

# Crossing the divide between mining houses and communities

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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The relationship between mining operations and its surrounding communities is often a tenuous one, somewhat seasoned by a degree of mistrust.

“We need to communicate on an ongoing basis to all our stakeholders, internally and externally via various platforms. However, we found that we were not actually speaking directly to our communities, and that they were unaware of the projects we had undertaken in their communities,” explains Pranill Ramchander, head of corporate communication for Anglo American South Africa.



“The trust deficit that exists between communities and mining companies is a real problem. It is not enough to tell people about mining company initiatives in their community; (initiatives for them to participate in education, healthcare, financial literacy, debt counselling, and enterprise development) they need to understand the initiatives and then it needs to be demonstrated to them that the initiatives do exist.”

## Real and sustainable engagement

So Anglo American has opted to use edutainment to bridge the divide between the two, with *Makarapa City*, a multilingual destination-listening radio series aimed at providing the company with an opportunity for real and sustainable engagement with their mining communities.

The second series recently took to the airwaves and is set around a feuding family, who live in Makarapa City - a fictitious mining community, where the characters are caught between a more traditional view of the world, and the demands and challenges of a modern society around them. Thereby addressing the social issues faced by the mining community. The first series comprised nine episodes, while this season is a 12-parter, recorded in six African languages.

“We had done the traditional route using billboards and print, but this methodology gave us the opportunity to reach our audience in their homes, and because it is a two-way channel to achieve more, instead of hoping that they pick up the newspaper or newsletter, or view the billboard. Switching on the radio to listen to the latest episode is part of their daily routine,” Ramchander says.

## **Creating an emotional attachment**

“Through this series we have connected with over 11m listeners in our mining communities, on their platform of choice, to tackle the issues they face daily,” says Ramchander.

Research shows that this strategy of creating an emotional connection allows for people to work through a process of cognitive change. The audience gets hooked and attached to the characters and the storyline, but while this is happening, attitudes and perceptions start changing and this leads to behavioural change.

It also fostered brand trust for Anglo American. The communities see us in a different light following the campaign, explains Ramchander. “The series has proven to positively influence cognitive, emotional and social change, engaging and empowering the target market on their terms, on their turf, in their language.”

The radio presenters play a key role as they invoke the interest when they introduce the episode. Following the episode, they summarise it and highlight the issue it addresses as well as talk about the competition. “The presenter’s role had to merge into the campaign seamlessly if it was to be authentic. Their role was crucial in the success of the campaign, in particular, with the call to action,” he adds.

The competition entries reflect the series’ success, which were as high as 10,000 entries in a week, and in most instances 90% of the responses were correct.

## **Research**

This success has been verified by research done by Millward Brown, which showed that 68% of respondents found the series easy to understand, while 65% of the respondents found the series informative and authentic. “The audience liked certain characters, while disliking the villains in the story. Important for the company is that 87% of respondents said it changed their perception of the company, and that the company was doing good in the areas of health, education and enterprise development.”

The benefits extend beyond perceptions, with debt relief counselling on site reducing the number of garnishing orders (many of which were illegal) from 5,877 to 799 – a saving of R32,3million in annual debt which equates to R3,000 more in their salary on average for mine workers.

The series has also led to a number of opportunities. “We are thinking of bringing it into a cartoon and then bringing the characters to life. These characters would be embedded into the communities through community newspapers.

## **ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH**

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and

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