

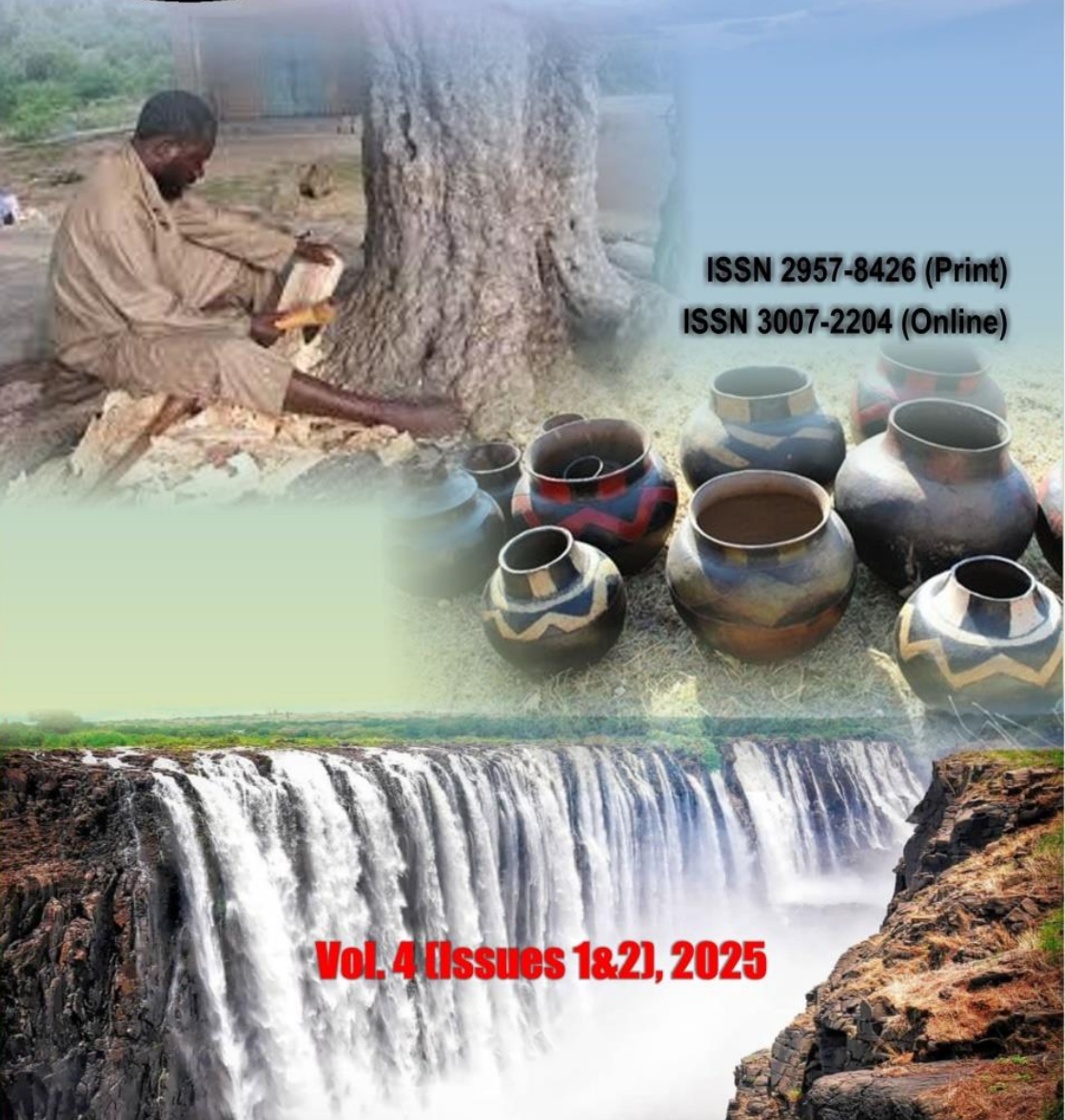


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The purpose of the *Kuveza neKuumba - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Design, Innovative Thinking and Practice* is to provide a forum for design and innovative solutions to daily challenges in communities.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Planners, engineers, social scientists, business experts, scholars and practitioners from various fields.

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Decrypting Community Engagement Practices by Chinese Mining Companies: A Focus on the Perspectives of Local Stakeholders in Shamva Rural District, Zimbabwe

KEVIN TIRIVANHU GWATIDZO¹ AND EMMANUEL DUMBU²

Abstract

The article is based on a study that investigated the effects of community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies from the perspectives of local stakeholders in the Shamva District of Zimbabwe. The influx of Chinese mining investments in Zimbabwe, driven by the country's Look East Policy, has brought significant economic benefits. However, it has also raised concerns about the social and environmental impacts on local communities. This research aims to explore how these community engagement practices influence community development and social cohesion. Using a qualitative research design, data was collected through in-depth interviews and participant observations with local stakeholders, including community leaders, residents and representatives from Chinese mining companies. The study reveals that while Chinese mining companies have implemented various community engagement initiatives, such as infrastructure development, health services and educational support, there are significant gaps in addressing the needs and concerns of the local population. Local stakeholders expressed mixed feelings about the effectiveness of these engagement practices. While some appreciated the tangible

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benefits, others highlighted issues such as inadequate consultation, lack of transparency and insufficient involvement of local communities in decision-making processes. These shortcomings have led to tensions and conflicts between the mining companies and the local population, undermining social cohesion and trust. The findings suggest that for community engagement practices to be truly effective, they must be inclusive, transparent and participatory. Recommendations include fostering genuine partnerships between mining companies and local communities, enhancing communication and transparency and ensuring that community members have a meaningful role in decision-making processes. By addressing these issues, Chinese mining companies can contribute to sustainable community development and strengthen social cohesion in the Shamva District. This study contributes to the broader understanding of socio-economic impacts of foreign direct investment in mining regions and provides valuable insights for policy-makers, mining companies and community leaders seeking to improve community engagement practices.

Keywords: community engagement practices, foreign direct investment, social cohesion, stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is critical in ensuring the sustainable development of mining communities. In Shamva District, Zimbabwe, Chinese mining companies have become significant players, necessitating an evaluation of their community engagement practices from the local stakeholders' perspectives. This study aims to understand the effectiveness of these practices in fostering trust, transparency and community development. Community engagement has become a critical component in the sustainable development of mining regions, ensuring that the benefits of mining activities are equitably distributed among all stakeholders (International Institute for

Environment and Development, 2002). In the Shamva District, Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the gold mining sector has brought significant economic opportunities. However, it has also introduced complex social, environmental and governance challenges (Gochero and Boopen, 2020). This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of community engagement practices employed by Chinese mining companies from the perspectives of local stakeholders. Community engagement refers to the process of working collaboratively with community members to address issues that affect their well-being and development. It involves the active participation of individuals and groups in decision-making processes, planning and implementation of projects that impact their lives. The goal of community engagement is to empower communities, foster trust and cooperation and promote sustainable development by ensuring that community voices are heard and considered.

The influx of Chinese mining companies in Shamva has led to mixed reactions among the local population. While some residents acknowledge the economic benefits, others express concerns about environmental degradation, social displacement and the lack of transparency in decision-making processes (ZIMCDD, 2018). Effective community engagement is essential to address these concerns, build trust and foster sustainable development (Herbertson *et al.*, 2009).

Through qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews and observational visits, this study seeks to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of local stakeholders. By understanding their views on the effectiveness of current engagement practices, the research aims to provide valuable insights for policy-makers, mining companies and communities (Bryman, 2016). The ultimate goal is to develop more inclusive and participatory engagement strategies that promote social cohesion, protect the environment and ensure

that the economic benefits of mining are shared equitably (Creswell, 2014).

Chinese FDI in Shamva District's gold mining sector has brought both economic opportunities and significant challenges. Local stakeholders often feel excluded from decision-making processes, leading to a lack of trust and transparency. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies from the perspectives of local stakeholders.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This conceptual framework (Figure 1) has been formulated to express the relationship between community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies and the communities that they operate from and the perspectives of local stakeholders. The theoretical basis of this framework dovetails with the Social Capital Theory, made famous by the likes of Robert D. Putnam in the 1990s. In this case, it is theorised that communication strategies, participation opportunities, transparency, cultural sensitivity and resource allocation will impact communities, bringing stakeholder satisfaction, trust and community development outcomes (Jensen, 2023). For the overall effectiveness of the community engagement practices to fully materialise and mature, other mediating variables such as cultural factors, economic conditions and the political environment are deemed to also play a pivotal role (Community Places, 2019).

Theoretical frameworks, such as the Social Capital Theory, the Stakeholder Theory and the Social Exchange Theory, have been used to analyse community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies. The Social Capital Theory emphasises the value of social networks and relationships in facilitating collective action and achieving community goals (Adam and

Rončević, 2003). The Stakeholder Theory focuses on managing the interests of all stakeholders involved in a project or organisation. The Social Exchange Theory highlights the importance of reciprocity and mutual benefits in relationships. This study employed the Social Capital Theory as it explores deeply the effects of community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies in Shamva District.

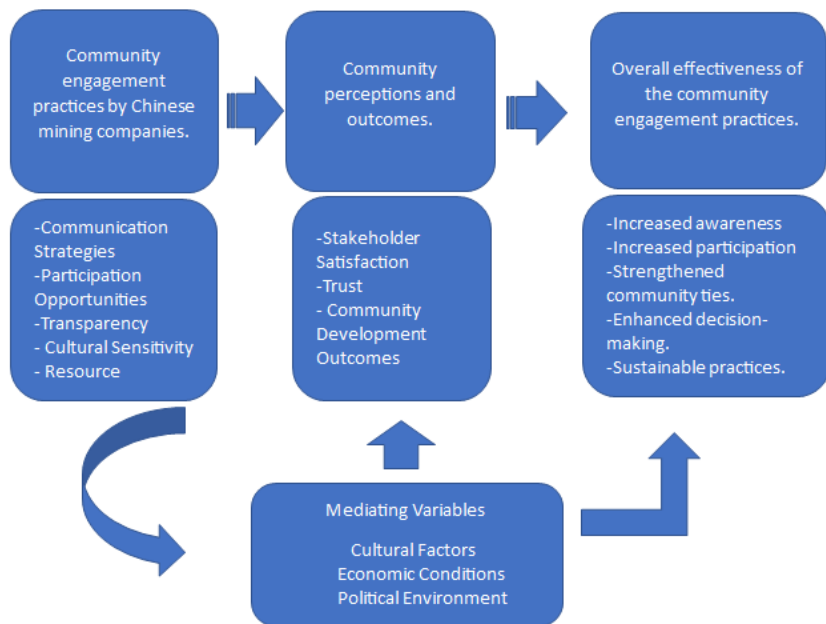


Figure 1: *The Conceptual Framework* (Authors, 2025)

The Social Capital Theory posits that social networks have value and it also emphasises the importance of relationships, social norms and trust in facilitating collective action and achieving individual and group goals (Somanath, 2022). Social networks refer to the web of relationships individuals have with others, which can be formal or informal, for example, professional associations or friendships (Galvis, 2022). Trust is the belief in the reliability, integrity and benevolence of others within the

network. High levels of trust facilitate cooperation and reduce the need for formal contracts and monitoring (Jung, 2022). It is integral for mutual exchange of resources, support and favours in terms of reciprocity which ultimately creates a sense of obligation and strengthening of social ties. Norms, shared values and vision also help promote cooperation, social cohesion, common goals and aspirations that will unite members of the network (Coleman, 1988).

Social Capital Theory advances that social networks and the norms of reciprocity, and trustworthiness that arise from them, constitute a valuable resource for individuals and communities. Key theorists like Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam have made significant contributions to this theory. Bourdieu emphasises the role of social connections in accessing resources and identifies three forms of capital which are, economic, cultural and social. He argues that individuals use social capital to gain advantages in various fields of life (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman highlights the importance of social capital in creating human capital, emphasising that social networks, norms and trust facilitate productive activities and educational attainment (Coleman, 1988). Putnam focuses on the decline of social capital in modern societies, particularly in the United States. He argues that the erosion of social networks and community participation leads to a decrease in civic engagement and social cohesion (Putnam, 1995).

Community engagement practices leverage on social capital by fostering trust, cooperation and mutual support among community members. These practices include participatory decision-making, community organisation and collaborative projects which strengthen social networks (Adam and Rončević, 2003). Participatory decision-making involves actively involving community members in the planning and decision-making processes, ensuring that their voices are heard and their input

is considered. Community organising focuses on building relationships and mobilising community members to work together towards common goals. Collaborative projects bring together diverse stakeholders to address community issues and promote collective action.

By enhancing social capital, communities can achieve better governance, improved public services and increased civic participation (Jung, 2022). Enhanced social capital leads to stronger social bonds, greater trust among community members and a more robust civil society. Communities with high levels of social capital are better equipped to address local challenges, advocate for their interests and create sustainable development outcomes. Additionally, social capital contributes to individuals' well-being by providing access to support networks, resources and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe have been a subject of significant research and debate. These practices are crucial for fostering positive relationships between mining companies and local communities, ensuring sustainable development and mitigating conflicts. This literature review examines various studies and reports on this topic, highlighting key findings and theoretical frameworks.

Marumahoko *et al.* (2023) conducted a study on the acceptance of Chinese mining activities in rural Zimbabwe, focusing on the Hwange District. The study aimed to assess public opinion of Chinese mining operations and present a workable investment model that addresses local complaints. The findings reveal that, while Chinese investments have contributed to economic growth, there are concerns about environmental degradation, lack of transparency and marginalisation of local labour. The

study used the Triple Bottom Line Theory (TBL) to evaluate the social, economic and environmental impacts of Chinese mining investments.

Corporate Community Engagement (CCE) in Zimbabwe's mining industry from the Stakeholder Theory Perspective (Wushe, 2014) explores corporate community engagement practices in Zimbabwe's mining industry from the stakeholder theory perspective. The study highlights the importance of considering the interests and needs of all stakeholders, including local communities, government and mining companies. Wushe notes that effective community engagement practices can lead to improved community relations, reduced conflicts and enhanced social responsibility (*ibid.*). The study emphasises the need for mining companies to adopt a stakeholder-centric approach to community engagement.

The Information for Development Trust (IDT) launched a detailed research report on the impact of Chinese mining investments on local communities in Zimbabwe. The report, titled "Purses and Curses: Impact of Chinese Mining on Local Communities in Zimbabwe", analysed the implications of Chinese mining investments on rural communities and small-scale business opportunities. The study found that Chinese investments have led to conflicts between mining companies and local communities, including evictions and displacement. The report called for greater transparency, accountability and community involvement in mining projects.

Several studies have highlighted the challenges and opportunities in community engagement by Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe (*ibid.*). Common challenges include environmental degradation, lack of transparency and marginalisation of local labour. However, there are also opportunities for improving community relations through

effective communication, participation opportunities and proper resource allocation. The studies emphasise the importance of adopting a holistic approach to community engagement, considering the social, economic and environmental impacts of mining activities (Marumahoko *et al.*, 2023).

Pandey and Kumar (2019) reiterate that regular updates and information dissemination using instruments such as newsletters, bulletins, community notice boards and social media platforms are effective. However, frequency, language and centrality of these instruments also determine their reach and effectiveness. For example, it is not effective to use social media in remote villages which have internet connectivity challenges and power deficiencies. Liang and Sandman (2015) also highlight the need for transparent communication channels in the form of community hall meetings, use of community liaison officers, hotlines and suggestion boxes. Regular meetings keep communities engaged on matters of community importance while giving them opportunities to express their concerns. Though it needs financial investment, community liaison officers help serve as a bridge between mining companies and the local community. Anonymity can help those in fear of victimisation to voice their concerns using suggestion boxes and dedicated hotlines. Communication strategies also include inclusive participation opportunities which is culturally sensitive, transparent and is able to build trust and credibility.

Cultural Sensitivity refers to the awareness, understanding and respect for cultural differences and practices of individuals from diverse backgrounds. It involves recognising that cultural norms, values and behaviours can significantly differ from one group to another and adapting one's interactions accordingly to foster respectful and harmonious relationships (Sieck, 2021). Being culturally sensitive means actively acknowledging these differences and ensuring that interactions are inclusive and

considerate of cultural diversity. In today's interconnected world, cultural sensitivity is a fundamental component of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. It promotes inclusivity by creating an environment where all individuals feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural background. This inclusivity can lead to improved team dynamics, enhanced communication and increased employee engagement.

Additionally, culturally sensitive practices can foster innovation by bringing together diverse perspectives and encouraging creative problem-solving (Shapiro *et al.*, 2008). Examples of cultural sensitivity in practice include recognising and celebrating cultural events, providing flexible leave policies for cultural observances and encouraging team members to share their traditions. Implementing cultural sensitivity in organisations involves training programmes focused on cultural awareness and sensitivity that equip employees with the skills needed to interact respectfully with colleagues from different backgrounds.

Resource allocation strategies in community engagement involve distributing resources such as funds, personnel and materials to maximise community impact and achieve engagement goals (Community Places, 2019). Effective strategies include needs-based allocation, which prioritises resources based on the community's most pressing needs identified through assessments and participatory planning. Equitable distribution ensures resources are fairly allocated, particularly to under-served and vulnerable groups. Collaborative allocation involves partnering with local organisations, leveraging additional resources and expertise. Transparent budgeting and reporting build trust by openly sharing how resources are used. Proper resource allocation enhances project effectiveness, fosters trust and supports sustainable community development (Jensen, 2023).

Participation opportunities for locals include community meetings, public consultations and volunteer programmes. These initiatives empower residents to contribute to decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard (Impact Hub Harare, 2024). Local governments and organisations often facilitate these opportunities to foster civic engagement and community development. By involving locals in planning and implementing projects, communities can address their unique needs and priorities effectively. Participation also builds social capital, strengthens community bonds and enhances trust in local authorities.

Trust fostering strategies involve transparent communication, consistent actions and inclusive participation. Key tactics include regular updates, open fora and public reports to ensure transparency (Griffith, 2022). Building accountability through timely responses to community concerns and establishing fair grievance mechanisms further enhances trust. Engaging community members in decision-making processes and involving local leaders promotes inclusivity and respect (Renn, 2023). Demonstrating a genuine commitment to community welfare through sustainable development projects and culturally sensitive practices solidifies trust and fosters positive relationships.

Community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe are crucial for fostering positive relationships, ensuring sustainable development and mitigating conflicts. The literature review highlighted key findings and theoretical frameworks which can guide future research and practices in this area. By adopting effective community engagement practices, mining companies can contribute to the well-being of local communities and achieve long-term success.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A research philosophy is a broad framework guiding researchers' thinking, design and conduct of studies, encompassing their worldview, assumptions and values (Creswell, 2014). Key components include ontology (nature of reality) and epistemology (creation and validation of knowledge (Hussain *et al.*, 2013). The ontological stance for this study is constructivism, that asserts that reality is socially constructed and varies, depending on individuals' experiences and perceptions. This study recognises that stakeholders' views on community engagement practices are shaped by their unique social, cultural and economic contexts. The epistemological stance for this study, on the other hand, is interpretivism, which emphasises on understanding the meanings and interpretations which individuals attach to their experiences. The study seeks to explore the subjective perceptions of local stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies. The interpretivist philosophy used in this research emphasises complexity, richness and multiple interpretations, making it suitable for qualitative studies (Mason, 2002). It captures the nuances of the effectiveness of community engagement practices, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study (Gichuru, 2017). Interpretivist researchers access reality through social constructions like language and shared meanings (Rehman and Alharthi, 2016).

This study utilises a qualitative research paradigm, best suited to capture participants' views, experiences and general perceptions in natural settings (Rossman and Marshall, 2010). Qualitative research uses non-numerical data and analyses it through methods like thematic or content analysis, unlike quantitative research, that uses numerical data and statistical analyses (Bryman, 2012). This approach aims to uncover underlying reasons, opinions and motivations within the

studied natural settings, using inductive and deductive analysis to identify patterns or themes (Sutton and Austin, 2015). The research adopts a constructivist ontological perspective, assuming reality is socially constructed and subjective and an interpretivist epistemological perspective that emphasises on understanding the meanings and interpretations that participants attach to their experiences.

This influenced the design and data collection methods, leading to the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews and observational visits (Pring, 2000). The study seeks to understand community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies by gathering personal stories and experiences from community members and stakeholders. This interpretivist approach allows for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the community engagement practices that may not be captured through quantitative methods alone. By providing contextual insights and capturing the complexities of community engagement practices, this study offers a detailed analysis, emphasising the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of participants.

A research design outlines the procedures and modalities for sampling, research development, data collection and analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015). It acts as a blueprint guiding all steps from initiation to completion (Rubin and Babbie, 2017). This study employs a case study design to meet its objectives and answer research questions. Case studies use various information sources like documents, reports and interviews to gather in-depth data on specific, real-world systems over time. (Creswell, 2009), Case studies may have limitations, such as limited generalisability, that the study mitigated by comparing findings from other cases. To address subjectivity and bias, this research applied data triangulation. Due to the time-consuming and resource-intensive nature of case study research, the scope

and objectives were clearly defined, focusing on key aspects with efficient data collection and analysis techniques.

The population, as defined by Saunders *et al.* (2009), includes local stakeholders that are community members, local leaders, representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and employees from Chinese mining companies in Shamva District. The sampling method used was the purposive sampling method, specifically maximum variation sampling and participants who had the relevant experience and knowledge about community engagement practices (Creswell, 2014). The sample size comprised a total of 40 participants, broken down as 20 community members, 10 local leaders, five (5) representatives from NGOs and five (5) employees of Chinese mining companies (Silverman, 2013). Sampling involves selecting a subset from the study population to gather data and draw conclusions (Sakaran and Bougie, 2013).

Qualitative data generation involves gathering rich, detailed and contextualised data through various methods to provide insights into the research phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). This study uses in-depth semi-structured interviews to gather rich, detailed data about participants' experiences (*ibid.*). The interviews include open-ended questions to explore participants' experiences, perceptions and opinion (Kvale, 2007). Semi-structured interviews provide reliable data and allow for follow-up questions (Creswell, 2014). Observation was done based on visits to the mining sites and surrounding communities to document interactions and engagement activities. Field notes were taken to capture observed behaviours, interactions and engagement practices.

The data generation process included developing an interview guide, recruiting participants from Shamva and ensuring their anonymity and safety (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2018). A

pilot study with a small diverse sample, identified issues with the interview guide, ensuring its clarity and effectiveness for the actual study. Data saturation was determined using repetition of themes, thematic saturation and conceptual saturation (Hennink *et al.*, 2017). Gathered data were recorded, transcribed and analysed through coding, categorising and interpreting to identify themes and patterns. This rigorous process enabled multi-layered conclusions.

FINDINGS

The study found that Chinese mining companies employ various communication strategies to engage with local stakeholders. These include town hall/village meetings, distribution of informational brochures and community liaison officers. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies, with some community members feeling well-informed and others expressing concerns about insufficient and inconsistent communication. For instance, town hall/village meetings have not been effective as they have been politicised. Instead of maintaining the purpose of community engagement and information dissemination, they tend to be used for sloganeering and promotion of ruling party ideologies. Threats for not supporting the politics and aligning with the powerful has rendered these meetings ineffective as some residents do not attend for fear of violent breakouts. one participant said,

‘If these Chinese would be professional and organise proper meetings, not rallies for the ruling party, we would all attend without fear of violence. Even the important information would be heard clearly, but now it is more slogans and threats for those perceived to be from the opposition party politics.’

Many stakeholders reported limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. While there are instances of consultation meetings, community members often feel that their input is not adequately considered in final decisions.

‘You wonder why they even ask for any input when they know pretty well that they are not going to listen to anything that we as local

people say. The political leaders decide for all of us since they would have benefitted themselves.'

The allegations of very minimal participation opportunities for villagers and residents came out very loud during the research and as long as it stays that way, mistrust is not going to end. Conflict is brewing and sooner than later it is going to boil over, affecting the co-existence of both the investments and the socio-economic development of Shamva.

Transparency emerged as a significant concern among local stakeholders. There is a perceived lack of openness regarding project plans, environmental impact assessments and financial allocations. This has led to mistrust and scepticism towards the mining companies. Generally, the Chinese mining investments have been shrouded in a deep cloud of secrecy and breaking down that wall has not been easy at all. This has caused so much mistrust and locals perceive it as an act of ingratitude fuelled by just profit.

'Everything to do with Chinese activities in this district is a secret. You can't question anything without getting yourself into unnecessary trouble with either the political elites or the security people. These people are protected more than us local Zimbabweans and we wonder if we can be protected as such if we go to China.'

Yes FDI is a key ingredient for economic development but without transparency, there is no way that even the relevant authorities will be able to assess whether there are benefits or not. Without it, the sector is susceptible to corruption, illicit financial flows, smuggling and laxity in adherence to environmental laws.

The study found mixed perceptions regarding cultural sensitivity. Some stakeholders appreciated the efforts made by the companies to respect local customs and traditions, while others felt that more could be done to integrate cultural considerations into engagement practices. It is important for

these investment projects to go through cultural impact assessments which help stakeholders to understand potential impacts of their projects and how they affect local cultural practices and heritage sites. Having done so, mitigating strategies to any negative impacts can be developed for effective community engagement.

'We, as African people, have our own sacred culture and we respect our ancestors and their graves but these people have no respect at all. Threats have come to destroy our father's graves to pave way for these people to expand their mining projects, our sacred shrines, caves and pools have been disrespected. We are truly hurt as a people as our leaders now respect money more than who we are.'

Investment in community development projects, such as schools, healthcare facilities and infrastructure, was highlighted as a positive aspect of community engagement. However, there were concerns about the equitable distribution of resources and the sustainability of these projects. It was found that community needs assessments are critical for proper resource allocation strategies for sustainable community engagement. These assessments must dovetail with participatory planning using community meetings, focus groups and surveys. From the point of social licence acquisition, the needs based on priority must be established so that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not focused on issues not at the heart of the community, but the sustainable and developmental ones. For instances where needs such as bus stop shelters, cattle dip tanks and safe drinking water at a local school, are identified as community needs, it is clear that the investment partners and the locals should prioritise issues based on the life transformative impact the needs bring.

Satisfaction levels varied among different stakeholder groups. While some community members expressed satisfaction with certain initiatives, others felt that the companies' efforts were

insufficient and primarily driven by regulatory compliance rather than genuine community welfare.

Trust between the mining companies and local stakeholders was generally low. The lack of transparency and perceived inadequacy in addressing community concerns contributed to this distrust. Chinese mining companies are regarded as very unaccountable to the community housing their mining investments and they have no regard for fostering good relations with locals. Commitment to demonstrating community welfare support was not established beyond just lip service and this was also seen in the quantity and quality of employment offered to locals. Mechanisms for handling and addressing community grievances show that a few influential politicians are deemed to be the most important and once they are happy and pacified, then the rest of the community members do not matter. Rather, the system should have channels that provide fair, timely and impartial grievance reporting as well as monitoring and feedback to the community that actively address grievances, providing steps taken to resolve them, thereby earning trust and responsiveness.

The study found that while some community development initiatives had positive impacts, such as improved access to education and healthcare, there were issues with project sustainability and long-term benefits. Some projects were perceived as short-term solutions rather than lasting improvements. Once there is proper community engagement between Chinese mining companies and local communities, the developmental success is unlimited and listed below are some of the potential outcomes.

There can be infrastructure development, evidenced by the construction of new schools and improvement of existing educational facilities, providing a conducive learning

environment for students. Educational programmes, including introduction of educational programmes, scholarships and vocational training to enhance skills and knowledge among community members have to be undertaken. Inwardly looking Chinese mining companies can also create on the job training for the local youths and help a great deal with skills transfer. Emphasis is also made towards the marginalised and excluded the girl child who has been relegated to menial cleaning and cooking jobs which is overshadowed by sexual, drug abuse and prostitution. Availing training and educational support goes a long way in narrowing the gender inequality gap and addressing cultural myths that excludes \ women from mining activities.

The mining companies can revamp healthcare facilities and establish healthcare centres and clinics, thereby improving access to medical services for the community. Health initiatives such as vaccination campaigns, health education and disease prevention programmes, contributes to overall community well-being. These initiatives alleviate pressure on the Ministry of Health and Child Care, giving it budgetary breathing space to be able to channel much needed resources to other communities that are not as privileged to house mineral resources.

Creation of jobs causes increased employment opportunities for local community members, contributing to economic stability and growth. There is need for Chinese support for local entrepreneurs and small businesses through grants, training and access to resources, fostering economic development and self-sufficiency. However, the job creation and employment for locals by Chinese investments have continued to have increasing scrutiny as research is proving that there are poor quality jobs being created in these sectorial investments. Skills and technology transfer has not been very encouraging in these investments and finding proper data that tells the full story is

always a challenge as so much gate-keeping is employed. Fear of disclosing any form of meaningful data has been expressed as participants fear retribution and unspecified repercussions. It is critical to highlight, at this point, the potential game-changing impact of Chinese mining companies' support to local entrepreneurs, small businesses in general. This can foster huge value addition and beneficiation for both the minerals and mining sector consumables and material needs. Local content policy initiatives will come in handy for such strategies to see the light of day.

Improvement of transportation infrastructure, including roads and bridges, facilitating easier movement and connectivity within and outside the community will improve transport woes for the community. Provision of essential utilities and services, such as clean water, electricity and sanitation, enhance the quality of life for residents. The mining projects are a huge cost to existing road infrastructure as the moving around of earth damages roads, and the influx of people from other parts of the country in search of economic opportunities has put immense pressure on local amenities such as clinics, water and sewer reticulation and energy demands. Such infrastructural pressure needs proper community engagement practices which will, in turn, foster sustainable community developments both in the short and long term.

Social cohesion and community engagement are achieved by the establishment of community centres and recreational facilities, providing spaces for social interaction, cultural activities and community events. Increased participation and representation of community members in decision-making processes, fosters a sense of ownership and agency in community development. Maintenance of open and transparent communication channels builds trust and credibility with the community. Mining companies need to ensure consistent and regular engagement

with community members to establish long-term relationships based on mutual respect. Including all stakeholders ensures that all segments of the community, including marginalised and vulnerable groups, have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Working with the community to develop a shared vision and common goals for community development is needed as it promotes a sense of unity and collective purpose.

These companies must show respect for local customs, traditions and cultural practices as this helps to strengthen social bonds and foster a sense of belonging, while the use of mediation and dialogue also helps address and resolve conflicts within the community. This helps maintain social harmony and prevents divisions. Implementation of environmentally sustainable practices in mining operations must be encouraged as they reduce negative impacts on the environment. Support for conservation projects, such as reforestation, wildlife protection and environmental education, promotion of ecological balance and sustainability cannot be over emphasised. Strengthened trust and relationships between the mining companies and the community through transparent communication, accountability and responsiveness to community concerns are key to community engagement and sustainable development. Increased collaboration and partnerships between the mining companies, local authorities and community members, leading to more effective and sustainable development initiatives need to be pushed through at all cost.

The success of community engagement practices was influenced by the companies' understanding and respect for local cultural norms and practices. Efforts to engage with community leaders and elders were seen as positive steps. The economic benefits provided by the mining companies, such as job creation and infrastructure development, were important factors in shaping

stakeholder perceptions. However, the uneven distribution of these benefits has led to dissatisfaction among some community members. The political context and local governance structures played a significant role in the effectiveness of community engagement. Collaboration with local authorities and alignment with government policies were critical for successful engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this qualitative study on the effectiveness of community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe provide valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of local stakeholders. This discussion explores the implications of these findings, highlights the strengths and weaknesses of current practices and offers recommendations for improvement.

The study reveals that communication strategies employed by Chinese mining companies vary in effectiveness. While town hall meetings and informational brochures are utilised, inconsistent and insufficient communication remains a significant concern for many community members. Effective communication is crucial for building trust and ensuring that stakeholders are well-informed about projects and developments. The inconsistency in communication strategies suggests a need for more structured and frequent communication channels. Regular updates and open lines of communication can help address concerns and build trust with local communities.

Limited participation opportunities in decision-making processes are reported by stakeholders. Although consultation meetings are held, many community members feel that their input is not adequately considered. Meaningful participation is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration

among stakeholders. The lack of genuine participation opportunities indicates a need for more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. Involving community members in a more substantive manner can enhance their sense of agency and improve the overall effectiveness of engagement practices.

The perceived lack of transparency regarding project plans, environmental impact assessments and financial allocations emerge as a significant issue. Transparency is a key factor in building trust and credibility with local stakeholders. The findings highlight the importance of increasing transparency in all aspects of community engagement. Providing clear and accessible information about project plans and decisions can help mitigate scepticism and build stronger relationships with stakeholders.

The study found mixed perceptions regarding cultural sensitivity. While some stakeholders appreciate efforts to respect local customs and traditions, others feel that more could be done to integrate cultural considerations into engagement practices. Understanding and respecting cultural norms is essential for effective community engagement. The mixed perceptions suggest a need for greater cultural sensitivity in engagement practices. Companies should invest in understanding local customs and traditions and actively involve community leaders and elders in the engagement process.

Investment in community development projects, such as schools, healthcare facilities and infrastructure, was positively received. However, concerns about the equitable distribution of resources and the sustainability of these projects were raised. Sustainable and equitable resource allocation is critical for long-term community development. The findings underscore the importance of ensuring that community development projects

are sustainable and equitably distributed. Collaborative planning with community members can help identify priority areas and ensure that resources are allocated in a manner that benefits the entire community.

The discussion of the findings highlights the complexities and challenges associated with community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe. While there are positive aspects, such as investment in community development, significant areas for improvement exist, particularly in communication, transparency, participation and cultural sensitivity. Addressing these issues can enhance the effectiveness of community engagement practices and foster better relationships with local stakeholders, ultimately leading to more sustainable and equitable community development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The qualitative study on the effectiveness of community engagement practices by Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe provides valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences of local stakeholders. The findings reveal both strengths and weaknesses in the current engagement practices, highlighting the need for improvements in communication, transparency, participation, cultural sensitivity and resource allocation. While there are positive aspects, such as investment in community development projects, significant areas for improvement exist. Addressing these issues can enhance the effectiveness of community engagement practices and foster better relationships with local stakeholders, ultimately leading to more sustainable and equitable community development. More consistent and transparent communication strategies to ensure that all community members are well-informed and their concerns are addressed, should be implemented. The mining companies and local communities will do well to establish regular updates and open lines of communication through

community meetings, newsletters and social media platforms, and also provide accessible information about project plans, developments and decisions to build trust and credibility. It is important that more opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making processes, be provided, ensuring that community input is genuinely considered. Community members must be involved in planning and decision-making through consultation meetings, workshops and participatory fora to ensure that community voices are represented and valued in final decisions.

There must be increased transparency in project planning, environmental impact assessments and financial allocations to build trust and credibility by sharing detailed information about project plans, environmental impacts and financial distributions with the community. To maintain accountability and transparency, regular audits must be conducted and the reports published.

Efforts to integrate cultural sensitivity into engagement practices, involving community leaders and elders in the process have to be strengthened. The Chinese mining companies must invest in understanding local customs and traditions and ensure that engagement practices respect and reflect these cultural norms. Cultural exchange programmes and events to promote mutual understanding and respect should be pursued. Community development projects have to be equitably distributed and focus on long-term sustainability. Collaboration between the mining companies with community members must be established to identify priority areas and ensure fair resource allocation. Focus should be on sustainable development projects that provide lasting benefits to the community, such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. To build trust, the Chinese must collaborate with local stakeholders by addressing their concerns and involving them

in decision-making processes. Community liaison officers must be installed to serve as a bridge between the mining companies and the community, and promote open dialogue and mutual respect to strengthen relationships and foster a sense of partnership. By implementing these recommendations, Chinese mining companies can enhance their community engagement practices, build stronger relationships with local stakeholders and contribute to sustainable and equitable community development in Zimbabwe. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of community engagement practices on community development and well-being. Additionally, comparative studies between different mining companies operating in Zimbabwe could provide further insights into best practices and areas for improvement.

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