



MAKING LIVES FOR COMPUTER HARD DRIVES

This is a summary of the report "Capacitating Electronics: The impact of platinum and palladium mining on communities," Esther de Haan & Tim Steinweg, SOMO, November 2007

As the demand for platinum increases to fuel our desire for computer hard drives and LCD screens used in laptops and flatscreen TVs, makeITfair has found that workers are suffering from unacceptably dangerous conditions in platinum mines.

At the same time, these workers earn extremely low wages. In South Africa, local communities have been forced to leave their land to make way for platinum mines.

HAZARDOUS WORK

makeITfair talked to miners – particularly those on temporary contracts. Because of the high price of platinum, some of the old mines are being re-mined under extremely hazardous conditions. Permanent mine workers are told that the work is too dangerous and needs to be done by the contracting company that specialises in this type of work. However, we have learned that contract workers are being used to carry out this hazardous work with no expertise and only after three days of safety training.

These sub-contracted labourers usually do not work under the same labour agreements as the mining company's own employees. Wages are lower, they do not benefit from the same collective agreements and their contracts are temporary. It comes as no surprise that they hardly earn enough money to make a living – or to provide enough food, decent shelter or a proper education for their families. At Anglo Platinum, the world's largest producer of platinum group metals, 40 per cent of the workers are employed on such temporary contracts.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

And it's not just the miners who are suffering. makeITfair has learned that 7,000 people in one mining region of South Africa alone have been forced to leave their homes to make way for just one platinum mine operated by Anglo Platinum. Ten thousand more people are in imminent danger of relocation. Families from the first village are now living in appalling conditions without adequate access to water and electricity supply. And communities that have relied on farming for generations no longer have any farm land, so are unable to earn a living.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Although responsibility for the conditions at and around these platinum mines rests with companies like Anglo Platinum, big brand electronics companies should also be held responsible for metal suppliers at the bottom of their supply chain. These companies could put pressure on the mining companies to make sure the building blocks of their products are mined in a sustainable manner.

In turn, consumers should demand more responsibly produced electronics, ask questions and communicate to big brand electronics companies that they are willing to pay for products that have been sustainably and ethically produced.

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