

# Her Security

## Women's Security as a Pathway to Improved Livelihoods in Democratic Republic of Congo's Cobalt Mining Communities

IMPACT's Her Security project aims to investigate how enhancing women's security in artisanal cobalt and copper mining communities in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) can improve livelihoods and decrease child labour. The project will examine various aspects of women's security—including physical, economic, and energy—to lay a foundation for future evidence-based programs and policy interventions.

### How is women's security important to artisanal mining?

Women make up 30 percent of the world's artisanal mining workforce,<sup>1</sup> yet our research has shown that women are often tasked with the lowest paying jobs at mine sites.<sup>2</sup> They rely on income from artisanal mining to meet the needs of their households: to pay for food, medical care, schooling, clothing, and sometimes housing.

Artisanal mining often takes place in areas where security and human rights are at risk, and in societies dominated by patriarchal ideals prompting decisions to be made by men, for their benefit.

However, development in the artisanal mining sector cannot be sustainable without both women and men empowered to participate fully and determining their own futures. This includes taking into consideration women's security—in the community, at the mine site, and at home. Among others, the main pillars of women's security include physical, economic, land, food, and energy security.

Physical security focuses on safety and freedom from violence or risks including those in and around mine sites and in related supply chains, and ensures women have support services available. Economic security

not only includes an increase in income but control over that income and its strategic use to ensure long-term improvement in livelihoods. Such strategies can include the establishment of loans and savings organizations geared towards women's needs, rights-based sensitization, the diversification of activities, and the recognition of the critical role women play in the artisanal mining sector. Land security determines who has access to and who benefits from natural resources, while food security ensures whether women and their dependents have consistent access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food.

IMPACT's project also targets a more specific security need—the access and safe use of energy. Energy access in DRC is limited, particularly in rural areas. According to the World Bank, out of the 10 million households in the country, only 1.6 million have access to electricity.<sup>3</sup> Electricity is a critical source of security and access to it has been proven highly beneficial for women's wellbeing. Street lighting provides them with a safer environment, girls and boys are able to read and complete school work under the light of a bulb, and electric stoves allow women to move away from unhealthy coal-based cooking. The decrease in charcoal use, in particular, trickles down to less deforestation and better resilience against climate change, while women are not required to travel distances to find wood.

1 Delve Database, accessed May 5, 2022, <https://delvedatabase.org/>.

2 "Women in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Central and East Africa," IMPACT, <https://impacttransform.org/en/work/project/women-in-artisanal-and-small-scale-mining-in-central-and-east-africa/>.

3 World Bank, *Increasing Access to Electricity in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Opportunities and Challenges*, 2020, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33593>.

## How will women's security impact child labour?

Child labour is the result of deeply-rooted factors, and is particularly driven by poverty at the household level. In 2018, the World Bank estimated that 73 percent of DRC's households lived under the international poverty rate of \$1.90 USD a day, while 43 percent of its children were malnourished.<sup>4</sup> Work at artisanal mines in DRC is driven by the lack access to alternative or equally lucrative economic opportunities for both women and men. Low incomes have prompted children to be involved in economic activities such as mining, while a lack of household resources is a major barrier to schooling.

**73% of DRC's households live under \$1.90 USD per day**

Anecdotal evidence, supported by IMPACT's preliminary research, suggests that enhancing women's security can reduce child labour.

We believe that increasing women's ability to earn a living wage and reinvest part of it in targeted ways, will strengthen household economic resilience and/or stability. In turn, we hypothesize that improving livelihoods decrease the need for households to rely on children's revenues, and therefore decrease child labour.

In DRC, children receive only 4.5 years of Learning Adjusted Years of School, which is calculated based on the average time spent in school and their quality of education.<sup>5</sup> Decreasing child labour and ensuring households have the resources to send their children to school will provide future generations, particularly girls, with better economic and social opportunities.

## What is the state of cobalt artisanal mining in DRC?

Artisanal and small-scale mining is a subsistence activity. The sector is attractive because of the higher wages it provides compared to agriculture or small businesses and is largely informal, characterized by low technology

and minimal machinery. It tends to operate inefficiently and is most prevalent in developing countries where it is an important source of livelihood for many people. Artisanal mining can often damage the environment and put the health and safety of workers, as well as the surrounding communities, at risk.<sup>6</sup>

Between 150,000 and 200,000 artisanal miners extract cobalt in the Haut-Katanga and Lualaba provinces. DRC supplies 70 percent of the world's cobalt, a critical element for battery manufacturing. Of this production, 15 to 30 percent of it originates from artisanal operations located in and around industrial mines.

**DRC supplies 70% of the world's cobalt**

Artisanal mining has long been a feature of the informal economy in DRC and the boom in electric vehicles sales since the mid-2010s led to a rush for extracting more and more cobalt. The sector has been criticized for its many risks, including child labour, poor working conditions, and environmental and health impacts. A study conducted by UNICEF in 2014 estimated 40,000 children in artisanal mines in DRC's Copperbelt.<sup>7</sup> NGOs and media reports since have highlighted the issue of unsafe conditions at cobalt mine sites—including landslides or rockfalls—as well as the presence of children.

## How will the Her Security project support women's security?

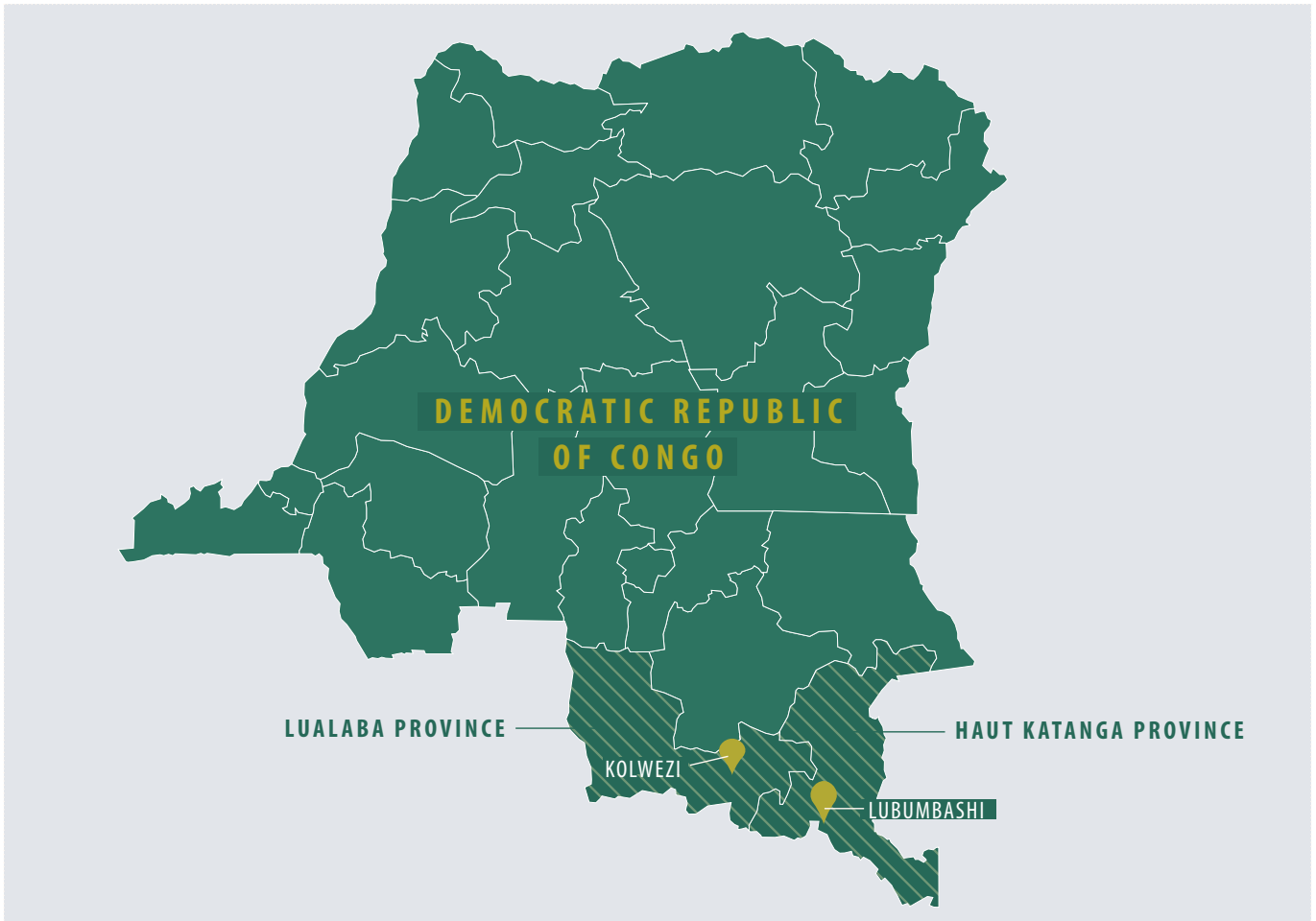
The Her Security project will develop its key findings through a desk study, on-the-ground research across communities in Lualaba Province in DRC, and interviews with multi-stakeholder experts, including academic, non-profit, and international organizations. We will conduct a preliminary analysis of existing initiatives and available data to inform our data collection, as well as a series of expert interviews that will inform our on-the-ground research. In partnership with Bon Pasteur Kolwezi, we will conduct field research through targeted focus groups and surveys in artisanal cobalt mining communities and with other relevant DRC stakeholders.

4 "Congo, Dem. Rep.," *World Bank*, 2022, accessed May 10, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/CD>

5 "Learning-Adjusted Years of School," *World Bank*, accessed May 13, 2022, [https://tdata360.worldbank.org/indicators/h00280750?country=BRA&indicator=40964&viz=line\\_chart&years=2010,2020](https://tdata360.worldbank.org/indicators/h00280750?country=BRA&indicator=40964&viz=line_chart&years=2010,2020)

6 Franklin W. Schwartz, Sangsuk Lee and Thomas H. Darrah, "A Review of the Scope of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Worldwide, Poverty, and the Associated Health Impacts," *Geohealth*, 5, no. 1, 2021.

7 UNICEF, *Factsheet: enfants dans les mines*, December 2014.



## About the implementing partners

IMPACT, formerly Partnership Africa Canada, has been transforming how natural resources are managed in areas where security and human rights are at risk for over 30 years. We investigate and develop approaches for natural resources to improve security, development, and equality. We are an independent non-profit, collaborating with local partners for lasting change.

IMPACT's work focuses on five focus areas: regulatory and legal reform, supply chain transparency, illicit trade and financing, gender equality, and environmental stewardship. IMPACT has worked in DRC and neighbouring countries for more than a decade.

Bon Pasteur Kolwezi is a Congolese nonprofit established in 2012 by the Good Shepherd sisters to improve the situation of artisanal miners by promoting community development, women's empowerment and child protection. It is currently consolidating its activities in Kolwezi, Lualaba Province, and gradually expanding to seven new artisanal mining communities nearby.

The implementation of the program is supported by the Good Shepherd International Foundation (GSIF), which is a non-profit organization based in Italy. GSIF was founded by the Good Shepherd sisters to support their programs in developing countries by promoting Economic Justice for women and children, and offering opportunities for the empowerment of grassroots communities and individuals.