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Host mining community expectations on stakeholder engagement in the West Wits Basin, South Africa

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Abstract

Stakeholder engagement is a critical issue in South Africa's mining sector, driven by increasing calls for transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation by host mining communities. Despite legislative frameworks such as the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRD Act), the Mining Charter, and Social and Labour Plans (SLPs), host mining communities continue to express concerns regarding the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement and their involvement in decisions that affect their communities. This study evaluated the methods of stakeholder engagement employed by surrounding mining companies as perceived by the Slovoville host mining community in the West Wits Basin. It assessed the methods used by mining companies to engage the community and examined the community's understanding, experiences, and expectations regarding the stakeholder engagement process. A mixed-methods approach that included a structured questionnaire administered to 50 community members and semi-structured qualitative interviews was utilised. The findings revealed that stakeholder engagement is often undertaken through passive communication platforms such as newspapers, company websites and social media. Many respondents considered these approaches ineffective for promoting meaningful understanding and participation. Respondents reported difficulties accessing and understanding information and had limited awareness of stakeholder engagement legislation. They preferred a face-to-face dialogue kind of engagement that allows interaction and clarification. Most felt that surrounding mining companies do not adequately understand or respond to community needs. The host mining community of Slovoville expects mining companies to not only inform them but engage them on community development projects, environmental responsibility, economic development and employment. The study concludes that improving stakeholder engagement requires communication that is more accessible, participatory, transparent and responsive to host mining community needs.

Keywords: *host mining community, mining companies, stakeholder, engagement, expectations*

1 Introduction

1.1 Stakeholder engagement in host mining communities

Host mining communities are increasingly, and rightfully, demanding to be meaningfully engaged and to share in the benefits of the resources mined in their jurisdictions. In this paper, the term host mining community refers to communities that reside within or adjacent to mining operations and which are directly affected by the social, economic, environmental and developmental impacts of mining activities. This terminology is used to distinguish these communities from the broader concept of host communities often used in the development-induced displacement and resettlement literature. In that context, host communities refers to communities that receive displaced or resettled populations. Throughout this paper, the term host mining community is therefore used consistently to represent communities that host mining operations and experience the direct impacts of mining activities.

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The increasing demand for meaningful engagement has contributed to growing tension between mining companies and host mining communities. This strained relationship has been associated with limited transparency, infrequent stakeholder engagement, power imbalances and the inequitable consideration of community interests. Mining continues to contribute significantly to South Africa's economy, yet many host mining communities experience poverty and limited socio-economic development despite the mineral wealth generated within their land (Dikgwatlhe & Mulenga 2023; Minerals Council South Africa 2025). An ideal situation for host mining community engagement would be considered one with a constructive relationship between mining companies and stakeholders that leads to increased participation, shared values, sustainable business performance, improved corporate reputation and enhanced cooperation (Sangqu 2024). A healthy relationship between mining firms and their stakeholders is important for long-term sustainability and value creation (Sangqu 2024). Greenwood (2007) defines stakeholder engagement as "an organisation's efforts to actively involve affected or interested parties in a constructive manner in its decisions, processes, and activities".

Host mining communities have frequently expressed concerns that mining companies do not adequately engage with them, even though the companies derive value from the resources they extract from the communities' jurisdictions, leaving the local communities to continue to experience limited socio-economic development (Dikgwatlhe & Mulenga 2023). Furthermore, some host mining communities perceive that regulatory authorities do not always adequately hold mining companies accountable for compliance with Social and Labour Plans (SLPs), environmental obligations and benefit-sharing commitments (Benchmarks Foundation 2018; Pickering & Nyapisi 2017). These perceptions have contributed to growing calls for more transparent, inclusive and meaningful stakeholder engagement processes. SLPs set out how the company intends to share some of the benefits that flow from mining. These include, for example, initiatives for developing the skills of their employees, upgrading local schools and roads, and providing housing, water and sanitation in the area.

When a company applies for a mining right it is required by Regulation 46 of the *Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act* (MPRD Act no 28 of 2002) to submit an SLP, which the Department of Mineral Petroleum Resources then uses to assess how the mining company will benefit the host mining community and employees. Once a company is awarded a mining right, the SLP it submitted becomes a legally binding document.

Mining continues to be the mainstay of the South African economy, contributing approximately 6% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing about 474,000 people (Minerals Council South Africa 2025). According to the 2023 Annual Report of the Minerals Council South Africa, the sector added more than 7,500 jobs during 2023, bringing total direct employment to approximately 477,000 people. Total employee remuneration increased by 7% to ZAR 186.5 billion, while the industry's contribution to the national fiscus was estimated at ZAR 135.3 billion during the same period (Minerals Council South Africa 2025). These significant economic contributions have not directly translated to a better socio-economic livelihood for host communities. The difference between mining contribution and host community benefits has intensified calls for greater transparency, accountability and meaningful stakeholder engagement to ensure that mining contributes more equitably to the development of communities hosting mining operations.

1.2 Stakeholder engagement in South Africa's mining sector

South Africa's mining sector has a long and complex history that continues to influence relationships between mining companies and their host communities. Historically, the dispossession of mineral-rich land, together with reliance on the migrant labour system, contributed to tensions between mining companies and surrounding communities (Mostert & Mathiba 2023; Mtero 2017). In many mining areas, mining activities disrupted communal land use, sacred sites and cultural practices attached to the land (Mostert & Mathiba 2023). These historical experiences have continued to influence community perceptions of mining activities and have contributed to demands for greater participation and more meaningful stakeholder engagement.

South Africa's legislative framework, including the MPRD Act, the Mining Charter and the SLP requirements, was developed to promote the greater participation of communities and ensure that mining contributes to local socio-economic development. Despite these provisions, implementation challenges remain. In some instances, agreements relating to mining activities have been concluded without meaningful engagement with the host community. This has resulted in disputes over representation, community consent and benefit sharing (Action Aid International 2019; Nyembo & Lees 2020). Such challenges have contributed to conflict and disconnect between mining companies and host mining communities (Pickering & Nyapisi 2017).

Access to information also remains a significant challenge that affects stakeholder engagement as the communities often experiences difficulties in accessing vital project information (Centre for Environmental Rights 2014). They may also lack the technical knowledge required to understand mining-related documents and their rights and responsibilities during mining developments (Centre for Environmental Rights 2014). Limited access to information at the level they can understand constrains meaningful participation and also reduces the ability of communities to effectively engage with mining companies or hold them accountable for their commitments (Centre for Environmental Rights 2014).

These challenges illustrate that stakeholder engagement in mining represents a complex or 'wicked' problem characterised by competing interests and dynamic governance processes. This is a wicked problem because it is not solved by one straightforward solution. Stakeholder engagement for host mining communities is complex, has interconnected issues that are hard to define, has no single correct solution, and involves multiple stakeholders with different values, interests and perspectives. To address such complexity, collaborative knowledge production, technical capacity and meaningful participation among mining companies, host mining communities, government and other stakeholders are required to reduce conflict and improve decision-making (Turnhout et al. 2020).

1.3 Stakeholder engagement in the West Wits Basin

The present study is situated in the West Wits Basin, a region that is within the West Wits Goldfield of the Witwatersrand Basin. This is one of South Africa's most historically significant gold mining regions, and mining activities within it have contributed substantially to South Africa's mineral production and economic development (Cole & Broadhurst 2022). The activities have also shaped the social, economic and environmental conditions of surrounding communities. Mining has generated considerable economic value within the region, but many host mining communities continue to experience socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, environmental impacts and local economic development (Breitenbach 2018; Cole & Broadhurst 2022). The Slovoville host mining community is located within the West Wits Basin and in proximity to several gold mining operations. The community therefore provided an appropriate context for examining stakeholder engagement within a historically established mining region.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement in building constructive relationships between mining companies and host mining communities (Benchmarks Foundation 2018; Brand et al. 2020). However, most of them have focused on stakeholder engagement practices, governance arrangements, regulatory compliance, and community participation. Less empirical attention has been given to understanding the expectations of host mining communities regarding the nature, processes, and outcomes of meaningful stakeholder engagement, particularly within historically established mining regions such as the West Wits Basin.

Against this background, this study assessed how the Slovoville host mining community is engaged by surrounding mining companies. Specifically, the study seeks to: (a) evaluate the methods of stakeholder engagement employed by mining companies as perceived by the host mining community, and (b) assess the host mining community's understanding of stakeholder engagement and identify their expectations regarding the stakeholder engagement process. The study contributes empirical evidence on host mining community expectations regarding stakeholder engagement within the West Wits Basin and provides practical insights that may assist surrounding mining companies in strengthening stakeholder engagement practices.

2 Methodology

A mixed-method approach using desktop review and field research was used to assess the Slovoville host mining community's expectations on stakeholder engagement with surrounding active gold mining companies in the West Wits Basin. The desktop review examined relevant literature, legislative and policy documents, and publicly available reports on stakeholder engagement in South Africa's mining sector. Insights from the desktop review informed the development of the questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide used during field research. The quantitative approach provided a high-level overview of current stakeholder engagement practices and community perceptions. Then the qualitative approach employed semi-structured interviews to capture the lived experiences, perceptions and expectations of host mining community members, thereby providing a deeper understanding and interpretation of the quantitative findings.

2.1 Data acquisition

Field data were collected within the Slovoville host mining community using a structured questionnaire. administered to 50 community members residing within the study area to obtain their perceptions and expectations regarding stakeholder engagement from mining companies operating within the area.

The structured questionnaire comprised 3 sections. Section A examined the current stakeholder engagement processes between the host mining community and the surrounding mining companies to report the perception of the community members. Section B explored the host mining community's expectations regarding stakeholder engagement. Section C examined power dynamics and stakeholder influence. All mining companies within a 50-km radius of the Slovoville community were considered in the study because they interact with the community through mining activities, stakeholder engagement processes and their socio-economic influence on the surrounding area.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected community members to obtain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences, perceptions and expectations regarding mining companies' stakeholder engagement. The interviews complemented the survey findings by providing contextual explanations and deeper insights into issues identified through the quantitative data, thereby strengthening the interpretation of the study findings.

Bongumusa Mbatha from the Slovoville community assisted in facilitating the data collection process, ensuring that the intention of the researcher was known and introducing the researcher to the ward councillor, community members and community leaders. The researcher then proceeded to collect the data. Mbatha had no involvement with the survey and interviews.

2.2 Sampling

A total of 50 members from the Slovoville host mining community participated in the questionnaire survey. For the quantitative component, respondents were selected using simple random sampling to minimise selection bias. Purposive sampling was used to select participants and was considered an appropriate sampling technique for the semi-structured interview. The demographic characteristics of the survey respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the survey participants (n = 50)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	29	58
	Male	21	42
Employment status	Unemployed	27	54
	Employed	23	46
Highest education level	Matriculation	23	46
	Undergraduate	9	18
	Other educational levels	18	36

The majority of the respondents are female (58%) and there is almost a 50/50 split between those employed and unemployed (male and female combined). The highest level of education for most respondents is matriculation (46%), but some of the respondents indicated that they are currently attending university and some are currently busy with an undergraduate degree (18%).

2.3 Data analysis

SPSS and ATLAS Ti software were used for data analysis, with descriptive statistics and statistical tests conducted to understand the community's perceptions on stakeholder engagements by mining companies. For quantitative analysis, SPSS was used to assign each question a descriptive variable name, i.e. nominal, ordinal, ratio etc. The closed-ended responses were coded numerically – for example, No = 1, Yes = 2 – to ensure that the output was interpretable and in alignment with the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics included calculating frequencies, and cross tabulations were employed to obtain an understanding of the data and relationships within variables.

The qualitative interview data were analysed using ATLAS.ti to identify recurring patterns, concepts and themes relating to participants' lived experiences, perceptions and expectations regarding stakeholder engagement.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings was done during the interpretation of the results. The quantitative findings provided an overview of stakeholder engagement patterns and community perceptions, and the qualitative findings provided participants' lived experiences and perspectives used to explain, contextualise and enrich the survey results. This complementary interpretation enabled triangulation of the findings by comparing quantitative trends with qualitative evidence, thereby strengthening the credibility of the study findings.

Figure 1 summarises the methodological procedure followed in this study.

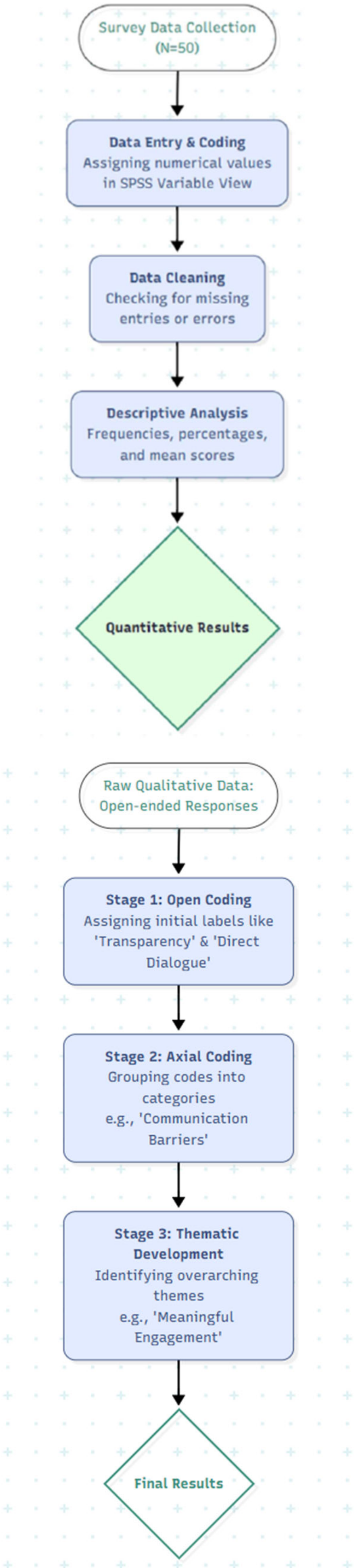

Figure 1 Methodological procedure flow chart

3 Results and discussions

The localised focus of the study was necessary to capture the broader views of the community members and their lived experiences. It was important to first understand what the host mining community's experience is with regards to stakeholder engagement by mining companies, thus Section A of the questionnaire addressed this issue.

3.1 Engagements between the Slovoville community and mining companies

Figure 2 presents a bar chart that shows the frequency of engagements between the host mining community of Slovoville and surrounding mining companies.

How often do mining company representatives address you?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	2 times a year	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
	Never	38	76.0	76.0	90.0
	Once a month	2	4.0	4.0	94.0
	Other	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

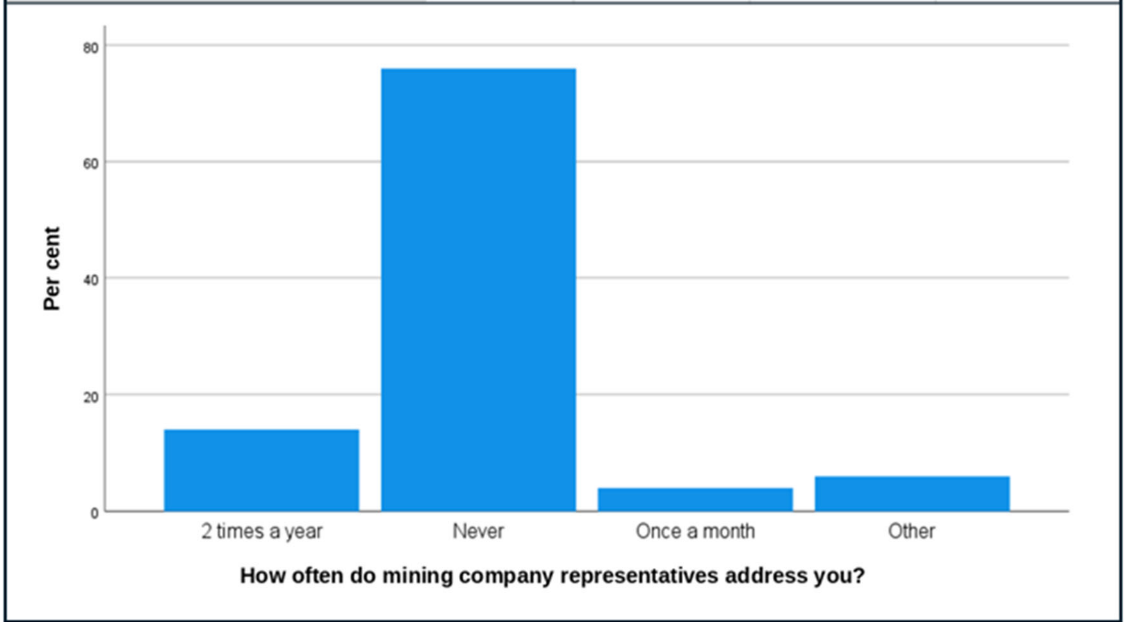

Figure 2 Frequency of host community engagement by a mining company

Figure 2 shows that 76% of the respondents reported that they were never directly engaged by a nearby mining company representative. Moreover, 14% of respondents mentioned that they were addressed only twice during the year. In combining the 2 it becomes evident that 90% of the respondents believe that engagement by nearby mining company representatives is scarce or sporadic.

3.1.1 Method of engagement and information comprehension

Figure 3 shows a cross tabulation of how mining companies engage the host mining community and if the community comprehends the information that the companies disseminate. The majority (34%) of respondents indicated that newspapers were the primary method used by mining companies to disseminate information. However, 41% of the respondents reported not comprehending the information disseminated through these platforms. These findings suggest that the current communication approach may be perceived more as a compliance activity than as a mechanism for facilitating meaningful communication with host mining communities. It shows that this method may not always facilitate effective communication or meaningful understanding among host mining community members. Considering the diversity in the highest educational attainment, home language and English proficiency among the respondents (see Figure 4), the findings further suggest that technical information may not always be presented in a manner that all members of the host mining community can access.

How do mining company representatives address you ?
Do you understand information disseminated by mining companies?
Cross tabulation

Count

		Do you understand information disseminated by mining companies		
		No	Yes	Total
How do mining company representatives address you	Company website	6	3	9
	Discussion forums	0	2	2
	Local radio	1	2	3
	Newspaper	7	10	17
	Social media	5	4	9
	The talk to community leaders	5	5	10
Total		24	26	50

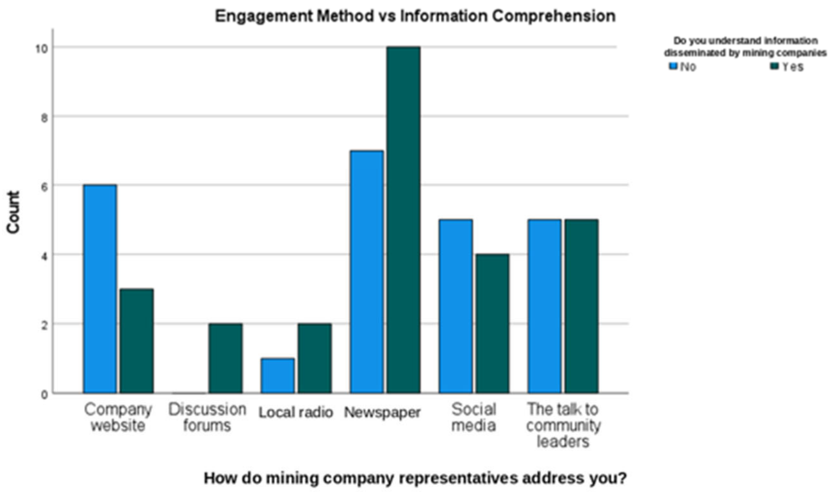

Figure 3 Mining companies' stakeholder engagement methods

The findings further show that discussion forums were reported as the least-used method of communication, but respondents indicated that they are the most effective tool for disseminating information. This is evidence that the host mining community members prefer active dialogue engagements instead of passive engagements such as newspapers. Previous studies similarly argue that meaningful stakeholder engagement is strengthened through continuous dialogue, mutual learning and active participation between mining companies and affected communities (Reed 2008; Brand et al. 2020).

Company websites and social media were also identified as avenues used to disseminate information to stakeholders. However, responses from the host mining community showed a non-comprehension rate of 66% and 56%, respectively, for these options. Participant 12 explained this challenge by stating that, 'Information is presented in a way that is hard for the community members to interpret.'

The interview findings corroborate the quantitative results and indicate that the stakeholders' engagement challenges extend beyond access to information: they also include the way information is communicated. The demographic profile of the respondents (see Figure 4) demonstrates variation in age, educational attainment, home language and English proficiency. This suggests that the host mining community comprise diverse groups with different communication needs. Therefore, reliance on digital communication platforms such as company websites and social media may not ensure equitable access or comprehension of stakeholder engagement. The majority (25%) of respondents are over the age of 45 and most (46%) only achieved a matriculation level of schooling. The European Union (2024) states that individuals older than 45 years have lower digital literacy levels and less technology confidence than younger generations. This further supports that the dissemination of relevant information using digital platforms may be a barrier to stakeholder engagement.

This may be relevant where stakeholder engagement information is communicated primarily in English or through highly technical language. In such contexts, variations in language proficiency, educational attainment and digital access may influence the extent to which community members can access, interpret and understand the information provided. Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of communicating stakeholder engagement information in clear and accessible language to facilitate meaningful participation (International Association for Public Participation [IAP2] 2018).

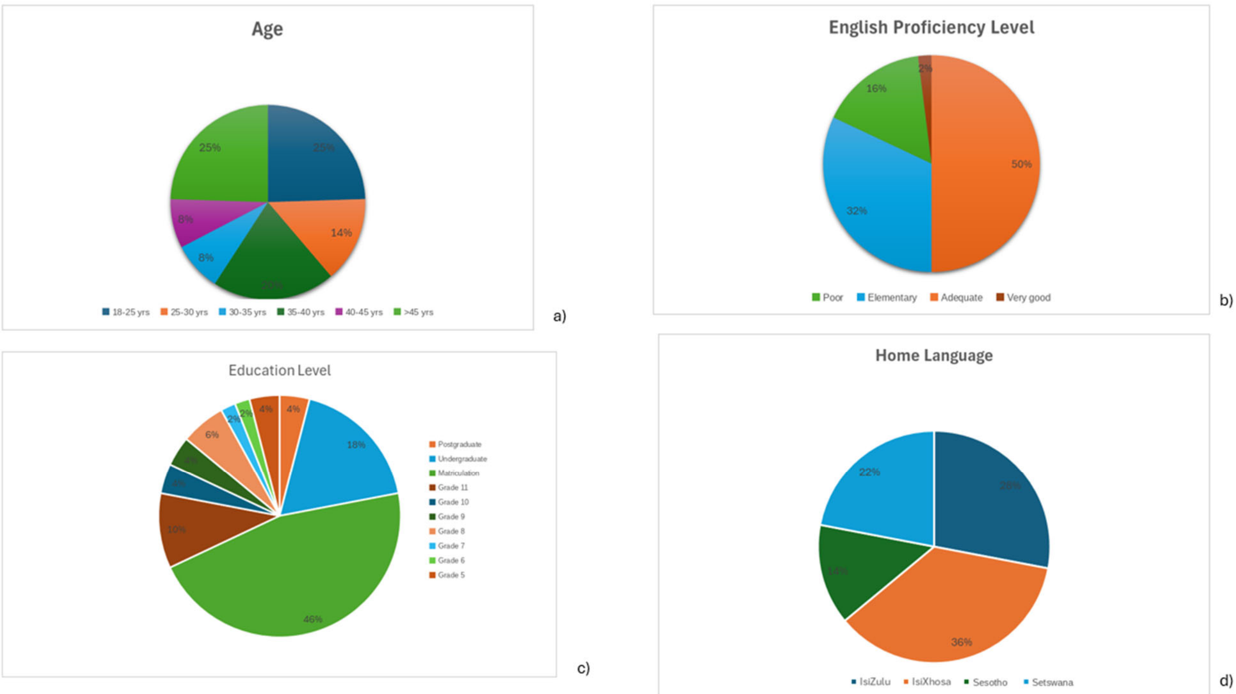

Figure 4 Participants' demographic information

Figure 4 summarises the demographic profile of the research participants in terms of age, English proficiency level, education level and home. The majority of participants (25%) are aged between 18 and 25 or older than 45 years. The education level of the participants also varies, with the majority's (46%) highest level of education matriculation (grade 12). It is notable that 2% of the participants indicated having attained an undergraduate degree, and another 2% a postgraduate degree, as their highest level of education. Majority of the participants have an adequate (50%) or elementary (32%) English proficiency level, with most of them being IsiXhosa (36%) or IsiZulu (28%) language speakers at home.

3.2 Information accessibility and transparency

Figure 5 presents a cross tabulation of whether the host communities can easily access the information disseminated by mining companies as well as how they feel about the mining companies' overall transparency.

Is information accessible from the mining company? Are mining companies transparent to host communities? Cross tabulation

			Are mining companies transparent to host communities: No	Yes	Total
Is information accessible from the mining company	No	Count	39	3	42
		Expected Count	32.8	9.2	42.0
		% within Is information accessible from mining company	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%
	Yes	Count	0	8	8
		Expected Count	6.2	1.8	8.0
		% within Is information accessible from mining company	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	39	11	50
		Expected Count	39.0	11.0	50.0
		% within Is information accessible from mining company	78.0%	22.0%	100.0%

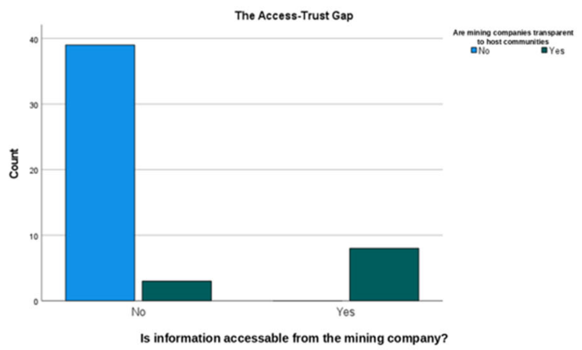

Figure 5 Information accessibility and transparency

The majority (92.9%) of the respondents reported that mining companies are not transparent to host mining communities and that the information disseminated is not easily accessible. This highlights that the host mining community struggles with retrieving company-communicated information and believes that companies deliberately hide information. Participant 23 stated that, *'Mining companies hide information from the community.'*

This finding is concerning because it does not align with the IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation, which emphasise that stakeholders should have access to timely and understandable information to enable meaningful participation in decision-making processes (IAP2 2018).

Are you aware of community engagement laws?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	No	46	92.0	92.0	92.0
	Yes	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

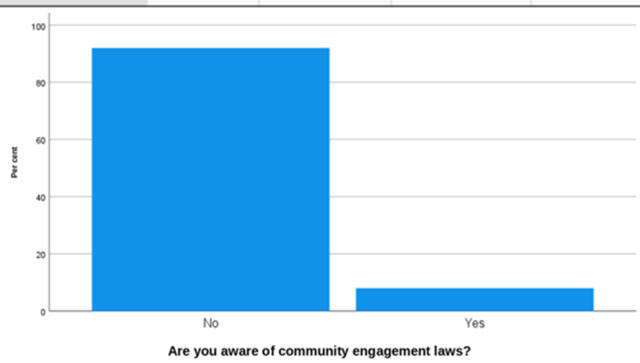

Figure 6 Policy, law and frameworks on stakeholder engagement awareness

Figure 6 shows that the majority of respondents have no legal awareness about stakeholder engagement, with only 8% of the respondents reported having some knowledge of the relevant legislation. As illustrated in Figure 4, the respondents had varying levels of education, with most having attained matriculation level. This provides an important context for understanding the findings. Limited legal awareness may reduce community members' understanding of their rights and the legislative framework governing stakeholder engagement. This may limit their ability to meaningfully participate in stakeholder engagement processes. It is further reflected in the finding that 76% of respondents reported not knowing what an SLP is.

This study also reveals that there is a lack of awareness about the legislation pertaining to stakeholder engagement by the host mining community that was investigated in this study.

3.3 Illusion of engagement

From the open-ended questions where participants provided a narrative, a theme on the illusion of engagement was established (see Figure 7).

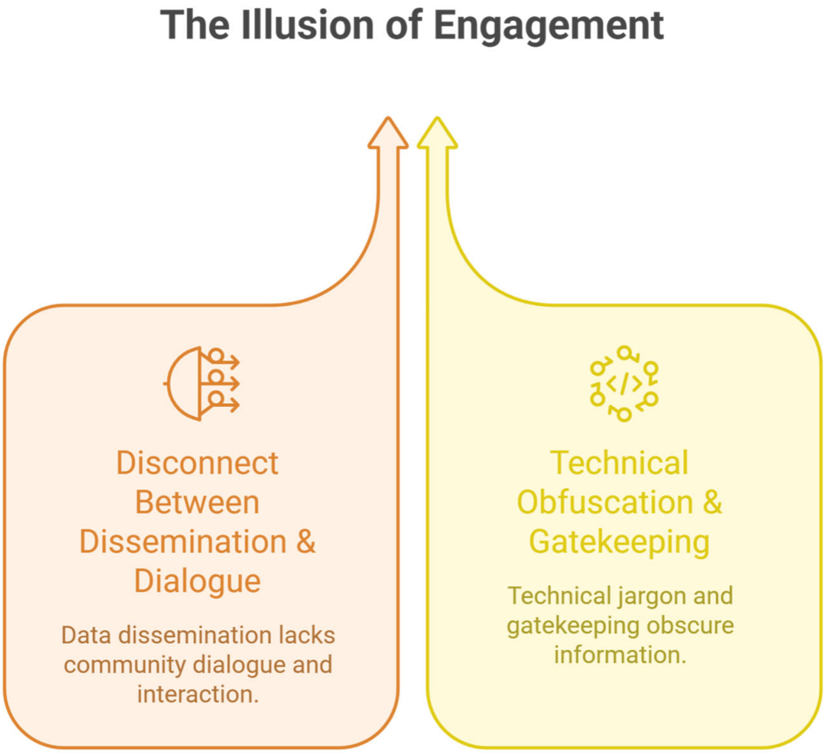

Figure 7 Illusion of engagement

This theme shows that communication approaches used during stakeholder engagement may not always support adequate understanding of the host mining communities. The qualitative findings indicate that technical language and communication methods that provide limited opportunities for stakeholders to engage and discuss may contribute to the challenges reported by the respondents.

For this study, 48% of respondents said that they do not understand the content passively published by mining companies. The lack of understanding indicates that the stakeholder engagement method the companies are using may not be effective in communicating vital information to host mining communities. Participant 7 went on to say 'Most of the community members are clueless about the information published by mining companies on their platforms.'

A similar sentiment was shared by participant 19, who stated that 'Most of the information, we don't understand it.'

This finding aligns with the earlier presented result that indicates host mining community members experience challenges in comprehending stakeholder engagement information communicated by mining companies. This is no surprise, considering that most participants indicated an 'adequate' English proficiency level, meaning that most speak English as either a second or third language. A majority of the communication is reported in English on various mining company platforms.

When the respondents were asked whether mining companies understand their needs, a majority (76%) reported negatively (see Figure 7). Under the MPRD Act and the SLP framework, mining companies are expected to engage host communities to identify local development priorities so as to align their social investments with these needs. The findings therefore demonstrate that there is a disconnect between the intended objectives of stakeholder engagement and how the host mining community experiences the engagement process.

Do mining companies understand your needs?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	No	38	76.0	76.0	76.0
	Yes	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

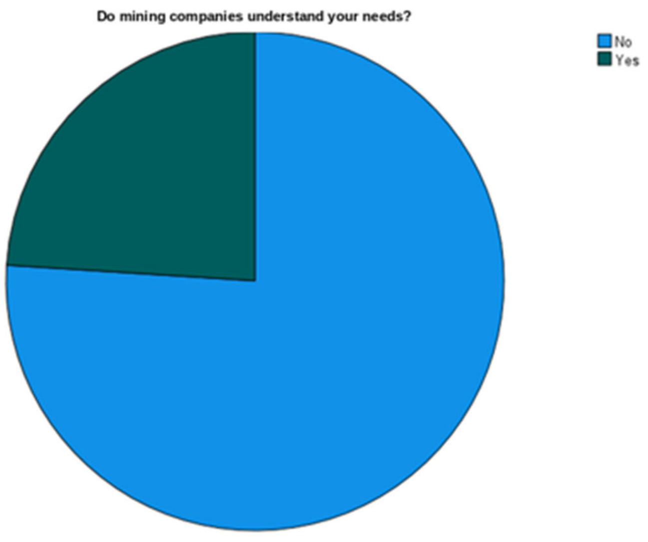

Figure 8 Do mining companies understanding the host community needs?

Figure 8 further indicates that the overall sentiment is that engagement for mining companies is a compliance tick-box exercise and is not meaningful. The amendments of the MPRD Act released in May 2025 address the issue of meaningful engagement to curb tick-box exercises. Section 10 of the amendment states that there should be 'meaningful consultation', which means:

> *'The applicant, has in good faith facilitated participation in such a manner that reasonable opportunity was given to provide comment by the landowner, lawful occupier or interested and affected person in respect of land subject to an application about the impact the prospecting or mining activities would have to his or her right of use of the land by availing all relevant information pertaining to the proposed activities enabling these parties to make an informed decision regarding the impact of the proposed activities'.*

This amendment allows the host mining communities to actively engage 'the applicant' (mining companies) about the intended mining project and its benefits as well as impacts. However, the amendment is not clear about how mining companies should continue engaging stakeholders such as the host mining community beyond mining project inception. To address this, the amendment should allow host mining communities to actively and continuously engage with mining companies beyond the proposed mining projects. The engagement should include their anticipated benefits and potential impacts. In addition, the SLP guidelines require mining companies to engage affected communities to identify local development priorities and properly align their social investment commitments. These provisions reinforce why continuous stakeholder engagement is important throughout the mining life cycle. This is as opposed to limiting engagement to the project approval stage.

The community members of Slovoville do not believe that the surrounding mining companies understand their needs. This finding suggests a perceived disconnect between the stakeholder engagement which MPRD Act and SLP framework proposed and the current situation experienced by the host mining community in the engagement process.

3.4 Host mining community's expectations on engagement

The host mining community was asked whether mining companies knew or cared about their interests, needs and expectations. Figure 9 reveals that most of the respondents believe that mining companies lack both knowledge of their expectations and interest.

Do mining companies know your expectations?
Do mining companies care about host community interests?
Cross tabulation

Count

		Do mining companies care about host community interests		
		No	Yes	Total
Do mining companies know your expectations	No	29	6	35
	Yes	4	11	15
Total		33	17	50

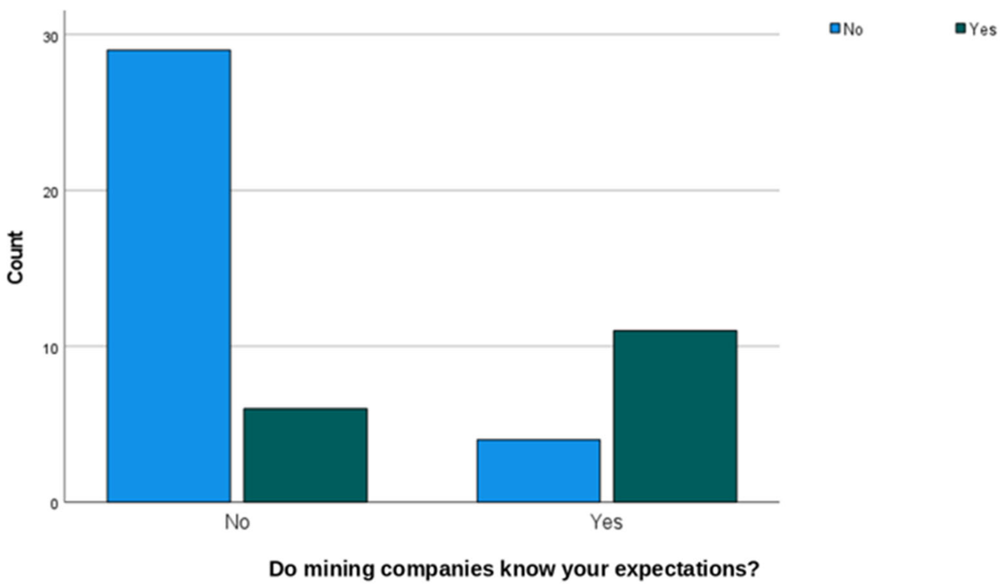

Figure 9 Mining companies' understanding of the mining community's expectations

In this study the quantitative analysis showed that respondents hardly engage actively with mining companies in their vicinity. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis showed that the lack of active engagement is interpreted as a lack of care and inclusion, and a prioritisation of profits over social responsibility.

The quantitative analysis also showed that the mining companies in the vicinity prefer to engage the community of Slovoville on mostly topics that cover employment and opportunities (16.1 %), followed by health and safety (12.9%), legal and regulatory frameworks (12.3%), and community rights and benefits (11.6%) see Figure 10.

Desired Discussion Topics

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Engagement & Consultation	4	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Economic & Development Impact	5	3.2	3.2	5.8
	Social & Labour Plans	9	5.8	5.8	11.6
	Environmental Management	17	11.0	11.0	22.6
	Strategic & Long-Term Planning	17	11.0	11.0	33.6
	Community Rights & Benefits	18	11.6	11.6	45.2
	Legal & Regulatory Frameworks	19	12.3	12.3	57.5
	Health & Safety	20	12.9	12.9	70.4
	Other	21	13.5	13.5	83.9
	Employment & Opportunities	25	16.1	16.1	100.0
	Total	155	100.0	100.0	

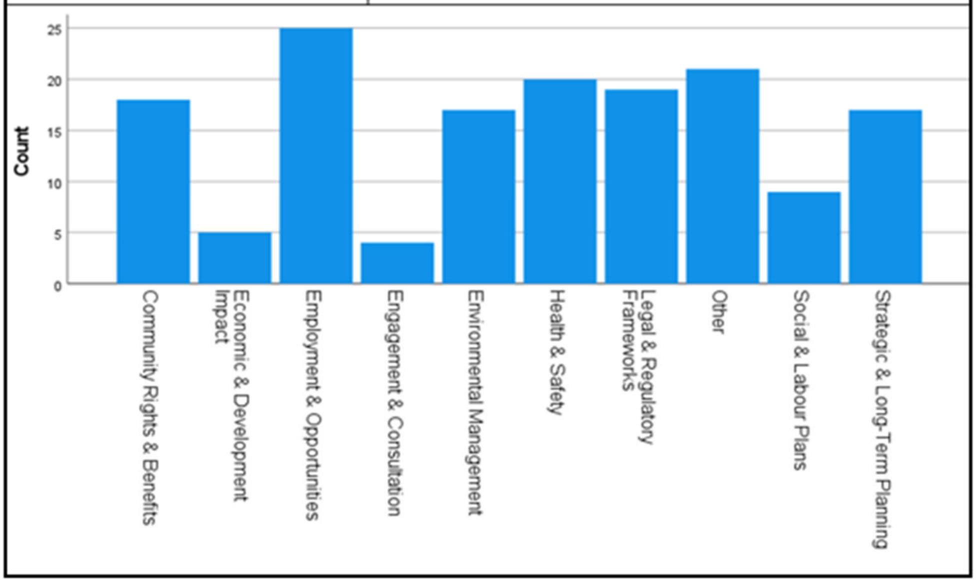

Figure 10 Topics which mining companies prefer to engage on with community stakeholders

As demonstrated by the distribution in Figure 11, the host mining community at most expect face-to-face engagements (23.3%). This is followed by community-based structures (18.0%) and broadcast media (17.4%) as communication channels. Interestingly, the digital platforms which were reported earlier to be largely utilised account for only 14.5% of preferences. The opposite end of preference is occupied by more participatory approaches such as workshops and forums (7.6%) and participatory engagement (5.2%). The skewness of the distribution towards face-to-face methods is reflective of a desire for engagement which is accessible, relational and responsive to local realities.

Preferred Communication Methods

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	General Communication	8	4.7	4.7	4.7
	Participatory Engagement	9	5.2	5.2	9.9
	Workshops & Forums	13	7.6	7.6	17.5
	Other	16	9.3	9.3	26.8
	Digital Communication	25	14.5	14.5	41.3
	Broadcast Media	30	17.4	17.4	58.7
	Community-Based Structures	31	18.0	18.0	76.7
	Face-to-Face Engagement	40	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	172	100.0	100.0	

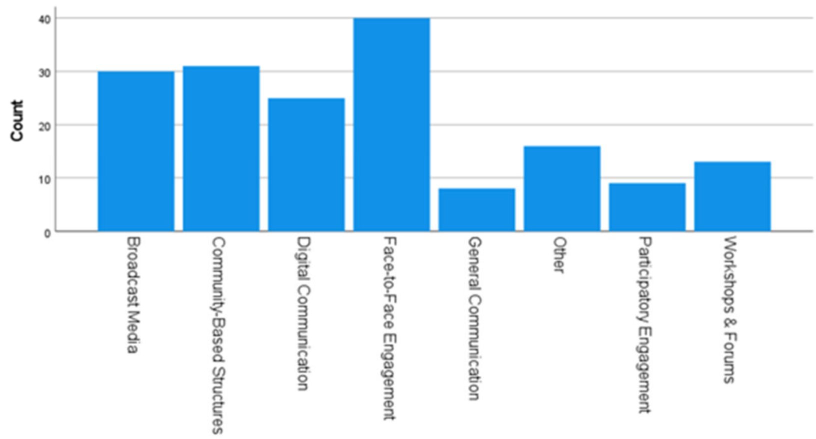

Figure 11 Host mining community's preferred engagement method

Figure 12 demonstrates that the host mining community of Slovoville expects overall to be most engaged on community development projects (26%). This is followed by environmental responsibility at 15% and, at a close third, economic development and employment with 14%. As the figure shows, the community is not only demanding tangible developmental outcomes but are also seeking improved dialogue in terms of the content discussed.

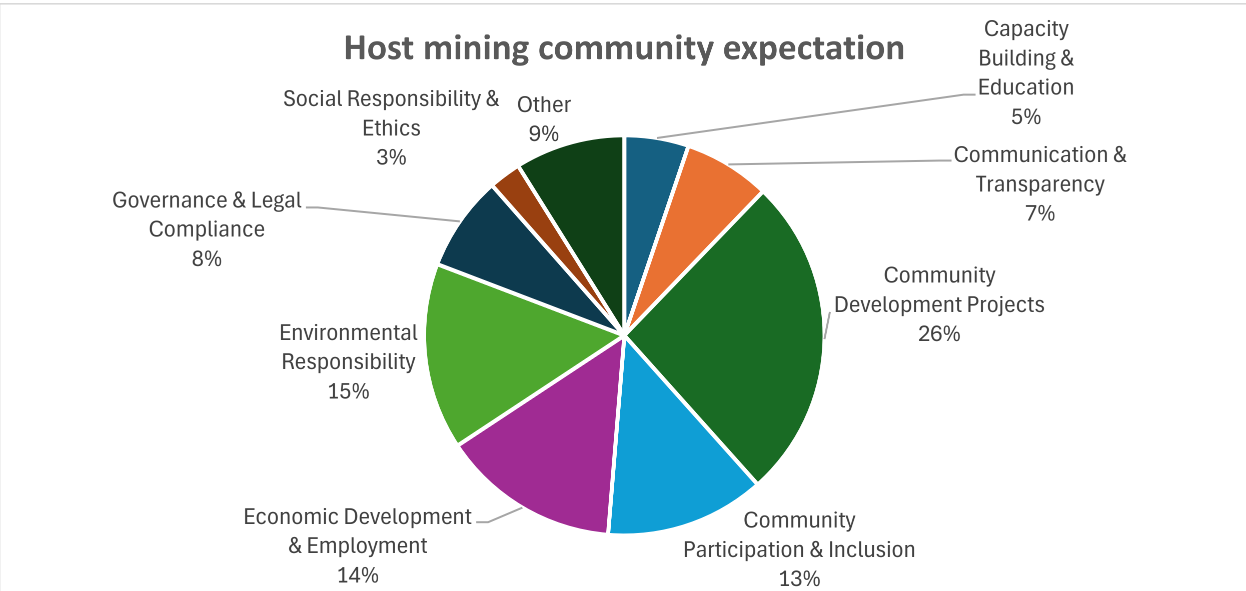

Figure 12 Host mining community's overall expectation

A disconnect is observed in Figures 10 and 12 as mining companies are perceived to prioritise topics on employment and opportunities, health and safety, and legal and regulatory frameworks while the host mining community expects engagements mainly on community development projects, environmental responsibility, and economic development and employment. It would be beneficial for mining companies to establish a social relationship with the host mining community and use dialogue and face-to-face engagements to discuss community development projects.

Although the study has revealed some shortfalls on stakeholder engagements in the West Wits Basin, it is limited to only a single host mining community (Slovoville, n = 50). The findings of this study may not be directly generalisable to other mining regions or community contexts.

4 Conclusion

The study examined the host mining community's expectations of stakeholder engagement by surrounding mining companies in the West Wits Basin, South Africa. The findings revealed that the various methods used by mining companies for stakeholder engagement, including newspapers, company websites and social media, do not necessarily facilitate effective communication or meaningful understanding among host mining communities. The study respondents consider the platforms a passive means of engagement; they inform, instead of engaging, the community. They expressed a clear preference for a dialogue engagement approach as felt this would allow interaction, clarification and active participation.

The study further found that many community members face challenges in understanding stakeholder engagement information. The findings also revealed limited awareness of the legislative framework that governs stakeholder engagement. The Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act and Social and Labour Plans (SLP) framework require engagement with affected communities and the alignment of social investments with identified local development priorities. However, the study insights demonstrate that there is a perceived disconnect between these objectives and the way the host mining community experiences stakeholder engagement. Training programs on SLP compliance and other legal requirements are required for the host mining community to fully understand stakeholder engagements.

The study also highlights that improving stakeholder engagement goes beyond making information available. For it to be effective, information should be communicated in clear and accessible language. It should also be made through communication methods that accommodate the educational, linguistic and communication needs of the host mining community. Dialogue, feedback and a continuous engagement approach should be given greater emphasis to improve mutual understanding between mining companies and host communities.

Improved stakeholder engagement is a shared responsibility that involves mining companies, government, community leadership structures and host communities. Mining companies should strengthen participatory engagement through regular community dialogue forums. Stakeholder engagement information should be communicated in plain language. Where appropriate, translations should be provided into local community-understood languages. These measures can contribute to more transparent, inclusive and meaningful stakeholder engagement within South Africa's mining sector.

Overall, the findings indicate that host mining communities expect stakeholder engagement to be transparent, continuous, dialogue-based and responsive to community needs. They also expect information to be communicated in a manner that is accessible and understandable, enabling meaningful participation in decisions that affect their communities. The engagements should discuss community development projects, environmental responsibility, economic development and employment.

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