



THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF MINING: REFLECTIONS FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Zimbabwe is endowed with up to forty minerals¹ including some of the world's most sought-after minerals such as diamonds, gold and lithium. The extraction of these minerals has brought much suffering in the livelihoods of communities in which these mining operations are conducted. These include communities in the Great Dyke provinces, Goromonzi, Gwanda and Matobo. Challenges range from prostitution, 'child marriages', violence, rising disease indicators, poor education and infrastructure amongst others.



Youths engaged in artisanal Mining (Columbus Mavhunga/Voice of America)

Women are in most African settings the most vulnerable group as they bear the brunt of unpaid care work, spending hours on end taking care of their families while limiting their human capital investment (such as education). This phenomenon and patriarchal stereotypes perpetuate the cycle of poverty for women. In mining communities, it is no different. Most mining companies fail to employ women hence poverty, hunger, violence force them to look for alternative sources of income. This reality has seen a third of girls being married before they reach the age of eighteen.² Either families will sell off their children to lessen the burden on themselves, or the girls will be lured by artisanal miners into these illegal unions. In the same vein, another rampant practice of prostitution has been noted on the rise in mining communities due to the disempowerment of women mentioned above. This has inherently led to mining communities presenting as hotspots for various Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including the Human Immune Virus (HIV). The Global Response strategy of 2014 reports that while the country has managed to force the decline of HIV and AIDS, mining towns remain major hotspots for the disease.³

1. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-mining-and-minerals#:~:text=Overview,coal%2C%20lithium%2C%20and%20diamonds>
 2. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/zimbabwe/#:~:text=What's%20the%20prevalence%20rate%3F,married%20before%20their%2018th%20birthday>
 3. <https://www.herald.co.zw/hiv-on-the-prowl-in-mining-towns/ext=What's%20the%20prevalence%20rate%3F,married%20before%20their%2018th%20birthday>

Mining is not only a deeply invasive process to its host society, but will in various levels and ways, alter the structure of the environment in which it is done and sometimes, to the environment's detriment. In a case study conducted in Connemara, a gold mine that closed down in 2000, it was found that fourteen years later, plants and other vegetation had failed to grow on soil at or close to the former mining site.⁴ This can be attributed to the surface mining process that was used to extract minerals during the mine's operational years. However, as surface mining is the most commonly utilised mining process in Zimbabwe painting a bleak picture for the environment across the country, especially where competing with agriculture. Indeed, unsustainable and irresponsible mining practices by mining companies have led to the devastation of many environments.

Bulawayo is currently facing water woes where suburbs have been receiving water only once or twice in a week. This crisis can also be partly attributed to the siltation of the Umzingwane Dam, one of Bulawayo's catchment areas, a place so ravaged by artisanal miners, whose operations left many grounds bare, leading to soil erosion and the ultimate siltation of the catchment area. Environmental practices by mining companies include the pollution of water bodies which have caused residents in Maphisa to be in conflict with the Nyamazana Gold Private Limited's plant. Proximity to their water source has led to contamination due to mining.⁵ The urban mining crisis has also witnessed reports by residents in places like Bulawayo alleging mining operations had caused cracks in their houses and caused some of them to lose valuable property.⁶ In urban Kwekwe, schools and houses alike have fallen inside mining tunnels as a result of the devastating environmental effects of mining.

Despite the gloomy picture painted here, mining has reeled in massive financial gains for Zimbabwe, becoming the biggest earner of foreign currency and contributing immensely to the country's annual Gross Domestic Product.⁷ Mining can also be attributed to creating over half a million jobs in the small and artisanal mining industry,⁸ providing ready employment for many youths, unskilled, uneducated or just lacking economic opportunities. Maybe a more relevant question could be, who is mining profitable to? Is it the government or foreign companies because it is clearly not profitable for ordinary Zimbabweans at all?

Principles of public finance management demand that public funds are used in a transparent manner and that the funds can be accounted for. Revenue received from the mining sector are public funds which should be used in a manner that the majority of society benefits from. One way to do that is through corporate social responsibility which is also a wealth redistribution strategy. There have been ever growing calls for a framework for sustainable corporate social responsibility in Zimbabwe. While focus was on the socio-economic and environmental impacts of mining on host communities this was an effort to lay the foundation necessitating a sustainable corporate social responsibility model in Zimbabwe. Communities should not be punished for being bearers of mineral resources!

4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360039513_INVESTIGATING_SOCIO-ECONOMIC_AND_ENVIRONMENTAL_IMPACTS_OF_MINING_ON_HOST_COMMUNITIES_THE_CASE_OF_CONNEMARA_GOLD_MINING_IN_MIDLANDS_PROVINCE_ZIMBABWE

5. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/thestandard/local/article/200024453/maphisa-residents-fret-over-dam-pollution>

6. <https://www.thezimbabwean.co/2023/10/mine-blasts-threaten-houses-and-schools-in-pumula/>

7. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-mining-and-minerals>

8. <https://www.hararepost.co.zw/en/the-news/business-news/1378-mining-sector-employment-soars>

Recommendations

- Legally mandated corporate social responsibility that is hinged on a community development model for sustainable development and not on a charity model.
- Continued implementation of developmental policies that encourage beneficiation and value addition of minerals by government such as the banning on the export of raw lithium and black granite.
- Strengthening the capacity of our regulatory institutions like the Environmental Management Agency to improve the adherence to sustainable mining practices by mining companies.