

WOMEN AND ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINING: TONKOLILI, SIERRA LEONE

Executive Summary

Women's economic activities in artisanal and small-scale gold mining is an important contribution but is often over-looked including in laws and regulations on ASM and by state officials.

The money women make from ASM is important to them and their families but they face distinct gendered challenges.

Women and men have received limited training and women face particular barriers to learning more about changes in the laws and policies, and about ways to improve their mining livelihoods.

Women are under-represented in community decision-making bodies, as license holders, gold buyers and in state offices overseeing resource development.

The laws and policies on artisanal mining do not fully account for women's ASM roles and gender is not sufficiently mainstreamed in line with the African Mining Vision.

The Research:

This report is based on field research carried out in two mining communities in Tonkolili District from 2016-2018 and comprising annual visits of two to four weeks in January and February. Interviews with government officials, agencies, and civil society organizations in Freetown were carried out in April 2017 and July 2018.

Organization of Artisanal Gold Mining Roles by Gender

All women in the research said artisanal mining is the economic activity that provides them more consistent money than farming or petty trading, though the work is difficult, hard on their bodies, and low status. However, women face many gendered challenges in their mining work.

Most of the excavation is done by teams of men, either self-organized or sponsored by a supporter. Gold is divided among the self-organized diggers while half of the gold found is given to a supporter who normally buys the diggers' share of the gold at a discounted price.

Although many men and women said women do not excavate ore, some women actually dig, either alone or with another. Typically, they dig in shallow pits. They do not have a supporter.

Transporting the ore-bearing rock out of the pit to the areas where it is processed and the processing work itself are done by those who excavate the ore. Females may assist in this transportation and processing. Females are paid either by receiving some ore-bearing dirt or money. Some females recruited through kin networks are not paid as they are said to be doing "family work."

Many women and some men also rework tailings retrieved from old pits or shafts or in processing areas. These women or men "panners" work on their own.

Almost all gold buyers are men. Men almost always sell their own gold and women sometimes give the gold to their spouse or a male relative to sell on their behalf. In these situations, women lose control over some or all of the money earned through the sale of the gold. They also lose the ability to develop a relationship with gold buyers who occasionally lend money to customers.

If they sell the gold, females in a male-headed household often give all or a portion of the money to the male head.

Women's contribution to household expenses through gold mining often leads to a greater recognition of their importance by the male head. Men rarely tell their female partners how much money they earned through gold or have them help deciding how to spend it.

In all of these economic activities, decision making is gendered and uneven. Females in male-headed households often need to have their economic activities approved by the male head. If he needs their work, then they will do that work. Wives who work at their husband's pits/shafts also are assumed to have no rights to any gold found, other than what their husbands give them, though some women contest their husband's monopolization of the gold.

Recommendations

1. Increase the availability of finance for women so they can access more important roles in artisanal gold mining.
2. Provide training to women in different techniques for excavating and processing gold to enable women to more efficiently and effectively acquire the mineral.
3. Conduct workshops in artisanal mining communities to emphasize that women are economic actors and should have a greater say over the use of money they earn while working with communities to create an environment where women can be more involved in artisanal gold mining.
4. Wives who work with husbands in digging, transporting and processing gold be given the same equal share of the gold as their husbands.

Relationships and Authority Figures Impacting Access to, and Control of, Resources in Artisanal Gold Mining

Recommendations

1. Women be recognized as mine workers in their own right by state officials.
2. Provide skills to a community organization or woman leader who can represent women miners and their concerns to other village stakeholders as well as to mines wardens and MMOs.
3. Explore methods of licensing that are less financially and administratively onerous to increase access to licensing by a greater array of women and men working in gold ASM.

All license holders in the study area were men, as are the chiefs and the stakeholders on the mining committees.

Prices for mining licenses varied with different amounts for securing approval of the landowner and paramount chief and demarcation by Mines Wardens. Numerous shaft owners do not get enough gold to pay the license fees and thus are unlicensed.

District Mines Monitoring Officers (MMOs) periodically visit the mining zones to assess compliance with the legislation, checking for licenses or if under-aged children are present or working in the mining zones, often collecting fines from those not in compliance.

Sometimes women had to pay a fine if they were working in areas not under license. Other times, MMOs said they "ignored" women working. Even if women were working in licensed sites, they never were listed on a license as one of the up to 50 workers hired to work the site

Staff in the District Council and several paramount chiefs said they have limited say over artisanal mining as mining was not devolved to local government. Accordingly, they have limited say over, and revenue streams from, a widespread economic activity in their area of nominal jurisdiction.

Access to Information, Knowledge, and Skills in Artisanal Gold Mining

Women and men both said they received limited training from any mining official whose main role is focused on compliance with the laws rather than in providing extension support in improved mining techniques and skill improvement in artisanal mining.

Most women involved in artisanal mining also said they have difficulty participating in any training workshops on other topics such as agriculture that do come to the village as they have limited spare time given their work and numerous household obligations (such as collecting firewood and water, cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc.).

The work by women in a male-headed household is contingent on the male head's needs for her labour in his mining. For women heading the household, her mining work is not recognized as "mine work" by government officials.

Recommendations

1. Develop women-focused training in artisanal gold mining.
2. Ensure that information and training workshops happen in artisanal mining sites, enabling more women to participate.
3. Recognize in government policies and communications that women are mine workers and develop appropriate training programs.
4. Consider having MMOs involved in training in improved and technologically-appropriate training of women and men in addition to their duties of enforcing compliance with legislation.
5. Ensure women and men in mining communities better understand laws, policies, and roles of different government officials in governance of artisanal mining.

Emerging Legal and Policy Framework: Governing Gender and Artisanal Mining

Regulation of artisanal mining is authorized by the 2009 *Mines and Minerals Act* with licensing the principal means for organizing mining rights. The holder of a license can list up to 50 workers on the license. If the license holder has a financial 'supporter', the National Minerals Agency requires this relationship to be documented. No license holders, and very few supporters encountered in the research area were women.



“Initiate empowerment of women through integrating gender equity in mining policies, laws, regulations, standards and codes” African Mining Vision, 2009

The draft Artisanal Mining Policy (October, 2017) includes a short section on women in artisanal mining, noting that women have a “dynamic” and varied role in artisanal mining but there is no evident commitment to ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in the policy or in addressing inequalities in women’s representation across the mining value chain (for example, as holders of mining or buyer’s licenses).

Recommendations

1. Take steps to support women currently working in gold ASM to become license holders:
 - a. Providing women-specific training on applying for and managing mining licenses;
 - b. Providing training in:
 - i. financial management skills;
 - ii. mining techniques to improve mining yields.
2. Consider cooperatives or other forms of association as one means to facilitate license holding by women and men from mining communities.
3. Ensure that women, and particularly those from mining communities, are hired and involved in mining governance structures such as: mines wardens, mines monitoring offices and Chiefdom Allocation committees.
4. Appoint gender focal points in the NMA, MMR and in district mining offices to ensure gender issues are consistently included in mining governance activities, including in all new initiatives for regulating the sector.
5. Ensure that revised laws and policies and offices of the NMA and MMR are gender responsive and align with the African Mining Vision.

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