

Observations on the MMSD Report – Chapter 13, Artisanal and Small-scale Mining

The MMSD report on Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM) is a comprehensive compilation of research conducted to date on this typically marginalized sector. This report also made a strong case for moving towards sustainable initiatives from a government, company, civil society and artisanal miners' perspective, although it wasn't explicitly described in these terms. The crucial issues that must be addressed to transform ASM into a sector capable of alleviating poverty and furthering sustainability in communities impacted by these activities were also reviewed.

Although this report is an excellent synthesis of issues facing ASM, it demonstrates that very little new data has been collected on this topic through the MMSD Initiative. The information on legalization and regulation, as well as technical alternatives, was primarily derived from major conferences and studies conducted in the mid-1990's. The development of alternative sustainable livelihoods is a 'new' challenge facing ASM and is a vitally important in terms of its potential contribution to furthering poverty eradication. However, this too, has been discussed and proposed at previous forums. Work commissioned ("country studies") for the MMSD initiative is also somewhat of a reproduction of pre-existing work, with the exception of China and a few other countries on which very little data was available prior to MMSD.

Further to this, some of the data compiled on ASM employment seems to be outdated, inaccurate and should be revised. For instance, employment and production statistics on Brazil are inconsistent with some very recent numbers compiled by Government agencies. The proportion (percentage) of miners in the table doesn't correlate with the first column of the table (number of miners). Gold production in China is listed as 1000 times its actual value (35 tonnes vs. 21,000 tonnes). Although numbers of women involved in ASM are available, as well as their proportion of total miners, numbers involved in ASM were oddly not shown for many countries as they were deemed too difficult to compile.

The recommendations presented in the ASM Report are legitimate and extremely important, however, it seems that they have been voiced before. Any new initiatives should be asking new questions. Specifically, how can these recommendations be realized? Future initiatives, forums and conferences should build upon this work and focus on the development and implementation of viable solutions for the well-documented problems in ASM. Research should be directed towards learning from existing successes, in ASM as well as other sectors, and advancing technical and non-technical measures for miners and ASM communities. There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the field of community development, as well as in large-scale mining and other sectors, that could be better incorporated within ASM initiatives. ASM has the potential to play a crucial role in stimulating entrepreneurial activities and supporting the development of more sustainable communities. However, companies, governments, civil society organizations and miners must have the tools necessary to move forward. The challenges facing ASM are widely known - it is time to take action and effect real change.