

Abstract

The major thrust of the current study was to establish the major environmental damages caused by gold panning in Gwanda district in Matabeleland South Province of Zimbabwe. In this study the qualitative with a combination of minor aspects of the quantitative research paradigms were used with a sample drawn from panners, non panners and stakeholders. The stakeholders comprised local government officials, Environmental Management Authorities and officials drawn from local mining organisations while non panners included those people living with panners along the river banks and nearby communal settlers.

Given the in depth nature of the study, purposive sampling techniques were used with maximum variations in selecting panners and non panners, while at the same time maintaining

a balance among the respondents. The use of purposive sampling was appropriate in the sense

that the researcher could select unique cases that were especially informative.

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected through the use of face-to-face interviews

and a combination of questionnaires and observations managed to provide an in built triangulation for the study. A total sample of 92 respondents was used to respond to the questionnaires.

The study established that gold panning activities, which are poverty driven, have immensely contributed to environmental damages such as deforestation, river siltation, soil erosion, and water pollution and the destruction of aquatic based food chains as a result of disposing waste

materials and the use of chemicals such as mercury and cyanide. Gold panning has been seen as having resulted in a serious health hazards associated with the lack of proper hygiene standards in the squatter camps.

Data from the study was presented through tables, figures and charts for easy analysis and evaluation. Besides being a disaster to the physical environment and the ecosystem gold panning was found to have negative socio – environmental effects on the land and to other aspects of human life like the spread of infectious diseases and HIV AIDS. In light of these findings the study recommends that a coordinated approach should be provided to panners to

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provide them with some basic training in environmental management and the disaster risk reduction management skills. This will assist in reducing the environmental damages and other related disasters emanating from gold panning.