

HOST COMMUNITY'S ROLE IN THE INTRODUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE BY MINING COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

Mining has long been central to South Africa's economic growth, yet its legacy has entrenched socio-economic inequalities in host communities, characterised by poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. Despite legislative reforms like the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002 mandating community engagement and socio-economic development, host communities continue to experience marginalisation and limited benefits from mining activities. This study aimed to explore the role of host communities in the introduction and implementation of systemic change by mining companies, with a focus on how these communities shape, influence, and respond to mining-led interventions. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the study employed a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews with 10 purposefully selected participants from a mining host community. Qualitative content analysis was used to interpret the data. Findings revealed that host communities play multiple roles: they identify local needs and priorities, grant the social license to operate, act as catalysts for accountability, collaborate in co-creating solutions, and advocate for inclusive development. They also facilitate social change and drive continuous improvement in mining strategies. These roles highlight the community's agency in shaping systemic change and ensuring that mining interventions align with local realities. The study recommends strengthening community partnerships, enhancing transparency mechanisms, and promoting inclusive co-created development frameworks. In conclusion, host communities are not passive beneficiaries but active agents of change whose engagement is critical for sustainable and equitable mining-led transformation.

KEY WORDS

corporate social responsibility, community engagement, mining companies, participatory development, systemic change

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INTRODUCTION

Mining has been a cornerstone of South Africa's economy for over a century, contributing significantly to gross domestic product and employment. The country's vast mineral wealth, including Platinum Group Metals (PGMs), gold, iron ore, coal, and manganese, has positioned mining as a key driver of economic development [1]. However, despite its economic benefits, mining has also entrenched systemic socio-economic disparities within host communities, largely due to its historical foundations in colonialism and apartheid. The institutionalised migrant labour system, socio-economic marginalisation, and environmental degradation have shaped the lived experiences of host communities, leaving them vulnerable to poverty, unemployment, and limited infrastructural development [2]. In response to these challenges, policy reforms such as the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002 (MPRDA) were introduced to ensure that mining companies engage with local communities and implement socio-economic initiatives like job creation and skills development [3]. Despite these interventions, host communities continue to experience economic marginalisation, limited access to opportunities, and an overall lack of meaningful development. The disconnect between mining companies' initiatives and community needs raises concerns about the effectiveness of mining-led systemic change. This study seeks to explore host communities' experiences and perceptions of systemic change introduced by mining companies, assessing the extent to which these changes address root socio-economic issues and contribute to sustainable development.

Despite policy reforms mandating community engagement and socio-economic development, mining host communities in South Africa continue to struggle with deep-rooted socio-economic challenges. Poverty, high unemployment rates, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental degradation persist, highlighting a gap between mining companies' interventions and the lived realities of local populations [2]. While mining companies implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and local development projects, these efforts often fall short of delivering systemic change, as they do not fully address the structural inequalities entrenched in these communities [4]. Furthermore, tensions between mining companies and host communities remain high, often resulting in protests, business disruptions, and growing distrust [5]. Community dissatisfaction frequently stems from a perceived lack of genuine consultation, transparency, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes regarding mining operations and associated development projects [6]. Despite legal frameworks advocating for inclusive engagement, the persistent grievances suggest that mining-led systemic change is not effectively translating into tangible benefits for host communities. This research seeks to critically examine the role of host communities in shaping systemic change, the effectiveness of mining-led interventions, and the barriers to meaningful socio-economic transformation.

Existing literature extensively explores corporate social responsibility initiatives and community engagement strategies in the mining sector. However, most studies focus on the economic contributions of mining operations, conflicts arising from inadequate compensation, or environmental degradation [7-10]. There is limited research on how host communities perceive and experience systemic change introduced by mining companies, particularly in terms of governance models, community development frameworks, and sustainability initiatives. While some research highlights community dissatisfaction with mining interventions, there remains a gap in understanding the effectiveness of systemic changes from the perspective of host communities [11]. Specifically, there is a need to assess whether mining-led changes foster genuine socio-economic transformation or merely reinforce existing inequalities. This study aims to address this gap by exploring community perceptions, evaluating the socio-economic impact of systemic change, and identifying key challenges that

hinder effective implementation. By doing so, it will contribute to policy discussions on improving mining-community relations and ensuring that host communities derive sustainable benefits from mining activities.

Understanding the role of host communities in systemic change is crucial for fostering sustainable development and improving mining-community relations. Given the persistent socio-economic struggles of host communities, it is imperative to assess the effectiveness of mining-led systemic changes and identify areas for improvement. Mining companies have a legal and ethical obligation to engage with local communities and contribute to their development, yet the persistent tensions and social unrest indicate a disconnect between corporate initiatives and community needs [12]. This research is significant for multiple stakeholders, including mining companies, policymakers, and community members. For mining companies, it provides insights into how their interventions are perceived and whether they align with local needs, enabling them to refine their engagement strategies. Policymakers can use the findings to strengthen regulations and ensure that community participation in mining governance is meaningful and effective. Additionally, host communities can benefit from a more inclusive approach to systemic change, leading to sustainable socio-economic transformation. By addressing the research gap and critically analysing the impact of systemic changes, this study aims to provide actionable recommendations for fostering long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between mining companies and host communities in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, which is well-suited for exploring the experiences and perceptions of host communities regarding systemic changes introduced by mining companies. Interpretivism is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed, meaning individuals interpret and experience the world based on their personal and cultural contexts [13]. This paradigm emphasises contextual understanding, recognising that experiences are shaped by socio-economic and cultural factors. Interpretivism acknowledges multiple realities, making it ideal for capturing the diverse perspectives within host communities [14]. By employing this paradigm, the study facilitated deeper engagement and dialogue with participants, ensuring a rich and nuanced understanding of their lived experiences. A qualitative research approach was adopted due to its exploratory and interpretative nature, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena rather than the testing of hypotheses [15]. The qualitative approach enabled the collection of rich, descriptive data in a naturalistic setting, allowing direct engagement with participants in their environment. It also focused on subjective meanings, capturing emotions, perceptions, and interpretations rather than objective measurements [16].

The study employed a generic qualitative research design, a flexible approach that does not strictly adhere to the methodological constraints of other qualitative traditions, such as phenomenology or grounded theory [15]. This approach focused on understanding participants' interpretations of systemic change without requiring theory development. It was particularly suitable for exploring the perspectives and experiences of the host community regarding their role in the introduction and implementation of systemic change. The design provided a structured yet adaptable framework, allowing for the identification of diverse community perspectives and ensuring a comprehensive exploration of their involvement in systemic change.

For participant selection, the study employed purposeful sampling, a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting individuals based on their knowledge, experience, or relevance to the research topic [16]. This approach ensured the inclusion of participants with direct experiences of systemic change, providing rich, detailed data [17]. A total of 10 participants were purposefully selected from the host community, including community leaders, local

workers affected by mining activities, and residents who had engaged with mining-related developments. The selection of participants was undertaken from a broader pool of approximately 27 individuals who initially expressed willingness to participate following community entry and engagement with local gatekeepers (e.g., community liaison officers and local leaders). From this pool, participants were screened against predefined inclusion criteria to ensure relevance and depth of experience. Of the 27 individuals, 16 met the residency criterion, 13 demonstrated clear evidence of engagement with mining-related systemic changes, and 10 ultimately satisfied all inclusion criteria and consented to participate fully in the study. The inclusion criteria required that participants: 1) had been residents of the host community for at least five years, ensuring familiarity with past and recent systemic changes; 2) had firsthand experience with mining-related systemic changes; and 3) were willing to share their experiences in detail. This sampling strategy ensured the collection of relevant and meaningful data aligned with the study's objectives.

The five-year residency criterion was deliberately selected to ensure that participants had sufficient longitudinal exposure to both pre- and post-intervention conditions within the community. This duration was considered adequate to observe and meaningfully reflect on changes introduced by mining companies, while also ensuring a sufficient pool of eligible participants. A longer threshold (e.g., ten years) would have significantly reduced the available participant pool and potentially excluded younger but actively engaged community members. "Firsthand experience with systemic change" was operationalised as direct involvement in, or observable impact from, mining-related interventions such as employment programmes, infrastructure development (e.g., roads, clinics, schools), environmental management initiatives, community consultation forums, or CSR projects. For example, several participants had participated in community consultation meetings, benefited from skills development programmes, or engaged in monitoring environmental practices.

To verify this criterion, participants were asked screening questions prior to the interview (e.g., "Can you describe a specific mining-related change you have experienced or observed in your community?"). Only those able to provide concrete, contextually grounded examples were included. This process ensured credibility and reduced the inclusion of participants without substantive engagement. The third criterion, willingness to share experiences, was assessed through initial engagement and rapport-building conversations, where participants demonstrated openness, coherence, and readiness to discuss potentially sensitive issues. No formal "test questions" were used; rather, this was evaluated through ethical consent procedures and preliminary discussions. While a few individuals initially expressed interest, they were excluded due to limited willingness to engage in detailed discussions or withdrawal prior to formal interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method. This method allows for a guided yet flexible exploration of participants' experiences, using open-ended questions to elicit in-depth responses while permitting follow-up questions for clarification [16]. Interviews were conducted over a three-month period. Participants were given the option to choose a setting in which they felt comfortable and secure. As a result, interviews were conducted in multiple locations, including participants' homes, community centres, and, in some cases, neutral public spaces such as local meeting halls. This flexible approach contributed to the creation of a "confident setting" by prioritising participant comfort, privacy, and trust. No group interviews were conducted; all interviews were one-on-one to ensure confidentiality and minimise peer influence. Semi-structured interviews ensured that all participants addressed similar themes, enhancing comparability while allowing for the emergence of diverse perspectives. One-on-one interviews provided a confidential and comfortable setting, encouraging openness, particularly given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic. This approach enabled the study to capture complex social dynamics and individual responses to the role they played in systemic change more effectively than rigid data collection methods.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the study to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and removing any identifying information from the data. Given the sensitive nature of mining-community relations, particular care was taken to create a safe and non-threatening interview environment. Additionally, ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review body, ensuring that the study adhered to established ethical standards in qualitative research.

For data analysis, the study utilised qualitative content analysis, a systematic technique for identifying themes, patterns, and meanings in textual data [16]. Content analysis focuses on both manifest content (explicit statements) and latent content (underlying meanings), allowing for a deeper exploration of participants' perspectives on systemic change. The analysis process involved iterative cycles of reading, coding, categorising themes, and interpreting findings, ensuring a thorough examination of community perceptions and experiences. This approach was well-suited for capturing both explicit concerns and implicit sentiments regarding mining-related changes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the host community's role in systemic change.

Despite the strengths of the chosen methodology, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The use of a qualitative approach with a relatively small, purposefully selected sample limits the generalisability of the findings beyond the specific context studied. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants may consciously or unconsciously present socially desirable views. The interpretivist nature of the study also means that findings are subject to the researcher's interpretative lens, although efforts were made to ensure credibility through careful coding and iterative analysis. Furthermore, the study focused on a single host community, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different mining contexts. These limitations, however, do not diminish the value of the study but rather highlight opportunities for future research to adopt comparative or mixed-method approaches to enhance broader applicability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

PARTNER IN IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Participants indicated that one of the roles of host communities in the successful introduction and implementation of systemic changes by mining companies is to identify local needs and priorities. They emphasised that by actively engaging with host communities, mining companies can ensure that their initiatives align with the socio-economic and environmental aspirations of the local population. This partnership fosters mutual growth, addresses community-driven challenges, and enhances the long-term sustainability of mining operations. Participant 2 emphasised the importance of host communities in guiding the alignment of mining changes with local needs, stating, "*Host communities are vital partners in identifying local needs and priorities, ensuring that changes are aligned with their socio-economic and environmental goals, thereby resulting in mutual growth*". Participant 4 highlighted the practical benefits of collaboration, particularly in addressing real-world issues such as infrastructure and public services: "*By collaborating with host communities to identify key areas for improvement, mining companies can implement changes that address real-world challenges, such as infrastructure development, healthcare, and education*".

Participant 5 stressed that the active involvement of host communities is essential for shaping the strategies of mining companies, ensuring that their initiatives are community-driven and

focused on tangible outcomes: *“The input of host communities is indispensable in shaping mining companies’ strategies, ensuring that transformative initiatives focus on tangible, community-driven needs like job creation and sustainable development”*. Participant 9 highlighted the long-term impact of such engagement, noting that understanding community priorities leads to more relevant and impactful changes: *“Mining companies that engage with host communities to understand their priorities can create more impactful and relevant changes that resonate with local aspirations and improve long-term relations”*. Participant 7 emphasised the potential for co-creating programmes that prepare the local workforce for future challenges, contributing to sustainable socio-economic development: *“Through meaningful collaboration, mining companies can co-create skills-training programmes with host communities, preparing the workforce for future challenges while encouraging sustainable socio-economic development”*. Participant 3 emphasised the direct benefits of community input in identifying needs, highlighting the positive effects on community well-being and the sustainability of mining operations: *“When host communities help identify local needs, it ensures that changes address critical issues, improving community well-being and promoting the long-term success of mining operations”*.

The involvement of host communities in identifying local needs and priorities is central to sustainable mining operations, as it ensures that systemic changes reflect socio-economic and environmental aspirations. Participants in this study emphasised the value of community engagement, with several noting that local input enhances the relevance, legitimacy, and sustainability of mining strategies. This aligns with the broader discourse on corporate social responsibility, which underscores stakeholder involvement as a driver of sustainable development [18]. Scholars support this view, arguing that participatory approaches improve the acceptability of initiatives [19], incorporate indigenous knowledge [20], and yield tangible benefits in infrastructure, healthcare, and education [21]. Moreover, co-created strategies promote job creation, economic diversification, and resilience [22], while strengthening the social license to operate through continuous community engagement [9, 23]. Prioritising host community concerns enhances both corporate sustainability and local development outcomes.

SOURCE OF SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE

Participants opined that for the mining companies to successfully introduce and implement systemic changes, the host communities play the role of granting them a social license to operate. This social license, essentially the approval or acceptance by local communities, helps minimise resistance and fosters smoother transitions in mining operations. Participant 1 emphasises the critical role of communities in legitimising the operations of mining companies, without which new initiatives would struggle to gain traction: *“Host communities are key providers of the social license to operate, granting legitimacy to mining companies’ initiatives and ensuring that changes are accepted and supported”*. Participant 9 highlighted the importance of early and meaningful engagement with communities in order to avoid resistance, stressing that community buy-in is a prerequisite for success: *“Without the endorsement of host communities, even the most well-designed changes can face resistance, making it essential for mining companies to engage early and meaningfully with local populations”*. Participant 2 highlights how community support facilitates the smooth implementation of changes and minimises the risk of disruptions, such as strikes or protests: *“The social license provided by communities is foundational to successful mining operations; when communities support changes, mining companies can implement new practices with reduced risk of disruptions like strikes or protests”*.

Participant 4 highlights the pivotal role communities play in ensuring the continued success of mining operations and in minimising potential conflicts through their active engagement: *“Host communities play a pivotal role in legitimising a mining company’s operations and*

transformation efforts, making their engagement crucial to securing ongoing operational success and reducing conflict". Participant 7 placed emphasis on transparent communication, particularly regarding shifts towards renewable energy, which builds trust and aligns with both local and environmental concerns, ensuring smoother transitions: *"Transparent communication, such as informing communities about a shift to renewable energy, helps gain their trust and social license, ensuring smoother implementation of changes that align with both environmental and local priorities"*. Participant 8 reiterates the point that community acceptance, as part of the social license, is essential in overcoming potential barriers and disruptions during the implementation of systemic changes by mining companies: *"Community acceptance and support, granted through the social license to operate, enable mining companies to introduce and implement changes without facing significant barriers or disruptions from local stakeholders"*.

The concept of a social license to operate is pivotal in the mining sector, particularly when implementing systemic changes, as it reflects the ongoing approval granted by local communities and stakeholders [24]. Data from participants revealed that community engagement legitimises operations, reduces resistance, and mitigates risks such as protests or legal disputes, aligning with findings by [9]. Proactive and transparent communication fosters trust and collaboration, especially when addressing environmental sustainability, as emphasised by Participant 7 and supported by [25]. This approach resonates with the Corporate Social Responsibility framework [26], highlighting the need for mining companies to integrate local perspectives and align business goals with social expectations to enhance resilience, regulatory stability, and long-term operational success [20, 22].

CATALYST FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Participants highlighted that the host communities play a crucial role in ensuring that mining companies uphold ethical practices, fulfil their environmental and social obligations, and operate with transparency. Participant 8 emphasised the role of host communities as the industry's moral compass, stating, *"Host communities serve as the critical conscience of the mining industry, demanding accountability and transparency in how companies address environmental and social obligations"*. Participant 6 reinforced this perspective, noting that communities actively hold mining companies accountable, which fosters ethical business practices: *"By holding mining companies accountable for their commitments, host communities act as catalysts for ethical practices and sustainable development within the sector"*. Participant 2 highlighted the importance of community involvement in environmental oversight, ensuring that mining companies mitigate pollution and rehabilitate affected ecosystems: *"The active role of host communities in monitoring environmental management plans ensures that mining companies prioritise reducing pollution and rehabilitating degraded ecosystems"*.

Participant 9 stressed that community oversight fosters transparency and compels mining companies to honour their commitments to fair benefit-sharing: *"When host communities enforce oversight, they create a culture of transparency, compelling mining companies to align their actions with promises of equitable benefit-sharing"*. Participant 4 pointed out that persistent advocacy by host communities drives systemic change and promotes inclusive and sustainable mining practices: *"Through consistent monitoring and advocacy, host communities drive change, ensuring that mining companies uphold the principles of inclusivity and sustainability"*. Participant 10 stated that communities acting as watchdogs encourage companies to go beyond mere regulatory compliance, fostering a culture of long-term accountability: *"Communities that actively engage as watchdogs push mining companies to go beyond compliance, allowing long-term accountability and ethical stewardship in the sector"*.

The role of host communities as catalysts for accountability and transparency in the mining sector is well-documented in academic literature. As key stakeholders, these communities serve

as the moral conscience of the industry by demanding ethical conduct, environmental compliance, and transparent operations [25]. Their engagement aligns with the concept of the social license to operate, which reveals the importance of community approval for sustainable mining. Community participation in environmental oversight not only ensures adherence to environmental management plans but also strengthens ecological accountability [7]. Moreover, by advocating for equitable benefit-sharing, host communities promote inclusive economic practices and transparency in revenue distribution [27]. Their watchdog role compels mining companies to exceed regulatory expectations and embed long-term accountability mechanisms [20], eventually contributing to ethical business practices and sustainable development.

COLLABORATOR IN CO-CREATION OF SOLUTIONS

In the introduction and implementation of systemic change by mining companies, participants highlighted that the host communities played a crucial role as collaborators in co-creating solutions that align with local needs and contexts. Participant 7 emphasised the importance of local knowledge in shaping sustainable solutions: *“By contributing local knowledge and lived experiences, host communities become essential collaborators in co-creating sustainable solutions that are culturally and contextually relevant”*. Participant 10 highlighted how partnerships between mining companies and host communities foster trust and innovation: *“When mining companies partner with host communities, they unlock innovative solutions grounded in local realities, cultivating trust and mutual growth”*. Participant 1 emphasised the value of engaging communities in key projects to ensure their relevance and effectiveness: *“Engaging communities in the design of housing and healthcare initiatives ensures these projects address genuine needs, reflecting a shared vision for change”*. Participant 5 further explained how co-creation helps align corporate intentions with community expectations: *“The co-creation of solutions with host communities bridges the gap between corporate intentions and community expectations, enabling meaningful and sustainable outcomes”*. Participant 3 pointed out that host communities contribute unique insights that enhance the practicality and inclusivity of solutions: *“Host communities provide unique insights that enrich the development of changes, creating solutions that are practical, inclusive, and widely supported”*. Participant 9 described how collaboration transforms change efforts into a shared journey, leading to long-term partnerships and equitable development: *“Collaboration with host communities transforms change from a corporate-led process into a shared journey, resulting in lasting partnerships and equitable development”*.

The data underlines the significance of participatory development in fostering sustainable corporate-community relations, particularly in the mining sector. Mining companies and host communities collaboratively design and implement solutions that reflect local realities, ensuring cultural sensitivity, trust, and relevance [26]. Participant insights highlight the value of indigenous knowledge in shaping effective interventions, reinforcing literature that community-driven solutions are more sustainable [28]. Co-creation not only bridges the gap between corporate intentions and community needs but also fosters trust and innovation, which are crucial for social license to operate in contexts marked by historical tensions [5, 9]. Evidence from community-led housing and healthcare initiatives supports the effectiveness of participatory approaches in addressing socio-economic disparities [29], while CSR literature affirms that involving communities ensures alignment with local priorities [30]. Therefore, inclusive governance enhances cohesion, durability of outcomes, and long-term partnerships, reducing dependency and promoting local economic resilience [31].

ADVOCATE FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Participants indicated that the host communities play a pivotal role in advocating for systemic changes that dismantle historical inequalities and drive inclusive economic development within

the mining sector. Their efforts influence employment, procurement, and decision-making processes, ensuring that mining companies implement policies that promote fairness and shared prosperity. Participant 1 emphasised the role of host communities in pushing for fair employment and procurement practices: *“By demanding equity in employment and procurement practices, communities compel mining companies to create opportunities that benefit a broader spectrum of society”*. Participant 6 highlighted the significance of community advocacy in fostering inclusive governance structures: *“The advocacy of host communities for inclusive decision-making ensures that changes reflect diverse voices and promote fairness across all stakeholders”*. Participant 10 pointed out how communities advocate for local economic growth through procurement policies: *“Through persistent calls for local business prioritisation in procurement policies, communities stimulate economic growth and empowerment within their regions”*. Participant 8 stressed how community advocacy encourages transformative policies that address disparities: *“Host communities’ advocacy efforts inspire mining companies to adopt transformative policies that bridge socioeconomic gaps and foster shared prosperity”*. Participant 5 highlighted the role of host communities as agents of change in ensuring widespread economic benefits: *“By championing inclusive development, host communities become agents of change, ensuring that economic benefits extend to previously marginalised groups”*.

The role of host communities in advocating for inclusive development in the mining sector is vital in addressing historical inequalities and ensuring shared prosperity. Participants’ responses reveal that community advocacy influences employment, procurement, and decision-making processes, aligning with literature on social justice, participatory governance, and corporate accountability. Rey-Martí et al. [32] note that communities often face exclusion from employment, prompting advocacy for equitable recruitment. Participant 11’s emphasis on decision-making reflects [33] arguments that participatory governance enhances transparency and reduces conflict. Similarly, Participant 10’s focus on procurement aligns with research by [1, 26], which shows that local content strategies promote inclusive economic growth. Furthermore, [34] affirms that community activism drives policy reforms that address systemic injustices. As highlighted by [35] and Participant 5, host communities serve as agents of change by leveraging advocacy to secure resource justice and ensure widespread economic inclusion.

FACILITATOR OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Participants opined that the host communities play a crucial role in facilitating social change by influencing public perceptions, fostering acceptance, and ensuring the successful implementation of systemic changes introduced by mining companies. Their involvement in advocacy, sustainability initiatives, and community-driven projects helps bridge the gap between corporate innovations and societal integration. Participant 2 emphasised the role of host communities in shaping public opinion and fostering acceptance of changes within the mining sector: *“Host communities act as facilitators of social change by shaping public opinion and fostering acceptance of transformations within the mining sector”*. Participant 5 highlighted how advocacy and community support create a ripple effect that encourages broader adoption of new initiatives: *“Through their advocacy and support, communities create a ripple effect, encouraging widespread adoption of initiatives like renewable energy and technological advancements”*.

Participant 7 stated the importance of community members who actively promote sustainability programmes, serving as key drivers of social progress: *“Community members who embrace and promote sustainability programmes serve as powerful ambassadors for change, driving collective action and social progress”*. Participant 9 pointed out that host communities play a crucial role in championing long-term sustainability efforts, ensuring their acceptance and integration into society: *“By championing initiatives that align with long-term sustainability, host communities pave the way for societal acceptance and integration of improvements”*.

Participant 3 emphasised the transformative impact of host communities in bridging corporate innovations with public engagement: *“Host communities play a transformative role in fostering social change, bridging the gap between corporate innovations and public engagement”*. Participant 8 highlighted how proactive community involvement in promoting green energy and technological advancements enhances societal buy-in and facilitates successful change implementation: *“The proactive role of host communities in promoting green energy and technological upgrades inspires broader societal buy-in, ensuring the success of changes”*.

The data highlights the crucial role of host communities in facilitating social change during the implementation of systemic transformations by mining companies. These communities act as intermediaries, bridging corporate innovation and public engagement through advocacy, fostering acceptance, and promoting sustainability [36]. Their narrative framing and community mobilisation align with concepts of community-driven transformation and social movement theory, which emphasise grassroots influence on policy and behaviour [37]. This community engagement helps ensure that changes such as renewable energy transitions are embraced as local progress rather than external impositions [38]. Furthermore, active community participation supports stakeholder theory by fostering trust, enhancing corporate-community relations, and facilitating smoother transitions to sustainable practices [20, 39]. When host communities lead or co-own sustainability initiatives, they generate societal buy-in and reduce resistance, which is vital for long-term success in industries like mining [40].

DRIVER OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

One of the key roles that host communities played in the introduction and implementation of systemic change by mining companies was serving as drivers of continuous improvement. Through active engagement, feedback, and collaboration, communities helped refine and enhance implemented changes, ensuring that they remained effective and relevant over time. Participant 6 emphasised the importance of community feedback in refining systemic changes, stating, *“Host communities play a crucial role in driving continuous improvement by providing feedback that refines and enhances changes over time”*. Participant 1 highlighted how local knowledge and lived experiences contribute to making changes more relevant and effective, noting, *“Through their insights and lived experiences, communities highlight gaps and opportunities, ensuring that changes remain relevant and responsive”*. Participant 9 pointed out the value of strong communication channels between host communities and mining companies, explaining, *“A strong feedback loop between host communities and mining companies fosters a culture of continuous improvement, promoting adaptability and sustained impact”*. Participant 2 provided an example of how communities contribute to improvement efforts, stating, *“By suggesting enhancements, such as improvements in environmental monitoring systems, communities help ensure that changes align with evolving local priorities”*. Participant 10 described host communities as proactive agents of change, remarking, *“Host communities serve as dynamic partners in change, offering constructive feedback that pushes mining companies to innovate and improve”*. Participant 5 highlighted the collaborative nature of continuous improvement, explaining, *“The feedback provided by host communities creates a collaborative environment, where change is continuously refined to meet shared goals effectively”*.

The role of host communities in the mining sector is critical to the continuous refinement of systemic changes, as their participation ensures that interventions remain relevant, contextually grounded, and sustainable. Rooted in the principles of participatory governance [41], community involvement, through feedback and local knowledge, enables mining companies to adjust strategies in line with socio-economic and environmental realities [42]. Effective communication channels further foster iterative learning and adaptation, consistent with the adaptive management approach [43], while community-led contributions to environmental

monitoring reflect broader trends in environmental governance [8]. Hence, sustained collaboration and shared decision-making, as emphasised in the collaborative governance literature, build trust and ownership, enhancing both the legitimacy of systemic change and the resilience of mining operations [18].

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Mining companies should establish formal mechanisms for host community engagement, such as participatory forums, community advisory boards, and joint planning committees, to ensure that local voices are represented in decision-making processes. Periodic socio-economic and environmental needs assessments should be conducted collaboratively with host communities to align mining initiatives with local development priorities, ensuring that projects address the most pressing concerns. By integrating indigenous knowledge and local expertise into decision-making, mining-led interventions can become more sustainable and widely accepted. Community-driven investments should be focused on critical areas such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education to maximise social impact, enhance livelihoods, and foster mutual growth between mining companies and host communities. Strengthening these partnerships can lead to long-term benefits, including improved relationships, shared prosperity, and more resilient local economies.

ENHANCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO SECURE SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE

To build trust and long-term acceptance, mining companies should initiate transparent, early-stage consultations with host communities before implementing systemic changes. Establishing clear and open communication channels is essential for providing regular updates on mining operations, sustainability initiatives, and anticipated changes that may impact the community. Mining companies should implement structured community grievance mechanisms that allow stakeholders to voice concerns, seek resolutions proactively, and prevent conflicts from escalating. Aligning corporate strategies with the Corporate Social Responsibility framework ensures adherence to ethical practices, enhances regulatory stability, and minimises operational uncertainties. This approach not only fosters goodwill and community support but also strengthens the mining company's reputation, reducing risks of operational disruptions due to local resistance.

STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY MECHANISMS

Accountability and transparency are essential to fostering trust and ensuring that mining activities benefit host communities equitably. Mining companies should encourage host communities to actively participate in monitoring corporate compliance with environmental and social commitments by establishing joint monitoring and evaluation teams composed of community representatives and company officials. These teams should oversee the impact of mining operations and ensure that mitigation measures are effectively implemented. Companies should disclose corporate social investment plans, revenue distribution, and environmental mitigation strategies in accessible formats to ensure equitable benefit-sharing and prevent corruption. Additionally, mining companies should support local advocacy groups and independent watchdog initiatives that promote ethical business practices and responsible mining. Strengthening these accountability measures will enhance corporate credibility, reduce conflicts, and promote responsible resource management.

PROMOTE CO-CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Mining companies should engage host communities as active partners in designing and implementing sustainable solutions that align with local needs and aspirations. By leveraging indigenous knowledge and local experiences, companies can develop housing, healthcare, and workforce development programs that are culturally appropriate and economically viable. A participatory approach should be adopted, treating communities as equal partners rather than passive beneficiaries in corporate social investment projects. Establishing long-term partnerships with community-based organisations, government agencies, and non-profit entities will ensure that the benefits of mining-led interventions extend beyond the mine's operational lifespan. Such collaborative efforts contribute to sustainable community development, enhance economic diversification, and leave a lasting positive impact that outlives mining activities.

SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of host communities in shaping systemic change, several avenues for future research emerge. First, future studies could adopt a comparative approach by examining multiple mining communities across different provinces or countries to explore contextual variations in community engagement and systemic change outcomes. Second, longitudinal research is recommended to assess the long-term impact of mining-led interventions on socio-economic transformation and sustainability within host communities. Third, quantitative or mixed-methods studies could complement the present qualitative findings by measuring the extent of community influence on policy implementation and development outcomes. Additionally, future research could investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as mining executives, policymakers, and non-governmental organisations, to provide a more holistic understanding of systemic change processes. Finally, there is a need to explore the role of emerging technologies and digital platforms in enhancing community participation, transparency, and accountability in the mining sector. These research directions would deepen understanding and contribute to more effective, evidence-based strategies for sustainable mining-community relations.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of host communities in the introduction and implementation of systemic change by mining companies. The findings underscore the crucial contributions of host communities in shaping corporate strategies, ensuring sustainable development, and fostering accountability in the mining sector. The study revealed that host communities play a multifaceted role in the systemic change process. They serve as key partners in identifying needs and priorities, ensuring that mining-led interventions align with local socio-economic and environmental realities. By actively engaging in decision-making, host communities help mining companies develop more contextually relevant and sustainable initiatives. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of the social license to operate, emphasising that mining companies must earn community trust through meaningful engagement and transparency. Without community endorsement, systemic changes face resistance, operational disruptions, and reputational risks. Host communities also function as catalysts for accountability and transparency, holding mining companies to ethical and environmental standards. Their scrutiny ensures that corporate commitments translate into tangible benefits, thereby fostering responsible business practices. Additionally, host communities act as collaborators in co-creating solutions, leveraging their indigenous knowledge and lived experiences to shape more effective and sustainable mining interventions.

Beyond these roles, host communities advocate for inclusive development, demanding fair employment opportunities, equitable resource distribution, and participatory decision-making processes. Their involvement in governance structures strengthens corporate-community relations, mitigates conflicts, and promotes long-term sustainability. Moreover, the study illustrates how host communities facilitate social change by influencing public perceptions, advocating for systemic shifts, and bridging the gap between corporate innovations and societal expectations. Finally, the findings highlight that host communities drive continuous improvement by providing feedback, ensuring that systemic changes remain adaptable to evolving socio-economic and environmental contexts. Their insights contribute to the refinement of mining strategies, making them more responsive to local needs. In conclusion, mining companies cannot achieve sustainable systemic change in isolation. Host communities are not passive recipients of corporate interventions but active agents shaping mining operations for the collective benefit. Therefore, companies must foster strong partnerships, engage in transparent decision-making, and integrate local knowledge into their strategies. By doing so, mining companies can achieve sustainable growth while ensuring that host communities derive meaningful and long-term benefits from mining activities.

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