

Advancing Economic Development at the Expense of Black Communities: A Study of the Somkhele Mine, since 2007

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Abstract: In rural areas of South Africa, mining development overseen by traditional leadership authorities has faced significant criticism in recent years. Concerns have been raised regarding the impact of these mines on natural environments, the livelihoods of rural residents and the perceived lack of adequate compensation for those displaced from their traditional lands. Environmental activists have aligned themselves with local communities, participating in protests and initiating legal actions, including interdicts, against mining operations in these rural areas. Years spanning 1948 and 1994, South Africa's history witnessed widespread displacement of communities from their traditional areas to various locations, driven by diverse factors such as the clearance of 'black spots', compliance with Influx Control legislation, urbanization initiatives, development schemes, strategic projects, and Homeland Consolidation efforts. The majority of those affected by these displacements were black communities. Despite the prevalence of such events, there is a notable scarcity of literature documenting the experiences of these relocated communities particularly in rural areas. This article seeks to reconstruct the experiences of black communities relocated due to the establishment and expansion of Somkhele/Tendele coal mine, in Mtubatuba, Northern KwaZulu Natal. Special attention is given to the removal process and the responses of the affected people. In doing this, the study employs a qualitative research approach, using open-ended interviews with the locals. In addition, archival material, official documents and newspaper articles, media statements relevant to the topic under study are used. The study concludes that the relocation was not aimed at improving the well-being of the relocated individuals, but rather served to generate the economy for the mining companies at the expense of the locals. This narrative is drawn from qualitative research, providing insights into the sentiments and attitudes of the victims.

Keywords: Apartheid, community, dispossession, forced removals, marginalization, Somkhele.

Introduction

The removal of people from their areas of residence in South Africa continues even under a democratic dispensation. At this time, this act of removal is always justified by a desire to improve either their living conditions or the country's economy. Despite numerous studies examining the effects of mining on rural areas of South Africa[1], the area of kwaSomkhele in Mtubatuba in democratic South Africa remains poorly documented. It remains overlooked in discussions concerning the impact of mining on local communities and ecosystems in northern KwaZulu-Natal. The reasons behind this scholarly neglect are complex and not readily apparent. Therefore, this study endeavours to shed light on the less explored aspects of this issue. During apartheid, those who were

removed from their areas of origin were not eligible for any assistance, despite the loss they incurred. This act of taking land which had been occupied by African people and handing it over for development had been given particular poignancy by the (apartheid) system which undermined black people and thereafter denied them fundamental human rights in the land of their forefathers [2].

In a broader political and economic context Somkhele is, in a real sense, the continuation of what many black people endured during apartheid. The Somkhele mine is creating and developing the economy at the expense and detriment of black people. The land on which Somkhele mine is operating has been occupied by black people for centuries. However, it is worth noting that mining in Somkhele is not a new phenomenon, it has occurred before and during the apartheid period, and for whatever reasons it was halted, the resumption of large-scale mining by Petmin in 2007 was not a new operation. Fluorspar, quarry and coal have been mined in the area before this massive operation currently taking place. The geological survey suggests that as early as 1894 there were mining prospects in Reserve Number 3 and 13 under the Hlabisa District (now Mtubatuba, Somkele) [3]. According to the residents of the area, the area was economically viable. The need for the construction of a coal mine and its expansion required that the local people should be requested to move from the area to settle elsewhere. This paper argues that the removal of people for mine expansion became an unfortunate episode, resulting in destabilized and compromised livelihoods of the people of kwaSomkhele in many forms and shapes. Against this broad background, even though the operation of the mine started in the late 1890s the large-scale mining started in 2007. This article looks at their experiences since 2007 which ranged from resistance, legal battles, hunger, hardship, and in some cases death.

Dispossession in South Africa

South Africa has experienced a long history of forced removal of people as a result of racist legislation. People have been removed from their areas of origin for a variety of reasons, sometimes for mining development, urban planning, clearing of border areas, or the removal of “black spots” in line with the apartheid’s policy of separate development. Scholars like Kgatla [4] noted that the forced removal in South Africa during apartheid was the most cruel and dehumanizing experience that black people had to endure. In addition to this, Cousins [5], observed that black people were pushed to areas where there was a lack of resources for survival and no services to sustain their livelihoods. Walker [6] argued that the removal of black people during apartheid did not even receive media coverage while the removals that affected white people would receive adequate media coverage, while Skelcher [7] posits that the worst experiences of “black spots” removals are that African people were not given a chance to consult with the spirit of the dead inform them of their move to the new locations. The spiritual aspects of forced removals denied Africans basic human rights to perform their rituals before they could be removed from an area. During apartheid, those who were removed were not eligible for any assistance. South Africa continues to experience forced removals but very little has been put into interrogating the extent to which the mine has and continues to improve the quality of life of those communities that were removed during the expansion of the mine. Forced removals refer to the moving of people from their homes. This did not involve physical threat or force but sometimes coercion and other tactics which the evictees were not able to challenge [8]. Apart from other racial groups which live in South Africa, the majority of people who were affected by removals are Black, Coloured and Indian people.

In an attempt to trace the history of the removals, Alan Baldwin has argued that the history of forced removals in South Africa could be traced back from the attempt to apply the theory of Separate Development. According to Baldwin [9], the theory was designed for two purposes. One – was to maintain the status quo of white supremacy. Two- to maintain economic demands for rapid industrial expansion [9]. Although the theory of maintaining the status quo no longer exists the theory of maintaining economic demands has continued to be part of the democratic government of South Africa.

It is also important to note that both experiences, especially in rural areas, which people endured during apartheid are the same experiences they endured under the democratic government. This is the case because during apartheid, once people were forcibly removed and resettled, their members scattered across the various areas with little opportunity

to reconnect. These experiences reveal the difficulties and traumas experienced by individuals and groups who are forced to relocate [7] [5][6].

The history of forced removals in South Africa is deeply intertwined with the country's apartheid regime and its policies of racial segregation. These removals affected various communities across different provinces in different ways, often with significant social, economic, and cultural implications. One notable example of removals to make way for leisure spaces occurred in the Western Cape province, particularly in areas like Cape Town. During apartheid, the Group Areas Act of 1950 designated certain areas for specific racial groups, leading to forced removals of non-white communities from prime urban locations to peripheral areas, often far from economic opportunities and essential services. Some of these areas were then repurposed for the development of leisure spaces, such as beaches and recreational facilities, primarily for the use of the white population.

In other provinces, like Gauteng, removals were often carried out to make way for infrastructure development aimed at serving the needs of the white population, such as the expansion of electricity or water supply networks. This frequently resulted in the displacement of black communities living in areas earmarked for development, with little regard for their rights or well-being. Eastern Cape province also experienced significant removals, particularly during the implementation of the notorious Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. This legislation sought to consolidate black South Africans into designated "homelands" or "Bantustans", leading to the forced removal of millions of people from their ancestral lands to these impoverished and overcrowded areas.

The history of removals in South Africa reflects the systematic oppression and dispossession experienced by non-white communities under apartheid rule. While the specific circumstances and motivations varied from province to province, the underlying injustice and disregard for human rights were consistent themes throughout. [8]. There was no limit to the reasons behind removals or the ferocity of their implementation. In modern times, forced removals have continued to occur.

Removals in modern times especially in rural areas have received little academic attention and documentation although evidence has indicated that these removals continue [10]. These types of evictions continue to occur in rural areas and private farms and residences across the country. They are always justified as initiated for economic reasons [11]. This has led to a comparison between the democratic government removals and the apartheid-era removals. One could only conclude that modern removals are not different from apartheid-era removals. This is the case because even though they are compensated in present times the experience they endure is the same.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology encompasses both a philosophical movement and a range of qualitative research approaches. The term "phenomenology" denotes the examination of phenomena, which encompasses anything that manifests within an individual's conscious experience,[20]. Researchers, through phenomenological research design, sought to explore the lived experiences of individuals regarding the development and operations of the mine in the area, aiming to grasp the essence of these encounters from the participants' perspectives. Phenomenology, as elucidated by Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio [12], entails examining phenomena through the lens of those who have directly witnessed them, emphasizing not only what occurred but also how individuals interpret these occurrences. By adopting this strategy, the study aimed to explore, understand, explain, and describe diverse experiences related to the mine's development and operations. Open-ended interviews were conducted to elicit participants' insights, enabling a flexible dialogue guided by the researchers and supplemented by follow-up inquiries and reflections. Creswell [21] argues that the need for interviews is that they allow participants to describe their experiences, which is in line with the phenomenological view. This method facilitated the collection of open-ended data, allowing for in-depth exploration of personal and potentially sensitive topics, including participants' thoughts, emotions, and viewpoints. Utilizing purposive sampling, the research involved 20 individuals, equally divided between genders and drawn from various households. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data, which encompassed interview transcripts and other pertinent writings reflecting participants' lived experiences. Ethical considerations were

carefully addressed throughout the research process, with consultations conducted with both the mine and the local traditional council to obtain permission for the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained to safeguard the dignity of participants, with typed narratives also made available to relevant stakeholders as agreed upon.

The history of mining in the KwaSomkhele area

The discovery of significant quantities of anthracite in the Somkhele area in the 1880s sparked a series of prospecting and mining projects. This area, rich in coal deposits, has a long history of mining activity dating back to the late 19th century. In anticipation of coal mining in Somkhele, the construction of a railway line from Durban to the area commenced in 1895, indicating the strategic importance of this resource. The first commercial extraction of anthracite in the Somkhele area occurred between 1903 and 1909. During this period, the now-defunct Zululand Collieries undertook mining operations in what is now known as Area 4 of Reserve 3. Over these initial years of operation, Zululand Collieries produced a total of 49,209 tons of anthracite, highlighting the significance of the mining activity in the region during that time. This early phase of coal mining laid the foundation for continued exploitation of the coal reserves in the Somkhele area, contributing to the economic development of the region and the broader coal industry in South Africa. The elders in Mtubatuba claim that mining in KwaSomkhele commenced in the early 20th century. The archival documents concur with their assertions, indicating that by 1948, mining had taken place and ceased its operation in the KwaSomkhele area (Native Reserve No. 3). The letter from the Hlabisa District Native Commissioner to the Chief Native Commissioner suggests that mining activities had occurred but had since ceased. Mr. Zuydam applied for permission to remove anthracite from the site of the old mine in the Somkele area of Native Reserve No. 3, which was abandoned on the surface when the mine ceased its operation.[13].

Between 1936 and 1939, Umfolozi Co-Op Sugar Planters tested anthracite from Somkhele to assess its suitability for their sugar mills near Mtubatuba. Subsequently, they mined approximately 300 tons of anthracite for use in their boilers. In 1965, Mining (Pty) acquired a concession through Somkhele Prospecting Co. (Pty) Ltd, covering an area of 168 square kilometres, extending from the Nongoma-Mtubatuba road in the south to the southeastern corner of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Between 1966 and 1976, extensive drilling took place in Somkhele Areas 1, 3, 4, 5, and 9 to explore for anthracite. The results from the exploratory drilling in Area 1 alone indicated a total extractable reserve of 7.9 million tons of anthracite to a depth of 300 meters, covering an area of 330 hectares with open-pit potential. [14].

Between 1976 and 1982, JCI (Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Co. Ltd.) continued exploration activities in the Somkhele area. They drilled additional boreholes and conducted geophysical surveys in what later became known as Somkhele Area 2. These efforts led to the identification of further potential anthracite reserves. In 1979, JCI expanded its prospecting endeavours by acquiring prospecting rights and authorizations for what would become Somkhele Area 3. Subsequently, they drilled more boreholes in this area in search of additional anthracite reserves. In 1986 and 1987, JCI resumed drilling activities in Somkhele Area 1, likely to further explore and delineate the extent of anthracite deposits in that specific region. These drilling efforts were likely part of JCI's ongoing efforts to assess the commercial viability and potential of the anthracite reserves in the Somkhele area [14].

Between 1994 and 2004 AfriOre acquired various mining interests in Somkhele. It was between 2001 and 2003 that AfriOre drilled numerous boreholes in what is now Somkhele Area 2, under a mining license issued according to the Minerals Act 50 of 1991. In 2004, AfriOre sold its interests in Somkhele to a consortium led by the New Africa Mining Fund (NAMF). In 2005, Petmin Limited, the holding company of Tendele, purchased all of the anthracite interests held by the NAMF in Somkhele. In 2006, Tendele commenced mining operations in Somkhele Area 2 under the grant of a Mining License. Later, they obtained a Mining Right and the approval of an Environmental Management Programme. [14].

On 11 October 2005 Petra Mining (Petmin) chairperson Andrew Lanham, Piet Nel and senior representative of Mpukunyoni Tribal Authority, BB Mkhwanazi turned the first sod on the site of the new washing plant at Somkhele. This is the first 'greenfield anthracite coal mine opened in South Africa more than a decade ago. The current mining

company (Petmin) is the third to operate in the Kwa-Somkhele area. In 1903, coal was discovered under the reign of Inkosi Somkhele. However, that mining operation was short-lived and no evidence which indicate the reasons for its closure. In 1985, the ZAC (Zululand Anthracite Colliery) was opened to operate. Mark Snelling was employed by JCI (a company exploring the Somkhele area for more coal. In 2007, Petmin/Tendele came back to continue operating for coal. Since 2013, the mine has relied on three plants, being the largest coal mine of metallurgical anthracite in South Africa energy-intensive type of coal [15] (Lanham, 2005).

The coal was discovered at the Msizi wamaKristu site. Tendele Coal Mining (Pty) Ltd, a subsidiary of Petmin, has been operating the Somkhele Coal Mine in northern KwaZulu-Natal since 2007. This open coal cast mine is located on Ingonyama Trust land under the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority and is situated between the Hluhluwe - iMfolozi Park to the west, and the N2 national road and the town of Mtubatuba to the east and southeast. Tendele currently holds the following mining rights granted under the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002 (MPRDA), the most recent of which was granted in 2016 for Areas 4 and 5 and is being challenged:

- Area 1 (6.6 km²): immediately north of the Mfolozi River. Tendele is still actively mining Area 1.
- Area 2 and 3 (14.6 km²): south of the R618 road that runs between Mtubatuba and the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. This mining right was extended to include the areas of KwaQubuka, and Luhlanga, including the Luhlanga Extension (Boxcut Zero). The coal processing plant is located in Area 2. Tendele is currently mining KwaQubuka and Luhlanga Boxcut Zero.
- Areas 4 and 5 (212 km² / 17.66 km²): mostly north of Area 2 and the R618 road. Mining has not commenced in Mining Areas 4 and 5. In early 2021, Tendele undertook to abandon most of the area under this mining right except for Ophondweni, Emalahleni and Mahujini totalling 17.66 km².

Life at Somkhele before mine expansion

Life at Somkhele was based on fishing, farming, livestock rearing, hunting and gathering. The area provided a very good place to grow vegetables, as the land was fertile. Farming was mainly subsistence. The men speared fish from the nearby rivers. Men and women gathered fruits while young boys looked after livestock (cattle, goats and sheep). Livestock did not only serve as a measure of wealth and power it also provided food security. Cattle were also for bride price (lobola). Men earned their living by forestry. They sold trees to big timber mills in the nearby firms controlled by the whites. The swampy lowland soil near the sea was ideal for growing revenue-earning blue gum trees [16]. Women used ox-drawn ploughs or iron-forged hoes to plant sweet potatoes, maize, pumpkins, millet, peanuts, and cabbage. They also moved to nearby St Lucia to harvest *incema* (*Juncus kraussii*) or special grass to weave baskets and Zulu mats. Even though, some community members were against such action as they were fighting their battle against forced removals [17]. Before the removal, the majority of the people at Somkhele did not migrate for job opportunities because they were comfortable with their living conditions at the time. However, after relocation, this situation changed dramatically as most men were forced to leave their families for months in search of jobs far away from their homes.

The Somkhele community continued to be bound by strong traditional beliefs and fell under traditional authorities which were easy to identify by hereditary clans. This strong traditional belief started to decline after the passing of Inkosi Mzondeni Mkhwanazi in 2007, the very year, large-scale open-cast mining commenced in the area. Even though there is this operation in the area, the community in Somkhele is made up of many unemployed people, the infrastructure is very poor, lack of proper roads, and proper transportation and schools are far from other households. Before the establishment of the mine, many people relied mostly on subsistence farming and social grants. Many of them are unemployed which makes them so vulnerable to exploitation.

Many residents have been residing in the area since the 1950s. Some of them arrived in the area around the same year because of the Apartheid government's forced removals. Most of these communities were removed from the Dukuduku area near St. Lucia. They were removed because of soil fertility and for the area to be developed to attract tourists. Before the removals, the Somkhele community settled in peace and harmony. There were very few cases of

conflict that were taken to the Mpukunyoni Paralegal office located in two areas namely: Mgeza Traditional Court and Mfekayi traditional court.

The proposed mine expansion, legal battles and environmental activism

Tendele's Somkhele mine is located in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality about some 200 km north of Durban (KwaSomkhele). The Somkhele area has seven villages (Myeki, Mahujini, Ntandabantu, Esiyembeni, Machibini, Ugengele, and Dubelenkunzi). The residents of the seven villages have been hit hard by the mining operation. Somkhele Coal Mine also referred to as Tendele's Somkhele Coal Mine was established with promises of many opportunities and community development.

The mine was officially launched during the soil turning at Machibini village, in 2005, followed by the construction of the processing plant (where coal got crushed, washed and stockpiled) at Machibini Village. The first pit was commissioned from the brownfield site at Machibini village in 2017. The second pit was established on the borders of Esiyembeni and Dubelenkhunzi towards the uMfolozi River, followed by a third pit at Kwaluhlanga and KwaQubuka (both at KwaMyeki Village). Mahujini village is earmarked for expansion. Ntandabantu and Ugengele are areas where the mine currently relocates people, causing confusion and congestion without proper town planning. It was clear that these areas were occupied by people. When they had to make space for the establishment and expansion of the mine no place was allocated for them to move to. They relocated to nearby areas and some of these areas were not fertile [18].

The Somkhele community moved to nearby areas not aware that those areas were surveyed to be rich in coal. In terms of compensation, the process was not fair. Those who were able to negotiate for themselves were compensated better compared to those who were unable to speak for themselves [19]. It was even worse for those whose homes were not fenced. What was puzzling in the process was the fact that the traditional structures were aware of the actions of the mine towards people because they represented the Somkhele community in the mine.

Numerous legal disputes have arisen between the mine and residents, who have sought to halt its operations in the area, alleging severe human rights violations. Additionally, environmentalists have criticized the mine for disregarding environmental regulations governing mining activities near protected areas. This contention arises due to the perceived threat posed by the Somkhele mine to the Hluhluwe-UMfolozi game reserve. Environmentalists feel aggrieved by the government's decision to grant Somkhele mining rights in such proximity to the park. The first occurred in 2017 in the Pietermaritzburg High Court, challenging the legality of Somkhele's operations and seeking a temporary injunction to halt mining activities until Somkhele obtained the necessary licenses. The second occurred in 2018 in the Pretoria High Court, requesting a judicial review to overturn Somkhele's 2016 Mining Rights for Areas 4 and 5. This came after Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation's (MCEJO) unsuccessful administrative appeal to the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy [22][23].

MCEJO receives active support from various organizations, including, Global Environmental Trust (GET), Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), ActionAid South Africa, South African Human Rights Defenders Network, Frontline Defenders, Human Rights Watch, Environmental Defender Law Centre (EDLC), groundwork, Richard Spoor Incorporated Attorneys, Land and Accountability Research Centre (LARC), Centre for Environmental Rights, Lawyers for Human Rights. Furthermore, All Rise is representing MCEJO and GET in their appeal against the water use license granted to Somkhele on July 9, 2020, in addition to pursuing legal action through the courts.[22]

Overall, the Somkhele coal mine has emerged victoriously in these court battles, giving them the green light to proceed with their operation. Most recently, more than 90 per cent of the people in the affected areas have voted in favour of the mine to reopen. The mine's business development manager, Nathi Kunene, mentioned that this vote follows the judgment on May 4, which 'reopened the appeal process before the Minister of the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy,' while affirming the validity of the mine's mining right and environmental management program [24].

Effects of the expansion of the Somkhele mine

It is important to mention that although the operation of the mine has affected the area in different ways. The Somkhele mine at the community's request has built halls, created job opportunities, helped youth acquire driver's licences and tried to build dams of water in the area. However, all the good deeds are overshadowed by what the community has experienced since the mine started its large-scale open-cast operation in 2007. This ranges from the following:

Waste management

The process of crushing and washing coal has produced liquid waste along with huge stockpiles of solid waste. The waste produced by Somkhele falls within the definition of 'hazardous waste', which includes 'residue stockpiles' and 'wastes from the pyrolytic treatment of coal'. The concept of 'residue stockpile' includes waste derived from a mining operation which is stockpiled, and wastes resulting from mining. According to community members, Somkhele started mining without a waste management licence as required by the Waste Act. This was against the law as Section 20 of the Waste Act provides that no person may commence, undertake or conduct a waste management activity, except by a waste management licence or the requirements or standards determined in terms of s 19(3) [18].

The blasting from the mine has caused a lot of dust in the areas surrounding the mine. There is a lot of noise and dust and the environment has been disturbed. The emitted dust does not only affect the environment but also affects the health of local people. One member of the community indicated, during the interview, that before the establishment of the mine they used to fish, farm and get fresh water from the nearby rivers. After the establishment of the mine, the climate changed. This means that the climate in the area was no longer favourable for the environment. This caused harm to both livestock and endangered the lives of the Somkhele people.

The community argues that there were issues of water scarcity in the area before the operation of the mine but the establishment of the mine exacerbated water problems in the area. The nearby rivers became dry and those still existing are polluted by coal dust emitted from the mine.

Intangible Heritage and grave issues in KwaSomkhele

Section 35 of the KwaZulu Natal Heritage Act provides that before any grave may be damaged, altered, exhumed or removed, prior written consent must be obtained from the AMAFA Heritage Council. The Council must be satisfied that an applicant has made concerted efforts to engage the relevant communities affected and that those communities have agreed to the relocation of graves. Several community members argued that when Somkhele started mining, there were many graves on the mining site which were exhumed and moved to another graveyard with no regard for the African people's deep respect for their ancestors. This graveyard is situated on a slope, and some of the graves have been undercut by rain and are slumping. In some of the graves, body parts can be seen.

The exhumation process was unpopular among the African people. According to African culture, death is considered a transition to the afterlife of ancestors, therefore exhumation is seen as contradicting the African culture and can result in a curse for the surviving family. If the situation demands that there must be the relocation of graves, there must be processes to be followed. This process indicates that firstly there must be a ritual where (the head of the family) informs and apologises to the deceased about the relocation of his/her remains. This ritual requires that, for each grave, there must be incense (impepho), goat (imbuzi), traditional beer (umqombothi) and cow (inkomo).

Some households indicated that when they had to relocate graves, they did not have time and money to prepare for this ritual. Although the mine tried to compensate each household with a cow and goat it was not significant. This was the case because some households had several graves to be relocated. This means that the Somkhele mine did not pay sufficient attention to African culture and also disrespected people.

Infrastructure

In terms of corporal social investment, organisations or businesses must give back to the communities they operate in as a show of appreciation. Although Somkhele has built community halls and dams in nearby areas, community members have expressed that this is not enough. Some areas where people relocated have no proper roads. In rainy

seasons those areas are inaccessible due to slippery muddy roads. Water accessibility is still a problem in the Somkhele area. Dams built by Somkhele mine do have sufficient water for livestock and the community. Even surrounding schools are not assisted by the mine instead the Department of Basic Education has assisted them with boreholes and water tanks.

Based on observation there is a shortage of health facilities in the Somkhele area. Residents of the area indicated that the area surrounding a mine should have at least one health facility to support their health needs.

Employment

According to mine, they have employed (both directly and indirectly via service providers and contractors) approximately 1,600 people which translates to 87% of those employed from the local community at Somkhele. Although this percentage is positive, it has only served in the short run because in the long the community has complained that the mine has retrenched local people without serving them with any warning. However, general sentiments from the public are that people who stand a good chance to be employed are those in cahoots with the Mpukonyoni Traditional Authority. The local community are replaced with people who are from outside Mtubatuba. The mine has also assisted Somkhele youth to get driver's licences.

Environmental effects

The mine has impacted negatively the Somkhele and nearby areas. The establishment and operation of the mine have destroyed the area's landscapes. The mine has stripped away the earth and rocks to reach the coal underneath. It has blasted or levelled the area leaving a scarred landscape and disturbing ecosystems and wildlife. When the mine was established, it deforested and eroded the area as part of the process of clearing the way for a coal mine. This also included trees cut down or burned, plants uprooted, and the topsoil scraped away. This results in the destruction of the land (it can no longer be used for planting crops) and soil erosion. The loosened topsoil can now be washed down by rain. Participant posited that in the down streams, they used to do fishing but now the streams have run dry.

The operation of the mine has also contaminated groundwater. Participants in the study argued that the minerals from the disturbed earth seeped into groundwater and contaminated water sources with chemicals that are hazardous to residents' health. When it rains, the diluted acid gets into rivers and streams and can even seep into underground sources of water and affect people and livestock. The mine operation has also caused chemical, air and dust pollution in the Somkhele area. The operation of the mine has allowed the company to dig for coal deeper into the ground. The problem is that huge amounts of earth and rock are brought up from the bowels of the earth. These mining wastes can become toxic after being exposed to air and water. The amount of dust generated in Somkhele mining operations has been carried to surrounding local communities by the wind. These dust particles have caused all kinds of health problems for humans who are exposed to them.

Conclusion

This study provides a firsthand narrative detailing the displacement inflicted upon the community by the Somkhele Coal Mine. Residents were forcibly relocated with minimal compensation, and those who resisted relocation faced not only exposure to harmful dust emissions but also mistreatment and humiliation from mine management and other "unseen" forces that threatened to take their lives. The proximity of the Somkhele mine to residential areas has resulted in long-term detrimental effects, including the infiltration of coal dust into homes and disruptions caused by mining activities such as blasting and processing. Consequently, the operation of the mine has had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of residents, rendering the water unsuitable for gardening and leading to significant environmental and social degradation in Somkhele. This includes the depletion of water sources, air, soil, and water pollution, and the destruction of ecosystems. Furthermore, mining activities have decimated arable land, exacerbating food insecurity in the region. In conclusion, the Somkhele mine serves as a stark illustration of the prioritization of mining over the lives, dignity, and livelihoods of the impoverished in the country's economic hierarchy.

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