



Extractives Hub



Addressing Gender Inequalities in the Mining Sector

Dr Victoria R. Nalule*

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Centre for Energy, Petroleum
and Mineral Law and Policy
University of Dundee

* Victoria Nalule, PhD (Dundee), Research Fellow, Extractives Hub, Centre for Energy Petroleum Mineral Law and Policy (CEPMLP), University of Dundee, UK. Email, v.r.z.nalule@dundee.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

Addressing gender inequality and the global efforts to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has been evidenced in different parts of the globe. Although women's participation in different sectors has improved in recent years, in the mining sector, one can arguably say that gender equality is still a myth. The sector has historically and up-to-now, is still labelled masculine. This is despite the continuous active role of women in the various stages of the mining life-span. This dire state has attracted various initiatives and literature on the nexus between gender and the extractive industries (oil, gas and mining). Albeit, not much focus has been directed singularly to the mining sector's impact on the achievement of SDG 5, on gender equality. This short paper, therefore, analyses the unique negative impacts of the mining sector to women. Therefore, the paper highlights the various ways to ensure the achievement of SDG 5 in the mining sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality is a recognized goal at the national, regional and international level as stipulated in SDG 5.¹ From the economic perspective, gender equality entails equal opportunities and equal pay among men and women; socially and politically, it entails women having equal roles and responsibilities.² Whereas some countries, especially in the developed world, are making good progress in achieving SDG 5 in all sectors, other countries, especially in the developing world, still have a long way to go. This discrepancy among countries in SDG 5 is often attributed to the cultural, traditional and religious practices and beliefs that exist in different countries.³ Similarly, achieving gender equality globally in all economic sectors presents various issues. This is because, some sectors such as education and medicine are more receptive to the inclusion of women, while other sectors such as the mining sector are predominately male-dominated. It is against this stark background that this paper assesses the progress of SDG 5 on gender equality in the mining sector.

The main questions to be addressed in this paper are:

1. How are women affected by mining activities?;
2. Why is there a gender gap between men and women in the mining sector?; and
3. What can be done to improve on the involvement of women in the mining sector?

In addressing the questions above, the chapter employs a three-step framework in the form of sections. Section one is the introduction. It analyses the meaning of gender equality and how it impacts other SDGs; Section two highlights how mining activities affect women; section three gives the concluding remarks and recommendations to ensure gender equality in the mining sector.

¹ Internationally, there are various instruments including: The Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the Beijing Platform for Action; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)

² Nalule, V.R. Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls. In Mining, Materials, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2020 Oct 14 (pp. 39-50). CRC Press

³ Ibid.

1.1 What is gender equality and how does it impact other SDGs?

Often people mistake gender equality to infer sameness between men and women. This is not true considering the visible physical differences and capabilities between the two sexes. Rather, gender equality is more concerned about men and women accessing the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities across all sectors of society. In this respect, therefore, we can measure gender equality by looking at men and women's representation in different roles.⁴

Gender equality is a human rights issue, and it is vital in ensuring sustainable development and the achievement of all the other SDGs. This, therefore, explains why initiatives to achieve gender equality are now more than ever expressly supported in the national legislations and international instruments. Equality of all humans, including males and females, is enshrined in international instruments and emphasized in national legislations. For instance, Article 21 of the Constitution of Uganda is to the effect that all people are equal before the law irrespective of their gender. The article states that,

"(1) All persons are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and in every other respect and shall enjoy equal protection of the law.

(2) Without prejudice to clause (1) of this article, a person shall not be discriminated against on the ground of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion or disability".

The above provision clearly emphasizes the equality of all human beings in all spheres of life. In the mining sector, to ensure gender equality, emphasis must be put on ensuring that women have access to the necessary education, training, and participation as men. They must be included in the negotiations of mining agreements and in all the various stages of the mining sector.

International organizations have been the main driver for gender equality campaigns. Several programs have been set up to ensure adherence to gender equality requirements in the extractive industry. A case in point is the World Bank's Gender and Extractive

⁴ Measuring gender equality requires consistent statistics. In the EU for instance, Eurostat publishes gender statistics covering different sectors including education, health, labour market just to mention but a few. This can be accessed at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_statistics

Industries Program. The UN also takes gender equality very seriously and encourages member countries to include women in the oil, gas and mining sectors.⁵

There are also various initiatives at a regional and international level. For instance, besides prioritising gender equality in EU laws, institutions have been set up at the regional level aimed at addressing gender issues. A case in point is the EU regional organization where, the European Institute for Gender Equality was established, and this is involved in various initiatives including establishing an online Glossary of gender mainstreaming concepts and definitions.⁶ Gender indexes are also used to measure gender equality in various sectors. For example, there are several gender indexes that exist including, the Social Watch Gender index;⁷ the EU Gender Equality Index;⁸ the United Nations Gender Inequality Index.⁹ Additionally, in 2016, the World Economic Forum introduced the Global Gender Gap Report aimed at highlighting gender-based disparities in different sectors.¹⁰

The UN through its trackers for SDGs, identified 9 targets and 14 indicators for SDG 5. Basically, the targets are aimed at identifying the goal, while the indicators represent metrics to track whether the targets are achieved or not.¹¹ Some of the UN indicators are highlighted in the table below:

Table 1: Selected UN Indicators

Legal frameworks for gender equality and non-discrimination
Violence against women from an intimate partner
Time spent on unpaid domestic and care work
Women in political positions
Equal rights to land ownership

⁵ UNDP, UN calls for equal opportunities for women in the extractives sector in Mozambique (posted online on June 6, 2016). This can be accessed at

<http://www.mz.undp.org/content/mozambique/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/06/06/un-calls-for-equal-opportunities-for-women-in-the-extractives-sector-in-mozambique-.html>

⁶ This can be accessed at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/concepts-and-definitions>. A similar glossary was compiled by the Council of Europe and this can be accessed at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/publications>

⁷ This can be accessed at <http://www.socialwatch.org/taxonomy/term/527>

⁸ This can be accessed at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2015/IE>

⁹ This can be accessed at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index>

¹⁰ The 2018 Global Gender Gap Report can be accessed at <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

¹¹ This can be accessed at <https://sdg-tracker.org/gender-equality>

The author notes that there remains a lot to be done in order to achieve gender equality. For instance, in table 1 above, with respect to the indicator on legal framework, there are several questions to be addressed such as whether it is the case that:

- the law mandate equal pay for males and females?;
- legislation explicitly criminalize marital rape?;
- married men and women have equal rights to property and land?; and
- the law mandate paid or unpaid maternity leave?

The above questions are indeed necessary, but how do we incorporate these in the mining sector? Most mining legislations do not explicitly mention the need for equality among men and women in the sector. Additionally, we note that most mining communities are occupied by miners who in most cases lack advanced training or education. Another issue worth noting is that often the mining licenses are granted to men. In Tanzania for instance, data shows that in 2020, out of the 1,400 ASM licenses granted to miners in Geita Region, only 66 of the licenses were held by women, 256 licenses are owned by mining groups of both men and women, and the rest of the 1,078 licenses are held by men.¹²

In this respect therefore, we need to ensure that, besides the international and national legislations, the local and community laws should adequately address gender inequality in the mining sectors. These laws should also ensure that women have access to alternative agricultural and farming land in the effect they must relocate due to mining activities. The next sub-section will briefly explore the impact of SDG 5 on the achievement of other SDGs.

1.2: How SDG 5 on gender equality impacts/is impacted by other SDGs

Goal 7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizes access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Energy is essential in the economic development as it is used in our everyday life for cooking, lighting, heating, transport, and healthcare just to mention but a few. We note that most of the mining sector challenges are in some way attributed to the lack of adequate modern energy. Moreover, there are now various initiatives to ensure utilization of renewables in mining (critical minerals).¹³

¹² See, EALS Policy Paper on Harmonization of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in the East African Community.

¹³ Nalule, V.R., Mining and the Law in Africa: Exploring the social and environmental impacts. Springer Nature.

The link between energy and gender equality is more visible in developing countries like those in Asia and Africa. This is mainly due to these countries' traditions and cultures, making women significant users of energy resources in local communities. Women are mostly involved in social work such as cooking and other domestic work; this implies that these women experience energy challenges differently and more severely from their male counterparts. Estimates indicate that women spend on average 1.4 hours a day collecting fuelwood and four hours for cooking.¹⁴ This is indeed one of the reasons why some scholars have argued that access to energy is gendered.¹⁵ Therefore, ensuring access to modern energy has the potential to improve the livelihoods of several women who depend on these energy resources for their day-to-day activities in developing countries, and as such contributes to achieving the SDG target of gender equality.

Other SDGs, including Goal 4 on quality education, are also linked to gender equality. Unlike in developed countries where girls and boys have equal opportunities to go to schools, in some developing countries, girls are often discouraged from taking up higher education, mainly due to cultural and traditional beliefs. Some tribes and cultures require girls to get married at an early age, and as such, they never get a chance to acquire the education they need. Additionally, due to their social roles, girls miss school because they must stay home to help with family chores, including cooking, farming just to mention but a few. Therefore, the link between gender and education lies in the fact that we cannot achieve quality education for all if women are not given a chance to attain this education. There are indeed more links between SDG 5 and the other SDGs including 1 on poverty eradication; 2 on hunger eradication; 3 on good health just to mention but a few.

There are various issues to discuss concerning gender equality; this short paper, however, focuses on gender equality in the mining sector's perspective; this is analyzed in the next section.

¹⁴ Nalule, V.R., 2019. Energy Access in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Energy Poverty and Access Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 21-39). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

¹⁵ Ibid.

2. GENDER AND MINING: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

2.1. Nexus between gender and mining

The mining sector is increasingly becoming very important, considering the escalating demand for critical minerals which are used in renewable energy systems globally. Mining refers to the act of removing substances such as coal or metal from the ground.¹⁶ In this short paper, gender inequality in the mining sector will be discussed drawing examples from African countries.

The mining sector is essential in the economic development of many resource-rich African countries as it has the potential to finance infrastructural developments which are much needed in Africa. This is because various minerals are used as raw materials in different sectors, including construction and transport. Most importantly, mineral materials also play an essential role in industrialization and urbanization, which are now rapidly escalating on the continent. Africa is home to 30% of mineral reserves, and these significantly contribute to exports and tax revenues for most countries on the continent.¹⁷

In understanding the extent of gender inequality in the mining sector, we must note that mining is carried out on both large-scale and small-scale. In this respect, therefore, the challenges women face depend on the type of mining involved. While large-scale mining (LSM) involves companies, which employ advanced technology and enormous capital to extract minerals, artisanal mining or small-scale mining (ASM) on the other hand involves the use of rudimentary methods by individuals whom a mining company does not officially employ.¹⁸

Unlike LSM, ASM attracts a significant number of women in the sector. In the table below, we highlight the challenges women face in ASM.

¹⁶ Cambridge Online Dictionary, Cambridge University Press, 2021. This can be accessed at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mining>

¹⁷ Nalule, V.R., 2020. Introduction to Mining in Africa. In Mining and the Law in Africa (pp. 1-17). Palgrave Pivot, Cham.

¹⁸ Hilson, G., Goumandakoye, H., and Diallo, P., 2019. Formalizing Artisanal Mining 'Spaces' in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Niger. Land Use Policy, 80, pp. 259-268.

Table 2: Challenges women face in ASM¹⁹

Economic challenges such as lack of finance to invest in ASM projects; protective gears; modern equipment and machinery
Social challenges such as traditional and cultural expectations which in most cases deny women a right fully participate
Political challenges such as being victims of wars in mineral rich countries

As illustrated in the table above, the challenges women face in ASM can be categorised into 3, including economic challenges; social challenges and political challenges.

Economically, women have no access to finances, limiting them from acquiring the land, machinery and equipment needed in ASM activities. Additionally, the lack of finances has forced many women to work without the necessary protective gears, which has exposed them to dangerous diseases. A case in point is salt mining and gold mining. I had a chance of visiting both the gold and salt ASM sites in Uganda. For gold mining, the use of mercury was evident by all the miners, especially women.²⁰ One striking feature is how most women involved in ASM did not have protective gears such as gloves and boots. For instance, in the salt mines I visited in Katwe, Uganda, most women involved in salt mining did not have boots or gloves. They explained that lack of such protective gears was associated with various health impacts, including being exposed to ammonium gas which negatively impacted their private parts, exposing them to various dangerous diseases.²¹

Socially, the cultural and traditional expectations from women hinder their active participation in the mining sector. For instance, in some cultures in Africa, women are not allowed to get involved in certain mining stages, including the digging of ores; sale of minerals. In some cultures, it is believed that it is bad luck for a woman to be involved in the first and last mining stage. Additionally, such activities have often been labelled as "men's work". This, therefore, undermines the role of women in ASM even though women play a significant role in the sector. Even though few women are seen digging pits, they are often involved in other essential activities in mining communities including catering, laundry, cleaning and many other goods and service provision around ASM. Women are also

¹⁹ Extracted from Nalule, V.R. Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls. In Mining, Materials, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2020 Oct 14 (pp. 39-50). CRC Press

²⁰ See the video that the author recorded from the gold mining site in Uganda. This is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuWmudeSz_A

²¹ For an overview of the impact of salt mining to women in Uganda, watch the video I recorded from the field. This is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKFP6DswMrM&t=491s>

involved in other mining stages, including processing, delivery, and some do get involved in the metals' exploration and mining. We note that mining practices have long been an area of gendered work, and women have long been involved. The role of women in the mining sector is well documented, for instance, two women in Ghana are celebrated for their influence in the country's sector before colonization and the introduction of machinery in the mining sector.²²

The above notwithstanding, there is a need to advocate for women's strong participation in the whole cycle of mining and related activities from exploration to consumption. We also note women's domestic roles, including cooking, raising children, looking after the household just to mention but a few. Besides making it hard for women to be actively involved in ASM, these domestic roles have also made it hard for some women to acquire the necessary education and training that are essential in taking up some formal jobs in the mining sector.

Politically, women have often been victims of rape in war-torn resource-rich areas where rape is sometimes used as a weapon of war. The mining sector is generally characterized by gender-based violence, especially in intense conflict countries such as the DRC. Rape is often used as a tool to oppress the local communities. Most people see gender in a natural sense; hence they naturally view men as masculine and women as feminine.²³ This has escalated gender-based violence as women are viewed as weaker sex and an easy target for political violence. Additionally, some countries' political unwillingness to amend all the relevant laws to favour women also makes it impossible for women to benefit in the mining sector.

There are indeed various issues that have barred women from gaining from the mining sector. It is imperative to note that, despite the barriers outlined above, women are involved in all the processes of mining, including production and marketing; however, these roles remain invisible. For instance, traditionally, as evidenced in India, women worked closely with men in the mining sector, such as coal just as they did in the plantations.²⁴ Women's

²² Akurang-Parry K.O. (2006) Making a Difference in Colonial Interventionism in Gold Mining in Wassa Fiase, Gold Coast (Ghana): The Activism of Two Women, 1874-1893. In: Gier J.J., Mercier L. (eds.) Mining Women. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

²³ See, Macdonald, C. 'The Role of Gender in the Extractives Industries', WIDER Working Paper 2017/52. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER (2017). This is available at <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/role-gender-extractives-industries>

²⁴ Lahiri-Dutt, K., 2007. Roles and status of women in extractive industries in India: Making a place for a gender-sensitive mining development. *Social Change*, 37(4), pp.37-64.

contribution in and around the mines is currently visible on-site, and it demolishes the myth that the mining sector is male-dominated. The traditional reference to mining as a male-dominated sector is understandable because mining is risky and hazardous, and as such most people think it is suited for men. It is mostly men who go down in the mines risking their lives to feed their families, this has therefore created strong solidarity among the miners, and it is traditionally attributed the manual labour by the miners as being masculine. The isolation, risks and solidarity of earlier mines have endowed the manual labour with attributes of masculinity. In this respect, there are various issues that policymakers must continue addressing if women are to equally benefit from the mining sector.

3. CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE MINING SECTOR

There are various issues associated with gender and mining, as highlighted in the previous section. Several initiatives on the local, national, regional and international level have been taken in different countries to generally address gender inequality in all sectors. In the mining sector, the issue of gender has been put at the forefront. Nevertheless, not much progress is seen to practically ensure that women do equally benefit from the mining sector as men. In this respect, therefore, there is a need for more practical solutions as highlighted in the table below:

Table 3: Practical solutions

Sensitizing mining communities, organizations, government ministries about the need for equal opportunities in the mining sector
It is essential to understand the social, historical and traditional influences which are likely to have an impact on gender equality in the mining sector.
There is need for more debate on how to further include women in the mining production process.
Involve women in the negotiation of mining projects at the local level
Amend all the relevant laws including land laws to ensure that they put women at the forefront
Focus on practical initiatives that do actively involve women in the mining communities

As highlighted above, there is an urgent need to embrace practical solutions in tackling gender inequalities in the mining sector.

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