ZIMCODD

WEEKEND READER

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

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When Communities Put Mining on Trial

Across Africa, the story of mining is usually told in the language of investment, growth, and opportunity. Governments speak of billions in mineral revenue. Corporations highlight jobs, infrastructure, and corporate social responsibility projects.

But in many mining communities, the story sounds different.

It is the story of land that no longer produces food. Rivers that can no longer be used for drinking or fishing. Families moved from ancestral homes. Young people watching trucks carry wealth away while jobs remain scarce.

For communities living closest to extraction, mining is not just an economic activity it reshapes daily life, access to resources, and whose voices matter. This reality is at the centre of the People's Tribunal for Accountability in Africa's Mining Sector, being held alongside the Alternative Mining Indaba in Cape Town.

A Platform for Lived Experience

The People's Tribunal is not a formal court. It is a community-led space where mining-affected people speak for themselves. Through testimonies, storytelling, and creative expression, communities share what it means to live with the impacts of mining from displacement and polluted water to broken promises and exclusion from decision-making. These are not abstract policy issues. They are lived experiences that rarely make it into official reports.

Beyond Charity, Towards Justice

Mining companies often point to schools, clinics, or small projects as proof of development. While helpful, communities know these efforts are often temporary.

A donated classroom cannot replace lost farmland.
A short-term project cannot secure a future when a mine closes.

Communities are not asking for charity. They are asking for fairness, transparent agreements, meaningful participation, environmental protection and a fair share of benefits from resources taken from their land.

They are asking to be part of decisions that shape their future.

From Isolation to Solidarity

For years, many communities have spoken out alone, sometimes facing intimidation or being ignored. Spaces like the Alternative Mining Indaba help bring these voices together across countries. The People's Tribunal builds that solidarity. It shows communities they are not alone, and it reminds leaders and companies that those most affected by mining are not obstacles to development they are rights holders. Women, youth, farmers, artisanal miners, and faith leaders all bring their perspectives. Together, they are calling for mining that respects people, land, and livelihoods.

Putting People at the Centre

At its heart, the People's Tribunal carries a simple message: nothing about communities should be decided without communities. As global demand for minerals grows, especially for the energy transition, communities are insisting that the future cannot be built on their exclusion and suffering. They are speaking not only of harm, but of hope, hope for a model of mining where development is defined not by what is taken from the ground, but by how well people are able to live with dignity above it.

Education Is Not the Problem — It Is the Evidence

On 24 January, the world marked the International Day of Education. With it came a familiar prompt: If you were the Minister of Education for a day, what would you do?

It is an important question and one that often invites education-specific answers: more classrooms, better textbooks, sustainable feeding programmes, digital access, teacher support. These interventions matter. Zimbabwe has indeed made notable progress.

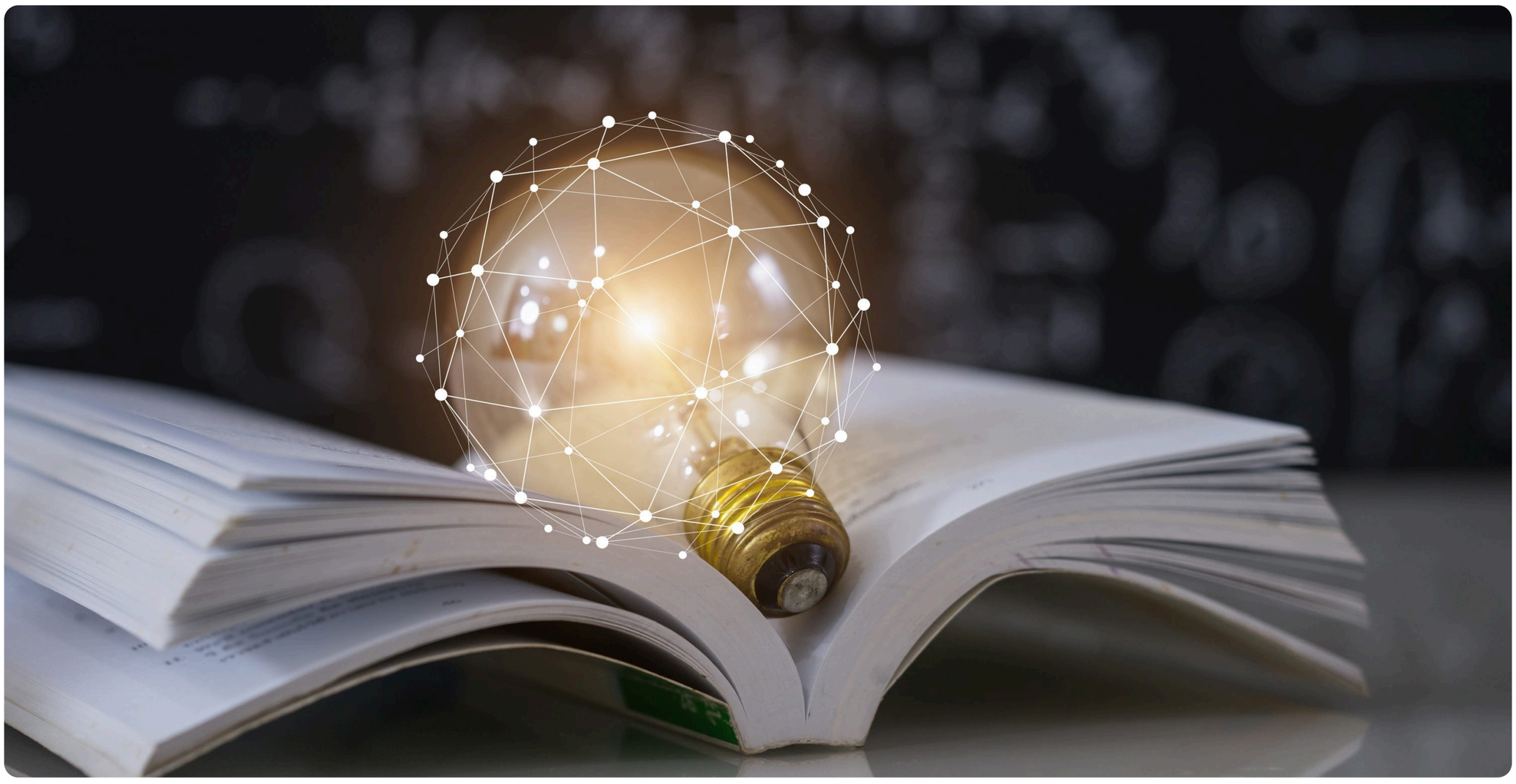
Valerie Tendai Chatindo

SEJA 2025

With a literacy rate of 90.7% for those aged 15 and above, and 89.5% among women, Zimbabwe remains one of the most literate countries in Africa. Government initiatives such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), the School Improvement Grant (SIG), and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) reflect long-standing policy commitment. Partnerships with communities, civil society, and development partners have further strengthened these efforts.

And yet beneath these achievements lies a deeper crisis.

The learning experiences of rural and marginalized learners remain markedly different from those in urban areas. Schools in remote districts often operate with inadequate classrooms, insufficient learning materials, weak feeding programmes, and limited support for learners with disabilities. Donor funding frequently fills the gaps that the state cannot, leaving these schools dependent on external support. This raises a fundamental question: Why, in a country rich in natural resources, are our schools underfunded?



Zimbabwe is a mineral-rich nation. All mineral resources belong to the State. Mining companies operate through licenses and pay royalties, taxes, and fees for extraction. The country also has structures meant to safeguard national wealth for public benefit from the Mutapa Investment Fund to state-linked mining initiatives. And yet, rural schools remain under-resourced, and citizens bear the heaviest fiscal burden through PAYE, VAT, and, most recently, a digital tax. In contrast, other resource-rich countries have leveraged natural wealth to fund public goods. Norway's oil revenues are managed through a sovereign wealth fund that supports free education and social services. Botswana, with diamond revenue, has similarly invested in long-term public welfare, including education. These examples demonstrate that wealth when managed transparently and strategically can translate into tangible benefits for all citizens.

So the question becomes unavoidable: Why are Zimbabwe's children still learning in underfunded classrooms? Why does the state rely so heavily on donors while the country possesses abundant resources? Auditor-General reports have repeatedly highlighted weak controls, revenue leakages, and limited transparency in state-linked entities and funds. Zimbabwe continues to perform poorly on global corruption indices. The root problem is not education it is governance.

Also, why are citizens subjected to rising taxes and digital levies, even as the country's mineral wealth and investment funds remain underutilized for public benefit? Why must everyday people shoulder costs that could be offset by strategic management of national resources? And the consequences are visible: talented young Zimbabweans are leaving, discouraged by a system that makes it nearly impossible to thrive. Starting a business, accessing finance, and participating meaningfully in the economy is increasingly difficult when national wealth is not translated into opportunity for citizens. The country risks becoming a place where only those with foreign capital can meaningfully operate, while ordinary Zimbabweans are sidelined.

Education, then, is not failing on its own. It is a reflection of the wider economic and governance system. Our classrooms bear witness to how wealth, power, and priorities are arranged. If we are serious about inclusive and equitable education, we must ask hard questions: Where is our mineral wealth going? Why are rural schools consistently marginalized? How can national resources be deliberately invested to ensure every child regardless of geography has the chance to learn, grow, and thrive?

Zimbabwe's learners deserve more than statistics. They deserve opportunity. They deserve justice. They deserve a system that works for them, not just on paper, but in every classroom, every school, and every community. And the citizens? They deserve better too.

Stability on Paper, Struggle in Practice, Zimbabwe's Lived Economy

For many ordinary people in Zimbabwe, the economy is not experienced through inflation graphs or exchange-rate tables, but through the daily struggle to stretch shrinking incomes across food, transport, school fees and rent. While the Minister of Finance, Mthuli Ncube, celebrates currency and price stability, households experience a different reality , one where each policy announcement is felt at the till, at the bus stop and on the phone screen when transaction charges are deducted before money even reaches its destination. Official data indicates that annual inflation fell into single digits in early 2026, a development widely presented as a major macro-economic achievement.

In the lived economy, however, higher indirect taxes matter more than headline inflation numbers. In January 2026, government increased the standard rate of Value Added Tax, raising the price of many everyday goods and services at once. At the same time, charges on electronic transfers, card payments and cash withdrawals continue to add hidden layers of cost to ordinary transactions. For low-income families who spend most of their income on basic necessities, these taxes are not abstract fiscal tools but they are daily penalties on survival.

The burden is especially heavy for informal traders and small producers the women selling vegetables, cross-border traders, market vendors and home-based manufacturers who form the backbone of urban and peri-urban livelihoods. Zimbabwe's economy remains highly informal, and international evidence consistently shows that consumption-based taxes are regressive, meaning poorer households spend a larger share of their income on taxed goods and services. For women in the informal sector, rising transaction costs and weak demand translate into longer working hours, shrinking profit margins and increased reliance on short-term debt simply to keep businesses alive.

From a civil society perspective, the central concern is not only how much revenue the state raises, but who carries the burden. Zimbabwe continues to face high poverty levels, with national statistics showing that more than half of the population lives below the poverty line.At the same time, development partners such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund emphasise the importance of macro-economic stability and fiscal discipline, often as a foundation for recovery. Yet the lived economy reveals that stability achieved through heavy reliance on consumption and transaction taxes deepens inequality and social strain.

A sharper picture of Zimbabwe's economy therefore lies in the gap between policy success and social reality. Currency calm and lower headline inflation may reassure markets, but for households facing rising everyday costs and insecure incomes, progress must be measured differently, by whether people can afford food, transport, healthcare and dignity. Until fiscal reforms actively protect low-income and informal workers, especially women, economic **"stability"** will remain a statistic rather than a shared reality.

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