



THE WEEKEND READER

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

THE CRISIS OF URBAN MINING: A CASE OF KWEKWE, PUMULA AND HWANGE.

The crisis of urban mining in Zimbabwe has become a daily challenge for communities endowed with mineral resources. From government complexes being condemned in Kwekwe, houses and school blocks falling in, accusations of miners sleeping in dog kennels in Pumula¹ and raging court battles in Hwange, the situation has become dire. This article delves into the contextual dynamics in the fore mentioned localities and proffers recommendations following.

Kwekwe

The "gold city" has been host to dramatic, at times saddening and always horrifying disasters caused by mining activities. The first gold rush in the town was experienced in 1900 giving birth to a host of mining activities in the form of iron, steel, aluminium and glass which have seen Kwekwe named Zimbabwe's richest city in terms of minerals.² However, the mining disasters that have followed have demonstrated the dangers of unregulated and unsustainable mining activities³ driven by economic desperation. In 2023, the media was awash with headlines of a mining tunnel carved underneath a family home. In the same year, a classroom block again collapsed into a mining tunnel, forcing teaching to stop at the school. In years prior, the ground gave in while a man was walking home leading to a fatality.⁴ Mining activities in Kwekwe have caused so much damage that in 2023, government threatened the closure of some mines.⁵

Pumula

Hualin Quarry Mine began its operations in 2021⁶ in the high-density suburb of Pumula North which is also home to peri-urban settlements hence the diversity of its population. Prior to this, Bulawayo residents had not known much mining activities, especially those that are just right behind their backyards. Approaching three years of its operations, Hualin Quarry Mine has been accused by residents of being solely responsible for the cracks on their houses and house walls, the destruction of house furniture and the continued dilapidation of Pumula road networks. The desperation of the residents has seen many, despite understanding the economic consequence of their decision, calling for the closure of the mine.⁷

1. <https://www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk/2022/12/workers-sleep-in-dog-kennels-at-chinese.html>

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwekwe>

3. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/battle-to-save-kwekwe-from-ravages-of-mining/>

4. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/kwekwe-a-city-under-siege-by-illegal-miners/>

5. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/battle-to-save-kwekwe-from-ravages-of-mining/>

6. <https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/residents-quarry-miner-at-loggerheads/o.zw/battle-to-save-kwekwe-from-ravages-of-mining/>

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

Hwange

Dusty fumes surround the little town of Hwange, overwhelmed by the small little particles on top of children's school desks and invading the many clean homes of its residents. The town was founded in 1900 after the discovery of coal⁸ in the Matebelend North province. A resident of the town in a Constituency Indaba meeting held by ZIMCODD in 2023 said, "we used to produce a lot of big mangoes here, now we hardly have mango trees." The environmental impacts that mining has had on the town of Hwange are so palpable, one can almost smell them in the air.

The town has very little development in terms of infrastructure, is constantly battling malaria outbreaks and has one of the poorest road networks in the country, the Bulawayo Victoria Falls Highway. However ironically, Hwange still boasts of being Zimbabwe's biggest coal mining town.

Corporate Social Accountability

"There are many companies in Hwange but we have no schools, roads or clinics, and communities complain about social amenities. So, we should make this a law in the constitution for companies to know that when they come to invest the community should benefit", Richard Moyo, then Minister of State and Devolution Affairs for Matebelend North province.

Corporate Social Accountability (CSR) is defined as a business model that helps a company be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders, and the public.¹⁰ In a loose and common definition, it is the vehicle that so many business ventures "give back" to communities around them with the understanding that it is their duty to do so. In many states around the world, this is a legally mandated responsibility that many businesses will endeavour to make possible whether they want to or not. The Finance Act left this responsibility solely dependent on the companies themselves. Previous years had seen the famous Community Share Ownership Trusts under the Indigenization policy become vehicles of CSR. The successes of this program are debated, since it achieved different successes in different areas. For example, CSR was a vehicle in which a number of schools and a few clinic and clinic blocks were built in Gwanda but the same is not entirely true for places like Zvishavane.

The CSR model is also a wealth redistribution model, using logic, structured in the recognising that mining companies make millions of profits yearly, that mining operations have devastating impacts to the environment as it leaves most of it either dead or uninhabitable, society should in a way be compensated for this loss and a country's natural resource wealth, enjoyed by many.

Mining companies have been notorious in drilling boreholes, painting schools and buying groceries for the marginalised in society. Sunflower, Chinese Company Director of the Hualin Quarry Mine in Pumula was said "We have been helping orphans at Zimkids for a while now, we give them groceries every month, that is a commitment we made to ourselves" while answering questions at a community meeting.¹¹ This is not to single out the company but to reflect the general attitude by most mining entities as evidenced by their actions. Natural Resource Governance expert Mukasiri Sibanda has continually remarked how minerals are in their nature "finite resources". This means that they are bound to run out at some point. Once they do, what will communities who are recipients of the charity model-based CSR have to show for it, groceries?

8. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hwange>

9. <https://cite.org.zw/so-many-counting-for-so-little-an-untold-story-of-a-zimbabwean-mining/>

10. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/corp-social-responsibility.asp>

11. <https://cite.org.zw/pumula-residents-engage-hualin-quarry-mine-over-community-benefits/>

Lack of Consultations.

The constitution of Zimbabwe Chapter 73 read with the Environmental Management Act mandates that local communities are consulted before mining activities take place. In Hwange, the Greater Whange Residents Trust has taken a Chinese company to court to stop them from proceeding with their mining operations. Just prior to this, Beifer Investments was forced to stop already underway mining operations after residents petitioned parliament over the same issue. In the former case, it is alleged that the chief and seven village heads were bribed by the Chinese company using bicycles and groceries. In Pumula North in Bulawayo, there have been similar accusations where only a handful of leaders were consulted before mining operations took place without the presence of the whole community. A move some defend saying it was to adhere to COVID-19 set guidelines. Some leaders who participated in the consultations have said they felt short changed because of their illiteracy which stopped them from fully comprehending the consultation process.

Effective citizen engagement of communities is essential in any decision-making platform. The interruptions to the environment and the lives of people living around mining areas makes their opinions and consent even more needed. It is them that will have to live with the dust, the reverberations from the earth surface, the constant noise, the violence and at times the moving that comes with mining operations.

In conclusion, though the mining sector is currently one of the most important economic sectors in Zimbabwe because of its contribution to foreign currency earning (70%), its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (12%) and contribution to the job market (close to five hundred thousand jobs in the informal economy) it is also prudent that mining activities are regulated and controlled in a way that does not lead to more poverty for local communities. It is even sadder to note that in a country with dozens of discovered minerals, the country's domestic resource mobilisation efforts remain underwhelming and the country continues to suffer under debt distress. Mineral resources in the country have largely not benefited the ordinary citizens but have instead perpetrated higher levels of corruption and entrenched deeper inequalities. The urban space has been riddled by conflicts between miners, legal and illegal destroying infrastructure and killing many exacerbated by the close proximity of mining operations and communities but is not much different from the suffering by rural mining communities.

Recommendations:

- Legally mandated corporate social responsibility that is hinged on a community development model for sustainable development and not on a charity model.
- Strengthening of adherence to the country's laws that mandate effective consultation of communities prior to mining operations taking place.
- 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.
- Ringfencing of mining revenues to drive domestic growth through investing in capital retaining projects such as infrastructure.
- Creation of knowledge sharing platforms between communities and investors to empower communities to be equal participants in the mining of their natural wealth.