

# INTERNATIONAL APPALACHIA

A BRIEF SUMMARY ON THE OUTREACH, IMPACT AND ACTIVITIES OF COALFIELD DEVELOPMENT  
THROUGHOUT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS TOLD THROUGH ITS CONSERVATION COORDINATOR



**COALFIELD  
DEVELOPMENT**



# FOREWORD

by  
*Jacob Israel Hannah*

Coalfield Development was founded in West Virginia upon the values of triple-bottom line sustainability, meaning that people, planet, and profit are all equally considered in any decision making. In 2018, I became our first Conservation Coordinator: learning, implementing, and sharing new strategies for coal-impacted communities. What follows is a brief testimony on how our Appalachian struggles and triumphs have resonated with others around the world - curious how ordinary coal mining descendants could band together and solve wicked problems.

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*



# BRUSSELS

NOVEMBER  
2018

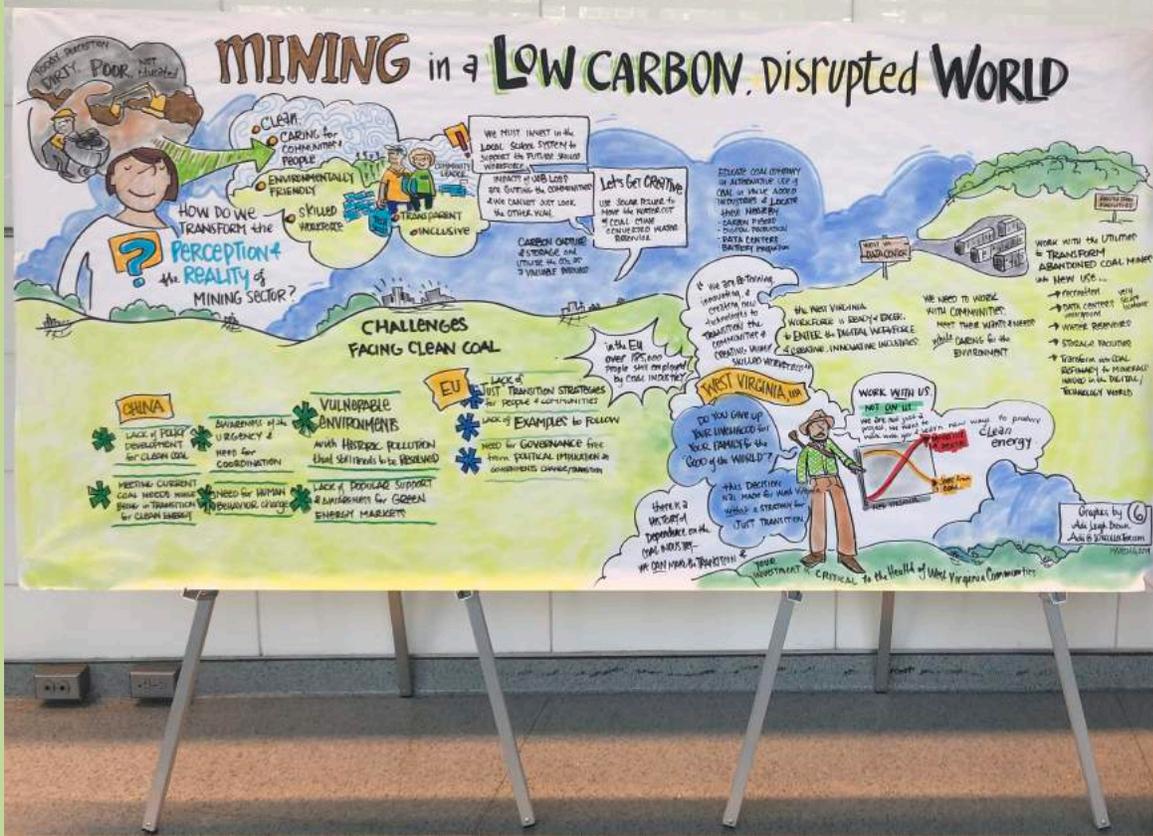


I had only been with Coalfield Development two months when we received an invitation from Bloomberg Philanthropies to travel to Brussels and present our work at *The Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, "Best practices and project ideas: Governance of Transition."* My whole life, I had grown up under the shadow of coal in Appalachia, a deeply nuanced topic that (for almost every Appalachian) simultaneously emits an odd sense of pride and shame, with a perpetual loudness that drowns out any other voices or conversations. In Brussels, that loudness found itself in an international symphony of similar struggles and heritage.

With translator headphones affixed, I listened as the words spoken from Polish, French, Russian, British, and Dutch mouths were saying the things that my father and papaw would speak on about the complexities of culture and coal. I found myself "amen-ing" my fellow panelist, Jean-François Caron, the Mayor of Loos-en-Gohelle, France who was sharing that a just transition wouldn't focus on discarding miners and their culture, but would respectfully integrate and catalyze their assets as driving forces towards new and sustainable economies.

As I wrapped up my presentation on our Appalachian renaissance, a wave of support, questions, and collaborations poured my way. Coalfield Development's "from the bottom-up" approach was very unique and inspiring in a room used to top-down governmental strategies. After exchanging stories, tears, and hopes, Appalachia didn't seem so alone in this world anymore. This couldn't have been more evident than in the *"Coal Face"* booklet a Polish colleague gave me - foreign faces never looked so familiar to this son of miners.





As winter subsided, Coalfield Development's relationship with The World Bank and the European Commission's Just Transition Platform blossomed. Our grassroots approach was an attractive and engaging methodology that localized sustainable development. This topic interested many regions in transition: how do we not leave behind those in coal while moving towards renewables? This culminated in another invitation to present at The World Bank building in Washington, D.C. for The Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM10), "Mining in a Low Carbon, Disrupted World."



This time around, I was asked to open the discussion by performing some "Appalachian Music," so I asked some of my family to make the trek up with me to sing together. We were used to singing together for funerals in Appalachia. The folk songs we'd written had people from what seemed like every other country up and clapping and dancing, and even the event coordinator brought out his little travel guitar and started playing along! Finally, we closed with a classic: "Country Roads." Hearing voices of every accent singing in unison "...to the place I belong, West Virginia..." brought me to tears.



During the panel discussion, I realized that my input wasn't only viewed as the organization of Coalfield Development, but that I was also the voice in the room that represented the "mining family," the social impact demographic. This perspective led us to a deep and holistic discussion on the intergenerational challenges that exist for getting coal-impacted folks back to work in a healthy and happy manner. This takeaway that "people aren't just projects" was captured in real-time by the event illustrator as reflected in the large poster above.





During the **2019 Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM 10), a closed-door roundtable on "Communities and Workers"** was conducted to bring together a small group of experts to discuss with Ministers from various governments on how to support a Just Transition. Along with Coalfield Development, other participants included renewable operators from Morocco and South Africa alongside the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC), indigenous communities from Canada, the European Commission and the governments of Canada, Germany, Norway and others.

For all of our similarities that do exist as coal regions throughout the world, Appalachia and South Africa still face some difficult challenges that aren't as prevalent in other countries. As those familiar with West Virginia history will know, mining communities have layers of distrust formed from exploitation of coal companies, the corruption of political aid programs, and the politicization of coal vs culture. This challenge of outsider-ism led to placing more emphasis on empowering local-level leaders to be the necessary cartilage between communities and governments.

One of the tools that had previously culminated out of our collective collaborations with The World Bank has been the manual for "**Managing Coal Mine Closure: Achieving A Just Transition For All.**" This document helped serve as a common language of understanding for our dialogues, even to the point of helping us define what a *just* transition even means from a triple bottom line approach. Tools like this, along with strategies developed from these events will be cultivated into the finalized deliverables that'll be shared on the **Just Transition Platform.**

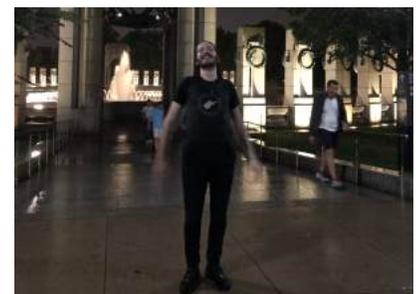




As these conversations continued to call for increased collaborations between governments and grassroots organizations, I was able to coordinate my time in D.C. to facilitate a relationship between our long-time supporter, The ***Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)*** with our partners at The World Bank. This cross-collaboration has helped The Just Transition Platform fill in some of the missing institutional gaps to the narrative of transition in Appalachia - creating a holistic understanding of how a two-way relationship can exist between the top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The rest of my time in D.C. was spent lobbying for ***The RECLAIM Act***, a powerful step toward revitalizing regions of the country hit hardest by the coal industry's downturn. It commits \$1 billion to projects in states that clean up abandoned coal mines and waters polluted by them, and lays a foundation for future economic development and diversification in coal-impacted communities. The metaphor of 'cartilage' was brought to reality as our group of advocates walked down the halls, speaking with our political representatives, gaining more co-sponsors to move the bill forward.

As the week wrapped up, my colleagues and I went walking together to view the Lincoln Memorial. Of all the people this line of work impacts in Appalachia, I feel that my own self has been moved deeper than I ever thought possible. Growing up with insecurities about being stigmatized as "white trailer trash" or an "ignorant hillbilly," I feel my own self-actualization growing within me now. And then I was instantly humbled again as I accidentally fell into the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, completely soaked haha! This is the stance of someone now baptized in the waters of politics.





Coalfield Development's narrative for Appalachia was on the world stage; now, the world was curious about coming here to West Virginia. Rachel Bernice Perks, a Senior Mining Specialist with The World Bank and a longtime collaborator with Coalfield Development put together a diverse and experienced team to travel into West Virginia to better understand the deeper contexts behind the Appalachian coal narrative and transition. I was honored to coordinate their journey into the "heart of the billion dollar coalfield" of Mingo County, WV - the place where I was born.

The World Bank team was dedicated to learning the more granular details of the coal economy and culture in Appalachia, communicating with the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority, Williamson Health & Wellness Center, the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce, the oldest chapter of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), and many others in between. Each abandoned mine, coal town, and conversation would answer one question while creating another at the same time. But the patterns, timeline, and chain of events were evident in conversation and could be summarized as follows:

1900s: extraction>exploitation>subordination>regulation>mechanization>recession>  
 1960s: politicization>stagnation>dilapidation>depopulation>depression>addiction>  
 2000s: evaluation>collaboration>integration>reclamation>restoration>revitalization>

A century's-worth of rich, tumultuous, vibrant history was condensed into a 3-day excursion that the team is taking back with them as part of their case studies for better understanding the tools needed for a just transition for all.





The last event I attended before the COVID-19 shutdowns was the **National Brownfields Conference** in Los Angeles, CA. Coalfield had become the recipient for a \$500,000 Brownfields Cleanup Grant to restore an old factory building, and I wanted to seek more training on how to best manage the program for our site. Much like the Appalachian Regional Commission, the **EPA's Brownfields program** is an incredible resource that empowers community-based developers with the tools and funding to transform industry-impacted liabilities into powerful assets.

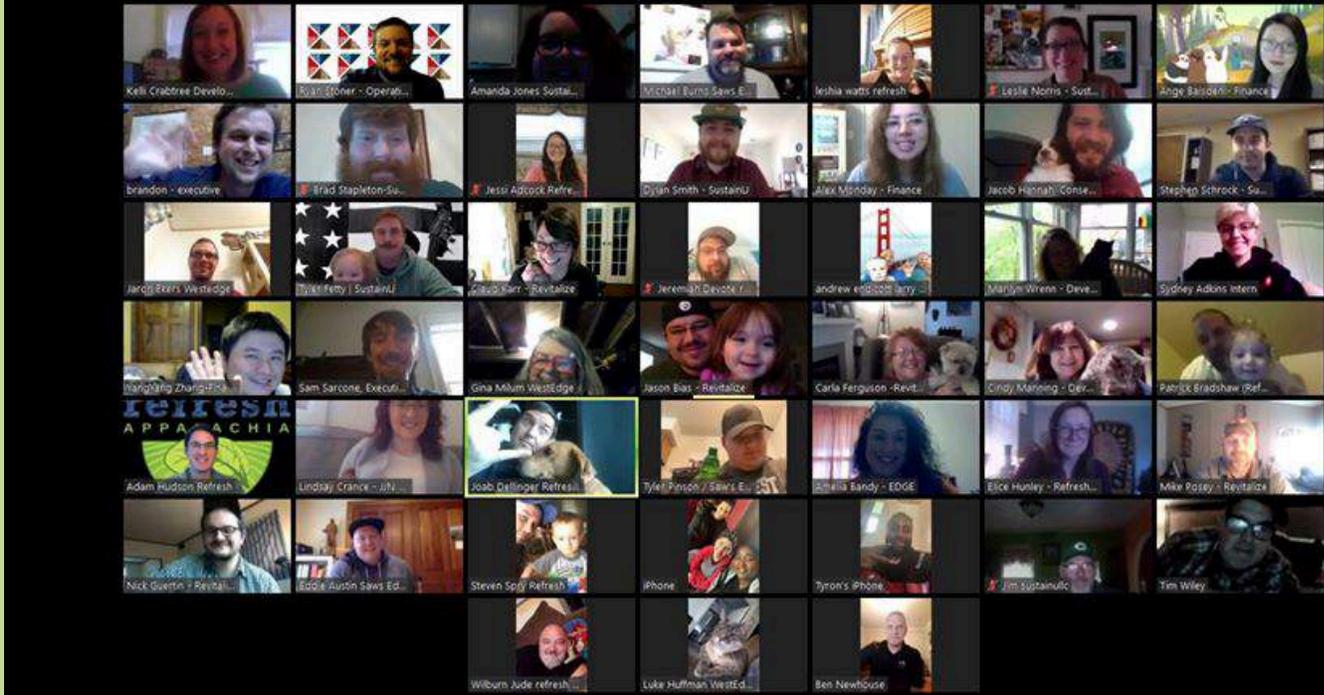


On the last day, a panel was put together for a **community revitalization roundtable** involving mayors, developers, and non-profits. This became a real-time representation of the kind of cross-sectoral collaboration that a Just Transition calls for: governance + private sector + community-based NGOs. Without these kinds of conversations, empowered by tools like EPA Brownfields, it's **"hard to talk about polar bears when people aren't meeting their basic needs next door,"** as my fellow panelist Matt Holmes put it.



*A negative with a negative creates a positive* - that is how I got to introduce the ReUse Corridor. Our latest Coalfield venture that establishes a logistical nervous system throughout central Appalachia, **The ReUse Corridor** transforms post coal economy liabilities (such as abandoned mines and factories) into aggregation and processing hubs that rescue landfill destined materials for upcycling, recycling, and green manufacturing - all while creating meaningful jobs. A Brownfields grant was used for one such project site, the Black Diamond facility, based in Huntington, West Virginia.





A LONG TIME  
2020



Now, here we are in the endless tides of 2020; and despite all of the challenges that emerge, our teams and partners have persisted through adapting how collaborations can function safely and effectively in today's trying times. What was initially perceived as a season of incredible limitations to our traditional methods of collaboration, metamorphosed into an atmosphere of opportunity for expanded reach via video calls, collaborative media packets, and the codification of best practices, strategies, and empowering narratives.

These opportunities now range from a wide spectrum, such as counseling wholly new initiatives such as ***Korea Beyond Coal*** on different labor transition strategies and experiences. Or discussing the similarities between Australia and West Virginia on the socio-cultural nuances underlying coal's power/politics dynamics with ***The Sunrise Project***. And collaborating with the Wuppertal Institute in Germany for creating ***a profile case-study on Appalachia's transition*** for the European Commission's Coal Regions in Transition Online platform.

Furthermore, these international collaborations are reciprocal in nature, providing valuable insight into new ways of viewing our shared challenges. For example, our partnership with ***ASHOKA***, a leader in social enterprise development, allowed the aforementioned ReUse Corridor to be a part of an intense ***innovation challenge session on systems change*** - refining our strategies and models through collaborative international input from similar change agents throughout the world! And the opportunities keep developing for meaningful impact worldwide.

**CASE STUDY**

**Rebuilding the Appalachian economy:  
Coalfield Development, USA**

Coalfield Development is a US social enterprise focused on ending the intergenerational cycle of poverty in Appalachia's coal region. It follows a relationship-based, holistic approach to on-the-job training and incubating new businesses at the same time.



# FOLLOW THE JOURNEY. . .



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