Park and Bordeaux in Johannesburg once a week. The company, Unilever, pays reclaimers a service fee of 50c per kg on all the material that they collect. Reclaimers collect on average between 120 – 350kg per day, so this is giving them an extra R60 – R175 for that day’s collecting.

We hope to get other companies like Unilever, or those using recycled paper or glass to come in on projects like this. And we hope to present this model to the City so it or other cities can use it.

Unfortunately, there has not been any proper interest from the City of Johannesburg, just a lot of coffee and futile engagements around a boardroom table. The City is still holding on to a cooperative system that is xenophobic as it excludes foreign nationals without documentation and displaces reclaimers who have been doing this work for decades.

We would love to work **with** the city, not for the city. The South African recycling industry is powered by a proper working informal system that needs to be recognised and organised, not formalised and we are ready to have meaningful engagements to make this happen.

Luyanda Hlatshwayo is a reclaimer and committee member of ARO

# A just transition to a sustainable food system

*While transforming the energy sector is viewed as the core of the just transition, transforming the food system is equally important, says **Brittany Kesselman**.*

Transforming the food system is a critical part of the just transition. We tend to think of the energy sector as the core of the just transition, but an examination of the contribution of the food system to climate change, its overall unsustainability as well as the injustice of it, shows how important the food system is to this change.

Further, more holistic definitions of the just transition, such as that of the [Climate Justice Alliance](#), show that it incorporates many sectors. They say: “Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to *shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy*. This means approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and waste-free. The transition itself must be just and equitable; redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations...” (emphasis added).

If a just transition involves a shift to a low-carbon, waste-free, regenerative economy, then the food system must be fundamentally transformed.

First, what do we mean by “the [food system](#)?” It can be understood as “i) the activities, actors and institutions who grow, process, distribute, acquire, consume and dispose of food and how they interact with other systems and actors, and ii) the outcomes of these activities contributing to food security”. This means everything and everyone involved in food production, processing, distribu-

tion, consumption and disposal, from the manufacturers of agricultural inputs like fertiliser, to farmers and farmworkers, to the big food manufacturing companies and retailers as well as the small-scale agro-processors and food vendors, through to every one of us as food consumers.

## **The global industrial food system: unsustainable, unhealthy, unjust**

The current food system can be characterised as a global, industrial food system. At each stage of the value chain, a few large multinational [corporations tend to dominate](#). This is especially true in terms of agro-chemical inputs, seeds, processing of grains and other commodity crops, food and beverage manufacturing, as well as the supermarket sector.

In this food system, food is produced as a commodity to sell, rather than being viewed as a basic human right. The general trend is toward larger and larger farms, using mechanised production and high levels of agro-chemical inputs to grow monocultures (only one type of crop).

These large farms are integrated into global value chains, in which agricultural commodities move around the world for processing and retail. As a result of this global interconnectedness, these food chains are vulnerable to shocks, as we saw during [COVID-19 lockdowns](#).

## **GHG emissions in the agri-food chain**

According to recent research by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), [31 per cent](#) of human-caused greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions originate from the world’s agri-food systems. Within this huge amount, about 44% of emissions are from within the farm gate, while about 35% come from supply chain processes. Deforestation, livestock manure, food waste and the use of fossil fuels on farms (to fuel machinery as well as in nitrogen fertilisers) are all major sources of GHG emissions. [Plastic packaging](#) is also made from fossil fuels. Beyond its contribution to climate change, the global, industrial food system causes other serious environmental damage as well, in the form of large amounts of [waste](#), biodiversity loss, soil erosion, high levels of water use, as well as land, air and water pollution.

## **Unhealthy**

In addition to the carbon emissions and other environmental destruction caused by the global industrial food system, it is also unhealthy. The food produced through industrial agriculture is frequently [genetically modified](#) (GM) in order to allow it to withstand being sprayed with toxic herbicides. Those agricultural products are then heavily processed by food manufacturers to enable them to travel long distances and sit on supermarket shelves. In the process, the nutrients are lost and large amounts of [sugar, salt and fat](#) make their way into our



*Agricultural products are heavily processed by food manufacturers to enable them to travel long distances and sit on supermarket shelves. In the process, the nutrients are lost and large amounts of sugar, salt and fat make their way into our diets.*

diets. As a result, many people suffer vitamin and mineral deficiencies, while at the same time consuming an excess of calories—a condition called hidden hunger. This brings with it a number of health problems, especially non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart conditions, strokes, and some cancers.

### Unjust

A discussion of the role of food in the just transition would not be complete without considering the injustices of the current global industrial food system. While there is enough food in the world to feed everyone, [one in nine people still go hungry](#), while over a quarter of the world's population (26%) is moderately or severely food insecure. At the same time, one in

eight adults are obese. Hunger and food insecurity tend to mirror racial, class and gender disparities. For example, while food insecurity is almost non-existent amongst white South Africans (1.35% food insecure and 9.4% at risk of hunger), the majority of the black population is [hungry or at risk of hunger](#) (30.3% food insecure and 30.3% at risk of hunger). Female-headed households are also more likely to experience food insecurity. While corporations in the food sector continued to [generate profits](#) during COVID-19, millions of South Africans [ran out of money](#) to buy food. What could be more unjust?

### Food sovereignty and agroecology

So how do we move from this exploitative, extractive, carbon-intensive food system to a more just, sustaina-

ble and regenerative one? We need to move towards [food sovereignty](#), which has been defined by the peasant movement, *La Via Campesina*, as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” This rights-based approach to locally controlled food systems is critical to a just transition.

The food sovereignty movement calls for the replacement of industrial agriculture with agroecology, a kind of farming that works with natural systems, instead of against them. [Agroecology](#) is based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity



*Refiloe Molefe, who runs Bertrams Inner City Farm, in Johannesburg, also supports [food relief](#) in her area by operating a soup kitchen at the garden*

and energy conservation. Agroecology is understood as a practice, a science and a movement, bringing together sustainable farming methods, recognition of traditional and indigenous knowledge and more equitable food systems.

### **Beginnings of a just transition**

So how do we achieve food sovereignty? How do we transition to agroecological food systems? There is no one path to follow, as the conditions in each place, and at each scale, are unique. However, small-scale agroecological initiatives and solidarity-based food programmes can help to show us the way.

In the face of the disruptions to food systems wrought by COVID-19, localised initiatives sprang up to ensure everyone had access to healthy

food. Across South Africa, [community action networks](#) sprang up to address hunger, with volunteers providing meals and other assistance to fellow community members.

Around Johannesburg, for example, the [C19 People's Coalition](#) sought to link small-scale farmers who lost access to their usual markets to communities in need of food assistance. Unlike most [government food packages](#), which were procured from large corporations and contained non-perishable items with almost no nutritional value, these vegetable packages sought to support the livelihoods of small-scale farmers while also promoting the health of vulnerable households.

### **Food gardens**

While interest in planting food gardens also increased during lockdown, some urban farms have been around for a long time. In Johannesburg, the [Bertrams Inner City Farm](#) and [Siyakhana](#) are two examples of agroecological farms supplying healthy produce to their local communities, outside of the usual corporate value chains.

In addition to selling direct to consumers in their neighbourhoods, they participate in other alternative forms of distribution such as vegetable box schemes and weekend markets. Refiloe Molefe, who runs Bertrams Inner City Farm, also supports [food relief](#) in her area by operating a soup kitchen at the garden. Environmental activists and agroecological farmers started the [Ubuntu pro-](#)

ject during COVID-19 lockdown, to provide access to fresh healthy produce.

In addition to donating food to those in need, the Ubuntu project also distributed seeds, seedlings and other farming supplies, so that households could grow their own food. Many agroecological initiatives exist through South Africa, in both urban and rural areas

## Challenges

Of course, attempting to operate outside of the global industrial food system is not without its challenges. Land and water are costly in urban and peri-urban areas. Accessing local, non-GM seeds and natural inputs such as compost and manure can be difficult. In addition, people are so used to consuming processed foods at

supermarkets, that they do not always want to shift to buying fresh produce at an urban farm (or from a box scheme) and cooking it themselves. Marketing these initiatives, to let consumers know they exist, can be a lot of work for farmers who are busy working in their fields. There is very [limited government support](#) available to small-scale farmers, and it is not usually oriented towards agroecology.

Despite the challenges, these small fields of change continue to spring up. With support from their local communities, as well as from movements advocating a just transition, they can grow and multiply.

Agroecological production for local markets, alternative distribution systems and community solidarity are three critical components of a transition to a food system that is low-

carbon, environmentally sustainable and socially just.

Brittany Kesselman is a Postdoctoral research fellow, Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP) at Wits University



*[Siyakhana](#) supplies healthy produce to their local communities, outside of the usual corporate value chain*

# “Unsafe and inefficient public transport endangers our lives”

*20 black working-class women from Orange Farm and Soweto call for urgent improvements to the public transport system. Singobile Akin and Andiswa Kona report.*

## Apartheid legacy

Public transport in South Africa has its fair share of challenges many of which are linked to South Africa’s colonial and apartheid history. Black people were forced to live far away from the areas where they were employed. [Apartheid policies](#) that were based on racial segregation privileged white people who lived in developed areas with easy access to transportation and adequate infrastructure. Black people relied on transport options that were sometimes costly and unsafe.

This article focuses on the experiences of 20 black working-class women from Soweto and Orange Farm in Johannesburg who commute on different forms of transport from their homes to work and who depend on the public transport system. Between 30 and 50 years old, they earned below the minimum wage of R3500 per month, working as domestic workers or in administrative roles.

## Problems experienced

Trains, buses and taxis are the most preferred modes of transport that black women in townships use. While these modes are cost effective and easily accessible, overcrowding remains the biggest challenge. Overcrowding is caused by the delays of trains and buses as there are challenges with schedules.

### • Inefficient scheduling

An inefficiency in scheduling leads to unpredictability of public transport. This can “place me at the risk of theft or murder, as my offices are near an industrial area and there are no security guards at the train platforms after hours,” one interviewee told us.

Due to a lack of public transport scheduling, black working-class women often have to wake up much earlier to catch the first bus, train or taxi to get them to the workplace. Their safety is often compromised because they walk long distances to access public transport. This is [common](#) in townships where the walking and waiting times for public transport are long.

### • Crime

Our interviewees expressed a great deal of concern over the issue of crime. They indicated that they were vulnerable to criminals because of the unpredictability of public transport, which forced them sometimes to have to walk in the dark to arrive at work on time. “I could be walking to get a taxi, and someone could be hiding in the bushes, and I cannot see them”, said one interviewee.

The most common types of crimes in public transport are [‘pickpocketing, bag snatching and jewellery theft, with more severe crimes like rape, assault and murder’](#). These crimes can happen at public transport locations such as train stations and bus stops.

When women wait longer to ac-

cess public transport due to a lack of clear scheduling, they also become vulnerable to gender based violence (GBV). The public transport industry is known for its culture of abuse that places women at risk of violence. (Eagle and Kwele, 2019) Verbal abuse from the taxi drivers affected how safe they felt during the trip. An interviewee from Orange Farm mentioned that “some taxi drivers stop to buy alcohol and I cannot say anything because I am a woman. They can look at your body and promise to beat you up”.

In some cases, these taxi drivers are drug users, and this affects how women passengers are treated.

An inefficiency in scheduling leads to unpredictability of public transport. This can “place me at the risk of theft or murder, as my offices are near an industrial area and there are no security guards at the train platforms after hours,”

### • Anxiety

[Anxiety](#) that arises out of uncertainty with the transport system and safety risks can affect women’s performance

at the workplace.

[Research](#) shows that physical strain experienced by workers whilst commuting affected their ability to function effectively compared to individuals that do not share similar challenges. This view was supported by our respondents.

Personal safety concerns also cause anxiety in women as they travel to the workplace. “I would rather be late for work than take taxis I have been intimidated in,” said one respondent.

Working women also worry about their children’s safety travelling to and from school, causing them emotional stress. Participants, especially those who collect children from school and day-care, revealed that they worried about transport-related issues towards the end of the day. The fear for their own safety when travelling in the evening was heightened when mothers who collect their children had to stand in queues.

### • **Transport inefficiency**

Workers are often sanctioned harshly at work for being late for work even though they leave their homes earlier than normal. Having to justify being late for work because of transport inefficiency is equally frustrating as supervisors or bosses are unable to relate or be understanding of the inconvenience experienced.

In addition, frequent breakdowns or malfunction cause them to be late for work leading to warnings and possible dismissal which adds to their anxiety.

Moreover, black working-class women are more likely to be in menial and precarious jobs. When they arrive at the workplace, after overcoming multiple transport challenges, they are already exhausted and [unlikely to be as productive](#) as others who do not face such hurdles.

“In the train there are no seats especially in the morning and we stand until you reach your destination.

By the time you leave the train, you are already tired and you still have to work. I work as a cleaner, so I’m always on my feet. I get home very tired,” said one of the interviewees.

### • **Making up for lost time**

Due to women arriving late for work frequently because of public transport problems, employers have created a way for them to make up for lost time. Workers must choose between staying late to ensure that tasks for the day are complete, or they forfeit their tea or lunch breaks. This disadvantages the workers and violates their rights. Participants agreed that they would perform better had they not been concerned about transport.

### • **Women’s care responsibilities at home**

During interviews, participants described their morning routine, before they head out to work. They must wake up early to clean the home and surrounding environment, care for children, the elderly, the sick, ensure availability of water for the day, and prepare food including their own lunch, and that of their children of school-going age, and any other employed men and or unemployed persons.

Supervisors and bosses need to be considerate of the care responsibilities that women have that might cause lateness at the workplace.

### • **Looking after themselves**

While participants struggle with an unreliable and unsafe public transport system, they themselves have started to look after their own safety. Some participants ask their family members to fetch them from the drop-off points after dark. Others said they prefer walking in groups when they catch a train or bus. Black working women have asked Community Policing Forum (CPF) members to accompany them to pick up points.

“In the train there are no seats especially in the morning and we stand until you reach your destination. By the time you leave the train, you are already tired and you still have to work. I work as a cleaner, so I’m always on my feet. I get home very tired.”

### **New technology to the rescue**

The Gauteng Province, in conjunction with the City of Joburg has been [implementing policies towards smart cities](#). This is being done with the hope of increasing efficiency in the public transport system. A smart city should be able to keep up with travel demand as stated by Integrated Transport Master Plan (ITMP25). However, if there are challenges with infrastructure for technology improvements, this might be a challenge for black working-class women that need real time schedules if there are breakdowns, traffic congestion or any unexpected delays.

In countries such as Brazil, new technology has provided prospects for renewed expansion, particularly through Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). This has allowed commuters to have access to smart bus monitoring systems that give commuters real time reports on public transport.

South Africa can learn from Brazil to ensure that public transport is more efficient. Furthermore, black working-class women still need further access to information and resources about technology for them to be able to be part of smart cities with efficient transport services. Technology can improve transport services but

**“Taxi associations should give taxi drivers name tags as a form of identification for passengers in the taxi. This will allow passengers to know who is taking them to work, and make them feel safer. Reporting of bad driving and retrieving of lost or stolen goods can be dealt with a lot faster and more easily.”**

improvements on infrastructure still need to be made.

### **Recommendations on improving public transport**

Developing sustainable transport systems in South Africa starts by addressing concerns about safety. Participants believe that if crime is not addressed around public transport within Soweto and Orange farm, this will lead to job losses for people who rely on public transport.

These are just some of the recommendations that study participants made on how public transport can be improved:

- Include black working women in the process to find solutions to the challenges that they face in the existing public transport system so they can highlight the changes required to ensure safety and ensure access to an efficient transport system. Without this, any attempt to introduce ‘smart cities’ in the context of spatial injustice and persistent socio-economic, racial, gendered and class inequalities will just amplify existing inequalities.
- Provide reliable modes of transport

which heed the demands of commuters through immediate responsiveness to complaints.

- Investigate the possibility of an integrated ticket policy: one ticket can be used on the different modes of transport with discounts for students, workers and pensioners.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution threatens the jobs of women; the challenges in the public transport industry can be used as [new opportunities for women](#). Black working women ought to be trained for new careers in technology and public transportation.

### **Taxis**

Participants recommended the following:

- The minibus or taxi industry should have staff members who are knowledgeable and who can conduct the business in a proper way.
- Train taxi drivers how to speak and treat their passengers, especially as it relates to safety and GBV. Training could also include how to deal with difficult passengers and resolve conflicts in the taxi.
- More formalised education for taxi drivers, for example the taxi driver occupational certificate from the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).
- The minibus industry should be formalised and made into a respectable profession.
- Taxi associations should give taxi drivers name tags. This will allow passengers to know who is taking them to work, and make them feel safer. Reporting of bad driving and retrieving of lost or stolen goods can be dealt with a lot faster and more easily.

**“Train taxi drivers how to speak and treat their passengers, especially as it relates to safety and GBV. Training could also include how to deal with difficult passengers and resolve conflicts in the taxi. Taxi associations should give taxi drivers name tags.”**

### **Trains**

Participants recommended the following:

- PRASA should provide more trains to address the current challenges.
- Fix damaged and vandalised trains, especially windows. “Without windows, when it’s windy or raining, we get cold and wet inside the train while going to work,” said one of the participants.

Respondents all agreed that better service delivery of public transport is needed.

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Akin and Kona would like to thank Dr Ibrahim Steyn for his assistance in putting this article together.



# Representing workers on a mandate

*Long-time NUMSA trade unionist, Christine Olivier, has just been elected the assistant general secretary of the 50 million-strong global trade union federation, [IndustriALL](#). She is the first African woman to hold this position. Neo Bodibe spoke to her.*

## **Congratulations on attaining this position**

I don't want this thing to go to my head. I don't even want to think about this position, what it is, how big it is, all that I want to think is about what the congress said we must do. The position that I occupy now should not be like a 'black African woman making history'. It should become normal for women and particularly black African women to occupy these kinds of positions.

## **On Facebook recently your caption was: We need African countries to industrialise, to create jobs, to build manufacturing, a just transition. Coming from Africa and being an industrial union, what do you think are the challenges that face Africa as they industrialise?**

We've got the mineral wealth, we export our raw material and then we import the products that have been made but we can do it here ourselves. You look at Nigeria. It's an oil-rich country but they don't even have refineries, they used to have but it's not there anymore, it's not working. And then you look at the energy crisis. You look at what's happening in Mozambique with foreign MNCs going there to extract their natural resources at the expense of the people of Mozambique.

And that's why those young people say, 'we don't belong to ISIS, we don't know why people are saying we are part of ISIS. We are young

Mozambicans who are unemployed, who are suffering but we have this gas, minerals, we have these minerals in our countries and these MNCs like Total they come and they extract at our expense. We don't even share in the profits, a few government officials are sharing the profits or getting the benefits from those big companies. That is what we are fighting against and our government is so corrupt they are not listening to us and what must we do when we have talked and talked and no-one listens. We've decided to take up arms and we've decided that Total will not come into our country.'

And that's the reality of Africa. Africa is so dependent on the west and on Europe.

## **Let's talk about you as one of three assistant general secretaries of IndustriALL. What's your role? What are you in charge of?**

I'm in this position for the past 2 months so what I'm currently working on is to really look at the mandates that the congress gave us. The congress adopted an [action plan](#) that's built on four strategic pillars: building strong unions, defending workers' rights, confronting global capital and building sustainable industrial policies. I am responsible for the sectors, so we have about 14 [sectors](#). And then I'm also responsible for women, youth, white collar workers, global framework agreements (GFAs) and campaigns.

## **Why the focus on white-collar workers?**

Workplaces are changing, new technology is coming in and the work that blue collars used to do is now more scientific and more technological and that's why we are changing from having more blue-collar workers [to] now having more white-collar workers in some countries. And I know it's going to be difficult because we know that white-collar workers don't believe in trade unions, they don't want to join trade unions. They only come to trade unions when they are really having challenges. So what is important ... is to look at what would attract white-collar workers to trade unions.

The same with **young workers** – you need to adapt to the challenges that young workers are confronted with but also [look at] what would attract [them] workers to trade unions. Like when I addressed the young workers of South Asia two days ago, I said to them that you are the future of IndustriALL global union, we need to build you, we need to build second tier leadership because if we don't build second tier leadership, when we die or when we retire, IndustriALL will totally collapse.

And it's very difficult because if you look at the leadership in trade unions, especially in Africa, you will see the leadership is older than 50. And they are clinging to the positions that they occupy, they are clinging to power and they don't want to create the space for young workers, ... [or]

white-collar workers and of course women.

### What will be the approach around women workers?

Women have been in trade unions for years and years, but the space for women has not been created and not because women are not capable to lead but men just don't want to create that space for [them] to take their rightful place in unions... If you look at our industries, many of the industries have not been totally transformed, to accommodate women. We really need to look at how do we make sure that we organise more women into the trade union.

And the one thing when we had a discussion around women in IndustriALL, I said to the women's coordinator, I want us to move a little bit away from gender-based violence and sexual harassment, not that it's not important, but also look at other areas of work that affect women like ... collective bargaining.

When unions negotiate with employ-

ers, they don't look at what are the issues that women are confronted with and negotiate [these] with employers. [And issues like] health and safety, science and technology and now with this transformation where are the women? Would women be able to adapt and be able to be re-skilled in this new way of working because women always occupy the low paid jobs in the workplaces? Because this transformation it's scientific, there's a lot of technology that is taking place and women might struggle to adapt... we really need to focus on education and training for women so that they are able to move with this transformation that is taking place... [W]hen we talk about just transition, we usually talk about reskilling, upskilling but we talk about it generally. We don't talk about the role of women and how we need to pay special attention to [them in this just transition].

### Why do you think it's important to focus on the global supply chain?

These huge MNCs don't want the

responsibility of looking after workers so it's better for them to outsource and to have a supply chain than having direct responsibility of workers. Then you would find in the global supply chain the bulk of those workers are contract workers and we all know that when you are a contract worker, and the employer tells you that if you join a trade union, we will end your contract.

That's why we [must] make sure that we organise the vulnerable workers, workers that are in precarious employment. When we enter into global framework agreements (GFAs) with MNC companies, we must make sure that that GFA includes the supply chain, [that it is] legally binding [and] extend[s] across borders [so that it] binds not only the MNC but also its supply chain. And employers or MNCs must make sure that their supply chains are familiar with the agreements that they sign with trade unions and that they are adhering to the provisions of those GFAs.



A screen-shot from IndustriALL's [video](#) on Global Framework Agreements in the textile industry

And that's the threat that trade unions are facing. As trade unions we really need to go back to the drawing board, to look at different ways of organising because we cannot organise workers in the same manner that we have been organising over the past few decades and expect to have different outcomes, and expect to have trade unions that are growing. If you look at trade unions now, trade unions are disappearing... if we don't change the way that we organise, in a few years' time there will be no trade unions.

### **How confident are you that you will achieve the congress mandate?**

We have four years to work on this congress mandate and hopefully, with the kind of team and the people that you surround yourself with, you and the team will be able to pull through because if you are a leader and you think that you can work on your own and you think that you are a boss, and you think that you are there to give instructions, then you set yourself up for failure.

And that's something that I always am very careful that I don't fall into that trap of seeing myself as somebody else's boss. Working with people it's also about respecting people and respecting their views and listening to the proposals that they are coming up with and listen to what they think.

[L]istening is a skill and sometimes us as leaders we don't listen. When somebody speaks, we prepare ourselves to respond to the person instead of listening to what the person is saying. It might be small, but for me it's important to always allow people to speak their minds.

### **So you've been in the trade union movement for years and years and years, and when you look back at the journey from being a shop steward and regional chairperson and**

### **national deputy president at Numsa and then the international officer, what do you think are the things that have prepared you for this role?**

Let me first say that I don't have any formal training. I started working in a factory in Atlantis, my father was a truck driver, my mother was a domestic worker so there was never money to send us to university or to college. So I had to, straight from doing my matric, I had to go and work in a factory, I became a shop steward representing workers, forever defending workers against the exploitation of employers.

So all my education and all my knowledge and everything that I know comes from working in the trade union movement, working in Numsa, fighting for the rights of workers. I think that's what built me and prepared me a lot for this role because I understand what workers are going through on a daily basis. I understand the exploitation that workers are subjected to in the workplace.

The union has taught us a lot how to fight, how to defend workers so I think all those years being in the factory, sitting and negotiating with employers for better working conditions for workers, dealing with arrogant employers, all those things have built us, have made us to grow and to think how are we going to deal with all these challenges that are brought about by employers who only think about making profits.

And do you know sometimes members are also very difficult. So they can deal with you, they can fight with you, insult you sometimes, that also made you strong. It also taught me to be patient and also taught me to listen sometimes to hear what are the challenges. But then it also taught you to educate workers and to make workers



*Christine Olivier presiding over a NUMSA meeting when she was NUMSA vice president (Pic: Sandra Hlungwani)*

understand what are the issues and how employers operate and think.

Once workers understand the challenges, it makes it easier for you to get workers united around the challenges that they are confronted with on a daily basis.

So all these years in the trade union movement has taught me about unity, about solidarity, about strategizing, about fighting, about taking workers along, about educating workers and explaining issues to workers. And always make sure that you take your mandate from the workers because many a time you will find that trade union leaders are speaking on behalf of workers, but they don't have a mandate, they're not consulting with workers.

For me consultation with workers and taking a mandate from workers and reporting back to workers is one of the cornerstones of having a strong trade union movement and in many trade unions you would see that that's one of the things that is missing.

And I think that one of my roles is also to build on that, to make sure that when we represent workers, wherever we are, we represent them honestly, we represent them on a mandate that we've got from them and we report back to workers.

# Oupa Lehulere: 1960—2021

## A lifelong struggle for the working class

Oupa Lehulere was born in Cape Town in 1960. After primary school he went to Fezeka High School in Gugulethu. Fezeka High School had a history of political activism, with many senior students active in Black Consciousness-inspired student organisations.

Oupa's first introduction to resistance politics was the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools in 1975. But it was in 1976 with the students' uprising that he became politically active.

Although new to student politics, Lehulere became one of the student leaders who organised and directed the student uprising in Cape Town which took off on 11 August 1976.

From 1976, Lehulere was involved in all the various uprisings in 1980 as a student leader, in 1985 as a student activist at UCT, in the 1990s as an activist linked to communities and the labour movement; and since then as an activist in the social movements that arose in the 2000s.

### Introduced to Marxism

Lehulere was introduced to Marxism in the late 1970s and became interested in Marxist theory. This led to an activism that put theoretical questions and strategy at the centre of his political activism.

Since the mid 1990s Lehulere has been based at Khanya College, a movement-building institution that arose out of the turbulent 1980s.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Lehulere taught academic courses – sociology and economics – at Khanya College. Since the mid-1990s his work has focused more on cadre formation and political education in the labour movement and the social movements.



### Website launched

A month before his death Oupa launched his [website](#). The website brings together his political and theoretical writings stretching over a period of more than 30 years.

Lehulere's interest in Marxism and theory began in the late 1970s when he joined Marxist study groups in Cape Town. In the mid 1980s as an activist, Lehulere spent a lot of time grounding himself in the Marxist classics and this triggered his interest and commitment to an activism that was grounded in the unity of theory and practice.

The idea of the website was to bring together numerous writings that can broadly be understood as covering three major historical periods in the development of the mass movement.

The first period is the transition from apartheid capitalism to post-apartheid capitalism.

The second part of the writings of this period trace the ANC in power and its capitulation to white monopoly capital and its global allies.

The third period broadly covers the writings from the Marikana movement to the present.

An additional body of work Oupa hoped to add later, is an archive of writing by a range of activists from the late 1980s to the 1990s.

### WILSA

In the late 1980s Lehulere joined a group of young militants who could see the unfolding betrayal of the working class by the ANC and the SACP. These militants had organised themselves into the Workers International League of South Africa (WILSA).

Although WILSA dissolved in the mid 2000s, it has left the working class and its militants a rich heritage of the theory and practice of left politics.

Lehulere hoped to provide through his writings and the WILSA Papers, a different perspective of how the transition unfolded and how South Africa arrived where it is today.

### Family

On 29 November 2021, Lehulere passed away after a long battle with cancer. He is survived by his lifelong partner, Maria Van Driel; daughter, Searatoa Van Driel; son, Obakeng Ramagaga; his older sisters, Seapei, Mogodi, Sophie; younger brother, Itumeleng Wa-Lehulere and was also a Beloved uncle.

Lehulere was loved and respected by many, the Lehulere and Van Driel families, as well as activists, colleagues, friends and comrades.

He will be sorely missed. We carry his spirit of lifelong struggle for the working class with us as we march onwards!

Khanya College