

A YOUTH-LED RESEARCH REPORT

**An assessment of the impact of mining
activities on sexual and reproductive health
among young people.**

A case study of Mazowe district, Zimbabwe.

Supported by



July 2022

PREFACE

In December 2021, Restless Development introduced us to youth-led research methodology. Under this methodology, we as young people were empowered to take the lead at all stages of the research process, from question design to analysis to the conclusions we shared in this report. Most of us were new to the whole research process – and what better way for us to experience it than through a radical and youth-focused approach! Our main goal as researchers was to assess the impact of mining activities on sexual and reproductive health among young people in Mazowe. We invite you to accompany us and the voices of the respondents included in this report by reading about their experiences, challenges, and successes. It was an exciting venture for us as young researchers to talk to amazing young men and women who are battling all odds to access health services in this mining town. With this research paper, we hope to do two things: with our findings, we hope to inform government and development actors about the light of young in accessing SRH services.

The youth-led research that we conducted is a clear example of how you can effectively engage young people from start to finish on a project and attain remarkable results. Young people are best placed to understand and clearly voice issues that their fellow youth are facing. We bring a unique perspective to the table because we can connect with the diverse experiences of our peers. This report is a call to action for all stakeholders to change their concept of youth programming and to invest in approaches that involve young people throughout the process. We would like to heartily thank all the youth researchers for their hard work and commitment in developing this report. We would also like to take this opportunity to convey our special thanks to the Restless Development team for the guidance and insights that they gave us on this research journey. Finally, we would like to acknowledge HIVOS for its genuine interest and investment in young people. We thank you for walking with us through this amazing journey.

Alexio Nguruve, Blessing Jongwe, Emmanuel Marove, Fortune Tapererwa

Young researchers



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KEY TERMINOLOGY AND ACRONYMS

There are many words often used interchangeably to describe participants and activities within this study. For the purposes of this study, we have made a number of semantic choices. Below, we describe what we mean by each of the keywords that we have used.

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
CESHAR	Sexual Health and HIV AIDS Research Zimbabwe
DREAMS	Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe
Guchu	is a traditional herb drink that one consumes to enhance the sexual appetite and also it helps in cleaning the body especially if one has sexually transmitted diseases.
Illegal gold miners	are people who go and do gold panning at illegal mining sites.
Livelihoods	are the capabilities, assets, and activities by which people satisfy their needs or gain a living.
Sexual Reproductive Health in the study	is defined as a person's right to a healthy body and the autonomy, education, and healthcare to freely decide who to have sex with and how to avoid sexually transmitted infections or unintended pregnancy.
Touchline	is defined as an area where young ladies will be soliciting for sex. The touchline term encompasses an area where the illegal miners or even any young boy or men go when he wants to engage in paid sex.

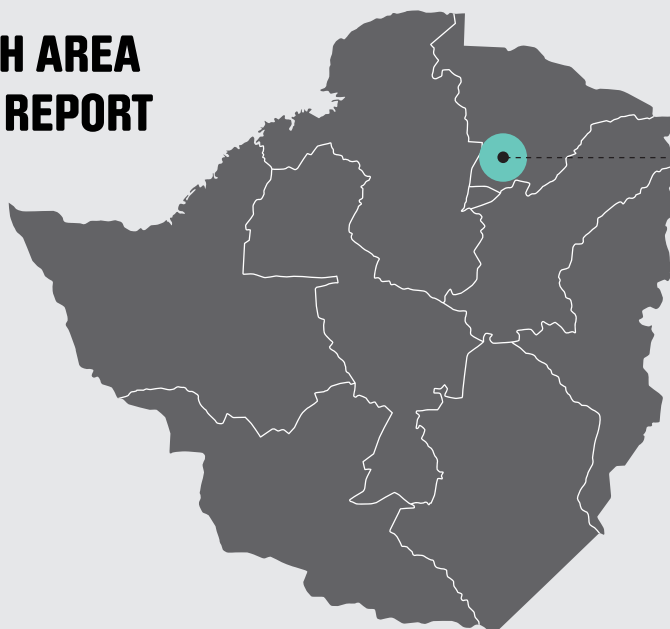
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artisanal Small-scale Mining has become a dominant livelihood strategy in several communities in the districts that have mineral deposits, the main one being gold. Mazowe District has experienced an unprecedented mining boom since the early start of 2019. Its popularity increased dramatically leading to a high influx of people from different areas setting their site on Mazowe.

The study looked at the impact of mining activities on sexual and reproductive health among young people in the area of Mazowe District. The study objectives were to assess the impact of mining activities on Sexual Reproductive Health among young people, to investigate knowledge levels of Sexual Reproductive Health among young people involved in mining activities, and determine the available Sexual Reproductive Health services among young people in mining communities. A qualitative method with Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Semi Structured Interviews (SSIs) was used during the research.

Purposive sampling was employed in the study, the target population were young people working in illegal mining sites aged 18–30 years, and key informants from Health care centre and district officials were recruited as respondents. Respondents chosen were from areas such as Jumbo, Christonbank, and surrounding areas in Concession all in the Mazowe District. The areas were chosen because these are the areas that have illegal gold miners. On the results obtained from the study, mining activities have led to an increase in commercial sex work, child marriage, Gender-Based Violence, and poor sexual behavior among young people. SRH services are available due to the help of community care workers and Organisations such as Centre for Sexual Health and HIV AIDS Research Zimbabwe (CESHHAR) and DREAMS with the support of vendors that sell both SRH products and traditional products such as *guchu* (traditional medicine used to treat STIs). However, unfriendly youth services, inconsistent supply of SRHs, and poor services have led to the low uptake of SRHs among young people in mining activities. Recommendations include staff development of health care workers, educational awareness campaigns, peer-to-peer education, mobile clinics near the illegal mining sites, and the establishment of recreational centers so as to address young people's sexual rights in mining areas.

RESEARCH AREA FOR THIS REPORT



Mazowe district

INTRODUCTION

Consistent evidence characterizes mining as one of the world's most hazardous activities because of the high risk of occupational accidents and toxic exposure among mineworkers and communities.

Generally, mineworkers are considered a population at risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, due to risk behaviors associated with them. Conversely, the current knowledge about the relationship between mining and Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) is limited. Mining activity has become the dominant livelihood strategy in communities that have mineral deposits, the main one being gold. Its popularity increased dramatically due to several factors such as economic hardships. The recent mining boom in Mazowe district, is a scenario of profound SRH inequities, providing a strong rationale for an assessment of the impact of mining activities on sexual and reproductive health among young people. This report serves to address and outline the vital stages and processes undertaken during our research study in Mazowe District. It elaborates how data was collected, analyzed, and validated, thereby coming up with findings and recommendations.

Restless Development believes that young people are best placed to understand and articulate the issues that their fellow young people are facing. This has allowed the research team to bring a unique perspective to the table because of the young researcher's ability to connect with the diverse experiences of their peers. This report is a call to action for all stakeholders to change their concept of youth programming and to invest in approaches that involve young people throughout the process.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Youth Leadership

Restless Development is about one thing: youth leadership. We listen to young people, our work is led by young people, and together we support young people to multiply leadership. This action views youth leadership holistically as depicted in the figure below, illustrating the levels of youth engagement that were used for this research:

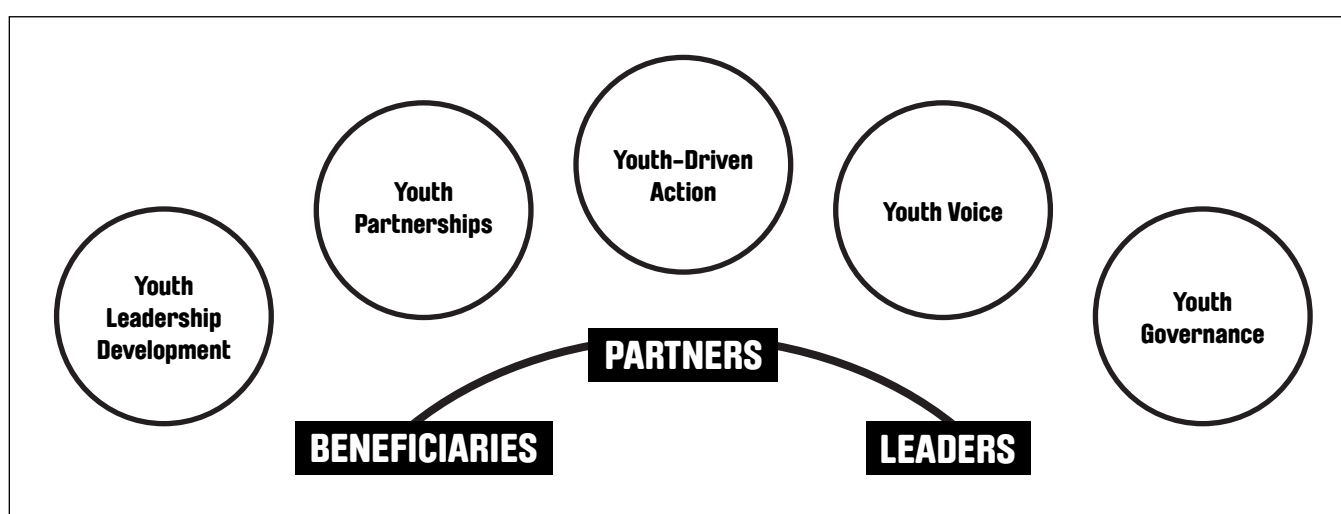


Figure 1 – Youth engagement illustration

Youth-led research

We utilized our youth-led research approach by partnering with young people to capture key insights and evidence on the impact of mining activities on sexual and reproductive health among young people in Mazowe. Our approach is comprised of the following components:

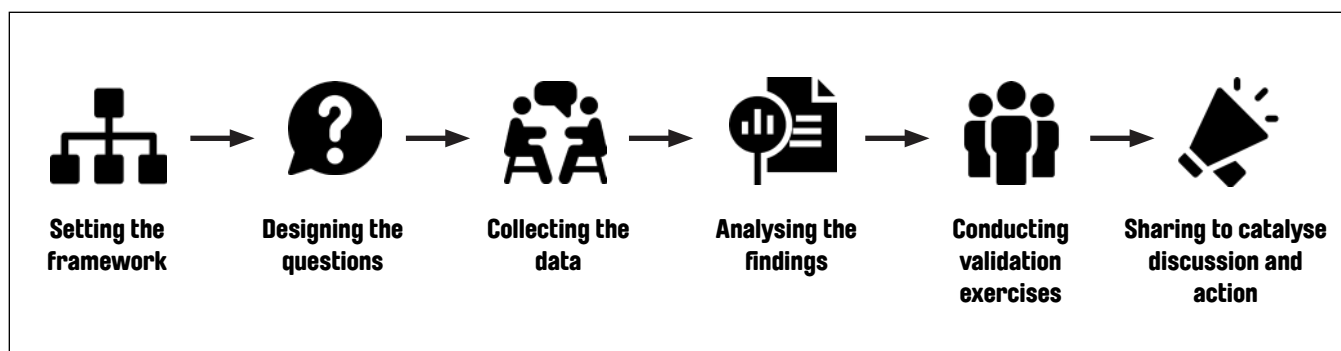


Figure 2 – Youth Research Methodology

What makes this approach unique is that staff and young leaders have clearly defined roles, designed to maximize youth leadership. Using this approach, we trained 5 Young Leaders in quantitative and qualitative

research skills, incorporating their insights into the research tools and supporting them to capture the experience of their peers. They led a research process assessing the impact of mining activities on sexual and reproductive health among young people in Mazowe district. The approach enabled the young people themselves to ask questions based on their priorities, collect stronger data through a deeper rapport and generate better insights on the issues affecting young people in farming compounds.

Research design

The study utilized a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research allowed the research team to gain a first-hand holistic understanding of a phenomenon. The approach enabled us to generate rich data and a comprehensive conception of how mining activities have affected the Sexual Reproductive Health of young people.

Data collection

Data was collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

Data Collection Method	Respondent Type	Sample
Semi-structured interview	Young people living in mining areas and Young people involved in gold panning	26 Young people
Focus Group Discussion	Young people involved in gold panning	32 Young people
Key informant interview	Key stakeholders	5 Key informants

Table 1 – Sampling Matrix

In-depth interviews

The research utilized the use of semi-structured interviews to allow probing and so as to acquire information or data that was essential for the research. A total of 26 young people who work in illegal mining sites were interviewed through this approach.

Key informant interviews

The study was informed by key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders in the districts. The selected key informants included district administrators, teachers, nurses, peer educators, and local leaders (councillors.). The selection and identification of participating individuals or institutions were guided by the direct link to the research question. A total of 5 key informants took part in the research in the Mazowe District (2 from Jumbo, 1 from Christonbank, and 2 from Concession).

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with young people, especially with the gold panners. A total of 4 focus group discussions were conducted. The FGDs were held with small groups (8 young people) to extract ideas, insights, and experiences and validate the information collected through the individual interviews.

Data Analysis

The Young researchers took part in a participatory analysis workshop. At the beginning of this workshop, researchers finalized the transcription of the data, with staff providing quality control and support. Afterward, they were supported to conduct a preliminary deductive thematic analysis of the qualitative data where they drew out general themes emerging from the data that was later condensed into specific findings. They coded, transcribed, and reviewed data according to pre-specified key codes of interest drawn from primary and secondary research questions. They then analyzed the coded data to find emerging patterns that could be developed into themes. We then re-verified themes against our dataset to ensure they were data-driven, and that every emerging theme had a strong basis in our primary data. Finally, we mapped evidence-based themes against one other, drawing connections between them, and then described them in detail.

Data Validation

Restless Development is invested in being data-driven, as such it was important to take the findings back to the farming communities where data was initially collected from. Through this process, young people were given an opportunity to review and interrogate the preliminary findings and see whether or not the report accurately reflected their perspectives and experiences, in the process adjusting anything that did not. This process also allowed respondents to understand what is done with the information that they share. At this touchpoint, respondents had the opportunity to add any further clarifications and for the research team to ask any additional questions that may have emerged from the data collection phase but may have been raised as pertinent during data validation. The first validation exercise took place in Jumbo where we conducted a Focus Group Discussion at Shingirirayi High School. A total of 10 young people were present and the second one was done in Concession where a total of 7 young people came through this.

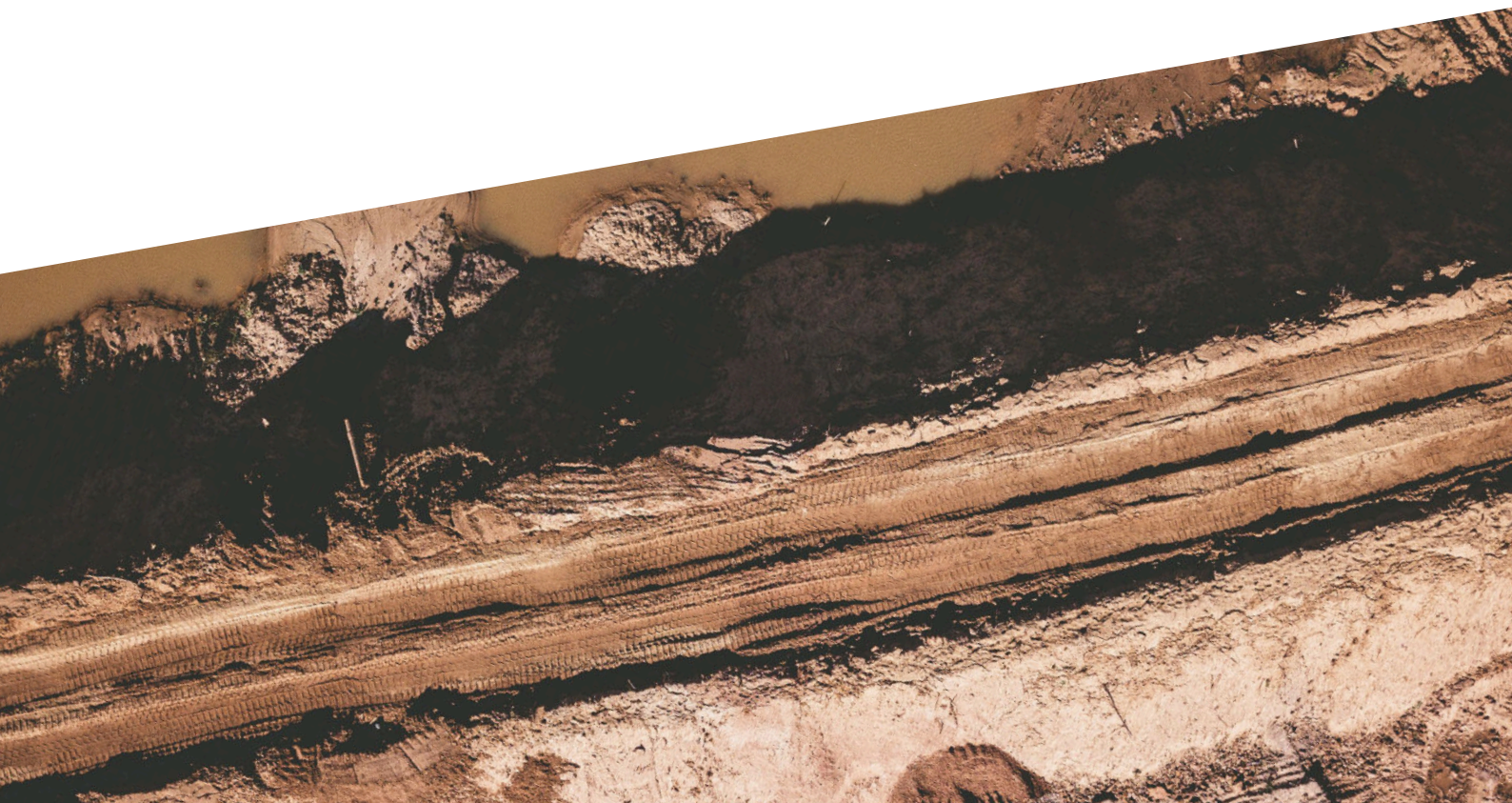
Limitations

- The majority of respondents were not aware of SRH services and this prompted some respondents to shy away during the middle of an interview or give information that is not relevant to the study.
- With most of the target population being either farm workers or gold panners, they are barely available during the day and also not willing to be part of the study.
- Given the resources and time available we could not access more young people to get their valuable insights.
- Insights from young people living with disability are missing. This demographic is often isolated. More research focusing on how disability intersects with child marriages will be key.

Conversations for Action

Conversations for Action are an integral part of every research that Restless Development conducts; this is why from the onset we are deliberate and clear on how we plan to use the findings with the intention to inform and influence. Restless Development has moved from simply disseminating findings to triggering impactful discussions by sharing findings in spaces where decisions are made. The research team presented its findings at the local, district, and national levels. The following are some of the recommendations made by the decision-makers at the Community and District levels through conversations for action.

- Lobby Government for **mobile clinics** operating at mining sites so that young people can have access to SRH services.
- **Roll out In-school and out-of-school SRH sessions** to ensure that people have comprehensive sexuality education.
- Clinics have to offer **free comprehensive health services** which range from prevention treatment, and rehabilitation services for Sexual Reproductive Health and substance abuse.
- **Create youth hubs** through the Ministry of Youth and Social Amenities.
- **Lobby for young people to get land** so as to improve their sources of income.
- Establishment of a **drug Rehabilitation center** is required in the district so as to cater for young people who are involved in drug use.
- **Construct** clinics and more schools especially in mining and farming areas.
- **Effective collaboration** between Organizations and Government Ministries to ensure that young people participate in decision-making processes.



FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We found that

There is a **low level of sexual health knowledge** among young people who work at illegal mines. There is a belief that there is no pleasure in having protected sexual intercourse. Young People rely on myths about HIV and STI infection. Most young people believe that you will be unlucky if you contract HIV. Such myths affect young people as they end up involved in risky sexual behavior such as having unprotected thereby exposing them to STIs.

“It depends on your body and blood, there are so many people who have sex with different partners but they have never had any infection...You can just be unlucky and you can end up infected with HIV or a sexually transmitted infection.” – *Young person*

“Honestly, I have no time for condoms. It is like eating a sweet while covered in plastic Honestly, there is no taste we all know that...” – *Young person*

How can we do it differently?

There is a need for the Government and stakeholders to raise **sexual health awareness** among young people particularly in mining areas, as an initiative to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Non Governmental Organizations and other civil society organizations should implement a holistic behavioral change by educating young people about sexual reproductive health starting from the school level to the community level. Awareness can be raised through awareness campaigns or even mobile outreaches. In doing so there is a need to explain the importance of condom use. This will help to increase the uptake of SRH services; young people making informed decisions and prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections in these remote communities. The awareness should be held continuously such that the hard-to-reach young people who work in mines are informed and are prepared to make informed decisions about their Sexual Reproductive Health.

“Young people should be provided with adequate sexual education so that we remove the misconceptions that they have.” – *Community leader*

“If we want to improve the uptake of SRHs among young people there is a need to first educate them on the importance of getting the services.” – *Key Informant*

We found that

Child pregnancies have increased in the nearby communities as illegal gold miners lure school children into sexual relationships. Poverty in the rural areas has driven young girls to have relationships with the miners. The need to have money pushes vulnerable girls into child marriages with gold panners simply because they have money as compared to the other men surrounding mining areas. Poverty and low levels of SRH knowledge among the young rural girls affect them as they do not make informed decisions about their sexuality.

“The illegal gold miners have caused an increase in teenage pregnancy in our area as young girls are lured by the cars they see the miners have.” – *Community leader*

“Poverty in this community has led to many young girls being impregnated by gold miners who usually have money to buy stuff which young girls which to have.”

How can we do it differently?

Educating girls and women on Sexual Reproductive Health, so that they are able to make informed decisions. Providing girls with **livelihood opportunities** like microfinance loans is an effective way to prevent child marriages that occur as a result of financial need. Organizations have to provide livelihood initiatives for young girls, this will **empower them** so that they do not get involved in relationships to get basic needs. Livelihoods will also help teenage mothers to provide for their families.

“Young girls need to be educated on the importance of remaining independent ... we need to support and empower them to acquire income.” – *Community member*

We found that

Substance abuse (alcohol and drug) has impacted the SRH of young people in mines as young people need to unwind and relax after getting paid or sharing the money, so drinking and sex are the most available diversionary activities at mining sites. **Lack of entertainment** is the reason young illegal miners spent most of their time drinking alcohol, sleeping with commercial sex workers, and not making informed decisions. There is a nexus between alcohol and unsafe sex among young people.

“When I am sober, I always know the dangers of having multiple sex partners without protection but once I smoke some weed all those thoughts fly out of my mind and end up in unprotected sex.” – *Young Gold Panner*

“Drug use among young people may be one of the biggest triggers why they get involved in risky sexual behavior. It is obvious when one is drunk he or she does not think straight.”

– Community leader

“Lack of entertainment leads to us abusing drugs and also going out to find commercial sex workers who entertain us.”

– Young person

How can we do it differently?

There is a need for the government to officially recognize these illegal gold miners and provide **recreational services** like gyms, parks, and other amenities to increase engagement and prevent substance abuse. There is also a need for the ministry of health through the sexual health promotion service to **raise awareness of the impact of substance abuse**. More importantly, there is a need for the Government to have clear policies and strategies that support communities to desist from using drugs using community-based methods.

“We need recreational services that keep us entertained, it helps to keep me occupied and thereby helping me not to go to do drugs.”

– Young person

We found that

Peer pressure among young people involved in mining activities has led to multiple relationships. It is common for young people involved in mining activities to have many partners and to pay for sex from commercial sex workers. Having multiple sexual partners is a symbol of wealth and status and most feel the need to have that.

“When we are talking as guys, the only thing we talk about is having multiple sexual partners and we usually give credit to a person who has many girlfriends, especially young girls.”

– Young person

“If you want to show people that you are loaded with money one has to have many girlfriends whom he is able to spoil with flashy things.”

– Young person

How can we do it differently?

There is a need for **peer-to-peer education**, this will help improve access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information among young people especially the hard-to-reach ones like illegal miners. Sensitive information is easier between people of the same age group.

“It is good for us to have other young people, especially the influential gold panners who educate us on SRHs... older people are boring.”

– Young person

We found that

Young people do not often have their spouses or family as they migrate alone to the mining sites, a situation that creates a desire to hire sex workers or approach young girls in the nearby areas to find sexual partners to satisfy them. **Prolonged periods of staying away from home** have led to extra-marital relationships and sometimes expose minors to sexually transmitted infections as they resort to commercial sex workers to satisfy their sexual drive. In some cases, the young illegal gold miners have sexual relationships with school-going age who are not aware of their Sexual Reproductive Rights.

“ You know this work of gold panning takes me away from home for a long period of time, sometimes close to five months without a wife. As a man, I can’t go for five months without seeing a woman... I will have no option but to go to these touchlines and pay for sex and sometimes pay for unprotected sex. ” – *Young person*

“ We have a lot of commercial sex workers, what should I do as a man if I do not get sex (LAUGHS) obvious I do what works which is to buy for sex. ” – *Young person*

We found that

There is been an **increase in commercial sex work business at the illegal mines**. Many people flock to the mines as they are lucrative businesses. Many commercial sex workers come to the illegal mines because of high demand, increased prices, financial independence, and quick money, unlike in other areas where there are no mining activities. Young girls as young as 11 years come to the mines and are involved in commercial sex work so as to get money. This has contributed to the rise of HIV and STI transmissions as they are different prices for protected and unprotected sex. Most commercial sex workers opt for unprotective sex so as to get more money.

“ Young girls from the ages of 13 are exposed to money and flashy stuff they are ending up engaging into activities such being involved commercial sex work at the Touchline area. ” – *Young person*

“ We have a lot of people from different Districts that come to do business in this community and for the ladies that come some of them are involved in commercial sex work others selling food or clothes. ” – *Young person*

“ Commercial sex work is easy money at mining sites this is because most of the men usually leave their families behind so they pay for sex with a good price. ” – *Young person*

How can we do it differently?

Providing **vocational training** to commercial sex workers who wish to exit sex work. There is also a need for programs like HIV testing, treatment for sexually transmitted infections, treatment for HIV-infected, consistent condom use, and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to be taken to scale with sufficient intensity and that they include the most vulnerable and difficult to reach, that is, young women.

We found that

Women are abused at illegal mining sites by fellow male miners. The levels of abuse vary, but include, in most cases, grievous bodily harm and rape. In addition to rape, some women and girls are grievously injured in brawls, during raids by police, and, in some cases of commercial sex workers in particular, during fights between their clients for their services. **Sexual harassment** through the use of abusive language that denigrates women is greatly used. The common language used is sexist and filled with sarcasm about women's genitalia and this results in loss of confidence and emotional trauma each time they are confronted by men. When cases are reported to the police they are negligent to take action as they think that people working at the illegal miners are always involved in bad behavior and are able to resolve their cases alone.

“Operating in such environments makes us feel uncomfortable and we endure stress and depression. Unfortunately, due to poverty, we are left with no option but to painfully endure this daily torture.” – Young woman

How can we do it differently?

Engage and train the young men and boys as **change agents** to transform discriminatory gender norms, and dispel the stereotypes, myths, and beliefs that drive abuse. There is a need to increase awareness of sexual exploitation as a means of preventing abuse against marginalized women and girls. Set up a safe, accessible, and confidential **gender-based violence complaints desk** that enables young girls and women to report any form of abuse, and ensure that there is an effective response mechanism.

We found that

Poor health services are a key reason why there is low uptake of SRHRs in the area among young people. Although there are nearby clinics at the mining sites, the SRH services such as condoms and HIV testing are usually **unavailable and inaccessible**. This is because when the mining sites were owned by private companies, the clinics were fully supplied by the company. The closure of the companies meant that no company was providing medical services and people had to rely on donations which are not constantly provided. Health workers such as doctors are not constantly available to attend to people. This sometimes leads to many people staying long periods without treatment because there is no treatment that is readily available at the health facilities.

“Whenever we go to the public clinics we are being told that they are no free condoms so as a result we no longer see the need to go to access Sexual Reproductive Services.” – Young person

“Mmmm the clinics at this area are not functional every time you go there for STI treatment they always say the treatment is not available.” – Young person

How can we do it differently?

Government should continuously provide Basic SRH supplies in clinics so as to ensure that young people can get services anytime. Condoms should be free or at a low cost. Organizations can also provide **mobile clinics** which can be stationed at the illegal mining sites such that they are able to reach out to the young people at any given time.

We found that

Unfriendly youth services are one of the challenges that deter young people from accessing SRH services, especially STI treatment leading to continuous spreading of the infection, only to present late at treatment centers when the situation becomes serious. The health workers usually exhibit a negative attitude when young people come for treatment. Most of the health workers at the health facilities are older people and believe that young people are mischievous as such the attitude is negative even from the first encounter.

“The problem is going to the clinic when I am infected with sexually transmitted infections, the nurse will just embarrass me, sometimes they ask me to bring the woman I slept with... honestly that’s embarrassing I would rather seek traditional herbs than to go to the clinic.” – Young person

“I once went to the clinic for STI treatment and I was not happy because after telling one of the nurses that I had an STI she gave me a judgmental look that I will never forget.” – Young person

How can we do it differently?

There is a need for the Government through the Ministry of Health to **capacitate health workers** such as nurses and peer educators to provide youth-friendly services. Training should also help improve welcoming and nonjudgmental attitudes; privacy, confidentiality, and affordability. This will help in increasing the uptake of SRH services by young people thereby reducing the rate of STI and HIV transmission.

“The health workers that we have are experienced what is just needed is for them to be trained on how to handle young people who come to obtain services.” – Young person

Commitments by Members of the National Assembly

A national Dialogue meeting was held with Members of the Parliament from the Youth and Health Portfolio Committee. The following are the commitments made by the **Honourable Members of parliament**:

- **Lobby** as Members of Parliament for clinics in every 5 km radius.
- **Increase joint synergies** between the health and youth committees so as to compliment all health efforts.
- There is a Youth Bill that hasn't been presented in parliament the Youth Portfolio Committee of **Youth will push for the Bill to be passed**. Without a Youth Bill it means there is no law for the youths. The bill should talk about every sector of the economy believed to affect the youth including health.
- **Policy alignment** on age of consent, we will accelerate the amendment of section 35.
- For **Empowerment** there are policies and initiatives that are already there which include Venture Capital. We will ensure that the venture Capital benefits young people in the whole country (All Districts).
- We will **engage** the committee on Primary and Secondary Education and the committee on Secondary and Tertiary Education for the construction of educational facilities. This will help to ensure that young people have access to low-cost education.

CONCLUSION

Our findings identified that mining activities among young people have resulted in high rate of STIs due to the fact that miners tend to engage in unprotected paid sex with sex workers. Additionally, substance abuse (alcohol and drug) has impacted the SRH of young people in mining areas. Drinking and sex are the most available diversionary activities at mining sites so they are a close association between alcohol and unsafe sex. Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls in the mining hotspot areas, with the most commonly reported forms being physical violence, sexual assault, and emotional abuse, followed by sexual violence. This research has unearthed some deep-rooted problem that is continuously brewing in mining areas caused by illegal gold mining, we believe that this research is only the tip of the iceberg and the Government needs to do more in preventing illegal gold mining. Looking forward, more research around the intersectionalities of illegal gold mining be crucial to gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges that young people face in similar circumstances face.

RESEARCHER PROFILES



Alexio Junior Nguruve

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District: Mazowe
Occupation: Small Scale Farmer
Age: 22
Interests: Listening to music



Blessing Itayi Jongwe

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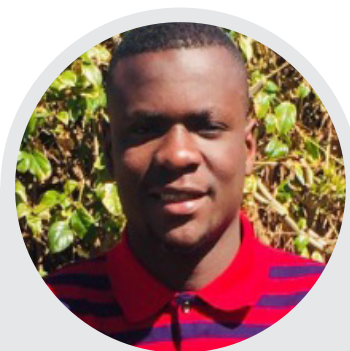
District: Mazowe
Occupation: Entrepreneur
Age: 29
Interests: Travelling



Emmanuel Marove

.....

District: Mazowe
Occupation: Entrepreneur
Age: 26
Interests: Watching Soccer



Fortune Lion Tapererwa

.....

District: Mazowe
Occupation: Entrepreneur
Age: 22
Interests: Listening to music

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