



# BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS



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## Pollution caused by mining in Manica: an environmental, social and development crisis



### Introduction

The right to development, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1986, establishes that all peoples have the right to participate in, contribute to, and benefit equally from economic, social, and cultural development. This principle is particularly relevant in Mozambique, where mining and natural resources are often presented as drivers of progress. However, evidence from Manica province and other parts of the country reveals a worrying reality: the current model, based on unsustainable exploitation, is compromising not only the environment but also the health, agriculture,

and dignity of local communities.

The ongoing environmental and social crisis in Manica highlights that when development is conflated with mere wealth extraction without regard for social and ecological responsibility, the result is exclusion, food insecurity, disease, and inequality. Thus, discussing business and human rights in this context means debating the extent to which the State and companies fulfill (or fail to fulfill) their obligation to ensure that the country's resources are transformed into means for communities to enjoy their right to development, while respecting the environment.



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**Without this balance, Mozambique risks converting its mineral abundance into a permanent source of disease, food insecurity, and social injustice. But with firm policies, community participation, and responsible companies, it is possible to transform the current crisis into an opportunity to reconfigure mining as a true lever for sustainable development.**

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## Pollution in Manica: environmental violations with social impacts

In recent months, inspections have revealed that several gold mining companies in Manica continue to operate in flagrant violation of environmental regulations. In August 2025 alone, six new companies were fined, bringing the total number of operators sanctioned for environmental crimes to 11<sup>1</sup>.

According to the national mining inspector, Grácio Cune, many of these companies have had their operations suspended, especially those operating in the Révuè River basin, whose pollution has already seriously compromised the Chicamba reservoir. The water is murky, muddy, and contaminated, jeopardizing the water supply to communities and the regional ecological balance.

Manica Governor Francisca Tomás publicly expressed her concern, emphasizing that unsustaina-

ble exploitation undermines the population's confidence in water quality and threatens families' most basic rights. In addition to the direct health risk, the impacts have a devastating impact on family farming, the district's mainstay of livelihood<sup>2</sup>. The use of mercury and other chemicals has contaminated the soil and made irrigation impossible, forcing farmers to abandon their land.

Fernanda Brito, a local farmer quoted by DW<sup>3</sup>, sums up the crisis in stark terms: *"Without agriculture, we have no life. This year we haven't produced anything because the land has already had enough of this mercury."* Her voice is also that of thousands of families who, deprived of means of production and food, see their right to development transformed into an empty promise.

## From local pollution to a national problem

The situation in Manica is no exception. In August 2024, the population of Moatize, Tete, reported to the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) the large-scale pollution caused by the coal mining company Vulcan Moçambique.<sup>4</sup> The company's mining practices, lacking adequate environmental safeguards, have turned the district into an increasingly inhospitable place for its inhabitants.

The complaints highlighted an alarming increase in respiratory, cardiovascular, and even cancerous diseases, especially among children and the elderly. "We live in a constantly and excessively polluted environment that significantly compromises the

immune systems of adults and the health of new and future generations," the community reported.

The impacts aren't limited to the air: biodiversity, soil, and water are seriously degraded. Even infrastructure built by residents shows accelerated signs of deterioration due to pollution.

This scenario demonstrates that mining, rather than being a vector for inclusive development, has served as a driver of human rights violations, particularly the right to health and the right to a balanced and sustainable environment, both enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique.

## The role of companies: social responsibility or immediate profit?

Mining companies, both domestic and foreign, cannot continue to operate based on a model that prioritizes immediate profits over the lives and future of communities. Their actions, marked by repeated violations and noncompliance, demonstra-

te a fragile commitment to minimum standards of corporate social responsibility and respect for human rights.

By externalizing environmental and social costs, these companies transform communities into sacri-

<sup>1</sup> <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/six-more-mining-companies-fined-for-pollution-in-manica-province-central-mozambique-289778/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rm.co.mz/mineracao-em-manica-governo-preocupado-com-nivel-de-poluicao-na-albufeira-de-chicamba/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/mocambique-rios-poluidos-forçam-abandono-da-agricultura-em-manica/a-72932319>

<sup>4</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>5</sup> <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/six-more-mining-companies-fined-for-pollution-in-manica-province-central-mozambique-289778/>

rice zones, where the degradation of health, agriculture, and the environment becomes the price paid for exploitation that enriches only a few. This logic contradicts international principles on Busi-

ness and Human Rights, including the UN Guiding Principles, which require companies not only to comply with the law but also to adopt preventive and restorative measures.

## The role of the State: weak regulator or guarantor of the right to development?

The Mozambican state has a constitutional duty to protect life, health, and the environment. However, experience shows persistent weaknesses in oversight and corporate accountability. The application of fines and suspensions, while positive, proves insufficient given the scale of the problem.

President Daniel Chapo warned in 2025 that the government could confiscate machinery from repeat offenders and sell it at public auction <sup>5</sup>. This statement highlights the need for tougher measu-

res. However, more than threats, what is required is a robust, independent, and transparent regulatory policy that guarantees reparations to affected populations and prevents further violations.

The absence of a strong regulatory state exacerbates pollution, as well as directly compromising the right to development: without a healthy environment, productive agriculture, and access to clean water, there are no minimum conditions for communities to participate in and benefit from the fruits of economic growth.

## Conclusion: Development with rights or growth without a future?

The environmental crises in Manica and Moatize clearly reveal the dilemma Mozambique faces: whether to transform mineral wealth into an opportunity for development or perpetuate an extractive model that deepens poverty, degrades the environment, and violates fundamental rights.

The right to community development depends on a relationship between three actors :

- Companies, which must respect environmental standards and human rights, must avoid the logic of profit at any cost;
- the State, which must act as a firm regulator, ensuring effective oversight and compensa-

tion for damages;

- communities, which must be recognized as active subjects, with the right to participate and decide on the destination of the resources in their territories.

Without this balance, Mozambique risks converting its mineral abundance into a permanent source of disease, food insecurity, and social injustice. But with firm policies, community participation, and responsible companies, it is possible to transform the current crisis into an opportunity to reconfigure mining as a true lever for sustainable development.



**MISSÃO:**

*Inspirar e impulsionar ações para proteger os direitos humanos, fortalecer a democracia e promover a justiça.*


**MISSION:**

*Inspiring and driving actions to protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and promote justice.*

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