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INTROSPECTIVE REFLECTIONS ON ATTEMPTS AT DEEPENING COLLABORATION, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND CO-CONSTRUCTING SHARED FUTURES IN MINING REGIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTROSPECTIVE REFLECTIONS ON ATTEMPTS AT DEEPENING COLLABORATION, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND CO-CONSTRUCTING SHARED FUTURES IN MINING REGIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, an overview of the MCPP, a municipal capacity–building and partnership–support programme initiated by a large mining company in South Africa early in 2020, is provided. The overview includes the roll–out and experiences of the programme in three of its key focus areas: (1) breaking down disrespect, mistrust, distrust and suspicion between stakeholders, (2) deepening collaboration and strengthening partnerships, and (3) co–constructing shared future visions and aligning state and non–state actors' plans, budgets and actions in accordance with these futures. This exposition covers the favourable observations made about the programme, along with the concerns raised and the questions asked during its implementation. The chapter concludes with a set of tentative reflections on the possibility for municipalities to undertake the kind of tasks that the programme undertook, as well as the need for the programme. It is argued that, should there be a need for such tasks, a body/structure should be established to undertake them, with careful consideration of the location, funding, staffing, oversight and performance management of such a body/structure – possibly also making use of some of the observations made, insights gained and lessons learnt in the execution of the MCPP. In addition to this, broader connections and possible contributions to the literature base are drawn on collaborative planning, with a specific focus on mining regions, mining–municipality–community relations and capacity building, and governance–actor support by mining companies in mining regions.

Keywords: collaboration; regional planning; partnerships; shared futures; South Africa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Save for the petrostates, there can be few other countries in the world in which minerals and mining have played such an outsized role in their establishment and transition into modern states as South Africa. It was the richest diamond and gold finds the planet had ever seen that drew the British Empire into the brutal conquest of what were otherwise dry and dusty plains at the southern end of Africa in the late 19th century. It was mining that brought unsurpassed inflows of global capital and the establishment of banks at the southern end of the continent (Bremner, 2024) and created the largest African stock exchange alongside one of the most highly regarded financial sectors in the world (IMF, 2022). It was a sprawling mining camp built on the Witwatersrand, the richest gold reef ever to be found on the globe, far away from the coast or any major rivers, that would become the prime metropolis of Johannesburg – incidentally named after the two officials who were instrumental in the proclamation of the area as a "diggings" for the extraction of gold in 1886. The wealth that mining generated spawned the manufacturing sector and turned South Africa into the most industrialised country on the continent, leading to the establishment of the first university in the country and providing much of the capital required to build the transport, trade, transmission and basic services infrastructure network that is still unsurpassed on the continent.

Yet, it was also this same enormous mineral wealth and gargantuan mining industry that (1) trampled on the lives, lands and livelihoods of the country's Indigenous inhabitants; (2) created a brutal migrant labour system, causing enormous suffering and lasting damage to traditional community and family systems; (3) played a huge part in the introduction of the "concentration camp" as a weapon of war against civilians in the pursuit of economic goals; and (4) was a key driver in the creation of a caste–like system of "work reservation" for "Whites/Europeans", Africans and "Coloureds" – "persons of mixed racial descent" (Van der Schyff, 2012; Davenport, 2013). In short, in many ways it was both a key driver and sustainer of the British Empire–focused extractive colonial system and later the all–encompassing, globally despised Apartheid state – from its national–scale macro–constructs of ethnically–based homelands for Africans, to its more local manifestations in sub–national settlement segregation, marginalisation, suppression and exploitation (Innes, 1984; Cawood & Minnitt, 1998).

It is little wonder then that with the advent of democracy in 1994, the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) government found itself in a conundrum – firstly, how to retain and expand on the functioning of this machine of wealth creation, while at the same time ensuring that its benefits were more equally spread amongst all South Africans; and secondly, how to put it to use in the building of a very different kind of country, society and economy. In addition to this, it had to establish working relationships with mining companies that had, for close to a century, benefited from a legislative framework that paid scant regard to workers' rights or those of the environment. Less than a decade earlier, ANC had literally fought these

same companies in the mining trenches on a daily basis, with labour unions being the only legal avenue for dissent for the disenfranchised African majority.

Mining companies, on their side, had to go through a similar catharsis – remaking and repositioning themselves without the extensive, exploitative legal support of the colonial and Apartheid systems in a twofold manner. Firstly, as responsible and caring corporate citizens, actively engaged in reconstructing and transforming the deeply fractured former Apartheid state into the non–racial, "new South African society" promised by the long sought–after advent of democracy. And secondly, as progressive builders of not only all the "host communities" on whose doorsteps they operated, but also those located in the far–away places that large segments of their labour force were drawn from.

This chapter is squarely located in this omnidimensional and multi–layered process of (1) building a new country and nation, including its many mining regions and towns; (2) redress and healing; and (3) transformation of a mining industry into a force for common and collective good in the service of the country at large. It tells the ongoing story of tensions and successes experienced in an endeavour to improve collaboration, partnering and co–construction of a shared future between government, industry partners and other stakeholders in mining regions in South Africa through introspective reflections on the experiences gained by participants in a programmatic initiative called the Municipal Capability and Partnership Programme (MCPP).

In terms of structure, the next section provides a high–level overview of the literature on extractive–sector collaboration and governance. This is followed by a brief engagement with collaborative planning as a theoretical framework, then a section on the past and present of planning, settlement development and governance in mining regions in South Africa. Against this contextual backdrop, the MCPP is introduced as a specific programmatic intervention aimed, among other things, at addressing municipal development planning challenges and strengthening mine–municipal collaboration. Then the research methodology is presented, including a note on the positionality of the authors as key participants in the MCPP. The findings are presented in relation to three distinct focal areas, followed by the authors' tentative reflections on the insights gained and lessons learned during programme implementation.

2. A HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON EXTRACTIVE-SECTOR COLLABORATION AND GOVERNANCE

A key theme in the literature in this field is the marked evolution from ad hoc corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects towards structured, partnership–based capacity–building programmes in mining regions (Hilson, 2012; Kemp & Owen, 2013). This shift reflects growing expectations that mining companies contribute to institutional strengthening, local economic diversification and participatory governance, rather than limiting interventions to philanthropic infrastructure delivery (Esteves et al., 2012). Several prominent examples illustrate this transition towards more systemic approaches.

One frequently cited African example is the Newmont Corporation–supported Newmont Ahafo Development Foundation (NADeF) in Ghana. Established through negotiated agreements with host communities, NADeF channels a portion of mine revenues into a legally constituted foundation governed by the representatives of communities, local authorities and the company (Ahafo Social Responsibility Forum, 2008; Aubynn, 2009). The foundation's structure aims to institutionalise benefit sharing and enhance transparency in project selection and oversight. Empirical analyses of NADeF highlight its emphasis on education, health, infrastructure and livelihoods, while also noting the importance of governance design in mediating power asymmetries between corporate and community actors (Owen & Kemp, 2014; Andrews, 2016).

In Australia, major diversified miners such as BHP and Rio Tinto have implemented Indigenous partnership and supplier–development programmes that integrate local enterprises into corporate procurement systems (Brereton & Parmenter, 2008; O'Faircheallaigh, 2013). These initiatives typically combine enterprise mentoring, preferential contracting, training pathways and long–term agreement frameworks with Indigenous organisations. The literature frames such programmes as efforts to embed economic participation within core business processes, thereby linking regional development objectives to the company's value chain, rather than to peripheral CSR budgets (Esteves & Barclay, 2011; Fleming & Measham, 2015).

A further strand of practice involves collaboration with multilateral and specialist development institutions. For example, Anglo American partnered with the Inter–American Development Bank and TechnoServe in Latin America under the "Beyond Extraction" initiative, which sought to strengthen small– and medium–sized enterprises in mining regions through market–oriented technical assistance and value–chain integration (Inter–American Development Bank, 2019; Anglo American, 2020). Such models leverage external expertise to enhance programme credibility, introduce rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, and also align company investments with broader regional development strategies (World Bank, 2017).

Across the cases, three common strands can be identified in the literature:

1) institutionalisation through foundations or formal partnership agreements;
2) integration of community development with economic inclusion mechanisms; particularly local procurement; and
3) multi–stakeholder governance arrangements designed to enhance accountability and legitimacy (Kemp & Owen, 2013; Vanclay, 2017).

Importantly, scholars in the field caution that sustainability beyond mine closure, genuine local ownership and alignment with public planning frameworks remain persistent challenges (Hilson, 2012; Owen & Kemp, 2014). Overall, international experience suggests that capacity–building programmes are most effective when they operate as embedded, long–term institutional partnerships, rather than as loose–standing, one–off, project–driven CSR interventions.

2.1 COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collaborative planning emerged in the 1990s as a normative and analytical response to (1) technocratic and rational–comprehensive planning models that were criticised for marginalising affected stakeholders and underappreciating the political and communicative dimensions of planning practice; and (2) a growing postmodern "anything goes" and nihilist tendency in planning thought. Drawing heavily on Jurgen Habermas' theory of "communicative rationality", the collaborative planning paradigm emphasised dialogue, consensus–building and inclusive governance as central to legitimate and effective spatial decision–making (Healey, 1997; Innes, 1995).

One of the foundational contributions to this field is Patsy Healey's articulation of planning as a communicative process embedded in institutional contexts (Healey, 1997). Rather than treating planning as "technical problem–solving", Healey conceptualised it as a socially constructed practice in which stakeholders, through meaningful and truthful deliberation, co–produce shared understandings of place, people and their shared possible future development trajectories. As such, collaborative planning seeks to create "arenas for dialogue" in which diverse actors – public authorities, private sector interests, civil society members and communities – deliberate and negotiate mutually agreed outcomes.

In parallel, Judith Innes (Innes, 1995; 2004) developed the theory of "collaborative rationality", arguing that authentic dialogue under conditions of diversity and interdependence can generate consensus–based outcomes that are both innovative and implementable. Innes & Booher (2010) further elaborate that collaboration works when participation is inclusive, communication is authentic, and engagement/participation processes are consequential. They emphasise that collaborative processes not only produce agreements, but also build and strengthen social capital, mutual learning and adaptive capacity.

Collaborative planning is closely associated with a broader "communicative turn" in planning theory in the 1990s, by which planning was reframed from a technocratic exercise to a deliberative democratic practice (Fischer & Forester, 1993). Scholars active in this field argue that collaboration can enhance legitimacy, reduce conflict and improve policy coherence, particularly in complex, multi–actor environments, such as city/municipal governance and environmental management (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

While the idea of communicative planning was welcomed by many in the field, the literature also contains substantial critiques against this paradigm. Tewdwr–Jones and Allmendinger (1998), for instance, question whether consensus–oriented planning underestimates structural power asymmetries. Flyvbjerg (1998) argues that power relations fundamentally shape planning outcomes, suggesting that communicative ideals may obscure strategic behaviour and domination. Similarly, Purcell (2009) critiques collaborative and deliberative approaches for potentially depoliticising planning by privileging consensus over contestation.

Empirical studies have revealed mixed outcomes. While collaborative approaches improved stakeholder trust and produced durable agreements in certain contexts, they are time–consuming, resource–intensive and vulnerable to elite capture (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Success appears contingent on institutional design, facilitative leadership, stakeholder capacity and alignment with statutory decision–making frameworks (Innes & Booher, 2010).

Collaborative planning has particular salience in mining regions where land–use conflicts, environmental risk, labour migration and fiscal asymmetries generate complex governance environments. Extractive contexts are characterised by high economic stakes, corporate concentration of resources, and uneven institutional capacity at the local level (Kemp & Owen, 2013). As a result, collaboration and collaborative planning approaches are frequently invoked to manage stakeholder conflicts, negotiate benefit–sharing arrangements, and integrate mining development with local and regional planning frameworks.

Community development agreements (CDAs) and impact and benefit agreements (IBAs) generated in such regions are often interpreted as institutionalised forms of collaborative planning (O'Faircheallaigh, 2013). These negotiated instruments create structured forums for dialogue between companies, local communities and, in some cases, subnational governments. Empirical research demonstrates that where agreements incorporate inclusive representation, independent facilitation and transparent monitoring, they can enhance procedural legitimacy and produce durable development commitments (Owen & Kemp, 2014). However, power asymmetries and technical capacity gaps frequently constrain meaningful participation.

In resource–dependent municipalities, collaborative planning has also been linked to capacity–building interventions aimed at strengthening local government systems so that they can engage mining companies on more equal footing. Studies of mining governance in the Global South show that collaboration is most effective when embedded in statutory planning frameworks and supported by institutional reform, rather than operating as ad hoc engagement processes (Hilson, 2012; Vanclay, 2017). Thus, in mining regions, collaborative planning intersects closely with institutional development and fiscal governance.

Over the course of the last decade, collaborative planning scholarship has increasingly engaged with questions of power, inequality and political economy. Parker and Street (2018) argue that collaborative governance must be analysed within neoliberal restructuring contexts, where decentralisation and austerity may shift responsibilities to local actors without adequate resources. Legacy (2017) similarly critiques the "post–political" tendency of consensus–oriented planning to marginalise dissent.

In environmental and resource governance, scholars have explored adaptive co–management and polycentric governance as refinements of collaborative theory (Morrison, 2017). These approaches emphasise learning, networked institutions and multi–level coordination – features particularly relevant in extractive regions where national regulation, local government and corporate actors intersect.

Recent planning theory has also moved towards "agonistic" interpretations that accept conflict as inherent and potentially productive (Metzger, 2017). Rather than seeking full consensus, collaborative processes are increasingly framed as arenas for structured contestation. This strand is especially relevant in mining contexts marked by resource nationalisation, environmental justice claims and mobilisation by local communities and traditional leaders. At the same time, growing attention to implementation gaps has led to a renewed emphasis on institutional design, monitoring systems, and enforceability mechanisms (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Innes & Booher, 2010). The contemporary literature, therefore, situates collaboration not merely as dialogue, but as a governance architecture requiring durable institutional support.

While collaborative planning clearly represents a significant normative shift towards collaboration and participatory, deliberative governance in planning, and focuses on shared learning and negotiated outcomes, it remains subject to critiques regarding power, representation and implementation. In response to this, proponents of collaborative planning have sought to integrate their ideals around deliberation and consensus with a more explicit recognition of power, institutional constraints and political economy dynamics.

3. PLANNING, SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN MINING REGIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA: PAST AND PRESENT

The history of the involvement of mining companies in town and local community building has a somewhat, and not unfamiliar, Janus–faced feature. In the Global North, where the introduction and gradual strengthening of workers' rights from the early 1800s onwards shifted the balance of power between capital and labour, mining companies – especially where they were responsible for the establishment of mining towns – became active participants in the provision of housing and municipal services and even the daily running and overall management of such towns (Oranje, 2013). In countries outside of the Global North where human rights were not observed, civil dissent was punished, and workers' rights were not recognised, the picture was very different.

In pre–1994 South Africa, with its dualistic nature, the situation was squarely between these two poles. In the "former white parts" of mining towns, mining companies took on a caring, paternalistic role, providing housing, bursaries, and sports and cultural facilities, as well as extensive support to municipalities in the execution of their service–provision and maintenance duties. In the "former African parts", the situation was very different. Even though conditions were generally better in these parts of mining towns than in other non–mining towns, they were still far removed from those in the "former white parts". Importantly, this lopsided model established not only a practice, but also an expectation, very much along the lines of the mining towns developed elsewhere in the Global North, of the mine as the benevolent provider of housing, parks, sporting grounds, libraries, bursaries, etc.

Accordingly, and based on this experience of investment in the white part of mining towns – especially during the Apartheid years – nothing less than this was expected for every part of these towns after the advent of democracy in 1994.

In the 1996 South African Constitution's aspiration to transform the spatial, social, and economic legacies of colonialism and Apartheid, it created three distinct, but interdependent spheres of government – national, provincial and local – that must cooperate and support one another, and align their plans, programmes and investments. Municipalities were assigned a powerful developmental mandate to (1) drive local economic development; (2) provide equitable services; (3) restructure the skewed settlement patterns; and (4) facilitate participatory governance. However, despite this ambitious governance architecture and set of arrangements, most municipalities remained under–capacitated, under–funded, institutionally fragile and not able to reverse historical backlogs, while facing rising demands from a highly expectant citizenry. Given the retention of law–making powers regarding the mining sector, as well as the allocation of mining licences and the establishment of government–industry protocols and structures at the centre, i.e., in the national sphere of government, municipalities and their local constituents had no say in these matters and had to live with decisions that they were not party to.

Key amongst the transitions in the mining sector, managed as it was at the centre, was the establishment of the Mining Charter, which sought to (1) transform ownership of the industry; (2) direct it towards the pursuit of national development objectives; and (3) ensure a deepening and a broadening of the wealth it created (RSA, 2002). A central component of this pursuit was the introduction of the Social and Labour Plan (SLP), which all mining companies had to prepare as part of their application for mining rights. The SLPs were envisioned to address historical exploitation and neglect by mining companies, and compel them to invest in local economic development, community infrastructure and worker welfare, both within their immediate areas of operation, their so–called "doorstep/host communities", as well as the so–called "labour–sending areas", i.e., municipalities where large percentages of migrant workers came from. In terms of the law, SLPs had to be developed in consultation with municipalities and affected communities, and their priorities had to align with the priorities in the municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDPs)[1].

Unfortunately, the envisaged collaborative arrangements regarding municipal planning and the provincial and national spheres of government and the preparation of SLPs were based on highly optimistic assumptions about institutional capability and multiple actors' sustained appetites for collaboration. It expected mines, municipalities, communities and provincial and national sector departments to share data, integrate planning, align budgets and co–produce long–term strategies. In practice, siloed legislation, fragmented institutions and uneven capacities resulted in weak intergovernmental relations and inconsistent participation by both state and non–state stakeholders. To make matters worse, many municipalities struggled to

[1] A municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is a five–year strategic plan that guides a municipality's development priorities, budgeting and service delivery. It seeks to align community needs with available resources and government policies.

produce credible IDPs and sector plans, while mining companies often planned in isolation, guided more by compliance requirements than systemic local development strategies. This misalignment made joint planning very difficult and undermined the transformational intentions of both (1) the local sphere of government and (2) the mining sector's legal and policy frameworks.

By the early 2000s, the South African system reflected both the promise and contradictions of its post–Apartheid reconstruction ideals, with a series of structural and capacity dynamics across the system at the heart of current challenges, notably (1) fragmented planning; (2) nationally directed fiscal arrangements; (3) mistrust and distrust amongst stakeholders; (4) unaligned mandates; (5) persisting inequality; and (6) limited resources in the municipal space to address developmental challenges, provide the constitutionally–mandated free levels of basic municipal services and impact meaningfully on the inherited inequalities.

At the same time, and in the wider international area, due to growing concerns about brand reputation and litigation in an ever–more information–rich world – notably online streaming and social media – coupled with growing threats about resource nationalisation and legal requirements tied to the licence to mine, mining companies active in the Global South have taken on a far more active role in the regions and towns where they are active. These actions have typically been undertaken by the larger, more global mining companies with international head offices in countries such as Australia, Canada, and the UK, where the risks of litigation are substantially greater than in countries in the Global South.

While not every company and context is the same, typical areas of support provided by mining companies have included (1) the provision of social, health, water and sanitation, and education services, and the building and maintenance of the necessary facilities and infrastructure networks required to do so; (2) the establishment and strengthening of local/indigenous SMEs and the procurement of services from these enterprises; (3) the making available of bursaries, apprenticeships and vocational training, with a specific emphasis on youth, women, underrepresented ethnic or racial groups and persons with disabilities; and (4) the establishment of forums and/or platforms for engagement, including the raising of grievances and concerns.

While these measures/actions in the international domain were enabled and supplemented by a sizeable share of royalties and taxes going to the sub–national areas where mines were active, in the South African case, these all went to the National Treasury. Only a small segment was "channelled" through the SLPs and discretionary corporate social investments back into regional and local communities and places.

Key understandings about "what works (best)" from these experiences have been that (1) respect, trust and co–design are fundamental in ensuring the initial and sustained buy–in and longevity of the programme, especially after the closure/departure of the mine; (2) transparency in planning, procurement, monitoring and reporting on the performance of the mine's programmes mediates expectations, reduces rumours and uncertainty and strengthens a sense of solidarity and togetherness; (3) integration

of the mine's programmes with the priorities, plans, programmes and budgets of state and non–state actors increases impacts and reduces conflicts; and (4) doing full life–cycle programme planning, especially with regards to entry and exit, and continuously communicating this to all involved, increases the chance of a successful hand–over of key tasks to regional and local champions, and reduces the chance of the legacy of the mine being tarnished.

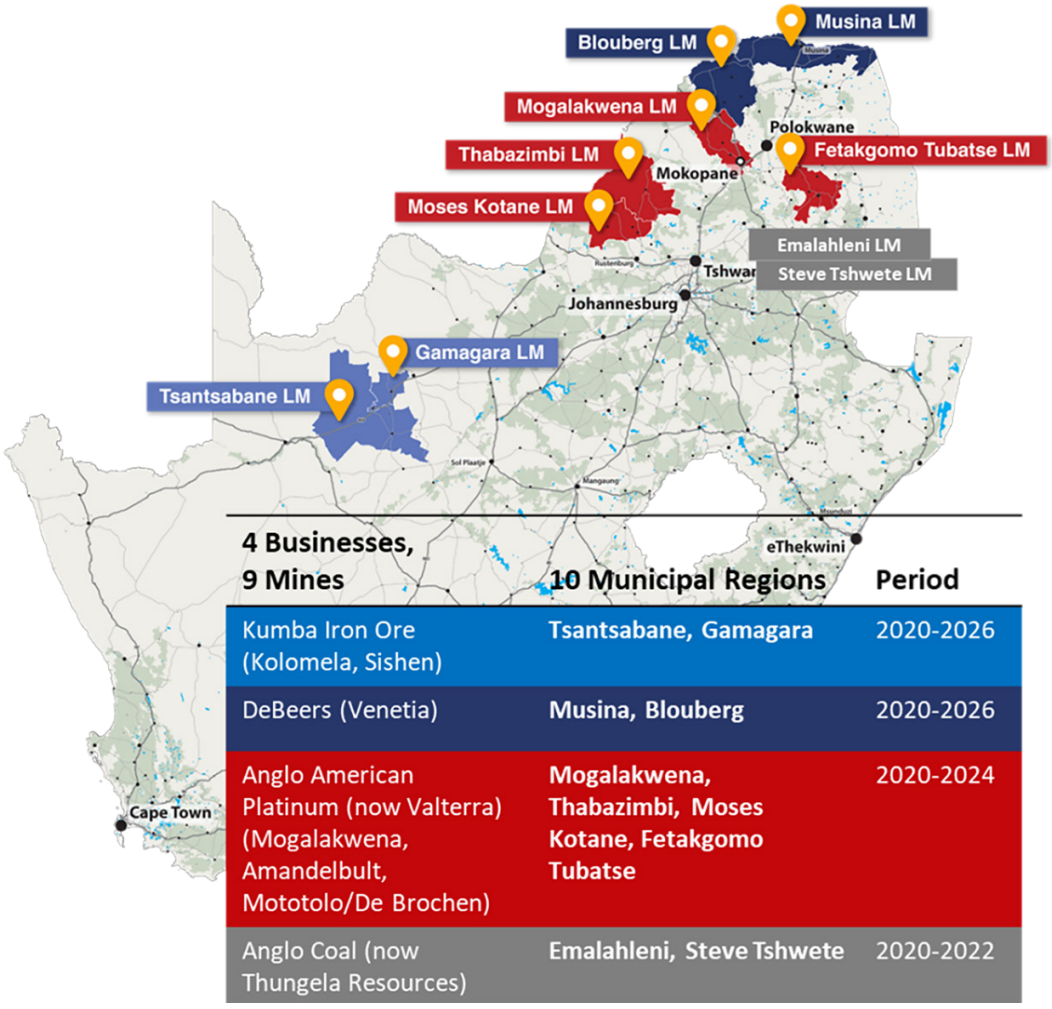
4. THE MUNICIPAL CAPABILITY AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME (MCPP)

In the context of increasing service delivery failures, huge pressures on settlements largely due to rapid in–migration, and the intertwined evolution and capacity challenges in effectuating local government and mineral governance in South Africa, the need for (1) more credible municipal planning and governance and (2) mines and municipalities to work together in a more deliberate, coordinated way, was identified by both government and industry partners as crucial in addressing development challenges and mitigating operational risks in mining areas. Accordingly, the MCPP was launched early in 2020 by a large multi–national mining company, Anglo American – one of the oldest and largest mining companies in South Africa – in collaboration with a group of Government partners, i.e., the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DCoGTA), Provincial Departments of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs (CoGHSTA) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

While being a standalone initiative covering all the sites where the company was active in the country, the MCPP did not replace any of Anglo American's voluntary corporate social investment programmes or mandated social, economic and environmental activities that all mining companies in the country have to comply with in terms of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act, Act No. 28 of 2002 (MPRDA) to obtain and retain their licence to mine. In order to ensure a common purpose, it was, however, closely aligned with the company's "Social Way 3.0"[2] and the capacity building support provided by DCoGTA, SALGA and other local government support programmes in the country.

The MCPP was gradually introduced in the ten municipalities in which Anglo American was active at the time (Figure 1). Over the course of the following five years, its area of operation shrank due to the company selling its coal and platinum group metals assets. This left the programme with only two areas of focus: the company's iron ore mines in the Gamagara and Tsantsabane Local Municipalities (LMs) in the Northern Cape Province, and the DeBeers diamond mining operations in the Musina and Blouberg LMs in Limpopo Province.

[2] A comprehensive corporate management system that provides (1) a high–level framework and overarching set of principles regarding the company's social policy, (2) a toolkit, providing practical guidance, processes, procedures and tools for mining operations to implement the policy where they are active, and (3) an assurance framework, providing a set of mechanisms for monitoring, assessment and compliance in relation to the policy.



4 Businesses, 9 Mines	10 Municipal Regions	Period
Kumba Iron Ore (Kolomela, Sishen)	Tsantsabane, Gamagara	2020-2026
DeBeers (Venetia)	Musina, Blouberg	2020-2026
Anglo American Platinum (now Valterra) (Mogalakwena, Amandelbult, Mototolo/De Brochen)	Mogalakwena, Thabazimbi, Moses Kotane, Fetakgomo Tubatse	2020-2024
Anglo Coal (now Thungela Resources)	Emalahleni, Steve Tshwete	2020-2022

Figure 1. MCPP Implementation Areas and Timeframes

Drawing on the understandings gained from the international literature on mine–municipality collaboration and support, as well as local experiences in this regard, the MCPP adopted a collaborative approach, working closely with municipalities and mining companies to identify priorities, gaps, underlying constraints and context–appropriate interventions. In accordance with this approach, the programme undertook to (1) build institutions' capabilities and not just individual capacities; (2) complement and strengthen capacities and capabilities, and not take the short–cut route of simply replacing them; and (3) establish and cement lasting, wide–ranging intra–municipal, state and non–state partner relationships built on trust, respect, co–ownership and a shared responsibility to not only each other, but also to the town and all its people and to its and their collective futures.

5. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in preparing this chapter was qualitative in nature, i.e. narrative analysis of a rich body of documented evidence and experiences as recorded/captured in:

- Three series of programme–wide semi–structured in–person and online interviews conducted between September 2023 and August 2025 with key stakeholders in the MCPP municipalities, including 21 municipal officials directly involved in the programme (interviewed between September and November 2023), 25 MCPP team members (interviewed during 2024), and ten town planning service providers (interviewed in August 2025);
- Self–signified micro–narratives shared by municipal participants (and collaborators) on their perceptions of significant change emanating from being involved in the programme, as captured via the Sensemaker[3] tool (287 respondents) and annual reflection sessions with development planning teams from nine municipalities (83 planning practitioners);
- Quarterly and annual programme monitoring and evaluation reports aimed at documenting progress, evaluating progress against set targets, and informing the adaptation of initiatives (five municipalities between 2020 and 2025, two municipalities between 2021 and 2025, two municipalities between 2020 and 2022 and one municipality between 2023 and 2025);
- Evidence from results documented in close–out evaluations by officials and MCPP team members in four municipalities (2025);
- Interviews with six MCPP–appointed practitioners in the Mogalakwena local municipality were conducted as part of a case study to document learning during September and October 2024; and
- The documented observations and experiences of the four authors over the course of the last five years of their involvement in the programme.

All interview participants were anonymised and cited as Municipal Official 1 to 21, MCPP Team Member 1 to 25, Planning Service Provider 1 to 10, and Mogalakwena Stakeholder 1 to 6.

It is important to note that the team of authors includes the Anglo–American Programme Manager, the CSIR MCPP Implementation Team Programme and Planning Workstream leads, as well as the lead from the University of Pretoria and CSIR "Collaboration Compact for Regional Development Planning in Mining Regions". While the closeness of the authors to the programme carries a definite risk of bias, it needs to be noted that the bulk of the findings reported in this chapter are derived from the documented responses and experiences of a myriad of diverse stakeholders, as listed above. The chapter includes not only positive outcomes, but also concerns and cautions about the programme's impacts, notably the longevity of its gains.

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[3] The MCPP used SenseMaker®, a narrative–based monitoring, evaluation, and learning tool developed by The Cynefin Co, to capture brief, first–person stories based on a prompt that participants then "selfsignified" using triads, dyads, and multiplechoice questions. Data entry was available via a web/app "collector" and paper forms. This approach is designed to surface patterns across many micronarratives rather than to produce single authoritative case accounts, aligning with complexityaware evaluation practice.

6. FINDINGS

The next three sub–sections present findings related to three key focal areas of the programme aimed at improving collaborative planning and development in the case study areas, i.e., initiatives aimed at (1) breaking down disrespect, mistrust, distrust and suspicion between stakeholders; (2) deepening collaboration and strengthening partnerships; and (3) co–constructing shared future visions and aligning stakeholders' plans, budgets and actions in accordance with these futures.

6.1 BREAKING DOWN DISRESPECT, MISTRUST, DISTRUST AND SUSPICION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

The colonial and Apartheid histories played a significant role in all the municipalities. The legacy of the past, and its persistence into present–day living conditions and access to opportunities and future life chances, including the difference in the ability of workers from different racial groups to leave and make a life elsewhere when mines close, has remained an area of division and deep and bitter anger. In addition, municipal officials highlighted several structural and behavioural examples that illustrate persistent trust deficits.

A recurring accusation from municipal officials was that mining companies bypass or exclude municipalities from key planning and consultation processes with mining doorstep communities which fall within their areas of municipal jurisdiction (Municipal Official 6, Personal Interview, 2023). Such parallel processes leave municipalities feeling marginalised and undermined, and create the perception that mining companies are opaque or deliberately evasive, thereby weakening the foundations for state and non–state–based collaborative governance.

Misaligned planning priorities were another contributor to, and/or result of trust deficits (Municipal Official 18, Personal Interview, 2023). Sometimes this misalignment was perceived to be driven by internal municipal and mining company deadlines – often required in terms of mining and municipal legislation – rather than community needs (Municipal Official 3, Personal Interview, 2023). In several municipalities, these misalignments led to (1) municipal administrations appearing corrupt and incompetent to community members (Municipal Official 17, Personal Interview, 2023); (2) standalone infrastructure being developed without proper integration into local networks/systems; and (3) mining companies being accused of prioritising their own business agendas rather than the needs of communities.

A lack of transparency and information sharing deepened mistrust, with mines withholding information they believe "could pose risks" to them or their operations (see Nel & Oranje, 2021). These practices made decisions appear secretive or manipulative, hindering effective municipal planning and fuelling mutual suspicions of corruption or stakeholders acting in bad faith.

A further source of mistrust was the perception that mining companies engage with municipalities only to satisfy regulatory requirements. Mine–municipal relations

often function as "reluctant partnerships", resembling a "tick–box exercise" rather than genuine collaboration (see Van der Watt & Marais, 2021). This leaves municipalities feeling that mines are insincere, while mines feel burdened by compliance, leading to joint planning being reduced to a performative, transactional exercise rather than a meaningful, collaborative and trust–building process.

From the mines' perspective, weak municipal capacity also undermines trust. Poor record–keeping, outdated documentation, non–functional ward committees and slow implementation indicate institutional unreliability. In this context, mines lose confidence in the municipalities' ability to fulfil their governance roles and increasingly "work around" local structures rather than with them. This facilitates parallel planning processes that further entrench exclusion and exacerbate often already high levels of mistrust.

Political instability and weak intergovernmental coordination further undermine trust–building between mines and municipalities. One of the MCPP town planning service providers observed that political and administrative challenges have repeatedly disturbed existing structures and forums, resulting in inconsistent engagement and disrupted decision–making (Planning Service Provider 3, Personal Interview, 2025). Compounding this, many national and provincial government departments fail to attend coordination meetings, leaving municipal officials feeling unsupported by their counterparts in the other two spheres of government. In such an unstable governance environment, mining companies cannot rely on their government partners being consistent in their approach and commitment, reinforcing uncertainty and weakening the foundations for state– and non–state–based collaborative planning.

Various attempts were made by the MCPP to counter these long–held negative perceptions. While it is nearly impossible to measure the levels of trust (and changes in this regard) between parties, there is some evidence of improved relationships. One such example is in the Mogalakwena LM in Limpopo Province, where the MCPP assisted in building trust between the municipality and the mining houses by strengthening the credibility, transparency and inclusiveness of local planning processes. One of the key trust interventions introduced in this municipality was the hosting of joint, multi–stakeholder consultations in the development of the municipality's Spatial Development Framework (SDF)[4]. With support from the MCPP, municipal officials had multiple consultations with mines, traditional authorities and local businesses. These consultations brought the municipality and mining companies together as "equal partners in planning". Mines and the municipality also engaged openly about their needs, concerns and experiences. The MCPP intentionally designed the engagements to be interactive and constructive, unlike past compliance–driven processes. Workshops became platforms for dialogue rather than stale one–way information–sharing sessions. Trust was built by improving the mutual understanding, budget and capacity challenges. The workshops also provided participants with a shared vocabulary for engagement and resulted in "normalising transparency" (Mogalakwena Stakeholder 3, Personal Interview, 2024).

[4] A municipal Spatial Development Framework (SDF) is a long–term plan that guides how land in a municipality should be used, managed, and developed. It indicates where settlement growth, infrastructure, housing and environmental protection should occur.

Through the development of shared planning instruments, notably a Local Economic Development (LED) Strategy and a suite of precinct spatial development plans, a common evidence base was created that both the municipality and mines could access and use. Trust was also built through the use of the same data, thereby removing contests about whose information was better/correct. The municipality also gained legitimacy in the eyes of the mines through planning that made use of this shared database.

Another important way in which trust was built was through bridging knowledge gaps. The MCPP prompted Anglo American to host internal sessions to explain local government mandates, processes and planning needs to their own staff. From the Mogalakwena Municipality's side, knowledge gaps were also identified and addressed (Mogalakwena Stakeholder 7, Personal Interview, 2024). Role–players on both sides claimed an improved understanding of the regulatory processes that each is subject to.

Municipal officials also reported a shift in addressing their concerns regarding parallel consultations. Mines and the Mogalakwena LM agreed to invite each other to community meetings to avoid duplication and the sending out of conflicting messages. A final piece of evidence of small steps taken to rebuild trust in Mogalakwena is the way in which the mining company's SLP process was run. In the past, municipal officials just had to sign off on the SLP without engaging in project selection. In 2023, as a result of the MCPP, the municipality was directly involved for the first time in SLP project identification and budgeting together with the mines (Mogalakwena Stakeholder 7, Personal Interview, 2024).

While the MCPP made significant gains in (1) reducing levels of disrespect, mistrust and distrust; and (2) assisting in the process of building trust during its time as an interlocutor in the municipalities where it was active, a question can be raised about what would transpire without the active support of such an intermediary and additional capacity support to municipal teams that are under tremendous regulatory compliance pressure and resource constraints. This was vividly demonstrated during the closure meeting of the programme in one of the municipalities when a manager in the municipality remonstrated very angrily that "all of the good work of the MCPP will be lost in a flash when it leaves the municipality" (Municipal Official 18, observation during workshop on 18 October 2024). Disconcerting as this view is, and the prospect this raises of many of the gains being lost with the departure of the programme, in a "learning–and–reflection session" in May 2025, post–programme evaluations in four of six municipalities that are no longer part of the programme illustrated that embedding and institutionalisation of some of the practices in intra–municipal and industry–municipal collaboration has taken place (van Huyssteen et al., 2025).

6.2 DEEPENING COLLABORATION AND STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

Respect and trust are fundamental elements in pursuing collaboration and establishing and strengthening partnerships between stakeholders. While attempts were made at breaking down disrespect, mistrust and distrust in all of the participating municipalities, the ultimate aim was the pursuit of active and constructive collaboration and its institutionalisation in practice in order to improve development outcomes and the investment impact of the respective partners. Improved collaboration practices were regarded as key to enhancing the impact of existing municipal planning processes and investment instruments, including the municipal (1) medium–to–long–term SDFs, multi–term LED strategies, and medium–term IDPs; as well as (2) the legally required medium–term SLPs and annual socio–economic development investments by mines.

The challenge is not merely alignment, but inherently the prioritisation of limited resources in municipal regions. While SLPs can and must (by law) play a key role in the development and strengthening of regions, they cannot fill endemic voids and gaps in the areas of (1) basic municipal service delivery; (2) the provision of health, education and housing; (3) safety and security; or (4) the creation of opportunities and conditions for economic growth and job creation. Tied to this is the reality that the demands in relation to infrastructure and public services in municipalities and provinces with strong mining economies far outstrip their financial, technical, administrative and managerial capabilities.

One of the key contributions by the MCPP has been the support it provided in re–establishing and improving the credibility of stakeholder communication channels and processes. Through support to municipal teams, municipal forums and processes were strengthened and, in some cases, re–established (see Table 1) (van Huyssteen et al., 2025).

Table 1. Improved collaboration through improved local planning processes and instruments

Source: van Huyssteen et al., 2025.

MUNICIPALITIES	MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESSES SUPPORTED AND STRENGTHENED
Mogalakwena*	• SDF engagement, visioning, prioritisation and development process (2022-2023) • Development of six local area development plans • LED strategy process and forum (2022-2024) (CSIR, 2025a)
Thabazimbi	• LED strategy process and forum (2024) (CSIR, 2025a)
Musina	• SDF engagement and development process (2023-2025)
Fetakgomo-Tubatse*	• City Development Strategy and long-term development vision process (2022-2024) • Regional IDP preparation engagement and development process (2024-2025) (CSIR, 2025a)

MUNICIPALITIES	MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESSES SUPPORTED AND STRENGTHENED
Moses-Kotane	• Long-term development vision and strategy development (2022-2024) (CSIR, 2025a)
Tsantsabane*	• SDF engagement and development process (2023-2025)
Gamagara*	• SDF engagement and development process (2023-2025)
Gamagara-Tsantsabane Mining Corridor*	• Mine-Municipal Compact established in 2023, resulting in an inter-municipal, inter-governmental and industry compact with collaboration for an emerging regional vision and strategy (2024-2025)

*Note: In these municipalities, the improvement in credibility, sharing of evidence and future projections, as well as improved stakeholder collaboration and intra-municipal alignment resulted in improved collaboration and the use of municipal processes to inform mine SLP development, community engagements and project prioritisation.

In the Mogalakwena LM, the LED Forum was established as a permanent platform for collaboration, allowing for concerns to be addressed through a clear institutional pathway. In the Thabazimbi LM, despite severe institutional challenges, the LED strategy preparation process was used to re–ignite participation of the private sector, resulting in the development of a Charter to galvanise their commitment to the process and strategy. In the case of Fetakgomo–Tubatse LM, a very large rural municipality spanning several traditional authorities, towns, villages and mining areas, an agreement was reached to structure a municipal–wide planning process through four regional IDP structures and processes, enabling strategic engagement on the prioritisation of development by mining companies, traditional authorities and the local municipality in a more meaningful and less ad hoc way (CSIR, 2025a).

While there were numerous challenges, it was evident that, when done in credible and highly participative ways, local planning interventions can provide platforms for (1) collaboration and information–sharing; (2) building trust through a shared understanding of the future; and (3) reaching agreements on land development priorities. One such experience was the development of the first–ever Mining Resource Area (MRA) Local SDF in the country, developed to guide and manage growth around Anglo American's platinum operations in the Mogalakwena LM through collaboration between the municipality, mines, traditional authorities and local political representatives. By specifically focusing on this area of past, current and potential future conflict, and involving all relevant stakeholders in the process, stakeholders' understanding of the complexity of the challenges was deepened, and the need for collaboration was recognised by all (CSIR, 2025a).

Improved collaboration and the credibility of evidence in local development plans and planning processes also resulted in a "shared realisation and urgency" amongst municipalities, provincial and national government entities and mines of the need to jointly and timely address the impacts of mine closures in the two municipalities in the Northern Cape Province, i.e., the Gamagara and Tsantsabane LMs. Starting in the Gamagara LM as a more limited mine–municipality compact, this understanding

and initiative soon widened to cover the two neighbouring municipalities in the form of a "Regional Development Compact" encapsulating a wide range of state actors (including district municipalities, several national and provincial government departments and SALGA) and non–state actors (including non–mining economic actors in the renewable energy, agriculture, hospitality/tourism and trade/retail sectors) (MCPP, 2025; CSIR, 2025b).

As positive as the establishment of the compact in these two municipalities may be, several serious concerns still have to be contended with. Key amongst these are

1) the very limited technical, administrative, financial and managerial resources in the municipalities to pursue, drive and sustain the compact without the support of the MCPP or another such entity;

2) the local government political cycle, which may see the agreements reached in the compact and other collaborative forums and structures (after years of painstaking work) disappear in the blink of an eye;

3) daunting immediate and pressing developmental challenges in the domains of housing, municipal service provision and job creation, which may lead to politicians and mining companies focusing on these immediate pressure points to avoid civil unrest and threats to mining operations; and

4) the influence of mafia–like groups that threaten, blackmail and hold both state and non–state entities to ransom, and could lead to a diversion and/or dilution of the already limited funds provided for the projects and programmes in the compact.

Looking beyond these two municipalities at the others where the MCPP has been active, as well as the wider South African local government arena, it is clear that the progression to collaboration and partnerships is a continuous, long–term, rather than a fixed, short– or medium–term journey. The complex stakeholder arenas in the mining municipalities, consisting of not only Anglo American's operations, but several other large mines, traditional authorities, previously segregated communities, commercial farming interests, tourism operators and NGOs, require many years of ceaseless, focused work. And, once a solid foundation is in place, substantial support/resources will be required to develop, embed and sustain the functioning of the compacts/structures.

6.3 CO-CONSTRUCTING SHARED FUTURE VISIONS AND ENSURING THE ALIGNMENT OF PLANS, BUDGETS AND ACTIONS WITH THESE FUTURES

A recurring and persistent theme in the international literature on mining regions and towns, government entities concerned with these areas, and mining localities, has been the diversification of regional and local economies, partially to (1) reduce dependency on mining (and pressure for jobs, livelihoods and services); and (2) prepare for mine closure (Maritz et al., 2021; Nel & Oranje, 2021).

Despite it being an area of serious concern, experience on the ground has been far from favourable, with at best limited diversification of the economies of mining regions and towns and then only with sustained and significant government support.

While planning for post–mining futures is now increasingly being done, in most cases, these plans have had only limited impacts on the trajectories of the mining regions and towns that lost their main source of sustenance. At the same time, inhabitants of these areas who did not leave have found it very hard to secure employment, despite the roll–out of intensive government–sponsored reskilling programmes.

It is against this backdrop that the MCPP included a focus on the planning and preparation of credible plans for economic diversification and post–mining futures, and the alignment of plans, budgets and actions with these futures in the municipalities in which it was active. A key component of this endeavour was to gain an in–depth understanding of (1) the awareness in the municipality of the need to plan for diversification and mine–closure; (2) the depth and extent of planning that had been done, and is being done in accordance with this awareness; (3) the degree of implementation of such plans; and (4) the reasons for the gaps in this regard, if any.

The research undertaken by the MCPP revealed a largely similar situation in all of the municipalities, irrespective of the diversity of their regional and local economies, or the number of years of extraction left in the mines in their areas (CSIR, 2024, 2025a; MCPP, 2025). While there was an awareness of the need, both in the country and in the more immediate region, and this need typically rose and subsided in accordance with lay–offs at local mines when commodity prices dropped and mines closed shafts or operations in full or went into "care and maintenance", this did not translate into sustained planning or the preparation of plans for such eventualities (see also Maritz et al., 2021). Where plans had been prepared, they were, by and large, not implemented, or only partially implemented and then only for a short period of time. As for the reasons for these gaps, the research revealed (1) a broadly shared unwillingness to confront something as final and devastating as mine closure – something akin to humankind's avoidance of engaging the inevitability of death; (2) a ceaseless need to focus on immediate developmental needs – many of them inherited from the country's past – and the political election–cycle–tied imperative to do so; (3) the lack of viable alternative industries that provide similar salaries to those earned in the mining sector, which dampened the enthusiasm to propose and/or actively pursue such sectors; and (4) the "changing of the guard", with changes in leadership positions, both in the mines and the municipalities, leading to rises and falls in the focus on the future tied to their views. Interestingly, it was stated in one of the interviews that in one of the municipalities where the mines have long–term extraction horizons (fifty years plus), it was perceived as "completely unnecessary to plan for the future" (Planning Service Provider 3, Personal Interview, 2025).

Based on these experiences and observations, the MCPP initiated engagements with stakeholders in the municipalities on the need to

1) plan for diversification and post–mining futures; and
2) prepare and implement plans with this in mind (MCPP, 2025).

The format of engagement was very similar to that deployed in other initiatives in the programme. The first step involved:

1) broad–based in–depth research;
2) projections and modelling of the potential implications of mine closure;
3) the development of possible future scenarios and what it would take to ensure that the preferred scenarios materialised and the undesirable ones did not; and
4) preparing and planning for both possible sets of futures.

This was followed by the hosting of facilitated engagement and capacity–building workshops to:

1) present the research, models and scenarios;
2) engage role players on "possible futures"; and
3) jointly develop proposals for realising the desired futures to be included in their municipal strategic and spatial development plans.

The interviews and the inputs provided on the Sensemaker platform clearly suggest that in those municipalities where it was active, the MCPP managed to help bring about a greater awareness of the need to (1) plan for economic diversification and post–mining futures; (2) introduce and transition to other economic activities, and (3) plan and prepare for the social turmoil that might accompany these transitions. It also assisted municipal development planning teams in engaging with municipal councillors and officials in (1) "getting real" about the consideration of alternative economic opportunities; (2) asking hard questions about what is possible and probable in their areas, and the scale of benefits that different economic activities might bring, and (3) avoiding the easy solutions that are often set out in LED strategies and plans (MCPP, 2024; CSIR, 2025a, 2025b; van Huyssteen, et al., 2025).

Despite the positive feedback, it is unclear whether it will be possible to sustain the newly gained "future–focused momentum", including the ceaseless (1) pursuit of economic diversification; and (2) need to plan and prepare for a post–mining future, without the involvement of an intermediary entity/structure such as the MCPP. While municipal councillors and officials have come out strongly in its support, and some also expressed this view in no uncertain terms on public platforms, the focus might once again be weakened by the immediate needs of their constituents and areas and municipal elections, relegating the issue to **just another** set of familiar sentences about the need to diversify the local economy and plan for a post–mining future in **just another** municipal plan. At the same time, the need for collaboration between a wide range of state and non–state stakeholders, and the coordination, integration and sequencing of as wide a range of strategies, frameworks, plans and programmes, without a well–resourced, dedicated entity or agency to assist with these tasks, raises serious questions about the prospects of these diversification intents and post–mining futures coming to fruition. The failure to make headway in this regard may, as such, even have a negative "agency–deficiency impact", leading local actors to reach the conclusion that there is not much they can do by themselves about the challenges posed by mining–dependent economies, or the implementation of post–mining future plans.

7. SOME TENTATIVE REFLECTIONS

The MCPP was launched as a programme aimed at (1) building and strengthening municipal capacities and capabilities; and (2) establishing and supporting collaboration between mines, municipalities and other stakeholders in municipal spaces. Having undertaken a detailed study of similar programmes in the international and local domains, the MCPP sought to address some of the identified shortcomings, and make a novel and lasting contribution in the South African mine–municipality interface space.

Experience on the ground, both as reported in interviews and inputs and comments shared on a dedicated online portal, and observed by the authors, suggests that the programme, including its approach and mode of implementation, was generally well received. In terms of its set objectives, (1) disrespect, mistrust and distrust were confronted and reduced; (2) stakeholder collaboration took place, partnerships were strengthened; and (3) a greater awareness was established regarding the need for economic diversification and planning for a post–mining future.

What did, however, emerge as an area of concern was the depth and longevity of these gains. Whether it would be possible to sustain them once the MCPP had concluded its activities, and whether municipalities located in mining regions, overburdened and overwhelmed as they already are, would be able to take on the many tasks that are expected of them without the support of an intermediary entity/structure such as the MCPP, are open questions.

Going forward with lessons learnt and insights gained as some form of guide, it would be important to establish whether municipalities can take on the tasks that the MCPP enabled them to perform and/or supported them with, and if not, how important these tasks are for the sustenance, strengthening and transitioning of the country's numerous mining regions into more diverse economic spaces. Should it emerge that these tasks are (viewed as) important, but that they need support from an intermediary entity/structure such as the MCPP, the question then becomes (1) how this entity/structure taking on these tasks should be established; (2) who should serve in it; (3) how it should be funded; (4) how and where it should be located in the architecture of the state; and (5) how it should be managed. Furthermore, who should decide (1) what its short–, medium– and long–term tasks should be and how these should be executed; (2) how its performance should be measured and reported; and (3) how its performance reports should be used, including to review its functions and core areas of focus, and amend these as and where required.

Looking further afield, the challenges experienced in the pursuit of collaboration and collaborative planning in mining regions clearly indicate that **these are not uniquely South African problems**. As confirmed by the international literature spanning a range of regulatory and governance contexts, the relationship between mining, local government and community development planning remains deeply contested and poorly resolved. The MCPP experience adds some interesting insights to the existing body of knowledge on why this is the case, and what kinds of interventions might begin to shift the dial in a more positive direction.

Firstly, through the production of a huge and diverse database of programme–participant and stakeholder experiences, it has added depth to appreciating the deep complexity of pursuing and sustaining collaboration in mining regions. The relationship between mines, municipalities, and local communities is historically laden, deeply entangled in both local and far wider narratives and perspectives, and far from straightforward. Mines are at the same time complicit in the current situation and also victims of escalating community demands. This creates a troubling paradox: the more mines collaborate directly with communities, the greater the demands from communities on mines become, and the greater their dependence on the mines become. At the same time, this "shielding and sidelining of the state" increases the likelihood of it evading and absconding from its responsibilities.

The resultant and sustained pressure on mines to take (and retain) direct responsibility for collaboration with local communities, as well as provide housing and basic services, makes collaboration increasingly transactional. Mines do not approach these negotiations with the long–term sustainability of the region in mind, but neither do communities or traditional authorities, who negotiate with mines based on their immediate needs and their desire to bring an end to their exclusion from the benefits of mining. What is absent in this equation is the local government, an institution that should serve as the custodian of life, livelihoods and life chances in the region, both now and in the future.

In contrast to these multi–layered and multi–actor time–and–space–laden complexities, most regulatory frameworks are written as though the impacts of mining can be mediated and successfully resolved through direct, bilateral collaborations between mines and affected communities. They fail to account for the reality that mining regions typically involve multiple mines or investors with different extraction profiles and timelines, and multiple affected communities. The **collaboration required is not one-on-one**; it is inherently regional, multi–actor, multi–layered and multi–textured. This is precisely where planning, as both a regional and municipal function, could and should play a critical role.

This plea for regional, multi–mine engagement and not one–on–one engagement, planning and agreement–seeking may seem counter–intuitive, but it is one that the MCPP experience compellingly suggests: instead of legislating for individualised mine and community engagements and responsibilities, all active and prospective mines in a region should be mandated to participate in broader, regional/area–based processes where mines, communities and other organisations with shared interests come together, share and deliberate knowledge, ideas, concerns, hopes and fears, collaborate and jointly plan and strategize. The required shift is from singular place–based transactional engagements to collective, regionally focused and coordinated, collaborative planning processes in which all role–players are participants and no single role–player is the owner or the manager of such processes. Learning from the literature base on collaborative planning, extreme and sustained care will have to be taken to ensure that differential power and "access to power bases" are recognised, planned for, and carefully managed in such processes.

Secondly, the MCPP experience has shown that the response to the complex challenges in mining regions does not lie in adding more regulatory/legal and policy emphasis to the prevailing, already highly transactional bilateral collaboration landscape. Instead, municipalities should receive far more attention when laws are drafted and policies prepared by the national sphere of government for mining regions. Importantly in this regard is recognising the strain that one–on–one investment agreements between mines and communities often place on municipalities – institutions that, unlike mines and communities, lack the leverage, human and fiscal capacity and power to assert themselves in these negotiations. In terms of the current legal and policy framework, municipalities are expected to coordinate regional development, yet they are structurally weakened in a system that routes resources, attention, and accountability through direct mine–community deals. Making matters even worse, decision–making on "the right to mine" is located not in the municipal sphere, but far away in the national sphere of government.

What the MCPP has begun to demonstrate is that a less obvious, but potentially more effective intervention lies in strengthening the capacity and positioning of the key authorities in mining regions, i.e., the local and district municipalities. The MCPP has, however, also illustrated just how far the capacity demands of genuine collaborative planning exceed what is normally expected in business–as–usual modes of planning and facilitation. These capacities extend well beyond convening meetings or producing plans, and include the ability to (1) communicate openly, respectfully and meaningfully with a wide range of role–players; (2) develop and maintain joint evidence bases; (3) undertake joint scenario development; (4) conduct shared modelling and analysis, and coordinate joint implementation – all of which are necessary to ensure credible, mutually valuable and sustainable collaboration, and to translate it into tangible impacts on the ground.

Thirdly, the MCPP has exposed the structural difficulty of bridging two very different worlds and their accompanying "perceptual and lived registers". Mining operates in a world of its own, one shaped by country–level negotiations, heavily regulated internal processes, shareholder expectations and global corporate frameworks. For mines accustomed to engaging at the national level, and with stakeholders familiar with the laws, policies and conditions in this realm, working with local governments is unfamiliar and often difficult. Given how tightly their own processes are regulated, plugging into local collaborative planning processes is a real, structural challenge. At the same time, municipal planning processes run on their own logic and timelines. The result is that processes run in parallel, with each one operating according to its own rules and particularities, and very little meaningful intersection, instead of working in tandem.

As proposed at numerous points in this chapter, this is where the value of an intermediary entity/structure becomes clear, and where the contribution offered by the experiences of the MCPP as such an intermediary capacity–building programme is perhaps most distinct. The intermediary role is not only about strengthening municipalities' capacity to plan and coordinate. It is equally about building mining

companies' understanding of why the state and formal collaborative planning processes matter, moving mining companies to see local government not as an obstacle or an irrelevant entity, but rather as an essential institutional partner for the long–term sustainability of the regions in which they operate. Strengthening this mutual understanding, grounded in shared evidence and trust, and cemented by jointly prepared and pursued future scenarios, appears to bear initial fruit. In the case of the MCPP, this was not done by tightening or hardening regulations and transactional obligations, but by creating the conditions under which collaborative regional planning can become the multi–actor coordinating mechanism it was always intended to be.

In this sense, the MCPP's contribution to the body of collaborative development planning in mining regions is twofold. Firstly, it assists by naming the challenge clearly, i.e., that direct, bilateral engagement between mines and communities and/or municipalities, however well–intentioned, is no substitute for inclusive multi–stakeholder, meaningful and deliberative regional governance and planning. Secondly, and following from this, it points towards a solution that is not the obvious one – rather than regulating mine–community collaboration more tightly, invest continuously in the institutions, relationships, shared knowledge and intermediary capacity that make genuine regional coordination possible, meaningful, impactful and sustainable.

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