



THE Weekend Reader

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Social & Economic Justice"

URGENT CALL FOR FRAMEWORKS THAT BENEFIT AND REACH TO WOMEN IN THE EXTRACTIVES

This week's weekend reader focuses on the lived experiences of women in the extractives which were drawn from the conversations at the 5th Annual Gender and Extractives Symposium, which was held under the theme "Women in leadership advancing an equal future in the extractives sector". The symposium provided an engagement space for various stakeholders working on extractive related issues. Specifically, the symposium was designed to unpack the barriers to effective women participation in the extractives sector; to assess the mechanisms and strategies in place for creating an equal future for women in the extractives sector; To formulate strategies for decent and meaningful work of women in the extractives sector and to launch the decent work campaign.

The role of women in the extractives sector cannot be overemphasized as they contribute significantly to the socio-economic spheres that impact development of communities. However, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 marked a regression in attainment of equal and decent participation of women in the extractives sector owing to the gender disparities that were further exposed by the pandemic.

It is surprising that four decades after Independence, women in the mining sector still face countless challenges with inequalities being more pronounced in the mining sector despite Zimbabwe's effort to address and facilitate gender equality through its legal frameworks. While mining remains the largest foreign currency earner in Zimbabwe, the contribution of women in the mining sector is silent and more often the full benefits of mining accrue to men.

Statistics from both formal and informal mining indicate that women are still underrepresented in the extractives sector including the mining value chains with men constituting 88% in formal mining and 82% in the informal sector. Although there has been an increase in the voices of women in the mining sector, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the challenges that are faced by women with the burden of care work exacerbating the challenges.

The following were shared as barriers that deter women in mining from participating and engaging meaningfully in the extractives sector:

Challenges in accessing capital finance

Most women continue to be financially marginalized and failing to access loans that are meant to empower women, and these often end up empowering women that are not so marginalized in the extractives. The funding that is availed by government continues to be out of reach to most women in the mining sector due to the stringent requirements required to access the availed funds. The main funder which is the Women's bank was described as only providing lip service to women. The stakeholders shared that from the Gold Initiative Fund, which is administered by the Fidelity Refiners and Printers, from a total amount of ZWL\$ 150 million, it is sad to note that women only benefited ZWL\$ 2 million. Lack of information concerning the funds availed also came out as one of the major barriers for women accessing the funds.

Lack of policies and legal frameworks for protecting rights of women in mining

Existing legal frameworks have not promoted equal participation of women in mining sector. The legal frameworks governing mining still do not adequately cater for artisanal and small-scale miners particularly women. The Lack of voice and representation in the decision-making process mean that views and interests of women are not considered in shaping the sector. Even if women are consulted decisions that are often made ignore their concerns.

Traditional beliefs

Mining is still burdened with myths and stereo types that continue to limit women's participation in the extractives sector. Women in mining shared that some of the traditional beliefs which have often placed women to partake on menial jobs, some stereotypes which have often driven women to do low end work include being pickers of chrome, with women being often referred to as "odobhadobha"/ pickers of chrome earning 10usd per tonne which cannot sustain their livelihoods. In gold mining sector, women are shunned as source of bad omen associated with menstrual cycles and cause 'depletion' of the mineral. Such traditional beliefs and stereotypes continue to relegate women to the periphery in mining value chain.

Recommendations

The different stakeholders managed to come up with the following recommendations to address the challenges that are faced by women in the extractives sector:

- There is an urgent need to ensure that information is disseminated to communities and reach out to women in marginalised areas.
- Government should put in place policies and regulatory frameworks that target women to remove economic, social, and cultural barriers that prevent them from participating meaningfully and benefiting economically from the extractives sector.
- There is need to ensure equal participation in decision making to address inequalities in the extractives sector. Mining institutions, associations and departments at various levels should have the participation of women to ensure adequate representation of their voice and concerns.
- There is need for provision of gendered information and useful networks on the opportunities that may arise for women through women focused and women led associations and groups.
- Civil society and other stakeholders should build women's capacity to actively participate and have a voice in key decision-making processes.