

GUNS, POWER AND POLITICS IN EXTRACTIVES INDUSTRIES:

Building Women's
Collective Power through
Trauma Support



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INTRODUCTION

EXTRACTIVES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

This report provides insight into a programme of trauma support designed by two organisations, the WoMin African Alliance (WoMin), and the Counselling Services Unit (CSU), which worked with 18 women from five communities impacted by gendered violence arising from mining in Zimbabwe. It tells the story of what took place and what the two organisations learnt through the process. It is hoped that this story will inspire other activists and practitioners to act with and for women who have been similarly impacted by mining or other extractive activities.

The programme drew on CSU's prior experience in trauma work with women who had experienced sexual violence; and on WoMin's understanding of violence as intrinsic to an exploitative economic system that profits through destroying the earth, and dispossessing communities, with women in these communities bearing the burden of this violence.

The women shared their own experiences of violence as illegal miners, as members of communities located close to mines, or as members of communities displaced by mining companies.

The assaults, profound loss, and cruel treatment they experienced shaped the women's feelings of ongoing fear, anxiety, depression, and isolation. For most women there was an acceptance that this is just life. For many there was little awareness of their rights.

The goal of the programme was to support the women to deal with the trauma they had lived through, break down their feelings of isolation, and build a collective capable of acting for justice. The process was embedded in principles of trust, safety, and a commitment to collective action. The strengths of the two organisations were leveraged with both a collective trauma-informed focus, and an eco-feminist approach. The programme included medical and psychological care, counselling, arts and craft therapy, awareness raising on rights, and the establishment of peer support groups.

Section One of the paper sets out the background to the programme, how it was set up and what took place in each of the three five-day sessions. **Section Two** sets out what was learnt about violence against women in mining, and what was learnt about a collective programme of trauma support which made the links between the personal and the politics of mining. **Section Three** offers some concluding comments to inform activists and organisations who might wish to build on this work.

Often women were not able to disclose what had happened to them until years later, and many experienced isolation, stigma, and chronic physical and mental health impacts



SECTION ONE:

The Programme of Collective Trauma Support

Background

The relationship between WoMin and CSU was forged in 2018 and flowered in 2019, in a partnership aimed at supporting women from five mining areas, who had been brutalised and sexually assaulted by members of the Zimbabwean military and police.

Each organisation brought its specific strengths to this partnership. WoMin brought its experience in working on women and extractives across Africa, from an ecofeminist perspective. The CSU brought its experience in addressing care and rehabilitation of people who experience state violence, rights abuses, and maltreatment by the state-controlled mining industry.

The two organisations had forged a working relationship when the CSU joined other Zimbabwean organisations on the steering group which was overseeing WoMin initiated research into violence against women in the context of mining. This was part of a three-country research project led by WoMin, the other two countries being Mozambique and Sierra Leone.¹

WoMin and partners had intended that this research, to be followed by participatory research with women in impacted communities, would inform litigation or campaigns for women to secure justice for the violence and human rights abuses they had experienced. However, ongoing work with women impacted by extractives industries across the continent uncovered the considerable trauma they had experienced, with most of the women silenced by the risk of victimisation by members of their families, communities, and the state. The urgent need for trauma and counselling, even before means of redress could be considered, led to the partnership between CSU and WoMin. The focus of this partnership was to develop a collective feminist model for trauma work.

WoMin brought to this partnership its understandings of violence as intrinsic to an extractivist economic system within which mining and other extractive industries operate. This system destroys nature, exploits labour, disrupts livelihoods and the social relations that guarantee survival. The toxic combination of the power of corporations and the complicity of states and national elites within this extractivist economic system, unleashes

¹ WoMin worked in Zimbabwe with the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), in Mozambique with *Justicia Ambiental*, and in Sierra Leone with *Women and Mining (WOME)* and *Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)*. The three feminist political economy research papers and guides for activists were concluded and launched regionally online in September 2020.

violence against communities which plays out on women's bodies in the form of violence, and sexualised violence in particular.

WoMin's ecofeminist analysis highlighted that both women and nature carry the externalised costs of an extractivist economic system. The costs to nature include pollution, the destruction of large swathes of land, forest and water bodies, the growing loss of biodiversity, and the climate crisis. Women, because of their role in social reproduction, are the ones who clean up polluted ecosystems, walk longer and further to meet the water, health and energy needs of their families, and fall ill as they encounter, in the greatest proximity, the toxicities and poisons. The system is structured so that corporations pay little if any of these social, economic, and political costs to women, their communities, nature, and the planet.

CSU brought its experience of working with trauma. Over the years, during its provision of services to victims of organised violence and torture, it became apparent to CSU that several women had suffered sexual assaults as an act of political violence by state security forces or political party supporters. Often women were not able to disclose what had happened to them until years later, and many experienced isolation, stigma, and chronic physical and mental health impacts. To cater for this specific category of victims, CSU developed and implemented a therapy program for survivors of sexual assault (SOSA) identified during counselling processes.

The CSU counselling team had run the SOSA programme for 11 years. In the years preceding its partnership with WoMin, CSU had become involved in assisting women in the Chiadzwa diamond mining area who had been assaulted and confronted other abuses by soldiers, police, and private security. This work led CSU to understand that in addition to the complex set of physical, psychological, and social needs of all torture survivors, women who were sexually assaulted faced additional family, community, and societal stigma.

The SOSA program has been shaped over time, particularly by the women participants themselves. The program understands:

- The need to develop trust over time; The complex family and community responses to victims of sexual assault, including the loss of social and family supports and networks;
- The impact on current and future security and safety;
- The ongoing physical and mental health impacts, many of which were never attended to after the assaults;
- The difficulties in understanding and accessing information about rights and legal processes;
- The impact on livelihoods;
- The impact of stigma and victim-blaming, which impact all areas of life.



Designing the programme

Working in partnership, WoMin and CSU began the process of tailoring a program whose overall goal was to build the ability of women impacted by sexualised and other forms of violence associated with mining, to realise their long-term healing at the personal, community, and family levels.

The objectives of the programme were to:

- Bring the women together in a safe space;
- Understand the impact of mining on women's safety, rights, livelihoods, health, and the environment within selected mining areas in Zimbabwe - and to use this information to shape a feminist-driven response;
- Offer necessary support to the clients and restore impaired capacity;
- Help the women build coping strategies and resilience for themselves, their families, and communities;
- Establish peer support and link women with partners who could offer support on a range of needs including their need for income generation;
- Develop women-led actions to challenge the impacts of mining;
- Make recommendations for further interventions.



1.

THE PROGRAMME OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA SUPPORT

Building on the successes of the SOSA program, the project brought women together three times, each time for five days, approximately one month apart. The major components of each of the three five-day sessions were:

- Assessments (psychological and medical);
- Therapy sessions: individual, group, and arts and craft therapy;
- Workshop sessions on psychological, medical, and legal needs run by CSU presenters;
- A session on risk planning and skills for personal safety;
- Workshop sessions run by external presenters, based on areas identified by participants;
- Peer group development and fostering, including the development of livelihoods projects.

A collective process was designed so that the women would be supported to come together to build their understanding, to work through the processes together, and to respond collectively. A next step, following the design, was to identify women who had experienced trauma due to repression and violence perpetrated by the mining sector. CSU's network of victims and volunteers across the country identified eighteen women across five different locations, each with their own unique mining-related challenges. The mining communities the women came from included diamond, gold, and granite mining areas. Some of the women selected to participate in this programme had worked as illegal miners, some were residents in communities close to mines, and some were members of communities relocated to make way for mining.





Getting started: The first session of five days

Women came together in the capital, Harare, a centralised location with access to a range of medical and other support facilities.

In the first session the women's expectations were broad and non-specific: to learn, to be empowered, to be counselled, to have peace, and to know what to do about challenges. The women really did not know what to expect specifically, or what to ask for from the program.

Assessments, craft work, and setting up the week

On the first day, the counsellors met with each woman individually to receive their narratives and conduct assessments². This can be onerous, emotional, and time consuming, both for counsellors and for those being assessed. To ease the intensity, craft activities were run simultaneously through the day by the craft therapist. Women made beaded earrings and bracelets. Each woman went to their individual assessment from this activity and returned to it once the assessment was completed. This simple activity was relaxing, allowed for creative expression, and was paired with guided discussion on common experiences.

This provided opportunity for social connection around a pleasurable activity during the often-stressful assessment, while building tangible, practical skills. The women began to know each other and to share at a level comfortable for them.

The group was then brought together in a circle to talk about the rest of the week and the programme as a whole. The women cautiously expressed their concerns - that CSU may breach confidentiality, that there were CCTV cameras at the CSU premises, and that attending or disclosing information would compromise their safety. It became clear to the counsellors that developing trust was key.

“... they were not cooperative in the first session, they didn't feel at home and thought we were influenced by the government. It was really tough for them and that's how we realised they were traumatised.”

Quote from a counsellor

² The assessments are part of the process of establishing a basic understanding of the emotional and social circumstances of each of the participants. These were critical in helping shape the programme for the first week. The assessments were deepened over the life of the programme and continued to shape the interventions and processes put in place.

The counselling team informed the women about the work of CSU, sharing that the organisation works with people who have experienced organised torture and violence. Within the group were two women who had previously attended CSU services for care for injuries, and they testified to the accuracy of the information provided by the counsellors.

Sharing experiences and listening to presentations

Slowly, through the first week, women were given the opportunity to speak of their experiences. The women began to feel comfortable to talk about other issues, beyond what the security forces and mining companies had done to them and their communities. Speaking about these many impacts was aided by presentations which the women could relate to in different ways:

- A presentation on personal safety with an accompanying booklet in local language gave basic information on ways to enhance personal and family safety in the rural environment.
- A presentation by a legal officer introduced the women to the rights of a mining licence holder and the rights of those affected by mining activities.
- A medical doctor presented on stress, the physical impacts of stress and how to better manage this. She also provided individual assessments and treatment where required.
- A session on bereavement and loss assisted those who were dealing with multiple losses.

Peer support groups

Four peer support groups were formed, based on where the women lived, as a way for women to support each other in between the sessions and beyond. The women developed their own group structures, agreements, and plans for collective activities to improve their livelihoods, based on their skills and resources. Planned activities included vegetable growing and selling, re-sale of fish and eggs, rearing chickens, and pigs, starting a hair salon, selling gas, and becoming money lenders.

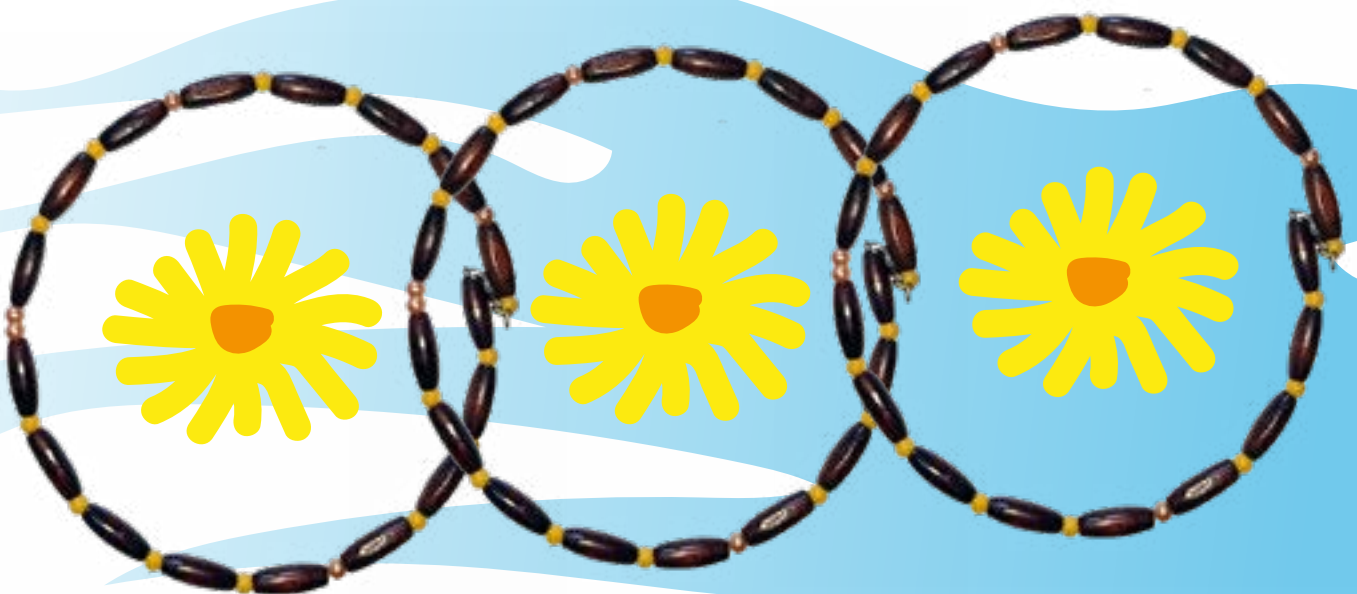
Counsellors did not influence the selection of income generation activities, nor did counsellors encourage or discourage women's engagement in mining. However, it was clear to counsellors that there was a lack of viable economic activities and that those women who engaged in dangerous mining did so out of sheer desperation, not because this was their chosen livelihood.

Listening, responding, and understanding the support women needed

Throughout the five days the staff tried to be attentive to the women's wants and needs, working with the venue to address complaints and making programme changes when necessary. Counsellors were also able to speak of their own status as Zimbabwean women.

The information the women provided helped shape the ongoing programme. Counsellors were struck by the women's lack of knowledge and by knowledge that was just inaccurate. Women who engaged in mining were aware that they were not allowed to trespass, but they also had the mistaken belief that because they were engaged in something illegal, they had no rights at all. With this understanding, the women believed that they deserved to be raped and that they had no right to protest when they were illegally detained. Women who had lost their homes did not believe that they had any rights to challenge what had happened to them.

The counsellors had to make a big shift in understanding to respond to the needs of this group of women. They were different from the women survivors of sexual violence that the counsellors had previous experience of. This group presented five or six different traumas relating to the social, economic, environmental, and other violent impacts of mining. These issues were not necessarily shared by all group members. Added to this challenge, the women evidenced severe psychological symptoms, with two thirds of the women having scores in the clinically significant range. As one counsellor expressed, "it was one of those moments where you feel hopeless".





Moving forward: The second session of five days

Excited, comfortable, and ready to learn were the feelings that women shared when they arrived for the second five-day session. The trust built in the first session had been maintained, particularly because there had been no adverse consequences for the women when they returned home. None of their fears in the initial session had been realised. Instead, the women reported positive changes in their lives.

The counsellors too had been more confident in their programme design for the second five-day session:

“After knowing their experiences we could tailor-make the second session. It informed us about what to include in the second session: the legal aspects, the safety issues, the doctor. By the second one we knew we were hitting the nail on the head.”



The women were more specific about their expectations and linked these to either their prior learning, or programme gaps. They expected more knowledge and information on rights, and they wanted the information to be practically applicable and to lead to opportunities to create jobs and income. They expected that the program would create opportunities to challenge the presence of mining companies. They also indicated a need for the programme to support their livelihoods, which were impacted by their absence from their homes for the week-long sessions.

The review assessments in this second session showed that one third of the women had clinically significant levels of distress - a lower number than at the first session, when two thirds of the women had clinically significant levels of distress.

However, although attitudes had greatly shifted, there was still some fear, including the fear of meeting external facilitators who had not been present at the first session. There was also empathy – towards each other and towards CSU – with women expressing a fear that CSU might be targeted because they were helping the women.

The women were able to recall much of what they had learnt in the first session on their legal situation and on medical knowledge, and what they had gained from the counselling team. More importantly they were able to apply that knowledge to their own situations. Women spoke of strategies they had learnt from the bereavement and loss session, and how they were using these to help them manage or deal with trauma.

Progress with peer support groups

As women reported on the four support groups, the broader impact of the programme became evident. While the one-month period between the two sessions was not long enough to allow for marked progress with income generation, small financial gains had been made which enabled a sense of hope for further development.

One group had added seven women and one man (who had experienced profound trauma) to their group to work on the challenges of carrying water for their vegetable gardens. This group reported that they were assisting a member whose family had died in an accident and that working in the group garden was helpful to this member as she dealt with her loss. The group also reported that with the proceeds from their garden they were able to buy medication for a member who had become ill.

A second group had successfully started a small chicken project and were pleased with their future plan to sell birds to the miners.

A third group shared that their beauty salon was operational, but the financial gains were small. The group members were diversifying their skills, with some seeking clients and products, and another opting to work as a hairdresser. Group members had learnt to “beautify” themselves and this had aided their self-esteem.

Other projects were too ambitious and reliant on capital that was not available and had therefore not succeeded.

Presentations on rights, health, and sexual assault

Building on the requests and recommendations from the women, external facilitators presented on human rights, laws, health, and sexual assault. CSU counselling and legal staff were present during all sessions for continuity and to allay any concerns on the part of the women.

The legal unit of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission presented on the rights enshrined in the constitution, in laws, and on other remedies women could draw on. An organisation working on the intersections between the law and the environment presented on legal procedures following displacement, procedures to become a legal miner, the law on environmental impacts, and what communities can do to ensure their rights are respected. This gave the women a basis for informed decisions and empowered them to consider possible actions. Those engaged in or interested in mining recognised that they would not be able to proceed with mining given the complex processes, the financial outlay required, and the inbuilt gender bias in the processes. This realisation increased their interest in alternate livelihoods.

The CSU medical doctor presented on common health conditions and an external presenter from the Adult Rape Clinic spoke on sexual assault. These presentations increased awareness and encouraged women to disclose in order to seek care and to manage feelings of self-blame and stigma.

Openly sharing traumas and thinking about resilience

During the first session, when the assessments had been conducted, trust was still being developed and the women had held back information. During the second session there was a developing relation of trust and women made disclosures concerning their health and traumatic incidents that they had not previously disclosed. Women made some big

disclosures – of sexual assault, family tragedy, and individual traumas. These were shared openly in groups, often with much emotion, and all with great support for fellow women. Women spoke about when they felt most at risk of being assaulted. Some risks were based on personal attributes, such as being a single mother, living in isolated places, or being impoverished, or alternatively having goods of value to be confiscated or stolen. Other risks were those experienced whilst engaging in activities, such as travelling away from home or returning from work late.

Following the discussion on risks and acts of sexual violence, a session on resilience guided the women to identify their toughest life challenges and explore their means of coping. The challenges this group had faced ranged from the traumatic death of a spouse to ongoing financial hardships. Participants shared how they managed to stand up after facing tough situations. They identified the coping mechanisms they were already using and could build upon. Social support from friends and family was considered important. They identified the formal and informal support persons they could depend on. And they resolved that they would take less input from people or groups who were not supportive. The women felt that religion, the re-framing of problems, and a focus on loved ones were critical available resources to aid their coping.

The mood at the conclusion of the second session was vastly different to the first. Women were more open and able to express more clearly what they were missing from the workshops. They expressed the need for financial support or support with food to attend these sessions; the need for viable livelihood options; and the opportunity to connect with WoMin as the project supporter. The women were enthusiastic for WoMin to bear witness to their stories.





Moving beyond: The third five-day session

Happy to be together again, it was a sociable and engaged group that greeted both CSU and WoMin for the third session, a month later. Fears had shifted – there had been no negative consequences for either themselves or for CSU, and the promise of the third session had been met.

As one counsellor described it, this was the time to get into the “nitty gritty”: the group did not need warming up, or trust development- they were there and ready to work and celebrate. The women’s positive approach was reflected in their clinical assessment: only one woman had scores on the psychological screening which were of clinical significance. She received individualised psychological support.

In reviewing the previous session, women were able to recall all the sessions, with a particular focus on the legal aspects of the program. Women picked out the points relevant to them – those who wished to mine understood that they should register; those who had been displaced recognised they had rights; and all women understood that mining companies should consult communities to receive their consent before mining begins.

Self-defence, counselling skills, referral pathways, and self-care

The CSU team built on the previous session and the interests the women had expressed there. The women had raised the need for basic defence. Consequently, a self-defence workshop was run to build basic protection techniques. The focus was on tactics to disable the assailant to create enough time to escape to safety, using techniques from judo and karate.

The physicality of the session made it a fun and bonding session, though one woman decided to sit out as it triggered her own history of violence. Counsellors were there to support her through this.

Women had started to take on roles of imparting knowledge and supporting other women in their communities. To aid them in these new roles, a day of basic counselling skills training was run. This aimed at assisting women with speaking and negotiating skills; assisting them to identify other women in need; and providing them with information so that they could refer women to relevant service providers. This took women full circle from learning to recognise trauma in themselves to being empowered to recognise trauma in others and to respond when someone is suicidal or has been sexually assaulted. The sessions aimed to build usable, basic, community-relevant skills that could be employed for communication and referrals. The counsellors cautioned that this session did not make the women qualified counsellors, but rather equipped them to identify women who

needed help and enabled them to refer these women to likely sources of help.

Women talked about the many other women who have been victimised, but don't really know where to get help or who to turn to. To address this, women were encouraged to play an ongoing active role in recognising and responding to counselling needs, and human rights violations more broadly. Women were reminded of the presentations by external facilitators in the second session on legal, medical, and care services. They were taken through referral pathways - how to refer others for care from CSU, how to refer for legal services, and for care after sexual assault. Additionally, women were made aware that when they observed mining-related human rights violations, there were options such as call centres for reporting these violations. They were made aware of how to record information (acknowledging safety as paramount) and how to communicate with volunteer community coordinators or CSU if they were not able to negotiate these referral pathways.

Counselling skills and referral learning was paired with self-care. As well as learning to recognise sources of stress, each woman came up with healthy coping mechanisms and a self-care plan, focused on care activities that are possible in their environments and encompass the physical, psychological, spiritual, and social aspects of their lives.

Women in a patriarchal society in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa

Importantly, the third session introduced WoMin to the women and brought the project into a wider frame – as one which spoke of impacts across Africa, emphasising that women's voices around mining and their impacts matter. The women were already understanding that violations against them are the fault of the perpetrator – that trespassing does not cancel your rights, that rape is always the perpetrator's fault.

From their own views of self, women were introduced to ideas explaining how they learnt their place as women in a patriarchal society. The women worked through an exercise of understanding when they became aware they were a girl. The women had been coached from an early age to fill gender stereotypical roles. They were taught by their mother to take on all work in the house for fathers and brothers. They were taught to behave more conservatively in social settings. Churches and schools reinforced gender differences. This understanding was powerful – it is the link between the personal experience and the political. The women understood that there is a whole system in place, which also plays out through their interactions with the mining industry.

WoMin screened its film “Women Hold Up the Sky” which shows the experiences of women affected by the extractive industries in Uganda (oil), DRC (mega hydro-electric dam), and South Africa (coal mining). The women saw that the issues they were facing in Zimbabwe were experienced by other women in Africa. These common issues included

displacement and the related problems of loss of homesteads and reburials of loved ones; relocation to areas with no infrastructure, schools, or hospitals; relocation with no compensation; loss of fishing income and arable land; pollution; rivers drying up; loss of livestock; sickness and diseases; sexualised violence; and local women not benefitting from such operations.

The film also showed how women mobilised themselves to claim their rights from the government, how they formed resistance movements to stop mining activities, and how they made their voices heard with the support of human rights organisations. The participants felt empowered. For the first time they understood that they could contribute to ways of making their voices heard by the government, policy makers, and civil society organisations. The women were able to start thinking about themselves in their own communities – and the ways they could implement what they had learnt from the workshops. Plans to mobilise and share new information and knowledge were developed, and the women expressed hopes that CSU and WoMin would visit them in their communities to appreciate further what they go through and to inform interventions.

Women told their stories in groups through dramas, songs, and poetry. They demonstrated that they were able to apply their learning about rights and were aware of the stakeholders in their communities who were a part of their story and their challenges. The stakeholders included women in the communities, chiefs, mining companies, government officials, and police.

Peer support groups and local income generation projects

The support groups at community level had served their purpose of keeping group members in regular contact and providing social and emotional support. However, the livelihoods projects had not gone well. This was largely due to issues beyond the control of the women and related to the broader political context and particularly to the impacts of mining. Alluvial gold panning, theft, and prospecting had destroyed vegetable gardens. The collapsing economy had increased costs of purchasing goods for resale and had reduced the number of people able to buy the goods and services offered by the groups. Transport costs inhibited travelling for sales. Safety concerns undermined the sale of goods to artisanal miners.



“An extensive garden project was raided by gold miners and destroyed on every level – vegetables were stolen, wooden poles were used as firewood, the earth was dug up to search for gold, and the area was left unsecured for cattle to eat the remaining vegetables. The women were trying to salvage their losses by hauling the dug-up soil to another secured location to sift for gold - forcing them back into working for the mining sector.”

Experience told by a program participant.

Most groups felt that chicken projects would be the most beneficial option – needs for water and land were less; there was always a market even with the tightening economy; and chicken runs could be secured if located at homesteads. Those women who had started chicken projects reported small successes and this was certainly a motivating factor. Chicken projects had been considered by CSU and WoMin and were encouraged with information from an organisation specialising in the empowerment of rural women, which gave training on rearing chickens.

WoMin agreed to support a chicken project which would provide 900 broiler chicks, chicken feed, and vaccinations. There was great enthusiasm about the opportunity and the women started planning how they would run their own projects, including home-made solutions for costly fowl run materials and feeding containers.

For this group of women, there was need to offer an alternative to illegal mining. Without other means of living, the women would have to risk re-traumatisation and consequently lose many of the gains from the program if forced to return to illegal mining. There was also great benefit in ongoing networks of support between the women themselves.

Celebration

There were several celebratory aspects to this session, which were valued and enjoyed. Certificates of participation were awarded in a ceremony, where each woman was named and applauded by the group. Women made cards for one another - each woman wrote on each card a few words about what that person had brought to the group. At the conclusion, women were able to collect their cards, and said that they were amazed at what other women thought of them, and that these were not things they had thought they had brought. As well as building solidarity, it was a means to validate each person for her value and resulted in a boost in self-esteem.

“My heart is moved for the recognition and love they gave one another.”

WoMin staff member



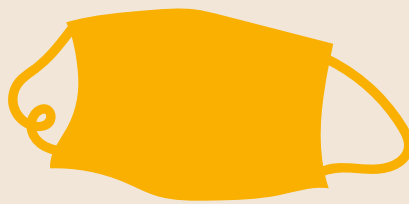
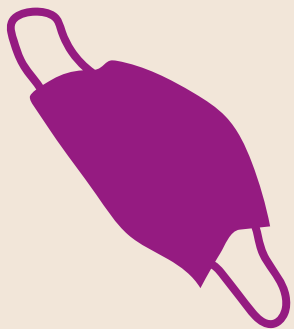
Stepping beyond: post-workshop stories and the impact of COVID-19

The third session was developed to link the women to the next phase of the work – to expand into their own communities and to seek ways of speaking out. However, these plans had to be abandoned as just six months after the end of the program, Zimbabwe went into an extended lockdown due to COVID-19.

The lockdown has had impacts on both the programme and the women participants. As a programme we were not able to bring the women together to share how they were applying the knowledge, skills, and resources they had gained. Plans to create beadings which represented their stories or to find another way of storytelling was left in limbo. Advocacy work envisioned for the group could not be implemented.

CSU counsellors made follow up telephone calls to the participants, providing limited services, particularly telephone counselling. Women reported that they have maintained many of the gains from the project – they could still recall relevant knowledge, they had contact with others who had attended the sessions and were using strategies and skills taught.

Through these calls counsellors wanted to show the women that they remained interested in their wellbeing. However, counsellors were also aware that calls in the absence of ongoing support was disheartening for both them and the women. Although the women expressed appreciation for these follow up calls, we were stuck in something of a 'holding pattern' until conditions improved to develop the next stage.



Every woman said that life was becoming increasingly difficult under COVID conditions. The economy was continuing to worsen, and their rural communities were not being spared. In terms of the chicken project, outcomes were mixed. While most groups were able to continue with their projects, one group's chicks had contracted a disease, and all had died. This group had therefore incurred a loss, which included their own resources they had to put into developing the project.

All the women were very clear that mining had only brought negative effects to their communities and that the environmental degradation, social deprivation, and harassment continue. For those based in communities living close to mines, the blasting and its subsequent impacts were ever-present. In one area, there had been mass retrenchments. Other women said they were no longer mining, or were heeding lockdown restrictions, and therefore had no contact with miners or security forces. A few women said that the miners were buying chickens or vegetables from them and that these were a source of income.

At the time of the project completion, CSU and WoMin had developed and confirmed a programme for bringing the women together again and advancing progress as previously decided by the group. This report is published in a state of hope that this next chapter will commence soon.



Women also carry an extra burden where their children are impacted, and where they are responsible for family members who require more care



SECTION TWO:

What has been learnt?



What was learnt About Violence Against Women in Mining?

The stories of the 18 women who participated in this programme explain the range of ways women interact with the mining industry.³ Women in the programme were affected in different ways as illegal miners, as residents in villages close to mines, and as members of communities displaced by mining.

Many women were impacted across multiple categories. Women also carry an extra burden where their children are impacted, and where they are responsible for family members who require more care (e.g., from AIDS, from acts of violence, or from lack of access to health care).

The impacts on women included the denial of their basic rights including to safety, to freedom of movement, to water, to medical care, and to other basic services. Women faced discrimination by mining companies and miners, by local chiefs and authorities, and by other family members.

Communities faced social disintegration through increased social problems including child marriages/ pregnancies, sex work, alcohol and drug abuse, the spread of HIV, school dropouts, and the loss of traditional ways of living.

Most women are not aware of their rights related to mining. When rights are violated, they do not report them due to lack of knowledge, because the law-enforcing agents are the perpetrators, or they fear being re-victimised.

Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society where women are second-class citizens, rarely involved or considered in major policies affecting their lives or livelihood. Most women accept their position in society as this has been reinforced since childhood. Most women see themselves as servers in their families and society. The reduced access to education for women and girls reinforces the other risks: women are less likely to have knowledge about their rights and less likely to have alternative employment pathways.

³ Note that the stories shared by the women included both their own stories, and what they had knowledge of from the experiences of other women around them.

Women working in mining

In some areas, women work for mining companies legally, or work as artisanal miners either legally (with claims and licenses), or illegally (by working without claims, or by entering restricted areas). Poverty, hunger, disease, and unemployment force women to engage in dangerous mining activities to fend for their families. Droughts have also forced women away from subsistence farming and into illegal mining.

Illegal miners go to the mine fields at night or on mining trips of multiple days. Distances are long, the work is physically taxing, and there are the risks of assault by mine security or soldiers. If caught, women are sexually assaulted (raped, fondled, and forced to expose private body parts), they face gunshot wounds, dog bites, physical assaults with fists, boots, and weapons, or being placed in 'detention centres' inside the mining areas - which are exposed cages with no roof. Men and women are detained together and must pay 'bail money' or are kept without food for days. Degrading acts include being forced to stand on their head, or to sit in rows with their legs around the person in front of them (including being forced to put their legs around male miners). Women detained or harassed by soldiers reported being humiliated by having to do head stands whilst wearing a skirt, having their bodies fondled, being forced to undress, and being coerced or otherwise forced to have sex as a 'fine'. Women reported carrying condoms in case they were forced to have sex.

Women compete with men who mine both legally and illegally. Male miners hire thugs to intimidate women out of their claims, and there is an ongoing fear amongst women of rape and other forms of violence. Only those affiliated with the ruling political party can work for mining companies, and it is even more difficult for women to get jobs. There are also risks of leaving family at home – girls left at home have been subjected to sexual abuse by men who know that the carers are absent. If women are suspected of mining illegally, their homes are raided by soldiers and security forces without warrants. Assaults, harassment, threats, and theft are the usual outcomes.

Women in communities close to mines

For women living next door to a mine, there are many impacts on health and wellbeing, and these can result in a trauma response. It is most often the formal mining companies which cause negative consequences for women in the local community.

Women in some areas report constant explosions even through the night. These explosions crack houses, disturb sleep, and cause constant stress. Water sources become polluted or are diverted for mining use. In some communities, water sources are fenced off so that locals can no longer access the water source they depend on and are forced to pay bribes

for access. The air is dusty and mothers fear for the health of their children as they see an increase in illness and respiratory problems.

Graveyards are relocated and this means that the bodies of loved ones are exhumed, usually with no reference to traditional rites. Whilst mining companies promise assistance and compensation for this already traumatic event, this is rarely delivered.

Some women who live in these communities, or who migrate to these communities, sell drinks, and produce to miners. These women small traders are also at times assaulted, detained, and harassed by security forces. They experience the same dehumanising treatment, and the same fear of rape and sexual assault. Migrant women experience additional risks by having nowhere safe to stay.

Women in communities displaced by mining

Whole communities have been forcibly relocated to remote locations where there are no facilities, no schools, no transport, no infrastructure, and no grazing land. At times these communities face physical violence. Their loss of homes, ways of living, and livelihoods is profound.

In most cases, communities are not consulted and not given prior warning of resettlement. Huge dump trucks arrive, and the community members are told to get in with everything they own – their livestock, furniture, children, and all their belongings. Anything left behind is destroyed. Some livestock die or their legs broken from travelling in dump trucks. Furniture too heavy to move is left behind.

In many instances the relocation is to substandard houses without solid foundations, with flimsy walls, and poor plumbing. Houses are allocated one per family and to males as heads of family. In some cases, up to 20 people are placed in a four-roomed house. When there is more than one adult male in a family, there are family conflicts, with each adult male claiming the house for himself, his spouse, and his children.

For some families, relocation also means loss of ownership of land. Ownership of the land had given families some power and through secondary rights to land, women also carried basic rights. That power was lost when families were forced to relocate. They lost their rights as they were forced to sign over their land and were moved to land under the trust of the State.



What was learnt about women, mining, and trauma?

All the women in this group experienced a trauma response. For some, this was from a single act such as a sexual assault or seeing the body of a loved one dug up without dignity or having their property destroyed. Trauma was also cumulative, such as living in constant fear of soldiers or experiencing continual blasting through the day and night. Most women experienced multiple traumas.

There is no single way that trauma is expressed – each person can experience trauma and its impacts differently. However, the group recognised themselves as traumatised – they commonly used the words trauma and traumatised (in their first language) to describe what they had been through in relation to their interactions with the mining industry. For this group, the experience of being traumatised could not be separated from the experience of being a woman. For many women, the experiences they had because of the mining industry and the government’s bias mirrored their experiences in their families or communities, where those who should be protectors were instead perpetrators or were complicit in violence.

“One woman was contemplating suicide because she thought ‘I am not going anywhere: the violence, there is no income for kids, the burden is too much for me.’”

Quote from a counsellor

Women described feeling isolated and alone, and that there was no one to listen. These feelings were exacerbated when women tried to get assistance from police or village heads and were turned away.

Powerlessness was a theme for all women – in relation to men, security forces, large foreign companies, and their own government.

Fear was the norm for most – particularly for those with more direct interactions with mining who lived with an ongoing fear of being raped by members of the security forces or other male miners.

As well as relying on the descriptions of the women, there was a locally validated screening tool which identified symptoms common to both trauma and depression. People who have had traumatic experiences are not only more likely to have trauma symptoms, but they are also more likely to experience all types of mental illness, particularly depression. Some women had suicidal thoughts, and hopelessness was unrelenting particularly for those who had been relocated and simply had nothing to do – no fields to work in, no homesteads to maintain, and no activities or schooling for their children to structure their days around.

“The women were traumatised – they had nowhere to report, and they had experienced all forms of violations without getting any justice.”

Quote from a counsellor

Mothers expressed anxieties about their children – they feared for their children’s safety, and for their futures given the loss of access to schooling and to land and livelihoods.

The counselling team noted that those who had interactions with soldiers or had to exhume bodies of loved ones had the highest levels of distress. The trauma of exhumations was not so much the result of seeing the bodies, but that the bodies were exhumed without traditional rites. This created worries that their deceased loved ones were no longer at peace.

The counselling team noted that all the women were living with ongoing trauma and trauma symptoms. This was a group of women who lived with fear, risk, and loss every day, and were likely to have to continue to live with this far beyond the duration of the group program. Living with trauma had become the norm for this group, and there was an acceptance that this was their life.

With this acceptance also came extraordinary coping skills and resilience. Women adopted various survival skills, from one woman who hired a small team of karate experts to protect her claim, to others who swallowed mineral nuggets to avoid confiscation. Other women were relied upon, such as the neighbours recruited to care for children so that women could spend several days at a time in the mining fields and the women who supported one another through processes of grief and loss.



What was learnt through the program?

This programme was a new experience for all. Though the programme was based on SOSA, an already established CSU program, there was a new set of traumas to understand. For the WoMin team it was new to work with a trauma healing approach. For the women themselves it was a first opportunity to come together and participate in such a program.

The learnings for the counsellors were many and multifaceted. As compared with survivors of sexual violence, the experiences of this group of women were many and varied. As women from rural areas they had all experienced trauma in many forms. There were links to mining, community displacement, environmental degradation, and damage to their homes.

While experiences were different, all were steeped in the patriarchal nature of society, their families, and the mining industry.

What was key for the counselling team, was to get an understanding of both the group dynamic and the individual needs of the women. This understanding helped in their work with the women and will be helpful in future programme design.

Counselling and workshop sessions assisted women to cope with and manage negative feelings. It was powerful to hear the women describe how much better they were feeling and to hear the positive impacts of the programme on their lives, even where the external challenges persist.

The level of disclosures in the group was a great strength, while also challenging group members and counsellors. The intensity of multiple and varied disclosures meant that counsellors had to be very aware of and responsive to women who were triggered by the disclosures of others.

Hand-outs on the topics covered in the presentations, particularly in first language, were valued and passed around in communities. Many women were not able to access medical care and legal advice previously and had not even considered these as rights they were entitled to. Medical care and legal advice became part of the whole package of care developed with feedback from the women.

The ability to take home pieces of jewellery they had crafted was a reminder of the group and the discussions they had in a safe setting. Women would have liked to take up crafting for business purposes but were unable to purchase the needed materials. Either a switch to local materials (reducing the quality but increasing the availability) or a 'starter pack' of craft materials could be considered in the future.

Overall, there was a balance between material and non-material contributions. The most memorable parts of the programme, most central in the changes they experienced, varied for each woman. For some it was the skills they learnt in craft therapy and poetry, for others it was information around legal rights, safety, and referrals, and for others it was the personal counselling sessions and relationships in the support group.

The interface with WoMin was also very important. This contact, as well as the film and broader political discussions in the third session, placed the programme in a larger context and further challenged women's initial fears that they were alone in their experiences.

A practical lesson learnt was that women need compensation for livelihood or workdays lost when they attend a five-day session. Support for communication costs is also essential so that participants can keep contact with their families.

The chicken project was highly appreciated, as was the distribution of food packs, as a form of compensation for lost livelihoods. These should have been introduced at the start of the programme, rather than in the final session when there was less opportunity to develop skills or identify additional needs for successful project development.

Whilst the programme had many successes, improvements could include pre and post visits to communities, particularly by counsellors. These visits could help to develop trust with women prior to the programme, clarify the most beneficial content, and enable a more strategic approach around livelihoods projects and anticipated next steps.









It is a therapeutic process and sharing stories with other women makes you realise you are not alone



SECTION THREE:

Some conclusions - what we would like others to know

Every one of the women in the programme gave feedback that WoMin should be providing more of these programmes, both in Zimbabwe and in other places where women are impacted by mining. They were clear that women should be helped, firstly with knowledge and then with start-up projects. Women were asked what they would like to tell other women in Africa about the program and some of their messages were:

-  *“It is a therapeutic process and sharing stories with other women makes you realise you are not alone.”*
-  *“I have learnt to be independent, and I am not alone in this. The problems we have in the mining areas are not new and they can be managed.”*
-  *“Participate in this programme with an open mind. It empowers you as a woman. At times we are taken advantage of in our communities because we do not know our rights.”*
-  *“This programme empowered me as a woman; I have learnt to provide for myself and my children. I now know where to report should I face any form of violations.”*
-  *“This programme is enlightening. Before the sessions I was always stressed but the counselling sessions helped me move on with my life.”*
-  *“This programme will empower you as a woman. You will learn to live in peace with fellow community members and above all you will find peace within yourself.”*

It took a range of professionals and organisations working collaboratively to cover the areas of counselling, health, legal, security, referrals, and livelihoods, and to build an understanding of the ‘bigger picture’. Whilst this holistic model was helpful for this group, a more specific focus on some of these areas could be considered in future work.

3. THE PROGRAMME OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA SUPPORT

Flexibility was very important throughout the programme. As one counsellor summarised, “In the first session, we knew that the programme had to change, but didn’t have all the right things lined up – there were a lot of things where we said: ‘not now’. This was not unexpected given this was the first group.”

Future work should be framed in both a trauma-sensitive approach and a feminist, women-centred approach. The safe space created by the programme is vital for women to find and nurture both their individual identity and their collective identity as women with shared experiences.

Women need information and knowledge to make decisions for themselves. They need to know how to manage the physical and emotional risks they are likely to encounter when engaging in actions against individuals or companies who abuse their rights.

One theme which ran throughout and helped shape the programme was storytelling. Culturally familiar and valued, stories were told throughout the sessions, and these became part of the bigger story of suppression by men and by mining. It was through the stories that counsellors identified the needs to be addressed in subsequent sessions. In each session, as the women felt safer with each other and the counsellors, there was a deeper sharing of stories. As women in the group listened to the stories, they were able to relate and give witness. The story telling takes us to the next phase of work: where the women who have participated in this trauma programme tell their own stories, including through beadwork, and consider what justice means to them individually and collectively. This work will be informed and supported by a deeper exploration of the opportunities and risks involved in the search for justice for women. Research on justice options, to inform women’s choices, has already been initiated. CSU, WoMin and a long-standing partner, the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), also in Zimbabwe, will work with the women to hold and support them in the next stage of their journey towards right and justice!





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