

Participatory Action Research IMPACTS OF EXTRACTION ON WOMEN IN AFRICA

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Extraction of gold and women's struggle to survive in Kalsaka



"We were promised happiness with the advent of the mine, but the mine has made us more miserable."

Awa, 63 year old female resident, Kalsaka

old is extracted everywhere in the Kalsaka area. Women dig small holes from which they extract the earth. They pound the earth to make it thinner or winnow it to keep the ore-containing earth.

Then they wash the retained ore to obtain gold. The gold thus obtained is sold and helps women support themselves and their families. Alternatively, men dig deep holes from which they bring the ore to the surface. Women pound the ore and put it in bags which are then returned to the male diggers. Late in the evening, as compensation, male diggers give a number of bags to the female pounders who then wash the ore and extract gold. Either way, women claim that they benefit in that the gold permits them to earn cash income.

Artisanal gold mining has long been an important source of cash income for members of the 51 villages in the Kalsaka area. In 2006, the Cluff Mining Company arrived in the area and was later replaced by Amara Mining, which continues large scale gold mining operations in Kalsaka today. The establishment of industrial gold mining has led to the demise of both agricultural production and artisanal

mining, the latter not least because the mining company has charged a security company with denying artisanal miners access to the gold site. Farmers expropriated of their fields are dissatisfied with the financial compensation received from the mining company because they believe it is inadequate.

Former artisanal gold miners still present in Kalsaka condemn the brutality of the prohibition to access the site. The decision to prohibit access was taken without discussion with artisanal miners. In turn, countervailing measures for losses suffered by the community were not considered. Compensation was provided by the mining company only for the loss of fields. The contrast is stark between the rights granted by the state to the mining company, operating beneath the soil, and those granted to the community - farmers and artisanal miners working the soil.

While the establishment of the mine has caused much upset for the community as a whole, women are the most affected.





On the one hand, women have lost access to land upon which they produced various subsistence and market goods. On the other hand, women have lost access to the cash income they drew from artisanal gold mining.

In more detail, the vast majority of women in Kalsaka worked the family fields as well as smaller, individual plots on which they grew crops, vegetables and tubers. The two activities complemented each other, with family field production allowing for livestock production and the sale of crops, and individual plot production providing subsistence goods for the family. With the deprivation of fields and plots due to the establishment of the mine, agricultural and livestock production was brought to a halt, leaving women without the means to provide for families, and ultimately, the community. Some women were able to access new plots of land but the conditions have not been conducive to effective production.

My field is far away from home and with the long journey I must make by foot, in addition to daily housework, I am now suffering from chronic back ache. I do not even have money to seek treatment.

Mariam (30)

Supplementing agricultural production, gold panning constituted a source of cash income which allowed women to cover school and other family expenses – all of which amounted to a considerable measure of financial independence for women. Today the reality for women in Kalsaka is ever decreasing purchasing power.

They (the mining company) deprived us of land, they forbid us from gold panning, and then my husband left to look for work in the city. I am alone with my five children and I no longer know how to feed them."

Petty trade as a source of income is the only option for women in Kalsaka today. Few, however, are engaged in petty trade due to a lack of funds. Though women try to cluster to work together and generate income, they face numerous social barriers. Most notable among these are illiteracy and the decision making of their absent husbands' families, with which they are obliged to live due to traditional and religious norms.

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For the full report see http://womin.org.za/images/docs/burkina-faso-report.pdf This research project is a collaboration of WoMin and l'Organisation pour le Renforcement des Capacités de Développement (ORCADE).



L'Organisation pour le Renforcement des Capacités de Développement (ORCADE) is a non-profit Burkinabé nongovernmental organisation with the main objective of addressing economic and social issues to promote development. It works in partnership with a number of NGO coalitions around the world. It has accompanied the people of Kalsaka since the start of large scale gold mining in the area in 2008. www.orcade.org

Fatima (30)



WoMin - African Gender and Extractives Alliance brings together non-governmental organisations and grassroots women resisting destructive extractivism, focusing on mining, oil and gas in Sub-Saharan Africa. Established in 2013, WoMin and its allies undertake women-led research, solidarity exchanges, education and campaigns to promote development models advancing gender, ecological, energy and climate justice. www.womin.org.za