Centre for Natural Resource Governance

The Weekly

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An areal view of the mining operations at the Christmas Pass mountain range, which government has ordered to shut down

Mutare's Poisoned River: 28 years of warnings, and still no cure

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Artisanal Miners Are Dying While Africa's Gold Economy Counts the Cost

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Behind every statistic are families, livelihoods and communities left to bear the cost of an industry that continues to depend heavily on their labour while offering them little protection. Despite their enormous contribution to mineral production and national economies, artisanal miners remain among the most neglected actors in the mining sector

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Partial Compliance at Toronto Mine...

As Night-Time Operations Raise Safety and Environmental Concerns

By Staff Reporter

There is growing concern over continued mining activities at Toronto Mines Pvt Ltd in Mutare, despite a government directive ordering the immediate cessation of mining and related operations at the site.

A cease-and-desist order issued by the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development on 9 August 2026 directed the company to immediately stop all mining, processing and allied activities following a high-level inspection of the mine on 8 August. The order cited unapproved mining activities and the unlawful erection of an elution boiler without the requisite approvals, safety inspections and formal commissioning.

The directive further ordered the immediate decommissioning of the unapproved elution boiler and the removal and demobilisation of all mobile equipment, plant and machinery from the site within 14 calendar days, with the deadline set for 22 August 2026.

However, a recent site visit has established that while there has been partial compliance with the government order, some mining-related activities appear to be continuing clandestinely, reportedly taking place under the cover of darkness in the middle of the night.

The discovery raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the enforcement measures and whether the cessation order is being adequately monitored.

The removal or cessation of some equipment and activities indicates that the company has taken steps towards complying with the government directive.

However, compliance cannot be considered complete while mining or processing activities continue outside the hours and conditions under which authorities can effectively monitor them.

The reported night-time operations are particularly concerning because they make it difficult for regulators, surrounding communities and other stakeholders to independently verify whether the cease-and-desist order is being fully observed.

The situation also highlights a broader challenge in Zimbabwe's mining sector, where regulatory orders can lose their effectiveness when enforcement is inconsistent or insufficiently resourced.

A government directive to stop operations must mean precisely that: all operations must stop. Partial compliance cannot be allowed to become a means through which prohibited activities simply move underground or into the night.

The government's original intervention was prompted, among other concerns, by the discovery of an unapproved elution boiler at the mine. According to the order, the equipment had been erected without the required design approvals, safety inspections or formal commissioning by the relevant inspectorate.

These concerns make continued clandestine operations even more troubling. Mining and mineral-processing activities involve significant risks to workers and surrounding communities, particularly where equipment has not undergone the required inspections and where operations are being conducted outside the oversight of regulatory authorities.

Artisanal Miners Are Dying While Africa's Gold Economy Counts the Cost

By Staff Reporter

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Behind every statistic are families, livelihoods and communities left to bear the cost of an industry that continues to depend heavily on their labour while offering them little protection.

Despite their enormous contribution to mineral production and national economies, artisanal miners remain among the most neglected actors in the mining sector. Many work in precarious and hazardous conditions, without adequate protective equipment, proper geological information, regulated mining sites or effective occupational health and safety systems.

The recent death of more than 100 artisanal gold miners in the Central African Republic (CAR) is yet another notch on the belt of an unforgiving industry, one largely driven by profit, but with far too little care for the workers whose labour sustains it.

Reports indicate that more than 100 people died after an artisanal gold mine collapsed in the village of Zamboye in the Central African Republic, near the border with Cameroon, on August 18, 2026.

Local media reported that the cave-in occurred on Tuesday in Zamboye, about 50 kilometres (31 miles) from the Central African town of Baboua and a few kilometres from Garoua-Boulai in eastern Cameroon.

Reseau De Lutte Contre La Faim Au Cameroun (RELUFA), a local civil society organisation in Cameroon, released a statement calling on government authorities in both countries to take measures to prevent this type of disaster, which continues to threaten artisanal miners.

Jaff Bamenjo, RELUFA coordinator, revealed in the statement that civil society organisations have, on numerous occasions, alerted relevant authorities to the dangers posed by unrehabilitated and unregulated mining sites.

"The regulations, level of implementation and monitoring of the sector is not well structured in both countries. Civil society can only raise the shortcomings and they effectively do that. The onus is in the power structures to ensure security and safety standards," said Bamenjo.

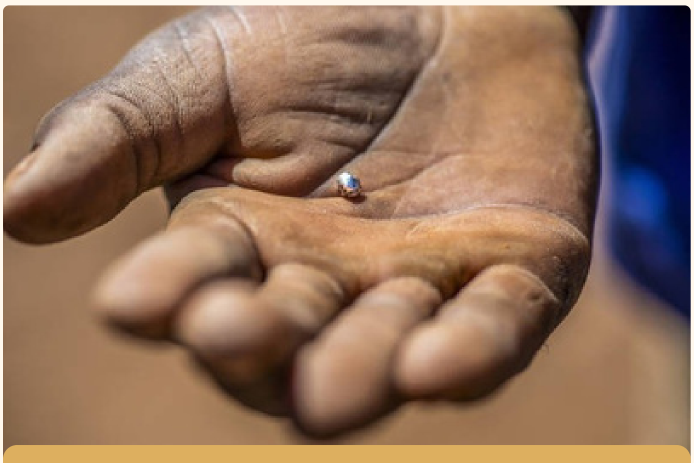
What happened in the Central African Republic is not an isolated tragedy. It is part of a disturbing pattern across the continent, where artisanal miners continue to lose their lives in unsafe and poorly regulated mining operations.

Closer to home, at least three artisanal miners died when a mineshaft they were working in collapsed in Penhalonga on August 24, 2026. National police spokesperson Commissioner Paul Nyathi confirmed the incident.

"The Zimbabwe Republic Police confirms a fatal mining accident which occurred on Monday, August 24, 2026 at around 4.30pm at Plot 55, Premier Central, Mutare. Three artisanal miners were killed when a mining shaft, approximately 20 metres deep, collapsed while they were working inside it,"

Commissioner Nyathi urged artisanal miners to prioritise safety and security when carrying out their operations.

Such caution risks being misdirected when the burden of safety is placed almost entirely on miners who operate within a much larger and often exploitative economic structure. Artisanal miners typically receive only a nominal fraction of the value generated from their labour, while sponsors, middlemen and buyers extract significant profits from their sweat and blood.



An artisanal miner holds a gold ignot in their palm

Mutare's Poisoned River: 28 years of Warnings, and Still No Cure

Rivers are usually the great equalisers of cities. They carry water from one place to another, binding communities together and sustaining farms, livestock and ecosystems along their course. In Mutare, the Sakubva River has acquired a less flattering role: it has become a moving record of the city's infrastructure failures.

By Donald Nyarota

A fresh complaint lodged on August 27 with the Minister of State for Manicaland, local Members of Parliament, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and the City of Mutare alleges that the Sakubva River, about 30km downstream from the city centre, is receiving continuous discharges of raw sewage and untreated industrial waste. Communities along the river are reportedly using the water for washing clothes and dishes, while livestock and other animals drink from it.

If verified, this is more than an environmental nuisance. It is a public-health and governance failure. The particularly troubling fact is that there is little new about the complaint. The pollution of Mutare's rivers was publicly exposed in 1998. A study by Jemitias Mapira, drawing on investigations conducted after that outcry, documented sewage overflows, industrial effluent, broken treatment equipment and other sources of pollution in the Sakubva River basin.

Twenty-eight years later, many of the same problems remain.

That longevity changes the nature of the problem. This is no longer simply a question of discovering who is polluting the river. It is a question of why successive authorities have failed to stop it.

Following the 1998 public outcry, the City of Mutare inspected streams within the Sakubva River basin and collected water samples. The investigation identified municipal sewage works, including Gimboki, as major sources of pollution. The treatment plant was reported to be operating above its design capacity of 23.5 million litres a day, while broken aerators, trunk-sewer blockages and delayed repairs allowed sewage spills to continue.

The city's growth has only intensified the pressure. Infrastructure designed for a much smaller population cannot indefinitely serve a substantially larger urban population without significant investment.

Polluted Effluent : Blackish water flows in Sakubva river putting lives of communties downstream at risk . Pic MRRI

When treatment capacity fails to keep pace with population growth, pollution is not an accident. It becomes the predictable consequence of underinvestment.

Industrial activity adds another layer. Historical investigations identified effluent from paper manufacturing, timber processing, food-processing plants and breweries as contributors to pollution in the river system. Used oils, grease, fuel, scrap metal and other waste from workshops and garages were also identified.

Some of those industrial actors and circumstances may have changed since 1998. The underlying governance question has not: Who is monitoring what enters the river, who is paying for it, and who is being held responsible when the system fails?

One issue deserves particular scrutiny: trade-waste fees. Businesses discharging industrial effluent into the municipal sewerage system are expected to pay applicable charges and comply with requirements governing the treatment and disposal of waste. But if the sewerage system itself is failing, citizens are entitled to ask where the money is going.

How much was billed in trade-waste fees in 2025? How much was collected? How much was spent on sewerage maintenance and upgrades? And what improvements can residents actually see?

The answer cannot be to allow companies to discharge untreated waste into rivers simply because municipal infrastructure is dysfunctional. Nor can industries evade their environmental responsibilities.

Mutare Women Learn Legal Avenues Against Domestic Violence

By Tara Boulle

Towards the end of a community training in Mutare on the Domestic Violence Act, the women participating were asked: Are you now ready to write a petition yourselves? There was some non-committal murmuring and shifting in seats.

An hour later, all five groups had presented draft petitions based on a hypothetical scenario and the atmosphere had changed significantly. Some women posed for photographs with their draft petitions, while others huddled to compare their approaches. They achieved what had seemed like an impossible task a short while ago.

This petition-writing workshop formed part of a Community Advocacy Training facilitated by the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG). The objective of the training was to build community resilience to violence against women and to equip women in Mutare with knowledge of their rights in the constitution and under the Zimbabwe Gender Policy. This included explanations of the options available to survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), such as applying for protection orders and seeking support from the Victim Friendly Unit.

The women who showed up explained that they did not have much faith in the police to handle cases of GBV. In the past, the police have shown an unwillingness to pursue investigations. Sometimes, perpetrators have friends inside the police force which makes women scared to come forward. Women were encouraged to approach the courts as an alternative avenue for pursuing justice.

There are good policies and services in Zimbabwe available for survivors of GBV, but there is a general lack of knowledge about them. This means that survivors often remain silent and do not seek justice. CNRG is working to change this through their Amplify Change-supported project on community-led resistance to violence against women in regions affected by extractive industries.

A critical part of this program was the discussion on the link between GBV and mining. Women bear the brunt of the negative impacts of the extractive industry and many have become sex workers in order to make ends meet. There were also several complaints about the security guards of the mines using their authority and power to take advantage of women. In order to combat this rise in GBV, women in Mutare must have the ability and confidence to resist.

The positivity in the room, at the end of the workshop, showcased the importance of community participation in advocacy and training programmes, especially in the extractive sector. It is remarkable what can be achieved when people believe in their ability to create change.

Women participants at a community meeting follow proceedings as they learn practical advocacy skills including petition writing

Penhalonga Speaks Out to Confront Gold Mining's Toll on Women and the Environment

By Tanaka Ndongera

On 27 August 2026, CNRG convened a Community Advocacy Meeting in Penhalonga, Mutasa District, bringing together residents, community workers, church leaders under the theme "Community Voices on Gold Mining, Women's Rights & Access to Justice." The meeting, held under the Amplify Change project, followed up directly on concerns raised during CNRG's earlier Domestic Violence Act training and Mobile Legal Aid Clinic sessions in the area.

Penhalonga is one of Zimbabwe's longest-standing gold mining areas, home to large-scale operations including DTZ-OZGEO and Namib Minerals (which recently took over Redwing Mine) alongside a significant population of small-scale and artisanal miners. Participants described how rapid mining activity has fuelled land dispossession, environmental degradation and heightened risks of gender-based violence linked to militarised mine sites and economic marginalisation.

A dedicated session on Reporting, Referral and Redress walked participants through the three main channels for seeking justice: the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, the Police Victim-Friendly Unit, and the Counselling Services Unit, emphasising that "no door is the wrong door."

Moreover, in thematic group discussions, community members raised concerns spanning sexual harassment, forced and early marriage, and economic and emotional abuse; land dispossession and pollution of water sources; and mining company conduct including unpaid wages, lack of protective equipment, child labour, and the absence of environmental impact assessments or prior community consultation.

Many women reported paying for their stands for years without ever receiving title deeds, and were unaware of the Title Deeds Digitalisation programme. Participants also noted that political divisions have made it harder for the community to unite around shared concerns, and that fear of injustice discourages many from reporting GBV cases.

Furthermore, in the plenary and stakeholder engagement session, the community discussed strengthening referral pathways and how police can establish or set up sub office or booth close to the people as there a distance from Tsvingwe to Police station.

The meeting closed with agreed community resolutions, identification of local champions, and follow-up actions to guide CNRG's continued advocacy and programming in Penhalonga.

Lastly, the meeting reinforced CNRG's ongoing commitment to linking gold mining governance to women's rights and socio-economic justice and will inform the continued rollout of CNRG's Domestic Violence Act and Gender Commission petition writing training model across Manicaland, as well as its wider extractive-industry accountability advocacy at national and SADC level.

The Policy Of The Future For A Comprehensive Management of Critical Minerals In Zimbabwe: A Brief Take

By Ebson Munhumumwe

In 2025 a third of the lithium being imported into China was coming from Zimbabwe. The lithium that helped to boost Chinese companies on the forefront of the green energy revolution like BYD and CATL.

China being the Global factory, it would not be hypocrisy to point out that Zimbabwe today stands at the centre of an industry determining the course of human development.

However, it is disheartening and enraging to realize just how little the Zimbabwean economy and people have benefited from the industry which is leaving behind a trail of destruction in local communities where the ore is exploited.

For a mineral standing to prevent an environmental and climatic disaster it's shocking to see just how destructive lithium mining has been to the Zimbabwean natural landscape. There is need for reevaluation of policy, our natural resource endowment is too diverse to not be benefitting the ordinary Zimbabwean as it must be, as it can.

To ensure mutual gains and human security there is need of shift in the approach of governance. This multi-stakeholder approach must bring together government, the mining companies, traditional leaders, and the communities living closest to the pits, not as a courtesy consultation once permits are already signed, but as a genuine seat at the table before the first tree is felled.

Zimbabwe's push toward mandatory local beneficiation, culminating in the planned 2027 ban on raw concentrate exports, is a step in the right direction, but value addition alone will not repair a collapsed hillside or restore a community's water table.

What is needed alongside it is enforceable environmental legislation with real teeth, mandatory rehabilitation bonds paid upfront by mining firms, independent environmental impact assessments before any expansion near ecologically sensitive zones and community trusts that channel a fixed share of lithium royalties directly into the towns bearing the cost of extraction, not just the national treasury.

Zimbabwe cannot un-plug itself from a global supply chain this lucrative, nor should it try to. But there is a wide gulf between participating in the green energy revolution and being quietly cannibalized by it.

The country holds genuine leverage here, its lithium is not easily substituted, and every Chinese battery giant racing to meet EV and grid-storage demand needs it. The world's clean energy future should not have to be built on someone else's ruined landscape, and if Zimbabwe insists on that principle now, while demand is high and its position strong, it may yet turn this mineral wealth into something the country keeps.

Munhumumwe is a youth leader and activist who advocates for good governance, climate action, and youth empowerment, write in his own capacity.

Partial Compliance at Toronto Mine...

Government therefore has a responsibility not only to issue enforcement orders but also to ensure that such orders are actually implemented. The Ministry of Mines and Mining Development and other relevant authorities should urgently follow up on the reported continued operations and establish the full extent of compliance with the cease-and-desist order.

Where violations are established, the government should take appropriate enforcement action in accordance with the law. This should include ensuring that all prohibited equipment is decommissioned and that mining and processing activities do not resume without the necessary approvals and safety requirements.

Effective enforcement is particularly important because allowing a mine to operate clandestinely after receiving a government closure order undermines the authority of the regulatory system and creates a dangerous precedent for other mining operations.

The enforcement process should also involve the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), the Zimbabwe Republic Police and relevant mining authorities to ensure that both environmental and public safety concerns are comprehensively addressed.

Closure must include an evacuation and rehabilitation plan. Beyond simply stopping operations, the government should require a clear mine closure, evacuation and rehabilitation plan for the site.

Any enforcement action should establish how workers and other people who may be exposed to hazards at the site will be safely evacuated or removed from areas presenting risks. This is particularly important where mining infrastructure, processing equipment, waste facilities, open workings or other hazardous structures remain on site.

The closure of a mine should not simply mean locking the gates and walking away.
There must be a clearly defined process for securing dangerous infrastructure, stabilising disturbed land, managing mine waste, preventing contamination of water sources and restoring the environment to a safe and stable condition. Most importantly, the cost of rehabilitation should be borne by the mining company responsible for the environmental disturbance, rather than transferred to taxpayers or surrounding communities.

The principle is straightforward: those who profit from extracting natural resources must also carry the responsibility and cost of addressing the damage caused by their operations. Mining leaves a physical footprint that can persist long after production has stopped. Excavations, waste dumps, tailings, contaminated soils, damaged vegetation and altered drainage systems can pose risks to communities and ecosystems for years if they are not properly rehabilitated.

Government should therefore ensure that rehabilitation obligations are clearly identified, costed and enforced before the company is allowed to undertake any further mining activities.Authorities should also establish mechanisms for monitoring rehabilitation and ensuring that the company does not simply abandon the site once profitable operations cease.

The situation at Christmas Pass provides an opportunity for government to demonstrate that regulatory orders are not merely administrative documents but instruments capable of protecting workers, communities and the environment.

The Cease-and-Desist order must be enforced in full. Partial compliance and clandestine night-time operations should not be allowed to undermine the government's intervention. At the same time, closure must be accompanied by a credible evacuation, environmental management and rehabilitation programme, with the financial burden placed squarely on the mining company responsible.

The protection of people and the environment cannot depend on whether mining activities take place in broad daylight or under the cover of darkness.

Artisanal Miners Are Dying While Africa's Gold Economy Counts the Cost

The scale of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) in Zimbabwe makes this contradiction even more glaring. The sector accounts for more than 60% of the country's official gold deliveries.

An estimated 500,000 people participate directly in ASGM, while more than a million people are believed to benefit indirectly from activities linked to the sector. Its scale and economic significance make artisanal mining a critical source of livelihoods and a key pillar of Zimbabwe's gold economy.

It is therefore impossible to continue treating artisanal miners as an informal or peripheral component of the mining sector while simultaneously relying on their production to sustain the national gold economy.

Recently, the planetGOLD Zimbabwe project launched a blueprint for formalisation, A Guide to Reforming Formalization of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe, a practical roadmap outlining how Zimbabwe can move towards a more inclusive, productive, environmentally responsible and formally regulated ASGM sector.

The guide is anchored in a fundamental premise: formalisation cannot be realised through licensing or legislative measures alone. Rather, it calls for the alignment of law, policy, finance, institutional frameworks, market systems and enforcement mechanisms.

Importantly, planetGOLD directly addresses the issue of fatalities by framing formalisation as a critical mechanism for improving occupational health and safety (OHS) and reducing fatal accidents. It identifies the lack of effective formal regulation as a root cause of dangerous working conditions, structural collapses and preventable deaths in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector.

These sentiments are also echoed by Hyde Chatyoka, president of the Emerging Miners Association of Zimbabwe (EMAZ), who calls for the protection of what he describes as the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg.

The message is clear: if Zimbabwe depends on artisanal miners to keep its gold economy moving, then protecting their lives cannot remain an afterthought. Formalisation must mean more than paperwork, licences and compliance requirements. It must translate into safer mining sites, access to finance and technology, geological information, protective equipment, fairer markets, effective monitoring and, above all, a mining system in which the people doing the most dangerous work are not the ones bearing the greatest risks.

The deaths in Zamboye and Penhalonga should therefore not be treated as isolated accidents. They are warnings of a deeper failure in how artisanal and small-scale mining is governed. Every collapsed shaft is a reminder that the gold economy has a human cost, and that no amount of gold is worth the life of a miner.

Mutare's Poisoned River: 28 years of Warnings, and Still No Cure

The solution requires accountability on all sides: businesses must comply with environmental standards, the municipality must maintain the infrastructure for which it charges users, and regulators must enforce the law.

The Gimboki sewage treatment plant cannot carry an entire city indefinitely. Power cuts, ageing infrastructure, mechanical failures and inadequate capacity create a vicious cycle in which untreated sewage eventually finds its way into the river. The costs are then transferred from municipal accounts to communities through polluted water, degraded ecosystems, threats to livestock and potential public-health emergencies.

After 28 years, the Sakubva crisis should no longer be treated as a recurring complaint. EMA should urgently test the river, identify the pollutants and trace them to their sources. Government must enforce against polluters, while the City of Mutare and central government address the infrastructure deficit.

Where pollution is caused by identifiable industrial actors, the polluter-pays principle should apply, including responsibility for rehabilitation. Where failing public infrastructure is responsible, government must finance its repair.

Most importantly, authorities should publish a time-bound Sakubva River rehabilitation plan, with clear responsibilities, budgets and public reporting. Mutare has known for 28 years that its river is sick. The real scandal is not that the problem has returned. It is that, after 28 years, there is still a debate about what needs to be done.