

Emergency Action Needed for Vulnerable Artisanal & Small-Scale Mining Communities & Supply Chains

As COVID-19 sweeps the globe, affecting the health and lives of millions, the pandemic is wreaking further economic havoc on the lives of artisanal, small scale miners and their communities. 83% of the world's mining workforce relies on these mines for their livelihood. That comes to roughly 40.5 million people. These people were vulnerable before COVID-19 and even more so now.

We the undersigned global civil society organizations and community-based associations work to promote the advancement of human rights and due diligence in minerals supply chains in conflict-affected and high-risk areas as well as the formalization of artisanal and small-scale mining.

We are calling for immediate and concerted action from governments, financing institutions, international organizations, private sector actors and others to support artisanal mining communities and to shore up their resilience in this time of COVID-19 crisis. It is also essential that we protect hard-won gains related to human rights and due diligence in mineral supply chains in alignment with the OECD Due Diligence Minerals Guidance. At a time of heightened risks in global mineral supply chains, the carrying out of due diligence and support for on-the-ground, OECD-aligned initiatives are more important than ever.

The World Bank conservatively estimates that there are over [41 million people](#) in the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector globally, at least 30% of which being women. The number of women grows exponentially when secondary activities are factored in. It is estimated that over [150 million people](#) are dependent on the artisanal and small-scale gold sector alone in over 80 countries.

The vast majority of those who work directly and indirectly in artisanal mining, do so informally and they are amongst some of the world's poorest. The ILO estimates that more than [one million children work in mines and quarries](#), a reality that is often poverty driven. Artisanal miners extract, pre-process and trade in high-value commodities such as tin, tungsten, tantalum, cobalt and mica that are used in everyday consumer goods from electronics to rechargeable batteries for electric vehicles and solar energy to the medical equipment indispensable to the treatment of COVID-19. Artisanal miners also extract and process lower-value minerals (so-called '[development minerals](#)') such as sand, clay, dimension stones and coral – which serve as essential materials for the construction of houses, roads and other infrastructure, propelling economic growth and development at the local level.

The prized nature of these high-value minerals – particularly gold – means that women and men working in the ASM sector are often at risk of being preyed upon by illicit traders. They rarely receive a decent price for their ore or labour, and are often pushed into the sector by poverty and economic hardship. In conflict-affected and high-risk environments they can also be targets of abuse by armed groups, public and private security forces.

All over the globe and irrespective of the commodity, the closure of borders and legal business channels has disrupted supply chains. Miners are having to accept [deeply discounted prices](#) for their ore and products in order to survive. Price drops are [more deeply felt by women working in the ASM](#) sector, as they are chronically underpaid for their work and minerals as compared to their male counterparts. Yet, while ASM miners are losing out, there are others who are gaining— especially in the case of gold, where the margin between the global prices and field prices continue to increase.

Where formal channels have collapsed, [illicit actors](#) are repositioning themselves to claim an even larger market share, which can increase criminality and insecurity, exaggerate local tensions, create community division, and increase risks to companies that source from the region. ASM typically involves high levels of migratory workforce, which lends itself to the spread of COVID-19 as well as violence against migrant workers. [Liquidity in mining communities is drying up and rising food prices](#) is compounding corresponding economic impacts on livelihoods. Economic desperation risks increasing the [prevalence of sexual exploitation, gender-based violence](#) and child labour in some mine sites, which may be further exacerbated by school closures. Mine sites are at greater risk of theft and banditry due to the decreased presence of miners and authorities on site.

Some governments have moved to [restrict or shut down some ASM](#) mine sites and in some cases the trade in minerals [has not been deemed essential](#) despite the high reliance of local economies on mining. This has more negatively affected women, as men are prioritized to remain on site and maintain access. Despite these official closures and restrictions, many ASM miners continue to dig out of necessity. Those who continue to mine are not only at increased risk of contracting COVID-19, but at risk of extortion and abuse of power by public security actors. Meanwhile, in some countries, armed non-state actors may also capitalize on the opportunity to take over ASM mine sites as attention is diverted and artisanal miners are vulnerable.

We are deeply concerned about these and other emerging and lasting impacts on artisanal mining communities and the rural economies that depend on them. We are equally concerned that important steps to ensure that supply chains are free of conflict, corruption and human rights violations including, but not limited to, the worst forms of child labour will be seriously eroded.

The COVID-19 crisis has made even more apparent the gaping inequalities in mineral supply chains. It has also made apparent the critical importance of supply chain due diligence from mine to market. Now more than ever, we need to invest in the structures and incentives for responsible production, trade and consumption. A safe and responsible artisanal mining sector can be a vector for development and rapid post-COVID economic recovery for millions of women and men. Were it well supported now, it could not only contribute to short term recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, but also function as an important bulwark against illicit trade, poor land management, ecosystem degradation, habitat loss and even wildlife trade, and so prevent disease transmission in addition to countering the effects of climate change. The impacts of mismanaged supply chains and natural resources are truly global and now upon us all.

We are calling for immediate and concerted action from governments, financing institutions, international organizations, private sector actors and others in order to achieve the following:

- i. A reduction in the potentially devastating impacts of COVID-19 on ASM communities, particularly those that are health and socio-economic related, and acknowledging that women and children may be more acutely affected;
- ii. The mitigation and reduction of conflict, criminal, corruption and human rights risks in all mining communities and related supply chains (artisanal, small and large-scale);

- iii. The protection and preservation of hard-won development and security gains related to formalization of the artisanal sector and supply chain due diligence;
- iv. Enhanced resiliency of ASM communities so that they are better prepared for other potential crises in the future;
- v. An ASM sector that is ready to act as a driver of rights-based socio-economic development during the recovery period;
- vi. Strengthened local civil society actors and human rights defenders who may be risking their own security to protect ASM communities; and
- vii. Greater consequences for illegal behavior that rewards armed groups and criminal networks and undermines efforts to mainstream or scale supply chain due diligence.

Recommended actions include:

DIGNIFIED EMERGENCY AID

- Call on and activate humanitarian and emergency response networks to deliver dignified aid through cash, and food and health supplies directly to artisanal mining communities in close collaboration with local authorities as well as dignified aid through cash assistance through which miners will have the ability to choose and prioritize their household spending.
- Governments and private sector actors such as large-scale mining companies should publicly report on their management of COVID-19 including dedicated resources during and after the pandemic.

HEALTH

- Invest in, support or reinforce local responses to COVID-19 preventing virus transmission including, but not limited to the installation of hand-washing stations, fever screening kits and the provision of masks or disinfectants that tend not to be otherwise accessible in and around mines sites.
- Provide health education and information through community-engagement approaches in local languages and ways most accessible and effective amongst ASM communities.
- Seek collaboration with local health care providers and health authorities to maximize the use of available resources for COVID-19 preparedness and response through improved communication between ASM communities and the health care sector. Provide logistical, financial and infrastructure support to health workers so that they may better serve ASM communities during and after the pandemic.

GOVERNANCE AND FORMALIZATION

- Consider whether ASM activities and supply chains should be counted as essential services or prioritized for economic recovery activities given the tremendous importance of ASM as a livelihood activity to the rural poor in many producer nations.
- Develop operational guidelines for the appropriate continuation of ASM activities in a responsible and safe manner under COVID-19 together with ASM communities and local supply chain actors.

- Ensure that development and technical programming in support of the formalization of the ASM sector intended to advance due diligence implementation and to address deeper structural issues of poverty, inequality and human rights can continue uninterrupted.
- Expand ASM formalization efforts as part of post COVID-19 development priorities, given the documented capacity of formalization to contribute to state revenue through taxes, royalties and other fees, to improve ASM workers' earnings, working conditions and resilience, and to mitigate environmental impacts.

RESPONSIBLE SUPPLY CHAINS

- Private sector actors must continue to improve on the carrying out and reporting on supply chain due diligence, and make every effort not to disengage during the current COVID-19 crisis as access to legal markets is needed more than ever. Companies should not minimize or overlook risks in the face of economic downturn. For example, in the gold sector, they should explicitly refer to the red flags in the [2015 FATF gold](#) typology report to ensure that they are not inadvertently aiding in laundering the proceeds of conflict gold.
- Governments should investigate and, if appropriate, sanction those refining, processing and trading companies and their owners whose illegal activities benefit armed groups or criminal networks.
- In producer nations, consider lessening the administrative and financial burden on legal artisanal trade. Explore the provision of added incentives to legal buyers who offer an equitable price, such as via tax breaks as well as via standardized assessments of weights and values such as purity.
- Support on-the-ground, OECD-aligned due diligence efforts and initiatives that have contributed to the mitigation and reduction of OECD Annex II risks such as the prevalence of conflict, the presence of armed groups in mining and minerals trade, direct or indirect support to non-state armed groups, gross human rights violations, corruption and money laundering.
- Where feasible, buy from cooperatives or legal entities, reinforcing formalization and legal trade and to get money and food directly in the hands of community members. Work with traders and exporters who demonstrate willingness to participate in, or are already adhering to, due diligence initiatives, to carry out the five steps of the guidance and who are not price-gauging or otherwise exploiting miners.
- Large-scale mining companies must continue to guarantee the health and safety of their employees in keeping with the [ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#), including the right to refuse or shut down unsafe work. Companies should also support immediate efforts to address COVID-19 related impacts in the broader communities where they operate. They are also encouraged to work with artisanal mining communities to help bring their product to market via legal means and on equitable terms.

GENDER-SPECIFIC AND CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES

- Support local women's groups and associations directly and ensure that they have meaningful leadership and decision-making opportunities in the delivery or implementation of COVID-19 measures as well as in matters of trade, development and security. Their leadership will also be critical to inclusive recovery.
- Invest in local civil society. A stronger civil society is better able to protect the most vulnerable and monitor, draw attention to and possibly close down illicit opportunism.

- Engage with international NGOs, who can make direct connections with local actors and provide additional supports where needed. These should not overshadow local capacities and strengths, but compliment and amplify them.
- Identify and leverage financial contributions from both traditional and non-traditional donors such as financing institutions including the provision of local guarantees, ethical bonds or other instruments. Do so in a way that implements [anti-corruption and anti-money laundering measures such as the IMF's Proposed Framework for Enhanced Fund Engagement](#).
- In all conflict-affected and high-risk areas, carry out conflict risk assessments prior to engagement and on an ongoing basis. Tailor interventions accordingly so as not to inadvertently heighten existing tensions. For example, be wary of blaming and conspiracy theories about the virus' origin and spread that may target certain groups.
- Elaborate communication tools in local languages and ways most accessible and effective amongst ASM communities. Explore use of mobile technology as a pricing transparency tool but also to provide miners with the correct information on COVID-19 including national public health policies, prevention and treatment options.
- Work collaboratively and in solidarity across stakeholder groups to share information and effective practices, and to guard against global threats.

SIGNATORIES

1. Action des Chrétiens Activistes des Droits de l'Homme à Shabunda (ACADHOSHA), RDC
2. Action Mines Guinée (Amines)
3. Actions pour la Protection des Droits de l'Homme (APDH), Côte d'Ivoire
4. Afrewatch
5. Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM)
6. Artisanal Gold Council (AGC)
7. Association pour le Développement des Initiatives Paysannes (ASSODIP), RDC
8. Bon Pasteur
9. Bureau d'Études et d'Appui au Développement du Territoire de WALIKALE (BEDEWA), RDC
10. Bureau d'Études Scientifiques et Techniques (BEST), RDC
11. Caritas Zambia
12. Centre de Commerce International pour le Développement (CECIDE), Guinée
13. Centre National d'Appui au Développement et à la Participation Populaire (CENADEP), RDC
14. Centre National de Coopération au Développement (CNCD-11.11.11)
15. Centre de Recherche sur l'Environnement, la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (CREDDHO), RDC
16. Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD), Zambia
17. Children's Voice, RDC
18. Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), Zambia
19. Club des Volontaires pour l'Appui aux Peuples Autochtones (CVAP), RDC
20. Coalition of Civil Society Organisations in the Great Lake Region against Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources (COSOC-GL)

21. Coalition des Volontaires pour la Paix et le Développement (CVPD), RDC
22. Commission Justice et Paix, Belgium
23. Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), Zambia
24. Diakonia, Sweden
25. Diamonds for Peace
26. Dynamique des Femmes des Mines (DYFEM), RDC
27. European Network for Central Africa / Réseau Européen pour l'Afrique Centrale (EurAc)
28. Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises (FFC)
29. Foro Nacional por Colombia
30. Fundación ALBOAN, Spain
31. Fundación Atabaque, Colombia
32. Good Shepherd International Foundation
33. Groupe de Recherche et de Plaidoyer sur les Industries Extractives (GRPIE), Côte d'Ivoire
34. Human Rights Watch
35. IMPACT
36. Initiative de Femme Entrepreneur pour le Développement Durable (IFEDD)
37. Instituto Redes de Desarrollo Social / Red Social, Peru
38. Integrity Watch Afghanistan
39. IPIS
40. Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), Zambia
41. Justice Pour Tous, RDC
42. Kakamega Environmental Conservation and Beautification Organisation (KECBO), Kenya
43. Kimberly Process Civil Society Coalition
44. Maniema Libertés (MALI), RDC
45. Max Impact, RDC
46. Mouvement Ivoirien des Droits Humains (M.I.D.H)
47. National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK)
48. Norwegian Church Aid
49. Observatoire Gouvernance et Paix (OGP), RDC
50. Observatoire de la Société Civile Congolaise pour les Minerais de Paix (OSCMP), RDC
51. OECD Watch
52. Organisation Congolaise des Écologistes et Amis de la Nature (OCEAN), RDC
53. Pact
54. PAX
55. People's Movement for Human Rights Education (MPEDH), Rwanda
56. Réseau pour l'Autonomisation des Femmes des Communautés Minières (REAFECOM), RDC
57. Réseau Innovation Organisationnelle (RIO), RDC
58. Responsible Sourcing Network
59. Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID)
60. Rwanda Extractive industry Workers Union (REWU)
61. SARW
62. SAVE ACT MINE, RDC

63. The Sentry
64. Social Justice, Côte d'Ivoire
65. Solidaridad
66. Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI), RDC
67. SOLSOC
68. SOMO
69. Sustainable Alluvial Mining Services, Papua New Guinea
70. Terres de Homes
71. Touche Pas À Mon Cobalt, RDC
72. Vox Populi Initiative (VPI), RDC
73. Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA)