

Waterberg without water!

As a Ugandan interfacing with coal mining for the first time (hydropower being what I have known back home), I was left dumb-folded once Comrade Querisha from DKA Austria started her brief to us as we set off from City Lodge Hotel in Johannesburg to Lephalale in North-East South Africa. Comrade emphasized the need to be frugal with the drinking water we had bought on our journey since the place where we were headed is water stressed. Indeed, with the standing temperature raising up to 40 Degrees Centigrade, I came to terms with reality once we had reached the Limpopo Provincial Offices on our way to Lephalale.

Being from Uganda, I was quick to inquire what makes places such as Waterberg, Vaalwater and others water stressed with no green vegetation to talk about. Comrade Trusha from WoMin, an organization that has been working on dismantling corporate power in Southern Africa was quick to give me an answer to the effect that gigantic coal mining plants have been established in the area which in turn has raised temperatures to unimaginable levels. Indeed, we are reaping from the triple effects of Extractivism, Patriarchy and Capitalism!

As we visited the different communities whose territories are on the verge of being forcefully taken over by coal mines, I could not believe the harrowing stories the local people were narrating to us. Paprika and Waterberg where huge coal plants have been set up is a clear reminder of how extractivism, capitalism and patriarchy have mercilessly impacted on rights of nature. As I listened, the question that kept coming up in my mind, is who talks on behalf of nature? Why has man (to mean woman as well) distanced himself from nature yet to soil we return some day? Man has simply failed to appreciate his/her connectedness with ecological system hence has gone ahead to mercilessly plunder mother earth impunity!

The local people who have now been encircled by electric fences erected by coal mining companies like Exxaro, tell of the past where agriculture thrived in this part of the South Africa, tell of the past where rivers would burst their banks because of too much water. All this is now a thing of the past! The rush for coal energy has left the local people living as destitutes on their own land that has been heavily polluted and are being threatened by coal companies for forceful eviction.

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