



Upholding Human Dignity: Addressing the Grievous Human Rights Abuses in Mozambique's Extractive Sector

- In recent years, the Government of Mozambique has made commendable efforts to embrace initiatives that promote business and human rights, such as joining the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)¹ and ongoing work to become a member of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights Initiative². Despite these positive steps, Mozambique continues to register cases of human rights abuses and dissatisfaction among communities living close to natural resource extraction zones.



¹ <https://eiti.org/countries/mozambique>

² <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/11/mozambique-and-voluntary-principles-security-and-human-rights>



- Mineral coal mining in the Moatize district, in Tete, has been a matter of great concern for the local population. Recently, TV Sucesso reported a case of water pollution caused by coal mining. Mineral coal extraction has caused a series of environmental and social problems in that region, affecting the quality of life of local communities.

The population of Moatize complains about the pollution of the water that has been used for human consumption and irrigation of plantations. Toxic waste resulting from coal mining has contaminated rivers, lakes and aquifers in the region, making the water unfit for consumption and harming the health of local communities. In addition to complaints from the local population, studies carried out in Moatize show the serious consequences of mining activities on the environment, health and livelihoods of communities. These studies exposed the pollution of water sources, the devastation of ecosystems, and the impact on the well-being of residents³.

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666765722000503>



Despite the abundance of knowledge and evidence, there seem to be no effective solutions to address these pressing issues. The voices of affected communities have been amplified through advocacy efforts demanding justice and a clean environment, but these calls have often fallen on deaf ears. The answer is to develop and implement comprehensive strategies that prioritize the protection of human rights and community well-being, ensuring that lessons from previous studies are translated into tangible actions for a sustainable and just future.

In addition to Moatize, graffiti exploration in Balama, in the province of Cabo Delgado, is characterized by labor conflicts, violations, and abuses of human rights, in addition to the denial of the right to the development of communities. In September 2022, more than 300 Twigg workers at Exploration & Mining Ltd went on strike to demand better working conditions, including salary increases, annual leave (disciplinary leave), recognition and enhancement of professional qualifications. Complaints included the existence of wage differences between local workers and workers from other provinces in the country, who are supposedly better paid and better regarded by the company's management. Of the workers involved in the strike that paralyzed operations for a month (from September to October), 23 were expelled in November 2022⁴.

These examples demonstrate how companies, instead of improving the lives of local communities and promoting development, have exacerbated their difficulties. Mineral coal and graphite mining, practices that cause pollution, also devastate precious lands and forests, destroying the livelihoods of communities that depend on these natural resources for their survival. It is extremely important that companies operating in the extractive sector are fully aware that their triumphs must never come at the expense of the well-being of communities or the disrespect for their fundamental rights.

The burden of responsibility rests with the

State, which has a duty to protect its population against human rights abuses perpetrated by companies involved in the extraction and exploitation of natural resources. Still, the State has failed to fulfill this duty, leaving communities vulnerable to the harmful actions of these companies. The absence of adequate oversight and regulation has paved the way for an environment where corporate interests take precedence over the well-being and fundamental rights of affected communities. The consequences of this regulatory gap are wide-ranging and devastating, with communities bearing the brunt of the social, environmental and health impacts caused by poorly regulated exploitation.

Without adequate supervision and regulation, companies operate in an environment of impunity, often prioritizing profit to the detriment of human dignity. As a result, communities suffer the irreversible destruction of their lands, the contamination of their water sources and the degradation of their health and well-being. It is within these communities that the true cost of this regulatory failure is most acutely felt. It is imperative that the State recognizes the gravity of its responsibilities and takes decisive measures to correct this systemic failure, guaranteeing the protection and well-being of its citizens in the face of uncontrolled corporate power.

Across the African continent, some nations have managed to overcome similar challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive and humane extractive sector. For example, in Ghana's mining sector, the implementation of Community Development Agreements (CDA) has enabled constructive dialogue between mining companies and local communities⁵. Through these agreements, communities receive social and economic benefits, enabling them to actively participate in decision-making processes and shape the direction of mining operations. In addition, Tanzania has taken steps to address imbalances in the distribution of benefits from mining⁶ activities. Imposing mining taxes, along with allocating funds to community development projects, ensures that local communities

⁴ <https://cartamz.com/index.php/economia-e-negocios/item/11800-trabalhadores-da-mina-de-grafite-de-balama-em-greve>

⁵ <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Ahafo.community.agreement.2018.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=b14bbf0b-16e4-491d-9172-0ed5750a343f#:~:text=The%20main%20legislation%20governing%20mining,processing%20and%20dealing%20in%20minerals.>

receive a fair share of the profits generated by extracting their resources.

Mozambique is at a crucial crossroads, where actions taken today will shape the future of its extractive sector and the well-being of its communities. It is essential that businesses and the Government recognize the immense suffering endured by these communities and adopt an approach that places human dignity at the heart of all operations. To achieve this, the Government must create an environment that promotes

transparency, accountability and empathy. Appropriate regulations must be implemented to ensure responsible sourcing and environmental protection. Companies must engage in meaningful dialogue with affected communities, valuing their perspectives and addressing their concerns. Mechanisms for fair compensation and reparation must be established to correct past injustices. The exploitation of natural resources cannot make life worse for local communities but rather contribute to their sustainable development.



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