

The Community Monitors School/ A project of the Bench-Marks foundation

A selection of

Activists Reports

***Stories from communities living near mines.
February and April 2023.***



Reflecting on 2022 and planning for 2023



We have done a lot of thinking on the community monitoring school programme during 2022. We implemented first changes like the inclusion of the facilitators to coordinate groups of monitors which has worked very well. We also learnt through our outcome harvesting, the team discussions and the programme feedback at the end of the year and have implemented a stronger programmatic shift to problem solving and action by integrating the problem-solving approach into the work of the community monitoring school. We call the process from alert to problem solving (or at least an engagement of power holders) and will try out different ways of linking these processes closer to other work of the Bench Marks Foundation.





Observe

Analyze

Act

The community Monitoring School is a Bench Marks Foundation programme designed to ensure local communities in regions impacted and affected by mining are capacitated and members engage with corporations and governments around human rights protection to resist injustices faced.

As of February 2023, we have 60 monitors from 6 provinces, working in 36 locations, in 15 local municipalities being coordinated by 9 facilitators. The majority of monitors continue to be based in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North-West, Gauteng, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces. This is the first edition of the Community Monitoring School newsletter for year 2023.

The selection of stories in this edition was from 139 monitor's reports posted in the months of February and April. You may access more Community Monitors Reports by visiting our website:

www.communitymonitors.net

Ballengiech, Newcastle – Kwa Zulu Natal

Floods leaves many homeless

Vuyisani Gwebani

Floods in Newcastle started as late summer rains, with 30% chances of rain to shower for an hour or two. The rain persisted and escalated to 80% - 100% chances of rain a day. Also, it is important to note that Newcastle is surrounded by rural places like Ballengiech and Vezubuhle which are demarcated in Ward 21, of municipality demarcation board and are situated next to the Ingagane River.

When the rain persisted, the streets were flooded, houses collapsed and residents were left without shelter, water flown into houses, people's food and furniture were damaged. People could not even go to work because roads were eroded and children could not go to school.

These floods took a period of a week and their two-hour rainfall was too much for the mud houses of the poor community. Surely these floods were not just a natural disaster, but rather a sign we are in the era of climate change. We ought to educate our communities about it so that they may start to change their lifestyle and live their lives in accordance with climate change.



Did you know

In 2022 Kwa Zulu Natal was hit by devastating flooding that claimed lives of 459 people, destroyed over 4000 houses and left 40 000 people homeless. This was most catastrophic natural disaster recorded by the province scientists said. – Mail&Guardian

Mathukuza, Newcastle – Kwa Zulu Natal



Communities need to be capacitated more about climate change

Bafana Blose

On the 23rd of February the Climate Change Bill consultation took place at Westville civil center KwaZulu Natal, hosted by the Department of Environmental Affairs, Fisheries and Forestry and National Parliament Portfolio committee.

The meeting was attended by more than 300 people especially residents of Durban, Newcastle and Midlands. Other stakeholders such as traditional healers, councillors and civil society representatives from Groundwork,

Ubunye bamahostela, Oceans not oil, Sisonke Environmental Justice Network and more.

The bill was presented to us, its aims and objectives will be to deal with the impact of climate change. The aim of the bill is to protect vulnerable communities especially those living in shacks and the poorest of the poor who cannot afford to face climate change impacts.

Participants were given a chance to comment, either we object or we support the bill. Most of those in attendance didn't know what is climate change which resulted in them raising their concerns with regards to social challenges such crime and that caused delays. This was a clear indication that the portfolio committee failed at educating the community on climate change so that people attend the consultation prepared to engage.

Many people objected the bill stating they were not properly involved in the process like with other bills such as section 25 of the constitution which has never been implemented with proper consultation with people.

Ikemeleng, Rustenburg - North West



Ikemeleng community confronts mining companies regarding possible nickel contamination

This after we have observed that most of the residents have skin problems such as acne, eczema and others are suffering from respiratory related illnesses. Women experience challenges with conceiving or carrying pregnancy full term while they are still within child bearing age.

Our plan is to acquire water testing kits to corroborate our story as the people of Ikemeleng. We will extend the invite to the safety officers of both Sibanye and Anglo American to be present when carrying out the water testing as well as the volume of air pollution, because we feel that our constitutional right to clean air and water are being violated as the community.

The South African law states that everyone has a right to an environment that is not harmful and access to clean water. We are still waiting for a response from both companies as we have furnished them with emails in line with the Environmental Act no 107 of 1998 and NEMA principles that they respond in seven working days.

Terrence Ngobeni

On the 27th February 2023, we wrote a letter to environmental officers of both Sibanye and Anglo American respectively. Our major concern is the impact the mining operation has on the environment and wellbeing.

Since we discovered that we might potentially have nickel contaminating water consumed by residents of Ikemeleng community in Kroondal, Rustenburg Local Municipality. We as Ikemeleng Environmental Development and Justice then mobilized other organizations in Ikemeleng to send a letter requesting a meeting with both the companies to seek clarity about the impacts their operations have on our water and air.

Did you know

Nickel may cause a variety of side effects on human health such as allergy, cardiovascular, kidney disease, lung fibrosis, lung and nasal cancer – National Center for Biotechnology Information

Phokeng, Rustenburg - North West



Phokeng village experiences water scarcity even boreholes have dried up

Tebogo Dikale

Phokeng village which is a capital of 29 Bafokeng Nation villages in Rustenburg, North West has been experiencing water scarcity in recent years and it has raised eyebrows for many. As a community monitor, I took a journey to research about it to hear views of the community members.

I have learned that there were boreholes when we grew up in our village back in 1970's and 80's but they are not being used anymore. In the early 80's members of community made plans to have boreholes on their properties.

Mme Mokgatla is one of the community members who took a decision to have a borehole in 1984. She said "The water from the borehole was clean, drinkable and was able to make garden for my family through watering the plants with the same water". She continued "In 1987 we had running water in our homestead, I was still young at that age. The community was instructed to abandon the boreholes due to reasons given

by the authorities".

Water was to be supplied from Magalieswater and Randwater. They said water from the boreholes is not clean due to mine shaft around the area. The mine promised to supply communities with clean water because they have used their land to mine, being the reason why the borehole water had a problem and most dried up.

The community abandoned those boreholes until they became rusty and some of them are dilapidated for not being used for a long time. Some of the community people want to re-use their boreholes but due to a number of issues they won't be able to. They say it's quite expensive to replace the water pipes to new ones as some of them are unemployed.

One community member Oupa Mokwalase said "I wish to use water from the borehole because water is a source of life and today we struggle with water in our community while there are boreholes in the community and our yards, the mining bosses did not keep their promise.

Kanana, Matlosana - North West



Since April 2022 the brutal killing of women in our area has become like a pandemic and that prompted us as women to march to the Orkney magistrate court. On the morning of 17th February 2023, we had our march against GBV. It was raining and the attendance was poor but our determination and courage saw us handing over a memorandum to Orkney court Manager. We also invited a family member of one of the victims.

Her name is Yonela Mboshane and she a 21-year-old young girl who was beaten by her boyfriend until she died.

We also invited the media as we know that our area doesn't get much coverage but we managed to seek and demand justice for all seven women and will continue to advocate for a safety of women and children of Kanana community.

Mahadio Mohapi

Kanana in Klerksdorp is a small township surrounded by gold mines that are mostly derelict and abandoned, presently we are left with only three mines that are operational, namely: Harmony, VMR and COM.

After Anglo Gold mine's closure, many migrant workers stayed behind with the hope of getting employment from the operating shafts around Orkney and Vaal Reefs.

We started witnessing the mushrooming of new informal settlements. Most of the residents are foreign national from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho and have no identity documents.

Most of the people who are designated for RDP houses are foreign nationals who are ex mine employees. Overcrowding in our area presents us with many challenges such as femicide, GBV, human trafficking and violence.

Since April 2022 we have buried seven women who were brutally killed. The first woman to be killed last year on the first of April was Nonzane, she was shot in the house and second victim was killed by her younger sister's boyfriend.

Did you know

The South African Police Service annual report recorded 25,204 murders in 2021/22, an increase of 26,6% from 19,904 in 2020/21. Of these, 3,198 were women. That's an average of about 9 women murdered every day. – Africa Check

Communities in Mokopane demand a labour desk from Ivanplaat mine

Rebecca Selomo

The residents of Tshamahansi, Magongoa, Moshate and Mahwelereng demand a labour desk at Ivanplaat mine, in order to ensure that the employment of local people by the mine is well managed.

This came as a result of an outcry from residents of various communities that current recruitment of local people for employment is done through various traditional authorities. That has led to other community members feeling disgruntled and side-lined.

The above-mentioned communities were mobilized to picket outside the premises of Ivanplaat mine for the whole week to submit their memorandum to what they call a 'labour desk'.

The mine then issued a statement that said they don't have a labour desk, their recruitment is done through their website. At this point there is no clear indication about what is going to happen to the data already submitted to the labour desk.

This demonstrates the dire economic situation that our communities find themselves in, with their hopes pinned on the mine as the biggest economic driver.

The communities themselves do not have a comprehensible development plan which aims to liberate them from poverty and unemployment. That is the main reason why there will always be a conflict between public representatives, civil society and traditional leaders within communities.

A recommendation is therefore that communities affected by mining must start engaging about their development plans. This will assure them that they become part of any developmental initiative and employment decisions. Community leaders to strive for unity at all fronts within the community and develop conflict management strategies. They must exercise impartiality in conflicts that exist between civil society organizations and traditional authorities, that will be only when they can hold mining houses and government accountable on issues affecting them.

Monametse, Fetakgomo Tubatse- Limpompo



Bokoni mine closure left women in Monametse village in destitute

Moshabi Selowa

Since the closure of Bokoni Mine, residents of Monametse and women who were directly affected and people from neighbouring villages heeded the call.

Residents strived so much with their families and the primary aim was to raise their children. Since the closure of the mine in September 2017, most residents were left destitute and struggled to make ends meet while trying to eke out a living.

Despite the monthly social grants from government that is distributed for all citizens, not much was remedied for many residents as prices shot up on an alarming rate. Not only price of commodities was increased, but transport costs also shot up alarmingly. The mine could not provide us with alternative means to continue looking after our families as per their Social Labour plan.

Young women could not escape the scourge as they found themselves abandoning their studies and turned into adults to start their own families.

Families are increasing while parents of those teenage mothers are all over the country seeking employment. Young girls are trembling with agony as a result of pregnancies that forced them to abandon their studies. On the other hand, we hardly afford to do any shopping for the fact we are unemployed with no buying power and terrible conditions of our roads.

Former employees of Bokoni Platinum mine were left disgruntled, the population increased and mistrust was bred among families. As residents who are facing a bleak future as a result of unemployment there was much outcry from residents. After a certain period of tribulation people started to engage in illegal mining of chrome.

Bokoni Platinum mine failed to provide residents of Monametse with alternatives even though they were obliged by their Social Labour Plan.

As the mine is now preparing to reopen and resume operation, we deem it necessary for the residents to be more empowered with information regarding the mine. In our view proper and fair consultation with communities can bring solutions to current situation.

Did you know

The Mineral Resource Act of 2004 requires mining rights applicant to submit SLPs to promote human resources development planning. SLPs were conceived as a remedial means to correct the disparity between mine workers and communities on the one hand and mine owners and managers on the other. – CALS

Presidential climate commission phase II consultation in Lephhalale

Lolo Malatji

The first consultation took place last year around March, where the community of Lephhalale submitted their comments regarding the Just transition. The PCC decided to come back to the people of Lephhalale to engage with them about what have been agreed on.

People were waiting to hear responses as they have submitted their comments. Most of the people were not happy as they have realized that what they commented on is not taken into consideration.

Businesses, companies and different departments were invited to ensure that the framework is adopted. Some of the departments supported the framework, meanwhile the business companies are not happy about the implementation of the Just transition framework.

The unions, NGO's and the community organizations raised their voices not supporting the implementation framework as their comments were not covered. The concern was that many people will lose their jobs and the economy of Lephhalale is based on coal. They also indicated that youth need to be trained so that when this transition takes place, it will benefit them.

Solution might be the introduction of new energy projects around Lephhalale, encourage companies to host renewable energy workshops and train workers about the new methods of Just transition. Monitoring of funds during the process of Just transition so that it can benefit the people. Engage with the municipality and other departments about the Just transition concepts.

Snakepark, City of Johannesburg- Gauteng



Tailing dam responsible for dolomitic occurrence in our community

Nobulawo Sitshaluza

Snake Park was established as an informal settlement and proclaimed on (2009/03/01), after three years some of the residents who were living next to the offices near Block 1 were moved. The reason for their removal was that the area they were inhabiting was dolomitic. They were moved to other areas such as Tshepisoong, Ebumnandini, Braam Fischer and Slovo village.

I spoke to a lady by the name of Gladys, a home owner who said her property started developing holes that were very deep. The depth of the holes can be measured by length of the wooden broomstick as it can be swallowed whole by the holes. She said that after some time water from underground started popping out of the holes.

Like other residents she alluded that she won't mind being moved although she has spent money to build the two backrooms on her property.

She has seen one big hole in front her property and the soil seem to be sinking, and that on its own is enough evidence that the area is dolomitic.

She once climbed the tailing dam after a rainfall and as soon as she took her first steps she could see that the ground was not stable. The ground continues to be more unstable and she could have easily been swallowed by slime if she took further steps.

As a witness to this occurrence it became more and more clearer that as the community of Snake Park they are living in clear and present danger.

How and why did the municipality allow such an area to be proclaimed without making a proper survey of the area is a question that leaves much to be answered. Why has the mining company not fenced the area to people from gaining access to the tailing dam? The question remains unanswered.

Did you know

There are more than 6,000 abandoned mines in South Africa, at least 2,322 are classified as "high risk", including coal mines. That means they pose immediate threat to the communities surrounding them. – Human Rights Watch

Snakepark, City of Johannesburg- Gauteng



Local farmers in Snakepark-Soweto unable to fully tap on the market due to poor soil quality

Sicelo Sithole

Toxic soil is an alarming issue for the subsistence and small-scale livestock farmers of Snake Park, especially those who erected their kraals close to the mine tailing dam. The mine tailing dam contains high radioactive chemicals that contaminates the soil, and poses a high risk to the environment and human health.

These farmers also grow crops in the area because the land is so arable and abundant for the livestock to graze and have access to drinking water. The toxic soil is affecting photosynthesis of the crops and slowing down the growth, this has a negative bearing on the desired output.

The heavy metals that are contained in the soil are not a danger to the crops, but also creates water pollution. This is a serious threat to food security and danger to the consumers when the crops enter food chain market.

Our local farmers are able to sell at the auction because their cattle are deemed to be fit but the beef they produce cannot be graded, these were the sentiments of Mr. Samuel Dlamini who is one of the local farmers. They end up selling their livestock at the township Friday livestock market for funerals and weddings. They are unable to compete on a large scale with commercial farmers as a result.

A strategic and serious intervention is needed to rescue our local farmers from this situation because there's no way they can grow under these conditions. Mine companies are the biggest polluters and they need to take responsibility of their actions by putting aside some funds to rehabilitate the land.

Welkom, Matjhabeng - Free State

Goldfields college under siege

Gift Rampai

Goldfields TVET College was established in 2002, it got its proclamation after the merger of TOSA and Welkom Colleges. Its name derives from the existence of the very region that that it is situated in, hence the name Goldfields College.

Being situated in Welkom in Matjhabeng means the campus caters for four other local municipalities that make up the district of Lejweleputswa, namely Masilonyana, Tokologo, Nala and Tswelopele.

The campus has had its fair share of trauma for the past twenty years of its existence. For the simple reason of being in a mining area, the walls have been cracking rapidly now lately and the upper floors of its three stories building had to undergo major reinforcements. What boggles the mind is whether this comes as a result of the historical existence of mining or shoddy workmanship.

What's is even scarier is the fact that the campus has been operating for a month and half now after reopening from the Christmas break and there hasn't been any clear answers to when the problem is going to be fixed.

Students attend classes on daily basis on the very same upper floors that are facing the risk of scrambling. This is a disaster in the making and tragedy may strike any moment.

One student alluded that they feel relieved now that the schools will be closing very soon and that is some sort of relief. A few weeks ago, students embarked on a protest action against this situation but every grievance was down played and everything went back to normal.



Nyakalong, Matjhabeng – Free State



Khanyisile Matsaba

Mining is and has always been the backbone of our economy as the community of Allanridge and Nyakallong. The existence of the mining industry has had both the positive and negative bearing that can only be felt after the closure of the mines.

Employment was on the rise during the heydays of mining and the economy was booming.

The environment and the agricultural sector are the ones that now bear the heavy brunt of the negative effects of mining. The health of residents is at a high risk of acid mine drainage. The Harmony One shaft that is situated just adjacent to Nyakallong has been discharging chemicals into the dam that has overflowed into residential areas.

Most of the houses that are situated near the dam are half submerged in the water and residents had to vacate their houses. The mine drainage is not only affecting the lives of the residents but is also damaging infrastructure

The water contains a very high volume of a toxic chemical called uranium.

One old man whose house is situated near the dam is living with sickness caused by this water. His house is damaged and his furniture is sitting in the water, his wife passed away as a result of the water that is overflowing into their property.

The sewerage pump is damaged and the sewer is flowing into the streets, causing more health hazards. The R30 road that passes between Allanridge and Nyakallong has been swept away and completely damaged. More accidents occur during the night by drivers who can't navigate the road. The shaft has been operational since 1995 and has been the only source of employment in the private sector for local residents, and its downscaling has given rise to mass unemployment.

Recently the municipality issued a tender to fix the dam and tenderpreneur took seven million and never did any work. The case was opened with the Hawks and is currently under investigation.

Did you know

Acid mine drainage is one of mining's most serious threat to water as it can devastate rivers, streams and aquatic life for hundred/thousand years. - Earthworks

Vosman, Emalahleni - Mpumalanga



Coal mining causing environmental destruction

Meisie Mashiane

The beautiful Emalahleni in Mpumalanga is no longer the same since the arrival of the mines as areas hosting mining operations are always covered by dark cloud of smoke caused by the burning of fossil fuel.

The KwaGuqa and Ezinambeni extensions are no longer safe places to live because of pollution. Fauna and flora are in danger as our environment has been negatively impacted by

coal mining. This is badly affecting our heritage, increasing deaths and causing lots of health risks. During load shedding people also burn different things to make fire which increase pollution in the area.

Awareness campaigns and workshops must be held in order to equip the community with information on environmental and health risk of burning fossil fuel.

People should stop the burning of fossil fuels and the coal mining should stop polluting the environment so that our area can go back to normal and take responsibility for the pollution they caused in the area by rehabilitation. Government must engage on this matter by enforcing the law, make sure the mining companies comply with the regulations. Department of forestry, fisheries and Environment must take this matter seriously to save lives of fauna and flora.

Did you know

Coal is the dirtiest of all fuels. From mining to coal cleaning, transportation to electricity generation to disposal, coal releases numerous toxic pollutants into the air, water and land. These disrupt the ecosystem and endanger human health. – Greenpeace

Ext 18 and Vosman, Emalahleni - Mpumalanga



A respiratory illness only hospital needed in the Highveld

Busisiwe Mahlangu and Evah Mokwena

Health facilities in Highveld should be a priority because of the high levels air pollution. Our local public hospitals and clinics don't have stock of relevant medication for Asthma, sinuses and other respiratory illnesses.

All these happens at Emalahleni Local Municipality kwaGuqa area. Communities around Emalahleni experience this problem every day when they attend to public hospitals and clinics. To find that there's no relevant medication for such illnesses, all they can do is to provide you with panado. During consultation at hospital or clinics, local clinics are usually out of oxygen and refer patients to the hospital.

Emalahleni communities are affected by poor service from health department especially children and mothers. When consulting a private doctor, they would be advised that relocating to a different area might be a solution for a better health, this is sad as residents are unemployed and relocation requires money.

A young mother of two beautiful children who wishes to remain anonymous, struggles a lot with her two little girls who are suffering from asthma. The young mother is staying in Vosman next to the mines where they operate 24/7. The mother is in and out of clinics, hospitals and doctors, no month passes without her consulting health facilities. During winter she has to stay home and stay on alert in case of an emergency as the school would call her to attend to either one of her kids. She concluded that she prays that the government would collaborate with the mines and build hospital or clinic that will deal with the respiratory diseases to aid the situation for the communities of Vosman and nearby extensions.

Department of health should prioritize Mpumalanga when it comes to proper medication, because they know most of the people who are living in the area are badly affected by air pollution caused by mining companies and also the Highveld as it was declared poor air quality high priority area many years ago. Communities around Emalahleni should stand up and raise their concerns to Department of health, alongside with different stakeholders who are also affected

Alternative Mining Indaba reflection

The Community Monitoring School facilitators from Gauteng and Free State attended the Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) in Cape Town to share about the plight of their communities and the work of the Community Monitoring School. More than 250 participants from over 20 African countries attended AMI.



I am an African

Makhotla Sefuli

(Free State Facilitator)

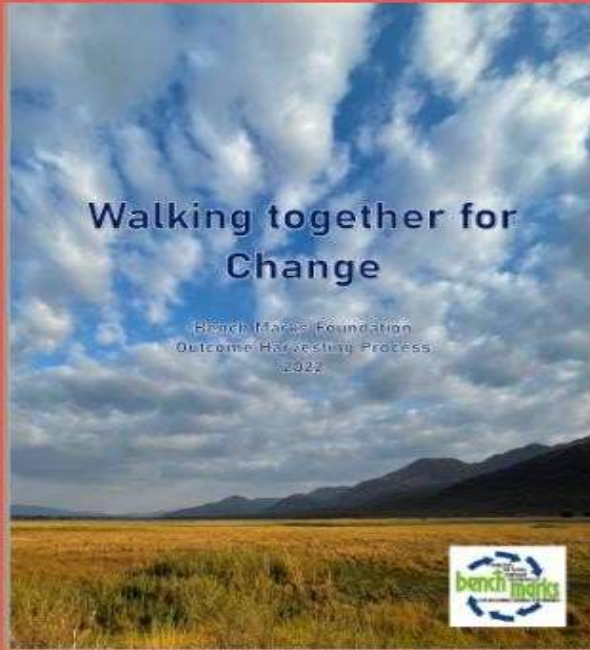
The 14th edition of the AMI was held in Cape Town from 7th to 9th February 2023, and I was a first time attendee. I believe this is the relevant platform as we can continue to use it to amplify with vigor the voices of the grassroots activists and communities.

It is my sincere belief that this platform can and must be used to bring in those excluded, the grassroots, to engage more thoroughly on the issues affecting them. Here are some of the lessons that I have learnt:

Africa has a very serious vacuum of leadership. Our leaders don't show any willingness - or is it a lack the political will? - to ensure that we all benefit from our minerals. Over 80% of mining communities live in abject poverty while in close proximity to these minerals that are exported out of our countries. This means that we do not benefit and are, in most cases, worse off after mining has come to our communities.

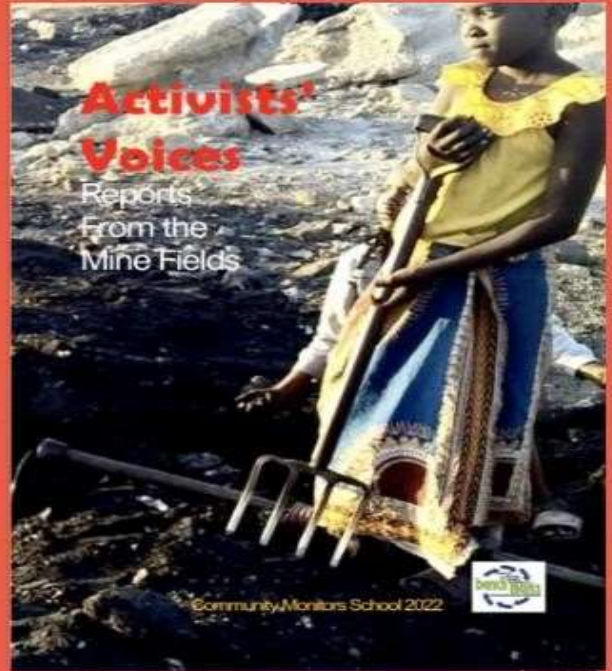
On a more personal level, this was an individual experience that gave me more insight on how other Africans, in particular African CSOs, do things. For the first time I could engage thoroughly with my fellow activists from across the continent. The afterhours engagements and social interaction was another eye opener for me. The Benchmarks Foundation and the Community Monitoring School is a tool I can use for personal empowerment. Being a panelist in the breakaway session was a mind-blowing experience for me. Thanks to the Benchmarks Foundation for this opportunity.

South Africa has many regions with mining activity. Many voices from mining communities are still to be heard. Civil society is the most effective platform to give audiences to the communities. Institutions such as the Benchmarks and other organs of civil society can be the best drivers to reach that goal. How do we ensure that those excluded communities are better involved in such a forum is an ongoing debate but we must find solutions for it, fast!



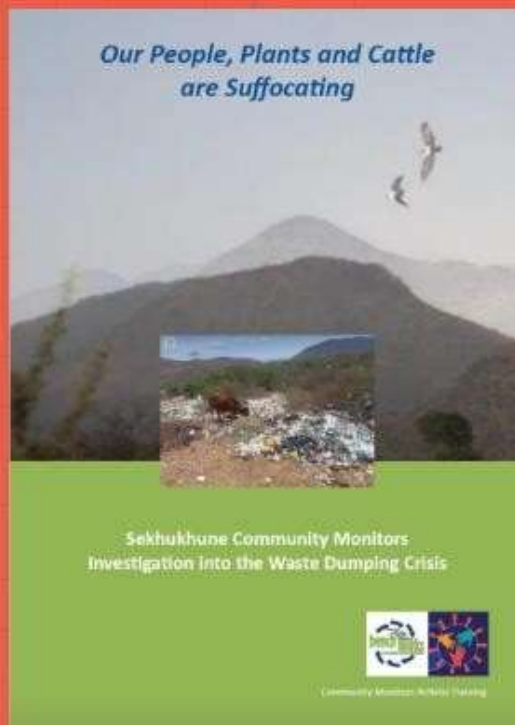
Oct 15, 2022 / Booklets / by admin

Walking together for Change



Oct 14, 2022 / Booklets / by admin

Activists' Voices 2022



Mar 10, 2022 / Booklets

Monitors Investigation Report – Sekhukhune Waste Crisis

Read more stories from communities living near mine fields of Southern Africa and download our publication from our website:

<http://communitymonitors.net>