



# WORKING CONDITIONS OF WOMEN IN MINING: A Case Of Buhweju and Mubende Gold Mining Sites

## Introduction

Structural barriers in Mubende and Buhweju district restrict women from participating in making decisions that affect their lives. A case in point is the mining sector. Though 35%<sup>1</sup> of the people employed in artisanal and small scale mining are women, they rarely participate in making decisions that shape the sector. Thus, they are exposed to poor working conditions often characterized by exploitation. With support from Voice – one of our development partners, Global Rights Alert is implementing a two-year project titled “Golden Voices in Gold Mining” in the districts of Buhweju and Mubende.

The project aims at creating a safe and productive space for women in artisanal and small scale gold mining in the two districts. It supports women to organize, identify and articulate

their concerns and interests at various platforms targeting relevant duty bearers. It further facilitates women to contribute to the ongoing legal and policy discussions that govern Uganda’s mining.

As part of the project, Global Rights Alert undertook the rapid assessment to understand the working conditions of women in mining. Specifically, the assessment sought to 1; ascertain the level of engagement of women in mining with duty bearers on issues that affect safety and productivity. 2; Ascertain the level at which women’s safety and productivity concerns are shared through documentation, media and partnerships, 3; Establish their level of involvement in decision making and contribution to bylaws, laws and regulations governing the sector.



**Country:** Uganda  
**Target districts:** Buhweju & Mubende  
**Project:** Golden Voices in Gold Mining  
**Programme:** Gender and Natural Resources  
**Funding:** Voice, Oxfam, Hivos & Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Sample size for the assessment**  
: 99

**Policy issue:** Unsafe working environment for women in the mines and exploitation.

<sup>1</sup>Understanding Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM) operations in Uganda (<https://www.plexii.org/index.php/resources/key-documents/research-reports/12-understanding-artisanal-and-small-scale-mining-asm-operations-in-uganda>)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/extractiveindustries/brief/gender-in-extractive-industries>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.oilinuganda.org/features/law/address-challenges-faced-by-women-in-mining-mps-activists-ask-government.html>

## Contextual perspective

World Bank notes that while the benefits of the mining industry are captured primarily by men, women often bear a disproportionate share of social, economic, and environmental risks. Women employed in mines work under unsafe conditions often characterized by meager pay, sexual harassment, poor sanitation, domestic violence and exposure to hazardous substances such as mercury among others.

The mineral Policy of Uganda 2000, set out to eliminate restrictive practices that prevent women from full participation in the mineral sector, protect children against

mining hazards and ensure compliance with the existing laws and regulations on environment, human health and safety. However, these particular policy objectives are not adequately translated into the Mining Act, 2003 and the Mining Regulations, 2004.

The National Development Plan (NDP II) and Vision 2040 recognizes the potential of the minerals sector to spur economic growth and development. However, mining communities have instead witnessed forceful evictions emanating from conflicts between Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners (ASMs) and large-scale investors.

### Assessment study

The assessment targeted women directly or indirectly involved along the gold mining value chain. The study randomly selected seventy five (75) women in the target districts to participate in questionnaire interviews. These were distributed across randomly selected mines.

The baseline study targeted sixteen (16) duty bearers such as district and sub-county officials, and representatives of mining associations who participated key informant interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs).

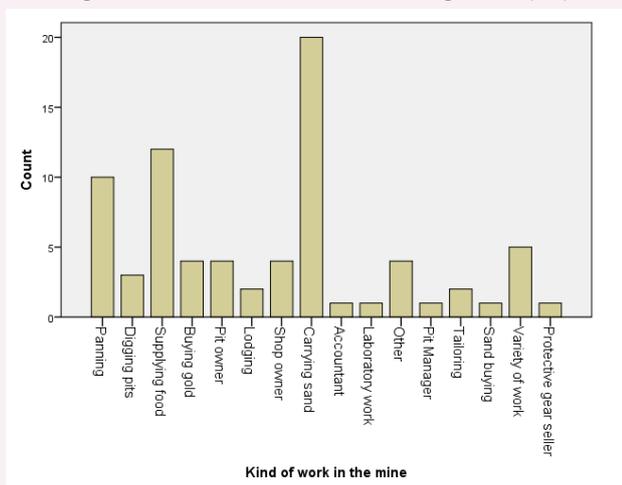
### Assessment findings

#### Nature of work

The study found that the exact number of women involved in gold mining value chain is in the two districts is not known by duty bearers in the target districts.

98.7 % of women were involved in petty work and rarely owned gold pits. This has left them with limited decision making powers and control rendering them vulnerable to decisions of their male employers with little or no regard to gender concerns and interests. Only 1.3% of people involved in mining, were employed as professionals.

Figure 1 Areas where women in mining are employed in.



### Ownership and use of protective gears

Protective gear range from gloves, boots, overalls, nose masks, etc

- 72% of the women did not have any form of protective gear.
- Only 13% of those who owned protective gear, used them consistently.
- 24% of those who owned protective gear, considered using them inconveniencing
- 13% could not afford to buy protective gears, because they considered them costly.
- 1% of the women revealed that their employers feared they could use protective gears to steal gold

The findings demonstrate the absence of clear measures and efforts in place to promote women's safety and productivity in the mines regardless of the existing policies, laws and institutions that are meant to monitor and enforce compliance.

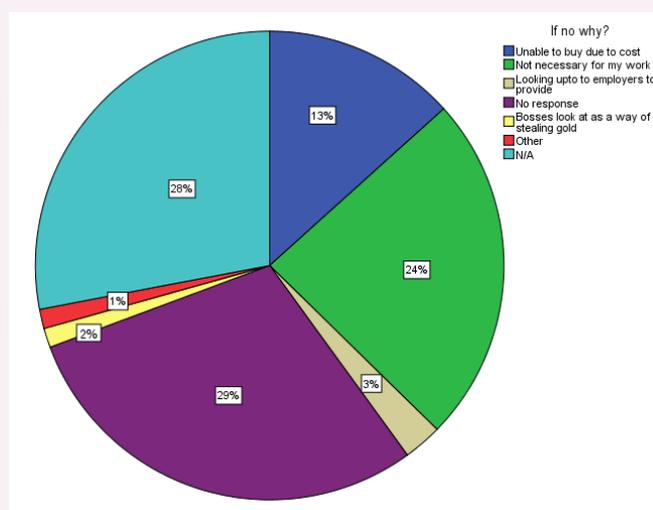
Table 1 Percentage of women with different kinds of protective gear in the mines

Ownership of protective gear	Frequency	Percent
One kind of protective gear	9	12.0
Has two kinds of protective gear	5	6.7
Has at least 3 types of protective gear	7	9.3
Had no protective gear	54	72.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Working Conditions

- Nearly half of the respondents (54.1% in Buhweju and 47.4% in Mubende) believe working conditions were favorable to them despite the observable risks and dangers identified during the study.
- In Buhweju, women were willing to work under any condition as long as they met their household needs.
- In Mubende, where recent evictions from mining areas affected women's livelihoods and wellbeing,

Figure 2: Reasons why women lack protective gears



the major focus was to return to the mines irrespective of the working conditions before the eviction.

- 61.3% of the respondents acknowledged that there were a number of risks, dangers and hindrances that affected women's activities in the mines.

Table 2: Ranging conditions of unsafe working environment

Conditions affecting women in the mines	Responses	
	NO	Percent
Sexual exploitation before work and when demanding money	2	3.7%
Limitations on what women can do in the mines	5	9.3%
Unfavorable sanitation facilities	10	18.5%
Accidents on site and the pits	4	7.4%
None payments	6	11.1%
Insecurity in the mines	9	18.6%
Mercury exposure	3	5.6%
Low payments for too much work	14	25.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

## Women's engagements with duty bearers on interests and concerns

- There was limited interaction between women in mining with relevant duty bearers to discuss their interests and concerns. Most discussions by these women happen with their male employers who have little or no regard for gender needs and concerns.
- There were limited opportunities or platforms for raising concerns and interests. Women thus opt to continue working irrespective of challenges and hindrances.
- At district level, actors did not acknowledge receipt of any women recommendations towards improving their working conditions
- Duty bearers at the district acknowledged that there weren't any interventions explicitly targeting women in the mines by Local government, except for Buhweju where initiatives to register all ASMs in the districts were ongoing.

### Use of media to amplify women's issues in mining

- Women in mining did not document any specific issues regarding their safety and productivity in the working environment.
- Women in mining did not use any media platforms to raise awareness of their interests and concerns.
- The assessment identified partners in the target districts with whom women in mining could work with to amplify their issues.
- Women's involvement in the ongoing policy and legal

frameworks

- There were no opportunities or platforms for women in the target districts to contribute to the ongoing discussions on the policies and laws that govern Uganda's mineral sector, despite the fact that laws and policies directly affected women in mines.

### Recommendations

The assessment made the following specific recommendations;

- Women in mining should organize themselves into advocacy units through which they can identify, organise and articulate their concerns and interests to relevant duty bearers.
- There is need to enhance women's access to relevant platforms to articulate their interests and concerns to relevant duty bearers/stakeholders.
- Partners in the sector should support women in mining to document and utilize media platforms to create awareness on their concerns amongst the public and stakeholders for redress.
- Global Rights Alert and like-minded organizations should step up advocacy aimed at fast tracking the review of the Mining Policy, 2000 and subsequent amendment to the Mining Act, 2003 and attendant Regulations. Global Rights Alert should ensure policy proposals from women in mining are incorporated into the laws.

### Note:

The assessment identified issues that were not foreseen in the process of conceptualization of the project and yet they affect safety and productivity of women in mining. These included; prevalence of gender based and domestic violence associated to gold mining; Insecurity in the mines and lack of access

to key social services within and around the mines, among others. In addition to this, eviction of ASMs in Mubende left women and men in dire conditions without any alternative source of livelihoods. As such, the identified issues call for concerted efforts by GRA and stakeholders in order to achieve a holistic results for women in mining.

### About GRA

Global Rights Alert (GRA) is a Civil Society Organisation whose mission is to make natural resources benefit the people. GRA is committed to ensure that men, women and young people benefit from the sustainable exploitation of natural resources. Our work is rooted in governance and human rights framework which considers challenging inequality and injustice as central to inclusive development. GRA's work empowers communities to negotiate for more equitable benefit sharing regimes, influence decisions that impact on their lives and mitigate conflicts and human rights abuses associated with the exploitation of natural resources.

Our vision is to become East Africa's leading civil society organization defending and promoting human and community resource rights in the extractives industry. Global Rights Alert pursues her mission and vision through implementation of the four interrelated programs namely; Human and Community Resource Rights, Gender and Natural Resources, Corporate Accountability and Transparency and Institutional Strengthening and Development.

Address  
Plot 24 Martyrs Way Ministers' Village, Ntinda  
P.O BOX 2779 KAMPALA  
TEL:+256 414 531661  
Email: [info@globalrightsalert.org](mailto:info@globalrightsalert.org)  
WEB: [www.globalrightsalert.org](http://www.globalrightsalert.org)

### About Voice

Voice is an innovative grant facility of 35 million Euro that supports the most marginalized and discriminated people in ten countries in Africa and Asia (Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines and Indonesia). It aims to amplify and connect thus far unheard voices in efforts to leave no one behind.

Voice is an initiative by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is executed by a consortium between Oxfam Novib and Hivos.

Address  
Oxfam Uganda  
Plot NO. 3459, Tank Hill Road, Muyenga  
P.O Box 6228, Kampala, Uganda  
Tel: +256 414390500 Fax: +256 414 510242  
Email: [uganda@voice.global](mailto:uganda@voice.global)