

NO Faith in False Solutions YES to a Just Energy Transition



Saldanha - West Coast Faith Communities



GHOERIMAN
SILDANHA

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Saldanha

Saldanha – is the largest and deepest natural harbour of South Africa, situated on the country’s West Coast. A town where more than half of the population depends on fish for their livelihood. It is heavily impacted by the steel industry, commercial mussel and oyster farming, and iron ore and coal transport to and from Saldanha. While regularly blasting by the special forces from Dongart, causing seismic vibrations felt in people's houses. As a result, the people of Saldanha have a sense of how offshore oil and gas drilling could impact their livelihoods.

During a recent workshop, faith leaders, fisherfolk and members of the “West Coast Faith Solutions” community group shared their views on the meaning of fish and the ocean in their lives, as well as on offshore oil and gas exploration. Their faith has called on them to protect our earth, as their communities depend on fishing. They describe the changes in the environment they experienced:

We no longer have enough food. Pollution is real here in Saldanha. The industries come for 10 years, and we suffer for 20 years. The iron and steel industries also came to use with promises of economic growth, but we know now that they came to Saldanha to make us poorer. They also have an impact on our health. We have many cases of asthma and other diseases linked to air pollution. We miss the harbour feel, the fish, the hype, the seagulls. It is all gone. People used to come to Saldanha for the fish festival. This heritage has fallen away. Today, we sit with more problems than solutions. There is no more joy. Many of the fisherfolk only went to school until grade 3. It is difficult for them to find an alternative income. With the pollution comes a significant increase in the cost of fish, like snoek and oysters, making them unaffordable to most people.

Fisherfolk

The ocean is my heart. I live for the ocean. One day, I'm going to die for the ocean. I really can't live without it. It has provided for me for years and years and years.

My name is **Rashiet Slarmi**. I was born here in Saldanha. I am a fisherman. My grandfather and my father were also fishermen, and one of my sons is too. When I left school, I went to sea, and I'm still on the sea. I have been working on the sea for 37 years, and I have been a skipper for 32 years. I have a boat in Saldanha Bay. Catching fish is the only thing I know. It is my only income, and I sustain my whole family through the sea.

If I lose that, I am going to lose my own life. Losing the ocean for oil and gas is going to upset my life. It would break me into pieces. It will hunger us out.

A normal morning starts around 3:00 am. My wife puts my bread in a lunch box, makes me a coffee and then somebody picks me up. We go to the sea to catch fish. When it is a good day, we make about R500 - R600. When it's a bad day, maybe R50. Sometimes the weather doesn't agree with us, and we come home empty-handed. My wife has seen that happen many times. At least half of Saldanha depends on fish. We are fishermen. Others clean the fish. Some people buy the fish to sell it. There are a lot of people who live on fish.

With the potential of oil and gas exploration along our coast, we are worried that the fish will disappear, and there will be no fish to catch. Oil could wash onto our beaches. We will lose our bait, and there will never be any fish in our town again. We foresee a catastrophe.



Faith Leaders



For generations, the ocean has been our source of food, income, and dignity. Today, extraction projects threaten not only our marine life but our very existence. Mining and extractive industries leave communities with pollution, broken livelihoods, and exclusion from decisions that affect our lives. Our faith and culture teach us to be stewards and that we must protect the living Earth. Extractive projects that destroy land and sea violate our responsibility to care for creation and to protect it for future generations. A truly just transition is one where no communities are sacrificed for profit.

Wiedaad Davids from Saldanha Bay
Spokesperson of West Coast Faith Solutions



I am **Ashwin Beaton**, a Seventh-day Adventist Pastor, from Saldanha. I have been coming to this area since I was a young boy. I am now placed here professionally. I relate the character of God to nature. God gives to us in the way the sea gives to us. He gives first, and in a manner that seeks to restore humanity. If you look at the ocean, there is a dependency between us and the ocean in the same way as there is a dependency between God and us.

People on the West Coast go out nearly every day to fish. Whether Velddrift, Paternoster, or Elandsbay. The reduction in fish robs them of their identity. Fishing has been a way of life that is ingrained in their identity as a people and the culture that surrounds them. They are because of fishing and the ocean itself. Generations of families existed because of fishing. Many young people will no longer inherit that heritage.



I have roots in the Khoisan, the original people of the land, who were driven away from the city area up the coast to escape enslavement. They settled at the coast. They took and gave from the sea only what was necessary. There was an exchange with nature and with each other that created community. You could call them people of the earth. They were humble people, and they just wanted to get by. Due to a lot of influences and the modernisation of the environment, the breakdown of the people has occurred.

Oil and Gas exploration will destroy the ecosystem. In this community, fishing is a livelihood and still the main source of income. Oil and Gas exploration will break down many families and destroy their livelihoods. It will create a whole collapse of the ecosystem, not only in the ocean but also in relation to our lives here in Saldanha and even in surrounding towns, like Paternoster, where the people are solely dependent on fishing as a source of income.

It will result in more drug and alcohol abuse and other social ills. It will have a negative impact on our people and on the environment.

Before, you would get fish every day you went out. This is no longer the case. That is where we see the change. Fish are sensitive to noise and pollution. Through the industries, the qualities of the fish are also decreasing. It has an impact on their health and their reproduction. I see the power of unity; we are like-minded in faith, irrespective of religion. Our collective dependence on fish binds us.

The question we all need to ask is: Are we willing to give our history up and our livelihood? Let us stand together, inspire one another and let us realise the value of one another. This breakdown could mean someone's life, someone's family, or someone's happiness is badly impacted. Let us hold up this community. That is what God would want from us.



I am **Sheikh Muzammil Adams**. I work in this community seeking ways to help and bring peace and justice. People in this area depend on fish; it feeds many families. Even though fish are small, in reality, they are incredibly important. Saldanha is not a large town, but most of it is made up of informal settlements.

The majority of the people living in these informal settlements rely on the ocean. Something as seemingly small as fish plays a crucial role in their lives. Oil and gas exploration and drilling along the shore will harm us. If fish are taken away, life will become even more difficult, especially as the cost of living will continue to rise.

For us, fish have a strong connection to faith: Allah (or God) has given us the gift of the sea and its bounty of fish free of charge. It is a gift meant to nourish all creation. Our people depend on it, and they are putting in their effort to earn a living from it. In Saldanha, we have very few other opportunities available for us to work. If this gift is taken away from us, life is undoubtedly going to change, and we don't want that.



I am **Raylene Fredericks** from Saldanha Bay. I am a Christian faith leader and a member of the West Coast Faith Solutions. The Saldanha Bay harbour is used for exporting iron ore. Transnet trains bring iron ore from the Sishen Open Cast mine in the Northern Cape to Saldanha. The trains have 80 or 100 wagons, and we just call them "the longest trains". The iron ore comes as powder or material that looks like stones.

The transport and the offloading create "red dust". Although efforts are made to keep the dust moist with sprinklers when offloading wagons, the wind in Saldanha often prevents containment, especially with the finer iron ore. The dust is sitting all over in Saldanha. In general, the iron ore and steel industry has a negative environmental impact on the ocean and marine life, as well as on humans.

When we moved here years ago, my daughter developed asthma in the span of two years. You need to paint your house every two years because of the dust, and your car rusts fast as well. We also have the mussel farms, and just behind the mussels, they grow the oysters. We are not exactly sure what pollution they are causing, but it is an interruption of the natural habitat. Today, we see different-coloured seaweed on our beaches.



Join Saldanha's Call: No faith in false solutions

We are ripped apart as a community because of all the changes we have experienced in Saldanha. Today, everyone is in their own corner. We must stop that and come together as a community again. We must fight against oil, gas and pollution together.

Your child is my child. We need to come together and collectively fight for our kids.

We say: Let's protect our marine life! Oil and gas exploration threatens whales, dolphins, fish and seabirds that depend on a healthy ocean. Let's prevent pollution, spills and leaks, which can cause long-term damage to beaches, ecosystems, and local communities. Let's support sustainable tourism. A clean and beautiful coastline attracts visitors and creates jobs, without harming nature. Let's preserve fishing livelihoods. Local fishermen rely on unpolluted waters for their catch and income. Let's combat climate change by investing in renewable energies. Oil and gas lock us into fossil fuels instead of promoting clean energy. Let's protect our cultural heritage. Coastal communities and indigenous peoples have deep cultural and spiritual ties to the ocean.

Rashiet, the fisherman, tells his community: "Let's say no to oil and gas! Never allow them to drill or come near our port for oil and gas. Let us collectively make plans to shut them out of our place, shut them out of our coastline. Shut them out because it is going to hurt us."



SAFCEI's campaign against false solutions to the Just Energy Transition

South Africa is transitioning from polluting fossil fuels to clean, affordable, sustainable, and renewable energy sources. This shift is called the Just Energy Transition (JET). The goal is to ensure the process is fair, equitable, and justice is achieved for everyone, especially the poor and vulnerable.

The Problem: False Solutions Hurt Communities

In the push to address climate change, some powerful groups promote what we call false solutions, such as nuclear power, oil and gas. They market these as clean energy sources, but actually do the opposite: they hurt people, damage the environment, and steal money and time away from people and the urgent switch to true renewable energy.

Oil and Gas Exploration

Oil and gas exploration and extraction are often promoted as vital to our energy future, but they are simply a continuation of the fossil fuel problem.

- **Environmental & Climate Risk:** Adding new fossil fuel projects, like offshore drilling, directly contradicts South Africa's climate commitments and increases global warming. Exploration activities, including seismic surveys, threaten to disorient marine mammals, destroy fish breeding grounds, and risk irreversible, long-term damage from unavoidable oil spills.
- **Economic & Social Catastrophe:** Drilling activities threaten the livelihoods of small-scale fishers and hurt the West Coast's tourism sector. This increases poverty and food insecurity for families who rely on the ocean for survival.
- **Undermining Justice:** These projects often violate environmental justice principles by moving forward without meaningful community consultation with affected fisherfolk and coastal communities, denying them their constitutional right to a safe, clean environment.



Your Power - Mobilising for a Real Just Transition

Demand Justice: People come before profit. Corporations and the government must be held accountable for historical and current economic, environmental, and social damages experienced by coastal communities. The transition must prioritise bottom-up, local, lived experiences of coastal communities over top-down, technical corporate agendas. The transition must remedy the climate impacts experienced by coastal communities that they did not cause.

Demand Inclusion: Vulnerable groups, including youth and women, are central to a just transition. Community voices must be included in decision-making processes on the JET for inclusive, people-centred energy policies rooted in justice. The deep, historical, and cultural connection that communities have with the ocean must be protected.

Demand Information: Communities have the power to request access to information and demand meaningful consultation throughout the transition process.

By mobilising together, we can reject false solutions and move South Africa towards a truly just, clean, and sustainable energy future.





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