



The Lived Realities of coping with loadshedding and power cuts in two South African Provinces

Round 2: July 2023

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Mobilize Energy Comms project is a new civil society campaign that aims to:

- inform, educate, and engage South Africans about the country's current and future energy challenges.
- The campaign objective is to initiate a non-aligned "persuasion programme" to equip civil society, business, labour, and other players with easy-to-understand information products that explain the move towards viable energy security (Just Transition) –with a strong focus on South Africa's economic development agenda.

This will be achieved by creating a reasoned, rational, and responsible body of work that helps to inform the national debate around the country's energy situation and the best practical options for energy security. In addition, how the best practical options for energy security impacts the choices and implications for the optimal future energy mix i.e., cutting through the noise and shaping consensus wherever possible.

Methods

Nine focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in semi-urban communities in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal from the 25th of June to the 6th of July 2023.

Findings

Perceptions of bridging or slowing down of electricity

The study communities attested that loadshedding and power cuts continue to affect their lives, and as a result they resort to multiple forms of illegally connecting or bridging electricity. All the study participants were aware of slowing down or bridging of electricity in their communities, and this is because of unemployment, being poor and the inability to afford to buy electricity as it is expensive.

Illegal housing and utilities

The study participants revealed that many community members have been waiting to be connected to electricity for many years by the municipality. As a result, community members have figured out ways of illegally connecting electricity by themselves. Some reasons for illegally connecting to electricity include lack of access to land and legal housing which causes them to erect shacks and then access utilities, including water, illegally.

Perceptions and knowledge of/about illegally connecting to electricity through various ways

Many participants across focus groups confirmed that that they were aware of illegal connections and that the people who do illegal connections include community members, , municipality workers and other public officials. These are done to help generate an income to sustain livelihoods. They were also aware of the risks involved. The communities also revealed that there are various ways of bridging electricity and/or illegally connecting electricity.

Reporting of illegal connections

Like the findings from the previous round of focus groups, the study revealed that participants do not report illegal connections or bridging. This is primarily due to the fear of getting the power cut for themselves, hopelessness about anything being done about the illegal connections, and because of fears of exposing other community members and possibly getting harmed in the process or causing conflicts within the community amongst and with their neighbours.

Groupthink (unchallenged norms) and illegal connections

Many of the community members expressed that they connected to electricity so that they don't feel any different from others, who do the same.

Free Basic Electricity to poor households

Many study participants were aware of the provision free basic electricity and mentioned that this is available to pensioners and when they buy electricity, they generally get additional units. However, many mentioned barriers to accessing the free electricity including, not having properly functioning meter boxes, and not knowing about it and how to apply. Some expressed that they were deliberately excluded by public servants who divert the service for themselves.

Using firewood for heating and cooking

The participants firstly reiterated their frustrations about the inconveniences that the loadshedding or power cuts cause including having to resort to other sources. Beyond the use of firewood for heating and cooking, they also shared hazards with using alternatives such as candles, gas and paraffin which can cause fires in their homes and community. Other issues include effects on health and safety in the home including respiratory issues and possible suffocation due to gas leaks, and the environmental implications such as air pollution. Communities also added that collecting firewood was seen as a risky activity in terms of personal security including falling prey to criminals while collecting wood as well as fears of snakes and other creatures in the forest.

Government plans to address the energy crisis

The Energy Action Plan (EAP)

Across focus groups, some participants expressed being unaware of the EAP, while some mentioned that they believe that the government has no solid plans to address the energy crisis. Others said they were aware of plans including the promotion of renewable energy sources such as wind power, solar, and buying electricity from neighbouring countries. . There is still distrust directed towards the government due to continued corruption and the failure to be transparent on the loadshedding crisis and what it may mean for energy security in the country. Participants also expressed that they do not think that the EAP will be effective in tackling the energy crisis in the country.

The Energy Transition Framework (JT)

Like the use of the term "loadshedding" as a euphemism in the previous focus groups, the study participants expressed that the use of the term "Just Transition" is misleading and an exclusionary whitewashing of what the transition really means, especially towards certain members of the public. For participants that have heard about the concept or the framework,

the transition is said to be a gateway towards informing the public on various ways of helping to save electricity and have a stable energy grid. Some community members expressed that they did not know about the energy transition, and they associated it with continued corruption using modern technology for the gains of the elite and powerful. They also expressed that the energy transition is a plot to ease the tensions caused by the power cuts in the country, and that they do not believe that the transition will be “just” or benefit people equally because they are still waiting for free basic healthcare amongst other promises from the government. Although this was the case, some participants expressed that they believe that the energy transition will bring about change and equality in the country.

The Minister of Electricity

Most participants in the various focus groups expressed their lack of faith in the Minister of Electricity who was appointed to address the energy crisis. The sentiments that were shared involved the Minister being part of a continues loop of corruption that the government has been involved in. Other participants expressed however that they believe that the way forward is for government to not be involved in the Ministers plans, the execution of the EAP, and various other plans put in place to address the energy crisis.

How participants desired to know about energy policies and government plans

When asked how they would like to be informed about the existing energy policies and government plans, participants mentioned the following:

- Community workshops/ sessions/ events.
- Door-to-door educational and informational sessions.
- Provision of brochures and flyers and pictorials for the elderly.
- Use of radio and TV dramas including during ad-breaks.
- Social media.
- Schools

Conclusions

Overall, many participants are still frustrated by the power cuts that interrupt their daily lives. They are also aware of the illegal connections of electricity by bridging and connecting to the main poles in their different communities. The participants added that they were aware of the people who illegally connect to electricity including community members (some of them who confessed), public servants who work in government offices and people who steal cables to sell them. Due to safety concerns, many felt like they could not report while some have self-reported, and government has not prioritised helping them with the illegal connecting and/or bridging.

The participants also use firewood, candles, and candles to cope through the power cuts however, their safety is always compromised due to the risk of fire. They were also concerned for their health and the environment. Although there are government plans and policies in place to address the energy crisis and to facilitate the energy transition from coal to many of the participants believe that these are meant to perpetuate corruption and the continued mismanagement of resources in government The study gave more insight on how communities continue to cope with the energy crisis using alternative means to heat, cook

and light their homes. The next phase will explore further the participants perceptions on renewable energy and understandings of government plans to have an energy secure energy future.

Introduction

The Mobilize Agency's Energy Comms project is a new civil society campaign that aims to:

- inform, educate, and engage South Africans about the country's current and future energy challenges.
- The campaign objective is to initiate a non-aligned "persuasion programme" to equip civil society, business, labour, and other players with easy-to-understand information products that explain the move towards viable energy security (Just Transition) –with a strong focus on South Africa's economic development agenda.

This will be achieved by creating a reasoned, rational, and responsible body of work that helps to inform the national debate around the country's energy situation and to explore practical options for energy security. In addition, how the best practical options for energy security impacts the choices and implications for the optimal future energy mix i.e., cutting through the noise and shaping consensus wherever possible.

Project Vision:

An informed, educated, and engaged South African public on the country's current and future energy challenges and the best practical options for energy security.

Study Objectives

The purpose of the study was to engage and gain insight from communities in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal to explore their understanding and perceptions of the blackouts/power cuts or load-shedding in their communities, municipalities, and the country. The study was also done to solicit their views about factors that contribute to the energy crisis, such as slowing down electricity and not paying for electricity, as well as gauge their knowledge, understanding and perceptions of government initiatives to address the crisis, such as the energy action plan. Additionally, the study explored what possible communication approaches can be used to increase people's awareness of load-shedding/power cuts and improve their response to the debates around the energy crisis.

The specific objectives were:

- To document issues of concern in communities on the national energy crisis and the energy debate.
- To track knowledge of initiatives such as the Energy Action Plan and the work of the National Energy Crisis Committee.

The previous (1st) round of focus group discussions asked questions to unpack people's opinions about power cuts/blackouts, how they experienced them in the communities, and how the power cuts directly affected service delivery, if and why they would or would not report cable theft which contributes to the power outages, and whether they knew where and how to report it. The study further explored their opinions about reporting or not reporting acts perpetrated by their own families or friends, and their coping strategies when they go for hours and even days without electricity. Additionally, the study explored their

awareness of government plans to solve the energy crisis and their perceptions of the proposed move or shift towards a consistent supply of energy. The 2nd round of focus groups built on these topics that were discussed, and further explored the participants awareness of any government plans to address the energy crisis, including the Energy Action Plan, the appointment of the Minister of Electricity and the Just Transition framework/ plan that is currently used to address the energy crisis in the country. Some of the questions that were asked built on sentiments expressed in the first round of focus groups, which spoke to the perceptions of community members on the bridging or slowing down of electricity metres, including electricity being expensive and increasingly inaccessible. Thus, the second round was aimed at exploring further whether the participants or community members are aware of *izinyoka*, if the *izinyoka* are known to the community members or are also members of community, and whether they are doing the right thing by illegally connecting electricity. Round two further explored why some community members do not pay for electricity and if the participants and other members of their communities report illegal connections to Eskom, the municipality, or the police. The discussions also unpacked the perceptions and implications of illegal connections on the overall state of energy in the country. Then, the study sought to find out if communities are receiving free basic electricity to poor households since they may resort to the use of firewood which has implications on their health, household safety and the environment, and if community members know how and where to apply for the free electricity. Lastly, the study explored the government's plans put in place to address the energy crisis through the Energy Action Plan (EAP), THE Just Transition Framework, and the specialised role of the Minister of Electricity.

Methods

Sampling and Recruitment

As indicated in the last report (Round 1 report), this study is a longitudinal study with the same facilitators and participants. Round two used the same 9 Facilitators that were trained for round one (4 females and 5 males). The Facilitators were trained on an updated Focus Group Discussion guide to ensure that they understood how to build the conversations from the first to the second round of discussions. They also received refresher training on the general methodology, and approach to be adopted for the focus groups and other supporting materials focused on administrative, App, and monitoring and evaluation aspects of the study.

Study Design

The selected study design is a longitudinal study with three (3) focus group discussions (FGDs) spaced at regular (6-week) intervals from early May to mid-August- 2023. The study's intention was to recruit and maintain the same group of about 8-12 participants per study site over the entire project cycle, and the study incorporated the following approaches:

Qualitative element

Focus group discussions were conducted using the updated FGD Discussion Guide. Groups were generally comprised of between 7-12 individuals. Focus group participants were recruited to represent permanent or stable members of the local community representing a spectrum of members from youth, adults, and the elderly, and occupations including

students, unemployed, employed, leaders, etc.), and gender, and the participants were legal adults 18 years and older.

Focus group discussions took place in the preferred language of participants. The languages used in Gauteng were predominantly Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, and English, and in KwaZulu-Natal, the groups were conducted mainly in isiZulu and some English. The facilitators used the focus group discussion guide to guide the discussion.

In the first round, participants completed a pre-discussion survey. A follow-up will be completed at the end of round 3.

Study setting

The study was conducted in the City of Joburg and West Rand in Gauteng and eThekweni and uMgungundlovu in KwaZulu-Natal.

Eligibility criteria

Permanent residents of the study communities who were 18 years and older were eligible to participate. All potential participants were required to agree to participate in the follow-up focus groups as part of this study.

Ethical considerations

Participants in the focus groups were legal adults above the age of 18. Participants had the aims and objectives of the research explained to them at the recruitment stage and were provided with the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any point. Prior to starting the focus groups, participants were required to go through and complete an online informed consent form for their participation in the study. All participants were also required to complete an online attendance Register. The attendance registers also served to track the attendance of the permanent members of the community throughout the study from Round 1 to 2, and finally Round 3. The focus groups were conducted by trained facilitators with experience in facilitation and community work.

Data capture and coding

All focus groups were audio-recorded, and the audio was uploaded onto the Mobilize App. All audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English by qualified transcribers, then the transcripts were reviewed by the researchers for quality and accuracy. The data reviewed by the researcher was thematically coded based on emerging findings and areas covered in the discussion guide.

Study limitations

Study design

- The study was conducted in geographically defined regions (communities) in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. These regions or communities were selected largely based on the residence of Facilitators who had performed well during the selection process for study Facilitators.

- The study was conducted in predominantly black African communities representing a lower socio-economic demographic to explore and document the extent to which the energy crisis is affecting the most vulnerable members of South African society. This means that the study may not reflect the experiences of people in more affluent communities who may have better access to other sources of energy beyond those provided by the national power supplier, Eskom.
- By nature, longitudinal studies are subject to loss to follow up (LTFU) of participants, and in Round 2, sixteen participants were LTFU. This is largely due inability to attend because of being unwell to attend, some participants ran late due to miscommunications on the agreed time and decided not to attend the focus groups, while others were unable to attend due to new job opportunities that have recently come up.

Data collection

- The study participants were selected by the Facilitators and they themselves agreed to participate. This represents self-selection bias. It is not known how the people who decided to participate in the study differ from those who refused or were not approached by Facilitators for recruitment.
- Focus group discussions, by their nature, allow a sharing of ideas, experiences, and thoughts among a group of individuals around a common theme or experience. This may result in individual thoughts, ideas, and experiences being “cross-pollinated” by others within the same focus group. This means that participants’ responses are not independent but are intrinsically linked to and are influenced by each other.
- The second round of the study (second of three rounds) occurred at a period when many places were experiencing less loadshedding during the winter (June -July) because of government plans to address the energy crisis in the country. The experiences shared in this report represent that reality from the first approach of winter and cold compounded by the reduced power outages.

Addressing the limitations

The study was conducted in 9 different communities by 9 different Facilitators using the same instrument (FGD Guide). This approach improved the validity of the findings as they are an accurate representation of the experiences shared within a group. Multiple groups conducted also improved the reliability of the findings as common experiences and ideas emerged across all 9 groups conducted.

Findings

Participant Demographics

A total of 86 participants took part in the study, of whom 35 were from Gauteng and 50 were from KwaZulu-Natal.

Province	District	Region	Community	Gender		Total in Round 2	LTFU*
Gauteng				Female	Male		
	West Rand	Rand West City	Mohlakeng	6	2	8	2
	City of Joburg	Region D	Mofolo	5	4	9	2
			Meadowlands	5	6	11	3
			Kliptown	6	1	7	2
		Total Gauteng	22	13	35	9	
			Community	Female	Male	Total	
KwaZulu-Natal	uMgungundlovu	Msunduzi	Georgetown	8	2	10	None
	eThekweni		Clermont	4	5	9	None
		Mayville Chatsworth Phoenix Inanda Durban Central	Durban Central	3	7	10	4
		Kwa-Mashu	Inanda	3	7	10	3
			Umlazi	5	6	11	None
			Total KwaZulu-Natal	23	27	51	7
		Total Study Participants			86	16	

*- LTFU- overall, the lost to follow-up from the data adds up to 16 participants from the focus groups, that is, there was a loss of approximately 2 participants per facilitator due to the inability to attend because of illness, some participants ran late and decided not to attend the focus groups, while others were unable to attend due to new job opportunities that have recently come up.

Insights from the discussions

The focus group discussion guide covered various questions to elicit responses around community experiences of power cuts; perceptions of the causes of bridging or illegally connecting to electricity the use of firewood in households for heating and cooking and the implications on health and the environment; government policies and plans to solve and address the energy crisis and alleviate the burden of coping with power cuts and loadshedding, and lastly ways in which they desired to be informed about the government policies and plans to address the energy crisis. The findings below will be structured to represent the broad questions reflected here.

Perceptions of bridging/slowing down electricity metres

Like the previous findings of the research in South African provinces, loadshedding continues to be an everyday reality for people living in the country and the focus group participants were able to share more of their perceptions on various issues affecting and affected by loadshedding and the overall energy crisis in South Africa. When asked about bridging or slowing down electricity, many participants associated this with or identified it as illegal

connections in that people use less electricity than what they pay for. Across the FGs, participants mentioned that they are aware of slowing down or bridging of electricity in their communities, and reasons for this were that many people are unemployed, poor and cannot afford to buy electricity as it is expensive.

Facilitator: So our first question is, in your own opinion, what enables people who bridge electricity to go and decide to bridge? Why do they bridge in your opinion?

F1: People bridge because some of them don't have money to buy electricity due to poverty and struggles. You may find that there is no one in the house who is employed, you find a mother, who does not even have pension, she stays with the children and there is no source of income. That's why some people bridge.

(Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

M6: There are people who connect electricity illegally. The reason for doing this is because they don't have jobs and then decided to steal electricity.

M5: It's true there are people who connect electricity illegally because the electricity is not affordable.

(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

F2: In my opinion people steal electricity because it's very expensive. You can buy R100.00 worth of electricity but it will take you for only two days or one and a half days. So, I think this could be one reason why people are stealing electricity.

(Inanda FGD, KZN)

F1: In my community, most of the people are not working, the young men and women are just loitering the streets, the households have got up to three generations and there may be one or two people who have an income, pension or so. So they cannot even afford to buy food and the only thing that they have an alternative to is electricity and then they can bridge it.

(Mofolo FGD, GP)

Illegal housing and utilities

Compounded by the issues of unemployment and the lack of financial resources to access electricity as a basic need in South Africa, the study revealed that many community members have been waiting to be connected to electricity for many years. Due to electricity being easy to connect (according to the responses shared in the focus groups), they resort to having access to electricity through illegally connecting for themselves. Other reasons towards illegally connecting to electricity include lack of access to land and legal housing which causes them to erect shacks and then access utilities, including water, illegally.

W3: Greetings. I would like to add on this issue of electricity, we have been applying for electricity since 1992. We were told we will not get electricity because we are illegal occupants where we have built houses. Even though we know a lot of people who connected electricity illegally, we are also in the same situation as them.

(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

F2: This is [name redacted]. They are there and a lot of them confessed that they have connected electricity illegally. Those who have built themselves shacks they have confirmed that they have connected the electricity illegally. They are many.

M2: This is [name redacted]. It is true they are there. Those who connected the electricity illegally and those who have breached their meter boxes. There are also those who have tampered with their meter boxes, but they have electricity in their houses boxes without the meter box working.

F3: This is [name redacted]. There is a lot of them they are they some of them a R20.00 worth of electricity takes them for the whole month.

(Inanda FGD, KZN)

Perceptions and knowledge of/about illegally connecting to electricity through various ways

Across focus groups, many participants attested to knowing the people who illegally connect and/or give community members access to bridging electricity and or connecting illegally. These people included community members, municipality workers and other public officials or servants including in law enforcement, who are skilled in installing or connecting electricity. These are done to help generate an income to sustain livelihoods. The study also revealed that connecting electricity illegally and bridging it is easy, and some members of the community end up risking their lives to generate an income to take care of their families and to gain access to electricity because there is a long waiting period to connect legally, and in some instances legal connections can be challenging because some community members are illegal settlers. When asked if the people who did the illegal connections were known, participants across the groups shared that these were part of the community, and some confessed to be the ones performing illegal connections.

Facilitator: There is a code to bridging?

M5: Yes, there are those people from... you know those people from the municipality are the ones who give us those codes to make money. They want money.

F2: People who fix the boxes are the ones who know bridge for us, so we have learnt how to bridge.

NP: Okay, let me hear you properly, M5, you are saying that your illegal connection is not done from stealing the cables? They gave you the code to put on the meter box?

NP: So, you got those codes from the people from the municipality?

M5: Yes, from them.

(Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

M3: It's people that we know..... They are using those the boys he just mentioned now. The other day I saw one boy coming down [the electricity pole] on aa stepladder in broad daylight. I asked him what he was doing, and he mentioned that he was assisting my neighbor with their metre box up there on the pole. So, it's people that are known by the community. They

also assist the community when they need help as the municipality people take their time to arrive.

M3: One of the things that makes people steal electricity it's because it's easy to steal it. Even amateurs can steal the electricity. And the municipality is failing us because they take their time to register people who applied for electricity. As a result, these people end up stealing the electricity. In some instances, you find that the meter box that was allocated for one person has been given to another person, so this becomes a problem also. And another reason is that electricity is very expensive.

(Inanda FGD, KZN)

W4: We are one of the people who connected electricity illegally. When we went to apply for electricity, we were told that they cannot install electricity in an area that is not approved for people to stay.

M2: I will just add to what they said, as a black person I need money and electricity. If there are people in need of electricity, I can connect for them illegally. Money makes us take risks.

(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

Although participants felt that illegal connections were wrong and contributing to the overall pressure on the national energy crisis, they also mentioned that they did not have a choice but to connect electricity illegally. The study also revealed that there are mixed feelings when it comes to issues of connecting illegally, some see no issues with bridging electricity, while some think it is justified since it gives community members access to electricity.

Facilitator: The question is, do you think it's a good thing for people not to pay for electricity.

W4: In my opinion, this is not a good thing, but people are forced to it because they don't have money.

M6: It's not a good thing to connect to connect illegally because as Eskom is a company and we are destroying our economy by not paying for the electricity. Eskom will not be in a position to hire people as there is no money coming into the company. Although that is not a good thing, people are forced by the fact that they don't have money.

(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

M3: It will be difficult to have an opinion on this issue because most of the people in the community they are not paying for electricity. As a result, it will be difficult to have a fair and honest opinion. This is not something that is usually discussed because in most cases people blame the government for this action.

(Inanda FGD, KZN)

R1: They are doing a clever thing for themselves.

R2: Do you see the people who are bridging electricity, they are making money. So, they are making a living out of it.

(Durban FGD, KZN)

The study also revealed that there are various ways toward bridging electricity or illegally connecting to have access to electricity, including connecting to the main electricity poles in their communities, connecting multiple tenants on one meter, and through slowing consumption on the plugs in the house and through connecting multiple people to the same meter box in one yard.

M1: There are those who have breached their meter boxes and there are those who have connected wires from the main poles to their houses.

(Inanda FGD, KZN)

Facilitator: There are different methods?

M5: Sometimes you buy electricity and have bridged the plugs.

NP: Just the plugs?

M5: Yes, just the plugs.

UF: It consumes electricity very slowly.

M5: Yes, there is a code to enable us to bridge.

F2: Some people bridge because they are the landlords and they have got a lot of tenants, so they feel that if they bridge, the tenants should not pay a lot of money for electricity.

(Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

Reporting of illegal connections

Like the findings from the previous round of focus groups, this study revealed that participants or community members do not report illegal connections or bridging due to the fear of getting the power cut for themselves, hopelessness about anything being done about the illegal connections, and because of fears of exposing other community members and possibly getting harmed in the process. Fears or reservations towards reporting also have to do with avoiding possibilities of quarrels which might cause divisions and alienation amongst neighbours and community members. There are however some who self-report to the municipality as an attempt to do the “right” thing.

Groupthink (unchallenged norms) and illegal connections

The study revealed that community members connect to electricity illegally so that they feel part of the community by not doing any different than those who have already connected. For some participants illegally connecting is justified as they suffered losses of units without using/ consuming the electricity that they pay for.

Facilitator: Why do people decide not to pay for electricity?

M3: Even if I have money to pay for the electricity, I will be seen as someone who is doing things differently as everyone in the community is not paying for electricity. If I buy electricity and other people will come and connect from my meter box, it does not help as I will be the one

paying more at the end of the day. We connect illegally because we have to feed our families also. And we also have loadshedding.

W2: People connect illegally because of load shedding. Even if you pay for electricity, you will still have no electricity because of load shedding. It's better for those who have connected illegally.
(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

Implications of illegal connections and/or not paying for electricity

This round affirmed assertions from the last round on reporting and implications of illegal connections in the community. There was consensus across the communities that there is an overall negative effect on the national grid and loadshedding due to bridging or not paying for electricity including explosions of transformers due to an overburden of supply. Additionally, the study participants asserted that the government is to be blamed for the illegal connections in their various communities since they do not attend to issues that are reported or raised on time, leaving the communities without power for days on end resulting in the illegally connecting to electricity. There were also issues of safety for children and community members since cables are left exposed and on the ground which could result in electrocution, and long-term financial burden since they may be required to pay back for electricity already used.

The government is using loadshedding to make money

Another recurring sentiment across the focus groups was that the power cuts or loadshedding are a money-making strategy due to corruption, and mismanagement of funds by the government.

Government should assist households

The participants also discussed the issue of the government helping households. They attested that the government should be responsible for doing away with illegal connections since their delayed responses (discussed in the sections above) creates opportunities for *izinyoka*, and public servants who illegally connect community members and give them access to other ways of bridging electricity. The study also revealed that the participants have been seeking help with faulty meters, and reporting illegal connections from unauthorised dwellers in shacks but they were/have not been getting help.

Free Basic Electricity to poor households

One of the key questions in the second round, was to explore if communities were aware of the government scheme to provide a portion of electricity for free to indigent households. Many of the study participants attested to being aware of the provision free basic electricity and mentioned that this is available to pensioners and when they buy electricity they generally get additional units. . Some of the community members expressed that they cannot get the service since they do not have properly functioning meter boxes, some did not know how to apply for it, while some said that the electricity barely sustains them. Additionally, participants attested that government officials and other public servants misuse and corruptively exclude the public from accessing the existing services by using those services for themselves. Some community members were however not aware of the provision of this service.

M5: I have seen that because when I bought electricity, I was given additional electricity, but the problem is that the electricity does not last for long.

M1: There is no such a thing as free electricity. We are paying for the electricity.

M5: You won't see the difference because the price of electricity has gone up.

M4: How do you get it if you don't have a meter box, but you need electricity?

F6: The government is aware that we know about this plan but the officials like Councilors are hiding it from the community they are only using it only for themselves and their friends. The people who really need the help are not being given the help that they require. They are not given advice on how they can access this. It's like these services don't exist at all because we don't know about them as the politicians only think for themselves. They only service themselves and their friends so it's like the same as like we don't know.

SB: are we aware of the government's plan to provide communities with free electricity every month by giving them a certain number of units.

M5: Yes, they give to pensioners.

M5: We are not sure whether you are referring to the whole entire community or to the elderly people however we know that pensioners are given a certain number of units per month. We are also aware of the units that are given when you buy units. We are not aware of the free units that is given to everyone in the community and if it's there we are not aware of it. All we know is that when your electricity is depleted you must buy again or if you don't buy you steal it.

(Inanda FGD, KZN)

F2: That's been there for a while now, that when you buy electricity on the first, you get free units and when you buy it for R50.00, you get extra 50. But we don't receive that service.

M5: I am not aware of it, which one is it?

F2: I want to respond to him. Okay, you get the free units when you have registered for it. You should register for it first to be able to get it, at the municipality. That's only when you will get the free units.

UF: Especially for the elderlies, they fill in some forms. They give you the statement and tell you that they have given it to you.

(Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

Using firewood for heating and cooking

In the last round, the discussion sought to understand and document how communities cope during power outages. In many of the communities, participants shared that they resorted to using firewood for heating and cooking. In this round of focus groups, the study sought to explore community perceptions of the health implications of using firewood for heating and cooking, as well as implications on the environment. When asked about these implications, participants firstly reiterated their frustrations about the inconveniences that the loadshedding or power cuts cause including having to resort to other sources. Beyond the use of firewood for heating and cooking, the participants shared their experiences with using candles to light their homes, gas to cook and heat and paraffin which pose a threat of safety

to them, their families, and the rest of the communities as these can start fires and burn down their houses and that of their neighbours.

Impacts of using firewood on health and safety in the home

The participants shared some of the effects that using firewood has on their health including respiratory complications, which may also be aggravated by gas leaks which they mentioned could possibly explode, suffocate, and burn them and their families.

Facilitator: So, in your in your own in your view, what are the implications of making open fires in your homes for cooking and heating.

R: People will get sick; houses will get burnt.

R: It's bad, it's bad. They might say it's saving money on electricity but it's dangerous. We should not as people be subjected to those methodologies.

R: Because even gas is not safe.

R: Gas can explode anytime.

(Durban FGD, KZN)

F2: I am not okay because of the smoke, sometimes I get something in my chest. So that smoke affects me.

(Meadowlands FGD, GP)

F1: Okay, some people become asthmatic and get shortness of breath because of the smoke and air pollution.

M4: And we suffocate from the smoke.

(Kliptown FGD, GP)

F1: When we sleep with the stoves on, we could burn houses.

UF: Children get burned and they end up in hospitals.

(Kliptown FGD, GP)

R: In my opinion, it's not safe to make fire in the house using firewood.

Making fire whether outside or inside is not good. When you use paraffin, you can smell it in your food, you can even smell it from your clothes and even inhale it. Some people some people get sick because of inhaling the smell of paraffin. The way we live is not the same, some get chest infections, some end up burning themselves, you find that you light a candle, and you forget it then the house gets burned down and even burn other people's houses. Even making fire from outside the air that we breathe it's not good and you find out that other people end up having diseases like asthma.

R: I will talk about the issue of paraffin. It is not safe to use paraffin because children can mistakenly drink the paraffin and get affected because their system is poor full stop.

(Clermont FGD, KZN)

Impacts of using firewood on the environment

The conversations also alluded to the environmental effects and issues caused by the air pollution from the carbon dioxide released from burning wood to cook and heat including air pollution, damage to the ozone layer which causes global warming. This is why participants in one focus group expressed expecting the worst with regards to the current energy crisis.

Facilitator: So, we should prepare. Prepare for more disaster!

R: As a country we should be preparing for more disasters. We should be preparing for more disaster.

R: Especially natural disaster.

R: In fact, there are people benefiting from the crafting of natural disasters. As much as I'm calling a natural disaster crafting, I'm not talking about they've crafted that but the situations they are creating that are feeding into the development of such natural disasters. They are people are benefiting from these things their people are benefiting from us chopping down trees, there are people are benefiting from us not selling electricity that people are benefiting from us resorting to methodologies that are killing data detrimental to the livelihood of our environment. There are people who are benefiting from it, and they shall continue to keep the status quo at the expense of people's lives.

(Durban FGD, KZN)

F4: Of course, when people don't have electricity, they will resort to wood a lot, so that smoke is obviously going to damage our ozone layer which is going to lead to a climate change. That is one of the impacts of load-shedding.

M1: The impact of load-shedding on the environment is it limits the resources which we don't have and it creates pollution, air pollution and we end up inhaling fumes because once electricity goes off, they start using paraffin and it causes smoke when people are sleeping. And then when we use wood to cook, it affects us.

(Meadowlands FGD, GP)

Collecting firewood is a safety hazard

The study also found that collecting firewood was seen as a risky activity in terms of personal security including falling prey to criminals while collecting wood as well as fears of snakes and other creatures in the forest.

W5: I get my firewood from the forest. However, this is dangerous for me because there are snakes and other things in the forest, and I might get hurt. Eskom Must visit communities to see the need in the community. They must come and install the meter boxes and see if really people are not going to pay for the electricity.

(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

Government plans to address the energy crisis

The Energy Action Plan (EAP)

This round of discussions sought to gauge participants' awareness of and sentiments on the EAP. Across focus groups, some participants expressed being unaware of the EAP, while some mentioned that they believe that the government has no solid plans as measures to address the energy crisis so far would have been taken, exhausted and fully communicated throughout stages. Some of the plans that the participants attested to being knowledgeable about include renewable energy such as wind power, solar, and buying electricity from neighbouring countries. In the previous focus groups, the participants asserted that the government should stop selling electricity to neighbouring countries, however in this round of focus groups they attest to being aware of the government buying electricity from Mozambique without any contestations. In addition, participants mentioned that renewables were one way that the government aims to address the energy crisis in the country as they do not contribute to air pollution amongst other environmental issues and acknowledged that the use of firewood contributes to deforestation which is an additional environmental sustainability issue.

M10: I think solar is one of the plans, but I am not sure of the plans itself and buying electricity from Mozambique I think it's one of the plans.

F4: As much as the Government has installed windmills at Eskom, it simply says we are trying to avert that thing of cutting down the trees.

M7: They were always buying electricity from Mozambique and there was a time when.... it was where we got our electricity, it's where we were transporting our electricity. I don't know... I don't have a clue about that.

(Meaadowlands FGD, GP)

UP: There are no plans. they would have addressed this long time ago if they had one.

M2: They have no plans if they had they would have solved these problems long time ago.

M5: This is new to us. If they had plans, we would see some of them implemented.

(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

M1: Yes. I am aware about these plans of the Government of bringing new electricity resources, but the issue is, we don't have electricity crisis in South Africa. They are making it look like we do, but we don't. Why can't we use the coal to generate electricity? Why can't we use it because it's our coal and they are supposed to reduce the cost from our electricity bills? Why should there be an energy bill? There is no electricity crisis.

(Mofolo FGD, GP)

In some of the focus group discussions, participants mentioned that they were unaware of any government plans to address the energy crisis. Like the shared perceptions above, there is distrust directed towards the government due to continued corruption and the failure to

be transparent on the loadshedding crisis and what it may mean for energy security in the country. Across the discussions, participants also expressed that they do not think that the EAP will be effective in tackling the energy crisis in the country since the different stakeholders and persons in charge are not communicating effectively nor do they have a similar outlook regarding the plans that are put in place and those being explored.

Facilitator: Okay, do you think that energy action plan will work in securing energy and ending load-shedding or power cuts?

M4: I don't know of any plans, i am not sure about how far those plans are.

F5: I don't know anything; I have never heard of anything like that.

M5: We are not sure because the Government is not trustworthy, and we can't even trust anything.

F1: Yeah, we don't know, we will see it when it happens because our government is full of promises, and they don't materialise. We will see it from them and see how it comes about.

(Kliptown FGD, GP)

R: But again, for me, with the with the action plan, they are speaking different languages. Someone is saying by the final financial by the end of the year we would have ended electricity someone is saying, we'll let us brace ourselves for a couple of years of having loadshedding and yet all of these people are looking at information from the same cloth, which is the action plan, but what they are telling us as the community or as a society is different. So, it's very hard to say with the action plan at hand. This is what we are looking at because even the principals are speaking a different language. The Minister of electricity is saying something else, Gwede Mantashe is saying something else, Fikile Mbalula is saying something else. I don't know where Fikile Mbalula fit in all these things, but he finds himself relevant to speak about this thing. And then he speaks a different language. So, can you imagine where society is in this?

(Durban FGD, KZN)

Other causes mentioned included: overpopulation and overcrowding resulting in an overburdened electricity grid. In one Gauteng focus group, the participants expressed that information that other countries are helping with the loadshedding crisis were to suppress the already existing perceptions that immigrants are the cause of the loadshedding crisis (amongst other issues), since they have increased the overall population of the country. Similar sentiments on issues of xenophobia were shared in the last round of focus groups.

Facilitator: But now we have Sputla who came up with a brilliant plan that we should buy energy from Mozambique and for you that's a new thing?

UM: With Mozambique, for them to say this is a new thing, it's politics and you know just to give people a false perception as if we are doing something. Minister of two portfolios which are similar is the same thing, just to bluff people. You delegate and don't do the job yourself, so you can delegate from the office, right, just like Mantashe.

M6: Yes, it's a new thing. We never got supported by another country in our age. This is the first time we get electricity from another country. Since then, everything is quiet, xenophobia is quiet now. Everything is quiet now.

(Meadowlands FGD, GP)

The Minister of Electricity

Most participants in the various focus groups expressed their lack of faith in the Minister of Electricity who was appointed to address the energy crisis. The sentiments that were shared involved the Minister being part of a continuous loop of corruption that the government has been involved in.

Facilitator: Okay. Since now that we have the Minister of Electricity, and minister of electricity is also given the powers to address and deal with the black outs or the power cuts in the country. What do you think is going to change?

R: nothing because he said he's not here to end load shedding. He is here to try. We don't need someone who says I'm here to try I'm here to solve the problem.

R: In my opinion the minister of electricity doesn't know his work. He is given that position so that they can push corruption. That position was not necessary.

(Clermont FGD, KZN)

F5: There will be no change since they are always changing and nothing changes, and they are all the same. Nothing is going to change.

F7: It's not going to change anything.

(Kliptown FGD, GP)

Other participants expressed however that they believe that the way forward is for government to not be involved in the Ministers plans and execution of the EAP and various other plans put in place to address the energy crisis.

R: I think it might help. I believe only if there's no interference from the government. They must let him to be an independent entity, let him fix this on his own. If there is interference from the government, it will not help. Anything that involves the ANC does not end well.

(Clermont FGD, KZN)

The Just Transition Framework

Similar to the use of the term "loadshedding" as a euphemism in the previous focus groups, the study participants revealed that the use of the term "Just Transition" is misleading and an exclusionary whitewashing of what the transition really means, especially towards certain members of the public. For participants that have heard about the concept or the framework, the transition is said to be a gateway towards informing the public on various ways of helping to save electricity and have a stable energy grid where people would not be forced to consider coping using firewood, gas, and candles which are risky for household use in the various communities.

F: In my opinion this is a policy that will guide us on how to use electricity wisely so that we don't experience load shedding so that we don't get to a point where we must make fire, use gas, etc. So that we don't get to that. They want to make a change so that we don't get to that point.

F: You can also tell from the name itself "Just Transition". They're even giving it names.

[talking at the same time]

M2: They started with COVID; they are selling these big names to us.

W3: They have started to be creative. They always come up with their names. They are now planning something. When you see things like this just know that it's just a plan and they want to find a way to misuse funds. Where were these names hidden, as they are only coming out now.

M4: There is nothing that will come out of this is just that they want to misuse funds. They are coming up with big names.

(Georgetown FGD, KZN)

R: Well, for me this thing of a just transition. First, we need we would need to look at, at what cost is that just transition. What constitutes it just because for them to say, a just transition, it means it's justice for all. What constitutes that transition, a just transition. At what cost to the person who's living in the rural area? To what cost is this just transition coming to the person who's unemployed? To what at cost are we going to find ourselves sitting with this just transition, telling us that they're transitioning from coal to nuclear energy, and what cost to the country. Right now, we have our repo rates, they've just gone up. As [name redacted] is rightfully putting it, people buy electricity and then an hour after they have bought the R200.00 electricity during load shedding, and then loadshedding come back two hours later, you're sitting with 10 units. You don't know where the rest of your electricity went, but you're sitting on 10 units. So, what just transition are they telling us about. I think these people are just throwing English at us to make themselves feel relevant and seem smart you know. They're playing us for fools actually. And I wish our communities can express this thing via their votes next year.
(Durban FGD, KZN)

Some community members expressed that they did not know about the energy transition framework that is used by government and various stakeholders to facilitate the transition, and they associated it with continued corruption using modern technology for the gains of the elite and powerful.

F: No, we didn't know about it.

M2: There is a lot that we don't know about. They are the only ones that know about and now they are coming up with big names like "Just Transition".

M1: South Africa, there is too much corruption.
(Umlazi FGD, KZN)

F3: It's my first-time hearing about it.

F6: It's my first time and I am shocked to hear about it.

(Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

Most participants also expressed that the energy transition is a plot to ease the tensions caused by the power cuts in the country. Additionally, they do not believe that the transition will be “just” or benefit people equally because they are still waiting for free basic healthcare amongst other promises from the government for the public. Although this was the case, some participants expressed that they believe that the energy transition will bring about change and equality in the country. The facilitators used the discussion guide which had a summarised definition of the Just Energy framework and what it aims to achieve through its implementation towards an energy secure future. These are some of the reactions and responses of the participants on the framework:

Facilitator: What are your thoughts on the Just Transition Policy?

M1: It's just a way to divert our attention. What did you say about the quality of life?

How do you measure their lives, based on what? [Inaudible at 01:32:28] is it for certain people? How do they measure that?

F1: We are still waiting for health for all, which is something that they were talking about. So we will wait and see how it goes.

(Mofolo FGD, GP)

M4: A great change, because it seems like it's going to bring some changes.

(Kliptown FGD, GP)

How participants desired to know about energy policies and government plans

When asked how they would like to be informed about the existing energy policies and government plans, the participants mentioned the following as vehicles of information:

- Community workshops/ sessions/ events.
- Door-to-door educational and informational sessions.
- Provision of brochures and flyers and pictorials for the elderly.
- Use of radio and TV dramas including during ad-breaks.
- Social media.
- Schools

Facilitator: Okay, how would you like to be informed and educated about these policies and other action plans that the Government has to address the power cuts or load-shedding?

M4: Through radio advertisements.

UF: They should do door to door activities for people who don't have TVs.

F6: Workshops and pamphlets.

UF: Facebook and Social Media.

(Kliptown FGD, GP)

F9: They should take us to the workshops and make it practical, in theory and practical so that it doesn't become something which they say up there, and we see it happening without having been informed. They need to teach us.

F2: They can also use the media.

UM: Door to door, workshops, call them and train them because people don't listen to the media.

M4: I think it must be implemented in schools and house to house.

UM: They should give their messages during the soapies on TV because people watch those a lot.

(Meadowlands FGD, GP)

R: I think the government need to work very closely with NPOs and come closer to the communities to give more information.

(Clermont FGD, KZN)

Conclusions

Overall, many participants are still frustrated by the power cuts that interrupt their daily lives. They are also aware of the illegal connections of electricity by bridging and connecting to the main poles in their different communities. The participants added that they were aware of the people who illegally connect to electricity; community members (including some of them who confessed), and public servants who work in government offices. They were also aware of people who steal cables to sell them and due to safety concerns, many felt like they could not report while some have self-reported, and government has not prioritised helping them with the illegal connecting and/or bridging. Additionally, the participants also use firewood, candles, and candles to cope through the power cuts however, their safety is always compromised as gas might explode, candles might burn their houses if unattended, and the use of firewood to heat and cook which affects their health and compromises the environment. Although there are government plans and policies in place to address the energy crisis and to facilitate the energy transition from coal to renewables (such as, the provision of free basic electricity, the EAP and JT and the appointment of the Minister of electricity) many of the participants believe that these are plans of perpetuating corruption and the continued mismanagement of resources in government and partnering stakeholders which has been and will continue to hinder any real change from happening or reaching people on grassroots levels. This is because the communities feel excluded either by the language used in the policies and other modes of communication or spreading information, and because they have been subjected to what they described as ignorance and a lack of urgency in promoting and facilitating inclusivity and equality within the energy debates in the country.