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Community struggles and the social license crisis: The Mogovolas mining case

- Conflicts in Mozambique's mining areas have been recurring, particularly since late 2024, following the post-election period. Recently, these conflicts have extended to Mogovolas in Nampula. The inadequate response from the State and companies to the needs of local communities has led to tensions and protests, as observed in Mogovolas. There is an urgent necessity to formalize and support artisanal mining: It is crucial to ensure community inclusion, prevent violence, and promote sustainable and equitable development.





In light of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, it is urgent that the State assumes its obligation to protect, that companies effectively respect the rights of communities and that accessible redress mechanisms are created for those who have been wronged.

Introduction: When exclusion creates conflict

The Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) has closely monitored the development of social conflicts in mining areas in Mozambique. On several occasions, CDD has documented cases of tensions between local communities, extractive companies, and state authorities, where human rights are often compromised.

Recently, events in the administrative post of Iuluti, in the district of Mogovolas (Nampula province), brought to light another worrying episode. Artisanal miners staged protests that culminated in the destruction of commercial and residential establishments, allegedly in response to the ban on mining activities in areas

of community interest. Despite the gravity of the facts, it is essential to understand this episode not as an isolated act of violence, but as the expression of deep social unrest.

CDD expresses concern regarding the manner in which the State and companies have addressed these situations, frequently choosing repressive measures that are inadequate for fostering social inclusion and dialogue. Considering the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), it is important to evaluate the extent to which the State's duty to protect, companies' duty to respect, and the necessity of ensuring redress mechanisms are being addressed in the Mogovolas case.

The Mogovolas Case: Despair, protest and absence of alternatives

According to the newspaper IKWELI, the motivation for the attacks was linked to the ban on mining in an area near the headquarters of a mining association, located approximately nine kilometers from the town. In response to the ban, the miners went to the homes of the buyers of these minerals as a form of protest¹. Although the protest took on violent overtones — with looting and destruction of establishments and homes — it is essential to recognize the context in which it took place: an environment marked by social exclusion, unfulfilled promises, and the absence of legitimate channels for resolving disputes.

According to the report, the district administrator, Emanuel Impissa, confirmed the events, acknowledging that the damage is still being assessed. However, the institutional response has been insufficient, both in immediately mitigating the conflict and in addressing the structural causes that caused it. This is a clear example of the State's failure to comply with its obligation to protect human rights, as provided for in the UN Principles. The State has a responsibility to prevent, investigate, and redress abuses, especially when they occur in contexts of business activity with significant impact.

Systemic Diagnosis: Exclusion, inequality and governance deficit

What happened in Mogovolas is not an isolated case. Conflicts in Mozambique's mining areas have become increasingly common, especially in provinces such as Cabo Delgado, Tete, Manica and Nampula. Mining, which should be a driver of development, has resulted in forced displacement, environmental degradation, repression of artisanal miners and growing frustration in communities.

The Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) has systematically documented these tensions, warning of the failure of exploitation models based on concessions that ignore local socio-economic realities. In April 2025, CDD reported on a similar case involving the people of Nhampassa, who invaded a mine for about six months, due to the failure of the company holding the concession to comply with social commitments

¹ <https://ikweli.co.mz/2025/05/21/illegal-miners-sow-terror-in-mogovolas/>

². The community denounced the lack of promised projects, such as hospitals, schools and jobs. In response, they formed a mining cooperative intending to manage the resources locally.

The company, in turn, claimed to have implemented several community actions, including the construction of the Nhampassa market, the Nhadue Primary School, the rehabilitation of classrooms and the delivery of ambulances to the Catandica Rural Hospital. Still, the persistence of discontent suggests that such initiatives were insufficient, poorly communicated or misaligned with the real priorities of the community.

CDD studies and investigations reveal common structural causes of these conflicts:

- Lack of free, prior and informed consultation (FPIC);

- Unfulfilled promises by companies holding concessions;
- Lack of community monitoring mechanisms;
- Exclusion of artisanal miners from formal licensing processes;
- Lack of a coherent public policy to integrate artisanal mining.

The UN Guiding Principles state that companies have a responsibility to respect human rights, which includes not causing or contributing to negative impacts. When companies operate in fragile contexts and without ensuring adequate mitigation measures, they are failing in this responsibility. Similarly, the absence of effective channels of redress — whether through the state or corporate mechanisms — exacerbates the sense of injustice.

The social license to operate crisis

The tension between legality and legitimacy is central to Mozambican mining conflicts. Most companies operate under legal concessions obtained from the state, but without obtaining a social license to operate — an increasingly essential concept in sustainable mining practices.

Social licence refers to the voluntary and long-term acceptance of activities by affected communities. When people feel betrayed by unfulfilled promises and excluded from benefits, they question the legitimacy of the exploitation. In many cases, such as Nhampassa, the community's response has been to occupy the mine or create alternative cooperatives in an attempt to re-empower the community. The

violent reaction in Mogovolas, on the other hand, can be read as a last form of resistance, in a context where institutional mechanisms for participation and consultation have completely failed.

Therefore, when communities realize that the profits generated by mining activities do not result in concrete improvements to their lives, the legitimacy of the corporate presence is called into question. Thus, the informal appropriation of mines, although illegal, emerges as a form of resistance and affirmation of the right to development — a right enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique and in several international human rights instruments.

Criminalization of artisanal mining: A dangerous path

The predominant response of the State has been repression, which has resulted in the persecution, detention and displacement of artisanal miners. This approach ignores the social and economic complexity of the phenomenon of informal mining, treating it as a simple illegality.

However, artisanal mining provides a vital live-

lihood for thousands of Mozambicans in areas where formal employment options are non-existent. Criminalisation without viable alternatives contributes to instability and creates opportunities for illegal networks, corruption and, in extreme cases, recruitment by armed or extremist groups.

² <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Conflict-in-the-Nhampassa-Turmalinas-Mine-The-Crisis-of-Legitimacy-and-the-Urgency-of-the-Social-License-to-Operate.pdf>

Instead of repression, it is urgent to promote a fair formalization of artisanal mining, based on:

- Accessible and transparent licensing;
- Technical and organizational support for cooperatives;
- Environmental education and good extraction practices;
- Legal recognition of the socioeconomic role of artisanal miners.

The repressive approach to informal mining in Mozambique has had worrying socioeconomic and political impacts. Cases such as Nhampassa, Mogovolas and even Namanhumbir illustrate

how the absence of mechanisms for including artisanal miners in formal mining processes, combined with the lack of tangible benefits for communities, perpetuates a cycle of tension, conflict and exclusion.

The lack of legal concessions granted to artisanal miners, combined with the lack of effective public policies to redistribute the benefits of mining, reinforces the perception of injustice and contributes to social instability. When entire communities are systematically excluded from the use of resources extracted in their territories — whether through unfulfilled promises, forced resettlement or lack of prior consultation — the legitimacy of mining operations is called into question.

Paths of reform

A public policy focused on human rights should prioritize social inclusion, equitable distribution of mining benefits, and the empowerment of local communities. Some strategic measures that should be adopted include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Establish binding participatory community consultation processes;
- Create local resource governance councils with community representation;

- Monitor compliance with social commitments undertaken by companies;
- Review mining concession models, prioritizing projects with direct returns for communities.

The governance of natural resources must be built based on transparency, shared responsibility and social justice, to transform mining into a vector for inclusive development.

Conclusion: The urgency of change

CDD reiterates its concern about the nature of community protests in mining areas and how the State and companies have reacted — often in a repressive manner and disconnected from local reality.

The Mogovolas case exemplifies a model of mineral exploration that does not ensure the human rights of affected communities. The absence of consultation, systematic exclusion from benefits, and lack of legitimate avenues for participation are compromising the credibility of the ex-

tractive sector and threatening social harmony.

In light of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, it is urgent that the State assumes its obligation to protect, that companies effectively respect the rights of communities and that accessible redress mechanisms are created for those who have been wronged.

Mozambique needs a paradigm shift. The time to act is now — for mining that respects people, values communities and contributes to truly sustainable development.



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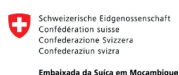
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