

‘This is our house, we deserve to know’: Potential Impacts of Fracking on Habitat and Livelihoods in the Drakensberg, South Africa

Brenda Chatira-Muchopa¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8130-4695>

Joshua Risiro

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5151-3303>

Tejbir Singh-Rana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8069-0165>

Abstract

Contemporary literature reveals that there is significant growth in scholarly attention on fracking globally. This paper draws from an interpretivist study that explored the potential impacts of fracking on communities in the Drakensberg Mountains, an area where fracking will consume excesses of water in a water stressed region. The research was carried out amongst the amaZizi community in the Drakensberg Mountains. A qualitative case study research approach was utilized for data generation by the researchers. The researchers utilized the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach coupled with the Asset Based Community Development approach that served as a theoretical to guide. Data were generated using three tools: semi-structured interviews, mini-focus group discussions and participatory observations. Thematic analysis was used by the researchers to identify emerging themes that were used to present and analyse the findings. Central to the findings was the contention that there was a lack of engagement with the communities about

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fracking and no active participation and collective decision-making with the amaZizi community in the Drakensberg Mountains. The study recommends that the government, its representatives, and fracking companies engage in extensive community consultations and include the traditional leadership in rural areas to ensure understanding of the process and its impacts for the amaZizi people. We recommend that there is the potential to avert a foreseeable challenge when fracking commences.

Keywords: Heritage Sites, Fracking, Habitat, Asset Based Community, Sustainable Livelihood Approach, Wetlands, Ground water, Interpretivist paradigm, Community Decision Making, Traditional Healers, Displacement.

1 Background

Recent studies reveal growing scholarly attention on fracking globally. Oil and gas companies use an advanced drilling method called hydraulic fracturing (DiChristopher & Schoen 2017; Staddon, Brown & Hayes 2016) to access underground oil and gas reserves. DiChristopher and Schoen (2017) state that these ‘frackers’ inject water, sand, and chemicals into the rock strata underground at high pressure to create a network of fractures in shale rock formations that allow oil and gas to flow. Fracking is a controversial method used to extract shale gas by breaking rock and it is argued to be very harmful to the environment (Staff 2018). Although fracking has been ongoing in the USA since the 1990s, the industry is in its infancy elsewhere in the world (Maieran 2021). Howarth (2015) notes that fracking contributes to the construction of socio-economic infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication, schools, and hospitals. However, recent evidence from Colorado and New Mexico reveals that despite oil and gas companies even purporting that though fracking creates high employment, they were also responsible for community exposure to toxic and radioactive materials leading to neurological damage. Additionally, fracking activities were blamed for the loss of livelihoods as companies enforced mineral rights without compensation for indigenous people (Maieran 2021). In some cases, fracking led to the contamination of water, destroying wetlands and microbiology with bromide and methane poisoning (King 2012). Havadi (2020) argues that ‘the process of fracking is controversial. The potential harm to the environment and local communities is polarizing’. In America,

opponents have argued that fracking causes surface and groundwater contamination and air pollution, all of which ultimately affect the livelihoods of local communities (DiChristopher & Schoen 2017). Additionally, due to the negative impacts on livelihoods and the environment, fracking has been banned in several countries. Staff (2018) reports that Ireland has followed European Union members France, Germany, and Bulgaria in banning fracking. France was the first European country to place a ban in 2011. Bulgaria followed France just a year later, banning fracking in 2012. Anti-fracking laws banning the extraction method found its way into the statute books of Germany in 2016. Therefore, several studies globally suggest that the negative impacts of fracking could outweigh the economic and energy benefits associated with fracking, lauded by gas and oil companies and some governments. Due to these negative impacts, France, Germany and Bulgaria have accordingly banned fracking.

The Issues: Local Responses to Fracking

Scholars and environmental activists in South Africa have also raised their concerns about the negative impacts of fracking. Naidoo (2021) noted that the burning of liquid natural gas will add to the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for the acceleration of climate change. Jacklin (2020a) argues, ‘Gas is falsely marketed as a clean energy source, but increased gas extraction will contribute to significant increases in greenhouse gas emissions and acceleration of climate change while polluting air and water and taking us deeper into poverty’. In addition, Jacklin (2020a) further notes that fracking contributes to higher methane levels, (which is a powerful greenhouse gas). The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP 2020) indicates that methane has a significant impact on climate change. Jacklin (2020a) also warns that, ‘Surges in methane emissions have been linked with increased fracking activity in the US as a result of false claims of it being a ‘cleaner’ fuel than coal for use as a ‘bridging’ or ‘transitional’ fuel’. Essentially, these views ultimately strongly link fracking to climate change and provide some evidence that it is not a clean source of energy as it is locally being purported to be.

In addition to the above, in another report, Avena Jacklin (head of Climate and Energy Justice at Groundwork and Friends of the Earth South Africa), notes that fossil fuels displace communities and threaten their lively-

hoods (Jacklin 2020b). Jacklin (2020b: 15) states ‘Fossil fuel developments are heavy water users and impact on groundwater reserves and water availability for existing land users’. Fracking could thus potentially be a threat to access to water for small-scale farmers and communities in the Drakensberg. Hence, it can be noted from the above views that fracking contributes to climate change, and it is vital to understand the potential effects of fracking on the livelihoods of communities in the Drakensberg via a study since the SA government was accused by Non-Governmental Organisations and communities of rushing to establish legislation without adequate research and hastening the granting of licenses, especially for fragile areas without consideration of the potential effects on communities. This study sought to offer a livelihoods perspective on the potential effects of fracking in the Drakensberg.

The Drakensberg Heritage Site

To contextualize this study, the researcher utilizes this section to review literature on the Drakensberg Heritage site. Ramagoshi (2013) defines a heritage site as, ‘Heritage sites are places of archaeological or historical significance that have been preserved and are open to the public for visitation’. The historical or archaeological significance of a place is relative to a country and or people. Ramagoshi (2013) states,

A World Heritage Site is an area that is deemed to have exceptional universal value. It is protected and preserved against threats of changing social and economic conditions and natural decay. The World Heritage Convention, a body established by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) is responsible for inscribing the chosen site.

From the above definitions, the Drakensberg can be viewed as both a heritage site and World Heritage site. South Africa has eight World Heritage sites: iSimangaliso Wetland Park, Robben Island, Cradle of Humankind, uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, Cape Floral Region, Vredefort Dome and Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical landscape. The Drakensberg Heritage Site has interested scholars from several fields of study: historians, geographers, anthropologists, cultural

heritage specialists among others. The Maloti Drakensberg Trans-Boundary World Heritage Site is a mixed site known for its density of rock-art and mountain landscape (SAHRA 2021). It consists of two parts: UKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park in South Africa and Sehlabathebe National Park in Lesotho. The uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, composed of 12 protected areas established between 1903 and 1973 has a long history of effective conservation management. Covering 242,813 ha in area, it is large enough to survive as a natural area and to maintain natural values. This section positions the Drakensberg as a world heritage site that requires preservation. The discussion is located with the discourse on sustainable use of natural resources for the next generation. The Drakensberg Heritage Site was listed in the Directory of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Site No. 886) on 21 January 1996 and as World Heritage Site No. 985 by UNESCO on 29 November 2000.

2 Theoretical Frameworks

This study on the potential effects on lives and livelihoods of fracking in the Drakensberg Heritage site is guided by the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) and the Asset Based Community Development Approach (ABCD). Lederman and Lederman (2015: 597) aver ‘all research articles should have a valid theoretical framework to justify the importance and significance of the work’. Thus, this study was grounded on a triangulated theoretical framework.

Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

Natarajan, Newsham, Rigg, and Suhardiman (2022: 1) provide a detailed introduction to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach,

Since its introduction in the early 1990s, the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) (DFID 1999) – or the sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) (UNDP 2017) – has become a mainstay of both academic and applied fieldwork, especially in rural areas of the global South.

The present study borrows from the rich history of the application of the

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach in the rural areas and global South. Su, Song, Ma, Sultanaliev, Ma, Xue, and Fahad (2021: 2) reveal, that the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, ‘is being widely used in poverty reduction and development projects around the World’. The researchers chose the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach because it ‘seeks to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context’ (Serrat 2017: 25). Fracking in the Drakensberg is considered within a framework of the anticipated changes in the livelihoods of the communities. Additionally, Karki (2021: 266) states that the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, ‘offers the prospects of a more coherent and integrated approach...’. Serrat (2017) indicates that the livelihood assets comprise of five capitals: human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital and financial capital. The potential effects of fracking in this study were thus studied in relation to these five capitals which are part of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach. Thus, the researchers sought to enhance this study by adopting a coherent and integrated approach to analyzing the potential effects of fracking in the Drakensberg Heritage Site.

Asset Based Community Development Approach (ABCD)

Additionally, the researchers drew from the Asset Based Community Development approach in this study. It is important to foreground the discussion on the Asset Based Community Development approach with defining Asset-based Community Development. The Coady International Institute cited in International Association for Community Development (2009: 2) defines Asset-based community development as, ‘an approach that recognizes the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities, and helps communities to mobilize and build on these for sustainable development’. This definition emphasizes the importance of the resources of individuals and the community as well as the need to mobilize and build these resources for sustainable development. Green, Moore, and O’Brien (2006) cited by International Association for Community Development (2009: 2) concurs, ‘Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) is a powerful approach focused on discovering and mobilizing the resources that are already present in a community. The ABCD approach provides a way for citizens to find and mobilize what they have to build a stronger community’. Both definitions above focus on the mobilization of

resources already in a community. Additionally, the International Association for Community Development (2009: 2) states, ‘community-initiated development, participation is often built around small, concrete and local realities and geared towards unique local context that people can relate to, therefore a commitment to action can be more visible and personally relevant’. Hence, the researchers drew from these definitions to probe the resources already possessed by the communities in the Drakensberg prior to the fracking. The researchers use the next section to discuss the research methodology.

3 Research Methodology

The researchers used the interpretivist paradigm in this study. The interpretivist paradigm was selected by the researchers because of its ‘fitness of purpose’. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018: 1) aver ‘fitness of purpose’ entails ‘different research paradigms for different research purposes’. Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm due to its ‘concern for the individual’ (Cohen *et al.* 2018: 19) was a fit for the purpose of unpacking the potential impacts of fracking in the Drakensberg mountains. The interpretivist paradigm entailed a ‘study (of) things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 3). Additionally, Neuman (2011: 102) defines the interpretive approach as, ‘the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds’. The researchers conducted qualitative research on the potential impacts of fracking in the Drakensberg mountains. Denzin and Lincoln (2011:3) state ‘Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world... this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’. The researchers’ choice of qualitative research was influenced by Creswell and Poth’s (2018: 45) view that, ‘we conduct qualitative research because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue’. The issue under study was the impact of impending fracking process on lives and livelihoods in an area that has tourism and agricultural activities. Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018:

45) argue ‘We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study’. Hence, the researchers utilized qualitative research as a strategy to empower the farmers and traditional leaders in the Drakensberg to share the stories on how their lives and livelihoods will be impacted by fracking processes.

To ensure methodological congruence, the researchers used case study research. Robson (2002: 181f) suggests that case study can include: ‘an individual case study; a set of individual case studies; a social group study; studies of organizations and institutions; studies of events, roles and relationships’. While Cohen *et al.* (2018: 376) state ‘A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles’. Furthermore, ‘case studies are set in temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case’ (Cohen *et al.* 2018:376). The researchers used a case study of the amaZizi community in the Drakensberg mountains to study the potential impacts of fracking in the Drakensberg mountains. Creswell and Poth (2018: 43) state ‘Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source’. In this study, data was generated using semi-structured interviews and mini-focus group discussions and observations in the field. Essentially, there was triangulation in this study. Johnson and Christensen (2014: 410) explains ‘triangulation is a validation approach based on the search for convergence of results obtained by using multiple investigators, methods, data sources, and/or theoretical perspectives’. ‘Traditionally, four kinds of triangulation were identified: data, methods, investigator, and theory’. Johnson and Christensen (2014: 185) aver, ‘a focus group is a type of group interview in which a moderator leads a discussion with a small group of individuals to examine in detail, how the group members think and feel about a topic’.

Innumerable suggestions are made by scholars on the size of focus group discussions, ranging from six (6) to nine (9) participants (Leedy 2010; Morgan 2010; Sandelowski 2007), as well as six (6) to twelve (12) participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018). However, Krueger (1994: 17) has recommended the usage of very small focus groups, what he terms ‘mini-focus groups’, which consist of three (Morgan 1997) or four (Krugger

& Casey 2014) contributors, when participants are experts in a certain area. Thus, the researchers opted to use mini-focus group discussions due to logistical challenges in the field. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Frisina (2018: 193) states ‘Sampling is the keystone of good qualitative research design. Participants are selected through a purposive sampling strategy, which aims at reflecting a diversity of cases within the population under study’. Twelve participants were selected for the study. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006: 10) further reveal, ‘a theme captures something important about data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’. Bradley, Curry, and Devers (2007: 1766) state that ‘themes are general propositions that emerge from diverse and detail-rich experiences of participants and provide recurrent and unifying ideas regarding the subject of inquiry’. Hence, the researchers used themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Ethical clearance was obtained from the main researchers’ affiliate institution, the University of Kwazulu-Natal and gatekeepers’ permission was also obtained from the relevant authorities. The researchers also left an audit trail. An audit trail is a qualitative strategy to establish the confirmability of a research study’s findings. Confirmability involves establishing that the findings are based on participants’ responses instead the researcher’s own preconceptions and biases. Audit trails are an in-depth approach to illustrating that the findings are based on the participants’ narratives and involve describing how you collected and analysed the data in a transparent manner. The next section of the paper presents the findings from the study.

4 Findings and Discussion

It was interesting to note from both the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions that there was a manifest lack of consultation and active participation by the communities which distanced them from a discussion about their own location.

Community Consultation and Lack of Active Participation

It was interesting to note from both the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions that there was a manifest lack of active participation by

the communities. Gogo, a traditional healer held in high regard, who draws her medicines from the plants and trees in the Drakensberg, and who participated in this study explained,

The government has not consulted or informed us on the prospect of fracking in our area. It shows that the government does not consider our views to be important. People never refuse if there are consultations on development projects. However, the community was never involved.

The above view shows that there was no active participation from a long standing and significant member of the community. The government and fracking companies have not consulted the traditional leaders in the area either and they were shocked to learn that exploratory fracking licences were granted. In addition, in the focus group discussions, participants were asked if it was important for the people to be consulted when fracking is going to take place in their community. Peter, a participant in the focus group discussion explained,

It is important for the people to be consulted. Previously the government has consulted us on development projects in the area. However, this time the government has not consulted us on fracking. We only hear about fracking on the radio. Maybe the government thinks our views are not important on the issue of fracking.

From the above statement, it can be argued that community consultations were missing on fracking in the Drakensberg mountains yet previously the community remembers being consulted on prospective development. The findings are in sync with Shizha (2006) who observed that Imperialism and colonial mentality has often regarded indigenous communities and indigenous knowledge (IK) as inferior and retrogressive, yet their views are important on economic development. Further, Shizha (2005) found that in most colonies in Africa, the indigenous people were not consulted in decision making.

Another participant in the study, Mikaela argued, ‘*This is our house, we deserve to know*’. According to Mikaela, the Drakensberg is their house and therefore it was imperative that they be consulted by the government of the day and fracking companies. The expression ‘it is our house’ suggests

that the amaZizi community regarded the Drakensberg mountains as their heritage and source of their livelihood they have inherited from their ancestors, the mountains thus have intrinsic value for them. Khupe (2014) in a study of Mqatsheni community in South Africa, found that the indigenous people regarded mountains, forests and rivers as part of their heritage worthy preserving. Moreso, Gibbens and Schoeman (2020: 24) noted that rural livelihoods can be protected through ‘the promotion and consolidation of localized decision-making...’ and encouraging active participation of the citizens in their own development. Another study by Gibbens and Schoeman (2020) revealed aptly that active participation from the citizens is important in the promotion of sustainable livelihoods. Drawing from this view, the significance of the active participation of the communities in the Drakensberg becomes evidently important.

The communities are the likely victims or beneficiaries of fracking in their area and therefore their active participation is important. However, it was noted from this study that rural livelihoods in the Drakensberg mountains were going to be adversely impacted due to a lack of localised decision-making and active participation by the local community. Additionally, these findings on the apparent lack of active participation by the communities is indicative that the government and fracking companies are not prioritising the ‘strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities’ in the Drakensberg as espoused in the Asset Based Community Development approach. Fundamentally, the local community has been relegated to the periphery of decision-making while their lives and livelihoods are going to be impacted upon if fracking takes place. The actions by the fracking companies of not consulting the local community is in contravention of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP 2007) which gave indigenous people control over their heritage, traditions, and philosophy.

Battle Lines Drawn in the Sand: Environment and Development Crisis

It was evident from the views expressed in the semi-structured interviews and mini-focus group discussions that there would be impending clashes between the communities in the Drakensberg mountains and the fracking companies. A participant in the semi-structured interviews, John stated

'*sizophati sizovavhimba*' meaning we are going to fight the fracking companies. From the participant's choice of words, the fight against the fracking companies is going to be violent using weapons and vandalism among other methods of shutting down any fracking operations in the Drakensberg mountains, if it happens. Previous attempts to establish fracking operations in South Africa in the Karoo have been met with protracted legal battles. However, some participants in this study had the conviction that fracking companies needed to be stopped violently using weapons and not going the legal route. The researchers noted that resorting to the use of violence by the community was related to the community feeling being left out of decision-making and being disempowered by this lack of community consultation and not being active participants in fracking conversations. Fundamentally, some members of the community were, when denied an avenue to air their grievances and reservations, against fracking in the Drakensberg and are preparing to engage the fracking companies violently. A study of Bafokeng community by Maditsi and Materechera (2021), it was observed that there was need for community engagement, dialogue and partnership for any sustainable development project to be successful.

In addition, another participant Thabo stated, '*If fracking companies proceeded with fracking, we are going to fight them with weapons. We are going to refuse to migrate or relocate from ancestral land*'. From the above findings, it can be noted that there could be a clash between the community and the fracking companies based on two critical reasons: firstly, the locals believe they would be forced to relocate once fracking companies move into the area and secondly, cultural heritage- they will have to abandon the land of their ancestors. Furthermore, the impending clash was also revealed by Gogo, the traditional healer. Gogo stated, '*uKhahlamba (isiZulu name for the Drakensberg mountains) is home to many important herbs that we require for survival. We are not going to give up our heritage without a fight*'. Therefore, it can be argued that there would be a clash between the community and the fracking company due to a multiplicity of reasons. The reasons elucidated by the participants included a lack of community consultation and the medicinal and cultural value attached to the Drakensberg mountains. Dei (2013), Khupe (2014) and Risiro (2020) noted that indigenous people associated objects such as mountains with ancestral spirits since traditional chiefs are buried in the mountains, thus the mountains also have spiritual value. The study further confirms findings by Jaravaza *et*

al. (2023) who revealed that rural communities rely greatly on traditional herbs to treat various ailments.

The researchers do argue impending clashes are expected whenever there is a lack of adequate community consultation and engagement on issues that could disrupt the everyday lives of a community. Providing a platform for engagement will alleviate any fears and concerns from the members of the community. However, the findings from this study suggest that consultations were absent especially with traditional leadership, the small-scale farmers, and traditional healers in amaZizi.

Displacement and Relocation

Another important finding from the study was that they would be dislodged from their land and homes and the community was going to resist displacement and relocation. One participant Mikaela stated, *‘Like what I told you earlier, this is our house. This is our land. Our ancestors left this land to us, and no one is going to displace us without a fight’*. The above statement shows that some members of the amaZizi community fear being displaced and relocated. It was also evident that the community was going to resist this. Drakensberg was portrayed as ancestral land by the participants in this study. Gogo, a traditional healer, lamented that displacement and relocation would deprive the community of access to important traditional medicines that are available in the Drakensberg mountains. Gogo explained,

The herbs that we use in our rituals were passed from one generation to another. Some of these herbs are only available in the Drakensberg mountains and if fracking displaces us, we will lose our way of life. Traditional medicines are important to our people.

From the above statement, the researchers argue that displacement and relocation have significant implications for the practices of African traditional healers in making their medicines and indigenous knowledge. African traditional medicine is said to be one of the oldest and most diverse of all medicine systems, even though the medicine systems are poorly recorded due to the oral tradition. African traditional healing is interwoven with cultural practices and religious beliefs and is therefore regarded as being holistic healing, involving both the body and the mind. The World Health

Organisation (2008) estimates that 80% of Africans use traditional medicine, compared to 60% of the world's population in general. The use of traditional medicines by the public has been reported since years back, and traditional medicine is used for many ailments and conditions including for HIV, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, pain, gynaecological disorders, mental disorders, and asthma. Resultantly the impact of fracking needs to be understood within the context of Drakensberg as a source of traditional life and indigenous knowledge: where healers create traditional herbal medicines from local plants and trees for communities in the amaZizi area. Traditional healing is also a livelihood for some community members, and this has ramifications.

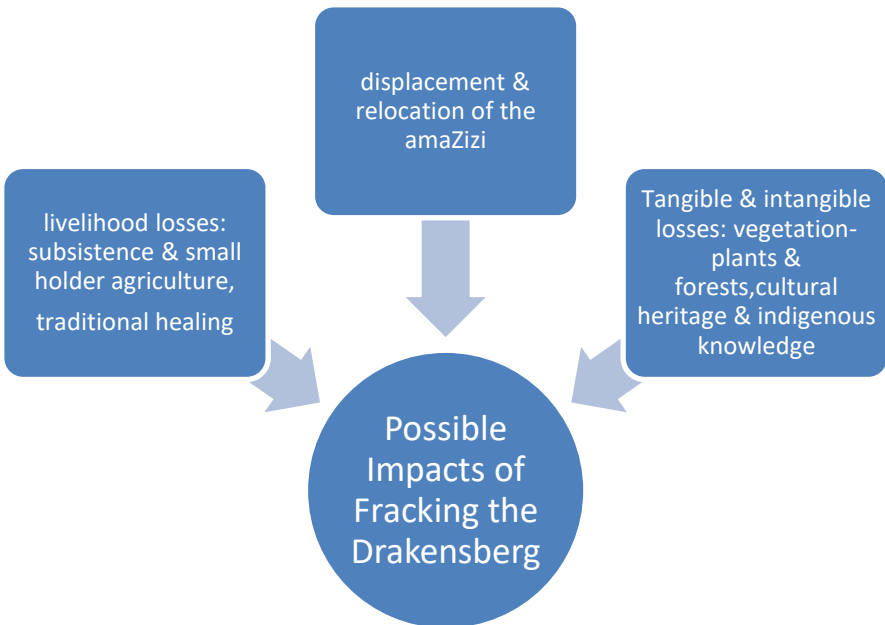
Impact on Livelihoods

This study revealed the significance of consulting with local communities regarding decisions that affect their lives and the environment. Apart from the impact on traditional healers, a local farmer, Themba explained not just the cultural significance but the impact on community agriculture as some of them are subsistence farmers whilst many are small holder farmers, *'Our community relies on these mountains for survival. Our livelihoods are under threat from the oil companies. These mountains are important for our communication with our ancestors for rain that we need for our farming activities'*.

Themba's statement highlights that the Drakensberg is not merely a piece of land, but rather a home to numerous communities whose livelihoods and cultural practices are intricately linked to the environment. The findings are consistent with Risiro's (2020) study in Zimbabwe where he noted that indigenous people performed rainmaking ceremonies in mountains and forests in which they request rains and protection from environmental hazards from their ancestors. By engaging in meaningful and inclusive consultation with local communities, authorities can promote equitable and sustainable environmental management that considers the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders. This finding aligns with the views expressed by Gibbens and Schoeman (2020), who argued for the protection of rural livelihoods through localized decision-making and active citizen participation in their own development. The study by Gibbens and Schoeman (2020) further demonstrated the importance of active community partici-

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pation in promoting sustainable livelihoods. Hence, it becomes evident that the active involvement of communities in the Drakensberg is crucial since they are likely to be impacted by fracking activities in their area. However, the study also revealed that rural livelihoods in the Drakensberg mountains would be negatively affected due to a lack of localized decision-making and active participation by local communities. These findings highlight that the resources of individuals and communities, as advocated by the Asset-Based Community Development approach have been overlooked by government and in the impact assessment report undertaken by the fracking company. Consequently, the local community feel that they have been marginalized while facing various possible impacts on their lives constituting livelihood losses, tangible and intangible losses and physical displacement and relocation.



Considering these findings, community consultation emerges as essential in decision-making processes, particularly concerning fracking in the Drakensberg mountains. The study underscores the need for localized decision-making and active community participation in their own develop-

ment to foster sustainable livelihoods while safeguarding rural livelihoods. Participants in the study emphasized the significance of localized decision-making by asserting the Drakensberg as their home area, indicating the oversight by the government and fracking companies in failing to consult the people. Furthermore, the Asset-Based Community Development approach can provide guidance on harnessing and leveraging the strengths, gifts, talents, and resources of individuals and communities in the development process. Therefore, it is crucial for the government and the fracking company involved in the exploration right 350 to prioritize community consultation in decision-making processes to ensure thorough assessment and mitigation of the impacts of fracking on rural livelihoods. Moreover, community consultation can foster a sense of ownership among the communities affected by fracking, leading to more sustainable outcomes for all stakeholders. This can be achieved through community-led initiatives, participatory planning processes, and collaborative decision-making forums that value and incorporate everyone's voice or multiple voices.

5 Conclusion

Contemporary literature reveals that there is significant growth in scholarly attention on fracking globally. This paper draws from a study that explored the potential impacts of fracking on one community in the Drakensberg mountains which may be affected by exploration right 350 which was granted by the South African government to Rhino Oil and Gas. Central to the findings was the view that there was no engagement with the communities and no active participation from the communities in the Drakensberg mountains. The study further exposed that the amaZizi community regarded the Drakensberg mountains as having intrinsic value: spiritual value, part of their heritage and a source of livelihood (farming, medicinal herbs) which they inherited from the ancestors. The mountains also have cultural significance as the AmaZizi perform their rainmaking ceremonies to sustain their farming activities. The amaZizi participants were not prepared to let the mountains and its surroundings go to fracking companies.

6 Recommendations

Considering these findings, community consultation emerges as essential in

decision-making processes, particularly concerning fracking in the Drakensberg mountains. The study underscores the need for localized decision-making and active community participation in their own development to foster sustainable livelihoods while safeguarding rural livelihoods. Participants in the study emphasized the significance of localized decision-making by asserting the Drakensberg as their home area, indicating the oversight by the government and fracking companies in failing to consult the people. Furthermore, the Asset-Based Community Development approach can provide guidance on harnessing and leveraging the strengths, gifts, talents, and resources of individuals and communities in the development process. Therefore, it is crucial for the government and the fracking company involved in the exploration right 350 to prioritize community consultation in decision-making processes to ensure thorough assessment and mitigation of the impacts of fracking on rural livelihoods. Moreover, community consultation can foster a sense of ownership among the communities affected by fracking, leading to more sustainable outcomes for all stakeholders. This can be achieved through community-led initiatives, participatory planning processes, and collaborative decision-making forums that value and incorporate multiple stakeholder voices. This study recommends that the government and the fracking company engage in extensive community consultations forthwith.

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Brenda Chatira-Muchopa
Doctoral Student
Geography Education
University of Kwazulu-Natal
brendachatira@gmail.com

Dr. Joshua Risiro
Lecturer
Geography and Environmental Science
School of Education
Great Zimbabwe University
jrisiro@gmail.com

Brenda Chatira-Muchopa, Joshua Risiro & Tejbir Singh-Rana

Tejbir Singh-Rana
Associate Professor
Geography
Shivaji College
University of Delhi
ranatejbir@gmail.com