Scholarly Communication

Community perceptions on the impacts of mining to the surrounding communities and on the natural resource management: A case study around Buzwagi mining project

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Received: 30 May 2012, Accepted: 14 June 2013 Published: 21 June 2013

ABSTRACT

The perceptions of the community on the impacts of mining and on the natural resource management were investigated using interview and observation methods. Different families belonging to houses neighbouring Buzwagi mine were chosen randomly for the interview. Cracks in houses, lack of safe water, smell and diseases are some of impacts pointed out by the interviewees. Most of interviewees recommended that the government should not remain as the reviewer in conducting EIA of mining projects, but should also conduct its own studies through its bodies/agencies. It was also recommended that, as mandatory approach for such cases the environmental legislation of Tanzania to be reviewed to allow more community participation especially the affected communities through public meetings.

KEYWORDS: Community perception, community participation, mining, Mwedakulima, Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

The mining sector of Tanzania is growing very fast; Tanzania is now the continent’s third largest gold producer after South Africa and Ghana. A large number of Tanzanians involve in small scale mining, the National Environmental Policy framework of Tanzania puts clear that much of the mining done in Tanzania is artisanal and large concentration of these small scale miners are found in gold bearing areas (NEP, 1997). The relationship between the artisanal miners and the foreign companies in mining areas has been very smooth and the situation continues to be overwhelmed with doubts. Tanzania mass media such as televisions, radios and newspapers have been reporting conflicts in mining areas. Conflicts between surrounding community and the government especially due to dissatisfaction land compensation. Another conflict is between the surrounding community and the mining company owners, also between artisanal miners and the government officials.

Although the mining policy of Tanzania puts clear that mineral resources should benefit the surrounding communities, still people living around some mining sites are very poor. On the other hand heavy metal poisoning, cyanide pollution, dusts and noises are common in mining areas. However, deaths are common in mining areas due to mining accidents; in some other mining areas in many countries including South Africa, some deaths occur as a result of conflicts arising from denial of the community participation in managing natural resources such as gold, diamond and other valuable gemstones. This is not an exclusive circumstance to mining industries in Tanzania the same have been said and happening too.

This case study is to look on the perceptions as regard to mining industries and the involvement of the community in various development activities, resource management and healthy aspects.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Description of the study area
This study was conducted at Mwendakulima village, a village near Buzwagi mining site. Buzwagi mining site is located in Kahama District in Shinyanga region. Kahama District was reported to have a population of 596,456 in which 9,179 were in Mwendakulima ward (National Census Report, 2010). Buzwagi is situated 6 km west of Kahama town; other villages surrounding the mine are Mwime and Chapulwa. The choice of Mwendakulima to be the study area was not pre-planned since authors were not familiar with the place. The choice was simply because it was found to be adjacent to the mine and also easily accessed.

Data collection
The methods used to collect data were observation and interviews. Three types of interviews were used. These are semi structured, unstructured and non directives. Semi structured was used because there was no a specific hypothesis to be tested (David, & Sutton, 2004). Unstructured interview was used because the interviewer preferred to be flexible as a lot of issues were raised and also the interviewees were encouraged to speak openly and frankly so that they can give as much detail as possible. Non directives interview was used because some questions used were not pre-planed (Kajornboon, 2005)

The data were collected for one day, (3rd of September 2011) in which twenty six (26) people from different families were interviewed. The interviewed families were chosen at random from different houses which were found to be close to Buzwagi mine. During the interview one member from each family was involved, however in some cases, more than one member from the same family was involved, this was counted as one family.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community perceptions on the impacts of mining
Many families around the mining project are affected by blasts which cause cracks in their houses, 62% of the families were found to have cracks in their houses (plate 1). Other impacts which were observed to be common in Mwendakulima community are smell and lack of safe water in which 31% and 42% of the people complained to be affected by smell and lack of safe water, respectively (Figure 1).

PLATE 1: House which is approximately 0.3 km from Buzwagi mining project in Shinyanga region (Photo by the author in 2011)
The only source of water for the community is ground water; this is picked from the bore holes which are found in different areas within the community. Among the respondents, 38% were found to be at risk of getting water borne diseases such as cholera and typhoid since they drink water without boiling. This study was conducted during dry season; there is a possibility that during rainy season the water is contaminated by remains of hazardous chemicals like cyanide which is used during gold extraction. On the other hand, 8% of the people claimed to suffer from diseases such as cough and vomit (Figure 1) as a result of mining activities of which they live around.

The perception of the people on the issues related to employment was very negative, 46% urged that the mine does not create employment opportunities to the community members, instead people from outside are the ones who benefit more. Plate 2 shows a picture taken for the houses which are about 0.3 km close to the mining reflecting the living conditions of many of such communities. This is different from the study in Ghana in which 82% of the community was of the view that the activities of Newmont Ghana Gold Limited, a mining company in Ghana served as a reliable source of employment especially among the youth (Frederick, 2010).

![Figure 1: The percentage of people affected by different impacts from Buzwagi mine.](image)

![Plate 2: Photograph showing children and some of the houses close to Buzwagi mine.](image)
Community participation

Some activities related to community participation are also taking place in the community; however, they are very few. Of the respondents 12% were aware of some meetings which were conducted between the village government officials and the community; however 15% of the people pointed out that there is no any kind of a meeting which was conducted between the community and the mining company officials. On the other hand, 8% of the respondents are aware of the meetings which were conducted between the mining company officials and the representatives of the people who were forced to relocate, however the representatives were not giving feedback to them.

It was recently reported that the mining company has built a school in Mwendakulima ward for the community; however none of the respondents mentioned about it, at the same time 46% of the people were found to have negative attitude towards the project, this implies that to them, school was not their first priority. If the community was well involved they could be made to choose their areas of priorities.

On an interview with one of the people; there was a case in which the mining company had built a special tank for storing rain water to be used by the person interviewed; at the same time when it rains, people are warned that they should not use rain water as it is not safe for their health. The argument for this was to why they should have these tanks for collecting rain water if the water is not safe? One of the women argued. These are some of the cases that the community need to be educated for to avoid ambiguity and misconceptions.

Environmental Impacts assessment (EIA) and public participation in the mining sector

EIA is a legal requirement when seeking a mining license in Tanzania. In conducting the EIA, public participation is one of the requirements. According to the Environmental Management Act of Tanzania of 2004, section 17(2) (b), in seeking the views of the public following the approval of the project brief, the developer or proponent shall hold, where appropriate, public meetings with the affected parties and communities to explain the project and its effects, and to receive their oral or written comments (EMA, 2004). This means that where it is not appropriate these communities may not participate. Who will decide where it is appropriate and where it is not? The law provides a room where very important people (The affected stakeholders) may not participate.

It should be noted that public meeting is the best public participation method where there is direct interaction with the community in the vicinity of the project. Other ways which were pointed by the law such as the use of the public radio, posters and newspapers do not have direct interaction with the community in the affected area. There is therefore a possibility that in conducting EIA people who are directly affected by the project may not participate. This can be one the causes of many conflicts in mining areas.

Stephen and Susan (2000) urge authorities to be aware that those most willing to participate in the decision-making process, including NGOs, may not be representative of the public’s views, it is therefore important to involve ordinary people as well as specialist groups and to actively seek out all the people and organizations likely to be affected by the decision.

Petts (1999) listed conflict resolution as one of the outcomes of participation in EIA. In views of the indigenous people, the World Bank reveals that the resources of the indigenous people have been exploited for the benefit of other groups in society and, in many countries; they are the poorest of the poor (World Bank, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The overview of this case study gives an insight on negative perceptions that might be around many mining areas were the community is less involved and consider itself as being marginalized. Therefore, there is a great need for the government and all the stakeholders in mining industries to take in consideration on health and development impacts to the immediate communities.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In conducting EIA in many developed and developing countries including Tanzania, it is the mining company who chooses who will conduct the study and pay for the study. This can affect community participation. To avoid this, it is recommended that the government should not be only the reviewer but should also conduct its own study through the environmental regulatory authority and other stakeholders of EIA by assisting to solicit research funds.

2. Since the EIA laws of Tanzania do not recognize the inherent conflict of interest produced when a mining company or project proponent hires a consultant to prepare an EIA, it may imply to hired consultant to carry out EIA in favor of the project proponent. Therefore to avoid conflict of interest the government should stipulate clearly on independent authorities to undertake such researches/assessments.

3. It should be a mandatory for the project proponents to schematize the policy to hold public meetings with the affected parties and communities to explain the project and its effects and to receive their oral and written comments, the meetings must be done in the project area. This will endeavor to keep peace, good relations and to ensure that the affected people are involved in decision making process.

4. The community to be given the right information at the right time. This will answer a lot of questions which they might have within the community.

REFERENCES


