RUTILE: THE UNFULFILLED PROMISES
Three decades in waiting...
In 2015 Komba Mathew Sam was in the corporate world as a banker when the diamond mining giant Koidu Limited was dragged to court over unpaid taxes. Little did he know that two years later, he would be dealing directly with the issue.

Koidu Limited, one of the top two mining companies in Sierra Leone, is a subsidiary of the Israeli owned OCTEA Limited, which has a 25-year lease to mine a 4.9 km² land area in Koidu, the headquarters of Kono District, the heartland of the country's diamond riches.

Prior to its civil war (1991-2002), diamonds were the mainstay of Sierra Leone's economy. Kono and its eastern neighbor, Kenema, were at the heart of the mining activities. It is in Kono that three of the world's 20 largest diamonds were found - from the Woyie River Diamond in 1945, which weighed 770 carats and ranks 6th biggest in the world, to the Star of Sierra Leone in 1972 which weighed 968.9 carats and ranks 4th in the world. Most recently, in 2017, the 'Peace Diamond' was discovered in another village in Kono, weighing 709 carats and earning the title of being the world's 14th largest...

Welcome to another edition of the NACE Newsletter.

In this issue our team travelled across all major mining communities in the country. We also used a completely different approach by collaborating with independent journalists and giving them the free hand to investigate and report on issues that we have always advocated around.

In this issue they reported on the lives of people living in mining communities, some of which have been and continue to serve as hosts of the country’s natural resources.

It is because of them that we are taking stalk of the extractives sector. It is because of them that we lobby for policies that are pro-people and advocate with passion for openness and political accountability in the extractives sector.

We want to thank OSIWA and all members of the coalition for supporting our work.

HAPPY READING
by over a decade of excavation by Koidu Limited. It takes him about a week to gather enough stones that can earn him about Le 30,000 (US$4), just enough to take care of three days' meals.

In most days, the foot of this artificial mountain is crowded with people, many of them women carrying babies on their backs, mining stones.

**Corporate Greed**

While some blame this state of affairs on mismanagement of its resources, many Kono residents point to corporate greed for the deprivation of their district.

But one thing everyone seems to agree on is that weak laws, lack of appropriate policies and failure to enforce regulations have all contributed to the situation. Consequently, the grievances of the Kono people range from environmental destruction, to issues arising from involuntary resettlement schemes, to alleged human rights violations of workers and unmet financial obligations to the local authorities.

According to the 2009 Mines and Minerals Act, mining communities are entitled to about half a dozen forms of payments from companies and other license holders, including surface rent, property tax, community development fund, and profit sharing. Besides concerns about the impact of these payments, activists and local authorities say the miners hardly adhere to them. An even more thorny issue has been the payment of property tax.

What makes this issue important is the refusal of Koidu Limited, which is the largest company in the district, to comply with it.

In 2004, following the end of the war, the Sierra Leone government introduced a policy that seeks to devolve functions, powers and services to local councils, as part of efforts to decentralize governance. The 2004 Local Government Act, which paved the way for this, requires every business entity operating within a local council authority to pay property tax.

But Koidu Limited argues that its agreement with the government exempts it from paying property tax.

Mr Sam was elected Mayor in the March 2018 general elections, as part of a political revolution that swept through Kono. Like almost every Kono native, the new mayor, in office only three months at the time of this interview in August 2018, said contrary to his expectations, mining was doing more harm to the district than good.

“Before becoming the mayor, it was my perception that being the mayor I will be home and dry in terms of revenue generation, more so from the giant mining companies. And that’s also the perception of the people. But as I speak to you, the opposite is the case,” he said.

Documents provided by the Council show that, among several businesses that include modern housing units, canteens, European and African style supermarkets, Koidu Limited also has about 50 drilling and power generation machines and what’s believed to be the second biggest diamond washing plant in Africa, which works 180 tons per hour. It also listed a 10 wheel loader, 7 graders, 7 truck trailers, 22 bulldozers, 45 ADT dumpers and 17 excavators. This combined property is estimated to bring in tens of thousands of US Dollars annually to the Council.

Council officials hope to use this to fill the huge gap in its annual budget, on top of its own-source revenue which stands at a paltry 45 percent. They say it would allow them to undertake tangible developments that will positively impact lives of the ordinary people who are directly affected by the mining activities of the company.

**POlitical Division**

The row over Koidu Limited’s refusal to pay property tax has been on over the last 10 years, starting with the administration of Mary Musa, the first and only female to have occupied the Koidu mayoral sit since 2004, when local councils were reintroduced. She served until 2008. Her two successors, among them Sam’s predecessor, Saa Emmerson Lamina, also took the property tax issue on unsuccessfully.

But it was Lamina who brought the issue to the attention of the outside world with his landmark suit.

According to documents he filed at the High Courts in Freetown in 2015, OCTEA owed the city council some Le2.7bn (US$500,000) in unpaid property taxes. High Court judge, Bintu Alhadi, however subsequently ruled in April 2016 that OCTEA Group, which was mentioned as the first defendant, wasn’t a registered company in Sierra Leone, owned no mining license and therefore wasn’t liable to pay property tax to the council.

Division among the major stakeholders in Kono is also a culprit for the state of the district. This disagreement has been particularly exhibited through sharp political differences.

For the last 10 years, the All Peoples Congress (APC) dominated politics in Kono and the rest of the country. Lamina was elected mayor under the party’s ticket in 2012. Shortly after his
court action against OCTEA, he was unceremoniously removed from office.

Although the government at the time accused him of financial impropriety, which was never proven by investigations, it said it mounted, it was widely believed that Lamina’s removal had something to do with the court action. That and several other issues led to the creation of the Coalition for Change (C4C) party, which has its stronghold in Kono.

Like Mayor Sam, it was under C4C’s ticket that Lamina was elected MP in the 2018 polls. He is now chairman of the parliamentary committee on Mines and he says plans were underway to review the Minerals Act.

"Mining companies are getting holiday and this has allowed them to trample on the people. The people are more less squatters in their own lands," he said, adding: “Even those things they are supposed to do by law, they are not adhering to them, like publishing their profit every year. Community people are not represented in these companies enough to know what is happening and what they are getting.”

According to Lamina, the long absence of a mining policy (the first was only created about two years ago), has led to the near unchecked destruction of the environment in the last decade, mostly due to the unregulated artisanal mining sector, but also due to the activities of the multinationals.

Many communities have lost important landmarks to both corporate and artisanal mining activities in Kono, including sacred graveyards and ‘Bondo’ bushes, and even water access points. Mined-out pits have created artificial lakes which have also become death traps in communities.

According to Lamina, certain aspects of the mining agreement with Koidu Limited, like surface rents, are supposed to be negotiable, but he said that license holders pay whatever they feel, whenever they feel to do so.

The Community Development Fund, a provision in the Minerals Act, has only been paid once (in 2016) since the law came into effect, according to the City Council. It was paid by Koidu Limited.

“I realized that I have inherited an uphill task as far as mining activities are concerned... A lot of gray areas. A lot of concerns need to be addressed,” says Lamina.

The carrot approach

A spokesman for Koidu Limited declined to comment specifically on the issue of property tax, citing its legal nature. Henry Vagg, Director of Community Affairs, however referred this writer to a previous statement issued by its legal representatives following the court ruling on the matter in 2016. That statement reiterated the company’s longstanding argument that its agreement with the government, which was ratified by parliament, takes precedence over any other law.

Mr Vagg however stressed that Koidu Limited was meeting all its financial obligations to the government and host communities.

This position of the company is enforced by Paramount Chief Paul Ngaba Saquee (V), one of the most prominent representatives of local interests in the investment of Koidu Limited. The company’s concession falls within Tankoro Chiefdom, which is under Saquee’s jurisdiction.

Critics of the company, and there are endless of them, believe it couldn’t have gotten its way amidst all the allegations levied against it, without the backing of the Chief.

Chief Saquee though dismissed this thought, attributing it to ignorance. He said the company was right as far as its agreement with the government is concerned, and he blamed the government for failing to fully implement the agreement, which he says contains far more beneficial contents than what critics tend to focus on.

"People blame chiefs because we are the custodians of the law. Our people cannot see how companies can mine without the agreement of the chiefs. And they are not even au fait with the laws, which says mineral rights belong to the central government," he said.

Mr Saquee added that whatever the grievances, the fact that the agreement had parliamentary approval, makes it a binding document.

"The law is the law," he stressed. Meanwhile, Mayor Komba Sam is unsure of what to do about the lack of compliance of mining companies, especially with regards the Property Tax issue. He is sure though that he doesn’t want to go to court, at least not so early. He plans to present his concerns through the ‘carrot’ approach.

"I know that my people are now thinking what the new Mayor is going to do. But the answer is simple. I want to have a different approach," he said.

Mayor Sam also hopes that new President Julius Maada Bio’s Executive Order – suspending all tax exemptions for companies – will extend to those operating within Koidu.

Just days into office, President Bio issued a series of Executive Orders in April as part of his clampdown on wastage in the economy. Among others, it suspended tax and duty waivers to all companies, including those holding agreements ratified by parliament. Chief Saquee says there is hope at the end of the tunnel, especially in light of the initial steps of the new government.

“I am very optimistic about what this government has done initially. First of all, the current chairman of the mining committee in the legislature is a Kono man. And then we have the Minister of Mines is a Kono. Maybe in other words, the president is saying you know what: You go and solve your problems as Kono people. Maybe that is the message that he is sending to us,” he said.
I t’s almost impossible to discuss modern day diamond mining in Sierra Leone without mentioning Paul Ngaba Saquee. He is the Paramount Chief of Tankoro, one of 14 chiefdoms in the Kono district, which is host to the most lucrative mining concession operated by Koidu Limited, a subsidiary of OCTEA.

Chief Saquee has come under heavy criticism, particularly among people affected by the activities of Koidu Limited. Most of those who have issues with the company’s investment say it’s getting away with its excesses, including human rights violations and unfulfilled financial obligations to local communities, because it has the backing of powerful traditional rulers like Saquee.

From the “forcefully” relocated families to aggrieved workers and dismissed workers, almost everyone has unfavourable words for the Chief.

In this interview with Kemo Cham, Chief Saquee opens up about his relationship with Koidu Limited, which is also referred to as OCTEA, his views on the management of Kono’s mineral resources, as well as his frustration with people he considers as ill-informed, who think he is an accomplice in the company’s alleged exploitation of their land.

Please read on:

Kemo Cham: Do you think mining has benefitted the people of Kono in anyway?

PC Saquee: I think it’s a question of the way you are looking at the glass. If you are a pessimist you will say it is half empty. If you are an optimist you will say it is half full. In essence, what I am saying is that yes, Kono has derived some benefits from mining. But as a Kono man, do I think that Kono has benefitted as much as it’s supposed to? I will say no.

That’s interesting coming from you. But why would you say so?

I think it has to do with the system of government that we have and the laws. As a tribe, we [Kono people] form less than 10 percent of the population of Sierra Leone, and most decisions are taken based on a democratic process, whether it is in the house of parliament or whether it is in the cabinet. I am not a tribalist, but it is just a fact of life that at every given time you have the two major tribes [Temne and Mende] that can come together and pull more votes.

Why is number important in this case?

**A panoramic view of the resettlement community, about 500 houses more are yet to be constructed**

As a tribe, at any given time, we cannot have more than eight members of that legislature. The laws of this country should have taken cognizance of that many, many years ago, to the extent that, the equivalent of the affirmative action in the United States, for example, where the black race is protected. I think similar laws should have been in place to protect that area where the diamonds have been coming from all these years. But instead we relied on the administrative structures and I think that is one reason why Kono has been left behind.

So basically, you are saying that laws relating to mining have not favored Kono and that because you do not have the numbers you have not been able to challenge them?

It could be that. Sometimes when I go around this country, I met a lot of people, Sierra Leonians, who have told me oh! ‘all what I am today I got from Kono. That is where my uncle worked to be able to pay my college fees. That is where my brother used to work for him to build us a house in Masingi or in Port Loko.’ And ‘Oh! Look this poor Kono people, they have had all these diamonds and they’ve not benefited.’ And sometimes, I say to such people, we are tired of hearing these sentiments, actualize it. I have not come across one Sierra Leonean, non-Kono, who has said the Kono people deserve this, that they should be punished. You’ve all said these nice things, but it is your brothers that are in the parliament, it is your brothers that are in the cabinet.

Sometimes we miss our targets. We target the mining companies, when in fact maybe it’s our own very government. I will give you an example. I want to believe OCTEA pays royalties to the government. Good sums of money. It is left with the government to say you know what, this diamond comes from this place, let me do A, B and C. But we forget about our government. All we do is to attack the company. When in fact you and I know that it is not possible for them to be here if they are not paying their taxes.

So it is not, for example, their responsibility to construct roads. That is why they pay the taxes to the central government. But I am very optimistic about what this government has done initially. First of all, the current chairman of the mining committee in the legislature is a Kono man, Saa Emmerson Lamina. And then we have the Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources from Kono (Dr Morie Manye).

Maybe in other words, the president is saying you know what: You go out and sort this mining thing out. Maybe that is the message that he is sending to us. They are going to review the Mines and Minerals Act. Hopefully with us at the helm of the minera sector, maybe this is going to be an opportunity.

So basically, you are saying that laws relating to mining have not favored Kono and that because you do not have the numbers you While we can ask the government about how it is spending monies from royalties, what about the companies’ corporate social responsibilities? The investors are making big money, while the locals get poorer and poorer. And some people are saying this is all happening because local authorities like Chief Saquee are ok with it. What do you say to such people?

I am glad I have an educated man sitting in front of me. One thing that I have learnt about our community, I think it is a characteristic of impoverished communities. No fault of theirs. Limited education.

When you couple lack of a good education with poverty, it is worse than a missile. If somebody is educated but doesn’t have money, he can reason with you. Or if they are uneducated but financially they are ok. But when they are uneducated and poor, and I am not saying this in a...
demearing way, to the extent that even when things are so clear and plain on the ground, they would still ignore them.

There is a Kono proverb that says: ‘it’s what the cock sees that it pecks.’ The local chiefs are the easiest targets.

There is a mining agreement between OCTEA and the government, not Tankoro chieftaincy. I hadn’t dreamt of being a chief, I was still in the [United] States, when OCTEA had a mining licence. It was during the NPRC junta regime they had their first licence.

When [President Ahmad] Tejan Kabbba came into office, he ratified the agreement. As long as Parliament ratified something, it is a law. When [President] Ernest Bai Koroma came into office, he decided to review all the mining agreements, starting with OCTEA. He set up a 12 man committee. Was Chief Saqueue a member of that committee? No. No local authority was in it. They negotiated that agreement for about a year and six months. Meetings were held here, in Johannesburg, in London, in Switzerland… I did not even have the opportunity to stand on the corridors of those meetings.

When they were finished they submitted it to cabinet. There were two Kono people in that cabinet. The former Vice President, Sam Sumana, and George Pessima as secretary to cabinet and head of civil service. Cabinet said it was the best agreement since the discovery of rice. They negotiated that agreement for about a year and six months. Meetings were held here, in Johannesburg, in London, in Switzerland… I did not even have the opportunity to stand on the corridors of those meetings.

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What do you think about this law personally?

As Paramount Chief, your number one responsibility is to maintain law and order. It doesn’t say the laws you agree with. As long as it has gone through the metamorphosis of becoming a law, it is now law. Whether I agree with it personally or not it’s irrelevant.

The Chief doesn’t give concession. In fact the only thing that the chieftainship is owed is the surface rent.

And is that the only thing between you and the company?

In fact, let me give you another example of the negligence of the government: if you go through the agreement, there is a provision for the setting aside of zero point something percent in an account for community development. It is called the Community Development Action Plan (CDAP). It took six years for government to finally launch that thing, when in fact the company was running after them.

So you are saying the company was willing to pay, but the government didn’t provide what it takes for them to do that?

Of course. It took forever. Why didn’t they put up those structures since the agreement was signed in 2010? They made our money wasted. Just this short time, we have had US$200, 000 in that account, which is manned by a committee as prescribed by the laws. In fact we the Paramount Chiefs are members and advisers, we are not even heads of those committees.

But then, back to your original question of the people blaming the chiefs. I can understand, because we are the custodians of the land. Our people cannot see how companies can mine without the agreement of the chiefs. That’s the kind of esteem they hold us to. They are not even au fait with the laws, which says mineral rights belong to the central governments. It is not Chief Saqueue’s law. It is the law of the land. ‘This is why I said the laws did not favour us. If we had the numbers, we could challenge it and ask for it to be put to vote [in parliament].

It is bad to a point now we are fighting each other. Ask how many educated people have read the OCTEA agreement. I will tell you that less than one percent of Kono people have read the agreement. And there are some good things there. Some of these have not been implemented and those are what we should be fighting for.

I am proud of the fact that we have been giving out scholarship for the past several years. Last year I had my first graduate from medical school. He received the OCTEA scholarship from year one to year seven. This year two more are going to graduate.

There are many people now in the workforce that benefitted from the scholarship, people who otherwise would not have been able to go to college.

It is the most transparent scholarship scheme.

What about their corporate social responsibility?

Yes…I will admit that they fall a little short in that area. But the thing about corporate social responsibility, unfortunately, it is not a legal requirement. Somebody cannot be taken to task for that. They have never denied us paying surcharge. I have never heard the government saying OCTEA is refusing to pay taxes.

But in 2015 we heard that story between Koidu City Council and OCTEA...

Well, I don’t mean to be the lawyer for OCTEA, but I can communicate their views to you. I know Kono is such a dangerous place. When you have one point of view, it’s good to have another point of view.

OCTEAs position is: ‘we are ot required to pay tax’. It is not that they are not going to pay.

Is that what the law says?

That’s what the agreement says. This issue started long ago. I have been one of the longest serving members in the Council. As Paramount Chiefs we are ex-officio members of the Council.

When I was in Council, Mary Musa was the mayor. She wrote to OCTEA requesting them to pay property tax. The lawyer of OCTEA wrote back and quoting the relevant laws, indicating that they were exempted from the tax.

Mary Musa made some noise and forgot about it. They [OCTEA] assisted her in grading some roads, refilling of swamps and constructing of roads.

When Sessie Ghenda became the mayor he did same and got the same response. He also made some noise and then forgot about it and created a working relationship with the company. He also benefited from a lot of help from the company, to the extent that they reclaimed the swamp to make way for the Gbense market. There was no way Gbense market could have been where it is without the help of OCTEA. It was a lake.

Not only that, there was a time Sessie Ghenda wanted to twin Koidu City to a city in South Ko-
Out about five years ago asking ‘To Mine or to

There was an interesting piece of study that came nonetheless it is all still degradation of the land.

In fact artisanal mining is even the worst. But
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So from time immemorial to now, there is land
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OCTEA. I’d like to know what you think
could have been done differently by them.

You have said so many good things about OCTEA. I’d like to know what you think could have been done differently by them.

Mining anywhere in the world degrades the land. So from time immemorial to now, there is land degradation that is taking place.

In fact artisanal mining is even the worst. But nonetheless it is all still degradation of the land. There was an interesting piece of study that came out about five years ago asking ‘To Mine or to

From Page 11

rea. He needed tickets for seven people, amounting to USS$500, 000. OCTEA bought all the tickets.

Come to Diamond Stars. I was the team manager. What they (OCTEA) did was unprecedented in football in this country. This is the first time in footballing history in Sierra Leone that a provincial team had won the national football championship. It had never happened. They spent well over Le700m at the time. All players were on salary. In fact we brought a player from Sweden. We had the best players in this country. Everybody wanted to play for Diamond Stars.

So when Emmerson Lamina came, he also did same thing. And he got the same reply. Emmerson then went to court. He did what he did without contacting any one at central government. It was politicking. You want to do something that will make you famous.

The one thing every Kono man is angry about is the fact that we have not benefitted from diamonds. So anyone that is seen to be challenging a big mining company you are the hero, without even knowing the details.

To me I think that’s intellectual dishonesty. Inwardly you know the facts, but you try to capitalize on the ignorance of our people and paint everybody else as a bad person.

You have said so many good things about OCTEA. I’d like to know what you think could have been done differently by them.

In fact artisanal mining is even the worst. But nonetheless it is all still degradation of the land

Government creates the enabling environment for wealth creation to take place.

With an ordinary man, you have no added responsibility, it is easier for you to say let’s shut them down. But when you are a leader you have to be able to control your emotions.

And I will give you typical examples why I said we should look at the agreement. It says USS$100, 000 should be spent every year for the training of Kono youths. Some 40% of that should go to university education, and 60% to identify Sierra Leoneans that are already working in the company to be retrained. That 40% I have control over. I have been religiously fighting for that. And I have been getting it.

But the 60 % is outside my purview, government and Ministry of mines are responsible for that. The Ministry is supposed to be auditing them about it. These are the things we should be fighting for. Instead they blame chiefs.

Another thing they could do better is the resettlement. I am very proud of my record on the resettlement scheme. I was elected chief in 2006, March 10. Before I came this resettlement saga was already there. First they came with a company called Sam King, which built some funny houses, like jail cells. They were rejected.

Meetings were held and they agreed on mod for mod, brick for brick. This means if your original house was built with mod block, the company will build a mod block house for you. If you had a concrete block house, they will build a concrete block house.

When I was elected, I stopped all that. I convinced the company against building mod houses, regardless of what they had.

In some of those houses when it rained they didn’t sleep. You know how it was after the war. If you go to the new resettlement center now it is more organized. They have got better schools. But there are aspects of the resettlement that I am not happy about, the slowness. Yes, I know the company also went through some rough patches, here and there, but the good thing is it has kick started again in earnest. We have a total of about 500 more houses to be built.

Do you think it maybe because people don’t know the existence of these opportunities that’s why they do not ask for them?

If you don’t read how would you know?
RUTILE: THE PRICE OF BEING ENDOWED
The Dusty Mining Town

The dusty nature of the road linking Moyamba Junction to Rutile adds a discomforting touch to an awful experience for travelers. Rutile is an informal reference to a conglomerate of communities within a geographical area endowed with the titanium mineral of the same name; just another Sierra Leonean community standing atop abundance of wealth, yet its people squalor in deprivation. The 76km (46miles) stretch of road directly links two of the four districts that make up the southern region of Sierra Leone – Moyamba and Bonthe – with it serving as a bypass to the other two – Bo and Pujehun.

Rutile is located partly in Bonthe and partly in Moyamba and, despite being home to a Class A mining company – Sierra Rutile Limited (one of the two largest mining companies currently operating in Sierra Leone) and with over 30 years of mining history, the community remains one of the poorest and least developed parts of the country.

Moriba Town, the most prominent business center in Rutile, is a regrettably perfect illustration of this sad reality. Even in November, when the rains were still pouring, the dusty nature of the township gave an insight into what life would be like during the dry season proper. The movement of one vehicle sets up a thick cloud of dusts that hangs in the air for between two and three minutes, before another vehicle passes, leaving behind it another cloud.

“We are constantly in this condition. We feel sick always,” laments Moriba Town resident, Fatmata Jalloh who sells shoes and cosmetics at the Lorry Park. She said she regularly buys medication for common cold.

Most of the vehicles that ply the roads within the township carry the logo of Sierra Rutile. Men, in bright yellow colored jackets with the company’s label, can be seen criss-crossing the streets.

Rutile (the mineral) is the most common and stable form of titanium dioxide found in nature and it has multiple uses of huge economic benefits. As a metal, it is used for high tech alloys because of its light weight, high strength and resistance to corrosion. In powder form, it is widely used as pigment for lending whiteness and opacity. Rutile is also thought to be of major importance to the gemstone market.

Sierra Leone ranks third on the list of Rutile producing countries with an annual production of over 600,000 metric tonnes in 2010, behind Australia at the top with an annual production of 2.8 million metric tonnes and South Africa with an annual production of 1.3 million metric tonnes the same year, according to the Maps of the World.

According to the National Minerals Agency (NMA), Sierra Leone has the largest natural rutile reserve in the world. Information on the agency’s website indicates that since the mineral was first discovered in the country in 1954 in the gravels of the Lanti River, in the Southern Province, four groups of deposits have been identified distributed across four districts: Bonthe, Bo, Moyamba and Kambia.

Sierra Rutile Limited, formerly a subsidiary of the British-owned Titanium Resources Group (In 2016, the Australian sand miner Illuka acquired Sierra Rutile for 215 million Pound Sterling), primarily holds leases for mining rutile in the country since its formation in 1971. These leases cover a land area of 580 km2, comprising some 19 identified deposits.

Sierra Rutile’s concessions presently span five chiefdoms in two districts: Imperi and Jong chiefdoms in Bonthe; Lower Banta, Upper Banta, and Bagruwa chiefdoms in Moyamba.

Imperi is the most important among them as it hosts the company’s main mine sites. And because of this, say activists, this chiefdom is also the most impacted both in terms of environmental destruction and human rights issues arising from the miner’s activities.

Moriba Town and nearby Mogbwemo are the two largest and most prominent towns in the Imperi Chiefdom. After over three decades of mining, the people in these communities can only dream of better days.

Dozens of houses have been destroyed and communities moved over the last three decades to make way for the ever expanding operation of Sierra Rutile. This has created many communities with grievances over issues relating to land grabbing, crop compensation, and royalty payments.

Lack of transparency

Continue on Page 16
Unlike in places like Kono, where there is a high level of awareness about what diamonds are and the people are directly involved in its exploration, in Rutile the people only know the name of the mineral removed from their land. And this, said Augusta Nuwomah, a civil society activist based in Mogbwemo, means that there is little chance for transparency and even more little chance for the people to benefit from their lands.

“If what is coming from your land you can’t see it, how will you know that it is not benefiting you?” she wondered.

Augusta runs the Women’s Initiative Forum for Empowerment in Extractive (WIFEE), which is one of a growing crop of community based organisations in Rutile that are raising awareness among mining communities. She said the lack of awareness had led to serious tension between affected communities and the company in the past, which called for the intervention of organizations like WIFEE. Locals, she noted, were not properly informed about their lands before they were taken by the company. Consequently, protests had become a commonplace.

Through community engagement, activists like Augusta have helped to sensitize the populace, to the point that tension between community people and the company has lessened over the last few years. But she warned that there is high potential for trouble in the future, as the rise in awareness level puts the company’s operation into tighter scrutiny, especially in light of the widespread poverty among the masses. Already there is a strong sense of this among many residents who lament the lack of amenities like electricity and piped borne water throughout the Rutile community.

People travel about 35 miles to Serabu in Moyamba District when they have serious health issues that require a doctor’s attention, because the health posts located in each of these communities aren’t equipped enough to serve their needs. Sierra Rutile runs a state of the art health center, located at a place called Plant Site, between Moriba Town and Mogbwemo. But it is open to only its staff and their immediate family.

Along the streets of Mogbwemo, electricity lines pass above houses with no light, onto the plush uphill estate housing the company’s executives and foreign consultants. And because they can no longer provide light throughout the school compound, the school has had to discontinue night classes for exam students.

Mr Robert Nyama, Principal of the school, said several appeals for help from Sierra Rutile have fallen on deaf ears. “We are just here people providing education to the children of the people,” he lamented. But there are other concerns for the school’s management - recurrent protests by students who are angry with the company for another reason.

A notable characteristic of Rutile the community is the huge, unpaved roads that adjoin the various communities, some of them freshly graded. To create unrestricted access between its mine site and the depository, the company has constructed many roads and diverted many others. The roads are not only wide to accommodate the huge haulage trucks. Due to the nature of its haulage trucks, it is not in the company’s interest to pave any of its roads. Therefore there is not a single paved road in the whole of Rutile.
Consequently, communities like Gundama, which are located along these routes that lead from the mine site to the depository, are constantly covered in dust. Also, because of Sierra Rutile’s relocation programs and diversions created for easy access of the haulage site, in some communities people now have to travel longer distances to places that previously took a shorter time to cover – like hospitals, markets and, for the children, school.

This has particularly affected school children in the relocated communities, who have organized themselves under the ‘Mining Area Concerned Students Association.’ Their president, Mamadou Allieu Sowe, explained that many of them travel to school from far away communities, like Mosenesie, Mokepai, and Mokanji. The closest among these to Impere SS is Mokeopai, which is about three miles distance. The farthest, Mokanji, is about 10 miles away.

“When we come to school, in our uniforms, the company vehicles pass us and raise dust on us and dirty our uniforms,” narrated Mamadou, who was the outgoing senior prefect of the school.

He said they have asked the company to help them with school buses but they were told that the company is not responsible for that because it gives money to their traditional leaders. I am in Moriba Town, but some of my colleagues come from very far away, some 16 miles away. When they come they are tied. They also come late to class,” stressed Mr Sowe.

Consequently, the students have resorted to striking. They usually block major routes plied by the company’s haulage trucks. The Mosenesie Junction, a popular intersection that links that part of Bonthe to Bo, Pujehun and Moyamba, has become the scene of recurrent student protests. The last strike happened two weeks before this interview with the student president.

Mamadou told me that he’d just come from the internet cafe where he went to type a letter addressed to three separate government ministers in Freetown: Mines; Transportation, and Education. He wanted to inform them about their plight.

Sowe is a final year student at the Impere SS. He is expecting to be enrolled to a tertiary institution, but he has no idea where to go to.

He said their other plea to the government ministers is for them to consider establishing a technical institution in Rutile where they can be trained so that they can be employed by the company.

“At the moment, when we finish here, there is nothing we can do,” he said.

While the younger generation dreams of jobs with the company, those already working there are struggling to fit in, amidst endless complaints of labor violations and unfair treatments. Samuel Lamin Suluku recently resigned from Sierra Rutile and returned to his former job as a teacher. He wouldn’t say exactly why he quit the company.

Every youth you talk with in Rutile, they will complain about this. And they all lay the blame on the door steps of the local authorities for turning a blind eye.

“Nothing is being done so that when mining will have faded out, the people can embark on something [meaningful] for their lives,” said Suluku.

“The government,” he added, “needs to come and do thorough investigations as to how the mining is taking place and to tell these miners that we are suffering directly and for them to give us priority when it comes to employment.”
TONKOLILI: REGULATORY DEFICIENCY IN GOLD

...mining spells environmental doom

Under the hot sun, on top of the Pampana Bridge, two men are standing by the railing, discussing. These are artisanal miners, on break, after spending about five hours in the river below, in search of gravel bearing gold. They are discussing the location to explore next in the water body. The Pampana River is one of the seven main rivers of Sierra Leone. The Jong flows across the country through Mattru Jong in Bonthe District, into the Atlantic Ocean. The part of the water body that runs between Tane Chiefdom and Kolifa Rowala Chiefdom in the Tonkolili District is what is referred to as Pampana River. This part of Sierra Leone is extremely rich in gold, zircon, titanium and several other rare earth elements. Unlike the diamond, Rutile and Iron Ore subsectors, gold mining is scarcely regulated in Sierra Leone. And like everywhere, artisanal miners dominate it. They follow no rules. The consequence is a chaotic scene in this northern part of the country, which has occasioned a worrying trend of environmental pollution. The state of the Pampana River is a perfect illustration of this. Due to illicit mining in and around the water body, Pampana has become so polluted that it has become useless to thousands of people who depend on it for domestic use. The miners, in search of the gravel, dig out rocks and, in the process, displace sludge. This has over the years rendered the water body a constant brown in color. Pa Amidu Lakko recalls, as a young man, when they relied on the river for everything. “No one dared dirty it,” he said. “But since they started mining there, we stopped drinking it. The water has become polluted,” the elderly farmer, who is the chief of Mabektheh Village, added. Mabektheh, which falls within the Tane Chiefdom, is one of about a dozen villages that lie along the Pampana River stretch. The other villages include Maberey and Mayata. The Pollution of the river has left the people in these communities, with an estimated population of over 3000, struggling to get water for domestic use. They rely on stream water, which they say has over the years become harder to find. In Mabektheh, whose population is around 500, according to the villagers, they have no other source of water. They say several appeals to local authorities to construct for them water well have fallen on deaf ears. A few meters from the village chief’s house is the point where some Non-Governmental Organization had planned to construct a water well. Pa Lakko said the organization suddenly decided to renge on its promise, forcing them to refill the pit. “The government people came here, we tell them and they only promise us and never come back until it is election time,” he said.

Artisanal Miners prospecting for gold

Foreign Investors

Many of these people now struggle to get a sufficient size of land to farm and grow enough for their families. The story is more or less the same across Tonkolili, which is one of 16 districts that make up Sierra Leone. According to the result of the latest boundary delimitation exercise in 2017, Tonkolili has a total of 19 chiefdoms. Civil society activists say there is active mining in at least 10 of these chiefdoms, and they fear that the apparent lack of regulation of the sector poses a serious threat to the environment. Tane and Kunike-Barina are two of the chiefdoms most affected by illicit mining in Tonkolili. Kunike-Barina is home to the villages of Matele and Makong, well known gold mining communities. China Compound, Ropolo and Mamankie, another group of renowned gold mining communities, are in Tane. China Compound, which is in Mabai Village, around the Pampana River, was one of the secret gold mining sites discovered in July as part of a government clampdown on illicit mining, which prompted a temporary government ban on mining in the district. A dozen Chinese and other foreign nationals were arrested in that operation. Sallieu Conteh, coordinator of the umbrella Center for Coordination of Human Rights
Activists (CCHRA) in Tonkolili, said both large scale and small scale miners were contributing to the situation. His organization, which is based in Magburaka, the district headquarters town, has been sensitizing locals on their rights and responsibilities in ensuring responsible and beneficial use of their lands by mining companies.

Conteh said they have taken up the issue of the pollution of the Pampana River with the relevant authorities several times in the past.

“We have a great concern over that because as human rights activists, we believe that right to water is a human right,” he said. Besides pollution, CCHRA says the deficiency in the regulatory environment has led to many other issues that are reinforcing poverty in the district like child labor and exploitation of women. The organization also says foreign investors, particularly Chinese, are taking advantage of this situation to acquire land without any real benefits for the land owners. According to the campaign group, local authorities have complained that Chinese investors have turned up with documents from individual government officials authorizing mining without proper licensing not acquired through official channels. “Because of the high esteem to which local authorities hold politicians, they make no resistance to these demands,” said Conteh.

CCHRAIs currently negotiating between a prospective Chinese investor and the people of Mamankie Village, who are reportedly resisting the advances of the investor until their demands bordering on Corporate Social Responsibilities are guaranteed. The villagers say their water source has already been polluted by mining activities and they want to see some concrete in terms of development projects by the company, to cushion the effect of the pollution on their livelihoods. The Chinese, apparently, aren’t keen on meeting the villagers’ demands, arguing that all what they were supposed to provide the communities in the form of Corporate Social Responsibilities had been channelled through the government.

Conteh said such negotiation is part of CCHRA’s mandate of ensuring protection in the form of financial benefits for the use of the lands of the communities. According to local laws, the proceeds from every land deal is divided into three parts: the Chiefdom authorities, through the office of the Paramount Chief, receive 10%; the elected representative [Parliamentarian] receives 15%; and the rest, often representing pitance, goes to the land owners.

Because land ownership is often communal in this part of Sierra Leone, sometimes a land owning family can consist of up to 50 people. If a land is sold for, say, Le100,000, 75% of that will be Le75,000.

“This amount will be insignificant to the 50 people,” noted the CCHRA coordinator.

Chinese frontiers and Western investors, particularly women. The organization says mining has contributed to the atmosphere in the bat-infested offices of the National Minerals Agency in Magburaka.

Chief Pa Lakko explains the effect of the pollution of Pampana River on the livelihoods of Mabekthe Village
B
tween 2011 and 2014, Sierra Leone’s economy realized the highest growth since the end of the country’s civil war. That economic boom was largely due to the mining sector which attained its peak within this period, and it was due largely to the contribution of the defunct iron ore miner African Minerals Limited (AML).

Alongside diamonds and rutile, iron ore constituted the top three mineral exports from Sierra Leone. AML, then a London Stock Exchange listed company, by 2014 exported over 25million tonnes of ore, most of which found its way to China. All of that came from the hills of the Sula Mountain range in the northern Tonkolili District. They were extracted at the expense of the livelihoods of thousands of Sierra Leoneans who live in communities dotted around this mineral endowed mountainous region.

The people in these communities suffered a horde of discomfort by reluctantly giving up their ancestral lands or forcefully adapting to new ways of life thanks to the effect of environmental destruction caused by the operations of the company. In spite of this, these communities say they have nothing to show for it in terms of development, except continued hardship.

It really doesn’t take much for a first time visitor to realise this poor state of affairs in this central part of Sierra Leone. You get the filing on the way to Bumbuna, the headquarter town of Dansogoya Chiefdom, where AML’s concession fall. The 30 miles unpaved road from Magburaka, the district headquarters town, is a bumpy ride with countless potholes. Motor bike is the best option for many during the rainy season, because it takes a lot more longer time to cover the distance by any other means of transport.

In the dry season, travelers and residents of villages lining the highway have to put up with an unbearable level of dust. Local authorities and business people say the poor state of the road has also helped made the cost of living more difficult for the ordinary man as commercial transport owners increase the fares, with a consequent ripple effect on the prices of commodities.

Bumbuna Town was among the best places to be in Sierra Leone during the heydays of AML, both in terms of business and job opportunities for many young Sierra Leoneans. But today, it is more or less a mere shadow of its old self. Many of the businesses which sprung up as a result of the mining boom have folded down. The jobs have gone, leaving behind a crop of many youths idle. Many of them have found their way to nearby towns and the country’s capital, Freetown.

Abdul Bangura now spends his time in the car park in Magburaka, where he makes living loading commercial motor vehicles. Abdul worked at the mine site on casual basis for three years, prior to the folding of AML. Even though he dreamt of being employed fully, he said life was far better then than it is now.

Environmental destruction

There are many youths in Bumbuna and its surrounding communities who share Abdul’s nostalgic feeling about the company’s operations. But for an overwhelming majority of them, it is mixed feelings.

Many of them either live in or are connected to communities which hosted the company and still struggling to cope in the face of environmental destruction that is posing a serious challenge to their livelihoods. For Paul Sorie Turay, for instance, it was regrettable that AML was allowed to operate in their community. Paul, who lives in Kemedugu Village, is bitter over the company’s failure to pay him his end of service benefit. However, there are many youths in Bumbuna that are host to the lands on which AML’s mines were located, on the hills of Numbara, Maronpo and Simbili. Kemedugu was the scene of recurrent tension, at least one of which led to loss of lives, over what the residents say is the company’s irresponsible mining activities that ridd them of farm lands, drinking water sources and even sacred bush. They also accused the company of failing to meet its Corporate Social Responsibilities. “As the land owners, we never got any benefit as what a land owner can expect,” said Paul, who is also Public Relations Officer for Dansogoya Chiefdom. He said as a consequence of the AML mining activities, the communities which sprung up as a result of the mining boom have folded down. The jobs have gone, leaving behind a crop of many youths idle. Many of them have found their way to nearby towns and the country’s capital, Freetown.

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people of Kemedugu virtually have no place to live on, particularly with regards access to farm lands. He added that his people now have to go to other communities to beg for land to farm on. According to Paul, AML took all their lands so that many land owners today don’t even know the limit of their land.

“Sometimes you walk into a piece of land you think was yours, and they will tell you not to go there.”

Like Paul, Paramount Chief Almamy B. Y. Koroma of Dansogoya Chiefdom blames the state of affairs on the former government’s handling of the complaints of the communities.

PC Almamy Koroma has been part of this bitter-sweet journey from day one. He said while there are indeed some good things to point out as benefit for mining in his chiefdom, the negatives far outweigh the positives. Mining, he said, helped build Bumbuna as a lot of people came in to settle there.

“They built houses and the company also brought about the establishment of some social amenities, like banks, fuel stations, and various entertainment centers,” he said. On the downside, however, there is the issue of the iron ore and tailing sludge pollutions affecting several small communities, the destruction of drinking water sources, and stock piles of debris that washes down on communities lining the rail line.

Kemedugu and Kegbema villages, for instance, are unhappy that their swamplands and water sources have been polluted by the mining operations. And according to the Paramount Chief, the company provided the communities an alternative water source, which he noted wasn’t treated. He said the place is also not secure and sometimes animals die there, posing serious health risk for the entire population.

A thorn in the flesh of the local people is the Tonkolili district's relocation project. Three communities in particular: Ferenbeya, Wondugu, and Foria, have remained a thorn in the flesh of the local authorities. The community people say they were relocated on arid plots of land. They said the company had agreed to provide them financial support for feeding while developing a piece of land to enable them cultivate their own crops.

Before this agreement could be fully implemented, ownership of the Tonkolili Iron Ore Mines changed hands, after Shandong’s 100 percent takeover. PC Almamy Koroma said every effort by the chiefdom authorities to get the Chinese assume their responsibility regarding these issues have failed to bear fruit.

“When it comes to spending money, it is like a sinful thing for them,” the Chief lamented.

He hopes that the new government of President Julius Maada Bio will take a different approach to the matter.
LIFE AS A GOLD MINER

prospecting under water

In Tonkolili District in the northern part of Sierra Leone, except for commercial motor bike riding, most of the youths are engaged in artisanal gold mining for survival. Many have been in the mining sector for many years, yet there is little or virtually nothing to show as personal development. But the apparently lack of alternative means of fending for their families is forcing many to pursue unimaginably dangerous path to this end.

Abdulai Kabba has been an artisanal miners, trying to make a living in the mining sector. Kabba's task in his team of artisanal miners is to dive underneath the Pampana River with a shovel and bag, to which a long string is attached. The string on the bag is used to signal his colleagues up above once he has discovered gravel. His colleagues, on board a canoe, would then use the same string to draw up the bag filled with gravel to be emptied on clear ground. After gathering enough gravel, they will then wash it in search of the gold.

"I can be under this river with my eyes closed for complete four hours," said Kabba, as he explained the merits and demerits of artisanal mining. Only the call to nature or some other emergency will force Kabba to leave the water when on duty. The miner said he can get up to 50 bags of gravels within the four-hour period, depending on their availability of course. The slightest mistake he makes to open his eyes while under water can get him blind. And because he has to have his eyes constantly closed, most of the time he is unaware of his location while operating under the deep river. He admits he is conscious that he is also constantly exposed to many dangers while under water, like falling rocks or even dangerous water creatures.

Luckily, Kabba observed, under water one is able to detected the slightest sound from afar. "I only have to be focused in listening to every sound under the river," he said. Kabba also has to deal with the potential of a serious health implications. With all these dangers, miners like him can spend so much time with so much risk involved, and at the end of the day, have nothing in return. A carat of goal can fetch them about Le50, 000, at the time of this interview.

Kabba is an illiterate, and he believes that without education the only means to survive is through hard work. He hopes to provide his children with quality education so that they do not have to go through his experience.

WOMEN IN SEARCH OF GOLD:

The general perception is that mining, especially the labor part of it, is for men. But deep in the bushes of Tonkolili, a group of women are defying that belief as they stand side by side with men in search of gold. But many of these women, like the story of Mabinty Bangura illustrates, are working for far less than they truly deserve in return, illustrating an uncharted side of Sierra Leone's mining sector – exploitation.

The elderly grandmother lives in Matotoka, the headquarters town of Tane Chiefdom, from where she travels every day, covering some three miles to China Combine. Like many part of Sierra Leone endowed with minerals, mining has become the only means to survive is through hard work. Like in many part of Sierra Leone, the former provides an easy route to wealth. Even if you do not get rich quick, you are assured of something to

Continue on Page 30

...prospecting under water
take care of your needs immediately, however small it is.

But it also means hard labour. After a whole day’s work, women like Mabinty are compensated with a bowl [‘headpan’] full of gravel, as pay-ment. She compiles her gravel for a week or two, after which she wash them with hope of getting gold. Despite the optimism in mining, as against farming, at times after a whole week’s work, she can realize nothing. “At times I do get up to three carats,” she explains. At the time of this interview, a carat of gold was valued at Le 50,000.

It is this money that Mabinty depends on in taking care of her family.

She leaves for work every day as early as 6am, and returns home at 6pm. She says if she arrives late for work she wouldn’t be al-lowed to work on that day.

Her eldest daughter lives in Magburaka, the district headquar-ters town of Tonkolili, where she attends secondary school.

“My other daughter abandoned her school-ling for a very long time and went to stay with her boyfriend. Her focus was all about getting married. It is this same boyfriend who impregnated her while she was in SSS1, but since she has been disappointed, she has decided going back to school.”

This decision has also multiplied the responsibilities of the grand-mother, who takes care of two children of her daughters.

Painfully, Mabinty lost the mother to one of her grandchildren a while back to child birth. The father of the boy refused to assume responsibility. “I am not happy as a woman mining gold, but I cannot afford to go into farming con-sidering the heavy work and the long time it takes to realise anything,” she said in an interview at the mine site, during break time.

The consequences of this work on Bangura have been frequent ill-health, and the lack of parental monitoring for her children and grandchildren. Mohamed T. Mas-saquoi contributed to this report.
Old Ferengbeya is the hub of the mines, as host to the mining plant and crusher. What used to be a school in old Ferengbeya was converted into offices for the company. The football field serves as a parking lot for heavy machines and vehicles. The blasting camp and Tellies Dam are in old Wondugu, while the railway passes through Faria on its way to Pepel. After over seven years of relentless complaints of the unfulfilled promises, some of the desperate villagers of Ferengbeya, Wondugu and Faria have decided to move back to the hills. This return migration, according to those who remain in the villages, is part of the reason why Ferengbeya is gradually transforming into a ghost town. “Everyone has gone into the bush in search of something to make some money to take care of their family. Other families have disintegrated because of deprivation,” explained Fanka Mansaray, a tribal leader and one of the few remaining elderly residents of Ferengbeya. The villagers said when AML wanted to relocate them, they took a team on a study tour to Ghana. What all they saw in Ghana raised their hopes, but in the end, nothing was implemented. The package the company promised them included household furniture, like beds, chairs and appliances. They said they were told that all three villages would be electrified. Some of the buildings were even wired and are fitted with bulbs. But light has never come yet, seven years on.

“They told us they will just hand over keys to us and we will meet everything in,” said Section Chief Ibrahim Sara Kargbo. There were also promises of scholarship and employment opportunities for the youths, and livelihood support. Kargbo recalled a company official telling the villagers that they were in hell fire and that they would be pAVING their way to heaven if they agreed to relocate. It took several rounds of negotiations involving government officials, local authorities and the villagers to relocate the three communities which, between them, comprised about 3,500 people. But the relocation exercise itself wasn’t as smooth as the villagers recalled. According to them, they never had prior notification of the relocation day. They claimed that amidst disagreement over key issues, the company, backed by armed police, just came one day and asked everyone to leave. As they exited their homes, excavators pulled the buildings down behind them, apparently to prevent them from returning. Some people left some belongings they

**The Sesay family in Ferengbeya are dealing with an impending disaster as their house roof crumbles by part**

Eight years on, the Villae lagers of Ferengbeya, Wondugu and Faria say their life is worse than the ‘hell’ they were taken from. And it isn’t hard to see this, as expressed in their faces and voices, and even the condition of their environment. “We are hungry and we are suffering,” said Mansaray, the elderly tribal leader. “They removed us from soft ground and placed us on rocks. We are only surviving by the grace of God.” The hard and bare terrain of Ferengbeya sharply contrasts the thick vegetation of the Simbili and Maronpo hills. Therefore, a key component of the relocation agreement was that the company would develop a piece of land for the locals suitable for food crop production. Another aspect of it was that the company would feed the villagers throughout this period, until they make their first harvest from the developed land. This package entailed a monthly allowance of Le150,000, plus a bag of rice for each household. AML did fulfil the promise of providing monthly feeding, at least up to three years ago when its successor company, Shandong, halted it. The villagers have since been left to fend for themselves without the means to do so. Kargbo, the Section Chief, narrated the struggle they go through to secure land to farm from neighboring villages. With their own lands, he said, they could farm and pay for their children’s school fees. The hills of Simbili and Maronpo are thought to be rich in gold too. The villagers would engage in artisanal mining to supplement their income from farming. “Now we have to beg for a small piece of land. And those who have land have conditions. At the end of the day we can’t produce enough to feed ourselves, let alone to pay for school fees for our children,” Kargbo said. Of the three villages, Ferengbeya is the largest, with an original population of about 2,000, which is now estimated at around 1,500.

They all share one hospital which is located in Wondugu. The villagers say there is always medicine shortage. Paramount Chief Almamy B. Y. Koroma of Dansogoya Chiefdom, under which the three villages fall, was personally involved in the negotiations with AML. He expressed frustration with Shandong for reneging on promises made by its predecessor. The chief said the Chinese were only keen on implementing the agreement with the villages where it suits them. “They just took action on stopping the feeding. That was wrong. And up to date, the land has never been developed. The people don’t have the capacity to develop the land,” he said. Consequently, according to the villagers, many of their colleagues, especially the youthful ones, have set up camps in the bushes up the hills where they have access to arable lands and can engage in artisanal mining. Another major concern for the people of Ferengbeya and its sister villages is access to water. As per the agreement, the company...
sociated with stream health dangers as boreholes, citing the insisting on providing water, the company would prefer stream people insisted they issue. He said while the villagers over the water the company and the PC Koroma explained a village three miles water from Yigben, situation, they fetch faulty head. In such a main ‘Barray’ , had a cated near the village’s tanks, which is lo three months. One of supply for the previous said they hadn’t got visit in November, they existed, the company supplies water, the villagers say the poor quality of the and Foria each. There are four such water collection points. lages and serving as regularly in huge tanks company supplies water, the villagers say the crumbled buildings eventually constructed, but the people shun it, saying it has a taste that makes it unsuit- able for drinking and that it isn’t also fit for laundering as it doesn’t latter. “Up to now, there is a stalemate on that. They [company] have not provided what the people want. They fear that if they provide stream water and someone gets sick and die they might have problem. But that’s what the people have been drinking all along,” the chief said.

Crumbling buildings The hardship in Ferengbeya and sister villages is also clearly expressed in the many crumbling buildings around. This speaks to another burning issue with regards the unful-filled promises of the company. The villagers say from the begin- ning, they had always challenged the quality of work put into the construction. Many of the crumbled buildings succumbed to heavy winds. A number of them are currently uninhabited, partly due to the serious structural damages on them and partly due to the decision by their owners to move back out of the village. Along some streets, there are open sucker-ways, revealing feces, with flies all over the place. The Sesay family has no place to go. Sheku Sesay’s house is crumbling under a weak-en beam dangling on top of two wooden pillars. One of the two concrete pillars that held the roof of the veranda was long broken. Two children were seated underneath this disaster waiting to happen. And just across the main entrance of the building is the toilet, which is adjacent to the kitchen. Sheku Kargbo worked as a contractor for the company that con- structed the houses. He said he had himself suspended for a month without pay for raising issues about the sub-standard work being done on the buildings during construction. This was after the roofs of some 15 houses got destroyed by wind. Sheku, who would later be sent to prison, alongside some other youths of the village, for challenging the company over the poor works done on their houses, blames former President Er- nest Bai Koroma and his younger brother, Thomas Koroma, who allegedly was con- tracted to construct the homes after the original contractor had their contract terminated. As a result of the concerns on the houses during construction, the villagers of Ferengbeya and its sister vil- lagers were reluctant to relocate. They recalled that even as negotiations were ongoing, officials from the government came to mark their old houses for demolition. The resistance they put up to that was what landed Sheku and his colleagues in jail for between three and six months.

With all this experience, the youths com- plain that they were the last to be considered for job, despite a prom- ise of job opportunity by the company during negotia-tion for the relocation. The lucky few indi- genes who were em- ployed, were taken on casual basis. Ibrahim Sorie Koroma, was among the very lucky few ones who got permanent employ-

For three months, water has not passed through this tank, leaving the people of Ferengbeya to walk long distance in search of water

Tribal elder Fanka Mansaray of Ferengbeya
NACE-National Coalition on Extractives
Freetown, Sierra Leone
Email: info@nacesl.org
    coordinator@nacesl.org
    chairman@nacesl.org
Phone: (+232) 33 353 471