

## Pondoland mining: (PART 1)

# Beauty, blood and uncertainty



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A dark cloud of uncertainty hangs over the close-knit communities of Pondoland. Since 2006, the people of Xolobeni have been fighting against proposed mining on their land.

In November last year, the North Gauteng High Court ruled in favour of the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC), a community-based group opposed to mining in Xolobeni, and ordered the Department of Mineral Resources to obtain full consent from the community before it issued a mining right. Mineral Resources Minister Gwede Mantashe announced that the department will appeal the judgment, and that a survey will be conducted in the area to determine the community's views on the granting of a mining licence.

Attorney Johan Lorenzen, in association with Richard Spoor Inc

Attorneys, said they were waiting to hear the outcome of these two items; firstly, for the court date for the appeal, and secondly, the type of independent survey that will be done.

"The Minister cancelled his trip to Xolobeni in April and there has not been any communication from his office since then. While it may have gone silent, we are expecting it to be kicked back to life," said Mr Lorenzen.

"These delays make it very difficult for tourism, agriculture and green growth to take a step forward when the stress of mining hangs on the horizon," he added.

No response was received from the Department of Mineral Resources before going to print.

## MURDER AND COURT RULINGS

More than three years ago, ACC chairman Sikhosiphi 'Bazooka' Rhadebe, who had spent years fighting attempts by an Australian mining company to mine titanium on the Eastern Cape's Wild Coast, was murdered at his home in Lurholweni village near the Wild Coast Sun.

No arrests have been made.

In September 2018, attorney Richard Spoor was arrested while trying to arrange the attendance of community members at a meeting with Minister Mantashe.

The community representatives were teargassed by police.

He was later charged with disobeying a police officer's instruction, inciting public violence, and common assault.

In February this year, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) declined to prosecute Mr Spoor.

## DAMAGES

The area proposed for mining consists of five 'blocks', namely Mphahlanga, Mnyameni, Kwanyana, Sikhombe and Mtentu.

If it goes ahead 22 kilometres of natural, beautiful, rugged coastline will be decimated.

It is also understood that the one-kilometre-wide coastal conservation area, declared in terms of a 1992 environmental decree, along the entire Transkei coast will be ignored.

Recently, this journalist took part in the Wild Coast hike sponsored by the environmental journalism training agency, Roving Reporters and the 8 Mile Club, part of a team of nine which walked the stretch of pristine coastal dunes earmarked to be opencast mined for titanium.

It was led by Sinegugu Zukulu, an anti-mining activist and award-winning conservationist.

After talking to members of the community, it was apparent that the mining saga has created division.

"It's a huge problem, so much so that family members no longer attend the same events or ceremonies, or eat the same food as they are worried they will be poisoned. Some people use lightning to attack those who are not in favour of the mining," said a woman living in Mtentu.

It is believed that so far 12 people have been murdered. None of these cases have been solved.

Reports have also surfaced of those supposedly in favour of mining being given food parcels and/or solar panels.



Women balance their harvest of amadumbe (yams) on their heads as they walk inland towards Mtolani Village.

PHOTO BY  
SHONA AYLWARD

Chairman of Amadiba Crisis Committee and Uncedo Taxi Association, Sikhosiphi Bazooka Rhadebe, was gunned down three years ago.

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