

Targeted investigation reports 2024

Allen Farm:

The impact of the contaminated/dirty river on the community



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1. Background and Context

The community of Allen Farm is in Danhauser municipality, Ward 7. Dannhauser is a coal mining town, where coal mining has taken place for a century already. It was named after Renier Dannhauser, a German settler, who purchased the farm Palmietfontein from the Natal Government in 1872. It was proclaimed a village in 1937.

The community of Allen Farm is in a deep rural area with little infrastructure and no development projects. The community does not have a community hall, no early childhood development centres, no clinic and no high school. The community depends on agriculture and farming for survival. They grow their own food and sell it to the market in Danhauser. They also sell their livestock at an auction sale yard. This is the only way they make money to put bread on their tables.

2. Problem description

Ever since the mine came in our community, we have been experiencing water shortages, so this river is the only source of water in our community. It is very important to preserve the water that we have. But some community members of Allen Farm dump their waste in the river. We believe that some community members don't have the knowledge that dumping waste in the river can harmful to their health well-being. In addition to dumping waste some community members also use left overs and waste from the coal mine to prepare usable coal for heating and cooking in their own homes. Since the mine is very close to this river, we also fear that when it is rainy season the river gets easily contaminated by mine waste.

When the river is contaminated the community can be exposed to water-borne diseases like cholera and other related disease because they drink water from the contaminated stream. Also, nowadays traditional healers find it very difficult to perform their ritual using that stream because it's water is no longer clean.



Picture 1: Women preparing coal for fire in the river.



Picture 2: Community Activist Lucky Shabalala



Picture 3: Community members

This year community activists organised a river clean up campaign. “During the river cleanup campaign we found a lot of medical waste inside the river. Our concern is that the Department of Health is not taking care of his waste because many people from the community are using this river as an alternative water source as the municipality is refusing to provide the community with enough water.” said Lucky Shabalala.

Sisonke Environmental Justice Network initiated the river clean up campaign because many mine dumps are too close to the river and many times we find leaks from the mine’s acid mine drainage flowing into the river but there is no sign of a Mine Manager or someone from the Department of Mineral Resources monitoring the situation.



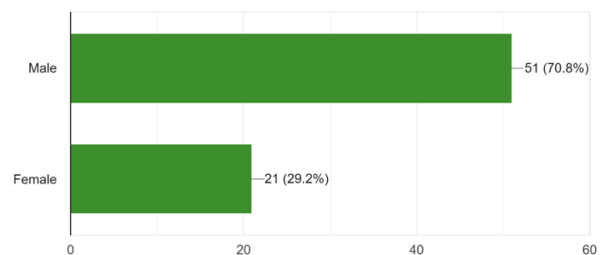
The problem that the community has is, that the coal mine is very close to the community and it affects them a lot. Villagers share:

“The mine damaged the beautiful stream that we used during times of water scarcity. Before the mine came we had plenty of water for our gardens and livestock. After the mine arrived we started to experience shortage of water because when the mine got their water use license they diverted the water from the river to their washing plant. We now have to wait for the municipal water tanker to provide us with water once a month. We also have acid mine drainage in the stream and when livestock drink the water they die. A lot of grazing land was taken by the mine. The remaining fields are dry now and livestock doesn’t get enough food because of the shortage of grazing land. The mountain which we used as a community to consult our ancestors and ask for rain is no longer a mountain of the community because it is full of mine waste. Since the mine came to extract coal, plants are no longer growing on the mountain. Some people used the mountain to collect materials to make brooms, to get herbs and Mpepho, which they sold at the local market.”

3. Investigation results

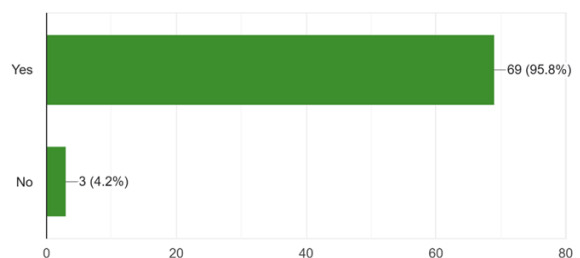
This year we conducted a survey with the community to understand their behavior and the pollution of the river a bit better. 72 people responded to the survey. 70,8% of the survey respondents from Allen Farm were male and 29,2% were female. Two out of three respondents (69,4%) were young people, 30,6% were above 35 years.

Gender
72 responses



The crucial importance of the river for the livelihoods of people in Allen Farm was displayed when we asked whether people are using the water from the stream of tap or borehole water. 95,8% of the respondents said that they are using and relying on the water from the stream. Only 3 of the 72 people said that they are using tap and borehole water.

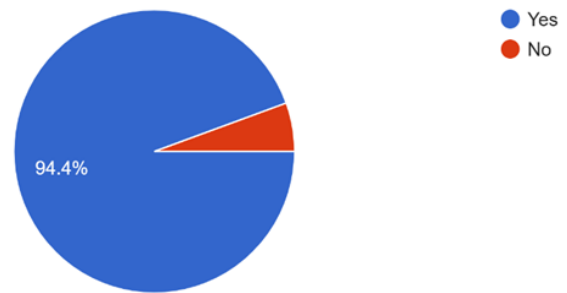
Are you using stream water instead of tap or borehole water?
72 responses



On the question whether people sometimes dump waste in the stream 94,4% of the respondents said yes. This is nearly everyone. So nearly everyone relies on the water but also pollutes it at the same time.

Do you sometimes dump waste in the river?

72 responses



The 72 respondents gave us reasons why they dispose waste in the river instead of using proper waste disposal methods. In this question respondents were able to select all answers that fitted for them. The results show that it is largely the lack of bins, the lack of service delivery and the lack of knowledge that lead to waste dumping.

The responses were as follows:

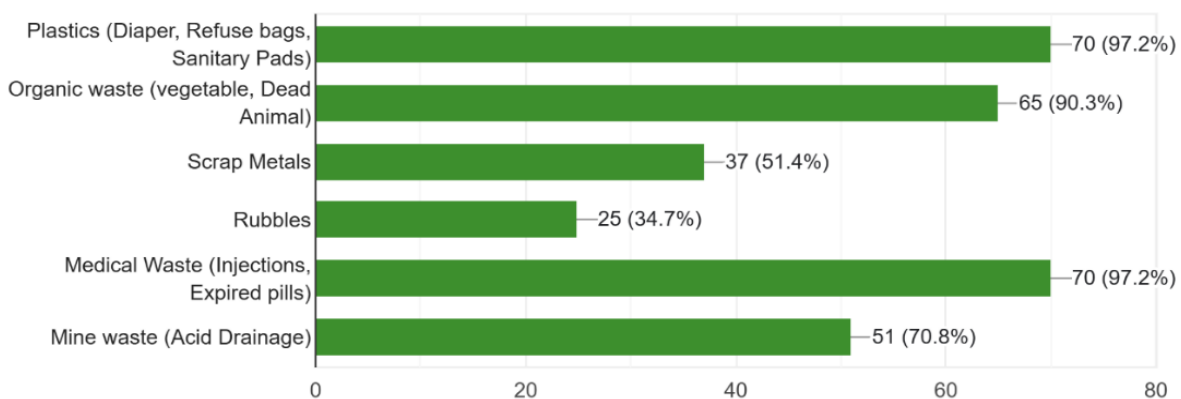
- 98,6% mentioned that it is due to the lack of bins to dump waste (municipality bins or household bins)
- 95,8% said it is due to a lack of service delivery, for example in the absence of waste bins being provided and emptied
- 87,5% said it is due to a lack of knowledge when it comes to the waste management and
- 18,1% indicated that it is due to a lack of discipline.

We also asked people how long they have already experienced the contaminated stream. Two out of three respondents (65,3%) said that they have experience the problem for 5 years or more than 5 years. On in three (34,7%) said that they experienced the issue of the contaminated stream water for less than 5 years.

We also checked with the respondents which contaminants they found in the water. In their responses plastic (including diapers and sanitary pads) and medical waste (old syringes from injections, expired pills) came first and where identified by 97,2 % of the respondents. 90% said that they see organic waste like vegetables and dead animals. 70,8 % pointed to mine waste (acid drainage), 51,4% to scrap metals and rubbles.

How many of the different pollutants or contaminants listed below in the river have been identified, based on local knowledge or testing?

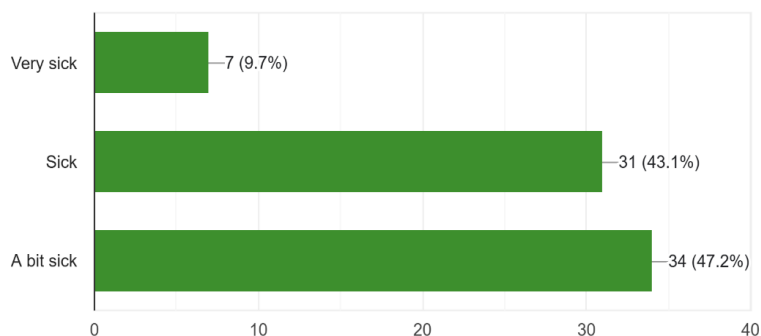
72 responses



In addition, we asked respondents how severely sick they get from the water. The results show that people get sick but mostly not very sick. 9,7% said that they get very sick while 43,1% said they get sick and 47,2% said they get a bit sick.

How severely sick do people get, if they sick?

72 responses



When we asked respondents what they think should be done to change the situation the following recommendations were made:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Educate the community, and mines about the importance of the environment.
2. We want the municipality to provide us with extra water tanks and the Department of Water and Sanitation must test the stream water to see if it is safe for us and our livestock
3. We should check and test the water first before confronting municipality and the mine about this issue.
4. We should confront the municipality about the lack of service delivery (waste bins)
5. We also need the municipality to come and see what we drink daily because they get money from Magdalena mine every year through their budget "Road show". Nothing of that money seems to flow back into the community.
6. The municipality needs to know about this so that will provide us with a clean water and waste bins.

4. What are the views of stakeholders on the issues

Women in the community

Many women at Allen Farm used to have their own gardens before the mine came. Due to the lack of service delivery from the municipality the community is now relying on the stream water for watering their plants and they use the water for cooking, bathing and drinking. The fact that the stream water is polluted affects women a lot. Women suffer when they have to walk for 3kms with a wheelbarrow to fetch clean water next to the main road. The women are also carrying the heavy load of transporting children to and from schools and clinics. They are the ones taking care of the sick.

Traditional healers

Many of the traditional healers cannot perform their work anymore when the steam water is polluted by domestic waste that is dumped into the stream and if there is acid mine draining from the mine flowing into the river. Since the mine came it's not easy for them to consult their ancestors in the mountains and ask for rain or plant a garden of Nomhubulwano on top of the mountain. In the mountain they collect different herbs to heal the local people but the mine had an impact on the growth of all the traditional herbs. It has taken the all underground water that was feeding their herbs. Water - is really the most precious resource that traditional healers use - to mix their herbs or for bathing people during healing.

Livestock owners and the environment

The mine damaged the beautiful stream that the community used during times of water scarcity. Many livestock owners of the Koppie Allen Farm lost their livestock because of the unclean water that comes out of the mine and flows through to the stream. After the mine arrived, we started to experience a shortage of water because when the mine got their water use license, they diverted the water to their washing plant. We also have acid mine drainage in the stream and when livestock drink that water they die. A lot of grazing land was taken by the mine. The remaining fields are dry now and livestock doesn't get enough food because of shortage of grazing land. The mountain, which we used as a community to consult the ancestors and ask for rain, is no longer a mountain of the community because it is full of mine dump waste.

5. Advocacy approach and action

Based on the survey and the feedback from stakeholders in the community we propose the following approach towards the government and in relation to the community:

- To get independent water testes done (including pH and chemicals) because by doing so we will be able to know whether the water is safe to be consumed by human beings and livestock or too contaminated to be consumed.
- On the basis of the water tests engage Dannhauser Local Municipality and Amajuba District Municipality about the matter.
- Approach the local municipality to provide and collect waste and then install litter bins - the aim is to reduce unnecessary litter.
- Request from the Local Municipality to provide extra Jojo tanks with clean water.
- Make the Siyakhuculula campaign an ongoing initiative:
 - Engage with community members to participate in the awareness and clean-up campaign
 - Remove trash during the river cleanup - we will focus on collecting waste and separate waste by source and
 - Creating sustainable practices so that we can make a positive impact on our environment and keep our rivers clean and healthy.

We acknowledge and appreciate the support
from the following organisations:

Bread for the World

Church of Sweden

Ford Foundation

Norwegian Church Aid

Steelworkers Humanity Fund – Canada.

Issued by



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