Women are essential to ASM and their involvement brings many benefits to the sector and society.

Overview

It is essential that legal and policy frameworks ensure their free, full, equal and equitable participation, and that women are empowered to become agents of change to enhance the social and economic benefits of ASM for all.

This policy brief shares the findings of SDMR’s baseline study on gender and social inclusion undertaken in Gakenke District, located in the northern province of Amajyaruguru, Rwanda.

The brief provides recommendations for policymakers seeking to ensure the full, equal, and equitable participation of women in ASM.

Why is the participation of women in ASM important?

Women account for approximately 16% of the workforce in Rwanda’s minerals sector, which almost entirely consists of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).

These are low-tech, labour-intensive operations that provide direct jobs to an estimated 34,000–65,000 people, with as many as 170,000 who are dependent on the sector for their livelihood in impoverished rural communities (Barreto et al., 2014). Albeit often with unhealthy working conditions and without formal contracts.

But, how can the sector be improved to enhance the participation and livelihoods of women, as well as the benefits they receive from ASM?
Rwanda’s legal frameworks promote women’s equality and gender mainstreaming

The increased participation of women in the mineral sector results in notable improvements for both women, as well as the community and society as a whole. In Gakenke, out of a total of 2,367 workers at four separate mining cooperatives 24% are female. Yet, when disaggregated further, SDMR found that 97% of these women are casual workers with no formal contract.

Thus, while these figures are above the national average, they still fall short of the government’s target to ensure at least 30% of the mining workforce are women (SDMR, 2017). Improving the policy conditions to enhance women’s participation is therefore important for the wider social and economic development of the sector and communities.

**Women’s participation in mining is linked to many positive development impacts**

Women’s employment in the mining sector is linked to many positive impacts. These include household well-being such as increased empowerment, decision-making and independence, the ability to cover family expenses (e.g. health, education, and savings), and provision for alternative longer-term investments. Furthermore, ASM is a largely poverty-driven activity with low barriers to entry. This means that during tough economic times the sector provides a vital lifeline, including women and the poorest groups in the community. In addition, during the dry-seasons and periods of downtime in agriculture, ASM provides an income and money to purchase fertilisers, equipment, and re-invest in farm activities. For women, this can be especially important because in Gakenke they comprise almost 80% of all agricultural workers (SDMR, 2017).

Although it is a male dominated industry, women are found in a wide variety of roles and are vital to the running of ASM operations. These include labour-intensive mineral processing work such as carrying ore, sluicing, panning, drying, grinding, as well as more technically skilled work in sales and marketing, and supply chain management. For example, women are often employed as ‘Tag Managers’ for the iTSCI initiative which tracks 3Ts (Tin, Tungsten, and Tantalum) most commonly mined in Rwanda from mine to market ensuring they are conflict free (iTSCI, 2017).

In countries where the law allows women to own land, licences, and obtain bank loans freely, they are empowered through ASM to become mine owners and leaders. In Rwanda, a unique system operates for ASM whereby sub-contractors are hired as management intermediaries between ASM companies that hold the licence, and groups of formal and informal labourers. By working as sub-contractors, women are can become self-employed or obtain a salary, having greater empowerment and autonomy.

Generally, when there is a high-level of community participation in mining, women’s involvement also increases and is encouraged by all members of the community. The only job from which women are commonly excluded is digging. This because they are either not considered strong enough, or due to cultural reasons.

**Women face particular challenges in ASM**

> Misconceptions, negative stereotypes, and cultural values around the ability of women and their involvement in ASM. Women may be forbidden from working underground, in certain roles, and at night. These hamper efforts to increase the number of women in mining.

> The environmental impacts of mining such as water pollution and deforestation disproportionally affect women as they are often the ones responsible for washing, and collecting water and firewood.

> Increased school and higher education dropout rates as children and youth see their elders and peers working in mines and perceive education to be a waste of time. Young women may be attracted to sex work in mining camps to provide a source of income. This also increases health risks and...
Practical issues such as a lack of separate WASH facilities deter women from mining workforce exposure to gender-based violence.

> Conversely, as women earn a greater income and are empowered through mining some male partners and relatives may feel able to spend their income on entertainment, instead of on the household.

**What are the policy challenges to women’s participation?**

While there are no specific gender laws for the mining sector in Rwanda, there are a number of more general legal instruments and policy frameworks that embed and promote women’s equality and gender mainstreaming (Table 1). Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. It involves assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned action and ensuring that gender perspectives are included (UN Women, 2018).

The policy framework for promoting gender equality in Rwanda’s mining sector is therefore relatively comprehensive and robust, but it lacks implementation. Translating policies into reality remains a significant challenge due to a number of reasons.

First, is that while civil society, NGOs, and foreign donors are very vocal in support of gender mainstreaming across all sectors, their actual involvement (especially in mining) has been limited to research and providing guidelines, as opposed to direct implementation and support. This is a result of ASM being a relatively new and very complex area for traditional development organisations to become involved with, as well as one that is seen as being much riskier. Furthermore, the awareness of the relevant rights, regulations, policies (Table 1), and international guidelines is limited among many advocacy organisations, civil society, mining companies, communities, and women in general. There is therefore a need to play a public education role to promote ASM.

Second, there are also practical considerations that deter women from entering the mining workforce and which make day-to-day work more challenging. For example, SDMR’s research found that in interviews with 44 female miners (across five companies), 29 pointed to a lack of personal protective equipment, and 23 mentioned a lack of on-site facilities such as separate toilets, washing and changing rooms (SDMR, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Law or policy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constitution of Rwanda</strong></td>
<td>Commits Rwanda to promote gender equality, with a clause that establishes women must occupy at least 30% of positions in decision-making organisations.</td>
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<td><strong>The Land Law</strong></td>
<td>Article 4 concerning equal rights to land bans all forms of discrimination (including those based on gender), except where marriage contracts state otherwise. Recognises women’s right to decide the destination of the income generated by various land related activities.</td>
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<td><strong>The National Gender Policy (2010)</strong></td>
<td>Recognises women are a minority in key employment positions, especially better paid technical jobs. Calls measures to ensure equal and effective participation of women in all environmental and natural resources programmes, and ensure effective law enforcement.</td>
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<td><strong>2009 Rwanda Mining Policy</strong></td>
<td>Places ‘increasing the participation of women in minerals industry activities’ at its core, with a target to increase the number of women in mining to 20-30% by 2013.</td>
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Due to their role as primary care givers, women also need to be supported through the provision of on-site child care facilities and flexible working arrangements. However, due to the fact that the majority of labourers are casual workers with no fixed contract, and due to limited financial resources at their disposal, the cost and investment needed to address these issues are too high for many owner-operators. Fostering the growth of a more professional sector through a reformed mineral regime and supportive government policy framework is therefore key. This will ensure that owner-operators are provided with access to finance and the confidence to make long-term investments in mine-site improvements and facilities, especially for women.

**Recommendations**

While the relevant laws, regulations, targets and policies exist to promote gender mainstreaming in ASM, a significant challenge lies with having the necessary knowledge, skills, capacity, support, and resources to effectively translate them into practice. This includes developing and implementing a range of cross-cutting policy options that are tailored to the different market players and the functions that women play in the sector.

1. **Government and policy making**

   Build capacity of relevant government agencies to oversee, monitor, and report on effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policies, guidelines, strategies and recommendations. This includes collecting and publishing data on the participation and role of women in mining. Develop and implement legal and policy mechanisms to introduce initiatives such as:

   > mining revenue sharing schemes; earmarking a proportion of mineral export profits to be invested back into the ASM sector, and specifically for women;
   > the development of easy-to-use corporate social responsibility guidelines that include practical advice and frameworks for gender mainstreaming; capacity building and work programmes to encourage economic and livelihood diversification into mining-related support service sectors;
   > and training opportunities to help women undertake more technical and better-paid job opportunities in mining.

   Consider educational policies, programmes, careers advice, and scholarships to encourage and facilitate women to become involved in the science, technology, engineering, and maths subjects from an early age, and promote positive role models of women in mining to school, college, and university students.

2. **Civil Society, NGOs, and business membership organisations**

   Engage, sensitise, and educate civil society, NGOs, and business membership and advocacy organisations to better understand ASM and how to establish a gender-sensitive physical and social environment. Support these organisations with seeking investment and donor support for capacity building training and programmes.

3. **Private mining companies and mine site owner-operators**

   Provide guidelines and assist companies to develop corporate (site-level) policies for gender mainstreaming, improved labour conditions, retention of women workers, provision of women only sanitation facilities, child care support, and training and career development into more secure, technical and better paid roles.

4. **Individuals (women and men)**

   Provide capacity building to women on mineral governance and gender equality laws and policies, as well as practical and technical training in mining, processing and more advanced technical skills.

   Sensitise men on the issues facing women in mining so that misconceptions and negative stereotypes can be addressed, and so that men can also support and advocate for change.
Practical issues such as a lack of separate WASH facilities deter women from mining workforce

References


Suggested citation

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