

All eyes on Karamoja! Investors, miners targeting the region's minerals

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Cover photo: Heaps of high quality marbel in Rupa Sub County, Moroto District. Photo by Pearl Arigye.

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Extracting Sustainability

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A golden mountain in Congo!

A 'golden' mountain in the Democratic Republic of Congo was invaded by locals in pursuit of the precious mineral, forcing authorities to ban mining on the mountain. The discovery of gold-rich ore in Luhihi village in late February brought throngs of diggers to the site, South Kivu Mines Minister Venant Burume Muhigirwa said, putting pressure on the small village that is located around 50 Km from the provincial capital, Bukavu.

Miners, traders and members of Congo's armed forces (FARDC) were forced to leave the mine sites in and around Luhihi and all mining activities were suspended until further notice.

Freelance journalist Ahmad Algobary shared a video on his Twitter account that showed villagers digging out the mountain with the quote: "A video from

DID YOU KNOW?



the Republic of the Congo documents the biggest surprise for some villagers in this country, as an entire mountain filled with gold was discovered! They dig the soil inside the gold deposits and take them (sic) to their homes to wash the dirt and extract the gold."

Gold production in the Congo is systematically underreported and tonnes of precious metal are smuggled into global supply chains through its eastern neighbours, the UN Group of experts on the Congo reported last year. ■

Competition for resources pits Karamoja locals against miners

Recently launched airborne geophysical survey and geological mapping of Karamoja will ultimately attract more mining investment into the region, but at what social cost?

BY ROBERT MWESIGYE

Karamoja region, now comprising nine districts, was mostly insecure until the turn of the twenty first century. A long stretch of civil strife that dates back to the 1970s characterized by incessant political unrest

and illicit arms trade was further exacerbated by a series of severe droughts and famine in the 1980s. The region experienced a record-breaking five-year drought, with no rainfall at all in 2004, recounts Sisto Dodoth, the Gombolola Internal Security Officer, Tapac sub-county.



Photo: Robert Mwesigye

A miner uses a sled hammer to split limestone ore in Katiyekile Sub-county, Moroto District



Rupa Parish Chief Mark Lokoru gestures during an engagement with miners in Loorung Lolet Kalemureng

Consequently, a humanitarian crisis unfolded, combining severe food insecurity and environmental destruction as the social and economic fabric deteriorated, with armed bandits engaging in raids and forcing the locals into internally displaced camps. For long, Karamoja, arguably the most highly mineralised area in the country, remained under-developed and marginalized.

However, relentless government interventions of disarmament that commenced in December 2001, combined with relief efforts by Development Partners, started to turn things around.

While prolonged insecurity in Karamoja discouraged many potential investors from setting up shop there, it created fertile ground for speculators and daring under-capitalised companies looking for a quick buck.

As the region opens up to development, the main attraction is minerals. Tebanyang Emmanuel, the Programs Manager at the Karamoja Development Forum (KDF), a local NGO, says that starting around 2010 to date, with relative peace, the Karimojong have been settling back into their traditional ancestral homes. However, most are finding

that their lands have been surveyed and fenced off by powerful individuals, investors and even government agencies. "Karamoja is known as the marble city," Tebanyang quips. "Up to 60 percent of Karamoja is under mineral concessions; 35 percent is under protected areas of Uganda Wildlife Authority and National Forestry Authority, leaving just 5 percent for human settlement and activities like pastoralism and agriculture," he adds.

Research by industry practitioners, civil society and other actors indicates that many licenses are being held by speculators and beneficial owners who hope to cash in when they eventually sell their interests to real investors. This is causing friction between mining companies and mineral host communities over surface rights, land acquisition and unfair compensation.

Lately, Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners (ASMs), whose operations are often nomadic in nature, have joined the fray and are engaged in mining of gold, marble, limestone, gemstones and other minerals.

In Moruita sub-county, Nakapiripirit District, ASMs operate in the areas of Morukakimat, Acherer and Utut. The Moruita Community Development Officer, Loput Callisto Kamkam,



A miner drills a pit for gold ore in Amudat

says the Pokot, who retreated into the surrounding mountains at the height of insecurity in the region, are the original landowners. “The Pokot are now returning to their vast grazing lands to find foreigners,” he says. “Bagisu, Karimojong, Baganda, Banyankole and many other tribes have come to mine in these areas and the Pokot feel threatened.”



Many other tribes have come to mine in these areas and the Pokot feel threatened

a clinker plant in Tapac sub-county, according to David Amido, the company’s Utility and Logistics Manager. Clinker is a binding agent commonly used in cement production.

However, a recent spike in cases of insecurity especially in the districts of Moroto, Nabilatuk, Napak and Kaabong could prove a daunting challenge as government works to

Insecurity threatens more investment

Gold, marble and limestone are the three minerals attracting most interest in the region. Big players like Tororo Cement and Hima Cement have huge mining concessions for limestone with plans underway by the latter to construct a plant in Rupa sub-county. Tororo Cement is also in advanced stages of assessing the feasibility of establishing

position mining as one of the priority sectors to attract more investors and spur national growth.

The insecurity also comes at a time when government is embarking on the aeromagnetic geophysical survey and geological mapping of Karamoja to generate data to facilitate further exploration and attract more investment. ■

Karamoja geophysical airborne survey to last one year

The project seeks to acquire, process, interpret and deliver high quality resolution data on the mineral potential of the region.

BY ROBERT MWESIGYE

The geophysical airborne survey and geological mapping of the Karamoja sub-region set to kick off anytime will last one year.

On March 24, 2021, the Minister of Energy & Mineral Development, Mary Goretti Kitutu and her junior, Sarah Opendi, presided over the flagging off of the planes that will carry out the airborne survey. The function took place at Entebbe Airport. The survey will be carried out by South African company Xcalibur Airborne Geophysics.

Ahead of the survey, the Police Minerals Police Protection Unit is expected to carry out sensitization of the communities where the survey will take place.

The Unit Commandant, SP Jessica Keigomba, says together with the Ministry of Energy and

Mineral Development, they have embarked on a sensitization and alertness campaign in the nine districts of Karamoja to inform the locals there that the exercise is for the good of the country.

The aerial surveying is expected to improve mineral exploration, local and foreign investment in the Karamoja region and increase employment opportunities. Industry experts have argued that the lack of geological data is a deterrent to investors.

The project is funded by a loan from the Corporate Internationalization Fund of Spain. The loan was approved by Parliament in January 2020. Government will borrow almost 84 billion shillings which will cover 85 percent of the costs of the exercise and the remaining 11 billion shillings will be covered by the Government of Uganda as counterpart funding. ■

MEMD officials pose with one of the planes for the survey and mapping exercise at Entebbe International Airport



Mining company, community locked in wrangles over land

Local leaders accused of conniving with gold mining company to give away communal land.

BY ROBERT MWESIGYE

A mining company tucked away in the village of Chepkararat in Lokales Sub-county, Amudat District is in trouble with the local community who accuse it of grabbing their land.

A search on the Uganda Mining Cadaster indicates the gold mining company, Evergrande Resources Co. Limited, is operating on a Location License 00096, issued on March 21, 2020, for an acreage of 15.64 hectares.

The local community alleges that the investor took over ownership of the land without compensating all the bonafide owners. However, some local leaders allege that a select few of the land owners received compensation.

"These Chinese came and bought people alcohol and later gave them documents to sign," explains Yonah Petot Munya, the Gombolola Internal Security Officer (GISO) of Lokales Parish. "They did not know what they were signing for." Likewise, several of the local leaders in Chepkararat are accused of having taken money from the company as well.

According to Yonah Petot, the company paid some people off, albeit cheaply. "When the investor came, the local people were cheated," he said. "People had their own (mining) pits but the Chinese bought them for UGX 700,000 and others UGX 1 million. Then, the families were given UGX 1.5 million for each household to relocate," he explained. "Their mine site stretches far and wide and even goes across the river into people's homesteads."

Locals here say the mine is busier after dusk as trucks ferry huge boulders of ore to the processing site. Occasionally one or two miners covered in white dust emerge from the tunnel to take a breather.



Yonah Petot Munya,
*the Gombolola Internal
Security Officer (GISO)
of Lokales Parish*

Photo: Robert Musisiye

The processing centre is located just about two kilometers before the mines, off the Karita - Lokales road. The camp is situated on about five acres, where the main processing of gold ore takes place. The camp also houses offices and sleeping quarters. "Even the Chinese come to the mines at night," says Pkopus Enock, the GISO of Chepkararat.

Getting information from the company manager, Roger Okello, proved a daunting task as he repeatedly declined to pick calls.

Responding to queries about the company's operations, Moses Karakire, the Operations Commander of the Police Minerals Protection Unit, says the company is actually Ugandan-owned and the Chinese are only employees. He adds that any issues the community or district leadership might have with the company should be addressed amicably by both parties.

Although the company is operating on a Location License, Karakire says they are aware that it is only exploration taking place at the mine.

According to the Mining Act 2003, one is obliged not to engage in drilling or excavation during exploration. ■

The entrance to the underground tunnel at the gold mine, with evidenced deep excavation ongoing

Amudat District leadership speaks out

Francis Kiyonga, the outgoing LCV Chairperson of the district reveals that since Evergrande started operations six months ago, the company has never interacted with the Local Government leadership. He adds that the company did not use the established local government structures to introduce

themselves to the community, but instead seem to go to great lengths to obscure their operations.

“These people worked with a few local leaders whom they paid meaning the majority of the people were not compensated for their homes and land. Those who were compensated were each given two million shillings,” he said. “Even as we speak

| *Boulders of ore surround the entrance to the mine*





An industrial generator used to supply power to the tunnel



They are not transparent and we do not know what is happening there because we are also kept out as a district. They claim they are doing exploration but they are mining. There is a weakness in the law. When one takes too long on exploration it actually becomes real mining

today, they are mining an average of 2 Kg of gold every week,” he claims, and thereafter clarifies, on further probing, that the ASMs operating in the area estimate the company is extracting that much. “They are not transparent and we do not know what is happening there because we are also kept out as a district. They claim they are doing exploration but they are mining. There is a weakness in the law. When one takes too long on exploration it actually becomes real mining,” he concludes.

The company reportedly applied for a land lease of 99 years at the Department of Lands in Amudat but their request was declined. “They were told they could not process a lease title on an area which is not yet registered and it is wrong to convert a mining license to a lease. You can only lease land on an area which is already registered and having owners,” says Kiyonga. ■



A miner sleuthing in Kaboong

Women miners place their hopes in associations

BY ROBERT MWESIGYE

In March 2019, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development launched the Biometric Registration of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners (BRASM) at a function in Kampala. The project constitutes the initial stages of an arduous process for government to formalise and regulate artisanal mining in the country in order to fully harness its potential.

Among the requirements for registration, artisanal miners are being encouraged to form or join associations and register them at the Sub-county and District level. There are at least 160 known and registered associations of artisanal miners in Uganda, with hundreds in the process of being formed and registered.

In Karamoja, there at least 20 registered ASM

associations. Much as there are mixed reactions from a traditionally cautious Pokot community, miners from the gold-rich Lokales Sub-county in Amudat district, particularly women, are expressing optimism that associations can address some of the gender issues they face.

“As women, we are being undermined just because we fail to go into the pits to mine. How will the association protect us?” Sclar Kyemokwen wondered during a miners’ sensitization meeting in Amudat in April.

Owing to cultural barriers and gender-based discrimination, women gold miners traditionally engage in the less lucrative tasks like panning. Those that engage in mining do not participate in digging pits, but only scrape the riverbeds for run-away gold particles.



In the mines we lack water. We do not have toilets so it is a very difficult situation

During the long spells of drought that characterize the mostly arid Karamoja, women find it even harder to mine because the rivers usually dry up, forcing them to engage in gruelling manual labour that involves breaking up stones that they then crash and pan in the hope of recovering some miniscule particles of gold.

Chebet Oliver, a miner from Utut in Nakapiripirit District, says whereas both women and men can do the panning to earn five thousand shillings for each basin of ore panned, the men are shrewd and often steal from the women to earn more. She says conditions under which women operate in the area are further exacerbated by poor sanitation and hygiene. “In the mines we lack water. We do not have toilets so it is a very difficult situation,” she says.

Mothers who depend on mining for a living



A woman miner gestures during an engagement with ASMs in Loorung Lolet Kalemureng



Scolar Kyemokwen makes her submission during the miners' meeting

must balance social responsibilities of looking after their young ones yet at the same time fend for the homes where, in most cases, men are preoccupied with making money to furnish their excesses, according to Chebet. "That is the reason we have a problem of alcoholism. Their money is for drinking and getting other women to pleasure them." This, she says, is also one of the causes of violence against women in the mines.

On the whole, the miners in Amudat are fairly optimistic about forming associations which they believe could address challenges in their work.

"We are ignorant. Even after forming the group, we don't know what to do next. We have mined in groups for so long but they haven't helped us," an elderly miner, Korimara Steven, says.

The miners recall a previous attempt to form associations that did not end well.

"There was an association called OCUSOLETA. They didn't have any members

of the community where they were mining. People from another community formed the association," explains Nariza Joseph, an elder. "When investors came, it is this group that was compensated instead of the real landowners."

Further probing, however, reveals that the process to register the association was never successful because disgruntled members abandoned it, according to the Sub-county Chief, Moses Koriang.

Nonetheless, the advantages of forming associations as evidenced by recent developments in the artisanal mining space far outweigh those fears.

Through such associations, artisanal miners in Mubende and Buhweju Districts have been able to secure location and exploration licenses, respectively. Associations have also emboldened them to seek legal representation in Court to resolve conflicts with mining companies and other investors.



Voices from Karamoja

Mineral host community members in Amudat and Nakapiripirit Districts give their thoughts on artisanal mining in Karamoja region, the unique challenges faced by female minors and the dynamic of forming mining associations.



Loperole Elijah – Parish Chief, Karita Sub County, Amudat

“We have for long mistaken the relationship we are supposed to have with investors. We need to form another association or restructure the existing one which has a lot of problems. If possible, we need to organize exchange visits with another community where such structures have worked. It will help us get where we are supposed to go. Also, the association will make our businesses thrive if we agree and follow what we have learnt.”



Chelangat Boniface – LCI Chairman, Moron mining village, Amudat



“We had some people that came and made an association but used it as a way of stealing from us because they looked for the investor and got paid without the community being informed. If we can get clear guidance and directions to form an association, we hope that we can recover part of what we lost. Also, it can help us negotiate with government together with the investor and our sub county chief. I believe registering will make it easy for us to get a Location Licence, so that we can benefit from our own land.”



Safia Aperetum – Miner, Chepkararat mining village, Amudat

“There has been no transfer of knowledge in our community except for a few targeted people. We were asked to form an association without being given the right information or lessons as to why we should join the association. We now understand that an association can lead us in the right direction and open our minds for the development of the community. I can now go back to my community and explain to them what an association is and the steps we need to make one and how it shall help us. Forming an association will help women



in Chepkararat a lot. It is very difficult for us to dig, the work is laborious and yet the men usually want to work alone because they say we are slow. Among Pokot, we women are the ones working for the family, we are the ones that bring in the daily bread, so it will be good to have an association so that it boosts us to also work along the linkages of the gold mining businesses and not just the extraction and processing.”



Narisa Joseph – Miner, Cheptakol mining village, Amudat

“We have come to realize that the community together with the government and the investor are all meant to benefit. We want to make mining work for us in our community. The former association did not direct us on how we can work with the investor. They were the ones that talked to the investor and presented to them things to do for the community for everyone’s benefit but up to today nothing has been done. We do not even know if they talked to them. We need a new transparent association.”



Hananiah Abura – Miner, Acherer mining village, Nakapiripirit

“The miners in this place, including myself, did not know that the minerals belong to the government but are now aware. We now know that we need to have a licence, minus that, we are not authorized to mine. Getting a licence will require money, and even after we get it, we need money for machines. So, before we even do that, why can’t we cooperate with the companies that mine in our communities? Can’t we work with them?”





Chebet Oliver – Miner, Utut mining village, Nakapiripirit

“Nakapiripirit is a complex district. It has Kadams, who claim to be the original people and that the land is theirs. There are the Karamajong and we also have the Pokot who came from Amudat. It is a challenge to bring the whole community

together. For example, there are elders in the mountains that have never come down. In 2015, there was a gold rush which drew many people to Nakapiripirit from across the country. The Kadam elders performed some cultural rituals which are said have made the gold hard to mine. They are however not bad people but there are procedures that should be followed. They are not sensitized about how they can benefit from the mining projects. For women in Nakapiripirit, the situation is not good because we are not as strong as men. The rocks that have gold are very hard so we only mine from the river sides. Women miners in this district are more than men – about 60% so if we organize ourselves, women can be supported by making policies in the association.”



Alice – Miner, Acherer mining village, Nakapiripirit

“We have a lot of problems but one of the biggest is that we are supposed to be united with the district people yet we are not. We need to bridge that gap. We need to always meet and share thoughts so that whenever an investor comes, they are dealing with a united community. For us women, at times the only money is to buy food and is not even enough to pay school fees for our children. So for most of us, the children are at home. If we come together as an association we can find ways to educate our children. Some of our families do not even have income to build homes. The little gold



you get, you sell and buy food. It is usually better to accumulate the gold first and sell at a higher price when you have a gram but it is hard when you don't have food at home. If we are willing to unite and work together, we can have more production and more gold to sell. There are about 400 miners in Acherer and even more during the rainy season.” ■

Influx of artisanal miners in Nakapiripirit causing anxiety over land

The Karamoja sub region has recently been rocked by cases of insecurity especially in the districts of Kaabong, Napak, Nabilatuk and Moroto. The successful disarmament of the locals in the late 2000s that ushered in relative peace is now under threat with renewed armed cattle rustling and killings in the communities. Also, the recent migration of artisanal and small-scale gold miners to the region is seemingly brewing tensions with land owners who view their activities as a threat. The Community Development Officer, Morita Sub-county, Loput Callisto Kamkam, shared some insights with Robert Mwesigye in the interview below:



Q *What is the general situation here in Nakapiripirit regarding ASM operations?*

First of all, disturbing cases of cattle theft have been on the increase especially in Nabilatuk. In January this year a seven-year-old Pokot boy was killed in Acherer. Tensions are now brewing between the Pokot who are the original inhabitants and immigrants coming from other parts who include Bagisu, Bateso, Karamojong, Baganda and many others. People are coming to mine here and it is getting uncomfortable for the locals. These people had retreated up in the mountains in fact, there are many

elders there. Now they are returning to find people mining on their land.

Q *Are there any miners' associations here in Nakapiripirit?*

There has been some sensitization about forming associations but they have not taken root here. I know of an NGO called LANET that has done some sensitization of miners about forming associations.

The idea ACEMP is bringing of a Community Trust is very good but without engaging the Pokot, who are the land owners, it will be very difficult. I can assure you once they are

engaged in the process from the start they will come on board. There are elders up there in those mountains who also have to be consulted.

These Pokot at one time stormed the District and wanted to close all offices being run by non-Pokot. Nothing will work out if they are not engaged. The Pokot are generally getting nothing from the minerals being mined in their lands which is causing tensions.

Q *Would you comment on any health, safety and environment issues in the mining areas?*

We have a very big problem here of environmental degradation. You see mining has reduced in Moruita because of inadequate rains. The streams where miners scrape the riverbeds for gold have dried up. Now they have gone into charcoal burning as an alternative source of income.

These people are stubborn, they have cut down all the trees to burn charcoal. But I tell you these miners are very dangerous. Sometime back they almost lynched officials who had gone to impound illegal charcoal.

HIV and alcohol are a major problem in the camps. When these miners get some little money, you imagine what happens. Alcoholism is a big problem there coupled with HIV. There is also the issue of violence against women. The major cause of Gender Based Violence is alcoholism in the mining

Q *How are ASMs relating with companies?*

There are two companies operating here. International University of East Africa and Angaro investments. There are wrangles in the communities over land. These people did not compensate those they found there. Companies end up targeting areas where already miners have invested and it is a sticking issue. These companies just come and take minerals and destroy the environment but do nothing for the community. ■

communities. Alcoholism has also led to child neglect. You see, the Pokot consider women as property. They also practice female genital mutilation which further disadvantages women.

Q *Can you shade more light on land issues here?*

Land is a very controversial issue here. In the 1960s most of the Kadam people were settled around Kakomongole but insecurity drove them up the mountains. Land in Moruita is owned by clans that is why they are very tough. Original owners are now coming back to their lands to go into cultivation. Most of the vast area is their grazing area and they do not want people settled there.

Their vast lands are in the villages of Nakamuria, Napeles, Komoret, Katukumok, Moruita, Apeikar and many others.

Q *How are ASMs relating with your office and other DLG authorities?*

Miners know the CDO's office and we are often in their communities addressing a couple of issues. ASMs have raised issues of insecurity, water, child protection, GBV and others. It is through our office that there are Village Health Teams in the camps that support expectant mothers and offer other basic services.

Kadam - Moroto Basin preliminary studies at 65 percent completion

BY PEARL ARIGYE

The ongoing geochemical and geophysical studies of the Kadam – Moroto Basin stand at 65%, according to a source at the Directorate of Petroleum.

The source reveals that the initial expected completion timeline of the exploration of June 2021 has now been rescheduled to December 2021.

In April 2019, Robert Kasande, the permanent secretary to the Ministry of Energy & Minerals Development (MEMD), revealed

that there was evidence of possible presence of a working petroleum system in the Kadam – Moroto Basin as demonstrated by the encountered oil seep and potential source rocks.

The revelation came ahead of the announcement of Uganda’s second licensing round in May 2019 by the minister then,

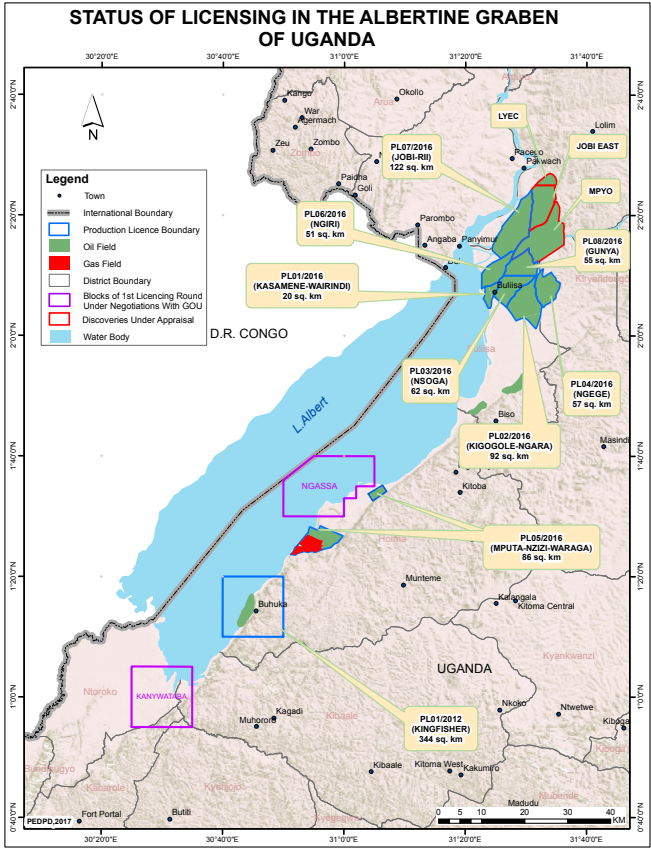


Map showing Uganda's sedimentary basins. Source: MEMD, 2009

Irene Muloni, at the East African Petroleum Conference in Mombasa, Kenya.

“The teams from the Directorate of Petroleum that are undertaking thorough exploration in that region were able to find a very strong seepage from the subsurface and that has given us morale to carry on with exploration because now it tells us there is

“The teams from the Directorate of Petroleum that are undertaking thorough exploration in that region were able to find a very strong seepage from the subsurface and that has given us morale carry on with exploration because now it tells us there is a working petroleum system”



Map showing status of licensing in the Albertine Graben. Source: Petroleum Authority of Uganda, 2017

of Mourita Sub County in Nakapiripirit and Nadunget and Rupa Sub Counties in Moroto.

As we await production of “First Oil”, there is potential for additional petroleum resources to be discovered in the country when additional exploration is undertaken.

According to the source, when studies on the Kadam-Moroto basin have been completed, they will embark on preliminary studies in the Hoima and Kyoga basins.

Currently, exploration of the Albertine Basin where the Tilenga and King Fisher oil projects are nearing the development phase stands at just 40%, with only 10% of it licensed to oil companies. ■

a working petroleum system,” he said then.

At the time, he had stated that within two years, the basin would be undergoing licensing through a competitive bidding process; however, that progress, according to the source, has been hampered by the Covid19 pandemic that resulted in the lockdown of the entire country to contain transmission of the virus.

The Kadam-Moroto Oil Basin covers parts

Mineral export ban sucks life out of mining community, dissipates livelihoods

Over 2,000 artisanal miners stranded after their employer, Uganda's largest Wolfram mining company, closed shop following Presidential directive to halt exports of unprocessed minerals.

BY MARTHA ACHOM

A once vibrant mining community in Kaara Parish, Muko Sub-county in the new Rubanda District appears desolate. Nyamuliro, along the Kabale - Kisoro highway was until December 2019, a bustling business centre. Now, save for a few poorly stocked shops and empty eateries, the trading centre is a shadow of what it used to be.

The community in Nyamuliro had for long derived their livelihood from mining, processing and trading in Wolfram. Wolfram, also called Tungsten, is commonly used in the manufacture of heating elements and as filaments in light bulbs and cathode ray tubes. It is also used in heavy metal alloys such as high-speed steel, from which cutting tools are manufactured.



Photo: Martha Achom

Life is not the same at the mines as machinery lies idle and the site looks deserted



Photo: Martha Achom

Good old days: Men working at the mines before operations ceased

KI3R Minerals Ltd, a UK-based company, was the major Wolfram miner in Nyamuliro and as such, the largest employer of artisanal miners in the area. The company took over control of the mines covering 185 acres from Krone Uganda Limited in 2016. At the time, Krone was the largest miner and exporter of Wolfram in Uganda. Those mines, also formerly known as Bjordal Mines after their first colonial era owner, have been in existence since 1932.

By the time KI3R Minerals Ltd ceased operations in February 2020, it was employing at least 2,000 artisanal miners.

According to Allan Agumya, one of the founding members, the company adopted a community approach. They entered an arrangement where artisanal miners were allowed to mine Wolfram within the company's concession and sell it to the company. The company would use excavators and tractors to remove the overburden making it easy for the artisanal miners to start up adits. "The company was injecting over fifteen million shillings into the community on a daily basis," Agumya says.

However, following the Presidential directive banning exportation of raw minerals, the company could not continue to buy Wolfram

from the artisanal miners and ended up taking the difficult decision to shut down operations.

The mine site is now desolate. Equipment, including shaking tables, trucks and crushers lie idle, covered in dust and cobwebs. "We have a mining lease but we are not working," says Pius Kalanzi, the Manager. "But we still have some maintenance expenses like the security that is guarding the mines to make sure people do not vandalise our machines."

Kalanzi says the company has failed to meet some of its business obligations with its clients because of the ban. "We entered into an MoU with two companies in the UK, where we agreed to export 20 tonnes of processed Wolfram on a monthly basis," he explains. "That obligation was met until December 2019 when the company was stopped from exporting, leading to a cancellation of the MoUs in 2020."

Kalanzi, however, argues that their exports can not be classified as 'raw minerals' because the Wolfram ore undergoes some processing before being shipped off to the market. "We should not have been included in those that are not allowed to export," he notes. "We process up to 75%. Irrespective of our cries, no one is listening."

Shattered dreams

Tukahabwa Danson, one of the leaders of the artisanal miners narrates that before the company closed, the miners had organised themselves into an association of over 2000 people under the Nyamuliro Wolfram Miners Association. However, many members have since moved to other mining districts like the gold-rich Mubende in search of better opportunities.

“There is no longer business in the area, even up to Kabirizi. All the small shops that were here before were benefiting from us. When we closed, they also closed,” he explains. “We have failed to cater for our families. We tried growing potatoes but last year, the heavy rains destroyed our gardens. Thank God for Covid, otherwise so many children would have dropped out of school. We don’t have money,” says a frustrated Tukahabwa.

Tweyambe Alex, a former storekeeper who started working with Krone Mines in 2000 ventured into timber business after the mines closed. He says that he first opted for agriculture, but it did not give immediate income like mining did. “So, after planting, then what? You have to wait for them to grow. But while you are waiting, you are doing nothing,” he laments.

Ronald Nuwahereza, who joined the company in 2016, says he was able to build a house two years later in 2018 with income from mining. Now he only makes a few thousand shillings per day transporting people by boat to the company premises but even then, customers are few.



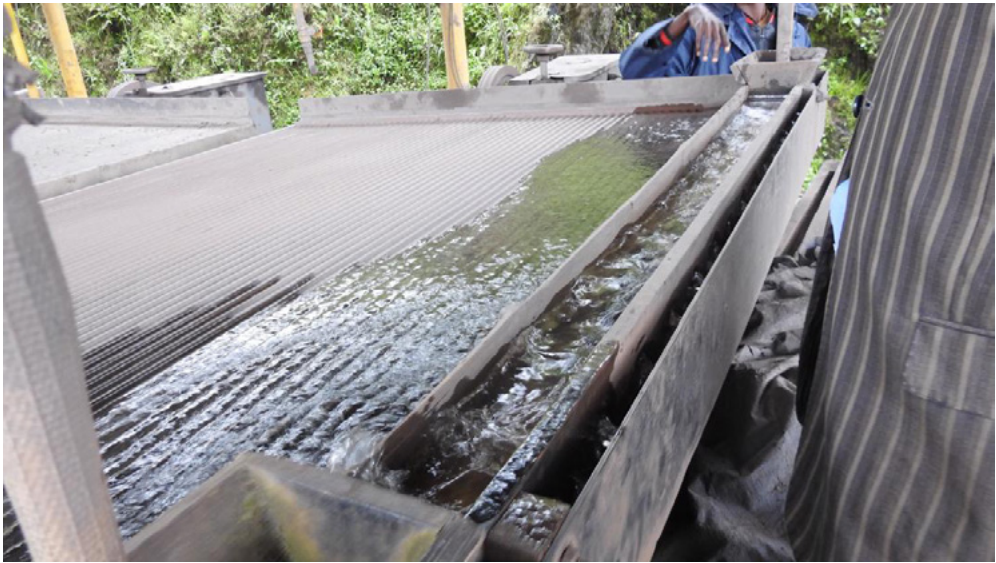
Tukahabwa Danson



Tweyambe Alex



Ronald Nuwahereza



A shaking table during the busy days at the mines

Bribing and smuggling for survival

Even with the mines closed, some shrewd miners bribe the security personnel deployed at the mines to allow them to enter and obtain some minerals. Some of the miners this publication spoke to claim they pay the security people up to one million shillings to illegally access the mines.

One of the miners narrated how his group was fleeced by security. “We gave Afande (policeman) our eight hundred thousand shillings to enter and mine. He allowed for the first two days, but arrested us on the third day and took our 3 Kilos of Wolfram.” According to the miner, the group ended up paying an additional one hundred thousand shillings to secure bail.

Barya Ronnie, the police officer in charge of the Criminal Investigations Department at Rubirizi District, confirms that indeed, a few miners are bribing security, mining and smuggling minerals. The mine site is now

guarded by the Police Minerals Protection Unit (PMPU) whom he accuses of taking bribes and offering protection to illegal miners. “Although it’s guarded, there are some people who are still mining and the Minerals Police is in on it,” he says.

Barya reveals that the last time he intercepted minerals that were being smuggled to Rwanda, he was telephoned by a high-ranking officer of PMPU who instructed him to leave issues of minerals to the Unit. “Even if you went there and engaged the Mineral Police, you would not get correct information because they are all benefiting from it. Most people in that community are,” he says.

However, Ozelle Francis, the lead guard at the company and a member of the PMPU affirms that the mine is closed and denies reports of any smuggling. “This was the source, but now that it is shut down, no one can access minerals to smuggle.” ■

Wakiso DLG Revenue Officer David Kabale says they have realised drastic declines in revenues from Tantialite



District Local Governments rue loss of revenue as ban bites

Royalties are certainly not the principal source of revenue for Local Governments, but the perpetually underfunded sub-national governments need all the money they can get.

BY MARTHA ACHOM & ROBERT MWESIGYE

Local Governments continue to feel the impact of lost revenue caused by the 2011 Presidential directive banning the export of raw minerals. President Museveni argued at the time that selling minerals in raw form denied the country income, employment and other benefits. The President temporarily lifted the

ban in 2017, but it was eventually reinstated by the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA).

Four years later, the ban continues to impact on Local Governments that were earning revenue from minerals mined and exported from their jurisdiction.

Livingstone Natukunda, the District Chief Finance Officer (CFO) for Rubanda District



Photo: Martha Achom

Miners drying wolfram mined from the tunnels of Nyamuliro, before selling it to KI-3R Minerals Ltd. This was before management closed the mines

said they last received royalties amounting to UGX 20,061,402 from the Central Government in the 2018/19 Financial Year before KI3R Minerals Ltd, a Wolfram mining company ceased operations in December 2019 following the ban.

“We do not budget for these revenues anymore because the company isn’t working,” said Natukunda. His counterpart from Isingiro District, Innocent Byagageire, re-echoes the same. “We used to budget for about UGX 40,000,000 and it was specifically from royalties. Not receiving it any more definitely affects service delivery,” he said. “In the F/y 2020/21, we received only UGX 126, 447 in royalties.”

David Kabale, the Wakiso District Revenue Officer reveals that royalties for Tantalite dropped drastically from UGX 20,000,000 in the 2017/18 Financial Year to UGX 3,843,059 in 2019/20. Prosy Sasao, who sits at the Namuyumba Sub-county office said that when her office followed up and visited the Tantalite mine, they discovered that the ban had indeed affected the company’s production.

At national level, the ban on export of unprocessed minerals has caused a steep decline in the country’s mineral exports. A 2020 performance report by the Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines (DGSM) indicates that mineral exports dropped by 52 percent compared to the previous financial year.

Royalties for Tantalite fell from UGX 20,068,246 in 2014 to UGX 349,080 in 2018; Wolfram from UGX 3,026,425,569 to UGX 181,789,264 in the same period. Whereas Tin brought in royalties UGX 472,808,669 in 2014, there were no royalties recorded in 2017 and for Wolfram as well. According to the report, mineral production fell by 25.6 percent in 2019/20 compared to that of 2018/2019, which the Directorate attributed to the export ban of unprocessed minerals.

Likewise, Non-Tax Revenue, largely attributed to mineral royalties, dropped by 21.8 percent in 2019/20 compared to that of 2018/19.

The ban has consequently had an effect on exploration, mining and attraction of new investors. ■

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