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Land degradation threatens Great Dyke ecosystem

June 6, 2015 in [National](#), [News](#)



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STAKEHOLDERS around the mineral-rich Great Dyke belt have raised concern over the environmental degradation at the hands of giant mining companies as well as the illegal panners who are extracting different minerals in that region.

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BY OBEY MANAYITI

Many people have been exposed to the deep pits that have been left open by miners while animals have also fallen prey to the unsustainable mining operations.

Midlands Environmental Management Agency (EMA) provincial manager Benson Basera said serious mechanisms should be employed to address the situation.

He said the problem of reckless mining was a cause for concern that required collective effort from all stakeholders.

"Of late following the depression of market price on chrome, several companies here are downsizing their operations," said Basera.

"The companies are not decommissioning their disused mines and they are leaving a lot of deep pits. We cannot force them to rehabilitate because the majority of the mining claims are still active and they haven't exhausted mining."

He added: "About 80% of the mining claims are still open and they are not fenced. This is very dangerous."

Basera accused different communities of allowing the miners to leave the pits open so that they will be able to use them for other activities like drawing water for livestock and gardening.

"We are saying mining companies should mechanisms such as fencing deep pits or putting warning signs. We have been issuing out orders to the companies to close the pits. I think the situation requires collective effort which should involve Parliament," he said.

Turning to illegal panners, the EMA provincial boss said the unregulated gold mining was destroying the ecosystem in the Great Dyke with places such as Shurugwi being the worst affected.

"Panners are a menace here. They operate under the shadow of darkness and we cannot call them to dialogue. They are irresponsible when it comes to mining and their proceeds are not accounted for," he said.

Basera's comments came at a time different communities have expressed concern over how giant mining companies are failing to compensate victims of unsustainable mining.

A 32-year-old Fortunate Siziba from Paradza village under Chief Mapanzure in Ward 6 Zvishavane said he fell into an unrehabilitated 24m deep mining shaft on his way from a fishing escapade and spent five months in hospital.

The injuries have left him half paralysed and yet still none of the mining companies have assisted him.

"I fell into a pit in 2001 and was rescued by a front-end loader. I only gained consciousness when I was admitted at a hospital in Bulawayo. My father took care of hospital bills without any assistance from the mining companies responsible besides numerous promises of compensation," he said.

Currently Siziba is being taken care of by his aged mother and has approached various government departments to have the matter addressed without success.

"I have gone from one office to another, but without any success. I am now incapacitated and partially blind," said the emotive Siziba.

"What I am asking for is assistance to start my own income-generating project like cattle rearing or poultry. It's unfortunate that this is the price that we have to pay for the minerals that are in our area."

Several chiefs in attendance took a swipe at the frosty relations between the communities and the miners. They called upon an interactive dialogue to map the way forward.

Shamiso Mtisi from the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association said victims of reckless mining should be compensated as per the provisions of the law.

"There should be some security or warning features on the pits so that

people are not harmed,” he said during the Midlands Provincial Alternative Mining Indaba on Thursday.

“Mining companies should be responsible and comply with environmental laws by rehabilitating the pits or fencing them where possible. People who have lost lives or livestock should be compensated as prescribed by the law.”



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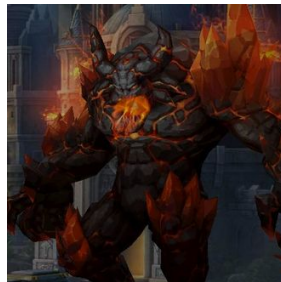
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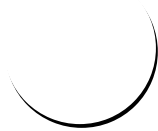
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