



## **JUST LIKE EITI, IS THE KIMBERLEY PROCESS SANITIZING PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION AND UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT?**

*By Simiso Mlevu Posted November 18, 2019 In Blog, Campaigns*

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*Part of the crowd that attended the 2019 Marange Commemoration organized by CNRG and the Marange Community*

*By Farai Maguwu*

## **Introduction**

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Today the Kimberley Process got underway in New Delhi, India. This comes at the end of its 3 year reform cycle that sought to ensure the KP is fit for purpose and better equipped to address the on-going human rights concerns in the diamond value chain, particularly in the producing countries. One of the issues at the core of the reform agenda is widening the scope of the KP by revisiting the outdated definition of conflict diamonds which narrowly focuses on diamonds used by rebel groups to overthrow 'legitimate' governments as defined in UN relevant documents. Based on that narrow definition, the KP erroneously claims that less than 1% of conflict diamonds are still in circulation. However, that narrow definition hides primitive and unjust accumulation of diamond wealth by those not affected by diamond mining whilst the communities that host the diamond reserves wallow in abject poverty. Rough diamond mining continues to be the epitome and perfect example of the 'resource curse' or 'paradox of plenty' to the producing nations, particularly the communities affected by mining. By presiding over syphoning of wealth from poor communities whilst further enriching the rich, the Kimberley Process is promoting combined and uneven development where super exploitation of one region/country leads to super profits for those thousands of miles away. This unevenness is perfectly on display in Zimbabwe's Marange community.

### **The Marange Diamond Curse**

Endowed with massive diamond wealth, Marange remains one of the poorest places on earth with absolutely nothing to show for all its natural capital that is leaving the country with KP certificates marked 'conflict free'. Not only is the current generation being robbed, future Marange generations shall forever feel robbed and shortchanged too, not only by the government of Zimbabwe, but also the Kimberley Process which okayed and sanitized the looting. It must be stated that unmined diamonds are a form of wealth for the current and future generations of Marange. Others call this natural capital. Every diamond coming out of Marange is a withdrawal/subtraction of Marange's hidden treasure. It is unjust and unpardonable that both government and mining corporations have no intention, whatsoever, to plough back diamond wealth into the Marange community. But to only talk of the Marange people as the sole losers in the Marange diamonds story would be to trivialize the matter. The entire Zimbabwean population is deeply angry that such looting is taking place at a time government coffers are nearly empty whilst thousands of citizens are dying of preventable diseases daily, as doctors and nurses have entered the third month of strike demanding living wages. In 2016 former President Robert Mugabe charged that as much as \$15 billion had been looted by the diamond mining firms. He attempted to nationalize the diamonds through the formation of the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC) but the results are the same – continued looting under the auspices of the Kimberley Process.

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## Counting their Losses

Against this background, Centre for Natural Resource Governance, acting in partnership with Community Based Organizations in Marange, organized the 5th edition of the Marange Commemoration attended by thousands of Marange villagers and Zimbabwean civil society groups. Several traditional leaders and representatives of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission were in attendance. The voice of the Marange community was loud and clear. They are bitter with the degree of looting and human rights abuses brought about by diamond mining to their peaceful community. The feeling of injustice and betrayal is deep in this community and throughout Zimbabwe and it will be passed on to future generations who shall forever demand to know who benefitted from their diamond wealth. Roads to Marange are impassable. The local clinic is a death trap with no medicine. Little school children walk up to 10KM to and from school daily. Some speakers at the commemoration were close to tears as they bemoaned lack of development in the area despite the diamond wealth. It is at a gathering like this that the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process is evaluated. Interestingly, not even a single speaker mentioned the Kimberley Process during the event that lasted about 7 hours. The majority do not even know of its existence or purpose. To the people of Marange and Zimbabwe the KP is a cornucopia of contextual irrelevance.

## Sanitizing diamond looting?

The KP has normalized the abnormal. The KP has proved to be no different from other mechanisms such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) which claims that its main objective is 'to promote the open and accountable management of oil, gas and mineral resources'. According to Human Rights Watch 'in countries where there are severe shortcomings in respect of fundamental freedoms, the EITI process can be reduced to a technocratic exercise ... that allows governments to associate themselves with a respected international initiative when their actions are in fact directly contrary to its aims' (Human Rights Watch, 2013, 20).

The observation by Human Rights Watch that EITI, and by extension KP, perform badly where democratic participation and respect for fundamental freedoms are in short supply, isn't new. More than a century ago, Polish -German philosopher Rosa Luxemburg made the same conclusion. She argued that primitive conditions or pre-capitalist societies allow more ruthless measures than could be tolerated under purely capitalist social conditions. Indeed the prevailing conditions in Marange – human rights abuses including torture of artisanal mining, killings, super exploitation of the diamond wealth by ruling elites and external forces, environmental degradation – will not be tolerated in countries like Belgium, Britain or the United States. Some of the elites could be in jail whilst some corporations could have been fined hundreds of millions of dollars for criminal conduct.

Just like EITI, the KP is weak on human rights especially where states are the perpetrators. It has been silent whilst people are mauled by dogs with impunity – some eventually succumbing to their injuries. It has not even attempted to address the economic injustice against the Marange people. The KP watched on as more than 1300 families were forcibly evicted from Marange without compensation to pave way for diamond mining. The displaced villagers are experiencing new poverty with no safe drinking water, no sources of livelihood and no government registered health facility. Truth of the matter is they were dumped in the middle of nowhere and forgotten. And yet one of the KP monitors, Mr Abbey Chikane, reported in 2010 that Zimbabwe had far exceeded the KP minimum standards. The rights and human security of the Marange people did not matter then and now.

### **What must be done?**

- The KP must widen the definition of conflict diamonds to include systemic human rights abuses by States and quasi state agents and corporations
- Addressing economic injustice in communities endowed with diamonds must be included in the KP mandate, so the KP can protect communities from greedy politicians and corporations.
- The KP must address environmental injustices caused by diamond mining
- The KP must come up with an acceptable labour standard for the diamond value chain. Diamonds produced in an inhuman / unfair working environment must be declared conflict diamonds
- Governments must be forced to declare how they utilize diamond revenues, especially in relation to producing communities

### **Conclusion**



Only a reformed Kimberley Process will be equipped to connect with the Marange people and acknowledge the injustice whilst engaging the Zimbabwe government to ensure the community concerns about human rights and community development are addressed. And yet it remains to be seen if the KP will emerge from India with a widened scope and a new definition of conflict diamonds to cover various forms of violations such as displacements without compensation, restrictions to freedoms of movement and association, systemic beatings, torture, killings of artisanal miners and villagers and violence against nature. Only then can the KP become relevant to the people of Marange. For now it remains part of the problem, if not the biggest problem.

*Farai Maguwu is Director of Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG)*

