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The impact of globalisation on environmental politics in South Africa, 1990 - 2002

Introduction

Until 1990 South Africa had a strong, vibrant civil society mobilised around resistance to apartheid. With the expectation of democratisation, the hitherto embryonic environmental movement gained confidence and gathered expertise. That provided the impetus for a broad, deep and inter-sectoral participation in environmental policy making, which by 1998 produced new legislation.

Subsequently key civil society activists were drawn into the post-apartheid state, and without the democratic movement having a coherent strategic plan to maintain grassroots structures, civil society was decimated. Despite progressive environmental policies there has been little effective implementation. Furthermore in adopting neo-liberal policies the post-apartheid state has increasingly left the allocation of resources to the market and eroded the tradition of mass political participation.

However, increasing globalisation is partly offsetting some of these negative trends. A global civil society is emerging around, for example, HIV/ AIDS, trade, genetic modification, privatisation, deregulation, jobs, and third world debt. These networks are helping to regalanise environmental and developmental movements in contemporary South Africa. The opportunity provided by the hosting of Rio +10, the World Summit for Sustainable Development, and the parallel civil society summit due to take place in Johannesburg in 2002, may be giving further impetus to this process.

1. Environmentalism and the environmental movement in South Africa

This paper follows Mittelman's conceptualisation of the environment as 'a political space, a critical venue where civil society is voicing its concerns' (1998:848). Collective action in the name of environmentalism in South Africa is extremely diverse and reflects the social divisions of class, race, ideology, geographic location and gender. These diverse forms never constituted a social movement in the sense of a co-ordinated formal alliance that is mass based and has a shared vision and set of objectives. Neither was there an environmental movement in South Africa in the sense that Giddens regards a social movement as a 'collective attempt to further a common interest or secure a common goal, through collective action outside of the sphere of established institutions'

(Giddens, 1994:24). Nor did collective action constitute a social movement as 'a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity' (Scott, 1990:6). However in the period under review there has emerged an informal partial, fragmented network of environmental initiatives of diverse social composition and with inchoate ideologies of varying shades of 'green' and 'brown'. In combination, their multiple voices involve what Castells has called 'a creative cacophony' (1997:69).

This 'cacophony' reflects how in South Africa since 1990 there has been a reconfiguration of the discourse on environmentalism. Prior to the nineties, the dominant understanding of environmental issues in South Africa was an authoritarian conservation perspective. This focused exclusively on the preservation of presumed 'wilderness areas' which often involved the removal and social dislocation of indigenous people, and the protection of threatened species of plants and animals and neglected human needs. The legacy of this perspective is that many South Africans view environmental issues with suspicion as 'white, middle class issues'. Farieda Khan has pointed to 'the negative, environmental perceptions and attitudes of many black people, ranging from apathy to hostility' (1990:37) seeing it as 'peripheral to their struggle for survival' (1999:1).

Only from the 1990s has an alternative environmentalism begun to emerge. This perspective views environmental issues as deeply political in the sense that they are embedded in access to power and resources in society. It is critical of the earlier victim-blaming approach and insists on the need for development to overcome poverty. It draws on the ideologies of 'environmental justice' and of green politics to emphasise the importance of linking the struggle against social injustice and the exploitation of people with the struggle against the abuse of the environment. It links urban or 'brown' issues in a more holistic environmental perspective. This alternative environmentalism has not only emerged in the South. Writing of environmentalism in the North, Castells points out that 'since the 1960s environmentalism has not been solely concerned with watching birds, saving forests and cleaning the air. Campaigns against toxic waste dumping, consumer rights, anti-nuclear protests ... and a number of other issues have merged with the defense of nature to root the movement in a wide landscape of rights and claims' (1997:132).

Environmentalism in South Africa has followed a similar trajectory. The emergence of this alternative perspective was due to a number of overlapping factors in the early 1990s. The unbanning of political movements and the prospect of a new democracy unleashed huge creative potential from within civil society. The return of many exiles infused local environmental and land reform initiatives with stronger linkages with the unbanned political movements and with global trends from which local initiatives had long been isolated. The possibility of consigning apartheid to the landfill of history meant that

anti-apartheid fora could begin to address the implementation of a broad human rights culture which included environmental rights (Sachs, 1990).

In the 'cultural effervescence' which marked the period of South Africa's transition to democracy, 'rainbow alliances' between trade unionists, poverty activists and environmentalists emerged around a number of key environmental issues including the importation and disposal of toxic waste, air and water pollution, the adverse impacts of mining on the environment and human health, and the crying demands for land restitution and redistribution. Mainstream newspapers and the South African Broadcasting Company began to cover environmental issues more thoroughly, whilst from the new environmental initiatives emerged a lively journal called *New Ground* published by the Environmental and Development Agency.

At this time in South Africa – and globally – a core vision emerged which cohered around the of comprehensive banner of 'environmental justice'. Castells maintains that the concept of environmental justice as 'an all-encompassing notion that affirms the use value of life, of all forms of life, against the interest of wealth, power and technology, is gradually capturing minds and policies' (1997:132). In South Africa it focuses on poverty as a fundamental cause of environmental degradation.

Widespread poverty and inequality is the legacy of 300 years of colonialism. Apartheid, as the final wave of successive colonial segregationist and land-grabbing policies, had, in separating people from their land and concentrating them in marginally productive 'homelands', impoverished the rural millions and created a major ecological crisis. This was further exacerbated by attempts to prevent urban migration, and to treat black people in cities as 'temporary sojourners'. The logic of the apartheid ideology therefore justified the dormitory nature of urban townships, locating them close to the most polluted industrial areas and failing to provide them with safe energy, water and green spaces. Apartheid spatial planning led to environmentally unsustainable cities, with glaring disparities in the allocation of municipal resources, disturbingly inefficient transportation systems, and urban insecurity on a massive scale. Rural environmental injustices included the exposure of residents of former asbestos mining towns to asbestos residues (Felix, 1991:33-43) and the location of a national nuclear waste disposal site within 24 km of villages in the Leliefontein 'coloured' reserve in Namaqualand after ruling out areas within 50 km of 'white' municipalities in the same district (see Fig, 1991).

The notion of redressing environmental injustices achieved an organisational form in the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF) which was founded after an international conference hosted in Pietermaritzburg in 1992 by Earthlife Africa, a voluntary organisation of environmental activists which had been founded three years previously. Earthlife had, in a short time, established a number of branches in South Africa, Namibia and Uganda, with a

significant presence in the universities. It spearheaded protests and campaigns on issues such as toxic waste and the nuclear industry. In particular it had led the movement against the importation of mercury waste by a British company, Thor Chemicals in the Natal Midlands, which had led to the deaths and poisoning of a number of workers and nearby residents (Butler, 1997:194-213). It also took a lead against the location of hazardous waste landfills in residential areas in Gauteng (Margolis and Chloorkop). By 1992 it had crafted links with other NGOs, trade unions, and civics (township residents' associations) and hence the proposal to establish EJNF was met with great enthusiasm. Within a five-year period, the EJNF had developed a significant national and provincial presence, with over 550 affiliates around South Africa.

EJNF articulated its commitment to working with the poor and the marginalised in a broad project of transformation. In its statement it projected its adherence to the new paradigm of environmentalism:

Environmental Justice is about social transformation directed towards meeting basic human needs and enhancing our quality of life – economic quality, health care, housing, human rights, environmental protection and democracy. In linking environmental and social justice issues the environmental justice approach seeks to challenge the abuse of power which results in poor people having to suffer the effects of environmental damage caused by the greed of others. (*Environmental Networker*, various issues).

Environmental justice in South Africa thus extends far beyond protesting the inequitable distribution of pollution. It also included an emphasis on access to basic resources such as land and water and the participation of communities in decision making (Macdonald, in press).

EJNF played an important role in the War on Poverty Campaign launched in 1997 by the South African Coalition of NGOs. It co-ordinated a special national hearing on poverty and the environment in 1998 (Butler and Hallows, 1994.)

During this phase, the EJNF was not the only environmental initiative to emerge in civil society. Apart from this coalition, broadly six types of (sometimes overlapping) initiatives developed:

(i) *A new wave of metropolitan environmental NGOs*

Attracting donor finance, these groups were formed and staffed by environmental professionals and political activists, taking on projects generally aimed at poverty alleviation or redressing past injustices. Based in the larger cities, these organisations had strong links with local campaigns and also engaged with government in policy-related processes.

(ii) *Residentially based local campaigns*

Usually based on activists within grassroots citizens, residents or youth groups, these coalesced around the resolution of particular environmental problems or

activities. A large range of these campaigns emerged, both in affluent and non-affluent communities. These relied on local voluntary support and occasionally, corporate or other sponsorship for their existence.

(iii) *Single issue campaigns*

These campaigns ranged from resistance to the siting of hazardous waste landfills, incinerators or nuclear facilities in specific areas, the combating of urban industrial and mining pollution, and the mining of conservation areas. Often these campaigns received support from established NGOs, public interest law firms, and coalitions.

(iv) *Professional consultancies*

This period saw the steep rise of a wide number of firms, often small or medium sized, to address the growing need for professional environmental services, particularly in the fields such as public participation, the management of environmental impact assessment processes, and development facilitation. On occasion, the government hired NGOs to act as consultants to particular processes.

(v) *Environmental education*

A major expansion in the field of environmental education occurred at primary, secondary and tertiary level with schools taking on numerous projects, and universities and technikons beginning to extend and consolidate their environmental courses. Initiatives at Howick (the environmental education network centre for SADC hosted by the Wildlife & Environment Society) and Rhodes (degrees and diplomas in environmental education) helped build an educational network across the region.

(vi) *Inter-sectoral initiatives*

There were attempts to forge links between environmental issues and the workplace, which witnessed collaboration between elements of the progressive trade union movement and environmental activists. These initiatives addressed issues such as the poisoning of workers by mercury at Thor Chemicals, and a complex of diseases – mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer – resulting from asbestos mining.

These environmental initiatives which emerged in the mid-1990s were a reflection of the political diversity of South African society. The traditional preservationist organisations, privileged under apartheid, had now to concede that they were not the only roleplayers.

All the key informants interviewed for this paper emphasised the fragmented nature of environmental initiatives in South Africa. Some emphasised how environmental politics reflected a complex interplay with the politics of

race, class and gender. According to one informant, 'What really hampers the movement in South Africa is that there is still that old divide and rule perspective, black and white, and when you do a thorough study you find that whites are only talking of animal conservation but people's environmental issues are quite different. It's more about poverty alleviation and job creation' (Interview with Mandla Mentoor, August 2001). On the other hand, there have been numerous initiatives that transcend racial lines, particularly in the work of the EJNF and specific campaigns, for example around the impacts of mining on community health, in which grassroots community organisations have forged linkages with public interest law firms, environmental NGOS, medical and other specialists. Alliances have also occurred with respect to nuclear issues, community-based natural resource management, urban greening, and numerous other questions.

Perceptions of the differences within environmental initiatives vary. Another informant stressed the division between grassroots and professional environmental organisations. In his view this amounted to a rich diversity which involves covering all the key environmental issues: 'In the case of a scientifically based organisation like the Endangered Wildlife Trust, we can see to it that the Brenton Blue butterfly doesn't become extinct because of some developer. We can advocate for biodiversity conservation based on our scientific knowledge of endangered species. At the same time the grassroots organisations are lobbying for better quality of life, better standards of sanitation and water supply and all of that is good for the environment as well so there's much less pollution going into rivers. So really, the environment movement, because of its diversity in South Africa, is managing to cover all bases and in that we are very strong' (Interview with John Ledger, director of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, August, 2001).

However all informants agreed that the environmental organisations had achieved a great deal, particularly in terms of creating greater environmental awareness and in terms of policy formulation.

2. Public participation in environmental policy formulation

The power of these environmental initiatives 'peaked' between 1990 and 1994 and was evident in the strong participation of civil society in CONNEPP, the Consultative National Environmental Policy Process. Public participation represented a strong contrast to the apartheid years when policy was formulated by a small homogeneous group largely to serve white minority interests.

CONNEPP arose out of work that had been done in terms of a process known as the Environmental Mission, which occurred during 1993. Funded with Canadian government support, the Mission consisted of a team of South Africans joined by a number of international environmental experts largely from developing countries. The Mission was aimed at supporting the ANC-COSATU-SANCO-SACP coalition on the eve of its coming to power,

by taking evidence around the country on environmental problems, and proposing policy solutions which the incoming government could consider (Whyte, 1995). The Mission report was formally presented to President Mandela, but no further action was taken. Eventually the remaining South African members of the Mission, with Canadian and Danish financial support, persuaded the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism to sponsor a participatory process to involve citizens across the country in the formulation of a new post-apartheid environmental policy.

CONNEPP was launched at a conference involving over 500 representatives of all tiers of government, business, labour, NGOs, civics, traditional leaders, youth and women's organisations. It went on to hold a series of sectoral and provincial conferences, to produce discussion documents that were widely disseminated in a number of official languages, to invite suggestions for a Green Paper, invite further comments on it, and hold a smaller 200-person report-back conference. The process, although highly contested between business and other sectors, was perhaps one of the most thorough and inclusive processes since the formulation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in the early 1990s. It resulted in the formulation of a White Paper, which subsequently took legislative form in the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), No 107 of 1998 (Fig, 2000).

The principle of community involvement was incorporated into NEMA. One of the key objectives of the Act was co-operative governance, aimed at extending environmental management to sectors and groups in civil society. The Act marked a significant shift away from traditional environmental management by giving those affected by environmental degradation opportunities for redress through mechanisms for conflict resolution, fair decision-making, the protection of those reporting on environmental transgressions and recognition of people's right to refuse to work in harmful environments. NEMA thus enshrined important new environmental principles, including that the polluter should pay for any damages; that whistle-blowing by members of the public would receive legal *locus standi*; that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism was to act as the 'lead agency' in national environmental matters.

But NEMA was by no means the only instrument for better environmental management. Environmental rights had been incorporated into the Bill of Rights in South Africa's 1996 Constitution. The National Water Act of 1998 represented a significant attempt to redress inequitable access to water. It was estimated that 12-14 million South Africans had no access to clean water and 20 million with no access to 'sanitation'. The Act abolished riparian rights, placed ownership of water firmly in the hands of the state and introduced principles of environmental justice in water management by establishing water reserves dedicated to meeting the basic needs of people (*Reconstruct*, 10 October 1999).

By 1998, therefore, some good environmental policies had therefore been achieved, with considerable buy-in from a wide range of citizens and civil society organisations.

3. Participation reversed

However, since 1998 there has been widespread concern about the lack of implementation, specifically that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has failed to give substance to the inclusion of communities in environmental management. One of the key institutions created by the act was a National Environmental Advisory Forum (NEAF) – a stakeholder structure appointed by the minister to advise on matters of environmental management and governance. Not only was the NEAF a victory for the broadening of participation in environmental governance, but it reflected the multi-sectoral bargaining which took place in the development of the policy through CONNEPP. Furthermore, it replaced the structure detested by the NGOs and CBOs, the Council for the Environment, an advisory structure enshrined in previous apartheid legislation and which was staffed almost entirely by conservative white males mostly associated with the former apartheid regime. The Council had been the subject of a committee of enquiry chaired by Rupert Lorimer in 1994, which recommended its replacement with a more representative body. Three years after parliament approved NEMA, the more representative National Environmental Advisory Forum has yet to be appointed.

Furthermore, the current Minister Mohamed Valli Moosa and his Director-General Dr Crispian Olver have already commissioned a thorough review of NEMA. Unlike the inclusive CONNEPP process, the review is happening behind closed doors and without any cognisance of the participatory spirit of the Act nor the policy making culture from which it emerged and which it tries to promote. The review is said to be revisiting the important principles enshrined in the Act, as well as departing from the ‘framework’ nature of the Act by adding substantive chapters on biodiversity, coastal zone management and pollution control. Normally these substantive issues would merit their own legislation, and have themselves been subject to participatory processes leading to green and white papers. It is quite unclear how these issues will be incorporated into the Act, whether the legal drafts will respect the participatory processes, and whether the participatory structures like NEAF will be retained.

Many development projects are being undertaken in direct contravention of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations. An example is the construction of environmentally damaging infrastructure such as a road to the port area of the Coega Project in the Eastern Cape before the completion of the EIA. This is being opposed by an NGO coalition which argues that the Coega development represents a major test of the post-apartheid state’s commitment to NEMA and the regulations governing development projects (Rogers, 2001).

This lack of implementation of the participatory clauses of NEMA and the spirit of CONNEPP and the act reflect a weakness in state capacity, a lack of political will, the enhanced influence of the private sector over the state, and the demobilisation of popular sectors in civil society.

According to one informant, these policies are 'really poetry more than anything else. There are no targets or objectives. The Department of Environment and Tourism itself is a complete shambles' (Interview with key informant 5, August 2001).

4. The demobilisation of civil society

Despite the euphoria of attaining a democratic system of government without descent into civil war, there had nevertheless been a widespread demobilisation of civil society in the years immediately after 1994. Many key activists in environmental initiatives moved into government, academia and highly-paid consultancies. Networks such as the EJNF grew too quickly and without the depth to ensure consolidation at the centre or in some of the more vulnerable provinces. Strong grassroots environmental networks in, for example, the rural Northern Province, which had been active during CONNEPP, did not survive the turn of the millennium. Civic structures, and their national movement SANCO, were further weakened, especially after many officials entered local government. This seriously impaired managerial capacity in many environmental organisations.

According to one informant, many environmental activists retreated into privatised concerns. They 'decided to have children and buy houses. They got all cynical' (Interview with key informant 3, August 2001). In addition, many former activists who had worked voluntarily, subsequently utilised their expertise to transform themselves into highly-paid consultants. 'The spirit of voluntarism seems to have disappeared'. (Interview with key informant 3, August 2001).

Many informants emphasised the lack of capacity in the environmental movement and the absence of any congruence between ideology and practice. 'We have increasingly got people who want the best car and their personal lifestyles are not mirroring what they say their beliefs are' (Interview with key informant 3, August 2001).

There is also a problem of political opportunism. In the changed political environment, according to one informant, some individuals used environmental issues 'as a stepping stone into power politics ... They wanted to get money from donors to fund personal agendas' (Interview with key informant 3, August 2001).

When the Government of National Unity took power in 1994, the Environmental portfolio had been allocated to the former ruling National Party and not the ANC. This delayed transformation at the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Personnel had also to be found for the nine new provincial

environmental departments, absorbing scarce capacity from civil society at the periphery. The ANC itself had not developed strong plans to deploy capacitated individuals to the environmental sector, nor were those MPs appointed to the parliamentary portfolio committee on environment at all experienced in the issues over which they enjoyed decision making power. The deficit in capacity has been compounded by a high turnover of responsible government officials at the centre.

As the popular sectors of civil society have weakened, so has their influence over government policy. Doctor Mthethwa from the Group for Environmental Monitoring said, 'What worries us is that government seems mostly prepared to listen to industry and industry is able to enthusiastically lobby government with a blank cheque' (*Reconstruct*, 3 September 2000).

Another environmental activist, 'Bobby' Peek of GroundWork, warned that 'it is conceivable that pollution-affected communities, particularly poor communities, will be excluded from agreements whose effects directly impact on their health and well being' (*ibid.*; also see Peek, 1999).

As one informant expressed it, 'from 1994, environmental debates were coming up very well. It's just now that they have toned down, no longer making noise' (Interview with Pelelo Magane, trade unionist, August 2001).

It might have been expected that such 'noise' could have been amplified by environmental activists mobilising around the post-apartheid legal regime. A clause in the Bill of Rights specifies the right to a clean and healthy environment. However to date this has not occurred partly because rights discourse was not a part of anti-apartheid struggle politics, and the specific nature of South Africa's transition to democracy.

5. Impact of neo-liberalism on environmental management

The transition to democracy between 1990 and 1994 was the result not of a 'miracle' or the seizure of power, but of a negotiated settlement that involved many explicit and implicit compromises. These compromises left key elements of apartheid privilege and power intact. Overall the South African transition was characterised by accommodation and appeasement of two sets of interests – those of white power and privilege and those of domestic and international capital. It was widely believed that this pattern of appeasement was unavoidable firstly, to prevent civil war or a seizure of power by the military, and secondly, for South Africa to survive economically in the context of globalisation. 'The main political compromise eventually negotiated has to be understood as an attempt to hold it all together and avoid a Bosnia' (Interview with deputy general secretary for the South African Communist Party, Jeremy Cronin, 1998).

Yet, with time, this tactical compromise deepened into a full-scale acceptance by the ANC of neo-liberal values and policies. This has been accompanied by a virtual abandonment of the erstwhile commitment to mass

participation in policy making. In this complicated context a key challenge for civil society is to strengthen democratic practices and institutions within the post-apartheid state. This is especially true in relation to environmental issues. As Gray writes, 'Effective state institutions are needed to monitor the impact of humans on the natural environment, and to limit the exploitation of natural resources by unaccountable interests' (Gray, 1998:201). But democratisation in South Africa has coincided with a deepening process of corporate-led globalisation which has helped to erode short-lived vestiges of people's power, to strengthen the interests of an emergent elite, and to weaken the capacity of the state relative to capital and the market.

Globalisation is a very contested concept. Arundhati Roy (2001) asks, 'is globalisation about "the eradication of world poverty" or is it a mutant variety of colonialism, remote-controlled and digitally operated?' (Roy, 2001:6) Gray maintains that behind all the various meanings of globalisation 'is a single underlying idea, which can be called de-localization: the uprooting of activities and relationships from local origins and cultures' (Gray, 1998:57). In his analysis globalisation means a global free market which: degrades the environment, undermines democratic institutions – 'an unfettered market is incompatible with democracy', loosens social cohesion, and is driven by a technology which results in growing unemployment.

Many theorists agree that the link between globalisation and marketisation means increasing environmental degradation. As Mittelman points out, 'with hyper-competition for profits, the market is breaching nature's limits' (1998:847). 'In a world in which market forces are subject to no overall constraint or regulation, peace is continually at risk. Slash-and-burn capitalism degrades the environment, and kindles conflict over natural resources' (Gray, 1998:196). Globalisation 'co-incides with new environmental problems such as global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, acute loss of biodiversity and forms of transborder pollution' (Mittelman, 1998:847).

The ideological core of globalisation is a neo-liberalism which has impacted on the economic policies of the post-apartheid state. The Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR) launched in June 1997 'reflects a textbook case of economic reform according to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)' (Interview with economist Stephen Gelb, 1998). The central pillars in the GEAR strategy were fashioned in accordance with standard neo-liberal economic principles – deficit reduction, trade liberalisation, privatisation, and the shrinking of the state. The post-apartheid state bought the neo-liberal argument that severe adjustments were needed to attract foreign investment which would spur growth, thereby generating a trickle-down improvement in living standards. Neo-liberal thinking is evident in the interpretation of macro-economic stability as requiring fiscal discipline, deregulation, privatisation and export-led growth. GEAR involved a voluntary form of structural adjustment. However 'there exists no example internationally where

neo-liberal adjustments of the sort championed by GEAR have produced a socially progressive outcome' (Marais, 1998:171). Under GEAR the taxation of the wealthy has declined. There has been no significant job creation; in fact jobs have declined since 1994 and poverty and inequality are deepening.

Vast racialised discrepancies in wealth and income remain with white families on average earning twelve times as much as black families and more than half of all African families living below the official poverty line. Whites still dominate middle and upper levels of the civil service and while black ownership has been introduced in some of the country's largest conglomerates, the economy still remains in white hands. South Africa remains a highly divided society marked by extremes of privilege and deprivation. The extent of this deprivation is evident in an extensive crisis which extends into all aspects of most black South Africans' lives, for example, a housing shortage of at least 1.3 million units; poor educational services resulting in only 11% of Africans graduating from high school – the figure for whites is 70%; and the lack of basic infrastructure such as sewage systems, electricity, piped water and waste removal in many black communities.

Access to such basic infrastructure is clearly part of social citizenship, but the GEAR policy blocks the resources required to achieve this. It is a policy which demonstrates how the transformation of South Africa is constrained by the compromises which marked our negotiated settlement, and the hegemonic status of neo-liberalism.

How has GEAR impacted on environmental management? Budgets for environmental services have been cut, despite the creation of provincial departments with responsibility for environmental management. These departments have had to decrease their expenditure on areas of their responsibility such as nature conservation, resulting in great damage to the provincial conservation estate, and hence the foregoing of tourism revenues and their potential local multiplier effects.

A lack of inter-ministerial and inter-departmental co-ordination (despite the establishment of such mechanisms under NEMA, the Committee for Environmental Co-ordination) has led to the promotion of unsustainable development practices. Housing policies have replicated the worst kind of apartheid housing on an even greater scale, privatisation of waste collection entrenches former apartheid urban resource allocation, the monopoly electricity utility is encouraged to expand significantly its output of nuclear energy, and the Spatial Development Initiatives of the Department of Trade and Industry have established industrial white elephants such as the Saldanha Steel plant, the unnecessary Coega harbour, and plans for export-processing zones. Great encouragement is being given to the development of biotechnology, including the semi-secretive licencing of experimental planting of genetically modified crops without the necessary environmental and health safeguards. The state is also supporting the commercialisation of local biodiversity by foreign companies without insisting

on sufficient plans for benefit sharing and the protection of community rights. In terms of land reform and restitution, the rights of poorer communities have been de-emphasised at the expense of privileging the claims of an emergent group of commercial farmers. Neo-liberal ideology militates against the expansion of the state's capacity to monitor infringements of pollution regulation and to act against polluters. Recently former mine and factory workers whose health had suffered due to direct contact with asbestos and mercury opted to litigate in British courts because they lacked confidence in the local justice system to redress their claims.

The above examples are not exhaustive. They reflect only some of the impacts of macroeconomic policy on the state of the South African environment.

6. Impact of global environmental civil society

However there is increasing resistance to these neo-liberal policies globally. This is the contradictory process at the heart of this paper. The contradiction is between on the one hand, a neo-liberal globalisation which is not only leading to increasing environmental degradation, but is eroding the capacity for collective action through an individualism which atomizes people and which is expressed in an increasing retreat into purely private and often materialist concerns. On the other hand, collective action to promote democracy, human rights and the protection of cultural and biological diversity is growing.

The force of significant resistance was first evident in Seattle in December 1999 which brought a ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation to an end. This was followed by the 12,000 protesters who met in Prague in September 2000 to object to the cornerstones of international global capitalism: the World Bank and the IMF. It was also reiterated at large scale protests at summit meetings in Quebec City (against the Free Trade Association of the Americas), in Gothenburg (against the Council of Ministers of the European Union) and in Genoa (against G7 leaders) during 2001. The Genoa protests were said to involve some 200,000 people. In South Africa the protests led by the Campaign Against Neo-Liberalism (CANSAs) at the meeting of the World Economic Forum in Durban in June 2001 were a local expression of this resistance.

This resistance constitutes a form of 'globalisation from below' that is offsetting some of the current global trends which involve increasing inequality, exclusion and environmental degradation. While the concept of a 'global civil society' is highly contested, it is arguable that such a terrain is emerging marked by a transnational network of individuals and groups with a shared commitment to a broad political agenda which includes non-violence, social justice, and feminism as well as environmentalism. Falk (1992) argues that this is disseminating powerful new social identities and new images of solidarity and connectedness 'on behalf of an invisible community or polity that

lacks spatial boundaries'. (Falk, 1992:224) It is based on new technologies which facilitate communication across the boundaries of space and time.

In his somewhat triumphalist account, Castells has emphasised the capacity of the environmental movement to adapt to the new technological paradigm. He views environmentalists as 'at the cutting edge of new communication technologies as organising and mobilizing tools, particularly the use of the Internet. World wide web sites are becoming rallying points for environmentalists around the world' (Castells, 1997:129). Many environmental activists in South Africa are part of these worldwide networks which share information, provide support and reinforce common values, beliefs and purposes. They benefit from structures such as the Third World Network which is an important site for deepening public understanding of globalisation and how it is eroding the capacity of national governments like South Africa to formulate policies which in turn erode citizen participation in decision making, a process especially stark in the economic arena, epitomised by the World Trade Organisation. In addition there are significant national networks linking environmental activists. An example is the National Land Committee which services more than 726 rural communities. This organisation's capacity to communicate and share information with affiliates has been 'greatly facilitated' by the introduction of e-mail (Lebert, 2000:13).

Despite the general demobilisation and depoliticisation of civil society, environmentalists and related activists have gained new ground in their associations with global campaigns and initiatives. It is clear that international collaboration is increasing. The siting of the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town led to the involvement of a local NGO, the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) in leading the worlds' NGO submissions to the commission. EMG co-ordinated global tribunals which attracted communities from around the world which had been affected by large dams. Representatives from these communities were able to bear witness to their experiences, which were entered as evidence before the World Commission.

In terms of protecting South Africa's significant biological heritage from bio-piracy (commercial appropriation without benefit to local people) and genetic pollution, South Africans have been influenced by international campaigns launched by Genetic Resources Action International, the Third World Network and the Gaia Foundation. These organisations have long worked closely with African governments and NGOs to ensure that Africa's genetic resources remain under local control. The drawing in of South African environmentalists has led to the formation of NGOs such as Biowatch South Africa and a campaign promoting a moratorium on genetic modification, the South African Freeze Against Genetic Engineering (SAFeAGE).

Informants had contradictory views on the value of global meetings. One informant found them inspirational: 'I think its important to attend these things because it does inspire you and give you energy'. (Interview with key infor-

mant 6, August, 2001). Another informant was very negative about 'the environmental militancy' which he understood as 'a kind of new international terrorism' that emerged that these meetings (interview with John Ledger, August, 2001).

In this context it is very significant that Johannesburg won the bid to host the 'Rio + 10' conference, which has become known as the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the 'Earth Summit', at Rio de Janeiro, there is a widespread understanding that the goals of sustainable development have proved elusive. Various explanations stress a lack of resources and capacity, the lack of political will on the part of governments, and the impotence of governments in the face of many current environmental problems and macro-economic policies.

Furthermore, as Wilson and Law point out, 'The problems faced by the world in 2002 bear a striking resemblance to those faced in 1992, but in many cases they are even more serious' (Wilson and Law, 2001:14). These problems are highlighted in Southern Africa with its pattern of deepening poverty and inequality, rising military expenditure, armed conflict and environmental deterioration 'This trend is likely to continue as long as the underlying causes – the abuse of power, inequality, and the quest for excessive profits – are further institutionalised and entrenched' (Wilson and Law, 2001:14).

While the agenda of the summit has not yet been determined this event in September 2002 is an important opportunity to assess and evaluate progress made over the intervening decade, including a formal review of Agenda 21. At the time of writing, a year prior to the summit, the summit had already become a focal point for regalanising environmental interests and activism. Being the hosts of the Global NGO Forum, the South African environmental NGOs have become reanimated in their efforts to promote the alternative environmentalism described above. Under the umbrella of the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) and the leadership of the Rural Development Services Network, the environmental NGOs have attempted to close ranks with the development sector. NGOs formed part of a multi-stakeholder forum which is being consulted by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism as well as by the specially created non-profit company tasked with the organisational logistics, the Johannesburg World Summit Company.

Workshops involving national and regional (Southern and Eastern African) groupings have been held and a delegation from South Africa attended the initial preparatory conference in New York, stopping over in Rio on their return to consult with the hosts of the 1992 Global Forum. South African environmental and development NGOs are being supported in their Rio + 10 work by the Heinrich Boell Foundation of the German Green Party.

The approaching summit is also having an impact on the development of new movements, capitalising on youth energy. The Earth Justice Movement,

recently formed at meetings in Cape Town and Johannesburg, has begun to attract interest in other African countries such as Ethiopia, and to stimulate the involvement of youth from the LTK to assist South African organisations in their summit preparations. Further donor support, originating from Denmark, has been assisting in the formation of resources for public interest law firms like the Legal Resources Centre to take up environmental issues under the aegis of NEMA. In particular, pollution-blighted communities on the West Rand, a gold mining area close to Johannesburg, have required legal support to challenge mining companies and government over the continued hazard of dust from mine dumps which impacts negatively on the community's health. The resources will assist the lawyers to take on cases which will uphold the principles of NEMA to establish legal precedent, to assist community whistle-blowers, and to empower people on the ground to secure their constitutional rights of citizens to a 'safe and healthy' environment.

Anti-globalisation work around the world has focused attention on the World Trade Organisation and in particular, to the inequitable WTO Agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs). TRIPs has provided protection to corporate holders of patent rights at the expense of major sectors: those in need of 'essential medicines' to combat the effects of HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases; those communities whose 'traditional knowledge' is being expropriated and patented without any compensation, and those farmers whose traditional access to seed and seed exchange is being compromised by patents held by large corporations. In South Africa, the work of the Treatment Action Campaign in pressurising the government to import cheap generic retroviral medicines rather than the expensive patented versions has paid off. Pharmaceutical transnational corporations were obliged to back down in April 2001 rather than sue the state, as the result of a major protest campaign supported by *Medicins sans Frontières*. This campaign has underlined the necessity for the review or scrapping of the TRIPs Agreement. Medicine and seed access advocacy groups recently formed the TRIPs Action Network in Brussels on 21 March 2001 which will co-ordinate global NGO activity for the WTO to end its punitive patents policy.

Africa has played a leadership role in questioning TRIPS, calling for an end to patents on all life forms and advocating the expansion of the rights of communities and small farmers. This has taken the concrete form of the development by the Organisation of African Unity of model legislation which, so far, has been endorsed by meetings of African trade ministers (Ekpere, 2000). Since South Africa is not in agreement with the OAU model legislation, and has been a signatory to the notorious UPOV 1991 Treaty (protecting the rights of commercial plant breeders rather than communities and small farmers), it has distanced itself from a common African position and has become isolated from the Africa Group in trade negotiations at Geneva (Interview with the Geneva-based convenor of the Africa Group of Trade Negotiators, Felix

Maonera, Addis Ababa, 6 May 2001). It has become a challenge for concerned South African NGOs to reverse this position, and recently an NGO trade network was founded which has demanded more access to the Department of Trade and Industry's policy formulation processes (Interview with environmentalist Jessica Wilson, convenor of the South African NGO trade network, and delegate to the first New York preparatory conference of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Cape Town, 19 June 2001).

However several informants were cynical about the potential local impact of the summit. It was seen by some as a dangerous distraction from the real work of policy implementation. For instance, 'it's wonderful that South Africa is hosting the summit, but one of our concerns is that many of the agencies from central to provincial government, down to NGOs are going to immerse themselves in this world summit and they won't get the work done that needs to be done on the ground' (Interview with John Ledger, August, 2001). Another informant admitted that he had been seconded to spend fifty percent of his time with the Department of the Environment on the summit (Interview with Salim Fakir of the IUCN national office, August, 2001).

Preparations for the summit are causing dissension. For example, according to an informant, there are inter-sectorial squabbles forming around the event. 'Already there's infighting around the summit. The land-based NGOs and human rights and development NGOs need to work together' (Interview with environmental activist Bev Geach, August, 2001).

Others felt that the impact would be transitory. 'My concern with the summit is that: We've had enough, we've seen people come and go and they just pass our people by' (Interview with environmental activist Mandla Mentoor, August 2001).

According to Lloyd Mdakane of the secretariat preparing for South African civil society's participation in the summit, fierce debate will take place on 'the control of power, how the world is being governed, and how globalisation has become a heightened form of imperialism'. (*Mail & Guardian*, 28 September 2001). To some informants this focus on exposing the power relations dominating the globalisation process has negative connotations. For example, 'The world summit is a marvelous opportunity for people to come and bash the Americans for example and George Bush for not coming on board at Kyoto and I'm afraid that's what one has seen in Seattle and Genoa. I find that quite scary' (Interview with John Ledger, August 2001). Certainly the organisation of the summit is imposing heavy demands on already overstretched organisations and individuals.

Conclusion

Whereas in the early years of democratisation post-apartheid policy formulation emphasised transparency and participation, there is now a tendency for policy to become exclusionary. The more centralised environmental networks

such as those that were active in the 1990s are no longer acting as a strong interlocutor with government. Hence, to date, the government's reversal of position has yet to be challenged by civil society.

This paper has shown that the potential to revive a somewhat dormant environmental movement has, to a significant extent, been restimulated by global-level issues and events. Anti-globalisation campaigns, the rejection of the WTO patent system the growing development of a coherent pan-African position on community rights, and global mobilisation against large dams, have all led to renewals of South African NGO environmental activism. The most significant global-level event, the hosting by Johannesburg of the World Summit for Sustainable Development in September 2002, has also served as a lodestone for galvanising new waves of NGO and CBO environmental activity.

This new wave of globally stimulated activism has in turn helped to renew confidence in initiating local campaigns. One example of this is the growing citizen mobilisations around government plans to develop a pilot Pebble Bed Modular Nuclear Reactor, sited either at Koeberg or Pelindaba, with associated problems of transporting nuclear fuel, as well as plans for the incineration of nuclear waste at Pelindaba.

South Africa needs such strong environmental initiatives with a transformative capacity, initiatives which constitute a 'network of social change with the capacity to counteract the networking logic of domination in the informational society' as Castells claims for the women's and environmental movements globally (Castells, 1997:326). This would involve the coherence of two movements that in South Africa, as in other societies like the US, were historically splintered: the movement for the protection and conservation of wilderness and biodiversity, which developed quite separately from the focus on issues generated by urbanisation – issues such as clean and sufficient water, sewage and sanitation services, waste management, cheap energy, safe transport, and healthy workplaces. In his account of this splintered trajectory in the US, Gottlieb emphasises that this could lead towards an environmentalism 'that is democratic and inclusive, an environmentalism of equality and social justice, an environmentalism of linked natural and human environments, an environmentalism of transformation' (Gottlieb, 1993:320).

If we conceptualise the environment as a political space, then environmental initiatives in civil society can be understood as a form of resistance to neo-liberal globalisation. Mittelman views the environment as representing 'a marker where, to varying degrees, popular resistance to globalization is manifest. Slicing across party, class, religion, gender, race and ethnicity, environmental politics offers a useful entry point for assessing counter-globalisation' (1998:848). In South Africa, with its persistent inequalities, questions of class, race and gender cannot so easily be transcended. Environmental politics in South Africa needs to redress such divisions and, in doing so, retain its counter-globalising thrust.

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Notes

1. The research on which this paper is based involved (i) a literature review of selected primary and secondary sources, (ii) interviews with twelve key informants selected for their expertise on environmental issues in South Africa, (iii) participant observation in various environmental initiatives.

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