

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: SDCEA AND OUR FUTURE LEADERS

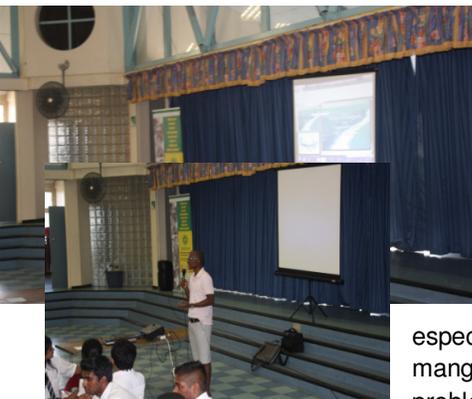


SDCEA decided to host school meetings with pupils/ youth who do geography as a subject, since we have been told, by numerous students who have contacted us about the information and knowledge that SDCEA has regarding the dugout port, that this is part of their curriculum for a research proposal discussing issues on land, space, and society; in particular, discussing the proposed dugout port set for the South Durban. We contacted schools, inviting them to participate in our youth meetings to discuss these crucial aspects of their project whilst educating them more on the importance of activism

and speaking their minds and being involved as youth in these major issues. These meetings ran over a period of four consecutive days, turnouts and immense amounts of knowledge sharing, learning, and being able to view their opinions. SDCEA invited guestspeakers on each day to give a short and brief but extremely informative presentation highlighting issues on the dugout port and explaining its impacts on the environment and society itself.

Bongani Mthembu, GIS and Air Quality Officer from SDCEA, welcomed each and every person present at every meeting. He also introduced all of the SDCEA staff members as well as what SDCEA is and what do we do: what do we represent and why. He gave the audience a brief understanding of what the meeting was about and introduced our guest speaker for each of the days.

On days 1 and 2, Vanessa Black from Earthlife Africa received a very loud round of applause as she started her presentation, giving everyone an understanding about the history of South Durban and what it means to the people of South Durban. She then went on to highlight the issue on the dugout port, explaining to everyone what impacts this type of development will have for South Durban and



what exactly the processes in this development are. She further emphasized the value of our homes and livelihoods, our communities and families, our jobs and the relationships we build with our neighbours, stating that these are important aspects to consider when proposing a development of this sort that will with no doubt cause tremendous social disruptions in South Durban and its communities. In her presentation, she spoke on the different phases of the development, how and in what structure the construction will be done, again mentioning the impacts,

especially environmental degradation and the fact that there are mangroves and sandbanks which will be destroyed – a major problem considering that these are important aspects of a balanced

ecosystem and will lead to the exploitation of endangered species that reside in the areas that will be re-zoned for the development. Her presentation covered the areas that will be affected and how will they be affected; this was presented through maps that were on PowerPoint.

On day 3 of the youth/school meeting, our guest speaker was Professor Patrick Bond, director of the Centre for Civil Society at UKZN. Patrick's presentation was energetic and educational in terms of

what tends to happen most often with huge developments in Durban. He titled his presentation 'White Elephants,' explaining that Durban tends to build white elephants that serve a specific purpose in the present but prove to be a bad investment for the future. According to Prof Patrick Bond, white elephants include the Moses Mabida Stadium which was built unnecessarily just for the World Cup in 2010 and now it's a huge burden to maintain and basically serves no purpose, considering we have other stadiums. Another white elephant according to him is Ushaka Marine World and also King Shaka International Airport. For him, these were unnecessary developments that Durban did not need, while there are other major issues that need to be addressed, including housing and services. He went on to explain how he felt that this will be another white elephant that will cause major negative impacts to society and the way we live now. Professor Bond further highlighted concerns of people's homes, possible relocation, damage to the environment, destruction of neighbourhoods and lives, and community disruption. He also mentioned that government and Transnet need to consider the people's points of view, for they will be the ones most affected.

On the 4th day of the meeting, Mr. Bobby Peek from GroundWork, Friends of the Earth International, joined us as the guest speaker. His presentation was rather illuminating in the sense that he gave a brief description of all parties involved in this matter concerning the dugout port, which are Transnet and the municipality, as well as the biggest parties – the people, the residents, and the communities that will be greatly placed between all three parties and now where about in this process we are and what measures can civil society take in order for their views to be heard and to be taken seriously in this country.

At every meeting for each of the four days, all the students were then given a chance to ask any questions about the presentation in which Vanessa Black, Professor Patrick Bond, or Bobby Peek – as well as Desmond D'sa, Coordinator of SDCEA – was happy to answer. The youth present at this meeting showed much enthusiasm and interest, considering most of them reside in these affected areas. They stood up and expressed their opinions and how they felt betrayed by the government, who had not considered the people in these matters.



Shannon-Leigh Landers, an intern at SDCEA, facilitated the group activities for the youth. The first activity included a little talent show from all the youth with singing, dancing, reciting poetry, and basically using artistic methods to present what they had learnt from the guest speaker. This activity was basically to break the ice between one another, get creative, and share their knowledge and what they have learned, and also have fun while doing that. It was very exciting and extremely fulfilling to see and watch what young minds can come up with, what the main points they were interested in were, what they got out of this information, and to understand and listen to their views. Their interpretations were informative and intellectual but done in a way they are able to relate to and be interested in. Every group, no matter their performance, was cheered by all their mates – including new friends from different schools. They built friendships and connections, as they are faced with similar challenges and this was exciting for them.

The second group activity was a debate, splitting groups up into either Transnet, the government, or civil society, NGO and the communities. This debate was incredible to witness, for these people have so much knowledge and opinions. It was educational and fun. It brought out students who were afraid to speak there; to watch them be put on a platform and be aware that every point of theirs cannot be wrong was absolutely magnificent. The debate was intellectual and professional; the points that were put across and the arguments were precise and factual. The reason for this debate was to open up



the minds of these youth to other points of view on a certain matter, this one being the dugout port. We split them up into those three particular groups to increase their capacity, to understand certain things and actions from different people. They were not only given the opportunity to put their points across but also to justify their views, giving examples of real life situations because this development will affect real people and real lives.

The last speaker for the four days was Mr. Desmond D'sa, who concluded the discussions of the day and encouraged all youth to play an active role in participating and being involved in these types of issues. He motivated them by saying that they need to stand out and speak their views by making a difference, for they are the future of this country. They need to get involved in trying to create a better society. He went on to explain that youth need to use and utilize the media to get your messages across and promote youth activism. He also mentioned that when it comes to the dugout port, there was no proper meaningful consultation in this process. These communities that make up South Durban have faced many social and political hardships in the past and will not allow for it to happen again, especially now being in a democratic society. Residents of South Durban have vowed to fight until the very end for their homes, their livelihoods, their families, their children, and their land.



Information packs and various learning material were also given to all schools which will aid pupils in their assignment on this matter. These information packs included all views on this issue. SDCEA included the municipality documents in English and isiZulu as well as comments and views from the community's perspectives. All of the students, as well as educators that participated in these meetings, were asked to comment on a little pamphlet about their view on this entire issue and

development. We then asked for their comments to be returned and now have a much better understanding as to what really the majority of the schools view is on the proposed dug out port.



It was an extremely enlightening experience to witness the vast amount of knowledge that the youth have when it comes to social problems and challenges that many people face. They shared ideas and engaged on many questions, teaching each other and most of all learning one from another. The youth had a much better understanding once

the speakers presented and I'm sure every one of us left with a sound knowledge on these issues.