



# AFRICA

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## Rutile Mining: Moyamba District, Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone is mineral rich; titanium minerals such as rutile and ilmenite are its principle mineral exports. Before war erupted in 1991, mining represented 90 per cent of Sierra Leone's registered

exports and roughly 20 per cent of its GDP—rutile accounted for well over half of that. The Moyamba District, which borders the Atlantic Ocean in the west and Bonthe to the south, is the most active rutile mining area in the country. Although mining companies left during the war, they returned when the war ended in 2002.

Rutile is mined by creating large artificial lakes which are then dredged, leaving behind large water-filled pits up to 600 m long. In Sierra Leone, these activities have left vast areas of land deforested and degraded. It is estimated that between 80 000 and 120 000 hectares of land have been mined out in different parts of the country with minimal efforts at restoration.

In the 1974 image, one small mining operation is visible (centre); however, much of the Moyamba District was still covered with relatively intact forests at that time. By 2003, mining activities had replaced large portions of forest with water-filled pits. These mining sites have extremely poor health and sanitary conditions; the pits teem with mosquitoes and bacteria that are linked to a high incidence of malaria, cholera, and diarrhoea.