

---

## [Testimony of unsustainability: The experience of the International Articulation of those affected by Vale](#)

Currently, the mining sector is one of the main engines of the world's economic system. In several countries, expropriation cases from native populations are recurrent, including loss of territory, disintegration of community solidarity bonds, pollution of territories and water sources, exploitation of workers, and criminalization of groups who dare to withstand large corporations.

One of the largest icons of this expropriating model in mining is the Brazilian company Vale S.A., previously Vale do Rio Doce and privatized in 1997 (1). Vale S.A. is the largest mining company in Brazil and comes third in the global ranking of mining industries. Vale is the world leader in iron ore production and the second largest producer of nickel, but also plays a crucial role in the production of manganese, copper, coal, iron "pellets", ferroalloys and some fertilizers. With activities in about 30 countries on the five continents, the multinational operates an integrated chain from mining, logistics (ore transportation through railways to ports), energy (production to meet its own energy demand that is enormous) and steel production (transformation of iron ore into steel). Each stage of this chain causes severe social and environmental impacts.

In the face of this context of global action by a large multinational, a global articulation of people affected by Vale was needed to ensure and strengthen resistance to the violation of their rights. Therefore, the International Articulation of those affected by Vale was born in 2010, bringing together diverse groups such as trade unionists, environmentalists, NGOs, community-based associations, religious groups and academics from eight countries where the company operates. The main objective is to contribute to strengthening community alliances, promoting strategies to address the social and environmental impacts related to the extractive mining industry, especially those related to Vale S.A.

Over recent decades, criticism of the social and environmental impacts of the mining industry has secured an important space in the international political debate. Countless facts and data submitted by civil society in many countries helped to consolidate the fact that there is no mining without disaster and, from the companies point of view, this meant not only a risk to their reputation and business, but also to the survival of the mining sector as a whole. To anticipate such risk, Vale, as well as major companies in the sector, strive to convey to the public an image of being companies that respect the environment and affected communities, and presenting this image under the name of sustainability strategy.

Nevertheless, arrogantly, Vale has become used to ignoring or giving no satisfactory answers when accused and sued by residents of affected communities, social movements and trade union representatives around the world, and avoids taking responsibility by resorting to legal, economic and political trickery to evade requirements and demands of impacted groups.

Despite the efforts to establish this image in society, using expensive advertising campaigns, the truth is that Vale has become a symbol for violent socio-environmental impacts, non-compliance with

---

labor and environmental laws, and causing human rights violations. Among several cases, an episode from March 2013 is emblematic insofar as it exposes the sordid actions that Vale uses to ensure continuity of its activities and the highest possible profitability for the longest possible time. In that month, a former staff member of Vale presented to the Federal Public Ministry of Brazil documentation about the functioning of the surveillance and intelligence division operations of the company. The information revealed Vale spying on its own staff, journalists, impacted communities and social movements that have criticised the projects of the company.

The revelation of this type of operating logic provides an important indication to society about what for this multinational mining company truly represents a sustainability strategy. The sustainability of its own *modus operandi*, guaranteeing significant profits even if that requires the violation of rights.

Knowing that it is not easy for people to disclosure, resonate, disseminate and challenge a company like Vale, the International Articulation of those affected by Vale seeks to act on several fronts, adding numerous communities and networks of various countries that help with information for producing several research papers and denounces of rights violations by the company, taking some of these to international bodies in defense of human rights.

One of the pillars of action of the Articulation is the perspective that exchange of information and experiences of struggles between impacted communities in different countries strengthens and potentiates the local resistance processes, since it evidences the global context of exploitation and the standard by which the company proceeds in the territories. The exchanges are spaces for strengthening actions of resistance and are held through International Meetings of those Affected by Vale and Caravans that travel across different localities as a way of showing the similarities and links between different social groups.

Another pillar is the interventions during the company's shareholder meetings in the role of critical shareholders. Such interventions are carried out every year since 2010 and aim to raise criticism in front of other shareholders about how Vale's current business strategy of expanding the iron ore supply and reducing production costs reverberates in the territories: with bigger and more aggressive pressure for easing environmental laws and streamlining permits, intensification of working hours, non-recognition of labour rights and the intensification of conflicts with local communities where the company operates.

One more front of action of the Articulation is the production of materials that illustrate social and environmental conflicts that the company tries to hide. In this regard, the Articulation published the *Dossier of Impacts and Violations of Vale around the World* (2), with denunciations related to the company's ventures in eight countries and six Brazilian states, released in 2010. Furthermore, the *Vale Unsustainability Reports* for 2012 (3) and 2015 (4) aim to contrast (point by point) all items addressed in the Sustainability Report of the company. In addition, the "Public Eye Award" for the worst corporation in the world (5) was granted to Vale in 2012, after an extensive online voting.

The *Vale 2015 Unsustainability Report*, launched one day before the Articulation's participation in the shareholders meeting, presents information on more than 30 cases of conflicts involving the entire production chain of Vale in different countries. The most serious cases include the aforementioned episode of espionage and charges of labour conditions similar to slavery, which were reported to the Public Prosecution Service in Brazil. The publication also presents cases where Vale invested in projects with legal disputes related to the infringement of environmental protection legislation.

---

Among the wide range of violations presented in the report, three emblematic cases can be highlighted that allow us to compare with other cases, because they touch upon key issues such as health, resettlement and freedom of workers' association. In Mozambique, in the Moatize district in the Tete province, where one of the largest coal reserves in the world is located, the company Vale S.A. extracts coal ore from an open pit mine. In the loading and unloading area, there is a high concentration of dust that causes the loss of vegetation in the region and puts the health of inhabitants at risk. From a study carried out the Institute of Mozambican Social and Economic Studies (IESE) warned that Moatize may face serious air pollution problems due to the coal mines, in addition to determine that the presence of pollutants in the air such as sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide, can be detrimental to the health of the population in the long term.

Also in Mozambique, Vale is known for the appalling conditions in which it resettled more than 1,300 families, stripped of the lands they occupied for generations to bring about the coal mining project in the Tete province. Now, families face difficulties to access water, land, and energy, in lands unsuitable for agriculture and so far they have not received the comprehensive compensation to which they are entitled. The houses, built by Vale itself, have already been repaired at least three times due to cracks, losses and erosion, threatening the houses' foundations. The resettled families have protested several times, even by blocking the roads that give access to the mine. Families have reported the precarious living conditions to which they are subjugated to since late 2009 and so far there has been no satisfactory response from the company.

Vale is also well known for not respecting the freedom of association and co-opting groups that criticize the company. Various unions accuse Vale of freezing union actions and creating obstacles to the attempts to ensure better living and working conditions. The management style of the company is often interpreted as a strategy to subtly undermine the strength of unions, and to isolate democratically elected union leaders. In 2014, Vale's co-opting practices became publicly known with the Metabase Carajás union (Pará) – Brazil's largest mine workers union, located at the heart of Vale's main mine - when, after 20 years, a group of workers managed to register a candidate for the union's presidency without being defeated behind the scenes. During those two decades, the company and the co-opted trade union movement claimed the absence of opposition among workers by suppressing the permissive influence of the company and workers' dissatisfaction.

The International Articulation of those affected by Vale will continue disseminating and giving visibility to the company's practices that hide behind the discourse of "social responsibility" and best practices of corporate governance, which subsidize the creation of a policy of social hardship in the interest of business objectives. What can be found as a result of this strategy is the disarticulation of resistance and a bigger territorial control of Vale. However, the actions of Vale will not deter us from fighting for justice, rights, respect for all forms of life and the environment, as well as to continue searching for autonomy and protagonism of those affected, directly and indirectly, in the decisions about economic activities that should or should not be developed in the territories.

We challenge the absolute power of Vale and fight for the strengthening of workers and all the peoples affected by its actions.

To live in dignity is priceless.

*Maíra Sertã Mansur, Operational Secretariat of the International Articulation of those affected by Vale and researcher.*

*Gabriel Strautman, Researcher of the Institute of Alternative Policies for the Southern Cone (Instituto Políticas Alternativas para el Cono Sur - PACS)*

---

1) There are about one hundred popular actions to cancel the privatization process of the company. In April 1997, the then Companhia Vale do Rio Doce was privatized by the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994-2002). With an understated value of US\$ 3.4 billion only, the sale also received funding from the National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) and it had the participation of pension funds of large Brazilian state enterprises. If tax evasion and undervaluation of goods are confirmed, the decision to nullify the sale of Vale will proceed.

2) [http://www.justicanostrilhos.org/IMG/pdf/dossie\\_versaoweb\\_1\\_0.pdf](http://www.justicanostrilhos.org/IMG/pdf/dossie_versaoweb_1_0.pdf)

3) <https://atingidospelavale.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/relatorio-de-Insostenibilidade-da-vale-2012/>

4) <https://atingidospelavale.wordpress.com/2015/04/16/leia-relatorio-de-Insostenibilidade-da-vale-2015/>

5) <http://www.publiceye.ch/en/ranking/>