

Gender Issues in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining Communities in Wau/Bulolo Areas of the Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea – Community Perspective.

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ABSTRACT

There are so many gender issues surrounding women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM) Communities. This paper will concentrate on gender issues that impact negatively on women as observed in these communities in Wau-Bulolo Area of the Bulolo District, Morobe Province of Papua New Guinea.

The paper will discuss gender issues in ASM communities ranging from lack of easy of access to basic health services, lack of access to education and small business opportunities due to high rates of illiteracy. The quality of life of women is further decreased by reduced access to clean and quality water for cooking, washing and drinking. Reduced access to clean water is caused by artisanal and small-scale mining activities as well as increased human settlement along streams and rivers.

Other gender issues faced by women in small-scale mining are denied rights to mining leases, lack of direct access to gold trading markets, lack of representation, issues of safety and security and general breakdown of traditional norms of each ethnic groupings that make up the small scale mining communities.

Recommendations for promotion and improvement in the quality of life women in ASM Communities will include discussion on policies that enhance that quality of live of women in small-scale mining, networking and self-help initiative for sustainable community development with support from government and NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

I am a member of the traditional indigenous people of the Wau Valleys known as the Biangai Tribe and I will present my paper on Gender Issues in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining based on my everyday contact with my own Biangai people and people from different ethnic groups from within the Morobe Province and Papua New Guinea who make up the artisanal and small-scale mining communities in Wau and Bulolo.

Wau and Bulolo Valleys are situated inland of the Morobe Province of Papua New Guinea. Gold was first discovered in the area in 1920 and gold has continually been mined until today. The townships of Wau and Bulolo were then established during gold rush days during the 1920's for government and commercial purposes.

TYPES OF ARTISANAL & SMALL SCALE MINING COMMUNITIES

There are two different types of ASM Communities here in Wau. The first type is made up of traditional customary landowners where majority of people in such communities belong to at least one ethnic group and the second type is made up of migrant communities who belong to different ethnic groups from within Papua New Guinea.

Basically the ASM communities consisting of traditional customary landowners differ in terms of social control because people belong to one type of ethnic group and traditional norms of leadership and control are intact. In ASM migrant communities where people of different ethnic groups are present, there is evidence of social break down resulting in adverse negative impacts on women. A number of gender issues mostly negatively impacting on women are outlined in this paper.

GENDER ISSUES

Issues 1 Basic Health Services, Water and Sanitation

Wau town has one Health Centre and there are Aid Posts that are easily accessible by people living in small-scale mining communities. Though provision by government health services is unreliable at times due to shortage of medical supplies, logistics and manpower, there is constant delivery of health services through the Aid Posts which women and children have access to.

Access to clean water and proper sanitation is still a major health problem in many ASM communities. People have accepted the situation as a normal way of live without seriously considering the facts that continual use of unsafe water and poor sanitation practices are detrimental to their health.

Access to clean water for cooking, bathing and drinking is a major problem in the dry season. It is women's role to fetch cooking and drinking water as well as using water for laundry. Water is usually obtained from small water wells dug up from mountain sides and it is the women who walk distances to carry water. Men dig up water wells and build in water pipes or bamboos to run water closer to where people live and where women can easily fetch.

In some ASM communities' poor housing and overcrowding is common posing the risk of spread of diseases.

Issues 2 Access to education

In some ASM communities, access to education is not a problem but the decision to gain education is cut short when children at a younger age enjoy rewards of mining choose mining more then gaining an education. In other communities, a longer distance to and from school is a major cause of children deciding to discontinue formal education. In such instances, women and girl are far more disadvantaged from gaining some form of formal education.

Girls are kept back from school simply for gender reasons. In one community, women have expressed the need for Adult Literacy Classes where a survey is currently being undertaken to measure the interest of the community in supporting the Adult Literacy Project.

Issue 3 Leases and Mining Practices

According to the ASM Survey recently conducted, very few women own a mining lease. Leases owned by men are mostly passed onto male children other then women.

In terms of actual mining, the survey found that women were mining because they did not have a man to mine for them and their children. These were cases where the husband had left for another women or had died or where husbands were not fairly sharing income from gold.

Women are not extremely exposed to unsafe mining conditions because most women mine dust in flood plains and do alluvial mining in most of the ASM communities around Wau/Bulolo.

Mostly it is men who handle mercury to burn amalgam but women and children are affected when amalgam is burnt indoors or when is discarded into rivers. Due to continuous awareness by the Small Scale Mining Branch in Wau about the dangers of mercury, people are now changing the practices of burning amalgam indoors where the family cooks food or sleep and are burning amalgam at their mine sites or outdoors.

Issue 4 Small Informal Business Opportunities

Very few women in ASM communities in Wau/Bulolo have used proceeds from mining to do small informal businesses such as chicken farming, baking of scones, selling cooked food, handicrafts and store goods but most of failed to sustain these small informal businesses due to their very low literacy level and lack knowledge and skills in managing income obtained through the profits they make. Most of the profits they make are used for basic household needs, clothes, and school fees. The common practice of giving money to extended family members as an obligation also affects the continuity of small informal businesses.

Issue 5 Direct accesses to gold trading markets

Mostly men do selling of gold and control money made from the sale. Women from ASM communities on the out sketch of Wau as well as communities that have direct access to black markets within the ASM communities do sell gold from their male family members mining and then use the money to buy goods required of families only if gold is in smaller quantities. In communities where arm hold ups are common, only men sell the gold and also if the gold recovered from mining is of a higher value.

Issue 6 Representations

In Wau, there is a network of the National Council of Women that have representatives in all the 20 wards in the Wau Rural LLG that cover ASM communities. The existence of the women's network only exists by name but has failed to be an avenue for representation of women in the area particularly the ASM Communities. This network has also failed to deliver programs aimed at developing the status of women.

Women in customary ASM communities however maintain stronger participation in their church groups and are more active in women's church fellowship meetings. In some migrant ASM communities, many women do not belong to any women's church group or active women's association.

Issue 7 Social Breakdown

One difference between ASM communities in Wau/Bulolo is the diversity of ethnic groups that make up each of these communities.

In communities that contain at least one ethnic, social problems are better controlled however in communities that have a diversity of ethnic groups, existences of social problems and the poor control of these problems are very evident. These social problems and breakdown in respect and upholding of traditional and cultural norms, inter ethnic marriages, youth problems, extra marital affairs, polygamy and the fear of the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections are impacts experienced by women. The abuse of alcohol and drug in these communities continue to have a greater impact on the lives of women and children. Rape, domestic violence and other forms of discrimination against women are also common in such communities.

This is not to say that communities with one ethnic group do not experience the above problems. These problems are evident but have low occurrences compared to communities with the presence of different ethnic groups.

Issue 10 Gardening

In traditional customary landowning ASM Communities, access to land is not a problem but in migrant communities, access to gardening land sometimes require extra spending from money earned from gold to pay customary landowners for land to garden. This is not the same for those who garden on state owned land. The same piece of land is continually used for gardening. Growing other cash crop like coffee to substantiate income from gold is not common among the migrant communities.

Though men spend most their time mining, they do give some time to clearing land for gardening while women do most of the planting, clearing weeds and harvesting. Women do most of transporting garden food to markets by foot and for those who have access to public transport they travel in groups or alone to market their sell their produce. In communities where animals such as pigs and chickens are bred, it is the women who do most of the raising of these animals. Again money raised from the sale of animals is used for household needs.

RECCOMENDATIONS

Given the above gender issues and the impacts these have on women in the ASM communities in the Wau/Bulolo area and considering efforts in addressing artisanal and small scale mining as one sector that can be managed in a manner that will alleviate poverty and create opportunities for women to better improve their livelihoods, the following are recommended;

- Efforts by authorities to alleviate poverty through artisanal and small scale mining should be managed within a framework that is gender balanced.
- Women in ASM communities must be considered as an important stakeholder in any community consultation meetings and in any poverty reduction programs.
- Concerns and issues affecting women in ASM communities need identifying and addressing in both formal and informal consultations.
- Opportunities need to be created so that women feel empowered to be able to actively participate in artisanal mining i.e. to apply for mining leases. There is need to identify some sort of credit facility available to them to improve their mining operations and small informal businesses.
- Opportunities should be created through appropriate authorities for women in ASM communities to establish an organization that women can work through to partner and network with Non- Government Organization and government service delivery bodies to develop programs that will better improve their level of education and conditions of living.
- Authorities need to establish monitoring and evaluation systems to measure conditions and status of women in ASM communities and to use this information to assist in the development programs aimed at developing the conditions of women.
- There is need for policy that will promote and divert benefits from ASM back into these communities for community sustainable development.

CONCLUTION

ASM is a daily activity for many individuals and families who inhabit the Valleys and Mountains of the Wau and Bulolo Valleys. ASM has been a daily activity in these valleys since the early 1920's when gold was first discovered there.

More money has flowed in and out of people's hand including women but for many, the living conditions have only deteriorated. If women in these ASM communities are empowered to take a more active role in mining, using correct mining techniques as well as controlling income and investing, they can better improve their way of live, their living condition and contribute positively to their community's sustainable development.

Having a mouthpiece through associations and partnerships with existing government institutions as well as non-government organizations and having better access to information and credit facilities would be a bonus for sustainable development for women in ASM communities.

REREFENCES

1. Personal observations and from day to day contact.
2. Wau – Bulolo SSM Survey conducted by Howard Lole, Sarah Marika, Justin Edimani, Jennifer Krimbu , Boina Yaya , Christine Kukubol, Siove Done. Findings were not formalized by the time this paper was written.