

TWO FACES OF DIAMONDS: THE WOMAN IN NEW YORK AND THE WOMAN IN MARANGE

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As the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme concludes its 2015 Intersessional meeting in the Angolan Capital, Luanda this week, it is time again to evaluate the social costs of diamond mining to the Marange community. It is also time to ask about the relevance of the Kimberly Process to the communities affected by both direct and structural violence due to diamond mining. This year the KPCS is being chaired by Angola, ranked the 2th largest producer of diamonds in Africa after Botswana and also regarded as one of the most unequal societies in the world.

In Zimbabwe illicit trade in Marange diamonds widened the inequality gap between the rich and poor; men and women. A decision made to relocate more than 1400 villagers from their homeland to a government farm 40KM away has increased the vulnerability of this community, particularly women, children and the disabled, sick and elderly. The future of Marange villagers remain uncertain. Government recently confirmed that alluvial diamonds are severely depleted meaning the hope of the displaced families to be compensated is fading. Diamond mining firms are illegally retrenching workers as they prepare to fold up. There is talk of merging the seven or so companies into one. To merge or not to merge is of no consequence to the displaced families who have already been long abandoned by both government and mining companies that displaced them.

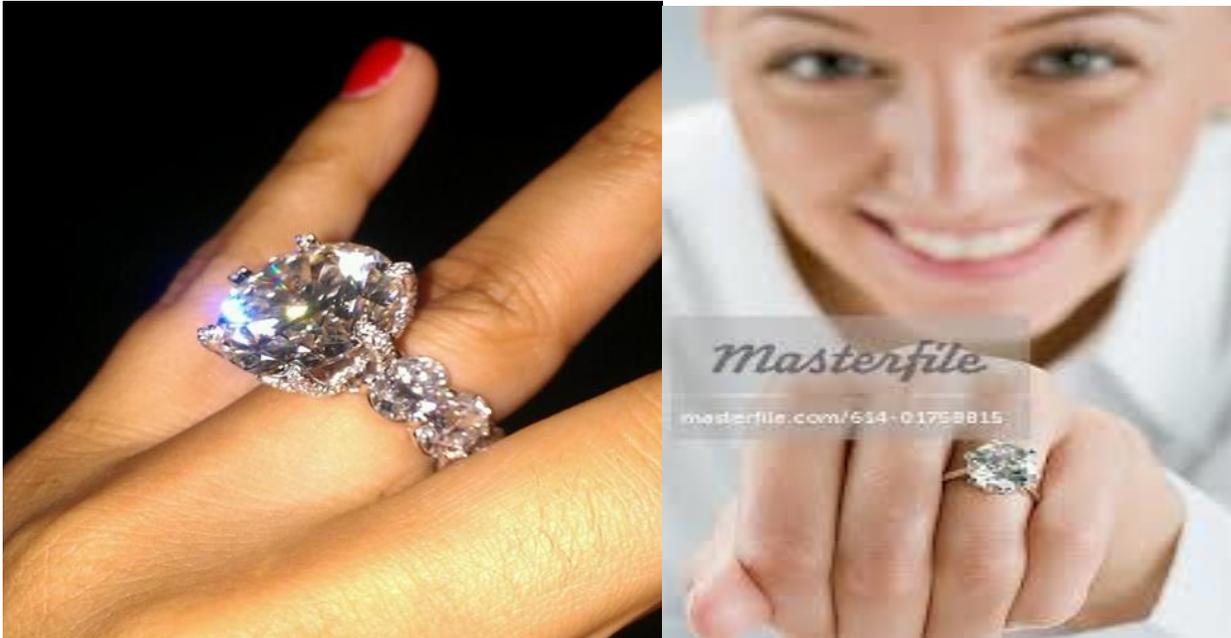
There has been finger pointing between the government of Zimbabwe and the mining companies on who is to blame for the misery afflicting the displaced families. It is also important to highlight that government has a 50% stake in all the companies except in Marange Resources where it has 100% ownership. Nevertheless government has tried hard to absolve itself of any wrong doing, choosing instead to point accusing fingers at the mining companies. This finger-pointing does not bring any relief to the over 1400 relocated Marange families who have sunk to new depths of poverty since being forcibly displaced from Marange at the height of diamond mining activities between 2009 and 2011. The horrific poverty that has become a new lifestyle for the former Marange villagers will affect generations to come.

A diamond: A woman's best friend?

Majority of the victims of Marange displacements are women and children. Interestingly some industry players market diamonds as a woman's best friend. Pinterest, a New York based diamond shop market its diamonds as a woman's best friend. To some extent yes, this is true of the women who live at the other end of the diamond value chain. However It will be hard to find a Marange woman who sees a diamond as her best friend. But the challenge is how to bring the woman in New York into contact with the woman in Marange. If the New York woman fully understand the plight of the woman in Marange they will start thinking seriously about the source of diamonds. They will start to ask before they buy. Some will consider not to accept as a gift a diamond ring ever again. The major problem with the diamond industry is it has more hypocrites than good people, thereby making it difficult for consumers to know the truth when they inquire.

Rough diamond mining has changed the lives of Marange women for the worse. Many will suffer premature deaths due to the socio-economic impacts of diamond mining. The new form of death is

far away from the diamond fields. It is at Arda Transau where the relocated families are experiencing acute food shortages. Mining companies have since stopped supplying the displaced families with quarterly food hampers. For the foreseeable future this community will continue to experience slow, gradual and painful deaths– structural violence. The relocated families have been denied land for crop cultivation even though they had vast tracts of land in Marange. Most promises made to them have not been fulfilled.



A sparkling diamond ring: best friend to the woman at the other end of the diamond value chain

Whilst the KPCS must be applauded for taking a tough stance against human rights abuses in Marange during its plenary at Swakopmund, Namibia in November 2009, it later backtracked, arguing that human rights monitoring is not part of its mandate. But the second paragraph of the KPCS core document is all about protecting communities from human rights abuses:

FURTHER RECOGNISING the devastating impact of conflicts fuelled by the trade in conflict diamonds on the peace, safety and security of people in affected countries and the systematic and gross human rights violations that have been perpetrated in such conflicts.... (KPCS Core Document 2003).

Apart from disowning its duty to protect the Marange community from direct violence, the KPCS also failed dismally to address the problem of structural or indirect violence. 'Peace, safety and security of people' is not just freedom from direct violence. A hungry, starving community cannot be said to be enjoying peace, safety and security. Peace narrowly defined as the absence of direct violence is negative peace which is characterized by absence of justice and human security.

Land to the Landless Blacks?

Failure by government to give the relocated families land for farming is surprising given that the displacement took place during the fast track land reform program of which government claimed it was resettling landless black Zimbabweans. The Marange case required special attention because these were displaced not by the racist colonial government but by President Mugabe's government which claim to have returned land to its rightful owners. But the Marange displacement was more ruthless and inhuman than the displacements suffered by black Zimbabweans during the colonial

era. Under the colonial era vast tracks of arable land, also known as reserves, were set aside for black peasants. But each family displaced from Marange was allocated 1 acre of land where the homestead is situated. As an agro-based community, the displaced Marange community has struggled to adapt to conditions at Arda Transau without land for crop cultivation and pasture.

Shortage of resources also means an increase in community conflicts and domestic violence. Preliminary investigations shows the displaced families are distressed and exhibiting various forms of conflict among and within themselves. Domestic violence is on the rise as families fight for the limited resources available. Families are selling their livestock – cattle, goats and chicken- to buy food stuffs such as maize meal, Zimbabwe’s staple food. The youths have nothing else to do except to indulge themselves in destructive behaviour. Cases of prostitution are on the rise thereby increasing the spread of HIV and AIDS among the displaced.

The KPCS has flatly refused to attend to the plight of the displaced Marange families, considering the matter to be a non KPCS issue. But the KPCS goes on to certify Marange diamonds as ‘conflict free’, ignoring this massive conflict over land grabbing by the diamond mining companies and the concomitant social woes that followed.



Marange Diamonds: A woman’s worst enemy
Mutare district administrator Mr Cosmas Chiringa addressing some of the women relocated to Arda Transau

The above picture was not taken at a women’s meeting or conference. It was a meeting called by the Mutare District Administrator, Cosmas Chiringa to address families displaced by diamond mining in Marange. Like any other government official, his mission was simply to ask them to be patient whilst government attended to their plight. But six years after the displacement government has not found alternative land for these wretched villagers.

Tellingly it is women who turned up in their numbers to meet the DA, confirming that women have been affected by the Marange displacements more than their male counterparts. This is the other

face of diamonds which the KPCS does not want to see. Of course on the other end of the diamond value chain are happy, smiling women. But in Marange and at Arda Transau are gloomy-faced women whose hope of a better tomorrow has been crashed by the very same diamonds that are bringing joy and happiness to the woman on the other end of the diamond value chain. It's a weird world for sure.

But as the KPCS converges in Luanda this week, it is time to remember the forgotten, resource cursed villagers of Marange to whom diamonds mean loss of everything. It is also important to highlight that as Marange companies are folding up, workers are being dismissed unfairly. Court judgements in favour of workers are being ignored with impunity

Having spent the past six years attending KPCS intersessional and plenary I fail to understand how the KPCS activities connect with the communities affected by diamond mining. Of course I have witnessed government and industry officials hugging and patting each other's backs in the corridors of KPCS meetings. These are happy and smiling faces. I have heard voices of self-praise in the KPCS, praising itself for eliminating conflict diamonds. Others falsely claim less than 1 per cent of conflict diamonds are still in circulation. But if Marange diamonds are not conflict diamonds then there has to be another term to describe them other than 'conflict free' diamonds.

The failure of the KPCS to protect communities against violence and exploitation by ruling elites and the diamond industry haunted Global Witness out of the KPCS in November 2011. Global Witness was a founding civil society member of the KPCS and had done ground breaking research on the connection between the diamond trade and civil wars in West Africa in 1990s. Global Witness released a press statement explaining its decision to quit the KPCS. Below are excerpts from their press statement:

Most recently, the decision to endorse unlimited diamond exports from named companies in the Marange region of Zimbabwe - the scene of mass killings by the national army - has turned an international conflict prevention mechanism into a cynical corporate accreditation scheme.

We now have to recognise that this scheme, begun with so many good intentions, has done much that is useful but ultimately has failed to deliver. It has proved beyond doubt that voluntary schemes are not going to cut it in a multi-polar world where companies and countries compete for mineral resources.

The Kimberley Process's refusal to evolve and address the clear links between diamonds, violence and tyranny has rendered it increasingly outdated. It is time for the diamond sector to start complying with international standards on minerals supply chain controls, including independent third party audits and regular public disclosure. Governments must show leadership by putting these standards into law.

I also argue that by certifying as 'conflict free' diamonds mined in regions where communities are arbitrarily displaced without compensation, the KPCS is undermining several international conventions. These include but are not limited to the following:

African Charter on Human and People's Rights

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading Treatment or Punishment

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

To say the KP risk losing its credibility is an understatement because that credibility was lost a long while ago. The question is how can the KPCS regain its credibility. How can the KPCS be a protector of communities from both direct and structural violence sponsored by the mining of rough diamonds. The KPCS need to reform itself and attend to the urgent human security needs of communities such as the displaced Marange villagers.