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## Golden practices that defy gloom



Small-scale mining in Ghana is mostly known for its faults. It's time to see what it gets right

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Kwaku Eric Gyamera

Elliott Larme

Jonathan Tettay

Collins Ani-Agyei

Zeinabu Abdulei

Ruth Boateng

Aleratu Moro

Felicia Amoah

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## Introduction

Ghana's artisanal and small-scale (ASM) sector has the potential to make a major contribution to the country's future. Artisanal miners produce over one third of Ghana's gold, and the sector employs an estimated one million people and supports up to 4.5 million more.

Unfortunately, ASM in Ghana has a poor track record: the majority of miners operate informally and unsafely, and have little access to training or technology. Informal mining has polluted waterways, damaged landscapes and exploited workers.

Amid this bleak backdrop, there is also a desire to do ASM differently — and better.

This booklet is based on a long read, available at:  
[www.iied.org/golden-practices-defy-gloom](http://www.iied.org/golden-practices-defy-gloom)

Low resolution photos have been used throughout

This booklet presents examples of small-scale mines that are operating responsibly, and shows that some ASM miners and mining companies want to become part of a more responsible and sustainable industry.

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is convening a global series of stakeholder dialogues on ASM. In January 2016, Ghana hosted the first ASM dialogue. The event brought together miners and business and community leaders to develop an agenda for action to improve the ASM sector.

The outcomes from the dialogue and the stories in this booklet demonstrate how a well-managed and regulated ASM sector could be a positive force for growth and equity in Ghana.







## Setting standards, achieving good practice

Kwaku Eric Gyamera manages Goldbank Resources, a small mine in Eastern Ghana. He says setting up good systems for a small mine is just as important as for any other venture.

He says: "There's no reason why a small mine cannot operate professionally."

He adds: "Good practices increase our production drastically. They are very good for the company."

Kwaku Eric introduced protective equipment for all mineworkers. "It wasn't easy," he explains. "At the beginning, they resisted so I had to be firm. I said that if they didn't attend training or wore their PPE (protective equipment) they could not access the site. Little by little they understood that it is for their own safety."

He set up bank accounts for the mineworkers, and ensured that their salaries were paid in. Workers used to be paid in cash — an unsafe practice for them and the business. Workers didn't trust the banks, he says: "Now they know that receiving their payment this way can give them access to other things, like credit."

"We are a training ground for other small-scale miners. We have about two hundred acres and we get the permits because we can prove that we use the land well."



**“Good practices increase our production drastically”**





## Preventing pollution

Elliott Larmer is the technical officer for Ghana's National Association of Small-Scale Miners (GNASSM) and advises small mines on environmental issues.

He helps mines to use water sustainably. ASM gold miners use water to separate alluvial gold from gravel. Informality and lack of resources can lead to pollution and damaged waterways.

He points out a system of interconnecting pools at Bright Way Mining Ventures, a small mine in Western Ghana. He describes the set-up: "You can see that we have a pool here. We use this one for washing gravels and extract the money, extract the gold. If we don't have this water here for the pool we have to go to the river. The water in this pool circulates across the other pools so it doesn't reach the river and it doesn't pollute."

**“Communities find the land in a better state than they left it”**



“The land doesn’t belong to us. It is their land”

## Working towards certification

Goldbank’s foreman Jonathan Tettay says that the site is working with the NGO Solidaridad to obtain Fairtrade certification. If they succeed, their gold will have access to fairer international markets.

To get certified, they need to have measures in place for rehabilitating the land after they have used it. These measures are also needed to secure a mining concession from the government, and are negotiated with the chiefs and local community.

He says: “We plant cocoa and other plants, so communities find the land in a better state than they left it. Reclamation is very important in our agenda. We make sure that every pit is filled.”

Jonathan is clear about the importance of regulation, saying: “There are rules and regulations guiding mining activities in Ghana. We don’t do things just like that. We take those regulations and rules into action because that is what we need to do so we don’t destroy the environment. From day one that was our concern. We see that this is the best way to go.”

## Rehabilitating the land

Disused mining pits that are left unfilled are hazards and breeding grounds for malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Elliot advises mines on how to rehabilitate land they have worked.

In a region scarred by unreclaimed land and unfilled mining pits, his work stands out.

He points out large areas dotted with small cocoa plants, saying: “This is land that has been reclaimed to bring it to almost near its original state.” He says: “The land doesn’t belong to us. It is their land. We only come in and take the mineral from the ground.”





## Creating jobs for poor communities

ASM can be a major source of employment in some of the world's most impoverished areas. During lengthy negotiations with chiefs and local community representatives, the Goldbank mine agreed to provide jobs for local people and rebuild the local school. It now employs 65 people from the neighbouring village, Apapatia, which has a total population of 430.

Collins Ani-Agyei has learned to operate the mine's water pump. He says: "I have completed secondary school, but we couldn't gain any employment. So we were in this town with nothing to do. Then these gold miners came to this town and we applied and got recruited."

He says: "I have been able to buy a car and build a two-bedroom apartment in which I live with my wife and children. Now we've nothing to worry about in this life again."



## Training

Jonathan Tettay has been training mineworkers, mechanics and machinery operators for two decades. He even mentored Kwaku Eric in his first job in mining. "I taught him and he has developed in his own way. Now we want to make this mine a centre to train others," he says with satisfaction.

Jonathan says: "I am excited and love to see activities going on in the mine and how people go about the work. It is my initiative. I have trained them. I have told them how to do it."

He says: "We just pick the laymen, unskilled men. By the fourth week they know the do's and don'ts in the mine. As the foreman I go around every hour or one and a half hour; I go around the site and see how they're faring. This keeps me healthy too, as I do a lot of walking."



“Now we want to  
make this mine  
a centre to train  
others”

Ruth Boateng says that her business has “flourished” since the mine arrived





## Spurring local business growth

Small mines also generate opportunities for local micro businesses. Many women work as cooks for mine companies or run food stalls patronised by hungry mineworkers.

Zeinabu Abdulei has traded farm work for a better-paid job as a cook. Every morning at 6am she stands by the main road with large bags of food, waiting for the car from the mine to collect her. She and another cook prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner for 22 mine workers.

She sees her work as a stepping stone to opening her own business one day. She says: "If I weren't here I would be a trader in the market but I wouldn't make as much money as I do here. I want to save money to open a shop and sell cosmetics. That is my choice."

Thriving small mines also benefit local markets. Ruth Boateng and Aleratu Moro sell vegetables and groceries in the Apapatia village street market. Their businesses have flourished since the mine arrived.



Workers from Goldbank  
Resources are among  
Aleratu Moro's customers





Felicia Amoah sells hearty meals to mineworkers in a market. But she has a bigger goal: Felicia is hoping to become a miner herself. She has joined a committee organised by GNASSM, which aims to organise 4,000 artisanal miners into groups that can eventually become mining cooperatives.

She says: “I want to be a businesswoman. I want my children to be proud of me. I want them to believe that their mother has something to give. If you are a businesswoman, people can come to you when they need things and you can help them.”

**“I want to be a  
businesswoman.  
I want my children  
to be proud of me”**









**“We want to be  
appreciated for  
what we are doing”**



## Pathfinders to a better future

Travelling across Ghana's gold mining regions reveals the environmental damage left by decades of informal or illegal mining.

But amid this bleak backdrop, the desire to do ASM differently — more sustainably and responsibly — is present too.

The examples on these pages show that Ghana already has responsible ASM operations, and that a more sustainable sector is possible.

While the current government drive against illegal mining continues, it is timely to remember that some ASM sites follow good practices. Amid a time of turmoil in Ghana's mining sector,

those who work with, support or regulate the ASM sector can take heart from these positive examples — and look to them as signposts to a better future.

The final word goes to Elliott Larme:

“We want to be appreciated for what we are doing,” he said.

“People always give a bad name to small-scale miners, which is not good. It is rather unfortunate that small-scale is portrayed as just being destructive. It could be destructive or maybe it will be destructive sometimes. But the good side of it is more than the bad side of it.”



IIED is a policy and action research organisation promoting sustainable development and linking local priorities to global challenges. We are based in London and work on five continents with some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them.

## **International Institute for Environment and Development**

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