

# Women and Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM)

## Gender and Development in artisanal and small-scale mining

As of 2013, an estimated 20 to 30 million people engaged in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) globally; in many countries, women make up between 10 to 50 percent of small-scale miners. (Eftimie et al., 2012, Hinton et al 2003.) But while women tend to have higher participation rates in ASM than in large-scale mining operations, women are also more likely to be involved in the mining of lower value industrial minerals that require more intensive extractive processes and greater safety risks. This note explores women's roles in ASM, as well as opportunities to increase security and opportunities for women in the sector.

## Women's Roles in ASM

The World Bank has developed a toolkit for understanding women's roles in ASM, as well as developed case studies on women in ASM, across Africa and Asia, and including a specific exploration of gender based violence around ASM in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (World Bank and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 2014). Research has identified that:

- Women's participation varies by country and mineral, but women often undertake a range of tasks within ASM mining operations, including digging, panning, processing, transporting, hauling, cooking and cleaning.
- Women's engagement is often concentrated around lower paid, lower value activities, and their engage-

ment typically declines as the degree of organization and mechanization increases. (WMMF 2000) Thus, women's roles tend to be less lucrative and profitable than other roles dominated by men (e.g. owners, managers and sellers).

- Women's labor is often 'invisible' in studies of small-scale mining: because women often doing jobs like transporting materials, they may not be formally identified as 'miners'. Women are also often working in the domestic sphere, or in informal supporting jobs, such as small shop owners, nightclub entertainers and/or sex workers.
- The remote, informal and often illegal nature of ASM often means that women are more susceptible to human rights abuses, sexual and gender-based violence, and health risks (World Bank 2014; Dinye and Erdiaw-Kwasie, 2012). Further the lack of judicial support and provision of basic infrastructure and basic services within ASM communities often heightens women's vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence and increases their sexual health and reproductive needs.
- Women's domestic responsibilities – preparing food, gathering water, and caring for families – means that they often disproportionately experience the negative indirect impacts of ASM, including contamination of water resources, injury or death of husbands from mining (Etimie et al., 2012; Hinton et al., 2003; Collins et al., 2014; Dinye and Erdiaw-Kwasie, 2012).

Structural barriers can also limit women's ability to fully participate in and

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# Support to Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners in Ethiopia

With the support of the Government of Japan, the World Bank is working with the Government of Ethiopia to reduce poverty among small-scale mining communities in Ethiopia, with a particular focus on supporting women in these communities to improve the environmental and social sustainability of their livelihoods. The project has supported women in 12 communities through geological assessments, training in improved mining techniques, environmental management, small business training and a related small grants program, and upgrading of basic infrastructure.

benefit from engagement in ASM:

- Women’s limited access to resources (e.g. land rights and financial credit) and mobility due to other domestic responsibilities (e.g. child-rearing).
- Legislation or socio-cultural norms that prevent some women from controlling their income from ASM activities (e.g. male head of the household controls the family finances).
- Legislation and cultural taboos prevent some women from entering mine sites or participating in particular roles (e.g. in some countries, it is illegal for women to work underground or socially taboo for them to enter a mine site if menstruating).

## Opportunities to improve gender equality in ASM

The majority of ASM activities around the world operate outside any legal framework (either no legal framework exists or ASM operations do not operate within it). While some governments have largely ignored ASM activities in the past, there is a growing consensus that the ASM sector must be formally acknowledged, better organized and supported to improve practices, reduce environmental degradation and maximize benefits for communities, including women (Lowe, 2005; Siegel and Veiga, 2009; Maconachie and Hilson, 2011; Collins et al., 2014).

A number of recommendations to maximize the sector’s development potential and to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities for women exist (Eftimie et al., 2012). These include:

### Understanding the gender dynamics of ASM

To successfully design and implement ASM assistance policies and programs, all stakeholders (government, private sector, civil society and ASM cooperatives or networks) need to understand

the local gender dynamics, divisions and challenges within the ASM sector. Stakeholders must identify the gender dimensions of all stages of the ASM value chain prior to developing ASM assistance policies and/or programs (Eftimie et al., 2012).

### ASM assistance strategies

Once the gender dynamics within ASM are identified and understood, governments, companies and civil society organizations (CSOs) can develop more informed strategies, policies and programs. Some best practice examples of gendered ASM assistance strategies include:

- **Systems to formalize and regulate** Develop strategies to better integrate local ASM activities, particularly those involving women, into formal systems, including:
  - Reducing barriers to formalization
  - Developing incentives to increase participation in the formal sector
  - Including measures like financial assistance and capacity building.
- **Cooperatives and associations** Women’s networks have proven important to raise awareness with government and policy makers on important public policy issues facing women. Support the formation of cooperatives or women mining networks that encourage women’s participation, bargaining power, work conditions and economic independence.
- **Gender sensitive financial assistance** Provide microcredit to women ASM miners and operators to improve production efficiencies and maximize financial outputs.
- **Gender appropriate training and capacity building** Design and deliver training workshops and programs. Capacity building for women should include: technical and processing



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aspects of mining; health and safety practices; financial literacy, legal capacity, bookkeeping, marketing and managerial skills.

- **Women-targeted value-adding strategies** Support the implementation of women specific value-adding or ‘beneficiary’ strategies to maximize the potential economic opportunities for women from ASM.
- **On-site supporting services** Provide on-site childcare services at ASM operations to improve women’s productivity and reduce the health and safety risks to children on mine sites.
- **Alternative livelihoods support** Support local communities, particularly vulnerable women, to develop their skills in alternative employment opportunities that are safer and more profitable.

## Key Take Aways

- Promoting gender equality in the ASM sector can maximize social and economic development and help reduce poverty.
- While women’s involvement in ASM is greater than other mining industries, women’s roles are concentrated in lower-level supporting roles rather than in managerial or ownership roles.
- Gender-neutral ASM assistance programs and policies may further exacerbate gender biases and gaps.
- Governments, companies and CSOs must understand the gender divisions, barriers and challenges of the ASM sector prior to developing and implementing ASM assistance policies and programs. ▶▶▶

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<sup>1</sup> Extractive industry companies tend to engage with ASM workers only if they are active in their area of operation.



## Resources:

“Gender Dimensions of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining: A Rapid Assessment Toolkit.” The World Bank, 2012.

“Mining for Equity: The Gender Dimensions of the Extractive Industries.” The World Bank, 2009.

“Resources and Resourcefulness: Gender, Human Rights, and Resilience in Select Artisanal Mining Towns of Eastern Congo.” The World Bank, 2014.

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- World Bank Group; Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, (2015), *Resources and Resourcefulness: Gender, Human Rights and Resilience in Select Artisanal Mining Towns of Eastern Congo*, The World Bank Group, Washington
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- World Bank (2013) *Small-scale mining*, Available at <http://go.worldbank.org/4KOMT244R0>

## CASE STUDY: Encouraging the formalization of women ASM miners – Micro-grant scheme, Sustainable Management of Mineral Resources Project, Nigeria (2005-2012)

In Nigeria, the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development, with the support of the World Bank, implemented a gender-sensitive micro-grant scheme under the Sustainable Management of Mineral Resources Project. The grant scheme was designed to offer incentives to women miners to join cooperatives and to help formalize their activities through formal support and capacity building. To participate in the scheme, women miners were required to join a cooperative or association. After doing so they became eligible for a small grant, which could be used to improve their operation’s resources and capacity.

Many women miners took up the initiative and a number of newly formed women’s associations and cooperatives received small grants to support their ASM activities. Some examples include:

- Sokoto Women Miners Association – purchased vehicles to transport gypsum
- Irrigwe Women’s Cooperatives – purchased milling equipment
- Otuifunaya Women’s Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society – purchased a generator and jaw crusher.

(World Bank 2012; In Collins et al., 2014)



Women small scale miners in Ethiopia. (Pact 2015)