

New film highlights human pressures of diamond industry in Sierra Leone

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The new film from development researchers at the University of Bath traces the diamond journey from mine face to market. Credit: Roy Maconachie and Simon Wharf / University of Bath

Enormous wealth and power inequalities mean that people making a living out of mining diamonds in Sierra Leone continue to face huge economic and social challenges, in spite of international efforts to improve the diamond trade over the past decade.

12 years on from the hit blockbuster 'Blood Diamond', starring Leonardo DiCaprio—which graphically depicted the human costs of conflict [diamonds](#) to a global audience—a new 30-minute feature film from development researchers at the University of Bath charts the untold story of artisanal diamond miners working informally in Sierra Leone.

The film, 'Voices from the Mine', funded by Humanity United—an organisation dedicated to bringing new approaches to global problems that have long been considered intractable—documents the path that diamonds follow, as they journey from the mine in Kono District right through to the market in Antwerp. It is screened for the first time tonight (Thursday 10 May) at The Edge, University of Bath.

It highlights how diamond mining is Sierra Leone's most lucrative export industry, worth up to \$250 million annually. But due to poor governance and widespread corruption, only a fraction of this wealth returns to the areas where diamonds are mined. So while international traders reap vast rewards, for those in the mining pits, poverty and hardship remain.

The film examines the challenges of local level governance arrangements in the artisanal diamond mining sector, and the implications this has for those at the bottom of the chain. It suggests that for consumers buying diamonds as a romantic gesture, right through to policy makers working on development initiatives, a more nuanced understanding of what is happening for miners at the grassroots level is needed.

Researcher and film-maker behind the project, Dr. Roy Maconachie from the University of Bath's Centre for Development Studies, explained: "International concerns for blood diamonds and efforts to address the problem through the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme focused a lot of attention on Sierra Leone's alluvial diamond mining sector. Sixteen years on from the end of the civil war, many people now just assume that everything is ok, but that's not always the

case.

"While the film Blood Diamond raised international awareness of conflict diamonds, and the Kimberley Process has done much to address the problem, many important issues that our film raises have been overshadowed; most notably the exploitation that takes place due to the informal nature of the sector, and the fact that those toiling the land in search of diamonds very often do not reap the rewards of their efforts.

"Film can be such a powerful way of exposing problems that often remain invisible, and by charting the diamond journey from Sierra Leone to Antwerp we hope this film shows why the system is not fair and points to what could be done to improve matters for those at the mine face."

The film is a collaboration with award-winning filmmaker, Simon Wharf, with support from postdoctoral researcher, Felix Conteh.

Provided by University of Bath

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