

From Fields to Frontlines: A Rural South African Farming Community's Struggle Against a multinational Iron-Ore Giant

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Abstract

While political ecology has long explored issues of conflict and resistance, there remains a critical gap in understanding how class, race, and alliances are built, maintained, and mobilized effectively. This is particularly relevant in anti-mining movements, where affected communities often comprise diverse racial and socioeconomic groups. The dynamics of collaboration in such settings merit deeper investigation. This paper examines grassroots resistance to a proposed iron-ore mine by Jindal in the agricultural region of Melmoth, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Despite the involvement of external experts, local residents retained leadership and control of the campaign, ultimately succeeding in halting the initial mining application. By framing the struggle as one of environmental justice, the movement avoided becoming exclusionary or elitist. The study emphasizes the significance of strategic organizing, cross-class and cross-racial solidarity, and the importance of effective leadership and networks in empowering marginalized communities.

Keywords

Mining, resistance, political ecology, environmental justice, mobilisation, networking, civil society, community empowerment.