

# GUNS, POWER AND POLITICS

A stylized illustration of a woman's profile in white and black, set against a green background. The woman's mouth is replaced by a large black gun barrel. The gun barrel is tilted upwards and to the right, with a white hand holding it from the top right. The woman's hair is depicted with white, flame-like or leaf-like shapes. The overall style is graphic and minimalist.

Community activist  
resource

Extractivism,  
Militarisation and  
Violence against  
Women in  
Sierra Leone

# Background to Guns, Power and Politics

WoMin and its partners – Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) in Zimbabwe, Justiça Ambiental (JA) in Mozambique, and Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) in Sierra Leone – jointly undertook this feminist political economy research in 2018. The aim of the research is to inform national network formation, support women's organising, trauma intervention and justice efforts by addressing the intersection of extractivism, militarisation, securitisation and violence against women.

When the research was commissioned, WoMin and its partners were clear that it would draw on formal academic analysis, research reports and reports written by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Interviews with key personnel working in NGOs or leading community organisations would be conducted, but there would be no primary fieldwork involving affected or potentially affected women. We adopted this position for a number of reasons:

- (a) Women who have endured violence perpetrated by private security and the military have rarely spoken about this experience and so there is deep unaddressed trauma; and
- (b) The terrain of work is extremely risky and there is need for careful process to enable women to think through risks and consequences to speaking out about the violence.

An extractive research process would likely cause further trauma and harm to the women we have elected to serve as an alliance. The researchers, bar one, respected this boundary.

The research was undertaken in Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and Mozambique, and informs a conceptual synthesis paper which draws key conclusions from the research and builds critical concepts and ideas about the relationship between extractivism, securitisation, militarisation and violence against women. The research has been translated into a community activist resource tool for information and consciousness-raising in each of the three countries.



**WoMin**  
AFRICAN WOMEN UNITE AGAINST  
DESTRUCTIVE RESOURCE EXTRACTION



**This report draws on research commissioned by Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Women and Mining (WOME) and the WoMin African Alliance.**

# 1.

## INTRODUCTION

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Sierra Leone is rich in minerals such as diamonds, rutile, bauxite, gold, iron ore and limonite. However, this wealth has not led to the development of the country or its people. Instead it has created increased hardship for people whose land is taken by mining and for the country as a whole. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission pointed out, conflict over the control of the diamond industry was a direct cause and fuel for the continuation of the 11-year civil war which started in 1991. The war devastated the country, with 75 000 people killed and 1 million people displaced.

Since the beginning of large-scale mining in the 1930s, mining companies have abused the rights of people and destroyed the environment. They have been able to do this with the help of government officials, politicians, and chiefs.

To make way for mining, people in many communities across Sierra Leone were forced to leave the land on which they depended for their survival – land on which they grew their food, grazed their cattle, buried their dead and from which they got their water and fire wood.

Women in these communities experience the greatest hardship from this loss of land. This is because women are the ones who grow food, who collect fuel and water and who cook and care for their families.

Added to these threats of survival, people living close to mines must deal with ongoing violence from the army, police, and mine security. The mining companies bring in these security forces to protect the minerals on the land taken from the community. They control the movement of the community, search people's homes, and often use violence against community members. For women, this often means sexual violence.

In the following pages we show that mining companies and mineral traders have captured Sierra Leone's mineral wealth with the help of government officials, politicians, and traditional leaders, leaving very little wealth for the development of the country and its people. To keep their control over the mineral wealth the mining companies, with the support of government, bring in the army, police, and private security. The mineral traders have their own private security too.

We then look at the increased hardship women and their communities face when their land is taken for mining. These hardships include loss of livelihoods and increased violence from security forces.

Next, we look at some of the actions organisations and communities are taking to stop the abuse of people and the environment by mining.

Finally, we conclude with a note that more information is needed on women's experiences of violence resulting from the presence of military and security companies in their villages. More information on women's experiences of violence is an important first step towards finding ways to support women to deal with such violence and obtain justice.

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## 2. THE CAPTURE OF MINING BENEFITS BY CORPORATIONS AND ELITES

Industrial mining started in Sierra Leone in 1930 when the colonial government gave the Sierra Leone Development Company rights to mine iron ore and a 99-year lease over large parcels of land. In the mid 1930's the colonial government gave rights to the Sierra Leone Selection Trust to mine diamonds over 7 700 square miles.

Many people were affected when government gave these large parcels of land to these mining companies. The survival of the families who depended on this land was threatened. Those who tried to get into small scale mining faced the violence of the army and police who were brought in to protect this land and the minerals which now belonged to these large mining companies.

From colonial times into independence, and up to the present, government has enabled the large companies to gain from Sierra Leone's mineral wealth while the people of Sierra Leone continue to benefit little.

Government officials, politicians and traditional leaders have the responsibility of overseeing mining. They have the responsibility of making sure there is good governance, that the environment is protected, and that the people of Sierra Leone benefit from mining. However, instead of carrying out these responsibilities they help multinational corporations and traders to capture the country's wealth. While government officials and traditional leaders benefit personally from some of this wealth in the form of bribes, most of the wealth is taken out of the country by the multinational companies and traders.

Sierra Leone loses large amounts of money that should be paid in taxes by the multinational corporations. These companies make deals with government officials who agree to bend the laws so that the companies pay little or no taxes. This means that Sierra Leone loses money that could go into health care, education, and other needs of the people of Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone also loses large amounts of money through smuggling. Diamonds and other minerals are smuggled by criminal groups. In some cases, government officials are directly involved in these criminal groups. In other cases, government officials and traditional leaders are paid to look the other way and allow these groups to carry out their crimes.

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The theft of mineral wealth by companies and traders, with the support of politicians and government officials, has led to Sierra Leone being listed as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and Global Corruption Barometer, and the World Bank's annual Worldwide Governance Indicators and Enterprise Survey have all reached the same conclusion.

There has been pressure from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and from civil society organisations in Sierra Leone for good governance particularly in relation to mining. As a result of this pressure the Sierra Leone government signed onto the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative, a global standard of good extractives governance in 2006. Sierra Leone was suspended from this Transparency Initiative in 2013 because it did not meet 4 requirements. There was a push then from civil society organisations for a new law to improve good governance in mining, but this is still under discussion.

Below we look in a little more detail at the unlawful and lawful ways in which multinational companies and traders' benefit from Sierra Leone's wealth with the help of government officials, politicians, and traditional leaders.

### Lawful Activities

Government loses money from mining wealth through lawful means when mining companies get government officials to agree on tax payments that are lower than the payments required by law. For example, a Danwatch report shows that in 2010/11 2 iron ore mining companies, African Minerals and London Mining, had individual agreements with the Sierra Leone government to pay 25% tax on their profits. This is much lower than the 37.5% required by law. The government officials who help the mining companies in this way may have been paid by the mining companies so they can pay lower taxes. The loss of taxes means that the country loses money that could have gone into development needs such as healthcare and education.

### Unlawful Activities

From colonial times government has tried to make sure that large companies have control over the mining of diamonds and the buying of diamonds. Two groups which threatened the control of the large companies were small scale miners and independent diamond traders who bought and sold diamonds.

In the 1950s, the colonial government tried to limit small scale mining and to stop the private traders from buying and selling diamonds. They did this through laws and through force.

The small-scale miners were mainly Sierra Leoneans who had been involved in agriculture and who saw an opportunity to add to their incomes through gold and diamond mining. These small-scale miners threatened the control that large companies had over gold and diamonds. Government brought in the army and police to prevent the small-scale miners from entering the lands rich in gold and diamonds.

To stop the private traders from buying and selling diamonds, the colonial government brought in a law that all diamonds had to be sold to the Sierra Leone Selection Trust.

This turned the mining areas into battle zones and led to illegal and criminal activities which continued after independence.

Despite having to face continual battles with the army and police, small-scale miners continued mining. To continue diamond dealing, the independent diamond dealers supported small-scale miners financially, on condition that the small-scale miners would only sell diamonds to these traders and no one else.

Since the areas rich in minerals were under the control of chiefs, the diamond traders paid the chiefs in return for being allowed to operate in these areas.

By the time of independence in 1961 the battle for control over the country's diamond wealth became more intense. Sierra Leone was then producing half of the world's diamonds. This meant that the wealth to be made by multinational corporations, illegal traders and smugglers, corrupt politicians, officials, and chiefs was higher than ever before.

By the end of the 1970s and into the early 1980s, criminal activities in diamond trading involved government officials and the Prime Minister Siaka Stevens himself.

Two cartels (or groups) controlled the diamond industry. Both cartels kept diamonds within their networks. They fixed prices and illegally smuggled diamonds out of the country. Each cartel had a private military force.

The cartel which dominated the diamond trade was led by Jamil Sahid Mohamed, a Sierra Leonian of Lebanese descent who was close to Prime Minister Siaka Stevens,

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and who Stevens had appointed head of government's National Diamond Mining Company. The cartel led by Jamil Sahid Mohamed had its own private army of Arabs from Palestine and Lebanon.

The other cartel was a West African cartel of Madingos, Marakas and Fulas from the Gambia, Mali, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

These cartels controlled the country's economy through their illegal trade and smuggling. The diamonds they bought and sold were lost to the country. It is believed that between 50-90% of Sierra Leone's diamond trade is lost through smuggling.

Smuggled diamonds are not counted as part of the country's wealth and there are no benefits from smuggled diamonds in the form of taxes that could fund housing, health, education, and other needs of the people.

The loss can be seen in the drop in official diamond production and exports from 2 million carats in 1970 to 595 000 in 1980, and 48 000 in 1988.

As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has pointed out, battles over control of the diamond industry was the main fuel for the 11-year civil war which began in 1991. The war was brutal and devastated the country. It is believed that 75 000 people were killed, and 1 million people were displaced in the war.

In the past 10 years, money has been taken out of the country by mining companies in new ways. The organisation Dan Watch reported that only 1 of the top 5 companies paid tax in 2011. Four of the top 5 companies were owned by companies registered in Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands, countries which do not require companies to pay tax.

Another illegal way that Sierra Leone loses money from mining is transfer mispricing. Companies lie about what they have spent on the purchase of goods and services. By showing smaller profits they can pay less tax.





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# 3. COMMUNITIES AND WOMEN

While mining companies capture the country's mining wealth, the communities on whose land mining takes place face increased hardship because of mining.

About 70% of the people in Sierra Leone, especially women, survive by growing their food. Some people take up artisanal mining in addition to farming to survive. Both survival activities have been affected by industrial mining.

Artisanal miners are not allowed to mine freely due to the many impediments imposed by mining authorities. They have regular battles with the security forces.

People whose land is taken over by the mining companies can no longer grow their crops, and have limited or no access to water, and to firewood. Women are especially hard hit by loss of land as they are the ones who farm the land and feed families.

A 2018 study by Network Movement for Justice and Development highlighted that women in Kono lost access to vast areas of land they used to farm when a diamond mining company took this land. They also showed that women in the south of Sierra Leone can no longer farm because rutile and bauxite mining companies caused serious damage to their land.

Women are further disadvantaged because they are seldom part of community discussions with mining companies. They have little chance to speak out about how mining affects them. Women are kept out of such discussions because of cultural ideas that these are men's concerns and because women's household responsibilities leave them with little time for such discussions.

There are various schemes in Sierra Leone which set out ways in which communities should benefit from mining. The schemes include that:

- A mining company must pay rent to those who own the land on which mining is taking place.
- Mining-affected communities should receive a share of taxes collected by government from artisanal mining activities because this land is for the use of local people.
- A mining company whose operations exceed a set limit should pay the community where the mining takes place 1% of 1% of the company's gross annual turnover.

Few if any of these promises are put into action and communities do not get due benefits. Payments go 'missing' or are used by the local elite, like chiefs, for their benefit.

Mining companies are required by Sierra Leone laws to pay compensation for damage they cause to vegetation, physical structures, water sources and other assets but they seldom pay and when they do, payments are very little.

In the few cases where communities receive payments from government schemes, women are heavily disadvantaged in enjoying even these small benefits. The male members of land-owning families handle money matters and negotiate with government and mining companies. So even when women are a part of a family whose land is leased to mining companies, women may not be part of such decision-making processes and may not benefit directly from the proceeds.

Communities living close to mines face continual harassment by military and company security forces. These security forces are sent by mining companies to protect mine property and personnel, and to prevent artisanal mining. They often raid people's homes in search of stolen goods, and they continually monitor the movement of people in these communities. Women and girls suffer additional physical safety challenges, including sexualised violence, when security forces enter their homes and villages.

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When their male partners are arrested for illegal mining women suffer the loss of their partners' incomes and struggle to raise money to post bail. All this increases the vulnerability of women and their families.

When communities have come out in protest against the violations, they face from mining companies, government and mining companies have in many cases responded with violence. Here are some examples of protest actions which have been crushed in the last decade:

- On 13 December 2007, people of Koidu protested against Koidu Holdings' refusal to pay for the resettlement of people affected by the mine and to stop blasting without protection. Security forces shot at the protesters, killing 2 people, and injuring many more.
- On 17th April 2012, security forces entered the iron ore mining town of

Bumbuna and fired tear gas at female traders and their children in the main market. One woman was killed. Several female traders reported that their goods were looted by the police.


- In December 2012, a woman was seriously injured, and 2 men were killed in Kono when police used firearms against protesting workers at the diamond mining company, Koidu Holdings.

It is well known that women experience sexualised violence when there is a high presence of men with guns, whether state or private security or civil militia. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission estimates that 275 000 women and girls were sexually violated during the Sierra Leone civil war. Women and girls were taken by force from their homes and villages by the warring groups. Their labour was exploited, they were raped, forced into sexual slavery, and suffered acts of gross sexual violence.

More research is needed to uncover the violence that women in communities and women artisanal miners experience when the military, police and private security enter their homes and villages to protect the wealth of mining companies.

After the civil war ended in 2002, many community based organisations and non-

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# 4. ORGANISED ACTIONS TO BRING CHANGE WITHIN MINING

governmental organisations began to form.


Some of these organisations, such as the Network Movement for Justice and Development, focus on mobilising and educating people on their rights and on what communities are entitled to from mining companies. They also call for companies to be accountable and for changes in mining law and policy in line with the African Mining Vision.

Since 2008 civil society organisations and international development partners began to push for laws and rules that would deal with the corruption in mining and help to bring about development for the country and its people.

Today there are many organisations which negotiate with government for a better deal and which highlight violations to people and the environment.

Community level land and property owners' associations negotiate fair surface rents and other payments. Property owners' associations negotiate fair compensation for damage to plantations and houses. Women's groups take up the impact of mining on women.

In the past years, an umbrella network, Women on Mining and Extractives (WoME) organised women affected by mining to speak out and make visible how mining had affected their lives, the lives of their children, and communities. WoME builds awareness that women and their communities have the right to say no to mining on their lands, and should they say yes to mining, they should enjoy benefits.

An illustration of four women with dark skin and light-colored hair, rendered in a stylized, flat-shaded manner. They are arranged in a circle, each with a speech bubble pointing to them. The background is black. The women are wearing simple, light-colored tops. The speech bubbles contain text in white font.

“Why do they say I asked for it?”

“Why do they ask if I tempted him?”

“Why do they ask what I was wearing?”

“Why do they ask what I was doing there?”



# 5. CONCLUSION

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The paper has highlighted how mining companies and traders have captured the benefits of Sierra Leone's mineral wealth through close links with politicians, government officials and chiefs.

Communities affected by mining and women in these communities have not benefitted from the country's wealth. Mining for them has meant increased hardship resulting from loss of land and livelihoods and the ongoing violence of security forces in mining areas.

More research is needed on the experiences of violence by women in communities affected by mining and by women artisanal miners. It is important to uncover women's experiences of violence as a first step towards providing support to women and to find ways to stop such violence.

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