

Women in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining

A Snapshot of Challenges and Opportunities for Empowerment

Context in Central and East Africa

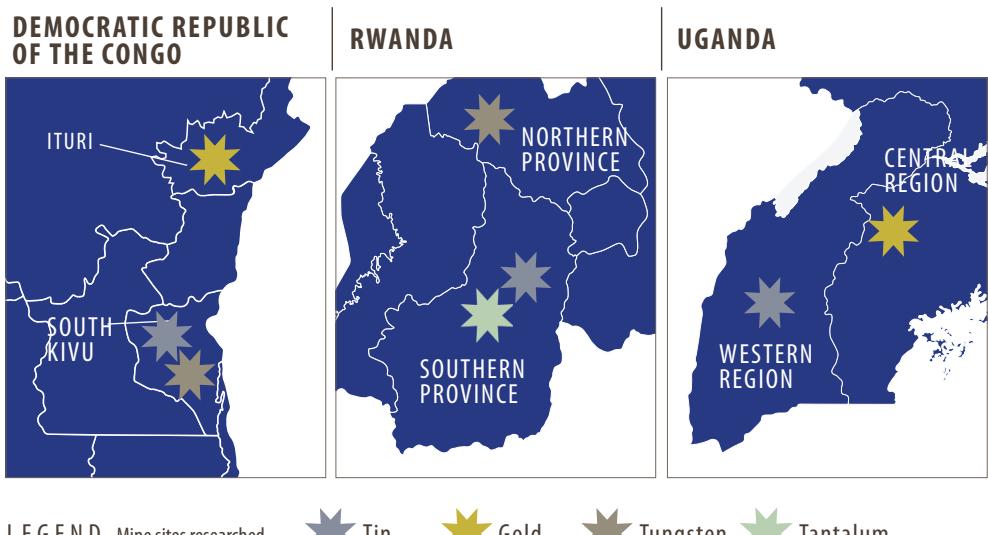
Africa holds an estimated one-third of the world's mineral reserves. Millions across the continent rely on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM)—an informal practice using basic techniques and equipment—for their livelihoods.

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



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.

Uganda: What the Research Shows

In Uganda, the study explored dynamics in and around two mine sites in the Central (gold site) and Western (tin site) parts of the country. Box 1 below highlights the distinctive characteristics of the two sites.

CENTRAL UGANDA

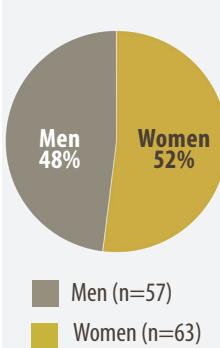
- Gold-rush site
- Multi-ethnic migrant population of about 3000 people
- About half of the population is female
- About a third of the miners are female
- Private/public land with multiple ownership and access rights
- Managed by a licensed artisanal association to hold a mining license
- Population primarily dependent on mining & support services

WESTERN UGANDA

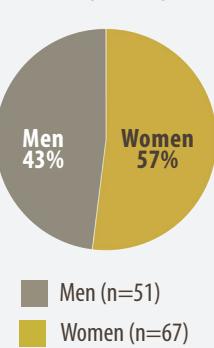
- Managed by a licensed company buying tin from miners
- Ethnically homogeneous
- Located along a national boundary
- An old gazetted mine site
- Miners are primarily farmers
- Mining under gang – (team) arrangement

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

Central Uganda
Gold Site (N=120)



Western Uganda
Tin Site (N=118)



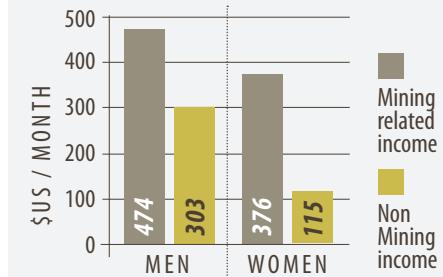
At a mean age of 31 years, women involved in artisanal mining related activities were younger than their male counterparts at a mean age of 35 years; 22% of these women were illiterate, and a substantial proportion (34%) were either single or widowed and the sole contributors to their households.

KEY FINDING ONE: Based on survey results, women earn three times more from mining activities than from other income generating activities which shows the potential of mining to women's livelihoods.

"Tin is my parent; it feeds me as a parent feeds her children. It pays school fees for my children as a parent pays school fees for her children; so tin is value, it is a parent to me."

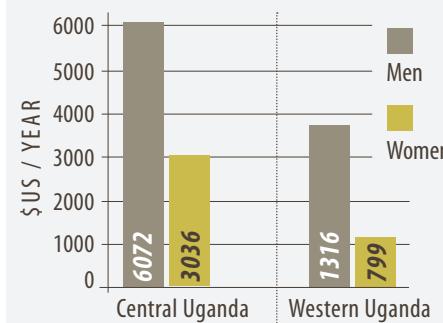
— Female in life history interviews – Western Uganda

FIG 1: MEDIAN MONTHLY INCOME (USD) FROM MINING AND NON-MINING ACTIVITIES BY GENDER



KEY FINDING TWO: Overall, women earn less than their male counterparts at both the gold and the tin sites. Annually, the women were earning almost a half what the men were earning (Fig 2a).

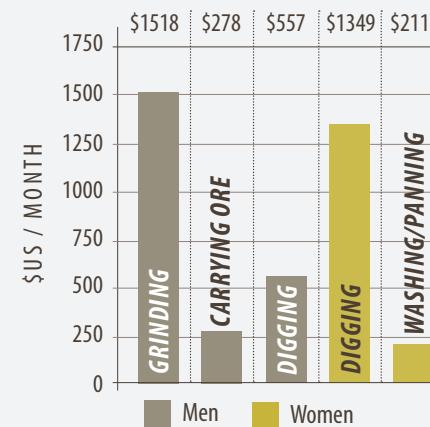
FIG 2a: OVERALL MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOME BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN BY SITE



The huge disparity at the gold site was due to the highly gendered activities, whereby most women were involved in the least paid activities. For example, grinders who were exclusively men, earning seven times more than the panners who happened to be exclusively women. The women (only 3%) who reported high income were diggers who also owned and dug their own mine sand pits (Fig 2b).

FIG 2b: MONTHLY MEDIAN INCOME (USD) FROM 3 TOP MINING ACTIVITIES BY GENDER

Central Region (Gold Site)



At the tin site, men and women were earning equally on a monthly basis (Fig 2c) but there was a noticeable disparity in annual income largely due to the fact that women work fewer months in a year in order to engage in food production during the rainy season.

FIG 2c: MONTHLY MEDIAN INCOME (USD) FROM 3 TOP MINING ACTIVITIES BY REGION

Western Region (Tin Site)



KEY FINDING THREE: Sixty-five (65%) of the surveyed women working at the gold site and 44% working at the tin site reported they were the major contributor to their household income.

KEY FINDING FOUR: Only 7% of the surveyed women compared to 19% of the men had knowledge about the mining law and just 4% of the women had received any form of training about mining related issues compared to 14% of the men.

KEY FINDING FIVE: At the gold site, an artisanal association is in place to govern the ASM activities. However, its authority is constantly questioned by many people working there.

"Apart from collecting the taxes from us we do not see any other thing the Association has done"

— Focus Group Discussion for women service providers, Gold site

At the tin site, there is tight control of operations by the licenced company and the gangs that organically evolved, making the situation far less conflictual because of the internal rules within gangs.

KEY FINDING SIX: Women more often than men worked individually and not in a team. About a half of the women at the gold site were working individually as compared to only 21% of their male counterparts who worked in groups, making it more difficult for the women to mobilise sufficient capital to invest in more profitable activities. At the tin site, the gang working arrangement ensured that the majority of both women and men work in teams (Fig 3). However, the majority of the gangs were male only, a few mixed ones where the female members had to be related or married to a male gang member and one

female only gang. This gang arrangement translates into an access barrier for those women who cannot find a gang to work with.

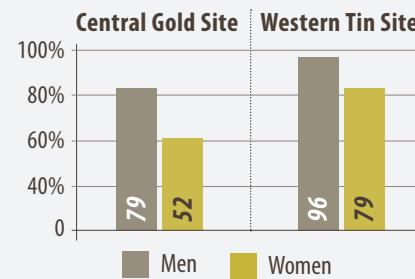
"[T]his kind of work needs to be team work because mining is too hard to do alone especially if you have to enter tunnels. ... When we work in a group, we can get more ore and more tin which brings more money"

— Male miner -Western Uganda

"[I]t eases work and the output is bigger than when you work as an individual"

— Female miner –Western Uganda

FIG 3: WORKING AS A TEAM



KEY FINDING SEVEN: Overall, there are very few savings and loans groups at the gold site, perhaps due the transient nature of the mining population. This makes it difficult to organise credit facilities. At the tin site, where the mining community is more stable, few women (36%) had access to savings and credit services compared to their male counterparts (67%).

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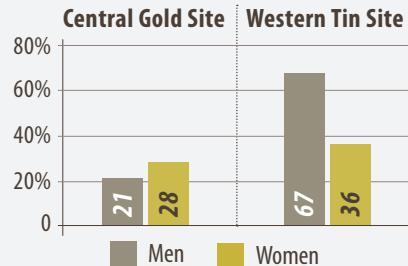
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FIG 4: % WHO ARE MEMBERS OF A SAVINGS AND LOAN SITE



KEY FINDING EIGHT: Overwhelmingly, women and men at the tin site identified tools/equipment as the key aspect they would like to change about their work at the mining site. Government failure to provide equipment, assistance to miners for example in times of accident, as well as not helping with the price of tin stood out as key reasons why government is viewed not helpful to tin miners.

At the gold site, the key issue desired for change was on the infrastructure where both women and men identified problems with noise, bathrooms, safety and the condition of roads.

KEY FINDING NINE: Artisanal mining has transformed the lives of some women despite the many challenges. Some women managed to overcome some of the barriers to earn an economic livelihood from it.

"Stopping me from mining is like telling me that my family will not eat and my children will not go to school. We left our children home and came to work here; we have been able to construct our family home, bought plots of land and are able to pay school fees for our children and all this money is coming from mining"

— Focus Group Discussion for women service providers, Gold site

RESEARCH IN UGANDA LED BY: Development Research and Social Policy Analysis Centre (DRASPAC)

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

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