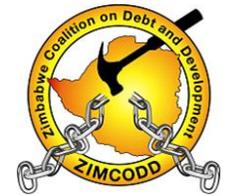


WEEKEND READER

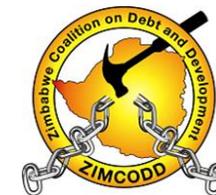


YOUTHS; INEQUALITY & EXTRACTIVES INDUSTRY IN ZIMBABWE

Inequality is the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. It is a concept very much at the heart of social and economic justice. Inequality manifests itself in many forms. It can be based on ethnicity, family background, opportunities, nutrition, health and education. The most common forms of inequalities cut across every sphere of life including “monetary inequality” or, more broadly, inequality in “living conditions” and economic inequality” or “income inequality”. The most pervasive form of inequality in Zimbabwe is entrenched in youths who constitute 67% of Zimbabwe’s population. Youth inequality can be found in all sectors, particularly, the extractives industry.

Zimbabwe’s mining sector has undergone slow governance transformation since independence. The Mines and Minerals Act [Chapter 21:05] has remained unchanged since its promulgation and commencement in 1961. The Act is limited in scope and does not provide for sustainable socio-economic development. There is an ongoing process to amend and develop the Act to ensure that it complies with international best practices. In Zimbabwe’s Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021), the mining sector has been identified as a key source of growth and is expected to alter the country’s development towards a path of sustainable economic and social transformation. In the RBZ Monetary Policy Statement in 2009, the bank estimated that the country has 13 million tons gold, 2.8 billion tons platinum, 930 million tons chromite, 4.5 million tons nickel, 26 billion tons coal, 30 billion tons iron ore and 5.2 million tons copper. Zimbabwe has the largest reserves of coalbed methane in Southern Africa. Despite being endowed with abundant natural resources, Zimbabwe is still plagued by the paradox of plenty; which refers to a state in which countries with an abundance of natural resources have less economic growth, less democracy and worse development outcomes than countries with fewer natural resources.

In an effort to find ways to remedy the issue of inequality in the extractives industry, ZIMCODD as convener of the Fight Inequality Alliance in Zimbabwe (FIAZ), organised a series of national gatherings from the 27th to the 31st of July 2020 as part of the Global Fight Inequality Alliance mobilisation initiative. ZIMCODD created dialogue platforms in and around resource rich areas in Zimbabwe for citizens, including the youth and women, to dialogue and express their aspirations on how they can confront inequality. Over 150 participants in the fora cited that youths remain incapacitated hindering their involvement in and benefiting from extractive sector development. Young people are often excluded from policy making and implementation. ZIMCODD calls for youth-focused policies which allow for inclusion of the youth in the extractives. There is need to establish a mechanism for distributing mineral revenues at the district and village levels for youths who partake in artisanal and small-scale mining. The criminalisation of artisanal and small-scale mining has further worsened the plight of youths in Zimbabwe. With an unemployment rate of over 90%, Zimbabwe should embrace and rationalise artisanal and small-scale mining as a livelihoods issue with a proven capacity to contribute to national development and address the income gap.



Existing legislation does not differentiate between artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and largescale mining (LSM) which inherently favours LSM and is difficult for ASM to comply with and operate legally. Long distances to licensing areas, lengthy processing times and high costs are a barrier to development and growth of young miners at all points in the supply chain (mining, processing and buying). Thus, there are multiple vulnerable points in the supply chain which can be exploited by illicit actors rendering the industry unbearable for youths especially young women in mining. Protection economies (the use of corruption, violence and politics to secure illicit incomes) play a vital role in determining who controls and profits from the extractive sector.

Although laws are neutral in their application, they affect men and women differently, the same rings true for mining laws and practices. Mining has differential impacts on men and women and this extends to participation and the actual benefits of extraction (WILSA, 2019). ZIMCODD calls on the government to implement and enforce sections 17, 56 and 80 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe on gender equality and equity and develop targeted policies to empower women in the mining sector. Women in mining, as well as youths have cited poor working conditions, dismal wages and health and safety concerns as issues that plague them in the extractives sector. They raised concerns of being underpaid and not receiving appropriate protective mining gear such as safety suits and helmets. ZIMCODD calls on the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development to enforce appropriate and uniform health, safety, and environmental guidelines for all players in the extractives industries.

The inequality gap in the mining sector continues to widen due to a lack of transparency and accountability. Pursuant to sustainable development goal number 10 earmarked to achieve reduced inequality, the mining governance and regulatory framework should include principles such as youth and gender equality, public participation and sustainable development. ZIMCODD recommends that citizen participation in mineral resource governance should include all marginalised groups like the youth, women, people living with disabilities, former employees and the elderly living in extractives communities.

It is important to move towards decentralizing licensing and operational processes, in tackling the issue of monopolies, partisan mine allocation and politicization in distribution of resources, as well as to optimize the contribution of mining growth to sustainable development at local level. Progress in the extractives industry is key in testing how government and corporate accountability can pave way to combatting inequality.

The voices of social and economic transformation are growing. Taking cognisance of this, ZIMCODD stresses the need to impose social obligations, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes including youth employment quota to benefit host communities, to holders of exploration and mining licenses and this should be a requirement for the granting and renewing of such licenses. In this way, social and economic transformation can be accomplished. Beyond CSR, ZIMCODD calls for facilitated and increased control and share ownership of natural resources by host communities who bear the brunt of excesses and negatives of extractive industry. Equitable access to means of production is the sustainable way to empower youths and redress existing inequalities.