

Crying For Coal

It feels untouched here in Zambia's deep south but far from the eyes of the world the rights of the local communities are being ignored and the environment is threatened.

The Zambian government has rented large tracts of community land in southern Zambia to foreign mining companies who resent the local people and banned them from earning an income from surface mining on claims of safety. Underground blasting in the mines has caused the water table to drop which means there is no clean water in the shallow wells. The streams in the area have nearly all dried up, and the water that does remain is polluted from the mine. The local women have to dig new scoop wells every day, lining up they take turns filling up buckets. Children play in the dams but the water makes their skin itch, sores appear on their feet and makes them sick.

Extractives Industries (EI) in Africa are extremely profitable but the benefits of natural resources often fail to trickle down to local communities. There is a need to focus on women's rights and opportunities as it is the women who bear the brunt of the negative impacts of mining.

Working with Oxfam this story advocates for local communities to be able earn income by surface mining the coal like they used to, for the mine company to employ at least one family member at 600-800 Kwacha (USD 50-67) a month, and for the community to receive at least ten per cent of mining company's profits for essential services like clinics, schools, roads, water and sanitation.

It is a huge challenge to document the impact the coal mining on local communities, but it is a critical step to help restore their rights to benefit from the natural resources and help protect the environment.