



The Lived Realities of coping with load-shedding and power cuts in two South African Provinces- Community perceptions and voices on government plans to address load-shedding

Round 3: August 2023

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	2
Methods.....	2
Findings.....	2
Conclusions	4
Introduction	6
Study Objectives.....	6
Methods.....	7
Sampling and Recruitment	7
Study Design.....	7
Study setting.....	8
Eligibility criteria	8
Ethical considerations	8
Data capture and coding	8
Study limitations.....	8
Addressing the limitations.....	9
Findings.....	9
Participant Demographics	9
Insights from the discussions.....	10
Searches on the Energy Action Plan	10
Information searching on the Just Transition Framework (JT).....	13
“Moving from crisis to crisis “- Perceptions on the shift from coal to renewable energy.	16
Poverty, Joblessness, and other perpetual disparities	19
Organisational interventions within communities	21
Accessible communication platforms or methods	24
Other issues of priority for communities	24
Conclusions	25

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 impact the choices and implications for the optimal future energy mix i.e., cutting through the noise and shaping consensus wherever possible.

Methods

Eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in semi-urban communities in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal from the 07th of August to the 14th of August 2023.

Findings

Search on the Energy Action Plan

Some participants attested to not being aware of the EAP in the previous rounds of focus groups, while some expressed that it was not a solid plan for addressing the energy crisis. In the last round of focus groups, some participants mentioned that they wanted to know more about the government's plans to address the energy crisis and would investigate to find out more. In this round, we sought to explore whether they had done any investigation and what they had found out. Those who investigated further mentioned that the plan was about securing national energy through renewable energy resources and doing away with load-shedding. Participants who did not search expressed that having more information on the plans would not change their lives or the current state of energy in the country. Their lack of faith even in empowering themselves lies in their stated views that the government has a long list of promises that have not been met and the energy crisis is one other that will be added or is already added. In one focus group, the other participants said they had no electricity for about a week and so their phones have not been charged since.

Information searching on the Just Transition Framework (JT)

The participants were also asked if they did any searches for information on the JT, and like the EAP question, some participants in their responses mentioned being aware of it, while some were not, and others were unable to do the searches. The participants who were aware of the JT understood that the JT plan was put in place to facilitate the shift from coal to using renewable sources of generating electricity. Many also mentioned that the primary goal of the plan was to contribute towards reducing the environmental effects of coal.

“Moving from crisis to crisis “- Perceptions on the shift from coal to renewable energy.

The participants were asked to share their thoughts and perceptions on the shift towards renewable energy as stated in the government plans. Across focus groups, participants acknowledged the need to shift towards renewable energy to preserve and ensure sustainability for the environment and to protect people from the effects of pollutants from using various alternatives for cooking, heating, etc. (discussed in previous focus groups). Some participants shared that they can already see the plans working as they have not had severe power cuts through winter compared to the other months. However, various concerns were shared regarding the shift across all groups. These are detailed below:

Poverty, Joblessness, and other perpetual disparities

The participants were further asked to share their perceptions of the shift and its implications on the economy. From their responses, they expressed that the shift will further increase unemployment which will perpetuate hunger and poverty since many people are already living under these circumstances. Other implications will be on people’s small businesses like spaza shops that generate their income from the local consumers, thus, the small businesses will also close if the local consumers are unable to participate in the township/rural economy. The interconnectedness of the disparities was also mentioned as what would contribute further to the high crime rates in the country while everyone strives for survival.

Organisational interventions within communities

When asked about community organisations helping communities understand the energy crisis, many study participants in seven of the focus groups mentioned that EnergyComms was the only organisation they were aware of that was actively helping the communities understand and contribute to the debates on the energy crisis. Other organisations that were mentioned in a Meadowlands, GP focus group included the Climate Justice Coalition and the University of Johannesburg through the Centre for Sociological Research and Practice (CSR). For the participants in Clermont, the existing community organisations are small, have little capacity, and are expected to operate in large areas which is not feasible due to financial constraints- the specific area where the EnergyComms focus groups have been conducted was excluded. Other communities expressed that the only other reliable source of information was through following updates and the news on or by the Minister of Electricity since Eskom or the government has not been sharing information with them about the energy crisis. Due to these barriers in communication and information sharing, the participants said that they are willing and will be sharing information amongst themselves since they have been exposed to EnergyComms workshops. Additionally, many said that they would appreciate the organisation and others hosting or mobilising for community-wide information sharing workshops which are not limited to a specific number of participants. Further, participants added that they felt empowered from being exposed to the various organisations in their communities and would be willing to participate in more information producing and sharing sessions so that they can continue to be informed and participate in the national and global energy crisis debates.

Accessible communication platforms or methods

When asked about accessible communication platforms that organisations and the government can use to share information, the participants mentioned the following:

- TV and radio adverts
- Social media
- Door-to-door educational and informational sessions.
- Community papers
- Weekly or monthly updates on major issues.
- Workshops, campaigns, and meetings with stakeholders and community/municipal leaders

Other issues of priority for communities

The participants were also asked to share issues that they felt the government must prioritise together with issues of energy in the country. These included government upskilling people to meet the consumer and supply needs of the country in industries such as food and textile amongst others. Other issues include the government being careful about relationships with international corporations and Western countries which are more developed, as they cause and perpetuate dependencies on South Africa as a developing country which may also subject the country to exploitative relationship dynamics. Participants also emphasised the inclusion of youth in various pockets of society, through employment, upskilling, and empowerment on various social issues to prepare them to be informed future leaders who prioritise issues for the greater good.

Conclusions

In conclusion, many participants are still frustrated by the power cuts and the load-shedding that persist. In the previous focus group, the participants mentioned that they would go and find out more information on the government plans, that is, the EAP and JT to educate themselves beyond the focus groups, and although some did, others did not due to lack of interest and perceived benefits from the information and inaccessibility to information platforms. The participants also expressed that they would rather stick to using coal as a source of energy since they are not informed about the policies and proposed implementations due to a lack of consultation with them about their needs, contributions to policy making, and perceived impacts on their lives. The participants also expressed being excluded from being informed or understanding the contents of the policies due to a language barrier. This is because many of them do not speak English as a first language, and the jargon used in the policies needed to be broken down or simplified to accommodate everyone in the public. Participants also felt that the country or government is constantly moving through crises that affect communities more since the lack of consultation and involvement of communities further perpetuates non-involvement in the country's democracy. Other concerns by the participants included the expensive cost to the government due to the energy transition, implications on water scarcity when considering hydroelectric means of generating electricity, concerns for jobs in the coal sector, and whether the energy transition will create enough to accommodate everyone. Further, the participants expressed that the transition would succeed if the government prioritised steering away from corruptive ways of leadership which may jeopardise the implementation of the policies. For communities, the

government is, therefore, unable to provide for their needs because they are unaware of the existing issues that need to be addressed and prioritised for them including, issues of unemployment, basic healthcare, housing, poor service delivery, social grants, rising crime rates- cable theft, drug and alcohol abuse in communities, gender-based violence (GBV) and the abuse of children, suicides and mental health issues. Thus, communities emphasised that they need to be involved in mobilising and contributing to the national debates on the energy crisis, and various other crises that affect the country and ultimately their individual lives, which according to them perpetuates the culture of exclusion that has existed pre-apartheid and will seemingly ripple to the next generation of citizens.

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 impact 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 (EAP) and the Just Transition (JT) framework. 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 2 rounds of focus group discussions revealed people's opinions and experiences on the use of coal and other alternatives for heating and cooking during power cuts/blackouts, and how these pose a safety and health hazard to them. The discussions further explored their opinions about the prevalence of illegal connections and reporting or not reporting illegal connections by their own families or friends and their awareness of government plans to solve the energy crisis. The 2nd round of focus groups further unpacked

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. In the third (3rd) round, the questions asked built on sentiments expressed in the first and second rounds of focus groups, which spoke to the perceptions of community members on government plans to address the energy crisis using the EAP and Just Transition plan. The study also explored information searching and understanding, the understanding/s of the information, limitations with the search by the study participants, and if there are any organisations in their communities helping them to understand the energy crisis better. Thus, the third round was aimed at exploring further the perceptions of communities regarding the government plans and policies, guided by the findings from the previous 2 rounds and gaps that were identified in the data.

Methods

Sampling and Recruitment

As indicated in the previous reports, this study is a longitudinal study with the same Facilitators and participants. Round three used the same 9 Facilitators that were trained for round one (4 females and 5 males), however, only 8 focus groups were conducted- 1 facilitator was unable to implement in the stipulated research period. The Facilitators were trained on an updated Focus Group Discussion guide to ensure that they understood how to build the conversations from the first two rounds of discussions to include the new round 3 questions. 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 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 intended 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 Round 3 FGD Discussion Guide. Groups were generally comprised of between 7-12 individuals. Focus group participants were the same participants from the first two rounds and represented 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. All 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. Before starting Round 1 of the focus groups, participants were required to go through and complete an online informed consent form for their participation in the study. This covered their consent for all three rounds of the study. All participants were also required to complete an online attendance Register at each of the three discussion sessions. The attendance registers also served to track the attendance of the permanent members of the community throughout the study from Round 1 to 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 and in communities of 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 3, 28 participants were LTFU. This is largely due inability to attend because of clashing schedules due to participants’ work and other commitments. Some reported that they were running late and ended up not making it, while others did not give notice for their non-attendance.

Data collection

- The study participants were selected by the Facilitators and 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 influenced by each other.
- The third round of the study occurred at a period when the weather was getting warmer, and the government had eased load-shedding in the country. The experiences shared in this report represent that reality.

Addressing the limitations

The study was conducted in 8 different communities by 8 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 8 groups conducted.

Findings

Participant Demographics

A total of 74 participants took part in the study, of whom 34 were from Gauteng and 40 were from KwaZulu-Natal. This represents an LTFU of 28 from the first round to the third round of focus groups.

Province	District	Region	Community	Gender		Total in Round 3	LTFU*
				Female	Male		
Gauteng							
	West Rand	Rand West City	Mohlakeng	6	1	7	2
	City of Joburg	Region D	Mofolo	4	3	7	5
			Meadowlands	5	6	11	3

			Kliptown	8	1	9	None
			Total Gauteng	23	11	34	10
			Community	Female	Male	Total	
KwaZulu-Natal	uMgungundlovu	Msunduzi	Georgetown	8	2	10	None
	eThekweni		Clermont	5	5	9	None
		Facilitator did not implement within the stipulated time					14
		Kwa-Mashu	Inanda	3	6	9	4
			Umlazi	6	5	11	None
			Total KwaZulu-Natal	22	18	40	18
			Total Study Participants			74	28

*- LTFU- Overall, the loss to follow-up from the study adds up to 28 participants from the first to the third round.

Insights from the discussions

The focus group discussion guide covered various questions to elicit responses around community perceptions and experiences of engaging with content and other information on government plans to address the energy crisis that causes the power cuts. In the previous round, the participants set out to find out more about the EAP and the JT as part of the government's plans to address the energy crisis. To recap, some participants expressed being unaware of the EAP and the Just Transition plan, while some mentioned that they do not believe that the government has solid plans to address the energy crisis. Thus, round 3 focus groups were structured to explore the type of search the participants did on the plans and policies; whether the plans have been working since they were first introduced; renewable energy sources, and ones they perceive as possible to be used optimally by the government; organisations that are helping the community to understand the energy crisis better, and lastly, suggestions on how the policies, plans, and strategies by the government, partners, or stakeholders can be communicated or refined so that the communities are not left out of the conversations and debates on the energy crisis. The findings below will be structured to represent the broad questions reflected here.

Searches on the Energy Action Plan

As mentioned before, some participants attested to not being aware of the EAP in the previous rounds of focus groups, while some expressed that it was not a solid plan for addressing the energy crisis. In the last round of focus groups, some participants mentioned that they wanted to know more about the government's plans to address the energy crisis and would investigate to find out more. In this round, we sought to explore whether they had done any investigation and what they had found out. Those who investigated further mentioned that the plan was about securing national energy through renewable energy resources and doing away with load-shedding. Participants who did not search expressed that

having more information on the plans would not change their lives or the current state of energy in the country. Their lack of faith even in empowering themselves lies in their stated views that the government has a long list of promises that have not been met and the energy crisis is one other that will be added or is already added. In one focus group, the other participants said they had no electricity for about a week and so their phones have not been charged since.

Facilitator: Okay, my first question is, as we have already talked about the energy action plan, is there any one of you who went to look for information about the action plan? Is there anyone among you?

M1: Yes. I asked people what they know about the energy action plan and people don't know anything about it. This has bothered me also and I had to go on Google to check what the energy plan is all about. I found out that the energy plan is about a plan to reserve electricity. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

W1: Yes. I searched. What I found out is that it is a road map stipulating how the energy is going to be used and stipulating long-term goals and short-term goals, and also that they will be using renewable energies. Their reason for using renewable energies is to avoid air pollution. Because they highlighted that when fire is used the air is polluted. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)

M4: According to my knowledge, the Energy Action Plan is something that was established mid-year last year with intentions of coming up with load-shedding interventions, above all it is to have energy sustainability in South Africa since we are under the pressure of load-shedding. (Inanda FGD, KZN)

M2: Yeah, I heard that there was a plant that was closed, and they are having plans to revive it and to produce more kilowatts so that they could reduce the shedding of electricity which is a good plan that they go back to that plant as it is using coal and they must use coal. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

Those who did not do any investigating said:

M6: I did not try to get any information. It looked like I was going to just waste my time because it was not going to make any difference. Things are still going to get worse even if you go and look for the information. It doesn't make any difference. There are things that you can put your effort into and think about, however this one, I did not bother myself because nothing is going to change. Sometimes it looks like things are getting better and the next minute things continue to get worse.

M3: I can also think on my own, I can see that this thing does not exist.

W4: What these people did they got together decided on our behalf, actually they are playing with our minds. I do not see a reason why I should go and look for it because even now we are sitting in the dark as we do not have electricity. Right now, we do not have electricity. All I can say is that I did not even check it because it was not going to make a difference. We do not

always have electricity, if it was a job, it would be a job I have to be proud about. It's all the same. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

UF: In the past few days we had an illegal connection of electricity, we didn't have electricity. So how were we going to make that search because we didn't have any chance to charge the phones? Almost three weeks, in the last month. (Kliptown FGD, GP)

Type of searches done

The participants used various methods including Google searches, checked websites, and social media to find out more about the Energy Action Plan. One participant had a conversation with a trusted public official in their community who is knowledgeable about the energy crisis.

M1: People don't know anything about this, and this bothered me hence I decided to go to Google and find information about the energy action plan. That is where I found this information. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

M1: It's not a search as such, it's information that is there on the website of the NDF [sic] and if you were watching the news a few weeks ago you would have seen the plan of the Government for solving this issue of electricity. They bought like 100 kilowatts from Mozambique to try to solve the issue of electricity. It's not that it's a search, it's something that was there in the news. So, I think that's an action plan for the government but I don't know how long it's going to be the contract that they have with the country.

F2: I follow, what is the Minister of Electricity? Ramokgopa, yeah. I follow him on Facebook, so whenever he has conferences, wherever he has press conferences, yeah I normally follow him on Facebook on social media. So that is where I got the information from, but that initiative of hiring young people was an initiative from the Premier of Gauteng. So, I don't know whether it is for all the provinces or Gauteng only, but because it came from Panyaza, I suppose it's for Gauteng.

F1: I as a customer went and asked another gentleman who works with electricity under [inaudible 00:01:24]. We were complaining about electricity and load-shedding. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

Trusting information sources on the EAP

The participants that conducted their search shared that they felt they could trust the information sources and they are hopeful that the government plans through the policies will work to a certain extent but are not expecting them to work to secure energy. Some had trust because they heard from people that they felt they could trust to give the correct information, while others expressed that they did not have trust in the information because it could be fake news.

PN: Do you trust the information you found?

M1: No, I do not trust it. I don't even know who wrote the information. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

W1: In my opinion, it's 50/50, some of it might happen but some of it will not happen. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)

F1: Yes, I trust him because he is the supervisor at the municipality. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

M1: The one about buying electricity from the nearest country I think it's reliable because it was announced by the government officially. That is why it's reliable and the NDF one, I don't know if it's reliable but it's on the website and I don't know what the process that will be followed is regarding what they said they are going to do for small businesses. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

Responses on understanding the information

The participants who searched for information expressed that the jargon used in the EAP was difficult to understand. They added that the document could have been more accessible by translating the EAP into the 11 local languages, and other visual props to make the content appealing and accessible to people. Participants also mentioned that the government could have done better with communicating the EAP like they do the load-shedding schedule through the Eskom load-shedding App.

Facilitator: Is it easy to understand the information you found or not?

M1: No, it's not easy to understand the information. First, it's the English language used, and besides the language, the information they have put there is not clear. They were supposed to explain. One needs to have enough data to search for more information on Google.

W2: To show that they are crazy, they were able to create a load-shedding App, but they are unable to explain this to us. They need to find a way to explain what this Just Transition means. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

W2: No, it was not easy because they used names that we do not know and understand. It would have been easy if they created pamphlets with sketches or anything that would help us understand the definitions of the words used in the action plan. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)

M2: Maybe one other reason we did not mention the last time, is that the compilation of these policies is mostly in English. You go there and to read, you will need a dictionary. It's very confusing to read the policy, only the only time we get to understand them is when they are spoken in gatherings like this... Maybe they need to ensure that whatever policy they publish should be published in every possible language it would be better.

Information searching on the Just Transition Framework (JT)

The participants were also asked if they did any searches for information on the JT, and like the EAP question, some participants in their responses mentioned being aware of it, while some were not, and others were unable to do the searches. The participants who were aware of the JT understood that the JT plan was put in place to facilitate the shift from coal to using renewable sources of generating electricity. Many also mentioned that the primary goal of the plan was to contribute towards reducing the environmental effects of coal.

Facilitator: So okay, you didn't do any research on it, but what are your thoughts on the Just Transition from the way I have explained it and what its aim is? What do you think as I have just explained it, what comes to mind and what do you think about it?

UF: When they are reducing air pollution, like the things which affect the climate, that ozone layer. We will reduce it by using less wood and maybe by...but we can't control the one caused by the cars because there is no way to do it. After all, petrol is needed, and that gas is emitted. There is no way in which we can be able to prevent it. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

M3: Just Transition Policy for me is changing, actually it's a reduction of using coal as electricity to use others for electricity. (FGD 9, Meadowlands)

M: Okay. What I think is that, since we have floods, the challenges are there. I don't think it's a system we can recommend for now. Yes, we do need electricity, but this is not a system we can use if it's going to put people's lives at risk. I think they can come up with other ways.

W: I think this can assist us as long as they are going to educate us about it. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

Participants who responded that they did not do any searching for information mentioned that they did not see a need to learn more as it would not change the current state of their living conditions and being in the dark due to load-shedding. The participants added that they have been surviving well using the alternative heating, cooking, and lighting methods mentioned and discussed in the previous focus groups including gas, paraffin, candles, etc. In other focus groups, the participants had to be reminded that the Just Transition is one other policy framework that the government is using and could only respond when the facilitator shared the simplified and basic definition of the policy that they were given as part of the 2nd round focus group guide.

F4: I didn't do anything probably because it's something that we prefer doing and if there is no electricity, we use gas. I felt like it was comfortable and it's something that I know that I have options if I don't have electricity I don't. So, me searching about it, ahh...there wasn't a need. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

Trusting information sources on the JT

The participants used various methods of searching for information on the JT3. When asked if they trust the information sources, some said yes, others said they did not because it could be fake news. Other participants said that they are hopeful that the information provided is trustworthy but are not expecting the policy to work to secure energy.

PN: Do you trust the information you found?

M1: No, I do not trust it. I don't even know who wrote the information. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

W1: In my opinion, it's 50/50, some of it might happen but some of it will not happen. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)

M2: *I don't trust it, it's like a business, this is a business, and they are changing business from another side to the other side. If you are owning trucks now for the coal, to take from the mines or whatsoever, you are [inaudible 00:08:04] because you can lose that business. After all, green energy is taking over, so we don't need it, so there is a policy or something, it's a business. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

Responses on understanding the information

Like the use of the term “load-shedding” as a euphemism in the previous two rounds of focus groups, the study participants revealed that the use of the term “Just Transition” is misleading and an exclusionary whitewashing of what the transition means, especially towards certain members of the public due to the language barrier. The participants who responded on understanding the JT mentioned that they are aware that it is used as a tool to facilitate a shift from the use of coal and other fossil fuels towards using renewable energy to preserve and ensure environmental sustainability while securing energy.

Facilitator: Okay, the third question says, what do you think would make the energy transition favourable to everyone? Shifting from coal to renewable, we also spoke about the shift from using or relying on coal as the main source of energy in our first focus group discussion. We would like to talk more about these alternative energy sources. Here we are talking about energy sources such as solar, wind, hydroelectric power, or water or hydro gas used to generate electricity. What are your thoughts on shifting from reliable coal as the main source to generate electricity?

UF: We are shifting to reliable energy will depend also on the cost of the production. It means the cost of the production would be less and maybe we can consider that. (Kliptown FGD, GP)

W1: What I remember about the Just Transition plan from the information I got, they did mention that if we use alternative ways to make fire, we must make sure that the environment is not affected.

W1: Yes. They also mentioned that the environment will not be affected by smoke. We continue saying that. It's chemicals that will destroy our environment.

W1: I think there, they were trying to brainwash us when they say we will affect the environment. So, I don't see the environment affected if you use firewood and other things.

W2: We can't even pronounce them.

W2: Just, to us just is like “just”

Facilitator: Just. So, we can't say it's a serious thing and we start the name with “Just.” ?

W: Ja. It means it's something with no meaning. It's a word with no meaning. By the way, hayke! This “just”, this just.

Facilitator: What does it mean?...

W: It's something that does not exist. Maybe they need to change the name Just. Let them change it and call it with a different name maybe we will understand it. A name with a meaning. Just the name only. They must just change the name. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)

UF: When they are reducing air pollution, like the things which affect the climate, that ozone layer. We will reduce it by using less wood and maybe by...but we can't control the one caused by the cars because there is no way to do it. After all, petrol is needed, and that gas is emitted. There is no way in which we can be able to prevent it.

M2: I think [it will bring] better things to improve the lives of the people in the world. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

“Moving from crisis to crisis “- Perceptions on the shift from coal to renewable energy.

The participants were asked to share their thoughts and perceptions on the shift towards renewable energy as stated in the government plans. Across focus groups, participants acknowledged the need to shift towards renewable energy to preserve and ensure sustainability for the environment and to prevent detrimental health effects from pollutants from using various alternatives for cooking, heating, etc. (discussed in previous focus groups). Some participants shared that they can already see the plans working as they have not had severe power cuts through winter compared to the other months. However, various concerns were shared about the shift across all groups. These are detailed below:

Facilitator: My question is this, what are your thoughts on the shift from relying on coal as the main source of energy to create electricity?

F8: Less sickness so that we don't have coal polluting the air which we breathe so we breathe more carbon dioxide which ends up staying in the internal organs, it just doesn't sit there in the lungs, it's poisonous and it spreads all over and then they give you endless diagnoses and the medication which is not available. So if we go around using renewable energy, there will be fewer illnesses.

M2: I am not sure about what's happening on the renewable but from the coal side, I think there is going to be a problem with joblessness because coal is being mined, so there are going to be job losses. I don't know when it comes to renewable, how many people are going to be employed, and how many people are going to lose from the coal side. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)

Anonymous: Since we have learnt that coal contributes to air pollution that results in global warming making our weather conditions unstable and exposing us to natural disasters, we should find another cost-effective yet reliable power source that will cause no harm to the environment. Because if we choose a safe yet expensive power source it will result in us moving from crisis to crisis. If we investigate things like nuclear energy, which sounds expensive to me will have the country spending most of its economy on generating power. We are moving from one mess to another. However, we can focus on renewable safe energy sources specifically solar power as a solution since it only uses sunlight to generate electricity.

M2: I just want to say in whatever we choose she should pick something within our reach. There was a gas explosion in Joburg the past few days. Word of mouth says it was because we were shifting to gas power, but this shows us how dangerous gas is and all that. So, all I am

trying to say is whatever we choose should be within our reach so that we do not depend on other countries because as a country we are already in debt, gas is not originating in this country, we buy it from neighbouring countries, but coal is available it is extracted from our land. (Inanda FGD, KZN)

M1: [We should] not move from coal- for what reason? Batteries of the solar are expensive. I said if you look at the rate of unemployment in our country is too high, where are they going to get the money to buy new batteries, to buy new solar panels if they say it's a got a lifetime span and it's done, where are they going to get the money? So, let's stick to our ways. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

M: If we didn't have capitalists in our government, it could be successful like other countries. But the problem is that the corruption here in South Africa is too high. Whatever they try to implement, they sabotage it. So, for me its no. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

The participants raised a few concerns with the transition, and these included the cost of the transition, water scarcity, the timing of the transition, and corruptive ways that the government uses to gain more than the people whose lives the policies are meant to improve. These are discussed below:

- **Costs for the transition**—Firstly, the participants were concerned that the proposed alternatives are expensive, as a result, the energy shift will be another failure added to the list of unmet promises to the citizens of the country.

Anonymous: Since we have learnt that coal contributes to air pollution that results in global warming making our weather conditions unstable and exposing us to natural disasters, we should find another cost-effective yet reliable power source that will cause no harm to the environment. Because if we choose a safe yet expensive power source it will result in us moving from crisis to crisis. If we look into things like nuclear energy, which sounds expensive to me will have the country spending most of its economy on generating power. We are moving from one mess to another. (Inanda FGD, KZN)

Water scarcity—Another concern mentioned was that the country is water scarce, so the participants were unsure as to how hydroelectric power would be utilized as part of the energy mix, without compromising water for other critical needs.

UF: The most important one is using water, hydro what-what, but we don't have enough water I think it's the one which is important because water is always there but the disadvantage is that we don't have water nearby and we don't have dams. (Mohlakeng FGD, KZN)

- **Timing of the transition**—Participants felt that the government was rushing into the transition, which could result in many job losses for people in the coal industry.

M1: Another thing that will cost us in this whole process is not choosing where our alternative source will come from. We will be spending too much in the wrong places. Another alternative might require the hands of a robot to be completed. Most jobs will be lost, and

the alternative will be costly if we do not create our own as South Africans. (Inanda FGD, KZN)

M2: I am not sure about what's happening on the renewable but from the coal side, I think there is going to be a problem with joblessness because coal is being mined, so there are going to be job losses. I don't know when it comes to renewable, how many people are going to be employed, and how many people are going to lose from the coal side. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)

- **Corruption**— Another recurring concern was mistrust of the government due to the continuous loop of corruption that is prevalent. Many felt that the plans would not succeed but would form part of the many issues that affect the country's society.

Facilitator: Okay, the next question says, do you think that the country or government can successfully rely on or carry out what is stated in the policies about the shift towards renewable energy sources?

M: If we didn't have capitalists in our government, it could be successful like other countries. But the problem is that the corruption here in South Africa is too high. Whatever they try to implement, they sabotage it. So, for me, it is no. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

UF: I think it can if they can stop corruption. (Mohlakeng FGD, KZN)

Other participants mentioned that they do not trust that any of the renewable energy projects or the shift will succeed due to affordability and already existing inequalities that do not allow them to access electricity. Due to this lack of trust, the participants insisted that they be left to use coal in their communities since it is still being exported to other countries to be used to generate electricity. Additionally, the participants mentioned that they will continue to steal or connect electricity illegally as the government continues to make unfulfilled promises.

Facilitator: Okay, the next question says, do you think that the country or government can successfully rely on or carry out what is stated in the policies about the shift towards renewable energy sources?

M3: They can't because most people will not be able to afford those renewable resources.

F1: And when you hear them saying coal should be stopped in South Africa, but coal comes from us, and they take it to America. Why do they take coal out there and use it and then say we are not supposed to use it? How are they using it differently?

M3: The plans are not going to work. Remember there are gas emissions, and they will light that thing and it explodes; they don't work.

M3: Yes, leave us with our coal.

M3: Like he has already mentioned this thing will continue. This action plan will not stop anything. We will continue to connect the electricity illegally. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)

Poverty, Joblessness, and other perpetual disparities

The participants were further asked to share their perceptions of the shift and its implications on the economy. From their responses, they expressed that the shift will further increase unemployment which will perpetuate hunger and poverty since many people are already living under these circumstances. Other implications will be on people's small businesses like spaza shops that generate their income from the local consumers, thus, the small businesses will also close if the local consumers are unable to participate in the township/rural economy. The interconnectedness of the disparities was also mentioned as what would contribute further to the high crime rates in the country while everyone strives for survival.

Facilitator: How do you think the country's economy will be affected by this shift?

F4: I think if we are shifting to those things, I think we will be going back to the old life because now we are living an advanced life where things are advanced. So, shifting to not using coal, other things such as solar and hydro what-what, I think we will go back because other things will downgrade, will drop.

F6: Like she said if things are going to change, you asked what the South African economy will be like, but we will be expected to buy and whereby if we use coal, it will be easier because we can't afford to go back. (Kliptown FGD, GP)

W: I also wanted to say what [name redacted] said, that a lot of people will lose their jobs and the economy of the country will be affected also. Maybe it will also affect other countries we collaborate with. They will also pull out because the change is going to happen. Also, poverty will increase, and the crime rate will increase due to poverty and unemployment rate. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

UF: Very bad because many people will be very poor, we will have less of food and less of water because some buy water.

F2: I think it's going to cause hunger; it will be bad and unemployment.

F4: Things will be messed up; we don't have money and we need money. People's spaza shops will be broken into, strikes, shutdowns, and a lot of things. Lack of jobs, money and not being able to support people at home.

F2: We are struggling to support kids with our pension money. We have become the hard workers at home, elderly women are supporting families.

F2: Yes, kids are not working so when they say the person who sells coal should not sell it because it's not allowed to be sold, electricity is not there and people are being retrenched, it's going to be worse, our country is already poor and things will get worse. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

What can the government or the country optimise on- Sticking to coal

Across the discussions, the participants had different views and perspectives on which of the renewable energy sources the government can optimise. The participants mentioned the use of all the renewable energy sources included in the energy mix, but many of them were leaning towards solar, wind, hydroelectric, and nuclear power as the main sources that the government must or can optimise. In one Gauteng focus group, the participants mentioned that they would prefer to continue using coal as it is the easiest to access and has been sustaining the power grid for many years. There were also concerns about the use of nuclear as there might be possibilities of explosions if the infrastructure is not maintained.

Facilitator: ...which of the renewable energy sources do you think the Government can use or rely more on them to supply us?

M3: It's solar but we are only going to experience the problems during winter.

F6: It's solar because solar is everywhere in the world and if there is sunlight, it's going to work for us and it won't stop working immediately when there is no sunlight. Yes, it won't finish up immediately.

UF: The most important one is using water, hydro what-what, but we don't have enough water I think it's the one which is important because water is always there, but the disadvantage is that we don't have water nearby and we don't have dams. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

M: I think if they can develop solar. I hear him say nuclear uses gas. Gas can explode and kill everyone. Just like what happened in Johannesburg, the gas exploded. If they can develop solar and have all the wires in the air not underground. I think this is the best idea for us to continue with our lives. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

UF: Solar, because obviously they have made agreements and they are already installing it in some communities. (Kliptown FGD, GP)

M2: The other source that can be used is wind power, but there are very few places where you find that there is that strong wind to turn or to make electricity out of that because in our country most of the places are flat, we haven't got much mountains where it could be installed or used so that we could be able to generate that wind power. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

W3: We want to stick to coal.

W3: Did you see what gas did in Johannesburg?

W1: As we know we don't take care of things; we will be running over it.

W3: Sometimes they don't install these things properly. Sometimes we see water pipes exposed from the ground. This will not work.

W1: We are used to using the coal. They must just let us use it.

M1: We have been using coal for a long time. What I have noticed is that there is nothing wrong with the coal...But the other options will not work, we don't want them. They just need to change the way they do things, and we stick to the coal. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)

The government will not be successful- “There is always a lack of the truth”

The participants expressed that they only see the policies succeeding if the government leadership is improved. Although the government has successfully reduced power cuts in winter in some parts of the country, some participants still felt like the government would be unsuccessful in implementing the various policies that are used to facilitate the energy transition. The participants felt that the government was not equipped to implement the policies and is using them to gain votes in the upcoming elections, and like in the past, they will not benefit as communities. As a result, some still maintain that the government should not do away with coal as it is the most secure source of energy in the country presently.

Facilitator: While we are still talking about the government, in your opinion, there is this Energy Action Plan, policy and Just Transition policy which talks about the use of renewable energy resources, in your opinion, do you think our government can successfully rely on or carry out these policies and implement them successfully?

M: They will not do it. These plans are drafted because they know it's time to vote. Once we have passed two years, they will not implement them, I bet.

M: Even if they don't do it themselves, they want people who can do it for them or with them for them to benefit. And we don't have a chance of benefiting from it.

M: It's like they are decorating a cake. When they put in these implementation plans and so forth, they are like a chef who is doing a wedding cake. And you see with big words. And firstly, these policies and so forth, are talking with them, not us. Because some in the grassroots, we know nothing about electricity, and they will come and decorate the cake, we look at the cake very nicely but we're not even gonna taste it. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

M1: My thoughts are, we need to stick to coal because it never gave us a problem. If they say it's damaging the environment, the people who are using coal now, is it not damaging the environment? Why is it damaging ours? So, my thoughts, we should continue with the way we are doing it now, continue using electricity. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

UM: Yeah, I think they can. With true leadership, they can do it.

M4: Not being political but as a community developer, we cannot rely so much on the Government's promises. If they are failing us with a lot of promises that they make. That's why we are in this state of not trusting them as communities. We don't say they cannot do it but trust is another thing that you cannot dare use especially with the Government.

F9: I also second M4 because the truth is the policies have come out promising us 1, 2, 3, and instead of fulfilling their promises, they end up talking about a different thing while the one they had promised us does not go forward. So, with this one, there is no such. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)

Organisational interventions within communities

When asked about community organisations helping communities understand the energy crisis, many study participants in seven of the focus groups mentioned that EnergyComms was the only organisation they were aware of that was actively helping the communities

understand and contribute to the debates on the energy crisis. Other organisations that were mentioned in a Meadowlands, GP focus group included the Climate Justice Coalition and the University of Johannesburg through the Centre for Sociological Research and Practice (CSR). For the participants in Clermont, the existing community organisations are small, have little capacity, and are placed to operate in large areas which is not feasible due to financial constraints- the specific area where the EnergyComms focus groups have been conducted was excluded. Other communities expressed that the only other reliable source of information was through following updates and the news on or by the Minister of Electricity since Eskom or the government has not been sharing information with them about the energy crisis. Due to these barriers in communication and information sharing, the participants said that they are willing and will be sharing information amongst themselves since they have been exposed to EnergyComms workshops. Additionally, many said that they would appreciate the organisation and others hosting or mobilising for community-wide information-sharing workshops which are not limited to a specific number of participants. Further, participants added that they felt empowered from being exposed to the various organisations in their communities and would be willing to participate in more information-sharing sessions so that they can continue to be informed and participate in the national and global energy crisis debates.

Facilitator: Are the companies or organizations in the communities that assist the community to understand what's happening with the energy crisis?

M2: No, there are no other resources that the government is using except for the Minister of Electricity. This is the only the reliable source to bring out exactly what is happening but if it is someone else or other people, we know that that information is not reliable.

M1: I think there are no other organisations except the...is it called Energy Comms, which is running this discussion. I have never heard any organisation that goes around and tells people about the electricity crisis while they are in crisis. How can you go out and tell people about the crisis during the same crisis? So I think this is the first organisation that is making us aware of the energy crisis. (Mofolo FGD, GP)

W3: There is no other organisation except for EnergyComms because we can see EnergyComms is trying really to teach us. They started with COVID-19, and we learned a lot of things about this. They taught us about the pros and cons, to say yes COVID is here this is how you need to protect yourself. We are truly grateful to EnergyComms for opening our eyes because we didn't know a lot of things about the electricity sources, like the changes in shifting from coal to other sources of energy, winds, and other things. We need things like this.

W2: Yes, that name. Maybe they can call a community meeting and involve us as we already have some information. If they call organise a bigger workshop with the community and explain to them about this. (Georgetown FGD, GP)

M: I think because of the resources, they are working within their neighbourhoods. Like Claremont is too big, we've got a lot of areas, we've got all extension, we've got Kwadabeka, you see. So normally, maybe because of the capacity, Senzakahle is working with areas that are around, like in Ndunduma.... So, they can't go too far. And they use a few ambassadors

to do such. So, if we can maybe get more organization within in Pinetown area, we can develop such a thing, and give it to other colleagues to do, for their organisation, same thing. Maybe this thing of implementing e-communication within this whole area of Pinetown can be much better. People will get it. But because of the resources, they are unable to reach out to do things. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

W1: There is none that I know of, however, there is one now which is the one we are attending right now. It is the one in our community who came to educate and make us understand, for that reason we will also be able to teach other members of our community. This was our very first experience we had not had other groups yet.

M: Indeed, this is the only organisation that has visited us and we hope it will continue to spread the word because these sessions are effective and are doing the right thing maybe there are organisations in other places but not in our area. If our leaders could get this message to develop these sessions to reach out to more people we must get different people's points of view because solutions can come out of these sessions. There are many people out there with many brilliant ideas and others who are confused but could be woken up by these sessions. (Inanda FGD, KZN)

UF: No. You are the first and the last one... And you seem to be the last one. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

UF: So far it's Climate Justice.

M2: Yes, there are other organizations such as Climate Justice, USMCF, UJ and others that I haven't mentioned. (Meadowlands FGD,

The participants shared the effectiveness of the workshops and focus groups in their various communities. They said:

SY: In your own opinion, do you think they are impactful and how are they impactful?

UM: They are impactful in the way that we have more information than before.

UF: Yes, they are impactful because they are bringing information that we didn't know about before to people. So yes, they are impactful because, without them, we would not know anything. (Kliptown FGD, GP)

F7: Yes, they are. There is a difference because they have influenced other countries to join and be able to fight. After all, we have the same challenge. So it started like this with you and it started like this with us, so let's unite because there is some commonality. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)

UF: But you are there. Yes, it helps (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

Accessible communication platforms or methods

When asked about accessible communication platforms that organisations and the government can use to share information, the participants mentioned the following:

- TV and radio adverts
- Social media
- Door-to-door educational and informational sessions.
- Community papers
- Weekly or monthly updates on major issues.
- Workshops, campaigns, and meetings with stakeholders and community/municipal leaders

M3: ...TV and radio stations and on social media and Google.

F1: I think if they could introduce it at the councils, like at every place. So, the councillors should speak to people about this so they can hear our views. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)

M: And metro papers. You know these municipality papers. EnergyComms can have a slot. (Clermont FGD, KZN)

Other issues of priority for communities

The participants were also asked to share issues that they felt the government must prioritise together with issues of energy in the country. These included government upskilling people to meet the consumer and supply needs of the country in industries such as food, and textile amongst others. Other issues include the government being careful about relationships with international corporations and Western countries which are more developed, as they cause and perpetuate dependencies on South Africa as a developing country which may also subject the country to exploitative relationship dynamics. Participants also emphasised the inclusion of youth in various pockets of society, through employment, upskilling, and empowerment on various social issues to prepare them to be informed future leaders who prioritise issues of the greater good.

M4: At the moment, industries in South Africa are heavily loaded. If you look at the relationship we have with China, the relationship we have with America has deeply scarred our economy. For instance, there's one element of things, [they] have killed our poultry industry in South Africa. When it comes to textiles and materials that we get from China, we've killed the textile industry in this country. In the 90s, my mother used to work in a nice place, I am not sure if we have someone wearing their clothes. But my mother was working for that company. It was nice, but as soon as China became a post, actually post-apartheid, as soon as China, we had a more significant relationship with China. All those textile clothing firms got closed as those were here in South Africa. So, we need to be careful about all those things especially when it comes to the Just Transition. There is this thing, unfortunately, there is a part where

the government fails when it comes to public participation and accountability and informing the community about their role as far as the Just Transition policy is concerned.

M1: As much as I didn't dwell much on this, we young people lack interest in reading policies because we feel like they exist, but they don't make any difference in our lives. I also noticed that this Just Policy Document touches on a lot of stuff like climate change and SDGs. It talks about a lot of this. Although I do not remember what it says about them, we do not show any interest because they do not support any aspect of our lives. (Inanda FGD, KZN)

M2: I think the other thing that they can prioritise that goes along with everything about electricity is job creation. It's job creation in the sense that whatever they are going to implement, must be paid for. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)

Recurring issues include those of consulting and involving communities in decision-making on policies, and projects that affect people on a national scale, and so that power is not centralised as the principles of democracy dictate. Additionally, issues of housing, poor service delivery, social grants, rising crime rates- cable theft, drug and alcohol abuse in communities, gender-based violence (GBV) and the abuse of children, suicides and mental health issues, and basic healthcare in public facilities were mentioned during focus groups.

Conclusions

In conclusion, many participants are still frustrated by the power cuts and the load-shedding that persist. In the previous focus group, the participants mentioned that they would go and find out more information on the government plans, that is, the EAP and JT to educate themselves beyond the focus groups, and although some did, others did not due to lack of interest and perceived benefits from the information and inaccessibility to information platforms. The participants also expressed that they would rather stick to using coal as a source of energy since they are not informed about the policies and proposed implementations due to a lack of consultation with them about their needs, contributions to policy making, and perceived impacts on their lives. Additionally, the participants expressed being excluded from being informed or understanding the contents of the policies due to a language barrier. This is because many of them do not speak English as a first language, and the jargon used in the policies needed to be broken down or simplified to accommodate everyone in the public. Participants also felt that the country or government is constantly moving through crises that affect communities more since the lack of consultation and involvement of communities further perpetuates non-involvement in the country's democracy. Other concerns by the participants included the expensive cost on the government due to the energy transition, implications on water scarcity when considering hydroelectric means of generating electricity, concerns for jobs in the coal sector, and if the energy transition will create enough to accommodate everyone. Further, the participants expressed that the transition would succeed if the government prioritised steering away from corruptive ways of leadership which may jeopardise the implementation of the policies. For communities, the government is, therefore, unable to provide for their needs because they are unaware of the existing issues that need to be addressed and prioritised for them including, issues of unemployment, basic healthcare, housing, poor service delivery, social

grants, rising crime rates- cable theft, drug and alcohol abuse in communities, gender-based violence (GBV) and the abuse of children, suicides and mental health issues. Thus, communities emphasised that they need to be involved in mobilising and contributing to the national debates on the energy crisis, and various other crises that affect the country and ultimately their individual lives, which according to them perpetuates the culture of exclusion that has existed pre-apartheid and will seemingly ripple to the next generation of citizens.