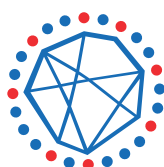




The Impact of COVID-19 on African communities affected by diamond mining

Kimberly Process Civil Society Coalition (KPCSC)



KIMBERLEY
PROCESS
CIVIL SOCIETY
COALITION

EDITORIAL

The Impact of COVID-19 on African communities affected by diamond mining

June 2020

Front cover image: Alluvial diamond miners at the Lebanon Fire Force site, Tankoro chiefdom, Kono district, Sierra Leone (Photo: NMJD, June 2020)

Author: Kimberly Process Civil Society Coalition (KPCSC)

Edited by the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA), the Center for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) and the International Peace Information Service (IPIS)

Layout: SAKADO (<https://www.sakado.be/>)



**KIMBERLEY
PROCESS
CIVIL SOCIETY
COALITION**

The Kimberly Process Civil Society Coalition (KPCSC) is the umbrella organization that acts as observer of the Kimberley Process on behalf of civil society. Most coalition members are based in Africa, the world's main diamond producing continent. Representing communities affected by diamond mining and trade, members strive to improve diamond sector governance in their home countries. The Coalition's local and

regional expertise enables us to follow up on responsible diamond sourcing on the ground and articulate a grassroots perspective on the diamond sector at national, regional and international fora. The Coalition includes representatives from Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Belgium.



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the KPCSC and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial.....	2
1. Introduction	4
2. Methodology	4
3. The geography and nature of selected diamond mining areas	5
4. Health impact of Covid-19	6
5. Impact on diamond mining and trading	7
6. Socio-economic impact.....	9
7. Awareness-raising and support programs	10
8. Compliance with Covid-19 regulations	12
9. Crime, tensions and human rights	13
10. Recommendations	15

1. Introduction

The diamond sector has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic¹. The devastation is felt across the supply chain, not the least in various African countries that depend on this precious mineral in their socio-economic development. To curb the spread of Covid-19, countries announced wide-ranging measures. Borders were closed across the continent for travel, with the movement of goods delayed at best. Interurban and intercity movements were banned in most countries. Lockdown measures were imposed, ranging from complete shutdowns to various restrictions on the movement of people and operation of businesses. Mining, as an essential industry for domestic resource mobilization, was mostly exempted from lockdown regulations, albeit subject to specific sanitary and distancing measures.

While the impact of Covid-19 on mid- and downstream businesses has been rather well documented,² much less is known about how this has affected African communities affected by diamond mining. In this light, the Kimberly Process Civil Society Coalition (KPCSC) has been assessing the situation on the level of various communities during Covid-19 lockdown measures. This report outlines the main findings of this assessment in seven African countries: Zimbabwe, Guinea, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

2. Methodology

Given Covid-19 travel restrictions, data for this report was collected remotely through phone interviews, messaging services, social media and email. Yet, thanks to the Coalition's network of community monitors and community groups on the ground, this data includes first-hand updates and insights on the situation in mining areas. In addition, interviews were conducted with mining company employees, artisanal miners, councilors, community representatives, members of public and private security services, traders, mining company officials, government officials, local health personnel and local leaders. Finally, a desk review of news articles and government reports was carried out to assess trends and evolutions related to the impact of the pandemic as well as of the measures aimed to curb it. The findings in this report are based on information and data gathered in April and May 2020.

3. The geography and nature of selected diamond mining areas

Table 1: Geography and nature of selected diamond mining areas

Country	Area/ region	Name of company	Nature of diamond mining activity
Zimbabwe	Marange	ZCDC and Anjin	Large-scale mining (LSM)
			Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM)
		Katanga Mining (Pvt) Ltd	LSM (exploration)
	Chivi	Murowa diamonds	LSM (exploration)
	Zvishavane	Murowa diamonds	LSM
Guinea	Macenta		ASM
	Kérouané		ASM
Cameroon	Eastern region along the border with Central African Republic		ASM
Sierra Leone	Kono	Koidu Limited	LSM and ASM
		Meya Mining	
		Sea Wright Mining	
	Kenema	Sierra Diamond Limited	
Lesotho	Southern region		ASM (mainly exploration)
	Northern region	Letšeng and Liqhobong diamond mine	LSM
Côte d'Ivoire	Séguéla		ASM
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Tshopo province		ASM

This report covers areas where diamonds are mined on large-scale, small-scale and artisanal operations, as shown in Table 1 above. For Zimbabwe information was gathered in 3 areas, two of which have just exploration activities going on. One area, Marange, has both large-scale and artisanal mining activities, although the latter take place informally and are being criminalized. The selected prefectures in Guinea, Macenta and Kérouané, where artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is taking place, account for the bulk of the country's diamond production. Most of the diamond exploitation in Cameroon is done in the country's Eastern region by artisanal miners, including refugees and migrants from the Central African Republic. In Sierra Leone, the survey focused on the two main diamond mining districts, Kono and Kenema, where all scales of exploitation occur

side by side. A large majority of young men in these areas are reported to try their luck in this sector. All diamond mining in Côte d'Ivoire is done on artisanal or small-scale. The targeted Séguéla region accounts for approximately 90% of the country's known diamond reserves³. DRC has around 28 diamond mining areas (spread over the provinces of Kasai-Central, Kasai-Oriental, Sankuru, Lomami, Equateur, Bas-Uele, Haut-Uele, Ituri and Tshopo). This survey covers three of the largest ASM areas in Banalia, Bafwasende et Opala (Tshopo province).

4. Health impact of Covid-19

Table 2: Covid-19 statistics for selected countries as of 12 June 2020 (source: Johns Hopkins CSSE)⁴

Country	Confirmed cases	Number of deaths
Zimbabwe	332	4
Guinea	4,372	23
Cameroon	8,681	212
Sierra Leone	1,085	50
Lesotho	4	0
Côte d'Ivoire	4,404	41
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	4,515	98

While statistics are hard to compare due to different testing capacities and approaches, they do give an indication about the spread of the virus on the continent. Lesotho has so far been spared of the worst of this pandemic, with only 4 confirmed cases and no deaths. Zimbabwe has the second lowest number of confirmed cases among the seven selected countries. Cameroon is worst affected with 8,681 confirmed infections and 212 deaths. In all countries, these cases are mainly in urban areas and have not spread much to diamond mining areas, which are typically located in remote, rural settings. It should however be highlighted that limited testing of the virus is being done outside of major towns and cities.

A few confirmed cases were reported in diamond-rich towns in Cameroon (Colomines and Batouri) and Sierra Leone (Tongo). If the virus were to spread in these areas, the impact would likely be devastating due to the absence of appropriate health care facilities in these zones. In Lesotho, the main community hosting diamond mining, relies on clinics and hospitals more than 50km away. In countries like Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC and Guinea, there are health facilities within the communities, but these lack adequate resources, staff, equipment and medication. The diamond-producing regions of Côte d'Ivoire (Séguéla and Tortiya), for instance, have the lowest physician-to-population ratio of the country (0.5 physicians per 10,000 inhabitants) and almost 46% of the population lives more than 15 kilometers from a health center⁵. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC) has a clinic for its staff, but it is not adequately

3 P. Chirico et K. Malpeli, Investigation reconnaissance de la ressource potentielle diamantifère et de la capacité de production de la Côte d'Ivoire, (U.S. Geological, 2012), <<https://www.kimberleyprocess.com/fr/system/files/documents/USGS%20Cote%20D%27Ivoire%20Fact%20Sheet%20FR.pdf>>.

4 John Hopkins University and Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Centre: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.

5 Côte d'Ivoire Minister of Health and Public Hygiene, Annual Report 2018.

resourced due to financial challenges. Marange clinic which is about 80km from the diamond mines is the major health center for the locals. However, the clinic is not well equipped to handle serious ill patients, which are referred to Mutare Provincial Hospital, about 130 km from the diamond mining area. At the time of the production of this report, Mutare provincial Hospital was not yet ready to handle Covid-19 cases.

5. Impact on diamond mining and trading

This section assesses the impact of Covid-19 on diamond mining and trading activities, looking at closure of sites, numbers of workers, production levels, nature of activities, financing arrangements, trade flows and others.



Artisanal diamond miners at work in Colomine, East region of Cameroon (Photo: RELUFA, March 2020)

Operations in all surveyed countries, artisanal, small as well as large-scale have been affected by Covid-19 related measures. Exports have halted almost completely. In Guinea, diamond exports fell drastically from 270,157 carats in the 1st quarter of 2019 to 39,494 carats in the 1st quarter of 2020⁶. Officials of the National Bureau of Expertise (BNE), that have to approve all diamond exports, confirmed that they had been out of work since the beginning of April due the closure of land and air borders. Cameroon has not exported any diamonds since the start of the lockdown either. According to Kimberley Process officials in the country few buying offices have come to declare goods. Buying offices that had already signed their KP certificates are now seeing them expire.

Artisanal and small-scale mining seems to be experiencing the worst slowdown. One factor reducing productivity are government measures put in place to contain and manage the spread of Covid-19. These include social distancing measures which often resulted in the downsizing of workers active at each given time and the reduction of working hours. Yet, what is particularly slackening operations is the fall in diamond prices and the disruption of trading routes. This is

6 National Bureau of Expertise (BNE), statistical bulletin, April 2020.

drying out of pre-financing arrangements by trader networks that no longer have the necessary cash flow. In Cameroon, for instance, 90% of artisanal diamond miners are estimated to depend on such pre-financing arrangements. Registered diamond dealers in the country confirmed that they are currently not making any purchases due to the lack of resources and uncertainty.

Across the region, there are reports of opportunistic and criminal actors stepping into this void, luring desperate miners into exploitative sponsor deals that force them to sell production at drastically reduced prices. A diamond dealer operating in Koakoyima community in Sierra Leone, for instance, indicated a 50% drop in prices. Diamonds that were bought at around SLL 5,000,000 *per carat* (ca. USD 515) before the pandemic are now purchased for only SLL 2,500,000. Also in Zimbabwe, artisanal miners indicated that regular buyers do no longer have money to trade, while new players are stepping in to buy at considerably reduced prices.

While the formal market is being squeezed even further, this indicates that illicit actors may be stocking up on cheap artisanal diamonds, which they hope to sell with huge profits when the disruptions of international supply chains will be relaxed. There are indications that ill-intentioned actors are quickly finding new money-making opportunities amidst this crisis. In Zimbabwe for instance, the closure of official border posts is said to be leading to an increase of diamond smuggling to Mozambique via illegal exit points. As highlighted in the global CSO call for emergency action to support ASM communities and supply chains, to which the KP CSC contributed, these worrying developments risk to “increase criminality and insecurity, exaggerate local tensions, create community division, and increase risks to companies that source from the region”.⁷

Due to the suffocating sponsorship arrangements, low profitability, work restrictions and a rise of prices for mining equipment, artisanal miners across the region are reported to be abandoning mine sites, some of them migrating to other livelihoods such as agriculture. Some large and particularly productive ASM diamond sites in Cameroon, appear to continue attracting considerable numbers of workers despite the restrictions and pull-back of traditional financiers. In Zimbabwe, CNRG found that women are disproportionately affected by this slowdown. Men often manage to circumvent restrictions by digging clandestinely, particularly at night, while this is much less evident for women due to particular security risks in the absence of social control and government oversight.⁸

This crisis is evidently not sparing workers in LSM either. In Cameroon, 76% of companies working in the mining sector was reported to have reduced their staff in April or May 2020.⁹ According to the Human Resource Manager of Koidu Limited in Sierra Leone, the company had 1,000 workers before the pandemic. However, following the outbreak of Covid-19, about 300 workers have been asked to go on leave. Sierra Diamond halted operations on May 8, and quarantined scores of workers on the mines premises, after one of its senior staff members tested positive for Covid-19.¹⁰

In Zimbabwe, worker numbers are also reduced and those who are allowed to work at ZCDC and Anjin Investments are required to camp onsite to reduce the risk of contamination through their family or other social contacts. The reduced production is moreover causing cashflow problems, which for ZCDC workers implies they have received no salaries since February. In Lesotho, there

7 'Emergency action needed for vulnerable artisanal and small-scale mining communities and supply chains', 12.5.2020, <<https://www.oecdwatch.org/2020/05/12/emergency-action-needed-for-vulnerable-artisanal-and-small-scale-mining-communities-and-supply-chains/>>.

8 S. Mlevu 'Women hard hit by Covid-19', 17.4.2020, <<http://www.cnrzim.org/women-hard-hit-by-covid-19/>>.

9 'Yaoundé Coronavirus: Most affected jobs in Cameroon are in the education, accommodation, mining and forestry sectors (INS survey)', *Business in Cameroon*, 10.6.2020, <<https://www.businessincameroon.com/economy/1006-10406-coronavirus-most-affected-jobs-in-cameroon-are-in-the-education-accommodation-mining-and-forestry-sectors-ins-survey>>.

10 M. Kamara, "Sierra Leone miner shut down due to Covid-19", *Politico SL*, 12.06.2020, <<https://politicosl.com/articles/sierra-leone-miner-shut-down-due-covid-19>>.

has been generally low diamond production during the lockdown, which started on March 30. Mining companies were allowed to resume operations on April 27.¹¹ Lihobong Diamond Mine, on the other hand, which is operated by UK-based Fire Stone, is under serious threat of closure with the likelihood of more than 250 staff members losing their jobs. There is however lack of transparency on the status of the mine and the future of its employees.



View of Letšeng diamond mine in Lesotho (Photo: MCDF, 2019)

6. Socio-economic impact

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted sources of income for diamond mining communities in all surveyed countries. Less jobs, less work and lower prices, means that the already poor communities dependent on diamond mining, now have even less income to make a living. Unfortunately, this is not the only impact, but part of a destructive chain reaction set in motion by national and global measures to stop the spread of the novel corona virus.

Many in these communities rely on their income from diamond mining to support small-scale agricultural activities and subsistence farming. Less village-level crop and livestock farming makes these communities more dependent on imported commodities. Yet, the shortages of such basic goods due to increased demand and disturbed supply chains is driving up prices, taking an even bigger bite out of already distressed household budgets. In Sierra Leone, for instance, prices of basic commodities, especially food items are increasing every week. Rice, the staple food for Sierra Leoneans, was SLL 180,000 (ca. USD 18) per 50 kg bag before the Covid-19 outbreak, but was mid-May already sold for SLL 280,000 (US\$28), a 55% increase. Due to reduced purchasing power, more locals now buy rice per cup, which was SLL 1,500 before Covid-19 and now costs SLL 3,000. In Zimbabwe, shops in diamond mining areas are low in stock due to inter-district travel restrictions, a public transport ban and border closures. Consequently, to remain profitable they are selling basic commodities at hiked prices or only in United States dollars, which many locals, particularly the disadvantaged, do not have access to. The current food shortages in these villages are a source of growing concern. The public transport ban also affected people's access to health care. In Arda Transau, a community of people relocated from Marange, one local for instance reported that she failed to travel to Mutare to collect hypertension tablets.

11 ' Lesotho green-lights operations at Letšeng', *Mining Review*, 24.4.2020, <<https://www.miningreview.com/diamonds-gems/lesotho-government-green-lights-operations-at-letseng/>>.

7. Awareness-raising and support programs

Table 3: Support programs and awareness-raising campaigns for diamond mining areas per country

Sierra Leone	DRC	Zimbabwe	Guinea	Lesotho	Cameroon	Côte d'Ivoire
Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio campaigns • National and district-level Covid-19 response structures CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio campaigns • Distribution of face masks, sanitizers • Food aid Rural District Councils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, Cash, sanitizers Mining companies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soap • Security to monitor movements • Radio campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door-to-door awareness campaigns by CSOs, public health services and Red Cross 	Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food aid • TV campaigns • Outreach/Community awareness sessions CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food aid • Radio campaigns • Use of Whatsapp platforms for communication with communities Mining companies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio campaigns 	Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV, radio, social media campaigns CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness campaigns in diamond areas 	Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV and radio campaigns Mining companies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food aid 	Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV, radio, social media campaigns CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness campaigns • Distributing protective gear, food aid 	Government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food aid, financial transfers, and support for electricity and water bills CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness campaigns, food aid and distribution of masks Mining companies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and non-food donations to mining communities and financial support to government

Governments in all surveyed countries are raising awareness on the impact of the novel coronavirus and the nature and importance of precautionary measures through radio and television campaigns. However, in most countries, communities affected by diamond mining have limited access to television and radio broadcasts, implying they miss official government updates. Some governments also extended direct support to protect their citizens from the devastating effects of this economic and humanitarian crisis. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, the government launched a CFAF 1,700 billion (ca. USD 2,9 million) economic, social and humanitarian support plan with the objective of mitigating the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic for the most vulnerable communities, including those in diamond mining areas.¹²

12 Portail officiel du gouvernement de Côte d'Ivoire, *Coronavirus : le plan de soutien économique est dans sa phase opérationnelle*, indique le ministre Adama Coulibaly, 1.5.2020, http://www.gouv.ci/_actualite-article.php?recordID=11095&d=1

In these challenging times for communities affected by diamond mining, corporate social responsibility contributions from mining companies can make a big difference. A few companies in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Lesotho have responded to these needs through radio awareness programs and distribution of health kits comprising of masks and sanitizers. In Lesotho, the business community has provided occasional food handouts to vulnerable community members. In Zimbabwe one company, Murowa Diamonds, has organised radio awareness campaigns in partnership with the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA). The company has also been donating health kits in Zvishavane District. In Manicaland, the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Mining Company (ZCDC) and Anjin Investments have not provided any support or awareness-raising to the communities impacted by their operations. In Sierra Leone, Koidu Limited constructed 10 security posts to monitor the movement of people in five chiefdoms bordering Guinea. However, many community members did not find this a priority and had hoped the company would have supported them in a different way.



Hand washing buckets in Masumbirie, Kafe Simira Chiefdom, Tonkolili district, Sierra Leone (Photo: NMJD, May 2020)

Despite the restrictions on movement and disruption of work for the KPCS Coalition, members sought ways to innovate and employ new methods of working to defend and promote community rights in diamond mining areas. The Center for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) and ZELA have been disseminating information to communities through social media platforms. Both CNRG and ZELA have started producing situation updates covering, among other issues, labor rights violations, non-compliance with regulations and gender impacts of Covid-19.¹³ CNRG is moreover in the process of securing food hampers for 50 of the most vulnerable women identified by community monitors in Marange. CECIDE, in Guinea, is carrying out sensitization initiatives and distributing sanitary products to community members in Sangaredi (Boké). The Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) distributed hand washing buckets, hand wash gel, portable loudspeakers and pen drives containing Covid-19 awareness raising messages in English and other local languages used in the country. In Kono District, NMJD is leading a consortium of CSOs fighting Covid-19. The

¹³ See for instance: ZELA, *Sitrep key highlights covid-19 mining sector and communities' situational report (sit-rep)* (<http://www.zela.org/covid-19-publications/#>); CNRG, *Transparency and Accountability lacking in national COVID-19 responses* (<https://www.cnrgezim.org/transparency-and-accountability-lacking-in-national-covid-19-responses/>).

consortium is raising awareness of diamond communities on Covid-19 with radio broadcasts and administers a checklist on the availability of the requisite logistical material for Covid-19 protection at important road hubs.

8. Compliance with Covid-19 regulations

Guided by recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and country-specific issues, governments have introduced various rules and restrictions. These include the obligatory use of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks and gloves, hand sanitizers, social distancing, ban on mass gatherings, curfews and reduced working hours. Sanctions for non-compliance are generally heavy in surveyed countries. In Côte d'Ivoire, any person who fails to observe curfew is liable to imprisonment for one to three years or a fine of FCFA 20,000 to 2,000,000 (ca. USD 35 to 3500). From 24 March to 6 May 2020 1,249 people were arrested in the country for failing to respect the curfew. Penalties in Cameroon are reported to be ad hoc and not regulated, which has provided a window for corruption.

To enforce these regulations, police officers and soldiers have in many countries been put in cities and towns and at vehicle checkpoints. This situation has created tensions that were occasionally reported to run out of control. Interviews in Sierra Leone pointed to locals in search for water or other goods to sustain their livelihoods being beaten by the police and military. On April 1st, in the country's eastern Kenema district, a group of at least 10 soldiers attacked a reporter of the Standard Times newspaper, hitting him with their guns, kicking him and seizing his phone after he photographed a new Covid-19 quarantine centre¹⁴. Other countries operationalized dedicated enforcement structures. This includes Sierra Leone which, building on its experience with combating Ebola, is enforcing Covid-19 regulations through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation's Emergency Operation Centre (EOC). The EOC has been decentralized to district levels across the country and includes local government, security apparatus (police and military) and CSOs. They are raising awareness through collaborative efforts. Zimbabwe also has district taskforces formed to assist in awareness-raising, managing and preventing the spread of the coronavirus. However, their movement is restricted due to limited resources.

Whereas many governments exempted the mining sector from lockdown policies, most of the sector's monitoring and enforcement agencies remained in lockdown. Public security services or dedicated taskforces lack the resources and staff to travel to typically remote, rural mining areas, which have therefore often been left without government oversight or outreach. Only for Cameroon there is some evidence of law enforcement officers verifying Covid-19 measures at the entrance of a number of large mining sites close to the border of CAR. The general absence of awareness-raising and enforcement, explains the poor compliance with Covid-19 regulations across the surveyed countries. The practice of regular handwashing is increasing, but the use of PPEs by locals and mining workers, in and around both ASM and LSM, is minimal. Social distancing is typically hard to impossible due to the nature of the teamwork, and where it is possible it is regularly neglected. Both ASM and LSM actors tend to remain focused on increasing production and profits while reducing extra costs.

Given the informality of many ASM operations there is diffused responsibility for investing in health and safety. Moreover, limited awareness-raising and outreach by health officials and other government services, means that ASM communities have limited understanding of the virus, its effects and how to prevent it from spreading. Furthermore, the reduced household budgets lead these locals to do whatever it takes to make a living.

14 CJP, 'Sierra Leone security forces attack, charge journalist covering COVID-19', 28.4.2020, <<https://cpj.org/2020/04/sierra-leone-security-forces-attack-and-detain-2-j/>>.



Small Sefadu ASM diamond site, Gbense chieftdom, Kono district (Photo: NMJD, June 2020).jpg

This situation should be more straightforward for LSM, where government measures require mining companies to invest in protective clothes and tools, sanitizers, testing kits, etc. However, interviews conducted in Marange, Zimbabwe, reveal that industrial miners have not invested in acquiring items like Covid-19 test kits, as required by law, but have provided workers with masks and sanitizers. At Anjin Investments in Marange, workers complained that a group of 40 employees is made to share an overcrowded facility for eating, bathing and sleeping.¹⁵ These circumstances, and the fact they have to share among others beds, evidently does not allow them to adequately observe hygiene and social distancing measures¹⁶. Moreover, workers indicate that there are no regular safety and health meetings before commencing work, as required by law. Such observations are particularly concerning as there are ever more indications that mines across the globe are becoming “hotspots for the spread of the coronavirus”.¹⁷

9. Crime, tensions and human rights

In this section we analyze changing trends related to crime, tensions and human rights since the start of the pandemic.

The desperation, disruptions of livelihoods, chaos and reduced state control had led to an elevated crime rate in some countries, with an increasing number of people resorting to breaking into homes

15 Similar alarming circumstances were reported by civil society groups in DRC concerning a number of copper-cobalt mining companies: RAID, *DR Congo: Mine Workers at Risk During Covid-19*, 11.06.2020, <<https://www.raid-uk.org/blog/dr-congo-mine-workers-risk-during-covid-19>>.

16 ZELA, 'Covid-19 mining sector situational report (ZELA's 3rd Series)', 13.5.2020, <<http://www.zela.org/download/covid-19-mining-sector-situational-report-zelas-3rd-series/>>; CNRG, 'An assessment of workers rights in the mining sector during Covid-19 lockdown', 15.5.2020, <<https://www.cnrzim.org/an-assessment-of-workers-rights-in-the-mining-sector-during-covid-19-lockdown/>>

17 S. Leahy, 'Mines are hotspots for spread of Covid-19, study finds', 5.6.2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/05/mines-coronavirus-hotspots-report-us-canada>>.

and shops. Mining affected communities in Lesotho witnessed an increase in livestock theft, with at one point over 250 sheep and 50 goats stolen in one night. A diamond community called Lower Bambara in Kenema district of Sierra Leone complained about youths breaking into business places and homes at nights. Communities in Zimbabwe lamented an increase in gender based violence.

Tensions have always existed in diamond mining areas between companies and communities, communities and public and private security services as well as artisanal and small-scale miners and security forces. Some countries have reported an increase in tensions, while others countries witnessed a decrease. For example, Sierra Leone has recorded a decrease in the occurrences of tensions and violence in diamond mining areas as a result of restrictive measures, such as curfews and a ban on public gatherings. Marange's diamond fields are since long a restricted area with heavy military and police presence. Communities report that soldiers continue to raid and arrest artisanal miners, releasing them upon forced payments of bribes. In countries such as Lesotho the unfair distribution of food assistance is causing discontent in communities hosting diamond mining.



Local security guard in an artisanal diamond mine in Eastern Cameroon (Photo: RELUFA, 2020)

The pandemic is causing new and heightened human rights concerns, with most of them coming from the way Covid-19 regulations are enforced. People are deprived of their right to information on Covid-19 because awareness programs have not been comprehensive. Government uses mass media, yet buying a newspaper or owning a radio or television is a preserve of the elite. Measures by mining companies obliging workers to camp onsite are separating staff from their spouses and children. Restrictions of movement deprive mining communities of their right to health as they cannot travel to health facilities outside their communities, with public transport bans disproportionately impacting impoverished communities. Several reports moreover indicate that the economic desperation of communities affected by diamond mining is causing an increase of incidences of child labour, including on diamond mining sites.

10. Recommendations

Based on the observations highlighted above, we identify three main policy recommendations:

1. Governments in all seven countries should ensure that information and data about the pandemic, its impact and how to avoid contamination, reaches mining communities. In cases of limited resources, they must seek partnerships with organizations with appropriate networks, resources and expertise.
2. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs of the private sector should be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of artisanal miners and communities affected by diamond mining, particularly in the light of the new challenges that emerge due to the Covid-19 crisis.
3. Efforts should be scaled-up to formalize the artisanal diamond sector in order to eliminate avenues of illicit trade, avoid abuse of well-intentioned mining communities and promote national resource mobilization. This should not be done through a top-down repressive approach, but by building on the specific modalities of this sector and providing incentives and support to progressively pull informal actors into the formal supply chain.
4. All actors along the diamond supply chain, from producers over manufacturers to retailers, should, in their recovery from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, be encouraged to not merely focus on restoring profits, but to continue scaling up responsible sourcing efforts.

