



Fria 5 to 8 September 2017

Mining towns in West Africa in the wake of site closures:
infrastructures, environment and political participation.

Closing presentation

Fria - 8 September 2017

**Closures: sobering indicators and a reflection of
the limits of the mining model in Africa**

Pr Bonnie Campbell

CIRDIS - UQAM

Organised by the Centre d'Étude et de Recherche en Environnement (CERE) at the University Gamal Abdel Nasser in Conakry (UGANC), l'Association des Ressortissants et Sympathisants de Fria (ARSYF), the Programme Concerté de Renforcement des Capacités des Organisations de la Société Civile et de la Jeunesse Guinéenne (PROJEG), the PRODIG joint research unit and the Groupement pour l'Étude de la Mondialisation et du Développement (GEMDEV), a research federation under the aegis of the University Paris 8 Saint-Denis.

We have just attended a seminar that has not only proven both very rich and highly stimulating, but has also been quite outstanding in many respects and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisers for offering us the chance to participate. The quality of the debates, the comparative perspectives presented, the collegial nature of the exchanges, the shared desire to consider collectively the situation of mine closures, in particular that of the Fria mine, and the fact that this meeting was held on the site of a city affected by a closure, have all contributed to making this a quite exceptional event. The aim of the seminar was to create a forum for exchange and, through our discussions, to attempt collectively to contribute to a better understanding of these processes which risk becoming increasingly common.

I was given the task of launching the closing discussions and it is with great reticence and modesty that I accepted this role, knowing that each and every one of the participants has an important contribution to make.

This is why I would invite you to complete and enrich this brief synopsis.

To frame this presentation, and as requested by the organisers, I will refer to the six avenues for contributing to the process that I proposed in the conclusion to my opening remarks at the beginning of the seminar.

1. First, the decision was made by the organizers to consider the contributions concerning different countries in order to benefit from comparative perspectives and see how these different experiences could shed light on what is happening at Fria and what strategies they bring to the fore. This choice proved very judicious and incorporating a comparative dimension was a highlight of the seminar.

With regard to pooling the experiences of different closures, while it is essential to underline the regulatory, political and institutional specificities, as well as those relating to the particular mineral in question, as illustrated by the case studies presented concerning Ghana, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo and Guinea and which reflect different historical trajectories, what was also highlighted during the two days of the seminar was the number of similarities. The comparative dimension also illustrated the evolution of reactions to closures as well as an increasing awareness over time of the need to take action. What becomes apparent is the importance of situating what is happening in a specific context. To give just one example, the provision and management of certain services by the mining companies in the mining towns was characterised by the term “paternalism”, but it is important to distinguish the different “eras” of this paternalism. The period 1950-1960 was not the same as the period 1980-1990, marked by the introduction of neoliberal reforms or the paternalism of “social responsibility” strategies introduced in parallel to these liberalisation reforms to order to mitigate some of their consequences and thus stabilise these reforms. The involvement of the companies in the area of urban planning and the management of the services provision in certain cities correspond to very different considerations depending on the contexts and the “mining models”, for issues of economic profitability entail roles and strategies of stakeholders

which evolve considerably over time. In light of this, the changing responses of communities to issues of dependence and vulnerability created by these different forms of paternalism must naturally be re-evaluated and they need to evolve accordingly.

The similarities in the case studies presented highlight the central importance of taking the “mining model” into account, and notably, of the model which is still dominant and which focuses on “mining first” as a development strategy. In this model “development” is not only conditioned by but also dependent on the industrial mining sector. The mining sector is presented as the “driving force of development” whereas, in reality, it is shackled by the parameters which condition the sector and over which states have very little control, including factors such as the logic and strategies of international competitiveness and delocalisation of companies, as well as the fluctuation of global mineral prices. Moreover, in this model successive reforms have also encouraged the state to withdraw from managing the sector, resulting in the dependence and vulnerability of the communities concerned. Unsurprisingly, as the Morila case study in Mali clearly demonstrated, there was a blatant lack of foresight concerning forthcoming closures and an absence of preparatory measures taken before the event. Among the similarities and the consequences of the mining model which was introduced so broadly across Africa over the last thirty years what stands out is the brutality of these processes and the resulting sudden lack of access to public services. This is the result of the gradual withdrawal of the public sector over many years as a result of the state transferring many of its functions and responsibilities to the private sector. The result of this process is to place the communities affected by mining operations in situations of extreme vulnerability when a mine closes, a vulnerability which gives rise to the dislocation and weakening of economic and social life.

However, the presentations heard during this seminar also highlighted a fundamental movement towards key changes in this sphere. Despite the discrepancies between the daily experiences of the populations who are the victims of the closures and the changes in practices currently being observed, the presentations bear witness to a clear, although very slow, increase in awareness among public leaders and policy-makers that these events are unacceptable and that change is necessary. In this regard, drawing a parallel may prove useful. We recall that at least fifteen or even twenty years passed before we began to take account of the environmental impacts which at the beginning of the 1990s were presented as being secondary and marginal compared to the highly positive economic impacts it was believed the “mining first” model would provide. To illustrate this, let us recall the highly detailed presentation by our legal expert from Senegal on the changing environmental requirements in that country. To summarise what was in fact an extremely precise and detailed presentation in a highly schematic manner and overly rapid manner, the regulatory framework in Senegal has moved from a situation in 1986 in which the environmental issues were essentially neglected, to a situation in 2000 in which an explicitly asserted concern appeared with a requirement for environmental impact studies, culminating in 2016 and the latest revisions to the code which stipulate increasing requirements including the rehabilitation of the mining sites as the activities progress, accompanied by the necessary creation of trust funds to cover the costs involved.

Even if this beginning of heightened awareness does not address closure-related issues from a social and political standpoint and still does not question, in a fundamental way, the existing mining model which could be described as mono-sectoral, enclaved and favouring exportable unprocessed minerals, we have reached a stage where the issues of rehabilitation and restoration can no longer be overlooked. There are certainly however, major discrepancies between the realities on the ground in the event of a closure and the urgent need to take action on the one hand, and on the other, the slowness of the decision-making process necessary to renew the approaches and translate this awareness into regulations and new practices.

Despite these discrepancies, it is difficult to imagine that this heightened awareness will be curtailed or even reversed. It is still to be seen however how the responsibilities for the social and political aspects of the closures will be clarified, specified, costed and compensated and how the standards defining the accountability of the stakeholders will be determined.

In this respect, the Fria seminar has been of paramount importance due to the forum for discussion created and the potential to learn that this meeting has provided the decision-makers, communities and companies involved in the closures who can share the lessons learned from previous, documented closures. The first lessons concern the roles of the stakeholders, the issue of clarifying responsibilities and the central question of the accountability of the stakeholders. Furthermore, our exchanges over the past few days have brought out a slow evolution of the standards which aim to bring about situations of increasing constraints and restrictions. How can we contribute to this process?

2. This brings us to the second point: the analysis of the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in the Fria closure. Throughout the seminar, we have observed asymmetrical relations between stakeholders in the mining sector due to the mining models introduced and the types of regulatory framework implemented. We have repeatedly raised the issue of the withdrawal of the state and the transfer of numerous of its functions to private operators. This can be explained by the fact that during the reforms of the mining regimes requested by the funders, it was intended that the mining companies become “owners” and “operators” of the mining sites with the states relegated to a marginal role of “facilitator” of investments and activities in the sector. Against this backdrop of state withdrawal, which is a key element of the mining model which has been introduced and institutionalised, we can find certain obvious explanatory factors of what is described as an absence of foresight and a lack of preparation concerning the closures when the events that occurred in numerous situations were, in fact, entirely foreseeable.

The past state withdrawal from the management of the sector raises the issue of the clarification and demarcation of the future responsibilities of the private as opposed to public stakeholders. This issue was explored by a speaker who raised the following question concerning mine closures: “Can chaos be avoided?” “The answer lies in a closure plan,” he continued, “involving all the stakeholders with a view to addressing 1) the management of the closure, 2) the development of the economy after the mine and 3) the relations with the community.” However, we could add that the long-term

development of the economy after the mine depends as well on the diversification of economic activities and a reduction in the dependence created, thereby presupposing planning and training according to the particularities of the region and the sub-region. Above all, this presupposes the strong involvement of the local stakeholders and their appropriation of such processes.

With regard to the role of the stakeholders, a recurrent theme throughout the seminar was the importance of the presence of the public authorities, in particular in planning not only the post-mine phase but also at the beginning of the activities. This is essential if we envisage a transformation of the role and place of the mining sector in development, in particular involving the creation of upstream and downstream links between this sector and other economic sectors (energy, infrastructures, industrial equipment, etc.) as proposed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. In this respect, the discussion concerning the purchase of local inputs cannot be held outside the scope of reflection on public policies in order to stimulate the creation of sectors complementary to mining activities, to provide training in the required competencies and to plan the links between sectors. Failing this, there is a major risk that the rhetoric concerning the purchase of local inputs will remain superficial and serve above all to give the international stakeholders a clear conscience without provoking structural changes in the economies concerned which can only result from the creation and articulation of activities both upstream and downstream of mining production.

Reflections concerning the “the role and need of the state” were voiced in various forms throughout the seminar with regard for example to 1) the creation of standards, 2) the role and capacity to implement regulations, to monitor and, if necessary, to introduce corrective measures and 3) the planning and coordination functions. To illustrate this, the discussion concerning artisanal miners – a frequently recurring theme – highlighted the fact that this group of workers clearly understood and accepted that there could be a moratorium on their activities during a certain period of the year but that they felt that these initiatives should be decided, announced and planned in a concerted manner. According to one participant, “ Artisanal miners are not against state regulations. They recognise the need for supervision”.

The usefulness of the comparative dimension of the presentations was particularly well illustrated by the recurring question of the importance of public policies concerning different facets of the mining activities.

3. A third avenue which had been suggested for our discussion related to the importance of taking account of the analyses, the perspectives, knowledge- and practices of the populations affected by mining activities. The debates highlighted the fact that participants firmly believed that it was not sufficient simply to draw up a list of recommendations – although this is in itself very important. To illustrate the need to go beyond prescribing solutions, the presentation on artisanal mining in Guinea provided a list of recommendations relating, among other things, to the question of child schooling, the control of toxic products and the importance of diversifying towards other activities. However, if the populations concerned do not take ownership of them, these recommendations will

never be applied. What is most important is therefore that the potential solutions are designed in collaboration with and by the communities involved, that these communities take ownership of them and, as far as possible, that they implement, manage and evaluate them.

4. Without in any way denying the critical importance of the international initiatives promoted by the civil society organisations, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) or Publish What You Pay (PWYP), mine closures require parallel considerations and actions rooted in local specificities while taking account of the realities which result from the globalised nature of the mining sector. As we all know, corporate strategies take place on another scale than national frameworks, and thus our analyses, just as national policies, need to adopt a similar perspective and evolve in such a manner as to be articulated with the sub-regional and regional integration institutions and initiatives.

Mention was made of the need to take the sub-regional authorities into account, including the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as the analyses of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. This attention to the link between actions at a local level and those at regional and international levels is by no means a luxury, as highlighted by the numerous references to the issues raised by these dimensions, including the problems of migration, climate change and cross-border mines not to mention corporate strategies themselves which satisfy criteria reflecting logics which unfold at a supra-national level. The conceptualisation of public policies at local and national levels cannot therefore overlook the inclusion of the sub-regional, regional and international dimensions so crucial in this highly globalised industry.

5. The importance of the role of research

The seminar addressed this point on many occasions and highlighted the need for interdisciplinary approaches capable of taking account of the different scales of analysis and time perspectives. To illustrate this, one presentation demonstrated the importance of macroeconomic analyses in order to ensure a better understanding of mining activities at local level and the possibilities of benefiting from positive impacts.

Another dimension emphasised was the importance of work on alternative strategies and how to develop them more effectively. During an economic boom, for example, it is the time to analyse and research new potential activities at the local and regional level. Among other things, the presentation on Mauritania underlined the importance of envisaging diversification in the mining sector not only with other sectors but also within the mining sector itself. Attention was drawn in this regard to the importance and benefits of exploring new uses of the minerals produced, in parallel to the main activity, as with the case in Mauritania, for example, of developing new procedures enabling quartz obtained from the primary mining activity to be transformed to make glass.

The areas which deserve that more in depth research be undertaken are numerous. By way of an illustration, during the seminar, one recurrent variable was that of price fluctuations for metals. However, prices are more often than not accepted as given without any examination of the processes and factors involved in price setting. This point underlines the potential benefit of conducting analyses of the strategies adopted by the relevant stakeholders in the industrial mining sector, including delocalisation and concentration strategies adopted to ensure that the countries owning the natural resources are not simply in a reactive position when prices fall or a delocalisation or closure takes place.

Such analyses would facilitate the capacity to implement local transformation strategies and allow less asymmetric relationships to be created for the states and communities concerned during the negotiation process.

6. Finally, one last challenge we were given was to identify how to increase awareness of the situation at Fria in our respective domains by learning, sharing and disseminating lessons from the Fria closure. How could this be done? To initiate the discussion, I would like to submit a number of questions to you.
 - a) How can we provide access to the case studies presented during the seminar to the inhabitants of Fria in particular and to the decision-makers responsible for the future of Fria?
 - b) How can we contribute to systematising the information collected during this seminar and ensure that this process is cumulative?
 - c) Could we create a website concerning closures which would include different sections such as: i) recent improvements to the regulations concerning rehabilitation and closures and ii) analysis of what is presented as best practices?
 - d) One possibility would be to ask the Economic Commission for Africa to host such a website to ensure maximum availability.
 - e) What other initiatives could be proposed with a view to seizing the extraordinary opportunity offered to us by the Fria seminar, having brought together researchers, policy-makers and civil society organisations – perhaps the first of its kind in West Africa – in order to ensure that the momentum created here is not lost? How can we ensure that this initiative is maintained and contributes to the ongoing process mentioned above aimed at ensuring greater accountability so that other communities do not suffer the same fate as Fria and that our deliberations can contribute to and benefit the citizens of Fria?

I would like to thank you for your kind attention and thank the organisers of the seminar for having given me the privilege to have participated in it.