



10 February 2014 - In Zimbabwe, young girls – with parental consent – forsake school and turn to sex work on diamond mines as a way out of poverty for them and their families.

In 2008, artisanal miners were flushed from the Marange region's diamond fields by government security forces, and the state then issued commercial mining licences. Seven companies now mine the 60,000 hectare fields, but proximity to wealth has undermined rather than improved livelihoods.

“The mines took away pastures and farmland from the locals... This worsened hunger and affected household income, as families traditionally sold some of their crops and livestock to raise money for food, school fees and other basic needs,” Melanie Chiponda, programme manager of the Chiadzwa Community Development Trust (CCDT), an NGO, told [IRIN News](#) .

Local communities have also been excluded from low-skilled jobs on the mines because companies have branded them as lazy and disobedient, and rely on migrant workers from other provinces instead.

Unfortunately, girls become part of the dirty game. Some of the girls get food handouts as payment for sex. Commercial sex among girls as young as 12 years has become a coping mechanism in the wake of the negative effects on household livelihoods caused by mining activities in Marange.

Nationally, about 2.2 million people are faced by food insecurity, but food shortages and rising levels of poverty in communities in Manicaland province's diamond fields are being attributed to the "resource curse".

Communities are not benefiting from the exploitation of resources, but are getting further impoverished. As a result, household members are forced to engage in activities - some of them life-threatening - that guarantee them bare survival. Child commercial sex is a cruel symptom of poverty.

A nurse at one of the few health centres in the area, who declined to be identified, told IRIN: "We attend to at least 20 girls a month who have contracted STIs [sexually transmitted infections]. The men... insist on unprotected sex, a trend worsened by the fact that there are no programmes designed to educate them against the risky practice. Many young girls have dropped out of school due to unwanted pregnancies."

According to Stella Washaya, a Marange villager and volunteer counsellor for vulnerable young girls, commercial sex among young girls has become a social crisis. "Among the several thousands homesteads in Marange, every five has at least one [girl] teenager engaging in sex for money".

In Marange, the prevalence of Apostolic religious communities advocating a boy's education ahead of a girl's, has attributed to some parents encouraging their daughters to enter the commercial sex trade to support the family.

*Source: IRIN News*