



Motivation

In the communities that surround large-scale mining sites across the developing world, air and noise pollution disrupts people's daily lives and environmental degradation threatens their livelihoods. When companies do not adequately address these grievances, they can boil over to protest or violent conflict. In South Africa alone, police recorded 10,000 crowd incidents near mines between 2010 and 2013.

One often-proposed solution to address these complaints and prevent conflict is a grievance redress mechanism. Mining companies set up community relations offices and grievance redress protocols to surface and resolve grievances in the communities in which they work.

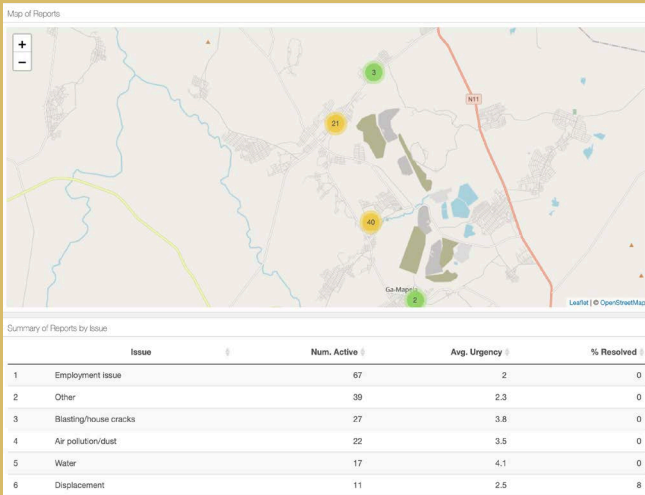
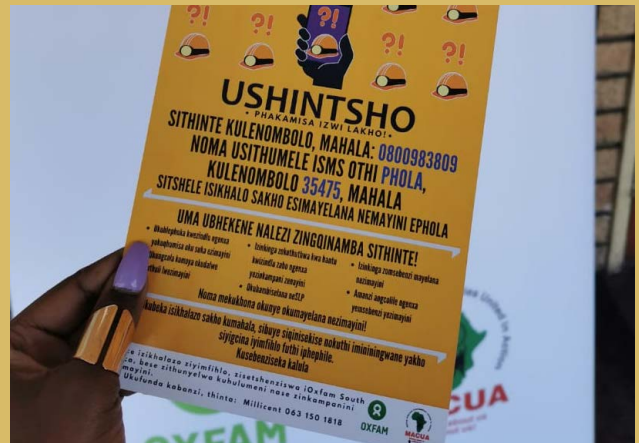
Do these mechanisms work? Does establishing a line of communication between community and company lead to grievances being identified and resolved? We sought to answer that question by piloting an independent and transparent grievance redress platform in three mining communities in South Africa.

The Pilot

We partnered with Oxfam South Africa, the grassroots organization Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA), and the social enterprise Ulula to develop and pilot a mobile-based grievance redress platform. The platform, named *Ushintsho*, enabled citizens to freely and anonymously submit mining related complaints via SMS or voice call.

USHINTSHO

Community members submitted grievances by texting or calling a hotline number. Through an automated process, the community member indicated the type, severity, and urgency of the grievance. Oxfam checked each of the submitted grievances, and verified complaints were emailed every week to mining company representatives. Company representatives were instructed to follow-up with Oxfam to resolve the grievances, while community members who submitted grievances were kept anonymous. Follow-up action by the companies would be noted in *Ushintsho*. A public web-dashboard displayed the number, types, and urgency of the grievances, and the percentage resolved by the company (See below).



Following existing grievance redress mechanisms, *Ushintsho* collected relevant details of the complaint and relayed that information to the relevant company. *Ushintsho* also displayed two novel aspects. First, it was operated by an independent third-party – Oxfam and MACAU – to enable sharing grievances and company responses with the public. *Ushintsho* also simplified the grievance redress process by allowing any community member with a cellphone to call in or text a concern. Leveraging the widespread cellphone ownership in mining communities, we designed *Ushintsho* to source many more grievances for a lower cost than deploying company representatives.

In September 2019, after a nine-month human-centered design and consultative process, we launched *Ushintsho* in three pilot mining communities in three provinces, with approximately 300 community members attending the launch events. Oxfam and MACUA conducted weekly tabling and organized door-to-door community drives to market the program.



Engaging Citizens to Address Company-Community Conflict at South African Mines

The Results

During the six-month pilot, *Ushintsho* received 415 grievances, 333 of which Oxfam verified as reliable. The most common complaints submitted concerned lack of employment opportunities, accounting for nearly 40% of all grievances. The next two most common were property damage from blasting (18%) and air pollution (14%). Interruption of water services and water contamination (11%) comprised the most urgent issues submitted to the platform.

We observed that *Ushintsho* required intensive face-to-face outreach to encourage community members to report grievances. Roughly half of the reports were sent within two days following door-to-door drives, wherein *Ushintsho* team members visited households to explain the platform and demonstrate how to submit a grievance. Given the high cost of outreach, **each grievance was costly to generate**. Factoring in fixed program costs, each grievance cost \$160.66.

We forwarded all 333 verified grievances to company representatives. Yet, there is no evidence that mining companies responded to any of the reported grievances. No company communicated follow-up action to Oxfam. No *Ushintsho* user indicated that the mining company had contacted them in response to their report. **Companies did not act on grievances sourced through the independent, anonymous platform**. More substantial incentives, or modifications to the theory-of-change of grievance redress mechanisms, may be required to compel companies to act

