

New rural struggles in platinum areas

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The rise in platinum mining by major mining companies in formerly densely populated rural areas has ushered a new wave of rural struggles with rural communities fighting for self-determination and land control.

These struggles are captured in a Working Paper titled, "No chief ever bought a piece of land!" Struggles over property, community and mining in the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela Traditional Authority Area, North West Province."

The paper was produced by the Mining and Rural Transformation in southern Africa (MARTISA) project in the Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP) at Wits to investigate the impact of new [mining](#) activity on evolving forms and relations of communal land, traditional authority and corporate community in mineral-rich [rural areas](#) of Southern Africa.

The paper draws on the case of the Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela traditional authority and investigates how local land and political histories have shaped a new wave of rural struggle on the platinum belt. The focus has been on the interrelationships between land, community and authority at the village level, and how these have been conditioned by a distinctive 'tribal trust' property regime.

The authors argue that the dramatic expansion of extractive activity in these communal areas and the various pieces of legislation enacted since the early 2000s has impacted [rural communities](#) by not only enhancing the powers of traditional leaders in South Africa, but has also enabled chiefs to play an increasingly significant mediating role between rural communities and the mining corporations.

"These developments and the institutionalisation of traditional authorities are a problem for villagers," said Dr Sonwabile Mnwana, researcher and co-author of the paper, during the launch.

Chiefs are seen by governments and corporate entities as custodians of the land who have the authority to decide on the use of land in their jurisdiction. However, the powers vested in chiefs are disputed by

villagers who state that land belongs to the community as it was acquired through the group land-buying in the early 1800s when Africans began to 'buy back' property after the massive land dispossession of Africans.

Consequently, the title of the report No chief ever bought a piece of land! highlights the voices of the villagers who argue that the use of land, the royalties paid by mining companies to the chief should be a communal affair.

Present at the launch were representatives from Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela who accused the chief of unaccountability and lamented the state of poverty despite royalties being paid to the chief. To listen to these testaments, click [here](#). For the full report, click [here](#).

Mnwana concluded by stating that the tribal authority is an indirect control of communal resources which uses custom to legitimise and defend power. The paper has been coauthored with Dr Gavin Capps, MARTISA senior researcher.

Provided by Wits University

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