

LSRI DIALOGUES

01

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Executive Director
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Laudato Si'
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
CAMPION HALL, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



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These papers are transcriptions of dialogues conducted by staff members of the Laudato Si' Research Institute with key thinkers and practitioners in the field of integral ecology.

They intentionally retain the form and grammar of the spoken interview.



The Laudato Si' Research Institute

The Laudato Si' Research Institute is based at Campion Hall at the University of Oxford.

Since opening in 2019, our work has been inspired by Pope Francis' vision in the encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, which calls all people to respond to the "cry of the earth" and the "cry of the poor."

The vision of the LSRI is to make a transdisciplinary approach to socio-ecological research mainstream within higher education.

By engaging in a different way of researching, teaching, and learning in higher education, we seek to inspire a new and creative dialogue between the academy and those who are invested in socio-ecological change for the flourishing of our common home.

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INTRODUCING ...

Ketakandriana Rafitoson is the Executive Director of Transparency International in Madagascar and coordinates the *Publish What You Pay* coalition for the country.

Ke was in the UK from 4-12 April 2023 to attend the Annual General Meeting of multinational mining company, Rio Tinto.

She speaks here with Dr Séverine Deneulin, Director of International Development at the Laudato Si' Research Institute, about her work, and what Jesuit networks can do to promote integral ecology in the context of mining and just energy transitions.

Séverine:

Ke, you have been working tirelessly for many years to hold Rio Tinto, and its subsidiary QMM, accountable for its actions in an ilmenite mine in Southern Madagascar. Could you tell us more about the type of work you do?

Ke:

Transparency International (TI) is an organization which fights against corruption and promotes integrity, accountability and transparency in all sectors, including the mining sector. Our chapter, TI Madagascar (TI-MG), has been elected as the coordinator of the *Publish What You Pay* (PWYP) national coalition. PWYP promotes better governance of extractive industries so that these industries benefit local communities.

Ke:

Our work mainly consists of monitoring how companies behave in terms of governance. For example, whether they have adequate grievance mechanisms that are suitable for local communities, and monitoring the relationship between the company and its government.

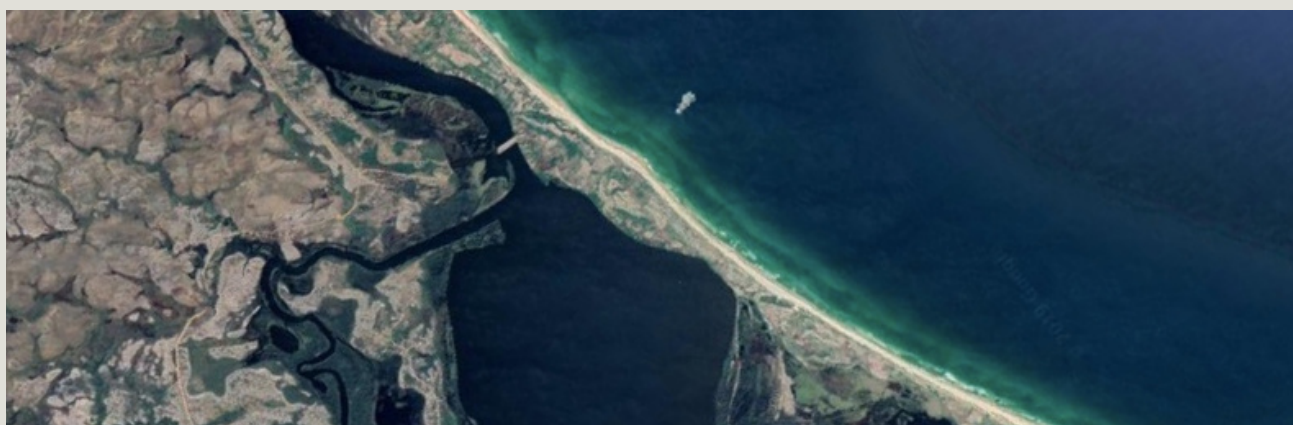


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We suspect that there can be forms of collusion at the point where the government grants the company a license to operate in the country. There can be bribes or embezzlement involved in such relationships and these patterns of corruption can be detrimental to communities. We also monitor the social performance of companies by engaging questions such as: what kind of social activities do they support? Do these activities meet the needs of local communities, or do they just tick some boxes? We also monitor potential human rights violations.

We do all this in order to improve company performance and to ensure benefits derived from mineral exploitation are shared by local communities. 'Putting people first' is one of the mottos and motivations of such activities. The slogan of PWYP is 'Extracting the Truth', which means you have to investigate, you have to listen to the complaints of the community, listen to what is going wrong. But it's not just listening, it's also fact-checking and documenting failures in order to identify room for improvement. We also send recommendations to governments because they are responsible for the wellbeing of local communities and need to be held accountable for what they are doing (or not doing). We also send recommendations to companies so that they can improve their mining operations.

The QMM/Rio Tinto mine is only one of those we are monitoring, but this case is illustrative of the lack of involvement of the government in environmental and social monitoring of the mining sector in Madagascar, and the lack of adjustment from mining companies to the needs of local communities.



Note: The Mandena mine is an ilmenite mine operated by Rio Tinto subsidiary QIT Madagascar Minerals (QMM). It is located near Taolagnaro, Fort Dauphin, Anosy region, Madagascar. Ilmenite was first discovered in 1986 in an environmentally fragile and important region. Since it began in 2005, mining activity has been met with mixed reactions from the local community.

Ke:

Its mining operations started in 2005 and it is now 2023. People have been complaining for more than 15 years without anyone listening. That is why we have put an emphasis on this case. In association with the *Andrew Lees Trust* (ALT) based in the UK, we have also conducted two main perception studies.



A first study in 2020 was around water pollution. ALT UK commissioned scientific studies about water pollution, but the company strongly denied some of the scientific findings.

This is why I would also like to highlight our methodology. We asked people what they felt on a daily basis about

changes in water quality. They reported that for more than 10 years the water they have been using for cooking and other daily needs has changed in colour, smell, and taste. They also sensed that this water was bringing a lot of diseases: their skin was itching, they had stomach aches and reported other, more unusual symptoms of disease. They did suspect that all this was linked to water pollution. We wanted to carry out such a study about people's feelings to complement the scientific study of water contamination and put more pressure on the company to recognize its responsibility.

In 2022, we conducted a second survey to dig deeper into the deprivations that local communities were experiencing, and their feelings about the mine. We discovered that 94% of people surveyed were dissatisfied with the mine. First of all, they were reporting huge loss of revenue. They said that they lost between 45-50% of their revenue since the mine was established. This revenue loss has been linked to lack of access to natural resources because the forest has been fenced and they no longer had access to it. Before the mine arrived, they were making a living out of the forest, such as basket-making. There is also a depletion of fish in the water. They said that 27 fish species have disappeared since mining operations began, and that they could only fish four species now, which are getting more and more

scarce. People also complained about access to jobs. They had been promised employment, but this had not materialised as they were lacking relevant qualifications to work in the mine. The company imported staff and human resources from elsewhere. I blame this on the government, as when you have such a big company which is going to settle in the country you have to plan ahead and think about how to train the local population so that they can take these jobs.

This dissatisfaction drives the local community to ask for compensation, a huge part of which is related to land loss. The local population lost their land to mining operations without any fair

compensation. And this takes us back to the government's responsibility because it is the government who is in charge of plotting the land and estimating the land value. Estimation at that time was that 1 m² was 300 Ariary (the local currency), equivalent to 6 pence per m² (1GBP=5000 Ariary). This is nothing. People cultivated an area of 1000 m², more or less. At the end of the day, however, they received very little compensation, and some did not get any. This was a big topic of grievance. There were, additionally, a lot of riots last year because of fish death in the waters around the mine. The population was scared because of the dead fish in the water, and they wanted to know the reason. The reason is still being disputed between the company and independent scientists who are trying to analyse the water pollution. Is the fish death linked to a combination of elevated aluminium and low pH from the mining basin waters, as has been suggested to be the most probable cause, or another factor?

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This is in addition to the other compensations which the villagers, especially fisherfolk, have been asking for for at least ten years. There have been lots of riots, blockades, demonstrations. Some people have been arbitrarily jailed. Freedom of expression is not granted in Madagascar. If you blow the whistle against something, you are likely to be heard by the police and jailed for some time or threatened. All this makes for an explosive situation. This led eventually to an agreement between the company, the government, and representatives of local communities. The negotiation started in May 2022, but it was difficult. The company asked the local communities to file their grievances, but many are illiterate. How can they write their grievances and estimate the value of their losses if they are not able to write? They were also in need of legal assistance. The company offered some legal assistance, but because of lack of trust, the communities didn't want the assistance of anyone paid by the company because they suspected collusion. More than

8,000 people submitted a compensation claim. The company has currently paid 5,400 compensations, but many did not manage to submit. And those who did are not happy either, as what they signed was a one-time compensation. Once they had agreed to claim and receive compensation, they are not entitled to claim any more, ever. One sees here the power asymmetries at play in this story: illiterate communities who want to claim their rights facing a careless giant mining company backed by the government. Those communities do not have any assistance except through some civil society organisations like ours who perform advocacy on another level so that the company behaves better, and put pressure on the government so that it plays its role correctly.

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This is why I came to London to attend the Rio Tinto AGM. I cannot pretend to represent the local communities, but my intention is to make known at the international level what is going on at the

local level, and to improve mining operations so they are less detrimental to local communities. The company is going to relocate soon to two other places in Madagascar (Sainte-Luce and Petriky), and we do not want it to replicate the same mistakes. We want it to behave better and to listen to communities. And we want to expose the collusion between the company and the government. For example, the National Office for the Environment, which is in charge of monitoring social and environmental standards, is partly paid by the company itself, so how can it be independent? Moreover, we do not have access to the Office's monitoring report. We, as civil society, have the right to monitor all of this on behalf of the community. So, there are a lot of parameters to adjust before the company moves to new locations. What we asked at the AGM was mainly to conduct an independent audit of the grievance and compensation process. There are many failures. If one does not deal correctly with these failures and grievances, it will create more explosions and tension. This can threaten a country's social stability.

To sum up, we do action-research. We document, we do fact-checking, we commission research with quantitative and qualitative data to inform the cause. We complement this with investigative journalism. We do a lot of advocacy work not only at the local and national level but also at the international level. For example, it is the London Mining Network which brought me here to London. This networking and collaboration among different entities is very important. Finally, we constantly seek to mobilize citizens, we provide information to the public. The situation with QMM/Rio Tinto is happening in one part of the country, and we want other citizens to be aware of it. Justice has to be sought by Malagasy people for Malagasy people. We build people power through information.

Séverine: How does your Catholic faith inform the work you do? What role do you see for spirituality and faith communities in promoting justice in mining?

Ke: I have to say that the organizations I am working for are non-partisan and not religious, but it is me, as an individual, who is driven by my own faith in what I am doing. It is about faith doing justice. This is something I have learned and have experienced through my volunteer work with the social centre Arrupe in Madagascar, and my long-time involvement with the Jesuits. I studied in a Jesuit high school and then at the Catholic University of Madagascar. I am Catholic myself. I am convinced that we have been sent here on the earth with a purpose. I am not sure if I can call it my mission or purpose, but I have the feeling that I have to speak for the voiceless and do my best to contribute to their wellbeing through engagement against corruption which undermines all human rights. I think that each Christian has to get involved in a cause of his or her choice in order to put into practice the apostolate of the laity because we have to make a difference in our societies, in our communities.

We have to fight injustice and to make sure that each and every individual right is truly guaranteed, protected and valued. In my engagement with the Jesuits, for instance, I work a lot with them to spread the word about good governance and why it matters. We explain during lectures, seminars or other events they organize how citizens, especially Christians, have to be involved in the fight for good governance. It is very simple for me. Whenever you go to Mass on Sunday or any other day, listen to the Scriptures. There is a message for you. The question is how you put that message into practice in your daily life. It is not just about praying. Praying is not enough. It has to be followed by actions. So, the idea is to do something on a daily basis, and in a sustained way, through a long-term work, to make a difference in our societies.

Séverine: The Global Ignatian Advocacy Network is currently working on a global campaign on 'justice in mining'. What is your view on what Jesuit networks and institutions could do for the promotion of justice in mining?

Ke: I think that the *Global Ignatian Advocacy Network*, as a network, can join the dots between different countries living under similar realities in fighting for just mining so that they can launch a global campaign, including, ideally for me, the establishment of mining observatories in such countries. Once again, it is first about documenting what is wrong. What are the wrongdoings and

malpractices which can be found in such mining companies, sites, and countries? Then it is about working together to build this global advocacy with a well-informed network because if you do not have the data, some people will say that your struggle for justice is not credible. So, research, observations, findings – all of this together.

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The network can also build regional and global strategies on how to fight together for just mining. This togetherness matters. If you are in a country like Madagascar, you can be quite isolated because it is an island in the middle of nowhere. No one knows about what is happening there. It is hard to reach out to the continent because we are part of Africa but geographically outside of it. So, I think that the GIAN could ease things. It could connect different missions and different communities for exchange of good practices and for joint work. Having someone who works with you is very valuable. You need someone sustaining your fight because it is a fight in which sometimes one feels desperate if one does not have allies.

But the most important thing is for the network to increase pressure at the international level. This is one thing that is critically needed. For instance, in a very practical way, Qit Mineral Madagascar (QMM) is not always listening to what we are saying. This is why we had to reach out to the main company, Rio Tinto, so that they could put pressure on their subsidiary. If we had more and more networks at the international level, there would no need for me to travel to London. The network could act on behalf these local stakeholders. It would save money, time and energy. It would be more efficient. And since the Network is guided by the same principles of faith doing justice, the common good, a sense of community service, speaking for the voiceless, working for the most vulnerable people, then we have a common ground for action. Even if our organisations are not religious (such as TI and PWYP), we can contribute to it. For example, PWYP has published its recommendations for a common African vision on transition minerals during the Alternative Mining Indaba in Cape Town in February, emphasising the need to centre people and planet, to strengthen governance and anticorruption, and to ensure a globally equitable transition. I think you do not need to be religious to share those values. So, there is a complementarity between non-religious organisations and religious ones. This needs to be the case in such a Network because, at the end of the day, we all have the same purpose of protecting communities, of making mining work.

I have to specify that our work is not anti-mining. TI-MG and PWYP MG do not want these companies to leave. The country needs these mining operations to access certain forms of development. But we want them to do things in the right way. That is what we are striving for. We do not want mining at all costs; there must be also the development of local communities.

Séverine: Given your advocacy work, what would you say is the contribution from academic research institutes, like the Laudato Si' Research Institute, in promoting justice in mining and supporting the work of social activists like yourself?

Ke: I think that the collaboration between academic research institutes such as the LSRI and activists, and also civil society organisations, is crucial. Most of the time activists and civil society organisations are seen as troublemakers shouting out slogans, organising sit-ins, demonstrations or whatever. But if you don't have good research, serious findings to sustain your fight, then your cause will not be credible. Some organisations have the ability to do this research, like we do at TI, thanks to some collaboration with other organisations and small grants, but it is not the case for all organizations or grassroots communities. So, this collaboration really helps them to build this capacity for collecting information on what is happening on the ground. The reverse is also I think relevant because research institutes can take interesting information from the ground, e.g., a socio-economic study, an anthropology study, you can have some material to analyse what these communities are going through. It is a win-win collaboration in my view, mutually enriching for this search for justice at the global level. It is really something I would push for.

And another thing to do is to build research skills and capacities at the local level. How do we research for greater justice in mining in the light of the social teachings of the Catholic Church? How do we drive these teachings and principles into action with a research lens? Something like this could be very interesting and useful. Because we are all moved by the teachings of Pope Francis in Laudato Si'. The notion of integral ecology is spoken about more and more. But not everybody sees what integral ecology implies for our daily lives. How do we translate integral ecology into action? The narrative today is framed around a discourse of energy transition, fighting climate change, alleviating the impacts of climate change. But we have mostly forgotten about the implications of this energy transition. We talk about energy transitions, but I wonder if there will be ever justice for the South. For small countries like Madagascar, rich in minerals but with a poor governance framework and not many anticorruption safeguards, won't we be ruined by energy transitions?

If something is not done, if there is no timely global reflection on the topic, then the energy transition will be harmful. The LSRI could, for example, do work in that regard, in fostering that global reflection, in building a narrative around how communities already affected by mining are living, and in putting warnings and safeguards in place.

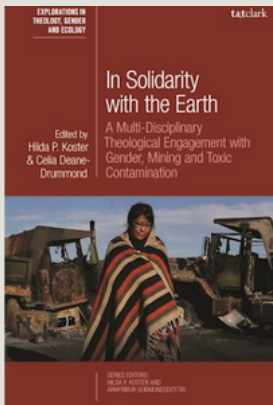
Yes, of course humanity needs to fight climate change and find more sustainable ways of living, but there are also human rights and social considerations that we have to keep in mind. That's the spirit of action-research for me. Research followed by action, and all of this informed by the stories of human beings.

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