

Global Community Health Annual Workshop

**Connecting planetary health, climate justice, and community health:
from knowledge to impact**

**Mobilising communities for climate action, health and the Just
Transition
in South Africa**

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Aim of the session is to share Strategies to mobilise communities for climate action and the Just Transition

Participants should:

- Get insight on how Environmental Health Literacy can facilitate community participation, empowerment and understanding of environmental rights.
- Understand how Citizen Science can support evidence gathering for air quality monitoring.
- Engaging health experts for evidence gathering and building a case for the Just Transition and Climate action.
- Get insight on how strategic litigation can catalyse policy and systemic change - the Deadly Air Case and Cancel Coal - while encouraging youth participation in environmental protection.



Background

Struggle for environmental Justice in South Africa

- The fight for environmental justice in South Africa is deeply linked to addressing the nation's energy, poverty, and industrial policies to ensure a safer, healthier future for its citizens.
- South Africa's reliance on coal as its primary energy source through Eskom a parastatal energy producer, has led to it being one of the most energy and carbon intensive countries in the world.
- Low-income communities, often live near power plants, and bear the brunt of toxic air, leading to tens of thousands of premature deaths annually from pollutants such as carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter.



Background continued

Sources of air pollution



Coal fired power stations e.g Eskom



Industry e.g. Sasol – fuels and chemicals



Waste burning



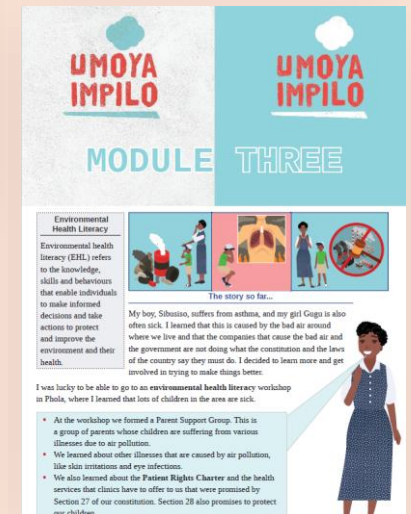
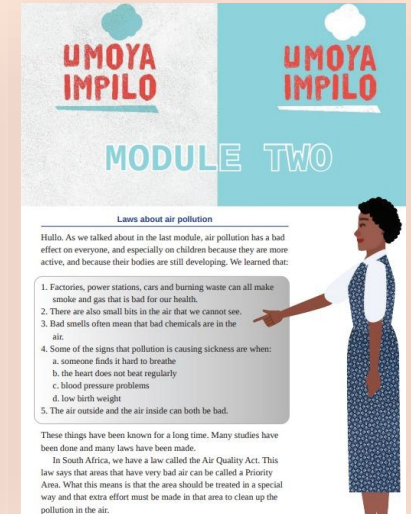
Mining operations



Transport emissions

Environmental Health Literacy – community participation and peoples environmental rights

- **Environmental Health Literacy (EHL)** is the ability to understand the relationship **between environmental exposures and health**, and to make informed decisions, **including engaging in community and public policy discussions.**
- Environmental Health Literacy workshops Educate affected communities on the health impacts of air pollution.
- Build capacity of affected communities to be able to demand their right to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well being.
- Community participation in environmental and health governance.
- Host annual Air Quality and Health Days in to mobilize health professionals and air quality officers to advocate for clean air and conduct community health screenings.



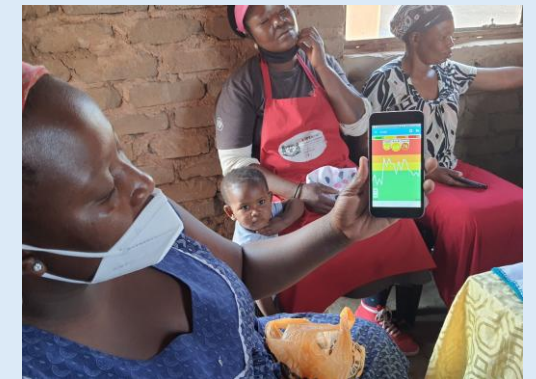
“Air is Life” Modules

Building evidence through Citizen Science - community led air quality monitoring

Bucket Brigade in South Durban



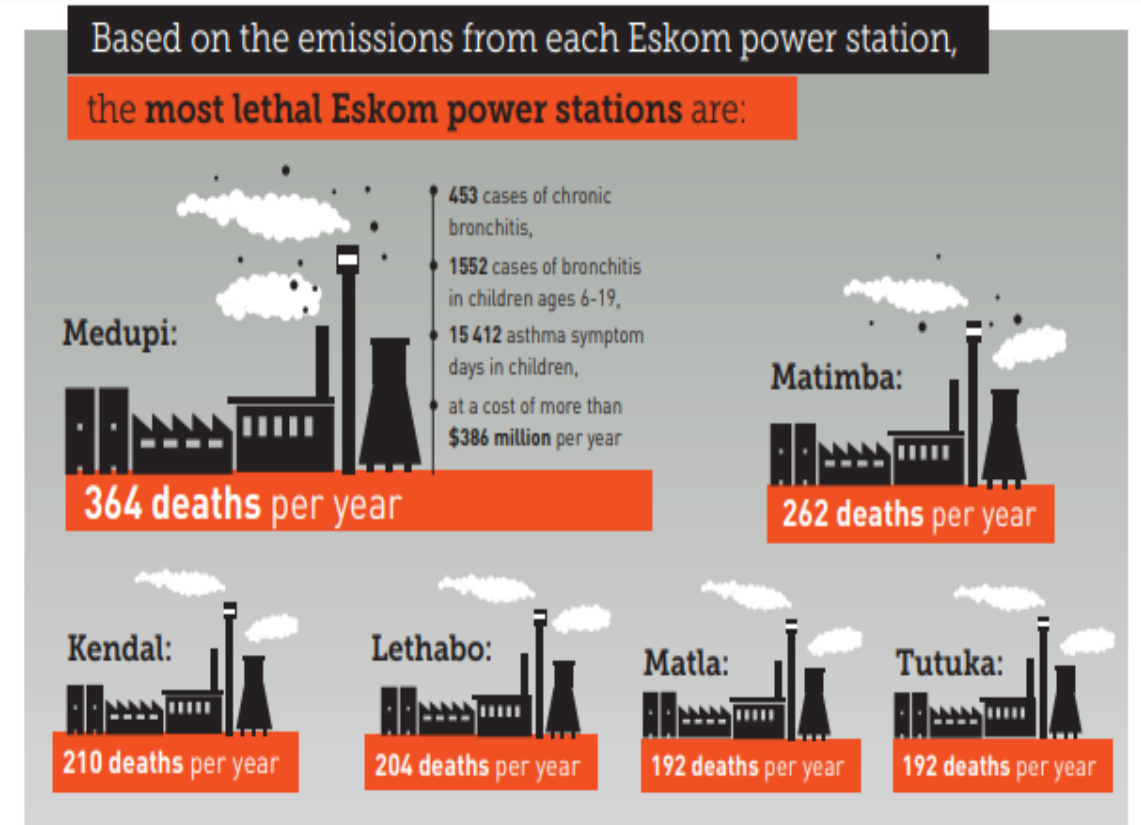
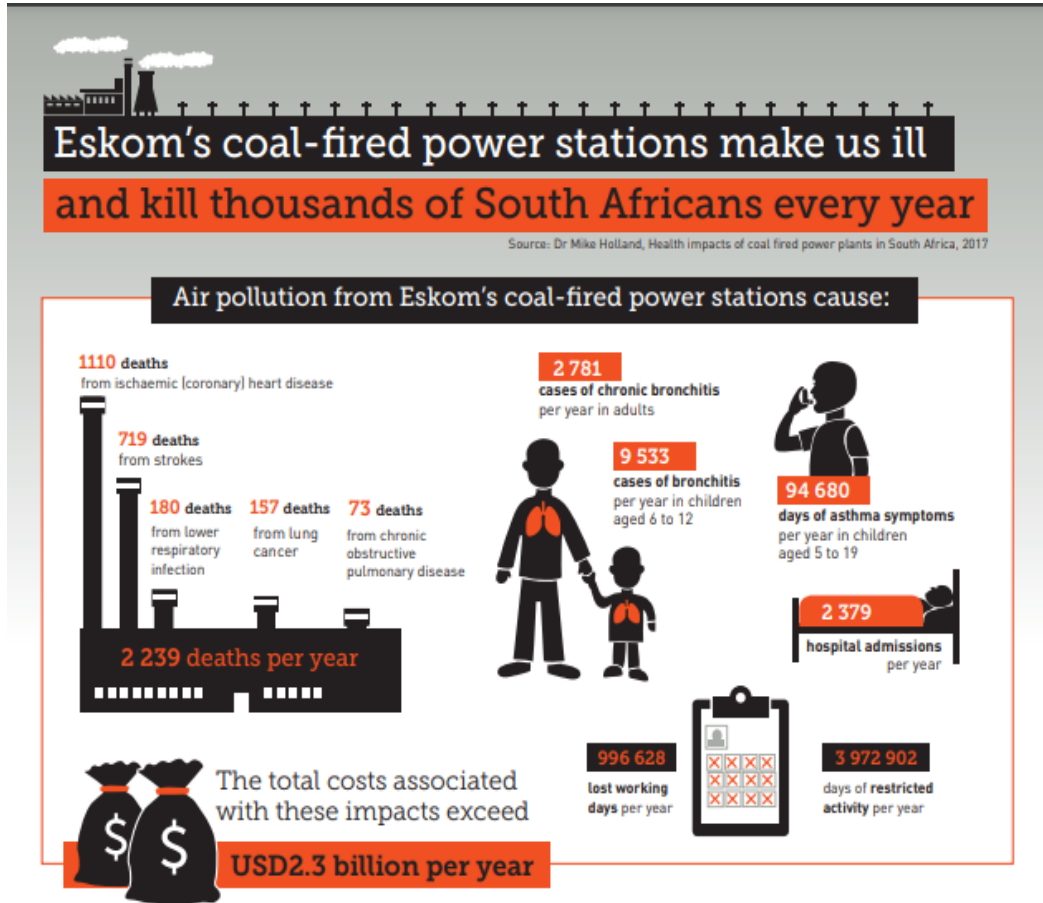
Airbeam low-cost palm sized air quality instrument Sensor in Limpopo - Lephalale





Which interventions have led to policy change in your advocacy work?

Engaging health experts in gathering evidence - Health impacts of coal fired power stations



These numbers exclude significant impacts of air pollution from mining (such as the effects of coal dust on workers and the public), the transportation of coal, and water contamination.

Dr Mike Holland 2017

<https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/press/57716/air-pollution-kills-42000-south-africans-in-one-year-big-polluters-must-be-held-accountable/>

Environmental groups take government to High Court over violation of Constitutional right to clean air – Deadly Air Case

- The case was brought because of the dangerous levels of air pollution that communities were exposed to in the Highveld.
- The people living in this area were getting sick and dying prematurely.
- To manage the amount of emissions an Air Quality Management Plan was published.

The Parties

- groundwork Trust
- Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action (VEM

v

- The Minister of Environmental Affairs
- National Air Quality Officer
- The President of the Republic of South Africa
- Member of the Executive Council for Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs Gauteng Province.



#OMOYAIMPILO #CLEANAIRSLIFE

Landmark Court Victory

The Judgment

- Section 24 (a) is an immediately realisable right. The state must put measures in place to enforce this.
- Judge Collis: “if air quality fails to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (“National Standards”), it is a prima facie violation of the right.”
- The state must prepare and publish regulations to enforce the Air Quality Management Plan.

Deadly Air Case: Minister’s #DeadlyAir Appeal Dismissed by Supreme Court of Appeal

APR 15, 2025 | NEWS & MEDIA

Major court victory for communities fighting air pollution in Mpumalanga Highveld

18 MARCH 2022 AT 5:58 PM



Image by Daylin Paul

The court also ruled that the minister has a legal duty – in terms of section 20 of the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act - to prescribe regulations necessary to maintain air quality standards or essentially clean up the dirty air in the region.

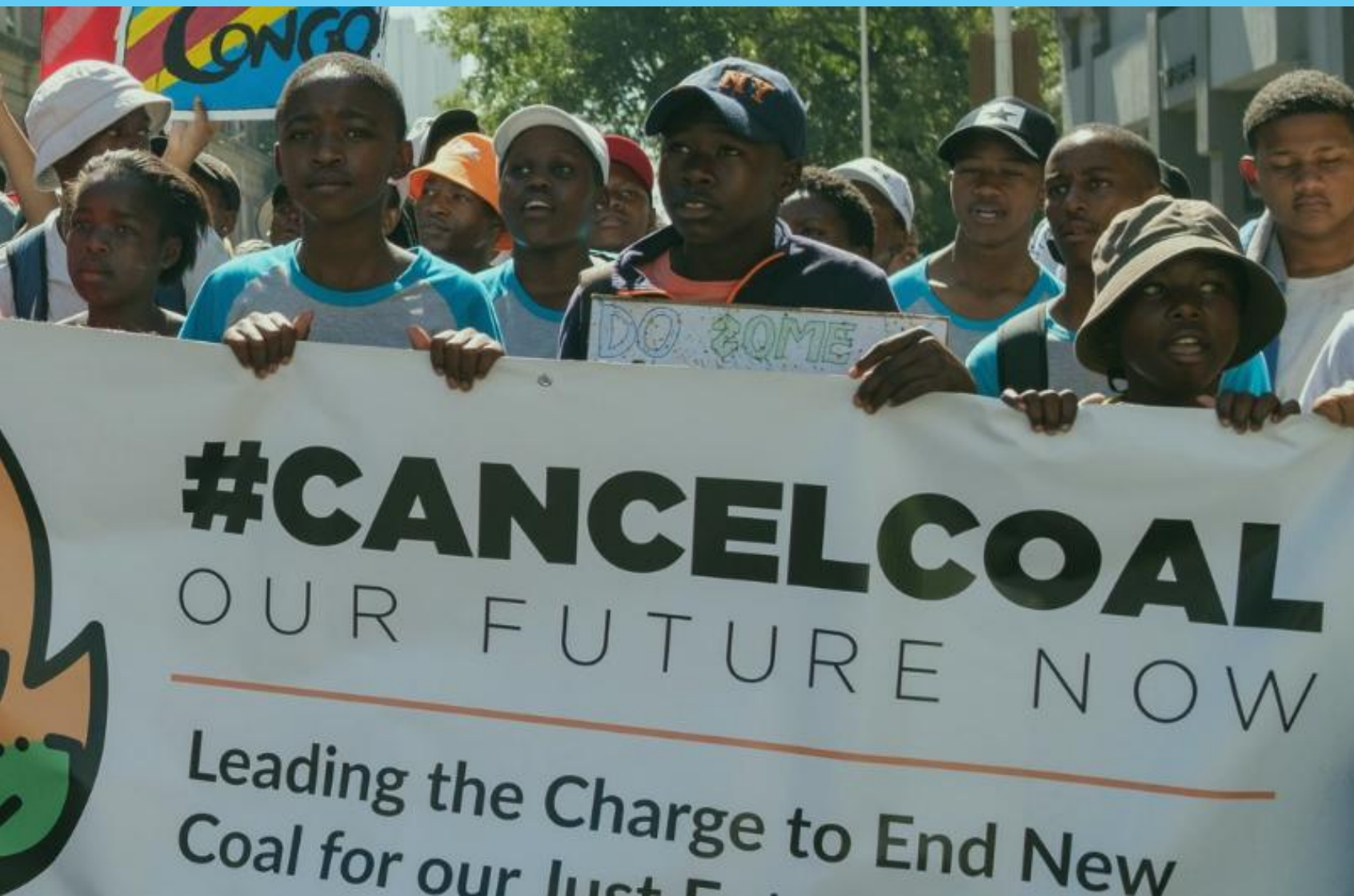


Cancel Coal Case- an administrative review and constitutional challenge

- The Cancel Coal Case is South Africa's first youth-led climate litigation.
- Constitutional challenge to the state's plans to **procure 1500MW of new coal-fired power.**
- The Cance Coal case asserts that these plans are inconsistent with the Constitution
 - Climate change harms
 - Air and water pollution harms
 - Harmful health impacts
 - Socio-economic harms and high energy costs
- The case calls for **the end of new coal** in South Africa and the move towards a Just Transition

Cancel Coal to protect Children's Constitutional Rights

“Inclusion of new coal fired powerinvalid and unlawful ...negative impact on children's rights”





Have you used the courts strategically to protect human rights?

Summary

- Role of Environmental Health Literacy in facilitating community participation
- Citizen Science can support evidence gathering for air quality monitoring
- Engaging health researchers for evidence gathering
- Get insight on how strategic litigation can catalyse policy and



**People are living well with each other
and with the earth.**

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