



Policy brief on mining industry in Uganda.

Title: Impacts of small scale Gold mining on the environment.

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Key messages

1. Need for intensive sensitization and awareness on dangers of mercury in the gold mining sites should be prioritized.
2. Gender issues need to be addressed in the mining industry.

3. There is a need for government to build a refinery for collectively gold selling to ease track revenue from Gold mining activities.
4. All miners should be sensitised and educated on the use and need to get licence which most of them look at as unimportant. This will prohibit child labour and protect the environment specifically in the fragile ecosystem.
5. There is a need to decentralize issuing of licenses in gold mining to fully give powers to local governments who are well acquainted with the local geography
6. Improved technology should be introduced to artisanal miners and trained on how to operate them.
7. Local communities should be empowered by government on better mining technologies
8. Need for clear policy that regulates mining to cater for restoration.

Aim

To improve on social, economic and environment standards of miners and legal status in mining industry. It is palpable that almost all mining activities are done illegally and are unregulated which hinders the country's economic growth

Introduction

Gold mining in most developing Countries remains in the hands of artisanal small scale miners who are informal and unregulated¹. The miners continue to use rudimentary tools like hoes, axes, hammers and basins among others to dig the grounds searching for gold to earn a living. This method exposes them to accidents like the recent one in March 2015 which

¹ Nabaasa.H, (2016).Artisanal and small scale Gold Mining and food Security :*African Journal of public Affairs* Volume 9 number 4

buried ten people alive in Kitumbi Sub-county². The miners also dispose domestic and human waste in the open due to lack of adequate waste management facilities and they are exposed to harmful, toxic and contaminating materials, such as mercury and cyanide, used to separate gold from soil and other impurities every day putting their lives in danger.

Widespread political and civil unrest under the regime of Idi Amin led to the collapse of the formal mining sector in the late 1970s and unemployment of over 10,000 trained miners. Dispersion of these unemployed miners stimulated unlicensed ASGM across the Southwest and, to a lesser extent, in the goldfields of the East and Northeast (Van Alstine, Manyindo et al. 2014). Widespread extralegal gold mining continued until 1986, when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power and President Yoweri Museveni made licensing of gold mining possible by presidential decree (Hinton 2012).

However, it remains hard for governments to track gold contribution to the country's GDP because most of the mining activities are in the hands of ASGM who operate illegally with no licenses. In the formalized sector, an increasing number of big multinational businesses are coming in Uganda during the past few years, but have been met with resistance due to fears from locals that large mining operations would affect their current mining efforts and livelihood³.

Important to note is that Gold mining is profitable for all as it contributes to the development of the economy. It is noted that informal sector alone contributes about 3.5 percent of GDP and 2.8 tonnes of gold is collected every year by unlicensed artisanal gold miners around the country who ranges between 50,000 to 200,000 miners⁴. According to the study

² <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/bahi-manyoni-uranium-mining>

³ *Ibid* <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/bahi-manyoni-uranium-mining>

⁴ Irene Schipper & Esther de Haan (SOMO) and Stephen Turyahikayo (CRSS) (2016), No Golden Future. Use of child labour in gold mining in Uganda,

done on artisanal and small-scale mining commissioned by the ministry of Energy revealed that Uganda had produced 1,200kg of gold in 2008 alone.

The gender dimension of ASGM also seems to be shifting depending on local circumstances. Only 0-25% of miners is women in ASGM areas in the West and Southwest where farming continues to thrive. However, in the comparatively impoverished Northeast region, women's participation increases to approximately 50-to-60% and is as high as 90% at some ASGM sites (Mpagi, Ssamula et al. 2017).

Mining Regulatory framework

Government of Uganda has established an independent Directorate of Geological Surveys and Mines (DGSM) including a new Inspection and Monitoring Division responsible for enforcement of compliance. This is spearheading a number of initiatives designed to enable the sector play its role in the economy. Worth noting also, new Mining and Mineral policy that provides a strategic direction and strategies for managing the exploitation of the country's finite mineral resources is under way which is an essential pre-requisite.

We note that, the minerals sector was administered and regulated by the Department of Geological Survey and Mines under the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD).

Mining problems in Uganda

Geographical set up

It is believed that fragile ecosystems such as wetlands and mountains are rich in minerals and productive. This has pushed all mining activities in such fragile ecosystems and we should not deny it that it's to a greater extent due to poor enforcement of

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environmental regulations. Case in point is Buhweju District where all mining activities are carried out in wetlands and its beautiful hills despite local government's orders to stop mining activities in wetlands. Additionally in areas gazetted for mining only extraction /excavation is done there and the real washing is brought closer to wetlands in such of free water and thereafter waste water discharged to wetlands.

Legal status

Uganda's mining sector is characterized by Artisanal small scale mining who are informal and un regulated. Collecting taxes and royalties from such groups is a bit hard and therefore government loses a lot from the sector. In areas like Kanoni mining site in Bisya sub-county miners mine freely following the orders of the chairman LCIII that no one should stop them from mining except him and his team. This has given them freedom to mine at their own time and no tax is being paid and this has complicated the whole process especially to the enforcement team due to politicization of everything.

Social and environmental aspects.

It's under the laws of Uganda to respect social and human rights, however we still witness child labour in many mining sites in the country which is against the law and denying them a right to education and this puts their lives at risk. Additionally, according to National Environment Act 153, no person shall discharge any hazardous substance, chemical, oil or mixture containing oil in any waters or any other segment of the environment except in accordance with guidelines prescribed by the authority in consultation with the lead agency, however this is devoid in the mining sector where mercury and cyanide is used and waste water discharged in wetlands.

To note also, this act requires the person to restore the environment as near as it may be to the state in which it was before the taking of the action which is the subject of the order but many abandoned mining

sites are uncovered partly because of low enforcement and lack of licenses of operation.

It's unfortunate that Mining activities are done in such areas that have no access to public health care facilities and despite the increased number of people in such areas no health facility has been built. Therefore planning to have health facilities build in such areas would be of great help to the economy of the country.

It should be noted that, almost all artisanal gold is mined and exported illegally and unregulated leading to conflicts in the mining sector, competing in land uses, smuggling of gold, child labour, human rights abuses, environmental and human health concerns and tax revenue losses.⁵ For example the ongoing conflict between the Chinese Company and BSMA over acquired licenses which local miners think is illegally acquired.

Basing on the working conditions, Diseases such as malaria, HIV/Aids, and allergies are on the raise. According to Bemera Amon the Buhweju District Disease severance Focal person and Lab Supervision HIV/Aids is going to be high due to increase in the number of miners and congestion with in mining sites. He adds that Malaria severance has also increased due to high spread of mosquitoes resulting from uncovered mining ponds and of course due to lack of safe drinking water many more diseases are envisaged.

Conflicts are at a rise in mining site between investors and artisanal local miners who in some cases own the land. In many places like Buhweju and others, gold mining is in the hands of individuals who are not willing to give in their lands to large investors who in some instances have licenses. This has increased conflicts between investors and locals calling for urgent attention from government if we are to attract investors.

⁵ <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/bahi-manyoni-uranium-mining>

From the environmental point of view, large volumes of soil are excavated and this can affect groundwater when the water-table level is reached, as well as the water quality of adjacent drainages. We note that, water contamination is one of the major health risks associated with small-scale mining.

Gender consideration

With continued belief that women are weaker sex and dedicated to weak duties and responsibilities, it's no different in the mining sector. Women are at the forefront of mining activities that are more dangerous to their lives such activities like washing gold from sand containing mercury has increasingly put their lives in danger with registered eye diseases among women and children working in the mining sector. World Health Organization Fact Sheet on Mercury highlights that mercury may cause serious health problems and may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes.

Conclusion

Mining in Uganda is envisaged to remain in the hands of artisanal small scale miners who operate illegally and unregulated for decades. This state will continuously deny government taxes and royalties from their activities hence reducing Country's GDP. However hope can be restored when we decide to legalize all mining activities and sensitization of miners to meet mining standards. Formalised, legal artisanal mining is more likely to improve livelihoods and require appropriate technologies and strategies⁶.

We note that many miners have neglected other economic activities like agriculture which is the back bone of Uganda due to mining activities that provides quick cash therefore supporting this industry will shape its activities.

⁶ MEMD, (2012). Energy and Mineral Development Joint Sector 2012

Recommendation

Miners should be sensitised and educated on the use and need to get licence which will prohibit child labour and protect environment specifically in fragile ecosystem.

Government should think of decentralizing issuing of licenses in gold mining to fully give powers to local governments who are well acquainted with the local geography. This is because due to centralized nature of the licensing process, licenses have been issued in fragile ecosystems.

The safe management of chemicals and wastes are essential for the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on poverty reduction, health, gender, water, cities, oceans, food and sustainable consumption and production

Environmentally friendly methods of mining should be introduced and taught to miners.

Strict policies and laws on mining sector should be developed and enforced .

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