

Field Notes

Our Monthly Profile of FPA
Researchers: Doris Buss and Blair
Rutherford



Doris Buss is an associate professor of Law and Legal Studies. Blair Rutherford is the director of the Institute of African Studies (and a professor of Sociology & Anthropology).

Professors Buss and Rutherford lead a research collaboration entitled, “Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining in Central and East Africa” that includes colleagues conducting research in six African countries: Mozambique, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Rwanda.

The Study: Tens of thousands of women in Africa work in what is now commonly called artisanal or small scale mining of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold. It’s precarious, unregulated work that enables many of them to make a living, and even prosper in some cases.

As these activities become more regulated, the work of these women is often excluded from the “formal” agreements at the corporate and governmental level, which can endanger their livelihoods.

The goal is to document the type of work these women are doing, the opportunities and barriers they face, and the effect legalization will have on them, their families, and their communities.

The Methodology: Canadian and African researchers and research assistants are interviewing miners, conducting surveys and collecting life histories over the next few years. Researchers are also interviewing policymakers in all of the participating countries.

The Collaboration: This is a multi-national, multi-lingual and interdisciplinary project. In fact, a recent methodology workshop in Uganda brought all of the researchers

together, requiring translators in six different languages. Some of the African participants were from non-governmental organizations, others were artisanal miners from the Great Lakes region.

While the Canadian and African researchers brought their academic theories and methodologies to the table, their counterparts in civil society organizations and the mining sites brought insight and knowledge of their respective countries.

The Outcomes: The outcomes of this research will provide information and insight to policymakers who are making decisions that will affect the livelihood of these women. The hope is that the study will bring more understanding of the issue and more security into these women’s lives.

Quote: “On the books, this mining activity is illegal. But it is also increasing the well-being and stability of these women’s lives and their society. We’re hoping our work will provide better understanding and insight into the importance of this form of work for many African women and men as well as the myriad challenges they face in improving their livelihoods.”

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[To learn more about Professors Buss and Rutherford’s research, click here.](#)