



POLICY BRIEF

Mining Fragments in the Districts of Mavago and Lago in Niassa Province¹

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union (EU). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU.

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1 This publication was produced under the project 'Towards an Inclusive and Peaceful Society in Mozambique' – TIPS, with the financial support of the European Union.



The Network
for Religious
& Traditional
Peacemakers



This project is funded
by the European Union

The exploration, mining, and management of natural resources in Mozambique has been one of the main topics debated in the country. Among other factors, this is because countless conflicts and tensions have arisen based on resource exploration and management.

Although Mozambique is rich in natural resources, there have been few benefits for the country, particularly for the communities living near the areas where the resources are exploited. A recent research report produced by IESE under the European Union-funded 'Towards Peaceful and Inclusive Societies' ('TIPS) project brought attention to the feeling of exclusion experienced by communities in accessing natural resources. This exclusion is notably linked to political party affiliation, particularly in the Niassa province,² where members or supporters of the Renamo opposition party claimed to be excluded in favour of members of the ruling Frelimo Party. The report also highlighted that, despite the perception locally that members of Frelimo have more privileges than members of the opposition, they also face many difficulties in access to the management and exploration of natural resources, underlining the complexity of the situation.

The aim of this policy brief is to further outline this issue of resources linked to political party affiliation highlighted in the above-mentioned research report. The findings are based on the analysis of Ntaka Wetu, an association of veterans of Msawize in Mavago district, and of four cooperatives (2nd Congress, 3rd February, 16 June and 1 May) of Lupilichi, in Lago district, led by senior members of the Frelimo Party in Niassa province. These two districts stand out because they have been the places where the impact of party affiliation on natural resource exploration was most prominent. It was found that the exclusion of members and supporters of opposition political parties in access to mining in these places is a potential source of social discontent with unpredictable consequences. Exclusion based on party affiliation, as well as acts of violence that have been practiced systematically, supposedly to put an end to "illegal mining", may lead to the

² See, for example, Rantala (2022).

radicalization of young people or the emergence of fertile ground for their recruitment by groups opposed to the State, like Al Shabaab³.

The findings of this policy brief result from semi-structured interviews held between June and July 2021 in Lichinga city and in Mavago and Lago districts in Niassa province, involving informal miners, civil society organisations (CSOs), and state employees.

When Party Affiliation Guarantees Access to Mining

The Mavago district is regarded as one of the most important ruby zones in Mozambique. In Mavago, Ntaka Wetu (Our Wealth), has a license to mine rubies within an area of 130 hectares in Lilasse in the Msawizi Administrative Post, within the Niassa Reserve. Ntaka Wetu consists of 160 members, all of them Frelimo veterans of the Independence war. According to its members, the ruby mining concession in Lilasse was granted to Ntaka Wetu in 2015 by the State with the support of the Frelimo Party. While there are many Frelimo veterans mining in this area, members of opposition parties, particularly Renamo,⁴ are excluded. For Ntaka Wetu, the opposition "will only be accepted in informal mining when the government [Frelimo] says so [authorities]"⁵.

³ Al Shabaab is an armed group which, since October 2017, has been attacking the civilian population and State infrastructures, particularly in the north of the country, demanding, among other things, the establishment of an Islamic State in Mozambique.

⁴ Local sources say that the discovery of rubies occurred between 2008 and 2009, when a peasant and his children discovered mysterious red stones on the banks of the Luatizi River in Msawize. Without knowing what they were, or their real value, they handed them to a Tanzanian citizen who, in exchange, gave them some money. This fact attracted citizens from several African countries.

⁵ Interview with L. Amisse, 8 July 2021, Lilasse, Msawizi

In Lago district, particularly in the locality of Lupilichi, the exclusion of access to natural resources is also expressed based on political party affiliation. All the leaders of the four cooperatives involved in the exploitation of rubies mentioned above hold important positions in the Frelimo Party, including as deputies of the Provincial Assembly and local Frelimo Party secretaries. Two of the four cooperatives involved in informal mining in that area have names that are linked to the Frelimo Party – such as, for example, the ‘2nd Congress’ cooperative, whose name refers to the Second Congress of Frelimo held in that region in 1968; and the ‘3 February’ cooperative, referring to the death of the first President of Frelimo, Eduardo Mondlane, on 3 February 1969⁶.

Just as in Mavago, the existence of other parties is not tolerated in Lupilichi. Individuals affiliated with opposition parties are excluded from mining mineral resources or from joining the local cooperatives or mining associations, even from farming in places near the mining areas. These individuals and their relatives are regularly targets of harassment. In the informal mining areas operated by the veterans in Lupilichi, as well as in the office of the President of the four cooperatives, only the flags of Frelimo are flown.

Not Everything is “A Bed of Roses” for Members of the Ruling Party

While artisanal miners with Frelimo affiliation may enjoy certain privileges, they pale in comparison to the significant wealth amassed through natural resource extraction by powerful Frelimo members such as Raimundo Pachinuapa. Pachinuapa owns renowned ruby mines in Montepuez (through Mozambique Ruby Mining) and the gold mines in Nairoto (through Nairoto Resources Limitada) that both operate in partnership with multinational capital. The Niassa veterans and other Frelimo members subject of this study are mere “poor relatives”⁷ when juxtaposed with these affluent figures.

⁶ See the composition of the membership of the “3 February”, “16 June” and “1 May” cooperatives here: Boletim da Republica No 223, 3rd Series, of 20 November 2020. As for the “2nd Congress” Cooperative, see Boletim da Republica No. 205, 3rd Series, 27 October 2020.

⁷ Between 2014 and 2022, the mines of Montepuez operated in partnership with the British company Gemfields, yielded US\$ 827.1 million. See Club of Mozambique (2022).

In fact, the Frelimo veterans and other informal miners in Lupilichi and Msawzi face countless difficulties, such as the lack of means to mine mineral resources, the absence of basic facilities such as electricity to undertake this type of activity, and difficulties in access to the market and to credit or to renew their mining licenses, among others. In 2018, for example, the State banned the Ntaka Wetu association from carrying out its activities on the grounds that its license had expired (CAIC 2018). One of the difficulties for renewing mining licenses is the cost, which is beyond the local informal miners’ reach. A further difficulty is the enormous amount of red tape involved, and the lack of identification documents, which are almost impossible to obtain locally.

The difficulty in establishing partnerships, particularly with national or foreign investors, is also one of the limitations, not only for Ntaka Wetu, but for all the local informal miners.

The conflict between the veterans (and other operators of natural resources) and the Niassa Special Reserve is also one of the characteristic marks of mining both in Msawazi and in Lupilichi. These are old conflicts, and they seem to have no solution in sight. Because of this, the veterans have presented constant complaints, not only to solve the above-mentioned problems, but also to claim greater access in the exploration of natural resources⁸.

In 2012, for example, the veterans complained to former President Armando Guebuza against the actions of the Niassa Special Reserve as well as the police (African Review 2012). The veterans said that many of their children – who, in practice, are the ones who participate in the mining activities as their parents are now elderly – have been victims of expropriation and imprisonment. Often, they are only released after paying large sums in bail. Furthermore, mining in these places (Msawize and Lupilichi) is also characterized by the presence of thousands of foreign citizens, particularly from Tanzania and from some countries of the Great Lakes region. They have also invariably been victims of expropriation and of expulsion from the country, accused of illegal mining and of poaching in the Niassa Special Reserve.

⁸ This was not the first time that the veterans demanded access to mining. See, for example, Noticias (2018).

In 2022, the persistence of these conflicts led the veterans to demand from the Niassa government more opportunities in access to mining for rubies, in addition to lodging complains regarding the ill-treatment they received at the hands of the guards of the Niassa Special Reserve (Yussuf 2022).

However, even if the veterans and other Frelimo members involved in mining in Niassa continue to show loyalty to the party, and their socio-economic condition is relatively better than that of members of the opposition parties, the difficulties they face and the marginalization of the opposition and its members are factors that can lead to the eruption of more violent conflicts. It should be stressed that it was acts of violence against informal ruby miners in Montepuez carried out by State agents which, among other factors, contributed to the recruitment of young people to join the ranks of Al Shabaab in Cabo Delgado. It should also be recalled that the radicalization of a young man from Niassa named Maulana Ali Cássimo, who was one of the most visible faces of the insurgency (before he was killed by government forces in late 2021), is partly explained by his indignation at the attitude of the authorities towards the informal miners of Mariri, in the Mbamba locality, in Mecula district, and towards poachers in the Niassa Reserve (Feijó 2021)⁹.

Recommendations

To improve the environment for the exploration and management of natural resources in the districts mentioned in this study, the following actions are suggested:

1. Ensure greater transparency and equity in access to the management and exploration of natural resources.

Complaints of exclusion in access to natural or other resources because of political party affiliation, are a constant in the Mozambican political context and are not exclusive to the districts covered by the study. This highly critical aspect for the political stability of the country should be debated and solved without taboos. One of the ways of solving it involved guaranteeing that access to the exploitation and management of natural resources is not granted merely on the grounds of party-political criteria but based on the requirements demanded and envisaged in the law. It also involves the political parties making their members and supporters aware that nobody should be excluded from access to any type of opportunity because of their political affiliation. Otherwise, this phenomenon may become a vicious cycle if an opposition party comes to power.

2. Provide technical and financial support for local informal miners.

Although access has been granted to some local communities to mine natural resources, particularly rubies and gold, they lack adequate technical knowledge and financial resources. The State, in collaboration with the local communities, could set up mechanisms making it possible to minimize these obstacles. These mechanisms could involve, among others, assisting in the establishment of partnerships between local communities and private companies; and constantly training the local communities in technical knowledge that allows them to sustainably mine their resources.

⁹ On the violence against the informal miners in Montepuez, see, Chichava (2020). On Maulana Ali, see Chichava (2022).

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