

BLACK GRANITE MINING IN ZIMBABWE



WHAT?

Black granite used for e.g. kitchen tops and gravestones

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Various European-linked and Chinese granite mining companies:

- **Chinese-owned companies** including Jintings, Surewin Pvt Ltd, Longlui, Dingmao
- **Natural Stones Export Company** current ownership linked to Italian shareholders CRG Quarries
- **Zimbabwe International Quarries** with Zimbabwean and European shareholders
- **Quarrying Enterprises** – with a Zimbabwean and Italian shareholders
- **Iford Services Mining Company**

WHO IS AFFECTED?



Communities in the Mutoko, Mt Darwin and Murehwa districts of Zimbabwe.

HUMAN RIGHTS HARM AND THEIR GENDERED IMPACTS



**LABOUR RIGHTS
ABUSES**



**FORCED EVICTIONS &
DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTIES**



**INCREASE IN WORK
& CARE BURDEN**



**DISCRIMINATION OF
WOMEN IN WORK**



**ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION
& LOSS OF LIVELIHOODS**



**INCREASE IN GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE**

Roads destroyed by mining vehicles, cause excessive water runoff into women's food gardens leading to less food security

WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES

GRANITE MINING IN ZIMBABWE

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

The activities of various European-linked and Chinese granite mining companies operating over several decades in the Mutoko, Mt Darwin and Murehwa Districts of Zimbabwe – and the failure of the Zimbabwean government to take appropriate action – are reported to be causing significant environmental degradation and human rights abuses and violations, with specific gendered impacts for women.

Black granite is a form of common natural stone used for construction, tiles and tombstones and is extracted from large areas of land. Most of this granite is exported to South Africa, various European Union countries, the United States and Mozambique (with 90% of the granite imported by the latter then exported to Italy and Spain).

LABOUR RIGHTS ABUSES

Workers at these companies have shared experiences of labour rights abuses, including the prevalence of short-term and precarious contracts, low or delayed wages, denial of the right to organise and the right to collective bargaining, and the failure to comply with health and safety standards for employees.

The land use involved in granite mining is substantial and in Zimbabwe has involved the widespread clearing of vegetation, dumping of rubble and interference with natural river flows. In turn, the lives and livelihoods of communities who depend on small-scale agriculture, livestock ranching, hunting and gathering forest products, grazing pastures and local businesses are greatly impacted. Some of the direct effects include forced evictions and displacement, while the long-term indirect effects are environmental degradation and air, soil, water and noise pollution. Various companies have

“We also suspect that the regulatory authorities are being paid by the mining authorities so that they do not expose them. When the Environmental Management Agency conducts inspection visits, we are never invited, yet it’s our lands that are damaged, our rivers that are silted and polluted, our forests that are cut.”

***Headman of impacted mining community,
Zimbabwe***

COMPANIES INVOLVED

The major granite mining companies operating in these areas of Zimbabwe are understood to be as follows, although very little public information is available to confirm corporate details and structures:

- Various Chinese-owned or linked companies including **Jintings, Surewin Pvt Ltd, Longlui** and **Dingmao**
- Natural Stones Export Company – one of the oldest companies operating in Mutoko, NSEC commenced mining in the early 1970s and its current ownership is linked to Italian shareholders
- **CRG Quarries** – mining since around 2000, with its ownership linked to Italian shareholders
- **Zimbabwe International Quarries (ZIQ)** – with local Zimbabwean and European shareholders, ZIQ has been mining since around 1995
- **Quarrying Enterprises** – the company has been mining since around 1986 and has a shareholder mix of Italians and Zimbabweans
- **Ilford Services Mining Company** – operating since the mid-1980s

operated, allegedly, without conducting or adhering to required environmental impact assessments.

Such mining activities occur in a broader context of a continuing struggle or unwillingness by Zimbabwe to regulate powerful transnational companies in a manner that continues to attract desired investment but that also guarantees human rights for workers and the communities. Corruption is reported to be rife within the sector, with alleged failure by government regulatory and administrative bodies to issue licences, to monitor compliance with relevant national laws and regulations, or to safeguard the human rights of communities.

IMPACT ON WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES

A male-dominated sector along with stressful, poor conditions for workers have knock-on effects in terms of the burden of care work, a lack of livelihood opportunities and the increased likelihood of gender-based violence.

With recruitment in the mining sector favouring men over women, women have not enjoyed similar employment opportunities with the mining companies. They generally face higher unemployment levels in the area and have turned to community agriculture to provide food for the community and sell to neighbouring markets.

Evictions and the destruction of homes have had a disproportionate impact on women. Due to the excess use of water in granite mining and the fencing of mining sites which block traditional rural footpaths, they have been forced to travel longer distances to fetch water and firewood and to reach grazing pastures and graveyards. Roads are destroyed or flattened by heavy mining company vehicles leading to reduced road levels and excessive water runoff during rainstorms. Sand is then washed into women's gardens, ruining the crops grown to help their families survive on low wages paid in the sector.

With considerable impact on communities and the environment, and an apparent lack of government action to protect against such harm, the granite mining practices in Zimbabwe arguably constitute patterns of human rights abuses and violations. These include: the right to just and favourable conditions of work (which ensure fair wages, equal remuneration for work of equal value and safe and healthy working conditions); the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, water and housing; the right to protection from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family or home; the right to health; the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; the right to self-determination; and cross-cutting guarantees of non-discrimination and equality.

COMMUNITY ACTION AND VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Widespread and significant patterns of human rights abuses and violations remain prevalent in the granite mining sector, exacerbated by Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political

context and complications linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities report a lack of redress mechanisms, whether through informal or formal resolution mechanisms.

The significant underfunding of government departments means that regulatory inspections, monitoring and investigations generally do not take place. When they do, corruption compromises their effectiveness. The involvement of many senior government officials and party personnel in the granite mining companies is also conducive to the corporate capture of government decision-making which puts corporate interests over community concerns.

ADEQUATE SUPPORT NEEDED

The communities are left with few options and reportedly no adequate mechanisms in the relevant legal framework to protect against human rights abuses by granite mining companies. There is also a lack of knowledge and adequate support regarding international standards such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights or the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Communities continue to face deep levels of poverty, necessitating urgent and transformative change. Targeted recommendations for granite mining companies, government departments and institutions, civil society organisations and domestic human rights institutions include demands related to access information on corporate activities, undertaking human rights due diligence, preventing and restoring environmental harms, full compliance with labour laws, adopting comprehensive complaint procedures and redress mechanisms, and robust government action to tackle corruption and improve governance issues in the extractive sectors.

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A woman from the mining community who lost her 12 year old son due to drowning in an open pit in 2021. Behind her is her son's grave.

PATHWAY TO A FEMINIST CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

Women around the world continue to experience business-related human rights abuses and violations differently and disproportionately: from significant barriers to access justice and discrimination in the labour market, to gender-based violence, uneven domestic workloads and unpaid care duties. Systemic gender impacts connected to corporate activities are particularly felt by women in the Global South. Business activities often have a negative impact on people and the planet. The need for a feminist corporate accountability framework in line with human rights obligations and planetary boundaries is urgent.

CURRENT STANDARDS ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the context of the international human rights framework as well as through voluntary commitments, global steps have been taken to adopt rules relating to women, business activities and human rights.

With a specific focus on corporate activities, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) were endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011 and designed to protect and respect human rights, prevent adverse impacts and ensure access to remedy for business-related harms. The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises further set out guidance around human rights due diligence requiring businesses to identify, prevent and mitigate adverse impacts and to account for how they address them.

However, the voluntary nature of these existing standards has not translated into meaningful change. And women's experiences are largely excluded from corporate accountability frameworks.

GENDERED IMPACTS OF CORPORATE CONDUCT

Case studies, such as this one, offer specific examples of how women from groups in various contexts experience corporate-related abuses in different and disproportionate ways.

For example, in Uganda, over 35,000 people were forcibly removed from their homes in Kyriandongo by agribusinesses linked to the Global North.

Following the evictions, women experienced violence, loss of livelihoods and restricted access to water and firewood.

Granite mining, in Zimbabwe, connected to Chinese and European companies and investors has impacted on the region's small-scale agriculture due to widespread clearing of vegetation. This male-dominated sector has a knock-on effect for women such as a lack of employment opportunities and increased likelihood of gender-based violence.

In Guatemala, nickel mining by the Swiss-based Solway Investment Group causes significant environmental damage in El Estor, Izabal. Women active in community advocacy have experienced impacts on their lives through ongoing criminalisation and repression.

Large-scale sisal cultivation in Taita Taveta County in Kenya raises human rights issues connected to land dispossession and employment circumstances. Women face gender-blind working conditions and a loss of livelihoods due to environmental degradation.

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Since 2014, in the context of an open-ended working group of the UN Human Rights Council, states come together every year to advance on an international legally binding instrument on business and human rights. Significant progress has been made to secure a gender-responsive treaty, including acknowledgement of the disproportionate impacts on women and girls, agreement on the need for states and businesses to integrate a gender perspective and gender-sensitive access to justice.

Despite advances, the adoption of a treaty is still several years away. Powerful business lobbies and a lack of engagement of a number of major economies, where transnational companies are based, hamper the treaty process. At the same time, while it is a positive step, the development of mandatory human rights due diligence laws at national and regional levels can also undercut progressive approaches at the international level.

With these concerns in mind, constructive engagement of states to incorporate a feminist perspective and build upon progress that has been made so far is needed.

A UN Treaty on business and human rights offers an opportunity for states to fulfil their obligation to respect, promote and protect human rights, put an end to harmful corporate activities, and harmonise international rules for businesses.

FIVE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the structural and gendered impacts of transnational corporate activities during the upcoming session of the working group on the UN Treaty, we call upon states to:

- 1. Engage constructively in the treaty process, build on previous negotiations, and harmonise with human rights and environmental obligations,** including by maintaining and strengthening gender-responsive provisions.
- 2. Ensure women are at the heart of the conversation,** leading with maxim “nothing about us, without us”.
- 3. Prevent harm to people and planet,** including provisions that encourage effective substantive equality analysis and practice.
- 4. Make things right when harm occurs,** ensure that systems of legal liability and provisions governing access to justice, remedy and support services are gender-responsive.
- 5. Put corporate accountability at the heart of broader measures towards economic, climate and ecological justice and transformation.**

This case study is part of the report “Pathway to a Feminist International Corporate Accountability Framework: cases from Uganda, Zimbabwe, Guatemala and Kenya”, which can be found at actionaid.nl/UNBT

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

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Father and mother who lost their first born
11 year old son, by drowning in an open pit in
2021, Zimbabwe