



SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY CAMPAIGN

Climate campaigning and building food sovereignty locally

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I. EDITORIAL

South Africa's Carbon Democracy is going over the cliff

Vishwas Satgar

The past few weeks have revealed palace wars: Public Protector against Pravin Gordhan; Public Protector against President Cyril Ramaphosa; more of the Red Berets' undemocratic moves in Parliament and then former president Jacob Zuma going for broke with his toxic tales at the Zondo Commission.

All of this political theatre has become high drama in our political discourse. The liberal commentariat amplifies the narrative by framing the script with simple binaries: constitutionalists versus looters, democrats versus authoritarians. All of this correlating with good versus evil and all one has to do is choose the good saviours. While our political world shrinks and becomes inward-looking, the United Nations has drawn attention to the fact that the world is experiencing one climate disaster every week. This includes floods, heatwaves, droughts, cyclones and other extreme weather events.

Another optic to explain developments in contemporary South Africa is to think beyond the binaries. We are living through and observing the second transition in our market-driven carbon democracy. This transition is about the terminal decline of ANC-led national liberation politics and nationalism; it is exhausted. Its greatest achievement has been to engender the forces that will destroy it and possibly our constitutional democratic order.

For the past two decades, we have been fed a regular diet of how virtuous the middle class is by an Afro-neoliberal common sense. The ANC-led Alliance succeeded in creating almost nine million new African members of the middle class. This social class is marked by an Americanised consciousness which includes an obsession with acquisition, possessive individualism, a technology fetish, nihilistic celebrity culture and a carbon centric way of life. As conscripts of a globalised American way of life, wanting to be more American than actual Americans, this middle class is also debt-ridden and precarious. At the same time, it has not been a bulwark against the degeneration of South Africa's democracy and its capture. In the largest democracies in the global south, India and Brazil, sizeable parts of the Americanised middle class have delivered their democracies to anti-democratic forces through the ballot box.

The new post-apartheid middle class is centrally implicated in the degeneration of South Africa's democracy. To understand this, we have to understand how the ANC-led Alliance turned its back on the working class and the poor.

This is also the story of how South Africa has received and internalised neoliberal reason: a world order project to remake the global political economy in the image of the USA and transnational capital. South Africa's national liberation movement is one of the oldest on the African continent and in the world. It was also a revolutionary movement. Moreover, the ANC

was also a movement vaunted and celebrated given how repulsive, racist and brutal apartheid was. We imbued it with mythical virtues and gave it an over-inflated place in our national imagination.

Given the convergence of diverse ideological forces in its midst the ANC is also contradictory, facing limits and objectively constrained by the contingencies of power relations. At the same time, it made political choices that shaped the direction of nation-building and post-apartheid democracy. Many of these choices related to economic policy went beyond the necessities of stabilising a debt- and crisis-ridden post-apartheid economy and became entrenched in state policy for over two decades.

This became part of national liberation common sense and was championed by an Afro-neoliberal fraction of the national liberation bloc. This fraction included successive ministers of finance, technocrats in the Department of Finance, the new middle class in the state, financialised sections of emergent black capital, finance capital, transnational capital and various international institutions. The translation of neoliberalism into South Africa, by this fraction, entailed giving it a South African idiom, coding it in national liberation discourse but most importantly ensuring a measure of trickle-down (through social grants, for example) while encouraging recognition of tribal authorities, LGBTQ+, affirming a liberal feminism that is about representation in male-centred hierarchies and allowing Mandelaesque Rainbowism to refract social antagonism.

This homegrown Afro-neoliberalism is grounded in two forms of reason: a de-democratising commitment against society (Thatcherite influenced) and hard-boiled pragmatic calculations (Reaganite influenced) to ensure what works for the market, first and foremost, will ostensibly work for society.

The Afro-neoliberal class project maintained the strategic initiative for over two decades, which entailed locking South Africa into deep globalisation through entrenching the power of global finance in the economy, shrinking manufacturing, encouraging further reproduction of the carbon-based minerals-energy complex such that platinum and coal became major exports and ensured South African agricultural exports continued under further monopolization of the sector. While this class project spawned a broader and racially diverse middle class it failed in terms of unemployment, inequality, hunger and ecological devastation. It has been central in creating a crisis of socio-ecological reproduction for which workers and the poor have had to pay the price.

Moreover, Afro-neoliberalism also failed politically and this is what defines South Africa's second transition. Those at the centre of this project have to take responsibility for where South Africa's thin and fragile market-centred carbon democracy has come to. Afro-neoliberalism spawned three counter projects from within the national liberation bloc and all are led by aspirant or new middle-class forces. These forces are infused with the impulses of a desperate and crisis-ridden society.

First, Zuma's kleptocratic project has entailed criminalising the state to engender a transactional middle class. The ersatz scream of "radical economic transformation" is from one fraction of the national liberation bloc wanting rapid class mobility.

Second, the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters reflects the first significant rupture in the national liberation bloc. Malema and his Red Berets strut through our democracy with a patina of radicalism but yet this game is really about Malema's nose for weaknesses in our body politic which he can exploit to his advantage. The degenerate and neo-fascist logic at work will undermine every democratic gain achieved by workers and the poor, so this opportunistic and anti-democratic force can achieve power.

Third, Irvin Jim's Socialist and Revolutionary Workers Party, is the second significant rupture in the national liberation bloc, although it still has to be seriously tested politically. It is led by well-paid middle-class union functionaries, who are building a caricature of the South African Communist Party, but grounded in sectarian dogma harking back to a Stalinised dystopia in which some are more equal than others and state terror is the means for social engineering.

These forces are not anachronistic and have the potential to fracture the ANC-led Alliance but also destroy the foundations of South Africa's constitutional order. To continue an Afro-neoliberal class project is to strengthen these forces. Cyril Ramaphosa's economic thinking has not displayed a fundamental break with Afro-neoliberalism. His fixation on foreign direct investment, as the basis of growth and development, completely occludes the socio-ecological crisis that is the result of such thinking.

A good example of this is how the business press has been cheering on the potential take-over of Pioneer foods by a US investor as a realisation of Ramaphosa's dream for investment-led growth. In the context of climate shocks, volatility in globalised food markets and the recent collapse of South Africa's food system in the drought such investment is certainly not in the national interest.

Also the brazen intention by his government to break up Eskom without a national debate and a clear plan to ensure a just transition for workers and society is a flashpoint that is also gridlocking South Africa's socially-owned renewable energy transition. Again, the Afro-neoliberal class project expressing the power of credit rating agencies, investors and international institutions like the World Bank is a recipe for major social conflict.

In a climate-driven world, building blocks for society such as food, water and energy have to be ring-fenced as strategic and even anchored around democratic public utilities and other socialised institutional forms. However, these issues do not feature in the Afro-neoliberal reasoning at work in Ramaphosa's class project.

Hence a weak carbon democracy, anchored in explosive socio-ecological conditions, is being led down a self-destructive path. In short, Afro-neoliberalism, which has been at the heart of ANC rule, through its own anti-democratic practices which privilege the sovereignty of capital, has spawned a state of political disorder which defines South Africa's second transition.

Political disorder and the uncertainties of South Africa's future are compounded by the dynamics of intensifying climate chaos. The ANC electoral manifesto does not have anything serious to say about the worsening climate crisis, the lessons to be learned from the drought and the deep just transition required now. Instead, it flaunts commitments to 20th-century style industrial development, a declaratory developmental state and resource nationalism. The ANC is willing to bury its head in the sand regarding the worsening climate crisis and premise its choices for the country on the false dichotomy of carbon development as opposed to addressing a mere "environmental problem".

This means the ANC simply does not care if more people die from drought, heatwaves, floods and other extreme climate impacts induced by global heating. It does not appreciate the challenge of socio-ecological collapse as an imminent possibility with the worsening climate crisis.

In this context, Barbara Creecy, Minister for Forestry, Fisheries and Environment, does not have a strong mandate from the ANC to advance ambitious climate crisis policy. She is also leading a department that has consistently failed to hold accountable those responsible for carbon and broader toxic air pollution in our society. According to the World Bank, 20,000 people die annually from air pollution. Given that this minister was part of the Gauteng Government responsible for the #LifeEsidemeni tragedy she needs to appreciate that one more death from air pollution because of ineffective regulation is unacceptable.

Gwede Mantashe, Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, is clearly hell-bent on driving the resource nationalism of the ANC, with more carbon extraction as the "big game-changer".

Besides having Eskom (number 29 on the list of 100 major carbon polluters in the world) and Sasol (number 45 on the list of 100 major carbon polluters in the world) within his portfolio, his pronouncements about the Total gas find, his opposition to the Xolobeni judgment against extractivism and his commitment to the dubious idea of "clean coal" place him on a collision course with present and future generations. He and the ANC are imposing a death sentence on all life forms through support for carbon interests and the reproduction of this weak carbon democracy. It is not the first time Mantashe is on the wrong side of history. His boisterous support for Zuma was the first.

This time, he and the Afro-neoliberal project of the Ramaphosa regime will have to face the street rage of climate justice forces, led by children and other progressive social forces, rising in the country against human and non-human extinction. Hope born from such rage emerges at a social-ecological breaking point and has been unstoppable in history. Mantashe the Communist dialectician should know this and heed the warning, because this time he will lose.

Originally posted in: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2019-07-24-our-burning-planet-south-africas-carbon-democracy-is-going-over-the-cliff/>

II. NATIONAL NEWS

2.1 Conference celebrates COPAC's 20 years and reflects on left politics today

Andrew Bennie

The year 2019 marked 20 years since the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) was established. Its founders, Vishwas Satgar and Langa Zita, were driven by the imperative of supporting a transformational, grassroots development process in the post-apartheid period, bucking the turn to neoliberal approaches to development that were congealing at the time. They believed that genuine cooperatives, through which people from working class communities could own and manage the means of production, had potential to help realise the democratisation of the economy that was so crucial to any meaningful post-apartheid transformation.

The focus of COPAC's work over its twenty years has continually shifted and evolved, but always within the framework of a progressive left project grounded in advancing systemic alternatives. In late October COPAC hosted a conference to celebrate and reflect on its 20 years of work of advancing systemic alternatives and on the fate of the Left, a political force so badly needed in South Africa and globally in the context of our multiple, converging crises.

The range of topics, speakers and discussions over the two days of the conference reflected COPAC's commitment in its years of work to engage with social questions and activism from holistic and multiple perspectives that highlight the connections between issues and attempts to advance transformational alternatives.

On the first afternoon the conference was opened by a panel of left thinkers who reflected on the crisis of South African and global capitalism. This was followed by an input from Christopher Chase Dunn, who helped further illuminate the connections between the multiple crises we face and the functioning of the world system, thus further placing COPAC's and left activists' work in South Africa in the context of the workings of this global capitalist system. The scope of COPAC's activism was further illustrated as an activist guide on land in South Africa was also launched, the practical considerations in the publication informed by a combination of deep thinking on the implications of the current social and ecological situation on how we envision and use land, and from existing practices and activism.

The following one-and-a-half days contained multiple sessions that reflected on various aspects of left politics today, including on understanding and building a radical feminist perspective and praxis in our current conditions, what it means to move beyond a vanguardist politics and advance a deeply democratic politics as the radical and necessary approach for the left today, and what it means to be an activist in this context.

For the past few years COPAC has focused on advancing food sovereignty pathways from below in South Africa, and so one of the highlights of the day was the visit to the Wits Food Sovereignty Centre, from where participants browsed the Wits Food Market and visited

agroecology gardens that have been established in students' residences. These were just some of the elements being constructed as part of building a food sovereignty pathway to end student hunger at Wits and shift the institution to taking a lead in making the necessary interventions to become an ecocentric university in the context of the just transition.

The visit ended off with a viewing of the murals painted all over the walls of Centre by the incredible radical Bolivian muralist, Knorke Leaf, and a brief input by her on the meaning and significance of the paintings. Once participants had returned to the conference, she gave an inspiring presentation of her work, and work she had done with other artist-activists, which had conference participants visibly energised and inspired, illustrating the critical role of art and creativity in activism and systemic transformation.

The conference also engaged further with practical components of activism for systemic alternatives, like learning from activists' experiences on advancing various aspects of food sovereignty, popular education and movement building. The variety and breadth of topics, debates and perspectives that were on display at the conference were a testament to COPAC's historical record and commitment to left pluralism, democracy and continually re-thinking radical politics that aim at bring together human creativity, thought and action into an emancipatory project for earth and humanity.

III. LOCAL CAMPAIGNING NEWS: BUILDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES

3.1. One Campus – Two plates

By Tshiamo Malatji, UFS Food Sovereignty Campaign Member

In 2017, as many as eight out of ten students at the University of the Free State indicated that, at least sometimes, they ran out of food and were not able to buy. This is shockingly revealed in a Food Insecurity Report commissioned by the university's Student Affairs. Although the cause was not thoroughly investigated by the university, its food systems narrate exclusion and unsustainability.

Food cafeterias and fast-food outlets are beyond the affordability range of most students and the university's feeding scheme is capicated to only help a few students. Launched in 2011, the No Student Hungry programme operates as a food bank for students. It estimates that it would cost R68 450 000 to feed 10 000 students for 185 days per year, according to the programme's 2017 report. Between 2011 and 2017, the programme has been able to assist 864 students -- about 123 students a year.

The solution to an exclusive market-based food system should not be an ostensibly exclusive food scheme, especially when the university can pursue an alternative -- food sovereignty.

At present, multiple student associations have joined together to form the UFS Food Sovereignty Campaign.

This is a grassroots student movement that aims to eradicate hunger at the university through sustainable, culturally-relevant and student-centred agriculture projects. These projects include food gardens, which maintain biodiversity, agroecology and the sustainable, safe and just use of resources (land, water and seed). Ultimately, the campaign aims to create a food sovereign system at the university where students can independently produce and distribute food.

A workshop was held on the 12th of April 2019 to explain the concept of food sovereignty to students and staff of the University of the Free State, in line with the university's Integrated Transformation Plan objective to create a sustainable food system. The workshop explained how to merge ecological principles and agriculture to serve the needs of students and the environment.



On the 24th of May 2019, the campaign will participate in a Zero Hunger Festival, releasing a written declaration for food sovereignty. From there, the campaign intends to lobby a dedicated planting area at the university for a pilot food garden, followed by an extensive agroecology plan for an alternative food system.

3.2. Agroecology training with John Nzira

Benazir Cassim

When I attended the Wits Food Sovereignty Centre's permaculture and agroecology workshop on 20 July, I thought I already had a decent idea of what it would be about. We'd learn how to make compost and be sent off with a handful of herbs, right? Turns out, I was right about the latter but got much more than I expected out of the former.

Jane Cherry kicked off the workshop, introducing us to the Wits Food Sovereignty Centre and its aims for the students at Wits. At the moment, the centre runs on donations but the aim is to become self-sufficient. Four gardens have been established and they plan to set up 21 gardens. The centre has three aims: 1. to be a place of dignity for students, where they can grow and cook their own meals. 2. To create an eco-demonstration site that is an example for the rest of Wits University to move to being a more eco-friendly institution. 3. To build knowledge around food sovereignty research and organising since there isn't much being taught right now about agro-ecology at universities.

Jane also told us about the Farmer's Market that takes place on the last Friday of every month at Wits, another step towards sustainability for food growers.

John Nzira then gave a presentation introducing us to permaculture aims, ethics and principles. He explained how many of us don't know what sovereignty means, and growing our own food will lead us to creating independence for ourselves, our families, our neighbours, and even the state. To be independent, we need to learn what to do with the land. And to start learning what can be done with the land, we need to observe what's on it and have a clear picture of what we want to do. Observing is different from just seeing or looking at something. It involves asking questions about why it is the way we are seeing it, and asking what steps we can take to improve what we see. Importantly, we must use all our senses to observe.

Some of the ethics of permaculture that John discussed are: care for the earth (looking after the earth so that it looks after you), understanding and managing water, and holistically considering elements that coexist on earth (air, plants, water and people, for example). We often behave as though these components act and exist in isolation, but it's important to consider the way they are connected to one another — especially how we as humans fit into the greater ecosystem. We can care for ourselves and our communities through growing healthy, nutritious food and building harmony with one another. Other principles underlying permaculture are creating sustainable systems that support us, seeking social justice and critiquing the profitmaking systems of commercialised farming.



John also gave us a brief breakdown of the principles of soil and water management, saying the best way to guard against climate change is to plant trees whose roots will hold the soil together and stop it from being washed away by extreme weather events. Other ways include planting ground cover to help reduce water evaporation and encourage growth, and directing

rainwater runoff into the soil or storing it for later irrigation. In these processes, it's important to ask ourselves how we are sharing water with plants and other living organisms.

John then explained how we should go about observing a food garden, or a space set aside for food garden. Some of the questions we should ask are: what does the landscape look like; what kind of soil is there; how is water managed; what kind of species are growing there;



and how do they coexist with one another. One particular aspect that fascinated me was how plants that we consider to be “weeds”, for example blackjack and khakibos, can actually be useful for us in that they can have medicinal or pest-control purposes. They just have to be harnessed in the right way. And that, for me, was the crux of the entire workshop. It's only once we have the right knowledge and objectives that we can become stewards of the land we live and farm on.

The workshop concluded with our group going out into the various gardens at Wits to observe and help clean up the spaces. We walked around trying to understand why some plants had been planted in certain spots, how well (or not) they were growing and how the gardens could be improved. We pulled out some of the (not-useful) weeds, dug some

compost pits and helped with mulching. A few volunteers picked some herbs and leaves from the gardens and prepared a delicious salad for us all.

As we happily munched on the salad, I felt so grateful for the opportunity to learn some valuable skills and be a small part of helping this wonderful initiative at Wits to flourish.

3.3. Report on permaculture and Agroecology Workshop

Felix Donkor

"Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." La Via Campesina. The need for interventions that help enhance food sovereignty has become urgent in our contemporary society. In South Africa for example, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey revealed that, in urban areas, 28% of households were at risk of hunger whilst 26% were already experiencing hunger. Moreover, in rural communities these rates climb to 32% and 36% respectively. The Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) and the South African Food Sovereignty Council (SASFC) are two of the foremost organisations addressing these issues.

In July 2019, a permaculture and agroecology workshop was held at the University of the Witwatersrand's Sunnyside Residence. The event brought together members from the general public with diverse backgrounds interested in learning organic methods of producing their own food and working with nature. Mr John Nzira of Ukuvuna (Urban Farming) was the main facilitator for the event and took the participants through topics such as the ethics of permaculture. Here he explained that at the core of permaculture as a philosophy is the principle of respecting nature and working with it, rather than against it. He also touched on the principles of soil and water management which included methods to promote ground water cover and reduce evaporation. The presentations were punctuated with questions from the active audience who sought clarification on the highly educative talk. Some of the questions touched on dealing with weeds, unwanted animals such as snails on the farm, alien species, companion planting amongst others. The facilitator encouraged the audience to always observe and interact with nature in the practice of their gardening. This involves observing what is happening on the farm and the immediate environment and then interacting or taking steps to address any related challenges he explained. He finally talked issues such as animals on the farm, effective energy flow and good garden design. The event ended with some practice sessions where participants were supervised to develop a student garden with the knowledge and insights from the workshop after which they were treated to a sumptuous lunch by the organisers.

Since their inception, the COPAC and SASFC have collectively championed the food sovereignty agenda and grassroots development in general through capacity building amongst poor communities, small scale farmers, farmworkers and NGOs amongst others to provide a national platform in advancing food sovereignty strategically in South Africa.

IV. SOLIDARITY WITH STRUGGLES

4.1 Message of solidarity with those affected by Gender Based Violence and Xenophobia

Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre

The Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre strongly condemns all forms of violence currently playing out in South Africa, particularly Xenophobic attacks and the scourge of Gender Based Violence. Furthermore, we strongly condemn the attack on the Casual Workers Advice Office in Germiston on the 2nd of September as part of the xenophobic violence, and wish them strength in rebuilding.

In the context of climate change and a heating planet, it is not just ecosystems that are shifting, entire populations will have to migrate as more of our Earth becomes unliveable. Climate Change also has the potential to create even more social unrest and competition as resources become scarcer and more difficult to access, we will see increased migration. During droughts, we have seen the collapse of food systems, and this is not due to the lack of food but rather because of the corporate owned food systems which put profit over the human right to food. In a heating world, with the potential for social unrest, incidents like this

will continue to worsen if we do not address both xenophobic feelings as well as the corporate owned systems, denying people access to basic resources. It must be noted that Xenophobia is being expressed by the minority, this is by no means the perspective of the majority of south Africa. The majority of our society must stand firm against Xenophobia, and amplify the voices of those speaking out against it and expressing our solidarity with our African brothers and sisters in this time of heightened violence.

It is also with great sadness that we note the violent rape and murder of 19 year old UCT student, Uyinene Mrwetyana and the countless other women and children who have been murdered at the hands of men. COPAC would also like to condemn the Gender-Based Violence and acts of Femicide taking place in the country. These acts are a symptom of the greater system of patriarchy which perpetuates rape culture in so many forms, creating the circumstances the violence we are seeing today. Both the Xenophobic attacks as well as the Femicide are clear signs of the toxic masculinity plaguing this society, something that can only be eradicated with the eradication of the patriarchy.

It is at this time that we must hold our governments accountable. We cannot allow those in positions of leadership to spew xenophobic rhetoric, without consequence. Continually, we have heard comments about migrant workers, not only from the mayor of Johannesburg- Herman Mashaba but also from his party as the Democratic Alliance has vowed to secure the borders of South Africa. Such comments have also been spewed by the ruling party, with the ANC saying on multiple occasions that they would deal with the issue of migrant workers¹. Both the ANC and the DA have blamed failing state departments such as the health department on migrant workers. It is comments like these from those in leadership that embolden every day citizens to act on their Xenophobic tendencies.



It is also at this time, when we have to intensify our fight against the systems which have pitted us against each other, and created circumstances for this kind of violence to thrive. It is now more than ever that we need to address the violent tendencies of capitalism. Capitalism is inherently a patriarchal, racist and violent system which must be eradicated in all forms. Finally, we commend all those who are actively doing work against Gender-Based Violence and Xenophobia, and wish them strength in this fight. We reaffirm our commitment, as COPAC to elevating the voices of the marginalised and work towards a society that sustains life, all life.

¹ <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-08-06-alarming-surge-in-xenophobic-language>

V. INTERNATIONAL NEWS

5.1 Solidarity Letter for SAFSC from La Via Campesina South East Africa Region

We, La Via Campesina Southern and East Africa Region, are part of a global social movement made up of many different kinds of food producers—peasants, small-scale farmers, fisherfolk and fish workers, indigenous and traditional peoples, pastoralists and nomads, agricultural and food workers, the landless, urban communities, consumers, youth, and women.



The multi-dimensional nature of climate crisis requires concerted regional and international efforts across the multitude of global struggle and policy spaces. As an engaged social movement committed to real solutions, we as LVC Southern and Eastern Africa are writing to you today, on 20th September, to express our solidarity with the communities affected, as well as with our allied movements and organization who are part of this struggle. As people directly impacted by climate change, we hereby join your voices demanding climate justice for a better, cleaner world.

The proliferation of mega-projects for energy production, such as mega-dams, coal and shale-gas extraction projects, as well as the many large-scale infrastructure projects, in the region are often not designed for and ultimately do not cater to the needs and interests of the majority of our African Peoples. The centralization and privatization of ownership and utilization of energy for corporate purposes is one of the main drivers of such crooked initiatives.

We regret to see our regional policy development and implementation captured by global North governments, TNCs, and private foundations, serving as enablers to the autocratic and often violent tendencies of our governing elites.

From our perspective, real solutions to the climate crisis, will not come from conforming to the industrial model of food production and consumption. Food sovereignty is a key form of resistance to an economic system that puts profit before life. It defends local food systems which are the foundations of creating new rural-urban links based on truly agroecological food production by peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists and urban farmers. Peasant agroecology is the answer to how to transform and repair our food system and rural world, and is a core solution to global climate change.

We are the ones who will feed our families, our communities and our world. We totally reject market-based mechanisms, and false solutions including Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA), REDD+, Blue Carbon, and geoengineering, among others. We call these false solutions because they are aimed at driving small-scale farmers away from diverse and healthy food production towards monoculture business models, continued dependence on corporate controlled and toxic farm inputs, and the commodification of Nature and Nature's services.

We the peasants of La Via Campesina Southern and Eastern Africa Region and our allies express our solidarity with all struggles against false solutions to climate change and for

climate justice across the globe. Standing in solidarity and hope with all the peoples of our region, we remain committed to the struggle for food sovereignty, agroecology, and rights to our territories, culture and identity as the basis for climate justice.

WE FEED THE PEOPLES AND BUILD THE MOVEMENT TO CHANGE THE WORLD!

GLOBALIZE THE STRUGGLE, GLOBALIZE HOPE!

MY STRUGGLE IS YOUR STRUGGLE! YOUR STRUGGLE IS MY STRUGGLE!

AMANDLA! AWETU!

5.2 Building autonomy through Ecology in Rojava

Andrew Neef

Before [years of war](#) devastated northern Syria, decades of capitalist exploitation by the Syrian state created the ecological disaster the people of Rojava face today. Through wheat [monoculture](#), oil extraction, and neglect of waste management planning, the Syrian state has left the region with growing ecological problems. Simultaneously, the Turkish government has been expanding dam projects along rivers running south into northern Syria for decades, turning rivers into dust and making it harder for people to grow food and be self-sustainable. Turkey also built massive walls along its border, carving miles of scars through the region's ancient forests. After decades of destructive colonial policies and war, the [Internationalist Commune of Rojava](#), in cooperation with the [Ecology](#) Committee of the Cizire [Canton](#), has begun taking direct action to protect the region's autonomy. Out of the rubble of war-torn cities, the people of Rojava launched an ecological campaign to develop solutions to these problems and, as their campaign slogan proclaims, "[Make Rojava Green Again](#)". The ecological campaign is addressing issues related to cultivation of food, reforesting large swaths of land, providing alternative forms of electricity, limiting fossil fuel usage, preserving the water supply, and even developing waste management solutions. Many of the local committee members are young adults who consider themselves responsible for building a more just social and economic system that functions in balance with the natural world. The women's liberation movement in Rojava also plays an important role in operating ecological pilot projects, such as agricultural [cooperatives](#). The Internationalist Commune is made up of individuals from around the world who have traveled to Rojava to support the revolution with their expertise, ideas, and labor. Internationals organizing with local communities in Rojava are working to support ecological projects, expand awareness, and build a healthy future across the region. The campaign is still very new and much work still lies ahead.

Developing urban agriculture is one tier in the ecological campaign to expand food security and autonomy in Rojava. Monocultures, the act of growing a single crop, has long been common policy supported by the [Assad government](#), which has controlled Syria since 1971.

Decades of monoculture resulted in the loss of ecological diversity across the region, and the use of artificially supplied water and chemical fertilizers has degraded the soil and made cultivation of food impossible in some areas. In [Afrin](#), for example, the regime cut down ancient forests to grow monocultures of olive trees, degrading topsoil. The Internationalist Commune plans to create rooftop gardens and plant on undeveloped land within cities, which will further decentralize agriculture across Rojava. The return to traditional organic fertilizer-based agriculture is also a solution being put into practice by the Internationalist Commune. Over the last few decades, many wildlife and plant species in the region have been displaced by deforestation and monoculture practices. Many wolves, foxes, wild pigs, and birds found refuge in the Hayaka forest, one of the last forests near Derik in Cizire. In 2014, the democratic self-administration of Rojava declared the Hayaka forest a natural reserve in order to preserve the biodiversity of the region. Hunting, fishing, construction of buildings, and agriculture are prohibited within the reserve. Since then, the development of non-profit cooperative tree nurseries has become an essential part of the ecological strategy to maintain autonomy in Rojava. Through the tree cooperative, internationalists will contribute their labor into reforesting Hayaka by planting 100,000 trees throughout the reserve, which will also improve local air quality. In the Spring of 2018, the Internationalist Commune will also plant 50,000 shoots of fruit trees that will produce pomegranate, grapes, pistachios, apricots, cherries, apples, pears, and olives. The commune will also plant wheat and cotton on the plains, establish beekeeping, and plant a variety of herbs accessible for medical research and use. Lack of access to clean water, and conflict over water sources, represent major factors in growing crises around the world. In Rojava, access to sustainable sources of water is yet another ecological issue the Internationalist Commune is working to overcome. The supply of clean drinking water mostly comes from springs and lakes. Climate change has contributed to the problem by shortening the rainy season across the region, which has decreased the amount of rainfall and significantly lowered groundwater levels. In the last two decades alone, precipitation in some areas has dropped 10-15%. Today, wells must be dug an estimated 50 meters deeper to access clean water. At the same time, Turkey has built dams upstream along the [Euphrates](#) and [Xabur](#) tributary, actively restricting the flow of water south into Rojava. In regions held by the Islamic State, Daesh has further compounded the problem of water scarcity by blocking off access to springs and wells. This lack of water has contributed to soil erosion and the dying off of once-thriving forests along river banks and lakes. Some of the remaining sources of water have also been left heavily contaminated after years of war across the region.

Across the region, access to water for drinking and agriculture has been slowly reduced for decades, due to monoculture and the building of dams. In an effort to promote sustainable use of water for growing crops, the Agricultural Protection Committee has registered all water wells and prohibited further expansion of wells for agriculture. In addition, the committee has limited the planting of crops requiring irrigation to 60%. Plans have also been implemented to begin using [greywater](#) (water from showers, the kitchen, etc) and [blackwater](#) (from toilets) for organic fertilization of agriculture. Human waste is the largest source of nutrients available to improve the soil and increase agriculture from organic waste across the region (after long [composting](#)). Much of the research, and technical implementation, for various uses of recycled water are ongoing at the International Academy.

Like most places around the world today, Rojava is still dependent on fossil fuels to drive vehicles, transport goods, and generate heat within stoves. Burning gasoline and diesel is the main source of air pollution in the region, especially in larger cities. The Internationalist Commune is currently developing plans to expand public transportation as a method to minimize this impact on the health of locals and environment. In addition, the ecological campaign is planting trees by thousands to help improve urban air quality.

The supply of electrical power to many regions of Rojava is a primary hurdle in sustaining autonomous self-governance. Rojava currently derives electricity from three primary sources: hydro-electric power plants, natural gas, and diesel generators. Much of the electrical infrastructure, such as power lines and substations, has been destroyed after years of war across the region. Currently, the Internationalist Commune, with strong support from the Ministry of Energy, is developing plans to create a more decentralized and sustainable infrastructure. Currently, the development of the first [wind power pilot project](#) in Rojava has begun, which will serve as a working example for communities throughout the region. Volunteers are also working to create decentralized solar solutions, using [photovoltaic](#) technology, which will provide alternative sources of power and water heating systems.

The Internationalist Commune believes this will reduce community dependency on both centralized electricity grids and fossil fuels. The Internationalist Commune in Rojava is simultaneously moving forward on plans for managing organic (food, paper, etc) and non-organic waste (plastic, metal, etc). Methods are being developed to sort, separate, and store all types of waste instead of burning or burying the waste, which causes air pollution and contamination of ground water. Organic waste is cleaned and stored for composting, and plans are underway to recycle all non-organic waste. Hazardous waste is stored far away from water sources to avoid contamination.

Such a massive ecological overhaul within Rojava will not be accomplished overnight. One essential pillar in maintaining self-governance throughout the region is community education. Success for an ecological revolution in Rojava will come from sharing concrete experiences and skills at all levels of society. The Internationalist Academy will be the center of this effort and will train individuals in the principles of self-organization, women's liberation, ecology, language, and culture. Students at the academy will participate in lectures and discussions at youth centers, municipalities, schools, and other institutions, to further develop what an ecological society in Rojava can look like and how to build it. International volunteers skilled in sanitation, renewable energy, mechanical and electrical engineering, and even physicists, chemists, and biologists continue to travel to Rojava to assist the construction of an autonomous ecological society. The academy hopes to build awareness throughout the region to "overcome the ecological and social crisis" which they see is "brought about by capitalist modernity", and promotes the destruction of nature and humanity. As Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac and international resistance fighters from all over the world deflect attacks by the the Islamic State and Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), the self-governed democratic society in Rojava is still very much under construction. Economic embargoes and war throughout the region continue to make it difficult to import the necessary technology, slowing the

construction of a democratic ecological society in the region. Other hurdles include more common issues such as financial support and expertise. The ongoing ecological revolution behind the front lines is rooted in its commitment to the long-term health of both the natural world and people that live within it. While battles may be won against fascist armed forces encroaching from every direction, without a sustained push to build a healthy autonomous society back home, the revolution in Rojava will not maintain long-term sustainability.

Originally posted in: <http://www.ilrigsa.org.za/index.php/2-uncategorised/241-building-autonomy-through-ecology-in-rojava>

VI. CLIMATE JUSTICE STRUGGLES

6.1 Climate Justice Activists target Sasol

Rhulani Mathebula

South Africans have joined the globe in responding to the world's call on climate change and have made it clear that they are not quitting in the quest of saving the world. o-operative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) took on Sasol on Friday demanding that the government take immediate action against companies that are adding problems to the world's climate change.

"The South African government must ensure the immediate roll-out of socially owned renewable energy in South Africa and clean energy mass transport systems across the country.

"Such plans must ensure decent labour absorption from the shut down of Sasol, Eskom and other Fossil fuel corporations." COPAC stated.

The organization also demanded that the government ensure that the parliament adopts the "climate justice charter".

"The South African government must ensure a people-led deep just transition based on democratic systematic alternatives to take South Africa beyond carbon capitalism.

"Such a transition must meet the needs of workers, the poor and the most vulnerable. Hence we demand parliament must adopt the #ClimateJusticeCharter" COPAC added.

COPAC took the decision to protest at Sasol because they believe that the company "had been let off the hook" and that the government will only act if capital is involved.

Originally posted in: <http://dailyworthing.com/index.php/2019/09/20/climate-change-activists-target-sasol/>

6.2 COPAC takes to the street in action against climate change



Watch the video at: <https://youtu.be/d5kJayLT4-s>

VII. SAFSC IN THE MEDIA

List of SAFSC's Latest Media Engagements

24 July 2019 Our burning planet: South Africa's Carbon Democracy is going over the cliff. By Vishwas Satgar. Daily Maverick, 24 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2019-07-24-our-burning-planet-south-africas-carbon-democracy-is-going-over-the-cliff/>

23 August 2019 Raging fires have been sweeping through the Amazon at a record rate. Vishwas Satgar is interviewed on ENCA, 23 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4udDxkSA4E&feature=youtu.be>.

15 September 2019 The climate emergency: Disruption and rebellion are now a matter of life and death. By Vishwas Satgar. Daily Maverick 15 September 2019. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-09-15-the-climate-emergency-disruption-and-rebellion-are-now-a-matter-of-life-and-death/>.

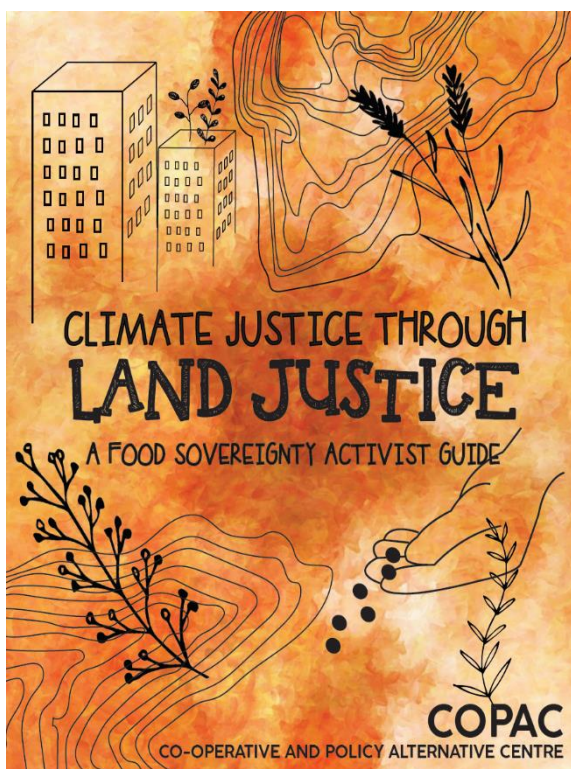
20 September 2019 The country's heating up and not in a good way. Global Warming Strike. Vishwas Satgar was interviewed on ENCA on 20 September after the global climate strikes. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MqIrFBTuxk>.

23 September 2019 Climate Change, Vishwas Satgar interviewed on SABC, Morning Live, 23 September 2019. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=306F-li5NIM&feature=youtu.be>.

VIII. ACTIVIST RESOURCES

8.1 Climate Justice through Land Justice: A Food Sovereignty Activist Guide

COPAC recently launched its land guide! This guide is a popular education tool for communities and grassroots activists. It serves to:



- empower people to understand the land crisis and the power relations involved in controlling and destroying land;
- equip people with the basic knowledge and understanding of land as a source of life;
- empower communities to organise and respond to policies on land;
- provide user friendly and practical techniques to use land in an eco-centric way to sustain it as the basis of eco-systems;
- protect, value and celebrate local and indigenous knowledge on land use;
- empower communities to strive towards systemic change through food, seed, and water sovereignty, land justice and a deep just transition.

Download the guide at this link: https://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Land-Justice-Guide-2019_Final-compressed.pdf

More information:

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