

Free State, North West, Gauteng  
First Edition

# Action Voices

Community Solidarity Forever

## Gold Mining Legacy Counter Mapping



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This publication brings together the voices, experiences, and countermapping stories of communities living alongside gold tailings and mining activities in the Free State, North West, and Gauteng provinces. Participants from Nyakallong, Virginia, and Welkom in the Free State; Jouberton, Kanana, and Dominionville in Klerksdorp; and Snake Park in Soweto have shared their lived realities through the Community Monitoring School. Their contributions reflect the strength of community knowledge and the importance of documenting local experiences that are often overlooked.

Through the leadership of Nyakallong Community Organization and GUBICO in the Free State, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Klerksdorp Diocese in North West, and Snake Bambabanani Co-operative together with the Snake Park Cerebral Palsy Forum in Gauteng, this work highlights how communities are organizing, learning, and advocating for environmental and social justice. Countermapping has allowed participants to tell their own stories, map risks and resources, and build collective understanding about the impact of mining and gold tailings on their health, environment, and livelihoods.

The stories in this publication are not only records of challenges but also expressions of resilience, solidarity, and hope. They show how community monitoring creates space for dialogue, accountability, and new ways of imagining safer and more sustainable futures. By sharing these voices, we aim to strengthen partnerships between communities, civil society, and decision-makers, while encouraging more inclusive approaches to development.

We acknowledge the courage and commitment of all participants who shared their knowledge and experiences. May this publication serve as a tool for learning, advocacy, and continued collaboration toward dignity, environmental protection, and community-led change.

## Counter maps vs Official maps: What they reveal

Counter-mapping is when communities create their own maps to show their reality, knowledge, and experiences especially when official maps leave out important information or tell only one side of the story. Instead of governments or big companies deciding what a place looks like, local people map things that matter to them, for example: where people live and work areas affected by mining or pollution cultural or historical sites safety issues or access to water and land. The goal of counter-mapping is to give communities a stronger voice. These maps can be used for advocacy, research, storytelling, and protecting rights, because they show perspectives that are often ignored in traditional maps.

## Counter maps vs Official maps: What they reveal

### Lived experience & local knowledge

Community maps can reveal footpaths, water points, sacred sites, gathering places, and unsafe zones based on lived experience. Official maps usually omit these informal and emotional aspects of space.

### Power imbalances & contestation

Counter-maps highlight land claims, disputed boundaries, environmental degradation, and impacts of mining or displacement often absent from official maps.

### Social relationships

Hand-drawn maps can show social networks, community leadership hubs, and relationships between households or families, which official maps cannot represent.

### Emotions, memories, & historical narratives

Community-drawn maps may reflect memories, emotional connections, and historical stories such as childhood spaces, sacred landmarks, or places tied to trauma or joy.

### Inequality & exclusion

Counter-maps reveal unserved areas, informal settlements, hazard zones, and environmental injustices often minimized or erased in official mapping.

|                          |                                              |                                          |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Purpose                  | Administration, planning, control            | Community voice, perspective, resistance |
| Data Source              | Government, surveys, GIS                     | Lived experience, memory, storytelling   |
| Focus                    | Roads, borders, infrastructure               | Social life, emotions, cultural meaning  |
| What They Miss           | Informal routes, unsafe zones, sacred spaces | Invisible data becomes visible           |
| Power Dynamic            | Top-down                                     | Bottom-up                                |
| Representation           | Objective and standardized                   | Subjective and experiential              |
| Visibility of Inequality | Often hidden                                 | Exposed clearly                          |
| Environmental Impacts    | Minimized or neutral                         | Highlighted through lived harm           |





## Gold Mining Legacy Mapping Stories: Free-State Province

The community of Virginia in Free State province of South Africa understand the nightmare of tailing disaster. Gold mining in Free state was the pulse of the community. The development and the economy of this town was designed to support the gold mining economy.

Years, of mining decline have rendered many areas in the Free state gold fields ghost area. Mine infrastructure is abandon with no care and left for scavenging. The counter mapping process have lift the lid on the hardships and the heavy pollution of the land in the areas of Nyakallong, Welkom and Virginia.

The agricultural land are heavily affected by the towering tailing facilities. Nyakallong township is submerged by a toxic body of water, which are constantly pumped from the shafts. This publication provides the reality of the situation seen from the counter map lens.





## Matjhabeng, Thabong: Free-State Province



### Pollution Affecting the Community of Matjabeng Thabaong

#### Lebohang Chabeli

The community of Matjabeng Thabaong is suffering from pollution caused by mine tailings. This pollution affects our air, water, and soil.

The air we breathe, the water we use for crops, and the soil we farm on are all contaminated with chemicals from the mines. Because of this, our economy is struggling, and we cannot produce enough healthy food to feed our community. Many of our animals have died after drinking from polluted man-made dams.

The mining company had promised to take care of the community after receiving permission to operate, but those promises were not kept. During the rainy season, the man-made dams become dangerous.

Children sometimes drown in them, and the polluted water worsens soil and crop damage. Without clean air, safe water, and healthy soil, we cannot grow food or live safely.

The community of Matjhabeng is facing very high levels of pollution. In 2014, a 36-year-old man who worked at Joel Mine died from silicosis, a disease caused by breathing in harmful dust.

As a community, we are asking for more air monitors to help reduce the amount of chemical dust we breathe every day. This will protect our health and prevent more people from getting sick.

### The Tailings That Cause Air Pollution in Our Community

#### Lerato Matebese

Imagine waking up in the morning, getting ready for school, and smelling the bad odor coming from the mine tailings. We live close to these tailings, and they cause serious health problems in our community.

In Matjhabeng, we face severe air pollution that damages our lungs. The dust from the tailings contains silica, which causes silicosis, a dangerous lung disease that leads to scarring and breathing difficulties.

Last year, we buried my uncle, who worked on a farm near the tailings. He developed a lung disease from inhaling asbestos fibers, which caused progressive lung scarring.

We are also affected by pollution from the local abattoir. Every day, after slaughtering animals, they burn the blood. The smell is terrible and harms our health.

In Thabong, many people suffer from eye problems because of the dust from the tailings. The pollution is everywhere, and it continues to affect our daily lives.

## Nyakallong, Allanridge: Free-State Province



### The Impact of Rock Dumps and Zama Zamas on Our Community

**Tshepo Tsie**

The rock dumps and closed mines in our hometown have made the area unsafe. Our community is being terrorised by zama zamas (illegal miners). They are everywhere, whether local or foreign, and treat this illegal activity as a job.

Zama zamas are very dangerous to society. They often carry illegal weapons such as guns, knives, garden forks, and spades. A few months ago, community members witnessed a violent fight between them. They even shot at each other, and the sound of gunfire left us frightened.

This illegal work has also influenced young people to drop out of school because they believe it is easy money. Sadly, many of them spend their earnings on drugs and alcohol instead of doing anything productive.

Most of the time, when zama zamas disagree about money or other issues, they end up fighting and threatening each other, which puts the whole community at risk.

### The Economic Cost of Nyakallong Mine Tailings

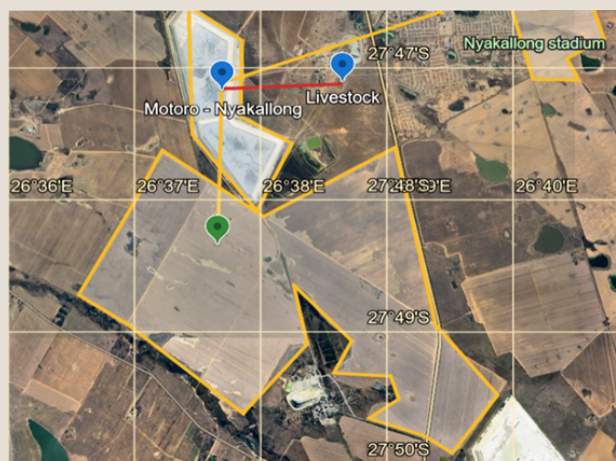
**Thabiso Mfunyiswa**

The mine tailings in Nyakallong have put a heavy strain on the local economy. Most residents have become sick and rely on public clinics, which already lack enough resources to treat everyone.

Because of this, many people are forced to buy their own medication out of pocket. With their small monthly income, families must cover food, housing, and now medical bills. This leaves them struggling, and those who cannot afford treatment suffer even more.

From a broader South African perspective, this problem increases the number of people who depend on government healthcare for survival. As a result, the Department of Health must spend more money each year to meet these needs.

In short, the mine tailings in Nyakallong and in other parts of the country create serious economic impacts. They weaken local clinics, drain family incomes, and place extra pressure on the national health budget.





## Nyakollong, Allanridge: Free-State Province



### The Haunting Legacy of Mine Tailings for Small-Scale Livestock Farmers

#### Thabang Thembani

In Allanridge, a small town in South Africa's Free State province, mine tailings (waste from mining) stand tall as reminders of the region's mineral wealth. But for small-scale livestock farmers, these tailings are a constant danger to their animals, their income, and their health. Mining has brought some jobs, but most of the profit goes to mine owners. The cost is high: toxic substances from the tailings seep into the soil and water, poisoning the land that farmers depend on.

Dust from the tailings spreads with the wind, contaminating kraals, animal feed, and water. Farmers, who have lived here for generations, often don't know how harmful this dust is. It makes animals sick, reduces productivity, and weakens food security.

Local farmers shared their struggles:

- Pitso Dela, a small-scale farmer, said:

"We cannot throw meat away when people are hungry. Poverty is everywhere here. If there is food to share, we will eat it."

This shows how food insecurity forces people to take risks, even eating animals that may have died from unknown causes.

- Ntate Naong, another farmer, explained:

"We have been trying to get help from our councillor because our livestock are dying. We invested our last money and emotions into them. We really need help."

Farmers lack access to affordable veterinary experts, so they cannot even find out what is killing their animals. This makes the situation even more dangerous.

Farmers must be given knowledge and training about tailings, pollution risks, and safer farming practices. Mining companies, government, and communities should work together to find solutions that balance economic growth with environmental safety. A healthcare and support fund should be created to help affected farmers and families.

Mine tailings in Allanridge are a painful reminder of the costs of mining. But by empowering farmers with knowledge and support, we can help them protect their animals, rebuild their livelihoods, and create a more sustainable future.

## Nyakallong, Allanridge: Free-State Province

### The Impact of Tailings on Plantations One Health Problem Equals Many Other Problems

#### Hlalele C Motaung

Everyone thinks they have 99 problems until they face a health problem. Then suddenly, that one problem becomes bigger than all the rest. Health is complex, and it connects to many other issues in life.

When we look closely, we see that health problems often come from many causes. In Nyakallong and other communities, mine tailings are a major source. These tailings are dumped in poor areas where people already face environmental challenges. Municipalities fail to protect communities, and mining companies take advantage, leaving behind waste and poor sewerage systems. This is an insult to the promise of equality in South Africa, where access to services and rights is still unequal.

Tailings are proof of injustice. Communities never gave consent, yet they suffer the consequences. The dust from tailings damages the respiratory system when blown by the wind, and it harms the eyes and skin because it contains dangerous underground chemicals. Tailings also damage the environment, plants die, soil becomes contaminated, and farming suffers. All of this leads back to one bigger issue, which is health.

The effects are clear. Public health facilities cannot cope because the illnesses caused by tailings require advanced treatments and equipment that poor clinics do not have. Sick workers cannot perform well, which weakens the economy. Families lose both livelihoods and lives.

Tailings must be moved far away from communities. Mining companies should create a healthcare fund to provide private medical care for affected residents. This is the least

they can do after harming people's health and livelihoods. Communities need activism, funding, and transparency to fight back against exploitation and ensure accountability.

As the saying goes, "It is useless for the sheep to vote for vegetarianism while the wolf disagrees." For society to be fair, we must stop allowing powerful industries to consume vulnerable communities. Only then can we build a more equal and just future.

### The Impact of Soil Contamination in Nyakallong

#### Vuyani Khahlane

Soil contamination remains a serious threat in Nyakallong. When Harmony Mine dumped its processed waste, it affected the soil on the surface of the tailings. During bad weather, such as heavy rain and strong winds, this contaminated soil spreads and causes air pollution across the community.

I have seen how the soil and dust flow into residential areas during these weather conditions. The dust from the tailings often reaches the nearby kraal. A community member who works close to the tailings explained: "I have noticed the dust from the tailings. It makes it hard to see and stops us from working."

This shows how dangerous the contaminated soil is for both health and daily life.

To reduce the problem, there are practical solutions like planting trees around the tailings to absorb pollutants and reduce air pollution. Community education sessions to raise awareness about the dangers of dust and how to protect themselves. Encouraging safe practices, such as keeping a distance from the tailings, to avoid inhaling polluted air and dust. By working together, the Nyakallong community can reduce the risks of soil contamination and protect both people and the environment.



## Nyakallong, Allanridge: Free-State Province



### The Impact of Tailings on Plantations

#### Khanyisile Matsaba

Agriculture is the second biggest contributor to the economy in Nyakallong after mining. But farming is now declining because the soil has been contaminated by mine tailings, which are only a few meters away from the land used for plantations.

As someone born and raised in Nyakallong, it is painful to see our once peaceful community decline because of mining. Mining was once the backbone of our economy, but the aftermath has left us with high unemployment, broken hopes, and a town that no longer offers opportunities for young people.

Grain farming, which used to support many families, has been badly affected. Toxic dust from the tailings has reduced crop yields, forcing farmers to abandon their land. Many farm workers are left jobless and hopeless, which has disrupted family life and community stability.

The contaminated soil can no longer support healthy plant growth. For example, maize used to grow 9–12 feet tall, but now it grows so poorly that even a 7-year-old child can be taller than the plants. This shows how tailings have reduced crop development.

When humans and animals eat crops grown in contaminated soil, they may absorb dangerous metals like lead and arsenic. These heavy metals can cause brain damage, lower IQ, kidney problems, cancer, and skin conditions. The most common issue in Nyakallong is skin problems; many residents complain of itchiness, pimples, and eczema.

A possible solution for this issue is the Phytoremediation: Planting certain plants that absorb heavy metals from the soil. Organic fertilizers: Regular use can help restore nutrients in the soil. Soil testing: Frequent testing to monitor contamination levels. Crop rotation: Rotating crops to reduce the long-term impact of tailings.

Even though the tailings will remain, these methods can help reduce their harmful effects and give Nyakallong's agriculture a chance to recover.



## Gold Mining Legacy Mapping Stories: North West Province

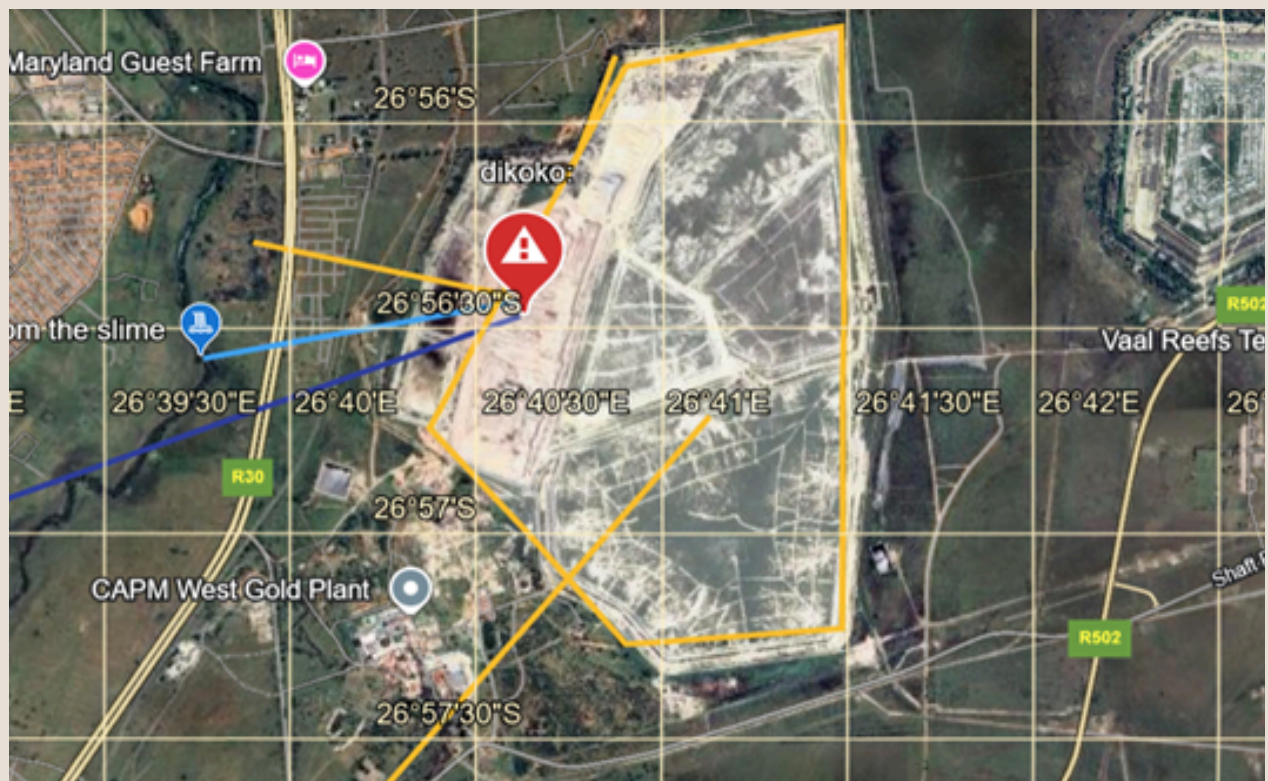
Klerksdorp is one of the old mining frontier towns. It is also with a visible gold mining legacy. The 2025 artisanal and small-scale miner was ramped up in a government suction operation vala-umgodi. The operation led to the death of miners when they were starved in Stilfontein.

There is over 6000 abandoned mines in South Africa, some of which are used for illicit activities. The countermapping process has helped the identification of the story of the communities who stays close to these mines and tailings.





## Kanana, Klerksdorp: North West Province



### Tailing Dams in Kanana Poise Health Risk

#### Petrus Moshe

Kanana is located in Klerksdorp is surrounded by mines that left a numerous Tailing Dams. Tailing Dams deposit Uranium' which toxic and Environmental risks and cause long term effect to ecosystems' that will include both human and animals healthy' with water being contaminated.

The interaction of ecosystems is in jeopardy water use for consumption cause various illnesses animals as cattle get ill' community members can be hospitalized for TB Siliceous and other health related illness. Consequently' intergeneration for species is being tempered for growth and cease to an end.

Tailings Dams are scientifically proven to be toxic' that can cause hampered environment' pose health for both animals and human.

### Crime and Illegal Activities Around Tailing Dams and Abandoned Shafts in Kanana

#### Samuel Olehile

Kanana in the north west of the legacy gold mining belt over decades numerous mine shafts, tailing dams and abandoned mining infrastructure have accumulated. While many of these sites are no longer operational, they continue to play a role in illicit activities especially in illegal mining.

These activities are linked not only to economic lose and environmental degradation, but also to serious crime, human rights concerns, and loss of life. Securing and policing the abandoned Shafts is challenging specifically given the cost and danger.

## Dominionville, Klerksdorp: North West Province

### Perilous Playgrounds: How Dominionville's Tailings dams Threaten Children and the Community

#### Pontsho Mokheseng

Dominionville, a small, semi-rural former mining town in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North West Province, has long been shaped by uranium and gold mining. Over decades, mining operations past and present have left lasting negative impact on the town. Mining operations have left behind a landscape of abandoned shafts, tailings dams, slime/slime-dams and structures that are poorly secured and inadequately rehabilitated.

While adults in the community deal with unemployment, water shortages and environmental degradation, children face acute and often overlooked risks from exposure to mining waste to unsafe structures.

Tailing dams and slime dams contain leftover minerals, uranium and other heavy metals that can be dispersed by wind, particularly in dry conditions. Children inhale dust, which may settle on surfaces, clothes and food. Radioactive decay breathing off gases like radon is a concern. Also, exposure over time to heavy metals can lead to chronic health issues.

Open shafts, old mining holes where children can fall in. These may be hidden by grass and not be visible. Wet or acid-contaminated water in tailings or slime dams or pits. Children may swim, wash or come into contact with contaminated water. This poses risks such as, drowning, poisoning and physical injuries.

While specific incidences of drowning seem less documented in Dominionville, analogous cases elsewhere are known.

Lack of safe recreational spaces or infrastructure means children are more likely to use unsafe abandoned mine areas to play. Children are naturally curious and would want to explore the surrounding areas.

Psychological impact; living in an environment perceived as unsafe, with loss of elders or peers due to accidents or illness, undermines well-being.

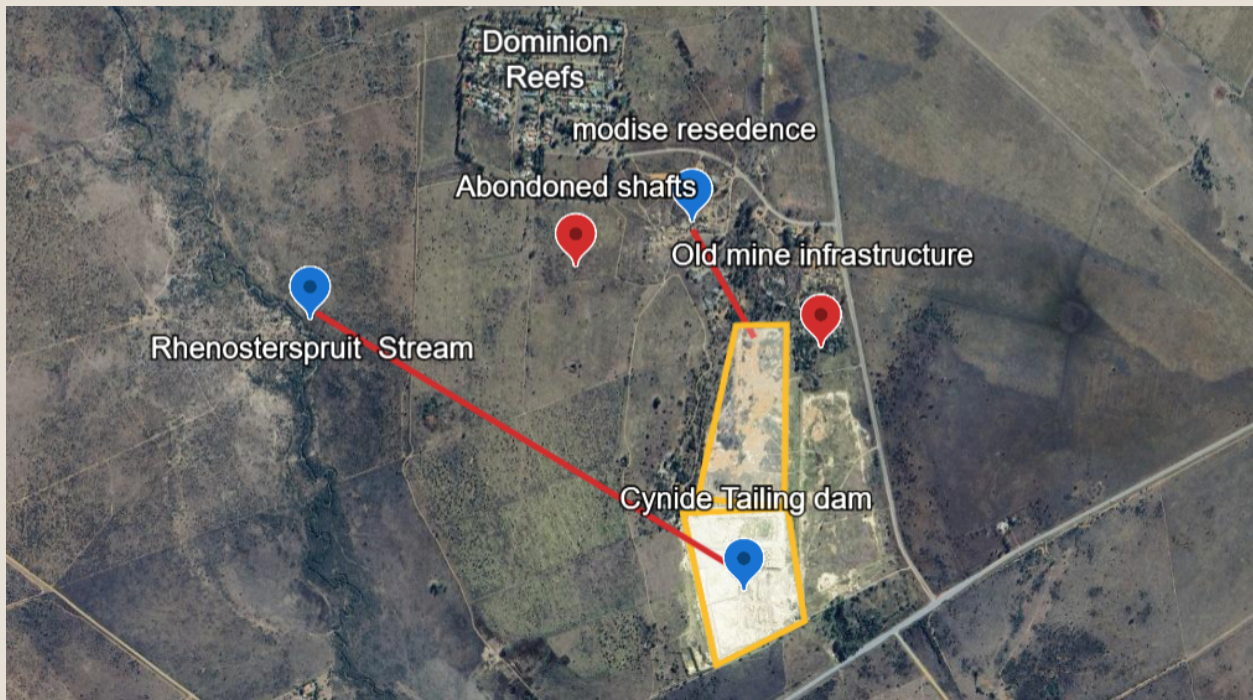
Some suggested interventions to protect children and the community:

- Placement of proper fencing and signage around dangerous pits, shafts, tailings dams. Removal or covering of exposed hazardous waste if possible.
- Inform and educate parents, children, schools about the dangers/risks of playing in tailings/slime dams and unsafe structures. Use school programs and community projects to make people aware.
- Mine operators (past and present) should be held accountable for rehabilitating land. Proper management of tailings dams like, covering, limiting dust, managing acid/contaminants and ensuring that dams meet the safety standards.
- Government should ensure permits are in place and enforced. There should be regular inspection of dams/residue deposits, especially near residential areas. Create safe play areas and spaces for children. Whilst also ensuring the water supplies are safe and provide alternative sources if contamination is detected.

In conclusion, Dominionville stands at the intersection of promise and peril. The mining that once promised jobs and infrastructure has left behind a legacy of environmental and health risks especially for the future generation, the vulnerable, the children. Without immediate and sustained action by those responsible the threats posed by abandoned mines will remain.



## Dominionville, Klerksdorp: North West Province



### Living with Cyanide: A Childhood Memory and a Community's Awakening in Dominionville

#### Joe Mashilo

Growing up as a boy child, my parents would normally take me to Dominionville area for the school holiday's, this area is 28km from my parent's home in Jouberton, I must say, I used to enjoy the school holidays there, to me the visits were adventurous and exciting, farming activities were taking place, and mining activity was no longer happening.

As a child who was visiting, I used to see unused old and dilapidated buildings, scary holes on the ground surface and tailing dam, everyone in the community called cyanide. Those were all the mining legacies, I've seen community members going to the fetch sand from the tailing dams Cyanide for the purpose of plastering their mud houses inside, cyanide is yellowish in colour, as such, it was used to beatify and brighten the houses inside.

This was a common practice for a very long time, and nobody has ever seen it as a problem.

In the year 2011, I went back to the community as a grown up and activist working for Justice and Peace, our office delegation visited Dominionville with one of the environmental activist by the name of Marriatte Liflink, she facilitated a workshop, we discovered that the old practice of plastering of houses with sand from the tailing dams (cyanide) was still continuing, Marriette raised awareness about the dangers associated with the practice. Community members were made aware that tailings often contain arsenic, lead, mercury, cyanide, and other harmful chemicals.

These was a much needed information, some members of the community started to refrain from using the sand from the tailings for plastering purposes, while others continued, in our last August 25 visit we were told that this harmful practice has stopped because people are no longer building mud houses, however the tailing dams are still affecting the community in many ways.



## Gold Mining Legacy Mapping Stories: Gauteng Province

Snake Park is a settlement in the outskirts of SOWETO in Johannesburg. South Africa has long history of mining where minerals like Diamond and Gold attracted labour from across the region. The Gold rush which began in Johannesburg towards the end of the 1800s have not only build empires, it also left the legacy of waste.

Using a tool of counter mapping which is more empowering the community group were able to develop their story. Counter mapping is a powerful tool deployed to liberate. It is a kind of mapping which surface the issues not depicted by formal mapping. The community of Snake park call this pile of waste behind their settlement “ntaba Mhlope”, this is a Zulu word to mean “white mountain”. This tailing facility has been a playing ground for children, it has also praying site for spiritual practitioners.

The stories bellow are a product of counter mapping workshops which took place in the 2025. They are lived experiences and represent the perspectives of this community





## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province



### Living in a Hazardous Place Called Snake Park

#### Sicelo Sithole

Snake Park is a dangerous place to live because of the toxic dust from the mine tailings. This dust puts people's lives at risk and forces them to spend money on medical bills. Many residents dream of relocating to a safer place with fresh air, far away from mine dumps.

Mr. Buthelezi moved to Snake Park in the early 2000s with good health. Today, he suffers from eye problems and asthma. He cannot afford medical bills and relies on his daughter's medical aid. Sadly, his daughter also has skin problems and must pay for expensive medication that could have been used for household needs.

Life in Snake Park is very hard. The massive mine tailing sits right next to people's homes, stealing their peace and comfort. For those without jobs or income, it is even worse; they cannot afford cleaning supplies to protect their homes from the toxic dust.

To create a healthy environment, residents must unite and raise their voices. They need to demand action from mine owners and authorities to remove the mine tailing dumps. Activists must speak for the voiceless so that Snake Park can become a safe place where people live in good health and dignity.

### Mining Industries Causing Climate and Environmental Injustice in Our Communities

#### Bongekile Rozana

Big mining companies like Harmony Gold, Anglo American, and Pan African have left many mine shafts abandoned and unattended. Some mines still operate near our communities, while others, like DRD Gold, were closed without proper monitoring or rehabilitation. This has created serious environmental disasters, health problems, crime, and economic decline.

In Johannesburg, there are about nine abandoned mine tailings, including Mathole Village, Meadowlands, and Snake Park. These tailings were left without care or closure. As a result, Children play and swim in toxic ponds and streams. Illegal miners (artisanal miners) have taken over sites like Mathole Tailings and Roberts Ville in Florida, turning them into crime hotspots. The environment is damaged, plants don't grow properly, and livestock are born with deformities such as blindness or extra legs due to contamination.

Meanwhile, mining companies continue to profit daily while ignoring the harm they have caused. Communities are left to suffer from disabilities, chronic diseases, and exposure to dangerous chemicals like lead, uranium, and arsenic. These chemicals contribute to health problems and climate change.

Our rivers and ponds are polluted with chemicals. Farmers who rely on these streams for gardens and livestock are harmed because crops fail to grow and animals develop abnormalities from drinking contaminated water. The impacts of abandoned mine tailings are severe and damage our economy, destroy our health, and threaten our livelihoods. Communities like ours are paying the price for the negligence of mining companies and the lack of government accountability.

## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province



### The Impact of Mine Tailings on Our Community

#### Bongani Dladla

In Snake Park, Doornkop, mine tailings are harming our community's health and safety. The toxic dust from the dumps has been linked to higher rates of TB and other serious health problems among students and residents. Community members have also reported more cases of babies being born with deformities and disabilities in children living near the mine dumps. These may be caused by exposure to heavy metals and other dangerous contaminants.

Mine tailings contaminate the soil, making it difficult for vegetation to grow and creating risks for livestock and agriculture. They also release dust and particles into the air, which reduces air quality and harms human health. In our community, many people suffer from illnesses caused by this toxic dust, including asthma, tuberculosis, cerebral palsy, and skin diseases.

We believe the mining sector, government, investors, and local communities must work together to set clear standards. These standards should promote environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and economic development so that mining does not continue to harm our health and future.

### Snake Park Mine Tailing Short Story

#### Jabulile Tshabalala

Snake Park has always been shaped by mining. Companies like Harmony and DRDGOLD operated here for generations. DRDGOLD, a gold mining company with a history dating back to 1897, extracted gold from slime dams and tailings. Over time, they left behind what locals call the "yellow mountain," a toxic legacy.

Today, the once-thriving town is surrounded by tailing ponds filled with waste. The air is thick with dust, and the water is undrinkable. Children growing up here breathe unhealthy air and suffer from illnesses such as asthma, seizures, and disabilities, all linked to the mine tailings.

Farming, which has always been part of our family traditions, is also suffering. Farmers living about 5 km from the mine dump struggle to raise livestock. Animals graze near contaminated areas, inhale dust, and develop respiratory problems. There is even a school nearby in Block One, where children breathe in dust every day. Many suffer from eczema and skin irritation. Life here is hard because of the mine tailings.

Still, there is hope. Pan African has taken over the tailings left behind by DRDGOLD, and as a community, we hope this will bring healing and revitalization to the Yellow Mountain and other mine dumps around Mogale City and Soweto. Young activists are also rising, determined to make change. Even though we struggle daily with the toxic legacy of the mine tailings, we believe our community can fight for a healthier and safer future.



## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province

### How the Mine Tailing Dump Affects the Community of Snake Park

#### Rethabile Seikaneng

Snake Park is a formal settlement in Soweto. Nearby, there is a mine tailing dump that is very dangerous for both residents and farmers. On dusty days, the community suffers as clouds of dust blow from the tailings into their homes. This dust puts their lives at risk. Many residents struggle to go outside, and street vendors cannot work. Since they depend on their small businesses to survive, losing income on dusty days makes life even harder for their families.

Farmers are also badly affected. Crops and animals are dying. Miss Buyi Gaza, a pig farmer, lost eight pigs because of contaminated soil, water, and food filled with dust from the tailings. Some of her pigs even went blind. She gave up farming because she saw no hope if she bought more pigs, they would die too. She cannot afford to buy land elsewhere, and she receives no help.

Health problems are also severe. Siphumulile Clinic in Snake Park is now called the “TB Hub” because so many people suffer from lung infections, tuberculosis, breathing problems, and skin diseases. Residents believe these illnesses are caused by inhaling toxic dust from the tailings. Miss Lebogang Hume, a Block 2 resident, shared her story. Her 11-year-old son has eye problems. Each time there is heavy dust, his eyes itch and hurt. When the dust clears, the problem goes away. At the clinic, he only received eye drops.

The people of Snake Park are pleading with the mining company to remove the tailings. The soil contains harmful metals like arsenic, mercury, and lead, which threaten their health. Removing the tailings would also protect animals and crops, giving them clean water and safer land to farm.

### Unhealthy Environment

#### Mami Moota

Slovo Ville is a settlement between Doornkop and Randfontein. Unlike Doornkop, it is not well developed.

In this area, there is a mine shaft, mine tailings, a graveyard, a railway line, sewer water running openly, and farmland. Children cross the sewer banks on their way to school, and cattle graze nearby. In August, the situation becomes worse because of the dust mixing with sewer water, which people inhale daily.

I spoke to several residents, and they confirmed these problems. It is clear that the government and councillors are aware, but nothing has been done.

Many children are suffering. Around 85% are born with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, which is believed to be caused by living in such an unhealthy environment.

Both Slovo Ville and Snake Park urgently need government intervention. The hope is that researchers or visitors coming to these areas will help find solutions to improve the lives of the people living here.



## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province



### Glamour in the Dust: The Hidden Cost of Entertainment in Soweto's Mine Tailings

#### Thabang Ndweni

In Soweto, creativity shines through music, fashion, and art. Artists have always turned ordinary things into something extraordinary. Recently, however, a new trend has appeared, one that mixes beauty with danger. More and more music videos, photo shoots, and social media posts are being filmed on mine tailings: huge golden piles of mining waste left behind from decades of gold mining.

On camera, these tailings look like beaches or desert dunes. Their wide, empty spaces give a sense of isolation in a busy township. For directors and photographers, they are free to access, visually striking, and unique. For viewers, the illusion is complete: the artist looks like they are in a remote, glamorous location.

But behind this beauty lies a serious problem. In places like Snake Park, mine tailings are unfenced and close to homes. This makes them easy to use for filming, but they are also dangerous. Tailings are toxic dumps filled with heavy metals, radioactive particles, and chemicals from mining.

The dust that blows from them contains arsenic, lead, and cadmium substances that can cause lung disease, cancer, and developmental problems.

Artists, dancers, and film crews spend hours on these sites without knowing the risks. There are no warning signs, no protective equipment, and no permission from mine owners. The shoots are informal, driven by the need to stand out online and earn money. The result is content that looks glamorous but is built on environmental danger.

Using mine tailings for entertainment is more than a trend; it shows neglect. It highlights the lack of safe creative spaces in townships, the hidden costs of informal economies, and the need for environmental justice.

Soweto's artists deserve spaces that inspire without harming them. Until then, the golden glow of the tailings will remain a haunting symbol of creativity born in struggle, and of the toxic legacy that still hangs over the township's future.



# Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province

## Taking Care of Our Environment

### Thembinkosi Mdakane

Nature gives life to all living things, but human activities often create danger for society and the environment. In Snake Park, we face serious problems from air pollution, dust from old mine dumps, illegal dumping sites, and delays in fixing sewage drains.

These issues have a big impact on our health. Children play near dumping sites where they can easily pick up germs and spread them to their families. Lindiwe, a parent, shared that her daughter was injected with a needle found at a dumpsite while children were playing “doctor.” She fears her child could get HIV or other diseases from used needles.

There are programs like the Community Work Programme (CWP) that help clean dumping sites, but the problem continues. People still dump waste carelessly, forgetting that children play in the streets and are exposed to this unhealthy environment.

I met a young boy, Thabiso, in Snake Park. When I greeted him, his voice was weak, and he struggled to breathe. His eyes were full of sadness, and his mother explained that he had been sick for a long time. She said her child spends most of his life indoors because the mine dust makes it hard for him to play like other children.

Lindiwe, Thabiso’s mother, believes that creating awareness projects in the community and working with the Department of Health can help protect children and parents. By educating people about the dangers of sewage, dumping sites, and mine dust, we can find better solutions for a healthier environment.

It is heartbreaking that children cannot enjoy life because of the toxic environment we live in. This is why it is so important for the Department of Health to step in, educate, and assist our community.

Together, as a community, we can stand up and fight for a cleaner, healthier environment. A united voice will help us build a better future for our children and society.

## Are Illegal Dumpsites Forever?

### Tshidiso Pule

They exist because municipal waste services and infrastructure are not enough. As a result, our communities face environmental damage and dangerous health risks.

When you enter my neighborhood, whether by taxi, bus, car, or on foot, you are greeted by a terrible smell. It comes from a bridge that carries sewage disguised as a river, and from two illegal dumpsites on either side of the busy tar road.

The problem is made worse by residents and strangers from other neighborhoods. Waste from tuck shops, fast food restaurants, kindergartens, and households ends up at these dumpsites. Renovation rubble is also dumped there. Sometimes the municipal waste truck (“Pikitup”) does not collect rubbish, so people throw it at the illegal sites instead.

Children are at risk as they play near dumpsites and face injuries from broken glass, nails, contaminated needles, toxic chemicals, and even dead animals. Dumpsites attract criminal activities and create social disorder. Each year, shocking cases occur, such as newborn babies being found dead in these areas.

We need educational campaigns to teach communities about waste management. Clean-up operations to remove existing dumpsites. Proper infrastructure and services to prevent new ones. Community action: Residents can start recycling programs and turn old dumpsites into gardens, parks, or small businesses like car washes and jumble sales.

## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province



### Mine Tailing Toxicity Faced by Local Farmers and Snake Park Residents

**Daniel Mkwana**

Mine tailings have long been a serious problem for the residents of Snake Park and for local farmers who live only a few meters away from the mine dump buffer zone.

I visited the mine tailing dump recently owned by Mogale Tailings Retreatment Pty Ltd. I also spoke with a local farming couple who live nearby to understand how the tailings affect their lives, animals, and crops. The experience was traumatic. Toxic dust from the mine dump blows across farms and into homes in Snake Park. The couple, aged between 30 and 36, explained their concerns about health problems caused by the tailings.

They said they struggle with a Lack of clean water because mine contaminants make it unsafe for farming and household use, Health risks from toxic dust, which has led to diseases such as tuberculosis, asthma, and skin problems among residents, and Difficulty

growing crops. After all, the soil and water are contaminated, making it hard to sustain healthy, organic vegetation for their families.

These challenges threaten both their livelihoods and their health. The farmers dream of growing safe crops and succeeding in agriculture, but they need support to protect their land from toxic dust and chemicals. The farmers want to gain knowledge and skills about safe food systems and farming practices.

To be supported through initiatives for small and medium enterprises that can help them adapt to living near mining areas. Find ways to reduce the impact of tailings so they can build sustainable farms and secure their future. Mine tailings have harmed Snake Park for too long. With education, support, and stronger community initiatives, local farmers can overcome these challenges and create healthier, more sustainable livelihoods.



## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province



### Dust and Sewer Water Affecting Children at Riverside Park (Block 2)

#### Nobulaw Sitshaluza

Riverside Park in Snake Park is meant to be a place for fun and activity. Many young people gather there to play, relax, and entertain others.

The park mainly serves residents from Block 1 to Block 3, while other blocks have their own smaller parks. Sadly, Snake Park has no recreational centres or even a library, so this park is very important for the community. But residents say the park has become a serious health hazard.

### Soil of Sorrow

#### Buyi Gasa

In 2023, I decided to buy pigs and start farming. I found a kraal near the mine tailings where I could keep them. I was happy because I was unemployed, and this gave me hope to earn a living for myself and my family. But I did not know that sorrow was waiting for me.

As time went on, my pigs started to get sick. Some went blind, and others vomited blood. I became worried, only to discover that it was not just my pigs; other farmers' animals had the same symptoms. The pigs were suffering because the soil, water, and food around the tailings were full of toxic dust. Eventually, all eight of my pigs died.

This not only affected my animals, but it broke me emotionally. I had hoped to grow my farm, build relationships with butchers, and support my family. But now everything I worked for is gone.

Even if I complain, who will listen? Where can I go for help? The mine tailings have destroyed our livestock and our livelihoods, leaving us in sorrow.

Buyi Gasa, a mother from Block 2, explained that children at the park are exposed to the smell of human waste from nearby sewer water. She worries this will make them sick. She also mentioned the constant dust, which causes many young people to suffer from respiratory problems.

Mr. Sakhile, a 40-year-old father from Block 5, said the smell is strongest near the bridge, especially in the evenings when he passes by taxi. He believes that breathing in dust and sewer water over time can be deadly. He added that both are major contributors to air pollution and an unhealthy environment.

The Department of Water and Sanitation must redirect the sewer water away from the park using proper pipes. Pan African Resources, the new owners of the mine tailing dump, must take responsibility and address the health issues caused by the dump. The City Parks Department should consider moving Riverside Park to a safer location.

The park was originally built by a good Samaritan as a gift to the community. It is needed and valued, but it must be safe for children and families.



## Snake Park, Soweto: Gauteng Province



### Mining Tailings Dump Impact on Our Community in Snake Park, Soweto

#### Tshidi Sebogodi

The Durbandeep Roodepoort Doornkop mine (DRD) was established in 1886. For many years, it produced gold and minerals and contributed to Gauteng's economy.

The problem began in 1980 when the mine closed due to low production. The site became a mine tailings dump, and illegal miners (zama zamas) started digging for gold. Waste from other mines, such as Harmony Doornkop, was also dumped there.

Because there was not enough land for housing, the government bought farmland in Doornkop Thulani and gave it to people with housing forms. Families moved there without knowing the dangers of living next to mine tailings. Later, the municipality discovered that Block 1 was built on dolomite, which is unstable, and they had to evict residents to safer areas.

Although the DRD mine is closed, Pan African Resources took over in 2023 to re-mine and rehabilitate the site. They began cleaning by redirecting rainwater away from homes and putting up warning signs. Digby Wells

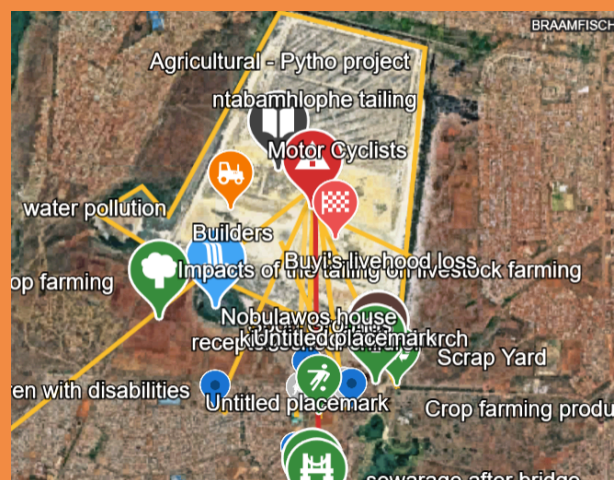
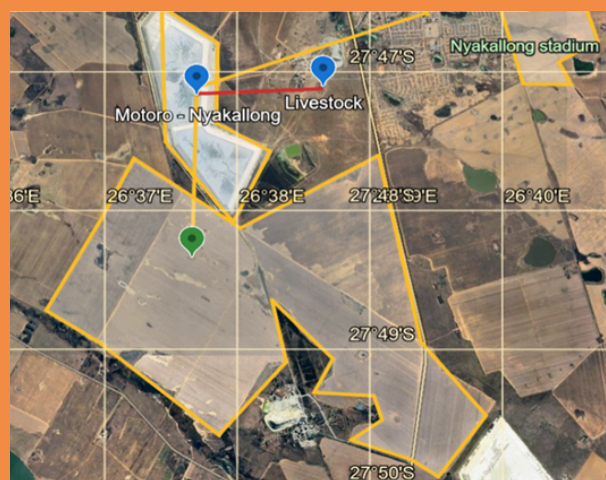
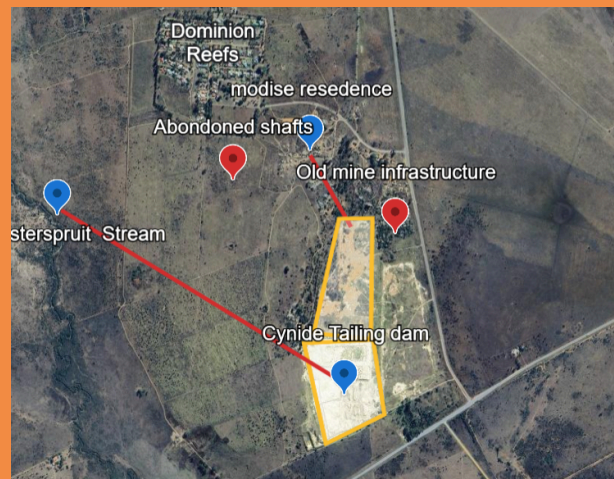
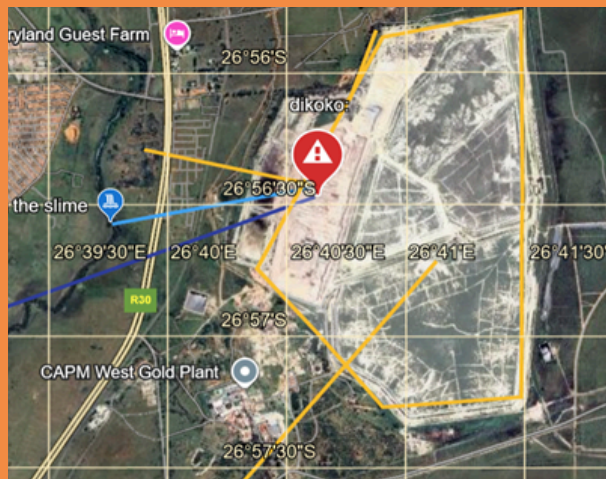
Consulting was appointed to issue licenses for rehabilitation so the community would not be harmed further.

Snake Park remains toxic for both people and animals. Research by Bambanani Cooperative, led by Benchmarks Foundation and Dr. Nteboheng, showed that many residents are affected. Pregnant women gave birth to children with disabilities such as cerebral palsy, autism, and Down syndrome. Animals near tailings also showed deformities. Gauteng has more than five tailings dumps, with mines still operating in Harmony, Doornkop, Simunye (Westonaria), and Ekurhuleni.

Residents of Snake Park suffer from serious health problems: asthma, tuberculosis, breathing difficulties, eye problems, skin rashes, and eczema.

The solution is for mining companies to rehabilitate the dumps properly. This includes installing large pipes to safely redirect toxic materials and ensuring tailings are managed in ways that protect communities





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