



Zimbabwe Environmental
Law Association (ZELA)



COVID-19: MINING SECTOR AND COMMUNITIES' SITUATIONAL REPORT (SIT-REP)



**STATE OF PLAY IN ARTISANAL, SMALL-SCALE
AND LARGE-SCALE MINING AREAS**

2ND SERIES

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Background

This is our second series and edition of the **COVID-19: Mining Sector and Communities' Situational Report (SitRep)**. We promised that so long Covid-19 is breaking-up families, disturbing livelihoods and causing economic and political tension in different parts of the world, we will continue to track its real and potential impacts on mining communities we work with in Zimbabwe on a weekly basis. We have lived up to our promise. As we have seen an upsurge of passion amongst different organisations to produce situational reports, we pride in being one of the first groups in Zimbabwe's mining sector to produce a Situational Report, but again sad that the world is being ravaged by a silent and invisible enemy and virus that knows no colour, race, creed, social status, age or sex. As on the 8th of April 2020, Zimbabwe tested 371 cases, 11 positive cases and 3 deaths. The numbers are low compared to other countries, but we believe every individual case is a statistic, a worry and a cause of anxiety and pain to the nation. With more testing, the numbers may increase. Therefore, our concerns on the current situation in Zimbabwe on COVID-19 are twofold; a) *adoption of prevention, containment and treatment systems and procedures for mining communities in case COVID-19 reaches a high apex in the country* and b) *the impact on community livelihoods, human rights, social well-being, good governance principles and the economy*. Communities and citizens have to prepare for any eventuality.

In this Second Series we give a keyhole snapshot of a mix of developments, responses, compliance levels, exemptions to the lockdown, legal developments and impacts of COVID-19 on communities, citizens, mine workers, artisanal miners and small-scale miners (ASM) and large-scale miners post the effective date of the National Lockdown -viz 30th of March 2020. However, it is by no means exhaustive of developments in the sector.

In keeping with our organisational approach, we gathered information from more than 200 ZELA affiliated community monitors, media reports and public statements by Government officials and corporates. In all this we adhere to our Safeguarding Policies and Principles of doing no harm to our communities and stakeholders. We encourage them to socially and physically distance- to stay safe by staying at home and not put themselves at risks of contracting or spreading COVID-19. They collect information using their own social media contacts and networks at community level, which will be triangulated by ZELA.



“The Impact of the COVID 19 has been terrible, all the milling centres have been shut down in Bubi. In the ASM one works from hand to mouth at the same time people are trying to be safe but survival is also key. People are terrified of the COVID19, the statistical updates we get on the radios are scary.” Jane Lusinga - Bubi

Situation in ASM Communities

- **Enforcement of Lockdown by Police and the Military:** In Gwanda, three days after the declaration of the National Lockdown on 30 March 2020, many people stayed

indoors, observed the social distancing dictates and in some cases wore masks and washed hands, although many people lacked the financial resources to buy the protective equipment or did not have access to suppliers of the equipment. Police officers were reported to have patrolled some mining areas encouraging people and motorists to avoid non-essential movement, except those with letters as essential service providers. In some cases, police ordered closure of ASM mine sites, gold hammer-mills and even arrested some artisanal miners in Bubi for defying the lockdown. In some parts of Shurugwi District the army was reported to have been involved in enforcing measures to stop unnecessary movements by the miners and citizens. As a result, there was minimal movement in the district at that time. However, police and military personnel were observed in mining communities to be enforcing the laws without wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) themselves, thereby exposing themselves and those they arrest (the public) to COVID-19. The world over, frontline actors like police and health workers have been lost to the deadly coronavirus. In Zimbabwe this demonstrates lack of Government's capacity in protecting the people against the pandemic through provision of preventive measures to law enforcements agents who risk spreading the disease to the public.

- **Cessation of gold mining and milling operations:** In Mberengwa, Shurugwi, Gwanda, Zvishavane, Bubi, Penhalonga, Guruve and Mazowe many ASM miners stopped working when the Lockdown became effective on March 30, 2020. As reported in the first series, some Small-Scale miners and milling plants left skeletal staff or security personnel at the mine or milling sites. For example, Shurugwi Development Trust (STD) an ASM gold mining cooperative in Shurugwi scaled-down operations by reducing its workforce from 1 000 miners to nearly 40 essential workers. Other ASM miners are reported to have reduced numbers to a maximum of 10 workers. Those at work at most mines were reported to have minimal or no PPE. Some workers are not practising social distancing, others defy use of masks and continue with handshakes. At Wanderer Mine in Shurugwi artisanal diggers did not heed the lockdown call and continued mining despite the perennial safety and health concerns and accidents at the site and the large number of artisan diggers working there. According to one miner in Mberengwa, as at 5 April 2020 ASM gold mines were operating at 20% capacity with only a few having applied for the partial exemption to operate from Zimbabwe Miners Federation (ZMF). In Bubi, reports indicated that immediately after declaration of the Lockdown it was increasingly becoming difficult for ASMs to operate as suppliers of mining equipment and accessories in Bulawayo had closed. However, a few days after the declaration in Gweru and Bulawayo one Chinese mining equipment supplier called Ming Hao Ming opened shop on the 6th of April 2020.
- **Existing Safety, Environment and Health Risks in ASM Sector:** While the ASM sector is a critical sector in gold production, accounting for more than 60% of total gold deliveries to Fidelity Printers and Refineries in 2019 , it is also a high risk sector from a safety, health and environment perspective-meaning that COVID-19 is likely to massively affect production and the economy if it peaks in Zimbabwe. According to Wellington Takavarasha and Sam Spiegel, ASM miners are most vulnerable to COVID-19 since they are already at risk of lung infections and dust pneumoconiosis

¹ <https://www.thestandard.co.zw/2020/01/19/politics-dollars-criminals-violence-rising-zimbabwes-small-scale-mines/>

as they work in groups, crowd gold outcrop areas in gold mining areas without water, toilets and other basic sanitation facilities . The most vulnerable ASM mining sites are Umsasa and Jumbo Mine, Wanderer Mine in Shurugwi, Urtna in Kadoma and Makaha areas where most of the diggers do not comply with health, safety and environment standards and are therefore at risk. The diggers view masks, gloves and other protective equipment as a burden and in some cases bad omen that affect gold production, although the mine owners or sponsors would have provided them with PPE. This exposes them to contracting COVID-19 and spreading it to their families and communities.

- **Crime and the Contagion-Theft of Gold and Mining Equipment:** While the levels of criminality and machete killings that plagued the ASM sector from November 2019 to February 2020 has somehow subsided, a few cases of criminality and theft were reported in Gwanda, Zvishavane and Shurugwi. Some ASM miners who closed their mines following the Lockdown lost their equipment, machinery and in some cases gold ore. At some artisanal mine sites in Zvishavane criminals pretended to be COVID-19 Law Enforcement agents and stole gold, gold ore or tools. Some of the cases were reported to the police in Shurugwi. Generally, many ASM miners in Zvishavane, Gwanda, Bubi, Shurugwi, Mberengwa and Kadoma still fear the return of machete gangs and loss of mining claims and equipment if they stay at home without security at the mine. Loss of mining claims is mostly fuelled by claim ownership and mining rights disputes, itself a result of lack of formalisation of Artisanal mining and absence of a mining cadastre system.
- **ASM Applications for Exemptions to Mine:** On the 29th of March 2020, ZMF, a representative body of artisanal and small-scale miners applied to the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development for a partial exemption from the 21 Days Lockdown on behalf of its members in terms of the Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order to continue operations . The Federation argued that mining is an essential service whose operations require continuous mining processes that can operate with minimum staff required for the care and maintenance. ZMF requested its members to apply for exemptions by stating nature of operations, measures to safeguard employees and stakeholders from potential spread of COVID-19, number of employees, deliveries of gold to Fidelity Printers and Refineries (FPR) in last 12 months and compliance with Government guidelines before they are allowed to operate during the lockdown. ASM players that sell gold to the black market instead of FPR are not likely to apply for the exemption since it's one of the requirements and this means they will operate outside the set guidelines and procedures.
- As at 4 April 2020, records of successful ASM exemption applications viewed by ZELA from different provinces showed that a total of 131 ASM gold miners had been granted partial exemption by ZMF and were already cautiously mining while waiting for final approval from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development. This means the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development has not fully approved the operations. Small Scale miners in Gwanda and Bubi who applied for exemption reported that they have not faced any problems with the police who are enforcing the Lockdown as

² <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2020/04/04/artisanal-miners-at-risk-of-coronavirus/>

³ Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order SI 83 of 2020

⁴ See also Zimbabwe Miners Federation Memorandum to All Miners; 29 March 2020

they produce exemption letters from ZMF, while those without have either stopped mining or continued mining without the letters. Some felt that the US\$50 fee required for the exemption process by ZMF is high.

- **Low gold prices and market disruptions:** The impact of COVID-19 has been felt in the ASM sector through the uneven, unstable and fluctuating low prices being offered by gold buyers. As on the 6th of April 2020, miners who sold gold to FPR in Harare got US\$47 per gram, although the FPR price would be subjected to the 55% in US\$ and 45% in RTGS policy. This means effectively FPR will be buying at more or less than US\$24 per gram. On the other hand, black market buyers were buying at US\$39 per gram in Harare, and US\$36 per gram in Chinhoyi. All these, prices are lower than US\$50 which was being offered before COVID-19 disrupted the supply chain. Due to price distortions and FPR policies, many ASM miners end up selling their gold on the black market which fetches a higher price than FPR. The opening hours of FPR buying offices have been limited to between 9am and 12pm in Bindura and other areas, while in Harare it opens from 9am-3pm. Some buyers indicated that due to bank closures, it is now difficult to access cash to buy gold. The above shows the disruptions and distortions caused by COVID-19 in the ASM sector and promotes arbitrage, corruption and illicit financial flows in the gold sector.
- **Water availability and Sanitation:** In Gwanda and Hwange water supply and sanitation remains a challenge. There is a limited number of clean and potable water sources and inefficient water supply systems. Many people resort to fetching water from unprotected water bodies like rivers. In Ward 5 Spitzckop North in Gwanda a large number of residents rely on borehole where they gather to fetch water thereby exposing themselves to contracting or spreading COVID-19. The same applies to Hwange where water scarcity is forcing women to disregard social distancing guidelines.
- **Food availability:** In some mining areas the price of food and other basic goods have gone up following the Lockdown. In Gwanda for example, a 10kg bag of mealie meal now cost 200 South Africa Rands from 80 Rands, while in Bubi a 5kg bag now cost RTG\$140 from RTG\$40. In Gwanda, following closure of mines some diggers have resorted to alternative income activities such as mopane worm harvesting.
- **ASM Service providers and vendors:** Following the Lockdown, many vendors who sell clothes, food, trinkets, mining equipment accessories and other wares to artisanal and small-scale miners and diggers in Gwanda and other parts of the country have abandoned their mine gate work-stations or no longer move from mine to mine to sell their merchandise. Their sources of livelihood have been affected.
- **Government responses and Provision of Health Services:** On health services in ASM communities, Gwanda Hospital is attending to critical cases only and visitors are restricted to a limited number at a given time. In Mutoko, health workers from Ministry of Health are involved in awareness campaigns on COVID-19. Around the country, Local Government officials are only involved in raising awareness on COVID-19 symptoms and prevention measures amongst miners and communities

without providing them with PPE due to lack of resources and the equipment.⁵ Government has not allocated such equipment. This means the health sector in Zimbabwe is not adequately prepared to deal with a spike in COVID-19 cases. Government proposed a preparedness and response budget of US\$26 million, with only US\$238 850 having been budgeted for infection prevention and control. This budget may not be enough and has not been fully funded to date. What is also lacking is a breakdown of how much each province or district will get from the Government from its own resources and donations for fighting the coronavirus. Therefore, in the majority of cases, citizens and communities in mining areas are on their own in fighting this deadly pandemic.

- **Use of Social Media Applications as a Monitoring and Communication Tool:** Social media has played a critical role as a medium for information sharing on COVID-19 in mining communities. Most citizens in mining areas have smart phones and share information via WhatsApp groups, Facebook, Twitter and SMS. National radio stations such as National FM, Studio 7 and community radio stations such as YaFm in Zvishavane (Shurugwi) and Diamond FM in Manicaland have also been effective information dissemination tools on COVID-19 related information. WhatsApp groups have however, been the main source of information for mining communities in Matebeleland, Midlands and Manicaland Provinces. However, most artisanal diggers who go underground rarely use smart phones but prefer the older versions of Nokia. This deprives them of information on COVID-19 prevention measures and the need for social distancing. As reported in the first series, dissemination of fake news on WhatsApp groups remains a problem in ASM communities.

Situation at Medium and Large-Scale Mining Companies

- **Medium-Large-Scale Mining Industry Applications for Exemptions:** The Minister of Mines issued a statement on 29 of March 2020 on Guidelines on essential services required to preserve operational capacity in the mining industry during the lockdown. Apart from coal mining companies exempted by the National Lockdown Order, the Ministry indicated that the mining industry needs to keep certain critical equipment and services operational. The Chamber of Mines, a representative body of medium-large scale companies worked on a framework with Ministry of Mines that includes measures on safety of employees and stakeholders from potential spread of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on the mining sector is massive. By the 29th of March 2020, the Chamber of Mines estimated that the industry had lost more than USD \$200 million, hence it wanted to ensure operations resume.
- **ZIMPLATS:** ZIMPLATS is a platinum metals group (PMG) mining company owned by IMPLATS operating in Mhondoro-Ngezi community. It successfully applied for exemption to continue mining operations during the Lockdown. In a statement the company indicated that its primary focus is protecting lives and livelihoods of its employees, contractors, service providers and communities, sustaining business financial viability and contributing to well-being of the country. ZIMPLATS said it will

⁵ In Shurugwi and Matebeleland South they have established Taskforces dealing with Covid-19 comprising of the Joint Operations Command (JOC), Rural District Council, ministry of health, ministry of education and district administrator and in Matebeleland South it includes representatives of small-scale miners. ZMF has been trying to reach mining communities and raising awareness through social media and its existing structures.

take heightened risk mitigation measures to protect the health of workers through COVID-19 detection, awareness, workplace hygiene, medical surveillance and supplies, provision of PPE, isolation and treatment of suspected and confirmed cases.⁶ Community monitors in Mhondoro indicated that ZIMPLATS has lived up to its promise by ensuring provision of PPE to all workers, social distancing in company business (bus now ferrying 30 instead of 60 workers at a time), testing temperature, washing hands with sanitisers and raising at Turf Village, although community monitors want the company to do more for the community at large.

- **UNKI Mine:** On the 30th of March 2020, Unki Mine, another platinum metals group company owned by Anglo-American in Shurugwi District had already sent home most of its employees except a few providing essential services on the effective date of the Lockdown. This was a preventive measure to safeguard the health and safety of workers against Covid-19. It is not clear if Unki Mine has applied for exemption to operate. However, on its website Anglo-American issued statements on COVID-19 highlighting that safety is at the heart of Anglo-American and that it safeguards its people, their families and provides support to host communities from the spread of COVID-19, including providing health, hygiene and distancing measures, but will at the same time seek to maintain security, integrity of assets, supply of essential raw materials to customers and preserve its ability to return operations to normal levels when appropriate⁷. However, on its website Anglo-American only profiled support provided to host communities in Botswana, South Africa, Australia, Brazil and other countries. It did not show its approach or COVID-19 related activities in Zimbabwe and this omission is worrying.⁸ Corporate accountability, transparency and responsible sourcing principles should be key principles driving such large-scale multinational companies.
- **Mimosa Mine:** Mimosa Mine is a Joint Venture between Impala Platinum Holdings Limited (Implats) and Sibanye. The Mine closed all other departments after the announcement of the Lockdown and only essential departments such as the plant department and water pumping sections were left operational. Most workers were sent home. However, the mine is reported to have applied for exemption to mine and will have a reduced workforce. The company is reported to have been involved in COVID-19 community awareness campaigns in Zvishavane.
- **Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC):** ZCDC continued diamond mining operations in Marange although it scaled down its operations following the effective date of the Lockdown. However, it is understood that the company has decided to lock-down some workers on two weeks shifts so that they work within the mine before another shift comes in on a rotational basis. ZCDC issued a flier as part of its awareness campaign on COVID-19 which was distributed to communities online and in the community. On the 1st of April 2020 in Mukwada Ward 29 Chisingwi Village Muchena shopping centre it was reported that state security (police and military) had ordered shop owners to close shops. It was also reported that illegal miners (*gwejas*) are still illegally mining diamonds in Marange without any regard to social distancing. At funerals, not many people are observing the social distancing protocols or any safety measures or limitations of number of people per funeral to 50.

⁶ https://www.zimplats.com/data/2020/04/COVID-19-UPDATE_2Apr20.pdf

⁷ <https://www.angloamerican.com/media/covid-19-update>

⁸ <https://www.angloamerican.com/media/press-releases/2020/06-04-2020>

Legal and Policy Developments on Covid-19

- **Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) Regulations, SI 77 of 2020.** Government passed the Regulations to declare COVID-19 as a formidable epidemic disease and to provide for measures for its prevention, containment and treatment. The regulations prohibit gatherings, gives powers to enforcement officers to disperse, arrest or detain such persons and provides for compulsory testing, detention, medical examination as well as disinfection and isolation of the infected. Mining communities should be familiar with the provisions of this law.
- **Coal mining as Essential Service: Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order, SI 83 of 2020:** The National Lockdown Order has great bearing on mining. It identifies essential services that can continue operating subject to stipulated conditions during the Lockdown. Such services include hospitals, water, supply or distribution of electricity and Coal mining in terms of Section 2(C), (f) and (i). Coal mining is considered an essential service for generation of electricity. Notwithstanding the exemption, coal mining companies are obliged to observe the measures for prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19. However, cases of Chinese coal mining companies disregarding set standards have been reported in Hwange where workers are not being provided with adequate PPE to prevent COVID-19.
- **Other Mining Operations-Applications for Exemptions:** In the Order (SI 83 of 2020) other mining sector operations such as platinum, gold mining or chrome mining among others are not specifically mentioned for exemption, except only coal in Section 2(C)(f) and (i). However, the Order contains Section 4(1) which provides that manufacturing or other businesses whose operations require continuous processes may operate with the minimum staff required for care and maintenance of operations. This provision has been used by mining companies to apply for exemptions with the support of the Ministry of Mines and Chamber of Mines. The mining industry argued that the National Lockdown will present problems to the sector if not allowed to operate. As a result, most mining companies in Zimbabwe have applied or are likely to apply for exemptions. While this is good to maintain essential operations and for the economy, the risk is that if the companies fail to implement adequate measures to prevent COVID-19 amongst workers and communities in which they live, the disease is likely to spread in mining areas. Many companies have weak safety, health, environment and responsible sourcing standards and compliance levels.

Court Cases

- **Access to Water for Communities Displaced from Marange:** On the 3rd of April 2020, ZELA filed an urgent High Court application seeking an order for ZESA to reconnect electricity to a Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) water pump station that supplies clean water to displaced communities at Arda Transau. The people were displaced from Marange by diamond mining companies. ZESA had

⁹ Arda – Transau Relocation Development Trust (Applicant) and Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (Respondent)

disconnected electricity due to non-payment of bills by poor relocated families, thereby depriving them of access to clean water and exposing them to COVID-19. A day before the court order was granted, ZESA reconnected the water, although subsequently an order by consent was granted by the High Court on the 4th of April 2020 compelling ZESA to connect electricity to the water pump. The court victory protects the right of access to water for the people as set in the Constitution specifically Section 77(a). It also helps in preventing the potential spread of Covid-19.

- **Hwange Colliery Company:** In Hwange, the Greater Whange Residents Trust filed an urgent chamber application in the High Court on the 6th of April 2020 against ZINWA, Hwange Colliery, Ministry of Health and others seeking for an order to improve water supply during the COVID-19 lockdown and to handover water provision to Hwange Local Board. Water scarcity has forced women to disregard social distancing in the community. ZLHR is assisting the community.
- **Chinese Coal Mining Case:** The ZELA Litigation unit is considering taking legal action against a Chinese coal mining company called Zimberly Investment in Hwange for putting the health, safety and lives of 21 of its workers at risk by failing to provide adequate protective equipment such as masks, gloves, sanitizers, toilets and water taps to help prevent spread of COVID-19. As a coal company it is exempt from the lockdown and has been operating. At the mine, 10 employees are said to be sharing a small room and this means social distancing is not being observed. Given the contagious nature of COVID-19 the conduct of the Chinese has serious implications on the right to life, violates health rights and the Lockdown Order for exempted coal companies and essential service providers. One would expect the Chinese to be more cautious on preventing the potential spread of COVID-19 since the virus started in Wuhan in China.
- **Natural Stone Export Company Ltd in Mutoko:** Natural Stone Export is a granite mining company in Mutoko District. There were allegations against Natural Stone that it had failed to adhere to safety and health standards to prevent COVID-19 by not providing its workers with masks, other protective equipment and social distancing. However, an investigation report filed by Ministry of Health officials dated 4 April 2020 indicated that the company has an exemption letter to operate and has taken measures to prevent any potential spread of COVID-19 amongst its workers. However, it appears the company only took corrective measures after complaints were lodged by workers.

Miner Voices

“The informal mining sector is the worst hit since they were still involved in the running Battles with the police under the operation “Chikorokoza Chapera”, the sector is on its knees.” Nyenje – Mberengwa

“People are not complying with the shut down because they are not used to being indoors in addition hunger makes it hard to stay home, one need to go out and look for food. Even the law enforcement agencies are hungry and are failing to comply, some police officers have been noted in long tight packed ques in search for Maize meal ” Anonymous-Gwanda

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Law Enforcement and respect of human rights:** While the National Lockdown Order restricts and limits the rights of citizens for public health reasons, law enforcement agents are encouraged to respect and protect the rights and freedoms of citizens and communities in mining communities. The right to health of law enforcement agents should also be respected, promoted and protected by Government during deployment through provision of personal protective equipment. The law enforcement agents are exposed and may spread COVID-19 to members of the public or those arrested.
- **ASM training and capacity building on SHE:** As ASM miners get exemptions to continue mining during the lockdown, there is need for more capacity building programmes for ASM players on safety, health and environment (SHE) to help remove the culture of non-compliance with public health, safety and environment standards and in particular use of PPE and applicable laws. This can be solidified post-COVID-19.
- **Elimination of gold trade distortion to improve revenue follows into fiscus:** To curb criminality, arbitrage, corruption, illicit financial flows and trade of gold on the black market by ASM players for improved revenue generation and allocation to the public health and other social service sectors, Government should scrap the 55% in US\$ and 45% in RTGS system for payment to those who sell gold to FPR.
- **ASM Compliance Monitoring and reporting of Safety and Health:** Following the exemptions granted to ASM and Large-Scale mining companies, civil society groups should continue monitoring and publicly reporting on the level of implementation and compliance on safety and health measures by mining companies and ASMs in preventing and containing COVID-19 as prescribed by the Order. This can enhance corporate accountability, transparency and enhance responsible sourcing practices in both the ASM sector and large-scale mining sector.
- **Improve Allocation of Resources to Provinces and Districts:** Allocation of financial and human resources for COVID-19 prevention awareness campaigns by Government needs to be improved as most provinces and districts lack adequate resources, equipment and health facilities to deal with any cases or to educate the public. A publicly accessible breakdown of funds allocated to the provinces and districts from the projected national COVID-19 Response Budget may be critical, including how the funds will be used to enhance transparency and accountability.
- **Use of social media and new technologies in monitoring at community level:** COVID-19 presents an opportunity for increased use and application of new social media applications in mining communities and amongst CSOs to promote corporate and Government accountability and transparency. This is an area that ZELA is researching on and will be sharing results on in the coming months.

Stay Safe, Stop the Spread, Save Lives



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