



Community Monitors' Report



Zimbabwe Environmental
Law Association (ZELA)

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Brief Background

The Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) is implementing a project which seeks to promote the Protection of Environmental, Social, Economic and Cultural Rights of Communities Living in Diamond Mining Areas of Eastern Zimbabwe. This project seeks to address the environmental damage being caused by diamond mining companies and the violation of the environmental, social and economic rights (EESCR) of poor and vulnerable women, men and children who live along the Save River, Devure and Odzi Rivers. In this project ZELA has conducted training and education campaigns for communities on strategies and tools to demand and claim their rights, for instance via the ZELA Community Rights Training Manual and community monitoring training. This update is a summary of community monitors' experiences as they strive to present factual information about their environmental, economic and socio cultural problems due to diamond mining and seek to engage government and other stakeholders for solutions. ZELA has developed a community monitoring tool together with the community monitors to promote systemic and consistent monitoring of the EESCR issues by the communities. Together ZELA and the community monitors also established an EESCR complaints handling toolkit which empowers the communities to alert authorities of EESCR in their communities.

Community Monitors Reports on Environmental Right

Communities in Buhera, Chipinge and Chimanimani Province have had the worst experience of pollution of Save River by diamond mining companies. The community monitors reported that some diamond mining companies have diverting clean water from Save River by pumping it into dams.



Mining companies release this dirty water into Save



Clean water being diverted from Save



Diverted water is put into Dams

The community monitors have been monitoring this issue over two years and they have reported that communities are still drinking dirty polluted water and the situation has worsened because of the drought. Women walk 15km in Museve and Mangwadza to fetch water from Save River points considered “cleaner”. This is what the “cleaner” water looks like.



Water from Save river being used for drinking and domestic purposes

ZELA's Intervention

After the inclusion of the right to a clean and safe environment in the Constitution ZELA has assisted communities to sue diamond mining companies and demand that they stop polluting Save River. ZELA in partnership with Action Aid has gone further to provide tangible solution to the communities pending finalisation of the court case by providing 10 boreholes in Buhera, Chipinge and Chimanimani. Community monitors have reported that communities have welcomed this development. The development also caught attention of mainstream media as reported here:

<https://www.thestandard.co.zw/2016/02/28/gem-miners-leave-marange-worse-off/>

KEY MESSAGE

Marange and its surroundings have had a natural water flow, which is characterized by low turbidity and a low amount of sediment. This has made the water suitable for drinking.



The right of the communities has been welcomed by diamond mining companies for mineral companies, which have largely committed to provide water within 10 days and other employees. However, they have severely affected supplementary projects for villages like gardening, fishing and business projects.

Last week Marange and Mining Development Minister Walter Chitlala visited all the nine mining companies to make their operations and plans to leave the area in their hands. Following the announcement of the new mining law, the Marange Development Company.

As a result, hundreds of people have been evicted from Marange and the people will stay where they are. Some have been evicted from their homes in a situation where they do not have the means to return to their homes. Some have been evicted from their homes.

The paper called attention to the fact that the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) was leading the community to solve the water problem.

Although people still face problems, several people mentioned that diamond mining has caused their situation in a positive "from rickety to rigid" position.

In Marange village in Marange South, one of the areas close to Save River where pollution has led to a group of about 20 women of different ages have resorted to carrying water and using plastic containers to fill it.

"We hope that you will do all that is happening in our area," said Marange Community Lead.

Save River, we would be happy to see you again, said Sam Kwan.

Community Monitors Reports on Social Rights

The community monitors reported that influx of male mining workers caused an increase in gender based violence around the mining area. There has been enormous rise in School drop outs from 2012 to 2015 with adolescent girls forming the bulk of the drop-outs after being impregnated by male mine workers. At Hotsprings Secondary School out of the 95 dropouts in 2015, 70 were girls. The mining companies must have been alive to the disproportionate risk women and adolescent girls face in mining communities. According to community monitors, diamond mining companies had not done anything to integrate such gender issues into their corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Impacts The community monitors have reported that the households where the young mothers live are among the most vulnerable in terms of food insecurity caused by the drought. Eventually the male mine workers dump the pregnant girls and according to community monitoring reports their families are now surviving on boiling baobab seeds as there isn't enough food for everyone in their families. The young mothers are asked by their parents to help fend for their children and are unable to go back to school. This means the young mother's children will in turn lose on the right to education perpetuating a poverty trap in their families.

ZELA's Intervention

ZELA established Women's Forums in Buhera, Chipinge and Chimanimani as a rights based approach aimed at empowering women with voice and power to seek redress for EESCR violations arising from mining activities. The community monitors who are part of the Women's Forum in Hotsprings approached the traditional leaders who joined forces with them to write a petition to the District Office and Provincial Minister's office. The petition urged authorities to act to protect sexual reproductive maternal health rights of young adolescent girls by ensuring mining companies have gender sensitive corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Community Monitors Reports on Cancellation of Diamond Mining Licences Impacts

Community monitors have reported on the volatile situation on the ground after the cancellation of diamond mining licences. The land owners who had built houses to provide accommodation services to mine workers have been left with empty shells after the mine workers left. The rentals had been a huge source of income for them for food and they fear their families might starve. Vendors at Hotsprings Shopping Centre also lamented the departure of the mine workers who would buy wild fruits and other items from them. The influx of magweja or illegal diamond miners has caused an increase in crime particularly sexual harassment of young women and girls and livestock theft. *"Magweja steal livestock because they will be hungry, we are living in fear because they may turn to housebreaking if they become desperate. Right now they are looting diamonds, asbestos sheets and fence from the closed mines. If they finish that, they will come for us and our property"*, said one Hotsprings community member. A traditional leader also indicated that the return of magweja would increase the breakdown of the moral fabric in society and lead to increased levels of prostitution and divorces as many women will be forced to enter into the sex trade as a coping strategy to the hunger caused by drought. The communities are wondering who will be held accountable for the environmental damage and pollution of Save River that was caused by some of the diamond mining companies whose licences have been cancelled. The communities are also wondering whether the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation will be different and more accommodating to community participation, dialogue and engagement especially with marginalised groups like women who undoubtedly bear the brunt of diamond mining impacts.



Illegal miners transacting looted diamonds (captured by a Community Monitor)