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USE AND MANAGEMENT OF MINING CHEMICALS BY ILLEGAL GOLD MINERS IN THE GREAT DYKE, ZIMBABWE

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In Zimbabwe, illegal gold mining is an attraction to most poor men, women and children. In the country, poverty is associated with economic meltdown. Weak enforcement of mining laws has seen a rise in illegal gold mining activities: some of the miners are foreign nationals from neighboring Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia etc. This livelihood activity is linked to public health concerns such as liberal use of chemicals, extensive environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS, violence, child labor and women abuse. This study focused on use and storage of chemicals by illegal gold miners along the gold-rich Great Dyke region. Qualitative data were collected from women, men and children involved in illegal gold mining and processing, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Health Centers, and Faculty of Mining Sciences at a University in Zimbabwe. The miners used chemicals such as mercury, carbon and cyanide to extract gold from its ore. The miners especially women and children have little knowledge about the effects of the chemicals on humans and the environment. Poisoned miners rarely seek specialized medical attention; if they do,

they neither disclose their correct residential addresses nor proper medical history for fear of being arrested. Worryingly, most of these miners are undocumented migrants. These chemicals are stored in food containers and there are no lockable storerooms. Chemicals residues and used containers are recklessly disposed into rivers and anthills. The chemicals do not affect the miners only; they have a life threatening effect to animals, plants, fish and people who are not involved in the mining activity. The study recommends sensitization of communities about the far reaching effects of the chemicals contamination. Community leaders and public health workers should be involved in controlling the use and disposal of chemicals by illegal miners.

Biography

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