WEEKEND READER

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

06 NOV 2026

Zimbabwe's Mineral Wealth, But What Do Mining Communities Get?



Mining-affected communities have called for stronger laws, environmental protection and a fair share of the country's mineral wealth during a parliamentary engagement convened by the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) on 6 November 2026.

Zimbabwe's mining sector contributes approximately 60% of the country's export earnings. However, for many communities living near mining operations, this wealth has brought limited improvements to their daily lives. Instead, they continue to face water pollution, damaged farmland, displacement, loss of livelihoods and inadequate compensation. While minerals are extracted from their communities, many residents still struggle to access basic services such as clean water, healthcare, roads and schools.

These concerns were raised during a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee engagement and community listening session convened by ZIMCODD. The meeting brought together representatives from mining-affected communities and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committees on Mines and Mining Development and Budget, Finance and Investment Promotion. Community representatives shared their experiences and presented evidence on how mining activities affect their human rights, livelihoods and the environment. They also called on Parliament to strengthen its oversight role and ensure that the interests of local communities are considered in decisions about the country's mineral resources.

One of the major concerns raised was the weakness of existing mining laws and the limited protection they offer to communities affected by mining activities. Participants called for stronger laws that hold mining companies accountable for their actions and ensure transparency in the management of mineral resources. They also stressed the need to involve communities in the development and review of the proposed Mines and Minerals Bill so that their concerns are reflected in the final legislation. Communities should not simply be informed about mining activities but must have a meaningful opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their land and livelihoods.

Environmental Damage and Water Challenges

Mining activities continue to damage the environment in several communities through land degradation, river pollution, dust and the destruction of productive agricultural land. Participants questioned whether Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are being properly conducted and whether regulatory authorities have enough capacity to monitor mining companies and enforce environmental laws. They also raised concerns that penalties for environmental violations are too weak to discourage harmful practices. Water scarcity was another major issue, with communities reporting concerns about declining river flows, polluted water sources and reduced access to water for household use and farming. Participants called for independent water-quality assessments, stronger environmental monitoring and better protection of local water resources.

Limited Benefits for Mining Communities

Despite the significant wealth generated from mineral extraction, many mining communities continue to receive very little in return. Participants highlighted the lack of investment in roads, schools, healthcare facilities, clean water and other essential services. They called for mining companies to make clear and measurable contributions towards community development and to publicly report how they are supporting the areas where they operate. The discussions raised an important question about who benefits from Zimbabwe's mineral wealth when communities hosting mining operations continue to face poor living conditions.

Worker Safety, Displacement and Loss of Livelihoods

The safety of mine workers, particularly those in the artisanal and small-scale mining sector, was also raised. Workers in some mining areas operate under dangerous conditions, with limited protective equipment and inadequate access to medical facilities. Accidents and injuries can have serious consequences, especially where workers cannot access proper emergency care. Participants called for stronger enforcement of workplace safety standards and improved access to medical services.



Mining expansion has also affected families who depend on farming and other natural resources for their livelihoods. Some communities have been displaced without adequate compensation or proper resettlement support, while the conversion of agricultural land into mining sites has reduced the land available for food production. These challenges are particularly difficult for older persons, low-income households and families with few alternative sources of income. Participants emphasised that mining should not leave communities without land, water and the means to support themselves.

Taking Community Concerns to Parliament

The engagement came at an important time as Zimbabwe prepares its 2027 National Budget and considers reforms to the mining sector. Participants called for community concerns to be considered in the Mines and Minerals Bill, mining tax policies and decisions on how revenue from mineral resources is collected and used. Parliament has an important role to play in ensuring that mining companies operate responsibly, public revenue is properly managed and communities receive fair benefits from the resources extracted from their areas.

The engagement also builds on previous parliamentary interactions with mining communities. During an earlier project, a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee visit to black granite mining areas in Mutoko helped Parliamentarians understand the challenges faced by local residents. This engagement contributed to subsequent policy action, including the promulgation of Statutory Instrument 127, which restricted the exportation of raw granite. It demonstrated the importance of giving communities direct access to Parliament and allowing their experiences to inform decisions. Through its project, Strengthening Citizens Agency and Public Institutions Accountability on Equality and Human Rights Goals, ZIMCODD continues to promote citizen participation and strengthen accountability in public institutions. The concerns and recommendations raised during the engagement will inform the organisation's continued advocacy on the 2027 National Budget, the Mines and Minerals Bill, mining taxation and responsible management of mineral resources.

Zimbabwe's mineral wealth should do more than generate export earnings. It must also improve the lives of the people living in mining communities. Those who live with the effects of mining deserve clean water, a safe environment, decent livelihoods, fair compensation and a meaningful share of the benefits generated from their natural resources.

The Price of a Future: How Scrapping ZIMSEC Subsidies Shifts the Burden onto Zimbabwe's Poorest Families

As the government ends a pandemic-era relief measure, the Education Act and Treasury's own fiscal circular reveal a deliberate choice to prioritise salaries and debt over children's right to education.

For a parent in Chiredzi, the arithmetic of hope has just become impossible. A child reaching Ordinary Level needs to sit at least eight subjects and under the old subsidised rate, a parent paid US$11 per subject, with the government covering US$13.20 of the US$24 total. This meant about US$88 for eight subjects, a sum that was already beyond reach for a household earning the average monthly income of US$250, if they are lucky enough to have one. With the removal of subsidies, a fee that previously amounted to US$88 would increase to US$192 for most households. At Advanced Level, the full tuition fee is US$48 per subject, meaning a student taking three subjects would pay US$144, while one taking four subjects would pay US$192. This represents a significant increase in education costs for families that were previously benefiting from subsidised fee. For a family that has been already choosing between food, rent, and transport, the message is simple as the child's future now has a price tag they cannot afford.

Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube announced the decision during a post-Cabinet briefing on Tuesday. The ZIMSEC examination fee subsidy that was introduced in 2020 as a COVID-19 relief measure and it will now be phased out. In 2027, support will continue for pupils in rural P3 and S3 schools, satellite schools, and BEAM beneficiaries. From 2028, only deserving BEAM beneficiaries, identified through an audit, will receive any government support. The government's justification is fiscal challenge as the Information Minister Zhemu Soda said that the universal subsidy had become increasingly unsustainable because of prevailing fiscal constraints and competing national priorities.

The government's decision is not just a fiscal choice but rather it is a direct contradiction of domestic law as the Section 6 of the Education Act Chapter 25:04 explicitly states that it is the objective of the state that tuition in schools in Zimbabwe be provided for the lowest possible fees consistent with the maintenance of high standards of education. The Act mandates the Minister to encourage the attainment of this objective by every appropriate means, including the making of grants and other subsidies to schools. By withdrawing the 55 % subsidy, the Minister is acting directly against the stated legal objective of the Act. The law mandates subsidies to keep fees low.The policy removes them. Furthermore, Section 4 of the Education Act guarantees every child the fundamental right to school education and prohibits the imposition of onerous terms and conditions in admission.

When a parent has to choose which child sits for exams because they cannot afford US$192 for eight O-Level subjects, that is an onerous condition. It effectively denies the right to education based on the ability to pay, rather than the ability to learn.

Just days before the ZIMSEC announcement, the chairperson of Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, Supa Mandiwanzira, told a pre-budget conference in Bulawayo that nearly 40,000 learners dropped out of school in 2025 with the financial constraints being part of the major causes at both levels. At secondary level alone, 9,974 children left school because their families could not pay. These are not abstract statistics. They are the children who will now face full examination fees. They are the siblings of the children who will sit exams in 2027 and 2028. The decision also lands hardest on girls as at secondary level a total of15,476 girls dropped out in 2025 compared to 11,228 boys. Financial constraints were the leading cause. When exam fees rise, girls are more likely to be withdrawn first, married off, or sent to work. The subsidy's removal is a gender policy decision, whether the government names it as one or not. The government says it cannot afford the subsidy. However, the reason it cannot afford it is not a lack of national wealth. It is a set of fiscal choices that have prioritised other obligations. Treasury Budget Call Circular Number 1 of 2026 is clear. Paragraph 16 instructs Ministries, Departments and Agencies to keep personnel requirements within the wage bill threshold not exceeding 50 per cent of annual projected revenues. This confirms that the government has capped its social spending by prioritising the wage bill. If half of all revenue goes to salaries, there is nothing left for ZIMSEC subsidies. The government is choosing to protect the wage bill at the expense of children's education.

The same circular notes the continued accumulation of domestic arrears and orders MDAs to conduct audits. This ties directly to the ZIMSEC exam fee arrears, where Treasury released only ZiG10 million against a massive need. The government is trying to fix a debt crisis by simply cutting services, rather than restructuring the debt or the wage bill. Zimbabwe's public debt stands at US$21.8 billion. Interest payments have, in some years, exceeded spending on health. Education's share of the budget has not been disclosed in the 2027 Budget Strategy Paper, making it impossible to benchmark against the Dakar Framework's 20 % target. In this environment, the ZIMSEC subsidy is treated as discretionary. However, the right to education is not discretionary. It is a constitutional guarantee. The government's answer is that BEAM will catch the vulnerable. However, BEAM is already in crisis. As ZIMCODD documented earlier this year, the programme owes schools over US$292 million in arrears. In the first half of 2026, only 1.5 % of its budget was utilised. Schools are turning away 70 to 80 % of BEAM-supported learners in some areas. An audit is now proposed to identify deserving beneficiaries, but the Auditor-General has repeatedly found that the system cannot reliably identify who is eligible. Promising to protect the poor through a programme that is itself broken is not a protection. It is a transfer of risk onto the poorest households, with a promise that the safety net will catch them even as that net is visibly tearing.

Recommendations

1. Keep the ZIMSEC subsidy for all public-school candidates until the BEAM targeting system is independently audited and proven to reach every eligible child. The right to education cannot be means-tested into oblivion.
2. Treasury must publish a dated arrears clearance schedule, by province and school, and release funds monthly. Parliament should demand an independent audit of the BEAM beneficiary list before any expansion of its role in examination financing.
3. The government should disclose how much the ZIMSEC subsidy's cost annually, and how that compares with debt service and the wage bill. Citizens deserve to know what is being prioritised.
4. Establish a national examination fund for vulnerable learners.
5. Rather than relying on a single, fragile programme, government should establish a dedicated, ring-fenced fund for examination fees, with clear eligibility criteria, an appeals process, and public reporting on disbursements.
6. Protect girls' education in the transition as any change to examination financing must include a gender impact assessment and targeted support for girls at risk of dropout, including fee waivers, sanitary wear provision, and re-entry pathways.

Conclusion

A child's future should not depend on the size of their parents' wallet. The ZIMSEC subsidy was never perfect. However, it was a recognition that education is a public good, not a private luxury. Withdrawing it, while BEAM remains in crisis and 40,000 children are already out of school, is a choice to let the poorest fall further. The government has promised to protect the vulnerable. It now has a chance to prove it, not by narrowing support, but by fixing the systems that are meant to deliver it. The price of a future is rising. The question is whether Zimbabwe is willing to pay it.

OPPORTUNITIES

Finance Intern – Saint-Gobain Zimbabwe
https://joinus.saint-gobain.com/en/zwe/fin/f/07960/328711/finance-intern?f%5B0%5D=country%3Azw
(Deadline: 8 November 2026)

SheDecides Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Consultancy – Remote
muriel@shedecides.com
(Deadline: 20 November 2026)

Regional Secretary – Grain Marketing Board (GMB)
recruitment@gmbdura.co.zw
(Deadline: 14 November 2026)

Assistant Corporate Secretary – ZIMRA
ZimraRecruitment@zimra.co.zw
(Deadline: 13 November 2026)

Legal Officer – Legal Services – ZIMRA
ZimraRecruitment@zimra.co.zw
(Deadline: 13 November 2026)

Public Prosecutors (45 Posts) – National Prosecuting Authority of Zimbabwe (NPAZ)
hr@npaz.gov.zw
(Deadline: 16 November 2026)

Executive Assistants (10 Posts) – National Prosecuting Authority of Zimbabwe (NPAZ)
hr@npaz.gov.zw
(Deadline: 16 November 2026)

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