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Artisanal gold mining: both a woman's and a man's world. A Uganda case study

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on ActionAid research exploring the livelihoods of women artisanal miners in the Kampala Camp in Kiltumbi Sub County, Mubende District in Uganda. It shows the different ways in which mining shapes women's lives and gender relations. The article focuses on women's strategies in response to their situation. ActionAid has supported and empowered women and men in their efforts through providing information, creating spaces for women to learn about mine policy and law, safety equipment and gear, and to network with their contemporaries in Tanzania.

El presente artículo da cuenta de investigaciones realizadas por ActionAid que abordan los medios de vida de las mujeres dedicadas a la minería artesanal en el campamento Kampala, subcondado de Kiltumbi, distrito de Mubende en Uganda. Muestra las distintas maneras en que la explotación minera moldea la vida de las mujeres y las relaciones de género. Asimismo, explora las estrategias empleadas por las mujeres para responder a su situación. ActionAid ha apoyado y empoderado a mujeres y hombres en sus iniciativas, proporcionándoles información, creando espacios para que las mujeres puedan aprender sobre políticas públicas, leyes mineras y equipos de seguridad, y facilitando maneras de enlazarse con sus contemporáneos en Tanzania.

Cet article se base sur des recherches menées par Action Aid examinant les moyens de subsistance des femmes mineurs artisanales dans le Camp Kampala, sous-comté de Kiltumbi, district Mubede, en Ouganda. Il montre les différentes manières dont l'exploitation minière façonne la vie des femmes et les rapports entre les hommes et les femmes. L'article se concentre sur les stratégies des femmes pour répondre à leur situation. ActionAid a soutenu les femmes et les hommes dans leurs efforts en fournissant des informations, en créant des espaces permettant aux femmes de s'informer sur les politiques et les lois régissant l'exploitation minière, le matériel et l'équipement de sécurité, et de travailler en réseau avec leurs contemporaines en Tanzanie.

KEYWORDS

Women; artisanal; Uganda; gold; safety; violence

Introduction

In Uganda, mining has been dominated by companies, mainly foreign, who have made large capital investments in their projects. Large oil and gas reserves have been discovered

in the last few years, thus there has been much focus on that sector. Yet recently, the Ugandan Government has begun to focus more attention on the artisanal mining sector. Gold production from the artisanal sector yields significant profits: just under a decade ago, profits were estimated at US\$28 million (UNEP 2012, 7).

Recently, a growing interest among poor Ugandans has led to increased gold rushes (UNEP 2012, 6), as the price of gold has risen and this has been coupled with downturns in agriculture, prolonged drought, and a lack of investment in small-scale agriculture. The Ugandan economy is growing strongly with a 6.6 per cent average annual increase between 2000 and 2014 (ActionAid 2017, 18).

However, one in five people are still living on less than 1.25 dollars a day (SOMO 2016, 14), and inequality persists: the Gini coefficient, indicating income disparity, is dropping more slowly than poverty, standing at 41 in 2012.¹ Artisanal mining has offered a route to earn a living for poor Ugandans for many decades, offering a livelihood opportunity for workers who are uneducated and untrained. In contrast, mine-work opportunities in large-scale industrial extractives require much higher levels of education and training.

The term artisanal mining spans a wide range of activities which can be as simple as panning for gold, but can also refer to mining underground and small-scale processing, in typically informal and therefore often very precarious conditions. Artisanal mining involves little mechanisation – most often it refers to the most basic form of extraction using tools like picks, axes, and shovels. The way we use the term in this article is broad, referring to the many different workers involved in and around the process of mineral extraction. The first artisanal mines in Uganda date from the 1920s. An artisanal mining camp grows up when speculative extraction begins and valuable minerals are found, sparking off a ‘gold rush’ as people arrive at the location in search of wealth.

There are limited national statistics on the scale of artisanal mining in Uganda currently, since by its nature it is informal and the earnings from it are largely under the radar of the government, uncounted and unregulated. Up to 200,000 people are estimated as being directly involved in artisanal mining in Uganda (Eftimie *et al.* 2012, 4). Around 45 per cent are estimated to be women, although this varies in different regions of the country (UNEP 2012, 7).

This article is based on ActionAid research exploring the livelihoods of women working in the artisanal mining industry, in the Kampala Camp in Kiltumbi Sub County, Mubende District in Uganda. It shows the different ways in which mining shapes women’s lives and gender relations, and explores the ways in which ActionAid is working with both women and men in the mining economy to help strengthen their chances of making a decent livelihood, through collective action and through working with the government to establish and strengthen the social contract between citizens and the state.

Because of its status as a precarious sector offering low returns to marginalised workers, artisanal mining is a sector of interest not only to government, but to international and national NGOs working to alleviate poverty. Justice, stability, and security depend on a functioning and accountable relationship between the state and its citizens, and the potential for wealth offered by the mineral sector offers a promise of prosperity for the

mineworking communities who extract minerals, as well as the prospect of greater national wealth.

ActionAid in Uganda and its work in the mining sector

ActionAid is a rights-based, social justice organisation that operates in at least 45 countries in the world, and has been working in Uganda for 35 years.² ActionAid has focused on women's rights in its programming because of its focus on the connection between poverty and powerlessness. In particular, it believes that poverty and injustice will be eliminated when women know and understand their rights, and are able to take collective action through their own groups and in solidarity with others to claim them. For this reason it focuses on supporting collective action at grassroots level, parallel to advocacy and campaigning for policy change and its implementation.

In 2015, ActionAid Uganda supported the establishment of a women's league within the Ssingu Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association. ActionAid Uganda had begun to work in the oil and gas sector in Uganda in 2010, focusing on accountability and governance issues, via analysis and publication of information on a website, www.oilinuganda.org, and a newsletter, *Oil in Uganda*. The intended audience was men and women in mining-affected communities and other Ugandans interested in issues of the oil and gas sector. This work was supported by the Ford Foundation. In 2013, we began to work directly with mineworkers. This work was a partnership with ActionAid Australia, with support from the Australian Government. ActionAid supported artisanal gold miners in Mubende District to organise, setting up the Ssingu Artisan Miners Association (SASSMA) in 2013. The Ssingu Association offers a range of benefits to its members including enabling them to access operational licences and taking them for exposure visits to mining areas in neighbouring countries. The current membership is estimated at 1,200 (800 men and 400 women), with members paying about 20,000 shillings or US\$6 per year (personal communication from General Secretary SASSMA Emmanuel Kibirige, August 2017).

In 2015, ActionAid Uganda undertook research with women artisanal miners in the Kampala Camp in Kiltumbi Sub County, Mubende District in Uganda. The research took place between October 2016 and March 2017, and was carried out by an independent consultant, as part of a Violence Against Women and Economic Justice study – a initiative intended to underpin ActionAid Uganda's wider overall programme on women's rights and poverty, by showing the links between violence against women, gendered poverty, and powerlessness.

Women in Uganda have not achieved equality with men in many domains. While progress has been made in educational attainment, there is still a gap as more boys are attending school compared to girls (18 per cent of boys aged 13–18 attend school, compared to 16 per cent of girls, https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Uganda_coreusaid.pdf, last checked 25 September 2017). As in most countries in the world, the gender division of labour means women shoulder most household unpaid care work, which affects their ability to gain education, decent work, impairing their well-being,

and leading to exhaustion (ActionAid 2013). Young women are often forced to leave school at a young age. Ugandan civil laws also disadvantage women in the country (World Bank 2015, 4), meaning women are often unable to control the resources they need to give them power over their lives. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is widespread: over half the women in a 2011 Uganda Bureau of Statistics and ICF International study (56 per cent) had been subjected to at least one incidence of violence since the age of 15 (2011, 239). Poverty and lack of alternatives make it very difficult for abused women to leave marriages or families to escape abuse, and there are only 16 women's protection shelters in the entire country (ActionAid 2017, 18) which means they often have to endure violent relationships.

The research with women artisanal miners was small-scale – and hence does not claim to be representative of women's typical experience in the artisanal mining sector – but it sheds light on an under-researched group of women, who have not been the subject of previous research. As the following sections show, the research gives interesting insights into the ways in which women are involved in artisanal gold mining in the area.

The section below draws on information gathered using a range of different methods, including separate focus group discussions with 12 women and five men, and semi-structured interviews with one woman and two men, all involved in the Ssingol Association, and three life-history case studies. All quotations below come from these sources. We have given pseudonyms to all individuals quoted. Data have also been collected from reports and meeting minutes.

Exploring Kampala Camp

The Kampala Camp is located in Kiltumbi Sub County, Mubende District. This part of Uganda has gold reserves which were first discovered and mined from around 2008. The area is now mined by both modern industrial mines and informally in artisan camps. There are four artisanal mine camps that sprawl across hilltops. The artisanal camps are located down dirt roads, a long way from the main tarmac road. The camps can be sighted from quite a distance, mainly by the blue tarpaulins which are draped across temporary shacks. Every day, vehicles with supplies are to be seen driving back and forth to the camps.

The Kampala Camp is about a square kilometre in size. It began to grow from around 2008. The land that it occupies is owned by private landlords. From some angles within the Kampala Camp, the larger formal gold mining enterprise that occupies the valley floor below can be seen. The mining pits in Kampala Camp are positioned on the hillsides. Panning takes place in water pools constructed close by. There are thousands of panning pools and mining pits.

The pits have owners, the majority of whom are tenants. These hire land from the land-owners and they pay them in terms of a percentage (10 per cent) of all gold that is mined and sold. A pit can be up to 100 metres deep with several horizontal tunnels at the base. Mineworkers dig and extend the mine pits themselves, and also undertake the actual activity that most of us think of when we use the word 'mining' – the manual or

mechanical extraction of residue. However, mining actually encompasses many more activities than this. After extraction, the residue is then carried to the surface, *by miners*, manually, before sale to middle-men or women, who employ workers to break it up or crush it in grinding machines. They also employ panners who work in the water pools, extracting gold from the soil and residue. This process usually uses mercury which sticks to the gold, making it heavier and easier to extract.

The panners then sell the gold to unlicensed buyers in the camp, who then sell it on to buyers in Kampala. Revenues from the mining camps are not formally regulated at present, as mentioned earlier. However, while gold prices vary, in March 2017 it was said to be about 170,000 UGX per gram (US\$50) in Kampala Camp. The pit owner who mines gold may receive around 30 dollars per gram, while a middle-man or woman will receive around 50 dollars per gram. We were told that on a good day, a gold trader can make as much as US\$1,000, whereas on a bad day he or she might make nothing. The good days were said to be more frequent than the bad. Mining appears very attractive as an alternative to farming: people flock to the camps.

All the artisanal mining camps are very noisy and dusty, with a continuous cacophony of noise from small generators (mainly operating jack-hammers during the day), stone crushers, and loud bar music. From early in the morning, as miners start the working day in the pits, the number in the camp dwindles to about 50. At the end of the day, from around seven to eight pm, the numbers swell to several thousand, as those working underground emerge from the pits.

The camp has an economic web of service providers, including workers in restaurants and bars, health workers operating out of informal clinics, toilet service providers, airtime vendors, and mercury sellers, as well as the gold brokers and buyers. As the government provides virtually no services to the camps, so residents have to procure all their basic services including electricity, water, health care, education, and security. Miners live at the camps temporarily and spend their other valuable time with their families in locations away from the mines. They come to the mines to work and go back to spend the money with their families.

Minework: not just a man's world

Mining is not just a man's world. Estimates of women's involvement in artisanal mining is 25 per cent in the central region of Uganda, where Mubende and Kampala Camp is located (UNEP 2012, 7). Women come from all over Uganda to the mining camps, and even from other countries. In Kampala Camp, an observation of the gendered breakdown of different forms of work in the camp shows a clear division of labour between men and women.

While work digging the mine pits and mining the gold from them remains almost completely done by men, there are women pit-owners and many more women work in extraction, processing, marketing, and sales of gold and other minerals, along the value chain that stretches from miner to purchaser. In addition, women offer essential services and goods that enable the economy of a mining camp to operate. Many of them are involved

in providing paid care and support services for miners, including food and accommodation. The World Bank has also noted that in Uganda, women sex-workers are present in artisanal mining camps (Eftimie *et al.* 2012, 98). While these activities are not considered minework, without them, mining could not continue.

Pit owners are mainly men, but Florence Kibuuka told us that she is a co-owner with her brother.

After visiting women in Tanzania I gained the confidence to be a pit owner myself. Women can do anything men can do ... there are few women pit owners and I myself have to partner with my brother as the men miners who go underground can cheat women by hiding the gold-rich deposits underground.

As suggested in this quotation, the jobs of actually constructing the mine and mining the gold are seen as male. Men in the camps are involved in more physically demanding roles, including digging pits and tunnels, and bringing the residue to the surface. All miners who go underground in the Kampala Camp are men.

Once the residue reaches the surface for processing, the jobs become less clearly 'masculine', and some women are found in processing roles – in fact, women are more prevalent in these roles. Processing each sack of residue takes about three hours, and they pan up to two sacks per day. Women reckon on earning between 15,000 and 25,000 UGX (US\$4.5–7.50) per sack of residue. However, Esther Kasule, one of the women panners in the camp, spoke of the low bargaining power women have:

A woman splits the stones, carries the gold sand and takes it to the ball mill for crushing, and then takes it for panning. You will be paid according to the amount of gold from the wash. Sometimes you may be paid as low as 2,000 UGX (US\$0.60). Some big-headed, stubborn employers may not even pay you.

Women are also heavily involved in support services, including retail shops, accommodation, and informal health clinics. These roles draw on the gendered norms of women as society's carers, requiring the 'female' skills of cookery, brewing traditional beer, serving food and drinks, and caring for the sick and injured. In addition women and girls also make a living through forming personal relationships with miners, from companionship to transactional sex.

In the next section, this brief gender analysis of the work of mining is explored further through a closer view of the role of women in mining and the issues they face. Despite women's active involvement in the artisanal mining industry, as direct participants and as service providers essential to the industry, they are virtually invisible from discussions of artisanal mining, just as they are from discussions of formal 'modern' industrial mining. This invisibility is linked to lack of acknowledgement of how essential their work is.

An essential step in ActionAid's engagement with mineworkers to further their rights and support them to make a decent living was to take this holistic view of minework from the point of view of all the activities undertaken in the industry: all of them are critical in the creation of value from mineral extraction.

Women's views on minework and the challenges they face

Our findings show that while women involved in artisanal mining in the camp prioritised a range of issues including health and safety in the mine camp environment, their first priority was to find opportunities to earn higher incomes, enabling them to pay costs for their children and family, and have enough money to allow them to realise choices – including the choice to live more securely and independently, free from violence. In the longer-term, they hope artisanal mining and the occupations associated with it in the camp will give them an opportunity to earn enough money to start businesses afterwards, often returning to their home areas.

The role of mining in women's livelihoods

Some women in Kampala Camp are living with their husbands or partners in a traditional household, but others are not. Some of these women talked about the freedom they experience in the camp. Some are living separate from their husbands, due to poverty making them migrate, to separation, or to divorce. Others are widows or have never married. They are mostly aged between 18 and 35, and around 15 per cent of them have dependent children with them. Conventional life – living in a farming community as a married woman – is a very different route offering a measure of security but without the potential for controlling resources, or making autonomous decisions. Some women said they had come to Kampala Camp to escape from violent relationships in their home areas.

Many of the women interviewed also mentioned the difficulties that they had faced in making money from farming and other income-generating activities in their communities. These created powerful 'push' factors out of agriculture, forcing them to turn to alternatives including artisanal mining. Women spoke of difficulties ranging from poor weather conditions, but also lack of resources to invest and gender-specific issues that meant they could not enable agriculture to work for them. An example was the difficulties facing women farmers (including practical and cultural barriers to women owning land, particularly problematic for widows and divorcees).

Women often referred to the importance of control over money. Their income in the mining camp provides many of them with some independence, allowing them to save and also pay school costs for their children. Women's stories showed how they use the opportunity of life at Kampala Camp, which they see as a temporary stage in a longer series of different life-stages and business opportunities. Several said they are able to put aside money for investments in other businesses. For instance, one woman, Nampeera Jesca, who is currently panning, stated that she was thinking of this as an activity that will create seed money for a stable business later:

I want to get involved in the hotel business when I finish here.

Not all women see the camp as a last resort due to difficulties in rural agricultural livelihoods. The camp also offers potential for women who have already made some money from businesses outside. For example, Ms Florence Kibuuka said she had been able to

buy a mine pit with the earnings from a restaurant business. However, she made no profit from the pit she owned, because she was running it with her brother who knew the exact value from the gold in this pit, hence she would be cheated and was forced to abandon it. After she sold it, she diversified into refining the residue once it was brought to the surface. This activity was profitable: she spoke of earning two million UGX (US\$600 per month). She has also since diversified into buying gold. With her earnings, she reported she has been able to educate her four children, and buy a plot of land in Kampala where she is constructing a house.

Women who are not able to make a good living in the camps may have relationships with men in the mining camp who they depend on for economic survival. In addition, a relationship with a man is also important for women in this insecure risky environment. There are high levels of sex work in Uganda's mining camps (Eftimie *et al.* 2012, 98). The mining camp may also represent a stage in life that it is difficult to move on from, because of the camps' reputation as places of ill-repute. For women who want to return to the more conventional agricultural life they have left, leaving the camp may present difficulties because living and working in a mining camp can carry a stigma. Werthmann (2009, 20) undertook research with women in mining communities in Burkina Faso. They were stereotyped as 'loose women', and faced challenges when they wanted to re-assimilate into their home communities on their return from the mines. The picture is similar in Uganda's camps.

One woman in Kampala Camp, Irene Mirembe, told an interesting story which illustrates a range of the points made in this section. She and her husband had worked hard on the marital farm the year she came to the camp, to produce 50 bags of maize. Her husband sold it, and used the proceeds to marry another woman. There were other incidences of abuse and violence that caused the woman to escape to the gold fields.

Here, Lutaaya Lukia has worked hard to raise money to invest in equipment and grow her processing business. However, she was not happy, having started a new relationship with a man in the gold fields. The man already had a family, and he sent almost all his proceeds to them, expecting this woman to support this decision and subsidise his life in the camp. She said she considers herself a 'garden' for the man and his official family. While she has educated her two children and built a house for her mother, her progress and growth in the business she has started has stalled.

Care work in the mining camps: the need for basic services

In Uganda, the ability of the state to support women in their caring role through providing basic and essential services is limited. This is particularly the case in a mining camp, because the workforce and inhabitants of the camp are assumed to be male. While many women are providing food, drink, laundry, and other services on a commercial basis to the mineworkers, these women themselves also have their own needs for basic services: both as individuals, and as unpaid family carers. These include health, including reproductive health services; education, for women's children; and access to the law, including police and justice.

Social norms also create problems around care work, which are present in this highly masculine environment. There can be tensions and stress around unpaid care work. One woman engaged in gold panning put it like this (Kampala Camp October 2016)

You can afford to work from morning to evening with your child on your back, but you may not receive a thank you from the man.

Care work in the camp is particularly difficult because of the informality of the shelters and buildings and the fact that there are no services. The camp is in some ways like a peri-urban slum, with unplanned layout and poor lighting. Water is transported to the mining camp by private suppliers in the surrounding areas and then the women have to pay for that. There is a set price per jerry can. Toilets are available but you have to pay to use them and undoubtedly there will be issues with locating them. Cooking can be done with gas, but trucks also bring firewood to the camps. Charcoal is also used.

Many of the issues facing women as carers in the camp are concerned with environmental, health, safety, and security issues. These underline that making a living may be possible in locations where human well-being remains out of reach. The mining camps cannot offer a sustainable and decent means of making a living until there is a better and more formal relationship between the citizens who work and live in artisanal mining communities, and the authorities.

Health and safety in the mine camp: women's perceptions

Women in Kampala Camp experience a number of health and safety issues. Panning – a job often done by women, as stated earlier – was particularly seen by participants in the research as responsible for a range of health problems for women. They suffer back pains, cracked palms, loss of nails from panning with their bare hands, and swollen feet from standing in pools of water for long periods of time.

The camp is also very dusty and the women, men, and children living there inhale vast quantities of dust, which causes persistent respiratory infections, and puts them at risk of silicosis. IANRA (2013, 12) also mention the higher risk of bladder and urinary tract infections that women can develop due to the lack of access to adequate sanitation and hygiene. In addition women are likely to be exposed to sexually transmitted infections – in particular if they are engaging in transactional sex where their bargaining power to use condoms is low. (Condoms are available in Kampala Camp, provided at health centres at no cost, clinics at minimal costs, and social workers from CSO distribute them). Uganda's high level of HIV during the peak of the pandemic in the 1990s is now lower.

One of the biggest health and safety risks for women (and men and children) in artisanal mine camps is exposure to mercury used to amalgamate gold residues. According to an ActionAid anonymous mercury retailer interviewed for this research, over 30kg of mercury is smuggled into Mubende from Tanzania and Kenya on a monthly basis. This 'easy and normal' routine of mercury smuggling is a result of porous borders, according to the mercury retailer. It is at this point that the artisanal miner buys small amounts of mercury. Three grams of mercury is used to produce one gram of gold.

Contact with mercury can cause women to miscarry, and also cause other ailments (Hinton *et al.* 2003). In addition to direct contact, mercury can enter into ecosystems and food systems. Uganda currently has no laws that prohibit mercury nor any legislation that regulates its use (SOMO 2016, 40).

According to *Oil in Uganda*, the government has become concerned about the effects of mercury and is considering making it illegal (<http://www.oilinuganda.org/features/environment/government-move-to-ban-use-of-mercury-in-gold-mining.html>, last checked 25 September 2017). Uganda is signatory to the Minamata global treaty on mercury to protect human health and the environment.³ This treaty calls on signatories to take steps to reduce and where feasible eliminate the use of mercury and mercury compounds.

Overall, the unregulated environment of Kampala Camp means there are serious health and safety considerations facing women as individuals, and also as carers for dependents. Women were keen to clean up the environment around them and considered the state authorities could play a helpful role, enabling them to access basic services, as well as law and order. The nearest health clinic is currently located 2km from the camp.

Grace Nabudere, a nurse in the camps, says access to health care is a hard one, and yet there are many people in the mining camps who need these services: 'I am a nurse and people come to my clinic to buy these medicines before they undertake check-up. They do not go for check-up because they say the health centres are far'.

Violence and insecurity in the mine camp environment

While the mining camp offers opportunities, it is also a highly insecure environment. The woman who had described being able to educate her children and purchase land in Kampala also spoke of the many risks involved here, including being tricked into buying fake gold, or the fear of robbery, which can sometimes result in death.

Women in the camps are exposed to sexual, physical, psychological, and economic violence. The nature of the gold rush phenomenon, where individuals with few social ties end up living in a location which is often remote, in a highly masculinised environment, also means that they are less protected against unlawful activities (including drugs and violence) (Hinton *et al.* 2003). While some women have moved to the mining camp to escape violent relationships, others experience violent relationships within the camp. One of the leaders of the women's league explained that women were beaten every day but that they have kept silent about it as they fear being laughed at by other women. It has also become normalised and participants in our research pointed out that both women and men will often say

After all, he is beating his own wife, leave him.

Women find it hard to leave violent relationships for many reasons. One woman shared her story:

I do not know what to do. I am happy that we make too much (money) but my husband spends it on things I do not know. I have thought of leaving him but he promised he would kill me.

Others endure violent relationships to ultimately protect their children from poverty.

Women in the camps were aware that beating a woman is a crime and an abuse of their rights, even while they also know that some men challenge this idea and instead see violence as a legitimate way of controlling wives and partners. However, they find it hard to report perpetrators as they fear continued violence. The nearest police station is about 1km away from the camp and hence it is also difficult to report it, and not all the police will take the complaint seriously. In addition it is not seen as a sustainable solution – in fact it can ramp up the risk of more violence:

When such a man comes out of the police cells, chances are high that you will be beaten again under the guise of other reasons: so it is better to keep quiet.

The women in the camps also shared that men often bribe their way out of trouble when violence is reported.

When you go to police, they will always ask for money to be able to help you effectively as a woman. Almost every word means money. We do not have this money to bribe. As a result we just give up.

We were told that men are sometimes punished with caning in the camps for violence. This punishment is administered by the local leaders in the camps. However, our informants were only aware of three men having received this punishment.

Women talked most about psychological and economic violence. Some men forcefully ask for money from women and others take it without women's consent. Men use money for a variety of reasons including alcohol, gambling, and promiscuous sex.

If you insist on the whereabouts of such money, you can even be beaten so silence is the best option.

This shows that even though earning money through mining gives women miners more choices than traditional means of making a living and lessens their economic reliance on men, they still experience structural gender inequality, facing several forms of violence in the camp. Women in the camp are not able to claim their right to live free from violence or to expect the authorities to support them when they face violence.

Programme responses to women's interests and needs

In this section, we explore the range of ways in which ActionAid has engaged with women in Kampala Camp so far, in an effort to strengthen their ability to make a decent livelihood, as well as increase women's bargaining power in this challenging environment.

Collective action for networking, knowledge, and information

ActionAid began to support women to form a league within the Ssingoo Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association in 2016. The aim of the Women's League is to improve women's ability to provide for themselves and their families, by dealing with the issues that they face. Women speaking during a monitoring visit in March 2017 stated:

Women need to be recognised in mining and hence the Ssingol women's league.

When they work together that can share ideas and problems.

These include responding to the range of practical needs women have, but also strategising to challenge the complex inequalities, including gender inequality, that create these practical needs in the first place. ActionAid believes that women are able to increase their collective power and change their lives for the better through taking collective action, through groups and organisations. Yet opportunities for doing this are sometimes limited due to lack of time, resources, or an environment where there is a large transient population, where personal relationships and networks between women are less well-established and stable.

A development NGO can play a useful role in creating opportunities for women to come together to invest in their relationships with each other and foster a sense of solidarity and shared interests. ActionAid hopes to support women in Uganda to build their knowledge of their legal rights, and wider knowledge of mining law and policy, and to unite in solidarity with women from other countries facing similar issues in coming years. ActionAid supported women from Kampala Camp to visit Tanzania on an exposure and networking visit in 2015 and the impact of this encounter is being seen in a number of different ways discussed in this section.

Women have appreciated the information they obtain from ActionAid's *Oil in Uganda* newsletter which has been translated into Luganda and other Ugandan languages. They are able to learn about other women working in extractive industries, of ways to expand their businesses, and developments in mining law and policies. In other parts of Uganda ActionAid has involved women and men farmers in radio talkshows, and Ssingol Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association has suggested that this method could be used in the mining sector, to raise artisanal miners' issues, and influence and engage decision-makers on policy. The radio has a very wide reach, and is especially important for informing and involving women who may be unable to read and write.

Furthering livelihood opportunities using collective action

Many of women's concerns are to do with health and safety, but their first priority was to invest in their livelihoods. The Women's League has offered them opportunities to develop ideas as a group and consider collective business opportunities, and to develop and continue activities to increase their security as well as expanding their business activities through savings and loans. The Women's League offers potential for expanding women's business options through working collectively, and allowing them to increase their capital through savings groups.

An example of a business opportunity that women have identified is collecting waste in the camp and transforming that into briquettes for cooking. Food is cooked in the camp using a range of methods including firewood, charcoal, and gas, but many women depend on wood fires, despite deforestation in the area. The visitors to Tanzania from Kampala Camp saw women involved in briquette-making in Tanzania, and ActionAid has offered

support to them to pursue this idea, giving them training and purchasing machinery to make the briquettes. This enterprise is currently being piloted. Women also plan to grow maize and rear chickens to sell to miners in the camp.

Women shared that their collective savings were important to be able to access and invest capital in small income-generating activities as well as meeting basic needs for them, and their families. The saving scheme is also important to resist and protect against violence as they do not have to irritate men by continually asking them for money to meet the family's basic needs. Hinton *et al.* (2003, 13) also report that some forms of credit can result in bonded, precarious sex work or forced marriage and their savings scheme can protect them against this form of exploitation.

Influencing the law and policy changes on artisanal mining

The Government of Uganda is interested in legalising and regulating the artisanal gold mining industry, but artisanal miners are often reluctant to formalise their industry because of the costs they fear they will incur through licensing their activities, paying fees, rents, and taxes (Hinton and Levin 2010).

In early 2015, Ssingoo Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association applied for location licences as a first step in the process of the 'formalisation' of Kampala Camp. Women involved in our research were very excited about the location licences, because they saw strong potential benefits. The location licences will lead to a change in the relationship between the inhabitants of Kampala Camp and the state. The new formalised relationship will involve the obligation to pay taxes, but the state will then be accountable to taxpayers. Camp-dwellers will be able to demand government services for themselves and their families, including health and education. The Association members also reason that the location licences will lead to greater regulation of the environment, and health and safety considerations in the camp. For example, they want the areas where mercury is used to be fenced off. Regulation is seen as offering an opportunity to protect their property and allowing them to invest in longer-term improvements, including the re-organisation of the work areas in the camps.

If licensing is to lead to a positive social contract between the mineworkers and government, the government has to be able to be held accountable. To that end, the Women's League has joined the men in the Ssingoo Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association, in joint activities aiming to strengthen the relationship between government and artisanal miners to improve the efficiency and safety of the sector, and support decent livelihoods in artisanal mining.

One way in which the government can support improving mine efficiency and safety is by ploughing back some of the profits from mining into support to develop the sector (Hinton and Levy 2010). One national study suggested that in the case of Uganda, using 5 per cent of royalties⁴ to provide this support to the mining sector would allow for services including training, outreach, regulation, and data collection about artisanal mining to enable the sector to be responsibly managed and developed, to further improve mine efficiency and safety (Hinton 2009).

In 2003 the World Bank set up an artisanal mining project in Uganda, and specifically pointed out the importance of involving both women and men in training and outreach services (Hinton and Levin 2010). It also pointed out that the application for location licences is overly bureaucratic and costly. Issues with bureaucracy and cost will particularly block women from obtaining licences on their own.

In partnership with ActionAid and other civil society actors, the Ssingu Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association has been influencing and engaging government to reform current laws and policies around minerals. A major step forward was the joint drafting of a scorecard to rate the government's laws and policies around mining. It focuses on a number of areas which need strengthening: Policy and Legal Framework, Reporting Practices; Safeguards and Quality Control; and the creation of an Enabling Environment. However, there is agreement between all of us that in future, the scorecard could be made more useful by extending its focus from law and policy to implementation.

We also see a need to strengthen community input into the processes of monitoring and assessing progress against the scorecard – in particular, increasing the input of the women involved in artisanal mining and associated activities. In South Africa, ActionAid has worked with women in mining-affected communities. The women have contributed toward people-centred mining charters which outline their demands of the government and companies around mining law and practice.⁵

Health and safety

ActionAid is working with artisanal mining communities on the effects and impact of mercury, discussed earlier. Women and men in the mining camps have been provided with a basic set of gear and equipment which has protected them from direct skin exposure to mercury. They also piloted mercury retorts which reduce exposure to toxic fumes in the amalgamation process and allow improved recycling of the mercury. However, the retorts which ActionAid provided were found to be too small and the Ssingu Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association are searching for bigger versions in markets in Kampala.

One woman (Kampala Camp, March 2017) who has used the safety gear shared this view:

Now that I understand how important this safety gear is, I can now wash up to eight basins of gold dust without worrying about getting sick from exposure to mercury. Before, I used to develop itchy skin rashes but my hands are now covered with gloves and I have boots to protect my legs.

Techniques and technologies are available that can be used to eliminate mercury in gold processing (<https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/reducing-mercury-pollution-artisanal-and-small-scale-gold-mining>, last checked 25 September 2017). The miners also have plans to re-organise the camps, fencing off the areas where mercury is used to reduce exposure. However, with artisanal mining currently being unregulated and illegal, miners are less inclined to change and/or make these investments. Some residents in Kampala Camp consider the safety gear to be a waste of resources.

Attaining greater security via obtaining location licences would help to build a shared commitment to health and safety.

After their trip to Tanzania, miners have also installed structures that lower the risk of pits collapsing and killing the underground miners. Seven of the 50 pits in the camp have these structures at the time of writing this article, and Ssinga Small Scale and Artisanal Mining Association is hopeful that all 50 will have them eventually. They would also like miners from other areas in Uganda to view and then install them. While women do not work underground, they appreciate the installation of safer pits to protect their husbands, partners, and colleagues.

Violence against women

Women themselves have prioritised the issues of livelihoods and health and safety in the first period of work in Kampala Camp, and of course economic independence and a safer and more organised physical environment are both important factors in reducing women's risk of violence. However, far more needs to be done both to prevent violence – including challenging the social norms that cause acceptance of violence against women as natural and inevitable – and also to provide protection and support for survivors.

ActionAid operates ten women's protection shelters across Uganda and five more are operated by other organisations (ActionAid 2017, 18). However, not one of them is funded by the Ugandan Government and the level of violence against women is shockingly high. ActionAid operates a protection shelter in Mubende Town close to Kampala Camp. Given the high level of violence against women in the camp, meetings could be organised in both the shelter and in the camp to determine if there are further ways to prevent violence and to respond to the needs of survivors.

This is an area where we plan to focus more in future, learning from other contexts in which women have taken collective action.

Conclusion

Women are active and important in the artisanal gold value chain. They occupy a range of positions including direct engagement with gold processing or supporting the chain through providing services. However, the idea of 'mining' as an activity is still strongly associated with the idea of a male miner extracting the minerals from the earth, and this stereotype obscures the reality of the many different activities associated with mining and the wider mineral industry, in which many women work.

This article has aimed to give a gender analysis of the significance of artisanal mining to the women in Kampala Camp. It highlighted how they value the freedom and income that the mining camp offers, which they cannot often obtain on their farms or their rural communities. However, they find their care needs – as individuals and as carers for their own dependents – are unmet in an environment that is unregulated and where the state is generally absent and does not provide the basic and essential health, education, water,

sanitation, and hygiene needs that they have. Women may become stronger economically as a result of their work in the camp but they will continue to face violence and exploitation, and are exposed to unsafe conditions. In addition, many women remain dependent on male income in the camp, in their intimate relationships with men, ranging from marriage to a miner to transactional sex. Women's groups can offer savings and loans activities that are particularly important to help lessen the risk of sexual exploitation and violence.

We pointed out the support that women are giving for current activities to increase and strengthen the voices of artisanal mining communities in national and local government spaces where mineral extraction laws and policies are decided. Women, like men, want location licensing and other changes that will make their lives in artisanal camps more secure and stable. It is important for the women to organise and be more deeply engaged in influencing policy and law so that their opinions are valued and their specific issues are addressed. Collective action is critical – both within mining communities, and between women specifically in these communities. We have suggested that exposure visits to women in other artisanal camps are important for solidarity, confidence building, and to develop their own vision for the future.

Notes

1. The Gini index or Gini coefficient is a statistical measure of distribution. It varies between 0 per cent or 0, which represents perfect equality and in the case of income would mean that everyone has the same income, and 100 per cent or 1, which is perfect inequality. In the case of income perfect inequality would be where one person earned income and the rest of the country earned nothing.
2. ActionAid Uganda website: <http://www.actionaid.org/uganda> (last checked 25 September 2017).
3. For more information on the Minamata Global Treaty, please see <http://www.mercuryconvention.org/> (last checked 25 September 2017).
4. To find out more about this South African work, please see pmg.org.za/files/170628actionaid_Declaration.docx (last checked 25 September 2017).
5. A royalty is a payment to the owner of mineral rights for the privilege of extracting the mineral from the ground based on a lease agreement. The royalty payment is based on a portion of earnings from production and varies depending on the type of mineral and the market conditions.

Notes on contributors

Ivan Mpagi is people for change and capacity building officer but is currently acting as manager for extractives work in ActionAid Uganda. Postal address: ActionAid Uganda, Plot 2514/2515 Gaba Road, Kansanga, PO Box 676 Kampala, Uganda. Email: Ivan.mpagi@actionaid.org

Flavia Nalubega is the sub-editor of *Oil in Uganda*.

Beatrice Ongode works in extractive work at ActionAid Uganda.

Sally Henderson is Programme Manager Women Rights and Economic Justice in ActionAid Australia.

Harriet Gimbo Robinah is Director Programmes ActionAid Uganda.

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