

## Poisoning of Nigerian children linked to new mines

Written by (GIN)

Wednesday, 09 June 2010 13:59

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Recently reported deaths of more than one hundred children in the northern Nigerian state of Zamfara are being blamed on polluted water pools where the children play.

The deaths of 163 Nigerians, most of them children, were reported by Dr. Henry Akpan, the health ministry's chief epidemiologist, as "lead poisoning caused by illegal gold mining."

The villages affected are in remote parts of Zamfara, one of Nigeria's poorest states in the arid Sahel region on the southern fringe of the Sahara desert, where many people work as artisanal miners and subsistence farmers.

Zamfara was recently hailed for newly-discovered subterranean wealth in gold, copper, iron ore and manganese. President Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated a mineral processing plant where he directed miners to respect international environmental practices.

But according to health officials, the natural resources were a double-edged sword. Tools, soil and water contaminated with large concentrations of lead began taking victims back in March and the government was slow to respond.

Abubakar Garba, a 40-year-old sheep farmer in Giadanbuzu, said in a press interview that Reuters that four of his six children died from lead poisoning two months ago. The four were all under the age of 10.

"The government of this country does not know where the poor live. They do not want to know what goes on in our villages," Garba said while fighting back tears.

"If it were their children, it would not have taken them so long to discover these problems."

The Blacksmith Institute, a New York-based nonprofit "working in highly polluted locations in the developing world with the intent of mitigating human health risks from pollution," according to their website, is taking part in the clean-up.