



THE IMPACTS OF ARTISANAL MINING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PROVINCE OF HAUT-KATANGA (DRC)

Results of community consultations, July 2024

A publication by Dominicans for Justice and Peace in collaboration with its partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including the sisters of the congregation of the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Rosary and the Dominican family network.

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Documentation



Results of the 2019 Universal
Periodic Review (UPR) of the
DRC



Joint submission to the
UPR Working Group for
the DRC

Introduction

The mining sector occupies a central place in the economy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). As the world's largest producer of cobalt and a major player in copper production, the country plays a decisive role in global supply chains, particularly for the manufacture of batteries, mobile phones, computers and electric vehicles. A significant portion of this production relies on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). This sector is an essential source of income for many local communities, but it is also associated with precarious working conditions, high health risks, and significant environmental impacts.

In this context, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, in collaboration with its local partners, including the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Rosary and the Dominican family network in the DRC, conducted a series of community consultations in the city of Likasi, Haut-Katanga province in July 2024. The results presented in this publication highlight the main concerns expressed by local communities regarding the social, economic, health, and environmental impacts of artisanal mining. This analysis is part of the follow-up to commitments made by the DRC during its 2019 Universal Periodic Review, to which we contributed. It aims to foster dialogue between public authorities, economic actors, and civil society in order to encourage a human rights-based approach to natural resource extraction.

Methodology

A total of **277 participants** – women, men, young people, and local stakeholders connected to artisanal mining sites – took part in the community consultations. Data were collected through community group discussions as well as semi-structured interviews. Testimonies were anonymised to ensure the safety of all participants.

Economic life and mining dependency

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Continue developing and implementing programmes and projects to improve youth employment"

What we found in Likasi

The economy of Haut-Katanga is heavily dependent on the extractive sector. While mines drive national growth, they also paradoxically act as a factor in the breakdown of the local economy. Consultations conducted in Likasi reveal a progressive abandonment of agricultural land in favour of quarries. This phenomenon undermines the region's food sovereignty and makes communities dependent on revenues generated by extraction.

A stark contrast emerges between the value of the resources extracted and the living conditions observed in mining areas. In some of the areas visited, most households reported that they are deprived of access to drinking water and electricity. Artisanal mining communities therefore receive only limited economic benefits from mining activities. At the same time, this dependency from the sector limits the alternatives available to young people and women, who remain in the mines for lack of other concrete opportunities.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Establish vocational training centres in mining areas;
- Promote financing of income-generating activities, particularly for young people and women;
- Consolidate the National Youth Employment Programme (Pro-YEN).

61 %

of respondents indicate that opportunities exist outside the mines, but that they lack the means or support needed to access them.

*« Many want to leave the mines for other work but unfortunately, they cannot manage to do so. » **



**The quotes and percentages presented in this brochure come from interviews conducted as part of the study. Statements have been anonymised and are not attributed to any specific respondent.*

Education and literacy

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Continue utmost efforts to provide access for all children to primary and secondary education, eliminate illiteracy and invest in improving the quality and competences of teachers."

What we found in Likasi

The data collected during the consultations paint a worrying picture: the vast majority of people encountered in and around mining sites had prematurely interrupted their schooling. Dropouts occur mainly at primary level or during the transition to secondary school, between the ages of 10 and 15 – a pivotal period during which the child becomes a potential labour force in the mining context. Although the Congolese Constitution guarantees free and compulsory primary education, the realities observed in mining areas are very different.

A striking element emerges from the testimonies: the desire to learn remains strong, but it is hampered by material and geographical barriers, including a lack of financial resources and the absence of nearby educational centres. Many people expressed their willingness to join a literacy programme if one were accessible close to where they live.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Design and fund literacy programmes for adults and out-of-school youth;
- Implement the mandatory financial mechanisms for mining royalties and the 0.3% allocation for local development in order to support nearby educational centres;
- Integrate non-formal education alternatives adapted to the realities of mining areas;
- Raise community awareness of the importance of education.

39 %

believe that young people working in the mines are illiterate.

+90 %

stated they were unaware of the existence of any literacy centre in the area.

« If a literacy school were set up close to us, we would come and enrol. »



Children's rights

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Take steps to eliminate child labour, including in illegal mines, and establish structures to support affected children"

What we found in Likasi

The survey confirms the widespread presence of school-age children at the heart of artisanal mines and quarries. Far from being mere bystanders, these young people are integrated into production cycles. They participate in extraction activities and operate in an environment marked by multiple forms of violence. Their early immersion in this environment leads to a gradual deterioration of their physical health. Exposure to arduous work causes premature physical wear, which may have irreversible consequences in adulthood.

To cope with the harshness of the work and fatigue, some resort to survival mechanisms such as the consumption of alcohol or drugs, which increases the risks of marginalisation and juvenile delinquency. This situation leads to students dropping out of school permanently. In a context of extreme poverty, the urgency of daily income takes precedence over continuing education. Extreme precarity also exposes these children to increased risks of sexual exploitation and prostitution within mining sites.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Establish a school support framework for children living near mines, including material and nutritional assistance;
- Revitalise the National Committee to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labour (CN/PFTE) to sustainably prevent children from being subjected to hazardous work;
- Fund alternative micro-projects (market gardening, small trade, crafts);
- Put in place a specific support mechanism for children whose living environment is the mining site.

66 %

confirm the presence of school-age children within mines and quarries.

59 %

believe that these children have permanently dropped out of school.

42 %

report that these minors are subjected to physical or psychological violence.

35 %

indicate that some children fall into prostitution.

" Instead of going to school, children are at the quarry or in the mines."



Rights of women and girls

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women, children and citizens in general"

What we found in Likasi

Contrary to common assumptions, women perform tasks of nearly the same physical difficulty as men: carrying heavy loads, crushing and washing ore. However, this equality in effort does not translate into equal treatment. Recurring acts of violence against women and girls are consistently reported. This violence takes many forms: it is physical and sexual – harassment, assault and rape; economic – underpayment compared to men for equivalent work and exploitation by intermediaries; and psychological – a permanent climate of intimidation and impunity.

No effective prevention or protection mechanism was identified by those consulted. Neither operators nor local authorities appear to be implementing concrete measures to prevent abuse, protect victims or sanction those responsible. This absence of institutional response leaves women in a situation of extreme vulnerability, in direct contradiction with the national and international commitments that have been made.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Contribute to the effective implementation of the national Gender Policy and strengthen funding for related programmes;
- Support women-led initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation and decision-making in the mining sector;
- Strengthen legislation and its enforcement regarding the protection of the rights of women and children in mining areas.

69 %

observe that women are victims of various forms of violence at mining sites.

70 %

state that there is an absence of protection for women and girls at the sites visited.

« To access the minerals, you have to sleep with the soldiers. »



Right to health

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Continue strengthening efforts to implement the national health development plan"

What we found in Likasi

The absence of personal protective equipment and the weakness of local healthcare structures turn mining sites into hotbeds of complex diseases. Prolonged exposure to mineral dust and toxic substances causes chronic respiratory diseases, severe skin conditions and cutaneous infections.

Communities report permanent exposure to fine particles, causing persistent coughs, breathlessness and bronchitis. The unregulated use of chemicals without adequate protection aggravates these risks. Furthermore, the infiltration of toxic substances into drinking water leads to pregnancy complications and neonatal malformations. In children, chronic inhalation of dust and contact with heavy metals can cause profound neurocognitive damage and developmental delays.

These harms go beyond simple occupational risk: they directly compromise the right to health and to life of the populations living around mining sites.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Prevent health risks at the source by strictly regulating mining operations;
- Ensure access to healthcare in mining areas through well-equipped facilities;
- Provide targeted health monitoring in areas of artisanal mining.

63 %

believe that mining activity seriously impacts women's health.

53 %

report skin problems linked to exposure to substances used in the mines.

24 %

confirm cases of birth defects.

« There is irradiation from uranium-bearing metals. You can tell when a miner walks in front of the TV – the screen shakes or goes off. »



Psychosocial impacts of mines

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Improve access to basic social needs"

What we found in Likasi

Artisanal mining is not limited to economic or health impacts. It causes a profound breakdown of the social fabric and constantly undermines the mental health of populations. Between the physical demands of work and financial insecurity, combined with the constant fear of accidents (cave-ins, collapses), the mine becomes a space of permanent tension.

The testimonies collected also reveal a deterioration of the social climate. The multiplication of thefts and the increase in insecurity reflect a criminality linked to precarity. More profoundly, several participants describe a progressive breakdown of family structures. Parental authority fades in the face of the imperative of economic survival, and traditional solidarity networks are weakened. The mine does not only transform the landscape: it changes social relations, weakens family bonds, and establishes a climate in which violence tends to replace dialogue.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Strengthen access to social services in mining areas;
- Develop psychosocial support programmes for vulnerable populations;
- Support community initiatives aimed at restoring social cohesion and preventing violence;
- Integrate the psychosocial dimension into public policies relating to artisanal mining areas.

53 %

denounce a multiplication of thefts linked to precarity.

21 %

testify to a breakdown of families in mining communities.

« Parents lose their grip on their children, as the latter become increasingly independent and no longer want to be controlled by their parents. »



Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

UPR recommendation accepted by the government

"Ensure that business operations comply with international human rights law, labour law and environmental law"

What we found in Likasi

The use of rudimentary techniques and the disregard for environmental standards cause systemic pollution that extends beyond extraction sites and directly affects the living areas of communities, who describe persistent contamination of the air, water and soil by heavy metals. Deforestation linked to the opening of quarries destroys the biological corridors characteristic of the region. This fragmentation prevents animal species from moving, feeding and reproducing, leading to a weakening of local biodiversity. Cave-ins at mines, in addition to being human disasters, also result in the destruction of ecosystems.

These impacts constitute a direct violation of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, recognised at the international level and guaranteed by the national Constitution. However, those consulted express a feeling of abandonment: no concrete measures are perceived as being implemented to restore the environment or secure the sites.

What the Congolese Government can do

- Undertake studies on the significant impacts of mines and quarries on the environment;
- Ensure strict compliance with environmental standards and the elimination of toxic waste;
- Strengthen regulation and oversight by enforcing the Mining Code and formalising the artisanal sector.

86 %

judge that nothing concrete is being done to address environmental degradation.

70 %

mention air pollution and associated respiratory problems.

62 %

report water pollution.

26 %

indicate that cave-ins occur in the mines.

« There is a lack of knowledge of the Mining Code and of rights within the mines. »



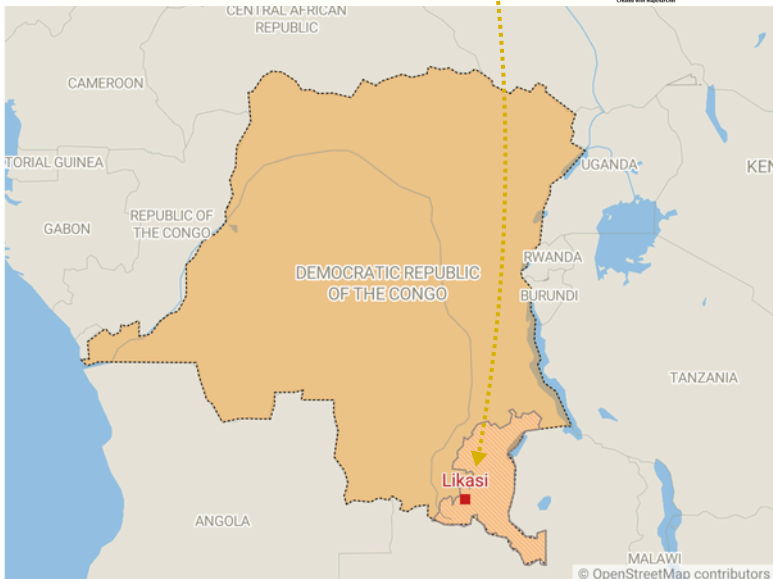
Next Steps


This study, based on field research conducted in Likasi, sheds light on the multiple violations of human rights faced by communities living near mining areas. The documented evidence reveals in particular the exposure of populations to significant health risks, the persistence of child labour in mining activities, as well as serious violations of the rights of women and girls, in a context marked by environmental degradation that constantly undermines the living conditions of local communities.

In response to these findings, the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of the Rosary, with the support of the Dominican network in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will continue its commitment to the communities of Likasi. Through education, training and awareness-raising initiatives, these actions aim to strengthen the capacities of local populations and support the most vulnerable people in the face of the social and health impacts linked to mining activities.

At the same time, Dominicans for Justice and Peace will continue to bring these concerns to international human rights protection mechanisms, particularly within the United Nations. This advocacy work aims to encourage greater accountability from public authorities and economic actors involved in the mining sector, **so that the extraction of natural resources takes place with full respect for human rights, public health, and the environment.**

Location of Likasi, Haut-Katanga Province, DRC.



 Province du Haut-Katanga

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