



ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINING

Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

KEY MESSAGES

- ◊ ASM’s contribution to development requires a holistic approach to formalization which is inclusive of different classes of ASMs and invests in technical, financial and marketing support.
- ◊ ASM’s positive impacts are especially significant at the community level, where state efforts should be focussed.
- ◊ Gender equity in accessing ASM economic opportunities should be promoted by stronger coordination among government departments focused on women, mining and community development.

INTRODUCTION

Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) is the primary source of livelihood for millions of people across Southern Africa. Yet it remains characterized by precarious access to mineralized sites, high dependence on outsourced basic services, and weak access to affordable finance. The sector has also been plagued by negative environmental, social, and health-related impacts of informal extraction. While governments’ resource nationalist policies have frequently expressed support for ASM, regulatory frameworks have often continued to criminalise ASM activity.

Table 1: Number of ASM Miners and Dependents

Country	ASM Miners	ASM Dependents
Tanzania	1,500,000	9,000,000
Zambia	600,000	3,600,000
Zimbabwe	1,000,000	6,000,000

Sources: IGF. 2017; Tychsens et al. 2022; Musukwaa 2023.

KEY ISSUES

The resource nationalism literature reveals tensions between national development and local-level community improvement. There is little consensus on ASM’s contribution to development, as the negative environmental and social impacts of ASM felt at local level conflict with a rising emphasis on boosting central government revenue. Some argue that ASM has direct positive impacts on communities through employment creation, stimulation of local economies, and skills development. Others contend that ASM traps workers in a cycle of poverty. Formalization is central in ASM debates and policy-making. Facilitating ASM’s formalization is currently global ‘best practice’, however modalities differ widely, and definitions and regulation of ‘artisanal’ versus ‘small-scale’ mining

remain contested. While some formalization strategies attempt to be inclusive, others prioritize more capable, capitalized, and organized miners. Unequal gender dynamics also inflect ASM operators’ access to mining opportunities and financial benefits, and often lead to gendered power gaps in economic decision-making.

KEY FINDINGS

Our research on ASM featured fieldwork in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe and included the amethyst, tanzanite, copper, and gold sub-sectors.

Gender, Community Development, and Empowerment

Findings from gemstone mines in Mapatizya, Zambia found that the gemstone sector is economically dominant in the local community. However, unequal gender participation has given rise to significant gender gaps. While women are actively engaged in ASM they are paid less than men. But women gemstone traders report exercising control over their own income and see their status as enhanced by ASM involvement.

In ASM gold sites in Zimbabwe, women typically hold precarious, low-level positions. While informants saw gendered patterns of economic marginalization as being partly linked to the physical demands of underground mining, they also highlighted the impact of the wider economic marginalization of women in Zimbabwean society in setting a context for ASM.

In Tanzania’s Merelani tanzanite mining area, our research found low levels of support to local community projects from ASM. Instead, ASM contributes to development through market transactions and private investments. In this context, while women are involved in marginal mining activities they have opportunities as tanzanite brokers.

ASM's role in 'community empowerment' remains hotly contested, with communities and government often holding, and promoting, contradictory visions. Our case study of Black Mountain, a copper slag dump in Kitwe, Zambia, underscores the contrasting approaches of government-endorsed contracted cooperative mining, and ASM demands for direct access by ASM and small commercial operators. It remains unclear if promotion of alternative livelihoods through cooperatives is likely to lead to empowerment.

Formalization

Formalization and incorporation of ASM into national mining strategies are recurring themes in resource nationalist discourses. Yet rhetorical appeals have mostly been unmatched by regulatory innovations.

Zimbabwe was an early pioneer of ASM formalization. However, due to poor coordination and limited capacity among multiple government departments with ASM responsibilities, miners report little contact with the government, onerous overlapping regulations, and insufficient training. The primary impediment to meaningful formalization in Zimbabwe is lack of political will, partly due to the involvement of politically-linked actors in the lucrative informal ASM gold trade. Formalization is seen as threatening accumulation gleaned through inconsistent regulation. Enforcement of ASM regulations remains selective.

In Zambia, the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development lacks resources and manpower to comprehensively oversee and enforce formalization. The state offers financial support, but through other ministries tailored toward supporting small- and medium-scale enterprises. As in other countries, fees required for registering ASM operations are typically beyond the reach of most informal miners.

The formalization of small-scale mechanised mining (SSM) has been more consistent owing to SSM's more consistent licensing of land claims and operating permits. Despite recognition of SSM's development potential and its contribution to greater local

participation, state measures enabling SSMs' expansion have fallen short of miners' needs. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, state facilities for SSM short-term financing, training and other services have been insufficiently funded and implemented. However, in Tanzania, state administration of SSM and large scale mining was consolidated in 2017 under the Mining Commission, resulting in the establishment of more than 40 mineral markets and 90 mineral trade centres. Improved monitoring saw SSM gold deliveries and revenue sharply increase during 2019–2023. Across the region recalibration of ASM regulations is required to account for the diversity of capacities and needs in the sector. Informants suggested formalization should include different measures for diverse ASM subsectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◇ Governments need to establish clearer, consistent and strategic approaches to support ASM's community empowerment potential, and work to transparently build an inclusive national political consensus around this goal.
- ◇ A transformational approach to formalization must address ASM legalisation, capitalisation and support services, and include measures to mitigate ASM gender gaps around access to land, training, credit and equipment.
- ◇ The importance of state investments in administrative and marketing capacity is demonstrated by interventions in Tanzania and Zambia. Expanded institutional capacity and reshaped regulatory instruments are needed for the wider inclusion of ASM within national resource nationalist strategies.

REFERENCES

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