



PARTICIPATION OF CONGOLESE WOMEN IN ARTISANAL MINING

Rubaya is a small town 60 kilometres from Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Access is difficult due to the lack of infrastructure, but this has not prevented thousands of people from living in this town since 2014. The city has grown from 1,287 inhabitants to a little over 40,000 in just three years. This population boom is the result of the "green certification" of mining sites near the city.

The certification scheme developed by the International Conference of the Great Lakes region consists of annual visits to mining sites where the mine is flagged green, yellow or red depending on whether it is under armed group control and whether the mine exploits children.

As a result of the "coltan boom", many peasant families from nearby villages left farming behind to work in artisanal mining, a shift that had a major impact on the lives of women in these communities.

First, women who moved to Rubaya have gone from full participation in agriculture to a marginal position in artisanal mining activities. The arable land on which their livelihoods depended has been drastically reduced as mining concessions have expanded in the hands of a few, mostly men.

Nor has the road been easy for women who have tried working in artisanal mining. Their work in quarries has been restricted in many cases either by misogynist prejudices (blocking women from the mines during menstruation, for example) or by selfishly motivated interpretations of the rules¹. Instead, women are forced to work processing and transporting the ore, which consists of crushing the stones, washing them in nearby streams to separate the impurities from the valuable mineral, sacking them and transporting the sacks to nearby towns.

The use of chemicals in washing facilities not only damages the environment, but also causes enormous damage to human health. Working as a porter is also unpleasant (sacks can weigh up to 50 kilos) and dangerous (risks include violence by armed groups or corrupt officials on transport routes).

Secondly, population growth has not been matched by a proportional increase in access to health or education, and **given scarce resources, boy's access to schools is given priority over girls**. As a result, many of the girls living in the refugee camp at the entrance to Rubaya end up accepting early marriages or even entering into prostitution to escape poverty.

The absence of specific health programmes for women means that the only resource for victims of sexual violence are civil society organisations like Synergie des Femmes.

Lastly, **women's perspectives have not been taken into account** during the entire mine certification process. Women have been demanding a comprehensive development plan since the start of the process that includes spaces where their interests and needs are represented, and where they can participate in decision-making on equal footing with the communities' men. What would you do? Participated in the suggested activity and put yourself in their shoes!

¹The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines on responsible supply of minerals from conflict zones condemn abuses linked to artisanal mining in the DRC, particularly when committed against children and women, but do not prohibit the participation of women in the mineral value chain, as some men have selfishly insisted.

ACTIVITY PROPOSAL

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES!

Objective: to raise awareness about the different roles of Congolese women in mining communities and to identify the causes of injustices they suffer daily.

Materials: Copy the roles onto strips of paper and distribute them among the group. The roles include the jobs performed by people involved in artisanal mining, their interests and goals.

No	Paper	Job	Living conditions	Aspirations
1	owner	You control the mine You see ore to local traders	You work 8 hours a day You earn 25 dollars for every kilo of coltan You can send your children to study abroad	Everything should stay the same
2	Miner	You work with a pick and shovel	You work 14 hours a day You earn 2 dollars a day You are subjected to many occupational risks	Higher wage Better conditions You don't want women to work in mining
3	Processor	Mineral crusher You wash minerals in toxic substances You put them into sacks	You work 14 hours a day You make 1 dollar a day Your children work with you because you can't leave them home alone You drink contaminated water You have health problems	Higher wages You can take your kids to school You have access to health care Trained to use non-toxic materials
4	Porter	You carry sacks to the village The sacks can weigh up to 50 kg	You work 14 hours a day Unsafe transport routes You make 50 cents a day	Better roads Have a cart Less weight More security
5	Activist	You help women who are victims of violence.	You work for an NGO You participate in decision-making	Create a development plan that gives women a say
6	Local merchant	You buy coltan from No. 1 You sell it on international markets	Multinational companies are pushing you to lower the price of coltan as much as possible	Get maximum benefit
7	Political leader	You regulated the mineral trade	You have the power to regulate trade (taxes, the responsibilities of no. 1 and no. 6)	Improve community development

Development: Give each participant a role. If you are working with a large group, people can form teams for each role. In a small group, the roles of women 3 and 4 can be represented by role 5, speaking on their behalf as an activist.

Part 1. Have the groups set up in the classroom in order and give them time to read the role they've been assigned and find more information online using the links provided.






Part 2. In order, each group explains the role it represents to the rest. The idea is for the rest to listen. When the first group is finished, you can use a symbolic item that represents the mineral (like a baton or a globe) to switch to the next group.

Part 3. Once the roles have been explained, encourage the groups to come up with a development plan through dialogue. Roles 1, 2, 5 (the activist on behalf of all women), 6 and 7 will participate in the discussion.

Questions for discussion: What are the community's most urgent needs? What injustices are there in the system? Who is responsible for their perpetuation? Who has the power to change them?

Brainstorming: it is a question of defining what actions each party should take to change unfair situations.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

-  **Violence against women, video by Synergie des Femmes and Casa Bulengo:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOSlwBHPjco&t=13s>
-  **What is it like inside a mine? Video from "En tierra hostil (In hostile land)":**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofZQ4ZRy-1I>
-  **Interview with an expert on the role of women in artisanal mining [English]:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wxj9QZF11Gg&t=300satico>
-  **Violence against women, mining and empowerment, World Bank:**
<http://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/feature/2015/05/04/empowering-women-in-the-mines-of-the-eastern-democratic-republic-of-the-congo>
-  **Research on women and artisanal mining by ALBOAN and Synergie des Femmes (esp):**
<https://www.tecnologia libre de conflicto.org/materiales-educativos/>

A project from:



ALBOAN
ONG - Jesuita - Fundazioa

www.alboan.org

For a:



www.tecnologia libre de conflicto.org

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