



Environmental Justice Fund

BY ACTIVISTS • FOR ACTIVISTS

GRANTEE CONVENING REPORT

2023





Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. The purpose of the Convening	5
3. About the participants	5
3.1 Grantees	7
3.2 Facilitators	18
4. Documenting the week	21
4.1 Overview of the programme	21
4.2 Day 1 – building relationships	22
4.3 Day 2 – strengthening capacity and deepening knowledge	24
4.4 Day 3 – contextualising our activism	25
4.5 Day 4 – strengthening capacity and building resilience	28
5. Common themes and ideas for moving forward	31
6. Conclusion	38
Annexure A: Participant list	39



1 Introduction

The Environmental Justice Fund (EJF) is an activist-centred organisation working to advance climate justice and realise environmental rights by strengthening the environmental justice movement in South Africa by providing financial, capacity-strengthening and networking support to community-based organisations (CBOs) and community networks. In the process we are developing an innovative grant-making model based on participatory grant-making principles, which seeks to disrupt and redefine the patterns of power inherent in philanthropy, and centre accessibility, trust, flexibility and community agency. You can read more about the EJF on our website: <https://ejfunds.org.za/>.

Our approach is to both strengthen what exists and to help grow the environmental justice movement. This means that we support a mix of established and new organisations. Our partners are working on a rich diversity of some of the most critical environmental justice challenges facing the planet today, including climate justice and the Just Transition, the need for reforestation to address poor air quality in concentrated industrial zones, environmentally harmful and exclusionary mining practices, the gendered impact of dwindling fishing stocks due to offshore mining, threats to human rights defenders, looming water crisis in big urban areas, agro-ecology and food sovereignty, and the importance of better solid waste management in informal settlements.

While our understanding of movement-building is evolving, we are clear that injecting funds is not enough and operate using an accompaniment model in which the support we provide includes a diverse range of capacity-strengthening support tailored to the unique needs of each organisation.

Furthermore, because we believe that collective mobilisation is important, we seek opportunities to strengthen the networks between CBOs in order to encourage and enable collaborative action.

In light of this approach, EJF hosts convenings at which we bring together all the organisations that we are supporting to learn, exchange and rejuvenate. The first of these convenings took place in Durban in February 2023.

This Report documents the second convening which took place from 6 - 10 November 2023 in Muldersdrift outside Johannesburg. The theme for the Convening was 'Advancing through adversity'. The Report aims to build EJF's institutional memory by documenting what took place at the Convening, and to capture some of the key themes and learnings which emerged during the week so that these can be fed back into EJF's strategy. It should be read in conjunction with the video which was produced to capture the event which is available <https://youtu.be/j982J5ZJopk>. EJF is indebted to Coline Bruintjies who authored most of this Report.



2 The purpose of the Convening

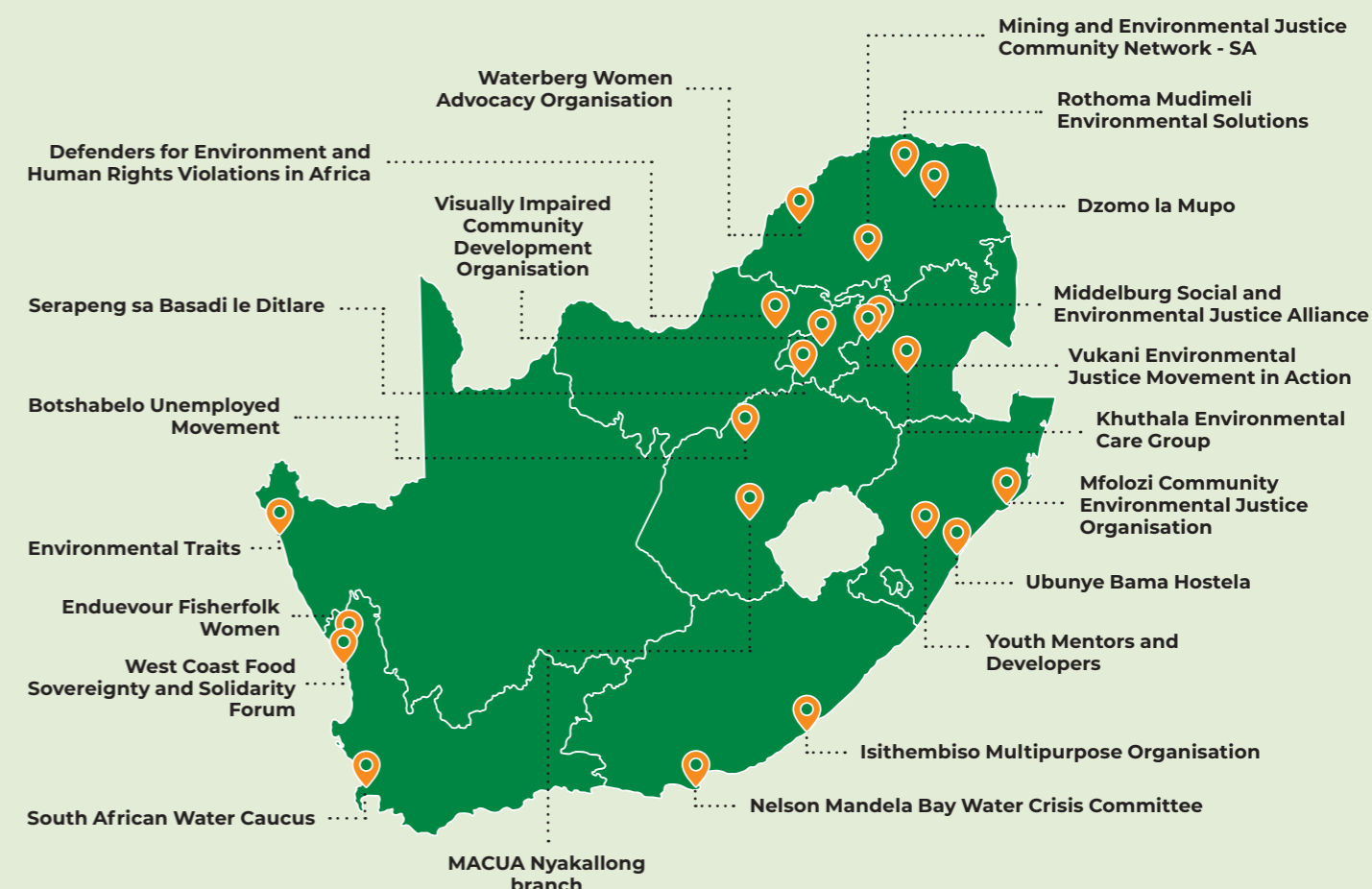
The purpose of the Convening was to:

- generate opportunities for the organisations that EJF supports to build solidarity, and connect across cultures, ideologies and disciplines;
- provide a platform for growth through peer learning and facilitated training;
- create space for EJF and our grantees to get to know each other better in order to deepen relationships of trust and assist EJF to refine the support we provide to the environmental justice movement; and
- allow busy activists working in difficult conditions some time out away from their daily work in order to pause, re-charge and strengthen their resilience for the struggles ahead.



3 About the participants

The Convening brought together the 21 organisations supported by EJF, from across all 9 provinces of South Africa. The map below shows the location of each organisation.



Each organisation was invited to send 3 representatives. Having 3 participants from each organisation allows an opportunity for learning, and for information to be shared across the organisation. It also helps with carrying institutional memory if one person leaves the organisation. The different participants can also hold each other accountable for implementing what comes out of the Convening. As part of EJF's feminist ethos, we also require at least some of each delegation to be women.

Members of EJF's board and Grants Committee also participated, and we were also joined by a number of partner organisations who work alongside EJF to advance environmental justice and provide support to community-based organisations. In total there were 91 participants. The details of participants can be found in Annexure A.



3.1 Grantees

The following organisations were represented:



Botshabelo Unemployed Movement

Botshabelo Unemployed Movement (BUM) was established in 1999 and is a popular membership-based organisation located in the peri-urban township of Botshabelo in the Free State. BUM exists to amplify and address the plight of poor unemployed youth. BUM's organisational objectives are to:

- a) strengthen the capacity of the unemployed to effectively advocate for a life of dignity;
- b) address issues of unemployment, democratic control, environmental issues and social justice; and
- c) fight against deepening poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

They operate in an area facing significant threats from fracking and oil prospecting, and have a particular focus on women through their women's wing.

EJF is supporting BUM to heighten the consciousness of unemployed people in Botshabelo about fracking and climate change through mass actions and mobilisation, and to hold local government accountable for the non-creation of plans to combat climate change and fracking.



Defenders For Environment and Human Rights Violations In Africa

Defenders For Environment and Human Rights Violations In Africa (DEHRVA) is a new community-based organisation (established in 2020) based in Marikana in the North West. Their objectives are:

- a) to promote and defend the environmental and human rights of communities both directly and indirectly affected by mining; and

b) to train, develop, and capacitate community members, with a particular focus on youth, on issues such as access to information about mining, the law and human rights.

EJF is supporting DEHRVA to set up an advice office in Marikana focussing on environmental and climate justice issues.





Dzomo La Mupo

Established in 2007, Dzomo La Mupo is a women and youth-led NPC operating in the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone in the Vhembe district in Limpopo. The core of Dzomo La Mupo's work is to preserve and revive cultural biodiversity, protect indigenous forests, rivers, wetlands and sacred natural sites, encourage intergenerational learning, rebuild confidence in the value of indigenous knowledge systems and promote food sovereignty. They focus on providing support in 12 communities – namely Vuwani, Tshidzivhe, Mulodi,

Vhuthalu, Vuvha, Vhutanda, Tshilungwi, Phiphidi, Swongozwi, Mabvete, Lwamondo and Tshiluvhi.

EJF is supporting Dzomo La Mupo to strengthen intergenerational learning, conduct ecological mapping and create an ecological calendar which shows the historical interaction between the people and the environment in the villages of Mulodi and Vuvha, which will guide the planting of indigenous trees in those areas.



Environmental Traits

Environmental Traits is a community-based organisation founded in 2022 and located in Port Nolloth in the Northern Cape. Their objectives are to foster a culture of sustainable farming, improve the conditions of the homeless recycling workers and train communities on various skills related to agriculture, mariculture, and recycling in a sustainable manner. They also aim

to work collectively with mining companies and small-scale fishers to improve the conditions of the environment.

EJF is supporting Environmental Traits to get up and running through legal registration and capacitation of its leadership, as well as to establish an organic community food garden.



Enduevour Fisherfolk Women aka Doringbaai Fisherfolk Women

Enduevour Fisherfolk Women is a community-based organisation which has been running for several years in Doringbaai in the Western Cape that brings together women from working class backgrounds to build solidarity, create alternative livelihood opportunities within the ocean's economy, advocate for a clean and sustainable environment including protecting the ocean and environment from harm, and create a foundation for leadership on women's social and environmental justice rights. The organisation is

particularly concerned about the gendered impact of dwindling fishing stocks due to offshore mining on the west coast.

EJF is supporting the Doringbaai Fisherfolk Women to explore how natural resources can be recycled and upcycled to generate income for the women in the community, and to run an organic garden that will provide food and income for the women.



Isithembiso Multipurpose Organisation

Isithembiso Multipurpose Organisation (Isithembiso) is a registered Non-Profit Organisation founded in 2018 based in Ncera near East London in the Eastern Cape. It runs a number of different initiatives aimed at uplifting the community's standard of living by promoting active participation in addressing their own needs and eradicating a sense of dependence, improving household and community income through income-generating projects involving recycling, farming, and arts and crafts, and

building the capacity of community members with a particular emphasis on women and youth. They have programmes on GBV, health, agriculture, and disability.

EJF is supporting Isithembiso's agriculture programme to train 25 local farmers from 9 villages on agroecology and permaculture techniques, including how to make biofertilizers, seed saving, establishing a seed bank, and how to conduct market research.





Khuthala Environmental Care Group / Khuthala Women's Movement

Founded in 2000, Khuthala Environmental Care Group is a registered Non-Profit Organisation based in Ermelo in Mpumalanga. Khuthala Women's Movement forms part of Khuthala Environmental Care Group and was founded in 2019. They are based in the Highveld Priority Area which was declared in 2007 as needing intervention to address the air quality crisis caused largely by the large number of power stations, mines and industrial activity in the area. Their combined organisational objectives are to

combat air and water pollution mainly caused by the local scrap yard, to drive responsible waste management, and to re-green the communities they work in.

EJF is supporting Khuthala to improve air quality in their area through a tree-planting initiative in 10 communities in which young people are trained as tree custodians, as well as to improve access to safe water by protecting a local natural spring.



Middelburg Social And Environmental Justice Alliance

Middelburg Social and Environmental Justice Alliance (MSEJA) are a community-based organisation from Middelburg in Mpumalanga and are thus located in the heart of one of South Africa's environmental crisis zones given the extreme concentration of coal mines, power stations and other industrial polluters in the area. They were founded in 2022. Their organisational objectives are to create awareness on the effects of coal mining, climate change and the transition away from coal.

EJF is supporting MSEJA to hold polluters accountable by enhancing community awareness of environmental health and environmental and other rights to participate in pollution monitoring processes, by conducting just transition and environmental health literacy workshops in villages around the Komati power station.



Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation

Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO) is a community-based organisation located near KwaMbonambi in KwaZulu-Natal and founded in 2015. MCEJO's objectives are to promote sustainable projects that will benefit women, the youth, and the elderly, and to uphold all community interests such as improving quality of life and living in an environment that is not harmful to their communities and livelihoods. MCEJO also protects

their community and the environment against open-cast mining.

EJF is supporting MCEJO to build the knowledge of community members regarding climate change and the just transition, strengthen youth leadership in the community, and improve security and protection for community activists under threat.



Mining Affected Communities United in Action - Nyakallong branch

Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA) is a national network of mining affected communities. MACUA's Nyakallong Branch was founded in 2019 and is in the Free State. The Branch objectives are to educate and advocate for Free Prior Informed Consent in the decision-making process related to mining activities conducted in their community. They also mobilise and collaborate with local organisations that fight for access to information, and oppose various forms of abuse of women, farm workers and mine

workers, and are striving to prevent environmental degradation caused by mining and business in their communities.

EJF is supporting MACUA-Nyakallong to improve levels of awareness amongst adults and school learners about climate justice and environmental degradation, including the launch of research into the environmental health impacts of a devastating sewage spillage in their community.





Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa

The Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa (MEJCON) is a national network of mining-affected communities founded in 2012 whose objectives are to promote and defend the environmental and human rights of communities both directly and indirectly affected by mining; and to ensure the sustainable use of mineral resources. Its other objectives include to train, develop, and capacitate community members to access vital information concerning mining, law, rights, processes and impacts of environmental injustices and to share and distribute that information within affected and interested communities. They also seek to provide

support and assistance to community champions, and members of affected communities, and to engage all relevant stakeholders namely all tiers of government, industry, civil society organisations, traditional authorities, and all chapter 9 institutions.

EJF is supporting MEJCON to build the capacity of its leadership as it works towards establishing as an independent entity, and to extend the network's footprint through the launch of additional branches.



Nelson Mandela Bay Water Crisis Committee

Nelson Mandela Bay Water Crisis Committee (NMBWCC) is a network based in Gqeberha in the Eastern Cape founded in 2021. Its objectives are to democratise the Water System and push back against privatisation, to bring out the community voice in the struggle against government failure in delivering clean and safe drinkable water and to conduct popular education around the ecological implications of desalination plants and groundwater systems. NMBWCC also campaigns for the cancellation of water bills which it views

as rooted in a flawed system and seeks to build community water catchment systems.

EJF supported NMBWCC to mobilise communities in Nelson Mandela Bay, including through conducting community water testing in order to evaluate municipal and national government reports, and creating spaces dedicated to hearing from women about the ways in which the water crisis impacts them in gendered ways.



Rothoma Mudimeli Environmental Solutions

Rothoma Mudimeli Environmental Solutions (Rothoma) is a women-led community-based organisation founded in 2021, based in Mudimeli village in Limpopo. Rothoma's objectives are to teach the community about the importance of a clean and healthy environment and to conduct cleaning campaigns in the community to build capable environmental activists.

EJF is supporting Rothoma to strengthen the leadership abilities of women activists in Mudimeli village, and to improve local environmental conditions through initiatives that address illegal dumping, and re-green deforested areas.



Serapeng sa Basadi le Ditlhare

Serapeng sa Basadi le Ditlhare is a women-led community-based organisation founded in 2008 based in Waterdal in Gauteng. The organisation's objectives are to create awareness about alternative energy, climate change and organic farming within the community.

EJF is supporting Serapeng to build a biogas digester and customised community kitchen. This digester - fed with organic waste - will power 6 communal stoves for about 6 hours a day, simultaneously showcasing the viability of alternative energy sources and building community cohesion by providing a communal gathering point for eating and learning together.





South African Water Caucus

Established in 2002, the South African Water Caucus (SAWC) is a national network which currently has provincial structures in eight provinces in South Africa (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Free State, Limpopo, Northwest, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape). Over the years SAWC has served as an important coordinating platform for civil society organisations working in the water sector, and has provided government with a co-ordinated point of contact in civil society

for engagement purposes. It is one of the few organisations working on water governance issues from a social justice perspective.

EJF is supporting SAWC to identify priorities and develop a programme of action for the next two years, so as to strengthen SAWC's sustainability and improve its ability to meaningfully participate in national water governance and policy discussions.



Ubunye Bama Hostela

Ubunye Bama Hostela was established in 1995 and are a community-based organisation comprising hostel-dwellers in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Their organisational objectives include:

- a) to promote information-sharing and capacity-building in the hostel community;
- b) to amplify the voices of hostel dwellers about climate change and environmental health;

- c) to conduct community research and monitoring of service delivery and inequality in the hostels; and
- d) to deepen the participation of women and youth from hostels in campaigns on environmental issues.

EJF is supporting Ubunye Bama Hostela to run a campaign to raise awareness about climate change and illegal dumping in 10 hostels around Durban, with a particular focus on women and youth in hostels.



Visually Impaired Community Development Organisation

Established in 1995, Visually Impaired Community Development Organisation (VICDO) is a registered NPO located in Tembisa in Johannesburg, Gauteng. VICDO was founded and is run by people living with disabilities, with the primary aim of advocating on behalf of people living with disabilities and to encourage skills development and establish support mechanisms for this community. They are already actively involved in recycling initiatives and are interested in learning more about the impact of climate change on people with disabilities and

would specifically like to deepen their knowledge of renewable energy options like solar and biogas digesters.

EJF is supporting VICDO to strengthen understandings of the intersections between environmental justice and disability rights struggles through holding workshops for people with disabilities in Tembisa on climate justice, renewable energy and recycling.



Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action

Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action (VEM) are a community-based organisation from Emalahleni in Mpumalanga that was founded in 2015. Their organisational objectives include motivating the community to become more involved in holding both coal and steel companies accountable to the law, training the community to improve their quality of life and networking with competent people in the community and rendering multi-disciplinary services to their community. VEM are a key player in the Deadly Air case which has been an important piece of litigation holding the state accountable for poor air quality in the Highveld, with the court recognising that the poor air quality in this region is a breach of residents' constitutional right to an environment

that is not harmful to their health and well-being. Since the successful High Court judgment in 2022, VEM and its partners have been continuously on the road in communities explaining what the case has been about, what the judgment says and why it is significant.

EJF is supporting VEM to host dialogue events on pollution and health strategies with government departments, coal industries, local community members and NGOs in support and pursuance of the Deadly Air case outcomes, and to galvanise the community to participate in the #CancelCoal Campaign, as well as to sustain their community food garden.





Waterberg Women Advocacy Organization

Waterberg Women Advocacy Organization (WWAO) was founded in 2012 and is a registered Non-Profit Company based and operating in Lephalale in Limpopo. WWAO's objectives are to transform mentalities and ways of living within the community and build power for transformative change, to build capacity of well-informed future generations and support women in rural and urban communities to organise themselves for purposes of strengthening their participation in community decision-making processes. They also want to develop an information and knowledge base that

can be used to inform decisions of women and youth in the community for transformative change and protect the interest and rights of women and children in the community.

EJF is supporting WWAO to raise levels of awareness on climate change and the Just Transition amongst women in the community by conducting a door-to-door campaign, and to hold the local municipality accountable for its failure to enact plans for a just transition in Lephalale.



Youth Mentors and Developers

Youth Mentors and Developers (YMAD) is a youth-led and driven organisation situated and working in the Pietermaritzburg area in KwaZulu-Natal founded in 2016, whose primary focus is restoring the dignity of informal settlement dwellers in the Khan Road vicinity and neighbouring settlements. YMAD's aim is to shift the narrative of informal settlements as places of environmental injustice and degradation and create an environmentally conscious informal settlement for the future. They

do this by creating safer, greener, and cleaner informal settlements through participatory community-based activities focused on clean ups, awareness drives and infrastructural development.

EJF is supporting YMAD to establish recycling hubs in a number of informal settlements, train community-based waste champions and explore waste-related income generation opportunities.



West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum

West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum is a women-led organisation based in Lutzville in the Northern Cape, which was established in 2016. The organisation's main objective is to pursue and promote agro-ecology and food-sovereignty, and to support women to participate in small-scale fisher cooperatives or start their own projects. This comes from their commitment to promoting alternative livelihoods due to the harmful

effects of the offshore mining and its associated environmental degradation in their community.

EJF is supporting the Forum to mobilise and coordinate a group of 40 women from different areas within the province to form a pressure group against mining, and to launch a grassroots campaign to raise awareness about women's rights in relation to environmental justice.





3.2 Facilitators

Overall facilitation for the Convening was provided by Busisiwe Dlamini and Thozzi Theko. They held the space for the participants as they moved through the week. They ensured that it was a safe space where people felt included and could engage openly. They played a vital role considering that the work that participants engage in is heavy, and reflecting on how

they situate themselves within their work could also be difficult. In addition to helping the participants to connect kindly and honestly with themselves and each other, and guiding the process of checking in on each other as a group every day, they also led a session focused on wellbeing and self-care on the final day of the convening.



Busisiwe Dlamini

Busisiwe is a dialogue practitioner focusing on social justice and transformation with 18 years of facilitation and training experience. Her expertise lies in organisational and culture change, diversity and inclusion (including gender norms, discrimination, sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse and bullying) and leadership development. Busisiwe brings experience of social innovation on complex social issues using systems thinking methodology and scenario planning. Other areas of work include food security, mining safety, health sector scenarios, rural poverty and social entrepreneurship.

Thozzi Theko

Thozzi is a personal and organisational development workshops facilitator. She is also a family constellation workshop facilitator, counselor & listener for healing, and a life and career coach. Thozzi has over 12 years experience in community development facilitation. She has worked with the Youth Empowerment Network in different urban townships focusing on Life Skills, and has worked with the Nelson Mandela Foundation's NMI Unit for Rural Schooling and Community Development in the Eastern Cape. Thozzi has occupied different leadership roles, including being on the boards of various organisations. These include being - former chairperson of the board of Homeless Talk Johannesburg; former chairperson of the board of Rahab Centre for Abused Girls & Young Women; former chairperson of the committee of Youth Empowerment Network; and executive committee member of Dependable Strengths Foundation.



A team of other facilitators from partner organisations led individual sessions during the week related to the just energy transition, digital security for activists, NPO governance and social media as a tool for CBOs.



The Toolbox

The Toolbox's central belief is the interconnectedness and interdependency of a human being's body, mind, and soul, hence they strongly believe that human beings have an ability to heal themselves. They strive for holistic health which they believe is central to a liberated future. They therefore support individuals and organisations to achieve this by sharing accessible wellness tools that can be integrated into daily life. Nosizwe Mji from the Toolbox offered embodiment and yoga classes to the participants at the Convening.

Digital Society of Africa

Digital Society of Africa (DSA) works to strengthen the resilience and ability of frontline activists, human rights defenders and other at-risk groups in the region to independently recognise and respond to digital threats and attacks. DSA seek to achieve this using a holistic security approach through a range of activities including: organisational security audits, risk assessment, trainings, sustainable security accompaniment, security policy formulation and tech support. Natasha Msonza and Tawanda Mugari joined us from DSA.



Noncedo Madubedube – guest speaker

Noncedo Madubedube is the General Secretary at Equal Education, the membership-based movement of learners, post-school youth, parents and citizens striving for quality and equality in the education system through activism and analysis. By mobilising the people directly affected by problems linked to education, she's hoping to win victories that secure a better future for more learners. Noncedo is a queer feminist activist who has a BA in education (maths and languages) from the University of the Western Cape. She is dedicated to developing youth politics and activism, with the long-term aim of reaching marginalised voices. Through her job at Equal Education she says she recognises the shortfalls in the education system, the inequalities that come as a result of these, and works to hold those responsible accountable.



Climate Justice Coalition

The Climate Justice Coalition (CJC) is a South African coalition of civil society, grassroots, trade union and community-based organisations working together to advance a transformative climate justice agenda. We were joined by CJC's elected general secretary and co-founder, Alex Lenferna. Alex is a post-doctoral research fellow at Nelson Mandela University in the Department of Development Studies on a National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences Fellowship. He also co-hosts Just Us and the Climate, a coalition podcast which aims to bring climate change back down to earth to show how it's not only a crisis, but also an opportunity to build a better, more just world. Alex facilitated a discussion on the Just Energy Transition: Alternatives to coal.

Social Change Assistance Trust

The Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT) is a veteran human rights and social justice, philanthropy (re-granting) organisation which has been in existence for 38 years. It has pioneered and developed a model of development that has been acknowledged as both empowering and sustainable with tangible impact at the local level. SCAT's mission is to empower communities, strengthen civil society, and promote social change in partnership with local development agencies which act as community-driven responses to social justice. We were joined by Vuyo Msizi and Kholofelo Kate Mabye from SCAT who provided training on NPO governance.



350.org

350.org is an international movement of ordinary people working to end the age of fossil fuels and build a world of community-centred renewable energy for all. They work on grassroots campaigns across the globe, leveraging people power — individuals working together in pursuit of a common goal — to dismantle the influence and infrastructure of the fossil fuel industry and to power up clean systems rooted in justice. To build a more sustainable and just future, they collaborate with communities at the frontline of the climate crisis, those who have historically contributed the least emissions but are feeling the worst effects. They campaign and organise to show the world what they really want, in pursuit of energy justice and distributed renewable energy solutions that will move us away from fossil fuels, for good. We were joined by Tumi Masipa, the Digital and Communications Specialist from 350.org, who facilitated a session on social media as a tool for community-based organisations.



4 Documenting the week

The Convening was held at Glenburn Lodge in Muldersdrift, about 45 minutes outside of Johannesburg. At this venue, participants could enjoy the tranquillity of nature, and were surrounded by

hills and rivers. This was a conducive environment for participants to pause and reflect on their work, away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.



Day 1

The first day of the Convening was made up of interactive sessions designed for participants to ground themselves and to be present with and connect with others. It was also an opportunity for people to reflect on their journeys as environmental justice activists. The guest speaker, Noncedo Madubedube, located the participants' activism within a broader political context and challenged us to consider what resilience-building should look like in the context of movement-building.

Day 2

On day two, there were two main sessions. The morning session focused on digital security for activists and why this is important considering the work they do. The afternoon session was about the just energy transition, which is a key part of the work that the organisations present engage with.



Day 3



The next day the group went on an excursion to the Apartheid Museum and Constitutional Hill. This gave participants, especially those in Gauteng for the first time, the opportunity to learn about important aspects of South Africa's history. The excursion also called attention to how different struggles are interconnected and the way in which present activists are standing on the shoulders of the activists who have gone before them.

Day 4

On the last day of the Convening participants could choose between different breakaway sessions which ran in parallel. These sessions were on the fundraising and proposal-writing; governance issues; and how social media can be used as a tool for community-based organisations. In the final session before the evaluation and closure, Busi and Thozie tied everything together with a session on centring wellbeing and self-care as activists.



Self-care was also prioritised throughout the week, as participants were invited to join facilitated yoga and movement classes in the mornings, and to go for walks or swim in the afternoons.



4.2 Day 1 building relationships

The first day opened activist-style with spirited singing of struggle songs by the participants. This was followed by a welcome by Lisa Chamberlain (EJF Director), who also introduced the facilitators for the week. Participants were invited to **lean in** to new ideas and people, **lean out** from noise and day-to-day hustle and bustle and **lean on** each other. The guest speaker, Noncedo Madubedube, led the group in a discussion where everyone was given an opportunity to reflect on **what it means to build a movement**, advance struggle through adversity, and to think deeply about where they want to go, why, and with who. Noncedo challenged participants to think about the costs – personal costs, costs to the environment and costs to

our communities – that our continued activism comes at. Noncedo proposed that if we are to continue in struggle, we need to build our resilience, and asked what this might look like. In response participants shared that they should take care of themselves so that they can take care of others. They also emphasised how resilience relates to solidarity and the importance of sharing information and resources. Participants further highlighted that they should think carefully about how to respond to different challenges without putting themselves in danger. This session gave the participants the opportunity to think deeply about what resilience means for them and for their work.

The next session focused on connecting and grounding. Participants were asked to take time to think about the elements of **water, air, fire and earth**. Each element was stationed in one corner of the room. Each group made a circle around the element they most identified with. Participants were asked to think about what their chosen element means to them. This activity was significant in that everyone who attended the convening works on issues related to climate change and environmental justice to resonate strongly with the elements. This was followed by an activity where participants shared their hopes for the week.

After lunch, participants were asked to create a **timeline of highlights and challenges** in their journey as environmental justice activists. Highlights included: being involved with workshops and campaigns around climate change, making food gardens, marches against coal mining and pollution, and challenging the activities of mining companies. Challenges faced included: receiving death threats, killing of activists, water scarcity, pollution; being labelled as 'blockers of jobs', the need for more environmental awareness in communities, funding cuts and lack of collaboration between different stakeholders.



As Day 1 was drawing to a close, the participants went outside for a speed dating activity to get to know each other better. This change of environment and movement visibly lifted people's energy levels and lots of laughter could be heard. In the check-out at the end of the day, participants shared that they enjoyed gaining insight into what others are doing and identifying common struggles. Participants were keen to learn more about the work and experiences of the different organisations represented at the Convening.

4.3 Day 2 strengthening capacity and deepening knowledge

The second day of the Convening started with a check-in where participants shared that they started forming good relationships, that the space was inclusive and acknowledging that although they come from different provinces and organisations, they have similar struggles and were keen to learn from each other.

Environmental activists across the world face growing levels of threat as a result of their work. These threats come in many forms including threats to physical safety, digital safety, and wellbeing. The first session of Day 2 was designed in response to this and focussed on **digital security training** for activists, facilitated by Digital Society of Africa (DSA). Participants were reminded that some activists are considered 'troublemakers' by the companies and government whose activities they challenge, and may consequently be under surveillance.

DSA helps activists to be protected from possible risks, such as being hacked. Participants were asked to reflect on how much they know about their devices, and were shown how to create strong passwords and the online tools that can be used to manage passwords.

The DSA team was on hand throughout the week running a **helpdesk** to provide tailored one-on-one support on digital literacy and security issues to individual activists.



4.4 Day 3 contextualising our activism

On Day 3 the participants went on an **excursion to the Apartheid Museum and Constitution Hill**, where South Africa's Constitutional Court is located. At the entrance to the Apartheid Museum visitors are welcomed by walls made of stones, which symbolise the mines and discovery of gold in this region. The museum highlights different aspects of apartheid and struggles for democracy. These include large images of forced removals as a part of apartheid's

Just as natural resources and ecosystems are interconnected, so too must struggles be intersectional. During this discussion, recurring themes were the need for **solidarity** between organisations and the need for **community participation** in issues that affect them.



This immersion in South Africa's racist, violent and oppressive past was very painful for many of the participants, especially given that deep structural inequality persists in South Africa today, and is the catalyst for so much environmental justice activism. Reminders of the apartheid government's use of violence to crush dissent and protest action were particularly hard to digest, as despite South Africa's transition to democracy, many environmental activists continue to operate in dangerous conditions and are victimised for confronting corporate and state power.

Outside the Constitutional Court there was a demonstration by the Khulumani Support Group (Khulumani). Khulumani was formed in 1995 by survivors and families of victims of the political conflict of South Africa's past. It was set up in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by victims who felt the Commission should be used to speak out about the past to ensure that such violations never occur again. Today, Khulumani is a membership-based, civil-society organisation which campaigns for truth, healing, and redress for those damaged by apartheid history, and for the advance of the ongoing struggle to create a democratic, non-racial and just society. A group of elderly Khulumani members had been sleeping outside the Constitutional Court since 2 November 2023 to bring attention to their demand for reparations for crimes committed during apartheid. Encountering this protest provided the activists amongst EJF's grantees to put the solidarity we had been discussing throughout the Convening into practice. Understanding the interconnectedness of different struggles, the participants joined in the protest. The spirited singing which followed also provided the participants with an important opportunity to process the heaviness of the experiences of the morning, and to energise and build resilience for the struggles ahead.

Upon returning to Glenburn Lodge in the afternoon, participants also had the option of joining a debriefing session facilitated by Busi and Thozi for those that wanted to process the complex emotions of the day in community.



4.5 Day 4 strengthening capacity and building resilience

The final day of the Convening started off with a check-in to see how people were feeling and to hear feedback from the previous days on what had been most practical for their work. The participants shared that the digital security session was an eye-opener and they appreciated learning about how to protect their

devices. They also shared that the visit to the Apartheid Museum reminded them of why they are activists and of the need to pick up where others left off.

After the check-in session, participants went into parallel sessions in breakout rooms.



Session 1: Money talks

This session was facilitated by Vuyo Mntonintshi (EJF Activist Support Coordinator) and Lisa Chamberlain (EJF Executive Director). The aim was to strengthen the fundraising capacity of organisations, with a specific focus on writing funding proposals and putting a budget together. Participants shared their own experiences with proposal-writing and strategies for writing strong proposals were examined. The facilitators highlighted the importance of having a track record of work before looking for funding. Organisations were encouraged to identify potential funders that might be interested in funding their organisation and to be on the lookout for open calls that are relevant to their organisation and whose criteria they comply with. Other strategies discussed included resource-mapping by identifying people in the community who could assist with introductions, or who could act as a reference. The session also covered how to compile a proposal budget, how budgets and proposal narratives should speak to each other and the need for as much budget accuracy as possible. In the second half of the session, participants put the principles they had been discussing into practice by working together to develop funding proposals and budgets. They then had an opportunity to critique each other's proposals, with some participants even getting to play the role of adjudicators on a grants committee!



Session 2: Governance

This session was facilitated by Vuyo Msizi and Kate Mabye from the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT). The participants were divided into groups and asked to explore their understanding of what governance is, why it is necessary, and what the respective roles of a management committee and coordinator are. In the plenary discussion afterwards, there was a general understanding that governance is about doing what you said you would do as an organisation, being accountable to others and reporting back to relevant structures, operating your organisation within the legal and regulatory framework, and monitoring the organisation's resources. Participants were keen to have formalised structures in order to be taken seriously by government and other institutions. There was a lot of excitement among the participants and the facilitators were flooded with questions. In the feedback at the end of the session, there was clear appetite for more detailed training on governance tailored to the specificities of their particular organisations.



Session 3: Social media

The social media session was facilitated by Tumi Masipa from 350.org. The session examined the differences between traditional and digital media. Participants explored the value of digital media when you want to engage your audience at high speed, for when you want to reach people all around the world beyond your immediate target group, and when you want to send information using multimedia formats. Whereas traditional media was framed as valuable for conveying a sense of trust and authority, or to find a niche audience (as a specific language or local radio and newspaper can assist in doing so). Participants had the opportunity to practice developing an effective digital campaign with elements such as clear objectives, a defined audience, the right channel, and compelling content.



Centring wellness and self-care as activists

Self-care had been a theme throughout the week. Participants had been organised into pods with whom they could reflect throughout the week and this allowed people to form bonds without getting lost in the bigger group. With many healers present, much indigenous knowledge was shared and remedies suggested when a few people fell ill. The beautiful surrounds had also encouraged people to take a stroll after intense days or to unwind to the sound of a pounding waterfall.

In the afternoon of Day 4, we took time for some dedicated discussions on how to centre wellbeing and practice self-care as activists, in the context of busy lives, and taxing and often dangerous work. Busi and Thozzi facilitated this session and encouraged participants to examine different aspects of self-care from the perspective of themselves as individuals, in their interpersonal relationships, and in the organisations they formed part of.





**The personal / individual perspective:
What does self-care look like in my everyday life?**

- love myself enough, because you can't give from an empty basket
- saving for the future
- avoiding negative talk
- removing oneself from toxic people / situations
- going for walks at the beach or forest, and swimming
- yearly health checks
- watching eating habits
- taking care of my mental health
- put myself first
- self-confidence
- having time to myself
- giving my mind time to rest
- having boundaries
- connecting with nature
- learning something new
- scheduling time for social activities
- relaxation days



**The interpersonal perspective:
What does ubuntu mean to me?**

- Standing together by helping and loving each other
- respect
- care
- support
- patience
- not discrimination
- spirit of comradeship
- protecting the environment for us and the future generation.



The organisational perspective: Collective care in an organisation would mean...

- being transparent in the organisation
- resources for stress management and wellbeing
- recognising and appreciating one's efforts
- counselling
- encouraging each other
- getting enough rest
- fully respecting each other as colleagues
- a positive environment
- sharing roles and responsibilities
- accountability and fairness
- centring ubuntu
- gender equality and inclusion of the disabled

5 Common themes and ideas for moving forward

As the week unfolded there were certain themes that weaved throughout the discussions.

- Firstly, all the organisations present were experiencing similar struggles and were eager to find ways to **build solidarity** and look at how they can collaborate with each other.
- Another theme that emerged was the need to raise more awareness in communities about issues affecting the environment and to get community 'buy-in' for the work of activists. Activists talked about wanting to **deepen the understanding of climate change in their communities**, specifically with regards to how climate change is relevant to their lived realities.
- The participation of the Visually Impaired Community Development Organisation (VICDO) was an important reminder of the **intersectionality of environmental justice and disability rights struggles**. Not only did their participation conscientise other participants about the ways in which different kinds of environmental harm and climate change impact particularly on people with disabilities, but we were also challenged to make sure that the convening itself was organised and facilitated in an inclusive manner. We are extremely grateful to comrades from VICDO for their guidance in this regard, and look forward to continuing to learn and strengthen an inclusionary approach.
- Finally, a recurring theme was **what resilience means for activists**. There was a lot of debate around how activists could strike a balance between being tough on the issues that need to be addressed, and tough in resistance to injustice and in relation to those that they were confronting (corporations and the state), while at the same time being gentle with themselves, taking care of their wellbeing and being kind to fellow comrades. This was seen as an important part of being effective in the work that participants engage in.



What was very clear from the Convening is that the environmental justice movement in South Africa is full of courageous, wise, passionate and visionary women in leadership. We celebrate and honour them (those reflected here and beyond).







Flowing from the expressions of solidarity throughout the Convening and the strong appetite for further collaboration between EJF's grantees, there were certain interventions that participants felt would be useful. Throughout the discussions at different points during the week, participants expressed that it would be helpful to have some type of **exchange programme** between the different organisations in different provinces. This would enable activists to learn about the work being done by other organisations and gain insight into how to strengthen their own work. One participant shared that "we should be united as civil society. Provide platforms where we can learn and grow together." Another participant said "it's important to acknowledge work done in different provinces. Struggles are similar. We can learn from each other - how to engage and build a strong movement." Participants said that they "would like to know what other participants do and how they survive when they don't have funding, [for example] having a backyard garden, and recycling; [and that] exchange programmes would be helpful to learn from each other."

It is evident from the input received from participants that different kinds of exchanges are envisioned.

- One type of exchange could be where organisations with different thematic focuses can learn about each other's work. For example, an organisation that runs a recycling project can do an exchange with an organisation that runs a water saving project.
- Another idea is an exchange between provinces, where organisations from different geographical areas can learn from each other's work.

- Finally, organisations could benefit from exchanges where others share their organisational strengthening journeys – for example how they have managed to sustain themselves without funding, or what their experience with governance issues or security threats has looked like.

This exchange programme idea is interesting food for thought for EJF. As an organisation committed to listening to the organisations we seek to serve, we must seriously consider this request. One of the key advantages of this kind of approach would be the ways in which it could centre and harness the knowledge and expertise that exists in EJF's grantees. There are however significant budget considerations involved in something like this, and it will need careful consideration.

Another concrete way that EJF could support solidarity-building suggested by participants was the idea of something described as **solidarity funding**. This would take the form of funding available to organisations who want to support the work of another organisation, be it a project, campaign or protest. A practical example of this would be providing funds for people to travel to a protest or demonstration organised by another organisation.

So often workshops and events end with participants expressing the desire for further collaboration. But the real test is whether those intentions are then implemented. It is therefore really encouraging for EJF to see our grantees making such concrete suggestions of how this might be made possible. Our job now is to investigate what might be feasible.

Feedback from participants

Overall, feedback was extremely positive. All participants reported having enjoyed the Convening and found it useful. We received a range of helpful feedback in relation to specific sessions, all of which has been documented. What is reflected in this section of the report is an overview of the themes that ran through participant feedback, as well as some key suggestions for improvement to take forward.

Common themes in the feedback included:



Role of grantees

There was strong support for the idea of incorporating a site visit to one of the participating organisations, as well as to involve grantees in the facilitation of sessions throughout the week. The proposal that grantees form part of a programme development committee for future convenings did not receive much support.



Future programming

- A desire for more time in just about every session, and particularly for organisations to learn more about each other's work, and to interact amongst themselves.
- Strong appetite for deeper sessions on governance in future convenings.
- Requests for more discussion about social movements, as well as basic political education.
- A request to bring funders to future convenings.



Language

Participants reflected that we should encourage the use of local languages as part of language justice and ensuring that people are free to express themselves in their own languages. Interpreters should be available where necessary.



Planning

Some key planning lessons were:

- To brief overall facilitators earlier in order to allow for more time for programme design and preparation.
- To programme in a debriefing session after attending traumatic visits – at this convening we realised the need for a debriefing session during the site visit to Apartheid Museum and Constitution Hill and worked with the facilitators to ensure that this was available, but this could have been better planned in advance.

“We learnt and are learning so much from other inspiring activists and environmental organisations. We got an opportunity to introduce our organisation to others and build connection with others. **This has truly been a productive and breakaway experience.**”

“The environment was conducive for us as blind people. **Inclusive and all that.**”

“The check-ins reminded us to **care about each other.**”

“The privilege of visiting Apartheid Museum and Constitution Hill reminded us **to know our history.**”

“We have learnt a lot and **we can't wait to go and implement whatever we learnt.**”

6 Conclusion

This was the second EJF convening of this nature. The week presented an opportunity for environmental justice organisations from around South Africa to pause and reflect on their work, to draw the connections between their work and the work of others, to recognise the similarity of their struggles, and to build solidarity with others in the field. The Convening also providing opportunities to strengthen their capacity to do their work. For EJF staff, it was a privilege to deepen our understanding of the challenges faced by our grantees, and to better understand the opportunities and interventions that they would find helpful to strengthen their work.

We are grateful to all the activists who took time out of their busy schedules to be at the Convening, many of whom had to travel for several days to get there. We would also like to thank the wonderful family of facilitators who gave of their time and expertise so generously in service of the environmental justice movement.

The journey of building a society where the environmental rights of all people are realised, and of building a sustainable future that includes poor and marginalised communities, is ongoing, and it is clear from the organisations represented at this Convening that they are determined – and equipped - to continue this fight together.



The EJF family of grantees, staff, board members, Grants Committee members and facilitators that together made the Convening such a rich and engaging week.



The EJF staff team that made it all happen

Annexure A: Participant list

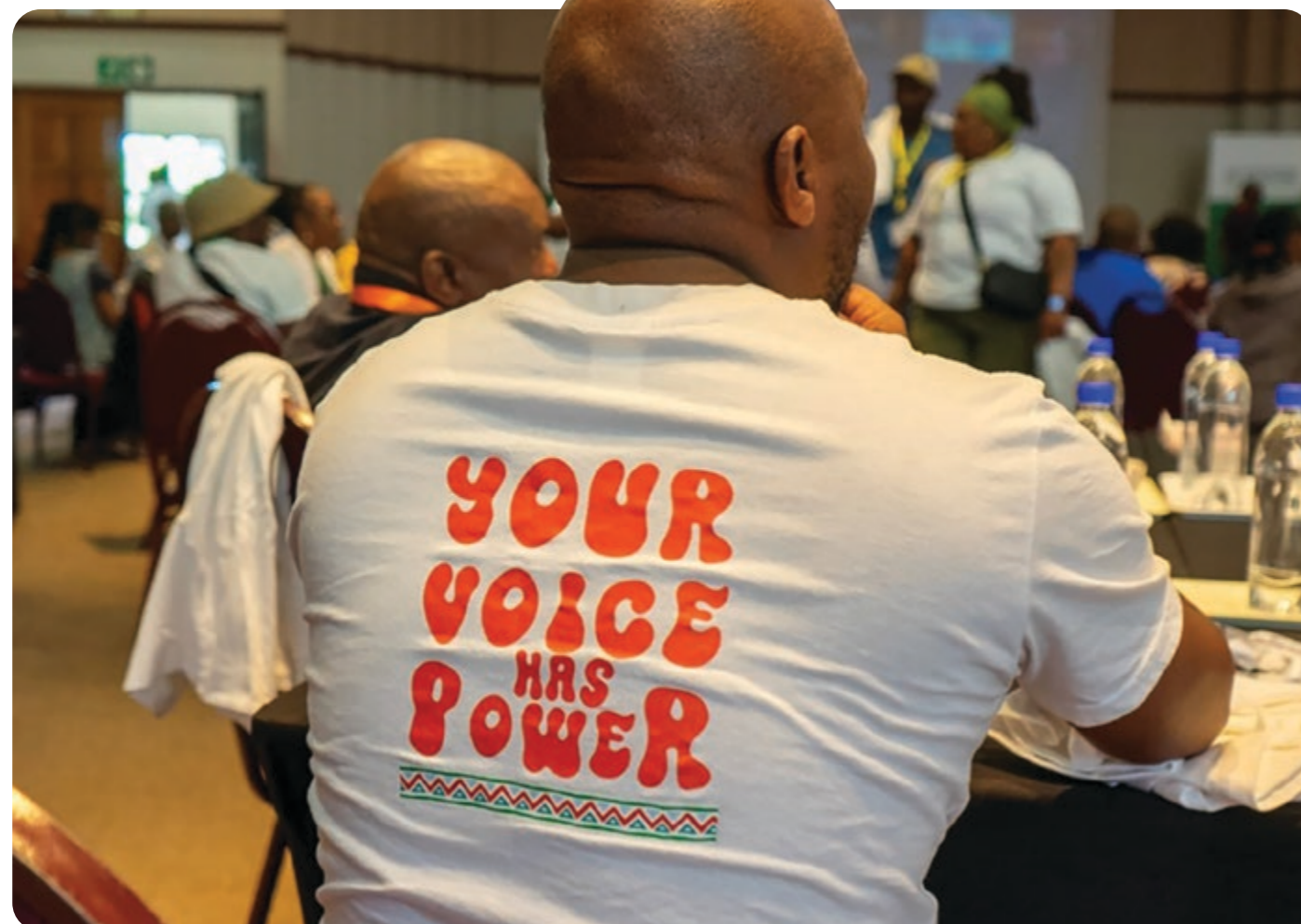
#	Name	Organisation
1	Tumi Masipa	350Africa
2	Dineo Violet Motloang	Botshabelo Unemployed Movement
3	Mooketsi Harold Diba	Botshabelo Unemployed Movement
4	Tshidiso Johannes Phaoane	Botshabelo Unemployed Movement
5	Alex Lenferna	Climate Justice Coalition
6	Busisiwe Dlamini	Consultant
7	Coline Bruintjies	Consultant
8	Thozi Theko	Consultant
9	Christinah Mdau	Defenders for Environmental and Human Rights Violations in Africa
10	Peter Selloe	Defenders for Environmental and Human Rights Violations in Africa
11	Renford Thulo	Defenders for Environmental and Human Rights Violations in Africa
12	Natasha Msonza	Digital Society Africa
13	Tawanda Mugari	Digital Society Africa
14	Deborah Mcquin	Doringbaai Fisherfolk Women
15	Laurencia Stevens	Doringbaai Fisherfolk Women
16	Lena Lazarus	Doringbaai Fisherfolk Women
17	Glen Maimela	Dzomo La Mupo
18	Mphatheleni Makaulule	Dzomo La Mupo
19	Unarine Emmanuel Ndou	Dzomo La Mupo
20	Amanda Rinqest	Environmental Justice Fund
21	Bulelwa Klaasen	Environmental Justice Fund
22	Elton Thobejane	Environmental Justice Fund
23	Eric Mokuoa	Environmental Justice Fund
24	Florence Morongoenyane Nkholise	Environmental Justice Fund
25	Gugulethu Makhubo	Environmental Justice Fund
26	Lisa Chamberlain	Environmental Justice Fund
27	Lizeka Ntsikeni	Environmental Justice Fund
28	Matome Kapa	Environmental Justice Fund

#	Name	Organisation
29	Philisiwe Mazibuko	Environmental Justice Fund
30	Phindile Khulu	Environmental Justice Fund
31	Stella Kif	Environmental Justice Fund
32	Bronwyn Van Neel	Environmental Traits
33	Vuyoletu Mntonintshi	Environmental Justice Fund
34	Charlton Bock	Environmental Traits
35	Cyril Jantjies	Environmental Traits
36	Noncedo Madubedube	Equal Education
37	Bulelwa Bosa	Isithembiso Multipurpose Organisation
38	Nomzamo Kolisi	Isithembiso Multipurpose Organisation
39	Xolelwa Koncoshe	Isithembiso Multipurpose Organisation
40	Ihsaan Haffajee	Judava Worx
41	Rumana Akoob	Judava Worx
42	Nondumiso Masango	Khuthala Woman's Movement & Khuthala Environmental Care Group
43	Thenjiwe Mavuso	Khuthala Woman's Movement & Khuthala Environmental Care Group
44	Zethu Hlatshwayo	Khuthala Woman's Movement & Khuthala Environmental Care Group
45	Khomotso Molapo	Lawyers for Human Rights
46	Siyabonga Prince Khanyile Sithole	Lawyers for Human Rights
47	Astone Chaole	MACUA (Mining Affected Communities United in Action) Nyakallong Branch
48	Selloane Tsheuo	MACUA (Mining Affected Communities United in Action) Nyakallong Branch
49	Thozani Philadelphia Can	MACUA (Mining Affected Communities United in Action) Nyakallong Branch
50	Billy Mngondo	Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation
51	Dumisani Ntombela	Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation
52	Sengiwakhile Mchunu	Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation
53	Happy Skosana	Middelburg Social and Environmental Justice Alliance
54	Nontobeko Mokoena	Middelburg Social and Environmental Justice Alliance
55	Sam Mmako	Middelburg Social and Environmental Justice Alliance

#	Name	Organisation
56	Margaret Molomo	Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa
57	Motshidisi Makintane	Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa
58	Toto Nzamo	Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa
59	Mzoxolo Sume	Nelson Mandela Bay Water Crisis Committee
60	Siyabulela Mama	Nelson Mandela Bay Water Crisis Committee
61	Thandokazi Hewu	Nelson Mandela Bay Water Crisis Committee
62	Lerato Victoria Hlahla	Rothoma Mudimeli Environmental Solutions
63	Madima Marubini Emma	Rothoma Mudimeli Environmental Solutions
64	Shonisani Mukuvhi	Rothoma Mudimeli Environmental Solutions
65	Dineo Tsoabi	Serapeng sa Basadi le Ditlhare
66	Mamosweu Tsoabi	Serapeng sa Basadi le Ditlhare
67	Ntshadi Nhlapo	Serapeng sa Basadi le Ditlhare
68	Kholofelo Kate Mabye	Social Change Assistance Trust
69	Vuyo Msizi	Social Change Assistance Trust
70	Apiwe Mdunyelwa	South African Water Caucus
71	Bafana Hlatshwayo	South African Water Caucus
72	Sandile Nombeni	South African Water Caucus
73	Nosizwe Mji	The Toolbox
74	Khulekani Muzi Ntuli	Ubunye Bama Hostela
75	Sithembiso Welcome Makoba	Ubunye Bama Hostela
76	Vuzokuhle Derrick Ntombela	Ubunye Bama Hostela
77	Clement Thaathe	Visually Impaired Community Development Organisation
78	Minah Funani	Visually Impaired Community Development Organisation
79	Philip Masitenyane	Visually Impaired Community Development Organisation
80	John Mxolisi Mthembu	Vukani Environmental Justice Movement
81	Promise Bonisiwe Mabilo	Vukani Environmental Justice Movement
82	Vusi Laurence Mabaso	Vukani Environmental Justice Movement


#	Name	Organisation
81	Francina Nkosi	Waterberg Women Advocacy Organisation
82	Sylvia Sebina	Waterberg Women Advocacy Organisation
83	Tshepiso Martha Choung	Waterberg Women Advocacy Organisation
84	Badrunisha Williams	West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum
85	Bettie Elizabeth Swartz	West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum
86	Davine Angela Witbooi	West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum
87	Lindani Makhaye	Youth Mentors and Developers
88	Nompumelelo Zibane	Youth Mentors and Developers
89	Snehlanhla Mngadi	Youth Mentors and Developers

EJF's work, including this Convening, would not be possible without the support of our funders.



Contact us

 ejfunds.org.za

 info@ejfunds.org.za

 [@EJF_sa](https://twitter.com/EJF_sa)

 [Environmental Justice Fund](https://www.facebook.com/EnvironmentalJusticeFund)

 [@ejfund_sa](https://www.instagram.com/ejfund_sa)

