Exploring Community Engagement Challenges in the Mining Sector of South Africa

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Abstract South Africa has recently experienced an increase in unrest within urban and rural communities, despite attempts from both government and business levels to engage communities through Community Engagement (CE) forums. This has had a negative impact on the operations of businesses in the mining industry in South Africa. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore CE challenges in the South African mining sector. The study used qualitative research methods where semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion, were conducted among different stakeholders who were selected purposefully. The data were thematically analysed using the Atlas.ti software programme. The following themes were identified: Anglo Social Way, CE approaches, CE structures, guiding policies, terms of references, and municipality framework. It was recommended that community members needed to be educated on how the mine interacts with the community, its activities, and their participation as well as eliminating community unrest in order to improve communication amongst all stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

The mining sector makes a significant contribution to the economy locally and globally. In South Africa, in 2018 the mining sector in South Africa contributed R351 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employed a total of 456,438 people (Mineral, 2018). However, it has been demonstrated that the success of mining operations is contingent on community engagement strategies, and there was evidence that mining projects were disrupted because of a lack of community support (Boutilier & Thomson, 2011; Browne et al., 2011; Davis & Franks, 2011). South Africa's mining industry contracted by 2.8% in 2019 from 7.6% input in previous years, a trend that had been in place for more than a decade (Mineral Council of South Africa, 2020). The reasons cited for the contraction are structural constraints (harbour capacity), disruption in electricity supply hampering production, logistical constraints (limited rail), indirect drivers (industrial relations), and community unrest (Mineral Council of South Africa, 2020).

Even though there is no universal accepted definition of community engagement, there are some common patterns of thinking in that it is a long-term process which is collaborative, group geographic specific, involving groups with a common interest, and there is an agreed framework that guides the engagement (Moore et al., 2016; Brunton et al., 2017; Walker, 2014). The definition by Glandon et al. (2017) which postulates that community engagement involves the respectful, meaningful, and fit-for-purpose participation of community members was adopted to guide this research.

In the mining industry, Community Engagement (CE) means that the corporation and its operations should be acceptable to the community and its stakeholders. For example, as a result of the CE efforts, a Social License to Operate (SLO) emerges, which is analogous to a legally mandated licence with precise terms and penalties for any infractions of the agreement (Wang et al., 2016). CE should be established prior to the start of mining operations to secure indigenous people's free, prior, and informed permission, so that operations would not be disturbed (Esteves et al., 2012). Furthermore, CE is collaborative work with a group of people within specific geographic proximity and, with common interests and contextual

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circumstances to ensure the well-being of the group. However, poor CE can lead to instability by disrupting mine operations, launching blockade efforts, and causing deliberate damage to mine property, infrastructure, and projects, as well as attracting ongoing legal challenges (Johnson, 2020).

Research findings on the experiences of community engagement as it is related to the lack of continuity in opportunities for involvement and consultation is limited, and stakeholders are not afforded power (Wang et al., 2016). Other practices of CE demonstrate that tokenism is also apparent, protracted engagement causes consultation fatigue, there is an inability to act decisively, and, in some instances, there is withdrawal from the CE (Glandon et al., 2017).

Johnson (2020) in South Africa reveals that the consequence of a lack of CE or ineffective CE causes instability through disruption of mine operations, blockade projects, and malicious damage to mine property and infrastructure; also, mine projects attract continuous legal challenges.

2. METHOD

This was a qualitative study conducted among the management of Amplats, government officials, and the mining communities within Amplats operations in Limpopo and North West regions. Purposive sampling was used to select community members who were elected leaders to represent them at the mine as they would be able to indicate whether or not the CEs were effective. These are the people who are also responsible for the unrest, marches, protests, violence, and disruptions at the mine operation sites. Senior Manager Social Performance, Community Relations Manager, Social Development Manager, and Communications Manager from Amplats were also selected to be part of the study as they are responsible for CE in the operations. In total, 96 participants participated in this study. Table 1 and Table 2 provide details of the sampling and data collection for the interviews and focus groups.

The North West (NW) is located in the northern border formed by the Magaliesburg Mountain range and the south by the Vaal River in South Africa. The focus group interviews in NW were conducted with community villagers from Mfidikwe, Photsaneng and Thekwane. The North WestIt is mainly home to the Tswana people. The community wais impacted by mining and they are had been involved in the unrest against mining houses in their area.

Limpopo is the northern most province of South Africa, bordering with Zimbabwe along the Limpopo River. It is mainly home to the Tsonga, Venda and Pedi peoples, and traditional leaders form a prominent part of the political landscape. The focus groups from Limpopo were conducted at Ga Phasha, Ga Kgwete, Ga Mongatane Ga Mashabela and Ditwebeleng. These communities had also been impacted by mining, hence they had been involved in the unrest against the mine in their area

The semi-structured interview tool was formulated to capture CE challenges facing extractive companies during exploration and mining phases. The data collection questions were aligned to the research objectives. The main questions for the study were:

a. What are the barriers that affect the implementation of CE?

b. What are the factors from different stakeholders that affect the implementation of CE?

c. How can the state of CE be made to be successful in mining recommendations for improvement?

Table **1** . Sample for research interviews

Institution	Limpopo Region	North West Region
Government	- 1 x Provincial Department of Economic Development Environment and Tourism Official - 1 x Regional Community Engagement Official	- A Local Municipality Senior Community Engagement Official - A Regional Community Engagement Official
Communities	- Community Engagement Chairperson - CEF Secretary - 5 Focus Groups (10 activists per Focus Group)	- Community Engagement Forum (CEF) chairperson - CEF Secretary - 3 Focus Groups (10 activists per Focus Group)
Amplats (Company)	- A Senior Manager Social Performance - A Community Relations Manager - A Social Development Manager - A Communications Manager	- A Senior Manager Social Performance - A Community Relations Manager - A Social Development Manager - A Communications Manager

Table **2** . Focus groups – small mining villages in Limpopo and North West Provinces

Limpopo	North West
Focus Group Ga Phasha Village (10 activists)	Focus Group Mfidikwe Village (10 activists)
Focus Group Ga Kgwete Village (10 activists)	Focus Group Photsaneng Village (10 activists)
Focus Group Ga Mongatane Village (10 activists) Focus Group	Thekwane Village (10 activists)
Focus Group Ga Mashabela Village (10 activists)	
Focus Group Ditwebeleng Village (10 activists)	

A one-on-one in-depth interview was conducted with an Amplats senior manager. Audio recordings were made of all focus group discussions as well as in-depth interviews. A bilingual specialist transcribed the taped interviews into Microsoft Word documents, which served as the foundation for the data analysis.

The data from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim into transcripts and included annotations to record behaviour (laughing, anger, tension and pausing). Thematic analysis was used to extract themes from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The emergent themes of CE were reviewed in the final analysis process, using relevant literature and research questions to draw insights that aided in the understanding of CE (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). ATLAS.ti v.9, a computer-aided data analysis software tool, was used for the data analysis and interpretation (Flick, 2014).

This study's credibility was achieved through data triangulation using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation (Varpio et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2016) The criteria for selecting the research participants were well documented to enable transferability of the research to other contexts (Polit & Beck, 2012). Trustworthiness was observed through the use of field notes to record insight, recording emerging themes, and using a reflective journal to extract lessons. In the coding process, the researchers confirmed the themes with the data analyst, debriefed with fellow researchers, and created a mind map of the themes.

The second stage of data analysis was to link the most significant themes in concept families. In the final analysis process, the emergent themes and concepts of CE were evaluated by considering the relevant literature and research questions to draw insights that assisted in the understanding of the CE practices and challenges. In the analysis and interpretation of the data, a computer-aided data analysis software package, ATLAS.ti v.9, was utilised.

The interviews and focus groups were selected because they would yield in-depth and rich information that could not be obtained using a different method. Follow-up questions espoused more data that could explain the reasons why the communities resorted to violence instead of engagement in spite of utilizing the existing CE structures.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges for CE in the mining sectors of two provinces, namely, North West and Limpopo Provinces, South Africa. Within this phase the researcher defined each theme identified and distinguished the essence of what each theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table **3** . Themes for the challenges in CE

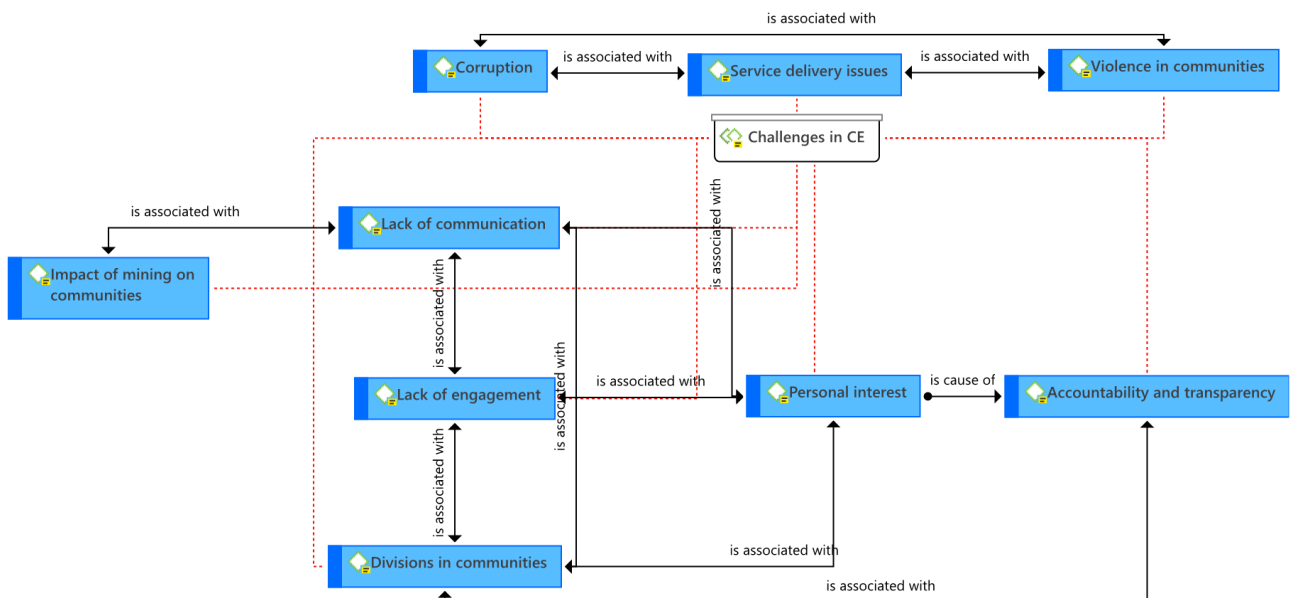| Theme	Code
Divisions in communities	50
Personal interest	43
A lack of communication	30
Violence in communities	25
A lack of accountability and transparency	24
Service delivery issues	23
A lack of engagement	20
Corruption	16
Impact of mining	13

Figure **1** . Internet users by age in 2021

The frequencies of the themes identified are presented in Table 3. The ranking of the frequencies with which the themes were mentioned reveals the domination of personal interest and the extent of the deep divisions within the communities. These are accompanied by a lack of communication, transparency, and accountability, service delivery issues, and violence in the communities. It is noteworthy that the impact of the mining was mentioned

the least.

The relationship between the challenges in CE are represented in Figure 1. The top section of the model suggests self-perpetuating associations among corruption, lack of service delivery, and violence in communities. Personal interests relate to placing interests above those of the community and play an important role in breaking down community engagement.

The quotes below are linked to the key challenges to community engagement as identified in Figure 1. They indicate the associations among corruption, service delivery, and violence. Perceptions also reveal the influence on community engagement of personal interests, community division, lack of engagement, a lack of communication, accountability, and transparency.

3.1 Corruption, service delivery, and violence

3.1.1 Corruption

Community members were frustrated about corruption, and they alleged that there were different forms of corruption that practised at the senior or executive level. NWFG3 (Respondent from North West Focus Group) mentioned: "And you find that one of us is in the position of power and someone in Anglo realises and identifies the vocal one amongst the six of us and decided to 'shut him up' by giving him or her what he or she wants."

Community members addressed concerns about corruption in unison during engagements and said that it was practiced at the executive decision-making level. In addition, all leaders were regarded with distrust unless they maintained the same standard of life and demeanour.

3.1.2 Service delivery issues

Mines found it difficult to interact with communities who had complaints non-delivery of municipal service delivery and social services which had been the main cause of strikes and violence. CRCO mentioned: "I think the challenge in the Twickenham area is that the municipality is almost non-existent and do not deliver any services and it create more expectations for the mine to deliver these services.

From the above responses there was an expectation from the community that the mines had provided energy, water, and education to the community. Communities' queries directed to government was referred to the local municipality and ward councillors that were aligned to the IDP objectives.

3.1.3 Violence in the communities

The community occasionally resorted to violence to address their service delivery problems and corrupt practices that were unattended by the municipality. NWBR1 mentioned: "So, they blockade the road in most cases and others will just go to our multi-purpose hub and just start insulting everyone"

Some participants mentioned that due to the nature of response by the mines and municipality reacting to the violence, communities had a sense that more strikes and violence would surge as more demands were reverberating

within communities. The communities expected a different response which would result in service delivery, leading to a peaceful resolution, as a violent response would only escalate the situation. The communities anticipated a different response that was more sustainable and would delivers peace and goodwill to the community. NWFG1 (Respondent from North West Focus Group) mentioned: "They are not responding in a good way, the only time when they listen to us it's when there are strikes. After the strike, there will be engagement, and those projects come"

When these demands were not granted, they reacted negatively, frequently protesting violently and destroying property, especially communal resources that were already scarce. "At the end of the day, we'll get what we want," they said. The ineffectiveness of the structures, as well as stakeholders that deviate from protocols to serve political and self-serving objectives fueled this rage.

3.2 Personal interests, community division, lack of engagement, and a lack of communication, accountability and transparency

3.2.1 Personal interest

Some community, traditional, and faith leaders, and CEF officials, were motivated by personal interests and a desire to profit from community resources. Individuals with personal agendas were driving some of the protests, which were unrelated to the services provided. There was a sense of entitlement as well. LFG1 (Respondent from Limpopo Focus Group) mentioned: "There is nothing here, it's just infighting within the community. Everyone wants to ensure that the mine looks after their area and their chiefs. That's it."

People who were motivated by personal interest or jealousy appear to be unable to recognize the success of a fellow community member. A spiral of actions followed in undermining the efforts of the person, tarnishing the reputation, providing misleading and negative information to discredit the person. Many of the projects had been harmed by community divisions and personal agendas, which were almost sustained rather than the community's best interests.

3.2.2 Divisions in the communities

If a mine was located in one village or community, that community did not want other villages or communities to benefit from it. The community was territorial and this ws only one level of division, and other divisions relate to span tribe, service, language, and interest lines. LBR1 mentioned: "Another thing that our people are doing which is very wrong is to place themselves in a silo. Because if people feel like they have, there's a mine, mining company eh, around them, then, around their doorstep, they tend to close themselves and say 'No, not employees from other communities should come closer."

3.2.3 A lack of engagement

When these demands were not granted, communities reacted negatively, frequently protesting violently and destroying property, especially communal resources that

were already scarce. "At the end of the day, we'll get what we want," they said. The ineffectiveness of the structures, as well as stakeholders deviating from protocols for political and self-serving objectives, fueled the rage. NWFG2 (Respondent from North West Focus Group) mentioned: "The greatest challenge here is that there is no community engagement between communities, government and the mines, at all, hence people do not know what is happening."

These utterances exhibited the need within this community to be more engaged as it seemed that they were not fully aware of when meetings were held, and who helds the responsibility of reporting to the mines and the municipality. CE in the North West appeared to be a major concern within the community.

3.2.4 A lack of communication

Although the code identified the lack of communication and consultations between the mine and the community, communication was still ineffective and there was no direct mine representative to engage with the community to address community grievances.

Research participants from the focus group discussions indicated that there was no contact from the mines and a lack information. The mining was expected to consult the community in the case of job opportunities, commercial projects, and any infrastructural improvements that would benefit and affect the community. LCR1 mentioned: "It is a communication challenge. Nothing else. Because you struggle to see the management. And the management does not account to the leaders. And the leaders do not go to the community."

All stakeholders had have substantial communication hurdles. The leaders and spokespeople of the community did not provide any information to the community members. Protocols prevented the mines from directly engaging all members of the community. LCR1 mentioned: "The disadvantages or benefits of mining in the community cannot be overlooked, minimised or ignored. Dust, blasting, pollution, and exposure to harmful minerals are all detrimental effects of mining." Interpretation and recommendation At various degrees of community engagement, challenges were encountered. For example, communities faced their own internal issues that stymied their interactions with the mine and the government. Internal difficulties in communities were concentrated on representational division and personal interests. Engagement forums were rendered counter-productive and dysfunctional because the need of the community was not satisfied and services were not being delivered.

An important finding was that dominant personal interests were a key disrupter of community engagement, where people placed their own interests above that of the community. This aligns with the definitions by Moore et al. (2016); Brunton et al. (2017); Walker, 2014; that community engagement involves groups with a common interest, and there is an agreed framework that guides the engagement. Furthermore, Glandon et al. (2017) postulate that community engagement involves the respectful, meaningful and fit-for-purpose participation of community members

A social licence to operate emerged as important for effective community engagement. From a sustainability perspective companies must adopt practices that are economically viable, socially applicable and environmentally responsible (Pereira et al., 2020).Through collaboration industry must earn itself a social licence to operate. More specifically, in the mining industry, Community Engagement (CE) means that the corporation and its operations should be acceptable to the community and its stakeholders.

The current findings on the experiences of community engagement support Wang et al. (2016), that a lack of continuity, opportunities and consultation with stakeholders resulting in a lack of empowerment for the communities. As found by Glandon et al. (2017), delays in consultation and lack of commitment break down communities' willingness to engage.

The responses from research participants indicated that communication was lacking in both communities. The communities in the North West Province and Limpopo Provinces have had an expectation to be fully empowered and only be informed in an ineffective manner.

3.2.5 Violence in the communities

Community Engagement (CE) is a process whereby a service system proactively seeks out community values, concerns, and aspirations (Moore et al., 2016). Values, concerns, and aspirations are incorporated into a decision-making process or processes, and an ongoing partnership with the community ensures that the community's priorities and values continue to shape services and the service system. CE is associated with forging coalitions and partnerships to mobilise resources and influence systems and to be the catalyst to change systems, policies, programmes, and practices.

Johnson (2020) revealed that in South Africa the consequence of a lack of CE or ineffective CE had caused instability through disruption of mine operations, blockade projects, and malicious damage to mine property and, infrastructure; also, and mine projects attracted continuous legal challenges. As it stood, most communities were not sufficiently benefiting from the mineral resources extracted from their geographical areas due to instability caused by the ineffectiveness of the CE structures.

The responses from research participants indicated that even though there was a communication engagement strategy, structures, processes, and principles, these were by-passed and nothing had been done in accordance with the CE plans. There was also a culture of protesting, resorting to violence and striking to demand services and interventions based on the perceived or identified.

The following recommendations are made based on the study findings; development of a CE framework should start from the inception of mining as part of the Social Licence to Operate (SLO); platforms for communities to evaluate the mine's service delivery and the effectiveness of CE must be created. The CE requirements, mining CE practices, and barriers to effective CE are shown in Table 4.

Table **4** . CE requirements, mining CE practices and barriers to CE

CE requirements	Mining CE Practices	Barriers to CE
CE Vision and Strategy	There is an unknown vision and strategy that focuses on the medium-long terms by the community members	There is no clear and known short, medium and long-terms objectives and plan linked to sustainability at community level
Community profiling and need analysis	All the responses do not refer to a community profile	No community profile
Community engagement structure	Community Engagement Forum (CEF)	Ineffective community engagement structures
Community engagement principles	The principles of CE are not adhered to in various areas	
Community engagement	There is an exclusive approach adopted to communicate and involve CEF reps/leaders and other beneficiaries	Personal interest and personal agendas (Johnson, 2020)

4. CONCLUSION

The importance of a society to understand the effects of CE on the areas where they intend to or operate are crucial, so that those who are not personally affected by poor CE or a lack thereof can understand and appreciate the consequences of it on the affected communities or individuals. The factors that were identified for CE challenges were ineffective implementation of the Anglo Social Way, unclear CE approaches, ineffective CE structures, the misalignment between the company framework, guiding policies, and the municipality framework as well as the terms of references. The Anglo Social Way was a great tool to ensure effective community engagement and development of the communities; however, it was not effectively communicated to the low-level individual community members.

Furthermore, CE structures existed but they were ineffective as the information and feedback meant for the entire community did not reach the intended audiences due to personal interest by those elected to represent the community. The lack of accountability and transparency were showed by the parties involved in Community Engagement Forums. This had led to community divisions, alleged corruption, and increased violence which had had a negative impact on the entire community.

The company's policies and guiding principles were also not aligned to the government's CE policies and approaches resulting in tensions and ineffective CE and poor service delivery. The Municipality Engagement Framework was also misaligned with other stakeholders such as the mining houses and community expectations. This study, has therefore, highlighted the critical need for the development of CE Framework that will address the impact of poor CE or a lack thereof felt by all and which cannot be underestimated as it happened in the past where communities were never consulted. The impact was noticeably the same among the participants, with showing more negative compared to positive outcomes.

Lastly, the study has highlighted the CE deficiencies that existed within the mining industry hence the surge in violence against the mines. It has further espoused the need for the education of all stakeholders especially the communities, some of which, were not literate enough to understand company's high-level strategies and approaches regarding community engagement. Moreover, all stakeholders needed to develop a CE Framework that would serve as a guideline for them.

The results of this study form a springboard for future research to address further aspects of CE in mining within a larger and more diverse sample size. It is evident that somewhat similar experiences exist in other mining communities where they are either consulted or engaged on a limited scale or never consulted or engaged at all.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Nothing to declare.

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