

**CASE STUDY REPORT AND ANALYSIS: THE IMPACT OF MINING ON GENDER, CLIMATE, AND ECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS IN ZELEKA TOWN**



**Above:** Hawa harvests for the last time at the Zeleka rice farm cooperative in Bomi County; Kongo Mining will take over their livelihood rice farm in 2025

## About this report

The case studies analysis report was developed following community engagement with the Zeleka Community, which is directly impacted by the Western Cluster Mining Company and Kongo Mining in Bomi County. The case studies presented are the result of the ongoing mining operations conducted by Kongo Mining and Western Cluster. This report serves as an annex to a recent study by ActionAid Liberia on Climate Justice Financing, which explores domestic resource mobilization in the context of climate change and the extractive industry in Liberia.

## Background

Liberia's mining sector has historically played a vital role in the nation's economy by generating revenue and creating employment opportunities. However, the rapid expansion of the industry has often come at a high cost to local communities, especially in areas like Zeleka Town. The environmental degradation, social inequities, and economic disruptions associated with mining activities have profoundly affected the lives of residents, particularly women and marginalized groups.

The case of Zeleka Town illustrates the multifaceted impacts of mining operations on gender dynamics, climate resilience, and community stability. Mining companies operating in these regions must balance their economic interests with social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and the promotion of gender equity to ensure the well-being of affected communities.

### Western Cluster Mining Company

Western Cluster, one of the two mining companies impacting Zeleka Town, has ceased its mining operations. However, despite halting its activities, the company is currently drying up the Blue Lake in preparation for further mining endeavors. Although the concession contract remains valid, Western Cluster has failed to uphold its societal contributions as outlined in the agreement with the local community. This lack of commitment has left residents without the promised benefits, intensifying the socioeconomic challenges they face.

### Kongo Mining Company

Kongo Mining is set to commence operations in 2025 to mine black sand. However, the company's operations will displace the 38-hectare rice farm owned by the Zeleka Rice Farmers Cooperative, a government-registered entity. The same land allocated to the cooperative has been reassigned by the Government of Liberia to Kongo Mining without providing a sustainable solution for the cooperative members.

This situation poses severe threats to the livelihoods of cooperative members and their families, as well as the education of their children and the local economy. Neither the government nor Kongo Mining has taken steps to address the relocation or compensation of the rice farmers, leaving the community in a precarious position. The availability of the copy of the Social agreement is only known by the Chairman in

### Broader Implications

The challenges faced by Zeleka Town exemplify the broader struggles of communities affected by mining activities in Liberia. While mining companies reap significant profits, local residents bear the brunt of environmental degradation, disrupted livelihoods, and unmet contractual obligations.

Urgent action is needed to address the concerns of the Zeleka community. The Government of Liberia and the involved mining companies must engage in transparent dialogue with affected stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions. This includes honoring concession agreements, providing fair compensation, and ensuring alternative livelihoods for displaced residents. Without these measures, the adverse impacts of mining will continue to deepen existing inequalities and undermine the long-term development of local communities

## Story 1: Town Chief Edward Momolu's Struggle for Community Rights

In Zeleka Town, Town Chief Edward Momolu, 61 years old, a father of five, has become a vocal advocate for his community's rights amidst the ongoing operations of the Western Cluster mine. Despite the mine's significant investment of over \$10 million and its A certificate in mining, Chief Momolu is disheartened by the company's failure to fulfill its social responsibility commitments.

The Western Cluster promised to build an elementary school for the community but has only managed to construct a single classroom, now used as an ABC class. This inadequate infrastructure has left local children struggling to access education. Additionally, the closure of a shortcut road by the mine has forced residents to travel long distances to reach Tubmanburg for essential services, such as school and healthcare.

Children often spend four hours each day commuting, risking their educational outcomes and safety. Women and girls, in particular, are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation during these long journeys. Chief Momolu expressed his frustration, stating,

*"None of the social corporate responsibilities have been met by the Western Cluster. Our community is undermined."*

### **Gender-Responsive Public Services Elements:**

The inadequate educational infrastructure, specifically the single classroom constructed by the Western Cluster mine, highlights the lack of gender-responsive services. Girls often face additional barriers to education, particularly in communities where schools are lacking or unsafe.

The long commutes for children, especially girls, to access education and healthcare expose them to risks of abuse and exploitation. This situation underscores the need for gender-sensitive transportation and safety measures.

### **Dangers Faced by Women and Girls:**

The closure of a shortcut road by the mine has forced residents, particularly women and girls, to navigate longer, potentially unsafe routes. This increases their vulnerability to harassment and violence.

Women, as primary caregivers, are disproportionately affected by the lack of educational access for their children, impacting their own opportunities for economic independence and security.

### **Climate Effects of Mining:**

While not explicitly mentioned, mining operations typically lead to environmental degradation, including deforestation and water pollution, which can exacerbate climate change impacts. This degradation affects agricultural productivity and food security for the community.

### **Economic Effects on Women, Girls, and Community Livelihoods:**

The failure of the mining company to fulfill its social responsibility commitments has direct economic implications. With children spending four hours daily commuting, parents may face difficulties in maintaining employment due to caregiving responsibilities.

The community's economic stability is threatened by inadequate investment in local infrastructure, which hampers access to education and healthcare, further entrenching poverty.

### **STORY 2: A RAY OF HOPE FROM KONGO MINING**

Despite the challenges posed by the Western Cluster mine, Chief Edward Momolu finds a glimmer of hope in a new mining company called KONGO. Unlike its predecessor, KONGO has demonstrated a commitment to the community by consistently paying \$500 in dues as a rental of Kongo mine's buildings on the land of Zeleka and providing support during public holidays with donations of rice and other food items.

However, the introduction of KONGO mining has also raised concerns. The land they intend to mine encompasses a crucial Zeleka's 38-hectare rice farm that feeds the community and supports its economic stability. Chief Momolu worries about the potential destruction of this vital resource, which not only sustains families but also helps pay for school fees and early childhood education for Zeleka and other communities around.

*"If my people lose this land, we will die of hunger, and our economic stability will be compromised," Momolu lamented.*

While the community appreciates KONGO's support, uncertainty surrounds their livelihoods as discussions about mining progress without clear communication regarding social responsibilities. Momolu and Zeleka's leadership have urged the government of Liberia and Kongo Mining to relocate their 38-hectare farm to a more suitable area with adequate water supply and equal land size fearing soil degradation and water pollution from Kongo. Despite Kongo mining's promise that they will not use chemical, residents of Zeleka remain concerned over that statement as they are already experiencing contaminated water flows. They have stated that it is impossible. To date, no action has been taken, leaving Zeleka's residents increasingly concerned.

### **Gender-Responsive Public Services Elements:**

The initial support provided by KONGO Mining, which includes financial contributions and donations, has the potential to improve community services. However, this support lacks a structured approach that specifically addresses the unique needs of women and girls. Moreover, there is no formal verification regarding whether KONGO Mining is fulfilling its financial obligations or how the figure of USD 500 was determined, especially given that it is essentially USD 6,000 annually. Additionally, there is no established agreement outlining a monthly payment schedule, which raises concerns about the reliability and consistency of this support.

### **Dangers Faced by Women and Girls:**

The potential destruction of the 38-hectare rice farm poses a significant threat to food security. Women, who often manage household food production, may face increased risks of hunger and poverty, further worsening gender inequalities.

### **Climate Effects of Mining:**

Mining activities threaten local ecosystems, which could lead to long-term changes in land use and adverse effects on biodiversity. The loss of agricultural land to mining operations can contribute to climate vulnerability by reducing local capacity to adapt to climate impacts.

### **Economic Effects on Women, Girls, and Community Livelihoods:**

The 38 hectares rice farm is not only a source of food but also a means for families to afford education and other necessities. The potential loss of this resource could lead to higher rates of school dropout among girls, further entrenching gender inequalities and increasing Gender Based Violence.

Economic instability resulting from mining could lead to increased migration, disrupting community structures and increasing the risk of exploitation for women and girls.

### **Story 3: The Fight for Sustainable Livelihoods in Zeleka Town**

In Zeleka Town, the community is caught in a precarious balance between mining interests and sustainable livelihoods. Town Chief Edward Momolu has voiced deep concerns about the impact of the Western Cluster mine on daily life. The company's failure to build the promised school and the closure of vital access roads have left families struggling to ensure their children's education and safety.

Meanwhile, the emerging presence of KONGO mining offers some hope, with initial promises of financial support and food donations. However, the impending threat to the community's rice farm underscores a significant dilemma. The 38-hectare farm is essential for food security and economic stability, providing income for school fees and community needs.

As discussions about mining activities progress, Chief Momolu and the residents of Zeleka Town find themselves at a crossroads. They seek assurances that their voices will be heard and that their livelihoods will not be sacrificed in the name of resource extraction.

*"We want a future where our children can go to school safely and where we can feed our families,"* Momolu declared, highlighting the community's struggle for dignity and sustainability in the face of powerful mining interests.

### **Gender-Responsive Public Services Elements:**

The ongoing dialogue around mining activities indicates a need for inclusive community engagement that prioritizes the voices of women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes.

**Dangers Faced by Women and Girls:**

The precarious situation of balancing mining interests with sustainable livelihoods means that women and girls are at risk of losing both their safety and their economic empowerment as essential resources become threatened.

**Climate Effects of Mining:**

The potential environmental impacts of mining, such as land degradation and pollution, pose long-term threats to the community's agricultural practices, which are vital for climate resilience and sustainability livelihoods.

**Economic Effects on Women, Girls, and Community Livelihoods:**

Chief Momolu's concerns about the community's future speak to the broader economic implications of resource extraction. Without sustainable practices, women may lose their roles in agriculture and local economies, leading to increased poverty levels.

The community's struggle for dignity and sustainability reflects the need for policies that ensure equitable resource distribution and protect the livelihoods of women and girls, emphasizing the importance of community-led economic initiatives.

**Conclusion**

The case studies from Zeleka Town illustrate the complex interplay between mining operations and the well-being of women, girls, and the community at large. Addressing gender-responsive public services, recognizing the dangers faced by the community especially women and girls, analyzing climate effects, and understanding economic impacts is essential for fostering a sustainable and equitable future for all community members.