

ACCESSING WATER AND ENERGY: PHOTOVOICE STORIES FROM KHAYELITSHA

The Politics and Urban Governance Research Group is undertaking a large research project called *Governing the Just Urban Transition (GoJUT)*. This project, funded by the National Research Foundation, examines the context in which South Africa’s Just Urban Transition is unfolding. We explore how small businesses—Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, hair salons, car washes, eateries, and shebeens or taverns—in low-income areas of Alexandra in Johannesburg and Khayelitsha in Cape Town cope with ongoing water and energy crises. We believe that understanding the strategies that people use to secure water and energy can help identify opportunities for stakeholders to work together toward a just urban transition.

Alongside other qualitative methods, we have used the Photovoice method to understand how participants access or struggle to access water and energy. Photovoice is a participatory research approach that uses photography to tell real stories related to the research topic. It allows participants to document their lives and share their perspectives on how they navigate specific challenges. Participants take photographs representing their daily realities and later share their stories and reflections in follow-up interviews and group discussions. In this way, participants help shape the research questions, contribute to data collection and analysis, and participate in disseminating the findings.

This photo essay contains images from 16 participants from Khayelitsha, showing their water and energy experiences. Together, these photographs and stories highlight how communities live and adapt to ongoing water and energy crises in Khayelitsha.



Water



“You see, this is how we get water. That's the only tap that is nearest, because the taps, where she stays, it's far from this tap. But she must carry the bucket to get water. There's only one tap on this street. If you are behind, you need to come here to get water. And as you see here, there's floods water. This water, it's deep for her to cross.”



“Water is very important, apart from cooking and drinking, water provides livelihood or job opportunities”.



“We can’t run the business without the water. This picture shows a man carrying water to one of the stalls to wash the dishes and the dishcloths and the tongs and knives.”



“Because I don’t have electricity, I have to go next door to heat my water. I have to boil it and then return it to my shop.”



“Education is very important; if I was educated, I wouldn’t be suffering like this”



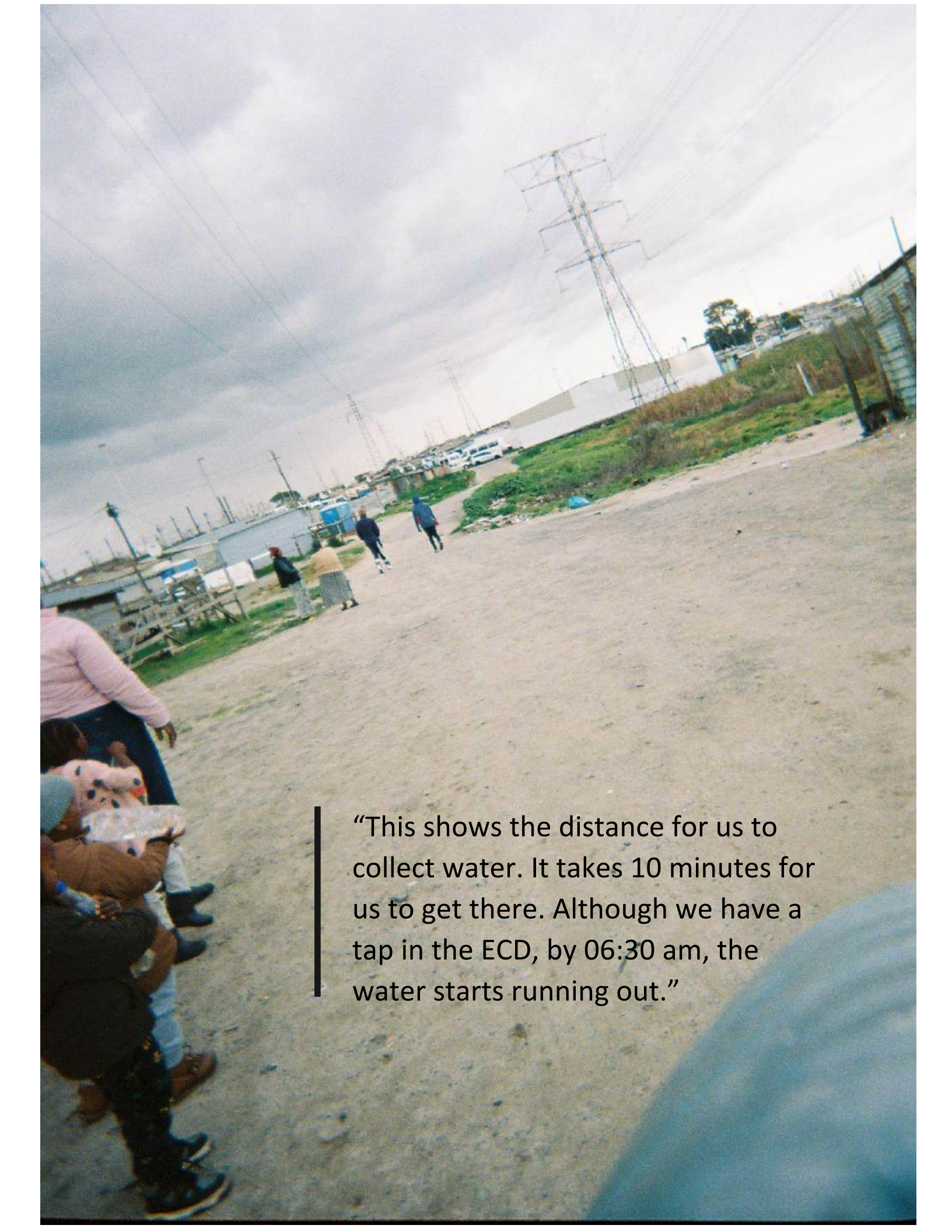
“When there is no water at our trading stands, I have to bring water from my house. It's far because I take a taxi every morning. For two weeks, we did not have water, so you had to bring water from your home. I was taking three buckets.”



“We get water from taps used by the whole community. Sometimes the tap gets closed because they say we must save water. I don’t know if it's the City or whoever says that.”



“We don’t get our water close by. We get it far. There is a person who fetches water for me. He does not work for me, but he is someone I just ask for help. Sometimes I can give him something like a R10.”

A photograph showing a dirt road in a low-income area. In the foreground, several people are walking, including a woman in a pink shirt and a person in a brown jacket. In the middle ground, more people are walking away from the camera. The background features a large electricity pylon, a white building, and a hillside with some vegetation. The sky is overcast.

“This shows the distance for us to collect water. It takes 10 minutes for us to get there. Although we have a tap in the ECD, by 06:30 am, the water starts running out.”

“This photo shows the way we use and save water because where we fetch water is far. The water that the child is using to wash her hands, we use it to flush the *Potapota*. This makes things easier for us.”



“For hygiene, children use this container to wash their hands before eating or when coming from the toilet.”



“This is a customer washing their hands before eating the meat. It is a little bottle with water and liquid soap. The water comes from the tap.”

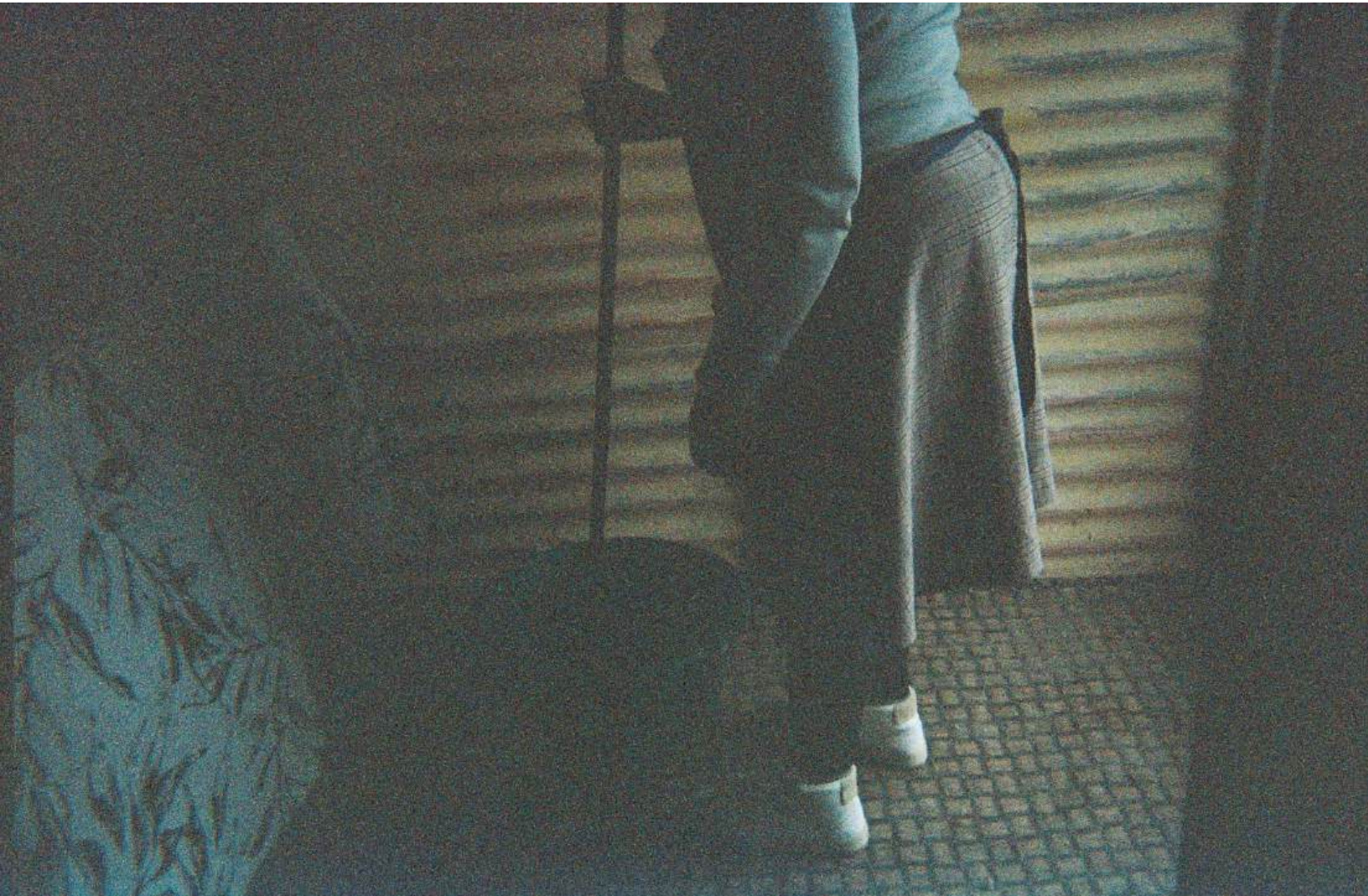


“One of the ladies washing the dishcloths.”



“In the morning, when I open my place, I start with the cleaning. I use a bucket of water to wipe the surfaces clean.”



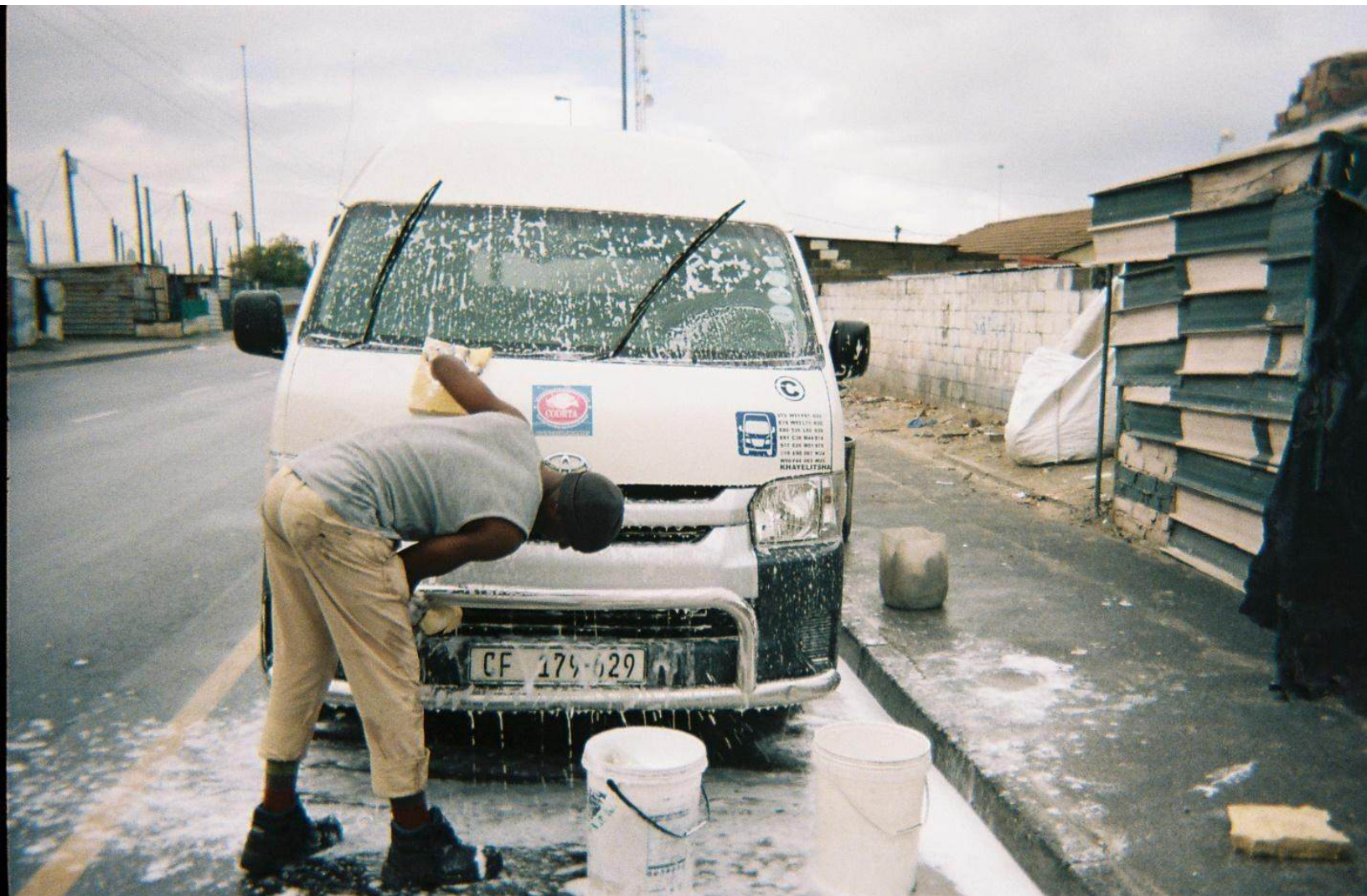


“To save water, we use the same bucket of water we wash our hands with.”

“I use three buckets. One for washing the dishes and surfaces with soap, the second one for the customers to wash their hands before they eat, and the third one to rinse the dishcloth. It keeps things hygienic.”



“Life is hard, it requires the strongest.”





“We are not allowed to use the pipe. We must use the drums to wash the cars. You must make sure your pipe is not linked to the tap. After you finish filling in the drums you must switch them off. Because if you use the pipe, it will waste too much water.”

“This shows that we use the water until the car is clean. We don’t just waste the water. Water is not just for use outside; the water is used to wash the carpet. It must be clean even inside.”



“We use a lot of water. I think 40 liters a car. I wish I had a shelter for the car wash because we get burnt by the sun. The water also has nowhere to go, so if I get a drain, the water would not be there. It would be cleaner, and it wouldn’t smell.”



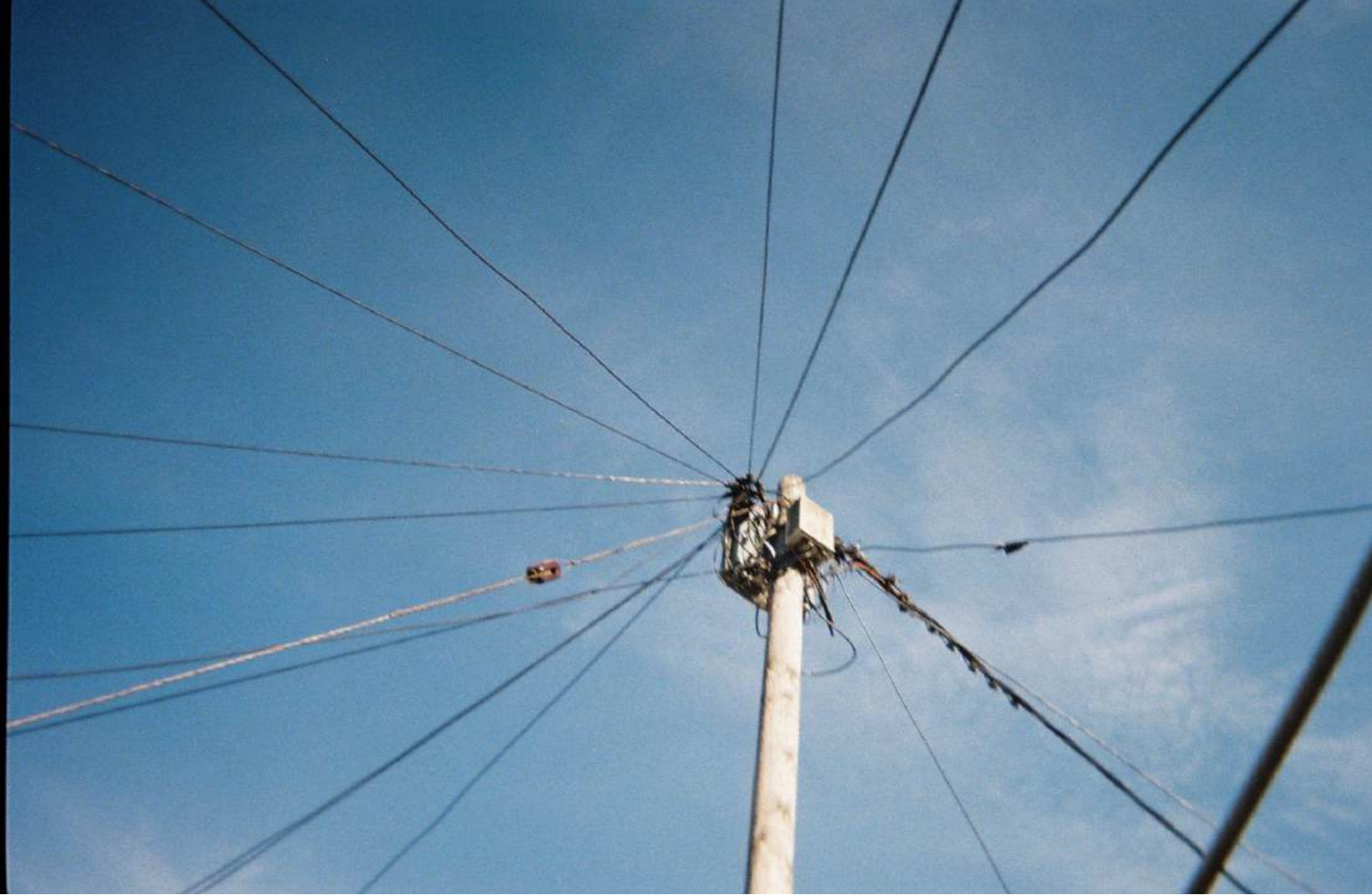
“We are waiting for the cars to be washed. When they come there are a lot. These are Quantums waiting to be washed...Monday is a busy day. Even Sunday is a busy day. You can't go Monday to work when your taxi is dirty.”



“During the rainwater stops on the road. After the rain there are floods and it is difficult to cross the road. It should be better after they fix the road.”



Energy



"I get electricity. I don't have a problem with water or electricity. The only problem I have is getting a permit for my business."

"I have to ask the neighbour to give me electricity.
Sometimes he gives it to me, sometimes he doesn't."



“This is how we access electricity in an informal settlement. It is not safe to connect like this, but it helps us. It is the only option that we have to access electricity.”



“We have to rent electricity. And there's different prices for it. Some charge R350, some charge R500 and R600. And if you can see the wires, it's dangerous while we are having that water. We were promised electricity, but still nothing. And for me to use the candle is very dangerous. To use the candle for lighting.”



“If I had my own electricity, I wouldn’t have to close my salon early and chase my customers away because the landlord is saying the time is up”



“Two years ago, we did not have this box. It is still new. We used it to get electricity by connecting to the house next door.”



“This electricity is not safe; it can harm the clients and damage the business itself”



“If I had my own tap, I wouldn't be using a 20-litre bucket. I would be using my own pipe.”



“This is my spaza shop. I use power to connect the fridge. If there is no power, I can’t have business. Costs R50 per week for the power.”



“This is how I save water. I use a flask to store hot water, so that I don’t have to boil water every time I want to prepare food or milk for the kids.”



“This is my cool box. I don’t have a fridge because we don’t have electricity.”



“This is the kind of place I am cooking in. I am using a gas stove, and I don’t have lights where I cook. It's dark. I have to have electricity, so I have lights inside, and so I have a fridge. Now I have to take a taxi home to get meat from the fridge. If I leave it here, it will go off.”



“Lady is braaiing meat and customers waiting for the meat.”



I was the first person to make a stand here in 1987. We don't have water. For me there is nothing without struggle, nothing *mahala*. You must think and you must do. If there is something on your mind, follow it. Because other people they say, "where is the water, where is the toilet, why is there no electric?" And I say, "Hey at home you have everything but now you are at work you must struggle."



"We braai meet in a dark place, but we survive. We need light. We light candles and they remind me of where I come from. When I light the candle, I think we got freedom, but I still use a candle for light."



“When we do not have electricity, we use a gas stove and it’s expensive. But it’s our second option when the electricity goes off and that can be for four days a week while still paying rent and needing to cook for the kids. We don’t have a choice.”



“We used to have electricity at the car wash for the vacuum cleaner, but now that we don’t have electricity anymore, I take the cars to my house for vacuum cleaning. This quantum is from my car wash”.



” People enjoying themselves playing pool. If we had a permit, they would be more comfortable, but because we are always on the lookout for the police, they cannot be comfortable.”





“We don’t make fire without the wood. We go to buy the wood there by the garage or call someone at BM section. So, we don’t have work without wood”.

“This is the person who sells the wood I use to braai the meat. He comes every day and sells his wood R80 for the whole trolley”



“In this picture, you can see that this business is close to a heap of rubbish. They sell sheep heads in that business and use wooden planks to cook the meat. This is not clean”.



“This business is in a good space on the market, but outside is always affected by dirty water from the drain that makes the business close because the water stinks, causing customers to stay away from the business”





“Here at the rank, I used to work for someone. So, I was not treated nicely. I found my own place, but I rented it here. I named it Pumla Restaurant. This is a place to eat. It’s a place that I am trying.”

This photo essay offers a glimpse into the everyday realities of water and energy insecurity in Khayelitsha, showing how small businesses navigate ongoing challenges with resilience, creativity, and determination. Together, these stories and images highlight both the strain and the ingenuity that shape daily life in the context of South Africa's Just Urban Transition.

We are deeply grateful to all the participants who generously shared their experiences, as well as to our funder and project partners whose support made this work possible.

The PUG team would happily engage with you on our research. Please contact us using the details below.

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