

Activist briefing: Fossil Fuels in Africa

The issue:

Australia has significant coal interests in Africa. Coal is the second most prevalent commodity invested in by Australian companies. The potential carbon liability is enormous: **Australian projects in Africa have coal reserves three times that of the proposed Carmichael mine in Queensland.** Their total emissions potential is at least 18% of the entire global carbon budget to give a reasonable chance of limiting global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees.

The extractives industry in Africa has been linked to major human rights violations, and women have faced the worst impacts. The sector has been found to contribute to gender-based violence, increased HIV rates, displacement of communities, environmental degradation, and severe and chronic health problems.

The coal industry in particular has had major impacts on women's unpaid labour due to the significant pollution it causes and the effect this has on health and natural resources. As women are generally responsible for tasks such as collecting water, subsistence farming, and healthcare for family members, this has disproportionately impacted women in mining-affected communities.

Climate change is already impacting women and the poorest and most vulnerable communities across Africa, and unless global warming is limited to no more than 1.5 degrees, the future impacts will be catastrophic.

The costs of Australia's fossil fuel interests in Africa are potentially devastating, but they are not inevitable. **The vast majority of these projects are still in the development phase, meaning that the coming years are critical for women and their communities to ensure they stand up for their rights and hold Australian fossil fuel companies accountable.**

The story so far:

This isn't the first time our Activist Network has worked on this issue. In 2016 and 2017, we partnered with feminist activist, Francina Nkosi, who is fighting the proposed Boikarabelo coal mine in her local community in Lephalale, South Africa. Francina's community put together a detailed complaint, outlining many issues they have with how the Australian company behind the project has treated them.

We found out that an Australian Government agency, Efic, was considering funding the mine – and so we stood in solidarity with Francina and her community by launching a public campaign calling on Efic to rule out funding Boikarabelo. Members of the ActionAid activist network across Australia organised film screenings, information evenings and they handed out copies of the formal

complaint from Francina's community to Efic staff as they entered Efic's Sydney office. Eventually Efic publically backed away from funding the mine – an amazing victory that ensured Australian taxpayer money didn't go to a project that put the rights of women at risk.

In the second half of 2017, ActionAid supporters crowdfunded so that Francina could come to Australia and tell her story to the public and decision-makers firsthand. We also released a report, [“Fuelling Injustice”](#), which exposed the scale of Australian coal-mining projects in Africa and the women's rights risks associated with this industry.

What now?

We know that there are many communities like Francina's around the world who are seeing their rights put at risk by Australian companies. That's why in 2018 we have launched a campaign so that women affected by fossil fuel extraction of Australian mining corporations have support and solidarity for their campaigns, and the Australian Government introduces new laws that will hold these companies accountable.

To do this we need to have the Australian Government introduce policies that hold mining corporations accountable and ensure women's rights are upheld – no matter where they operate.

We are calling for the government to:

- 1. Introduce transparency by requiring companies to report publicly on all their projects*

Right now we don't have any good publicly available information in Australia on our mining companies that are operating overseas. In Canada and the EU they have a policy called “mandatory disclosure,” which means that all mining companies that are publicly listed on their stock exchange have to report on where all their projects are and what their finances are for each project – so you can easily find out what companies are operating overseas, how much they are paying in taxes, etc. We will be asking all parties to commit to this policy (the ALP is the only party with a current commitment, but theirs is only for companies with more than 100 million turnover, not all publicly listed companies).

- 2. Ensure justice for mining-affected communities through an independent watchdog*

We know that Australian mining companies have been shown in many cases to be causing human rights violations in low income countries overseas, and these impacts affect women the most. Yet at the moment communities have no way to make a complaint in Australia about the behaviour of Australian companies and have the company face any real penalties or consequences. Canada has just introduced an independent watchdog – with resources and special powers – to address this problem, and we want the Australian government to do the same.

3. Provide Government funding and loans to local women-led climate solutions, not fossil fuels

As we learnt with our Efic campaign, we have a government agency that gives loans to fossil fuel projects – and this is just one of many ways our Government funds fossil fuels instead of women-led climate solutions. As a first step, we want to see the Government change Efic's mandate so it can't fund fossil fuels anymore, in line with what's needed to reach the goal in the Paris Agreement on climate change that Australia has signed up to.

How we will win?

We will call on our activist network to get petition signatures, to engage their MPs and Senators as well as their local community, and take part in bold and creative tactics to ensure the voices of women like Francina can be heard in board rooms and the halls of Parliament House. We know that we will win if we have a big enough movement of Australians standing in solidarity with the incredible work already being done by women at the coalface around the world.

We've already launched a petition, and it currently has more than 500 signatures! Now we are ready to take this campaign to the next level.

Tactics

Petition blitzes

We are hoping to do a big action in Parliament House in June, and we need 5000 signatures first. We need to make petitioning a focus for this campaign to demonstrate to politicians that voters care about this issue. Make sure at every event you hold you are asking people to sign the petition!

Ways of getting petition signatures:

1. Sign people up at a local march e.g. IWD march.
2. Attend a local festival or community event with clipboards.
3. Book a stall at a market near you and talk to people about the campaign and ask them to sign the petition.

Get in touch with Liz at liz.hadjia@actionaid.org to get access to the petition.

Adopt your MP/Senator

We know that most politicians don't know much about this issue. They need to know that their voters care about it!

Many of our activists already have existing relationships with their MP after the Beneficial Ownership campaign. For activists who've already built a relationship this is your chance to get in touch again - for those that haven't this is another chance to try and meet with your local MP or get in touch with Liz to develop a strategy to attract their attention.

Growing your group

At the same time as we are gathering petition signatures and engaging our MPs, we need to also be bringing new people in to our movement. Petitioning is a great way of finding interested people but always make sure you have a follow up event to invite them to.

Some ideas of events that will attract people to your group and promote the campaign are:

1. A film screening of 'The Shore Break' - we have the rights to use this documentary that highlights the experiences of a local community fighting an Australian coal mine. This is great local event to get people involved.
2. An MP engagement training - invite members of your local group and community to an MP engagement training and develop a joint strategy on how you are going to engage local MPs/Senators.

Solidarity with South African women

As we grow this campaign there will be opportunities to show solidarity with women directly affected in South Africa by:

1. Sharing content from women affected by Australian mining corporations in South Africa. Keep an eye out for this content as we develop it on the ActionAid Facebook page.
2. Solidarity messages: Why not combine an event with writing solidarity messages to local women's rights activists in South Africa. Get in touch if you are keen to do this.

Objectives for groups

Based on the tactics below we're hoping that each ActionAid group can achieve the following objectives:

1. Each group obtains 200 signatures on the Fossil Fuels in Africa petition.
2. Each group obtains 20 solidarity messages for women directly affected in South Africa.
3. Each group recruits at least 2 new group members through this campaign.
4. Each group meets with at least 1 MP to talk about this issue.

Note: These objectives are general and will vary per group – we encourage groups to meet and decide what you think is achievable for your team.