

# The Lived Reality of Daily Power Cuts in two South African Provinces

PHASE 1: MAY 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

Ten focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in semi-urban communities in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. One site's data could not be used due to delayed data collection (convening of the focus groups) and poor quality.

### Findings

#### **Community perceptions and experiences of power cuts and the energy crisis**

All study communities decried the devastation that the constant power cuts brought to their lives and communities. This includes disruption to everyday life and how the constant power cuts damage their appliances through power surges, how their food gets spoiled, how people who are dependent on oxygen machines to live are affected and live in fear, how these cuts result in traffic chaos, how school children, workers, families, and households bear the brunt of the impact of these power cuts.

#### **Why Eskom calls these power cuts load-shedding—seeing beyond the Public Relations**

The study revealed that people find the use of the term load-shedding a misleading PR euphemism meant to diminish the severity of the energy problem that the country is facing.

#### **Perceptions of the causes of the energy crisis**

Mismanagement of Eskom and corruption were seen as the root cause of the electricity crisis in the country. Additional causes identified included inadequate infrastructure to supply electricity to growing communities that are overcrowded and overpopulated, as well as the stealing of electricity by communities through slowing down pre-paid electricity meters (known colloquially as 'bridging'/'breaching' electricity) and illegal connections known as

*izinyoka*. Other factors cited included the selling of electricity to other countries at the expense of the needs of the country.

### **Impact the power cuts have on lives, livelihoods, service delivery, and community experiences**

The study communities were very vocal about the impact of the constant power cuts on their lives. This included impact on life, especially for people who are dependent on oxygen tanks for their survival, impact on school children being to study, prepare for school, etc., impact on caregivers' ability to prepare food for their families and children, impact on service delivery including inability of government services including health facilities to function during black outs, impact on livelihoods and the economy, and impact on safety and security as loadshedding resulted in increased crime, including house invasions and murder.

### **Coping without electricity at home and in the community**

The study participants expressed that they found it extremely hard, demoralising, depressing, and inconvenient to live with the daily reality of power cuts, yet they had little choice, but to keep going. Many participants shared that they have had to resort to energy sources that they had used in the past, long before electricity was part of their lives at home. These sources include paraffin stoves (primus stoves), firewood, and coal. Gas was mentioned by others but was collectively seen as very expensive and forcing families to dig deep into pockets that were already empty.

### **What people are doing to try and solve the problem?**

When asked what they do to solve the problem of power cuts, many participants were simply despondent, frustrated, and angry. There were perceptions and sentiments expressed of these power cuts only affecting them and suburbs and places where ministers and other powerful people resided being exempt or shielded by money which afforded them access to generators and solar systems. Some participants shared that they have resorted to service delivery protests, including burning tyres and barricading streets.

### **Why do people steal or not pay for electricity?**

Many participants cited financial hardships and high electricity costs as reasons for stealing or not paying for electricity. Many shared that 'bridging' or slowing down the meter were common occurrences in their communities. Some participants mentioned that this is wrongdoing however they would not report the people who are stealing as they are unemployed and deserve access to free electricity which government should provide.

### **Views on how the government should address the energy crisis**

Across the groups, the proposals centred on assisting households to become energy 'self-sufficient', fixing Eskom, building new power stations, and securing the country's existing power supply.

### **What more they desired to learn more about in the energy sector**

When asked what they wanted to learn about, participants said the following:

- Desire to learn about how to get into the sector as independent power suppliers.
- How to use electricity safely and efficiently.
- How to save electricity.

## **Conclusions**

This study provided a glimpse into the realities of how the ongoing electricity power cuts impact every facet of people's lives in the country. Many participants are frustrated by the power cuts which interrupt their daily lives. The loadshedding or power cuts affect personal and family lives, service delivery and health, appliances and homes, livelihoods, and finances.

When it comes to coping with the situation or attempting to alleviate the impact, many participants shared how they have had to adapt their lives to using wood, paraffin stoves and other survival strategies to better cope with the power cuts/ loadshedding that happen unexpectedly, sometimes uncommunicated, and for days and weeks on end in some cases. The study revealed the deep-seated mistrust of government and faith to address the crisis.

In conclusion, the study provided important insights into how communities were experiencing and coping with the energy crisis. The next two phases of the study will explore how communities understand and perceive government initiatives to address the crisis.

## 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 what can be done to address the energy crisis and 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 questions asked sought to unpack their opinions about power cuts/blackouts, how they experienced them in the communities, including how it directly affected service delivery, if and why or why they 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. .

## Methods

### Sampling and Recruitment

A total of 10 Facilitators (5 females and 5 males) were recruited to conduct focus groups in selected communities in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Facilitators were trained on the material, methodology, and approach to be adopted for the focus groups using the Energy Comms Focus Group Discussion Guide 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-July 2023. The study intention was to recruit and maintain the same group of about 8-12 participants per study site over the entire project cycle. The study incorporated the following approaches:

#### ***Qualitative element***

Focus group discussions were conducted using the FGD Discussion Guide. Groups were generally comprised of between 8-12 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 facilitator used the focus group discussion guide to guide the discussion.

#### ***Quantitative element***

All participants were required to complete an online Attendance and Pre-FGD questionnaire on the energy crisis and their personal understanding and experiences of power-cuts and the energy crisis. These survey results will be analysed separately and incorporated later into the longitudinal results.

### 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. 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.

### **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 first phase of the study (first of three FGDs) occurred at a period when many places were experiencing the first approach of winter and cold, exacerbated by constant load-shedding and the experiences shared represent that reality.
- One site’s data could not be used due to delayed data collection (convening of the focus groups) and poor quality.

## **Addressing the limitations**



The focus group discussion guide covered a myriad of questions to elicit responses around community experiences of power cuts; perceptions of the causes of the energy crisis; what impact the power cuts have on their lives, livelihoods, service delivery and community experiences, how they cope as households and communities; what they are doing to try and alleviate the problem, what their thoughts are about how the government should be addressing the crisis and whether they know about the government’s plans to solve the crisis, and finally their thoughts about future solutions and what they as community members desired to learn more about in the energy sector. The findings below will be structured to represent the broad questions reflected here.

## Findings

### Participant Demographics

A total of 102 participants took part in the study, of whom 45 were from Gauteng and 51 were from KwaZulu-Natal.

Province	District	Region	Community	Gender		Total
				Female	Male	
Gauteng	West Rand	Rand West City	Mohlakeng	8	2	10
	City of Joburg	Region D	Mofolo	6	5	12
			Meadowlands	8	6	14
			Kliptown	8	1	9
			<b>Facilitator 5</b>			<b>Invalid data</b>
			<b>Total Gauteng</b>	30	14	44
			Community	Female	Male	Total
KwaZulu-Natal	uMgungundlovu	Msunduzi	Georgetown	8	2	10
	eThekweni		Clermont	5	5	10
		Mayville Chatsworth Phoenix Inanda Durban Central	Durban Central -	8	6	14
			Inanda	9	4	13
			Umlazi	6	5	11
			<b>Total KwaZulu-Natal</b>	36	22	58
		<b>Total Study Participants</b>			<b>102</b>	

The focus group discussion guide covered a myriad of questions to elicit responses around community experiences of power cuts; perceptions of the causes of the energy crisis; what impact the power cuts have on their lives, livelihoods, service delivery and community experiences, how they cope as households and communities; what they are doing to try and

alleviate the problem, what their thoughts are about how the government should be addressing the crisis and whether they know about the government's plans to solve the crisis, and finally their thoughts about future solutions and what they as community members desired to learn more about in the energy sector. The findings below will be structured to represent the broad questions reflected here.

### **Community perceptions and experiences of power cuts and the energy crisis**

Loadshedding or power cuts are an everyday reality for all people living in this country. It was therefore not surprising that the study found that across all communities studied, power cuts and the current energy crisis were highly emotive issues that were experienced daily and affected every facet of life at home and in the communities. Words that came to mind when this topic was introduced included: 'corruption', 'crime', 'suffering', 'darkness', 'anxiety', 'frustration', etc. All communities were unanimous in decrying the devastation wrought by these power cuts and many mentioned how the constant power cuts damage their appliances through power surges, how their food gets spoiled, how people who are dependent on oxygen machines to live are affected and live in fear, how these cuts result in traffic chaos, how school children, workers, families, and households bear the brunt of the impact of these power cuts.

*F5: "For me when I think about load-shedding, I have somebody in the family, who uses oxygen, she has got a disease. She is supposed to use oxygen, so with the issue of electricity, she is suffering. Secondly, some of the children use laptops and they can't continue with schoolwork. I also think that food gets spoiled". (Umlazi FGD, KZN)*

*F8: You see this whole situation is hurtful because most people use machines. So when there is no electricity, it's not powerful enough to accommodate at the hospitals everyone who use machines. One might even end up dead because of load-shedding as the machine does not function and the generator is not powerful enough to produce enough electricity. So we get harmed, besides us, yes we do suffer but those people at the hospitals as they suffer more. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)*

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### **Why Eskom calls these power cuts load-shedding—seeing beyond the Public Relations (PR)**

The study revealed that people find the use of the term load-shedding a misleading PR euphemism meant to diminish the severity of the energy problem that the country is facing.

*M1: They wanted a name that will sound nice because if they call it power cut, it will anger people when electricity switches off all the time and they know how black people operate, they will take to the streets to demand answers. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

*F2: To add on what Mr [name redacted] is saying, the reason why they call it load shedding it's because the name sounds fancy, if they call it power cut we will go to the streets and burn tyres and they are aware that we know that the budget is there but they misuse municipality funds, and this is done by the people in high positions, they take the money for themselves. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

## Perceptions of the causes of the energy crisis

The conversations held showed that people share a common understanding and perception of what has led to the current energy crisis. Many of them expressed that mismanagement of funding and corruption were at the core of the problem. Other causes mentioned included: overpopulation and overcrowding resulting in an overburdened electricity grid; people not paying for electricity and illegally connecting to electricity (a phenomenon many referred to as 'bridging' or 'breaching' electricity; lack of maintenance of the existing power stations attributed to corruption and mismanagement, exporting of coal to other counties and selling of electricity to neighbouring countries at the expense of the `South African population. Some sentiments are shared below.

*Facilitator: Okay, from your own perspective, what causes rolling black-out or power cuts? In your own opinion, what causes power cuts and blackouts?*

*M8: Shortage of resources*

*UF: Cable theft.*

*UF: Too much of izinyoka-nyoka [cable thieves].*

*UF: I think that it's because they don't maintain the power stations.*

*Facilitator: They don't maintain the power stations. Okay, another one?*

*UF: The Government has finished the money.*

*Facilitator: The Government has spent all the money?*

*UF: Yes. (Kliptown FGD, KZN)*

One group interestingly saw corruption as both a cause and an effect of corruption. This was expressed as people using load-shedding as an opportunity to advance corruption.

*F3: To add to what [name redacted] has mentioned, load shedding problem is now being used as an excuse for eating people's money. This electricity crisis is increasing the level of corruption. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)*

*F4: It is true what [name redacted] is saying, .....These people are now using load shedding as an excuse of doing corruption. Electricity is a big problem in our lives, it was better when we didn't have it, we knew how to survive. (Georgetown FGD 5, KZN)*

Some sentiments shared centred around overpopulation, overcrowding and what some called 'a lack of influx control' which is a term that has apartheid connotations of controlling access to well-resourced urban areas for people of African descent. In this study, the views expressed were about seeing the arrival and presence of foreign nationals as creating and aggravating the problem of electricity shortage and therefore needed to be managed through 'influx control'. These sentiments reveal an often seen pattern of blaming foreign nationals for issues of service delivery, crime, jobs, drugs, etc.

*M2: I think load-shedding was brought upon by...During the time when the Whites were still ruling South Africa, there were several people who were using electricity with the influx [of*

*immigrants]. So all of these things have they contributed to the overuse of electricity. Then this is seconded by the incompetence of people who have occupied the positions. They couldn't see that now that people are going to increase, can't we build another station? I think that's where the problem is. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

*F8: Yes, it is overpopulation, influx control has contributed to not knowing how many people occupy the area. So, the delivery cannot be sustained. There are people who don't think. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

### **Impact the power cuts have on lives, livelihoods, service delivery, and community experiences**

The study affirmed the realities and sentiments of communities across the country. There was no aspect of life that the participants did not consider affected.

**Impact on family life-** children being unable to study or to prepare for school (bathing in cold water, being unable to iron their school uniforms); caregivers being unable to prepare meals and sometimes having to either dig into their meagre funds for fast-food or ready food (as simple as bread and 'sugar-water') and sometimes being forced to discard half-cooked 'pap' due to an untimely power-cut; having to use other sources of energy such as gas (very expensive), paraffin stoves, coal, and wood fires indoors and outside, etc. Most of the burden for being resourceful and making things work, seems to fall disproportionately on women and sometimes children as they were most often reported to be the ones who had to go to nearby bushes and other unsafe places to gather firewood.

#### **Impact on personal finances**

Some participants shared their challenges about the impact of load-shedding on their financial situations. Many said they were forced to make difficult decisions about what they could or could not afford.

*UF: It has affected me a lot because I am unemployed, and I can't afford paraffin or gas. (Kliptown FGD, GP)*

*F: As communities and as families you are now using these methods that you have mentioned, you make fire, use gas, paraffin, prima stove and life goes on. The only problem is that these things are very expensive.*

*M4: We are faced with high level of unemployment in our country, we come back from work dinner is not ready now you have to spend extra money on take aways that you did not budget for and yet cost of living is so high... (Clermont FDG, KZN)*

#### **Damage to appliances and food getting spoiled**

Every group had a story to tell about how the constant power cuts have resulted in damage to their appliances such as fridges and TVs. The load-shedding also resulted in them having to throw out food that had gotten spoiled. These were heavy loads to bear, especially in contexts where they were already struggling to make ends meet due to being unemployed and also due to the high cost of living.

*F4: I also wanted to say the same thing that there are a lot of houses which have been damaged because when electricity comes back, everything [appliances] get damaged. Another thing is that there are a lot of people who pay for electricity, we all suffer, whether you pay or not. Imagine paying for something which you are never going to use, it's very difficult. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)*

### **Impact on crime**

Across all groups, participants shared that power-cuts, especially at night aggravated the crime situation and left many people anxious and afraid. One participant referred to break-ins/ house robberies as 'looting in homes and not at shops. The elderly felt that they were at higher risk of home invasions during load-shedding. The ensuing darkness was seen as an opportunity for criminals to rob, maim and murder victims on their way to and from home.

*F3: This load shedding is exposing us to criminals, when it's dark they get a chance to cut cables, while you are waiting for the municipality to replace the cables by the time the cables are replaced many things are already destroyed. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

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*M9: On the other hand, he has talked about crime, so crime also increases because there is an opportunity. They use electricity to operate and when it's not there, immediately when it's dark, they group themselves and rob you and take people's belongings. (FGD 1, GP)*

*F3: The crime level has increased drastically. (Georgetown FDG, KZN)*

*F2: And looting, these days they don't loot at the shops they loot in our houses (Georgetown FDG, KZN)*

### **Impact on livelihoods and the economy**

The study communities recognised and decried the impact of these power cuts on their livelihoods and on the economy in general. Parents talked about how their employed children were struggling due to only being paid for hours worked and not being compensated for load-shedding. Some also shared their own personal stories of how load-shedding is destroying their economic endeavours.

*UF: It affects us because we get retrenched from work and the country... there is not so much work as much as before, we are facing retrenchment because of load-shedding and the working hours are not the same as before. (Kliptown FGD, GP)*

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*F4: I feel sad for the young people that are working less hours because they are not paid for the hours not worked, they struggle to make ends meet, because of this load-shedding.*

*F1: You end up subsidising them with transport money because they are getting less salaries. (Umlazi FGD, KZN)*

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*M10: I stay in Newlands and I have a poultry business there, I bought 60 chickens the other day and the electricity was switched off in the evening. When I woke up the next morning, I found 30*

*of them dead because there was no electricity, and they need electricity to survive. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

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*Facilitator: How have the rolling blackouts affected your livelihood or small businesses or work?*

*UF: For work, you get off before 8 hours.*

*UF And when you run a small business, you don't make much profit as you did before.*

*UF: And some businesses have stopped functioning as before or get less customers.*

*IV: Why do they get less customers?*

*M8: Because production gets disrupted. (Kliptown FGD, GP)*

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*Facilitator: How does load shedding affect service delivery?*

*F3: If I sell scones and fat cakes I need to get up early in the morning and make them so that by the time people go work they are ready, but I can't because of load shedding and on top of that I am the breadwinner in my family. (Clermont FDG, KZN.)*

### **Impact on service delivery**

Many participants mentioned that power cuts affected their access to and use of essential public services. These included local health facilities, water, Home Affairs, social services, etc. This resulted in frustrations and delays and sometimes these were life-and-death situations.

*M6: Here in Lindelani load shedding has affected us a lot, we have water crisis now we feel that they are using load shedding as an excuse for not giving us water. Local clinics close during load shedding and the crime rate has also increased. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

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*M9:.....if there is someone who is sick and you want to phone the hospital and they tell you that load-shedding, nothing works..... It does a lot of damage because other people use Oxygen and some of them are rechargeable. Most of elderly people lose their lives because they use oxygen tanks, and such things and network does not function. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

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*Facilitator: I think we have touched on that a bit, but I would like to check; when there is load-shedding, does the service delivery get affected? I want you to tell me more if service delivery gets affected when there is load-shedding and how, what's happening? I know you have touched on some of the things, but I just need that emphasis on it. M6, what do you think? Does load-shedding affect service delivery?*

*M6: It does affect service delivery. You go to the offices, and they tell you that the machines are not working. You must stand there for three hours. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

*M2: Yes, the service delivery does not work because even if you go and open a case at the police station, they tell you that there is no electricity, and you are supposed to come back when it's back. (Meadowlands FGD , GP)*

*Facilitator: How does load shedding affect service delivery?*

*M1: Government and Municipality employees they enjoy this load shedding and it's an advantage to them. Even when electricity is back they will tell you that they are still off line or they are network has been disturbed by load shedding (Durban-Kwa-Muhle FDG, KZN)*

### **Coping without electricity at home and in the community**

The study communities expressed that they found it extremely hard, demoralising, depressing, and inconvenient to live with the daily reality of power cuts, yet they had little choice, but to keep going. Many participants shared that they have had to resort to energy sources that they had used in the past, long before electricity was part of their lives at home. These sources include paraffin stoves (primus stoves), firewood, and coal. Gas was mentioned by others but was collectively seen as very expensive and forcing families to dig deep into pockets that were already empty. Many shared that they were unemployed or struggling to make ends meet and the electricity crisis exacerbated their poor circumstances.

### **Coping by going back to past energy sources**

*F5: For most of us, it's like we have gone back to the life we used to live before having electricity before it was introduced. We used paraffin, and primus stove to cook and those who have stoves use coal to cook. And that is not genuine coal, it coal also destroys our stoves, so we resort to using wood. We dry wood up to cook or use gas and gas is also expensive, it does not last. You fill up the bottle today and it's finished within three days' time. (Georgetown FGD, KZN)*

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*F1: When there's no electricity we go to the bushes and get wood to make fire so that we can be able to cook for our kids, because they come back from school, they are already hungry. (Umlazi FGD 2, KZN)*

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*M2: My brother they have said the mouthful, our pockets are not the same, someone might be able to afford to buy gas and I can't. I must wait for people to bring me wood, wait for the electricity that switches off all the time, it ok there is nothing that I can do.*

*F1: Seconded (Umlazi FGD, KZN)*

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*F2: I bought Sikeni stove (small gas stove). (Clermont FGD, KZN)*

### **The emotional and mental toll of electricity cuts**

The question of coping with power cuts revealed the deep emotional and mental toll that the continuous lack of electricity has on many. One participant summed his experience as follows:

*M2: I would say that I am not coping, when there is no electricity, the mind does not function. When there is no electricity, people in kasi become anxious, asking themselves when it will come back. It's emotional, mental and it has damaged me. So, my focus remains on the electricity, not other things. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

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*Facilitator: Could we please speak up. So how do you cope when there is no electricity for a long period of time?*

*F2: Yoh, we go mad. We can't cope, if we can't cope for 30 minutes, 7 days is too much.*

*F5: What stresses us the most is the kids, when you have kids who are studying, and say the parent is not working, there is no income, you are just waiting for the grant money. You don't have money for paraffin or candles. What will you do with the child in the morning? You see. (Kliptown FGD, KZN)*

The depth of the mental toll of these cuts on communities was further supported by sentiments around what it would mean to have an uninterrupted electricity supply.

*Facilitator: What does it mean to you to have uninterrupted electricity?*

*M4: Peace of mind, kids will be able to study comfortably, there will be enough food at home and we will be safe.*

*M6: I second what my brother has just said, we will have peace of mind, I won't have to worry when I am not at home, my family will be having food and they will be safe.*

*M2: Peace of mind*

*M9: Peace of mind, some people cannot study when other people are talking, they must wait for them to sleep. What if the electricity switches off at that time, you must now use candles and sometimes you dose off and the candle will fall and burn your house. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

## **What people are doing to try and alleviate the problem**

When a question was posed about what their family and/or community were doing to solve the problem of power cuts, many participants were simply despondent, frustrated, and angry at the government and senior officials for failing them and not caring about their plight. There were perceptions and sentiments expressed of these power cuts only affecting them and suburbs and places where ministers and other powerful people resided being exempt or shielded by money which afforded them access to generators and solar systems. Some participants shared that they have resorted to service delivery protests, including burning tyres and barricading streets.

*UM: We have tried to protest, barricaded the streets, burn the buses. We are supposed to go to Eskom and burn buses in front of their offices because when we block the streets, some people are going to work so if we are going to burn, we need to do that straight in Eskom offices, burn the tires their entrance so that they can feel what we are feeling. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*



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In some instances, members were left feeling despondent and “doing nothing”.

*F3: I don't think there's anything that we can do in our community to help ourselves.*

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*Facilitator: Fleurhof, what has your community, or your family done to cope with load-shedding or power cuts?*

*UM: Honestly speaking, I won't say that we have done this or that but we have tried barricading the streets, called them but still, they wouldn't listen to us. But for my community, nothing. (Meadowlands FGD, GP)*

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*NM: What do you think Government and the country can do to move towards a constant supply of electricity and the future without load shedding?*

*M3: Let us keep on talking and implement action. Let's go out there and voice our voices outdoor and close import routes that brings money in South Africa, the harbour and we also go to Richards Bay, by doing that they will see that we are serious. It is better to talk about GBV then talking about this. (Durban Kwa-Muhle FDG, KZN)*

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*Facilitator: Thank you, let us move. What has your family and or your community done to solve the problem of power cuts? As a community, what have we done?*

*F5: Okay, we did that, we blocked the streets, mobilised the taxi drivers to support us and the traffic cops to help us. The traffic cops actually supported us to go to Eskom. We also contacted a TV programme, this one on 405, what is it called, The News? They are the only ones who listened. They highlighted it and once it was highlighted, there was interest to come and see what is happening and they were shocked to find out that there was a community that didn't have electricity for three years. So those efforts paid off. (Mofolo FDG, GP)*

One individual shared how he and his family had clubbed together to create a ‘stokvel’ to buy each other gas stoves.

*M1: My brothers and I, together with our wives have a stokvel- every two months we buy one family a gas cylinder and a stove, that is what's helping us to survive, but I don't lend my neighbours my stove. (Kliptown FGD, GP)*

### **Why do people steal or not pay for electricity?**

When asked why people steal or do not pay electricity, participants cited financial hardships and high electricity costs as reasons. Many people acknowledged that ‘bridging’ or slowing down the meter were common occurrences in their communities. Some participants mentioned that this is wrongdoing however they would not report the people who are

stealing as they are unemployed and deserve access to free electricity which government should provide.

*Facilitator: All right, so the problem is with the squatter campers?*

*UF: And it's those people who bridge electricity who are using the most of it.*

*F5: As F6 said, they are the ones who... obviously when you work with electricity, you would know how electricity works. And you would buy units for R100.00, which gives you more units. But I buy it with the same amount and get less units. So if electricity units are equalized, it would reduce load-shedding. (Kliptown FGD, GP).*

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*M3: If the problem is money and electricity is expensive, they must reduce the number of the members of the parliament and take that money and contribute it towards electricity. (Claremont FGD, KZN)*

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*Facilitator: What causes power cuts?*

*M2: Firstly, it is caused by illegal connections, I'm one of them at home we have two meter boxes. One that is legal, and we load electricity on it and second one we don't. I wish they can identify those who are not paying.*

*M3: I don't think that would be fair because people are not working and government should provide them with electricity, especially black people. The reason why they connect electricity illegally it's because they can't afford it's too expensive. There are things that government is suppose give to people for free like water and electricity. (Durban FGD, KZN)*

## **Views on how the government should be addressing the energy crisis**

Across the groups, the proposals centred on assisting households to become energy 'self-sufficient', fixing Eskom, building new power stations, and securing the country's existing power supply.

### **Government should assist households.**

The views shared were that the government should provide solar panels or subsidise households to get solar panels and thus alleviate the pressure on the grid.

*M3: ...The reason why they connect electricity illegally it's because they can't afford it's too expensive. There are things that government is suppose give to people for free like water and electricity. (Durban Kwa FDG, Gauteng)*

*Facilitator: Okay, let's continue. The next questions says; what do you think the Government and the country can do to move towards a consistent supply of electricity and a future without load-shedding?*

*M5: If they could try and contribute solar for us. (MohlakengFDG, GP)*

### **Government should fix Eskom**

Many agreed that the power utility needed a turn-around, but not many believed that this was even possible. The extent of people's perceptions and experiences was that corruption and greed rendered this an "unfixable" problem. There were very strong sentiments of distrusting the government and its motives, with many expressing that the government did not care about them and that only those with money could solve their own energy problems.

*Facilitator: Okay, let us move on, now what do you think should be done to solve this problem? How do you think we can work together as a community and the nation to help address the energy problem?*

*M4: ...I am not saying that we shouldn't pay if they can afford, but the reality is electricity is a human right and for us to be able to hold the Government accountable ...They are people who are in charge, they were appointed by us as the community, and they have been voted in by us the people, to serve us, not the other way around. So, we need to make sure that we keep them accountable, even if it means we block the streets. Of course, violence is not the way, we cannot throw stones at cars, but maybe a peaceful protest. (FDG 7, GP)*

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*Facilitator: Okay, let's continue. The next question says, what do you think the Government and the country can do to move towards a consistent supply of electricity and a future without load-shedding?*

*M5: ...If a generator gets damaged, they just leave it as it is and use another one. So those which are damaged are left like that. So, we will have load-shedding until they hire the correct people, and they should stop stealing money for their own pockets. It doesn't mean that the Government does not have money, there is money, if a person can steal R154 Million and buy a car worth R10 Million and properties, with whose money? That money is supposed to go to Eskom to be able to fix everything. The president is sitting with dollars at his farms, do you understand? Whereas they should have contributed to Eskom, if they could stop stealing money, everything would go according to plan, and they put people who are not corrupt instead of putting those who are corrupt. (Mohlakeng FGD, GP)*

### **Eskom should invest in the maintenance of the existing power stations**

Participants raised the issue that a big part of the problem was the lack of maintenance of power stations. This was attributed to mismanagement and corruption and the use of cheap coal to produce energy.

*F: How is the electricity produced? Let us move on with the questions. What is the main cause of load shedding?*

*M3: Politics and corruption are the main cause of loadshedding, they are using fake coal lately and those fake coals destroys the power stations. (Clermont FDG, KZN)*

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*Facilitator: Okay, let's continue. The next questions says, what do you think the Government and the country can do to move towards a consistent supply of electricity and a future without load-shedding?*

*M5: Eskom should hire people who are competent in doing their jobs because I have heard that Eskom has different departments, there are generators. If a generator gets damaged, they just leave it as it is and use another one. So those which are damaged are left like that. So, we will have load-shedding until they hire the correct people and they should stop stealing money for their pockets. (Mohlakeng FDG, Gauteng)*

### ***The country should secure its own energy instead of selling to other countries***

Participants raised their concerns about what they had heard or were aware of. One of the key concerns was about 'selling coal to the USA and other countries' and 'supplying electricity to the neighbouring countries. This was seen as compromising the domestic supply and aggravating the energy situation. There was also mention of selling "good quality coal" at the expense of the domestic need and thus the country was left with "inferior" coal.

*Facilitator: Ok, What can the Government or the country do for us to have uninterrupted electricity supply in the future?*

*M6: Firstly, we must stop supplying USA with coal, until such time that things have stabilise in our country. We must also stop supplying the neighbouring countries with electricity.*

*M11: Eskom management needs to be disciplined. The problem lies with us, even if we can stop supplying electricity to other countries that won't solve our load shedding problem we do not service our power stations and they break all the time. (Inanda FGD, KZN)*

### ***New energy players/ power stations need to come on board***

A perception shared was that because Eskom had no competitor, it has no incentive to perform. New power stations and new forms of energy including solar need to come into the picture.

*Facilitator: What do you think should be done to solve this problem, how do you think we can work together as a community and the nation to help address this energy crisis?*

*F3: Build new power stations (Durban FDG, KZN)*

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*IV: Okay, our next question says; are you aware of any plans by the Government to solve the current energy crisis?*

*M3: I have heard that other countries want to come and invest and help with electricity. Like China wants to come. (Mohlakeng FDG, Gauteng)*

### **What more they desired to learn more about in the energy sector**

When asked what they wanted to learn about, participants said the following:

- Desire to learn about how to get into the sector as independent power suppliers.
- How to use electricity safely and efficiently.
- How to save electricity.

Participants mentioned the approaches below as vehicles for learning:

- 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.
- Social media.

*Facilitator: If you want to learn about the electricity crisis, what form of content or ways of educating and empowering yourself and the community will be the most appealing to you?*

*M1: Content that is user-friendly that is in my language.*

*M2: Conversations like this (Durban FDG, GP)*

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*Facilitator: Okay, now the last question, if you were to learn more about the energy or electricity crisis, what form of content or ways of educating and empowering yourself and your community would be the most appealing to you.*

*M7: ...I think social media is the best way to put the message across, everybody is on Social Media, that's the best way to get it (FDG 7, GP)*

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*Facilitator: Okay, so the following question says; if you were to learn more about the energy or electricity crisis, what form of content or way of educating or empowering yourself and your community would be most appealing to you?*

*F2: Maybe if they could create learnerships and internships teaching us about the energy crisis.*

*M5: The community projects, like our elders, should be educated about energy.*

*M5: Have sessions like this one.*

*M5: Yes, they should also participate, not just us the youth because most of the elderlies are the ones helping us. (Mohlakeng FDG, Gauteng)*

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*Facilitator: If you were to learn more about electricity what form of content will be more appealing and relevant to empower you?*

*M4: Collages must teach people practical skills*

*F1: People who have skills must get funding and teach communities skills and councillors must support that initiative.*

## Conclusions

This study provided a glimpse into the realities of how the ongoing electricity power cuts impact every facet of people's lives in the country. Many participants are frustrated by the power cuts which interrupt their daily lives. The loadshedding or power cuts affect personal and family lives, service delivery and health, appliances and homes, livelihoods, and finances. Many shared how they are forced to spend additional resources on other energy sources such as gas stoves, paraffin stoves, wood, and other sources to prepare food and to keep warm. Others also mentioned the high cost of takeaway meals. Other threats of the crisis are on their job security as people lose jobs through retrenchment as businesses and employers struggle to maintain production and business and keep staff because of the constant power cuts.

When it comes to coping with the situation or attempting to alleviate the impact, many participants shared how they have had to adapt their lives to using wood, paraffin stoves and other survival strategies to better cope with the power cuts/ loadshedding that happen unexpectedly, sometimes uncommunicated, and for days and weeks on end in some cases. The study revealed the deep-seated mistrust of government and faith to address the crisis. Many of the participants are aware of government plans with other stakeholders to address the energy crisis, however, they state that corruption and the continued mismanagement of resources in government and partnering stakeholders is hindering any real change from happening or reaching people at grassroots levels. Some participants are willing to shift or transition into renewable and alternative sources of energy, but the picture is quite unclear as the infrastructure is expensive and Eskom is already in debt while the government still struggles to save them.

In conclusion, the study provided important insights into how communities were experiencing and coping with the energy crisis. The next two phases of the study will explore how communities understand and perceive government initiatives to address the crisis.