

Organising communities for sustainable development

Communities of the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape are organising on climate change and taking on companies that are destroying the environment through open cast mining. **Elijah Chiwota** talks to community activist **Nohle Mbuthuma**.

In our community we decided to organise on climate change to make sure that there is no pollution in the air we breathe and our drinking water,' says Nohle Mbuthuma, a climate change activist from the Wild Coast.

Mbuthuma organises in schools and communities in the coastal areas of Xolobeni and AmaMadiba.

In Xolobeni, Transworld Mineral Resource Commodities intends to mine titanium using open cast mining which 'destroys land and creates a dusty environment that exposes people to lung diseases such as tuberculosis.' This pollution reduces the quality of life of the community.

Open cast mining also destroys vegetation. 'We are farmers who rely on the land for our livelihoods. We grow maize, vegetables and keep livestock. What will happen to our animals when we lose grazing land?'

There were fears that mining would destroy local culture. 'In our culture we respect the dead and so we are worried when local cemeteries are destroyed and graves of our ancestors violated all in the interest of mining operations whose benefit we don't see.'

If the mining operations were to continue the community would be relocated. 'Who will pay for the relocation and provide money for the building of new houses,' she asks.



William Matlala

Nohle Mbuthuma speaks at One Million Climate jobs seminar during Cop17 in Durban.

However, Mbuthuma says mining is not the only option and suggests that eco-tourism, which is more sustainable, is suitable for the environment. She gives the example of a European Union-funded eco-tourism project that benefitted the community. This project did not only employ the local people, but was run by the community as well.

However, she moans that the eco-tourism projects were allowed to collapse, and the two camp sites along the coast in Kwanyana and Mtentu are now abandoned.

'A lot of equipment is rotten and there is no support from the Department of Environmental

Affairs. Although we have submitted a proposal to Mbizana Municipality nothing has come out of it.'

'We also don't understand why a new application is being considered by the government for a company whose previous application was rejected. Our reasons for opposing the mining rights remain the same.'

The companies involved in the new applications are Australian mining company Mineral Resources Commodities and its local associates, Transworld Energy and Mineral Resources and the black economic-empowerment entity Xolobeni Empowerment Company. **LE**