

The Weekly

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Brown Supply Chain: Coal powered electricity plant at Sabi Star lithium mine in Buhera where communities suffer energy poverty

Open Letter to China's Ambassador: Counts the Hidden Cost of Mineral Extraction

Zimbabwe wants investment. What it cannot afford is investment that treats environmental safeguards as optional.

That is the uncomfortable message at the heart of a new open letter by the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) to China's ambassador to Zimbabwe, Zhou Ding. The organisation says communities across the country have reported environmental damage, disputes over land and water, and alleged regulatory breaches involving Chinese-owned or Chinese-linked mining operations. It's a wide ranging epitaph of diplomatic offensive urging for greater scrutiny of the impact of the investments across Zimbabwe.

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Lithium Mines, Lost Livelihoods: How African Women Are Challenging the Human Cost of Clean Energy

In this article Mary Nyadome a community activist from Goromonzi shares her reflections from a recently held community exchange visit.

Community delegates from Namaqualand, South Africa, and lithium-affected areas of Zimbabwe gathered for a four-day exchange on the impacts of critical mineral extraction. Through safety sessions, community dialogue and a field visit to Buhera, participants shared experiences of mining-related risks, pressure and environmental harm. Women from both countries reflected on the balance between extraction's economic benefits and its environmental and social costs.



Lithium Mines, Lost Livelihoods: How African Women Are Challenging the Human Cost of Clean Energy

By Mary Nyadome

The exchange visit between women from mining-affected communities in Zimbabwe and South Africa, facilitated by the Centre for Natural Resource Governance and WoMin Alliance, created an important space to share lived experiences of the just energy transition and critical minerals.

Held in Buhera District, where Sabi Star Mine operates a lithium mine, the meeting examined how demand for critical minerals affects communities, particularly women, and whether transition benefits reach people living in mining areas.

Women from both countries reflected on the balance between extraction's economic benefits and its environmental and social costs. They said a just transition must protect communities, livelihoods, water, biodiversity, land and human rights, not only supply minerals for cleaner energy.

Women from the Northern Cape shared experiences from Namaqualand, where Vedanta Zinc International mines zinc alongside copper, lead and silver, and communities live with the impacts of mining along the Orange River.

They warned that pollution entering this major water system can move towards the Atlantic, threatening aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity. Around the Boegoeberg confluence, environmental pressures are increasingly visible, adding to concerns about cumulative pollution and deep-sea mining.

These concerns are inseparable from decision-making over communal land. Participants said the Community Property Association does not adequately represent everyone along the Orange River, leaving people frustrated when decisions affecting land, water and livelihoods proceed without sufficient participation.

Women also questioned limited skills transfer and local participation. Competition for opportunities has increased with an influx of Chinese workers, while communities receive too few pathways into technical work, training, entrepreneurship and higher-value activities across the mining value chain. Participants said consultations often involve only a few selected people. This particularly disadvantages women, who carry major responsibilities for water collection, household care, food production and community wellbeing, yet may bear mining's consequences without an equal voice.

The shortage of employment for young people is also contributing to social problems, including drug and substance abuse. Women called for skills development, decent work and local enterprises so youth can build futures within their own communities.

Water scarcity and access to clean, potable water emerged as another major concern. Pollution directly affects daily life, livelihoods and community health because families depend on rivers and other sources for domestic and productive activities.

Namaqualand women described intimidation on communal land, private security and politicisation that restrict organising and free expression. They called these human-rights violations and demanded safe spaces where community members, especially women, can participate without fear.

They also questioned Corporate Social Responsibility commitments that remain promises. Some mining-affected areas are not properly rehabilitated and lack clear reclamation plans. Women stressed that companies must plan from the outset for land, water and ecosystems after mining ends.

Formalisation Not Just Paperwork, CNRG Warns at Midlands State University ASM Summit

The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) brought a civil society and community-rights perspective to the Midlands State University Symposium on Sustainable Capacity Building for Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) in SADC Countries, held in Gweru from 23–25 September 2026 under the theme "Our Hands, Our Minds, Our Destiny."

CNRG Project Officer Tanaka Ndongera sat on the Day 2 breakaway panel on Governance, Policy Formulation and Formalisation, alongside the Provincial Mining Director for Midlands Province and representatives of Runde Rural District Council.

The panel followed a symposium-wide conversation that had already set a challenging tone: keynote speaker Mukasiri Sibanda told delegates that current mining practices "disrespect the ethos of the National Anthem," framing mining as an ecosystem rather than mere extraction and pressing for stronger youth participation beyond what he called "crumbs."

Guest speaker Mr Mangisi went further, arguing that formalisation must start with basics like record-keeping and mechanisation support, admitting he was "getting tired" of formalisation being discussed without concrete steps, and calling on universities and banks to become active partners in the sector's development.

Against this backdrop, Ndongera argued that formalisation cannot simply mean issuing a licence to an informal miner it must bring the entire mining relationship, including community rights, into a transparent and accountable framework.

Drawing on CNRG's community-based research, he highlighted a persistent gap between formal governance processes and the lived realities of mining-affected communities: exclusion from consultation and compensation, weak grievance mechanisms, and gendered impacts. He called for Free, Prior and Informed Consent to function as genuine decision-making rather than a box-ticking exercise held after licences are already issued.

Ndongera also set out what a developmental rather than purely regulatory formalisation framework should deliver: accessible licensing, access to finance, technical support, fair market access, basic infrastructure, environmental rehabilitation, and mechanisms for community accountability.

He positioned civil society as an independent monitor and bridge between communities, government and mining actors pointing to tools like CNRG's Critical Minerals Data Observatory while warning against revenue models that entrench elite capture or sideline women and youth.

The discussion echoed concerns raised elsewhere at the symposium, including a plenary session where participants questioned why so few Zimbabweans hold formal stakes in the country's mineral wealth, and where informal miners are still commonly dismissed as "makorokoza" despite sustaining livelihoods across the country's mining districts.

CNRG's contribution reinforced its consistent position: that sustainable ASM growth in Zimbabwe depends on formalisation being designed with communities, not merely imposed on them.



An artisanal miner holds a gold ignot in their palm

Mazowe's Polluted Waters: Distress Calls From a River under Siege

By Staff Reporter

For a farmer in Glendale, Mazowe District, the environmental crisis is no longer an abstract debate about mining and regulation. It arrives through irrigation pipes.

“Our irrigation pumps and centre pivots are constantly blocked with mud,” the farmer said. “The river is in a sorry state from an environmental point of view.”

The farm sits at the junction of the Mazowe and Mwenje rivers, where the farmer says Chinese mining operations upstream are polluting the waterway. The claim has yet to be independently established, but the symptoms described heavy sedimentation, blocked irrigation infrastructure and deteriorating river conditions fit a problem that researchers and authorities have documented in the Mazowe catchment.

“I am farming in the Glendale area of Mazowe District. We are currently having major issues with Chinese mining operations polluting the river,” the farmer told *The Weekly*.

A 2019 study of the Mazowe and Mwenje rivers found that alluvial gold mining was associated with elevated total suspended solids and turbidity, with researchers identifying the two rivers as being heavily affected by mining along their courses.

More recent research has found evidence of mercury and arsenic associated with gold mining in the Upper Mazowe River.

So when a farmer says the river is in “a sorry state”, there is a body of scientific evidence behind the broader concern.

There is also an uncomfortable irony. In May this year, the Government declared 17 rivers a state of disaster because of degradation linked to mining. The Mazowe was among them.

The declaration was not merely symbolic. Government has since embarked on a national river rehabilitation programme, while the State of Disaster was extended in September because the initial rehabilitation period was considered insufficient.

The farmer says complaints have already been made to the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), but alleges that the responses have not resolved the problem.



“Reports to EMA and ZINWA have fallen on deaf ears,” the farmer said.

If mining is responsible for the sediment entering the river, regulators should be able to identify the source, inspect the operation, test the water and sediment, and enforce the law. If the Chinese-linked operations are not responsible, that too should be established through evidence.

Zimbabwe cannot afford an environmental regulatory system in which communities must repeatedly complain while rivers continue carrying the consequences downstream.

Government has already acknowledged the scale of the crisis. It has banned riverbed and alluvial mining and launched an emergency rehabilitation programme.

The Glendale farmer's distress call therefore comes at a critical moment. It is a question is no longer whether Zimbabwe's rivers are under pressure. That has been established.

For farmers, communities and ecosystems along the Mazowe, time is already flowing downstream.

A distress call is coming from Glendale in Mazowe District, where farmers say mining activity upstream is turning a critical river system into an environmental and agricultural liability.

The farmer says the operation is located at the junction of the Mazowe and Mwenje rivers, where the condition of the waterway has deteriorated to the point that agricultural infrastructure is being repeatedly affected.

The complaint is not simply about dirty water. It raises questions about the sustainability of agriculture, the protection of downstream communities and the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's environmental regulatory system.

Christmas Pass Mining Raises Fresh Questions Over Water and Power Infrastructure



By Donald Nyarota

A disputed gold mining project at Christmas Pass is becoming a growing test of transparency in Mutare, with questions emerging over a large water pipeline and major electricity infrastructure being installed in the area.

Mutare Mayor Councillor Simon Chabuka has firmly denied that the city is supplying water to the Toronto mining operation.

“We are not supplying them with water... We are not and we will not,” Chabuka said.

But people monitoring developments at the site say a substantial pipeline has already been laid towards the mining operation. They allege that the City of Mutare and the Mutasa Rural District Council allowed a large trench to be excavated and a pipeline installed along Kloof Road.

The mining operation is reportedly not yet using municipal water. Instead, it is drawing water from three boreholes sunk at the site, which are being used for construction activities and dust suppression.

The immediate query may not be whether the mine is receiving municipal water today, but why major water infrastructure is being installed towards a project whose environmental and legal status remains contested.

The same questions are now being raised about electricity.

Residents report that ZESA has been working in the area for several weeks installing a substantial electricity line to service the development. The capacity and ultimate customer for the line should be independently verified; claims circulating locally describe it as a major 6 kVA connection.

taken together, the water and electricity works point to something larger than a temporary mining operation.

Significant capital is being committed to the site.

That makes the continuing legal and regulatory questions increasingly important.

CNRG has been campaigning against mining at Christmas Pass since 2025, citing environmental degradation, public safety concerns and inadequate community participation. In April 2026, CNRG and partner organisations inspected the site and reported extensive removal of vegetation and topsoil on steep mountain slopes.

This confrontation subsequently escalated after regulatory intervention, while CNRG reported allegations of continued activity at the site.

The matter has since moved to the Mutare High Court, where Hillcrest School, represented by Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) lawyers Calex Maunga Jnr, Tatenda Sigauke and Dorothy Mutungura, is challenging mining activities by Toronto Mines and associated companies.

The legal challenge adds urgency to questions over infrastructure being installed around the project.

If the mine is ultimately stopped, what happens to the pipeline? Who paid for it? Who authorised the trench? Who is paying for the electricity infrastructure? And what approvals underpin these investments?

Mayor Chabuka says Mutare is not and will not be supplying the mine with water. That should be easy to establish.

The next step is transparency: publish the approvals, identify the infrastructure owners and explain who is paying because Christmas Pass is no longer just a dispute over a mine.

It is becoming a question about how much infrastructure a contested project can build before the public gets a clear answer about who authorised it and why.

IN PICTURES: Regional Community Exchange



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Despite these challenges, women are strengthening community knowledge. In Namaqualand, Alternative Land Development supports education and outreach on rights, policies and natural-resource laws, helping communities become informed participants in decisions affecting their lives.

The discussion also highlighted the loss of indigenous knowledge and endangered traditional trees, reportedly sold for as much as 500,000 rand. Their destruction erases not only vegetation, but cultural practices and knowledge passed between generations.

This exchange became more than a discussion about critical minerals. It connected the global energy transition with realities on the ground, asking who bears environmental costs, who receives economic benefits and who influences decisions over land and natural resources.

For participants, a just transition means clean water, meaningful participation, decent youth employment, local skills transfer, biodiversity protection, rehabilitation of mined land, respect for human rights, and recognition of women's knowledge and leadership.

Their message was clear: communities should not carry the environmental and social costs of the energy transition while receiving limited benefits. Women must be recognised not only as people affected by mining, but as active participants and leaders shaping a just and sustainable future.

IN PICTURES: Regional Community Exchange

