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AFRICAN WOMEN IN MINING PARTNERSHIPS

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by

Dr Brigitte BOCOUM²

In a variety of ways, high costs have been found to be associated with the low participation of women in the economic sphere. Yet the traditional paradigm still limits the recognition that women need greater flexibility to play multiple roles – as mothers, wives, workers, and citizens – to maximize family welfare. Meanwhile, few families in Africa for example and most parts of the world are affluent enough to live comfortably on one income, whereas it has become common knowledge that Gender Inequality holds back a country's economic performance. Barriers in whatever form they come, that reduce open competition impede a country's ability to draw on its best talents, ultimately undermine economic growth and productivity. The need has now thus become urgent to look to alternative models of growth and development.

It is worth recalling the importance of the mineral sector for at least 23 out of 53 nations in Africa. Also, the undeniable fact that mining has not yet generated the kind of socio-economic development one would expect is an important consideration. So are the availability of sizeable deposits of great variety, the several revisions of development policies and sizeable investments granted overtime, but most importantly here the fact that mineral exploitation is not new on the continent. It is thus believed that the situation calls for rethinking the development strategy for the sector. It is further suggested that this process urgently puts great emphasis on the need to involve a wider spectrum of stakeholders, to include women, with the aim to better guide policy and perform mining business for development purposes. The paper attempts to highlight the importance for any policy reformulation process to seriously reconsider the existing gender imbalances and prevailing unsuitable approach to women integration in the mining of Africa. Suggestions are also offered to fully integrate both the concept and practice of increased women participation in mining business and related activities with its associated impact in promoting sustainable socio-economic development on a much larger scale on the continent.

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Today, the proliferation of new mining partnerships across the globe offers a unique opportunity to mainstream gender equality into the mining sector of Africa. These partnerships through mining networks are seen as a viable channel to create sustainable economic growth and development. Also, they aim at establishing close ties between all constituents with a true commitment to the sustainable development of the abundant, diversified, and still mostly untapped mineral resources of the continent. An increasingly significant number of knowledgeable women are involved in all aspects of mining in some countries. However, any increase in female recruiting is generally from a very low base. This, as well as current conditions surrounding women coupled with their low level of involvement in the mining industry of Africa no longer match neither the need and aspirations of women themselves, nor the realities and needs of the region. It is intended that similar mining networks be created or strengthened among women wishing to contribute substantially to the socio-economic development of Africa. The ultimate aim is to create an enabling environment for the successful integration of women as key partners for mineral development.

There is no doubt, the make up of the mining force is changing and will continue to evolve. Most urgent needs lie in the participation of women in decision-making and in insuring that gender is mainstreamed in the mining industry without discrimination. As time goes by, there will be an even growing need to involve people from non-traditional sources, reconciling the experiences and seeking the most effective approaches that meet the specific needs of women in mining in an efficient and lasting way.

Women's Involvement in Mining

Available statistics point at huge discrepancies in both the degree and levels of involvement between men and women in the mining sector of Africa. Mining and many other industries are traditionally viewed as a male domain and the integration, advancement and retention of women in this sector has been slow to non-existent. In the job market for example, there is ample evidence that employers in the field prefer to hire and work mostly with men. Empirical analysis conducted to explain such phenomena has shed light to the significant detrimental influence caused by the general belief that men's income is more important to their families. Also, the demand for female labor has been found more tied to the level and state of economic growth than the demand for male labor, which does not induce much for Africa. Greater details are available on this topic, which are however discussed elsewhere in the literature. This report mainly focuses on the mining sector's female labor force constraints, to ensure that inefficiencies and distortions that affect much of the increasingly growing and capable work force are better addressed in the future.

Natural resources-endowment is another preferred underlying theory to explain the causes of retardation of women's involvement in the mining sector of Africa. The theory advances that higher levels of unearned income such as natural-resource rents reduce the need for earned income, which in turn is thought to reduce the supply of female labor in general. The resource-poor economies tend to rely more heavily on labor-intensive development and so have depended more on women's economic participation, with rates of female labor force participation closer to their potential. The labor-abundant, resource-rich countries like Nigeria and South Africa (10500 women miners total, ie 2.6% of the workforce in 2004) tend to have slightly lower rates of female labor force participation than the labor-abundant, resource-poor economies in Africa. This is valid of most countries, albeit with a few exceptions.

Other analyses have placed greater emphasis on the direct link, which exists between the discouraging support infrastructure³ and the degree of women's participation in the mining sector. They underline the fact that women are more constrained than men by their immediate physical environment. A woman's horizon could be greatly expanded by investments in standard infrastructure - such as better transport, water, and telecommunications - as well as expansion in market services, acquisition of skills and education for the provision of vocational and life long learning opportunities. Indeed, the matching of competency standards across gender is an essential link between marketable employment requirements and systems. Directly linked to this concept are learning programs, education and training. When isolating specifically the issue of training, the need to maintain a properly skilled workforce has led the mining industry to place strong emphasis on on-the-job training and to develop multi-skilled jobs, formal skill development programs and payment systems based on available skill use. In developed mineral economies like Australia, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of work organization systems in the mining industry reflect these developments. However, in Africa very few such programs include, let alone benefit women.

Based on actual figures concerning employment rates and working conditions, the gaps between men and women in the mining sector of Africa are even more substantial. The proportion of women in the workforce was computed by the International Labor Organization (ILO) on a sample of 15 countries out of which three (3) were from Africa. In those, female employment stood respectively at 21%, 7% and 2.5% respectively for Kenya, Mauritius and South Africa. Typically female employment in the mining sector is below 10% on the continent. The data made available here further evidences that: (i) in most countries and mining companies the average remuneration of women in mining is below that of men; (ii) the representation of women in senior management positions is less than that of men; (iii) the proportion also declines with the introduction of longer

³ This has also been termed "The lack of right enabling environment."

working hours and compressed shifts tending to have a disproportionate effect on women because of their family responsibilities; and (iv) there is no difference between female employment in mining depending on whether developing or developed country. Environment mismanagement also plays a major prohibitive role. The example of South Africa is worth mentioning, where there has been noticeable cases of decline in female employment since 1995, mainly due to substantial decrease in the number of women mineworkers working in underground production in poor conditions as far as exposure to dust, heat and noise is concerned.

Indeed, despite the huge potential for women to significantly accrue their contribution to mining development, actual rates of participation in Africa remain among the lowest in the world. Recruitment of women is rendered difficult by the fact that the mining industry is also an employer of predominantly full-time workers, an increasing number of whom are contractors, including in development, production and maintenance. Age, also seems to be a discouraging factor for women since in the average, age of the mining force is considerably above that of the industry as a whole. As regards the type of activities conducted, available statistics reveal no restriction though, apart from the different operational levels, beginners and medium scale included. In terms of representation, African women in mining are present in the industry as full-time professionals, miners, mining company owners, jewelry store owners, manufacturers and traders. Concerning the specific sectors of intervention, their involvement range from the exploitation of a number of minerals like Gold, Silver, Diamonds, Rubies, Emeralds, Aquamarines, Tin, Malachite, Cobalt, Copper, Industrial Minerals, Talc, Gypsum, Dimension Stones, Granite, Marble, Limestone etc. to broad policy-making, academia, and project finance. On the ground, there are concentrating mainly on small-scale mining and have had to experience the unfortunate typical major issues having to do with the sub-sector – including illegal trading (where sales are not transparent and smuggling is rife, benefits are lost to the community and, in most cases, the commodities pass through several hands at discounted prices before reaching the formal market. This often translates into the artisanal miners generally receiving less than half the market value of their production); health and safety; environmental mis-management (pressure on the environment as well as on worker health is particularly strong with respect to gold mining because of the use of mercury); and taxation; in addition to gender discrimination.

Environmental hazards are worth mentioning since gold and gemstones are the main substances extracted by women small-scale miners in Sub-Saharan Africa. But few women miners have any formal mining skills and many have acquired experience on the ground. Moreover, they are generally not organized. However, both training and organization into small groups is starting to occur in places. In Africa, they represent only a small proportion of the mining force; but bearing in

mind extended families in many countries and a small multiplier effect, their socio-economic impact could be as substantial as that of large-scale mining development. However, any increase in involvement by women in order to be efficient will ultimately depend on the approach taken to restructuring – from the planning stage – which will entail adequate vision and willingness/openness on the part of the people and decision-making body involved in the process.

Further from a socio-economic standpoint, the mining industry remains the main sector, beside agriculture, that can hire large numbers of unskilled workers. The industry is, therefore, in a unique position to contribute substantially, at least in the short to medium-term, to the development of the country's human capital, including women. However, it is imperative that unlighted and committed gender planners be involved in the process. Indeed, gender planning when performed efficiently enables development workers to have the effect they want on women as well as men. Besides, Gender planning is supposed to give content to aspirations to promote gender equity between women and men so that women's roles and benefits are equally supported as those of men and hence suits well in the current context.

In actual practice, a growing number of measures are being taken –either voluntarily, forced by institutional pressure groups or as a result of legislation – to counter these imbalances. But their inefficient implementation accompanied with poor monitoring is still suffering to date and, resulting in mounting dissatisfaction. In addition, it is expected that all these measures will rely less heavily on equal opportunity and affirmative action policies with time. Rather, the time should come where they are based more on economic and social rationale rather. To that effect, current efforts should concentrate on initiatives aimed at opening the way forward. Hopefully, this would result in the elaboration of more appropriate policy development as well as the establishment/strengthening of all the causal links and partnerships needed to find working solutions to the problem.

Factoring in Women into Global Partnership

Most substantive reforms achieved to date aimed at promoting sustainable development in Africa's mining sector could not have been achieved successfully without the strong implication of a multidisciplinary consortium to ensure that all key aspects were addressed. Using the mining sector as one of the most important channels forward, translates into the need to develop the necessary strategic partnerships to ensure that the minerals and mining sector is identified as a vehicle for poverty eradication in Africa. Today, mining actors everywhere are placing great emphasis on the development of partnerships with all stakeholders having a similar strategic orientation and with whom partnership can lead to constructive division of labor and benefits from synergies.

Partnerships are being sought after everywhere and at all levels, with two broad (and sometimes conflicting) purposes in mind: (i) provide stability; and/or (ii) create a better life for all. A snapshot at some of the most recent partnership building efforts in the mining sector offers a better background picture, a comprehensive review of which for initiatives outside the continent is offered in Bocoum (2003). The underlying argument is three-fold: (1) there is a direct link between poverty and the ability to built adequate institutional capabilities and synergies among key regional partners; (2) potential additional negative future development impacts and increased sector vulnerability could result from such global initiative where Africa does not play an active role, as past experience has it; and (3) no counterpart body to such global initiatives as the Global Mining Initiative (GMI), the Collaborative Group on Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (CASM) etc. exist to represent the local sector's interests which would have eroded the continent's effectiveness at guiding mineral policy and worsened the quality of operations overtime. Once again it is worth noting the important role played by these global partnership initiatives. It reinforces the conviction of the urgent need for consolidation at all key levels possible in African mining, whose economic importance in the region warrants a similar level of institutional organization and high-power consultation on the part of all actors and institutions involved in the development of mining activities on the continent.

In a similar attempt to share good practices for generating mineral resources based sustainable development in Africa, the MINTEK Institute of South Africa has recently established partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa ("ECA"). Other important global mining initiatives with an African focus have recently been established, such as the African Mining Network (AMN) at the Headquarters of ECA in Addis Ababa (February 2003). Meanwhile, the African Millenium Initiative on Science and Technology (AMIST) hosted by UNU/INRA, an initiative of Africa scholars launched by the African Diaspora in 2000 will continue to assist Africa in its development path by integrating mining activities in the near future. In 2002, the African Mining Partnership (AMP) was launched at the World Mines Ministries Forum in Toronto (WMMF) following recommendations made by the NEPAD Mining Chapter and the Special Conference of African Ministers of Mining and Energy that called for the immediate establishment of a very strong forum for high-level consultations and consensus building, which was held in Ouagadougou in December 2000. The creation of AMP had been supported by the African Mining Ministers who met in Cape Town, South Africa in February 2003 to discuss issues of common interest, particularly those considered strategic in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). It is seen as a potential vehicle to implement the minerals and mining chapter of NEPAD with a view to harnessing Africa's mineral wealth to promote socio-economic development.

Notwithstanding the critical role of mining to the well being of so many African economies, the evidence is that women, despite their growing involvement in mining, have not received the same kind of attention as other cross-cutting issues such as environment, to name just one. Today, the mining sector's overall contribution to the region GDP does not exceed 4% and its net contribution to socio-economic progress is insignificant. Let's start from the premises/understanding that (i) the economic well-being of a population - including consumption of food, housing, healthcare, and other market-based goods and services - is determined not only by how much each working person earns, but also by what proportion of the population works; (ii) importantly in Africa, each employed person supports more than 2 nonworking dependents, and with women often supporting nearly all their children; (iii) Africa's achievements in many areas of women well-being compare favorably with those of other regions. Indicators such as female education, fertility, life expectancy, and per capita income show that Africa's progress over the last decades has been substantial; (iv) Africa falls considerably short on indicators of women's substantive participation in key economic activity; (v) it is commonly agreed that African economies must look to new models of growth and development relying more heavily on more productive use of human capital. Women remain a largely untapped resource in the region, making up to 53% of the population and in some countries the majority of enrolled university students, but only a small proportion of the active labor force.

In all situations, individual champions are of course the prerequisite for success and the need to build the necessary appropriate capacity to foster change. This is an important starting point. However, what the societal poverty reduction process mostly entails is multi-faceted partnership, with strong support from all, knowledgeable resource persons including practitioners, public and private institutions as well as supporting services being critical. In this context, research could play a significant supporting role in assessing the evolution of key measurement parameters such as involvement/employment levels, levels of poverty, salary rates and income generation capabilities, social and environmental problems, education and job levels, socio-economic contribution capacity and empowerment for contribution sake.

The 1st official regional Association of African Women in Mining Business (AFWIMN) was launched in Elmina, Ghana in September 2003. It took off with the initial technical and financial assistance of the United Nations Development Fund (UNIFEM), the SADC Gender Program from CIDA Canada, the Minerals Commission of Ghana, the World Bank Group through the CASM initiative, and knowledgeable experts in the area. This has not been achieved however without difficulties: getting all the member states to sign (SADC, ECOWAS, COMESA, etc.), and refining its overall purpose, as time would evolve. The ultimate aim of AFWIMN as its definition stipulates is *"to set a vibrant and transparent sector*

where gender imbalances do not exist and access and control of resources from the mining industry are equally distributed." The statement of its purposes outlines that AFWIMN proposes to achieve its objectives by making visible the participation of women in mining through gender mainstreaming, growth, innovation and increased productivity for the economic empowerment of women, poverty reduction and employment creation of all. Of recently, some momentum was certainly gathered. It is hoped that AFWIMN will not only grow in membership, but also in terms of net impact/contribution as it initially set to contribute substantially to the socio-economic advancement of the African region, along side with other partners involved in the sector. It will all depend on the network's ability to adjust on the spot to the ever changing realities of the sector, to rely on clear definitions of targets and objectives based on consensus and enlighten knowledge of the requirements embodied in growth, true commitment on the part of all designated representatives and infallible search for collective gain as well as a dynamic & multidisciplinary approach to resolving the challenge of achieving sustainable development in the mining sector of Africa.

The True Focus Remains Sustainable Development

Mining (small-scale, industrial-scale, trade, etc.) can contribute to poverty reduction in a variety of ways, mostly through generating income as well as creating opportunities for growth for different categories of businesses. As stated previously, discrimination against segments of a population on the basis of gender influences a country's larger social climate and reduces development prospects, good governance, and the effectiveness of society's institutions. Also, this applies to race, ethnicity, and religious background. Studies show that inclusiveness and diversity of perspectives improve decision-making about resource allocation. Women tend to have different perspectives than men about issues of importance in the public domain and decision-making. Women's presence in the key economic and public arenas and their influence on public policy are still limited in Africa.

The 3rd of the Millennium Development Goals agreed between all members of the United Nations aimed at promoting gender equality and empower women. Nowadays, girls are staying longer in school. Across the region, more than one in four girls now enrolls in tertiary education, and women outnumber men in colleges and universities in several countries of the region. Also, girls who stay in school tend to outperform boys. By investing increasingly massively on women's education and training and integrating women in economic activities that are key most for the continent, Africa is increasing women's productive (not reproductive) potential and their capacity to earn incomes and to participate in decisions. Paradoxically, the very low levels of active female participation in the labor force and/or women's representation at the decision-making level mean

that the region is not capturing a large enough part of the return on this investment. Add to that the proven higher rates of return in general to empowering women, and it becomes clear that increased female labor force participation and surrounding women with the right enabling environment in the work force would raise the returns to education and training throughout the economy and would improve the living standards of our nations as well as the functioning of our institutions.

Matrix 1: Selected Parameters for Women's Contribution to Sustainable Development in Mining Sector & Mining - Related Activities
<i>Budget & Finance related:</i> Need to agree and obtain a budget and/or Business Plan as well as mobilize funding per target activity
<i>Institutional Matters:</i> Establish specialized agencies, pressure groups or thematic partnerships if needed
<i>Government/Institutional Support:</i> Seek & obtain support at the highest possible levels
<i>Data related:</i> Gather specific quantitative figures to back-up and substantiate the facts
<i>Market related:</i> Assess all specificities and define all requirements in the surrounding environment
<i>Social dialogue:</i> Develop efficient means and strengthen channels to address specific prioritized issues of interest
<i>Education & training:</i> Acquire all necessary sound basic skills to ensure efficient involvement & long-term employment opportunities
<i>Technology related:</i> Value the acquisition of technological know-how and the need to master technical processes
<i>Environment Matters:</i> Support the provision and practice of appropriate standards
<i>Spatial Gender Transgression:</i> Seek the acquisition of power in order to influence decision-making
<i>Communication frontiers:</i> Access all modern means of communication and expand knowledge frontiers
<i>Poverty reduction:</i> Adopt a voluntaristic approach to the issue of contribution for development and encourage involvement in self-generating development promotional activities; make poverty reduction a strategy
<i>Global sustainability:</i> Encourage involvement in activities and forum with global scope
<i>R & D:</i> Develop means to conduct research, further functional capability and improve on existing operational tools

The benefits of enhanced women participation have been found to be positive on sustainable development. Besides, low female labor participation has proven to have a high cost to the economy and to the family. Simulations, although not specific to the mining sector –although the latter could yield even higher results-, have shown that increasing female labor force participation from their actual rates to predicted rates could boost average household earnings by as much as 25 percent. For many families, this is a ticket for greater comfort in life. Analyses based on cross-country data have also suggested elsewhere that as countries progress to higher levels of per capita income, increased female labor force participation results in significantly faster income growth. If female participation rates had been at predicted levels, per capita GDP growth rates might have been at least 1.0% higher during the last decade.

Today, the old “male-breadwinner” model is increasingly becoming out of date, the economic pressures leaving many households without a choice: a growing number of women now need to work outside the home to help support their families. The correct assessment of the surrounding socio-economic realities have created everywhere a generation of young women who are increasingly at par with their male counterparts and expect the same opportunities and rewards. This is also true of the key economic activity, which represents the mining sector. Change, however, will need to be led from the top and supported by the grassroots. The sole responsibility lies in the hands of women, but also with the state and institutions. Gender equality will remain an abstraction unless a substantial number of women believe that they must do something to exercise their rights. Of course, they will have to rely/work on the improvement of institutional frameworks to achieve that purpose. In mining, the challenge for women ultimately lies in how to successfully integrate themselves in light of the prevailing above constraints.

Several key ingredients to ensure the successful integration as well as the sustained involvement of women in mining activities in Africa are highlighted in the Matrix, which is provided. It is clear from the layout, that nearly the totality of these will require the need for strong partnerships, whether at the individual, national, regional or international levels to be built.

Conclusions

Calls for gender equality are often seen as a claim to share power and control or undermine existing systems. Common perception sees it as a threat to social order and an erosion of the established power structure, the latter perhaps with some justification. Yet gender equality has been broadly recognized as important for improving economic growth, creating productive employment, and reducing poverty. Past policies of growth strategies left fewer opportunities for women outside of traditional female jobs. As the region adopts new development models that are more global impact oriented, the demand dynamics for female labor will evolve.

African women in mining still face significant disadvantages today, often working under sub-optimal conditions affording very little potential for growth. Subtle forms of discrimination against women take place through a host of non-wage employment benefits, labor laws themselves not explicitly discriminating against women. In fact, such laws clearly stipulate that women should receive equal compensation for work and skills of equal value while stressing the need to understand that recognition, respect and promotion are natural requirements and are not included in the compensation package. It remains valid to date, however, that the benefits granted by these laws tend to remain unattainable, since they are weakly enforced and the potential beneficiaries lack recourse or

information. Significant responsibility hence lies on networks such as AFWIMN and its ability to expand its scope of activities in the future. This should include the promotion among others of large-scale development and the involvement of women in non-traditional activities such as industrial minerals development, the provision of technical assistance, advisory and policy-related work and dissemination of information on best practices in fostering the integration of African women in the mining field. A proposal is also made for the network, once fully operational, to join efforts with key regional institutions and partners such as the NEPAD Secretariat and the ECA in order to insure that significant benefits are now accrued to the local community and the economies of the African countries while factoring in the substantive impact of women in the mining sector.

It has now become evident that great benefits, including income generation, local community development, the mitigation of health, environmental and socio-cultural risks, could be reaped from furthering and most importantly sustaining women's involvement in mining activities. The paper has also highlighted the importance of the need for active participation by all key constituencies and the consolidation of partnerships in order to all jointly successfully achieve sustainable development in the mining sector of Africa. Finally, the promising challenges offered now by NEPAD but also the dynamism embodied in globalization offers a unique opportunity to mainstream the issue of women in mining on the continent. Greater attention should, however, be given to the ever growing importance of improving family welfare, social and community uplifting, and labor laws in mineral development. The creation of a new paradigm for better integration of women into broader socio-economic development goals at national and regional levels is also paramount. The ultimate challenge remains one of men and women joining forces in order (i) to encourage understanding and strengthen collaboration among all stakeholders that have a similar strategic orientation and with whom partnerships can lead to constructive division of labor and benefits from synergy; (ii) to avoid further wastage of valuable and scarce human resources; and (iii) to finance development projects, design and/or implement carefully selected programs capable of optimizing the socio-economic linkages generated by mining-related activities and thus promote sustainable growth and poverty eradication on the continent at any possible scale.

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