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## Feeling the Heat in Durban

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance

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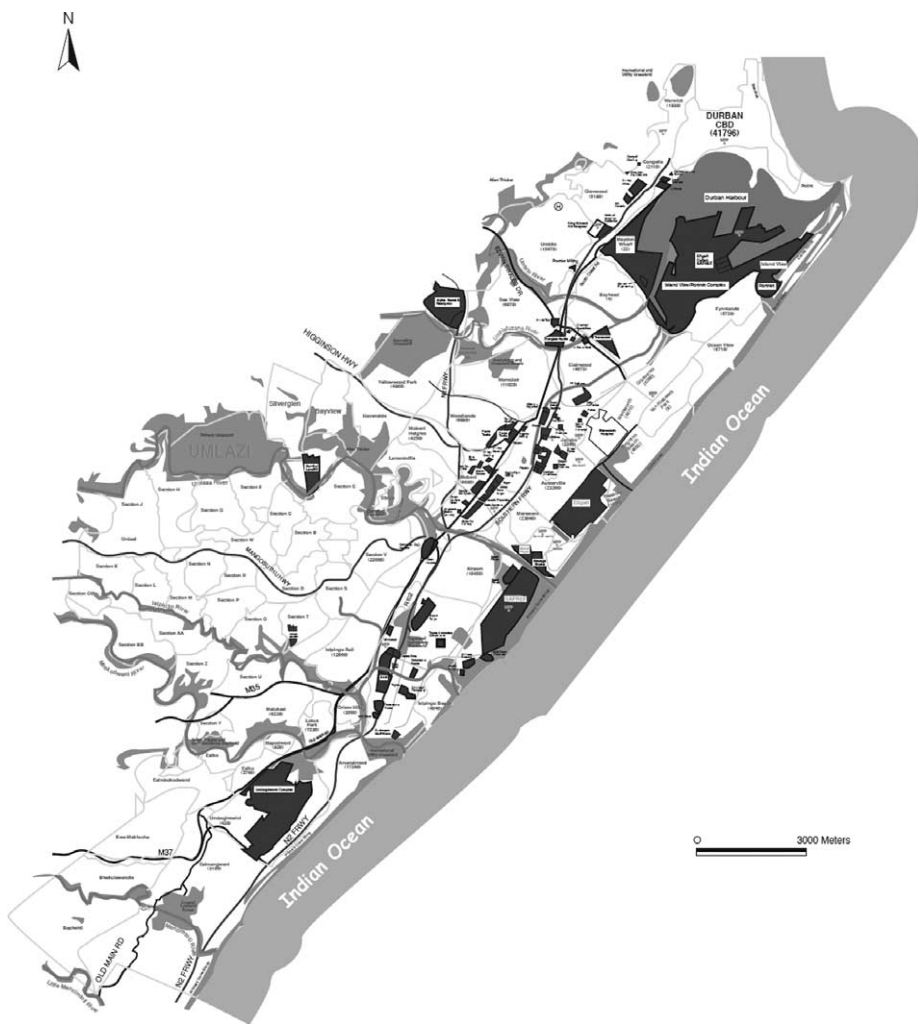
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## Feeling the Heat in Durban

*South Durban Community Environmental Alliance*



**Map 1.** South Durban's pollution sites (dark shade)

Source: <http://sdcea.co.za/images/stories/pdfs/mapsouthdurbanbasin.pdf>.

Durban's climate is already changing. It is a degree hotter than in 1950, and storms are more intense but also less predictable and less frequent, so periodic droughts are more likely. It is also vulnerable to rising sea levels and has already experienced a major storm surge that swept away coastal roads and beachside buildings. While the city is beginning to feel the impacts, it is also stoking climate change and is home to some world-class polluters.

Durban's port is the biggest in Africa and the primary route for imported crude oil and exported petrochemical products. Big industries are concentrated in south Durban. Next to the port is the Island View bulk chemical storage, which contains an extensive infrastructure of tanks and pipelines, some running inland to Gauteng while others lead directly, beneath residential streets, to the south Durban refineries—Sapref, jointly owned by Shell and BP, and Engen, controlled by Petronas. Between the refineries is the massive Mondi paper mill. Another 150 smokestack industries, together with toxic dumps and a major sewerage works, are located in adjacent areas.

What is now Durban was once a series of interconnected wetlands centered on the bay and stretching from the Mgeni to the Isipingo River. This was the land of the Thuli clan, who were moved out as the first colonial settlement expanded. With the city center growing up on the north side of the bay, Durban's early industrialists looked to the south for flat land close to the port. The area was occupied by black people, mostly of Indian descent, who were brought to the Colony of Natal as indentured labor to work on the sugar plantations. Once free of indenture, they made their living as market gardeners, seine netters, and small traders. Being excluded from the city's decision-making, they were easy targets politically.

The process that dispossessed the once-indentured black people and led to the current industrial landscape began in the 1930s when the all-white Chamber of Commerce and Industry lobbied the all-white Durban Town Council to zone the entire area for industrial development. They also initiated planning to segregate people along lines of color. Black people were moved to make way for industrial complexes and crowded into residential areas close by to create a pool of cheap labor. When the apartheid government came to power in 1948, it modeled industrial planning on the precedents set by Durban while taking the logic of racist planning to new extremes. In the process, thousands of black people were forcibly removed, restricted, and/or resettled in south Durban. The result is a patchwork of residential and industrial areas located cheek by jowl. The area is now nicknamed "cancer valley." It has a population of close to 300,000 people living in the low-income communities of Clairwood, Jacobs, Isipingo, Merebank, Wentworth, Umlazi, and Umbogintwini. The Bluff, a white and predominantly working-class area, also borders the industrial areas.

These South Durban communities have made the city a center of resistance to the state and corporate agendas that are leading the world to destruction. They have a

long history of resistance to polluting industries. In 1996, they formed the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) to step up their campaign and connect with fenceline communities in South Africa's other pollution hotspots. In the 2000s, they responded to calls from local fishermen and market gardeners to support their struggles against dispossession. They also linked with struggles across Durban, with shack dwellers and street traders, and with campaigns in defense of democratic freedoms.

SDCEA has long understood the struggle against polluting industries as part of the struggle against the drivers of climate change. People are now also feeling the impacts of climate change, and it is the poorest who are most vulnerable. In 2009, SDCEA hosted hearings on climate change and poverty to hear people's own views, and this was followed by a series of workshops and meetings. The voices of the people who attended the hearings and two climate justice workshops held in 2011 are quoted throughout the first part of this article<sup>1</sup> and document the people's analysis of the links between their local struggles and climate change. The article also looks at SDCEA's response to the climate politics of the national state. The South African government published a green paper on climate policy in late 2010 and intends to publish a white paper before the seventeenth Conference of the Parties (COP-17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which meets in Durban November 28-December 9, 2011. SDCEA, together with its allies in Climate Justice Now! South Africa (CJNSA), is highly critical of these processes and has dubbed the COP the Conference of Polluters. What follows are the voices of those most directly on the receiving end of the pollution wrought by the state and corporate sector's industrial policy—voices too often left out of public discourse on climate destabilization and pollution.

### Driving Climate Change

The port is at the center of Durban's economy. Over the years its development has led to the complete destruction of the once extensive mangrove swamps. Infilling to make land for quays and storage, railways and roads has reduced the bay to a third of its original size, and the rivers have been canalized and diverted. Much of the bay is now biologically dead. At the same time, people were forced out of the way of successive expansion projects. The once expansive area of Clairwood is now boxed in by the port infrastructure on the one side and the southern M4 Albert Luthuli freeway on the other.

Many families have lived here for 60 years or more and carry a living memory of struggle against this piecemeal dispossession over several generations. Residents recall

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<sup>1</sup>None of these quotes are attributed to the individual speaker, partly because they are from group report backs or are anonymous comments from the floor at the climate justice workshops and hearings. They are meant here to provide a collective analysis.

the significant markers in the process. It started around 1936 when the Durban Council put a freeze on residential development. Under apartheid the urban infrastructure was allowed to decay, but in 1986 the Council finally responded to community pressure with the promise of a structured plan to enable coherent residential development.

The people of Clairwood won a significant victory when a sewage system was installed to replace the buckets used for sanitation, but the roads, sidewalks, and street lighting were largely neglected. With the transition to democracy, they anticipated a real change in the process of development. But alas, that has not yet materialized. As one community member put it, "Instead, things went backwards. A new Council came to power, but the only difference was the color of the councillors."

The lifting of anti-apartheid sanctions coincided with the massive expansion of global trade. This trade is dominated by the big transnational corporations. They now put together products made from components produced in many different places—wherever is cheapest—and export goods from one part of the corporate empire to another. To facilitate this global restructuring of production, they demanded quick delivery, and ships were made ever bigger, faster, and more energy intensive. By 2007, carbon emissions from ships were estimated at up to 5 percent of total global emissions—more than the whole of the rest of Africa.

Durban was swept up in the global trade expansion. Its port capacity was expanded with new wharfs, cranes, and container yards, and most recently, the harbor mouth was widened and deepened to take the latest generation of big ships. Demand for transport inland grew explosively. With rail capacity stagnating, the trucking industry expanded rapidly, which added to South Africa's carbon emissions from transport. Trucking companies cut costs by using local streets for overnight truck stops rather than investing in new depots.

In the language of the city's planners, Clairwood is the "back of the port." The truckers have invaded the narrow streets and colonized vacant land owned but abandoned by the Durban Council. Local people see a process of purposeful neglect:

We are woken at 4 am when the trucks start up. The vibration shakes us awake—you can hear, see, and feel them. Crime is not our greatest fear—being run over by a truck is.

They also wash out the trucks, some of which carry toxic substances, and the effluent drains from Clairwood into the bay.

This invasion is illegal, but the law is not enforced. The city says that dealing with the problem is "a process" but, say residents, nothing happens. This is part of a

general pattern of neglect. The city turns a blind eye to illegal waste dumping and to noisy workshops operating in contravention of zoning regulations. In the environment created by neglect, crime thrives.

Local people are still demanding proper planning to restore the residential character of the area. This too, says the city, is a process. Nothing happens. Residents say that “process” has been turned into distraction. The real agenda is to clear the way for a new round of industrial modernization through the whole of south Durban: “If Clairwood goes, Austerville, Wentworth, Merebank, and Isipingo will follow. We need everyone to stand together.”

### **Making the Car Culture**

Port expansion is also linked with the expansion of the Toyota car plant at the other end of the south Durban valley. Supported by massive subsidies from the Department of Trade and Industry, Toyota’s Prospecton plant next to Isipingo has been transformed from a local to a global manufacturer producing 220,000 vehicles a year. A high proportion of the components are imported, while over 60 percent of the cars are exported. The port car terminal capacity has been increased five-fold since 1994 to meet Toyota’s needs but still imports much more than it exports. Cars, of course, burn up the better part of the petrol produced at the refineries. It also takes a lot of energy to make them and more to build the roads surfaced with tar from the refineries. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the entire urban infrastructure was reorganized for the convenience of the minority of people who owned cars. Public transport was meanwhile run down, making it difficult to get around without a car. Durban sold off its bus service to Remant Alton in 2003 in what was widely regarded as a cheap sweetheart deal. The company ran down the service until it finally collapsed in 2009. As government itself acknowledges, creating a decent public transport system for all is essential if we are serious about climate change.

### **On the Fenceline**

In 1946, the development of the airport in south Durban resulted in most of the surrounding wetland areas being drained. In 1954, Mobil built South Africa’s first refinery, now the Engen refinery. BP and Shell followed with Sapref in 1960. Both refineries were built on land that had been used by local people for market gardening. Engen is right across the road from people’s houses in Wentworth, while Sapref is just a kilometer away, across the Umlaas canal from Merebank.

The Key Points Act, a notorious piece of apartheid security legislation, made it illegal to publish anything about the refineries. Not even the local authorities were allowed to know how much pollution the plants were pumping out. Permits issued by the Department of Environment, which regulated only for sulfur dioxide

emissions, were similarly secret. In fact, the permits were mostly written by the industries themselves. Engen was allowed 72 metric tons of sulfur dioxide a day, while Sapref was allowed 50. Both claimed to operate well below their permit levels, but in 2000, it emerged that Sapref had cooked its figures. It was, in fact, exceeding its very generous emissions permit allowance.

Under sustained pressure from SDCEA, both plants have substantially reduced their sulfur emissions. It seems, however, that there's a trick to it. They put the surplus sulfur into the heavy diesel used by ships, so it is emitted at sea. Emissions of other toxics, particularly benzene, remain extremely high. This is from "normal" operations.

Fires, explosions, gas leaks, spills, and excessive flaring occur with appalling regularity at the petrochemical plants. In 2001, Sapref spilled 1-2 million liters of fuel from a pipeline buried under a residential street. The spill forced the evacuation of local people and marked the beginning of a lengthy struggle to make Sapref replace its 40-year-old pipes rather than just patch them. This was just one of 26 spills from the Engen and Sapref refineries recorded by SDCEA from 2001 to the end of 2004. 2007 was a year of fire. At the Island View chemical storage on Durban docks, a series of explosions ripped through eight tanks, which burned through the night of September 18<sup>th</sup>. The air was thick with chemical smoke, and fish turned up dead in the water a few days later. More fires at the refineries—three at Engen and one at Sapref—spread fumes and soot across the neighborhood. In 2008 another major fire at Engen's crude-oil feed shut down the entire refinery for weeks.

The city says it has adequate emergency plans. SDCEA has repeatedly asked to see them but has been refused. People do not believe they really exist:

Incidents and accidents—the fires—they call them "acts of God." but they are not. There is no emergency plan. People don't know where to go when there's a fire. And the old people can't go anywhere without assistance. So we want an emergency plan.

People's immediate concern is health. Government and industry have always claimed superior scientific knowledge to belittle this concern. The first systematic study of health in south Durban confirmed that the people were right. Living here is likely to blight your life. Respiratory diseases like asthma are well above the average rate, and people who live with pollution do *not* get used to it—they are made more vulnerable to it. And the chances of getting cancer are 250 times higher than normal. Most families have lost someone:

I live with the pollution from Engen. I gave birth to a boy in 1993. After fourteen years, he was diagnosed with leukemia. He died on January 13, 2009.

Leukemia is strongly associated with benzene.



## Expanding

Refinery carbon dioxide emissions rise or fall pretty much in line with production. The one sure way to reduce them is to cut production. Since 1990, both refineries have dramatically expanded production capacity—Engen from 67,000 to 150,000 barrels a day and Sapref from 120,000 to 180,000 barrels a day. The refineries also supply the basic feedstock to south Durban's other chemical industries, many of which are located at the AECI complex in Umbogintwini.

The latest expansion is driven by the government's infrastructure development program. The state-owned corporation Transnet is building a high-capacity multi-product pipeline to carry crude oil to Sasol's Natref refinery and petrol and diesel from the Durban refineries to the big Gauteng market. It is routed through poor semi-rural areas where little resistance was anticipated. But people are angry:

They are taking the pipeline through our gardens. What will happen when there are leaks and explosions? We are sick already. Why are they taking it through our area? They don't talk to us. They don't care about us, because we are poor.

In 2010 the new King Shaka International airport was opened, leaving the old airport in south Durban vacant. This was long anticipated, and in 1998 a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) looked at what to do with the land. The Department of Trade and Industry pushed for a "world class" chemicals cluster, supposedly free of pollution, to take advantage of feedstock from the refineries next door and create jobs. SDCEA did not buy this. Promises of clean production are broken everywhere. Moreover, new investment in Durban's chemical industries has replaced labor with automated plant, which has destroyed rather than created jobs.

Transnet lobbied for a dug-out port to expand capacity even further. This new port would be physically separate from the existing port and located at the opposite end of the valley. For SDCEA, it became evident that this would create a new "back of the port" hunger for land. The SEA report indicated that port infrastructure would elbow into Merebank just as it does into Clairwood. And the new infrastructure would be required to connect the new port with the old and therefore run right through all the communities in between. The new port would also destroy what remains of the Isipingo lagoon and mangroves.

In 1999, thousands of people packed into public meetings to denounce these plans. The government, however, expanded its ambitions. It wants both the port and the chemicals cluster plus an "automotive supplier park" to supplement Toyota next door.

Regulation of industry, meanwhile, has been gutted. Under pressure from SDCEA, Durban's City Health unit painstakingly built up a local air quality

monitoring and regulatory system—not perfect but probably the best in the country. But in 2011, the number of staff was cut by more than half, effectively restoring industry's charter to pollute.

A growing stream of toxic waste flows from expanded production. Two toxic dumps were opened in black residential areas in south Durban in the 1980s. Waste-Tech's Umlazi dump did not even have a lining. It leached poisons into the Isipingo River below, while toxic fumes from the dump repeatedly forced nearby schools to shut down. Sustained community protest forced the closure of the dump in 1997, although it continued to take toxic ash from Mondi until 2007.

The Durban company Wasteman's Bulbul Drive dump in Chatsworth opened over the protests of the local community. Poorly constructed on steep land, the dump subsequently "slipped," releasing toxic clouds into the air and a toxic flood into the Umlazi River below. As at Umlazi, children at local schools are periodically overcome by fumes from the dump. Meanwhile, "the waste trucks pass our homes and shops and schools endlessly every day." What they bring in includes galley waste from ships, waste from Rainbow Chicken's industrial farming operations, and high-hazard chromium waste.

In 2009, Wasteman applied to expand the dump and extend its life to 2021. Building on the long-running campaign to close the dump, local organizations united to oppose the application. They won. In March 2011, it was finally announced that the dump would be closed by the end of the year, a process that will be closely monitored by the Bulbul Drive Dumpsite Action Committee.

### **World-Class Appropriation**

Durban's street vendors observe that:

COP-17 will be a big event with many visitors from around the world. And we know that they will then start with "street cleaning," so the international visitors will not see dirty street vendors. We want support for our demand that we are not cleaned off the streets. We have learnt that the same thing happens in other parts of the world when they host big events. And we experienced it during the football World Cup.

South Africa pulled off the 2010 World Cup with style. The grand stadiums were all completed on time—though not within budget—and Durban opened its new King Shaka International Airport shortly before the opening. Government said this was proof that it could deliver. The poor of Durban asked, "To whom?"

In the late 1990s, Durban managed an innovative and generally supportive approach to street traders. This was reversed when the Durban City Council adopted the “world-class city” slogan, meaning that high-value locations should look attractive to investors. Global capital has made the succession of mega-events into significant sources of profit with carbon emissions to match. For host countries and cities, they present the opportunity to market themselves to global investors. These opportunities come at a very dear cost. FIFA<sup>2</sup> walked off with staggering profits from the World Cup, the corporate sponsors latched onto the global audience, and Durban was stuck with a R2 billion bill. The prestigious Moses Mabhida Stadium has not been filled since the World Cup, and maintenance alone drains the city coffers. South Africa will also pay handsomely for the privilege of hosting COP-17.

The whole of Warwick Triangle, a major commuter terminal and the center of Durban’s street trade, was to be “cleaned up” ahead of the World Cup. The Early Morning Market, Durban’s original fresh produce market, was about to celebrate its centenary year. Instead of celebration, the city targeted it for demolition. It planned to use central government funding for World Cup-related infrastructure to replace the venerable building with a mall owned by politically connected businessmen that was intended to capture the commuter market. The plan threatened around 2,000 people—stall holders, workers, and barrow boys—all of whom struggle for meager livelihoods: “This is the politics of the Council, robbing poor people of their livelihoods, destroying small businesses to give it to big business.”

The market was the center of a web of connections across the city. One community member describes its importance:

The whole of Springfield was farmed when I was growing up, and all the produce went to the Early Morning Market. My grandmother started a stall and handed it on to my parents. That is what kept me and six siblings.

Springfield is on the banks of the Mgeni River and has since been turned over to industry and big box stores selling cheap imported consumer goods. The farmers were moved and moved again. The last of them are on the old airport land. They still supply the local markets but have been working under the threat of eviction, with their leases extended one month at a time, since 2005. One local citizen describes the historical context and impact of the situation on a close family member:

My grandfather was an indentured laborer. He started farming at Springfield Flats. That was very fertile land. Durban City Council said they needed the land for housing, but then they built industry there. He was moved first out to Phoenix then to the new airport land. Now where?

<sup>2</sup>FIFA, the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*, is the parent organization of the World Cup.

Aside from the poisoning and expropriation of their land, farmers have another worry. Already they feel the climate changing:

The weather is odd. The rain does not come when it is expected. The droughts dry out the land and then the floods come and wash it away. We also have more pests.

Because climate change threatens food production, the farmers say it is vital to keep productive land for agriculture close to the city. The municipality, however, is turning it all over to industry. This will undermine the resilience to climate change of the whole Durban community. "If we are moved, you'll be paying exorbitant prices for your vegetables at supermarkets," one farmer notes. Out along the route of the new pipeline, small farmers want government to support them in adapting to climate change. What they experience is a government that cannot distinguish support from command: "Government should give us the seeds we need—not the ones they think we need."

The street traders are also threatened:

We are concerned that the changing dynamics of the market are squeezing us out. Seventy percent of street trade is in foodstuff, but, for example, it is increasingly difficult to get bananas, because they are now bought in bulk. We are trying to respond to that, but we get no support from government, NGOs, or civil society.

The city colludes with capitalist market forces using the police "day-to-day to shut us down" and providing neither shelters nor toilets. And women traders have to look after children while working, because the city will not provide crèches.

The fight to defend the Early Morning Market drew support from community groups across the city. They took to the streets and took the city council to court four times. So far they have stopped the city from closing the market, though one supporter notes, at great cost: "We won in the courts but it is very expensive, and we have problems getting legal support." The council abandoned the project when it became clear that it could not push it through in time to capitalize on World Cup funding. It no doubt awaits its next opportunity.

Subsistence fishermen are also criminalized:

We've been thrown out of the Bay and surrounding areas that were our traditional grounds. The harbor is being privatized for industry and polluters. Rules are imposed on us limiting our catch. . . . They blame shore fishers with one hook for the decline in stocks. They don't look at the big industrial fishers with long lines and kilometers of net. They are the ones depleting the stock.

Stocks are also declining with the loss of habitat. The bay and the local estuaries, vital spawning ground for several marine fish, have shrunk, and most of the mangroves are gone. They are also poisoned by pollution:

Engen uses storms as a cover for releasing polluted waste water. It also pollutes the mouth of the Umlaas canal. That used to be good fishing, but there is nothing there now.

The fish themselves are also polluted, so the poison “comes back in food” to add to the toxic burden carried in people’s bodies.

To bring the World Cup to the people and leave a legacy, several township football grounds were upgraded to FIFA training standards. People living next to the Umlazi stadium were moved, one community member offers, “because they said the place must be clean for 2010 when the visitors come.” The visitors did not come. Some of the people lost substantial homes and were compensated with a one-room house in a toxic area:

We have been removed to where chemicals were dumped. The chemicals are now coming back up. The wind comes into our homes, and our children are sick.

### Shack Dwellers

New people are arriving every day in South Africa’s crowded shack settlements. They come from the farms, from the destitute former Bantustans, and from other areas of the city hoping for work or a space of freedom. Abahlali baseMjondolo, the shack dweller’s movement, which got its start in Durban, has resisted the world-class city agenda to remove them to the peripheries. It sees the roots of dispossession in the unending privatization of land initiated under colonial rule:

In places where we had houses, they are taken from us, because we do not have the money to bribe officials. And we have no access to RDP [Reconstruction and Development Program] houses for the same reason.

In the towns and cities, they are occupying the spaces left open: “That is the land that is not privatized, that we have taken back for the people, because we understand that land is a gift from God.” This is often land without value to the market. In the small town of Ixopo, inland from Durban, people have built their shacks from mud. They call it Chocolate City, because that is what it looks like from across the valley. The lack of infrastructure and services in the terrain on which Chocolate City is located make it a dangerous place:

It is on a steep slope. There are no proper drains, so it is badly eroded, and we have mudslides when it rains. Whole houses are swept away and people die. We recently buried two children.

Shacks are more commonly made of tin, which has its own problems: "In the heat of summer, people die in their homes." They are cold in winter and sodden when it rains. Most are not serviced:

We have no electricity so we must use dirty and dangerous energy to cook, to keep warm, to have light. We have the *mbaula* (braziers), which fill our homes with smoke, and we use paraffin. We live in constant danger of fires.

Respiratory infections from indoor pollution are a leading cause of death in young children. The fires are alarmingly frequent and spread rapidly through the densely packed shack settlements. Many people lose their lives every year, and many more lose all their possessions.

The people see safe connection to electricity as the most significant solution. However, millions are denied this basic service, and even for those who are hooked up to Eskom (4 million) nearly a third have zero consumption recorded because they cannot afford to buy the power legally:

Electricity is for some but not for us, so many of us connect illegally. This, too, is dangerous and people die. And they make us into criminals.

Disconnections by utility officials are frequently accompanied by violence: "The poor in Durban have been abandoned to fire, left to burn, because we do not count in this city."

Most shack settlements have no water and no sanitation. One shack dweller describes what this means:

This is the most disgusting problem. People defecate in open ground and in rivers. Some use plastic bags which they throw away. People also keep animals to survive and have pigs and chickens living in their homes. Animal and human feces are mixed. So we are put in the way of disease, and we contaminate the rivers which people downstream use for drinking.

### **Waste Pickers**

Waste pickers work in dirty and dangerous conditions, mostly for little return. They are among the most vulnerable of people working in the informal economy. But they are getting organized:

We've founded co-ops and started provincial movements and a national movement. These are our own organizations—of waste pickers, by waste pickers and for waste pickers. Our first concern is getting recognition, because neither government nor communities recognize us or the value of the work we do.

The dumps produce landfill gas (LFG), which is dirty methane and a major greenhouse gas. It is created from rotting organic matter, and it is dirty because it is contaminated by everything else that goes to the dump:

The waste management system neglects separation of waste, so it is all mixed together and creates dirty and dangerous working conditions for us. We also appeal to people to separate wet compostable waste from other waste.

At COP-16 in Cancún, South Africans joined the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers to campaign against false climate solutions and demand recognition for their role in mitigation. Recycling produces the largest savings on carbon emissions: “We return materials to industry and the avoided emissions along the production chain are even greater than the emissions from dumps and incinerators.”

Waste, like everything else, is also being privatized: “Waste pickers are displaced so that private companies can take the profits from recycling. Corporations are also promoting incinerators and other forms of waste to energy.” Incinerators are also being promoted by governments and the World Bank as saving on carbon emissions. But as one waste picker points out, this is a false solution to the climate problem: “It wastes resources that could be recycled.”

At Durban's Bisaser Road dump, dirty LFG is used to produce electricity. It also produces toxic emissions. It is nevertheless credited under the “Clean Development Mechanism” of the Kyoto Protocol, because it is claimed to save carbon emissions when compared with the equivalent amount of coal-fired power. New coal-fired stations are built anyway, while the supposed emission reductions are traded away to polluting corporations in the rich countries of the North. These corporations can then claim the reductions without actually reducing their real emissions.

Shack dwellers get no waste services:

We know about separation but no-one comes to collect. So when we separate we end up throwing it in the dump or even burning it.

For their part, the waste pickers “are promoting residential recycling centers where residents can take separated waste.” Beyond this, they are looking for solidarity with community organizations and the movements of the poor. They come from the same communities.

### Exclusion

“We are crying and no-one can hear. Nothing has changed. We are the underclass.” This is the common cry of the people that government disregards. The government promises people’s participation, but it acts in the interest of corporate capital. One citizen describes it this way:

Government talks about women on women’s day. They talk about fighting poverty. They say *Batho Pele* [people first]. But they should change that. For government, it is Money First.

People from across Durban try to engage government but meet obstacles at every turn:

We have approached the authorities—both national and local. But if the request is from the shack dwellers, they send people who have no authority. Then when we make a press statement, they will say [they] were not aware of this problem.

Even the formal mechanisms of participation are used to prevent real participation. As in Clairwood, people spend time engaging in processes that never end and never produce any results. Other processes, such as the environmental impact assessment for the multi-product pipeline, merely rubber stamp plans that have already been decided.

Shack dwellers in Kennedy Road spent years trying to work within the proper channels of participation, but they were never heard.

So we have taken our protests onto the streets. But we are met with violence. They use rubber bullets and tear gas against us. The system that is supposed to protect us kills us.

This is the experience that led them to form Abahlali base Mjondolo.



Protest is itself a legitimate means of participation. In terms of the law, people have to notify the police that they intend holding a protest. They do not have to ask permission, but the police often respond as if they do. So police denied permission when SDCEA and 20 other organizations organized a protest to stop the pipeline. Since the police acted in breach of their own regulations, the people defied them and protested anyway.

People in Durban do use the courts to defend their rights, and sometimes they win. It was Abahlali who established in court that the police did not have authority to deny them permission to march. Nevertheless, “the judicial system is biased against the poor.” This is not only because the cost of going to court makes it prohibitive without financial assistance, but also because officers of the court tend to share the prejudice of the establishment against the poor. A man in a suit is generally given more credibility than a woman without shoes. Beyond this, the privatization of land and labor is backed by the laws of property made by and for the rich.

People’s demand for participation is not only about whether they are consulted in this or that process about precinct plans or service delivery or even national policies. Their slogans are, “Nothing about us without us” and “Talk to us, not for us.” Real participation means that development as a whole should be democratized. This raises the challenge of beginning to think about what people’s development would look like: “how would we organize production and consumption, what are people’s technologies as opposed to corporate technologies, how would we relate to the environment?”

### **Carbon Politics**

While SDCEA was born out of local struggles, it has always looked beyond to forge national and international solidarities and to engage the government on policies that shape the way local struggles play out. Together with organizations from other fenceline communities, it ran a long battle for the overhaul of air quality and waste legislation. It is also fiercely contesting the government’s climate policy—both as it is written and as it is revealed in practice.

South Africa ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1997 and signed onto the Kyoto Protocol in 2002. These signatures cost it little, and climate change scarcely ruffled the government’s policy agenda. In December 2010, it finally published a Climate Change Response Green Paper. The Department of Environmental Affairs ran a brutally short consultation process, with one workshop in each of the three major urban centers. Challenged on this, officials replied that the green paper was part of a longer policy process that began in 2004 with the first national response strategy.

That was a bad start. The 2004 document gave absolute priority to economic growth based on cheap energy from coal. It said that cutting emissions in the North meant that energy intensive industries could be relocated to the South but warned that South Africa should defend its coal exports to the North.

This was a fair reflection of the government's real policies. It offered the cheapest power in the world to transnational corporate investors, particularly for mining and minerals processing. It told Eskom to build more coal-fired power stations to meet their demand. It told Transnet to expand the rail and port infrastructure to handle more coal exports, as well as to build the big new oil pipeline out of Durban. It allowed Sasol to wriggle out of repaying subsidies when the rising price of oil lifted the coal-to-liquid (CTL) plants into profit. Instead, it agreed that Sasol should invest windfall profits in expanding production. Beyond expanding production at its existing plants, Sasol then started feasibility studies on building an entirely new CTL plant. State-owned PetroSA, meanwhile, started planning a new and very large refinery in the Coega Industrial Development Zone outside Port Elizabeth.

These initiatives reflect the entrenched interests of the “minerals-energy complex” of state and private corporations that, since the discovery of gold, have dominated the South African economy. The policies of the 2000s thus echoed those of the 1920s when Eskom was established specifically to supply “cheap and abundant” electricity to industry. Since 2004, there have been two national climate summits where government ministers said all sorts of good things but still insisted that coal was king. The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) meanwhile commissioned the Long Term Mitigation Scenarios (LTMS), a research process with participation heavily biased to industry. These processes largely confirmed the subordination of climate to energy policy. In response, SDCEA joined with allies around the country to protest the expansion of the carbon economy on the ground.

### **Coal Power Expansion**

In 2008, the national power supply tripped out. Suddenly, the government and Eskom started talking about saving energy as if they meant it. They also wanted to speed up Eskom's “new build.” But the costs of the enormous new power stations—Medupi and Kusile—went up and up, and Eskom ran into funding difficulties. It then went repeatedly to the National Energy Regulator (NERSA) to demand a succession of hikes in the electricity price to pay for the new build and the interest on borrowed money. The actual increases that NERSA awarded Eskom add up to 137 percent above inflation over the period from 2008 to 2012. And there are more price hikes to come.

South Durban people took to the streets to protest the whole deal. Their reasons included:

- They can't afford it. Most are just scraping by and will be forced to choose between food and the means of cooking it, between schooling and the light to study by.
- Eskom's new build is based almost entirely on coal and will add 80 or 90 million metric tons of carbon to South Africa's already excessive emissions.
- These plants are primarily designed to supply energy-intensive industries. The biggest consumers—BHP Billiton and Anglo American—get power at below what it costs Eskom to produce it. So South Africa's people are subsidizing the richest minerals corporations in the world, who then take their profits out of the country.
- Eskom went to the World Bank for funding. The government has guaranteed World Bank and private bank loans to the tune of R350 billion. If (or when) the rand hits the skids again, this will turn into a debt trap, and the World Bank will hit the country with a structural adjustment process designed to ensure that, whatever else happens, the creditors will get their money back with interest. Ordinary people will then end up paying all over again. And Eskom will go back to pushing up demand to get the revenues to cover its debt.

The new build was given retrospective sanction through another process: the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2010) for electricity through to 2030. The IRP approach was meant to shift planning from a one-dimensional focus on supply to looking at the electricity system as a whole. But IRP 2010 doesn't make the shift. It is a traditional power expansion plan that justifies itself by projecting accelerated and unrestrained electricity demand. Most of this future new demand is driven by a major expansion of minerals processing, particularly ferrochrome smelters.

Some renewable energy is introduced into the supply mix and is mostly to be privatized. The real business remains big baseload power. Beyond Medupi and Kusile, the IRP plans two or three major new coal plants between 2014 and 2030. In addition, big minerals corporations will be building their own coal stations in the hope that they will be exempt from future power cuts. The IRP's biggest—and most expensive—ambitions are reserved for nuclear power. It plans for a "fleet" of six new plants to be built by 2030.

So the IRP looks very much like the minerals-energy complex view of the future. This is not surprising. In February 2010, the Department of Energy (DoE) secretly called together a "technical committee" to develop the IRP. Committee members were drawn from the minerals-energy complex A list—Eskom, Anglo American, BHP Billiton, Sasol, Xstrata, and the Chamber of Mines. Once the existence of the committee was exposed, the DoE refused to open the doors to the public or make the minutes of its meetings publicly available.

Public consultations—the by now usual round of a one-day workshop in each major city—followed on the foundation put down by the technical committee. For most participants, they had the feel of a formality, of consultation after the real decisions had been made. SDCEA therefore used the process to register its protest both against the process and the substance of the IRP 2010.

### South Africa's False Start

As a developing country, South Africa is not obliged to cut carbon emissions. It is nevertheless a heavy carbon emitter, ranked twelfth in the world and first in Africa, and its emissions are growing rapidly. At COP-15 in Copenhagen, South Africa offered to trim its growth in emissions. Compared with the steep rise in emissions expected in a business-as-usual scenario, it said it would slow the growth in emissions by 34 percent by 2020 and 42 percent by 2025. It would look to cut emissions in real terms sometime after 2035. This offer was said to be based on the Long Term Mitigation Scenarios. The offer itself, and the LTMS, were then used by the government and the World Bank to justify both Eskom's new build and the World Bank's loan. Medupi and Kusile, they said, were already factored into the promised reduction, so there could be no objection to these plants on climate grounds. The Copenhagen offer was proof enough of South Africa's climate commitments.

But the numbers do not add up. First, the Copenhagen offer does not come close to the reductions that the LTMS says are "required by science." Second, the offer itself has already been overtaken by the rampant growth of South Africa's emissions. The numbers are shown in Table 1.

Things are even worse than they look in this table for two reasons. First, what the LTMS says is "required by science" actually falls well short of the reductions that will really be required to avoid catastrophic climate change. This is mainly because the LTMS assumes that global warming of 2°C is safe—which it is not—and the allowable carbon emissions are calculated on that basis. Second, the IRP 2010 commits South Africa to another 100 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the power sector alone. So, excluding all other emissions growth from transport and industry, it is on track for emissions of around 640 million metric tons by about 2018.

**Table 1.** South African emissions and promises

Dates	Actual		LTMS ('required by science')		Copenhagen offer	
	2004	2011	2020	2025	2020	2025
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (million metric tons)	440	540	460	453	495	505

South Africa's climate commitments, thus, look flimsy. The real commitment is to economic growth driven by expanding energy. Given that commitment, climate policy offers several false solutions:

**Carbon capture and storage (CCS).** It is possible to separate CO<sub>2</sub> from the rest of a power station's emissions and then pump it underground. However, SDCEA opposes CCS because:

- It has not been shown anywhere in the world that either carbon capture or storage will work at the scale required to make a real difference.
- CCS is very expensive both to build and to operate and would require a global infrastructure on the scale of the oil industry. Even if separation plants are built, there can be little faith that utilities looking to cut costs will not switch them off when no-one is looking.
- Separating CO<sub>2</sub> will consume around 30 percent of the energy produced by a power station and thus substantially reduce its efficiency. Sasol's CTL process allows for a relatively cheap separation of a portion of its carbon emissions. On Sasol's own account, CCS would at best reduce its emissions to the level of those emitted in producing fuel from conventional crude oil.
- Underground carbon storage requires very particular geological formations. A "CO<sub>2</sub> Storage Atlas" prepared at the behest of the government, Eskom, Sasol, and other minerals-energy complex corporations shows that potential (not proven) sites are remote from industrial areas and mostly offshore.

CCS is one of several "clean coal technologies" promoted by policy. This is merely an industry greenwash slogan: any technological advances in mining or combustion is claimed to be clean coal and used to justify expanded coal use.

**Nuclear power.** The government says this is the low-carbon option that will provide for industry's baseload power needs. SDCEA opposes it because:

- Nuclear power is low-carbon only at the point of generation. The rest of the production chain through to decommissioning is both energy- and carbon-intensive.
- Rivers on the West Rand are already poisoned with radioactive waste from uranium mining.
- Costs are excessive and will likely bankrupt the country. Even if cheap options are taken, the industry record is one of major cost escalations.

- Safety cannot be guaranteed and is likely to be further compromised if cheap options are taken.
- Nuclear security regimes are not compatible with democratic accountability and control.
- Nowhere has a safe storage option for high-level waste been identified.

**Carbon markets.** Carbon trading was brought into being by the Kyoto Protocol. It allows dirty industries to avoid the costs of cleaning up by buying “carbon credits” from industries that are (or that claim to be) reducing emissions. It assumes that everything is cheaper in the Third World. The clean development mechanism (CDM) therefore allows Northern corporations to invest in cheaper but supposedly cleaner Southern projects and claim carbon credits without reducing emissions from their own factories. The market is now a decade old. It has not been shown to reduce real emissions by so much as a single ton of CO<sub>2</sub>. It has been shown to be riddled with corruption and has worked primarily to transfer more money to the rich.

### The Durban COP

South Africa is not alone in looking for false solutions. Most other countries are also protecting their interests in the carbon economy, and corporate business—particularly the big polluters—is included in most official delegations. South Africa’s delegation includes Eskom and Sasol along with other business interests.

The UNFCCC was negotiated in 1992. It recognizes that developed and developing countries have “common but differentiated responsibilities.” This means that the rich Northern countries are responsible for most carbon emissions to date and must therefore cut first and hardest. However, since then, most countries of the North have done everything possible to avoid making real cuts in emissions.

The UNFCCC initially relied on voluntary reductions from rich countries. Not one volunteered. A binding agreement was therefore called for. The Kyoto Protocol is a “cap-and-trade” scheme based on a proposal pushed by the U.S. It proposes a “cap” on Northern emissions—with each country committing to binding emission reductions—but then lets them trade these commitments away. Having imposed this market system, the U.S. refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol and so exempted itself from any binding reductions.

The commitments agreed by the rest of the North added up to a mere 5 percent reduction compared with what they emitted in 1990. These targets were based on “grandfathering”: the biggest historic polluters get the biggest future pollution allowance. Despite this sweetheart deal, several countries missed their target, and those that made it did so only because of the economic recession. Canada, defending

its profits from the tar sands, made a big display of throwing its supposedly binding commitments into the bin.

Copenhagen was supposed to mark the opening of a “second commitment period” with tougher reduction targets. Instead, the U.S. led a process for abandoning the very idea of binding commitments. The Copenhagen Accord, negotiated between the U.S. and the BASIC countries—Brazil, South Africa, India, and China—invited all parties to make their own carbon reduction “pledge.”

These are promises made to be broken. Even if they are kept, they put the world on course for warming of 4°C—that is, for climate catastrophe. Carbon trading is meanwhile retained even as the cap is abandoned. The Accord was met with howls of derision, and the Copenhagen COP broke up in disarray. One year later, all its key elements were formally adopted to the cheers of delegates at Cancún. Only Bolivia refused to agree to this charade. For its part, the South African government says Cancún was an “extraordinary achievement.” Clearly, there is little to expect from its chairing of the Durban COP. Within the present logic of the negotiations, it will instead confirm that the basis of any agreement is that it should work for the economy but not for the climate, for corporate capital but not for people.

### Where SDCEA Stands

SDCEA expects little from the governments gathered for the Durban COP. They have not shown themselves to be serious about addressing climate change. They have not shown themselves to be capable of leading the necessary change in the economic system of production and consumption.

SDCEA expects much from the people. On the streets of Copenhagen and Cancún, people chanted “change the system not the climate.” This is the real issue. This is what will be debated in the people’s autonomous space in Durban. This is what people from south Durban, together with their allies from around the city and the world, will call for as they join the Global Day of Action on December 3, 2011.

Changing the system is necessary because capitalism is not compatible with addressing climate change. Capitalism requires never-ending economic growth, which can be sustained only with growing carbon emissions. Addressing climate change requires a very steep reduction in emissions starting *now*. Further delay means steeper reductions.

Governments North and South have adapted their concept of development to capital’s requirement for economic growth. They claim that it is necessary to “pull people out of poverty.” Growth has indeed brought incredible wealth to the owners of capital and prosperity to the world’s middle classes. But it has also brought untold misery to the majority of people, particularly in the global South.

Economic growth is accompanied by the growing inequality of incomes globally. In most countries, it also brings intensified pollution and carbon emissions along with large-scale dispossession of those who stand in the way of “development.”

In South Africa, the richest 20 percent of people take 75 percent of all income, and 60 percent of the people are poor by any reasonable measure. This is not for want of economic growth. The boom years up until 2008 merely intensified poverty as ever-higher food prices cut into the budgets of poor households.

## Targets

There is no “safe” level for rising temperatures or carbon concentrations. The global temperature rise is now about  $0.85^{\circ}\text{C}$ —already catastrophic for millions of people around the world. In 2010, Pakistan drowned while Russia burned. 2011 opened with unprecedented flooding in Australia and Brazil.

In much of Africa the temperature rises at 1.5 times the global average and already exceeds  $1^{\circ}\text{C}$ . In Niger, several years of drought were followed by unusually severe flooding in August 2010. People already vulnerable to malnutrition saw their crops destroyed and their homes flooded. In South Africa, successive years of heavy flooding in the southern Cape yielded to severe drought in 2010, while the normally dry northern Cape was inundated with flood waters in early 2011.

The Cancún agreement sets a target for stabilizing temperatures at  $2^{\circ}\text{C}$ . This is a target for global catastrophe. The risk of runaway climate change—the point when natural feedbacks become more significant than man-made emissions—is already evident and becomes a near certainty at  $2^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

It is therefore imperative to keep warming as little above one degree as is now physically possible. That probably means  $1.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  which is the target demanded by African countries. This is not a “safe” target. It is what the global elites have brought us to.

The rising temperature is dragged up by rising concentrations of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the atmosphere. As with temperature, “safe” concentrations are far exceeded. Over the last million years or so,  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations have fluctuated between 180 and 280 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere. The concentration is now over 390 ppm, well outside earth’s normal operating range, and increasing at around 2 ppm a year.

Including all greenhouse gases, concentrations are now around 440  $\text{CO}_2\text{e}$  (carbon dioxide equivalents) ppm. Global leaders talk of “stabilization” at 450  $\text{CO}_2\text{e}$  ppm. This does not correlate even with the dangerous  $2^{\circ}\text{C}$  target but puts us on the path to  $3^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Nor have global leaders taken any credible action even to achieve stabilization at 450 ppm.



It is now clear that the rise in temperature cannot be reversed. If we go to 1.5°C, that is what we are stuck with. But the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> can and must be reduced to stop the temperature rising further. The 2010 People's Conference on Climate Change meeting in Cochabamba demanded a return to pre-industrial concentrations. There is no "carbon space" left. Meeting any credible target now requires that global energy and industrial emissions are cut by between 2 and 3 billion metric tons each year. The implications are evident:

- all oil, coal, and gas exploration should stop—more than enough to burn the planet has already been found;
- unconventional fossil fuels (tar sands, deep water deposits, shale gas, coal-to-liquids, etc.) must be abandoned;
- no more coal power stations should be built in South Africa or anywhere else in the world.

The government is not planning for the real future. The Climate Change Response Green Paper warns that average temperatures will be 3–4°C hotter at the coast and 6–7°C hotter inland. That is not livable.

But government cannot face up to what it sees coming, because it remains wedded to the dominant interests of the minerals-energy complex. It remains locked in a view of the world in which economic growth constitutes the central organizing principle of development. This is not because growth is needed to alleviate poverty but because it is needed to reproduce capital. This is the system that puts profit before people.

To address climate change and meet the needs of the people, there must be a radical redefinition of what is meant by development and who defines it.

First, the central organizing principle should be sustainable development founded on economic, social, and environmental justice. This means a commitment to growing human solidarity and equality and that people recognize themselves as a living part of the earth's ecology. To destroy the environment is, finally, to destroy the people.

Second, localization is essential to any serious program of mitigation and requires that national resources should be focused on supporting people's capacities to direct local development.

Third, the energy system must be transformed as a matter of urgency. This is not only about choosing renewable technologies. It is about what energy is for and who controls it. We call for people's energy sovereignty founded on democratic and local control.

Fourth, the transition to a different energy and development order will require energy inputs from the declining fossil-fuel system. If these investments go into the declining system, they will represent a permanent loss. In the period between now and the latest credible peak-emission target date of 2015, fossil-fuel resources should be used to build the new system.

Fifth, food is the most basic form of energy for people, and the food system must be thoroughly transformed to enable people to define and take control of production and consumption, and hence of their own futures.

Finally, the Green Paper repeats government's stated commitment to people-centered development. That commitment is not visible to ordinary people. We believe that a "people-centered approach" means an open-ended process of transition to a society in which people are actively and consciously making the decisions that shape their collective future.