

Greener gold: UNDP and the Government of Kenya support sustainable livelihoods in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector by eliminating mercury

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May 26, 2017



Small Scale Gold Miners in Kakamega County

In 2016 the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approved the Global Opportunities for Long-term Development (GOLD) in the Artisanal Small-scale Gold Mining sector programme (<https://www.thegef.org/news/gold-shines-opportunity-artisanal-miners-reduce-and-eliminate-mercury-use>) to help artisanal gold miners eliminate the use of mercury in gold mining, reduce harmful risks to their health and the environment and create sustainable livelihood opportunities.

The GEF GOLD programme intends to introduce and promote best practices and techniques for gold extraction in collaboration with the governments of eight countries (Burkina Faso, Colombia, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru, and the Philippines), three United Nations (UN) agencies (the United Nations Development Programme, UN Environment, the lead agency at the global level, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization) and one Non-Governmental Organisation (Conservation International). As part of the GOLD programme, UNDP will be supporting the Governments of Colombia, Indonesia, Kenya and Peru.

The preparatory phase for the GEF GOLD project in Kenya was launched on 26 May 2017 in Nairobi. The inception was attended by more than 30 participants, including representatives of Kenya's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and Ministry of Mining, Non-Governmental Organizations - the Centre for Environmental Justice And Development (CEJAD), [the Canadian International Resources and Development Institute \(CIRDI\)](#), Fairtrade Africa and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) - representatives of artisanal mining organizations and the press.

UNDP will be supporting the Government of Kenya to plan for the implementation of the Kenya GEF GOLD project, which is expected to start in early 2018. The project plans to focus on strengthening institutions and the policy/regulatory framework to support mercury-free ASGM, increasing financing opportunities for ASGM miners and cooperatives as well as capacity for mercury-free ASGM through provision of technical assistance, technology transfer and disseminating best practices. The project will also aim to raise awareness about the dangers of mercury and help connect miners to gold markets.

In Kenya, the ASGM sector dates to the 19th century. ASGM activities occur mostly near Lake Victoria, where there remain significant underexplored or underexploited reserves of gold in high concentrations. ASGM is mostly found in the counties of Migori, Kisumu, Siaya, Vihiga, Kakamega and further up north in Pokot and Turkana. The total number of artisanal small-scale gold miners in Kenya may be close to 250,000, but this is on the increase as more people shift towards gold mining as a main livelihood source, due to a decline in agricultural productivity within the region.

During the Inception Workshop, Mr. Francis Kihumba Mugure, Focal point for the Ministry of Environment, highlighted that haphazard and unsafe mining processes applied by artisanal and small scale miners, and particularly the use of mercury to extract gold from ore, present serious occupational health and safety hazards. He also highlighted how working on ASGM fits within the priorities that are being defined through Kenya's Minamata Initial Assessment. The Minamata Convention on Mercury, an international agreement Kenya signed in 2013 and plans to ratify, enters into force on 16 August 2017 after more than 50 countries ratified it.

The Ministry of Mining Director, represented by Gregory Kituku, reminded participants that Kenya adopted the Mining Act in 2016, recognizing the status of small-scale gold miners, and called it one of the most progressive mining laws in Africa. The Ministry also emphasized its wish to receive information on mercury-free ore processing alternatives as well as its commitment to the project.

David Maina (Head of Programmes a.i. at UNDP Kenya) reiterated that exposure to mercury – even small amounts – may cause serious health problems, and is extremely dangerous to the development of a fetus and during the early years of a child’s development. The reality that in Kenya women are primarily the ones handling mercury in ASGM communities is thus particularly concerning, as mercury can be passed from a mother to a fetus or a breastfed baby. Exposure to mercury is also high in children and teenagers, as many drop out of school to engage in mining.

Through their active engagement in this inception workshop, stakeholders demonstrated their commitment to the objectives of the project and to support this preparatory phase. UNDP will collaborate closely with the other GEF implementing agencies in the GOLD programme to ensure synergies and strong coordination.

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Link to the GOLD Programme on GEF web site (<https://www.thegef.org/events/gold-addressing-mercury-pollution-artisanal-gold-mining>)

Link to the Minamata Convention Secretariat - <http://www.mercuryconvention.org/>

Link to UNDP Kenya Extractives project <http://www.ke.undp.org/content/kenya/en/home/operations/projects/inclusiveeconomicgrowth/extractive-industries-for-sustainable-development-/> (<http://www.ke.undp.org/content/kenya/en/home/operations/projects/inclusiveeconomicgrowth/extractive-industries-for-sustainable-development-/>)

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Population
40
million

Poverty Rate
45.5



Human Dev. Index
0.54

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