

**Women's Livelihoods in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Central
and Eastern Africa**
Methodological Notes from the Kampala Workshop
(29 June-04 July 2015)

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This methodological note reflects on the experience of a group of field researchers involved in an in-depth study of women's livelihoods in artisanal and small-scale mining of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold in three countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.² Its focus is on the methodological approaches researchers used in the first stage of this three-year research project in mining sites they visited and where they conducted participant observation research prior to attending a five-day methodological workshop in Kampala, Uganda (29 June – 03 July 2015). The workshop was co-organized by the Development Research and Social Policy Analysis Center (DRASPAC) in Uganda, Carleton University, and Partnership Africa Canada (PAC). The intent of this note is to share experiences from that workshop and to help generate a substantive discussion on methodological issues we discussed relating to researching gender and livelihoods in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).

In addition to the organizers, the workshop was attended by four field researchers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, two from Rwanda, four from Uganda, two from Mozambique, and one from each of Kenya and Sierra Leone.³ In addition, two gender focal points from two different mine sites in each of DRC, Rwanda and Uganda attended. The focus of the workshop was on sharing the results of the preliminary stages of the research and using that information as a basis from which to discuss and refine the next stages of the research, and in particular, the development of a survey and life history research tools. The results of the participant observation were also used as a basis to conduct training on research techniques and issues relating to the conduct and regulation of ASM. The training aspects of the workshop are discussed further in [“Kampala Workshop Summary.”](#)

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² The Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) initiative is a multi-funder partnership with the UK Government's Department for International Development, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the International Development Research Centre, Canada. For more information, see: <http://carleton.ca/africanstudies/research/artisanal-mining-and-gender-in-sub-saharan-africalexploitation-miniere-artisanale-et-le-genre/>.

³ Some of the researchers in attendance are involved in a second project on women's livelihoods in ASM gold mining in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. For more information see: <http://carleton.ca/africanstudies/research/artisanal-mining-and-gender-in-sub-saharan-africalexploitation-miniere-artisanale-et-le-genre/>

This note summarizes key insights generated through the participant observation research.

Participant observation

Participant observation is an important tool for data collection for qualitative research in social sciences. It is commonly understood as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study” (Marshall and Rossnan, 1989, p. 79).⁴ It is a way of conducting research through exposure to a target population’s environment and daily activities. As such, participant observation requires fieldwork, sustained observation, face-to-face informal interviews with participants, and note taking.

Field researchers involved in the Women’s Livelihoods in ASM project used the participant observation approach in six mining sites, two in each country. The purposes were to observe and identify the livelihood conditions of artisanal miners, gender dynamics in the mining-related livelihoods, and possible barriers to socio-economic empowerment, especially for women. From a public policy perspective, understanding such issues as miners’ organizational dynamics, access to land rights, income and saving opportunities or barriers, time management, and gender power relations is crucial in order to influence the legal frameworks pertaining to artisanal and small-scale mining in the countries covered by this research project.

Researchers used different techniques to collect information on miners. First and foremost, they required formal administrative authorizations from district authorities to access the mining sites and talk to miners. Once they were granted that permission, they went into the mining sites and observed the way miners, both men and women, were working. They conducted some informal interviews, using these to get recommendations for further contacts and potential participants who would later be interviewed. Additionally, researchers contacted and informally spoke with administrators of mining sites. They also used their time to have the miners select a man and a woman to act as “gender focal points” for the research. These individuals will act as a bridge between the researchers and the wider mining communities.

Three points from the preliminary participant observation reports are noteworthy. First, the participant observation conducted in each site allowed researchers two benefits, notably: a better insight into the complexity of both men and women’s livelihoods in mining sites as well as exposure to living conditions of people involved in ASM activities. Second, reports on participant observations sparked interesting debates at the workshop on such important issues as miners’ organizations and related structures of authorities involved in ASM. With respect to the organization of mining sites, the results coming from the participant observation at the different sites began to uncover the different layers of social and administrative organization as a result of both mining and

⁴ Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman. 1989. *Designing Qualitative Research*. 1st edition. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.

non-mining activities being conducted simultaneously in the sites. This element alone enables researchers to better understand how women's livelihoods should be systematically examined. With respect to structures of authorities in mining sites, the participant observation allowed researchers and participants at the workshop to begin to disentangle the influences that both administrative and traditional authorities have in ASM. For instance, following the presentation of participant observation conducted in the South Kivu site, the power of the Mwami - a traditional authority in the South-Kivu province - was brought to the attention of participants at the workshop. The Mwami has power over mining activities in areas under his authority. For instance, he has the power to collect royalties and taxes from miners operating in his territory. In the event that miners do not pay royalties, the Mwami can consequently deny them access to mining sites even if they possess miners' cards issued by the provincial administrative authorities. However, it is worth mentioning that the Mwami's authority is only discharged in mining zones where such a traditional authority exists. These and other related insights about different authority structures were instrumental in shaping subsequent discussions about how the survey and life history tools could be designed to better investigate the inter-relationship between power and authority relationships, including their gendered configurations, and the multiple livelihood strategies pursued in mining areas.

Finally, participants at the workshop debated the limits of the participant observation as a qualitative research method. For instance, participants discussed the danger of drawing research conclusions too soon from the observations without further investigations on issues observed. This cautionary note is important because the use of multiple research methods provides the possibility of greater triangulation of the research results. Moreover, the reports on participant observation approaches revealed that not all the researchers used the same research terminology during their respective investigations. The terminology used by each team differed from each other's due to cultural and language differences.