

JULY 2026

SOUTH DURBAN'S **FUTURE** *REIMAGINED* *BEYOND FOSSIL FUELS*



*from 30+ years of struggle upholding the
Right to Know, the Duty to Inquire, and
the Obligation to Act.*

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OVERVIEW

The South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), together with community activists, former refinery and chemical industry workers, researchers, environmental justice advocates, environmental health and climate experts, and local community leaders, came together on the 1st and 2nd of July 2026 at Ganges Secondary School in Merebank for the South Durban Just Transition Strategic Dialogue.

The purpose of the gathering was to collect and share stories, knowledge, expertise, experiences and learnings in support of planning and mapping pathways towards a community-led Just Transition in South Durban.

Under the theme ***Building a Community-Led Roadmap Towards a Fossil Fuel-Free South Durban***, the dialogue offered a powerful space to reflect on more than 30 years of environmental justice struggles. Participants shared lived experiences of industrial pollution and reflected on the impacts fossil fuel industries, including accidents, incidents and ongoing intergenerational health outcomes. This reflection set a common understanding of the situation in South Durban providing a baseline from which affected communities can collectively envision a healthier, more resilient and economically sustainable future and a plan towards realising a Just Transition in the area.

The South Durban Just Transition plan will seek to address and mitigate the multiple risks faced by communities of the South Durban basin. These risks remain ever present because of poor urban planning, negligent or absent governance, failed

“Communities and workers must be at the centre of a Just Transition. Building a fossil fuel free future involves protecting livelihoods, advancing environmental justice, improving public health, and creating sustainable economic solutions.”

regulation of petrochemical industries at national, provincial and local levels. The petrochemical industries operating in the area continue to enjoy secrecy and impunity with no accountability or redress for the intergenerational harm their operations, actions and omissions have caused to the communities of South Durban. These risks remain persistent in the face of a lack of disaster management plans for citizens outside of industry property, inadequate health facilities and services, legacy pollution and new pollution/disaster risks posed by petrochemical industry expansion and increasing climate weather incidents caused by global warming and constant carbon emissions, among others.

This strategic, intergenerational dialogue thus set in motion of a longer, community-driven process to develop a South Durban Just Transition Plan shaped by the voices, knowledge, experience and aspirations of those most affected by pollution and industrial development in the area.



Building a community-led Just Transition

OPENING REMARKS

by Dr Desmond d'Sa SDCEA
Coordinator

We must seize the moment, the vision and dreams of our people in South Durban. We have hope. Our experiences will inform what we want to achieve. We shall share our experiences of struggle and efforts to hold the refineries to account.

We all know that now is the time that you can get access to renewable energy, today you can talk about it, it is being used, and its creating jobs.

The refineries will not be the same, our children will have better education, trees will grow better. We can't just react; we can't go back.



“We have to shape the future we want. We each want to leave a mark, to be able to say: ‘I was part of the change for good’. Everyone has a part in making change.”

FUTURE VISIONS



Just Imagine: in the not-too-distant future, the SDCEA office is a thriving hub of community connection and activity. It is the Just Transition Hub for South Durban. There are separated waste skips outside, the school youth programme tends food gardens on the grounds. The art group completes a mural about our right to clean air at the school down the road. SDCEA representatives from different local governance committees – Health, Green Conservancy, People’s Budget, Community Policing Forum, The Durban Coalition, Water and Sanitation, Pollution Clean-up, Legacy Reparations monitors, Art and Culture, Education, Climate resilience, Disaster management, Fisher Folk, Ocean Protectors – meet regularly to report back to the network members and partners. The sidewalks on street have cycle lanes, park gym equipment and skateboard tracks. Fruit trees line the streets. On the other side there are communal food gardens. There are income generating solar panels on the rooftops.



Future SDCEA office 2040 Artist impression (AI generated)

Building a community-led Just Transition

"Communities and workers must be at the centre of a Just Transition. Building a fossil fuel free future involves protecting livelihoods, advancing environmental justice, improving public health, and creating sustainable economic solutions."



Engen Refinery repurposed for aquaponics and RE training and development facility – Solar Punk artist impression (AI generated)

Imagine further in the not-too-distant future, the old Engen refinery and petrochemical storage facility is now called Evergreen. The communities of South Durban have achieved justice, accountability and redress from the old fossil fools. The land and facilities have been detoxified, retrofitted and repurposed into an aquaponics green industry. The workers collectively hold shares in the business and the space provides training in skills for the local energy economy. Trainees learn to assemble, install and maintain the wind and solar farms of South Durban that feed the grid and the city. There are solar streetlights and it is safe to walk up the road to visit a friend or attend a community event at night. The whole neighbourhood has free internet connectivity. eThekweni People Mover electric busses have stops and routes all over south Durban; there are no trucks and only a few electric vehicles on the road. There are community bike stations every few blocks and there is a 10-minute train ride into the city every 30 minutes between 7:00 and 19:00. It is free for students and pensioners. Once a week a mobile clinic sets up in the neighbourhood to provide regular screening and monitoring for community members receiving treatment and reparations for the health harms they experienced in the dark old days of fossil fuel addiction.



Evergreen South Durban and Bluff 2050 – Solar Punk artist impression (AI generated)

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What does a cleaner healthier South Durban look like ?

- **Clean atmosphere, no pollution;** reduce or eliminate fossil fuel emissions; full accountable compliance with MES. Less people present with asthma, cancer and pollution induced ill-health. Clean energy including rooftop solar power is extensively used; it provides jobs for south Durban community members.
- **Increased biodiversity** and return of natural habitat – trees, birds, fish stocks, healthier ecosystems, environment and community. Reduced household waste. Greater awareness in schools, communal vegetable gardens in open spaces. Community activities that encourage circular economy including recycling waste and stewardship of open green and recreational space.
- **Healthy, happy, safe, inclusive, caring communities** with adequate housing, health and education services; affordable (or free) access to clean water, electricity and transport. Safe, clean, well-lit neighbourhood with green spaces and recreational facilities.
- **Reparations and redress effected** for the whole community and individual members who have suffered loss, damage, ill-health, harm and Section 24 rights violations from the actions of industry and government have received compensation and redress, the land is restored to health, ongoing health care, treatment and services are in place. The new generation of graduates from South Durban are employed in the delivery of services to south Durban and serve the community with integrity and commitment.



Evergreen south Durban and Bluff 2050 – Solar Punk artist impression (AI generated)

What can we do to get to the clean evergreen south Durban we envision?

- The **green energy transition** can create **alternative jobs and livelihoods**; move to renewable energy where we employ youths and train them and give them jobs. Community based renewable initiatives can include skills development with youth. Also engage national, provincial and local Government for local energy participation.
- Counter the **poor information on health hazards**; all government authorities need to be kept informed, abreast and accountable on health issues and ensure they provide services accordingly. Educate communities, public services and local government officials on the **implications and risks of hazardous industry chemicals** and their impact on livelihoods and health. We need to change people's mindsets. Pass information on to other community members so that the whole community is well informed and able to take action and demand adequate services.
- **Encourage active participation** with learning events for advocacy, and to inform broader community. Participate in community forums e.g. Island View Community Forum and circulate information there. Create forums where the community can participate in and contribute to EIAs, government feedback, planning meetings etc.
- **Build circular community economies**: Initiate and drive recycling and rain harvesting in South Durban including, informing and empower community members. Organise community makers markets and service exchanges. Introduce organics separation and composting at source supporting food gardening, permaculture, agro-ecology, seed banks and growers collectives to generate and secure the future.
- **Health education** and **environmental restoration**, jobs, services, **fixing infrastructure**, adaptation in terms of the Climate Change Act. Give recognition to the care contributors to the economy at household level and across the community.
- Actively engage in and **call for government accountability** (local, provincial and national). Participate in the re-established South Durban coast conservancy. Actively engage local government and industries about how we see our future. Identify Community members and professionals with knowledge and expertise who have time to **participate in governance** to represent community interests in particular focus areas. It is important to spread the workload among more people according to different topics and to share this information where it intersects with other areas of effort.
- **Nothing for us without us**. Community involvement in the Durban Coalition **Emergency Risk Process**. Demand and campaign for open information, participation in and transparency of decision making by industry, government and all stakeholders. Demand participation constitutional democratic local governance.
- **Hold polluters and perpetrators accountable** for harmful substances entering our atmosphere, ground and water. Get support for legal class actions that result in reparations and redress.
- **Identify policy gaps**, unclear responsibility and accountability ownership, to address adequate and appropriate legislation and regulation along with **effective implementation monitoring**. Track and document the changes. Involve multi-sector forums and research institutions that work directly with the community using **participatory research methods**.
- **Document and showcase** the results and impacts from the Energy Democracy project for the benefit of greater eThekweni. **Investigate local government initiatives** through its press office and utilise existing KPIs to surface information on government programmes.

Building a community-led Just Transition > Nothing for us without us

How do we sustain our clean, healthy South Durban?

- **Ongoing monitoring and communication** with all parties kept informed. Community and industries take responsibility in clearing their surroundings. Minimised trucking in the area, trucks removed from residential roads, the railway is reinstated and operating efficiently.
- **Risk mitigation and management** in place that addresses legacy pollution, daily emissions, disaster response. All community members are aware of dangers and hazards from the refinery and all other South Durban industry activities and facilities.
- **South Durban communities are active participants in governance** and the Durban Coalition Emergency Risk Process including housing, urban planning, people's budgets, accountability forums. South Durban communities actively demand and produce open information and campaign for Open Democracy.

The **SDCEA** office operates as a **Just Transition Hub**, it serves as a community information hub (digital and physical). It creates a library, share information, pamphlets, guidelines, toolkits videos. Through engagement and participation, it supports and strengthens existing bodies, alliances and processes, for example in trucking involving metro police and industries. It includes, involves and collaborates with youth in higher education. Allied experts, elders and stalwarts are invited to assist where needed.

Barriers & Obstacles

- Members of the NEC have shares in fossil fuel entities
- Failing governance affects infrastructure development, service delivery, and implementation
- Absence of regulation and the rule of law allow little recourse to seek justice and realise constitutional rights
- No coordination between national, provincial and local government duty bearers
- Workforce shortages
- Policy inconsistency
- Lack of community awareness or gaps in awareness
- Weak public participation mechanisms and unclear timelines of goals
- Fear of change to renewable energy
- Legacy pollution and toxicity
- Unclear land tenure and usage provisions



SDCEA Just Transition Hub, 2030, Artist impression (AI generated)

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INSIGHTS & FINDINGS

- The workshop involved rich conversations unpacking the issues facing our communities; the discussions were strong on the knowledge and experience of the past and present. They were weaker on the actions we can take.
- Many spoke of the need to knock on government doors without being too reliant on government and institutions as the community has capacity to led action for a green future.
- There is a need for community-based early warning systems; these can be implemented by community members in their own right, independently of government and industry.
- Accountability of government, industries and within the community is essential. Community actors can start with small steps in preparation for catching up with accountability for the bigger picture.
- Decision makers and officials in all three spheres of government are ignorant; particularly in local government, DFFE, DFI, Local Government. Where there is interest, it is predominantly about getting a good business deal.
- It will be important to shift the focus and demand for accountability from political leaders to the big corporations as they are pulling the strings behind the scenes, regularly violating environmental law with impunity.
- Propose local solar plants (community owned and run) at national level. It will be important to account for usage as we explore RE as it may not always meet high demand.
- Political leaders swear an oath of office; we must hold them accountable, (Industry is also accountable to workers for fair and safe practice and ongoing health impacts.
- Municipal electricity generation is now in development eThekweni. There is a bid for solar which SDCEA supports and a bid for gas which SDCEA strongly opposes given the emissions and risks.
- SAPREF did not rehabilitate the land as they should have.
- Street protests with important partners and stakeholders can give visibility to the important issues.
- Engagement of universities and student communities is critical to heighten awareness and ensure locally relevant research.
- Effective action starts with individuals standing up for their own rights in workplaces. Building community solidarity and support for these people and whistle blowers creates momentum.
- Companies have an obligation to engage communities on what they are doing to rehabilitate the environment, as they build their projects. However there is continued failure to hold companies and industry accountable because community members are not aware of their rights.
- There is an extractive lithium mine that has started operations in Umzumbe without all the necessary permissions. SDCEA needs to consider its position on this as Lithium is potentially linked to Renewable Energy initiatives that we support if developed ethically.
- Communities need to be updated on new industries and their potential impacts
- Moving away from fossil fuels to RE does not always have a direct impact on communities – we need to focus on what we know and what we can measure.



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DEMANDS & ACTIONS

- Knowing that government decision makers are ignorant, how do we strategize? What issues should we put on the table?
- There is a need for community-based early warning systems; these can be implemented by community members in their own right, independently of government and industry.
- Demand accountability from government, and industry in line with MES, NEMA, the Constitution (Section 24, 27, 28).
- Demand access to information and meaningful consultation and input on all local government and industry plans affecting south Durban. Place all relevant authorities on notice for this.
- Community actors can start with small steps towards demanding accountability in preparation for catching up with accountability for the bigger picture to make sure that rights are realised and defended and that effective regulation takes place.
- Build relationships and take action to inform and raise awareness of decision makers and government officials and industry representatives.
- Demand climate and industry safety risk assessments; demand access to and input on these if they have been done and where they may affect the south Durban area and resident communities.
- Stop oil extraction from the ocean.
- Spread, circulate and disseminate relevant information.
- Create a library (digital archive and physical) that holds information and where ongoing tracking information can be updated. This needs research interns or student to set up, manage and disseminate information as needed.
- Develop guidelines and a code of conduct to ensure activist community trust, inclusion equality, safety and fairness.



Immediate information gathering & sharing actions

- List of policies, regulatory rules and guidelines, national provincial and local commitments
- Keep a members, partners, allies, media and stakeholder database with relevant information
- Document and record all convenings and communicate information and decisions where relevant
- List of all current cases in progress and EIAs for which SDCEA has made submissions
- Identify the people involved and get others involved so that there is a spread of knowledge and information
- Each one teach one

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RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS



- **Define Next Steps**
The next session of this group should rely less on what happened in the past and focus on what can we do now for and in our communities. The session should define the next (small) steps to take back to our communities.
- **Information Sharing Forums**
Identify existing processes and forums that community members, especially youth can join allowing their participation in discussions. A WhatsApp information group was suggested to keep participants in different and intersecting forums updated.
- **Decommissioning of Engen**
We need a plan for the decommissioning of Engen that will ensure rehabilitation and redress for the Communities of South Durban and restoration of the environment. To this end, develop a specific campaign and strategy on the decommissioning of Engen.
- **South Durban Conservancy**
We need to be organised to preserve trees and vegetation and protect biodiversity between the ridges of the South Durban basin. We must call on building inspectors when developers cut trees down and threaten the environment.
- **Entrench participation, consultation and input into local planning**
We need to ensure South Durban Community input into all local implementation plans. For this we need to engage local government, IDP processes, climate risk assessment plans, and south Durban industry risk assessment and emergency plans.
- **Monitoring, tracking data capture and information dissemination**
Ensure that air, water and soil quality are monitored and tracked and that this information is disseminated to all relevant actors to inform their.
- **Process going forward**
Hold regular (monthly) strategic workshop sessions and set up working groups each with a specific focus. The next workshop will develop a South Durban Just Transition Roadmap, set strategic priorities, define and resource immediate actions, medium-term actions and long-term goals. We need to keep the ball rolling in engaging local, provincial, and national government and ensure an ongoing feedback/feed-in mechanisms; this could be the focus of the third workshop.



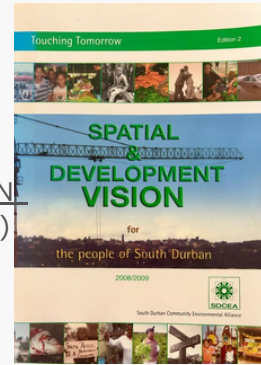
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USEFUL RESOURCES



JUST TRANSITION OPEN AGENDA

SPATIAL & DEVELOPMENT VISION FOR SOUTH DURBAN (SDCEA Print only)



TOWARDS ENERGY SOVERIGNTY



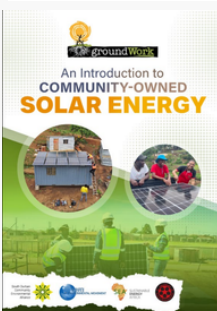
COMMUNITY JUST TRANSITION FUND



CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION TOOLKIT



YOUTH TOOLKIT FORA JUST TRANSITION



AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY OWNED SOLAR ENERGY

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ABOUT SDCEA

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) is an environmental justice organisation based in South Durban, South Africa. It is made up of 19 affiliate organisations and has been active since its formation in 1995. It is an independent, non-aligned, non-profit, community based NGO existing solely on finances sourced from funders and sponsors solely for the benefit of the people it represents. It is a vocal and vigilant group active in reporting and researching industrial incidents and accidents in this area, and advocating for environmental justice, corporate and government accountability.

The people of SDCEA continuously struggles for clean air, water and soil and for the alleviation of environmental racism and poverty. SDCEA works with and is located in South Durban Community; this makes it easier for community members to convey their problems to us. The people of South Durban are SDCEA's target audience as they are immersed in the polluted basin and directly affected by the numerous negative consequences.

Campaigns

Pollution & Health

Infrastructure & Development

Community Empowerment

Energy & Climate Change

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance



Structure

SDCEA is a structured network that seeks to improve the strategic information and communication functions of the participating 19 affiliate organisations. It also seeks to provide a common structure through which different sectors of south Durban civil society can explore, strengthen and promote matters of common interest relating to environmental issues and sustainable development.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the SDCEA have always been to uplift and educate the community on performing an educational role in promoting an understanding of the inter-related nature of social, political, environmental and economic factors limiting or enabling the achievement of a sustainable, equitable and just society to promote the wise use and conservation of natural resources. The SDCEA regularly engages with other role players including, but certainly not limited to the local authority, provincial and local government, industry and commerce in order to promote a healthy, safe and sustainable environment.

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Right to Know *Duty to Inquire* Obligation to Act