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Research Article

Rethinking Alternative Livelihood Projects for Women of the Pits: The Case of Atiwa

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Abstract

Artisanal Small Scale Mining with its environmental, social, economic, and health impacts, is replacing agriculture as the main economic activity in sub-Saharan Africa. Mining activities have therefore become an economic activity in the rural mining areas, as a quick way to escape poverty. This exploratory qualitative study examines the factors behind the prevalence of women in the pit business, washing muddy sand for particles of gold, in the Atiwa district of Ghana. However, not much is known about the impact of the pit work on the women's wellbeing. The goal is to understand the lived experiences of the women and explore ways they could be assisted. Findings from the study indicate that poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and unattractive rural poverty alleviation strategies have contributed to the plight of these women. The women could benefit from asset-based interventions that could redirect their work to projects that would enhance their livelihoods.

Keywords: *Artisanal mining, kolikoli (pit work), women, alternative livelihood, Atiwa, Ghana*

1. Introduction

Artisanal Small Scale Mining (ASM) is noted in various areas in SSA, including Ghana to be replacing agriculture as the main economic activity (Boateng, Codjoe & Ofori, 2014). This is attributed to the decline of many export products, including cocoa, forcing farmers to divert into other economic ventures. It is reported that in 1999 the ILO estimated the ASM sector employing two million people in SSA, mainly people who had diverted from agriculture, and were working in the small-scale industry to support their income. There are extensive debates on the environmental, social, economic, and health impacts of ASM (Boateng, Codjoe & Ofori, 2014; Banchirigah & Hilson, 2010; Hilson and Nyame, 2006; Ghana Chamber of Mines 2006). Artisanal and small-scale gold mining are livelihood activities noted to have significant poverty reduction potential in developing countries, such as Ghana. Nevertheless, this potential is noted to be undermined by many factors, including human-health and environmental consequences. The concern of the critics includes the destruction of forest reserves and farms, contamination of local rivers and streams from mercury and cyanide spills, and displacement of mining communities. The rapid growth of ASM in SSA is mainly attributed to the fact that rural poverty alleviation strategies are not attractive enough to replace small holder farming (Banchirigah & Hilson, 2010). As such, individuals sell their lands to pit owners, or engage in the ASM industry.

It has been noted that unemployment and poverty drive people into small scale illegal mining and that until such problems are addressed, illegal mining would continue. There have been cases where task force or the police have been employed by politicians to arrest those involved in illegal mining. But it failed to stop the operations of small scale, illegal miners. There must therefore be a total understanding of the basic reasons why people, including women and children engage in illegal mining activities, and seek viable alternative to ASM. This study seeks to explore the

experiences of women engaged in washing muddy sand for gold at a mining site in the Atiwa district of Ghana, in an effort to explore alternative livelihood projects for these women.

2. Statement of Problem

Majority of local women in Ghana live in rural communities and are into subsistence farming. With the emergence of ASM, many of these women have lost their agricultural lands, and thus have lost their critical livelihood and economic opportunities. To survive, some of these women are engaged at the mining pits, doing all kinds of work, including selling food, water, clothing items, and processing or washing left over sand for particles of gold. The processing involves standing in muddy water to wash the sand to extract the gold. The polluted water may have its own negative effects on these women. Women may experience these impacts differently from their male counterparts, as a result of their unequal social status and a division of labour, which make women bear the greater burden of responsibility for household food production, care of the ill, water collection, etc.. They, in addition, endure lower wages, predominant in the more dangerous processing activities. Additionally, engaging in a workforce that consists largely of men who are far from their homes and wives, or are single may come with other issues related to sexual abuse and unplanned pregnancies.

Though these women go to work at the pit almost every day, not much is known about the impact of the work on their wellbeing. For instance, if working at mining sites is the main source of livelihood for others as reported in the literature (Banchirigah and Hilson (2010), to what extent is this true for these women? And what alternative sustainable livelihood projects could replace the kolikoli work? Additionally, many studies into the artisanal and small scale mining sector have presented men's role in the industry. The roles women play and the key challenges they face in the sector are underreported. For instance, there have been reports in various small-scale illegal mining sites of women drowning in uncovered pits dug by miners (Ghana Web News, 2015). The current study aims to make a modest contribution to supporting rural women to counter the growing social and ecological crisis linked to small scale artisanal mining in Ghana. An understanding of how women respond to and overcome the numerous challenges they encounter in their work at artisanal mining sites must be the starting point to inform policies to help protect and promote women's rights.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Women and Rural Poverty in Ghana

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy classifies poverty under four dimensions, namely "poverty as lack of income or consumption poverty; poverty as lack of access to basic social services, e.g. water, health and educational facilities; poverty as deprivations in human development, i.e. capacity development; and poverty as a multidimensional deprivation, such as physical weakness, powerlessness in decision making, vulnerability, isolation, gender discrimination, and inability to access legal or political rights (Government of Ghana 2003, cited in Wrigley-Asante, 2008, p.1). Rural poverty in poor countries, including Ghana, is well documented (Adjei and Bour, 2012; Bull, Mittelmark and Kanyeka, 2013; Wrigley-Asante, 2008). Majority of people in Africa live in rural communities that are deprived of the factors that foster wellbeing, such as health advances and socio-economic development. In a study that explores the relationship between socio-economic conditions and health outcomes in rural communities, Adjei and Buor (2012) highlight how social stratification and inequalities could affect quality of life of people in any given society. By 2025, the rural population of Africa is expected to increase from 510 to 702 million, and the rural population of the developing world is projected to increase from 2.92 billion to 3.09 billion (UNO, 1998 cited in Adjei and Bour, 2012). These communities are confronted with absolute poverty, consisting of poor housing, poor educational facilities, lack of job opportunities, poor sanitation, poor drinking water, and poor health facilities (Adjei and Bour, 2012). According to these authors, "the prevailing circumstances in which people grow, live and work determine whether a child born today can

expect to live for more than 80 years or less than 45 years" (p. 233). What this means is that people can fulfill their full human potential, depending on socio-economic policies available to them.

The rural poor are thus prone to problems associated with diseases and short life-span, including measles, malaria, intestinal disorders, poor feeding habits, and poor sanitation, as observed by the above authors. Bull, Mittelmark and Kanyeka, (2013) in their study on rural women in poverty, including Ghana, observed for instance that desperate lack of resources including food, money, health care for families, and lack of vocational skills are stressors to poor women.

In a study that examined the multidimensionality of poverty through women's and men's daily experiences, Wrigley-Asante (2008) observed that poverty affects women and men differently, and that women's experiences of poverty tend to be more severe than those of men, resulting from multiplicity of factors, including historical, socio-economic, ethical, political, and government policies. These authors concluded that poor communities would be motivated and empowered by asset-approach initiatives, such as agro-based industries, and credit facilities. In Ghana, despite attempts made by successive governments in addressing some of these problems in rural areas, poverty continues to deepen (Handa & Park, 2012). With needs unmet, people in rural areas, including women and children hang on to whatever work is available for survival.

3.2 Factors Promoting Small Scale, Illegal Mining in Ghana

Family hardships, due to poverty are a driving force into the ASM trade. Subsistence farming is reported to be failing to support rural communities, a situation noted to have been worsened by Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), (Brycen, 2002; Ellis, 2006). Another factor is the seasonal agriculture, which makes it difficult for farmers to earn enough income to care for their needs and those of their households, coupled with the fact that farm products are mainly for home use. Small scale illegal mining is therefore pursued to supplement income earned from farming, which is still the main economic activity of people in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) (Adu-Gyamfi, Brenya & Abakah, 2015; Banchirigah & Hilson, 2010; Hilson, 2010). As Hilson (2010) for instance observed, children are pushed by their parents to work at ASM sites to make some money to add to their impoverished family income, which contributes to child labour (in a region where child work is generally acceptable), which is linked to poverty. Many of the children in Hilson's study engaged in ASM activity in order to earn income to pay for their school fees. ASM is thus tagged as a 'poverty-driven activity,' undertaken by a range of various actors, including men, women, children, who have few alternative income opportunities.

Small scale mining is also recognized as a lucrative business because gold products are in high demand both on the local and international markets (Hilson, 2001). Also, in Boateng et al's study, 76.4% (majority) of the farmers said they chose to engage in small scale illegal mining for quick money. They hinted that cocoa farms are not doing well, and so galamsey pays better. With soil highly degraded and lands forcibly taken by galamsey operators, farmers have no alternative than to engage in galamsey. This also has negative impact on cocoa yield. The farmers in this study lamented on death of frogs, birds, fishes, as well as loss of economic trees in the area. Additionally, small scale mining activities in Ghana employ very simple devices and equipments such as shovels, pick-axes, sluice boxes, mattocks, and cutlasses. In few instances, mechanized machines such as washing plants, explosives, Honda water pumps are used (Hilson, 2001). Generally, the processes involved in small scale gold mining are crushing the ore into pebbles or powder under various stages, washing the crushed sediments with washing blanket or hands along riverbanks to separate the mineral, and panning (Hilson, 2001).

3.3 Impacts of Small Scale, Illegal Mining in Ghana - The positive and negative aspects

Impacts of mining have attracted different views. Whereas some people believe that the ongoing mining in regions of SSA has created a positive impact in their lives, others are with the view that it has created social, health, environmental, cultural and economic issues related to surface mining. Adu-Gyamfi et al, (2015) observed that illegal mining activities pursued by students have negative effect on school attendance and academic performance. In fact, 96% of respondents in that study

said student pit miners use school hours to engage themselves in the illegal mining, 4% said they engage in the trade after school hours and during weekends. This is a clear indication that a huge majority of the students do illegal mining during school hours, thus, at the expense of their education and future. Small scale illegal mining is noted to have serious environmental consequences: These include water pollution from excessive chemical use. Many rural communities depend on rivers and streams for water for drinking, washing, and bathing etc. The heavy machines used in digging the soil for gold also cause land degradation and air pollution. Farms closer to mine areas are unable to yield good crops, due to exposure to the pollution of the land. Additionally, Ghana is noted to be losing agricultural yields including cocoa, as a result of the activities of illegal mining across the country (Boateng et al, 2014; Diao and Sarpong, 2011).

It is also believed that as the mine workers wash the clay with their hands to extract the gold, they come into contact with such dangerous chemicals such as mercury, which is introduced to the concentrate and mixed to form a gold amalgam that is heated to separate the gold (Hilson, 2010). Other negative impacts of mining may include unemployment, when people lose their farmlands to the mining companies. In effect, they lose their source of livelihood. Migration of people to mining areas may breed social problems such as school drop-out, drug abuse, prostitution, and armed robbery. For instance, divorce, and teen pregnancies abound in mining communities (Hilson, 2001). This is the case when a man relocates from his own village to a mining village, takes another wife, and abandons his first wife in his own village.

Also, poor compensation is given to land owners. For instance, in the Atiwa area, farmers are compelled to give their lands to small scale mining operators for small amount of monies, due to poverty. Even with the small amount, some pit owners refuse to pay some farmers, and these farmers chase the pit owners for their money. The saddest part is that pits dug as a result of the removal of vegetation and top soil are left uncovered, across an area larger than a sports stadium. These serve as death threats to the various workers at the site, and to other framers whose farms are beyond the “sports stadium.” In just one pit area, four people, including two women have drowned within a year (Researcher observation, 2016). When arable farmlands are also being substituted for mining, food becomes scarce and expensive in these areas. Additionally, ineffective mining laws, coupled with lack of viable income-earning alternatives are noted to contribute to small scale, illegal mining activities (Adjei and Buor, 2012). A study by (Akabzaa and Darimani, (2001) shows among other things that the Western Region of Ghana has the highest incidence of malaria and tuberculosis in the country, as a result of open pits that accumulate stagnant waters that support malaria vector growth.

Positive impacts have also been recorded of mining: Some mining companies provide good drinking water, such as bore holes; build schools, clinics, infrastructure, provide extension services to farmers, and help to provide livelihood projects for the communities they have dislocated (Boateng et al; 2014). Some land owners who sold their lands to pit owners may use their money to complete their house, or start a small business. Additionally, as Banchirigah and Hilson (2010), argued, ASM has become an important source of income for impoverished communities, because agricultural activities are no more viable, and ASM’s low barriers to entry and minimal capital startup requirements have made it more attractive. As further noted by these authors, the attraction of earning ‘quick-money’ from working at mining pits has also made the pursuit of education by children a forgone alternative. However, Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah (2011) observed that people in the illegal mining industry earn a living at great threat to their lives.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is pinged on the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). ADCD builds on the assets that are already found in the community and mobilizes individuals, associations, and institutions to band together to build on their assets. When the assets of individuals, associations, and institutions are identified, they are mobilized to work together to build on the identified assets of all involved. Then the identified assets from an individual are matched with people/groups that have an interest or need in that asset. The key is to start using what assets are already in the community. By this process, the poor begin to see themselves as people with special assets or strengths that

could be used by themselves to make an impact in their communities. ABCD's community-driven approach is in line with the principles and practice of participatory approaches development, where active participation and empowerment are the basis of practice. It is a strategy geared towards sustainable, economic development that is community-driven. There is the view that everyone in a community has something to offer, and leaders should involve others through relationship building, to unveil their motivations and potentials. Thus, leaders and institutions having relationships with the women in this study, such as the mining companies, could engage the community to solve their own problems.by creating opportunities for sustainable development. According to this process, solutions to these women's problems may already exist within their assets and strengths.

4. Methodology

This study seeks to examine factors that contribute to Atiwa women's engagement in drilling muddy sand for gold (kolikoli); examine both positive and negative effects of the kolikoli business; explore alternative projects to sustain the women's livelihood, and examine ways through which mining companies can assist the communities they have dislocated.

4.1 Study Area

Illegal artisanal mining (galamsey) is noted to be highly concentrated in Eastern, Western and Upper East Regions of Ghana (Banchirigah and Hilson (2010). This study focuses on the Atiwa West district of Ghana. The Atiwa District which covers a total area of 2,950 square kilometers is one of the twenty-one Districts in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The District was carved from the then East Akim District, currently East Akim Municipal, in the year 2004. Its capital is Kwabeng, which is located at the foot of the Atiwa range. The District is bounded on the North by Kwahu West and Kwahu South Districts, Kwaebibrim to the South and Birim North to the West, on the North-East by the Fanteakwa District. Almost every Atiwa town or village is affected by small scale and illegal artisanal mining. Inhabitants of these communities such as Kwabeng, Bomaa, and Pameng now depend on water from wells, bore holes, for bathing, washing, and all kinds of sachet water for drinking. Gold excavation in these communities are undertaken by companies who call themselves legal, and other groups identified as illegal miners.

4.2 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design; specifically focus group interviews with women from three villages (Bomaa, Awenare, and Pameng) in the Atiwa West Constituency of Ghana. This community is among the predominant areas for small scale illegal mining, with various activities going on at the mining sites. Koppelman and Bourjolly (2001) contend that focus groups "are uniquely well-suited for eliciting the insights of segments of consumers who have been underserved, unheard or overlooked in previous research" (p. 142). Employing the focus group method in conducting this research on a marginalized population, such as Atiwa rural women in the pit business is appropriate, since very little is known about them in scholarly work.

4.3 Sample and Data Collection Techniques

Purposive sampling was adopted for this study. This sampling technique enabled the researcher obtain detailed data from participants whose job at the site for a year or more is mainly washing sand for gold (kolikoli), and therefore could share their knowledge and experience about the topic. First, the researcher organized an informational meeting with women who are into the kolikoli business in each of the three towns (i.e., three informational meetings). Researcher provided prospective participants information about the study, and then recruited those willing to participate. Using a semi-structured interview guide, the researcher collected data from a sample of 20 in two focus group sessions of 10 participants (10 from Bomaa, and 5 each from Awenare and Pameng put together). Both sessions were conducted at Bomaa (location chosen by the two groups), since

Bomaa is the mining site for the study. Each focus group interview session lasted approximately two and a half hours, including time for eating and socializing. Notes and a voice recorder were used to collect data, after permission has been granted by the participants. Participants' observation at the pits also formed part of the data.

4.4 Data Handling and Analysis

The audio data was transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. With the thematic analysis, the researcher read and familiarized with the content of each of the three focus group transcripts. Through this, the key messages in the transcripts were identified, based on the objectives of the study. Themes were then developed from the key messages, as relevant to the research questions. The developed themes were then interpreted and discussed.

5. Data Analysis & Discussion of Findings

5.1 Demographics

The ages of the 20 participants were between 14 and 62; eight were married, six were widowed or divorced, and the remaining six were single. Sixteen of them had three to eight children, and four had no children. Twelve of them had no formal education, five had some primary school education, and three had completed Junior Secondary School. Emerging Themes are analysed as follows:

5.2 Factors Contributing to the Pit Work

According to the participants, they used to farm, but since their lands have been sold or taken over by the mining companies, the alternative work for survival is the washing of muddy sand for gold (kolikoli). Many of them are financially poor, and so have been compelled to do this work to earn some money. In their own voices:

> *Since we don't have our lands to farm any more, we are into kolikoli, which is the available work. … It brings quick, ready cash money, compared to farming.*
>
> *It's not that some of us like this work, but one reason is, those of us who refused to sell our lands, our farms are no go area; pits have been dug around our farms … so in the end we have to abandon our farms, and join the other women in the kolikoli business.*
>
> *For instance, when my child was sacked for school fees, I didn't have, and so went to do kolikoli and got some money for her fees and other things.*

Findings are in agreement with Adu-Gyamfi et al, 2015; Ellis, 2006; Hilson, 2010, who observed in their studies that unattractiveness of farming, poverty, and hardships are among the factors that push women to engage in the pit business.

5.3 Description of the Kolikoli Work

This is how two participants explained 'Kolikoli.'

> *We use a burnt cutlass/tool to scrape the muddy sand into our pots. Then we wash the sand off the pots, and then scrape the bottom of the pots for the gold. As we scrape, the cutlass coming into contact with the pot make the kolikolikoli sound. So this work was named kolikoli.*
>
> *The gold we earn from our work is in small particles, so it comes small small (koli, koli), hence the word kolikoli for the name of the work.*

Another participant also provided a full description of the actual work:

First, the miners dig a large pit, wash the muddy gravels and extract their gold from it. Then they dig standing water at the other end of the pit. Then their machine dumps the leftover muddy gravels in one section of the dug pit, around 3pm, when they have finished their work. We rush to the pit as soon as the machine dumps the muddy sands/stones. We then collect some of the muddy sands into our pots (koroo). Then we take the pots to where the standing water or pool is. We then pour water on to the sand in our pots and start shaking the pots to wash off the sand gradually, till particles of gold is seen under the bottom of the pots. Then we scrape the gold and place it into a small bowl. We repeat this process several times that evening, till we close. Most of the time, we put the week's gold together and sell to the mining company at the end of the week.

5.4 Exchanging the gold for Ghana Cedis

Asked whether they trust the miners' gold weighing system, and are not cheated, during the exchange for money, the participants said they didn't know, but they trusted the miners and that if they hadn't allowed them to the pits, they (participants) would not have gotten a job to do. One of them put it this way, 'W'anieebo n'eteeesi so' meaning, half a loaf is better than none.

5.5 Positive Effects of the Kolikoli Business

The women indicated that they earn some money from the work to enhance their wellbeing; they have become financially independent, and now a voice in decision making:

I use some of the money to buy building materials, and have started building my two-bedroom house.

Some of us, our husbands don't work, so we support our families with the kolikoli money. … But it is not all the days that we get some gold,

We also use some to pay school fees; some of us don't go to our husbands for money anymore; we are able to buy things women buy – cloths, head scarves, bangles, and make-ups.

Thus, in consonance with Boateng et al (2014) as well as Banchirigah & Hilson (2010), the pit work (kolikoli) is pursued as work to support unstable family income. Participants stated further that the weekly amount of money they earn depends on how rich the muddy sands are; the amount of gold particles they could collect from the sand. They said it could be 100, 50, or 25 Ghana Cedis. The women also agreed to the fact that when they come together at the mining centre, popularly known as 'pit so,' they socialize, especially when they are waiting for the machine to complete its work, so they can jump into the pit. As they wait, they tell stories, sing songs, and share their pit experiences. An additional benefit they indicated was that, now that the youth who have come to join the business have some income earning opportunities, the incidence of theft in the community has decreased.

5.6 Negative Effects of the Kolikoli Business

All the twenty women agreed that kolikoli is a hard job and it comes with a lot of issues:

The work is such that we bend our bodies, as we gather the sand; we stand up and walk on the sand, and then shake the container to wash off the mud/sand. As such, we experience bodily pains.

Sometimes, we push big stones to remove the muddy sand under them, either with our hands or with a tool (soso). So we experience back, neck, and waist pains.

Also, in our scramble in the pit for the sand, we hurt ourselves, or and fight each other: One of us would say, this part of the pit is my area, don't come close, another would say, how dare you? I jumped in here first.'

Thus, the women receive injuries through the rush, and according to them, there were cases

where some of them rushed into the pits, without approval, and were lashed with sticks by the workers of the mining company, and for being disobedient. They further indicated that they use the dirty pit water to wash their dirty bodies after work, before they go home. They also stated that the pools are dug deep so if one is unable to swim, she could easily drown, so washing in the water is dangerous, and people have drowned before. The ten women from the other two villages (Awenare, Pameng), added that closing late is dangerous, when sometimes they have to walk back to the next village, three miles away. Dangers associated with the pit work are widely recorded, which include contact with dust, toxic substances, accidents, water-borne infections, and drowning (Adu-Gyamfi et al, 2015: Banchirigah & Hilson, 2012; Boateng et al, 2014; Ghana Web News, 2015; ILO, 2007).

6. Conclusion & Recommendations

The women in the study agreed that washing sand for gold (kolikoli) is not the best job, and that if there is a better job, they would quit. They agreed that kolikoli comes with risks, such as injuries, skin rushes, waist/bodily pains, fear of snakes, and itches on their hands and legs, due to their standing in muddy water to wash the sand for the gold. They also indicated fear of thugs at the close of day, when they are carrying their particles of gold home. Though some expressed trust for the miners, they indicated that they would not leave their day's gold with them.

On sustainable livelihood interventions that could be developed to replace the kolikoli work, the women suggested four activities: bakery; running a cold store; soap making; and vegetable farming. According to them, people eat bread all the time, and there is no bakery in the community. Therefore, some of them who are interested in baking bread could be trained on how to bake bread. They could then sell their bread to institutions in the communities, like schools and to individuals as well. They then could use the profit for their own sustainability and that of their families. Additionally, the women agreed that the second group of women could run a cold store, sell fish, meat and chicken to the surrounding communities. The third group of women could learn and make assorted soaps, including washing, and liquid soaps for sale. They also suggested that those interested in farming could also do vegetable farming, products that take short time to harvest, such as cabbage, pepper, and mushrooms. They also indicated that each group could use some of their profits to assist other women who are interested in petty trading.

The participants further recommended support from the mining companies who have destroyed their farm lands. They indicated that five mining companies are working in the communities, some are registered and some are not. Others have bought the lands from the bigger company (Xtra Gold) that claims to have the concession. These miners, according to participants, have not done much for these communities. They therefore suggested the following: Some nursing mothers carry their babies to work at the pit. These mothers stand in the waters for a long time, with the babies on their back. The villages in the community have day care centres for children, but none is well equipped. So they suggested the mining companies renovate the centres and provide resources, such as food, and play activities, so the women could keep their children there and come to work. Additionally, the miners could build for the community bore holes, and pipe borne water to replace the streams and rivers mining has destroyed. Furthermore, with the projects they have identified above, the women suggested that since the miners themselves do not want them at the pits, they could provide financial support to help them pursue these projects as work, to replace kolikoli. Participants' other concern was that when people drown, the mining companies should do more than providing money for their funerals, and that if they had covered the pits, people wouldn't have drowned. Beside money for the funeral, the company should bear the responsibility of the deceased, such as caring for their children through school, and financially supporting their families.

On the whole, the women seemed to have less knowledge about the long-term repercussions of standing in muddy waters and washing sand for gold. They have less knowledge of the effects of chemicals, such as mercury and cyanide that the miners use to extract their gold, which are dumped in the muddy sand. Rather, they seem to be focused on the short term ready cash. The question is, are women's migration from farming to gold self-sustainable? The hazardous tasks at mining sites are damaging, illegal, and abusive to human rights. Special attention needs to be paid

to the plight of these women, since the tasks they perform at the pits put them at serious risks, as indicated in this study. Rural women suffer disproportionately from poverty, and are confronted with multiple forms of discrimination, abuse, and insecurity.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have gender equality and women's empowerment at their core, and this new framework encourages global leaders to put measures in place to transform rural women's lives, so they can both contribute to and benefit from sustainable development. In line with the Assets Based Community Development theory, rural women, including those in this study have a significant and crucial role to play towards the progress of their families and communities. The stakeholders, including government, traditional leaders, policy makers, and the mining companies should focus on assisting these women with sustainable livelihood projects. Identifying individual and community assets, skills development, capabilities enhancement, and development of their living standard and livelihood are crucial to eradicating rural women's poverty. In the long-term, these women will experience better quality of life and livelihood, which will be helpful to increase the socially and economically women empowerment.

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