

# Original Research Article

## **WOMEN AND MINING IN ZAMBIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

### **ABSTRACT**

The rise of urbanisation in colonial Zambia particularly on the Copperbelt province is associated with the discovery of minerals in the early 1900s. The widespread discovery of minerals and exploitation of the same minerals required labour both skilled and unskilled labour. Skilled labour was drawn from overseas while unskilled labour was available from the local population. During the colonial period, the predominant labour force on the mines were men while women were by law not allowed to enter towns during the early years of urbanization or to take residence in urban areas anywhere in the country.

Early researchers commented that “early African migration to mine towns essentialised as men’s wage work, depended on agricultural and reproductive labour performed by women, who officially remained in rural areas” [1]. Local labour migrations were highly restricted and employment of women in urban areas was scarce or none existent in the initial stages of urbanisation.

Skilled and none skilled labour for women employees on the mines initially did not exist in the colonial period because they (women) were not viewed as important labourers needed for production in the mines. This restriction of women in urban areas created a legacy of gender inequalities in almost all the sectors of labour employment and more so in the mining sector during the colonial period. Consequently, one can argue that since the colonial period to date, women have been a minority group in the mines occupying low positions in their majority compared to men and very few women hold executive positions in the mining sector.

Employment during the colonial period was not easily found due to clear discrimination. The end result of this type of discrimination in employment resulted in few or no women at all in some instances in the mines. With passage of time, women were allowed into towns and on the mines but formal jobs for women were difficult to find. The current state of gender inequalities in the mines in Zambia today is a carryover from the colonial period. Currently, training institutions for mine workers such as universities, colleges and technical institute are still dominated by male students.

The above situation eventually results into a gendered labour force in the mines with men occupying highly skilled jobs while women dominate the low skilled and non-skilled jobs in mining conglomerates. The current gender inequalities on the mines are historically embedded in the mines as patriarchal institutions owned and ran by the same men. Consequently, very few women are in the executive positions in mines and even very few do own mines.

**Key Words: Women, mining, opportunities, challenges, Zambia.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Zambian urbanisation can be traced to the discovery and expansion of mining activities particularly on the Copperbelt province where the urban population grew due to employment opportunities for both locals and foreigners. During the early years of mining activities the locals predominantly men migrated to the urban areas for employment leaving behind their wives and families. Employment in the mines was a male activity or opportunity for many years even during the early years of political independence. Even the proletariat or working class that emerged on the Copperbelt during the colonial period was a male dominated working class that had more male workers on the mines than anywhere else. Moyo conducted a research covering mining countries in Southern Africa which included Zambia. Moyo's study reported that with regards to women, the mining sector was an injustice and based on evidence from research, the greater majority of women in the region (Southern Africa) were largely excluded or marginalised from participating in or benefiting from the vast wealth of the region. Women were at the periphery of the mining industry in terms of ownership or equity participation and were marginalised in terms of governance and management of the industry [2].

For most of the colonial period, women by law were not allowed to enter towns and the mining areas and the colonial government worked together with the traditional rulers to ensure that women did not enter towns and those who did so, had to have documentation to allow them to enter towns while others who did not have documentation were repatriated to the villages [1]. The migrant labour system in most of the mineral rich African countries during the colonial period employed males and deliberately introduced laws which prohibited or stringently limited the movement of their spouses from entering mining towns to live together with their husbands [2].

This article revolves around the following questions: What were the long term effects of the long absence of women on the Copperbelt?; Have women benefitted from the mines even after political independence was attained?; What could be some of the challenges and opportunities to accessing mines as a natural resource which women up to date face as a gender category? This article aims at providing a perspective that issues such as patriarchy as a system that excludes women is enshrined in the laws, cultural practices, programmes, policies and legislation and how the patriarchy system works to disadvantage women as a gender category that has restricted access to mines as a natural resource. Further, article

discusses the role of women in the mines on the Copperbelt and of late in North-western province and the impact that mining has exerted on the lives of women and their families.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The research wholly depended on secondary data and literature that was collected over time in different areas where Zambia has mines. The sources of the data for were predominantly books reports, University Zambia graduation handbooks for some years as indicated in the bibliography and from articles written by different individuals who attempted to study the same subject. These materials were analysed to find what was on in the mining sector as far as gender inclusion was concerned.

## **3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN MINING**

There is evidence that some though very few women are board members of some mining companies in Zambia and others are in senior management and supervisory positions. This is to say that the mining companies have attempted to integrate some women in their structures and are not exclusively run by men only and that women have to some extent benefited from the mining companies as employees at different levels of organisational hierarchy. But suffice to say that there are comparatively fewer women compared to men in these companies at all levels of organisational structures.

### **3.1 Benefits through corporate social responsibility**

To some extent women have benefitted from the corporate social responsibility expenditure of mining companies, though evidence suggest that the benefits are limited [3]. The mining companies from time to time do make contributions to communities in terms of provision of services which benefit entire communities and by doing so benefit women through these contributions to communities.

### **3.2 Employment**

Mining companies like any other company have women employed as workers. In terms of current employment in mines and according to the 2008 labour force survey, the mining and quarrying industry is dominated by males. Females only account for 17.2 per cent of the current employed persons in the mines [4]. The greater percentage of workers were males though females benefited from mining employment too. In 2012, the figure or proportion of female employees in the mines dropped to 0.4 per cent [5]. In 2015, it was further reported

that more males (86%) than females (14%) were employed in the mining and quarrying sector [6]. For many years women have participated as a minority group in the Zambian mines and have benefited but not at the same level as their male counterparts. Lungu observed and commented that in Zambia employment in the copper mines in general was male dominated, with many women taking up nursing, secretarial, accounting and computing jobs [7]. The mining industry from the beginning has been an industry for male workers who have numerically benefited from available employment at all times up to date. The Table below though data was for some years back as indicated, the point to note is that women have been a minority as workers in the mining industry.

**Table 1: Percentage distribution of currently employed persons aged Fifteen years and above by industry, sex and residence, 2005**

Industry	Zambia		Rural		Urban	
	% Male	%Female	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	47.1	52.1	47.2	52.8	45.8	54.2
Mining & Quarrying	92.5	7.5	63.0	37.0	94.7	5.3
Manufacturing	69.2	30.8	56.5	43.5	73.8	26.2
Construction	92.5	7.5	88.1	11.9	93.5	6.5

*Source: CSO Labour force Survey 2005.*

The above Table shows that as at 2005, only 7.5 per cent of the labour force in mines were women and that in both urban and rural mines, very low numbers of women were employed in the mines. However, the percentage of urban women was lower than that of rural women mine employees. The general perception is that mining is a man's job since most of the work involves physical work associated with men. Even the jobs are not by design but by practice divided into male and female jobs with the lucrative and well-paying jobs in the hands of men and women in their majority occupying low paying jobs at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. Historically in Zambia the mines have been under the control of men in terms of employment opportunities and it is only in recent years that few women have been employed in technical jobs.

Distribution of workers by sex in non-management occupations at Kansanshi mine in Solwezi in 2014.

**Table 2. Non-Management staff across departments in 2014**

Department	Sex	
	Male	Female
Training and Development Department(T&D)	13	5
Human Resources	7	10
Corporate Social responsibility	15	4
Core Mining Operations	8	10
Health Department	11	9
Engineering Department	16	2

*Human Resources records for 2014 at kansanshi mine.*

### **3.3 Ownership of mining companies**

Some women in the country and these are few but rich women who own small mining companies particularly those mining gemstones. Moyo [8] reports that in Zambia women are involved in small-scale gemstone mining and the International Press Service (IPS) presents the story of Namakau Kaingu, a Zambian woman who owns three mines in Zambia where she mines aquamarine, a precious stone [2]. Thus there is but a small number of women who own mines or small mines in Zambia and this category of women have benefited from the mineral resources of the country but not at the same level as men who own mining companies.

## **4. CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE IN ACCESSING MINERALS AND SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT**

### **4.1 Legislation**

Zambian mines are both open pit and underground, and the working environments for most of these mines is said to be harsh and not gender friendly because of the rough work culture that has dominated the mines from time of inception. Mines are harsh environments where not only accidents occur but death is almost inevitable in mines. This environment instils fear in women job seekers who would desire to venture into the male dominated work

environment. In Zambia it has been reported that, regulations restrict women from working underground [9,2] also reported that women are not allowed to work underground by legislation. In Zambia the above statistics confirm that there is legal restriction in terms of women's participation in underground mining activities. When it comes to mining of gemstones which in most cases is excavated from very low depths, men would take this responsibility and eventually benefit more than women who either cannot go underground to dig the gemstones or cannot operate the machinery used to dig the gemstones. Legal restriction results in few women as workers and beneficiaries from the minerals which are mined. The argument does not mean that without the legislation that restricts women, then there would be equal benefit from the men and women as workers in the mines. The point is that the mining industry is governed by a patriarchal culture that has defined mining as a role of men and continues to exclude women in terms of participation as workers and participation as owners of the mining companies. Therefore the cultural playing field is not on an egalitarian level. Legislation happens in a cultural context and reflects the gendered culture of the legislating community. Therefore, with legislation or not patriarchal cultural gender roles would still dictate the gender inequalities in the mining sector to the disadvantage of women.

#### **4.2 Cultural norms**

Related to the above argument, the gender related myths or taboos surrounding the mining activities are barriers to women's full participation and benefiting from the minerals as natural resources. There are a lot of beliefs which have affected women's participation and the same beliefs do not apply to men as far as mining activities are concerned. Research has found out that a significant barrier to women's equitable participation in mining involves cultural taboos and superstitions. In Zambia for instance, at one gemstone mine, it was believed that women should not approach a gemstone mine as the spirits of the stones would drive the gemstone deeper into the earth or would disappear. Disappearance of the gemstone could be averted with the slaughter of a cow or a goat and the calling of the spirits of the ancestors [1]. This means keep the women away from the gemstone mines as workers who cannot be employers or as owners of the mines. These myths mean that there will be more men as workers at the gemstone mines and as owners of the mines.

### **4.3 Hostility from chiefs**

Women face a lot of hostilities and disapproval from the traditional leaders who own land endowed with minerals. For one to prospect for minerals they at times have to buy land from the chiefs if the land is not under state or government control. Women in some areas face hostilities from the chiefs who do not approve their participation in mining activities in their areas and the justification for discrimination has different reasons. However, the end result is ultimately a system that undermines women's ability to participate fully in mining activities [10]. While this discrimination is tilted towards women, men as investors have no problems with chiefs because the cultural expectations of who is a miner or a mine owner favour men and not women. Discrimination does not only deny women access to minerals as a natural resource and their entitlement but it undermines their confidence to venture into the male dominated sector. Zambia is signatory to international conventions such as the 1979 CEDAW (convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women) but this convention and many others have not been translated into practice at all levels as women still face discrimination by some traditional leaders when it comes to owning mines in areas endowed with gemstones in particular may be found in areas that fall under the control of chiefs. Hostility towards women mining investors still remains a big barrier for women to access the minerals in some mining areas in Zambia. This applies more to small scale mines which focus on precious stones. The fact that men were the first owners of mines in some rural communities endowed with gemstones, this gives an impression that the mining role is a male domain and women as late entrants into the mining sector face rejection and hostilities from some traditional rulers.

### **4.4 Lack of the know-how and technical skills**

Usually gemstone mining requires some rare expertise on the part of the owner for effective prospecting and mining. Other observations by researchers the mining sector indicate that one of the challenges that women face in the mining sector is lack of the know-how of the sector due to unavailability of capacity building opportunities [11]. Information on what the mining sector entails is more confined to the men because they are the ones in the majority in the sector as mine surveyors, metallurgists, geologists, engineers and etc. Women are very few as experts in the mining sector because the education system at tertiary level where the mining experts are trained does not have a lot of women as students pursuing a career in mining and this ultimately creates imbalances in terms of levels of knowledge in the sector with men

having an upper hand and benefiting more than women from the minerals as mine owners and from employment in mines.

#### **4.5 Lack of financial resources to invest in mining**

Mining activities require finances for many requirements and in most cases at individual levels; this is beyond the capacity of most women investors. Being a risk venture, most financial institutions would rather lend loans for mining activities to reputable companies and not individuals and consequently women may not be credit worth even as a corporate to borrow money to finance their mining activities. Research has revealed that lack of finances for employment of mining surveyors is one of the major challenges that exclude women from accessing mines and minerals in Zambia [11]. Most of the small scale mines in the country are owned by rich individuals or small or companies and very few of these companies are owned or controlled by women miners. The mining sector is a complicated sector that requires a lot of money and most of the women would be investors but lack financial standing to engage in mining as an income generating activity or as worker due to risk excavation works involved in the sector.

#### **4.6 Lack of information**

There is inadequate information among women who intend to venture into mining activities for a variety of reasons ranging from few women experts as geologists, mining engineers, mining procurement specialists, etc. Women still in their majority lack information on marketing and partnerships making them vulnerable to swindlers and end up making loses in their business activities. On lack of information, Moyo [2] writes about women gemstone miners in Zambia being tricked by 'craft foreign investors' in Zambia's Southern province ( Mapatizya area) where a woman was swindled out of some money after selling her gemstone to a foreign investor with whom she had entered into a partnership agreement to provide mining equipment. The point to stress here is that the women small scale miners rarely have adequate information about marketing of their products, procurement of necessary mining equipment and this makes them vulnerable to swindlers who may be local or foreign investors.

#### **4.7 Lack of implementation of government regulations to counter gender discrimination**

Government is cognisant of the ever increasing poverty levels among women and to this end, government has passed the Economic Empowerment Act No. 9 of 2009 which among other

issues prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender in accessing and controlling economic resource and in employment. While this Act is very clear and important, it seems that it has not effectively been implemented in the mining sector where there are wide gender gaps to the favour of men. Even when it comes to ownership of mines as an economic resource, women have been discriminated against and this is evidenced by the few numbers of women who own the mines. The discussion above has evidence to this effect. The under-representation of women in Table 1 is clear sign of discrimination against women in terms of employment opportunities and ownership of minerals as small scale miners.

#### **4.8 Illiteracy among women on mining**

“But the really effective barrier to the employment of women in mines was their illiteracy in a country which could only boast of 105 indigenous graduates, of whom but a handful were women in 1964, its year of independence’ [12]. In addition to this factor, illiteracy that characterised and acted as a barrier to the employment of women soon after independence, the open discrimination against women due to the perception that mining work was hard work requiring strong men did work against the employment of women in the mines during the colonial period and even in the post-independence period as no vigorous gender sensitisation has been done in the sector. For instance, the National Gender Policy of 2000 which is a government document for mainstreaming gender in all government sectors has no section on the mining sector. While other sectors of the economy has received massive sensitisation on gender and some do have policies on gender, the mining sector does not have the same experience. Illiteracy among women was used as a discrimination tool to deny women employment in the mines because while illiterate women could not be employed, illiterate men found jobs in the same mines. The point is that women were discriminated against by the mining corporations during the colonial period as far as employment was concerned and this discrimination continued in the post-colonial period under the umbrella of the term illiteracy.

#### **4.9 Underrepresentation of women in tertiary institutions**

The gender discrimination against women has continued even in institutions of learning that offer training in mining jobs such as colleges and universities. For instance at the University of Zambia in the 2015 academic year, four females and twenty males graduated with Bachelor of Mineral Sciences [13]. This under-representation of women in tertiary institutions that offer training in mining professions implies that there will be few women

employees in mining corporations in technical jobs and this is currently the situation in Zambian mining companies. There has been a steady increase in the number of female students studying mining courses at the University of Zambia lately. Table 2 below shows the percentage of women graduating from the school of Mines in different years.

**Table 3: Percentage of female students graduating from University of Zambia from 2005 to 2017.**

Year	% female	% male
2005	9	91
2010	7.3	92.7
2015	12.1	87.9
2017	26.2	73.8

*Source: UNZA Graduation handbooks 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017.*

Table 2 above shows that since 2005, female students have been graduating in smaller numbers than male students. The implication is that in technical jobs within mines, there will be few women employees and this is the case for all mines in Zambia. The mining sector for many years have been the major employers in the country and with lucrative paying jobs to ten thousands of workers as beneficiaries but these employees are predominantly males. Women have not benefitted numerically at the same level benefiting as male employees especially in jobs that require rigorous training because of their underrepresentation in tertiary institutions such as universities. The above statistics from the School of Mines at the University of Zambia demonstrates the fact that there are few female students graduating from the mining profession hence women though employed in mines do not in their majority take lucrative technical well-paying jobs as is the case with their male counterparts who have been the majority among those graduating from the school of mines for many years to date.

#### **4.10 Unsafe conditions under which most mining activities take place**

Historically and even currently mining is usually conducted in unsafe environments where accidents frequently occur resulting in serious injuries to the miners and sometimes even death. Violent crimes especially in small scale mines do take place as miners fight for the resources secured. Even at the small scale level, owners need security which might be obtained at a high cost beyond the capacity of most small scale women would be investors in

mining. Reports of gemstone mines collapsing and killing miners are ever reported in the media that focus on mining activities. This unsafe environment itself is a deterrent to women as miners or as would be investors due to insecurity which costs so much if a mine is to continue its operations. This means that there should be big investment's to make the mining conditions safe or greatly reduce the risks that go with mining activities.

#### **4.11 Displacement from own land, loss of livelihoods**

One of the latest mines in Zambia is located in the North-western province called Kalumbila mine situated in one of the rural areas in the country. The site of this mine is, was an inhabited location whose owners were relocated to alternative land to pave way for the establishment of a new mine. Displacement entails loss of land, farms, forest products, etc. Commenting on the impact of the new mine on women ACTIONAID Zambia reported that “one of the greatest impacts of mining was the loss of land and livelihoods in many regions, particularly strongly felt in Kalumbila. Many women have lost access to land used for gardening and farming. They also no longer have access to forest resources which they depended on for wild food stuffs, medicinal herbs and for their livelihoods through using the materials for handicrafts” [14]. In most cases when a new piece of land is given to displaced people, the titles are in the names of the heads of households who are in the majority in this case men. Married women who may have owned some pieces of land completely lose out as land is given to heads of households who are men. Displaced aged single women (either widows or divorced) who owned land may benefit from the newly re-allocated but might have difficulties in clearing land due to lack of labour and equipment to clear new land for farming. Recovering from land lost due to mining activities may not be easy for the majority of poor women due to lack of resources to begin a new type of life in anew environment.

#### **4.12 Social and cultural impacts affecting women**

The introduction of new labour or new population of workers next to the rural communities impacts the cultural fabric of the surrounding communities. Workers from the other regions within the country and those from different countries enter the new areas and rarely adhere to the cultural expectation of the local communities. Relationships such as marriages, transactional sex with members of the local community with strangers introduce new norms which might be contrary to the local culture. Sexually transmitted diseases of different types including HIV are reported in communities in close proximity with mines. Alcoholism and its inevitable consequences such as gender-based violence, divorce and desertions occur in

communities near mines and women have borne the negative impact of the undesired behaviours in homes. Research has revealed that “the presence of mines precipitates changes in social and cultural fabric of the areas where they are found.

Mines bring with them an increase in migrant workers and income for some men. This has been tied with heightened alcohol abuse leading to multiple concurrent sexual relationships and temporal marriages, polygamy and or abandonment of families exuberated by migrant workers. These trends were also highlighted by communities interviewed in Kankoyo compound. Higher levels of alcohol consumption also precipitated marital instability and gender based violence, including psychological and physical abuse” [15]. The major victims of gender-based violence, desertions and divorce emanating from alcohol abuse are women.

#### **4.13 Women bear the burden of diseases and accidents associated with mines**

Related to what has been stated in the paragraph above, it shows that there is divorce, desertions, gender based violence and alcoholism in communities near the mines there burden of looking after the sick due to alcoholism or other diseases falls predominantly on women because they are the care givers to the sick and victims of mining accidents. It has been found out from research that “women bear the burden of increased health problems associated with mines including accidents and human injuries, eye irritation, bronchial and other respiratory diseases affecting miners, children and women in communities. This is because women tend to bear the burden for caring for the sick” [15]. Even though mines have some of the best hospitals in the country, women’s burdens of caring for the sick in homes whose illnesses result from the mines have continued. Every so often mining accidents are reported and some workers are permanently disabled and the burden of taking care of the sick falls on women. The above reported diseases are common in mining communities and the burden bearers in provision of care to the sick are women in their majority whose economic activities suffer because of multiple roles in the homes. Mines have compounded the women’s burden due to diseases of workers and disease of household members without compensation from mining companies particularly on diseases arising from mining activities.

## **5. Conclusion**

Mining in Zambia is the major employer of many Zambians and foreigners. From the colonial period to the post- colonial period, urbanisation has been driven by the mining sector. Many more Zambians may have beneficiaries from the mines as employees and

owners of the small mines since the big conglomerates still own the mines with government. However, there have been some changes in mine ownership of small scale mines with very few women as mine owners particularly of small scale mines in some parts of the Copperbelt province in Zambia. However, this number still remains far lower than men mine owners of small scale mines and those in executive positions in the big mining conglomerates in Zambia. This article has argued that the gender inequalities in the mining sector are historical and culturally embedded, reproduced, reinforced and perpetuated. The legal and policy frameworks governing the mining sector are equally rife with gender discrimination and this has made inequalities to appear to be the order of the day. Gender has been and is the organising principle common in different institutions which includes the mines in Zambia. The patriarchal culture from the colonial period which is the dominant organisational culture in the mining sector has perpetuated gender discrimination in training, employment, appointments and allocation of resources in the mining conglomerates in favour of men.

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