

Challenges of Salt Mining: An account of Katwe women salt miners



This research was produced in collaboration with
WoMin – African Gender and Extractives Alliance.



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Abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HIV/AIDs	Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
KSCB	Katwe Salt Conservation Board
NAPE	National Association of Professional Environmentalists
PAR	Participatory Action Research
UGX	Uganda Shillings
USD	United Stated Dollars

Executive Summary

Katwe Lake is too salty to support any aquatic life. However, this lake sustains thousands of Katwe inhabitants, who spend more than eight hours a day under the scorching sun harvesting salt from its highly polluted waters.

All around Lake Katwe, there are hundreds of salt pans (temporary ponds) and makeshift shelters uniquely connected by a network of foot paths to support hundreds of miners and their associated activities – salt harvesting, winning and selling of the rock and table salt to traders from across Uganda and neighboring countries Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda.

Salt mining is the only source of income for the communities around Lake Katwe. Just like people in other rural communities own gardens to farm for a living, communities near Lake Katwe own salt pans. There are more than 3,000 miners in Katwe, men and women and children. The mining process is labour-intensive and involves the use of rudimentary techniques. Salt miners are exposed to a number of economic, social and health challenges, and women are the most affected. These impacts, however, are not well documented or well publicised, leaving the miners to suffer in silence. Mining activities impact severely on the reproductive health of the miners, produce low returns from the hard and laborious work, result in human rights violation including sexual harassment and rape at the salt lake, high HIV prevalence, and the lack of a platform for miners to voice the problems they confront on a daily basis.

NAPE carried out a feminist Participatory Action Research (PAR) from May–August, 2014 with the support of Women against Mining (WoMin). The research aimed at exploring the impacts of salt mining at Katwe and getting in-depth understanding of the problems female salt miners confront on a daily basis, and to capture the voices of the salt-affected miners. The research findings would be used to lobby the concerned duty bearers to work towards ensuring improved mining conditions and to advocate for better returns that could promote better livelihoods.

The PAR project has to some extent helped the women to open-up and discuss as a group solutions to some of the problems they have been facing. The women now understand and appreciate the effects of salt mining on their livelihoods. They have decided to switch to goat rearing and agriculture as an alternative to mining. The women are working with NAPE to replant the eroded slopes of the lake with Euphorbia tree seedlings and allow for regeneration of grass to provide pasture for the goats. The mining community has worked with NAPE to construct a cage at the eastern side of the lake, and women have already started growing crops for food and cash.

In the words of women at Katwe



"I have worked in this salt mine for 10 years now. I work from about 8am till 6pm for UGX5.000 (USD2) a day. Both my husband and I are miners, but I do not have power over the money I earn. Sometimes I develop wounds on my legs and hands, but if I don't work my children will not have food to eat." – Laprida Kabugho





“I do not own a salt pan but work for others who pay me UGX4000 (USD 1.50) a day. This money is not enough to buy domestic needs and medication. When I get sores on my body, I just apply super glue to cover the wounds and continue working.” – Susan Kabugha

1. Introduction

NAPE held internal planning meeting prior to going into the field. The meeting was aimed at exploring collaborative activities with the communities at the salt lake, and also to explore possibility of other aspects of the PAR process.

1.1 Field visit

NAPE carried out three field visits to the project area. The first visit was aimed at holding a meeting with the communities to introduce the concept of PAR. The meeting was also aimed at identifying women who are directly affected by the salt mining process and who would participate in the PAR.

The second field visit involved meeting with the research partners to share experiences, listen to the women’s stories and get women’s suggestions on how they would like to improve their working conditions and better their living standards. The research partners included those who: (1) own salt pans and are able to provide employment to other women miners; (2) are directly affected by the salt mining process; and (3) those who have worked in the salt mining business for more than 10 years, and who are

responsible for relatives who are former miners but have been forced out of the work due to illness resulting from the poor working conditions.

The third visit aimed to further explore: ways of improving the working conditions that make women miners vulnerable to reproductive health risks; ways to strengthen their ability to negotiate for better returns; and to explore alternative ways of generating income. The meeting also resolved to form an association of women affected by salt mining and to capture the voices of women through story telling for use as an advocacy tool in future.

2. Findings on the ground

During the meetings and discussions with the communities, we found out that salt mining is the only source of income for communities around Lake Katwe. People in the community are well aware that the salt mining process presents social, economic and health-related impacts to their lives, however, they see salt mining as the only option they have for survival. In our conversations with women miners, we found that they are confronted with more problems than their male counterparts. The open discussions were opportunities for sharing information and knowledge on the effects of the brine on women which informed deeper understanding of the problems women confront. These problems are outlined below.

2.1 Economic impact

Most women do not own salt pans. They are employed individually, or in a group, by those who own salt pans and are paid on a daily basis. Women miners work for more than eight hours a day and earn between UGX 4.000 and 10.000 (USD 1-3) per day. The money is not enough to meet essential needs, including buying food and school fees for their children. Moreover, these women do not make independent decisions about how to spend the money they earn, because of the traditional power that men hold in the community.

2.2 Health impacts

All the women miners in Katwe work without protective gear, despite the dangers of exposure to brine and other corrosive chemicals that are part and parcel of the mining process. Brine is water with high concentration of salt and mixture chemical gases such as ammonia, hydrogen dioxide and many others. They work in extreme temperatures, under direct sun, and without limited access to fresh drinking water.

2.3 HIV / AIDs prevalence

During our discussions with the miners, we found out that prevalence of HIV and AIDS is very high in the mining communities. We also found out that education and sensitisation about HIV/AIDs is carried out by private institutions, such as Save the Children and Kagando Hospital. Testing services for HIV/AIDs and retroviral treatment is available free of charge in government health facilities near Katwe and many

community members are benefiting. These health services are limited to HIV/AIDs and minor health issues such as malaria fevers.

2.4 Sexual harassment and rape

During our discussions with the miners, we found out that sexual harassment and rape has not happened in the salt mining community. This was attributed to the risky nature of the working environment which could lead to instant loss of life if a person fell into the brine. Oftentimes, rape is preceded by a fight or struggling in self-defense by the victims.

We also found out that the leadership at the Salt mine had a strict code of conduct/guidelines that prohibit any form of fighting or struggling to avoid falling into the brine. We found out that breach of this guideline attracts a jail term of not less than seven years.

2.5 Formation of salt-affected Women's Group / Association

The women miners agreed to come together in a group, in collaboration with NAPE, to form an association of specifically women working at the salt mines. This association will bring women miners together regularly to share their experiences and discuss other income-generating initiatives that could supplement their earnings from salt mining. The association will also be used as a platform to advocate for fair taxation and direct access to markets, earning them better returns. The association will also offer a platform to amplify the voices of women miners and advocate for authorities to take appropriate action.

2.6 Women's participation in participatory video

After a series of discussions, women opened-up and told their stories. Their stories were captured in short video clips that will be used to lobby policy makers and advocate for improved working conditions and better earnings. The video clips were taken by research partners from NAPE, because the women were not yet confident to do the filming on their own.

2.7 Women's reflection on the PAR process and suggestions for next steps

At the end of the PAR process, the women said they realised that they were affected in a similar way and needed to come together to find ways of addressing their problems. They said that listening to each other's stories deepened their understanding and knowledge, especially in relation to their reproductive health problems. The women also said that coming together to jointly find solutions to their problems was strength, because they would speak as one voice when advocating for improved working conditions and better access to better earnings.

3. Research challenges

During the PAR process we encountered a number of challenges that impacted the research:

- a) Distance to the project area: Katwe Salt Lake is in southwestern Uganda, about 360 miles (and eight hour drive) from Kampala.
- b) High temperature and air pollution: Katwe Salt Lake is an explosion Crater Lake situated along the equator, so temperatures are very high. The lake water contains hydrogen dioxide and ammonia gas, which evaporates under the equatorial sun filling the air with a noxious smell.
- c) Language barrier: Most of the research participants could only understand and speak their native language (Lukonzo). This slowed down the process as we had to get translations to English. A woman leader from the salt mining community, and also a member of the Katwe Salt Conservation Board (KSCB) were specifically selected to be part of the research because she could speak both English and the local language. She helped in translations and bridged the language gap.
- d) Tribal conflicts: During the project implementation, there was a conflict between two native tribes that live near Lake Katwe, and this conflict attracted heavy security in Kasese and surrounding district. There was significant risk to our research team and we were forced to clear access with security forces before carrying out any activities in the area. The NAPE team had identification cards and official letters of introduction from NAPE to Kasese district authorities detailing the nature of work they were carrying out and the duration of their stay in the area. These documents were presented to the security personnel and district authorities to guarantee the team's entry to the project area.

3.1 Changes after the PAR process

Following the PAR process, the affected women mobilised and began planning the following food security and income-generating initiatives:

- a) They have so far restored around 600 acres of degraded Katwe salt hill slopes with indigenous Europhobia trees seedlings with hope that they will check erosion around the lake and lead to increased soil fertility, encouraging birding around the salt lake that could in future, lead to ecotourism in the community.
- b) The women have begun protecting and conserving the Cyprus grass around the lake so that in the near future they can begin making handcrafted materials for sale.
- c) Goat rearing, mainly by women, is now a growing activity in the restored hill slopes.
- d) Same agricultural production has also begun at the Kanyabayonga hill slope, east of the lake and we believe it is due to increased awareness among salt miners of the dangers of the work.

4. Appendix

4.1 List of participants

First meeting – 12 July, 2014

No.	Name	Sex	Position / Responsibility
1.	Rehema Elias	F	Katwe Salt Conservation Board (member)
2.	Rusia Nyanamo	F	Salt winner
3.			
4.	Baluku Adolf	M	Salt Extractor
5.	Sarah Tindatina	F	Salt winner
6.	Margaret Akol	F	Katwe Tourism Institution
7.	Sindiabo M. Kelvin	F	Katwe Owran P/S
8.	Julian Itungur	F	Salt winner
9.	Laprida Kabugho	F	Salt winner
10.	Kyetume Sele Amooti	M	Salt Extractor
11.	Nurnat Businge	F	Salt winner
12.	Rwecumugura Archangel	F	Salt winner
13.	Regina Mbambu	F	Salt winner
14.	Kanagwa Medius	F	Salt winner
15.	Agnes Mberiraba	F	Salt winner
16.	Musa Proscovia	F	Salt winner
17.	Mwapuri Bahati	F	Salt winner
18.	Kiiza Zainabu	F	Salt Cluster
19.	Sulaima Kabugho	F	Salt winner
20.	Busingye Nuriat	F	Salt Winner
21.	Susan Kabugha	F	Salt winner
22.	Tinka John	M	Chair Man (BMU)
23.	Hakiima Bukonya	M	Chair man LC1.
24.	Bwambale Leopold	M	Salt Lake
25.	Mawano Victor	M	Salt Cluster (Chair person)
26.	Annet Mpiira	F	Salt winner
27.	Mariam Nsemerirwe	F	Salt winner
28.	Rosette Kyomugisha	F	Salt winner
29.	Amiri Sauda	F	Salt winner
30.	Peace Kiiza	F	Salt winner
31.	Mathe Sylvester	M	Boat Owner
32.	Karebe John Baptist	M	Salt Cluster
33.	Kabiira Rutaaro	F	Salt winner
34.	Kagwa Sanyu	F	Salt winner

Second Meeting – 17 July, 2014

No.	Name	Sex	Position / Responsibility
1.	Mariam Nsemerirwe	F	Salt winner
2.	Kiiza Nainab	F	Salt winner
3.	Sulaima Kabugho	F	Salt winner
4.	Peace Kiiza	F	Salt winner
5.	Agnes Mberiraba	F	Salt winner
6.	Rwecumungura Archangel	F	Salt winner
7.	Margaret Akol	F	Salt winner
8.	Kanagwa Medius	F	Salt winner
9.	Rusia Nyanamo	F	Salt winner
10.	Mathe Sylivester	M	Boat Owner
11.	Susan Kabugha	F	Salt winner
12.	Rogers Miirwa	M	Salt Extractor
13.	Kanagida M.	M	Salt Extractor
14.	Bahati Jibaril	F	Salt Extractor
15.	Rosette Kyomugisha	F	Salt winner
16.	Sarah Tinditina	F	Salt winner
17.	Regina Mbabu	F	Salt winner
18.	Kagwa Sanyu	F	Salt winner
19.	Hakiima Bukeya	M	Chairman BMU
20.	Sindiabo Kelvin	F	Katwe Owran P/S
21.	Karebe John Baptist	M	Salt cluster
22.	Byamuhira Vicent	M	Boat Owner
23.	Bwambale Leopold	M	Salt Cluster
24.	Kyetume Amooti Sele	M	Salt Extractor
25.	Mbabari Hamadi	F	Salt winner
26.	Julian Itungur	F	Salt winner
27.	Kakanu Friday	F	Salt winner
28.	Mawano Victor	N	Salt Custer –Chair man
29.	Mpwapuri Bahati	F	Salt winner
30.	Laprida Kabugo	F	Salt winner
31.	Nicholas Kagongo	M	Field Officer NAPE
32.	Sarah Tindatine	F	Katwe Salt Board (member)
33.	Robert Byamuka	M	Salt cluster
34.	Rehema Elias	F	Katwe Salt Board
35.	Musa proscovia	F	Salt winner
36.	Sauda Amira	F	Salt winner
37.	Kabiira Rutaaro	F	Salt winner
38.	Kabagambe Tadeo	M	Salt Cluster
39.	Annet Mpiira	F	Salt winner
40.	Busingye Nuriat	F	Salt winner

41.	Baluke Adolf	M	Salt Extractor
42.	Miriam Katoina	F	Salt winner
43.	Tinka John	M	Katwe Salt Lake BMU Chair man