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**Mining for Change? Youth livelihoods and extractive industry investment in Sierra Leone**

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## Abstract

Over the past two decades, neoliberal reforms, soaring commodity prices and heightened global resource demands have led to significant growth in extractive industry investment across sub-Saharan Africa. A surge of investment has triggered a variety of responses in mineral-rich communities – from outright rejection, to protest over labour conditions, to acceptance in anticipation of gainful employment. Drawing on recent research carried out in Kono District in Sierra Leone, this article critically explores these contrasting responses to mining activities, by focusing on how youth perceive and respond to extractive industry expansion. In doing so, the paper broadens understanding of why youth perceptions of mining investment differ, and illuminates the various factors underlying a diverse range of responses to the expansion of extractive industries. The focus on youth and its heterogeneity as a social category has important policy implications and the paper makes a contribution to understanding the dynamics and diversity of youth livelihood strategies in resource rich developing countries. In making a distinction between autonomous spaces of community-led development 'from below' and corporate controlled spaces of development 'from above', the article reflects on how youth perceptions of extractive industry expansion may also be influencing the ways in which mining companies understand and fashion their business and social responsibility strategies.

## Introduction

Across sub-Saharan Africa, pressures on natural resources are rapidly increasing in response to growing global demands for fuel and non-fuel minerals. Over the last two decades, the globalization of the extractive industries has led to dramatic technological, organizational and regulatory changes across the African continent, as many governments have adopted new mining codes, or revised existing ones, to stimulate a flood of foreign direct investment in mineral extraction (Bridge, 2004). While Africa's natural resources have become increasingly important in global markets, with some sub-Saharan countries experiencing phenomenal growth (Weng, et al., 2013), paradoxically, the continent remains the world's poorest region. The communities surrounding the locations of extraction are often the most marginalized and economically depressed, as serious social and environmental

impacts displace indigenous populations from their land and transform local livelihoods.

In such contexts, as Bebbington et al. (2008) suggest, investments in mineral extraction have become a particularly contentious and ambiguous face of global capitalist expansion, often leading to a pronounced increase in conflict and social mobilization around the detrimental effects of mining and hydrocarbon projects. In many extraction-impacted communities, evidence also suggests that youth – understood here as a social category defined by a combination of age, social status and relative livelihood dependence – are in particularly disadvantaged positions. Even in locations of abundant natural resource wealth, young people often lack access to land, credit, employment opportunities and other assets. At the same time, however, they may be in better positions to mobilize, being more literate, more able to take advantage of new communication technologies, and more attuned to global narratives on the environment and rights.

Focusing on the case of Sierra Leone, this paper critically explores contrasting youth perceptions of, and responses to, recent extractive industry expansion. Questions that concern the future of Sierra Leone's natural resource wealth, and of what is often referred to as a 'crisis of youth', are both central to post-conflict development trajectories, government peace-building initiatives and security sector reform. Indeed, in recent years, there has been renewed interest in debates about the underlying causes of Sierra Leone's decade-long diamond-fuelled civil war of the 1990s, with considerable difference of opinion about whether the conflict was driven more by politics ('grievance') or exploitative economic interests ('greed') (e.g. see Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). While it is true that some of the bitterest battles of the war were fought in the diamond mining areas of Kono District, the root cause of the conflict is now increasingly being linked to underlying questions that concern the marginalization of youth (Peters and Richards, 2011; Mokuwa et al, 2011). A growing literature on the agrarian dimensions of Sierra Leone's war, and more specifically the intergenerational tensions that drove the conflict, suggests that large numbers of socially excluded young people were prompted to embrace the war in a desperate search for empowerment. These same concerns for youth marginalization remain high on the post-war agenda for donors and policy makers, largely driven by

particular concerns that continuing youth alienation may be a potential source of further conflict.

While the 'crisis of youth' may have become the master narrative of post-war reconstruction in Sierra Leone, youth concerns have also increasingly become a focal point for a host of new international mining companies who are keen to invest in a politically stable country. With 42 per cent of Sierra Leone's population below the age of 15 years, and 34 per cent between the ages of 15 and 35, young people represent the majority of the population (GoSL, 2004). But at the same time, this very age cohort is most likely to be equipped with few employable skills and be inactive in the labour market (Peeters et al., 2009). Government estimates suggest that 70 per cent of all youth are presently unemployed or underemployed (Peeters et al., 2009) and youth employment generation has understandably been designated as a central development pillar in the country's third PRSP, 'The Agenda for Prosperity'. Meeting the challenges of youth is a key element of the government's vision for achieving middle-income status within the next twenty-five years, a goal which also relies heavily on natural resources being the initial driver for rapid growth (GoSL, 2012).

In this context, the objectives of this paper are twofold: first, it seeks to explore how changing global-economic patterns and processes associated with extractive industry investment are shaping livelihood perceptions and opportunities for young people in resource-rich communities; and second, it aims to understand how youth responses to extractive industry expansion may be influencing the ways in which mining companies understand and fashion their business and social responsibility strategies. Drawing upon recent research carried out in diamondiferous Kono District, where there has been a proliferation of foreign interest in mineral extraction, the paper seeks to critically explore heterogeneity within the social category of youth, in the context of its relationship to social activism, mining and livelihoods. For young people in Kono District, the underlying agendas and motivations for engaging with mining companies vary considerably between different subgroupings of youth, as do the responses of companies to these different voices.

In trying to better understand how the agency of youth shapes and responds to extractive industry investment, different 'spaces of participation' are explored and the distinction is made between 'invited' corporate controlled spaces of development 'from above', and more autonomous non-institutionalized spaces created 'from below' through social activism. Discussions with young people in Kono District reveal that much youth participation in mobilizations driven by mining expansion has crystalized on the back of severe exploitation and marginalization by powerful corporate actors. But at the same time, evidence also suggests that some mining-based advocacy groups have been equally motivated by the opportunity of attracting external development funding from international actors. As poverty and hardship have become entrenched during the post-war period, some youth may be drawing on mining-focused social activism as a new livelihood strategy and an avenue to advance their causes.

Following this introduction, the first section of the paper outlines a broad conceptual approach for understanding how different actors respond to the impacts of mining, and how community development initiatives are driven. Indeed, many mining companies now adopt the language of 'participation' and 'sustainable development' as a central platform of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies. Drawing upon the work of Andrea Cornwall, it is suggested that a spatial lens is a particularly useful metaphor for exploring how power and participation are situated within the community development initiatives found in many mining areas. More specifically, a distinction is made between corporate controlled spaces of development 'from above' and youth-led spaces of development 'from below'. This discussion sets the stage for section two, which focuses in further detail on youth perceptions of mining investment, and the factors underlying their diversity of responses to the expansion of extractive industries. In section three, the article reflects on how different youth responses to extractive industry expansion may be influencing the ways in which mining companies understand their social responsibility strategies. Ultimately, as is explored in the conclusion, a better understanding of how diverse interpretations of 'sustainability' become shaped by conflicting interests and underlying agendas remains critical for ensuring that young people in Sierra Leone are included in development processes that have for so long

been dominated by powerful actors.

## Conceptualizing 'spaces for change'

Over the past two decades, 'participation' has become enshrined as a central tenet of development discourse and is now widely accepted as 'standard practice' in development policy and practice around the world. Corporate approaches to community development are no exception to this norm, with some scholars arguing that "[t]he notion of 'participation' is integral to the discourses of CSR and development, both as a process and as an end in itself" (Kemp, 2010: 203). While there is now a burgeoning body of scholarly work which has explored participation in a wide range of development contexts, there are a number of recent works which are especially germane to understanding how CSR initiatives are being designed and implemented in mining communities in Sierra Leone. Most notably, the sub-category of work which reflects on issues of power and difference in participation and development is particularly relevant to understanding how youth are being included, or excluded, from community development processes.

Recent critiques of participatory approaches to development argue that there is often a danger of participation being based on "over-optimistic notions of agency combined with romantic ideas about groups and institutions" (Cleaver, 2004: 271). Even when local people are included in decision-making processes, there is still often a failure to transform existing social, political and economic structures in ways that give voice to those who have been marginalized (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Consequently, in exploring the processes that are underpinning social transformations in regions of extractive industry expansion, it remains important to appreciate that spaces of engagement are always mediated by relationships of power between actors, and by the modes of influence that different actors exercise. As succinctly summarized by Hamann (2003: 251):

> While resisting the temptation to misuse their power advantage,...[companies] need to support communities' right to prior informed consent, and acknowledge and respect the culture gap between the corporation and indigenous communities. One implication of this is that CSR strategies cannot be taken 'off the shelf': they need to be established within the local African context and in continual dialogue with key stakeholders.

In trying to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of power in arenas of participation, Cornwall (2002a; 2004) argues that the concept of 'space' is a particularly useful construct. She suggests that a spatial lens can help to convey the situated nature of participation, as well as the "bounded yet permeable arenas in which participation is invited, and the domains from within which new intermediary institutions and new opportunities for citizen involvement have been fashioned" (2004: p. 75). Accordingly, she (2002a, 2002b) examines different kinds of space in which participation can occur, distinguishing between two main contexts in which they are created. First, she notes that 'invited' institutionalised spaces of participation are those that are most often created 'from above' by powerful actors, such as government agencies, international NGOs or multinational mining corporations; and second, she suggests that 'autonomous' non-institutionalized spaces are those created 'from below' through collective action or social activism. In both cases, she points out that it remains important to remember that participation is shaped and defined by power relations. When considering the creation of 'new spaces' of participation, Cleaver (2004: p. 247) further adds that questions remain as to how 'old' sources of authority come to shape and legitimize the new rules and institutions of liberal democracy which claim to support citizen voice. For the purpose of this paper, this distinction – between invited corporate-controlled spaces of development 'from above' and autonomous community development 'from below' – provides a useful lens when considering how youth respond to extractive industry investment. Recent fieldwork carried out in Kono District illustrates how the emergence of public spaces – both in the form of invited institutionalized spaces as well as more organically created, people-driven sites of political action – may be opening up new opportunities for post-war public engagement in resource governance, particularly amongst youth.

**Youth-led spaces of development 'from below'**

In exploring social transformations associated with extractive industry investment and, more specifically, considering how they may be impacting upon livelihood opportunities for young people in resource-rich communities, in-depth fieldwork was carried out in Kono District in the Eastern Province during the months of January and June 2013. The investigation focused on the Kono diamond mining

centre of Koidu in Tankoro Chiefdom, a settlement with a long, rich history of diamond mining, and now a thriving town of 87,539 people (see Figure 1). A broad range of qualitative methods was adopted in the fieldwork – including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and structured observations at community meetings – to gain an understanding of the wide range of perspectives held by young people.
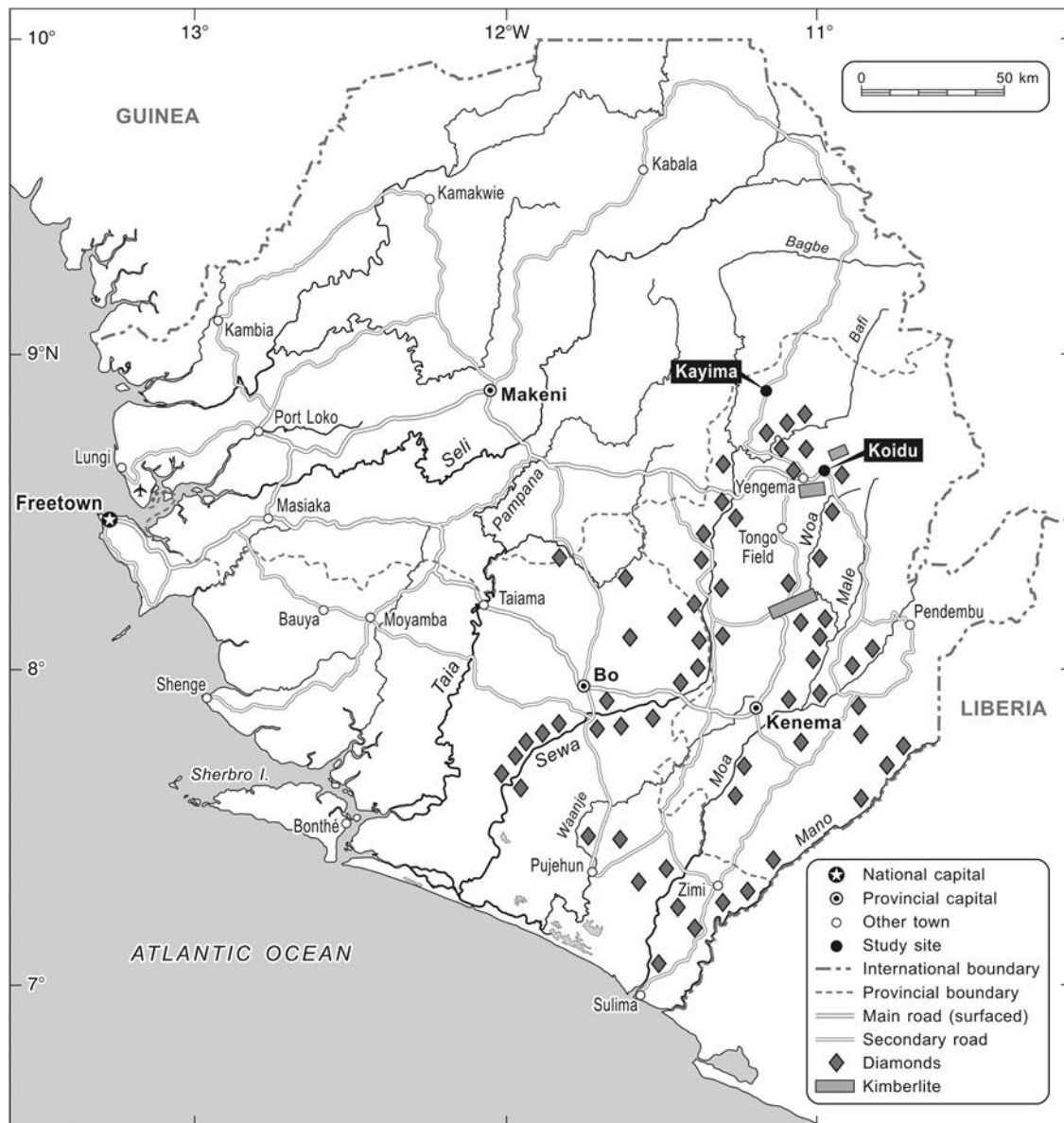


**Figure 1: Diamondiferous regions of Sierra Leone**

Initially, a purposive sampling frame was used to identify key informants, such as youth political leaders and those working in youth-focused civil society organizations, who possessed specific knowledge and understanding of the mining investments that had taken place. But this eventually gave way to a broader

investigation, whereby different self-generating groupings of youth were targeted and interviewed, including those working as casual labourers in industrial mining operations, those engaged in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) activities, those who had previously mined but had given it up to pursue other livelihood options, and those who had never mined but had rather focused their attention on farming.

Over the two month fieldwork period, interviews were conducted with a total 12 youth leaders, the staff of 14 different youth-focused civil society organizations, 4 local Paramount Chiefs and a range of lower ranking sub-chiefs, and executives from 4 different mining companies based in the Koidu area. While 3 of these companies were medium sized operations, employing a relatively modest sized work force, the main corporate focus of the research was on the country's largest Kimberlite diamond mining company, OCTEA Ltd. (formerly known as Koidu Holdings). Between the 4 companies, a total of 20 interviews were carried out with youth who were employed as labourers. This was complemented by interviews with 34 young people working in the ASM sector, an activity that often occurs on, or alongside, concessions where industrialized mining takes place.

As anticipated, a wide range of perceptions were reported. The panoply of opinions expressed was largely a product of personal circumstances, different priorities, and contrasting expectations concerning the benefits that extractive-led development trajectories should yield. For many youth who were employed by industrial mining operations, and to some extent those working within the ASM sector, there was a general consensus that diamond mining had always been, and would continue to be, an essential livelihood activity in the economy and society of Kono District. While most of the miners interviewed reported that the working conditions they were subjected to, the remuneration they received for their labour, and the uneven distribution of mineral rents associated with the sector were far from desirable, there was also a general feeling that they were fortunate to be employed at all, as livelihood opportunities were few and far between. This dichotomy of feelings was represented in a number of interviews with labourers at, OCTEA Ltd., suggesting that the same ambiguous relationship between mining and development described by Bebbington et al. (2008), was also clearly present in Koidu. Many young miners felt that there was great potential for mining investments to be a more effective

driver of local economic development, particularly if the government played a stronger role in negotiating more beneficial conditions in the agreements made with international mining companies. As one labourer employed at OCTEA Ltd. commented in an interview:

> Artisanal mining is no longer paying off for most people. There are just not as many alluvial diamonds around any more, and a digger can spend years waiting to recover a winning stone. So many young people are turning their eyes to the companies who are mining intensively, although it is true that they cannot provide jobs for everyone. So you see the companies have a captive audience. They can pay what they want and young people will still come running. These companies are making big money, and so it only seems right that the authorities should be doing more to ensure that workers are paid a better daily wage (personal communication, OCTEA labourer, Koidu, 05/06/13).

While some young miners remained ambivalent about mining investment, others displayed great indignation about the very uneven benefits that accrued to different actors within the sector. These discussions revealed that many youth-focused CSOs had mobilized in reaction to perceptions of severe exploitation and marginalization by powerful corporate actors. More specifically, there was widespread concern for both the labour exploitation that is characteristic of many mining companies, and for the dispossession of land and other assets that typically occurs during the process of extractive industries expansion. As one miner put it:

> Internationally, people think the companies are creating employment for youth, but in actual fact it is very limited. OCTEA is doing very little for the local population and the jobs they offer are not secure. Recently more than 300 workers were made redundant and many of them had to go back to the mining fields to do artisanal mining. So the company and the local people are not on good terms. Many youth are now coming together and they are really shouting. We have had two riots so far, both of which have resulted in the loss of life (personal communication, artisanal miner, Koidu, 03/06/13).

Such sentiments are, of course, not peculiar to Kono District and other scholars have noted how the un-inclusive and unsustainable nature of mining has also motivated social mobilization and conflict in other West African country contexts (see for example, Hilson and Yakovelva, 2007; Pegg, 2006). But such conflict may not always be detrimental, and as Bebbington et al. (2008: 893) point out, in some cases conflict may have the ability to create a 'political pathway towards the construction of

institutions that could foster more socio-economically inclusive and less environmentally damaging forms of mineral expansion' (2008: 5). Others have noted that resistance to mining, and particularly the struggles of youth, may not only be driven by the need to defend human and citizenship rights, but also the need to assert an identity (O'Brien, 1996).

In Kono District, much of the present youth-led activism around the extractive industries is fundamentally concerned with citizenship rights. Ideas about rights and identity among Kono youth are strongly tied to livelihood security in whatever form it can be found, and this has increasingly driven social mobilization. More broadly, a recent World Bank study of youth employment reported that the post-war period has seen "a remarkable upsurge in self-organised social activism amongst young people" (World Bank, 2007: 87-101) and a parallel revival of reciprocal labour companies, cooperative associations and rotational credit clubs have been noted in rural areas (Fanthorpe, 2007). While these modalities of social cooperation are not new, they have acquired a new salience under conditions of post-war economic hardship and the decline of patron-client relationships. The mobilization of youth-dominated associational groups and civil society organizations, and the subsequent youth-led protests that have recently been staged against industrial mining operations in and around Koidu, are examples of how such spaces for citizen engagement in diamond governance may be opening up. These mobilizations have been driven by new forms of mass communication and consumption – including the use of mobile phones and the internet, and a thriving youth-orientated music industry – all of which have helped youth to shape political ideas in ways unimaginable a generation ago.

While new communication technologies have undoubtedly been an important instrument for holding mining companies to account, and for disseminating local grievances against companies to international audiences, it is worth noting that most diamond mining in the Kono District has historically been associated with the ASM sector. In the past, large-scale and capital intensive mining operations have only accounted for some 10 per cent of Sierra Leone's diamond exports by value (Diamond Industry Annual Review, 2006). The bulk of the country's diamonds have come from ASM production, an activity demanding heavy inputs of unskilled (youth)

labour. But a recurrent theme in the history of diamond mining areas, especially Kono, has been confrontation between, on the one hand, state agencies and concession-holding companies seeking greater control over diamond production and, on the other hand, peasants and artisanal miners seeking to maximise their own returns from the industry and defend their putative rights and entitlements. Confrontations of this kind are a signature feature of bureaucratically weak states, but the presence of diamonds has lent them a particular intensity in Kono District.

More recent interviews with Kono youth in and around the town of Koidu suggest that changes in the local economy are having bearing on both the nature of confrontation and the direction of youth activism. As many of Kono's prime alluvial diamond areas have become 'mined out' and ASM operations have waned in favour of more capital-intensive modes of mechanized extraction (also see NACE monitoring report, 2006), tensions between small-scale and large scale-mining have somewhat subsided. Consequently, youth-led activism has shifted its focus to a number of high profile international mining companies (Fanthorpe and Maconachie, 2010). However, many of the youth-focused CSOs in Kono that are presently lobbying against mining companies are not suggesting that mining should be halted altogether. Rather they are advocating that the institutional arrangements should be put in place to ensure that communities are compensated with development investment and better employment opportunities. In fact, discussions with some youth revealed the perception that the permanent closure of large industrial mining operations, such as OCTEA, would be disastrous for the local economy. The main grievance was that more benefits needed to be channelled back into diamondiferous communities, predominantly the creation of more jobs for youth. But as mining has increasingly shifted to more capital-intensive modes of extraction, and is becoming more attractive to larger companies who aim to pursue deep-shaft mining, it is the youth who are ultimately losing out. While youths are no longer able to engage in ASM activities – a sector which has been notoriously popular because of its low barriers to entry – chiefs and village elites still continue to benefit from rent-seeking activities as new relationships are formed with companies, and income is derived from various corporate kick-backs. In short, declining demand for unskilled labour in the mining sector may thus emerge as one of the greatest challenges for

overcoming the social and economic marginalization of youth and related security problems.

As the mobilization of Kono-based youth groups has been a vehicle for addressing the labour issues and employment conditions of predominantly larger-scale mechanized companies, the tension that this has created between companies and communities has, on occasion, led to antagonistic situations. The disturbance at the OCTEA (then called Koidu Holdings Limited) blasting area in December 2007, is a case in point. A group, predominantly composed of youths calling itself the Affected Property Owners Association, staged what was initially a peaceful protest outside the company blasting area, to demand a less intrusive schedule of blasting and better compensation for environmental degradation for local residents. These protests were supported by a number of CSOs, but they soon turned into a full-scale riot, resulting in the death of two individuals and numerous injuries.

In the aftermath of the disturbance, the government halted company operations pending a Commission of Enquiry into the events. The recommendations of the Jenkins-Johnson Enquiry resulted in a government White Paper that laid out new regulations for corporate social behaviour, but it remains unclear as to whether or not any real lessons were learned from the conflict that took place. For example, more recently in December 2012, a group of aggrieved mine workers at OCTEA staged a second peaceful protest, this time to demonstrate their frustration and dissatisfaction over poor working conditions and what they believed to be corporate deceit. The atmosphere that was borne out of the protest was, once again, tense and the situation quickly degenerated into an all out battle between the protesting mine workers and the armed police guards stationed at the mining concession, with two people being killed. Whether or not the Jenkins-Johnson recommendations have actually addressed any of the grievances of Kono youth therefore remains to be seen. As stated by the Co-ordinator of one local youth-focused CSO:

> The Jenkins-Johnson document is a beautiful list of recommendations. If you read the document, its beautifully written on paper, but it's not doing anything. One of the most important recommendations was that resettlement of the community should take place before mining continued. But they're not going by it. So who should hold [the company] accountable? It should be the

Government.  But the Government is not doing anything towards that (Personal communication, Co-ordinator of KoCEPO, Koidu, 11/01/13).

**Corporate controlled development 'from above'**

While the conflicts described above represent extreme cases where the tensions between youth and mining companies have escalated into tragic confrontations, the demands being placed upon companies such as OCTEA may be illustrative of the wider trends that are currently unfolding across sub-Saharan Africa.  In natural resource-rich regions in all corners of the continent, it has become clear that mining and oil and gas companies are now increasingly being expected to secure a 'social licence to operate', and to fund and implement community development projects. In many cases, companies are often expected to take on responsibilities for which governments have traditionally been liable.  This was particularly the case following the initiation of long-term IMF structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and early 1990s, as measures were implemented to reduce spending and the direct economic involvement of the state.   While these policies were, in rhetoric, implemented to provide an 'enabling environment' for private enterprise to thrive, the draconian 'conditionalities' associated with adjustment most often left African governments impotent and unable to provide services and infrastructure for their citizens.

In the case of Sierra Leone, the devastation caused by a decade of civil war during the 1990s further exacerbated poverty, destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and reduced the capacity of the state to provide development for its citizenry.  In many instances, extractive industry companies in Kono District have indeed embraced the opportunity to fill these development voids in some of the country's most impoverished areas, seeing it as an opportunity to enhance their international reputations and strengthen their social license to operate.  But at the same time, expectations have been high, and in some cases this has been difficult for companies to manage.  This tension is well explained by the Public Relations Officer at OCTEA:

> Many people see mining companies as proxy governments. They say, you must fix the roads, or you must provide clinics and schools. There is

> a burning desire for Sierra Leoneans to escape poverty, but there is only a limited means for mining companies to assist people. No matter how much you do, you won't be able to make everybody happy. (OCTEA Public Relations Officer, personal communication, Freetown, 26/01/13)

However, in addition to the challenges of meeting these high expectations, in some cases it has been difficult for mining companies to build constructive relationships with rural populations. First, a common point made by a number of mining company executives was that the primary objective of a company is not to develop communities, but rather to maximize profits and protect its investments for shareholders. And second, in interviews with those in the medium sized companies, it was also noted that managing community relations may be particularly difficult for smaller companies that do not possess the resources or expertise to initiate extensive community development programmes. In rural Sierra Leone, building strong community relationships has also been particularly complicated because of a strong sense of community ownership over land and resources, which, it has been suggested has led to an equally strong sense of entitlement to benefits from outsiders using 'community land' for profit and self-enrichment (Fanthorpe and Gabelle, 2013).

That said, in recent years, a number of mining companies in Kono District have become much more focused on contributing to social development programmes for the youth population. There is now an increasingly strong 'business case' for companies to actively support sustainable development initiatives that go beyond impact mitigation. This pro-business CSR stance has also been highlighted in recent academic literature, with proponents arguing that mining companies have the potential to effectively address poverty and contribute to human development, at the same time as improving financial performance. But the focus on youth programming has particular resonance in Sierra Leone, given the role that impoverished and socially marginalized youth played in the country's resource-fuelled civil war. There are still strongly held fears that increasing youth marginalization may lead to insecurity and further conflict, an environment that is obviously not conducive to 'good business' for international mining companies. As explained by Hamman (2003: 242):

> Local community opposition, ranging from protest to sabotage, can cause costly delays in production or even termination of production. Such production delays are particularly problematic in the context of increasingly demanding customers in just-in-time supply chains.

In this light, a number of interviews with mining company officials suggested that they were now taking youth concerns much more seriously. At the same time, however, there was also a range of opinions expressed as to what constituted the most important youth issues to be addressed. Discussions with officials at OCTEA, for example, stressed the importance of social development programmes. It was explained that the company had recently launched a programme to promote reading and learning for youth in Koidu schools and the surrounding Kono communities, including training for teachers and providing reading material to more than 7,000 school children. In addition, it was reported that the company also spent US$ 100,000 each year supporting two local premier league football clubs, an investment that has received the widespread approval of the region's football-passionate youth population. It would therefore seem that questions around youth livelihoods and wellbeing have become of increasing concern to OCTEA's CSR strategy, perhaps having gained more salience since the forced temporary closure of operations following the December 2007 riots.

On the other hand, interviews with officials from the Yinhu Group, a medium sized Chinese-owned gold mining company operating eight miles off the main road from Koidu at at Bandafayie, stressed the importance of employment opportunities as the most essential youth concern. Being a good employer, it was explained, was not just about the number of jobs provided, but also the training and opportunities provided with the employment:

> Most of our employees are local people. We first have to train them and after they master some technology they can start to work. We believe in a win-win policy, and it is also the reason why we want to train more apprentices in all the different sectors. When we reach full production we will need about 200 local staff, and in the future we want to use more local people (Yinhu Group, Public Relations Officer, personal communication, 27/01/13).

While it was clear that the capacity building being offered to employees was an important aspect of the Yinhu Group's CSR agenda, it was reported that another aspect of its community relations strategy involved a respect for local livelihoods.

For example, the company's Public Relations Officer noted the importance of building good relationships with illicit miners who were working alongside the company concession, particularly because of the importance of ASM as an informal employment generating activity:

> A stable social environment is important for good business. We need to think about how to promote the local economy, and for our company the artisanal miners are not a big problem. We have come here for investment and if we want to be here for a long time, we have to be at peace with the local community (Yinhu Group, Public Relations Officer, personal communication, 27/01/13).

With respect to more constructed forms of corporate controlled development 'from above', such as those guided by global performance standards, a number of scholars have argued that good community relations are crucial for a company's reputation, and can also influence the nature of global debates surrounding sustainability (Auty, 1998; Blowfield and Frynas, 2005). In the case of Sierra Leone, Fanthorpe and Gabelle (2013: 52) point out that mining companies "...have a clear incentive to build and foster relationships with a wide range of stakeholders (notably, companies, trade unions and development partners) to ensure security and protection for their operations...". From this perspective, as was clearly articulated by the Public Relations officer at OCTEA, there is both an economic and a security incentive for companies to take CSR on board:

> ...when you come to operate, you get your mining licence from the government and for that you have an agreement. You have obligations that you are supposed to meet... and as long as these are met, you are fine legally. Nobody is going to take you to a court of law for meeting your obligations. But what you will not get is a social licence to operate, and that is why mining companies tend to want to embark on corporate social responsibility....You have to embark on activities that will engender a very cordial relationship between your operations and the community, providing you with an enabling environment so that at the end of the day you are able to carry out your operations and maximise your profit (OCTEA Public Relations Officer, personal communication, Freetown, 07/06/13).

But considerable concerns have been raised by a number of scholars who have demonstrated how elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, extractive industry companies often implement community development programmes with little knowledge or understanding of the socio-cultural contexts of the people's lives in which they

operate (Hilson and Banchirigah, 2009; Tschakert, 2009). In extreme cases (e.g. see Gilberthorpe and Banks, 2012), an over-emphasis on meeting global sustainability performance standards has led to inappropriate and ill-conceived development outcomes at the local level, which has resulted in further fragmentation and inequality. This also raises the question of how sincere mining companies actually are about their youth-focused development initiatives, and whether or not the pursuit of 'blueprint' CSR schemes might play a role in de-contextualizing local development needs.

As such, unequal power relationships play a central role in reinforcing the most commanding interpretations of 'sustainability', as they become conditioned to serve particular interests. While young people in Kono District are generally in structurally disadvantaged livelihood positions, and are likely to find it difficult to effect meaningful change, powerful mining companies that are flush with resources are able to control any development that might take place, and define what 'sustainability' entails on their own terms. As David Mosse (2005: 8) has suggested, '...power lies in the narratives that maintain an organisation's own definition of the problem...[and] success in development depends upon the stabilization of a particular interpretation...'. Dauvergne and Neville (2010) add that in weak states such as Sierra Leone – where governments often lack the power required to influence the underlying agendas of transnational companies – an absence of state regulatory oversight and control makes it even more unlikely that voluntary corporate initiatives will lead to meaningful environmental and social outcomes.

In short, as Newell (2005) reminds us, power disparities between companies and communities have significant implications for corporate-community interaction, and the impact that CSR can have on poverty reduction and human development. In order for CSR to be both appropriate and effectively operationalised, and therefore a potential vehicle for positive change, corporate-led development initiatives must seek acceptability, credibility, and ultimately legitimacy, from multiple and competing sources. But perhaps being central to this task is a more explicit appreciation of the unequal power relations between different stakeholders in mining investments, and a recognition of their varying agendas, which should help to ensure that the needs of youth are more fully incorporated into CSR strategies.

**Conclusion**

In Sierra Leone's most recent PRSP, 'The Agenda for Prosperity', the message is clear that the government aims to pursue an extractive-led development trajectory in the immediate future and the years to come. Indeed, the country is now poised on the verge of an unprecedented period of economic growth, driven principally by the discovery of vast new deposits of strategic minerals, and more recently, offshore oil deposits on the Sierra Leone-Liberia basin. Moreover, significant international investments in the exploitation of rich iron ore deposits at Marampa suggest that the management of natural resources will continue to assume a high priority on both political and economic agendas. In the wake of a pending 'revenue bonanza' driven by natural resource exploitation, the question of how resource benefits will be channelled back to their communities of origin, and indeed the general populace at large, has returned to centre stage. Perhaps at the heart of these concerns are the very issues raised in this paper that concern relationships between youth, companies and extractive industry investment.

In exploring these relationships, there are three main conclusions that can be drawn. First, while it is clear that interactions between youth and corporate actors are taking place in a variety of different ways, and are being driven by different agendas, spatial metaphors remain helpful for understanding these relationships. The linkages between community-driven development and corporate-controlled development are often not well defined or articulated, leaving the possibility for significant misunderstanding to occur. Moreover, the issues of sustainability that arise in young people's day-to-day lives may be conceptualised in ways so different from those incorporated within business management plans that they simply become inconceivable within the terms conceptualised by the company. In mapping out youth participation in mining, and making sense of how companies respond to youth, it is therefore useful to make a distinction between autonomous forms of community-led development 'from below' and corporate controlled development 'from above'.

Second, in the context of Sierra Leone it also remains clear that, numerically at least, the most important actor occupying these spaces of change is 'youth' and this will continue to be the case given the demographic context. While young people do not

have a single position on mining, and there are a wide range of youth responses to mining investment that can be explained by a variety of factors, pressures from these different positions of youth will affect the mining sector one way or another. In this sense, youth are playing an important role in opening up spaces 'from below', and in doing so will influence the nature of spaces 'from above'.

Finally, the inverse side of the relationship between young people and mining companies is that the CSR spaces that are being driven 'from above' also do not have a single position on youth – some seem more accommodating, while others appear to be more instrumental. Indeed, a multiplicity of agendas must be accommodated in order to insulate corporate actors from potential risks and to protect their 'social license to operate'. But whatever the case may be, these corporate spaces of engagement must respond to youth. As the government continues to pursue an extractive-led path to development and corporate investment in the mining sector is encouraged in the years to come, it will also to be the case that the physical spaces around mining sites in Sierra Leone are occupied by large contingents of youth. The youth occupying those physical spaces necessarily will affect the political spaces that emerge around mining investment, and companies would be wise to recognize this.

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