

Women miners suffer 'shocking injustice'

By John Agaba

Women continue to get sidelined at work in Uganda despite affirmative action, according to surveys.

However, when it comes to women in the mining sector, the injustice is even more glaring.

A new report by Development Research and Social Policy Analysis Centre reveals shocking injustices women miners persevere under the tunnels – from being rejected by men after they have fathered children with them to being told day and night that they are not “home makers” and to earning very little compared to their male counterparts.

"The survey shows discrimination in its worst form," consultant Jennifer Hinton said.

"It is very unfortunate that women who do the bulk of the work (in this artisanal mining) are paid the least while male middlemen take all the money."

Away from the disparity in pay cheque vis-à-vis work input, the report presented at the Lake Victoria Serena

Kigo, vividly demonstrated the dangers women miners suffer when under the tunnels digging for the minerals.

"In some cases, the women go 40ft under. The tunnel walls are ricking. They do not have support. At times it rains and they have to manually empty the water out — those who do not have pumps," the report said.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ In some cases, the women go 40ft under. The tunnel walls are weak. They do not have support. At times it rains and they have to manually empty the water out – those who do not have pumps

Prof. Abby Sebina, an anthropologist, while presenting the survey findings, said labour authorities needed to pay more attention to the "alarming work environments in mining areas."

A team of researchers explored women's livelihoods in the artisanal and small scale

mining of 3Ts (tin, tantalum, tungsten), and gold within the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

The study explored dynamics in and around two mine sites in each country to reveal how gender inequality limits women's contributions and potential as economic and social actors within the artisanal sector.

In addition, the research team examined how initiatives, policies, regulations and laws fail to acknowledge the gender inequalities within mining communities, making women even more vulnerable.

In Uganda, the team explored injustices women miners in Mubende district face as they attempt to make a living through extraction of gold. The other sites explored were the tin mines in Isingiro district in southwestern Uganda.

"Women are an essential part of artisanal mining, taking on roles from panning and processing, to trading goods and services," Sebina said.

"They rely on the income from this informal mining economy to support their households and dependents,"



The acting permanent secretary of Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, Robert Kasande, chats with Hinton as other delegates look on. This was at Lake Victoria Serena Kigo last week. Photo by Ramadhan Abbey

he added.

Among those surveyed, women were much more likely than men to be unmarried and most have dependent children.

In one small-scale site, company records showed that nearly two out of three female mine workers were unmarried and/or the head of their households.

Overall, 55% of women identified as unmarried (single, widowed, divorced or not

cohabiting) compared to 37% of men. Ninety-one percent of women had children under the age of 18.

The strikingly high number of single women and single mothers results from stigma and discrimination.

Single mothers said they faced condemnation in their communities and started working at the mine site because of poverty.

Research assistant Joy Zawede said the women stayed in shacks for homes. They had more workloads, but got paid little compared to the men.

Mariam Nakacwa, a woman miner in Mubende, said the environment "gets worse" when it rains and the holes are filled with water, narrating the rigorous process they brave to extract the jewels.

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