



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: Mining

The mining industry has been the economic and social backbone of Zambia since independence, and as of 2005, mining has contributed about 65% of export earnings. Major minerals are copper and cobalt.

With the production of these minerals comes an impact on the environment. It has been generally observed that mining leaves negative effects on the communities such as health hazards and land degradation.

With the environmental impact that come with mining there is need to come up with measures that would reduce the adverse impact of mining activities on the nearby communities.

For instance, the Copperbelt, which is Zambia's mining hub, is seriously polluted. The Kafue National Park – the second largest national park in the world, and one of the places with the most endangered wildlife species – is threatened by the pollution of the Kafue River running through it.

Pollution also affects local communities exposed to toxic waste. Traditional activities such as agriculture, livestock farming and fishing are all adversely affected by air, ground and water pollution – created by mining operations.

The Weekly Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Effects of Mining on the Environment

Mining causes land degradation in that huge pits are created. These pits pose a hazard as they can become a death trap to people that move around these areas.

Also there is the aspect of these huge mining pits filling with water. Water from these mining pits is contaminated with minerals and other chemical substances that are dangerous to the health of the people. Often times, this water that is in these mining pits is used by surrounding communities for many things – including bathing. This creates a health hazard.

Mining activities bring about air pollution. “Around the Mufulira smelter there is enormous air pollution, with sulphur dioxide in the part of town where the miners live,” according to the head of the Planning and Information Department at the Zambian

Ministry of the Environment, March 2009.

This pollution, too, has impact on the local communities' health. It causes asthma attacks, lung infections and respiratory complications. At Kankoyo the inhabitants complain of coughs and eye irritations, and worry about the effects of these emissions on their babies (The Mopani copper mine report, 2010).

Sulphur dioxide emission also causes acid rain which contributes to soil deterioration making it unfit for farming.

“Acid rain makes the soil acidic. You have to apply lime to neutralize it. It's expensive, and you've got to start all over again after the next acid rain” (Environment Outlook report, 2010).

Activities for Journalists

A few kilometres from Mufulira there used to be the Kabwe zinc and lead deposits. They were the richest in Africa until they were mined to exhaustion by the mining company, Anglo-American. Since then, despite the clean-up programme initiated by the World Bank, Kabwe is one of the ten most polluted industrial towns in the world. The children have an average level of lead in their blood that is five to ten times higher than the limit set by the US Environmental Protection Agency. The soil and water also contain alarmingly high concentrations of metals.

Looking at the above scenario of Kabwe the mining company leaves too much to be desired. The town of Kabwe has now become a ghost town as the minerals that were being mined have been depleted.

Many environmentalists believe there is a need for mining companies to increase the corporate social responsibility on the communities. Mines should contribute more of the resources so that the effects of the mines on the environment are reduced.

Mines now have to get a license to discharge into the environment. Looking at these regulations there is need to strictly observe these regulations in order to make the communities where these mining companies are located benefit.

There is a law where it is stipulated that all mines have to address environmental issues as per Environmental Impact Assessment. At times some of the environmental issues that are brought out by the Zambia Environmental Management Authority are overturned by the government. Therefore, going forward ZEMA needs more authority to make decisions and those decisions should only be repealed after certain conditions are met by the government.

There is also urgent need for diversification from the mining sector into the agriculture sector. Certain types of agriculture techniques can help communities better adapt to the effects of climate change and other techniques, such as

Permaculture, can even slow the effects of it.

Interview an expert on ZEMA regulations and ask him/her how effective the enforcement of mining regulations is that affect the environment.

Is he/she pleased with the enforcement? Can more be done to enforce exist regulations?

You might interview people who have had been affected by some mining operations. How have they been affected?

Talk to health care providers in these communities. Do they see any health effects from mining operations in their patients? If so, what kinds of health issues?

What, if anything, are the mines doing to curb mining effects on the environment? How effective are those plans? Are some mining companies doing a better job than others? If so, what are they doing?

Check with ZEMA officials and environmental groups to see if these mining companies are, in fact, trying to make serious changes to protect the health of citizens and the Zambian environment.

Useful Links

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The Mopani Copper Mine Report, December 2010.