



## CAN ZIMBABWE'S RARE EARTH MINERALS BE A GAME CHANGER?

*By Simiso Mlevu Posted July 4, 2019 In Blog, Campaigns*

The revelation by President Emmerson Mnangagwa that Zimbabwe is sitting on 17 rare earth elements (REE) should, ordinarily, be exciting news for Zimbabweans. However, the Government of Zimbabwe's reputation or lack of it in mineral resource governance makes the revelation worrisome.

The legacy of mineral resources exploitation in Zimbabwe has been human rights abuse, loss of livelihood and life as well as under-development for the communities.

According to the state media, these 17 rare-earth minerals are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).

Although Zimbabwe has not carried out a comprehensive mineral survey, President Mnangagwa told the media that the country's REE are the second largest in the world after China's. There is need for a comprehensive strategy on how to harness these minerals for present and future generations before extraction begins. Zimbabwe need to analyse what is wrong with the current model of extraction and use that information to craft a strategy that ensures mining is linked to the rest of the economy and is the pinnacle of industrialisation.

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Policy inconsistency and rent-seeking behaviour by Zimbabwe's political – business - military complex has been the major stumbling block to good governance of the extractive sector in Zimbabwe. The political-business-military cartel which influenced the deployment of the army in Marange in November 2008 followed by the formation of dodgy mining companies that have been looting Marange diamonds since then, has now spread to the entire extractive sector. These untouchables, which include powerful politicians, have used government offices to negotiate personal deals that are prejudicing the country of potential revenues worth billions of dollars.

Under the Zimbabwe is Open for Business public relations initiative, President Mnangagwa has mortgaged and parcelled out minerals through secretive 'mega deals' whose contracts are only known to him, his cronies and the miners. In most cases even the identity of the investors remain a closely guarded secret.

Mineral resource governance is shrouded by a cloud of secrecy in Zimbabwe and it is increasingly becoming difficult for organisations like Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) involved in advocating for transparency and accountability in the sector to operate as various state agents show determination to scuttle the work by making unjustified demands. Conducting awareness raising workshops in mining communities is increasingly becoming difficult as Police demand CNRG to produce a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rural District Council of the area. The MOUs are negotiated with the District Administrators whose also demand a lot of documents from other government departments. Nevertheless there is no law in Zimbabwe that compels civil society organisations to sign MOUs with RDCs.

Shrinking the operating space for civil society in communities affected by extractive industries is an indication of corruption and an attempt to conceal human rights violations which are rampant throughout the mining sector in Zimbabwe. There is a high level of disgruntlement in the communities which are now calling on CNRG to help them mobilize for resistance to destructive mining.

The precedence set by the government of Zimbabwe in the management and governance of diamonds, granite, gold, chrome and coal and other mineral deposits does not inspire confidence on the citizens.

In light of the revelation by President Mnangagwa CNRG calls on the President to be transparent regarding geological information, contracts negotiations and the potential impacts of those mining projects. Minerals belong to the Zimbabwean people and government should negotiate mining deals on behalf of the people and not those on the negotiating table. The parliamentary portfolio committee on Mines and Energy must be allowed to play its oversight role in scrutinizing every deal in order to secure the national interest.

Further, CNRG calls for a broad based mineral resources governance policy that promotes transparency and accountability. Without a proper governance and management model, the proceeds from REE and other existing minerals will only serve to line the pockets of the ruling elites while the communities and the country get poorer.

We call on the government of Zimbabwe to formulate and enforce contract disclosure as a policy for the extractive sector. Although Section 34 A (3a) of the Revenue Authority Act binds Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) on confidentiality on client information on taxes, the act can be amended and corporates can be compelled to disclose their remittances in the interest of transparency.



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