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# GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINING (ASM)



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### **Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM)**

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## OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating impacts on the livelihoods of many people around the world. Its impact on informal sectors and in jurisdictions where state reach and support are limited have been all the more damaging. The artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector—which employs nearly 45 million people around the world (Delve, n.d.) and indirectly supports approximately 150 million (Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development, 2017)—has been among those hit hardest by the pandemic. Health impacts on miners and their families have included sickness and in some cases death, with many mining communities located in rural areas far from health care or the social safety net of the state. The closure of international borders and imposition of national movement restrictions in many countries disrupted mineral supply chains, creating significant obstacles to trade and a buyer's market that saw the collapse of mineral prices at the ASM site level. In the gold sector, for example, despite international gold prices reaching record highs in the summer of 2020, gold prices at some ASM sites fell as much as 40% (Artisanal Gold Council, n.d.). For producers who tend to live hand to mouth and rely on regular mineral sales, these supply chain disruptions were extremely damaging. While some impacts, such as site-level prices, have now recovered, ongoing resurgences of COVID-19 and related restrictions will continue to affect the ASM sector going forward. The UAE, for example, one of the world's biggest international hubs for ASM gold from Africa, in June 2021 closed its doors to gold from Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda as part of measures to contain the spread of coronavirus (Chmaytelli, 2021), the implications of which will no doubt be felt by ASM producers and traders in the region for some time.

Against this backdrop, this policy brief focuses on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on ASM communities. Given their historic marginalization in the sector, research on gendered impacts on ASM has to date translated largely into a focus on women, a trend followed by this policy brief. However, it should be noted that sound research on the gendered impacts of ASM and COVID on men and masculinities is lacking and represents a gap that should be filled.

The resounding finding of ASM sector research from the past year is that COVID-19 and its related impacts have exacerbated pre-pandemic gender inequalities in the sector. Despite being critical members of the ASM workforce worldwide—women are estimated to make up 50% of the ASM workforce globally, a percentage that is even higher in some mineral categories (e.g., 70% in salt mining in Uganda) (Hinton et al., 2017)—women have historically faced a number of gendered barriers to full participation in ASM. They tend to occupy roles



in the sector that garner lower pay and are often specifically excluded from better-paid activities such as digging. This has created an important gender pay gap. They, along with women in other sectors around the world, are disproportionately represented in unpaid work and face the double burden of unpaid household work and income earning. They often face more challenges in terms of access to finance and land, disadvantageous gender social norms, and a lack of access to social services and support systems, networks, associations and, ultimately, information. These barriers mean that men almost always hold positions of authority in the ASM sector, and receive the majority share of income.

COVID-19 has reinforced many of these disadvantages for women in ASM. In a number of contexts, women appear to have been disproportionately affected by job loss. While some research has suggested that women and men have suffered equally from lost access to mine sites and shorter working hours (Perks & Schneck, 2021), qualitative data collected from women in mining communities in a number of countries suggest that this is not universally the case. Research from Zimbabwe, Uganda and Kenya reveals that women were more likely to be laid off or unable to continue working during the pandemic (Lyster & Singo, 2020). Roles typically assigned to women—including washing and sorting ore, transporting materials, and providing food and other services—are often seen as “peripheral,” and, in some cases, they have been deemed unnecessary in the face of restricted access on ASM sites. Faced with school closures and extra childcare, many women were simply not able to leave home in order to travel to mine sites. Market disadvantages were also reported. In Uganda, for example, women stone crushers who normally sell to individual buyers found themselves without a market in the face of government restrictions on small-scale construction (Lyster & Singo, 2020). In Zimbabwe, a border closure with South Africa led to a fall in the availability of mercury, which disproportionately affected ASM gold processing, in which women play a crucial role (Lyster & Singo, 2020).

ASM job losses and associated income reductions, for both women and men, had knock-on effects on food insecurity, which is widely acknowledged to disproportionately impact women. In research conducted in 22 countries from May to July 2020 under the Delve COVID Impact Reporting Initiative (Delve, 2020), the proportion of female respondents reporting their households skipping meals was consistently higher than for male respondents. Food price inflation and school closures resulting in higher food costs at home would have disproportionately impacted women, who are often responsible for household expenditure. Combined with lower incomes, this constitutes a significant strain on household resources.

In addition to the negative impacts caused by market fluctuations, COVID-19 response policy also had gendered impacts on ASM communities. In Zimbabwe, for example, while ASM was classified as “essential” and exempted from the nationwide travel restrictions, service providers to the sector were not initially included in this exemption. This not only affected production (ASMs could not obtain the tools, equipment, and food they needed to work) but also disproportionately affected women as primary service providers (Tufo et al., 2020). Similarly, government-imposed movement restrictions (along with reduced incomes) restricted women’s access to essential health items and medicines (Lyster & Singo, 2020). In Kenya, restrictions on ASM activities saw many women who relied on ASM forced to conduct their mining activities at night, reportedly increasing their vulnerability to gender-based violence (Kenya Land Alliance, 2021).

Despite these disadvantages, ASM has continued to be a critical source of income to and livelihood for women during the pandemic. Pre-COVID-19 research (Impact, 2017) showed that



despite the ASM sector gender pay gap, women benefit economically and socially from ASM, which provides them with essential household income and, in many cases, increased social status. This remained true—although with greater challenges—during the pandemic. Women in Kenya choosing to risk working at night is but one example of this. In other contexts, women moved from working in formal mines (that faced workforce restrictions) to the unregulated informal sector in order to continue working, increasing their vulnerability to COVID-19 as well as other risk factors such as sexual and gender-based violence (Lyster & Singo, 2020).

For this reason, increased government support to the sector, and to the marginalized groups who work within it in particular, is essential. Government interventions that specifically supported women in ASM throughout the pandemic were limited. Even before the pandemic, governments faced challenges in providing this support, lacking the data, financial, material, and human resources to effectively regulate remote and informal ASM activities. Throughout the pandemic, government support has tended to be limited to sensitization about COVID-19 and how to manage the risks associated with it, with many unable to provide pandemic-specific support to ASM (Crawford et al., 2020). However, many have continued to provide essential services to ASM, such as extension services and training and environmental management. The continuation and improvement of this support with new measures targeting gender equality in the sector are critical to ensuring that women are not marginalized in COVID-19 recovery efforts. Despite facing additional vulnerabilities during the pandemic, ASM remains an important livelihood for millions of women around the world. Gender-responsive government responses, therefore, are critical to ensuring that the road to recovery brings us closer to equality and inclusivity in the ASM sector.

Below are three case studies that showcase the experiences of women in ASM in Zimbabwe, Peru, and the Philippines. The final section outlines some key principles to achieving the goal of a more inclusive and equitable ASM sector globally.



## CASE STUDY 1: GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON ARTISANAL GOLD MINING COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE

The pandemic in Zimbabwe exacerbated an already complex and challenging operating environment for ASM. In recent years, Zimbabwe has suffered repetitive droughts, high inflation, and foreign exchange shortages leading to a weakened economy. Natural disasters such as Cyclone Idai in 2019 have only intensified these challenges. In addition to this, COVID-related impacts are estimated to have increased the number of extremely poor citizens in the country by 1.3 million people, pushing 49% of the population into extreme poverty in 2020 (World Bank, 2021). The pandemic has also seen an exacerbation of gender-related impacts: gender-based violence (GBV) increased following the imposition of virus-response movement restrictions, with women and girls more vulnerable to violence both at home and in accessing essential services such as water (Social Development Direct, 2020).

These impacts were also seen across the ASM sector. Women miners in Zimbabwe—estimated to make up around 10% of the total workforce—have long faced discrimination in their roles (Mhaka, 2020). This includes harassment, economic exclusion, and vulnerability to violence (including sexual violence). Interviews with women miners in the Midlands and Matabeleland South provinces<sup>1</sup> highlighted that the situation caused by the pandemic only served to make these challenges worse. Increases in food insecurity resulting from the pandemic—widely acknowledged to disproportionately impact women—exacerbated one of the worst food crises Zimbabwe had seen in living memory (Global Network Against Food Crises and Food Security Information Network, 2020). The situation was made even worse by changing weather patterns (including increased drought) and economic crises linked to shortages of cash, high inflation, and challenges in the supply of fuel and power. Women ASM respondents were consistently more likely to report skipped meals in their household than men, although the gap between the two closed as the impacts of the pandemic became more severe over time (Delve, 2020). In response, the government, as well as some non-governmental organizations (NGOs), were reportedly distributing essential food items

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<sup>1</sup> Conducted by Josephine Singo and Levin Sources as part of the Delve COVID-19 Impact Reporting Initiative, looking at the impacts of COVID on ASM in 22 countries



to vulnerable families; however, it was difficult to ascertain whether this support was sufficient and systematic (Tufo et al., 2020).

Food insecurity in ASM communities occurred largely due to food price inflation combined with lower household income for miners. Government lockdown measures and movement restrictions aimed at containing the spread of the virus resulted in reduced workforces at ASM gold sites, leaving many unable to earn an income. This was especially the case for women miners, a greater proportion of whom reported that they were selling less gold and that it was more difficult to sell their gold than before the pandemic compared to their male counterparts (Delve, 2020). Furthermore, the sole legal buyer of gold in Zimbabwe—Fidelity Printers and Refiners—was reportedly responsible for long payment delays for purchased gold. For ASM workers with little savings, and in particular for women, who are generally responsible for household expenditure, these delays negatively impacted their ability to buy essential household goods.

Finally, research shows increased vulnerabilities in women's health in ASM communities as a result of the pandemic. Actual rates of COVID-19 in ASM communities are not known due to limited testing and the remote nature of ASM. Anecdotal evidence collected in the first few months of the pandemic shows that perceived rates of COVID were very low amongst ASM respondents (Delve, 2020). However, women in ASM communities experienced indirect negative health impacts as a result of the pandemic. Reduced or no work at mine sites as a result of the pandemic left women with less access to foreign currency and subsequently reduced access to essential health items, which are often only available in Zimbabwe in USD (Lyster & Singo, 2020). Women experienced increased difficulty in accessing birth control pills, sanitary items, and essential medicines such as the antiretroviral drugs needed to treat HIV/AIDS. This was due in part to reduced household income and movement restrictions but also to the fact that many of these items had previously been provided by door-to-door community health services that were no longer operating because of COVID-19.

In light of the urgent challenges faced by both women and men in mining communities in Zimbabwe, preventive measures implemented in ASM communities were not gender sensitive or adapted to the context of artisanal gold mining. The promotion of hand sanitizer, for example, is not useful for ASM because it does not take into account the fact that many miners could not afford it in sufficient quantities or that sanitizers are not well-suited to those who work directly with soil. Similarly, lack of access to water at many mine sites precluded handwashing from being a suitable alternative. However, women played a critical role in community-led pandemic responses. The local production of hand sanitizers and cloth masks was done mainly by women (Tufo et al., 2020). Gender sensitivity was shown in an initiative in Shurugwi, where the ASM community raised funds for and set up a COVID-19 isolation centre in the local hospital (which did not already have one), with separate spaces for female and male miners (Tufo et al., 2020). These efforts highlight the key role that women (and men) miners have played in COVID responses—and the important place they should have in post-COVID recovery—in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.





## CASE STUDY 2: PERU & THE PALLAQUERAS

*Pallaqueras* are women artisanal and small-scale miners who collect residual gold ore along the mountainsides of Peru, in the regions of Puno, Arequipa, and Ayacucho. Pallaqueo (from the Spanish verb *pallar*, meaning “to collect”) is a traditional, historical activity that has occurred among Andean peoples for centuries.

Women involved in artisanal gold mining in Peru have particularly been impacted by the effects of COVID-19. Even before the pandemic, employment statistics from the Puno region demonstrated that *pallaqueras* worked an average of 42% more hours a week than male miners, but they made only USD 255 per month, compared to the USD 420 per month on average than male miners made (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). This wage gap is typical among ASM workers globally, and research suggests that COVID-19 has only exacerbated this. The drops experienced in early 2020 in the price that ASM workers were able to obtain for gold is one area where women miners may have been more negatively impacted than men, as research shows that price drops are generally felt more deeply by women working in ASM (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021).

Women *pallaqueras* in Peru were particularly affected by this decrease in gold mining proceeds, as *pallaqueo* is often the only source of income for many women miners, nearly half of whom live in extreme poverty, as defined by national statistics, and 75% of them earn below the federal minimum wage (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). In addition, because Peru did not categorize ASM as an “essential” activity during the lockdown, artisanal gold mining activities across the country were temporarily halted, intensifying the vulnerability of the *pallaqueras*. Despite such vulnerability, the informal status of many of the *pallaqueras* meant that, as of June 2020, nearly 80% of the women had not received, or were not eligible for, any government aid (Solidaridad, 2020).

In Peru, the informal economy became a risk factor that led the country to have one of the highest COVID-19 death rates in the world (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). Also known as the “shadow economy,” over 50% of those in the informal economy in Peru reported losing their entire incomes as a result of the lockdown, compared to just 16% of Peruvians with formal employment (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). Economic vulnerability, coupled with the lack of



access to government benefits such as unemployment insurance, negatively affected the economic and social well-being of millions of Peruvians, pallaqueras included.

In addition, pallaqueras experienced vulnerability when it came to knowledge of the virus and access to health care itself. Research conducted by the Instituto de Redes de Desarrollo Social (Red Social) in June 2020 found that 75% of pallaqueras had little information about COVID-19 symptoms, protocols, and potential situations in which the virus spread. Over 50% of women miners surveyed lacked health insurance, and many lived in remote areas without access to basic health care services (Solidaridad, 2021).

In addition, many women miners are chronically exposed to occupational hazards such as respiratory diseases or chronic conditions, making them even more susceptible to the risks of severe forms of COVID-19 due to already weak health conditions.

Due to this vulnerability, various advocates called for pallaqueras and other informal miners in Peru to be eligible for governmental emergency aid, just as large-scale miners and formalized artisanal miners were eligible for benefits under the law (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). Despite their informality, many pallaqueras are registered, either through the Ministry of Energy and Mines or through the registry of pallaqueras associations in the National Superintendence of Public Registries in Peru (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). Using these registries, direct access to stimulus and other forms of economic and social support for pallaqueras could be possible.

In response to this situation, the civil society organization Solidaridad partnered with Red Social to launch a crowdfunding campaign to aid women miners in Peru. Launched in July 2020, the pallaquera assistance platform had three parts: fundraising and distribution of food supplies to families, especially those with children; a remote capacity-building program to support women in adjusting their mining practices and daily activities to the COVID-19 emergency; and the establishment of a call centre that provided information on how to prevent and handle COVID-19 infection (Smith-Roberts et al., 2021). Pallaqueras also received training to build their organizational and communication skills to positively impact their mining associations, improve working conditions, and support their families and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Solidaridad, 2020).

As of October 2020, over USD 11,000 of aid had been distributed to nearly 600 pallaqueras in Peru through the assistance platform (Solidaridad, 2020). By March 2021, over USD 22,000 in aid had been provided to women miners in Peru (Solidaridad, 2021).



## CASE STUDY 3: ASM, WOMEN, AND THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines has an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 artisanal gold miners operating in more than 30 provinces across the country. According to the Artisanal Gold Council, the country represents one of the more significant sources of artisanal gold worldwide (Catedral et al., 2020). Figures from the Philippines Central Bank demonstrate that artisanal producers in 2018 generated an estimated USD 14 million worth of gold, or about 350 kg (Catedral et al., 2020). However, given that many artisanal miners in the Philippines are informal, and thereby often do not end up in official statistics, the real figure is likely much higher. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 production figures are likely to show a decrease (Catedral et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown led to the halting of many artisanal mining activities in the Philippines. The artisanal gold supply chain was disrupted when, in March 2020, the Philippine government declared the island of Luzon to be under an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). Luzon contains the Philippine capital, Manila, and is also home to 60 million residents, thousands of whom are engaged in artisanal gold mining (Catedral et al., 2020).

Women miners and their families immediately felt the impact of the ECQ, which mandated that residents stay home (Catedral et al., 2020). Thousands of businesses were shuttered, and all public transportation was stopped. Artisanal miners quickly lost access to markets and potential customers, buyers of artisanal gold, and experienced a reduced workforce (Catedral et al., 2020). The ECQ also led to challenges in procuring processing supplies, which further impacted artisanal gold production (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). Because of the disruption of the gold supply chain, miners were selling gold at a rate about 16% lower than pre-quarantine prices, as major traders were closed (Catedral et al., 2020).

Women miners interviewed in the Luzon town of Itogon were especially affected by the ECQ. Gold production in Itogon was fully suspended, and strict enforcement checkpoints were established across the region (Catedral et al., 2020). Women miners, as well as the wives of male miners, explained they quickly ran out of money and food, due to the lack of cash on hand and the reduced buying price of gold (Catedral et al., 2020). Women artisanal miners also cited the transportation restrictions, slow gold production, limited options for alternative employment, an increased burden of unpaid work and caretaking of family members, and



difficulty in accessing public support services as challenges they experienced as a result of the quarantine (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020).

Women miners and their families obtained some relief when, in May 2020, the Philippines' Department of Social Welfare and Development provided economic subsidies to families in need, through the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). Three out of four women interviewed by the Artisanal Gold Council had received the SAP cash emergency subsidy (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). Women also reported receiving food such as rice, sugar, coffee, and canned goods from their Local Government Units. However, while this food-based relief was received periodically throughout the lockdown, some families reported the assistance was not enough, and women had to borrow money from relatives or neighbours or buy food on credit in order to feed their families (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020).

As in other countries, such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Peru, Colombia, female miners in the Philippines reported that gender inequalities that existed even before COVID-19 have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The number of women working in artisanal gold mining in Itogon is estimated to be around 17% (out of an estimated 1,500 person mining workforce) (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). In Itogon, women are mainly in charge of mineral processing, including bagging the ore, and many women there make no income outside of mineral processing (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). The introduction of the ECQ led to the suspension of public transportation, and this, in turn, saw the stalling of a number of economic activities, including agriculture, food vending, and mineral processing. Mining activities were halted as miners ran out of bags to pack the ore and as gold production slowed. Women who attempted to find alternative employment outside of mining reported difficulties because most businesses deemed non-essential were shuttered, and the lack of transportation made it difficult to search for work options (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). The closing of schools and increased childcare needs also placed additional burdens on women, whose unpaid work often increased while the family income from mining decreased drastically. Some women attempted to open *sari-sari* stores, or neighbourhood sundry stores, within their homes, but they reported difficulties in obtaining goods for the business because of the lack of transportation and the restricted movement of goods (Belo-Enricoso & Catedral, 2020). Others reported attempting to engage in businesses such as flower farming or growing chilis, but each of these ventures contained its own challenges related to the pandemic.



## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICY INITIATIVES

The above sections have given an overview of some of the principal gendered impacts of the pandemic on ASM communities to date, as well as provided examples of how these impacts have played out in communities in Africa, Asia, and South America. Acknowledging the critical role that national and local governments can play in supporting vulnerable communities, this section presents some key principles for guiding gender-responsive policy initiatives related to the pandemic and its impact on ASM.

The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (UN Women & United Nations Development Program, 2021), analyzed over 3,100 policy measures across 219 countries and territories from a gender perspective and identified that 1,299 of these COVID-19 measures (64%) could be classified as gender sensitive, meaning they seek to directly address the specific risks and challenges that women and girls face because of the pandemic. Those policies, according to the Tracker, were classified as gender sensitive if they focused on preventing and/or responding to violence against women and girls, included measures to target women's economic security and/or unpaid care, or provided support to female-dominated sectors of the economy (UN Women & United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). Out of 2,280 fiscal, labour market and social protection measures identified in the tracker, only 287 explicitly address women's economic security, mostly through policies to support women entrepreneurs and informal traders, or through provision of cash transfers or grants (UN Women & UNDP, 2021). In total, 23% of the 1,700 social protection and labour market measures are gender sensitive, targeting either women's economic security or support for unpaid care (UN Women & UNDP, 2021). This shows us that negligence of gender equality in COVID-19 emergency and recovery planning is not specific to ASM, and a significant part of the COVID-19 emergency response was split along gender lines.

It is important to remember that a COVID-19 response policy does not need to be developed from scratch. While being unique in many aspects, COVID-19 nevertheless shares common elements with other humanitarian crises and emergencies. One element is that it has disproportionately affected women, girls, and those who are already marginalized by pre-existing systems. International experience in gender-responsive humanitarian programs, as comprehensively explained in the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (2017) [Gender in Humanitarian Action Handbook](#) could and should feed into the design and delivery of targeted



programs, policies, and actions for minimizing the negative impacts of COVID-19 on women in ASM. Targeted actions such as these should address gender-based inequality in terms of such things as the long-term deprivation of rights to education or, as in the case of women in ASM, access to land rights and social protection.

Accordingly, policy responses include the following:

- Emergency-focused policies and actions to provide the most urgent relief to those who are most affected or would potentially be most affected.
- Short-term policies and actions that aim for temporary fixes to improve the resilience of the most affected communities.
- Long-term policies and actions that drive structural reforms based on lessons learned.

The case studies featured earlier provide a stock of existing policies, programs, and actions targeting women in ASM and COVID-19. A thorough analysis of these policies, programs, and actions demonstrates that they often lack a longer-term focus, and most of the time, the window of opportunity to design and provide emergency support has been missed. Most of the existing good practices fall under the second group of policies characterized by short-term solutions, such as shifting roles for women in ASM to produce hand sanitizers or cloth masks. However, this is not universally the case—as the case studies presented above feature good examples of gender-responsive emergency response, such as the cash emergency subsidy in the Philippines and the pallaquera assistance platform in Peru that have provided emergency relief for women in ASM. On the other hand, long-term and structural policies that could offer sustainability and resilience against the exacerbated impacts of gender inequalities in the sector are yet to be developed.

Overall, gender-responsive COVID-19 response policies should take into account the need for emergency, short-term, and long-term responses to the pandemic. They can be used within existing or planned policy responses to ensure that these are gender-responsive and to avoid the further marginalization of vulnerable groups such as women. They can also be applied in future crises that have an impact on ASM communities, including but not limited to those that are related to climate change, armed conflict, and endemic or pandemic diseases. Below is a list of policy-making tools and policy options that can be used in this three-stage policy-making and implementation.

## 1. RAPID GENDER ASSESSMENTS

One critical lesson for future crises is the need for preparedness and capacity to act quickly and in a gender-responsive way once the emergent response is needed. Rapid gender assessment is a tool that can be used to enable the design and delivery of gender-responsive humanitarian and emergency assistance for the most marginalized—and therefore most affected—women. These assessments are executed rapidly in the face of crises and can help define and prioritize the gendered needs and vulnerabilities in emergency contexts when comprehensive gender assessments can be time consuming and may be impeded by the lack of gender-disaggregated data (UN Women, 2020b). Some international organizations (i.e., UN Women [2020a], the United Nations Population Fund [2020]) and international NGOs have undertaken rapid gender assessments in countries and regions (Haneef & Kalyanpur, 2020) but these assessments do not tend to have a focus on women in ASM, even in countries where women represent a significant part of the ASM workforce. This is an important gap that, if filled, may result in better emergency support for women in ASM.



The main purpose of a rapid gender assessment is to predict the most immediate and urgent vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls (in particular marginalized women, such as those in ASM) based on existing gender roles, responsibilities, capacities, and resources and then design emergency support in a way that responds to their gendered needs and vulnerabilities. Governments, international organizations, and civil society can:

1. Conduct rapid gender assessments for women in ASM communities when and if ASM is a critical source of livelihoods for local women and is expected to be affected by the crisis in question.
2. Include women in ASM as a specific target group in the design and implementation of rapid gender assessments conducted at a broader scale, as those women are mostly further marginalized in terms of access to livelihoods, health care, social services, and social security, which leads them to fall through the cracks of the systems if not specifically targeted.

### **BOX 1. POLICY OPTIONS THAT CAN BE DEVELOPED AFTER RAPID GENDER ASSESSMENTS**

In the context of COVID-19 and women in ASM, rapid gender assessments would help spot gender-specific vulnerabilities and develop emergency policies to respond to these needs. Some policy options that could be developed following rapid gender assessments are listed below:

- Women in ASM communities, and in particular Indigenous women miners in remote communities, have specific vulnerabilities in terms of their access to information and health care. They are often excluded from formal and mainstream mining associations, and they frequently lack social security. Women's networks and organizations that have outreach to women in ASM can be critical sources to support their access to information about the outbreaks in mining sites, protection recommendations, and hygiene and sanitization products. The call centre operated within the pallaquera assistance platform is another good example of a targeted policy that provides emergency support for women in ASM. In addition, a good policy to address this vulnerability would be to distribute hygiene kits, family planning products, and sanitary products through mobile service centres in ASM communities.
- Women in ASM are prone to food insecurity caused by the loss of cultivated land to mining and exacerbated by the loss of income as ASM activities are halted or shrunk for women miners. In such cases, emergency food relief programs that specifically target women and girls like those in the Philippines and Peru have critical importance for women and girls in ASM communities.
- Considering that crises increase the prevalence of SGBV, as an emergency policy, it is critical to include measures to strengthen SGBV protection and prevention services in ASM communities within emergency response schemes. An option could be to mobilize relief assistance channels (i.e., COVID-19 information centres, hospital ERs and testing centers) to help women seek help when needed.



## 2. GENDER-DISAGGREGATED DATA AND GENDER ANALYSIS

In addition to rapid gender assessments that would inform emergency planning in the face of a crisis such as COVID-19, it is important to focus on both short-term and long-term structural planning and programming that is based on gender-disaggregated and granular data. This would help policy-makers observe and analyze gendered risks that further disadvantage women, as exemplified in some of the COVID-19 response policies like lockdowns, where women remained responsible for household spending but did not have the cash flow to stockpile essential items like food and medication. Similarly, the classification of the ASM sector as an essential service, as in Zimbabwe, played a key role in maintaining this critical income for many of the sector's poorest. However, in Zimbabwe, the initial exclusion of service providers from this exemption meant that the ability to continue earning an income was split largely along gender lines, disadvantaging the women who normally played a critical role in service provision to the sector. This is an example of a context in which a gender analysis may have led to the development of more gender-responsive policies, programs, and actions that would have served to alleviate some of these negative impacts.

Examples such as these showcase the need to collect gender-disaggregated data and to design and implement ASM policies through analysis of that data. Data collection and analysis must pay attention to the intersectional vulnerabilities women face on the basis of their other identities such as Indigeneity, ethnicity, age, sexual identity and orientation, and poverty.

Accordingly, policy-makers could design and deliver short-term and long-term policies that could respond to the gendered inequalities faced by women in ASM and exacerbated by COVID-19. Canada's Gender-Based Analysis+ (GBA+) tool (Government of Canada, 2021) or Oxfam's (2017) *Guide to Gender Impact Assessment for the Extractive Industries* could be tapped into when policy-makers plan for a gender analysis of their COVID-19 policies, programs, and actions.

### BOX 2. POLICY OPTIONS THAT CAN BE DEVELOPED AFTER GENDER ANALYSIS

In the context of COVID-19 and women in ASM, gender analyses based on gender-disaggregated data would support the development of short-term and long-term policies to respond to gender-specific vulnerabilities as well as their root causes. Some policy options that could be developed after gender analyses are conducted are listed below:

- The pallaquera experience in Peru informs how this recommendation can be put into practice:
  - Gender-disaggregated data shows that pallaqueras represent a significant part of Peru's ASM; however, they work an average of 42% more hours a week than male miners but make only half of male miners' income. Data also shows that 75% of pallaqueras earn below the federal minimum wage, and their informal status made them ineligible for access to government aid.
  - A short-term gender-responsive policy response could be developed as a result of the pallaqueras' registration through the Ministry of Energy and Mines, which could help to alleviate the short-term negative impacts of COVID-19 on these women miners by enabling their access to specific government aid and emergency support programs for miners.
  - A long-term policy would require taking this data and analysis into consideration during the regularization and formalization of ASM and ensuring





that the informality, wage gap, and poverty of pallaqueras do not increase their vulnerabilities against future crises. An example could be building business skills that would increase their resilience against market fluctuations triggered by crisis; building transferable skills (such as digital skills) that would help them find non-exploitative alternative livelihoods if access to ASM halted for prolonged periods; supporting miner and women organizations to help pallaqueras formalize their businesses via access to information, finances, and networks; or on-site, one-stop-shop service provision centres where they can retrieve information related to market access, legal issues, health care and sanitization information, and most crucially childcare, which has been one of the most critical barriers against women miners' access to employment and livelihoods during COVID-19.

- Investing in alternative livelihoods for women in ASM during the closure of mine sites or disruptions in supply chains is another short-term strategy that can be implemented, as in Zimbabwe where women miners shifted to the production of masks and hygiene products. Nonetheless, when this policy option is chosen, it is critical to pay attention to the fact that shifting to alternative livelihoods is not always easy or desirable, as showcased in the Philippines, for example, where women who attempted to find alternative employment outside of mining reported difficulties because most businesses deemed non-essential were shuttered and lack of transportation made it difficult to search for work options. In addition, the income from alternative livelihoods is often inferior to mining income. Therefore, alternative livelihoods must be in line with women's skills, domestic responsibilities and COVID-19 requirements. Governments can also develop policies to support women in ASM by creating public work programs and providing temporary employment for them. It is also critical to highlight that the aim should not be to exclude women from ASM permanently. On the contrary: longer-term policies should address the structural problems that created these gender-specific vulnerabilities that allow women to return to their former—but this time more resilient—livelihoods once the impacts of the crisis fade out.

### 3. FINANCING THE POLICIES

Good gender policies are those that are adequately financed. Gender-responsive budgeting is a policy tool that ensures that the collection and allocation of public resources are carried out in ways that are effective and contribute to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment and can be applied when public policies are designed and implemented for ASM (UN Women, n.d.).

It is crucial that women in ASM and their specific needs are accounted for in the emergency and relief budgets of governments, international organizations, NGOs, and mining companies. Women in ASM, most of whom are concentrated in the informal workforce, too often fall through the cracks in the design and delivery of COVID-19 relief support. The findings of the rapid gender assessments could help prioritize and budget the most critical needs of women and girls.

Some countries with gender-responsive budgeting policies have had good experiences in integrating them into their COVID-19 emergency measures. As exemplified in the UN Women report on COVID-19 and fiscal policy (Khan & Gifford, 2021) the Government of Canada



applied its Gender-Based Analysis+ tool to 68 pandemic response measures, which in turn enabled the government to address gender inequalities, including increased rates of GBV, reports of disproportionate hardship of majority women-owned businesses, and a higher unpaid care load among women following school and daycare closures (UN Women, 2021). Accordingly, the Canadian government allocated specific funding for women shelters and sexual assault centres, women entrepreneurship programs, and childcare within its emergency response (Government of Canada, 2020). Applying a similar approach to ASM programs would improve their gender responsiveness.

### **BOX 3. EXAMPLES OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE FISCAL POLICIES TO BE INCLUDED IN EMERGENCY MEASURES**

In the ASM context, gender-responsive emergency policies such as direct financial support for women in ASM communities, accessible and quick credit schemes (including payment deferrals and interest rate relief for women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs] operating in the mining sector; child benefits for women who have lost their income due to COVID-19; and women-specific service provision in ASM communities, including financing women's shelters and SGBV counselling centres) should be properly reflected and budgeted within the emergency response plans.

### **BOX 4. EXAMPLES OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE FISCAL POLICIES TO BE INCLUDED IN RECOVERY MEASURES**

Some aspects of recovery that policies need to address include creating safety nets for women in ASM to ensure their access to health care and critical services, including cash-based emergency aids, in the absence of social security. Similarly, childcare support for women in ASM has long been advocated (Impact, 2017), and it has been proven to be critical during the COVID-19 crisis, as the lack of public budgets to finance childcare further marginalizes vulnerable families. Budgeting for childcare support for women in ASM would make it easier for governments to transfer these funds to cash-based child support should the crises impede women's access to mine sites due to school closures. Budget allocations and support measures to strengthen the capacity and outreach of women's networks, cooperatives, and associations could also increase resilience of women in ASM as well as government's preparedness for future crises. Recovery policies should invest in decent work for women in ASM and support their reintegration into the labour force through training programs that could bolster their skills, knowledge, and networks. Also, tax incentives and measures such as pension contributions or tax deferrals that explicitly target women entrepreneurs and SMEs in ASM could support women in building back their businesses during post-COVID-19 recovery. Creating awareness within supply chains and large-scale miners (LSMs) about the gender-specific impacts of COVID-19 and providing specific incentives for LSMs to implement gender-responsive policies could also be a viable strategy to support women in ASM via engaging other value chain actors. For example, tax and wage incentives, along with skills-building programs, could also be used as fiscal tools to integrate women in ASM who lost their livelihoods to COVID-19 into large-scale mining and supply chains.



Another good example is the World Bank's (2020) "Emergency Response for Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Communities Impacted by COVID-19" that was formally established in June 2020 with funding from Sweden, Belgium, and Germany. It targets ASM vulnerabilities, providing short-term assistance to several international, regional, national, and local organizations engaged in artisanal mining. Among its interventions are support to women to address social and health vulnerabilities emerging from the crisis such as unemployment, reduced income, childcare, and education to help with transition.

In addition, short-term and long-term policies need to be better reflected in the annual and multi-annual budgets of public institutions and international organizations and not limited to relief support. It is particularly critical for recovery policies to include adequate and targeted public investment—as well as reprioritization of public spending—to address policy gaps (UN Women, 2021) that could otherwise push women, especially marginalized women such as those women working in ASM, further into poverty. This is especially salient given the fact that high levels of public debt and financial instability caused by COVID-19 are likely to have widespread and long-term negative impacts on women, based on the evidence and analysis of previous economic crises (Pearson & Elson, 2015). Accordingly, it is important for recovery policies in countries where ASM exists to define and prioritize women in the sector as a specific target group within recovery policies and budgets. These measures can address, among other things, the care work that women perform along with their lack of economic security and barriers to access to finances and other resources including land, equipment, and markets: COVID-19 has proven that women in ASM are further marginalized when these inequalities are not addressed.

It is important to highlight that some of the most devastating gendered impacts of COVID-19 for women in ASM were triggered by entrenched inequalities such as women's lack of access to land, finances, resources, and markets. Most of these issues can best be remedied and addressed through local and national efforts to regularize and formalize the ASM sector. Gender assessments and gender-responsive budgeting can be integrated into long-running ASM formalization policies to make sure that the outsized impacts of COVID-19 on women in ASM are remedied and that women are not further marginalized within the sector. Governments are advised to take specific advice and work with gender experts to analyze whether the policies related to mining licences, mineral rights and fiscal regimes would alleviate or further exacerbate these inequalities.



## CONCLUSIONS

Women in ASM communities are well-placed to play key roles in the post-COVID recovery. Development research has long drawn links between gender equality (in particular women's empowerment) and food security. Women have an equally important role to play in post-COVID-19 recovery. Case studies in this policy brief highlight how women have already been playing critical local roles in COVID-19 response, for example, in the local production of cloth masks reportedly used by most ASM actors across the target countries included in this policy brief. Policy-makers must look for ways to support and strengthen these existing responses by identifying and addressing women's needs in each context. This requires a holistic approach that goes beyond short-term solutions but encompasses collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data for the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies, programs, and budgets for emergency response as well as recovery response.

The ASM sector has the opportunity to build forward better. For women, this means harnessing the role they are already playing in responding to the crisis into meaningful participation in decision-making, creating opportunities for the rebuilding of a more equitable post-COVID ASM sector. Recovery policies provide a critical opportunity to address pre-existing and entrenched inequalities in ASM and increase the resilience of women in ASM against future shocks and crises.



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