

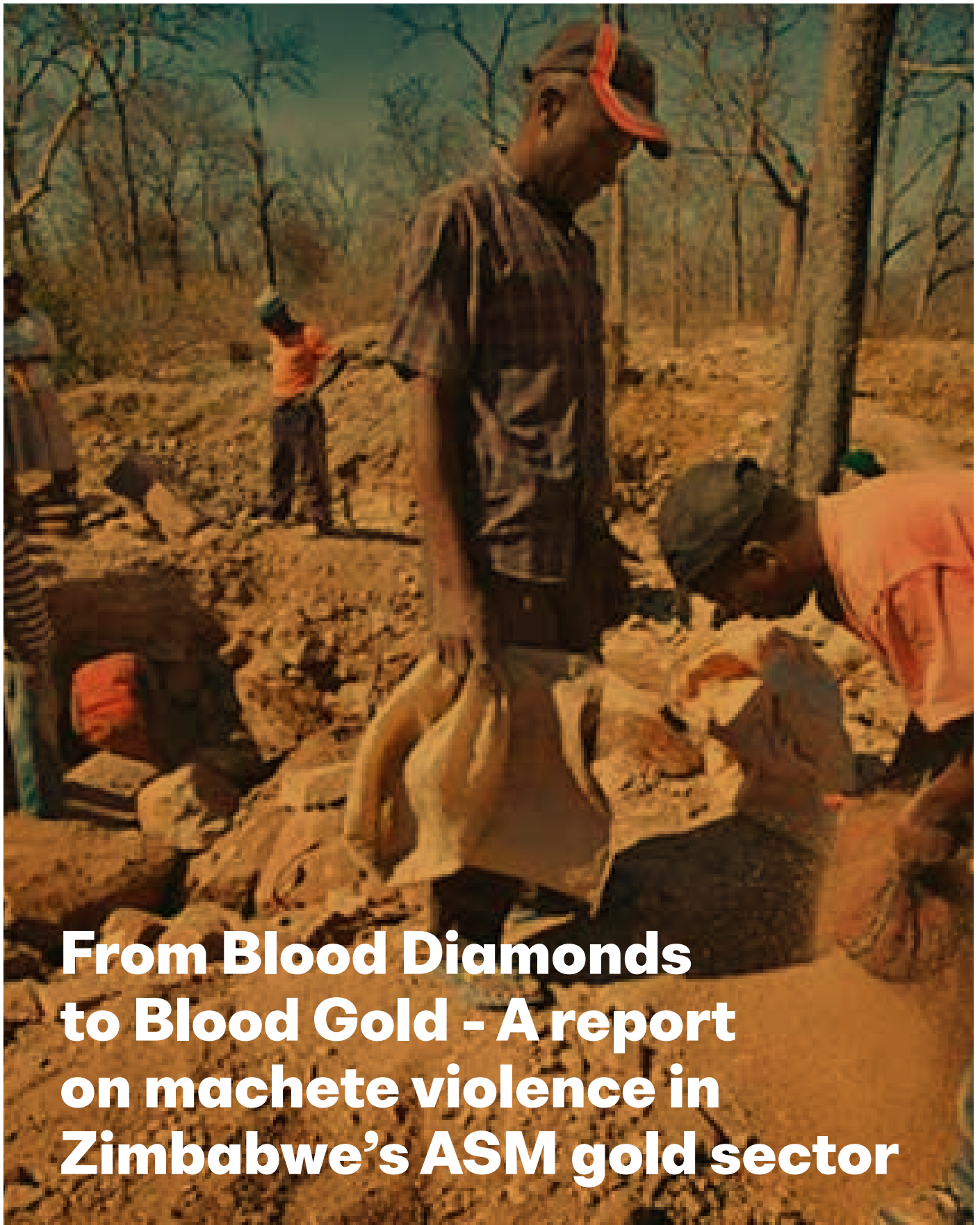


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From Blood Diamonds to Blood Gold - A report on machete violence in Zimbabwe's ASM gold sector



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Introduction

Shurugwi is a beautiful scenic town in Zimbabwe's Midlands Province which sits on the famous mineral rich Great Dyke belt. A drive through the small town justifies why Zimbabweans believe their country is the most beautiful in the world. The Great Dyke, which is up to 8 miles wide and about 330 miles long, consists of several precious minerals which include gold, silver, chromium, platinum, and nickel. Other types of minerals include but not limited to mica, asbestos, and tin. It is almost as if Shurugwi enjoys an unfair advantage over other towns in Zimbabwe.

However, before the Covid-19 induced lockdown, the name Shurugwi was the subject of a violent narrative sweeping over the country's mining sector; a phenomenon of terror synonymous with towns and communities where artisanal gold mining is done. Since then, Zimbabwe's gold mining communities in particular, have been living in fear of terror gangs whose modus operandi is said to have originated in the Midlands Province, which is the place where Shurugwi is found.

The term "*MaShurugwi*," as Machete violence gangs are being called, has become a codename describing a group of young and middle-aged men and, in some instances women, unleashing a reign of terror in gold mining communities. According to Mazowe residents, the age group for these machete wielding gangsters ranges between 14 and 42 years. "*MaShurugwi*" was first used in reference to violent gangs that used to rob, rape and kill people in Marange during the height of diamond rush from 2005 to 2008. The existence of machete unleashing terror gangs has been a subject of conversations in hushed tones until around 2017, when their presence began to be felt around the country, especially in gold mining areas.

In April 2019, a Gender and Extractives symposium, in which Centre for Natural Resource Governance (**CNRG**) participated, released a communiqué calling on the Government of Zimbabwe to "ensure that the Ministry of Home Affairs rolls out a national ban on possession of machetes while supporting the #Stopthemachete campaign." However, the call fell on deaf ears and machete unleashing terror gangs continued to hurt, rape, steal and kill. They used machetes as their preferred instrument of instilling fear and assuming control over their victims. Machete violence points to a silent terrorist situation in Zimbabwe's mining industry, which, if not attended to as a matter of urgency, will lead to an emergency of war-lords in mining communities as individuals seek to fight and defend their territories.

Although the police could not give statistics on the number of lives which have been lost at the hands of 'MaShurugwi,' the grouping(s) expanded their territory to all the mining communities across the country targeting disused gold mines. Their presence has been felt in Mazowe, Mashava, Bindura, Bubi, Gwanda, Shurugwi, Zvishavane and they have since invaded Kintyre Estates in Norton, less than 50 kilometres outside Harare. This paper interrogates the menace of machete violence, the drivers of artisanal mining and gives recommendations to policy makers towards promoting a safe and secure place in which citizens live in a peaceful environment.

Methodology

In its attempt to describe the character of violence in artisanal mining and exploring the possible root causes or drivers of this phenomenon, this study assumed both descriptive and analytical approaches. Cross-sectional surveys, interviews and observations were conducted, over a period of 6 months (December 2019 to May 2020) through physical visits to a sample of 5 disused mines where scores of artisanal miners had descended on. These mines were Mazowe Mine also known as Jumbo Mine in Mazowe where 5 artisanal miners, a Police Officer, 2 former mine workers, 4 residents were engaged as sources of information.

CNRG also carried out a tour of areas particularly where artisanal miners were converged and doing their business as well as their sites of work. At Globe and Phoenix in Kadoma **CNRG** researchers interviewed 3 security guards and 3 artisanal miners. Other artisanal miners who participated as sources of information include 3 artisanal miners from Zvishavane in Midlands; 22 in Bubi, Matabeleland North and 3 in Penhalonga, Manicaland. A virtual focus group discussion with 12 members from different parts of the country where artisanal mining is rife was also done to validate and triangulate the data. In addition to the above, three expert interviews with experienced researchers on artisanal mining in Zimbabwe were held.

Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners representatives were contacted for additional information on the subject matter. In addition to the above data collection methods, CNRG carried out desktop research where government documents and media reports were reviewed. The research team carried out triangulation of data collected by the different methods to arrive at the conclusions in this report.

The Origin of MaShurugwi

The term MaShurugwi was popularized between 2006 and 2008 at the height of the Marange diamond rush. When diamonds were discovered in Marange around May 2006 scores of poverty-stricken Zimbabweans thronged Marange in search of the precious stones. As more and more stories of wealth and fortune came out of Marange there was a surge in the arrival of artisanal miners from around the country. Artisanal miners who were engaged in gold mining abandoned their pits in various parts of Zimbabwe and converged on Marange. Whilst in 2006 most conflicts were between artisanal miners and members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police deployed to stop artisanal diamond mining, events changed around 2007 when reports of violence involving machete wielding gangs started circulating.

The perpetrators of these gruesome crimes were reported to originate from the mineral resources-rich area of Shurugwi. They were a small group of criminals whose common denominator was their place of origin – Shurugwi. Within a short space of time they had established themselves as a much-feared terror group that did not hesitate to attack anyone who stood in their way – particularly those in possession of diamonds. They killed several artisanal miners as they robbed them of their diamonds.

They also established illegal roadblocks, sometimes in police and military uniforms, where they robbed artisanal miners and dealers of their diamonds. These gangsters became known as MaShurugwi. They withdrew from Marange in November 2008 when government deployed troops of soldiers to take control of the diamond fields from artisanal miners in an operation code-named Operation Hakudzokwi (You shall not return).

Effects of Covid19

The surge in machete violence in the gold sector started receding when government announced a national lockdown which commenced on the 30th of March. The lockdown saw police and soldiers setting up numerous roadblocks throughout the country where, among other things, people were asked to produce **exemption** letters authorising them to travel. However, two incidents of Machete violence have been reported in Mbembesi, just outside Bulawayo and in Kwekwe.

The lockdown also slowed down artisanal gold production due to limited supply

of chemicals such as cyanide which is imported from countries that closed their borders much earlier than Zimbabwe. CNRG noted that smuggling went up during the lockdown as the illicit gold market adapted to the lockdown **conditions** in various ways. **RG Mugabe International Airport** remained open to both passenger and cargo planes whilst the country's porous borders remained active. The closure of Beitbridge Border Post has seen a rise in organized crime as security officials on both sides of the border facilitate illegal passage of smugglers into both countries.

Economic meltdown and growing poverty

The spike in violence in the artisanal mining sector can be linked to the economic developments in the country, particularly the monetary statement announcement by the Central Bank on 20 February 2019 on the foreign currency interbank market, allowing importers and exporters to trade the bond note, the RTGS balances and other foreign currencies using market-determined daily rates. According to the statement, bond notes were no longer trading at 1:1 with the US dollar but rates were rather now determined by the daily interbank market. For three years, since 2016, government had pegged the bond note/ RTGS to 1:1 with the US dollar. But the new statement by the Central Bank resulted in the bond note rapidly losing value against the USD which increasingly became scarce. The situation was compounded by the Statutory Instrument 142 of 2019 which banned the use of the United States dollar, Botswana pula, British pound and other currencies as legal tender in Zimbabwe. This fuelled the parallel money market amidst skyrocketing prices of commodities, as retailers tried to peg prices at the parallel black-market rate. Most commodity prices shot beyond the reach of many. Salaries of civil servants and industry workers were not adjusted to match the interbank market rates, resulting in most workers unions declaring incapacitation.

The basic salary of many workers went below the poverty datum line and not enough to sustain a family of five for a month. According to ZimStat, the Total Consumption Poverty Line (TCPL) for an average of five persons stood at **\$6,420** in March 2020. Artisanal miners sell their gold in United States dollars. Because the Fidelity Printers and Refiners pay miners 55% in USD and 45% in RTGS, the majority of artisanal miners prefer to sell their gold to middle men who pay them between USD\$35 and USD\$40 per gram.

Gold is one of the scarce commodities that can earn someone United States Dollars in Zimbabwe. Gold deposits are randomly distributed across the country. It is against this background that the majority of Zimbabweans have been turning to artisanal gold mining as it gives them an opportunity to earn the greenback which gives them stronger purchasing power. People have been digging anywhere and everywhere, where they suspect there are gold deposits.

Climate Change – The Untold Story

Closely connected to the spike in artisanal mining and the concomitant machete violence is climate change. Since 2018, Zimbabwe has received below average rainfalls. Majority of Zimbabwe's peasant farmers rely on rainfed agriculture for food and livestock production. Successive droughts for the past three years have seen a sharp drop in livestock herds. In January 2020, The Sunday Mail reported that according to statistics obtained from Matabeleland South's Department of Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (Agritex) at least 15,596 cattle had died due to drought in Matabeleland South Province only.¹

During times of drought, rural Zimbabweans resort to selling their livestock in order to buy food, particularly the staple – maize. With the depletion of cattle herds in

¹ Nsingo, D (2020) Farmer loses 45 beasts . . . 15 596 cattle succumb to drought in Matabeleland South. <https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/farmer-loses-45-beasts-15-596-cattle-succumb-to-drought-in-matabeleland-south-desperate-farmers-selling-cattle-for-as-low-as-zwl-2-000/>



worth to note that during the 2008 closure, evidence of small-scale artisanal miners' operations was very insignificant.

However, before the second closure which happened in 2018, employees had gone for months without receiving their monthly salaries. The situation deteriorated further when mine workers were forced to work two weeks per month without getting paid. With the mine owing its employees large sums of money, lawsuits began to flood the courts and the mine's property was being attached in the process. The loss of mine property benefited those in the top management who could afford the legal bills. The rest of the staff, were left with nothing other than the houses that they were staying in. With no other source of income, the mine employees continued with the mining operations, this time with no proper management.

At that point, mining activities were being carried by bona fide mine employees before artisanal small-scale miners from the surrounding areas started to join in. The small-scale miners paid bribes to the mine security to be allowed entry into the mine shaft. These entry points and collection points have a special name, 'Mbuzhu'.

The situation deteriorated until it was no longer the ordinary small-scale miners and the mine workers who were carrying out mining activities but anyone from anywhere with capacity to pay the bribe. Reports of conflicts and blood cold killings began to feature in the media. Conflict, as has been reported, was being perpetrated by the popular group, 'MaShurugwi'.

Some of the mine workers have been accused of sheltering and protecting the 'MaShurugwi', whilst others joined the violent groups. The old mine workers who were not interested in carrying out the mining activities rented out their houses to the artisanal miners, who wanted accommodation close to the mine. The rent initially was paid in local currency but later changed to forex i.e. the US dollars. Members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police were deployed to man the entry points, but the situation deteriorated further because of corruption.

Artisanal miners would pay the security forces amounts ranging between US\$5 to US\$10 to gain entry into the mine for a limited number of hours. In essence, the mine workers played a critical role in aiding the violent groups to gain access to the mine shaft and identifying targets for them to rob. Others provided shelter and food, probably to show allegiance and avoiding victimisation.

Political influence in Mine Ownership and its impact on fuelling violence in the mining community

Mining has greatly improved local economies of many cities and small towns across the country. Looking at the City of Kwekwe as one of the cities that has been sustained by both formal and informal mining activities, artisanal gold panning is now wreaking havoc to the city's infrastructure and service delivery. As industry collapsed owing to a decade-long political crisis, thousands of workers formerly employed by defunct mining companies and downstream industries turned to artisanal gold panning for survival.

Gold panning requires plenty of water to separate the gold from sand. Due to lack of capital and the unorganized nature of gold panning, in Kwekwe, panners have turned to bizarre methods of processing gold such as breaking water pipes in and around the city to access water for their work. Gold panning in Kwekwe is controlled by a cartel of senior Cabinet Ministers and politicians who buy gold from the panners. In January 2012, a new gold rush began in Kwekwe following the discovery of gold nuggets at Sherwood Park by local panners. Zanu-PF provincial leaders immediately sealed the area and declared it a party's territory. Environmental Management Agency has been helpless in dealing with panners due to their affiliation to politicians.

Announcing the takeover of the area at a rally attended by hundreds of panners who had been chased away from the fields by police, then Zanu-PF Midlands

rural areas, more and more people are embarking into alternative livelihood options such as artisanal mining. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Ms. Hilal Elver, who paid an official visit to Zimbabwe from 18 - 28 November 2019 estimated that as many as 8 million Zimbabweans are desperately in need of food aid, adding that 'Zimbabwe counts amongst the four highest food insecure states, alongside conflict ravaged countries.' Traditionally the lowest activity in the artisanal mining sector is recorded during the raining season, which is November to March. This is because majority of artisanal miners are peasant farmers who return to their homes during the farming season.



Artisanal mining is a seasonal job, especially for those who live with their families. Money earned from selling gold is invested in buying inputs for subsistence farming. Further, during the rainy season mine shafts are flooded with water making it difficult and dangerous for the miners. Nevertheless, successive droughts have meant mine shafts remain dry, making it possible for artisanal mining work to continue throughout the usually wet season. This means seasonal artisanal miners no longer take a break from the trade because farming is disrupted by the droughts whilst conditions in the shafts are favourable for the continuation of their work.



Closure of Mines

Several mines have shut down in Zimbabwe in the past 5 years largely due to a hostile investment climate and declining global commodity prices. Doing business in Zimbabwe is extremely challenging owing to policy inconsistencies, high government interference in the banking and financial sector, rent-seeking behaviour by government officials and political instability, among a host of reasons. Against this background, big companies have been shutting down their operations in Zimbabwe, leaving thousands of workers destitute and disused mine shafts that are now being exploited by artisanal miners.

Globe and Phoenix

Big companies that have shut down include Zimbabwe's oldest gold mine, Globe and Phoenix which was shut down in 2007 after the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) carried out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which revealed that some of the mine's tunnels had gone for 8km, cutting across Kwekwe town central business district and thus posing a danger to the residents of the town. However, the mine was not properly closed down. Instead, reports say senior Zanu-PF officials, led by the current Cabinet Minister, moved in and started organizing illicit gold-digging activities at the mine.



Metallon Gold

In April 2019, Metallon Gold which produced 50% of Zimbabwe's gold output announced that it was shutting down 3 of its four mines in the country reportedly due to limited access to forex. The three mines were Shamva, Redwing and Mazowe/Jumbo Mine. In May 2019, Reuters reported that the company was suing the Central bank demanding US\$132 million owed to them by the bank. Zimbabwe's gold regulations stipulate that gold mining companies sell their produce to the central bank through Fidelity Printers and Refiners, which only allows companies to retain a portion of their export earnings, the rest being paid in RTGS dollars. The abandonment of Metallon owned mines has led to an influx of artisanal miners to these places. A good example is the Jumbo mine scenario explained below.

Jumbo Mine / Mazowe Mine

Mazowe Mine popularly known as Jumbo mine was closed in 2018 soon after the harmonized elections. This was not the first time that the mine had closed. During the 2007-2008 economic melt-down, the mine closed only to be reopened in 2009 after the adoption of the multi-currency system in Zimbabwe. Jumbo mine and all other Metallon Gold companies are owned by a South African national, Mzee Khumalo. It is

Provincial Security Officer Owen “Mudha” Ncube who is now Zimbabwe’s Minister of State Security, said the gold deposits in Sherwood belonged to his party, NewsDay reported. Mudha said Zanu-PF had fought in the liberation struggle to ensure that Zimbabweans owned their land and the minerals in it and therefore had the right to decide who mined at the fields. The authority of the police to deal with this menace has diminished as evidenced by the murder of Constable Wonder Hokoyo on 28 December 2019 who was hacked to death by a marauding large group of machete and axe wielding men at Brompton Mine in Battlefields in Kadoma.

These (gangsters) had allegedly forcibly taken over mine shafts at the mine ‘thereby dispersing genuine miners who were extracting gold ore.’ According to Zimlive.com ‘Brompton Mine has been subdivided into several small units including Maglass, Goodhope, Alexander, Musakaneni, Moddi, Nganganga, Bongola and Copper mines, each with dozens of mine shafts where un-mechanised gold mining is currently taking place.’² The mine is said to be owned by a former Zanu-PF Member of Parliament, Peter Haritatos, but currently managed by Zanu-PF Mashonaland West Province Secretary for Transport, Philemon Ndushu.

Are Machete Gangs Artisanal Miners?

Whilst there is significant amount of violence among artisanal miners, there is no evidence to suggest that machete gangs that went around terrorizing people are artisanal miners. Usually, violence among artisanal miners is over control of territories. Artisanal miners fight for territories because they believe in hard work. However, some cases reported in the recent spate of armed robberies by machete wielding gangs appeared to be purely mugging criminal acts with no clear links to artisanal mining. Some of the robberies did not take place in mining areas whilst in some cases, small scale miners, known to keeping gold and large sums of cash at home were targeted.

As the economic hardships deepen, members of the security forces, in particular soldiers and police officers have been arrested on various occasions for armed robberies. In one of the incidences, on 1 June 2019, eight soldiers stormed Ceola Mine in Concession and attempted to gain entry into the store room but were overpowered and made good their escape. In this heist, a 52 year old Captain with the Zimbabwe National Army was apprehended by the mine guards.³ Later in December 2019, a group of 15 armed robbers, brandishing an AK 47 rifle and machetes invaded Gobathema Business Centre in Gwanda where they attacked shop workers and robbed them of R14,000, \$1,100 and groceries.⁴

On 7 January 2020 a corporal with the Zimbabwe National Army, Kudakwashe Hoko, was shot and killed by private security guards at Goodhope Gold Mine where he and five others had tried to gain entry into the gold-rush site. The group had three soldiers, including the deceased Hoko.⁵ A search in the vehicle used by the gang produced two pairs of Zimbabwe National Army camouflage uniform, a small axe, a Colombian knife and four explosives. There was no evidence in their car to suggest these were artisanal miners. Also, on the 13th of February, 3 police officers teamed up with 2 ex-police officers to rob a gold miner of 92 grams of gold which he wanted to dispose

2 Machaya P (2019) Police officer killed by gold gangs while guarding Zanu PF-linked mine <https://www.zimlive.com/2019/12/30/police-officer-killed-by-gold-gangs-while-guarding-zanu-pf-linked-mine/>

3 Sithole, S. (2019) Eight soldiers up for armed robbery. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2019/06/8-soldiers-up-for-armed-robbery/>

4 Dube-Matutu, S. (2019). 15 robbers armed with AK47 rifle attack business centre in Gwanda. <https://nehandaradio.com/2019/12/20/15-robbers-armed-with-ak47-rifle-attack-business-centre-in-gwanda/>

5 Bhebhe, N (2020). ‘ZNA soldier armed with an axe shot and killed by security guards at Goodhope gold mine. <https://www.myzimbabwe.co.zw/news/58427-zna-soldier-armed-with-an-axe-shot-and-killed-by-security-guards-at-goodhope-gold-mine.html>

illicitly with their assistance.⁶

Government's response to machete violence was slow and inefficient. In most cases government targeted wrong people and wrong activities. For instance on 24 January 2020 The Herald Newspaper reported that Police raided Siya-So Home Industry in Mbare where they arrested seven people for allegedly supplying machetes to criminal gangs.⁷ It is a well-known that Siya-So is a home industry where an assortment of tools which include machetes and axes that are produced at cheap prices. Manufacturers of these tools have no business vetting customers or asking the purpose for which they want to use them. Further, there is no law prohibiting the manufacture of tools such as machetes and axes which are used by rural people on a daily basis for various cultural, domestic and economic activities since time immemorial. In late 2019, the Zimbabwe Republic Police launched an operation code-named 'No To Anarchy by Artisanal Miners' leading to the arrest of 3,471 people for possessing dangerous weapons, among them, machetes, while 1,549 illegal artisanal miners were also arrested countrywide.⁸

Operation Chikorokoza Ngachipere and Covid-19

The ZRP operation 'No to Anarchy by Artisanal Miners' was followed by yet another operation dubbed Operation Chikorokoza Ngachipere (Operation Stop Artisanal mining) in early January, this time by the Joint Operations Command, the security supreme organ of the country, as the public demand for political action against machete gangs grew. As of 5 March 2020 police had arrested 4,570 artisanal miners countrywide.⁹ According to the police, the operation led to the confiscation of "nine hammer mill engines, jack hammer, water tank, 35 litres of diesel, wheelbarrows, shovels and a water pump."¹⁰

However the above are typical equipment used by artisanal miners and have no link whatsoever to armed robbery that necessitated the police operation. The police operation ended with the national lockdown enforced by the government to contain the deadly coronavirus in March. The massive crackdown on artisanal miners, some of whom are still languishing in jail and the tough implementation of the lockdown regulations has seen a number of artisanal miners staying away from the pits. Nevertheless, the number of artisanal miners is set to rise again once the national lockdown is fully lifted and when the gold market is thriving again.



The Untouchables

There is some degree of impunity in the way the machete gangs were operating. The machete gangsters were allegedly being protected by some powerful politicians who benefit from their lawlessness. Though yet to be proven, these gangs might play a crucial role in the 2023 elections as they will be instrumental in instilling fear and intimidation in various communities during elections. If at all they enjoy impunity granted by powerful politicians, the same politicians will demand pay back in the form of violent campaigning ensuring they retain their constituencies in the next election.

In a survey done by CNRG in gold mining communities such as Mazowe, Kadoma, Kwekwe and Chegutu, names of politicians and some of them very high-ranking officials, featured prominently. The involvement of politicians in the machete gangs was unwittingly confirmed by the Minister of Home Affairs Kazembe Kazembe who was quoted in The Herald of December 6 2019 saying "the law will not be applied

6 Chingarande B, (2020) Armed cops rob Guruve miner. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2020/02/armed-cops-rob-guruve-miner/>

7 Razemba, F (2020) MACHETE GANGS: Seven arrested for supplying weapons as police swoop down on Mbare. <https://www.herald.co.zw/machete-gangs-seven-arrested-for-supplying-weapons-as-police-swoop-down-on-mbare/>

8 Mushanawani, C (2019). Politicians warned over machete gangs

9 <https://www.herald.co.zw/4-560-illegal-miners-arrested/>

10 Op cit

selectively in dealing with illegal activities regardless of one's social standing, including politicians." Minister Kazembe Kazembe's pronouncements indicate that these individuals are known to government. One cabinet minister has a long history of involvement in illicit gold trade and the skirmishes that often characterize control of gold mining territories.

The causes of machete violence in gold mining areas

Gold is one mineral which is easily mined and sold to the government and local buyers at attractive prices. Until June 2020, The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe used to pay 55 percent in United States Dollars and 45 percent in local currency for gold. However local black-market buyers have always paid 100% in USD, which is more attractive to gold producers including artisanal and small-scale miners given the hyperinflation associated with the Zimbabwe RTGS dollar. It is estimated that up to 500,000 people are involved in small-scale and artisanal mining, and in 2017, these were responsible for nearly half of the 24.8 tons of gold produced in Zimbabwe, according to the Fidelity Printers and Refiners. The rich pickings associated with artisanal and small-scale mining, which have transformed the lives of some at a time all other economic sectors are crumbling, might have attracted violent criminals to the sector. The motive behind the so-called MaShurugwi might as well be the same with the motive that drives any other criminal to use whatever weapon at their disposal to dispossess others of their wealth. Failure to surrender the ore may lead to death or grave injuries. The violent act is meant to instill fear and control to those they raid.

Artisanal miners have also been implicated in terrorizing other artisanal miners. Information gathered by CNRG indicates that some well-organized machete terror gangs specialize in confiscating gold ore from fellow artisanal miners. At Jumbo Mine, machete gangs reportedly way lay fellow artisanal miners at the former Metallon Gold owned mine. "They approach those who would be on their way out and forcibly grab the ore for processing. Clashes break out as people try to resist and defend their pickings," a source involved in artisanal mining said.

The conflation of artisanal and small-scale mining

The government of Zimbabwe has deliberately conflated small-scale mining and artisanal mining. Small-scale mining is extraction of natural resources with minimal or no mechanization. However, unlike artisanal miners, small scale miners are registered and are somehow regulated. On the other hand, artisanal mining is not regulated. However, the two are simultaneously referred to as artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) In a bid to give some semblance of decency, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe through its gold buying unit, Fidelity Printers and Refiners and Refiners, decided to classify gold produced by small scale miners and artisanal miners as one. This gold is bought on a no-questions-asked basis.

This has potential to fuel violence since anyone can rob someone of their gold and go to Fidelity straight away where they sell without being asked questions. This also raises serious ethical questions on whether Fidelity Printers and Refiners can assure consumers that the gold it sells is not associated with violence and crime. Efforts to regulate the artisanal mining sector have been met with some form of resistance from both the miners and government.

Putting police inaction into political context

For as long as the Zimbabwe Republic Police is passive on machete violence, this kind of violence will continue. However, following widespread violence at Gaika Mine which sucked in senior politicians within the ruling Zanu-PF, there was a national outcry regarding the lackadaisical approach of the government to the growing menace of machete violence. Others were beginning to warn that the terror gangs were now a huge threat to national security. There were also unconfirmed reports that the most powerful politicians in government were divided on how to handle the crisis, with Vice President Constantino Chiwenga reportedly threatening to deploy the army whilst



President Mnangagwa felt the crisis could be managed without resorting to the use of the army.

It was at this stage that the police were instructed to deal ruthlessly with the terror gangs. This bickering on the right approach to handle the crisis demonstrates that the machete violence had deep political roots with some undertones of factionalism in the ruling Zanu-PF party. At the lower structure of the State, the chaos in the artisanal mining sector was also fuelled by the participation of law enforcement agents in illicit gold mining activities. A police source from one of the mining communities told CNRG that the weak response by state security actors is caused by their involvement in gold mining. In Mazowe, police officers, soldiers, central intelligence officers and prison guards have all been involved in artisanal mining.

When off-duty, state security officials reportedly removed the official garbs and go underground in search of the valuable mineral. According to the source, these officials bring a new dimension of violence in artisanal mining because sometimes they go underground with service weapons. "Some members of violent machete gangs have been killed underground during clashes with state security officials. These officials, because they know how dangerous machete unleashing terror gangs are, they also go underground with service pistols to protect themselves and most cases of underground violence go unreported because no one is willing to testify. All in all, the political links that most gang members have also make it difficult for the police to execute their duties.

The perpetuation of tribal and ethnic tensions

Zimbabwe's already fluid tribal and ethnic terrain is at risk of further implosion as there are undertones that MaShurugwi travel from their places of origin to terrorize other provinces. However, the naming of the terror gangs as MaShurugwi does not necessarily mean they come from Shurugwi. MaShurugwi has become synonymous with anyone who exhibit violent tendencies within the artisanal mining sector. This can be an artisanal miner, a gold dealer or a plain criminal. In some cases, MaShurugwi is the name given to artisanal miners who do not belong to that place. Any artisanal miner who force themselves onto a particular community is feared by the locals and often has to be daring in order to be feared and allowed to do their work. Tribal clashes in artisanal mining regions have also been on the rise. On one hand, people from gold mining communities in Matabeleland have been accusing people from Mashonaland of importing violence to their areas. For the people in Matabeleland, the Gukurahundi violence which occurred in the early 1980s is still fresh in the minds of people and the emergence of violent machete terror gangs serves as a reminder of the violent past.

On the other hand, in Mashonaland, they also alleged that members of the violent machete gangs are from Matabeleland. In some cases, violence occurs between those who believe they have a right to protect their region from outside artisanal gold panners. These clashes are more deadly in gold rich areas such as Midlands province. In 2019 Zimbabwe Peace Project reported that "Kadoma Hospital showed that between August and October this year, some 105 murders were reported in mining areas, with 221 cases of assault at the mines".

Way Forward

The chaotic situation in the artisanal mining sector which is characterized by an ever-rising number of desperate artisanal miners preyed on by armed gangs with links to politicians poses a security threat to the country. There is danger that some gangs shall be armed by their political godfathers to venture into wide scale organized crime. Therefore, there is need for the government to:

- To adopt artisanal mining best practices from around the world and ensure the sector is properly regulated for the safety, security and benefit of the miners, women, communities and the country.
- Commission a thorough investigation on the surge in violence in the Artisanal and Small Sector Mining (ASM) sectors and bring the perpetrators to book.
- Craft an artisanal mining policy that improves the safety, health and wellbeing of those involved in the sector.
- Amend the Mines and Minerals Act and the Environmental Management Act to ensure thorough land rehabilitation after mine closure.
- Impose tough sentences on those found guilty of machete violence or robberies in the ASM sector.

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