

Solidarity Economy News

Building Human Solidarity to Sustain Life

Newsletter No. 3 2012

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The massacre of the Marikana/Lonmin workers has inserted itself within South Africa's national consciousness, not so much through the analysis, commentary and reporting in its wake. Instead, it has been the power of the visual images of police armed with awesome fire power gunning down these workers, together with images of bodies lying defeated and lifeless, that has aroused a national outcry and wave of condemnation.

Vishwas Satgar
(Chairperson, COPAC)

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Editorial

The Marikana Massacre and the South African State's Low Intensity War Against the People

By Vishwas Satgar (Chairperson, COPAC)

These images have also engendered international protest actions outside South African embassies. In themselves these images communicate a politics about 'official state power'. It is bereft of moral concern, de-humanised, brutal and at odds with international human rights standards; in these ways it is no different from apartheid era state sponsored violence and technologies of oppressive rule. Moreover, the images of police officers walking through the Marikana/Lonmin killing field, with a sense of professional accomplishment in its aftermath, starkly portrays a scary reality: the triumph of South Africa's state in its brutal conquest of its enemies, its citizens.

At the same time, the pain and suffering of the gunned down workers has become the pain of a nation and the world; this has happened even without the ANC government declaring we must not apportion blame but mourn the dead. In a world steeped in possessive individualism and greed, the brutal Marikana/Lonmin massacre reminds us of a universal connection; our common humanity. However, while this modern human connection and sense of empathy is important, it is also superficial. This is brought home by a simple truth: the pain of the Marikana/Lonmin workers is only our pain in their martyrdom. They had to perish for all of us to realise how deep social injustice has become inscribed in the everyday lives of post-apartheid South Africa's workers and the poor. The low wage, super exploitation model of South African mining, socially engineered during apartheid, is alive and well, and thriving. It is condoned by the post-apartheid state. This is the tragic irony of what we have become as the much vaunted 'Rainbow nation'.

Moreover, the spectral presence of the Marikana/Lonmin massacre speaks to us about another shadow cast by the 'Rainbow' fairytale. It forces us to confront the hard edge of violence fluxing through our stressed social fabric. At one time, violent crime - car jackings, robberies, rapes, murders - defined our everyday understandings of violence. Our narration of these violent events constructed a sense of criminal violence as a major fault-line running through South African society. Such violence spreads fear, racial division and a sense of siege. It has been our undeclared civil war. However, the social geography of violence changes with the Marikana/Lonmin moment. A new faultline is revealed. Such a faultline has been in the making deep inside South

African society through xenophobic attacks, violent police attacks on striking transport and municipal workers (over the past few years), violence against gays and lesbians especially in township communities, and police complicity in thwarting legitimate protest actions in poor communities and informal settlements. Through a failure to act decisively (in some instances like during xenophobic violence or by failing to provide policing in informal settlements) or through orchestrated violence the South African state is at war with the working class within its borders; it is a 'low intensity war'. More specifically, such a war spans shootings, intimidation, failure to allow communities to lay charges, failure to investigate crimes perpetrated against poor communities, failure to be responsive to the safety needs of poor communities, fabrication and smear campaigns against local leaders, complicity with goons linked to local politicians (particularly the ANC) and a failure to act knowing that innocent lives are in danger.

A few examples of police orchestrated low intensity warfare working in cahoots with ANC goon squads or local politicians against communities illustrates this more clearly. This is based on testimony received from activists. First, after Abahlali Basemjondolo (Shack Dwellers movement) successfully challenged the Slums Act in the Constitutional Court, ensuring community participation to determine whether there can be relocation from an established community they became the target of police-ANC violence. In early 2010 an ANC goon squad violently removes Abahlali from Kennedy Road informal settlement. This is also captured in a documentary entitled: Dear Mandela. The police carry out arrests of Abahlali leadership on trumped up charges and public violence which are eventually kicked out of court. Abahlali is not able to return to Kennedy Road informal settlement.

Second, a more recent example in Umlazi township Durban also shows this police-political party nexus working in insidious ways to suppress community demands. The local Unemployed Peoples Movement (UPM) and ward 88 residents demanded a recall of their ANC councillor and a democratisation of the ward committee. In their perception the ANC ward councillor was corrupt, failing to deliver and engaging in clientelistic control of development resources. This unleashed a series of reprisals. On 23 July the leader of the UPM was arrested under false charges. The complainants turned out to be incited by the councillor working in cahoots with the station commander at Umlazi police station. These charges could not stick but they held the leader of UPM for a day. It would seem these trumped up charges were meant to prevent him from leading a community meeting being held on the same day. This story has many twists and turns with the police-ANC apparatus constantly trying to intimidate the UPM and residents of Ward 88 in the course of this struggle.

What is striking about these examples is the challenge to mainstream academic and media explanations of community based violence as being merely reducible to intra-ANC battles. In all these instances a conscious awakening and challenge by communities and movements to the ANC state unleashes a low intensity destabilisation of these community forces through the police-ANC state nexus.

Contrary to Zwelinzima Vavi, the General Secretary of COSATU, who believes South Africa is poised to experience the shock of a 'ticking time bomb' rooted in deep inequality and unemployment, this bomb is already exploding in various locales. However, the response of the ANC state has been about a recourse to low intensity violence. The Marikana/Lonmin massacre merely brings this trend into sharp relief. The challenge to COSATU is simple: does it want to remain a democratising force, with a proud history, and take a stand with the wider working class or does it want to be complicit in the low intensity war against the broader working class and citizenry? As the Farlam-led Marikana Commission of enquiry exposes the premeditated and brutal intentions of the police it is clear state violence against the working class has become a dimension of ANC-led neoliberal rule and merely expresses the deepening of low intensity war against the people when they dare challenge the ANC's elite democracy. This cannot happen again and those responsible at the highest levels of the state must be held accountable.

In short, Marikana as a defining moment in post-apartheid politics is essentially about galvanising the battle to reclaim South Africa's democracy from below. The Marikana moment resonates with and expresses the desire of the majority to end the ugly reality of South Africa's deep seated and racialised class based inequality that has been widening under ANC rule. This has been expressed in the strike wave since the Marikana massacre: on the mines, in the transport sector and now in the winelands. As South Africa's income inequalities persist the Marikana moment will exist in our midst.

Author:

Vishwas Satgar is the Chairperson of the COPAC board.

A version of this article has appeared in *Bullet* and on the blog defendingpopulardemocracy.blogspot.com



National News

Defending Participatory Democracy in Umlazi: The Struggle for Ward 88

By Athish Kirun

Residents of ward 88 in Umlazi, Durban, have faced a barrage of live ammunition, intimidation, and false arrests from the local councillor and police since June 2012. The communities have been battling against an inadequate and repressive local government over lack of access to basic services, informal housing, and high unemployment.

The ward crisis committee has organised two legal marches and handed over a memorandum of demands to the KZN Speakers office and local police station to address these problems. However their demands have fallen on deaf ears like many informal settlements and township communities around South Africa. This resulted in a wave of service delivery protests expressing their anger and dismay.



The response by the state has been coercive. They have accused the ward crisis committee leadership of intimidation and in some cases implicating community leadership on attempted murder charges. Bheki Buthelezi is one such leader who has been continuously harassed by the police. He was arrested on false charges of intimidation of a disabled person and recently attempted murder. Buthelezi still has a pending case with no concrete evidence to support these charges. The community was able to prove his innocence when they marched to the police station with video evidence of the victim who, having slipped out of his coma, stated the alleged attackers' names, and who have been linked to the local councillor.

However, throughout these challenges the community has been resilient and innovative in its struggle. They collectively called off their service delivery protests of burning tyres and barricading roads and opted for a new tactic of occupation. A call was issued to the community to recall their councillor and occupy her office indefinitely until their demands were met. A tent was set up parallel to her office, which the community called the 'People's Office'. Various social movements, communities and political formations welcomed the occupation and provided solidarity and support, such as Abahlali BaseMjondolo, Unemployed Peoples Movement, Democratic Left Front, South Durban Community Environment Alliance, KZN Right To Know Campaign and Clairewood Community.

The People's Office' was used to strategize and organise various subcommittees to deal with the community's challenges around housing, public works, unemployment, electricity, water and sanitation. Workshops on local government, climate change and solidarity economy were also organised.

The occupation attracted the attention of the local Branch Executive Committee of the ANC who agreed to meet with the ward crisis committee. The BEC were not willing to budge on the recall of the councillor as they said that this was an internal political issue and they will have to deal with it internally through their provincial structures. They also wanted the ward crisis committee to table their demands with them directly so that they could take it forward. The crisis committee refused and asked that their demands be given to directly the municipality and zonal planning committee. With this renewed pressure, the crisis committee was able to meet with the municipality and learn about the developmental and budget plans for their ward. As the local ward committee elections was approaching in mid August the BEC was trying to dominate by having the most number of seats in the ward committee and were offering the crisis committee 40% representation.

However, on the day of the elections an overwhelming mass of supporters of 1500 community members came to support their democratically nominated candidates versus the thirty-seven ANC candidates. They clinched a 100% representative victory for their ward committee. This victory has allowed them to now be able to sit in weekly meetings with the municipality and councillor and shape the roll out of their demands. They are empowered to take back information and outcomes to their ward.

This struggle has demonstrated the victory of social and civic action by the residents against the failure of the local government to be inclusive and respond to the structural and social crisis facing the residents of Ward 88. It also highlighted how smart activism and new tactics were able to overcome state violence and repression.

But the initiative by the residents is still continuing beyond the ward committee victory. Integrally, the Unemployed Peoples Movement (UPM) is going beyond only oppositional struggle against the state and towards a clear strategy on simultaneously building a transformational logic into their struggles. The UPM is working with COPAC to embed the Solidarity Economy Movement within their ward and have started the process of registering Isoyi Unemployed People Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperative (SEEC) to carry forward the movement. They now also have a vision to set up many worker co-operatives involved in food production and manufacturing to address the crisis of unemployment and hunger.



International News

A Decade of Enterprise Recuperations in Argentina

By Jose Itzigsohn and Julian Rebon

Recuperated enterprises are enterprises that have been taken over by their workers and transformed into self-managed cooperatives. Since the late 1990s, Argentinean workers have recuperated about 200 hundred enterprises employing around ten thousand people. The importance of this movement is that its actions question the basic organization of property and the idea that labor is a commodity that can be disposed of at will.

The recuperated enterprises emerged in the context of a deep social crisis. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell for four consecutive years, from 1999 to 2002. In 2002 the rate of poverty was 45.5 and the rate of unemployment reached 18.4 percent. This socioeconomic context pushed Argentinean workers to take radical steps to defend their livelihood. The bulk of the recuperations took place in 2002, at the height of the crisis, but there are still a handful of new recuperated enterprises every year. The “typical” process of recuperation went as follows: when the workers realized that the factory was about to close they started to demand unpaid wages and severance payments. When they realized that their demands would not be met they organized to occupy the premises and make the enterprise productive again. There were of course many variations within this process.

In order to obtain the legal right to stay on the premises the workers had to organize as a cooperative. After that, the recuperated enterprises sought the expropriation of the company, in order to transfer the property to their ownership. Still, most recuperated enterprises have a precarious legal status. Some expropriation laws are temporary and not definitive, and even among those that are definitive, several have not been implemented due to conflicts over the terms of compensation for the creditors of the enterprise.

The recuperated enterprises movement went through two broad phases. The first one lasted from 1998 to 2003. This was a period of direct action by workers who were being expelled from the labor market. In the second moment, since 2003 to the present, the number of new recuperations declined and the cooperatives focused on the daily challenges of economic subsistence and growth. The recuperated enterprises started looking for subsidies and loans to improve production and their workers started demanding access to social benefits.

In ten years the recuperated enterprises accomplished important achievements. First, they show that workers can rebel against unemployment and marginality to defend their jobs and their dignity. Second, they demonstrate that workers can successfully run their enterprises in a democratic way. Third, they have created new forms of solidarity and mutual help between them and between them and other social movements. Fourth, they have achieved a radical change in the country's bankruptcy law, a change that makes it much easier for workers to recuperate bankrupt enterprises. The recuperation of enterprises is now part of the tools of contention of Argentinean workers and it is recognized by the law.

Still, the recuperated enterprises face a number of challenges. On the political level they have to define their relationship with the state and with the union movements. On the organizational level they have to consolidate the democratic self-management. And on the economic level they have to strengthen their market insertion and develop a financial mechanism to obtain funds for working capital and for growth. Their answers to these challenges will determine whether they can play a more central role in the social and economic development of the country.

For more information, go to

[http://webiigg.social.es.uba.ar/
empresasrecuperadas/](http://webiigg.social.es.uba.ar/empresasrecuperadas/)

(you will need a translator on your web browser though, as the website is in Spanish).

Spotlight on Corporate Irresponsibility in Mozambique: Justica Ambiental (JA!) Second Annual Seminar

By Athish Kirun



Justica Ambiental (JA!) hosted their second annual seminar on corporate responsibility in October this year. Following the meeting initiated last year concerning “Corporate Responsibility versus Corporate Irresponsibility”, Justica Ambiental, in partnership with KEPA, intended to carry out a reflective workshop on known cases of violations of the rights of communities by large companies or megaprojects and look at ways to strengthen communities’ defence of their rights.

Within the Mozambique context, four cases of rights violations were presented by NGO’s and social movements supporting these communities. The first two cases focused on land grabs by the Chikweti Forests Company and Wambao agriculture company. Chikweti began planting large-scale monoculture pine and eucalyptus plantations in the Niassa province known for its flat terrain and fertile soil. This has displaced its 70% to 80% rural population who are small-scale farmers dependent on the land for food production. It has also threatened food security and sovereignty of local families and the region as a whole. Similarly, a Chinese company, Wembao, has been granted 20 000 hectares of land for rice production for a period of 50 years by the Mozambique government. The farming method by the company is polluting the nearby Limpopo River and is burning down the forests, which has affected cattle farmers. The company continues to invade other pieces of land and there is no communication and information available to the communities from the government. An estimated 80 000 people will be displaced.



Cases were also presented on mining companies and their impact on communities. The Vale coal mining company and Montepuez Ruby Mining company have promised to develop road infrastructure, relocate displaced families to better arable land, and provide new houses. However, this was not the case as many families were pushed into more densely populated areas where land was not fertile and water for farming is scarce. The companies provided poor-standard housing with weak foundations. Like the South African experience of Lonmin and Marikana, any forms of community protest were met with heavy repression and state violence by the Mozambique police. International cases were also presented on the impact of the Canadian Tar Sands pipelines on native communities and environment as well as Ecuador’s oil companies’ impacts on indigenous Yasuni communities and the Amazon rain forest.

Finally, COPAC presented on the solidarity economy as an alternative to the civilizational crisis caused by neoliberal capitalism. The presentation shared international examples from Brazil, Venezuela, Kerala (India) and South Africa which have made important strides in building the solidarity economy movement within their communities. It also spoke to the importance of activism and the need for communities to build structural power, movement power, direct power and symbolic power to fight against and move beyond the destructive logic capitalist accumulation.

400 People Gather in Boston for the USFWC 5th Worker Cooperative Conference

By Melissa Hoover

The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) celebrated its 5th national conference in Boston from 22nd to 24th June. The event gathered nearly 400 attendees from the worker cooperative sector and external groups interested in the cooperative movement, nearly double the attendance of the first national worker cooperative conference in 2004. The conference was preceded by an over-capacity daylong intensive exploring the various models of worker cooperative development in the United States.

Numerous sessions and workshops shared skills and explored possibilities for cooperatives, worker ownership and workplace democracy over three days. During those activities many international speakers participated, such as in the session "Lessons for Growth from around the World", where Bruno Roelants (CICOPA Secretary General) and Hiroshi Shimamura (Japanese Worker Cooperative Union) took the floor discussing elements of successful cooperative movement-building. José Orbaiceta (President of the Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo en Argentina) also participated via Skype video conference, speaking about the principled approach to growing the Argentinian worker cooperative movement. The keynote address was delivered by U.S. Congressman Chaka Fattah of Philadelphia, sponsor of the National Cooperative Development Act.

Work also continued to build CICOPA-North America, the newly launched branch of CICOPA (the worker cooperative body within the International Cooperative Alliance), which now includes 2 of the 3 worker cooperative federations in Quebec, the CWCF, USFWC and the Mexican Confederation. Leaders from CICOPA-North America held a discussion: "Building a Cooperative "Ecosystem" in North America," which discussed lessons from cooperative organizing in other parts of the world, as well as interest and resources in North America. At this session, there was a remarkable presence of Spanish-speaking cooperators who are based in the United States. This fact underlined the possibility of forming a sub-organization of the USFWC of Spanish-speaking immigrant worker cooperatives and also a plan from CICOPA-North America to strengthen the relations between Hispanic cooperatives in Canada, United States and Latin America.

Regarding the atmosphere at the event, the current President of USFWC and of CICOPA-North America, Rebecca Kemble, spoke to the great enthusiasm that she perceived from the participants: "I don't think any of us were prepared for the level of energy, engagement and excitement" evident at the conference. Two things stood out as remarkable at this event: (1) the strong presence of social justice and community groups exploring the worker cooperative model as a means of creating community self-sufficiency and (2) the clear interest in and energy for organizing for larger-scale impact. This second trend was evident everywhere, from the sessions on local and regional cross-sector organizing, to the desire to learn from cooperative movements abroad, to spontaneous organizing of a network of green housecleaners at the conference itself. The worker cooperative movement in the United States is indeed moving, as shown by our most dynamic national conference to date.

For more information visit
www.usworker.coop.



The Activist Engagement of the United States Solidarity Economy Network: Occupy Wall Street and Beyond

By Ana Margarida Esteves

The unannounced eviction of Occupy Wall Street from Zuccotti Park on November 15 2011 will remain engraved in the minds of activists and concerned citizens around the world for years to come. The resulting losses included not only personal property and trust in institutions that are supposed to protect constitutionally guaranteed rights. They also included an immense wealth of knowledge on alternative socio-economic paradigms that propose paths for a peaceful transition from capitalism to a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development model. The 'People's Library' at Zuccotti park had more than 5 000 books on that subject, which were forcefully removed by the police and sent to an unknown location. Such books were donated by a myriad of civil society organizations, including the United States Solidarity Economy Network (US SEN).

Since its foundation during the US Social Forum of 2007, the US SEN has been promoting collaboration between scholar-activists, workers' cooperatives, community development organizations and other grassroots initiatives. The purpose is to promote the emergence and growth of a Solidarity Economy Movement in the US through the mutual recognition of those initiatives in the values and principles of collective needs over profit, worker ownership, participatory democracy, stakeholder control, solidarity, reciprocity, community embedment and the promotion of local economies. The US SEN is also engaged in the promotion of transnational collaboration between Solidarity Economy organizations and movements across the world, namely through RIPESS - Réseau International d'Économie Sociale et Solidaire / International Network of Social and Solidarity Economy (www.ripest.org).

The US SEN contributed to Occupy Wall Street with a range of initiatives that are in line with its goal of spreading information about Solidarity Economy and promoting the mutual recognition of Solidarity Economy-based initiatives. Members of US SEN gave talks and workshops at Zuccotti Park and donated several books to the 'People's Library'. In January 2012, the US SEN started a series of 'Solidarity Economy Briefs' entitled 'Occupy the Economy!'. These briefs are aimed at diffusing key concepts and strategies not only within Occupy Wall Street, but also in the whole activist community in the US.

Those briefings include themes such as food cooperatives, the 'economy of abundance', workers' cooperatives, community supported agriculture and community development credit unions. The briefings are available at www.ussen.org. Besides, the US SEN is also promoting a 'mapping' of Solidarity Economy-based initiatives across the US.

The US SEN is also involved in transnational mobilizations. In June 2012, it participated in the international assembly of RIPESS that took place in Rio de Janeiro just before the Peoples' Summit of Rio +20. During the Summit, it contributed to the elaboration of the Charter that was presented by the participants to the 'official' summit of the UN. In August 2012, the US SEN sent a delegation to Mondragón in the Basque Country, with the purpose of promoting collaboration between workers' cooperatives in the two countries.

For more information, visit
www.ussen.org and www.ripest.org.



The Food Sovereignty Campaign

Food Security in Crisis: Lessons for South Africa from Zimbabwe

By Jos Martens

The central question in Zimbabwean agriculture is, how was it possible for Zimbabwe to transform from a once self-sufficient, food secure and self-reliant country into one that is structurally producing less than it needs and that has to regularly extend a begging bowl to the outside world?



Answering this question may well reveal some lessons for South Africa.

From Food Secure to Food Deprived

In the first 10 years of its independence, Zimbabwe generally managed to meet its food requirements and avert famine despite having to deal with four serious droughts.

But the food stability of the 1980's gave way to a decade of dismantlement, as Zimbabwe embraced an IMF/World Bank inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1990 and pressure mounted on the GMB to sell its large reserves, close non-profitable grain depots and drastically reduce its subsidies. Consequently, in 1990 and 1991 Zimbabwe exported a significant amount of its maize reserves.

Zimbabwe then experienced one of its worst droughts in 1991, but for much of the decade, given the dictates of the ESAP, Zimbabwe continued exporting maize even with the occurrence of two more serious droughts in the 90's. As a result its strategic grain reserves dwindled substantially.

Over the same period, government also introduced export incentives and cash crop stimulus measures and both communal and small-scale farmers increasingly diversified into cash crop production. The acreage under seed cotton increased from 90,000 hectares (8%) in 1980 and 230,000 hectares (20%) in 1990 to 370,000 hectares (26%) in 2000.

Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme

The Zimbabwean government embarked on its Fast Track Land Reform Programme in the year 2000. It did so under pressure of increased land occupations and after a hastily crafted draft constitution had been rejected in a referendum. By 2004 more than 3,000 of the 4,000 white-owned large-scale commercial farms had been compulsorily acquired.

The mainstream debate focused almost solely on the issue of land grabbing by the politically connected elite. This discussion was generally blown out of proportion and obscured the fact that Zimbabwe's agrarian structure had fundamentally changed. While the reform programme thoroughly disrupted and largely crippled large-scale farming, production in the communal areas continued during the first years of the new millennium. National maize yields in the good rainfall years of 2003/04 and 2005/06 were still substantial and the acreage under maize increased.

Only in the second half of the decennium - notwithstanding good rainfall - did maize production drop and remain below the one million MT mark. These were the years that Zimbabwe's economy truly started collapsing. With hyperinflation beginning in earnest in 2007 and skyrocketing to around 500,000,000,000% by the end of 2008, it was simply no longer viable to invest in inputs like seeds and fertiliser; maize yields per hectare dropped.

Climate change compounded this situation. Zimbabwe's rainfall became increasingly erratic, evidenced in particular by a disastrous lengthening of the typical dry spell in January - and frequency of failed harvests increased, now even occurring five times in the nine years from 2003 to 2012.

It is crucial to recognise that the 'miracle' maize increase by Zimbabwe's small farmers in the 1980's was almost fully produced by the top 20% only, i.e. the ones who had easier access to inputs such as seeds, fertiliser and credit and lived in areas with better soil and higher rainfall. Neither government's pre-ESAP high-input agriculture efforts, nor the free market, private sector thrust of the last 20 years has succeeded in substantially increasing the production of the bottom 80%. It even rendered many of them more vulnerable to drought as mono-cropping, use of high yielding maize varieties at the expense of small grains and the application of fertilisers has increased the risk of crop failure in drought-prone areas.

And yet the Zimbabwean government is touting a green revolution and private sector approach that will further marginalise the million farmer families who live in the drier and more marginal areas of Zimbabwe.

Lessons for South Africa

In South Africa approximately 18,000 commercial grain producers accounted for 90% of all grains produced in 2005, while up to three million subsistence farmers, who produce for household use, accounted for the remaining 10%.

The ANC government has until now failed to substantially redistribute the land. Instead it has continued to pursue a green revolution strategy based on high levels of artificial inputs (including GMOs), decreasing labour costs, a consolidation of landholdings into larger units of ownership and production, privatisation of an increasingly multinational agro-industry and the free market to make it all happen.

It ought to be clear from Zimbabwe's experience that this approach has not and will not bring benefits to either South Africa's decreasing number of farm workers, its subsistence farmers, the landless or the urban poor. Instead, with increasing speculation on the food futures markets, the production of bio fuel and an increase in land grabbing, South Africa might well be in danger of losing both its national and household food sovereignty and security.

For both South Africa and Zimbabwe, the answer has to lie in an agricultural policy that aims to prevent widespread hunger and famine. It will have to focus not only on issues of national food security, but first and foremost, at pursuing food security at the local level, for the below-subsistence level farmers in agriculturally marginal areas.

This will entail a completely different type of site-specific, sustainable, ecological form of agriculture, spearheaded by local farmers themselves, organised along cooperative principles and directed first and foremost towards the rehabilitation and conservation of land and agro-ecosystems in order to increase local food security. Support of urban agriculture will also have to be a critical part of such an alternative policy.

Martens is an agriculturist who has worked and lived in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa since 1984. He works for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Access the full article online at
<http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1461>.



The African Centre for Biosafety (ACB): Fighting the Imposition of Genetic Modification of Our Food Systems

By Gareth Jones



The African Centre for Biosafety (ACB) is a non-profit organisation, based in Johannesburg, which campaigns against the proliferation of genetically modified (GM) food in South Africa and the wider African continent, and the privatisation and consolidation of African food systems by international capital. It does this through a variety of avenues, ranging from policy engagement and analysis to education and awareness raising at the grass roots level.

Before founding the ACB in 2004, director Mariam Mayet was on the South African delegation during the negotiations to the United Nations Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety during 1999, and was privy to the intense lobbying from agribusiness that was underway to weaken it. By the time the ACB was founded South Africa was growing GM maize, cotton and soybeans, and Monsanto, the world's largest seed company, had firmly embedded itself in the country's commercial seed market by buying out two of South Africa's largest seed companies, Sensako and Carnia.

Even today, South Africa remains the only African country that grows GM crops in significant quantities (approximately 70% of our maize is now genetically modified). However, the biotechnology industry, as well as other agribusiness interests, covets what it misleadingly terms Africa's 'vast' and 'underutilised' land, and sees South Africa as a vital spring board into the rest of the continent. Thus the interests of profit-chasing corporations such as Monsanto, and our own government, who has fully bought into the (much discredited) notion that GM crops and biotechnology signify progress and the solution to global hunger, have become closely intertwined. Any activity relating to a GMO in South Africa requires a permit from the South African biosafety authorities. With the odd exception, this process has become little more than a rubber stamping exercise. As far as we are aware Monsanto have never been refused a GMO permit in South Africa.

There is a small window for public participation in this process. The ACB has itself submitted more than 40 independent scientific comments to our regulators. Some noticeable successes have been achieved, including the prevention of the commercial release of a GM potato variety in 2009 (though this decision was appealed, with a final decision expected soon). In 2010 the ACB became involved in a matter with the Competition Commission, following an announcement that chemical giant DuPont wanted to purchase South Africa's largest remaining seed company, Pannar. Following substantial inputs by the ACB, the Commission rejecting the proposed take-over, citing concerns over consolidation in our seed markets. The decision was appealed to the Competition Tribunal, who also rejected it (The ACB became the first NGO to participate at the Competition Tribunal). Unfortunately, the Competition Appeals Court overturned these two decisions earlier this year.

During 2012 the ACB has expanded its work, and produced reports on the corporate threat to Africa's seed systems (including proposed tightening and harmonisation of seed laws) and the threats to human and environmental health posed by agricultural pesticides. Research undertaken by the ACB in South Africa has revealed a shocking lack of testing of pesticide residues in our food supply and in the environment. Another crucial part of the ACB's work is to contribute research and analysis on GM policy and geo-politics to social movements in Africa and further abroad. The ACB has provided pro-bono analysis of numerous draft African Biosafety Frameworks over the years and actively engages with and is informed by African movements fighting for food sovereignty and environmentally sound forms of agriculture. The ACB partnered with the African Biodiversity Network, EcoNexus and the Third World Network to run a series of biosafety workshops in 6 African countries in 2011 and 2012. There are plans to continue offering these intensive capacity buildings with African civil society in 2013.

**The ACB has a wealth of information, research and reports on their website that are useful for activism: www.acbio.org.za.
or contact them at 011 486 1156.**

Building Food Sovereignty to Advance the Solidarity Economy in Pietermaritzburg

By Athish Kirun



Northlands Primary School in Northdale, Pietermaritzburg, hosted COPAC recently in September to present on the Solidarity Economy and Food Sovereignty Campaign. The audience was largely made up of unemployed women from the local women's league and surrounding Northdale community.

Northlands Primary is committed to local food production and has initiated a local food garden for its learners. It has also identified open land next to its school, which it wishes to utilise for larger scale food production. The school has a history of cooperative development and has initiated a sewing cooperative in the past for a group of unemployed women, manufacturing pillowcases and bedding.

Pietermaritzburg used to have a thriving shoe manufacturing industry. Many workers from Northdale used to work in these factories but since liberalization of the South African economy, many of these workers were retrenched, causing high unemployment, hunger and a social crisis within households and community.

The meeting resolved to start the process of setting up a local Pietermaritzburg Solidarity Economy & Food Sovereignty Forum to address some of these socioeconomic problems through building a solidarity economy movement.

The objectives of such a forum is for enabling an education and learning space for movement building, networking and sharing of information and skills from various support organizations, building activism and campaigns, and planning and coordination. COPAC will provide its support, resources, and tools for setting up agricultural worker cooperatives and the solidarity economy movement in 2013.

Local Farming in Ivory Park Continues to Move Forward

By Andrew Bennie

Earlier this year, the Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperative (SEEC) in Ivory Park, as part of its food sovereignty strategy, undertook three days of training with volunteer home food gardeners, who received equipment to plant gardens at home from the Gauteng Department of Agriculture. However, activists from the SEEC and farmers from some of the cooperatives, using their existing knowledge as well as additional knowledge gained from permaculture training received at Siyakhana Garden in Johannesburg, decided that they would independently conduct thorough training with the group of about 70 people. This training was conducted without any outside assistance, and demonstrated the importance of building and multiplying local knowledge to build food sovereignty and the solidarity economy in Ivory Park.

Many of those trained continue to attend the monthly solidarity economy and food sovereignty forum meetings held by the SEEC, where information sharing, education and training, and planning around the implementation of the food sovereignty strategy takes place. What is encouraging is that many of those that attended the training have organised themselves in groups and have started gardens on public properties such as schools and clinics. The photo below is of Maria, Jacob, Charles and Paulo, who after the training were invited by a teacher at PS Tsosane Primary School, who is passionate about ensuring good nutrition for school children, invited them to begin gardening on the school premises. The garden is flourishing with strong and healthy vegetables that they now have to consume at home, and which they also sometimes provide to the school kitchen to supplement the daily lunches cooked for the school kids.



Another community member that benefitted from the training and equipment, Goodfriday, says that the training helped him a lot and says 'Having the garden now is a good thing, because I have fresh food in the house every day for me and my kids, and I also sell to people coming past.' Some days he makes up to R100 selling to passersby and street traders.

All the other home food gardeners have confirmed the benefits of now having easy access to fresh and healthy food. This process has been an important step in igniting the energy and capabilities on the road to building food sovereignty in Ivory Park.



Activist Resources to build the Solidarity Economy Movement from Below

New Report: *Who Decides About Global Food and Nutrition? Strategies to Regain Control* by Right to Food and Nutrition Watch



Civil society representatives launching the fifth annual report on the right to food and nutrition state that it is impossible to combat the causes of hunger while keeping existing power relations untouched. "Food and power are related. It is almost impossible to find one person among the powerful in society and politics worldwide, who does not have enough to eat," said Huguette Akplogan-Dossa, the Regional Coordinator of the African Network on the Right to Food (ANoRF). "The tendency is for exclusion from economic and political decision-making to go hand in hand with incidence of hunger and malnutrition."

The global report *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2012*, with the title 'Who Decides About Global Food and Nutrition? - Strategies to Regain Control,' gives a multitude of examples of the severe violations of the right to food and nutrition that the current food system is provoking: from forced evictions and land grabbing by companies or corrupted members of governments, as illustrated by the articles on Mexico and on the Arab Spring, to inappropriate food supply programs or speculative investments in agrofuels, described in the articles on Bangladesh, Paraguay and the Philippines.

The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2012 focuses on exposing who is really in control of decision and policy-making when it comes to food and nutrition. "Far too often, agribusinesses and nutrition companies use their weight and influence to increase their profit margins, and to manipulate the rules to their interests and convenience, without regard for the best interests of small-scale food producers and the survival of their communities - let alone the moral and legal requirements of the human right to food," observed Peter Prove, Executive Director of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA).

In reaction, social movements and other expressions of civil society have engaged in strategies to regain people's control over food and nutrition. "With the reform of the Committee on World Food Security, an innovative way of inclusive governance has been established. It has been a breakthrough for those civil society groups that traditionally have been excluded from decision making processes on all levels," said Flavio Valente, Secretary General of FIAN International. "The time has come to occupy political space and fight for the primacy of human rights."

Article Source: <http://www.rtfn-watch.org>.

Download the report at: http://www.rtfn-watch.org/fileadmin/media/rtfn-watch.org/ENGLISH/pdf/Watch_2012/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2012_eng_web_rz.pdf

Tips for using the Internet for Activism Part 3: Research Using a Search Engine

Critical to being an effective transformative activist is to be constantly engaging with information that can strengthen struggles. This requires knowing how to access information. The Internet has a huge amount of information on just about any topic you can think of. This includes information relevant to radical grassroots activism! However, if you do not have a specific website address for information that you are searching for, how do you access it? In Part 1 on using the internet for activism tip, we showed you how to access information by entering a website address for a particular organisation etc. There is another crucial way to research a particular topic from a central point (the 'search engine'), which then finds all the information existing on the internet for the topic that you searched.

What is a search engine?

A search engine is designed to help you enter a topic, concept or a question you are searching for and finds the closest relevant match based on the words you have entered. There are various forms of search engines namely Yahoo, Bing and Google. The most popularly and widely used search engine is Google. Have you have heard the response "Just Google it" to a question you have asked to someone? Google is an amazing search engine that is able to pick up all the websites relevant to your search. One can use the Google search engine to search for news articles, journal articles, reports, books, images, videos, meaning of words or terms, and their applications and functions.

Step 1:

Open Internet Explorer (or whatever internet browser is on the computer that you are using).

Step 2:

In the address bar, type in: www.google.co.za and press ENTER on the keyboard. The Google website will appear on the screen.

Step 3:

In the open box below the word 'Google' type in the term you are searching for. For example, 'solidarity economy'. Press ENTER.

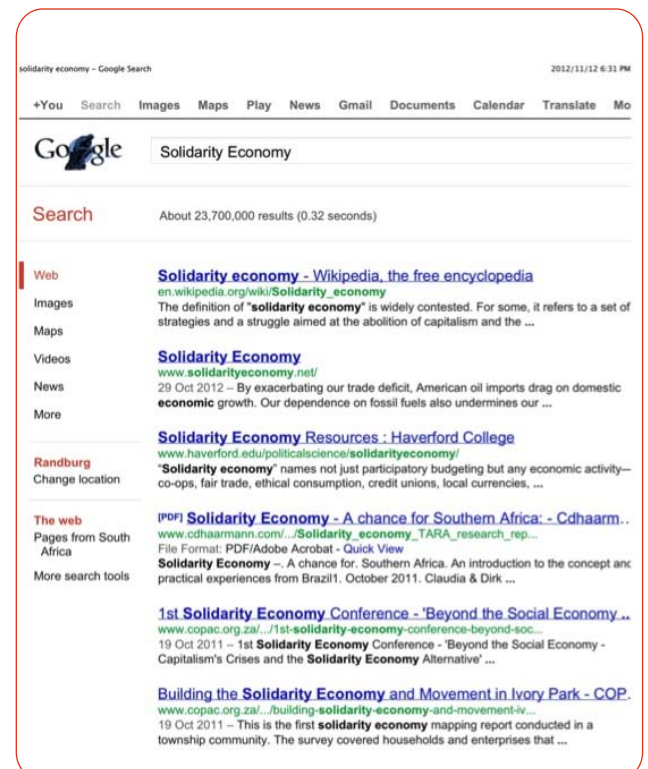
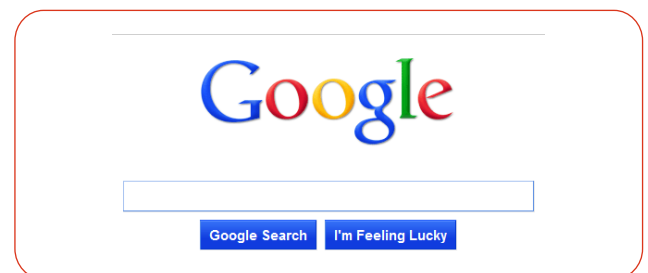
Step 4:

Here is an example of some the search results on the Solidarity Economy that will come up.

Step 5:

To now start looking at each result to see whether it is useful for your purposes, just click on the bold heading. However, the screen will Then open the website you have clicked on, which means your search results will disappear. So, there are two things you can do:

- While on the Google page, place the mouse on the bold heading that you want, and click the RIGHT button on the mouse. A bar will open down, and click on 'Open link in new tab'. If you look at the top of the browser screen, you will see a new bar appear, which will have the page open that you selected from the Google page. You can do this with all the search results that you want to look at. Once doing this, just click on the tab at the top of the screen to select the page you want to look at.



- Or, you can just click as normal on the page you want to select and it will open in your browser. Once you are finished looking at it, or saved it, you can return to the Google search results page. To do this, look at the top left of your screen. You will see two arrows next to each other (for example, $\leftarrow \rightarrow$). Click on the left arrow. This will take you back.

Remember: When using Google it is important to refine your search and be more specific around the titles and questions you enter for your topic. You can pretty much find information on any type of topic through this search engine.

Research is a vital tool for activism and empowers your analysis on various topics more objectively. Search engines are one such way to access some of this information digitally and efficiently. We hope this tip will help you to use this search engine to find new information you are searching for and will strengthen your activism!

Best

COPAC TEAM

Discussion, Note and Research Page

contact us

We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter through writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

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