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Women account for about one-third of the artisanal and small-scale mining workforce, which supplies minerals essential to modern technologies and the global energy transition. But gender discrimination, enshrined in mining laws, and disregard for health, safety, and social protection limit the rights and economic opportunities of women artisanal and small-scale miners, finds a new World Bank report.

Launched today at the annual Mining Indaba Conference, the 2023 State of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Sector report, a collaboration with the international development organization Pact, details gender inequalities in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and highlights actions to improve gender equality and advance women's participation. It reviews mining laws in 21 countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America, and draws on primary data from 1,900 participants, contributing unique insights about the deep-seated barriers women face in fully participating in ASM activities and opportunities toward gender equality.

"Women in artisanal and small-scale mining face formidable challenges that require urgent action to ensure they are safe and can thrive in the mine and at home," said World Bank Global Director for Energy and Extractives, Demetrios Papathanasiou. "We are thrilled to release this ground-breaking report, which offers concrete solutions to create a more inclusive and equitable mining sector that benefits women and everyone."

The report advocates for gender-responsive legislation to safeguard women's rights in mining and build a more sustainable sector. This includes improving mining codes—

World Bank Urges Action for Gender Equality in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining



Ajay Banga, President of the World Bank

which often lack provisions to enhance women's participation—and changing discriminatory property laws and land tenure agreements that hinder women's ability to own land and access mineral resources for artisanal and small-scale mining.

Poor working conditions, sanitation, and violence, as well as domestic work, also disproportionately impact women artisanal and small-scale miners' health and earnings, relegating them to low-paying roles and 90 times more at risk of death than men. Women's health, working conditions, and safety have received scant attention due to the perception of the mining industry as male-dominated.

The report urges policymakers to address the distinct hazards women face to improve their occupational health and safety in mining environments. The report also underscores the need to further empower women's associations and female-led professional groups, which have been critical in improving the visibility of women artisanal and small-scale miners and advancing gender reforms in mining.

"Women's empowerment and equal participation in mining are the right thing to do and will pave the way for a more just future and prosperous communities," said Rachel Perks, World Bank Senior Mining Specialist and co-author of the report. "It's critical to create an environment in which women artisanal and small-scale miners can be heard and enjoy their rights without discrimination."

About Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) plays a crucial role in the global mining industry. It employs approximately 45 million people across 80 countries, making it the largest mining workforce in the world. This sector significantly contributes to livelihoods and economic growth, serving as the primary source of employment for millions of individuals. However, the World Bank estimates that 80–90% of ASM miners worldwide operate informally without the licenses and permits required by law and poor practices. One of ASM's key contributions is the supply of var-

ious minerals essential for modern technologies, including communication technologies, low-carbon and clean energy technologies, and the production of jewelry goods. It is estimated that ASM supplies 18–30 percent of the world's cobalt, which is crucial for powering the global shift towards clean energy.

Women play a significant role in ASM, with approximately one-third to one-fourth of all ASM miners being women. However, efforts to formalize the ASM sector over the past 40 years have not achieved a significant impact at scale. There is an urgent need for further interventions and support to improve ASM miners' working conditions and opportunities, with a specific focus on women miners.

The World Bank has been an important partner for ASM formalization since the late 1970s. Over four decades, the Bank has financed ASM formalization through lending, grant financing, and analytical work in 31 countries. During that period, it also championed important global initiatives on ASM and functioned as an important interlocutor and adviser to various international ASM initiatives. Through the Extractives Global Programmatic Support trust fund, the World Bank is committed to promoting gender equality in the extractives sector and continues to support governments in developing and adopting policies, as well as taking actions to mainstream gender equality in the extractives sector.