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State Silence, Corporate Power: The Tragedy of Artisanal Mining in Mozambique

- Artisanal mining in Mozambique encounters serious challenges, including frequent fatalities, violent repression, and social exclusion, particularly in provinces such as Manica and Cabo Delgado. The vulnerability of miners is further exacerbated by state indifference and corporate authoritarianism. There is an urgent need for inclusive policies, formalization of the sector, and respect for human rights to enhance security and foster sustainable development.



Introduction

Artisanal mining in Mozambique is a complex reality that involves thousands of citizens, especially young people, who turn to this activity as a strategy to mitigate the serious shortage of

formal jobs and the limited supply of economic opportunities. In provinces such as Manica and Cabo Delgado, the abundance of mineral resources starkly contrasts with the persistent



Recent incidents in Montepuez and Manica illustrate the complexity of the challenges facing artisanal mining in Mozambique. State repression and neglect have proven insufficient and counterproductive, exacerbating vulnerabilities and fueling social tensions. Implementing international human rights standards and formalizing the sector are essential ways to transform a scenario marked by violence and exclusion into a sustainable, inclusive model that respects human dignity.

poverty of local communities, making mining a frequently used alternative means of survival that is often marked by precarious and unsafe conditions. This phenomenon has proven to be particularly tragic, as evidenced by the frequent collapses of illegal mines, which in Manica alone have caused at least twenty deaths since the beginning of the year. At the same time, repression against miners has intensified, with episodes such as the recent shooting of two artisanal miners by security forces at the Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM) concession in Cabo Delgado.

The Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) is deeply concerned about the way in

which artisanal mining has been managed in Mozambique, in a context that highlights a cyclical pattern of human rights violations against local communities. These communities are often criminalised for seeking access to resources found in their territories, in a dynamic that reflects both the State's negligence in regulating and protecting these workers and the corporate authoritarianism that predominates in the extractive sector. CDD warns that the lack of a coordinated response that promotes sustainable development and social inclusion of the affected populations exacerbates inequalities and fuels social tensions, with profound negative impacts on social stability and cohesion.

Clashes in Montepuez: Historic repression and recent violence against artisanal miners

On 28 May 2025, a patrol of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM) detected the presence of artisanal miners operating within the Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM) concession. According to official reports, the initial attempt at peaceful dispersal degenerated into a confrontation, with miners armed with machetes and pickaxes resisting. The escalation resulted in police shooting, which injured two miners – both Tanzanian nationals – who received medical treatment at the MRM clinic before being transferred to the local hospital, where they are currently in stable condition¹.

This is not an isolated incident, but rather a reflection of a long history of confrontations

between artisanal miners and security forces, dating back to the discovery of rubies in Montepuez in 2009. Human rights organisations have documented over the years systematic repressive practices, including arbitrary detentions, torture and physical violence, both by the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) and by MRM's private security guards. These actions, aimed at expelling miners from concession areas, have generated growing antagonism between local communities and authorities, reinforcing socio-economic marginalisation and exacerbating vulnerabilities that favour the proliferation of instability, including recruitment by armed groups in Cabo Delgado.

Silent tragedies in Manica: the human cost of artisanal mining and the fear of the authorities

In Manica province, artisanal mining is considered a high-risk activity, with at least twenty people having died since January 2025, victims of collapses in illegal mines. The districts most affected are Manica, Gondola and Báruè. However, the real number of fatalities is probably higher, given the reluctance of communities to report incidents, often motivated by fear of reprisals by state authorities. This climate of fear reinforces the invisibility of the dangers faced by miners and highlights the lack of effective public policies to regulate, protect and organize this sector, which is vital for many.

Instead of implementing measures to ensure safer and more sustainable working conditions, the authorities have favoured a repressive approach, which not only fails to address structural problems but has also contributed to increased mortality among artisanal miners. Silva Manuel, director of the

¹ <https://integritymagazine.co.mz/archives/43491>

Provincial Infrastructure Services, quoted by the Club of Mozambique ², highlights the need for miners to organise themselves into associations to mitigate risks and promote responsible min-

ing. However, recent episodes, such as the landslides in Báruè that resulted in multiple deaths, illustrate the persistence of a cycle of vulnerability and institutional neglect.

The high cost of state and corporate negligence in artisanal mining

The Mozambican state's continued indifference towards artisanal mining has resulted in avoidable human losses and degrading working conditions. Since the beginning of the year, at least twenty miners have lost their lives in Manica due to landslides, a figure that could be even higher due to underreporting. This invisibility is compounded by the constant fear of reprisals, which has become a factor in silencing communities. The lack of effective regulation and technical support pushes thousands of people into risky activities, highlighting a serious failure to

protect the fundamental rights of these workers.

At the same time, the violent repression against miners in areas under concession by companies, such as MRM in Montepuez, reinforces a worrying pattern of criminalization of artisanal mining. The recent shooting of two miners exemplifies this logic that prioritizes the defense of economic interests over the lives and dignity of local communities. Violence and deaths must stop being seen as collateral damage and start being addressed as symptoms of a system in need of profound reforms.

International standards and the role of the Voluntary Principles and ICoCA

The tension between the need to maintain order and the obligation to respect human rights becomes particularly evident in the context of illegal mining. The incident in Montepuez highlights the challenges inherent in containing illicit activities involving transnational networks and disinformation campaigns. In this context, the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs) and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoCA) play a key role.

These international standards set standards for ethical and responsible conduct by both private security companies and state forces, guiding the proportional use of force and respect for human rights. Their application can help ensure security within a framework of transparency, accountability and social inclusion, preventing abuses and promoting an environment in which sustainable development and the protection of fundamental rights coexist.

Recommendations for an inclusive and sustainable approach

Given the current situation, it is imperative to adopt an approach that goes beyond repression and promotes the formalisation of artisanal mining. This involves granting licenses, providing technical training to miners and supporting local communities, fostering sustainable practices and integrating this sector into the formal economy. This would help reduce conflicts, improve working conditions and strengthen social cohesion.

The implementation of the VPs and ICoCA should be seen as a strategic instrument to ensure that interventions in artisanal mining respect human rights, promoting a balance between safety and dignity. Only through a coordinated effort between the State, companies and civil society will it be possible to build a lasting solution that ensures inclusive economic and social development and protects the most vulnerable populations.

² <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-at-least-20-artisanal-miners-have-died-in-manica-province-since-january-283972/>

Conclusion

Recent incidents in Montepuez and Manica illustrate the complexity of the challenges facing artisanal mining in Mozambique. State repression and neglect have proven insufficient and counterproductive, exacerbating vulnerabilities and fueling social tensions. Implementing international human rights standards and formalizing the sector are essential ways to transform a scenario marked by violence and exclusion into a sustainable, inclusive model that respects human dignity.

The solution involves ensuring that all actors involved, i.e. authorities, companies and communities, dialogue and cooperate on a common agenda of social justice, security and sustainable development, preventing lives from continuing to be lost due to a fragmented and authoritarian approach.



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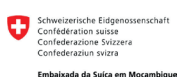
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