

Artisanal Diamond Mining in Ghana: A Gendered Perspective

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Diamond mining significantly contributes to the economies of several developing countries, particularly across parts of West and Southern Africa. It is thus important for the development community to recognize the role that mining can play in reducing poverty and encouraging positive change. While diamond mining is often the economic pursuit of men, women are both directly and indirectly involved in the industry and in considering poverty reduction through the lens of the Millennium Development Goals, specifically the third, regarding the promotion of gender equality, it is of value to investigate artisanal diamond mining from a gendered perspective.ⁱ

Artisanal diamond mining in Ghana is in many ways atypical, but nevertheless offers important lessons to the development community. It is uncharacteristic of other diamond producing countries because these minerals do not account for a substantial part of the national economy. However, Ghana represents a developing country in transition, with an increasingly diverse economy and growing middle class that continues to struggle with basic human security issues. The country shares much in common with its neighbors, but also exists as an example of a possible future scenario for other lesser developed diamond producing countries.

A Diamond Producer Not Dominated by Diamonds Agriculture & Other Minerals

Ghana's national economy is not driven by artisanal diamond mining to the same extent as its diamond producing neighbors, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, whereby these countries report production in US dollars per carats of \$266.05 and \$210.43, respectively, compared to Ghana's \$28.70 per carat in 2008.ⁱⁱ ¹ Agricultural products make up 44 per cent of Ghana's exports, where as mining only comprises 3. Within this figure, mining gold, and to a lesser extent, bauxite and manganese have become more important to the Ghanaian economy than diamonds, primarily because of stronger (though still limited, relative to agriculture and fisheries) government promotion and support, at both large and small scale levels.ⁱⁱⁱ

Transition: Diamonds to Gold

A transition towards artisanal gold mining away from diamond mining is also occurring because it is widely perceived at the local level that Ghana is running out of diamonds, because the source of its surface stones has never been located.^{iv} Statistics from the Kimberley Process office in Akwatia, Ghana's primary diamond mining town, supports this local observation, with production figures declining by about half between 2007 and

¹ Note: Production figures are as follows for 2008: Ghana 643,289.21; Sierra Leone 371,260.95; Liberia 47,006.50 (Source: KP Statistics, <https://mmsd.mms.nrcan.gc.ca/kimberleystats/publicstats.asp>) While I realize that you were looking for production statistics, in this section, I'm not sure that this raw stat paints the most accurate picture, given that SL and Liberian diamonds are of so much higher value, and thus a more significant part of the nation economy. What would be best is a figure that indicates the percentage of GDP that could be attributed to diamond/mineral production, but I have been unable to locate such a figure, perhaps you might be able to help?

2008.^v While there is always the possibility for new discovery and surface diamonds continue to be found, bought and sold on a daily basis, the declining abundance and quality of Ghanaian diamonds, coupled with the softening of international prices due to the current global recession, has pushed more men and women alike to transition into small-scale gold mining, created new and unique challenges.

The lottery-like nature of artisanal diamond mining makes any transition away from mining, difficult because there remains a continued hope that the next days rains will reveal a stone underfoot large enough to fetch a value equivalent to months of farming or fishing. While interviews with the Akwatia community reveal that gold mining is undesirable because it is considered physically harder work compared to searching for diamonds it is widely understood as the only source of employment guaranteed to provide a decent and somewhat regular income, and thus artisanal gold mining represents Akwatia's 'emerging' economy, rather than a transition into agriculture.^{vi}

Ghana Consolidated Diamonds Ltd.

During the town's height of production, both men and women could be found digging or searching for diamonds along the roadsides, in fields or on the large swath of land owned partially by the national government, known as the GCD, or Ghana Consolidated Diamonds Ltd. This is a feature of artisanal mining unique to Ghana –most of the diamond production occurs on privately owned land, which, in the past, employed the majority of the town as either diggers or support personnel, and as a result, land claims and distribution schemes do not feature prominently as concerns or challenges for this community, unlike reports emerging from Sierra Leone.^{vii}

The insolvency of the GCD two years ago has significantly changed the landscape in Akwatia though. Many have left in search of work mining gold in nearby towns, or other opportunities elsewhere. In many cases, men abandon their families permanently, moving away for work or to avoid the pressure to provide when their key source of income, diamonds, has declined in abundance and value so dramatically. Women too, where able, have left Akwatia, but this is less common because gender roles dictate women as primary caregivers and thus responsible for raising and keeping their children.

The Women of Ghana's Diamond Town

Women's roles and position in society in Akwatia vary significantly and are currently in transition, given the decline of diamonds in Ghana. Several women owned land and employed diggers to work it for them, as well as were involved in buying and selling diamonds. Women also have multiple supportive roles, beyond working in the diamond industry, which includes keeping the household, raising the children and selling small goods and foodstuffs to ensure a regular, if minimal, income for the family.

Those women who owned land or were involved in diamond dealing have been able to transition into an alternative livelihood, in some cases opting to use their land for gold mining or to grow palms for oil. In other instances, these women have used land as collateral to take on new roles as sellers of foodstuffs and household goods, or have purchased sewing machines to make and mend clothing. Women who were formerly

employed as support staff at the GCD, such as in secretarial positions, have perhaps been the most fortunate, because this kind of work supplied them with individual incomes as well as useful skill sets that could be more easily applied outside the diamond mining industry specifically.

The Tailings Women

Those women who formed the bottom of the diamond supply chain are not faring as well however. Many were part of the 800 employees left without work when the GCD closed in August of 2007.^{viii} These individuals are known as the ‘tailings’ women because they search carefully through dirt that has been previously picked over by the male diggers who still search independently, both on GCD and privately owned surrounding land. The dirt used to be free approximately 10 years ago, but today, the women must purchase the dirt, which is usually done on credit. In the hierarchy of diamond dealers in Akwatia, the smallest-scale dealers will work directly with the tailings women, often providing the dirt, buckets and sieves on credit in exchange for exclusivity over the diamonds found by the tailings women.

In many ways, this is considered to be the best possible arrangement for both parties. While the women acknowledge that they face daily concerns about their ability to pay for food, clean drinking water and school fees, they stick to searching the tailings because they feel it is a guaranteed, though minimal, source of income, as well as a guaranteed means to ‘purchase’ most items on credit, including food. Additionally, the tailings women work from their homes or courtyards, allowing them to watch over their children and keep the household simultaneously, which could not be accomplished if they were traveling daily for alternative work in a nearby town.

It is further important because many of the poorest women in Akwatia, particularly the tailings women, are socially ostracized by the rest of the community because of their position in society. The established relationship with the small-scale dealers is important because it is often the only connection these women have to the rest of the community, with the dealers acting as conduits. For the small-scale dealers who lack the capital to move up as dealers on the supply chain, the relationship is beneficial because it ensures a constant source of diamonds to resell and thus a guaranteed income for them as well. In many ways, this relationship can be described as a traditional patron-client, as it is symbiotic and mutually supportive.^{ix}

Unintended Consequences: The Downside of the Tailings Relationship

At the same time however, this kind of relationship is problematic because of the cycles of dependency that are created. The ‘credit’ system means that unless women ‘find the big one’, which they are unlikely to do given that the soil has already been searched, they will not pay off their debts. Since the ‘debts’ do not necessarily have a fixed monetary value and are provided primarily by the small-scale dealer who works directly with the women, they do not have an option to sell to another dealer in hopes of negotiating a better price.

This dependency is specific to the tailings women. Small-scale male diggers independently find stones, bring them to Akwatia's central diamond trading market, the 'Belgian Market,' and attempt to sell their stone. While they do not have much influence on the price per carat either, they do have the ability to bargain, speak to multiple dealers and walk away if they are unsatisfied with the price being offered on a particular day. The tailings women give over their diamonds to the small-scale dealers without bargaining, and without visiting the Belgian Market, primarily because they cannot leave their household unsupervised. These women are not being undercut on the value of the diamond finds per se, as the relationship is formed based on mutual trust and agreement, but the dependency on one or two small-time dealers to connect with the Belgian Market and the rest of the community makes it difficult for these women to move beyond subsistence.

Additional Challenges for Women in Akwatia

Disappearing Men & Widowhood

A further challenge for these women, and many others in Akwatia, has become the burden of being the sole provider for their families. Given the decline in diamond production, many men have opted to leave the town in search of other work, often far away, essentially abandoning their families. More specific to the tailings women, the physically difficult nature of artisanal mining has left almost all of them prematurely widowed.

Expenses

As a result, women report that daily concerns include finding enough money on their own to provide their dependents with clean drinking water, food and education. Drinking water can be purchased for 5 peswes (0.007 USD) per 500ml container, while the average meal ranges from 20 peswes (0.30 USD) to 2 cedis (1.40 USD). Government schools are free to attend, but the uniform fee must be covered by the family, which amounts to 1.80 (1.25 USD) cedis per semester per child. These expenses must be considered in the context that the average individual in Ghana lives on roughly 2 USD per day.^x

Personal Savings & Credit

Even though school fees are minimal and clean drinking water can be purchased for pennies, many women experience a constant struggle to scrape by, as personal savings are non-existent or minimal, and income is dependent on finding a diamond. Additionally, because most items are bought on credit with the promise of 'selling' found stones to the small-scale dealers, most women, particularly those who are widowed, rarely have cash to purchase everyday items such as food. While GDP per capita per year for the country was 670 USD in 2008 the reality for many in Akwatia is significantly less, though this is hard to determine because of the extensive patron-client relationships and ad hoc credit-purchase systems.^{xi} Of the women interviewed for this piece, the majority had no personal savings and rely on family or 'brothers' and 'sisters' (patrons) to lend a few peswes for water or porridge.

Primary Concerns:

Education

Women in Akwatia, either currently or formerly involved in diamond mining, reported that their primary concern was their ability to find the money to keep their children in school in the required uniform. Education is highly valued in the area, and seen as the key to any future success, though in almost all cases, it was reported that this success lies outside of Akwatia. Similar to the sentiments of those in the dying mining towns of North America, residents of Akwatia see their community as that of turning into a ghost town with few opportunities.

Clean Water Access

Observation however suggests that the most pressing concern for both men and women in the area is the provision of clean drinking water. When the GCD was operational, it not only provided employment for the town, but acted as a mini-government, supplying all the services that would typically be the state's responsibility. The GCD functioned as an enclosed compound, set up by the British corporation C.A.S.T. in the 1930s, with the intention that everything would be provided for its workers –housing, dining rooms, recreation facilities, a school, a hospital, and a water treatment plant. The drinking water from the ground was supposed to be treated at the GCD Water Works and provided to the town. For many years this 'pipe water' was free, but approximately seven years ago, Akwatia's residents began paying a nominal fee to cover the cost of repairing and laying pipes, as well as purification. Currently, this fee sits at 20 peswes (0.30 USD) for 35 buckets of water. This water is well known by the townspeople as unsafe for drinking and most residents only use the 'pipe water' for cleaning, cooking and bathing. 'Pure water,' at 5 peswes (0.007 USD) per 500 ml bag, is affordable for most, but for those on the bottom rungs of society, particularly the tailings women, pure water remains out of reach.

Until recently, the pipe water was relatively safe for drinking but the insolvency of the GCD and the pressure to transition to gold mining has changed this, to a potentially dangerous effect. Despite officially shutting down operations, most workers continue to live and dig on the GCD lands independently, though a skeleton 'security' staff remains under retainer by the government. An unofficial agreement was made that this arrangement could continue because the workers had not been paid their wages for several months. As a result, the GCD Water Works is now run by one young man who is responsible for both water treatment and the security of the building. He has not been paid in four months and picks up odd jobs, mainly as a plumber, to buy food. The quality of the water treatment has necessarily declined because of a lack of staff, as well as insufficient monies to regularly purchase chlorine. A lack of oversight means that this problem within the Water Works continues.

Environmental Issues

In relation to this problem, gold is now being mined on GCD lands as part of Akwatia's transition away from the soft prices of diamonds, which has created serious health issues. Mercury is used to attract gold out of the soil, which is then washed. The gold is extracted and the mercury-laced water is pumped back out into the water table. The concern of mercury poisoning from drinking 'pipe water' runs quite high, according to local residents and staff at the nearby Sr. Dominic's Hospital. This is also damaging from

an environmental perspective, poisoning water tables, soils and ecosystems. The transition to gold mining is creating additional problems related to land degradation as well.

Local Reports:

Alcoholism, Drug Use & Domestic Violence

Additionally, national newspapers that have recently studied Akwatia report on the challenges presented by abandonment, alcoholism, drug use and domestic violence.^{xii} Interviews with local residents and observation confirm that alcoholism is in fact quite prevalent, as well as that abandonment and domestic violence are quite common, though not often publicly reported. These practices negatively and specifically affect women, in addition to the daily struggles and concerns already identified, primarily because of established notions regarding gender roles and responsibilities. For males, abandonment and alcoholism is frowned upon, but is nevertheless understood and accepted. Men have the ability to pick up and leave town when they are unable to provide for their family because they do not share the same kind of ‘direct’ responsibility to child rearing and keeping household. Additionally, men do not face the deep social stigma against excessive drinking. Similar behaviors, when adopted by women, are unacceptable and result in ridicule and ostracism. Thus, the impacts of alcoholism and abandonment tend to be felt more by women, as men are unofficially ‘allowed’ to continue such patterns of behavior. This behavior significantly increases the likelihood of domestic violence, which creates continual security threats for women in addition to daily concerns.^{xiii}

Suggestions When Considering Policy Development

Starting Points

Women face specific and unique challenges in developing countries, and thus policy must be tailored to their everyday realities, rather than remaining gender neutral. The strong and active women’s movement in Africa, specifically in Ghana, has done a great deal to advance this notion generally in government and international policy over the last 30 years, and it is thus an important to carry this knowledge over when specifically considering policy for artisanal diamond mining communities.

It is important to note, as has been previously addressed by Diamond Development Initiative’s Monica Gagnon in *Artisanal Diamond Mining and Gender –An Overview*, that women in diamond mining communities work in all areas of the industry: directly as diggers, dealers and land owners, as well as indirectly in supportive roles that allow men the ability to look for diamonds even though there is the possibility that some days they will not be successful in their search.^{xiv} Policies that acknowledge the variety of roles that women play, with specific attention to the often invisible supportive or indirect contributions made by women as keepers of the household, or small-item sellers (drinking water packs, local vegetables, used clothing) would likely be the most effective in the long term.

The Double Burden

Finally, policy should consider its own unintentional implications when placed in context and put into practice. Common roles, such as men as ‘breadwinner’ and woman as ‘household keeper,’ are quite strong and considered an important reflection of traditional divisions of labor. Policy that encourages women to move out of household roles and take advantage of microfinance schemes to start a small business for example, such as in the most recent national Poverty Reduction Strategy, must acknowledge that such policy inevitably creates an inadvertent double burden for women, because in the husband-wife household scenario, it is unlikely that the husband will begin to take on domestic duties or that keeping the house and family will cease to be a primarily female duty.

Social Security

New employment alternatives could result in women being stretched further, rather than be an ‘opportunity’ per se. In Ghana, national poverty reduction strategies, foreign aid and the development community focus significant attention on giving women more economic opportunities, specifically through microfinancing for entrepreneurial pursuits. As a developing country though, Ghana lacks the strong social safety nets that are in place in Europe and North America which gives some women the ability to function under this ‘double burden.’ There exists the danger that these policy directives will fail to help women in the long run, and may actually make their situation worse, by adding increase expectation and creating a new list of additional ‘duties,’ such as in Akwatia, where most women bring in small monies daily by selling foodstuffs and clothing.^{xv} Where the government is unable or fails to provide adequate social services, it is likely that women will continue to be primary caregivers and keepers of the household, in addition to any other roles they ‘choose’ to take on in order to earn income, either to supplement the husband’s earnings or as sole provider.

Widowhood

Additionally, the tendency to stereotype roles such as ‘breadwinner’ should be approached with caution, as the responsibilities of women and men may not always be so clear-cut. These role designations do little to address the burdens faced by widowed or abandoned women, who in the context of Akwatia, are struggling the most, yet remain invisible from a policy perspective. Policy that is conscious of existing gender roles and is sensitive to the implications of implementing policy within this context, as well as sensitive to those individuals who do not fit into the traditional gender roles will likely be the most successful in the long term.

Macro Challenges to be Tackled

There are two primary issues that are likely to make the development and implementation of future policy challenging: a lack of widespread ‘higher’ or complex literacy skills, and basic monetary management knowledge. Women who are able to move beyond basic subsistence often remain in limbo with enough income to get by, but never enough to guarantee security or save for the future. Future development policy would be most effective if it first attempted to address these two issues.

‘High Literacy’

A key underlying issue that prevents most women from moving beyond a step above subsistence or taking advantage of existing poverty reduction strategies, including microfinance, revolves around the notion of ‘higher’ literacy. This issue specifically references the difficulties faced by individuals in accessing or understanding more complex written documents such as loan applications, banking procedures and financial or contract-based agreements, even though they may speak, read and write fluently in conversational English or have a secondary school level education. Currently, it is common for most development programmes, sponsored by either the government or NGOs, to use criteria and application systems that require knowledge and understanding at the level of complex literacy. The current quality of education in Ghana, despite high attendance, makes it difficult for young people to learn this kind of ‘higher’ literacy, and for the many adult women who were not able to complete secondary or post-secondary school, basic and complex literacy remain both a challenge and a barrier.

Key Policy Suggestion

In light of this, future education policy may be best served by shifting focus from attendance based concerns, and placing more emphasis on improving the quality of education and specifically, the degree of literacy taught in primary and secondary schools. While attendance is crucial, the importance of attending school has already been strongly ingrained in parents and children alike, which may allow room for policy to put more money and attention into better teaching training facilities, improving teacher testing and standards, or offering after-school literacy programs. Investment in adult education program designed for women would also likely be beneficial, whereby women of all literacy levels could either learn or improve on developing a more useful skill set.

Basic Monetary Management

Another key issue is a lack of knowledge of basic monetary management. In Ghana, it is very difficult to do business because loans do not come cheap. Even loans from the rural banks, which have offered small loans since the mid 1970s, carry a steep (by developed country standards) 10 per cent interest rate.^{xvi} This makes it difficult for any money received through a business loan to be effectively put towards expanding the business. While there are many macro-level dynamics which keep the national and small loan interest rates high, part of the problem too is a lack of personal savings within the country. Most local residents of Akwatia do not have significant disposable income, and of the women interviewed, none had a bank account, nor saw the merit in regularly saving significant portions of income. Some understood the idea of setting a few cedis or pocket change aside to treat oneself to bananas or for a rainy day, but of those interviewed, most explained that the recent hard times and a lack of new alternative opportunities had meant spending what had little had been set aside.

Key Policy Suggestion

It would likely be useful to encourage simple money management and personal savings in schools, beginning at the earliest ages and through community programmes. The benefit of teaching savings and money management in school is that teachers could use props to substitute money, while the children can feel a sense of responsibility and

accomplishment, as well as learn lessons that can be carried into their adult life. Community programs, through the churches or other local organizations, could help stimulate more education and provide assistance to the adult population. Perhaps one of the most economical ways to improve adult monetary management could be accomplished by running basic financial advice columns in existing local newspapers and encouraging personal savings in these daily or weekly sources.

Additional Suggestions:

In Response to Akwatian Women's Challenges

1. Clean Drinking Water

Most of the direct threats to women's personal health and security are related to polluted drinking water. Clean drinking water is an absolute necessity and must be provided immediately by the government.

2. Vocational Schools

More investment of government and foreign aid funds into vocational schools and training opportunities would help the next generation of young women to move out of the declining diamond sector. The main universities in Ghana have excellent quality of education, but are out of reach for most youth outside of the Accra hinterland. A greater investment in vocational schools could present a most cost-effective means of promoting job creation and alternative employment opportunities.

3. Household Credit System and Social Services Support:

In order to reduce the double burden faced by women who are either sole-providers or providers of supplementary income, the government could expand social services, such as by subsidizing clean drinking water. A subsidized program of credits based on something similar to food stamps with a straightforward application process, available in local languages rather than only in English, with a streamlined and simple acceptance criteria (such as an income line, widowhood, number of dependents) would help reduce the primary concerns of women in Akwatia.

4. Accessible and Affordable Loans:

Most women would like to move out of diamond mining and have a desire to open a shop or move into another industry but lack the capital to do so. It remains nearly impossible for both men and women to get loans with affordable interest rates, and thus difficult to transition to an alternative industry or job opportunity. National and small loan interest rates reflect macro-level economic and international trade balances, as well as internal savings. While it is difficult for a developing country to address international macro-economic challenges, policies that promote, encourage and even reward personal savings could help in part to assuage high interest rates over the long term.

Conclusions

While all of these suggestions pertain particularly to the situation of women in Akwatia specifically and Ghana more generally, it is important to note that the ideas are reflective of the Millennium Development Goals and applicable across the developing world. It is the challenge of the development community to come together to improve quality of life and opportunity in a sustainable manner for those in artisanal diamond mining communities. In order to do this, each community, region, and country must be carefully observed and understood; policies must be creative and holistically applied –yet there is a

lesson that can be learned from each case and knowledge that can be carried over from one place to another. Clean water, literacy, education, improving the ability to do business –these are goals that are shared across borders. Ghana has not experienced vicious civil war, land distribution does not present a significant problem in Akwatia and the national economy is robust for a small developing country, making it atypical compared to its other diamond producing neighbors. Even in a small town like Akwatia, in a country that does not have comparatively high rates of diamond production, where women exist within unique cultural norms, there are commonalities and lessons to be learned, thus presenting the development community and government with an immense opportunity to come together to make a real difference in lives of those not only in Akwatia, but for those in other artisanal diamond mining communities who can benefit from this sharing of knowledge and experience.

ⁱ Diamond Development Initiative. Policy Backgrounder, Artisanal Diamond Mining and Gender: An Overview. May 2009, p. 1

ⁱⁱ Kimberley Process Statistics, Annual Global Summary 2008.

<https://mmsd.mms.nrcan.gc.ca/kimberleystats/publicstats.asp>

ⁱⁱⁱ Minerals Commission. 'Mineral Occurrences and Deposits in Ghana.' 2006 <http://www.ghana-mining.org/ghweb/en/geologymining/deposits.html>

^{iv} Peter Adofo-Asante. "Akwatia is Dying." *The National Star*, July 2-8, 2009, p. 1-2

^v Precious Minerals Mining Company legers record 2007 production at 438 859. 134 carats; 2008 production at 244 205. 16 carats

^{vi} Interviews with Atta, Salamatu, Hajia Barakesu, Adwoa Yeboah, Sophia Asare

^{vii} Partnership Africa Canada and Global Witness. Rich Man, Poor Man: Development Diamonds and Poverty Diamonds: The Potential for Change in the Artisanal Alluvial Diamond Fields of Africa. Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada, 2004.

^{viii} 'Save Ghana Consolidated Diamonds Ltd.' Editorial, AllAfrica.com, 13 August 2007

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200708131066.html>

^{ix} Interviews with Atta, Kotokorinzongo women, Sepedi

^x World Bank Statistics, 2008: GNI, per capita, PPP in \$US 670.

<<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20535285~menuPK:1192694~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html>>

^{xi} World Bank Statistics 2007/2008, Ghana. Ibid

^{xii} Peter Adofo-Asante. "Akwatia is Dying." *The National Star*, July 2-8, 2009, p. 1-2

^{xiii} Diamond Development Initiative. Policy Backgrounder, Artisanal Diamond Mining and Gender: An Overview. May 2009, p. 3

^{xiv} Ibid

^{xv} Interviews with Stephen Atta, Sophia Asare, Adwoa Yeboah

^{xvi} Agricultural Development Bank literature; Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy II 2007