



## COAL ASH DUMP SITE NIGHTMARE FOR HWANGE RESIDENTS

*By Simiso Mlevu Posted July 24, 2019 In Blog, Campaigns, News, Press Releases*

HWANGE – One fateful afternoon, then 13 year old Obedient Dube from Hwange town went bird hunting with three other boys as they enjoyed the last days of the 2016 August school holiday.

The boys' adventure took the youngsters from Madumabisa compound to the forestry coal ash dump sites near Area A residential side. At the time of the incident the ash dump site wasn't marked 'Danger'.

The adventure turned tragic when the top surface suddenly gave in partly swallowing young Obedient to knee level and exposing him to burning coal ash.

Obedient was burnt both feet as he rhythmically moved them up and down hoping to escape from the fiery coal ash.

When he eventually escaped, his left foot had been seriously burnt and he had to spend more than three months admitted at Hwange Colliery Hospital.

"I wrote my ZIMSEC Grade 7 examinations from the hospital bed," the 17 year old Wankie Secondary School boy said as he narrated the traumatic encounter.

Four years later, Obedient is still feeling some pain on the left foot and the hallux has been moving backward as the muscle tightens, presumably to heal the internal injuries.

[Leave a message](#)



The shift in his hallux, he says, has denied him the propulsive potency needed for walking.

“I cannot walk long distances anymore. It takes me about 40 minutes to walk to school (a distance of less than two kilometres),” he said adding that he does not wear school shoes any longer.

Obedient’s mother, Zondiwe Dube said life has been difficult for her son ever since he got injured and Hwange Colliery Company has not been helpful.

“He is visibly in pain but I do not have any money to take him to specialist doctors for attention . . . I now buy him oversized shoes because of his deformed leg,”

“We tried to seek help but were told that the company cannot pay for specialist treatment,” she said on the side-lines of the commemoration to remember women’s struggles against destructive mining which was organised by Centre for Natural Resource Governance in conjunction with Greater Hwange Residents Trust. She also said the company only put a danger warning sign at the dump site after her son had been burnt.

The place where Obedient was injured is not the only coal ash dump site in Hwange. There are several others in Cinderella and Lwendulu villages.

In 2016 CNRG documented a horrific case of yet another boy, Simba Mulezu, who was permanently handicapped after falling into the raging Hwange underground fires.

Simba was driving away cattle from his mother’s field when the ground gave in under his feet sinking his body into the burning coal underground. He was 10 years old.

The underground fires left the now seventeen-year-old Simba with deformed limbs, rendering him incapacitated and severely psychologically affected. Simba still suffers from the accident and can’t spend much time outdoors, as his skin still won’t endure the region’s severe weather conditions.

His widowed mother, Susan Mulezu, has no better words to talk about how ‘underground hot coal pits’ have severely burned her son’s body and left him with deformed limbs and feet.

“For me, my son’s catastrophe shows that coal is a curse to humankind. Since their father passed away, I struggle to get my son and his three younger siblings to go to school. I want to secure a better future for them, but since my son fell into the coal pit, he cannot do much of what children of his age do,” said Susan.

These sites are not protected and are prone to fire. The oxidation process of coal, which is the main burning by-product material of mining operation, leads to spontaneous combustion of coal waste dump sites, often triggering fires that can burn for decades.

Director for Centre for Natural Resource Governance, Farai Maguwu bemoaned the laxity of health and safety measures by Hwange Colliery Company when dumping coal ash saying it exposes residents to various health risks.

“This is negligence on the part of the Hwange Colliery Company Limited. Since these ashes are highly flammable as residents say, there are safety measures to be put in place to protect Hwange residents,” he said. However the level of impunity enjoyed by the company is shocking. No corporation must be allowed to act irresponsibly, maim people and continue as if nothing has happened. I wonder where the Environmental Management Agency is when all of this is happening,’ he added.



Leave a message

