

Women in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining

A SNAPSHOT OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPOWERMENT

Context in Central and East Africa

Africa holds an estimated one-third of the world's mineral reserves. Millions across the continent rely on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM)—an informal practice using basic techniques and equipment—for their livelihoods.

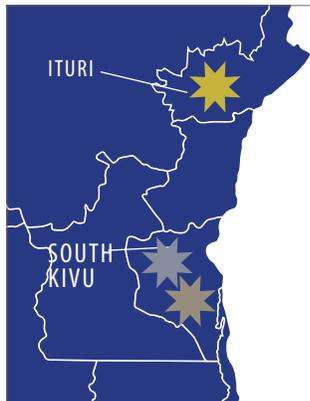
Governments are stepping up efforts to integrate artisanal miners into the formal economy. Policies are being reformed to increase benefits from mineral wealth. At the same time, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Regional Certification Mechanism and chain of custody schemes are being implemented across the region to bring responsibly sourced minerals to international markets.

Women are an essential part of artisanal mining, taking on roles from panning and processing, to trading goods and services. They rely on the income from this informal mining economy to support their households and dependents. Yet, at the most basic level, women's diverse and active participation in the artisanal sector, and the gendered experience of artisanal mining, is often ignored.

A team of researchers is exploring women's livelihoods in the artisanal and small-scale mining of 3Ts (tin, tantalum, tungsten), and gold within the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.

The study is exploring dynamics in and around two mine sites in each country to reveal how gender inequality limits women's contributions and potential as economic and political actors within the

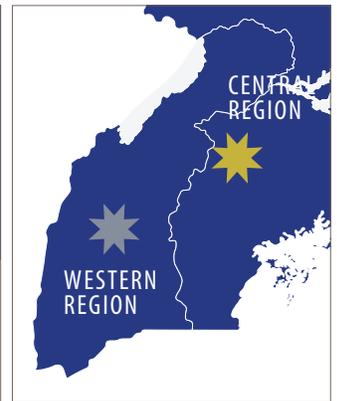
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



RWANDA



UGANDA



LEGEND Mine sites researched



Tin



Gold



Tungsten



Tantalum

artisanal mining sector. In addition, the research team is examining how initiatives, policies, regulations and laws fail to acknowledge the gender inequalities within mining communities, making women even more vulnerable. The three countries in the study are at different stages of implementing reforms targeting the integration of gender equality into artisanal mining, providing comparison across the region.

The following four key findings present an overview of the challenges women face in the artisanal mining sector across the three countries surveyed. This is based on preliminary analysis of 878 surveys, 60 focus groups involving 400 men and women, 28 life histories, and interviews.

KEY FINDING ONE: The current structure and division of labour characterizing the ASM sector overwhelmingly disadvantages women, despite their significant role in the workforce. This research demonstrates that restrictions on women's roles in mining can be arbitrary, change over time, and could be made more gender equal.

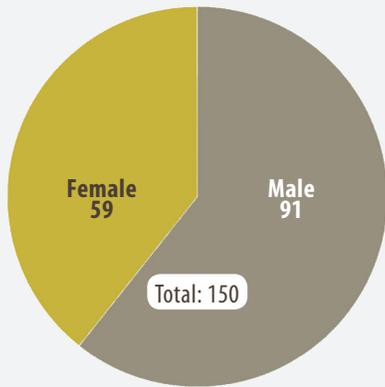
KEY FINDING TWO: Patriarchal norms, beliefs and values prevent women's full participation in ASM, even though many women surveyed find it a good job and seek improved working conditions and training in the sector.

KEY FINDING THREE: Circumstances often prevent women from accessing credit that would allow for increased income and security, and women are routinely denied direct access or control over minerals, blocking their participation in decision-making and leadership opportunities.

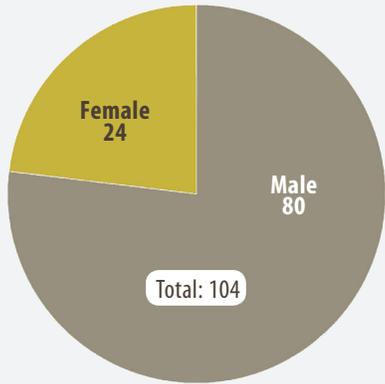
KEY FINDING FOUR: Women economically and socially benefit from working in ASM, with the income helping to meet household needs and providing them with increased status.

Rwanda: What the Research Shows

NUMBER OF PEOPLE SURVEYED



Southern Province



Northern Province

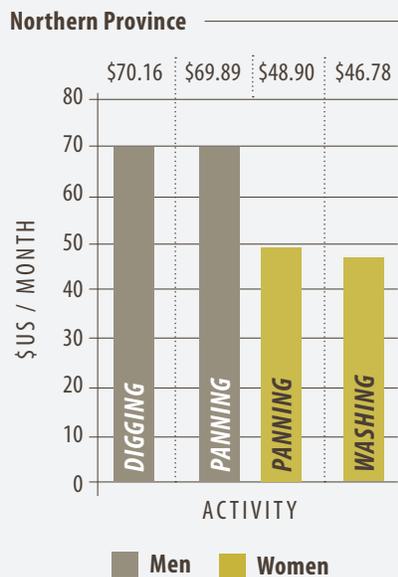
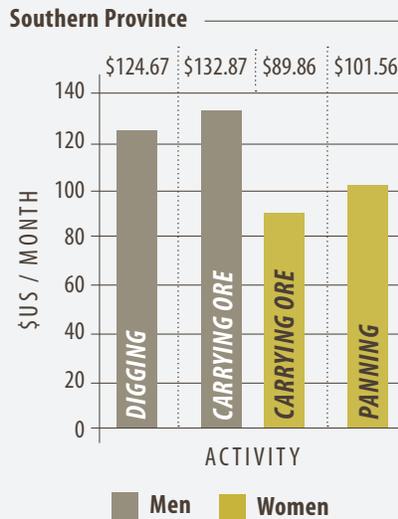
All people surveyed work in and around two artisanal mines, one in Rwanda's Southern Province, another in Northern Province. The vast majority—99% of women and 97% of men—work in mining year round. The average age of women surveyed is 33 years, and men 32 years.

KEY FINDING ONE: On average, women make more than two times the income from artisanal mining per month than in other income generating activities. This income is a significant source of revenue for many households.

72% of women surveyed in Southern Province contribute to at least half of the household's income, and 30% of these women are the sole income earners.

KEY FINDING TWO: Despite a standardized pay structure for mining roles, women still tend to earn less than men.

AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME (\$US) BY MOST COMMON ACTIVITIES AND GENDER



KEY FINDING THREE: In both the sites studied, women are largely excluded from mining activities with higher earning potential, including digging and sluicing. These exclusions make it difficult for women to acquire the experience and skills necessary to move up to more senior roles, including leadership positions.

MOST COMMON MINING ACTIVITIES BY GENDER

	Men	Women
Southern Province	DIGGING (39%)	CARRYING ORE (70%)
	CARRYING ORE (29%)	PANNING (3%)
Northern Province	PANNING (63%)	PANNING (75%)
	DIGGING (49%)	WASHING (21%)

The reasons for excluding women from certain roles are generally based on discriminatory views about women. According to those surveyed, women who go into mining tunnels, for example, are said to "lack good manners". Women are also thought to be incapable of sluicing at the Southern Province site because they are not experienced or strong enough, yet some women do perform these roles. These women, we were told are "like a man and not really a woman."

In the semi-industrialized small-scale mining site adjacent to the artisanal mine site in Northern Province, none of the 350 employees are women. Respondents said women have not been hired for the highly desirable semi-industrialized positions (where a daily wage is paid regardless of fluctuating production levels) because the manager said they would "make men uncomfortable."

"The fact that the majority of women transport ore materials only is a handicap on our success in mining."

— Focus group participant in Southern Province

71% of women surveyed in Northern Province contribute to at least half of the household's income, and 38% of these women are the sole income earners.

KEY FINDING FOUR: Women must balance mining work with other household obligations and therefore cannot spend as much time at the mine site. This impinges on their earning potential and further limits the acquisition of new skills, experiences and networks needed to help improve livelihoods.

AVERAGE HOURS AT MINE SITE PER DAY

MEN	WOMEN
7.09	5.35

KEY FINDING FIVE: Amongst those surveyed, women were much more likely than men to be unmarried, and most have dependent children. In Northern Province, company records indicate that nearly two out of three female mine workers are unmarried and/or the head of their households. Overall, 55% of women identified as unmarried (single, widowed, divorced or not cohabiting) compared to 37% of men, and 91% of women we spoke to have children under the age of 18.

The strikingly high number of single women and mothers results from stigma and discrimination. Single mothers said they faced condemnation in their communities and started working at the mine site because of poverty. Once married, women are discouraged from working at the mine site by their communities and their husbands.

We were told repeatedly by women and men that the roles of women as wives and as miners were incompatible: *“Women who work in mining cannot be organized in their home.”*

KEY FINDING SIX: Women participating in mining have varying educational backgrounds. They are both more likely than their male colleagues to have no schooling at all and more likely to have an education beyond the primary level.

28% of female miners have no schooling compared to just 11% of male miners

21% of women working at the mines have education beyond the primary level, compared to just 15% of men.

KEY FINDING SEVEN: Women are less likely than men to work as part of a mining team, and therefore do not have access to the benefits associated with teamwork, including a network and learning from the experience of others. For women who want to, but are not working in a team, financial and time constraints were cited as important barriers they face. Other women not in a team said they preferred individual work because it gives them flexibility to meet their household obligations.

75% of men work on a team, compared to 52% of women.

22% of women not in a team would like to join one.

KEY FINDING EIGHT: A ‘women’s only’ cooperative, which used to exist in the Northern Province site, provided women with loans, advice and support that they do not find in mixed cooperatives of men and women. In mixed cooperatives, we were told “women never lead”.

KEY FINDING NINE: Women have difficulty accessing credit from banks because they require their husbands’ permission. This permission, we were told, can be difficult for the women to secure, and high service fees further limit women’s access to banking services. Without access to credit, women are unable to invest in mining activities as a subcontractor, a position which would allow them to move from subsistence to accumulation activities.

“As we don’t receive a regular salary [it depends on production of minerals], when there is no production I still have to pay the service fees to the bank. If you take the sum of 500,000 RWF as credit, you have to pay 30,000 RWF to the bank! I can buy many goats with that amount of 30,000.”

– Woman interviewed

KEY FINDING TEN: Despite barriers, some women working in artisanal mining have seen a transformation of negative stereotypes in the household and broader community. Some women are seen as ‘big people’ by their families as they contribute money to the household. Other women have been trailblazers within the mine site, taking on roles generally reserved for men, like working in sluicing, as leader of a mining team, and in some cases, as subcontractors.

RESEARCH IN RWANDA LED BY: Women In/And Mining (WIAMO)

RESEARCH LED BY: Carleton University, Partnership Africa Canada, Development Research and Social Policy Analysis Centre

This project is part of the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program, jointly funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DfID), the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Additional funding has been provided by Global Affairs Canada.

