

Implications of income diversification in Irisvale farming community, uMzingwane District, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, peasants in Irisvale have been moving away from agriculture towards other livelihood strategies, chiefly, gold mining. In this study, we used a qualitative approach through a case study design to investigate the implications of diversification among the peasant community in Irisvale, uMzingwane District, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe. Through purposive sampling, we selected 34 participants and 2 key informants, and we used 3 focus group discussions to collect data from participants, together with key informant interviews. Data that were analysed through thematic analysis reveals that through gold mining, income has improved significantly among 'mining farmers' as they can now easily buy cattle, build houses, buy cars, and inputs for farming – something that was not possible before diversification. It was also revealed that gold mining has had negative effects that include shrinking fields, deagrarianisation or neglect of farming, environmental degradation, and a sharp rise in illegal activities (violence, commercial sex work, trade and use of drugs and substances, and the growth of make-shift housing). The researchers then recommend the need to subsidise agricultural inputs to encourage the co-existence of farming and mining, the regularisation of artisanal gold mining, the provision of SRHR services in the area, and improved targeting for children in such communities by the DSD, among other recommendations.

Keywords: agriculture, deagrarianisation, diversification, gold mining, peasant farmers

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Introduction

The last thirty years have seen peasants in the Irisvale resettlement area moving away from predominantly agricultural livelihoods towards diversified portfolios. The reasons for resettling people are decongesting the farming population and restoration of the indigenous population's dignity through observing their rights to land. However, the resettled farmers were guided by various regulations that directed them to engage in agriculture and nothing else. With time, and as a result of successive droughts and also the onset of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), peasants began to calculate the benefits of abiding by the decree or nose-diving deep into poverty. They began to engage in some income-generating activities that were outside of agriculture. Among the new livelihood strategies that the peasants employed is gold mining. Gold mining is fast becoming the main livelihood activity in the area leading to peasants being torn between agriculture and gold mining. With this in mind, the effects of diversification have not been investigated in Zimbabwe and this presents a gap that affects government policy towards responding to the changes in livelihood options in the area. Given this, this study examines the effects of diversification from farming to gold mining among the peasant community in Irisvale, uMzingwane District, in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland South province.

Understanding the peasantry

Peasants have been producing grain at Irisvale since their initial settling in 1985, but with Lenin's (1964) assertion, we are concerned that the peasants do not produce for themselves. The larger system wipes out whatever they produce by setting prices of the products and buying the same goods. This leaves the farmer with no option but to look for alternative means to eke out a living. In this way, peasants are introduced to the capitalist system in a way in which they are never winners. Iiyama (2010) discusses the

concept of peasantry from Brycesson's corner, and infers that in rural sociology, smallholder producers in Africa have often synonymously been treated as 'peasants' (Brycesson et al., 2000). In that way, they are not expected to thrive from their production, but have to remain impoverished and at the mercy of both economic and political powers. Suttie (IFAD) (2019) establishes that the 'prevailing political economy frameworks' in most third world countries further marginalise rural people hence making higher the probability of rural dwellers likely to suffer from poverty and deprivation.

Manyani (2011) concurs with Wolf (1966) in describing peasants as rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers, and that the economic surplus that is extracted takes place either freely or coercively by non-producing classes. I add the issue of political surplus as well. It seems in Africa, peasants not only surrender economic surplus but political surplus as well. African peasants seem to live at the mercy of their rulers whom they have to always pay back during election time. We differ with Manyani's (2011) comments in that, these orthodox definitions of the peasantry as postulated by Wolf could have been applicable at certain points in history under systems of oppression that have taken various turns over the years, however, in present-day societies, their relevance has waned in some societies and lost meaning. We agree with Bernstein (2000) who does not see peasantry as a homogenous class or group but as people who have arrived at different stations in life as a result of the different ways they interact with contemporary capitalism. The various ways in which they access natural resources like gold leads to heterogeneity among the peasants. Such are the resettled farmers in the Irisvale area. These are not homogenous groups. They are those who are stuck in agriculture, while others are farming, trading and gold panning and yet some have left farming completely for gold mining.

The rationale and determinants of household diversification

Abdulai and Crolerees (2001) give us a picture that rural households in sub-Saharan Africa allocate their assets among various income-generating activities and may diversify their farm activities by planting different crops, rearing different kinds of livestock, working on other farms or engaging in natural resource related activities (Losch, Freguin-Gresh and White, 2012). Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon (2007) point out those rural households may also diversify into non-farm activities like trading and gold mining. Djurfeldt & Djurfeldt (2013) point out that other households even swing between farm and off-farm activities over time depending on opportunities and constraints they face. Loison (2018) has identified several determinants of household income and livelihood diversification using the pull and push theory. She classified the types of diversification based on motives of survival/distress as push factors and those that lean towards accumulation or opportunity as pull factors. In line with Martin and Lorenzen, (2016), Loison (2018) identified push factors for on-farm diversification as those that include seasonality, climatic uncertainty, land constraints, missing or incomplete factor markets, market access problems, poor infrastructure, asset strategies and coping behaviour.

Rural folk have been associated with a wide range of activities that they do as a way of keeping their families afloat against the vagaries of suffocating social and economic life. In the process, they are found to depend on other activities in addition to farming to eke out a living. Some say these activities are ventured into as a result of trying to survive, while others say these additional are ventured into as a way of thriving, thereby accumulating. Ellis identifies three categories. For him, livelihood diversification activities are categorised based on their roles as mechanisms for coping, adaptation and accumulation (Ellis 2000). Gautam (2016:3) shows that “diversification to non-farm livelihood strategies rather than relying only on subsistence farming enables households to have better incomes, enhance food security,

increase agricultural production by smoothing capital constraints and also to better cope with environmental stresses”. For Albore (2018:251), “the driving forces of diversification operate at different levels. They operate at the macro (trade policies, exchange rate, fiscal and monetary policies, market and infrastructure policies and research and extension policies). They also operate at the meso-environment (regional or local agro-ecology, topography, soil quality, rainfall) population, infrastructure and markets and micro levels (household asset basis and characteristics such as land, livestock, savings, education, labour, age, gender, dependency ratio”

Studies by esteemed multilateral organisations (FAO 2014, ECA 2016 and World Bank 2016) have shown that more than 40 per cent of the world population, approximately 415 million, live in extreme poverty and approximately a fourth are undernourished, the Sub-Saharan African region is not spared in any way. This might have encouraged some peasants to diversify into other portfolios. Ellis (1989) “says the centrality of smallholder agriculture in alleviating poverty and enhancing food security cannot be undermined especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where more than 70% of the population still resides in rural areas.” Jaka and Shava (2017) say agriculture has remained the main livelihood for rural populations to promote food security, even in drought-prone regions. Gangata and Matavire (2013) assert that rural areas in Zimbabwe have suffered various shocks and stresses; these include persistent economic meltdowns and climate changes, such as droughts and floods that negatively affect agriculture. These shocks have left a wake of poverty, hunger and a general decline in living standards, especially for people in rural areas with limited access to resources. These drastic changes have also facilitated shifts for women and men in rural areas to play active roles in income-generating activities (Fook, 2011).

Ellis and Mdoe (2003) point out that a growing number of rural Tanzanians are turning to the non-farm economy for sustenance, a

process that Brycesson (1996) refers to as deagrarianisation. Earlier on, Chuta and Leidholm (1990) had been modest and suggested that up to 50% of African rural households' income comes from non-farm enterprises. Reardon and Vosti (1995) view diversification as part of coping strategies while Ellis (1998) sees it as an accumulation technique. Through Hiremath (2007) we get the view that since the peasants' land is no longer able to meet the requirements of food due to uncertainty brought about by climate change, rural households are forced to look towards alternative sources of income. Albore (2018) implies that such uncertainty results in people switching from farm sources of income to non-farm activities for secure and sustainable livelihoods. Davis et al., (2007) add that diversification is a norm in every economy, particularly in rural Africa, where farming alone rarely provides sufficient income.

Loison (2015) is of the understanding that getting a thorough knowledge of rural people's livelihoods involves examining how communities have managed to adjust their livelihoods amid challenges resulting not only from drought but also from various forces such as socio-economics, political and ecological factors. At Irisvale, villagers have learnt to live with droughts. They have adjusted in many ways like digging for water in river beds and drying locally growing vegetables as soon as their sprout to cope with droughts. They have also made various alliances with social, business and political leaders to extract whatever they can from the various systems they represent. Brycesson, (2009) points out that while rural households try to achieve a balanced portfolio of productive activities, with subsistence food production as insurance against failure, no such balancing efforts are taking place at the national level. The state seems to be prioritising sectors such as mining and petty trading over agriculture. As a result of this apparent neglect of agriculture, political mudslinging and deepening economic woes, the farmer in Irisvale is finding him or herself in an even more precarious position. The peasants, state and external capital in their interfacing bring about dynamics,

which are of interest to the study. For instance, due to the establishment of SAPs, the farmer became impoverished and decided to pursue other livelihood options like mining and trading which are again linked to the state and capital.

Why gold mining?

Mining has been one of the mainstays of Southern African economies for over a century. It is significant in the shaping of the region's relative prosperity which has made the industry an important topic of historical research (Kwai and Hilson 2010). Development scholars argue that Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in 2000 resulted in inequitable outcomes whilst reshaping rural labour relations throughout the country. Mining predominantly contributes to development and continues to bring much-needed income (Kasere et al., 2015). According to Mapuranga (2020), mining acts as a poverty alleviation scheme in many countries owing to endemic poverty and skyrocketing inflation. Zimbabwe is generally a mining and agricultural country. Both activities were the main livelihood strategies even before colonialism. Malinga (2018) attests to the fact that during the early and late Stone Age period, inhabitants of Zimbabwe were mostly hunters and gathers as there is no record of any farming activities. The later Iron Age saw the rise of the Great Zimbabwe Empire in the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. During this period, inhabitants had sedentarised and had begun to farm as a result of the mining of iron from which they made rudimentary tools. Extraction of minerals was to continue under the Mutapa state which began to see the importance of gold and silver as they were trading these, with the Portuguese. During colonialism, while agricultural activities were limited for the native population due to land expropriation and commodity pricing, mineral extraction was banned and became a punishable offence. It was only through licensing that one could mine. As is

the situation now, getting a prospecting license was a dream for the villagers. They could only access this sector through being employees, and very exploited ones for that. At Independence, various African governments would open up the mining sector to their citizens, but they would continue to emphasise agriculture. Examples of this are the Tanzanian government under Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the Zambian experience under Kenneth Kaunda and the Zimbabwean one under Robert Mugabe. However, due to economic challenges and subsequent policies discussed in the sections above, peasants have been slowly moving into mining to augment the meagre resources coming out of agriculture.

Mapuranga (2020) argues that the number of formal artisanal miners is above 35 000 in Zimbabwe whilst over one million people mine illegally. Yet the government of Zimbabwe is delaying the formalisation of artisanal mining – exacerbating illegal mining (Mapuranga, 2020). Mabhena (2010) laments that the majority of residents in Matabeleland South now depend on off-farm livelihoods such as small-scale mining and migration to South Africa. Estelle Levin Ltd (2012) notices a shift from agriculture to small-scale mining by a majority of smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe. It seems being engaged in agriculture for all these years has not helped the African peasant in noticeable ways. Poverty has been entrenched over the years and the peasant has had to come up with ways to help themselves out. Gold mining has become not only a coping mechanism but an accumulation tool for some. It needs to be pointed out however that as Okoh and Hilson (2011) found out, the emergence of make-shift communities or settlements was characterised by *inter alia*, significant prostitution, excessive violence and widespread narcotics consumption which tend to attract several people of school-going ages has resulted from the new mining compounds (Branchiringa 2008; Hilson, 2010). This also compares well with the actions of

the amakorokoza (artisanal miners) as the Zimbabwean version is not to be outdone.

Mkodzongi and Spiegel (2018) saw farmers on one hand and artisanal and small-scale gold miners on the other and found out that these two camps were at loggerheads. This study, while it came to the same conclusion, also found out that in many cases, the peasants are the very same gold panners and miners. These are the farmers who realized the privilege that the white settlers had and now want to maximise their current positions (Mkodzongi and Spiegel 2018; Rutherford, 2016; Scoones, 2015). Mkodzongi (2013) points out that changes in agrarian structure led to increased mobility across formerly large-scale commercial farms by rural peasants and unemployed people from across Zimbabwe. Malinga (2018) points out that in the 2000s, mining was given precedence over the agricultural sector. It, therefore, followed that the sharp decline of the once-thriving agricultural sector provided a very smooth avenue for the prominence of the mining sector. Malinga (2018) and Scoones (2014) point out that the growth of artisanal or small-scale mining is one of the main features of the post-2000 Zimbabwean economy. This is mainly attributed to the decline of the agricultural sector which was a source of livelihood for a majority of households in the rural areas.

Methodology

Study Setting

Umzingwane district has long been known for its agriculture, as this is an activity that most of its people have engaged in, traditionally. In recent years, however, the dynamics of the district and the wider Matabeleland South region have changed. While the locals continue being agricultural, villagers in Irisvale resettlement (ward 13) of Umzingwane district have also

embraced gold mining among the new activities that they have taken up. The resettlement area is 81 kilometres Southeast of Bulawayo and is unique in that it has experienced four resettlement groups in various epochs of the Zimbabwean land reform. Irisvale is a resettlement area that was first established during the willing seller-willing buyer era of the land reform programme of the 1980s. The uMzingwane district generally receives low and unreliable rainfall. Most of the area is regarded as semi-arid because it receives an average rainfall of <500mm per annum. The area experiences a long dry season between May and December and a short rainy season. Rains start in December and are interrupted by a short dry spell between January and February. The people in the area are also involved in gold panning, trading, amacimbi (edible mopane worms) gathering, sand poaching, firewood selling and beekeeping while they wait for the rain, in recent years, these activities have competed with agriculture even if the rains are above normal.

Irisvale comprises nine villages. Initially, there were eight villages, but after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, they became nine. It is located within the then Cammings Farm in the uMzingwane district. The area has 360 households, three boreholes and 4 small dams. Irisvale has three dip tanks, one primary school, one secondary school and one clinic. The Cammings was a big estate subdivided into smaller farms like Pennelvan (now Villages 4, 5, &7), Charter (village 6), Stratemore (village 3), New Brighton farm (village 8) and Irisvale (village 1a, 1b & 2) [Source: RDC records]. Maize is the main crop, although many now also plant small grains. The area is endowed with red alluvial clay soils, which are not navigable during the rainy season. A caretaker who used to operate under the Department of Rural Development (Derude), supervised the initial villages. He represented the village head since there were no village heads by

then. The first group was resettled in 1985, and the beneficiaries were deserving cases from overpopulated and unproductive communal lands of Matabeleland South. These occupied villages 1a, 1b and 2. The government built three-bedroom houses for the resettled farmers and electrified the houses.

In 1988, another group of farmers was resettled and became villages 3 and 4. The group was not as fortunate as the first one. No houses were built for them and there was no electricity for them as well. They also had to fetch water from water points that were a distance from their homes. In 1990 the third group was resettled in the area and formed villages 5, 6, 7 and 8. In 1990, more occupants who were former workers from Bushtick farm in Esigodini were also resettled there. Also, during this time, government policy on land acquisition was changing from willing seller-willing buyer towards one of compulsory acquisition and it was also during the Structural Adjustment programme. The latest beneficiaries came through the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. The four groups have been on collision courses over the years and they have responded differently to various interventions. For instance, it took more than 25 years for a secondary school to be built in Irisvale because different councillors elected over the years would push for it to be built in their villages. Also, the initial group could hunt, and cut down trees unmonitored, but subsequent groups were stricter with the environment.

Approach and design

In line with the scope of the study, a qualitative research paradigm was used through an instrumental case study design. The case study method is especially beneficial when it is necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of a topic, event, or phenomenon of interest in its natural real-life setting (Crowe et al., 2011). As a result, it is frequently referred to as a "naturalistic" design, as

opposed to an "experimental" design (such as a randomised controlled trial), in which the investigator attempts to exercise control over and influence the variable in the model) of concern (Crowe et al., 2011). The researchers used an instrumental case study design because they wanted to gain a broader appreciation of what is happening in Irisvale, even though other cases are facing diversification.

Sampling

In line with the need to collect rich data in the natural setting, purposive sampling was used to select participants for 3 focus groups, and 2 key informant interviews. The 3 focus group discussions had 9, 12 and 13 participants each, giving rise to 34 participants and 2 key informants. Of the 34 participants, 21 were male whilst 13 were female. All of the 34 participants owned land in Irisvale and they were resident there. The researchers approached every participant and informed them of the study to get informed consent. It was then that focus groups were organised for data collection and we drafted participants into either focus groups 1, 2 or 3, depending on their preferences.

Data collection

Three focus group discussions were used to collect data through focus group discussion guides. The focus group discussions were held on different days in line with the preferences of participants. Data were collected between January and March of 2022, and this was during the summer period when most farming and mining take place in the target area. As such, some of the participants that had agreed to be part of the study could not avail themselves. The focus group discussion guides that we used had questions that were crafted in line with the objectives of the study. Each focus group lasted around 3 to 4 hours and the researchers managed to collect data without much challenges. After the focus group discussions, 2 key informant interviews were conducted through a key informant

guide that was crafted in line with the objectives of the study, and the responses that had been received from participants of the study.

Data analysis and ethical issues

After data collection, we transcribed data whilst translating it from Ndebele to English. Data were then analysed through thematic analysis in line with the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2022). We analysed data and merged themes iteratively until they were refined. The themes that emerged from the analysis became the basis for the systematic presentation of findings as shown in the following subsection. The study received ethics approval from Women's University in Africa. Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants and the researchers followed the University's research ethical guidelines (informed consent, confidentiality, least harm, and anonymity, among others).

Study findings

Through thematic analysis, we came up with 4 themes that relate to the (1) accumulation of wealth and improvement in quality of life, (2) shrinking fields, (3) neglect of farming and environmental degradation, and (4) illegal activities (violence, sex work, trade and use of drugs and substances, and the sprouting of make-shift housing).

Accumulation of wealth and improvement in quality of life

In line with the accumulation of wealth, the following was said by the participants in the FGDs.

Participant 14 pointed out that,

...Participation in artisanal gold mining has helped my household buy equipment for farming and also helped me build a bigger house and that is something that we could not have done had we stuck to crop farming...

This means villagers can use gold mining as a means to prop up farming. In the end, farming and mining become complementary. In addition, participant 19 in the FGDs said,

I have been able to buy cattle from gold mining and I am now respected in this area. Anyone with a big herd of cattle is held in high esteem here... A result has been that we quickly buy cattle as soon as we raise enough money. This keeps us relevant in our areas of origin and gives us mileage if the wider family encounters an emergency... We are usually called upon and consulted regardless of our younger age.

This then means the artisanal gold miner weighs more than the crop farmer in Irisvale at the moment.

Some artisanal gold miners also indicated that,

...I have also bought non-farming assets like gas stoves, kitchen utensils, household linen, solar systems and furniture from the proceeds of gold.... This has set me on the same pedestal as urban dwellers...

Participant 23 pointed out that,

...I have managed to acquire farming implements like ripper tyres, ox-drawn ploughs and fencing material... I have also bought a car and I am in the process of acquiring a residential stand in Bulawayo from the gold that I mine...

It also came out in the study that the community has not only thrived in portable assets only, but some have bought cars, especially from dealing in gold and foreign currency and they use these cars to make more money by transporting goods and people

to the mining compounds, Esigodini and neighbouring areas like Nswazi, Mbalabala and Filabusi.

Shrinking fields

Generally, fields in Irisvale are becoming smaller due to the increased population and the advancement of mining and gold panning. Locals blame the Chinese and politicians for their predicament. However, of late the farmers are somewhat softening from the blame game as the number of 'mining farmers' continues to rise in Irisvale.

Participant 2 in the FGDs said,

...On many occasions, we the farmers have been told by authorities that we own the topsoil only... It seems to most farmers that the message is now sinking home, and we are now manipulating the environment for other natural resources... I however bemoan situations in which livestock continuously falls into pits and we glare at losses every time... This makes us consider livelihood options outside agriculture...

To add on, participant 17 mentioned that,

...I lost two heifers when they fell into open pits dug by artisanal miners... One of them broke its hind legs, while the other broke its neck... I had to slaughter the cattle and sell the meat at a loss... The killing of the cattle hurt my family as nutrition was compromised since we could not get the regular milk, we were used to... our fields and grazing lands continue to retreat as the miners advance... and unfortunately, most of the farmers here are part of the miners, and because of that, I do not think this will end...

A key informant then stated,

...miners are supposed to cover any pits they dig or face a fine or incarceration of up to a year in prison... artisanal mining has created numerous hazards for Irisvale and other regions' livestock... and the mercury used in gold smelting may end up in the 2 dams that are close by, in the end affecting both humans and animals... as such, I hope for a speedy amendment of the Mines and Minerals Act, whose amendment bill has been stuck in Parliament since 2015...

Participant 22 then added,

...fields are shrinking due to food aid that is given to locals as a result of the many droughts that we encounter... As we receive more aid, we plant less and when the aid does not come, we have to quickly come up with survival strategies, and mining is normally a preferred one...

The above indicates the influence of aid and remedial social welfare activities on the Irisvale community. Aid creates a dependency syndrome (Kurevakwesu, 2017; Kurevakwesu & Mukushi, 2018; Kurevakwesu et al., 2022) – and when this aid does not come later on, people have to find ways to survive. The same participant also mentioned that,

...fields are also getting smaller because of population growth... as sons and more recently daughters grow up, they are given small plots to farm within the parents' main farming area... This cuts farm size and pushes people to look for alternative means of living like gold mining...

Neglect of farming (deagrarianisation) and environmental degradation

Most of the participants in the FGDs saw mining as a blessing in

disguise. They seemed uncomfortable with the processes and how it is done, but they all saw it as necessary, bearing in mind the economic times that they are in, the amount of rainfall they receive and the types of soils they have. Participant 5 pointed out that,

...Initially, I was discouraged by the river (that kept on being flooded) to continue with my education... now I am enjoying life following rivers and valleys in search of gold... we have a piece of land, but you will outrightly see that what you produce after a year of toiling, you can buy within 2 weeks... so, we should mine, than farm... doing gold is much better again because I am given real money while in agriculture you receive RTGS (Zimbabwean dollars)...

Participant 9 then said,

...the decreasing rewards of farming pushed me into gold mining... I used to work very hard in the fields but year after year, the value of what I worked for kept decreasing and I finally thought of joining the gold panners... my family refused initially arguing that panners are violent and they could kill me if relations go bad... I insisted and today they are all happy that I did because I am now taking great care of them like never before...

Participant 11 also mentioned that,

...choosing between farming and agriculture is not difficult at all since agricultural produce is paid for in Zimbabwean dollars while what we mine is paid for in forex... I prefer the Forex way without question... I would rather buy food after getting the forex from mining... and as it stands, most fields now lie fallow because no one is giving them any attention... people are busy looking for money...

In addition, key informant 1 said,

...It is hard to stop this gold panning activity because everyone is in one way or another benefiting from it... We may want it to be stopped, but more people will suffer as a result... I think that it be allowed but be controlled to benefit all the people even those that do not go and dig... However, the problem is that they leave open pits and use mercury to recover the gold yet they never really went to school to learn how best to do it and are not accountable for the environmental degradation...

The issue of environmental degradation was mentioned by some participants, but chiefly, by key informants. They argued that gold panning was giving rise to unreclaimed pits that had become death traps together with excessive deforestation and the use of dangerous chemicals like mercury.

Illegal activities (violence, sex work and the sprouting of make-shift housing)

From the findings, it was reflected that the area of Irisvale, due to diversification into gold mining, has seen a sharp rise in illegal activities over the years. For instance, participant 4 argued that,

...Mining is the major livelihood activity as the area is rich in gold, whilst livestock farming is the second, vending the third together with cross-border trading... This has created a small economy in this area and with that, we have seen the rise of people coming from outside Matabeleland and setting up illegal housing structures here... there is also a lot of violence as people fight over mines since no one owns any claim... injuries due to fights at mining sites are now very common...

In the FGDs, issues of domestic and community violence were

debated and people expressed that these cases had increased severely. This can be seen through what Participant 28 said,

...the increase in domestic and community violence is just too much in this area... peasants fight over boundaries and they also fight when they get to the gold fields... Due to the rise of sex work, they also fight over women at local pubs and there is marked violence in homes as well... Sex work has become the mainstay here... and we now have commercial sex workers living in this area prying for hard-earned money from gold panners... due to the nature of their work, gold panners fall easily to these commercial sex workers, and due to that, they are multiplying in large numbers... you mentioned that your study is focused on diversification... isn't that diversification also because our sisters and children are now heavily engaged in commercial sex work...

Key informant 2 then stated that,

...What is worrying from all that you have been told is that drug and substance use now characterises this area... people come to sell drugs here because the gold panners need them... Moreover, with the rise of sex work and make-shift housing, you will be surprised that most of the people coming in to pan gold and live in the makeshift houses are below 18... and some of the sex workers are also children below the age of 18 again... this presents a huge challenge... and with illegal gold mining, we cannot run away from all these vices...

Ostensibly, violence, commercial sex work and the sprouting of make-shift housing together with trading and using drugs and substances are the consequences of diversification into illegal gold mining. What is worrying is that illegal gold mining, though helping communities with income diversification, has created more problems for the community. Technically, violence and sex

work have grave consequences, in the same manner that substance use has (Kurevakwesu et al., 2023).

Discussion

It is clear from the findings above that the diversification of peasants into gold mining has brought about both positive and negative effects on the Irisvale community. On a positive note, there has been the accumulation of wealth and improvement in quality of life. However, on another note, this income diversification has led to shrinking fields, neglect of farming and environmental degradation, and illegal activities (violence, sex work and the sprouting of make-shift housing). Farmers have been noticing diminishing rewards from all forms of farming which include livestock rearing, mostly due to cruel droughts and unending economic woes both of which rise the prices of inputs and chemicals. The only logical response to the crises that ensued has been a move away from agriculture (Dube, 2016). Dube et al. (2016) and Spiegel (2015) point out that smallholder farming and small-scale mining in Zimbabwe have become the two main pillars of Zimbabwe's economy, but Malinga (2018) says of the two, in the 2000s, mining was given precedence over the agriculture. It, therefore, followed that the sharp decline of the once-thriving agricultural sector provided a very smooth avenue for the prominence of the mining sector. Irisvale peasants have also taken advantage of the booming gold opportunities and have sent their young, strong men and women into the gap created by somewhat unclear policies (Scoones, 2014; Mpfu and Mpfu 2017; Malinga, 2018).

However, in many accounts, gold panning has been illustrated as complimenting farming (Ncube-Phiri, Mucherera, & Ncube, 2015). However, the peasants at Irisvale seem to have completely shunned farming for mining despite the two co-existing. This is because of the benefits that mining provides as compared to

farming (Brycesson, 2009). In Irisvale, there is a definite move towards non-farm activities like trading and gold mining as people cite depressed returns from agriculture and recurrent droughts. Such activities have become important to the peasants as they bring in more income than traditional farming. This is what Bebbington (2005) and Rigg (2006) term deagrarianisation. Brycesson (2005) believes that the suffering brought about by neoliberal policies by African governments is responsible for the movements from farm-based livelihoods towards non-farm livelihoods. Ohiorhenuan (1998) points out that the rural youth end up cherishing the standards of the urban folk which are mostly not associated with agriculture. This coupled with socio-economic changes in ways like improved education, employment opportunities and labour mobility further devalue agro-based livelihoods, hence opting for activities like artisanal gold mining. On the other hand, Scoones et al., (2012) believe that the Zimbabwe government through the land reform programme has set the country's rural political economy towards 'repeasantisation'. A study they conducted in Masvingo among peasants that had been resettled under the Fast Track Land Reform programme led to that conclusion. However, the Irisvale study does not come to the same conclusion as Scoones et al. (2012) in that the conditions currently prevailing in rural areas do not support repeasantisation at all. Repeasantisation could only result if the government would fully support the farmer and reintroduce subsidies and a conducive market. Without that kind of support, gold mining and other livelihoods away from agriculture would gain more and more popularity. The other reason why Irisvale peasants continue to shun agriculture is that the farmers are given their money in local currency when they sell their produce, but artisanal miners are getting their money in forex. That is a big incentive for the miners.

Many different kinds of negative externalities can result from the mining and processing of minerals. These include pollution, demands placed on other finite natural resources, and social unrest, which may affect community well-being. Environmental pollution has the potential to negatively affect health. Indirectly influencing crop health and growth, decreasing the quality of essential agricultural inputs like soil and water, and affecting labour productivity are further ways that air pollution can result in the loss of agricultural output. Another way in which residents' livelihoods are being put in peril is through mining-induced displacement. Local communities are impacted by mining developments in terms of ecosystems and land usage. Dust, noise, wastewater, and heavy metal deposits from mining and mineral processing have severely lowered the ecosystem's quality and posed health risks to the general populace. The usage of land and water also causes other disturbances, which decreases the sustainability of other industries including tourism, aquaculture, and agriculture (Yang and Ho, 2019). The violence that is taking place in the mines and later in the homes is a huge negative in that there are reports of loss of life, stress and damage to property in the process. Okoh and Hilson (2011) found that there was significant prostitution, excessive violence and widespread narcotics consumption in the mining compounds in their study in Ghana.

However, it needs to be noted that it is not solely the attractiveness of gold prices that have made the Irisvale farmer retreat, but government and non-governmental organisations' relief initiatives have immensely contributed to less work being done in Irisvale fields. This is in line with Clara and Du Toit (2007) who noted that agricultural production has declined because state support in the form of pensions and grants has made rural people lazy. Tanga and Gutura (2013) note that most of those governmental grants are in the form of child support grants, disability grants and old age

pensions which are viewed as a source of income and lead to the development of reluctance to work on the land. Chitonge (2013) buttresses this argument by pointing out that social grants provide poor households with alternative income which in turn reduces the pressure to embark on subsistence agriculture. There are times in which the state and non-governmental organisations assist children and the aged monetarily in Irisvale. While this is not considerable enough to encourage the recipients to abandon farming, it is significant enough cause them not to expend all their energy on farming. This, therefore, results in less land being farmed, and when hunger sets in, the able-bodied go for the gold fields.

Population growth has been given as one of the major causes of Irisvale peasants moving into artisanal gold mining. Losch et al., (2015) suggest that the population in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) will grow by 450 million people or more by 2030 and around that time about 52% of the population will be found in rural areas. Losch et al., (2015) cemented by Jayne et al., (2014) and Headey and Jayne, (2014) view diminishing farming acreage in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as due to high population growth. According to these scholars, a high population shrinks farmland as more people take up farming space. This then directly leads people to diversify from agriculture because the land they farm would be much smaller and not able to sustain families (Davis et al, 2016; Winters et al., 2009, 2010). Loison (2017:34) says that “there is a crisis in the agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa, characterised by declining farm sizes, low levels of output per farm, low productivity and a high degree of subsistence farming, with increases in production being driven mainly by area expansion rather than yield growth”. Declining farm sizes in SSA, especially in land-constrained areas, are attributed to high population growth resulting from high fertility rates (Headey and

Jayne, 2014; Jayne et al., 2014). The Irisvale resettlement area has seen population growth from both a biological point of view and a mechanical increase where inhabitants have continued to be added in. This has affected the capacity of the land. As the land begins to fail to accommodate all, there arises a move towards diversification and more so into the gold fields. This is more so as many Irisvale parents are not excited about their children choosing crop farming as a livelihood option. They could be basing it on what they have seen over the years. They are happy with them being involved in gold mining or migrating to urban settings.

On another note, income diversification in Irisvale has created and intensified social problems and illegal activities that include violence, commercial sex work, the sprouting of make-shift housing and trading and using harmful drugs and substances. These vices will indubitably have effects on community welfare and some of the major victims will be children. If children are affected, then their development and welfare will be compromised – and so will their future (Chineka & Kurevakwesu, 2021). Moreover, the rise in commercial sex work will reduce all the gains that had been made in reducing the prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS and STIs in communal areas (Kurevakwesu, 2021). Given this, further studies on interventions are needed, and as a starting point, we proffered the following recommendations.

Recommendations

In line with the findings and their discussion, we recommend that:

- * The state should find ways to subsidise agricultural inputs to promote agriculture or its co-existence with mining
- * The state should address policy inconsistency over the

wrangle between mining and farming in an attempt to promote both because, without farming, there can be no mining.

- * The state should grant title deeds to peasants so that they will be able to get loans and be able to develop the fields without fear of them being taken away.
- * Artisanal gold mining should be regularised so that whole communities may benefit from gold mining.
- * The Department of Social Development (DSD) has to develop or rather target children in communities like Irisvale because, with the rise in social problems, they risk becoming a lost generation that will subscribe to the cycle of the evils that are there.
- * There is a need for more Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services in the target area and other similar areas because commercial sex work will wipe off the gains that Zimbabwe had made in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and STIs.
- * Areas like Irisvale need sensitisation and constant monitoring from the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) so that environmental degradation and pollution are reduced.

Conclusion

The last 30 years have seen a definite shift in terms of livelihoods in the Irisvale resettlement area. At the launch of the resettlement scheme, the peasants had to strictly farm, any deviation from farming met with ejection from the area. However, successive droughts, shifts in government policies and changing business environments led to the diversification of livelihoods, especially, towards artisanal mining. Farming would have continued being the mainstay livelihood option had the state continued supporting it. Diminishing returns led farmers to consider alternatives and peasants are leaving farming for mining, leading to deagrarianisation. It is clear that gold mining in the study area has

improved living conditions and income, however, it has also brought about the shrinkage of farmland, total neglect of farming, environmental degradation, and the sprouting of illegal activities that are bringing about various social challenges – affecting community welfare with women and children being some of the victims. As such, the government, through its relevant departments, has to prioritise such areas and come up with related interventions to avoid the collapse of such communities.

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