

Guinea: Mining zones take on AIDS

With an HIV infection rate of 5.2 per cent, the lucrative mining sector in Guinea is particularly at risk from the epidemic. Some mining companies have begun setting up their own programmes to make up for the lack of HIV/AIDS services on offer. But they say a public-private partnership is essential if local residents are not to be excluded.

Guinea has immense resources in bauxite, iron, gold, diamonds and other minerals which, the government says, make it “potentially one of the richest countries in West Africa”. Yet according to the UN Guinea is one of the poorest countries in the world; over 53 per cent of its nine million inhabitants live on less than a dollar a day.

Mine employees are generally better paid than those working in other sectors and are often envied, particularly by local people who are living in poverty. “Mining areas are little islands of prosperity where a lot of risky behaviour goes on [regarding HIV],” said Cheikhou Yaya Diallo, president of the HIV/AIDS Steering Committee of the Guinea Chamber of Mines (CMG).

“In mining areas people aren't careful, especially young people,” confirmed Piantoni, who is HIV-positive and works at the mine in Fria, 160km north of the capital Conakry. “With the high cost of living, boys and girls give themselves easily.” “Prostitution is high; the area is known for it.”

State of suspended development Mine employees often come from other parts of the country and are far from their families for months at a time. They are what could be called “geographically single” and so enter into “short marriages” - temporary unions which last the length of their work contracts. The practice is known to be high-risk in the spread of HIV.

Read the full article here <http://www.IRINnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=81724>