

# The danger of living next to a mine operation

Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network

By Mmathapelo Thobejane,  
Tokelo Mahlakoane and Eustine Matsepane



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**The danger of living next to a mine operation**  
**A case study developed through the *Changing Practice: Olifants* project.**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BMF	Bench-Marks Foundation
CALS	Centre for Applied Legal Studies
CER	Centre For Environmental Rights
CDW	Community Development Workers
FET	Further Education and Training
GITH	Girls in the Hood
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
MACUA	Mining Affected Communities United in Action
MPRDA	Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
PASMA	Pan African Student Movement of Azania
SA	South Africa
SCMAC	Sekhukhune Combined Mining Affected Communities
SEJN	Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network
SRC	Student Representative Council
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

# 1.

## Introduction

### Introducing SEJN

Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network (SEJN) is made up of local CBOs from different mining communities in the Sekhukhune area. The Sekhukhune area is one of five districts in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. The organisation was formed by Mmathapelo Thobejane and other community leaders around Sekhukhune after Mmathapelo attended the Environmental Justice School run by Groundwork in 2016. After attending this school, Mmathapelo ran a workshop where she shared what she had learnt about environmental activism, how to teach an activist about the environment and how to protect the environment.

She and others started the organisation because they saw a need for their community to know more about the environment they live in and have more knowledge about the injustices that they face. SEJN also wanted to ensure that communities understood their rights to a healthy environment.

Another motivation to start the organisation was witnessing how members' parents lose their livestock, land and see their houses being damaged as a result of mining operations. SEJN was started with the aim of mobilising communities around these issues; they believe that unity is power and that we can do better when we are together.

### Our Story

The organisation started in three different villages: Moshira, Sekutlong and Ditwebeleng. While we have been building this case we have introduced the organisation to another 9 mining affected communities. These villages are Modimolle, Mantsekane, Magobading, Morapaneng, Dithabaneng, Ga-Mashabela, Ga-Makgopa, Makgaake and Serafa. SEJN now has more than 10 branches across these villages. SEJN is now looking to work all over the district by extending to Makhudutamaga Municipality and other municipalities in Sekhukhune, starting with mining affected communities as a priority. The organisation was officially registered in August in 2017 three months after we started the Changing Practice course and began building this case.





**Activist: MmathapeloThobejane**

I am an environmental activist, born in the small village called Morapaneng in the Burgersfort area. Now I stay at Ditoebeleng village with my family. We used to drink water from the river in the 1990s until so-called development came to my village. Platinum and chrome was discovered in our village in 2000 and the mine started operations in 2002. This is when we started to lose our connection with the environment and wetlands became dry. Our Olifants River also started to be highly polluted by the operation of mines through the discharge of chemicals into the streams that supply our Olifants River. The frogs that we used to hear in the evening before we sleep no longer sing for us. Our parents lost their livestock as a result of contaminated water from underground that flows to our main river.

In 2015 I attended the Environmental Justice School with Groundwork(NGO) and from that day I started to mobilise my community and Sekhukhune Combined Mining Affected Communities (SCMAC) was born after myself and another activist sat down and saw the need to have an organisation that would represent communities affected by mines in Sekhukhune. Later in 2015 we extended our work to Fetakgomo and other parts of Sekhukhune like Ga-Nkwana, Ga-Nchabeleng and Atok. I saw the need to focus on the environment because the mines never took us seriously because we were tackling all problems and not sticking on one issue. SEJN was born in 2016 and we managed to registered in 2017 after 3 village leaders agreed to deal with only environmental issues.

**Activist: Tokelo Mahlakoane**

I am Tokelo Mahlakoane. I started to be an activist around 2012. It was my first year at Sekhukhune Further Education and Training College (FET) (now called Sekhukhune Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)). It was at college that I saw some of the students fight for their rights after they got pending results and their lecturers didn't consult them for information. That year I joined a movement called the Pan African Student Movement of Azania (PASMA). I was a secretary at PASMA. The following year, which was 2013, I contested for SRC Elections. I didn't get elected but I started to be active and see things in a different way.

In 2015, when I was home from college, I heard about an organization called SCMAC. I got an invitation from one of our activists around my village. When I got there I found different activists from different communities crying about the impact from the mining operation. Some of the community where crying about water pollution that is caused by the water from the mine that is coming from underground. It carries acid that makes the water acidic. The high acidic level of the water then interacts with metals that are naturally found in the environment and

turns them toxic. This is not healthy for our bodies and our livestock because we as people after drinking that water experience different diseases like stomach running, headache and our skin experiences itching. Even our livestock experience stomach running and end up dying. This may also be due to other things in the water that we don't know about.

That information clicked in my mind and I realized that we are drinking polluted water because the village called Moroke Sekutlong is where I come from and we depend on water that is coming from the river called Motse. I was shocked because those who were sharing the information in the meeting/workshop come from a village up from my village and this is where the mine called Twickenham operates. Since the water is polluted it means the people who try to put bread on the table by making gardens are suffering because of that water.

I decided to tell my community about the injustice that is happening and mobilized them and we started to run some workshops with help of the NGOs like Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA). Now I am working closely with the community that is busy with the vegetable gardens. I am also taking part in Action Voices Alert that is funded by Benchmarks Foundation. We are writing stories about the issues/challenges that are around the villages.

### **Activist: Eustine Matsepane**

I'm from the community of Modimolle in Ga-Mashabela traditional authority. I started to be an activist around 2013 as structures from different communities were looking for jobs in the mine and we were denied jobs by the mine. During that year I lost the father of my son who was very helpful. I never looked back from that time as this was a hard lesson of my life. In 2015 I and my fellow activists formed SCMAC that was focusing on monitoring employment and the Social and Labour Plan of the mines. In 2016 I joined Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network after realizing that my community is more affected by the blasting which leads to the drying of our borehole water

### **Introducing our Change Project**

#### **Our vision:**

**“We want to see our community stand on their own to protect their environmental rights, and for the mines to comply according to the environmental laws.”**

In this section we summarise the issues we are dealing with and list our strategies and demands.

### ***Summary of issues we are wanting to address***

- **Water pollution:** the mines are discharging contaminated water from underground in our area. This is the most disturbing issue because it affects everyone in the community. The pollution is happening and industries (mines that produce platinum group metals) are the biggest polluters.
- **Mines:** Discharge polluted water that has chemicals and heavy metals that are dangerous to our wellbeing. This makes our river water quality to be very poor. The mining operation affects the quantity of underground water because our boreholes become dry.
- **Communities** are dumping disposable nappies in the rivers, dongas and under the bridge. This adds to the water pollution and increases the level of e-coli in our river.
- **Government:** Fetakgomo Tubatse Local Municipality don't supply waste disposal services and the Department of Mineral Resources doesn't monitor the compliance of the mines in our area, especially in relation to water pollution [see the area map on page 4].

### ***Our strategy on how to respond to these problems***

#### **Our strategy in our community is:**

- to educate communities about environmental injustices that are happening in our area like water pollution and soil pollution that is caused by mines (discharging contaminated water from underground) to the Motse River.
- to raise awareness with livestock owners (farmers) about the water pollution that is happening in the mine's discharge channel (man-made) that causes their livestock to die.
- to mobilise the community to work together and share information. For example, there are other organisations that have skills that are working with Twickenham mine's Social and Labour Plan and with the Mining Charter. We are also realising that it is important to start engaging with climate change issues.

#### **Our strategy with industry is:**

- to open doors of engagement and communication between mines and communities so we can deal with issues as they arise.

#### **Our strategy with government is:**



- to work on having a relationship with the Department of Water and Sanitation (Sekhukhune District Municipality water quality team) and to monitor water licences that they issue to the mining companies.

### ***Our demands***

- **To industries and mines:** we want them to be aware of the injustices they create with regards water pollution (contaminated water) from the mine's premises and we want them to comply with legislation.



SEJN meetings with livestock owners 11/09/2017



Meeting with livestock owners at Morapaneng 11/09/2017



During Social and Labour Plan workshop with Oxfam SA on 05/06/2017



Meetings with the mine officials on 09/09/2017

## 2.

# What do we see?

### Mapping out the local context

In this section we map out the local context of our Change Project. Each one of us investigated an aspect of the challenges we face. We did this by investigating the local context and practice through observations and interviews. This research answers the question ‘What is happening in our areas?’ and ‘How has this come to be?’ Our initial reports on this fieldwork can be found in our Changing Practice: Olifants course portfolio. The three investigations are from Maotsi communities, Mototolong and Modimolle. (See map on page 5).

### ***Investigation into water pollution from the mine stream in the Maotsi communities, by Mmathapelo Thobejane***

The community started to be afraid of drinking water because livestock started to die. People began experiencing itching, running stomachs and headaches and the vegetable farmers started to produce poor products. This is when we began to be suspicious that the mine was discharging pollution into our main river, the Motse.



Hackney mine shaft discharge channel where livestock drink water daily

Livestock is business and culture to the communities of Maotsi. They use cattle to sell and take care of their families, for ceremonies like weddings and to pay for studies. Cattle also play a role in cultural beliefs, like connecting to ancestors and cultural ceremonies (Diphaso). In 2014 the number of cattle deaths became higher and higher. Most livestock are found dead in the discharge channel where we suspect the water is polluted. Some of the cattle kraals have been closed down because of this problem as people have lost so many cattle. When livestock owners/farmers try to engage with the mine to tell their story they are ignored. In 2014 more than 15 cattle and 30 goats were found dead at the discharge channel and some were next to the graveyard at Ditwebeleng village. This scenario had never happened before and the farmers from 5 villages did not know what to do as they were never told, nor did they realise when it was first proposed, that the mines operating in the area would kill their livestock. About 150 cattle have died from 2016-17 according to the evidence we collected when interviewing livestock owners.

Farmers now buy water for their cattle and this situation brings stress to their families as buying water is expensive. Now we are all saying “enough is enough”. We all want to know why livestock owners are facing this challenge and we want Twickenhammine to compensate them because we are sure that this happens as a result of their operations. The livestock don’t have any other means of clean water but the polluted water from the mine stream as it is always flowing.

Below I share some interviews with livestock owners as evidence of the effect of the Twickenham mine on their lives.

#### Interview with Mr A from Mototolong

Mr A is excited to hear about the Changing Practice course. He is supporting me as a participant and he is willing to spread the word as he is also a livestock owner and community member. Mr A says he lost four cows between 2015-2016 that all suddenly miscarried and died. He believes this happened as a result of drinking the water that comes from Hackney shaft and forms into a discharging channel that runs to the Motse river. Some of his cows died at home and some died in the field as they drink water from the channel and struggled to come back home in the evening.

The livestock don’t have any alternative clean source of water where they can drink. Mr A mentioned that the stream is accessible to their livestock because it is near their grazing land. Livestock from Ditoebeleng, Mototolong, Mantsekane, Dithabaneng and Morapaneng graze

in this area and after grazing they drink the water from the stream. He also mentioned that they don't have a choice even if the livestock can be led to the main Motse River. It will be the same because the discharging channel from the mine flows to the Motse River and so pollutes the river too.

Since Mr A lost his job a few years ago he depends on his livestock to take care of his family and the situation of cattle dying puts him under a lot of stress. In 2012 he said they tried to communicate with the mine through their municipal ward councillor but they never heard from the mine. Mr A said "I'll be happy if the mine will stop polluting our river and recycle their water so that we can use the river water again and our livestock will drink clean water and stop dying."



Dead cow in the mine discharging channel

#### Interview with a herdsman from Morapaneng.

Mr B was born in Morapaneng village and he still stays there. He lost six cattle in 2014 and now he is left with seven. Most of the cattle died at the discharge channels that have been there since the mine started. There are three pools: one of the pools is where the water falls from the dongas, the other one is where Motse River meets with Mokgotane and the last one is where discharge channel meets with Motse river. The water loses control and makes a pool in each junction. Mr Mangope says his cattle don't have an option as "we are staying next to Motse River and it is the only source where our cattle can drink water". Since livestock owners have realized that the water is a problem there is nothing they can do but take their cattle to



drink at the Motse River. “During this winter time we buy grass for the cattle and use our grant money to buy it.” The mountain of Maotsi where his cattle used to graze is now fenced off by the mine. He did not report all this to the mine because in his experience it does not help as those who reported their problems were not helped. He is ready to talk to the mine about this injustice and how livestock owners are treated in their own village.



Mmathapelo Thobejane during interviews with one of the cattle owners.

***Investigation of the effects of water pollution on gardens and people  
Sekutlong village, by Tokelo Mahlakoane***

At Moroke Sekutlong the water pollution that is happening is coming from the underground of Twickenham mine that discharges acid that flows into the Motse River. This means that the community has no access to clean water. Our fathers' vegetable gardens are dying and we suspect this is as a result of the pollution. The community also has to drink water from the river and we suspect the river is polluted upstream where there are mining operations. The mine is mining gold and platinum. We suspect the water is polluted because people are suffering from skin rashes, headaches and running stomachs. This started happening a long time ago. We just didn't know what caused these ailments and it took a few months before we began to suspect the water. Now the gardens don't produce quality produce because of the acid that is flowing through the furrows. Another sign that things have changed is that we used to hear frogs crying inside the river but now we don't hear them. Our mothers and fathers used to bathe in the river without seeing anything wrong on their bodies but now they are experiencing itching skin.

Even the CDW (Community Development Worker) knows that the water that is flowing through the Motse River is polluted because she is the one who does research around the community. She supported my report when we were in the Ward Management meeting early last year and I reported on the pollution, the lack of water that is around my village and the drying up of boreholes. Even though she agreed with me she refused to tell us what the cause of the drying of boreholes is and who is the polluter. We suspect that the mine and the municipality protect each other.

I interviewed one of the farmers at Moroke village about the impact of pollution on the vegetables. He said, “they are affected because they don’t produce good produce these days because of the water from the river.” The farmers gathered and formed a structure called Dilokong Development Farmers so that they can talk to the mines. They did not manage to talk to the mine yet. The mining staff gave them forms to fill in. This was in early February 2017. The fact that they gave the farmers the forms to claim back for damages shows that they agree that they are polluters and they expect to compensate them. To this day the farmers are still waiting to be compensated. It has been a year and four months now.

I remember the year of 2017 around September when we bought a ‘motshaena’, one of the vegetables from the farmer. The following day I had a runny stomach but on that time/day I didn’t know the cause. As days go by I started to realize the cause. It was because I only ate that vegetable on that day and this shows that the product is not healthy for people.



#### *Affected garden*

This is a local farmer who made a small garden in the village who irrigates with polluted water that is flowing through discharge channel. The discharge channel is connected with the Motse River at the upper part of the village of Moroke Sekutlong. I took this photo on 16 April 2018.





*Discharge channel that supplies gardens at Moroke Sekutlong*

This is a discharge channel that is polluted; our mothers and fathers use it to irrigate their gardens. The discharge channel is passing through the village called Moroke Sekutlong.

### ***Investigation of boreholes and the shortage of water in Modimolle Village by Eustine Matsepane***



Boreholes are dry in our area, Modimolle, because of the mine activities that are happening in Marula mine and Twickenham mine. These mines are mining platinum and chrome. We suspect that it is these mining activities that are affecting access to underground water in my village because we never experienced this before the mining operations started. The community realised this a few years after the mine operations started in our village in 2009. The community is now suffering. Some of the gardens are now affected by the lack of the water in our area.

Picture of a dry borehole in Modimolle

#### **Interview with one of the gardeners in Modimolle:**

The gardener was born in Modimolle and he still stays there. After retrenchment a few years ago in Johannesburg, he started a project of gardening to supply the community and to put food on his family table. The problem he is facing now is that the water is not enough and now

he must buy extra water to water his garden. He started his business because his children are unemployed. Nothing seems to be coming right in this village so he also thought this project that SEJN is doing will help many people in the community to know that it is their right to have access of clean water.

#### Interview with pump operator

Mr C is also concerned about the water issues around this community as he is always hearing people complain about it to him. He explained that there's nothing he can do about the situation because the Modimolle water reservoir is too small to supply everyone in the community. This means he needs to pump water every day and then he supplies different sections. This is the reason different sections of Modimolle, Mahlakaneng, Shushumela and Mpanengget water only twice a week. He also said that he has been working in the community for about ten years but he is not registered yet as an employee and at anytime he can lose his job because he has nothing that proves he is an employee of the municipality. He finds this situation very stressful.



Pressure pump in Modimolle

### 3.

## Why this is not what we want to see

It was our experience of seeing how the people in the upper Olifants River Catchment suffer when we took part in Module 1 of the Changing Practice course, that made us realise that this situation cannot continue. We did a toxic tour in Emalahleni and were shocked by what we saw. This has made us want to fight the continuous pollution of our river because of the acid mine drainage issues that we saw in Emalahleni. We are really looking forward to seeing the mines stop this pollution as it is dangerous for people and entire environment.

We also know that our rivers are protected by law. The highest of these laws is the South African Constitution. In particular Section 24 of SA constitution says everyone has a right to

live in an environment that is not harmful to their health and wellbeing. Below we highlight other laws that relate to our case.

Act	Section and sub-section	WHAT IT SAYS	How this relates to our case
NEMA [National Environmental Management Act]	28 (1)	Every person who causes, has caused or may cause significant pollution or degradation of the environment must take reasonable measures to prevent such pollution or degradation from occurring, continuing or recurring or, in so far as such harm to the environment is authorised by law or cannot reasonably be avoided or stopped and rectify such pollution or degradation of the environment.	Mines don't comply according to this law because since the mines have arrived in our area our boreholes have dried up and the river is being polluted by acid mine drainage and heavy metals. We know this is happening because a recent report by the SAWC on the state of DWS highlighted how Anglo American mines are only 5% compliant. As the Twickenham mine is a Anglo American mine we know that it is polluting the environment.
National Water Act 36 of 1998	19 (1)	<p>An owner of land or person in control of land or person occupied: where a situation exists which caused or is likely to cause pollution of a water resources, must take all reasonable measure to prevent any such pollution from occurring or recurring.</p> <p>Sub (2)</p> <p>The measures referred to in section (1) may include measures to</p> <p>Cease, modify or control any act or process causing pollution.</p> <p>Comply with any prescribed waste standard or management practice.</p> <p>Contain or prevent the movement of pollutants.</p> <p>Eliminate any source of pollution.</p>	We know that the mines in our area will have stipulations in their water license that they have to comply with. We know they are not doing this. We know that DWS is not monitoring the mines sufficiently enough to ensure that they adhere to the NWA.

National Water Act	21 (g and j)	g. Discharge waste water of which contains waste form or which has been heated in, any industrial or power generation process.  j. Removing, discharging or disposing of water found underground if it is necessary for the efficient continuation of activity or for the safety of people.	We suspect that mines in our area are simply channeling water from underground into the discharge channel and directly into the river. We believe that this water has not been treated sufficiently because we can see how our cattle suffer when they drink this water.
National Water Act	152 (a)	Person who has suffered loss as a result of the act or damage has caused to water sources the court may in the same time proceed; a written request of the person who suffered the harm or loss	
National Water Act	153 (a)	Award for the loss suffered by the person referred to in section 152 the accused must pay.	The mines in our area try to get out of paying for damages incurred. When they do agree to pay they try and convince us to take a sum of money that is less than the value of the cattle that have been lost. In May 2018 we walked out of a meeting where the mines were trying to convince us to accept a small fee for the loss of cattle.

The fact that the mine pollutes is an injustice to all people because our human right to live in an environment that does not harm us is not happening. The mines keep on polluting our rivers. Water pollution affects the black economy in our communities and the ability of people to grow food and keep cattle for their families. Our parents survived with livestock by selling cattle to take care of their families. Cattle are also integrated into our cultural heritage during weddings, funerals and traditional ceremonies.

All this is happening because companies see profit above everything else and don't care about the impact their operations have on people that stay around their operations. We are the ones that bear the brunt of their activities and we receive no benefit. When they go they will not fix

the environment again so we can carry on looking after ourselves. We will be left with a damaged environment long after they have gone.

There are also other changes that have led to things we don't want to see. Our communities have left the old lifestyle they used to live that was very helpful in keeping our environment clean. For example a mother used cloth nappies but now the disposable nappy seems to be the answer to every mother while it is not recyclable. (For more information about the effect of disposable nappies on the environment see the case written up by our comrades from Itumeleng Youth Project that are part of this series of booklets). Communities also don't care about the environment at all as they see rivers as transporters of waste just as the mines do. This view of the rivers that the mine follows has spread amongst us. Something has happened since the mines arrived. Our relationship with the environment has been eroded like the mines erode the environment.

**“Something has happened since the mines arrived.  
Our relationship with the environment has been  
eroded like the mines erode the environment”**

**4.**

## **How are we changing things?**

It is difficult to take on these big challenges. We don't have an income and as we have reported the mines do not listen to communities but what we do have is the ability to mobilise and the commitment to keep trying to bring about change in our community. Below we document what we have done so far.

### **SEJN CHANGING PRACTICE COURSE TIMELINE**

<b>21-25 May 2017</b>	Beginning of Change Practice Course
<b>20 June 2017</b>	Introduction of Changing Practice course to SEJN (organisation)
<b>25 June 2017</b>	Meeting with gardeners at Moroke
<b>28 June 2017</b>	Meeting with ward counsellor and CDW Moroke
<b>30 June 2017</b>	Meeting with Ward counsellor

<b>15 July 2017</b>	Meeting with District Municipality (Sekhukhune)
<b>07 August 2017</b>	Meeting with livestock owners
<b>17 August 2017</b>	Meeting with University of Venda students
<b>18 August 2017</b>	Water sampling with University of Venda
<b>07 September 2017</b>	Meeting with livestock owner and mine about compensation
<b>09 September 2017</b>	Meeting with mine and government departments (Water and Sanitation, Agriculture and Environmental Affairs)
<b>11 September 2017</b>	Water sampling by Department of Water and Sanitation and Twickenham mine
<b>27-30 November 2017</b>	Mmathapelo attended the United Nation Forum On Business and Human Rights (Presenting on how Company Grievance Mechanism fails the mining communities and introducing IPSS (Independence Problem Solving Service))
<b>7-9 February 2018</b>	Alternative Mining Indaba (Presenting on the IPSS)
<b>15-16 February 2018</b>	FSCAL – Fiscal Framework Workshop
<b>20 february 2018</b>	Mining charter court case in Pretoria
<b>24 April 2018</b>	Amadiba Crisis Committee Court case (Pretoria high court) about the right to say no
<b>9-11 May 2018</b>	Seedbed Conference (SEJN presented their Change Practice course)
<b>26-29 June 2018</b>	African Queen Various Feminist Movement Workshop (SEJN presented their work and issues they encounter as women living next to the mine)
<b>10 July 2018</b>	SEJN present the Changing Practice course to Limpopo Monitors from the following organisations: Waterberg Environmental Justice Forum; Waterberg Women Advocacy Organisation; Sekhukhune Combined Mining Affected Communities; Kopano Foundation; Ithumeleng Youth Project; Malengine Corruption Watch
<b>19 July 2018</b>	SEJN (launching of the organisation)
<b>21-22 July 2018</b>	SAFTU ( Working Class Summit where SEJN was represented).



## **Mobilising and educating communities**

SEJN is raising awareness in communities to educate them on environmental rights and information.

### **Launching Girls In The Hood (GITH)**



Girls in the Hood

SEJN has a new affiliation with girls and young women in Lydenburg where we offer advice and career guidance, teach about gender inequality and home based violence. GITH started because we saw the need to teach girls to protect themselves, to build self esteem and about the need to take girl children to school. This initiative was started by young students from the University of Johannesburg, Wits University, the University of Pretoria and women who come from Lydenburg.

## **Engaging with mines towards compliance**

SEJN is now making headway in getting the mine to comply according to the environmental laws and respect people and their heritage. We wrote an email to the mine in February 2017 but we did not receive any reply. We then wrote to the Department of Water and Sanitation in April 2017, and in response to our letter they called the first meeting with the mines and invited

us . The most important result of this meeting is that it opened up a line of communication between our organisation and mine which has continued until today. We are in the process of negotiating with the mines to compensate farmers for the loss of their livestock. SEJN is also negotiating with the mine to provide the community with alternatives of clean water and grazing for the livestock, not only at Hackney shaft but also at the Twickenham shaft.

We are now extending our work by mobilising and working with farmers from 3 communities: Ga-Makgopa, Ga-Mashabela and Serafa. We organise meetings to share information and educate farmers that are affected by the operation of Anglo American in our Municipality.

### **Awareness about water pollution**

After realising that we have an issue of dying of livestock the community of Morapaneng, Dithabaneng and Makgaake, SEJN members gathered to share information about water pollution in our area. The livestock owners never look back but always engage with us when they have meetings. This is helpful because more information is given during on these meeting days and livestock owners engage us every time they find new information .



Meeting with livestock owners on 07/08/2017

### **Building relationships with Government and NGOs**

We have developed good relationships with our government departments (Water and Sanitation, Agriculture and Environment Affairs in our district municipality and province), as well as students from the Universities of Venda, Cape Town and Limpopo and other international institutions in America and Canada. The University of Venda played a role in our organisation when we did the first water testing, and a test of animals that have died. We have



formed a task team that has representatives from livestock owners, government, the mine and SEJN, where we deal with the issue of water pollution, quantity and quality. We, the task team, meet every month to assess the progress and government's doors are open for us communities when we need their help. We are taking water samples with them every 3 months. The mines and government are now recognising us, (SEJN and livestock owners) and always when we want to see them we have that access. We have also now formed a task team that is dealing with the water pollution in our area



Taking water samples with University of Venda Students on 18/08/2017



Formation of a task team on water pollution in our area (Maotsi) 09/09/2017

**List of meetings and workshops that we have attended or organised to forward our case.**

DATE	EVENT	NO. PPL ATTENDED	OBJECTIVES OF MEETINGS	OUTCOMES
14/02/2017	Centre For Environmental Rights	20 ppl	Environmental Rights and Remedies workshop	Activists were given information on how to report environmental cases at government departments, how to draft a complaint letter, how to fill A form (government) and C form (for industries). We used the knowledge we gained at this workshop to write our letter to the mines and the Department of Water and Sanitation. We heard about this workshop through the CSO indabas
17/02/2017	Social audits workshop	35 ppl	To teach communities how to do audits; some of the projects that are happening in their communities	The community of Monametse was chosen by the community to start the social audits. This community is part of SEJN.
01/06/2017	Launching Girls in the Hood.(GITH). Launched by GITH and SEJN	30	Empowering women around gender violence	Affiliation of GITH with SEJN
05/06/2017	Social and Labour Plan workshop (Oxfam SA)	50	To educate communities about the importance of SLPs and how important it is for communities to be part of them. How can they access SLP document?	Agreed to apply for SLP documents of the mine (Bokone, Twickenham and Marula)
19/07/2017	Water pollution awareness workshop run by SEJN	45	To educate farmers about water pollution	Establishment of a collective movement that will represent communities on the water pollution and land grabbing issues.
18/08/2017	Monitoring school run by Benchmarks Foundation	15	To train activists on how to make, record and produce stories.	A local whatsapp group was formed and Tshedimosho Newsletter commenced (provincial newsletter). We published our stories developed from CPC

				Assignment one interviews in this newsletter.
25/10/2017	SEJN workshop with livestock owners	35	To give feedback on door to door questionnaires that we did for social audits	Activist agreed to do social audits on Bokone Social and Labour Plan (SLP)

## Publishing our stories and monitoring our river

We have also been working with **Benchmarks Foundations (BMF)** by publishing our stories about the environmental injustices we see in our communities. Benchmarks is helping us monitor our river water for the first time. BMF gave us the equipment to monitor the ph level of the water around our village. Community monitors have been testing the PH level at Motse River and from the mine canal; the results have helped us because now SEJN can raise an argument with the polluters (the mine).

## Deepening our knowledge and practice

**Centre For Environmental Rights (CER)** gave us information about environmental laws and the help we needed as a community when writing complaint letters to the mine. They also helped us make our arguments strong during negotiations with companies by giving us the law around the Water Act. We have worked with the Legal Resources Centre who have strengthened our knowledge about human rights in relation to the environment. We have also worked with the **Centre For Applied Legal Studies (CALS)** to unpack the knowledge for communities about Social and Labour Plans and Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA). Communities have the right to participate when the SLP is drafted and also to access the SLP document in their preferable languages. The **Association for Water and Rural Development** has offered us courses and skills in our area, including the CSO Indabas and the Water Clinic. We have attended courses run by **Groundwork** where we have learnt more about our environmental rights, such as our right to clean water.

## Broader solidarity work with other mining affected communities

With CALS help, mining affected communities are being represented for the first time in court about the Mining Charter. This happened in February 2018. SEJN was in attendance.

## Sharing our case in South Africa and overseas

SEJN has presented their work provincially, nationally and internationally, including at the United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights Conference (November 2017), on how our community is suffering because of the operation of the mines, especially on water pollution and how the Company Greivance Machanism fails the mining affected communities.



Mmathapelo presenting in London at the United Nations on 27/11/2017

## 5. Broader influences that affect our Change Project

### Gender and Inequality

It has been very difficult sometimes to pursue issues of pollution related to livestock as our communities are very traditional and still believe that the place of women is in the kitchen, not herding livestock. They don't expect women to call a man's meeting. Being 3 women from 3 different villages of 2 different traditional leaderships was one of the most challenging things because it took us time to work with the traditional leaders before they adjusted and engaged and understood what we were doing as women. Most of our meetings were attended by 100% men because tending livestock in our tradition is a duty that is performed by men. But as times goes by we started to see women coming to such meetings because some of them were widows and single parents taking care of their livestock. By looking at the 3 of us leading the process they were challenged and started to send even their daughters to the meetings. A big problem was that men did not pass the message about the meetings to the women who own



livestock. Women approached us to make sure we told them directly so that they could also come.

### **Social movements**

Our social movements have played an important role in grooming who we are as activists and in all we've learned to raise and stand on our own to fight inequality and start to change the struggle that people see we are having as organisations.

We have realised that our Change Project is not happening only in our area but in all mining affected areas in the whole world, for example in other areas like Atok, Mokopane, Rustenburg and Emalahleni they suffer the very same thing. Solidarity is the answer to fight such injustices.

From being part of the Changing Practice course we have interacted with other activists who strongly believe that gardening is more than just growing food but an act of resistance to show our community that life is not based around mining. We can do something positive by starting gardening and we are planning to extend this to feed the entire community and to use our land how we choose to. We are working with other organisations from our area like Morapaneng Home Based Care, Maotsi Recycling and Basadi Tia.



A community food garden



Itumeleng Youth Project and Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network during a march in Pretoria in support of Amadiba Crisis Committee on 24/04/2018

## 6.

## Conclusion

SEJN is working hard and still needs more skills and resources to work with marginalised communities living next to mines in Sekhukhune. We wish to continue raising awareness, running workshops and working with various legal representations and experts who can further our cause, our human and environmental rights.



Tokelo, Mmathapelo and Eustine working together on their Change Project

**The danger of living next to a mine operation**  
**A case study developed through the *Changing Practice: Olifants* project.**

**July 2018**

**Written by: Mmathapelo Thobejane, Tokelo Mahlakoane and Eustine Matsepane, SEJN**

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