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The role of knowledge management and information sharing in capacity building for sustainable development—an example from South Africa

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Abstract

The coastal areas of the Northern Cape, South Africa, and the transfrontier region with Namibia are in a state of rapid transformation from a mining-based economy to one supporting diverse and sustainable livelihoods. Land-based diamond mining activities are in the early stages of decommissioning while a number of planning and development initiatives are underway. Key obstacles to integrated planning and development in the region are insufficient and inaccessible information. Knowledge management (KM) and information sharing mechanisms can facilitate meaningful participation and promote decision-making at the local level. The distance learning and information sharing tool is an internet based KM tool that promotes transparency and collaboration and provides open access to information resources for sustainable development.

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1. Introduction

The coastal areas in the Northern Cape, South Africa, and the transfrontier region with Namibia are in a state of rapid transition. For many decades access to 90 percent of the coastline remained restricted due to diamond mining activities (Fig. 1). However, viable land-based diamond deposits in the ancient coastal marine terraces are now becoming depleted causing the major mining houses to begin to

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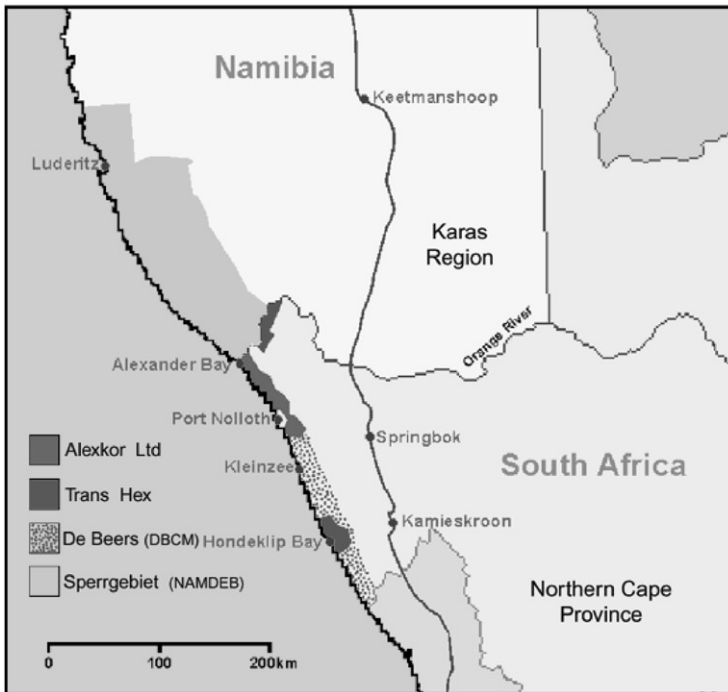


Fig. 1.

scale down their mining activities. This will result in the opening up of vast tracks of coastal areas for land uses other than mining. Downscaling by the diamond mining industry, the largest employer in the region, is already having a dramatic effect on the livelihood of inhabitants. Typically the loss of one job translates to a loss of income for an entire family or extended family. Fortunately alternative livelihood options are emerging through a number of development initiatives and planning processes. Activities in the coastal areas currently include livestock farming, agriculture, fishing and harvesting of living marine resources, mariculture, tourism and conservation. All of these activities are likely to expand in a post-mining era. Careful and pro-active planning that involves all role players is essential if the negative effects of downscaling are to be mitigated through the development of new livelihood options and better utilization of the region's attributes.

This paper investigates the role of knowledge management (KM) and information sharing in facilitating integrated development planning in the coastal areas of the Northern Cape, South Africa, and the transfrontier region with Namibia. The paper describes how the distance learning and information sharing tool (DLIST), a Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded IW:LEARN pilot project, is attempting to aid a collective approach to sustainable development. As DLIST works on the principle of information gathering from a wide range of sources, "lessons learned" from current

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