Beyond the "conflict mineral": Assessing women's diverse livelihood strategies in DRC's artisanal mining communities

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Abstract

In the DRC, ASM has been strongly associated with armed conflict. The supposed link between artisanal mining exploitation, sexual violence, and long-term conflict have led to a number of reforms programmes that aim to improve the situation of people leaving in and around the mines. Yet, the artisanal mining industry provides an important source of livelihoods for people and especially women in different activities directly or indirectly related to the mining. Based on 15 months of extensive fieldwork, the paper starts from the questions: (1) What are the different sources of women’s livelihoods in mining community? (2) what are the factors that determine differentiation between women? (3) How do reforms affect the roles of women and the differentiation between them? It turns out that women find different types of employment in the mining areas. They are engaged in various way (directly and indirectly) in the mining exploitation and find all sorts of small jobs in the mining communities. However, within the livelihood diversification strategies taken by the women in the mining centre there is many case of differentiation among them that need to be analysed. Diversity in the situation of the reform implementation is a part on this situation. In fact, while it is argued by many literatures that women are working under dire of perilous conditions, exploitation and marginalisation there are also women who gain positions of power and manage to save money and to invest in other activities.

Keys words: DRC’s artisanal mining, women’s livelihood strategies, diversity, mining reforms.