

## **We need a real “Alternatives to Mining” Indaba**

*Farai Maguwu and Christelle Terreblanche*

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This year’s alternative to mining conference in South Africa was a failure in many ways. It shied away from critical discussions over the intersections between the energy crises, the escalating looting of Africa’s resources, its deepening poverty and food insecurity and especially its disproportional vulnerability to global warming. Why were these burning issues not prominent on the programme?

You could be forgiven for thinking you were attending a side-event at Cape Town's glitzy annual Mining Indaba in early February, when the opening panel of a civil society meeting repeatedly stressed how crucial mining is for Africa's 'development.'

The challenge, many inferred, was merely to close the tax gaps that have led to massive illicit financial outflows, secreted away to offshore banking centres by looting corporations. Another concern was to ensure that affected communities get a bit more bang for their buck.

Not justice for the dispossessed, not radical measures to head off a climate emergency driven by fossil fuel mining; not an end to systemic violence (reflecting capital-state power, society-nature exploitation and patriarchy), and certainly no word about alternatives to mining. At a time of extreme crises in the mining industry – including 90% declines in stock market values of industry leaders Anglo American, Glencore and Lonmin – this was the moment to strike the Achilles Heel of minerals capitalism.

After all, the 7th Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) speakers were talking on behalf of millions of Africans alienated from their land and livelihoods in an unprecedented scramble for Africa's resources, mostly aided and abetted by corrupt local elites.

The outflow of non-renewable mineral wealth is said to be offset by attracting 'much needed' foreign direct investment, boosting national 'growth' (Gross Domestic Product) and creating jobs. But mining takes a massive toll on the prospects of future generations, on the environment and especially on already poor communities in the here and now.

This is a net outflow of wealth accompanied by an entrenchment of the structural violence that had torn the continent's people apart for centuries. Above all, as the local elites are pocketing millions that fall from corporate tables, governments in Africa have slowed down on productive and sustainable sectors of their economies such as agriculture, renewable energy generation and manufacturing.

In most cases, that means rural communities are forcibly removed, ill-compensated (if at all), and suffer violent repression of protests and countless mining externalities such as dust, bad air, blasting and toxic water. Displaced from access to their reproductive resources, including growing food, women often bear the brunt of the violent dislocation. They live as the bottom layer at the edges of squalid mining towns where they render unpaid and devalued care work, but swell the increasingly feminised ranks of refugees on the continent.

Cheap migrant labour, after all, had cemented South Africa's minerals-energy complex. This structural fault line creates poverty and inequality, on behalf of profits for transnational companies who were enticed to the African Mining Indaba by, among other things, golf days and music soir e treats.

So where were the countless African communities adversely affected by mining? A few were present among the 350-strong AMI delegates, but the event was dominated by NGOs, liberal funders and the faith community. The AMI programme contained fewer than a third of speakers who were community representatives. They were mostly given five-minute speaking slots to describe complex, multiple layers of dispossession.

A few more affected voices were heard in the side-sessions. As one woman from Mokopane in South Africa's North West province, where the community had been fighting a seven year battle said: "When a woman loses land, (the family) can't eat, we can't produce".

There are plenty of reasons for wondering what happened to a potential 'alternative' forum to garner much-needed solidarity action and justice for marginalised groups, while exposing mining atrocities – much like the World Social Forum is to the World Economic Forum.

Beyond this year's less-than-ambitious AMI agenda, three trends were particularly indicative of this 'alternative' potential gone astray.

First, the opening remarks betrayed a certain apologetic tone. Almost every official speaker indicted mining as harmful. Nevertheless, all argued that mining must continue and can be reined in: mining is good for Africa because Africa needs development and must grow.

This is despite over 60 years of imposed development schemes that had left much of the continent more export-dependent and depleted than before, structurally skewed into uneven enclaves and politically captured by transnational corporations.

Across town, the mining corporates were consolidating their growing power over the continent's resources, striking deals for big infrastructure and off-set schemes with governments – all of which lead to further land, water and 'green grabs' – resources enclosed purportedly to mitigate climate change that actually lead to further devastation and enclosure.

But all this is framed as 'development,' even 'green' development. The corporate AMI counterpart even had it's own 'sustainability' day for the public this year, though few mining houses comply with environmental requirements.

The mining-for-development paradigm is increasingly questioned among progressives worldwide, especially in the Global South, given the role of fossil fuel and energy-intensive mineral extraction in escalating inequality, climate change and other socio-ecological problems.

The narrative of 'mining ourselves out of poverty' is now banal propaganda: from government, from big corporates and sadly, from civil society – which seemed to sing the same tune in Cape Town despite mounting evidence that this is a fallacy.

It is the 'development'-at-any-cost mindset that underpins the African Mining Vision, of which the AMI only said: let's 'domesticate' the corporate vision, through engagement and better consent and transparency mechanisms.

This already alludes to the second problem: the AMI once again failed to

‘connect the dots’ from mining to climate, electricity and economy, as Patrick Bond commented after the 2015 AMI gathering.

The conference unnecessarily shied away from critical discussions over the intersections between the energy crises (from South Africa’s crunch, coal addiction and nuclear ambitions to the fact that less than half of Africans have access to electricity), the escalating looting of Africa’s resources, its deepening poverty and food insecurity and especially its disproportional vulnerability to global warming.

Why were these burning issues not prominent on the programme? Where are the ‘alternatives’ –from food sovereignty to post-extractivism to ‘zero waste’ and solidarity economy pathways? Where are the discussions about real jobs that could also ward off catastrophic warming of the continent? Why does gender remain a side issue?

We can think of countless reasons why the climate change-mining link should have been a prominent theme of the 2016 AMI. Given AMI’s close relationship with the faith community, surely there was reason to take note of last year’s mea culpa intervention by the Pope’s ‘Encyclical’ on climate change that has quite a lot to say about mining impacts.

Then, the world watched in astonishment as the United Nation’s COP21 Paris climate talks condemned Africa to an almost certain ecocide. And we are acutely aware of the drought that is crippling farmers across southern Africa, the water crisis and the billions of dollars ‘fleeing’ the developing world as the capitalist financial crisis deepens.

As conference attendees sweltered in an unprecedented heat wave, how could the connection between extraction and climate not be centre-stage?

Lastly, the most disconcerting question: why is the AMI failing to follow through on its own resolutions? In 2014, the civil society gathering resolved to ‘name and shame’ transgressing companies. In 2015, it went further, resolving to hold a Mining Tribunal to hold companies accountable.

We are still waiting. Not that there has been lack of opportunity. It would have been easy enough to slot into a growing movement that held a Third International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature at the December 2015 Paris COP21, with mining corporations prominent among the indicted – and the event presided over by respected Cape Town lawyer Cormac Cullinan.

Indeed, it is unfortunate that no space has been created at the AMI for reflection on previous resolutions: progress, setbacks and the worsening trends in dispossession and inequality since its first meeting in 2010.

These omissions only reinforce a growing perception that the ‘alternative’ is just a space for victims of mining to blow off steam, while they are taught how to scrounge a few more crumbs from the looters’ banquet, via civilizing-society NGOs.

The mute tone at the opening session was also evident in this year’s communiqué to the main Indaba, with rather polite suggestions that governments do the things they already should be doing to reign in transnationals and protect their own people.

Sadly, the AMI’s narrative can hardly be distinguished from the official big boys’ Indaba – that Africa’s hopes of economic growth are inextricably pinned to extraction and export of raw minerals – an optimism negated by the history of mining in Africa.

There was no ‘thinking outside the box’ about what else Africa can do apart from destructive mining. No discussion on commodity price volatility, China’s economic slowdown and its effect on African economies that heavily rely on mineral extraction and export.

For instance, the price of iron ore has slumped from \$150 per ton in 2013 to \$65 per ton in February 2016; coal and platinum are not far behind. Several mining companies are slowing production and sending workers home to cope with the commodity prices slump. Many will be placed on care maintenance

for a couple of years to come, thereby drilling holes in the minerals-for-development narrative. Vast chunks of mining land are now un-economic, to be scavenged –terribly dangerously – by gangs of desperate, informal artisanal miners.

But mentioning this harsh reality – the decisive end of the commodity super-cycle –would have dampened the optimism of believers: both those who genuinely and innocently believe mining to be a panacea to Africa’s development crises, and those NGOs paid to sanitize mining in the civil society sphere.

Africa needs alternatives to mining and fossil fuels even as basic or minimal mining would remain necessary. Even keynoters at the official Mining Indaba screamed out for ‘diversification’ thanks to the crash of commodity prices. Not every mineral in Africa must be extracted NOW. We need alternatives to development-as-ecocide. We need solidarity against both the Western imperialist and BRICS-sub imperialist New Scramble for Africa.

In short, we need a conference on ‘Alternatives to Mining’, and even more coordinated resistance and solidarity.

After all, Africa gave rise to one of the most innovative solutions to both the capitalist and climate crisis: “Leave the Oil in the Soil, the Coal in the Hole, and the Fracking Shale Gas under the Grass!” This philosophy was catalyzed by the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other activists by the Nigerian government at the behest of Shell Oil 20 years ago, because they organized hundreds of thousands of people to peacefully protest the oil-extractive destruction of the Niger Delta.

The concept of avoiding a Resource Curse by leaving ‘wealth’ underground, has animated activists globally. Why could it not be discussed, let alone owned, in Cape Town in 2016? The NGOs’ failure of nerve and the neglect of mining communities’ interests so that mining-as-development rhetoric can continue, are reasons why the AMI steers dangerously close to becoming a ridiculous distraction, not a space for counter-power.

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## Alternative Mining Indaba: a response to Christopher Rutledge

By [John Capel](#) and [Hassen Lorgat](#)

23 February 2016

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Protest at the official mining Indaba in 2015. Photo: Marta Garrich

The recent flurry of post Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) articles have had their moment of fame until next year, but the discussion is welcomed as it raises at least two valid points – raised by others over the recent past. One persistent criticism is that of the diminished voices at the Alternative Mining Indaba. The mining communities are the centre of work and we note that, as we write, the people of Xolobeni are waging a life and death struggle against the mining-energy-industrial complex. Sadly, this situation has been fuelled by the deliberately inept Department of Mineral Resources (DMR).

Today, the united people of Xolobeni will once again face the united power of the DMR and the Australian mining company, who insist on mining over the heads of people, and they will do this whatever the costs in lives, social cohesion, and democratic rights to refuse mining. We must campaign nationally and internationally to ensure that the peoples right in Xolobeni to say "no to mining" is successful.

The Xolobeni decision is based on strong organisation and knowledge about the failure of mining to deliver to people, and our 13 years working with mining communities confirm this.

Christopher Rutledge, of Action Aid South Africa, correctly attacks the "current model" of the AMI, which "excludes communities and preferences NGO elites." He further alleges that these elites (presumably leaders in the AMI) "speak on behalf of communities and raise funds in the name of communities, while limiting and excluding communities in the very same way that state and corporate duty bearers consistently do."

Notwithstanding the corporate and UN speak, he does raise the genuine concern about substitutionism, but views these problems as external to him or his organisation. He does not take ownership of the perceived problems – only for his own critique. Yet he has been a participant in these processes without consistently arguing and organising for the politics he desires for the movement as a whole.

He is not the first to do this, as others before have done the same. Yet to criticise politics and processes after the fact, or "after the indaba", has limited value for those who are dedicated to building greater principled unity in action in a very fractious sector – civil society, broadly defined.

His is a valuable critique of the AMI, albeit somewhat limited, as it, for instance, fails to fully critique the trends towards elite representation and corporatisation. These critiques fail to recognise that business, unions, church organisations and its networks and even some communities have been subject to corporate capture. It is a phenomenon that engulfs more sectors than simply "the NGOs". Thus, we argue that corporate capture has come with a vengeance to the faith-based or, more specifically, the church leaders and churches, which we will talk more of later.

Elitism and elitists come in many ways and we need a more substantial discussion about how to combat this control over processes and how those of us, genuinely interested, can in its place contribute towards the task of building a popular movement of the workers and the poor ("the communities", etc.), which will ensure that they keep all of us in check as well.

So, if we begin to have a wider discussion about elite power at the AMI and elsewhere, we will have to ask hard questions to all who participate: university-based researchers, academics, lawyers and professors (and doctoral students) as well as church, community, social movement, political party and union "leaders" too. In addition we must not forget the role of the International NGOs who also have an agenda that must be scrutinised as well. If we do this, we will own both the problems (as we allowed it) and become part of the

solution. This brings us to the hard and persistent question of community participation which cannot be avoided head on:

How many communities or community members did the big powerful NGO groupings like Action Aid, Oxfam, or university-based groupings or the established church-aligned groups bring to the AMI, to enlarge the voice and participation of communities? If these groups, in particular the NGOs helped to fund or supported the participation of autonomous community groups in the AMI, it would advance our deliberations ten-fold. But alas, this did not happen.

For the record the Bench Marks Foundation brought 20 community representatives working in different provinces with us to share experiences, debate and protest at the Indabas. This cost the organisation well over R200,000 for transport, clean and decent accommodation and good quality meals to ensure quality and effective learning exchanges. We could not bring more participants but we sincerely ask that each of these groups answer what have they done to promote the much cherished goal of community participation and ownership of the AMI?

We believe, as Rutledge acknowledges, that the AMI is a valuable forum, which must be further democratised and strengthened. The AMI, as we understand it, was set up some eight years ago, with a modest 40 delegates to challenge the dominant narrative coming from the Investing in Mining Indaba that has been around for decades and that had gone unchallenged. Increasingly over the years, the thousands of negative impacts of mining on society, economic wellbeing and the ecology as well as the fiscus and taxation was laid bare for all to see.

We argue daily that in mining and extractives at large there are winners and losers and that not all investment is good. Increasingly communities we work with point out that the true costs of mining calls for other development paths outside of extractivism to be explored. The Indaba over a year ago, threatened to sue the Alternative Mining Indaba for using the African word Indaba, and when they were challenged back, they backed off. The AMI is intended as a sharing space for communities, NGOs and faith-based organisations and must resist capture by corporations and international NGOs, who by the way also raise their money in the name of communities.

Let us not be misunderstood, international NGOs do at times play a progressive role, but sometimes wittingly or not, displace nationally based social movements and NGOs to the detriment of building power from below, which is essential to building a society free of exploitation and marginalisation. We further hope that they do not take the AMI *as the only avenue* to express their work.

We now turn to our concern that critiques of the AMI have not fully explored:

Firstly, the AMI is not the only forum to express the work of the Bench Marks Foundation, and should not be for others as well. It is but one of a number of engagements, that we use to advance a progressive agenda.

Secondly, we must keep it as a platform to exchange views and plan collective actions with working people and the poor we work with to contest corporate power. It must be a forum for workers, the mining communities, progressive faith-based organizations and NGOs but we must resist corporate encroachment in our forums. In addition, we must limit the dominance of international NGOs who with their immense resources, intellectual and financial, tend to shape agendas away from the concerns of locals.

Corporate social responsibility and the sustainable development agenda is part of the capture of civil society organisations by a business agenda. From the 1970s civil society at the UN level was pushing for a binding code of conduct to reign in the power of transnational corporations. They failed. After pushing strongly for this in the 80s, the 1992 Earth Summit backed by the then General Secretary of the UN, Kofi Annan, led to the birth of voluntary mechanisms by business. The UN launched the voluntary Global Compact, a set of ten principles. All companies had to do was sign on and hence came the defeat of the global south for binding regulations. Business developed Business Action for Sustainable Development; World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the UN encouraged partnerships. Bodies like UNICEF, WHO and UNDP involved themselves in thousands of partnerships raking tens of million dollars while losing legitimacy.

The Global South was campaigning for external control over corporations and promoted human rights, skills and technology transfer, local economic development, human rights, equitable sharing of wealth, strict tax measures and accountability of corporations.

Supporting the global compact and its voluntary agenda at the time was WWF, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, Save the Children and Amnesty International. Many now do not. Here was corporate capture at its best.

Thirdly, we define our approach as evidence or research-based activism, accompanied by community organising and monitoring of corporate conduct with the view of challenging corporate power and continuing to agitate wherever power lies. An advocacy strategy built on research, community organising, building alliances with organised workers and other communities has stood us thus far in good stead. We have much to do and improve and will use whatever forum to advance the objectives of the organisation and the people we work with.

This brings us to the ICMM (International Council on Minerals and Metals) representative speaking at the AMI closing session. It was a Bench Marks staffer who led the criticism of the ICMM agenda and approach to seeking to talk to communities. He said, and we reiterate, that their current willingness to talk to communities is not genuine and will dissipate as soon as the current phase of capitalist crisis is over. The organised pressure of communities and the deepening crisis, have sharpened the crisis of legitimacy of the mining sector. Mining faces a crisis of legitimacy and business will make overtures to the AMI, hoping to placate its voice and alternative vision captured in the outcomes of each AMI.

We must continually challenge corporate power. Last year, the Bench Marks intervened as CEO Mark Cutifani of Anglo American, fresh from a Vatican visit, begun what we believe to be an exercise aimed at co-opting church leaders. Out of interest the message the Vatican

gave many mining executives was to consider the common good and what is meaningful existence. The context was set as the Church of England had decided to disinvest in coal, a landmark visionary investment decision but which was soon overturned.

With all his charm, Cutifani decided to give UK church leaders a visit to very selective mining sights in three countries. On hearing this, the Bench Marks first wrote a letter to Cutifani stating clearly that talking to church investors and not impacted communities was an attempt to gain legitimacy at the expense of communities. We wrote to the UK church leaders inviting them to go on toxic tours of mining areas to witness the devastation of extractionism when they came to South Africa. They refused the toxic tour but agreed to see us for a limited time of only two hours!

Having suffered the first shock, we were in for an even bigger surprise when we heard about a similar initiative with South African church leaders led by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba. Euphemistically called *courageous day of conversation* and hosted by the Anglican Archbishop with about 20 CEOs of who's who in mining. We received an invitation to come and listen and participate from the floor. In addition, the Bench Marks Foundation tried inviting the South African Church leaders on a toxic tour which we believe will make them rethink their keenness to invest in fossil fuels.

We were refused permission to take the church leaders on what we call "a toxic tour" of actually existing life of mining and its impacts on communities. However, and at the last moment, we were allowed to be on one of the panels to address the church leaders. Internally, we debated whether we should take up the seat on the panel at the late hour. Eventually we participated and made our unhappiness known. We restated clearly that mining corporations needed to talk directly to communities, providing them with full information on matters affecting them. This means providing them with mining licenses, water licenses, social and labour plans, environmental management plans and the resources for them to build their informed capacities. These we have championed for 13 years.

Thus the issue of challenging power means that we must go into their indaba but restrict them from coming into ours. Our questions are strategic, to put corporations under heat to separate off their words from their deeds and to show them up. In addition to get them to make public commitments in front of large audiences of their own kin, is to hold them accountable. This is what some of us did during the 2016 Mining Indaba.

At this year's Investing in Africa Mining Indaba, at one panel discussion the Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba was chaperoned by Anglo CEO Mark Cutifani and one community representative. One of us asked the archbishop if he had forsaken the option for the poor for an option for CEOs. In addition, Cutifani was challenged to immediately publish all the Anglo American Social and Labour Plans on their website and he promised to do so.

These engagements will be futile if not backed up by quality research, community organisations and monitors and a militant media and advocacy campaign.

We have a lot to do to build focus and keep the faith communities on our side, keep out corporations from our organisations and forums, and to increase the organisation and

support for self-organisation of communities of workers and the poor. We are up to this challenge and hope others can remain on course. We have no option but to redouble our efforts as mining is killing the poor and giving the golden goose to the corporations. Sadly, our government - that is morally and politically mandated to protect the poorest - continues to serve as a conduit for the most powerful.

It is a time for governments to rededicate themselves in words but backed up in concrete deeds that they will not be party to harming the poor any longer. And it is time for the NGOs and in particular international NGOs to give communities moral and political support so that mining communities can obtain a real voice and organisational power to defeat greed and destruction of their communities. The responsibility belongs to all of us. We write this as a contribution to healthy debate, but more so that we can work with others to make real impacts on the lives of the mining communities we work with.

The authors are with the Benchmarks Foundation, one of the organisers of the Alternative Mining Indaba.

# **Rejoinder: In defence of the Alternative Mining Indaba**

## **John Capel and Hassen Lorgat**

Feb 24, 2016

In a response to critiques of this year's Alternative Mining Indaba for sidelining effected communities and their concerns from the forum, the Bench Marks Foundation asserts their commitment to a popular movement of workers and the poor while reminding of the importance of contesting corporate power.

The recent flurry of post-Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) articles have had their moment of fame until next year, but the discussion is welcome as it raises at least two valid points – raised by others over the recent past. Farau Maguwu and Terreblanche lament that climate change was not discussed and, importantly, the AMI failed to address and build action on its own past decisions.[1] Ultimately, they admonish the AMI for not campaigning to keep the natural resources in the ground, a position we have not heard Farau articulate vociferously for when he is at home working with poor communities.[2]

This is understandable as we must not simply counter-pose one slogan for another, and invariably progressive groups are often the last to come to areas where prospection and implicit decision to mine has been given. What we then find is that communities are being divided by the allure of false promises of mining riches, in collusion with our Department of Mineral Resources (DMR). Where people are well organised and resist, we find the full mining – energy complex come down upon them, which is what the people of Xolobeni are witnessing now.

Today, the united people of Xolobeni will once again face the united power of the DMR and the Australian mining company who insist on mining over the heads of people, and they will do this whatever the costs in lives, social cohesion, and democratic rights to refuse mining. We must campaign nationally and internationally to ensure that the people's right in Xolobeni to say no to mining is successful. It is the second Pondoland Revolt, but it is one that must be fought in Australia, the US, UK, Jo'burg and everywhere where those whose greed for money and hatred of democracy is self-evident.

These questions are not simply ideological statements but require serious organisational-political work and must be derived with communities, journeyed together about the failure of mining to deliver any benefits to the majority of South Africans. Our 13 years' working with mining communities is one that does not have a good story to tell.

Rutledge of Action Aid South Africa, in turn, attacks the "current model" of the AMI, which "excludes communities and preferences NGO elites." He further alleges that these elites (presumably leaders in the AMI) "speak on behalf of communities and raise funds in the name of communities, while limiting and excluding communities in the very same way that state and corporate duty bearers consistently do."

Notwithstanding the corporate and UN speak, authors of both articles mentioned above raise genuine concerns about substitutionism, but also write as if these problems are external to them. They do not take ownership of the perceived problems – only for their own critiques. Yet they have been participants in these processes without consistently arguing and organizing for the politics they want for the whole movement. But they are not the first to do this, as others before have done the same. To criticize politics and processes after the fact, or “after the indaba” has limited value for those who are dedicated to build greater principled unity in action in a very fractious sector – civil society, broadly defined.

Yet both contributions we refer to (and others), contain valuable critiques of the AMI, albeit somewhat limited. They, for instance, fail to fully critique the trends towards elite representation and corporatization. They fail to recognize that business, unionism, NGO-ism, church organizations and their networks, and even some communities all have been subject of corporate capture. It is a phenomenon that engulfs more sectors than simply “the NGOs”. Thus, we argue that corporate capture has come with a vengeance to the faith-based or, more specifically, the church leaders and churches, which we will talk more of later.

Elitism and elitists come in many ways and we need a more substantial discussion about how to combat this control over processes and how those of us who are genuinely interested, can contribute towards the task of building a popular movement of the workers and the poor (“the communities” etc.), which will ensure that they keep all of us in check as well.

So, if we begin to have a wider discussion about elite power at the AMI and elsewhere, we will have to ask hard questions to all who participate: university-based researchers, academics, lawyers and professors (and doctoral students) as well as church, community, social movement, political party and union “leaders”, too. In addition we must not forget the role of the International NGOs who also have an agenda that must be scrutinized. If we do this, we will own both the problems (as we allowed it) and become part of the solution. This brings us head on to the hard and persistent question of community participation which cannot be avoided:

How many communities or community members did the big powerful NGO groupings like Action Aid, Oxfam, or university-based groupings or the established church-aligned groups bring to the AMI, to enlarge the voice and participation of communities? If these groups, in particular the INGOs helped to fund or supported the participation of autonomous community groups in the AMI, it would advance our deliberations ten-fold. But alas, this did not happen.

For the record, the Bench Marks brought 20 community representatives working in different provinces with us to share experiences, debate and protest at the Indabas. This cost the organisation well over R200,000 (US\$13,000) for transport, clean and decent accommodation, good quality meals to ensure quality and effective learning exchanges. We could not bring more participants but we sincerely ask that each of these groups answer what have they have done to promote the much cherished goal of community participation and ownership of the AMI?

We believe, as do the two sets of commentators, that the AMI is a valuable forum, which must be further democratized and strengthened. The AMI, as we understand it, was set up some 8 years ago, with a modest 40 delegates to challenge the dominant narrative coming from the Investing in Mining Indaba that has been around for decades going unchallenged. Increasingly over the years, the thousands of negative impacts of mining on society, economic wellbeing and the ecology as well as the fiscus and taxation was laid bare for all to see.

We argue daily that in mining and extractives at large there are winners and losers and that not all investment is good and increasingly communities we work with point out that the true costs of mining calls for other development paths outside extractivism to be explored. The Indaba over a year ago, threatened to sue the Alternative Mining Indaba for using the African word Indaba, and when they were challenged, they backed off. The AMI is intended as a sharing space for communities, NGOs and faith-based organisations and must resist capture by corporations and INGOs, who by the way also raise their money in the name of communities.

Let us not be misunderstood, INGOs do at times play a progressive role, but sometimes wittingly or not, displace nationally based social movements and NGOs to the detriment of building power from below, which is essential to build a society free of exploitation and marginalisation. We further hope that they do not take the AMI as the only avenue to express their work.

We now turn to our concern that the critiques have not fully explored and this is how we contest corporate power.

Firstly, the AMI is not the only forum to express our work, and it should not be for others as well. It is but one of a number of engagements, that we use to advance a progressive agenda.

Secondly, and in this regard, we must keep it as a platform to exchange views and plan collective actions with working people and the poor we work with to contest corporate power. Thus it must be a forum for workers, the mining communities, progressive faith-based organizations and NGOs but we must resist corporate encroachment in our forums. In addition, we must limit the dominance of INGOs who with their immense resources, intellectual and financial, tend to shape agendas away from the concerns of locals.

Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development agenda is part of the capture of civil society organisations by a business agenda. From the 1970s civil society at the UN level was pushing for a binding code of conduct to reign in the power of transnational corporations. They failed. After pushing strongly for this in the 80s, at the 1992 Earth Summit voluntary mechanisms by business were born, backed by the then General Secretary of the UN, Kofi Annan,. The UN launched the voluntary Global Compact, a set of 10 principles. All companies had to do was sign on, hence the defeat of the Global South for binding regulations. Business developed Business Action for Sustainable Development; World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the UN encouraged partnerships.

Bodies like UNICEF, WHO, and UNDP involved themselves in thousands of partnerships raking tens of million dollars while losing legitimacy.

The Global South was campaigning for external control over corporations and promoted human rights, skills and technology transfer, local economic development, equitable sharing of wealth, strict tax measures and accountability of corporations.

Supporting the global compact and its voluntary agenda at the time was WWF, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, Save the Children and Amnesty International. Many now do not. Here was corporate capture at its best.

Thirdly, we define our approach as evidence or research-based activism, accompanied by community organising and monitoring of corporate conduct with the view of challenging corporate power and continuing to agitate wherever power lies. An advocacy strategy built on research, community organising, building alliances with organised workers and other communities has stood us thus far in good stead. We have much to do and improve and will use whatever forum to advance the objectives of the organisation and the people we work with.

This brings us to the International Council on Minerals and Metals (ICMM) representative speaking at the AMI closing session. If the writers of the two articles can recall, it was a Bench Marks staffer who led the criticism of the ICMM agenda and approach to seeking to talk to communities. He said, and we reiterate, that their current willingness to talk to communities is not genuine and will dissipate as soon as the current phase of capitalist crisis is over. The organised pressure of communities and the deepening crisis, have sharpened the crisis of legitimacy of the mining sector. Therefore business will make overtures to the AMI, hoping to placate its voice and alternative vision captured in the outcomes of each AMI.

We must continually challenge corporate power. Last year, the Bench Marks intervened as CEO Mark Cutifani of Anglo American, fresh from a Vatican visit, begun what we believe to be an exercise aimed at co-opting church leaders. Out of interest the message the Vatican gave many mining executives was to consider the common good and what is meaningful existence. The context was set as the Church of England had decided to disinvest in coal, a landmark visionary investment decision but which was soon overturned.

With all his charm, Cutifani decided to give UK church leaders a visit to very selective mining sights in three countries. On hearing this, the Bench Marks first wrote a letter to Cutifani stating clearly that talking to church investors and not impacted communities was an attempt to gain legitimacy at the expense of communities. We wrote to the UK church leaders inviting them to go on toxic tours of mining areas to witness the devastation of extractionism when they came to South Africa. They refused the toxic tour but agreed to see us for a limited time of only two hours!

Having suffered the first shock, we were in for an even bigger surprise when we heard about a similar initiative with South African church leaders led by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba It was euphemistically called “courageous day of conversation” and hosted by the Anglican

Archbishop with about 20 CEOs of who's who in mining. We received an invitation to come and listen and participate from the floor. In addition, the Bench Marks Foundation tried inviting the South African Church leaders on a "toxic tour" which we believe will make them rethink their keenness to invest in fossil fuels.

We were refused permission to take the church leaders on what we call "a toxic tour" of actually existing life of mining and its impacts on communities. However, and at the last moment, we were allowed to be on one of the panels to address the church leaders. Internally, we debated whether we should take up the seat on the panel at the late hour. Eventually we participated and made our unhappiness known. We restated clearly that mining corporations needed to talk directly to communities, providing them with full information on matters affecting them. This means providing them with mining licenses, water licenses, social and labour plans, environmental management plans and the resources for them to build their informed capacities. These we have championed for 13 years.

Thus the issue of challenging power means that we must go into their indaba but restrict them from coming into ours. Our questions are strategic, to put corporations under heat to separate off their words from their deeds and to show them up as well as to get them to make public commitments in front of large audiences in order to hold them accountable. This is what some of us did during the 2016 Mining Indaba.

At this year's Investing in Africa Mining Indaba, in one panel discussion, where the Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba was chaperoned by Anglo CEO Mark Cutifani and one community representative, one of us asked the archbishop if he had forsaken the option for the poor for an option for CEOs. In addition, Cutifani was challenged to immediately publish all the Anglo American Social and Labour Plans on their website and he promised to do so.

These engagements will be futile if not backed up by quality research, community organisations and monitors and a militant media and advocacy campaign.

We have a lot to do to build focus and keep the faith communities on our side, keep out corporations from our organisations and forums, and to increase the organisation and support for self-organisation of communities of workers and the poor. We are up to this challenge and hope others can remain on course. We have no option but to redouble our efforts as mining is killing the poor and giving the golden goose to the corporations. Sadly, our government -that is morally and politically mandated to protect the poorest - continues to serve as a conduit for the most powerful.

It is a time for governments to rededicate themselves in words but backed up in concrete deeds that they will not be party to harming the poor any longer. And it is time for the NGOs and in particular international NGOs to give communities moral and political support so that mining communities can obtain a real voice and organisational power to defeat greed and destruction of their communities. The responsibility belongs to all of us. We write this as a contribution to a healthy debate, but more so that we can work with others to make real impacts on the lives of the mining communities we work with.

\* John Capel and Hassen Lorgat are part of the Bench Marks Foundation, one of the organizers of the Alternative Mining Indaba in South Africa.

## END NOTES

[1] See Farau Maguwu and Christelle Terreblanche, “We need a real “Alternatives to Mining” Indaba”, <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category.php/features/96629/print> (Pambazuka News, 16-02-2016),

[2] See press release 2013, celebrating Zimbabwe’s 33rd anniversary. In that statement they wrote: As the nation celebrates 33 years of independence, CNRG calls on government to do the following: Ensure that Zimbabwe's natural resources are governed in a transparent and professional manner, for the good of all Zimbabweans”

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## Community voices muted at Alternative Mining Indaba

### By giving corporations a bigger stake, the people affected by mining are being marginalised

By Christopher Rutledge

18 February 2016

OPINION | CAPE TOWN

Communities affected by mining: a group of former miners with silicosis and TB as a result of working in the gold mines hold a meeting. Photo: GroundUp archive

At the 2014 Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI), a community leader stood up and made an impassioned plea for the AMI to be opened up to more community participation and held closer to where communities are experiencing the effects of mining.

By the time the 2015 AMI came around, communities had become so frustrated at their exclusion that they initiated an impromptu protest at the indaba. The organisers were livid and could not understand why the AMI should be the target of community protest.

For the 2016 AMI, community funding support to attend had been withdrawn. Less than 10% of the delegates were community members affected by mining.

The AMI states that its first aim is “to provide a platform for communities affected and impacted by the extractive industries to reclaim their rights through the formulation of alternatives”. Foregrounding communities, and providing the space to “create meaningful decision making processes for communities” are the key objective of the AMI.

Yet looking through the 2016 programme, one is struck that out of 69 speaking slots or allocations to influence discussions, only ten slots were allocated to communities. In commission after commission, when counting the participants and doing a roll call of who was present, community participants were noticeably absent and rarely pipped the 10% level.

A march in the Free State by MACAU (Mining Affected Communities United in Action), whose demand is "nothing about us without us". Photo: Christopher Rutledge.

On the Sunday evening before the AMI was due to start, I received a call at 11pm from community members who were bitterly disappointed that the small group of them that had managed to squeeze out an invitation and support to attend the AMI, were housed in dire old army barracks with stinking toilets and poor facilities, while the organisers were all enjoying four-star luxury.

While I understand the difficulties of finding accommodation in Cape Town during this period, I do think it speaks to the lack of preference that community members enjoy.

Where community members were present in commissions, they were often faced with hostile interventions by business delegates, who often sought to limit the intensity of the debate or the radical contributions of the participants. Business delegates were disguised as free thinking hippies in one case, or often as NGOs, very seldom announcing their funders or members.

Having been invited by the organisers to facilitate a session on business and human rights, I was confronted by a situation where the organisers had asked me to co-facilitate with an NGO which upon further investigation turned out to be a proxy for Shell, Vale Mining, Total and other corporate entities. When I raised my concerns with the organisers, I was asked to accommodate their inclusion.

During my exchange with the coordinating committee of the AMI, it became clear that the incorporation of business into the life of the AMI and indeed a policy of dialogue and collaboration which excludes communities had already taken root within the funders of the indaba and its organising committee.

Collaboration and dialogue with business and capital is of course not a new phenomenon and has been the cornerstone of efforts by people such as Ban Ki Moon of the UN, who has promoted big business as a "truly transformative force" whose goodwill and resources provide a "unique opportunity" to drive sustainable development.

Others, such as Simon Zadek, a recent contributor to Ban Ki-Moon's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, whose 2008 article *Global Collaborative Governance, There is No Alternative* argued: "It is through collaboration, often involving the oddest bedfellows, that we vest this generation's hope for effectively addressing the challenges of poverty, inequality, and environmental insecurity."

The logic here is rather straight forward and through various processes such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the message rings consistently as Maria Hengeveld, a Fulbright fellow in human rights at Columbia University explains the message to convey; that corporations are our partners, not our enemies. We reach out to them asking for responsibility, and we don't demand accountability. We are urged to charm them and not to scold them. And we should of course do all of this, while ignoring the long violent history of dispossession and exclusion presided over by the very corporates we are now to embrace as our partners. We are asked to ignore the long history corporations have of assimilating the liberal language of NGOs, while fastidiously bulldozing communities off their land.

In an address at the AMI by the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), a body representing major mining companies with which the AMI has been having private meetings, the chairperson noted how progressive their members were and how Mark Cutifani, the CEO of Anglo, was one of their most forward thinking members.

I was struck by the irony of it all. Mark Cutifani's Anglo is currently presiding over almost a century of dispossession and the abuse of 65,000 community members human rights in Mokopane. This systemic and structural violence against the community of Mapela in Mokopane is vividly captured in a current report which I authored for ActionAid South Africa entitled *Precious Metal II, A systemic Inequality*.

The promotion by the AMI for certain NGO groups to participate in the corporate Mining Indaba, itself raises serious questions about the efficacy of providing legitimacy to the corporate Mining Indaba. Having a few dissenting voices in a limited number of discussions does more for the corporates than it does for the people the NGOs profess to do it for.

Maria Hengeveld captures it well when she argues: 'Corporations have long recognized that investing in NGOs and attaching their brands to trusted activist organizations — preferably those who represent "innocent victims" such as children and women and, ideally, those who focus on the cultural and traditional practices that oppress them — is a lucrative way to protect their reputations and pacify opposition to corporate globalization. Increasingly, they rely on NGOs not just to legitimize their direct practices but also to normalize neoliberal, market-led development.'

The issue then is not so much that we must engage business and government on the impact mining has on communities, but how do we do this in a way that not only builds the agency of communities to articulate their issues to the duty bearers in government and business, but also that our engagement does not provide legitimacy to corporate and state abuses, and does not further entrench the inequality that is inherent in the current system.

It is in challenging the current inequities of the system which silences communities living in poverty that social justice NGOs have stepped into the breach to facilitate community engagement.

The danger with the current model adopted by the AMI, which excludes communities and preferences NGO elites, is that it sets up NGOs as a Sixth Estate of elites that speaks on behalf of communities and raise funds in the name of communities, while limiting and

excluding communities in the very same way that state and corporate duty bearers consistently do.

Without placing communities in a position where they are empowered to drive their own change agenda, the intervention and agenda setting by NGOs are more likely to affirm existing inequalities rather than provide alternatives or a challenge to the status quo.

Finally, this brings me to the way the AMI is coordinated and run. The AMI does not have an elected governance structure and no community voices in the coordinating structure which develops its strategy and agenda. This by itself is not unusual, but it does raise concerns when the AMI appropriates the right to engage in negotiations with governments and business on behalf of communities. As I already pointed out, communities have an extremely limited role in its deliberations and absolutely no role in setting agendas.

It is ironic then that the AMI in its 2016 declaration declares that it seeks to end the exclusion and injustice against communities and seeks to give a voice to communities, when the AMI appears to be doing the very same thing it accuses government and corporates of doing.

The need to open this conversation to include communities goes to the heart of the role of NGOs in contemporary society. It is my hope that this opinion will facilitate such a discussion.

Opinions expressed are not necessarily GroundUp's.

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*Business Day*

## **Mining plans ignore affected people**

by Robert Krause, February 18 2016

A PERVASIVE theme in the discussions among civil society organisations and communities at the 7th Alternative Mining Indaba was increasing impatience at the use of progressive-sounding phrases by mining companies without real action attached to them. This frustration with the gap between paper rights and substance goes beyond the mining sector to the whole global economic order and is exemplified by movements such as #FeesMustFall.

The Centre for Applied Legal Studies is conducting research into the social and labour plan (SLP) system, which involves mining companies making undertakings for local economic development and education and training as a condition for obtaining the right to mine. This system, it turns out, is one of the areas in which the gap between rhetoric and substance is the most stark, as the experience articulated by mining communities remains one of dispossession, impoverishment and environmental degradation.

This is not only a question of the gap between legislative architecture and implementation. Rather, the gap is built into the legislation itself, namely between its transformative aims and the quality of the mechanisms the legislation puts in place.

Consider, for example, the objective of ensuring companies contribute to the development of the areas in which they operate. If development for the communities directly affected by mining was the objective, one would assume communities would be accorded a central role in the process, from the formulation of the social and labour plans to their implementation and the monitoring of compliance and revision.

On the contrary, there is no clear provision in binding legislation or regulations that requires any community participation in SLPs. Only the (soft law) guidelines state that communities must be consulted in the design of the SLP, and even here nothing is stated about the role of communities for the rest of the plan's life cycle. It is therefore not surprising that of the 50 SLPs we examined only two referred to consultation with community members beyond local government and traditional authorities, and none provided a life-cycle plan for participation.

One would also expect the legislative framework would make it compulsory for companies to provide both the SLP documents and a summary of their content for communities. However, the only requirement is to make the SLP known to workers, with other members of affected communities excluded. This legislative silence has led to the absurd situation in which community members have to resort to lawyers' letters and even protest to access the documents.

Part of our research involved testing the accessibility of SLPs by lodging access to information requests under the Promotion of Access to Information Act with both the individual companies and with the Department of Mineral Resources.

Nearly 50% of the responses from the private sector were negative. The department did, by contrast, decide to grant access to all the SLPs. However, this followed a protracted process of engagement including several phone calls. Once access is granted by the department, the requester still needs to arrange with the regional branches to access the records. In one instance a branch initially resisted granting access despite a departmental directive to provide the documents. This is a time-intensive process for community members who have their own work to do.

Addressing the gaps between promises and reality requires community mobilisation to create the necessary pressure on companies and the government. An important role can be played by improvements to the legislation that lessen the discretion accorded to companies and provide entry points for communities to have a meaningful voice in how the programmes tasked with improving their life circumstances are designed, implemented and monitored.

• *Krause is a researcher in the environmental justice programme at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies*

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(a year ago...)

## Disconnecting the minerals-energy-climate dots

Intersectionality missing-in-action at Cape Town's Alternative Mining Indaba

*Patrick Bond*

2015-03-12, Issue 717

<http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/94161>

CC AR Can Africans with dot-connecting talents now more forcefully consider an eco-socialist model? We need to recover the socialist traditions of Fanon, Lumumba, Cabral, Rodney, Ruth First, Sankara and Chris Hani; and to these add environmentalist, feminist and other intersectional activists. Or perish.

Sometimes a single event reveals crucial stories about our strengths and weaknesses in advancing progressive social change and ecological sanity. Early last month I sought out intersections between three simple phenomena: the predatory extractive industries now looting Africa; our energy access crises (especially here in South Africa); and climate change.

I thought that progressive civil society allies might begin to assemble their strengths in class, gender, race, generational and environmental consciousness; that they would fuse activist passion and NGO technical sophistication; and that they could draw upon lessons from Africa's many great anti-extraction struggles.

I fear I was wrong. Even with the best will, and amongst truly exceptional activists and strategists at the Cape Town Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) from February 9-12, a typical civil society "intersectionality" gap was glaringly evident.

That clunky word – "the study of intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination or discrimination" – is increasingly understood to be vital medicine to treat the NGO disease of siloisation: being stuck in our little specialisations with historic prejudices intact, unable to lift up our heads and use the full range of human capacities to find unity.

The AMI brought together more than 150 activists from vibrant African community organisations, another hundred or more NGO workers stretching from local to international, the hottest advocacy networks, a phalanx of public interest lawyers, a few brave trade unionists and even some curious armchair academics like myself. It should have offered the best conditions possible for intersectional work.

The kick-off day included a set-piece protest march to the gleaming Cape Town International Convention Centre. The target: the corporate African Mining Indaba attended by thousands of delegates from multinational and local mining houses plus a few of their side-pocket politicians.

There, former UK Labour Party prime minister Tony Blair gave a keynote speech notably hostile to “problematic, politicised” trade unions who enjoy class struggle more than class snuggle. Security was ultra-tight because Blair is, after all, regularly subject to citizen arrests because of his Iraq-related war crimes.

And money was another reason no activists could make their case inside: the entrance fee was nearly \$2000. For a taste of some of the grievances against the big mining houses, see the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre’s balanced fact sheet.

The AMI’s internal critics told me they felt the march was tame and predictable. It was. Actually, the week’s best moment for confrontation was a small guerrilla theatre stunt just outside the convention centre. Pretoria’s Anglican Bishop Jo Seoka invited suited executives to drink the disgusting water that his grassroots allies brought from mining-affected communities. No one took the bait; and amusing video resulted.

The march helped activists let off some steam, for they were angry at the blasé mood in both Indabas. Just beforehand in the opening AMI plenary, two charismatic keynote speakers – Zimbabwean democracy advocate Brian Kagoro and Matthews Hlabane from the SA Green Revolutionary Council – were joined by militants from several communities who raged openly against petit-bourgeois NGO reformism.

Warned Kagoro, “We risk here, as the elite of civil society – civilocracy – becoming irrelevant. If you want mining to carry on, in just a bit more humane way, there will be another Alternative Mining Indaba happening in the streets.”

Indeed, if the AMI does avoid that fate, a healthier future would probably require switching the event away from trendy Cape Town suburbs and instead convening a people’s assembly and set of (translated, inter-connected) teach-ins located at various sites within the gritty mining belts sweeping from northwest to eastern or northern South Africa. Only in such venues can the masses properly hold forth.

Perhaps with this bracing threat in mind, the march was followed by three days of exceptionally rich presentations and debates. The break-out rooms were filled with campaigning tales and most carried the frisson of outright opposition to non-essential mining.

For example, asked the leading-edge critics, do we really need to drink the fizzy sugar water (Coca Cola products whose profits line Cyril Ramaphosa’s gorged pockets) from the tin cans (smelted in Richards Bay, South Africa, at a wicked cost in terms of coal-fired electricity) that we immediately toss away into the AMI hotel’s (non-recycled) rubbish bin?

To slow the awesome destruction caused by senseless mining, some activists suggested UN “Free Prior and Informed Consent” language as the best way for communities to deflect prospecting. Techniques to delay Environmental Impact Assessments were shared. Tax justice narratives came in handy, given the mining houses’ prolific capital flight and illicit financial flows. Still other progressive lawyers suggested routes into the jurisdiction of legal reparations. And almost everyone complained of a Resource Curse in which multinational mining capitalists corrupt African politics, economics, environments and societies.

I had a clear sense that no one believed minor Corporate Social Responsibility reforms will ever treat, much less cure, the Resource Curse. Instead, the reforms discussed were practical handles for raising concerns, getting publicity, adding a bit of pressure, and giving mining-affected communities – especially women – a sense of hope and solidarity.

Still, for me, the event also provided a sobering and somewhat depressing lesson: much more work is needed to generate intersectionality: connecting the dots to other issues, political scales and constituencies. The disconnects were obvious regarding three issues which might become vital elements in campaigning against extractive industries, in both the short and long term: electricity access, climate change and mineral economics. Consider each in turn.

#### SHORT-TERM EMPOWERMENT CRISIS

Just outside the AMI, but apparently unnoticed, South African society was seething with hatred against state electricity supplier Eskom. The increasingly incompetent agency has threatened near-daily ‘load-shedding’ (electricity black-outs for two hours at a time) for years to come.

There’s not enough working power capacity (only 30 000 MegaWatts when 43 000 are technically available) to meet industrial and household demand most days - with mega-mining corporations having extraordinary access to power, symbolized in 2014 when a former executive of the world’s largest commodity firm, GlencoreXstrata, was seconded into Eskom to represent mining interests: Mike Rossouw.

Rossouw had for many years served as chair of the 31-member Energy Intensive Users’ Group (EIUG), the largest corporate guzzlers which together consume 44% of the country’s supply. The nickname Minerals-Energy Complex emerged 20 years ago thanks to very sweet Eskom deals that have persisted for most of the company’s 85-year history. For example, two of the world’s biggest mining houses, BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation, signed decades-long agreements supplying them at US\$0.01/kWh, a tenth as much as what low-income South Africans pay.

So South Africa’s load-shedding phenomenon should be blamed on both the multinational mining corporations and the local energy industry, and their allies in Pretoria and Eskom’s MegaWatt Park headquarters. This is not an unusual configuration in Resource-Cursed Africa, where vast amounts of electricity are delivered via high-tension cables to multinational corporate mining houses for the sake of extraction and capital-intensive smelting.

Most African women meanwhile slave over fires to cook and heat households: their main energy

source is a usually fragile woodlot; their transmission system is their back; and their energy consumption is often done while coughing, thanks to dense particulates in the air. Going from HIV-positive to full-blown AIDS is just an opportunistic respiratory infection away, again with gendered implications for care-giving.

Given these intense contradictions, how could the AMI anti-mining activists, strategists, funders and intellectuals not connect the dots; how could they fail to put together load-shedding due to mining overconsumption, with most Africans' lack of basic electricity access, and place these at or near the fore of their grievances so as to harvest so-far-untapped popular support for their programme of rolling back mining and rolling forward clean household electricity?

A Cape Town-based "Million Climate Jobs" campaign already suggests how turning off the vast flow of electricity to South Africa's smelters and mines would, in turn, help redirect employment there to more constructive, post-carbon activities: jobs in renewable energy, public transport, insulation retrofitting, digging biogas digesters and many others.

As for communities, their class/race analysis of electricity access is expressed readily when they show visitors their own dirty household energy, often in the immediate vicinity of a massive mine, smelter or powerplant (see the excellent mini-doccie "Clear the Air" by the NGO groundWork, for example, or the fiery tv Big Debate episode on energy).

So why can't those dots – the environment-labour-community-feminist sites of struggle – be connected at the NGO-dominated AMI? Why do the words energy and electricity not even appear in the final AMI declaration, in spite of their extreme abuse by multinational mining capital?

#### LONG-TERM CLIMATE CRISIS NOT ON SA CIVIL SOCIETY SHORT-TERM AGENDA?

As I mulled this paradox over in the unlikely (luxury Hilton Hotel) AMI venue, my eye was caught by a flashy red-and-white document about South African coal, containing explosive information and some of the most vivid photos I've ever seen of ecological destruction and human suffering. It is full of horrifying facts about the coal industry's wreckage: of public and household health, local environments, and the lives of workers, women, the elderly and children. (Regrettably there's no web link and I won't name the agency responsible in order to make a more general point and avoid singling out a particular example by name.)

This particular booklet doesn't hesitate to explain mining industry abuse via cooptation of African National Congress ruling-party elites via Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Cyril Ramaphosa-style BEE translates into worse misery for the many, and enrichment for a very few such as South Africa's deputy president. His billion-dollar net worth comes not only from that notorious 9% share of Lonmin and all that it entailed, but also from his Shanduka company's filthy coal operations. With men like him at the helm, South Africa certainly isn't going to kick the life-threatening Minerals-Energy Complex habit.

It's a good critique that connects many dots, and certainly the particular agency that published it is one I consider amongst the half-dozen better international NGOs. Their grantees do amazing things

in many South African, other African and global contexts.

Yet the coal booklet offered only a token mention – a few words buried deep in the text – about climate change. Though coal is the major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and although there's a vibrant world campaign against coal mining in favour of renewable energy, the climate crisis was completely lost amidst scores of other eloquently-described grievances.

Drawing this to the agency's attention, I received this explanation from one staffer: "While climate change is a great middle class rallying point, it has no relevance to people living in poverty beyond their empty stomachs, dirty water and polluted air."

As we learned the hard way at the civil society counter-summit during the United Nations COP17 here in Durban, this may be a brutally frank but true estimation of the hard work required to mobilise for climate justice. In the last comparative poll I've seen (done by Pew in 2013), only 48% of South Africans considered climate change to be a 'top global threat', compared to 54% of the rest of the world.

Fortunately though, the terrain is fertile, especially in the South African provinces – Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal – attracting the most militant and sophisticated attacks on Big Coal anywhere in Africa. They are carried out by a myriad of militant community and environmental groups, including Mining Affected Communities United in Action, the Green Revolutionary Council, Bench Marks Foundation (a progressive church-based research/advocacy network), periodic critiques by radical NGOs groundWork and Earthlife (the latter hosts a branch of the International Coal Campaign), legal filings by the Centre for Environmental Rights and Legal Resources Centre, supportive funders like ActionAid, and women's resistance organisations (supported by Women in Mining, Womin).

Still, aside from communiqués by Womin feminists and occasional NGOs (mostly in passing), it is extremely rare that they connect the dots to climate change.

#### GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS ARE POLLUTANTS, TOO (!)

A good example of disconnecting-the-dots emerged last week, when South African Environment Minister Edna Molewa infuriated grassroots communities, NGO activists and progressive lawyers who fight prolific pollution by mining houses, petro-chemical plants and smelters. Molewa's job includes applying new Minimal Emissions Standards to 119 firms – including the toxic operations of Eskom, Sasol, AngloPlats, PPC cement, Shell, Chevron and Engen oil refinery – whose more than 1000 pollution point sources are subject to the Air Quality Act.

Ten years ago when the law was mooted, these firms should have begun the process of lowering emissions. They didn't, and so Molewa just let 37 of them (mostly the largest) off the hook for another five years by granting exemptions that make a mockery of the Act.

Yet notwithstanding justifiably vociferous complaints, South Africa's environmental NGOs (ENGOS) simply forgot to mention climate change. There was just one exception, Samson Mokoena, who

coordinates the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance: “Not only has Eskom been granted postponements, but so has the largest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the country, Sasol.”

(At its Secunda plant, Sasol squeezes coal and gas to make liquid petroleum, in the process creating the single greatest site of CO2 emissions on earth, and Eskom is Africa’s largest CO2 emitter by far when adding up all its plants together.)

In contrast to Mokoena, one of the world’s top campaigning ENGOs ignored CO2 in predicting Molewa’s decision will “result in about 20,000 premature deaths over the remaining life of the [Eskom] power plants – including approximately 1,600 deaths of young children. The economic cost associated with the premature deaths, and the neurotoxic effects of mercury exposure, was estimated at R230 billion.” Add climate change (that NGO didn’t, for reasons I just don’t get) and these figures would rise far higher.

The excuse for giving Molewa a pass on the climate implications of her latest polluter-massage is that the Air Quality Act was badly drafted, omitting CO2 and methane. That omission allowed one of the country’s leading journalists to report, “The three pollution baddies that can cause serious health issues, are particulate matter (soot), sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides.”

Ahem, surely in such a list, GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions qualify as a baddy? More than 182 million Africans are expected to die prematurely by 2100 thanks to GHGs, according to Christian Aid.

But Molewa “seemed to have developed a ‘massive blind spot’, ignoring how air pollution was transported over very long distances to damage human health in places far removed from the source of emissions,” alleged another international ENGO.

Sorry, but just as big a blind spot exists when that very ENGO simply forgot about climate change, even though GHGs are co-pollutants with all the other air-borne toxins, transported over very long distances, wreaking enormous damage.

There is, however, one thing worse than neglecting climate change when you have an excellent chance to raise consciousness: assimilation into the enemy camp. In some cases, civil society degenerates from watchdog to lapdog.

I don’t mind naming what may be the most notorious, a multinational corporate tool called the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), whose SA chairperson Valli Moosa also chairs AngloPlats. Moosa was responsible for what, five years ago, the SA Public Protector termed “improper conduct” when approving the world’s largest coal-fired power plant now under construction, Eskom’s Medupi.

At the time, Moosa was serving as both Eskom chair and a member of the ruling party’s finance committee, and signed a dubious boiler-supply deal worth more than \$4 billion with a company, Hitachi, whose local affiliate was 25% owned by Moosa’s party. The Medupi boilers needed to have 7000 of the welds redone. (The ruling party led the liberation struggle and regularly wins elections... but really isn’t too experienced at making coal boilers.)

With a man like Moosa at the helm, I wasn't too surprised when, a couple of days after Molewa's announcement and a day after the SA finance minister yet again postponed introducing a carbon tax law, WWF's Saliem Fakir "welcomed the government's commitment to the mitigation of climate change and support which showed that South Africa was leading the way among developing countries in terms of policy measures towards easing the burden on the environment."

When WWF meets a toxic polluter or a captive regulator like Molewa, it seeks a snuggle-not-struggle relationship. It's long overdue that it changes its acronym to WTF.

#### BEHIND THE DISCONNECTIONS LIES CAPITALISM

In Naomi Klein's brilliant new book and her husband Avi Lewis' forthcoming film, 'This Changes Everything', we find crystal-clear linkages between climate ("This") and practically all other areas of social struggle. For Klein, it is the profit motive that, universally, prevents a reasonable solution to our emissions of greenhouse gases: from energy, transport, agriculture, urbanisation, production, distribution, consumption, disposal and financing.

In other words, the intersectionality possibilities and requirements of a serious climate change campaign span nearly all human activity. Through all these aspects of the world's value chains, we are carbon addicted. In each sector, vested corporate interests prevent the necessary change for species survival.

It is only by linking together our single issues and tackling climate as the kind of all-embracing problem it is, that we can soar out of our silos and generate the critical mass needed to make a difference.

But in turn, that means that any sort of systemic analysis to save us from climate catastrophe not only permits but requires us to demand a restructured economic system in which instead of the profit motive as the driving incentive, large-scale ecologically-sound planning becomes the fundamental requirement for organising life.

So it's time, in civil society, that "capitalism" should be spoken about openly, even if this occurs now for the first time in many generations, especially in those politically backward societies – e.g. North America and Europe – where since the 1950s it was practically forbidden to do so.

In much of Africa, in contrast, grievances against colonialism were so fierce that when neo-colonialism replaced it over fifty years ago, many progressive activists found courage to talk about capitalism as the overarching, durable problem (worse even than the remaining white settlers). In South Africa, anti-capitalist rhetoric can regularly be heard in every township, blue-collar (and red-collar) workplace, and university. Here, Moscow-trained presidents and even communists who were once trade union leaders have quite comfortably populated the highest levels of the neoliberal state since 1994.

Talking about capitalism is now more crucial than ever. If we don't make this leap to address the profit motive underlying so much eco-social chaos, then our economic future is also doomed,

especially in Africa. One reason for that is what is sometimes called “natural capital” depletion: the minerals, gas and oil being torn out of the earth don’t grow back.

The next logical question is whether, given the diminishing natural wealth that results, the economic activity associated with extractive industries is a net positive or net negative. In resource-rich Norway, Australia, Canada and the US, where the headquarters of mining and petroleum companies are located, the profits recirculate. According to natural capital accounts compiled in the World Bank’s book *The Changing Wealth of Nations*, this plus educational investment gives these countries much higher net positive returns.

Environmental damage is another matter – but on economic grounds, again, the critical question is whether the profits are being reinvested. Answer: in the Global North, yes; but in Africa, no! They’re being looted by multinational corporates and local comprador allies.

That means that one of the AMI’s other dot-disconnections was any talk of the capitalist economy, or even mention of the way mineral resources are being stripped away so fast and with so little reinvestment that the net economic effect of mining is profoundly negative for the continent’s wealth. (This fact you need not accept from me; have a look at the *Changing Wealth of Nations* to see Africa’s -6% annual wealth effect from natural capital outflows.)

What is the solution? Can Africans with intersectionality dot-connecting talents now more forcefully consider an eco-socialist model? If we do not recover the socialist traditions of Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Ruth First, Thomas Sankara and Chris Hani, and to these add environmentalist, feminist and other intersectional arguments, the generations living now will have quite literally kindled next-generation Africans’ scorched-earth future.

Large-scale planning may sound terrifying, given how badly earlier attempts turned out, such as the Soviet Union’s. On the other hand, Cuba has made the jump out of carbon addiction faster than any other society thanks to planning. Or just compare the well-planned and executed evacuation of Havana during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, to utter chaos in capitalist New Orleans. State-led innovations ranging from municipal water systems to the internet (a product of Pentagon R&D) are so vital to daily life that, unless denied them, we don’t think twice about their public sector origins and status as public goods.

And after all, is there any other way to achieve the power shift required to overcome a climate disaster, than to build a movement for democratic state decision-making?

To do so, though, requires a somewhat longer-term perspective than the average activist and NGO strategist has scope for, in sites like the AMI.

If we do not make that leap out of the silos in which all of us have sunk, we will perish. We are so overly specialised and often so isolated in small ghettos of researchers and advocacy networks, that I’m not surprised at the AMI’s conceptual impotence. Even our finest extractives-sector activists and strategists are not being given sufficient scope to think about the full implications of, for example, where our electricity supply comes from, and why mining-smelting corporates get the lion’s share;

how climate change threatens us all; and how the capitalist economy makes these crises inevitable.

The solution? A critical part of it will be to think in ways that intersect, with as much commitment as we can muster to linking our class, race, gender, generational, environmental and other analyses of the oppressed. Action then follows logically.

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