

EIA is the modern-day Rudd Concession

31 October 2024

Participants of the 13th edition of the Zimbabwe Alternative Mining Indaba (ZAMI) expressed deep concern over the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) process in Zimbabwe, with Councillor Mushekwa from Bikita likening the current situation to the historical Rudd Concession, a controversial land deal that granted vast tracts of land to Cecil Rhodes in the late 19th century.

These sentiments dominated discussions during the ZAMI which was convened by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA), and Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) in Bulawayo recently.

The issue of mining companies operating without adhering to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) guidelines is increasingly prevalent in mining communities raising concerns among communities, who question the importance of EIAs when the well-being of residents is often overlooked.

“The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is just a document used as a bridge for companies to do their operations disregarding the communities’ needs, it’s a modern-day Rudd Concession,” Mushekwa said.

He further questioned the powers of the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) as it does not have the enforcement and deciding powers whenever there are cases of environmental contestations between mining companies and host communities.

He categorically called for the amendments of the EMA Act and Mines and Minerals Act which he feels are not addressing the needs of the current communities.

“The Mines and Minerals Act is archaic and does not meet the needs of the present people, the government must amend the Act to align with the needs of the people. On the other hand, the EMA is powerless they need to be given the power to regulate environmental activities happening in communities,” he said.



In the picture above, Councillor Mushekwa and other panelist during a side session on Debt, Inequality and Extractives

Speaking at the same event, Chief Marozva (born Ishmael Mudhe) from Bikita District bemoaned the mining activities, especially in his home area. He felt that the communities’ voices are not heard, and when used, they are mostly nothing but tools to sanitize mining companies’ work. He further emphasised the importance of genuine, and meaningful community consultation and participation in the EIA process.

“Communities should have a genuine say in decisions that affect their livelihoods and well-being. Unfortunately, this is often not the case, as communities are marginalized and their concerns are ignored,” he said.

Mining companies frequently prioritise expediency over thoroughness in their EIAs, leading to significant neglect of the enduring environmental and social repercussions of their activities.

“Communities should have a genuine say in decisions that affect their livelihoods and well-being. Unfortunately, this is often not the case, as communities are marginalized and their concerns are ignored,” he said.

Mining companies frequently prioritise expediency over thoroughness in their EIAs, leading to significant neglect of the enduring environmental and social repercussions of their activities.

“Mining companies often conduct rushed and inadequate EIAs, neglecting the long-term environmental and social consequences of their operations. Communities are left to bear the brunt of pollution, land degradation, and displacement,” he added.

Chief Marozva expressed his skepticism regarding the effectiveness of EIAs, recounting a troubling experience where he was invited to discuss an already fenced area, raising doubts about the genuine value of community input in such processes. He emphasised the importance of community involvement, noting that they often feel treated as mere tools to be used only when convenient.

“I was once invited to attend an EIA on an area that was already fenced and I questioned the significance of my contribution to an EIA for an area that has been fenced already. I am glad I managed to stop everything and nothing has happened yet. The communities are seen as (mops) Zvikorobo used only when there is a need,” said Chief Marozva.

Goromonzi District Environmental Officer, Cynthia Chingoviro, highlighted the fact that EIAs are often conducted without adequately considering the impact on nearby communities. She expressed concern that reversing the negative consequences of such poorly planned mining activities can be a complex and time-consuming process due to the stringent protocols involved.

“There are instances where EIAs overlook significant impacts, particularly on distant communities. For example, the Prospect Mine in Goromonzi was pegged on a farm, but the EIA failed to adequately consider the potential effects of mining and transportation activities on villages located some 10 kilometres away that are now affected by dust coming out of trucks transporting lithium ore daily,” she said.

The discussants during the side session urged the government to strengthen regulations and ensure that mining companies adhere to environmental standards and social responsibility principles calling for greater transparency and accountability in the mining sector, with a focus on sustainable development and equitable benefit-sharing.



A picture collage of ZCC president Bishop I. Makumbe and participants during the ZAMI 2024 side session