

# SEKHUKHUNE'S SOCIALLY OWNED RENEWABLE ENERGY CAMPAIGN: A COMMUNITY'S FIGHT

Meet the Sekhukhune Combined Mining-Affected Communities (#SCMAC), a group of ordinary people who've decided to advance socially-owned renewable energy in mining-affected communities by harnessing the power of the sun to fight back against the extractive companies. Their plan? Energy by the people and for the people. Let's break it down.

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## SOLAR FARMS FOR THE PEOPLE

Imagine a world where mining-affected communities - I mean, the ones left holding the bag (and the toxic waste, of course) when the mines close - get to own their energy production facilities and operate solar farms. These farms would not only power their homes but also sell energy back to the grid or even to the very mines that once exploited them.

But now, as the world shifts toward renewable energy, these companies are investing in solar and wind farms to power their operations and increase their profits. It's a classic case of adding insult to injury: they take the minerals, and now they want the sunlight, too.

But SCMAC has a different idea. Instead of letting mining companies control the energy transition, why not let the communities own it? Why not build solar farms that benefit the people who've borne the brunt of mining's environmental and social costs?

It's a bold, inspiring, and audacious plan.

To make it happen, SCMAC has partnered with civil society organisations such as 350.org, the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, the consultancy firm Ahinasa and Lawyers for Human Rights to provide desktop research. "Concrete Models Of Socially Owned Renewable Energy: The case of Sekhukhune Combined Mining Affected Communities." provides a baseline and needs assessment research to develop an initial vision and governance principles for a community-owned renewable energy.

SCMAC's vision is simple yet radical: community-owned solar farms that generate energy, create jobs and fund local development. These wouldn't be massive, corporate-controlled projects but small, grid-tied mini solar farms installed in communities. The energy produced could power homes and be sold to the grid.

The model is designed to be democratic, with communities owning and managing the projects through co-operatives. This ensures that the benefits stay local and that decisions are made by the people who actually live there. It's a refreshing change from the top-down approach that has left so many communities behind.

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## THE REALITY: FIGHTING THE SYSTEM (AND PROBABLY ESKOM)

Of course, nothing is ever that simple when implementing such community-led projects. First, there's Eskom, the national utility that can't keep the lights on but somehow still has the power to make life difficult for anyone trying to innovate. SCMAC's plan requires feasibility studies, pilot projects and public funding.

It sounds bleak, I know, especially when you realise the same public funding usually ends up in the pockets of the already wealthy.

But they're optimistic! They've even chosen the cooperative model for ownership as a guiding principle because nothing says "democracy" like a bunch of communities arguing over solar panel maintenance budgets.

And let's not forget the mining companies. They're legally obligated to support community development (thanks, Social and Labour Plans!), but so far, their idea of "development" has been irrelevant, inefficient, useless and ineffective. SCMAC is demanding they put their money where their mines are and fund these solar projects without any hidden agenda.

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## IS SOCIALLY-OWNED RENEWABLE ENERGY A DYSTOPIA?

Yes, and maybe no at the same time, because in a perfect world, SCMAC's plan would work like this:

1. Mining companies fund solar farms.
2. Communities become energy moguls, selling power back to the grid and using the profits to build schools and hospitals.
3. Eskom supports the project.

But let's be real. This is South Africa. Eskom will probably find a way to "load-shed the sun". Yes, don't be shocked to find yourself in the dark in broad daylight due to a "solar-shedding?" brought to you by....you know who. And guess what? Mining companies will argue they're "too broke" to help while posting record profits.

Let me tell you this: if South Africa is explained to you and you understand it, just know that it was not well explained!

But jokes aside, the just energy transition is a serious matter, and we have reason to be optimistic. SCMAC's campaign is a bold, inspiring, and ambitious attempt to turn the energy transition into something that actually benefits the people living around the area of Burgersfort. It's a reminder that the fight for a just transition isn't just about swapping coal for solar; it's about who owns the means of production and management (yes, Marx fans, we see you).

In a nutshell, here's SCMAC's campaign for socially-owned renewable energy. May the panels be ever shiny, the co-operatives ever democratic, the solar farms ever owned by communities and the battles with Eskom ever... well, let's just hope SCMAC have good lawyers since Eskom threatens households with solar panels with penalties.

Be right back; it's load-shedding here!

