



KAMANDAMA DISASTER A PAINFUL REMINDER OF THE HAZARDS OF MINING IN ZIMBABWE

By Simiso Mlevu Posted June 6, 2021 In Campaigns, Front

June 6 on the Zimbabwe calendar marks a painful reminder of the hazards of mining and the long term effects of these disasters on surviving families. On this day in 1972, 427 mine workers perished at the then Wankie Colliery's Number 2 shaft when a series of underground gas explosions ripped through the mine. The disaster, which has come to be known as the Kamandama Disaster, epitomises the disregard for the health and safety of mineworkers and their families in Zimbabwe. The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) joins the people of Zimbabwe in commiserating with mineworkers and mining-affected communities who continue to shoulder the negative impacts of mining.

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The Kamandama disaster spelt a bleak future for the families of the victims who perished at the mine. The victims, mostly in their late 20s and early 30s then left young families, who were then deprived of education and decent livelihoods. These families, mostly the widows, continue to be neglected by both the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) and the Hwange Colliery Company Limited (HCCL). We call upon the GoZ and HCCL to take care of the socio-economic needs of these widows. 22 surviving widows who were guests of honour at a commemoration event held by CNRG in 2019 in Hwange said they never remarried after being told by HCCL management they would lose their benefits, including houses if they got married. They are invited to the colliery on 6 June every year for the commemoration where they are given bus fares and small food hampers. They are not on medical aid and the allowances they used to get have ceased. The widows deserve access to functioning healthcare facilities and decent accommodation. However, because of the cruel nature of mining, they have remained to bear the brunt.

While the Kamandama disaster remains the deadliest in the history of mining in Zimbabwe, more lives continue to be lost at various formal and informal mines across Zimbabwe. The year 2020 saw the most tragic mine accidents for the gold mining sector. Over a hundred artisanal and small scale mineworkers died in mine accidents. At Tusk Mine in Chegutu, at least 5 artisanal miners were buried alive after a shaft collapsed on them. At Matshetshe mine in Esigodini, a shaft collapsed with six employees of a small scale mine underground. The rescue mission was abandoned after 11 days. At Ran Mine in Bindura, over 30 artisanal miners died after a disused mine shaft collapsed on them. At Premier Estate outside Mutare, an unknown number of artisanal miners were killed when Chinese gold panners closed a shaft with full knowledge of the presence of artisanal miners underground in November 2020. Only two bodies were recovered and rescue operations abruptly stopped despite artisanal miners insisting that at least 12 miners were underground when disaster struck. As with the Kamandama Disaster, the families of mineworkers who have been buried alive at the mines lost breadwinners and have been sentenced to perpetual suffering and poverty. The families also continue to suffer from the cultural trauma of failing to accord their loved ones a decent burial.

As CNRG, we believe natural resources like minerals should not be a curse for the people of Zimbabwe. Instead, they should lead to positive socio-economic development among citizens, host communities and indeed the whole country. We call upon the government of Zimbabwe to ensure the country has policies that promote greater benefits for the people of Zimbabwe, especially host communities.

CNRG, therefore, calls on:

- HCCL to deliver justice and compensate Kamandama mine disaster v

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- HCCL to deliver on its promises to provide livelihood support to the widows.
- HCCL build decent houses for the widows in their rural homes.
- HCCL to provide medical cover to the widows.
- Parliament of Zimbabwe to protect the rights and dignity of the Kamandama widows and ensure they are compensated
- Parliament of Zimbabwe to lead in the formulation of mining investment laws that will protect Zimbabwean citizens.



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