



# BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS



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GUARDIÃO DA DEMOCRACIA

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## Towards respect for human rights or a repetition of the cycle of abuse and violation of community rights?

- The relationship between the extractive sector and human rights has been a central theme in the debate on development and social justice in Mozambique. The year 2024 brought important advances, such as the development of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and the country's accession to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights initiative. However, these advances contrast with a reality marked by persistent violations. Communities affected by large projects continue to face challenges, environmental pollution, poor working conditions and the lack of effective mechanisms to hold companies accountable





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The big question that emerges is: are corporate advances and commitments really promoting structural change or do they merely represent an image of social responsibility by extractive companies without real impact? This article analyses recent cases and discusses the persistent challenges in the sector.

## Impacts of Extractive Activity in 2024: Protests, Failures and Local Tensions

The year 2024 was marked by iconic events in Mozambique, reflecting social, economic and environmental challenges that continue to shape the country's future. Each event highlights not only the challenges faced, but also the resilience and determination of local communities to demand justice and change. Below, we highlight the most notable cases.

One of the first cases recorded was discontent in Chongoene <sup>1</sup>. The Chinese mining company Dingsheng Minerals faced strong opposition from the community in Chibuto, in Gaza province, due to its failure to deliver on promises made to the local population. On 8 January 2024, the protests resulted in the halt of construction work on a dock intended for the export of heavy sands. This case illustrates the recurring cycle in Mozambique: foreign companies begin to exploit natural resources without ensuring transparent and honest dialogue with the affected communities. The lack of mechanisms to force these companies to fulfil their commitments generates social tensions and growing discontent.

Subsequently, on 22 July 2024, two workers from the Portuguese company Mota Engel lost their lives in a workplace accident at Mine 2, located in Moatize, Tete <sup>2</sup>. The lack of adequate safety equipment was the main cause of the incident, exposing a deep-rooted systemic failure: negligence with safety standards and the inability of authorities to effectively monitor working conditions. Many subcontracted companies operate at standards well below those required internationally, increasing risks and placing workers in a vulnerable situation.

Subsequently, worrying cases of environmental pollution emerged in Moatize <sup>3</sup>. Through a complaint sent to "Vulcan Moçambique", with the knowledge of several public and private entities, including the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD), residents of the affected neighborhoods of 25 de Setembro, Bagamoio, Chithatha, 1.º de Maio, Nhantchere, Liberdade, Malàbué and Chipanga, expressed dissatisfaction with the living conditions they have faced due to mining operations. As described in the document, the residents are, for the most part, natives or naturalized residents of the region, and have always valued the natural resources of Moatize, which have historically provided a healthy and prosperous environment. However, the implementation of mining activities, which was initially met with optimism, has brought a bitter and discouraging reality.

Since Vulcan Mozambique took over the coal operations previously managed by Vale, residents in the region have reported worsening air and water pollution. Coal dust affects entire neighborhoods, causing respiratory diseases and other health problems in the local population. This case highlights the weakness of regulatory mechanisms in Mozambique and the ineffectiveness of environmental policies implemented by mining companies. Without pressure from the government or international entities, multinationals continue to operate without facing effective accountability.

Furthermore, on 26 November 2024, workers at Jindal Mozambique staged a protest against illegal wage deductions and alleged intimidation by political figures <sup>4</sup>. This case raises seri-

<sup>1</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Descontentamento-Popular-em-Chongoene-Comunidade-Exige-Cumprimento-de-Promessas-na-Exploracao-de-Areias-Pesadas.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Acidentes-Mortais-Levantam-Preocupacoes-de-Seguranca-nas-Minas-de-Moatize-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Populacao-de-Moatize-Denuncia-Poluicao-em-Larga-Escala-Causada-pelas-Actividades-Mineiras-da-Vulcan-Mocambique.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Trabalhadores-da-Jindal-Alegam-Descontos-Ilegais-e-Intimidacao-por-Meio-de-Politicos.pdf>

ous questions about the abuse of power and the fragility of labour rights in the extractive sector. Many workers in Mozambican mines are subcontracted, receive lower wages than expected and work in precarious conditions. The lack of strong trade unions and effective legal mechanisms perpetuates this scenario of exploitation.

Finally, one of the most recent cases recorded was the invasion of the Kenmare Mine, in Moma,

in the province of Nampula <sup>5</sup>. On 5 December 2024, protesters occupied the mine in protest against the company's failure to comply with its commitments. Tensions escalated to such an extent that executives had to be evacuated in a private plane, while facing the threat of a fire on the runway. This incident demonstrated the growing dissatisfaction of local communities, who, faced with the ineffectiveness of formal channels of dialogue and demands, resorted to more drastic forms of protest.

## The Extractive Sector: Weak Regulation, Corporate Impunity and Exclusion of Local Communities

The cases presented are just a small sample of the many problems recorded throughout the year. These examples highlight the structural challenges faced by the extractive sector in Mozambique, which reflect the complexity of systemic problems that go far beyond the simple lack of individual commitment by companies. These challenges highlight deep-rooted failures that continue to undermine the country's sustainable and equitable development.

One of the main problems is weak regulation and lack of effective enforcement. The Mozambican government does not have sufficient mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure compliance with environmental, labor and human rights standards, allowing inappropriate practices to flourish without proper oversight. This deficiency paves the way for abuse and negligence. Furthermore, the lack of corporate accountabili-

ty is a barrier. Many companies operate without facing legal or financial consequences, even for serious violations. This institutionalized impunity creates an environment where unethical practices can continue unchecked.

Another key obstacle is the lack of transparency and the exclusion of local communities from decision-making processes. The lack of effective dialogue with communities results in unfulfilled promises, increasing conflicts and undermining trust. This dynamic makes it difficult to establish constructive relationships between companies and communities. Meanwhile, the government's subordination to personal interests is notable. In many cases, the state appears to prioritize the demands of companies over the protection of workers and communities. This unbalanced alliance further weakens the social and economic fabric of the country.

## The Need for Change: An Action Plan to Ensure Respect for Human Rights

Therefore, despite progress and growing international pressure for companies to act more responsibly, persistent challenges reveal that Mozambique has not yet broken the cycle of violations and abuses in the extractive sector. Lack of oversight, impunity and non-compliance by many companies continue to perpetuate abus-

es. To move forward, the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights mustn't be just a formal document, but an effective instrument for change. In addition, it is crucial to strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that human rights are respected in practice and not just in words.

<sup>5</sup> <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Protesters-Invade-Kenmare-Mine-Raising-Alarm-in-Mozambique-Extractive-Sector.pdf>

In the Business and Human Rights space, the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) has two main projects. First, the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR) Project aims to establish working groups on voluntary principles in the country, both at the national level in Maputo and in Cabo Delgado province. The national working group contributes to minimizing the risk of human rights abuses and security-related incidents in communities and promotes transparency and good corporate social performance practices. This project

is being led by CDD and the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs (MJACR) in partnership with the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). The second Project, Promoting Human Rights in the Business Environment and Judicial Sector Action in Northern Mozambique, aims to contribute to strengthening the capacities of ombudsmen, human rights defenders, businesses and other stakeholders on human rights in business. This project is being implemented in partnership with the Legal and Judicial Training Center (CFJJ).

## Final Considerations

Mozambique's extractive sector continues to be a breeding ground for tensions between local communities and large mining companies. 2024 saw protests and cases of negligence that reflect the systemic failures that still plague the country, such as weak regulation, lack of effective oversight and corporate impunity. Although the government has taken important steps, such as the creation of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, the reality on the ground remains challenging, with local communities still facing serious human rights violations. The lack of true corporate accountability and the subordination of the state to corporate interests continue to perpetuate the exploitation of communities and environmental degradation.

On the other hand, the resistance and resilience of communities has been remarkable. Throughout 2024, we have seen demonstrations and protests by affected populations, demanding not only fair compensation, but also an active role in decisions that directly impact their lives. These protests, such as those that took place in Chongoene, Moatize and Moma, are not only a reflection of growing dissatisfaction, but also a response to the lack of true dialogue between communities and companies, in addition to the ineffectiveness of public policies that should guarantee the protection of the population's fundamental rights.

The commitments made by the government and companies regarding human rights and corporate social responsibility must be implemented practically and effectively. The National Action Plan, although an important step forward, must be more than a formal document: it must be an instrument of real change. For this to happen, it is necessary to strengthen monitoring mechanisms, promote greater transparency and ensure that companies genuinely fulfill their responsibilities and not just as a façade of social commitment. Otherwise, Mozambique will continue to experience the cycle of human rights violations, undermining its development and social justice.



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### EDITORIAL INFORMATION

**Property:** CDD – Centro para Democracia e Direitos Humanos  
**Director:** Prof. Adriano Nuvunga  
**Editor:** André Mulungu  
**Author:** Helio Siteo  
**Layout:** CDD

**Address:**  
Rua de Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.  
Telefone: +258 21 085 797

 CDD\_moz  
**E-mail:** [info@cddmoz.org](mailto:info@cddmoz.org)  
**Website:** <http://www.cddmoz.org>

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