



REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF COAL MINING IN HWANGE

Special Focus
On
Hwange Colliery Company

July 2016

Foreword

The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (GNRG) team visited Hwange Colliery community from the 7th of July to the 9th of July 2016, in order to conduct a planning workshop for Participatory Action Research (PAR) training for women representatives in the town. This was part of a bigger project entitled “**Enhancing the Capacity of Women in Communities Affected by Extractive Industries in Zimbabwe to mobilize and demand rights**” implemented with the support from OSISA. The project also aimed at building movements of women affected by natural resource extraction in several districts in Zimbabwe.

It is against this visit that the team after interaction with several community members discovered that coal mining in Hwange was doing more harm to the community and the environment. The situation in Hwange clearly showed that there is need to end destructive mining and search for alternatives to extraction. It was evident that Zimbabwe, the rest of Africa and the world beyond need a model of development that is inclusive and that creates livelihoods for everyone. The Hwange situation is evidence enough to show that mining creates a few hundred jobs whilst destroying livelihoods for thousands of families. One such alternative is agriculture.

This short report focusing on Hwange colliery Company will bring out how communities are bearing the burden of destructive extraction. The report is based in evidence that was gathered during the visit in July 2016.

Contextual Background & Current Situation

Hwange is a mining town located within the Hwange National Park, Matabeleland North region, in the north western corner 'of the country, close to the Zambian border and approximately 100km from the widely noted Victoria Falls. As stated on the Hwange Colliery Company website, Zimbabwe's leading coal producer and owner of one of the biggest mines, "to speak of Hwange town is to speak of Hwange colliery. It is a mining town, a Company town, a coal town which, owing to its remote location, has developed a self-contained community with a population of about 55 000 people. All services associated with local and central government – from road maintenance to refuse collection, water and power reticulation, schools, health, housing, recreational facilities and sewage disposal, are provided by the Company. It also operates its own railway and road transport system, internal security and telephone system"¹.

Yet, despite the amenities and facilities provided for the employees, living conditions for miners appears to be unbearable and well below any international Conventions concerning labour standards and individual rights at work. For instance with regards to wage standards, safety, or social security and assistance measures.

In the morning of 8th July 2016, CNRG Program Manager Ms Tafadzwa Muropa held the community workshop attended by 10 female community members, aimed at spreading awareness of what is happening in Hwange in relation to coal mining and developing an action plan to implement Participatory Action Research at local level. Meanwhile, the rest of CNRG staff had the opportunity to enter the Hwange Colliery Company. During the visit, we observed the coal preparation plants which wash coal of soil and rock, crushes it into graded sized chunks, stockpile it and prepare it for sale. The team also passed through the different miners' neighbourhoods and talked with some members of the community, mostly women who work for the Hwange Colliery or are married to employers of the mining firm.

The team also gathered visual evidence through pictures highlighting the deplorable living conditions of the miners and the appalling environmental and ecological degradation taking place. (**See Pictures Appendix 1**). Overall, from a socio-economic and environmental perspective the Hwange situation is undoubtedly deplorable and there seem to be no solution in sight. The open pits left by the colliery are posing serious threats to the lives of the miners and their families.

There are high levels of vulnerability as a result of economic insecurity, pollution and hydric contamination, degrading air and water quality which results in a health hazard for the community members particularly burdening women more.

Key Issues Encountered:

Socio-Economic Issues:

- **Salary** → miners have not been paid for the past 2 years. Hwange Colliery Company attributes the lack of workers' remuneration to the slowdown of the Company's economic activity, but the woman who accompanied us in the mining site explained that Hwange Limited is still exporting coal to 14 countries apart from Zimbabwe which also consumes a sizable portion of coal through Hwange Power Station (**See Appendix 1**). As a result of the lack of any economic remuneration, miners living in Hwange have been increasingly forced to steal, beg or turn to informal street commerce where they sell anything ranging from toxic fruits, vegetables to their own bodies in the case of women.
- **Housing Conditions** → the houses in mining villages for low ranking workers within the Colliery are well below the standards enshrined in international conventions. The houses cannot even meet the

¹ Hwange Colliery Company Limited website, http://www.hwangecolliery.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53&Itemid=61

minimum requirements that are affirmed by the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) website.² The OHCHR calls on governments to guarantee their citizens access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and washing facilities, food security, and refuse disposal to name a few. The pictures enclosed in the Appendix clearly illustrate the deplorable conditions the Hwange workers and community live in.

- **Social security** → assistance measures and compensation required because of occupational accidents or diseases of miners are not adequately ensured by the mining company:
 - For example, a woman from Wankie 2° District, explained that her husband who had been working in the colliery for 35 years, died in January 2016 because of pneumoconiosis, due to the inhalation of coal dust. The Hwange Colliery did not compensate the loss of her husband; furthermore, the local doctor refused to release the post mortem certificate when he died, probably because of reluctance to admit the cause of the death which implied the company acted irresponsibly by not having provided adequate safety measures such as face masks. Now the widow has remained alone with 3 children of 18,15 and 13 years old and she currently receives \$70 monthly as pension, but this pension can be arbitrarily withheld by the company at any time and, when this eventuality occurs, she will have to leave the house where she has been living with her family for ages.
 - Other inhabitants of Wankie 2° District have shown to CNRG staff the worrisome health conditions of their children (elephantiasis, down syndrome) and affirmed that they do not have sufficient money to bring them to the nearest hospital to receive medical treatment, as the company is failing to pay the salaries (see Appendix for related pictures)

Environmental Issues:

- **Air pollution** → the quality of air Hwange town is questionable due to high presence of coal and carbon dust covering streets, engulfing the town and hardening lungs thereby causing breathing difficulties in villagers, who now need to take pills or drink cold milk to ease their respiratory challenges. Dust from mining activities reduces air quality in the area, resulting in an adverse impact on vegetative life and posing health and safety hazards for mine workers and residents.
- **Hydric contamination and water pollution** within the mining site, a swamp has been formed as a result of the disruption of the soil by mining activities. This result in the contamination of Deka river by acid mine drainage, causing severe health hazard for humans and animals who drink from it. Furthermore, viral food poisoning is a common concern, due to the fact that crops grown along the river is heavily polluted. According to our guide within the mining site, a rampant river pollution. Another cause for concern is the fact that local women collect the acidic dust and detritus of the river and sell throughout the country as a sexual stimulant, thus seriously endangering female communities beyond the coal-mining site.
- **Soil and land degradation** → mining in Hwange has disrupted the aesthetic elements of the landscape, resulting in unnatural and discontinuous configurations of the area, whilst the underground smouldering of the coal deposits produces fires which have detrimental, long-lasting economic, social and ecological impacts. Indeed, they continue to proliferate underground after surface fires have been extinguished, burning forest and vegetation nearby, disrupting the soil and provoking cracks in geologic structures. This often result in abrupt sink and collapse of the ground which represent serious hazards by causing subsidence of surface and infrastructures such as roads, pipelines, buildings and homes.

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx>

- **Ecosystem loss and degradation** → the vegetation in the mining and surrounding areas is dying because of the burning soil underneath. Plants and trees are heavily intoxicated with chemical substances polluting hydric waterways with harmful consequences for the local inhabitants who grow and harvest vegetables and fruit for consumption and commerce purposes.

Health Issues:

- **Exposure to polluted air and coal dust** → high incidence of pneumoconiosis and black lung disease among miners and their relatives.
- **Higher risks of contracting a wide array of diseases** → cardiopulmonary disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, lung disease, and kidney diseases.
- **Toxic levels of arsenic, fluorine, mercury, and selenium** are emitted by coal fires and spread through the waterways, then entering the air and the food chain of those living in the mining areas with harmful health and mental consequences endangering the nervous system³.

Gender & Child Issues:

- Children are often forced to drop school and help families working as small-scale, informal and street vendors, being exposed to a whole spectrum of socio-economic, sanitary and environmental hazards which disrupts and prevent them to obtain the necessary protection and assistance needed in their vulnerable conditions, and to grow up in an atmosphere that provides them special safeguards and care, in line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*⁴
- Lack of adequate facilities to carry children to community schools force them to walk everyday along highly polluted roads
- The unmitigated underground fires around the mines might result in serious hazards for children. Some of them experienced grave accidents due to the unsafe environment where their mothers work – one child fell abruptly into coal fire underground when the ground just sank whilst he was running, suffering 70% burns. The child did not receive any compensation from the colliery.
- A vegetable vending market for 5 women who lost their husbands in the 1972 Hwange Coal Mine disaster was grabbed by a former Vice President who gave to his son who converted it to a Truck Inn. Women ironically now suffer sexual exploitation in a place originally designed to give them shelter and dignity.
- As a result of not being supported by their families in the continuation of their studies because of overwhelming poverty, young women and girls to engage in commercial sex work along the Hwange-Victoria Falls Highway to self-sustain their education, with worrisome consequences on their sexual and reproductive health conditions.

CNRG actions and activities to remedy the situation in Hwange

- CNRG is holding Participatory Action Research (PAR) training workshops with local women in Hwange so as to share updates and exchange insights concerning what is happening in the community, in relation to coal mining and to develop an action plan to implement PAR at local level.
- CNRG is strengthening the research capacities of Hwange community activists to enable them to provide the organisation with timely and regular updates on the situation on the ground for advocacy purposes and to hold the responsible stakeholders accountable.

³ <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/climate-change/coal/Mining-impacts/>

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

- CNRG is planning to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment in Hwange
- Advocacy activities: highlighting the issue in mainstream media through articles, utilisation of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and through our website to raise awareness on the Hwange crises, meeting with local governmental, stakeholders and civil society partners

Appendix 1: Pictures from Hwange Colliery Mining Site



Figure 1: A vision of Hwange artificial overburden due to coal mining



Figure 2: Hwange Colliery Company processing plant



Figure 3: Miners houses in one of the villages within the mining site



Figure 4: Road covered by coal and carbon dust



Figure 5: Pollution in Deka river as a result of mining activities



Figure 6: Vegetation dying because of the burning coal underground



Figure 7: Miners going to work in Hwange Colliery without proper PPE



Figure 8: Miners houses in Hwange villages



Figure 9: hydric facilities in one of the miners' villages



Fig 10: Contaminated water



Figure 11: Contaminated water coming from a pipe



Figure 12: A child who sank into the underground burning soil



Figure 13: Injuries as a result of underground burning coal.



Figure 14: A young woman suffering of elephantiasis who has no money for medical treatment



ZimRights House, Alveston Court
90 Forth Street
Cnr Baines Ave/4th St,
Harare,
Zimbabwe

 CNRG_ZIM

info@cnrgzim.org | www.cnrgzim.org