

MOZAMBIQUE: HEARING COMMUNITY VOICES DURING A PANDEMIC



As the world reels from the impacts of COVID-19, workers and communities are affected differently in their local contexts. Over the course of the summer, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) Updates will report on the experiences of our partner organizations in Asia, Latin America and Africa, as they respond to this evolving crisis. This third update will focus on the activities of the Association for Community Legal Support and Defence (AAAJC), in Mozambique.

Photo Credits: AAAJC



Mr. Tomo interviewing a community member in Moatize.

As the voice of Sinalo is heard reporting from the mining community of Bagamoyo, the faint sound of a rooster can be heard in the background. Mining-related issues have always been front and centre in his coverage of local news, but not today: “There is no other conversation in the neighborhoods other than coronavirus”.

Sinalo is part of the team of seven community activists participating in a skill-building project with AAAJC and Benchmarks (a human rights NGO in South Africa) to learn how to monitor what is happening in their communities and find solutions. Currently, Sinalo and his colleagues are documenting the impact of COVID-19 in the province of Tete, Mozambique.

Tete sits on one of the largest reserves of coal on the planet. Coal mining has led to the eviction of thousands of families and their relocation to new settlements. There are many complaints about the new settlements: poor housing construction, lack of access to water, far from farming plots and other sources of employment. Communities that were not moved are affected by pollution from the coal mines.



Physical distancing is hard to maintain at the Moatize Market.

Mining is powerful, and independent community voices are weak and fragmented.

This is why AAAJC and Benchmarks are teaching community members to document the issues related to this industry. Sinalo and his colleagues have learned how to interview community members and to gather evidence such as photos and videos using their cellphones.

According to Tomás Queface, the coordinator for the project, "Community monitoring is the basis for organizing a movement able to give voice to the community and bring mining companies to the table to address problems. Community activists have been ignored for years, and can get discouraged that nothing changes. But step by step, we can build motivated activists with strong skills."

When COVID-19 happened, the project shifted focus to the impact that the pandemic had on the community. Although the government-imposed

lockdown drastically limited their movements, the team used alternatives such as WhatsApp messaging as a way to collect and record their findings, which were then put together in the form of a monthly podcast.

Through this new platform, activists such as Sérgio are able to voice the concern that the lockdown could have disastrous consequences for his community of Mualadzi: "If the president decrees another state of emergency on the 30th, it will be a catastrophe, as many people do not have the means to survive. [...] We would like the government and companies to help us, at least with masks and disinfectant products."

In a rapidly changing situation, the team of activists trained by AAAJC and Benchmarks continue to build skills to give a voice to vulnerable mining communities in Tete.

At work drying the harvest – Moatize during the pandemic.



To learn more about the
Steelworkers Humanity Fund
WWW.USW.CA/SHF

Steelworkers Humanity Fund

234 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 800
Toronto, ON M4P 1K7

Phone: 416-487-1571

Fax: 416-487-9308

Email: humanityfund@usw.ca

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
MÉTALLOS