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The relation between environmental protection and 'development' : a case study of the social dynamics iinvolved in the proposed mining at Xolobeni, Wild Coast.

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ABSTRACT

This research report analyses the social dynamics involved in a proposed project to mine the sand dunes along a 22km stretch of the Wild Coast for titanium products, named the Xolobeni Heavy Minerals Sands Project. The proposal has been presented by a small Australian mining company, Mineral Commodities (MRC), and its local subsidiary, Transworld Energy and Minerals Resources (TEM), and would directly impact an area of the Wild Coast known as Mgungundlovu, situated in the Amadiba Tribal Administrative Area. It has become a highly contested process, with the affected communities ultimately rejecting the proposal.

The report aims to analyse these social dynamics through the frame of 'development' and its relation to environmental protection. It argues that participation is central in 'development' and that in this case study, such participation is crucial in highlighting the centrality of subsistence livelihoods, based on local natural resources, to the people of Mgungundlovu. That is, 'development' options should be based on the recognition of the importance of local livelihoods in this instance, and not on their destruction for 'development' to occur.

The report begins with a discussion of the notion of 'development' and adopts a critical view of it that acknowledges its socially, historically, and discursively constructed nature. It also adopts a skeptical view of 'sustainable development', which largely fails to analyse power relations and social inequality. It therefore proposes the discourse of environmental justice as a more suitable alternative to analysing the relationship between power, participation and 'development'. The report presents two case studies in order to provide a comparison with the case of Xolobeni, and it then describes the local social context. Given this context, it then moves on to analyse the extent to which the environmental management regime in South Africa allowed for participation by the affected communities. Following this, it analyses the roles played by the various social actors in terms of participation, power, environment and 'development'.

The research finds that participation in 'development' by the affected communities was minimal, and that the process was instead driven by particular interests and

broader discourses of the relation between environmental protection and ‘development’ that position the environment in opposition to ‘development’ and prioritise economic growth over the local social, cultural and environmental context. The degree of control exercised by the affected residents over the dynamics surrounding the proposed mining have therefore been minimal, and have instead been driven by institutions of the market and state, disconnected from local needs. This in turn highlights the role of power in ‘development’.