UGAASM
UGANDA ASSOCIATION OF ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINERS

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Your Voice On Artisanal And Small-Scale Mining In Uganda

Mining Tragedy: How Miners Died in Pit Collapse



In this Issue

12 Minister Nyamutoro negotiates for Kamalenge miners

14 Isingiro Tin Model ASM-centered Partnership

25 High-stakes politics in Kanungu gold rush

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CONTENTS

01 Foreword

02 Mabuka Mining Tragedy: Economic Desperation, Abandonment, Chaos, Grounded in Pit Collapse

04 Beyond Stigma: Economic Desperation Vs. Regulatory Realities

06 Busia Backyard Gold Mining – Trade Runs Through Generations

08 Nanyidik, The Global Village of Marble Artisanal Miners

10 Women Miners Decry Business Exploitation

12 Minister Nyamutoro Negotiates Reprieve For Kamalenge Miners

14 Isingiro Tin Mining: A Model ASM-centered Partnership

16 Mineral Export Ban: We're Hurting, Frustrated Miners Cry Out

17 From Informality to Influence: Six Years of the Mkutano

19 Unlocking the Full Potential of ASM in Uganda – Supporting their formalization journey.

21 MUMA Acquires Mineral Digital Traceability System

23 From the Ground Up: Redefining Africa's Mineral Wealth

25 Kayungwe Gold Rush: Institutional Betrayal, Extortion, High-Stakes Politics spiraling Out of Control

27 From Licence to Protection: Managing Risk in ASM

29 UGAASM conducts countrywide mine-site safety drive, business aspects sensitisation

Foreword

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) remains a vital pillar of Uganda's socioeconomic transformation. Millions of Ugandans depend directly and indirectly on the sector for their livelihoods, while its growing contribution to mineral production and export earnings demonstrates that ASM is not a peripheral activity, but an important part of our national economy.

As the Uganda Association of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners (UGAASM), we welcome the progress made towards formalisation, licensing and greater recognition of the sector. We equally recognise the continued efforts of the Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines, National Environment Management Authority and local governments, alongside Parliament, civil society and development partners, to create a more enabling environment for miners.

We particularly value the partnerships we continue to build across the sector. The collaboration with the Uganda National Mining Company (UNMC), and engagement around the Bank of Uganda's Domestic Gold Purchase Programme, represent important steps towards creating more transparent and competitive markets for locally produced gold. These initiatives can give miners better market access and more competitive prices while strengthening the connection between artisanal production and Uganda's formal economy. We encourage these partnerships to deepen and expand so that more miners can benefit from formal markets and Uganda can capture greater value from its mineral wealth.

Yet, as the sector grows, so too must our attention to the challenges that continue to threaten miners and mining communities.

The recent pit collapse in Namayingo is a painful reminder that health and safety must remain at the heart of formalisation. Every miner deserves to work in conditions that protect their life and dignity. We therefore call for stronger emphasis on practical mine-site safety, including safer mining methods, pit management, protective equipment, training and emergency preparedness. Regulation must protect lives, but enforcement should be accompanied by technical support that enables miners to comply.

We also commend Government's efforts to mobilise miners into cooperatives. Properly constituted and well-governed cooperatives can be a powerful vehicle for formalisation, enabling miners to access licences, finance, technology, markets and technical services while strengthening their collective voice. We encourage continued investment in building cooperatives that are transparent, accountable, commercially viable and genuinely owned by miners.

At the same time, regulatory barriers remain a concern. Licensing and environmental requirements are necessary, but their implementation must be proportionate to the scale and realities of ASM. Excessive costs, lengthy procedures and bureaucratic red tape can unintentionally push miners back into informality. We urge continued reforms that make compliance achievable while maintaining appropriate environmental and social safeguards.

Our recent countrywide familiarization and affirmation tours amongst the mining communities reveal the inherent resource curse especially in Karamoja which demand urgent attention. Mineral wealth must not coexist with persistent community poverty. Where companies extract valuable resources while host communities remain impoverished, we risk reproducing the resource curse. Mining must generate tangible and lasting benefits for local people through meaningful participation, fair economic opportunities, environmental protection, transparency and local value creation.

Our vision is therefore clear: a formalised, safe, responsible and inclusive ASM sector in which miners are recognised as economic actors and mining communities meaningfully share in the wealth generated from their natural resources.

We thank all stakeholders who continue to walk this journey with us, and above all, we recognise the resilience and determination of Uganda's artisanal and small-scale miners. Their organisation and collective voice remain the foundation upon which a stronger sector will be built.



John Bosco Bukya
Chairperson, UGAASM

Mabuka Mining Tragedy: Economic Desperation, Abandonment, Chaos, Grounded in Pit Collapse

By Kenneth Asiimwe & Robert Mwesigye

On **July 19, 2026,** a somber mood hung over Mabuka Village in Bukhana Sub-County, Namayingo District, after a 120-foot-deep mine pit collapsed, trapping 10 miners beneath tons of earth. The disaster laid bare a local environment driven by economic desperation, institutional failure, and systemic neglect.

Economic Push into Hazardous Pits

Amidst a cocktail of unenviable record youth unemployment statistics and challenging economic times, local youth here face few options for survival. Fishing bans on nearby lakes and skyrocketing fuel prices have severely disrupted the boda boda trade, stripping away daily profits. Pushed to the brink, an exodus of young men has recently flocked to informal gold mining. Much of this work is haphazard: while main pit owners register their presence with local leaders, many workers are reported to arrive quietly at night, dropping off in trading centers before blending into the mines, according to Wafula Richard, the LCI chairperson of Mabuka Village.

In early June 2026, the Police Minerals Protection Unit (PMPU) shut down illegal mining operations in Mabuka Village. However, enforcement quickly collapsed. Off-the-record accounts indicate that officers allowed miners to return under unclear circumstances or following conflicting "orders from above." Following hasty negotiations, local leadership at the mines was briefly constituted to enforce saafety standards, but these measures were never maintained.

> *"Pushed to the brink, an exodus of young men has recently flocked to informal gold mining."*



Miners and well-wishers dig through rubble during the recovery mission in Mabuka Village. Photo by Kenneth Asiimwe

The Collapse and Immediate Betrayal

When the pit caved in on July 19, chaos ensued. In the immediate panic, the site supervisor, identified only as “Silver,” fled the scene with the official registry of on-site workers.

“Some miners managed to escape the moment they realized the pit was caving in,” explained Chairman Wafula. “Their leaders who are said to record whoever worked at the site all vanished and we could not tell who was who.”

One worker who spoke to UGAASM, that was at hand to support recovery efforts through logistical mobilisation, said he survived only because he had stepped out seconds earlier to speak with the supervisor.

Community-Driven Rescue Operation

The immediate response met severe resource shortages. Local police and volunteers lacked basic emergency tools and were forced to dig with their bare hands. Official district leaders, aand local council officials were at least nowhere in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Progress relied entirely on community solidarity. Local miner Julius and Wagagai Mining (U) Co. Ltd provided private excavators, while residents and field responders crowd-sourced fuel, food, and water. Led by local volunteers and PMPU Zonal Commander ASP Cephas Wanjara, five miners were pulled out alive on the first morning, and three bodies were initially recovered.

The recovery operation turned into an agonizing wait as time ran out. Sixteen days after the collapse, another body was retrieved. On August 4, the final body was recovered. The last two victims were brothers who had traveled from Mubende to earn a living in the mines.

Even as rescuers pulled the final bodies from the wreckage, desperate miners continued working in an adjacent, visibly unstable pit directly across the site, a stark testament to the ongoing cycle of poverty and unsafe working conditions in the region.



From Informality to Safety: Rethinking Uganda's Mining Regulatory Framework

By Kenneth Asiimwe

Labeling those affected as "illegal miners" risks obscuring the underlying economic and regulatory drivers that push communities into unsafe mining. A sustainable response requires examining these root causes.

Structural Gaps in the Current Framework

Analysis of current practice points to three key structural issues:

License Administration and Speculation
The current regime allows Exploration Licenses to be held for extended periods with minimal on-ground activity. This creates a situation where license holders, often with no direct presence in mining communities, control large tracts of land.
Consequently, local communities with limited livelihood alternatives are compelled to mine without legal authorization or technical support, increasing safety risks.

Institutional Mandate and Coordination
Under the Mining and Minerals Act, 2022, the Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines (DGSM) provides technical expertise but does not have direct operational command over enforcement. Enforcement is carried out by the PMPU under the Uganda Police Force.

This separation means technical directives from mines inspectors can be overridden, and police are tasked with enforcing safety standards without necessarily having the engineering mandate or resources to do so. This division creates grey areas in accountability.
Formalization Without Capitalization
Efforts to formalize artisanal and small-scale miners are positive, but transferring access to idle sites without accompanying capital for safety works such as shoring, geotechnical audits, and training, shifts risk to cooperatives that are not equipped to manage it.



The current regime allows Exploration Licenses to be held for extended periods with minimal on-ground activity.

Proposed Interventions

To address these gaps, the following four measures are proposed for urgent consideration:

Strengthen License Accountability: "Use-It-or-Lose-It" Mechanism
Introduce a progressive annual holding fee for Exploration Licenses that increases significantly if no demonstrable activity is recorded within 12 months.
DGSM, in coordination with URA, should conduct annual physical verification audits. Licenses that fail verification should be subject to revocation within 30 days to reduce speculative hoarding and free up land for productive use.



Integrate Technical Command of Enforcement
Place the PMPU under the operational command of the Commissioner, DGSM, while retaining its administrative home in the Police.
This model aligns with regional and national precedents such as the Environmental Protection Force under NEMA, and the Inspectorate Divisions in Ghana's Minerals Commission and Tanzania's Mining Commission. Technical decisions on mine safety should be led by qualified inspectors, with police providing security support.

Establish a Mines Safety and Formalization Fund
Create a dedicated, recoverable fund, potentially housed within the Parish Development Model (PDM), to support formalization. The fund would finance: risk mapping, subsidized safety materials like timber and steel props, and mandatory on-site safety training prior to operations. Formalization should therefore be paired with the means to operate safely.

Enable Compulsory Sub-Leasing of Surface Rights
Amend the law to require holders of idle licenses to sub-lease designated "Community Mining Delegation Zones" on the surface to registered cooperatives after 24 months of inactivity.
This would be done under DGSM supervision and technical standards. The license holder would retain subsurface rights, while communities gain legal access to mine safely. This approach reduces illegal activity and promotes shared use of mineral resources.

The Need for a Technical Review

The Bukana incident is not an isolated event, but a predictable outcome of current structural arrangements.

The Minister of Energy and Mineral Development, the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources, and the Inspector General of Police to convene a Technical Review Summit. The objective should be to review enforcement structures, license administration, and safety financing based on evidence from the field.

Uganda can develop its mineral resources in a way that protects both livelihoods and lives. Doing so requires moving from reactive response to proactive, technically-led regulation.

The memory of those lost in Bukana, and the safety of those still working, demand no less.

The writer is the CEO, Uganda Association of Artisans and Small-Scale Miners (UGAASM) These are personal views and do not necessarily reflect the official position of UGAASM.



Busia Backyard Mining – Trade Runs Through Generations

By Robert Mwesigye



Geoffrey Ojok, Uganda Association of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners' legal consultant, tries operation the hoist during a field visit. Courtesy photo

On a sweltering Saturday afternoon, Susan Nambuya's compound in Angarama Village, Tiira Town Council, Busia District, is a beehive of activity. The compound has a main house – modern and spacious, and other smaller quarters adjacent to it. Men are seen crisscrossing the open compound with tools; some are consulting her on a number of things. She is armed with a counter book where she's referencing and recording.

In the yard are cassava cuttings drying out in the sun – a typical homestead in this eastern part of the country.

The rush of activity at her home, however, is not your routine home chores by just family members. Right in her compound is an 80-foot deep mining shaft. A group of miners can be seen hovering around the seemingly well-engineered pit, firmly secured with timbers running all the way down. A thick hoist dangles above the pit, with a bucket tethered to the end. Men can be seen way below in the pit, only visible by the flashlights on their helmets.

A mini circuit board is installed at the site; piping delivering oxygen down the pit is also visible – a proper mining operation right in the middle of Nambuya's residential compound.

In her early thirties, she narrates that she used to operate the pit but fell short on finances and an "investor" took over.

"I am just a landlady," she says, adding that she earns her percentage on every sale of gold by the investor.

This business model is not unique to Nambuya. In fact, it is quite the practice in many homesteads in Tiira to find mining operations. It could be a ball mill, sluicing or Z-systems, and in other cases, huge excavated pits right in the homestead.

Gold mining is a trade that runs through generations in this part of Uganda. While it is a livelihood and way of life, the fact that it is done in people's homes rather has its downside.



A view of Nambuya's (L) backyard

The Risks

Nambuya shares that lately in Tiira, they are infiltrated by gangs that stage attacks in search of gold and money.

One mining association leader in the area says the culprits are “these young men that have grown amongst us and know our homes; some could be your own workers who will know that you have gold or money.”

There have also been allegations that these criminal gangs are well connected to security personnel, some from as far as Kampala.

Tebanyi Vincent, the LCI chairperson, the incumbent who recently won back his seat, however says no such report has ever reached his office, though he acknowledged that he would not rule out business rivalry among miners, especially as it involves gold, if there are such cases.

He, however, notes that even they cannot rein in this mining practice, and that the biggest challenge for officials is unregulated mining and dealing with stubborn landlords.

The Law

According to an inspector of mines at the Department of Geological Survey and Mines, this constitutes illegal mining that raises environmental concerns.

The inspector’s position exposes one of the central contradictions facing Tiira: gold mining is both deeply embedded in the local economy and, in many cases, operating outside the formal regulatory framework.

For families like Nambuya’s, the distinction between home and mine has become blurred over generations. The land on which a family builds a house can also be the land from which it earns its livelihood. A pit can sit a few metres from a kitchen, while processing equipment operates within sight of where children play and families go about their daily routines.

Yet beneath the apparent normality is a growing question about what happens when informal mining expands without adequate safeguards.



An 80-foot shaft beneath a residential compound presents obvious safety concerns. The risks do not end with the miners working underground. Unsecured excavations can threaten residents, especially children, while poorly managed mining and processing can leave lasting scars on the land. Waste from processing can also affect surrounding soil and water sources.

For local leaders, the challenge is therefore larger than simply stopping people from mining. Any attempt to enforce the law must contend with families whose incomes, investments and property arrangements have become intertwined with gold.

And gold remains a powerful incentive.

Tiira sits within one of Uganda’s best-known gold-producing areas, and the metal has attracted miners, investors, traders and job seekers for decades. As long as gold remains in the ground and buyers remain willing to pay for it, the pressure to keep digging is unlikely to disappear.

What may need to change is how that mining is conducted.

For miners, formalisation could provide a route to safer operations, access to technical guidance and clearer ownership arrangements. For local authorities, better registration and monitoring of mining sites could make it easier to identify dangerous shafts and enforce environmental and safety requirements. For landowners, formal agreements with investors could reduce disputes and clarify who carries responsibility when something goes wrong.

The story of backyard mining in Tiira is therefore not simply one of illegal activity. It is also a story of communities trying to turn the resources beneath their feet into a livelihood in an economy where alternatives may be limited.

Nambuya’s compound illustrates that reality vividly. Her home is at once a family residence, a piece of land with economic value and part of a gold supply chain that stretches beyond Tiira.

“I am just a landlady,” she says.

But that simple description masks a much larger relationship between land, gold and generations of families who have learned to live with, and earn from, what lies beneath their homes.

The challenge now is whether Tiira can preserve the economic opportunities created by gold while reducing the risks that come with mining in backyards.

Gold may have run through generations in Busia. The next generation, however, may need a safer and more regulated way to mine it.

Nanyidik, The Global Village of Marble Artisanal Miners

By Robert Mwesigye



Nanyidik village in Rupa Sub-county, renowned for its vast quantities of marble and limestone, gives Karamoja its moniker of the "Marble City".

Over the years, it has morphed into a global village of sorts, where Ugandans from all corners of the country, the east African region and beyond, are etching a living extracting huge boulders the glittering white stone, and crashing it ready for sale.

These are artisanal miners working alongside Chinese-owned Sunbelt Mining Group under a community development agreement. Nanyidik is also home to Sunbelt Marble Mining Factory.

Under the arrangement the miners can be allocated at the discretion of the company on an area where the latter isn't working.

Artisanal miners, comprising young and elderly men and women, spread across the acreage using manual tools like crowbars to extract large boulders of marble; and hammers to break them into smaller sizes, stashed in heaps of seven tonnes each. Each tonne goes for UGX 120,000, a rate that the local mining leaders decry as exploitation.

"These stones are going to Jinja and Kampala; many companies buy from these miners but they benefit most," says Andrew. He is equally awed by how the locals have received people from elsewhere, and basks in the knowledge that this is a global village open to everyone.

Bugema hails from Bugiri and has been in the area since 2013. He is on his way to the camp with a colleague who is a Mugisu from Mbale. He says the locals have no issues with people who come to work. He says the attraction to work in Rupa is because of the sheer abundance of the rock. "If you have capital you will do business," he says.

The cost of misery

For the price miners are given for their hard earned work, it pales miserably to what buyers reap in terms of benefits. Fine marble dust has a host of uses ranging from construction, environmental, agricultural and industrial. Yet for the measly prices buyers offer the miners in Nanyidik, these communities remain trapped in





A heap of marble at Nanyidik that goes for just UGX 120,000

Each tonne goes for UGX 120,000, a rate that the local mining leaders decry as exploitation.

economic hardship while foreign entities and middlemen profit off the true value of Karamoja's rich natural resources.

The Moroto District Local Government has over time also decried the lack of royalty accruals to it through central government. To be exact, authorities are not aware how much of their marble and other material like limestone leaves the region. A plan was mooted to install two weigh bridges in Karamoja at selected points but that remains on paper.

As Nanyidik continues to embody the spirit of a bustling, multicultural mining hub, its true potential remains anchored to the fair distribution of its immense wealth. For the local and migrant miners who endure grueling physical labor under the hot Karamoja sun, as well as the local government striving to capture its rightful revenue, systemic reform is no longer optional. Installing long-overdue weighbridges to track mineral output, enforcing fair pricing mechanisms, and renegotiating Community Development Agreements to better protect artisanal laborers are essential first steps. Only when the value generated by Nanyidik's marble is equitably shared can this unique global village transform from a site of daily struggle into a sustainable beacon of economic empowerment for Karamoja.

Women Miners Decry Business Exploitation

By Robert Mwesigye

Women miners in Rupa and Katikekile sub counties have decried the exploitative business tendencies by limestone and dolomite dealers who cheat them through low prices and delayed payments.

Esther Dengel who operates from Karukochom Hill narrated the hardships they face daily, from cheating workers who take money upfront but instead abandon the work; dealers who take their material and delay to pay up and yet offer low prices.

"You give someone UGX 50,000 so they can break these stones but instead abandon the work after two days. Scooping the soil to expose the outcrop costs UGX 4,000 daily while breaking the rock is UGX 6,000. That is UGX 10,000 daily.

"Moreover the dealers buy a 7-tonne heap of limestone at just UGX 100,000. The most you can make in profit is just UGX 30,000, yet they even take long to pay," she lamented.

The dealers buy a 7-tonne heap of limestone at just UGX 100,000. The most you can make in profit is just UGX 30,000, yet they even take long to pay.

The buyers who are usually middlemen also do not pay immediately and this complicates doing business further. It is a very desperate situation. Sometimes buyers take a while without showing up, leaving them with the option of seeking survival elsewhere.

Rupa and Katikekile bear a lot of significance in the construction sector in Uganda and beyond. These remain crucial sources of raw material for cement manufacturing companies like Tororo and Hima Cement; and many others that have come onto the market like Yaobai Cement. Tororo Cement has a new facility operating in Katikekile; while Sunbird Resources is mining its limestone in Rupa. Sunbelt Mining Group is also minin marble in Rupa, and as a factory in Nanyidik village.

A host of many other local investors are engaged in quarryng and have set up facilities for block making, stone crashing for domestic and commercial construction materials among others.

That Karamoja is a vast and significant source of these materials that have seen a construction boom in the country, yet her people continue to benefit almost nothing from the abundant natural resources, supersedes basic comprehension.

To bridge this stark divide between local sacrifice and industrial gain, urgent intervention is needed from local authorities, government regulators, and industry leaders. Establishing fair pricing standards, enforcing timely payment regulations, and empowering artisanal mining cooperatives will be essential steps toward protecting women miners from systemic exploitation. Karamoja's rich natural resources should serve as a engine for local prosperity, not a cycle of poverty for the very communities breaking the stone.



A miner uses a sledge hammer to break a rock in Kosiroi, Katikekile Sub County. Courtesy photo



A woman miner gestures as she complains about unfair business practices at Karukochom Hill where families etch a living mining limestone.

What Next?

Karamoja Agrobusiness and Mining Cooperative Society hopes to address these issues among the artisanal miners. Andrew Sagal Angellah, the brain behind the Coop, with a 25-year experience as a miner, says the Coop already has representatives across Karamoja Sub-region, including Karenga, Kaabong, Kotido, Abim, Napak, Moroto, Nibalatuk, Nakapiripirit and Amudat.

“We hope that this Coop can be a solution to this exploitation of our miners. It is our ambition that we really make it work for the benefit of our people especially the youth who should be kept busy doing productive work.

“It has been the tendency for middlemen to cheat miners because we as Karamoja have had our challenges overtime; people are not educated and all they look for is survival,” he said.

Minister Nyamutoro Negotiates Reprieve For Kamalenge Miners

By Robert Mwesigye

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Development Phiona Nyamutoro has secured a one-year reprieve after leading negotiations for artisanal miners in Kamalenge.

The miners were poised for eviction from AUC Mining Limited's Medium Scale Mining License (MML 4063) where they have been working alongside the investor on the 580.6816-hectare acreage since February 2026.

The over 500 miners' representatives under Kamalenge Artisanal Miners Association had previously met Minister Musenero Monica; State Minister Phiona Nyamutoro and a team from the Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines led by the Commissioner of Mines Agnes Alaba, and presented a petition detailing how the investor had breached a verbal contract where ASMs were invited to work, having paid millions of money for workspace, access to electricity, charged a percentage of ore mined, among others.



State Minister Phiona Nyamutoro shares a light moment during a tour of the AUC Mining area. Courtesy photo

The Genesis

According to the petition, miners said they were invited by representatives of AUC Mining to work on their license. Different fees were charged for processing sites, where an acre was sold at UGX11M; pits for UGX 500K, UGX 400K for electricity; UGX 6M for reopening old pits believed to have already proven reserves (developed before the 2017 evictions), and a 30% on ore mined. Over 200 pits were already operational and 40 acres sold for processing sites.

However, after a few months of operation, a one Michael Wang who had since secured the mining rights in a reported US$20M deal as majority shareholder with 80%, suddenly declared a one-month ultimatum for the miners to vacate the license.

Gradually operations ebbed as the situation got more uncertain. The miners tried to engage the investor, holding four meetings that came to no fruition. Additionally there was contention over the ore which was still being taxed 30% leading to a standoff from some miners who questioned why they were still paying the charge while being threatened with evictions.

The Leverage

In all this the miners argued that they were even in possession of AUC Mining company receipts for all the payments they had been making. At the meeting that was interspersed with raw emotions and at times humour, this seemed to play to their advantage and clearly had already caught the minister's attention. There was confusion however when Wang denied knowledge of the receipts saying he had never seen any such money, further thrusting the matter in a tailspin.

Miners nonetheless pinned Wang's business partner, Jackson Mayanja, on how he had personally given them assurance to come into AUC Mining and even move their processing operations into the licensed area.

On his part, Mayanja said the well-intended arrangement was to support formalisation of the miners and boost the previously non-performing license - in limbo for 30 years, that had even riled ministry officials, led by former Minister Ruth Nankabirwa - and make the government much needed revenue. Unfortunately, the "process was mismanaged by our managers," according to Mayanja.

Partners to Adversaries

Several miners led by Sasirwe Johnny, fondly referred to as "grandfather of artisanal miners", who also heads the Federation of Artisanal Miners' Association, expressed how Wang had shown a kindness rarely expressed by investors towards artisanal miners by reassuring them that they would work together.

Wang, who has a 14-year work and acquaintance history with Johnny, had earlier said his stance changed when miners wanted to harm him. Johnny said he was then approached by the investor pleading with him to diffuse tensions and endear him to the locals, and was therefore "shocked when he heard that the same Wang was giving miners a month's ultimatum to vacate the license after all the promises of working together."



Wang however argued that "eviction" was a strong word to describe the situation and that he had only asked miners to leave the areas that were in proximity to his operations.

Senior Mines Inspector David Sebagala cited the Mining and Minerals Act 2022 that explicitly says any such agreements must involve government as the Minister reserves authority over granting a license.

Boundaries, uncompensated landlords

In the miners' petition is a pertinent issue of uncompensated landlords who own up to 190 hectare of land that have reportedly never been compensated, but are also licensed to AUC Mining. The miners spurred with one Joseph Masagazi, a man whose name has been synonymous with the AUC Mining License as far back as 32 years ago. Masagazi, a geologist by training, says he came to the area in 1988 after completing his university degree. He boasts that he alone is responsible for opening the geology of Kamalenge to the world, and it was through him that mining started there.

Masagazi retains a 10% stake in AUC Mining Limited, and was firmly at the center of the action in 2017 when the miners were evicted. He earned the unenviable label of a hardliner who proved hard to negotiate with and has since developed a frosty relationship with the community. He argued that while he place is under their license the company has not carried out any activities there as yet. It was consequently resolved that the landlords are free to carry out any other activity on the land except mining activities. Compensation will only be done when the company secured an extention of the license that expires in 2030.

Passionate Plea

The LC3 chairman Kijuna Sub county, Yakobo Kawutu, pleaded with the minister that the miners had come a long way since the evictions in 2017 and couldn't relive that experience. He said the miners had made significant investments after being invited by the license holders and were in fact making the license productive having been lying idle and causing the government losses for 30 years.

Going Forward

Having appreciated the proceedings, and with the minister's intervention amidst hard, receipted evidence of payments by miners, Wang firmly cautioned that agreements could be reached with the different groups since their statuses of operations were varied - meaning that those who had not commenced work but had secured workspace, might in fact have to cut their losses and vacate, while those already in operation would have to maximise during the ultimatum. He warned against any further investments, including opening up new sites nor developing pits.

In another win for the miners, those who purchased land for processing will, on presentation of verifiable receipts and proof of payment, be refunded their money.

The negotiations, overall, were significant for a sector that is only just budding. That a balance can be struck between local and international investors' interests to foster coexistence business models is a worthy milestone.



State Minister Phiona Nyamutoro shares a light moment during a tour of the AUC Mining area. Courtesy photo

Isingiro Tin Mining: A Model ASM-centered Partnership

By Robert Mwesigye

On an early morning in Katanga Village, Kikagati Town Council, Isingiro District; workers are streaming in at the company premises as the day's routine beehive activity at African Panther Resources processing site take shape.

Workers wheel huge fans, drills, explosives and fuses, generators and air pumps out of the company stores, and snake their way into the hills just across the road, where the company has a 200-hectare Tin Mining Lease of imposing rock outcrops.

The mining equipment in fact belongs to the company that also does the maintenance. Every morning, it is routine for miners to register first before going up into the hills. On any given day no one is unaccounted for as long as they are in the hills.

Different group leaders sign for the equipment before it's moved to the hills. Before descending into the pits, compressed air is pumped all the way from the company control room. Up in the hills, work kicks off with distribution of explosives whose detonation is closely supervised by ballistics experts although many of the miners have acquired blasting skills.

The blasting is coordinated closely with security because of the public highway and human traffic. Traffic is stopped on either side before a warning whistle goes off in the hills, followed by ear-bursting, thundering explosions. During all this no one is allowed close to the road or hills as debris is reported to fly across over the surrounding perimeter wall and into the road and sometimes the neighbouring residential dwellings.

After blasting the work is inspected by a blasting inspector and then ore is hauled to the processing sight at the company. At the end of the day the company pays out for the final product at the prevailing price, currently at UGX 40,000 per kilo.

Elsewhere artisanal miners can also be seen working in the pits, drilling and women panning from small poodles of water. Whatever they recover from this they too sell to the company.



Ore is crashed on arrival at the processing site. Courtesy photo



African Panther avails all the equipment for miners to process Tin. Courtesy photo

The Partnership

Laban Owor, the site manager at African Panther Resources, says they are working with over a thousand miners, providing them access to mining and processing equipment which the company services. In the process they are skilling miners with mining technology and developing their capacity.

“They have acquired competencies in certain aspects of mining because of this and also access ready market for their minerals since we buy here at the site,” he said.

“This working partnership has been in existence for two years now. The company blasts for us rocks that we can then extract easily and bring to this facility for processing,” says the miners’ chairperson Nsimire Ludoviko.

Willy Ninyikyiriza, a mining engineer and supervisor at African Panther, while conducting a tour of the mines, says many of the miners have indeed acquired skills on the job, especially the many young men who come to mine.

While the company has its own staff who do the mechanized mining deep in the tunnels running beneath the imposing hills, they also provide work space for the artisanal miners.







Local processing of Tin at African Panther involves continous panning until the metal settles at the bottom of the container. Courtesy photo

Mineral Export Ban: We're Hurting, Frustrated Miners Cry Out

By Robert Mwesigye

Artisanal miners in Rubanda have expressed frustration over the mineral export ban that has them at the mercy of middlemen over exploitative prices for their minerals.

In February 2015, the president issued a directive against the export of raw minerals in line with promoting in-country value addition and developing the beneficiation value chain to optimise the potential of the mineral sector.

However eleven years since it came into effect, there still linger varying arguments for and against it among stakeholders. While government touts its results much as the many investors that have set up fully integrated mining companies like Wagagai in Busia, Sunbird Resources and Sunbelt Mining Group in Karamoja, among others, some industry experts still argue that for most of the minerals, there aren't quantifiable resources to warrant an export ban.

For artisanal miners though, especially for Tin, Wolfram, iron ore mostly in the Kigezi sub region, the ban has adversely affected livelihoods and business, even encouraging smuggling as the only means of survival.

These sentiments were voiced by artisanal miners undergoing a mine site safety and business aspects training by the Uganda Association of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners in Kyanjare Village, Rubanda District.

"Because of the ban we are the mercy of unscrupulous middlemen who are cheating us with low prices. Now more than ever we are willing to take the risk of smuggling these minerals to better markets," said one of the miners.

Allan Aguma, the chairperson of Miners' Forum, argues that mining should be prioritized over small-scale value addition and job creation.

"Mining creates the necessary feedstock, employment, and production scale. Prioritizing small-scale mineral processing before establishing strong mining operations is economically flawed, as small processing facilities often lack economies of scale, incur high unit costs, and yield thin profit margins.

"Mines are significantly more labor-intensive and offer better pay than small-scale processing plants or typical manufacturing factories. Developing active mines serves as the fastest path to addressing youth unemployment and creating high-paying jobs."

He also argues that globally, mineral extraction is often far more profitable than downstream processing or manufacturing (e.g., iron ore mining yields significantly higher Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization margins and supports more jobs than small-scale steel production).

Mineral beneficiation

A sprawling facility sits in Kyakwambara Village, Rwengoma Parish, Ruhaama Sub County, about 15 kilometers from Ntungamo Town along the highway to Mirama border town. The facility, that boasts of lecture rooms, offices, laboratories, conference room, and even dormitories for trainees, was set up to quicken mineral sample analysis, serve as a training hub for artisanal and small-scale miners, and act as a regional rally point for the Uganda National Mining Company.

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development launched it in June 2024 in grandeur, nine years after the export ban. However despite completion its operationalization has since been delayed by equipment procurement and staffing specifications

Despite this, reports from the directorate of geological survey and mines indicate that some procurement to operationalise the center and staffing process is in the process. In addition to Ntungamo, Fort Portal is also equipped with a center that will serve the western region; while for eastern region, one is being planned



for Busia. Karamoja sub region will be served by the DGSM office that is already in Moroto.

Mineral markets

The ministry of energy and minerals development announced pilot sites for the proposed minerals markets intended to formalize the sector, stop smuggling and price cheating by middlemen, and force value addition before export. Priority minerals include gold at 99.9% purity, Tin 98.5%, and gemstones as finished jewellery-ready.

According to an official at the directorate of geological survey and mines the Solicitor General's Office is still handling the Mineral Markets & Buying Centres Regulations 2026.

The proposed markets will be in Karamoja (Kaabong, Amudat, Moroto); Busia, Kassanda, Kampala, Buhweju, Entebbe and Ruhama where only processed/ refined minerals will be allowed to be traded.

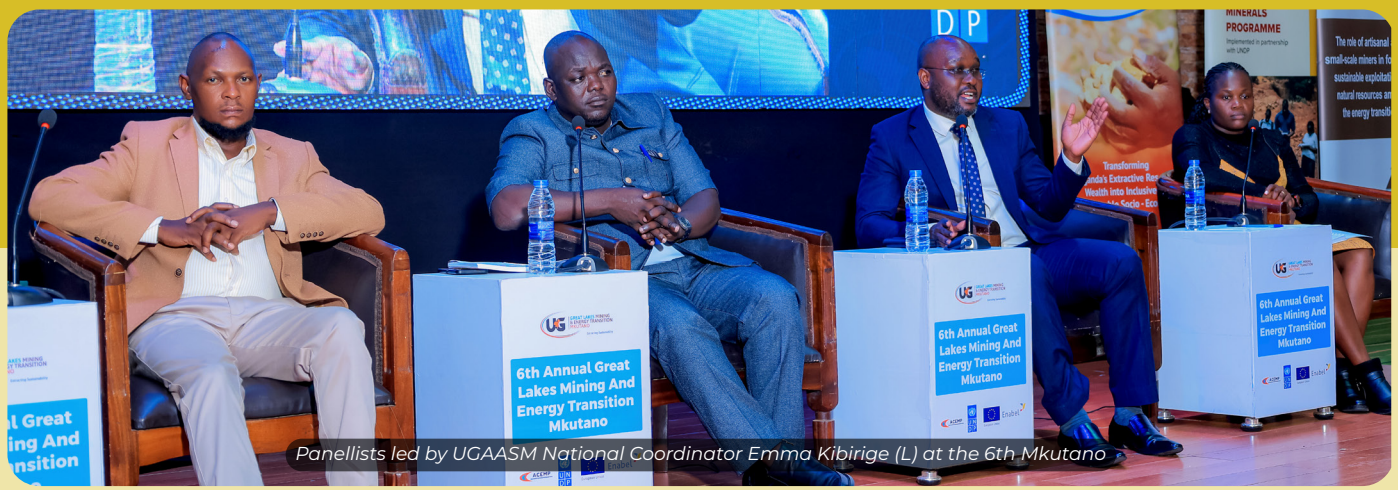
Nine years after the initial export ban, Uganda stands at a crossroads between national industrial ambition and the economic realities of its mining communities. In Rubanda, where mineral wealth lies locked behind regulatory delays and unequipped processing centers, the push for value addition feels less like a path to prosperity and more like a barrier to survival.

In a global economy hungry for critical minerals, raw extraction remains a primary driver of job creation and capital flow. Until Uganda's downstream processing infrastructure moves from blueprint to reality, forcing miners to wait for domestic processing will continue to push valuable resources across border lines unchecked, costing both the artisanal communities their livelihoods and the nation its strategic revenue.



Training and sensitisation of miners in Rubanda. Courtsey photo

From Informality to Influence: Six Years of the Mkutano



Panellists led by UGAASM National Coordinator Emma Kibirige (L) at the 6th Mkutano

The Great Lakes Region holds some of the world's most crucial mineral deposits. From the copper-cobalt belts and gold reserves to the 3T minerals (tin, tungsten, and tantalum), rare earth elements, and world-class graphite deposits, the region's natural wealth is central to the global transition toward clean energy. Parallel to these critical minerals, development minerals such as sand and silicates represent the second most-extracted global resource after water. Yet behind this vast economic potential are millions of artisanal and small-scale miners (ASMs) - the true backbone of local mining economies, who historically operated in the shadows of informal and exploitative systems.

To bridge the gap between miners and decision-makers, the Africa Centre for Energy and Mineral Policy (ACEMP), in partnership with the Uganda Association of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners (UGAASM), launched the inaugural Annual Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining and Quarrying (ASMQ) Conference in June 2019. The event was conceived as an open forum for ASMs to amplify their voices, showcase their work, and engage directly with government agencies, civil society, the private sector, and development partners.

Reflecting on those early days, Paul Twebaze recalls: ***"At the start in 2019, the ASMQs were majorly a start of a long journey for collecting, linking, and putting together like-minded people to spearhead the Extractives sector debate in Uganda."***

A Six-Year Audit of Impact and Evolution

Over the past six years, and through its recent 6th annual convening on July 23, the gathering has evolved into the Annual Great Lakes Mining and Energy Transition Mkutano, establishing itself as a premier regional platform that actively shapes policy and governance:

2019 (Inaugural ASMQ Conference, Kampala): Set the foundation by creating the first dedicated, multi-stakeholder space for miners to engage directly with regulators and policymakers.

2020 (2nd Annual Conference, Mbarara): Highlighted the mineral potential of Western Uganda while addressing critical barriers, particularly access to affordable financing amidst the economic strain of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021 (The Legislative Breakthrough): Marked the defining highlight of the Mkutano's history. Drawing on consensus built during earlier conferences and sustained stakeholder engagement,

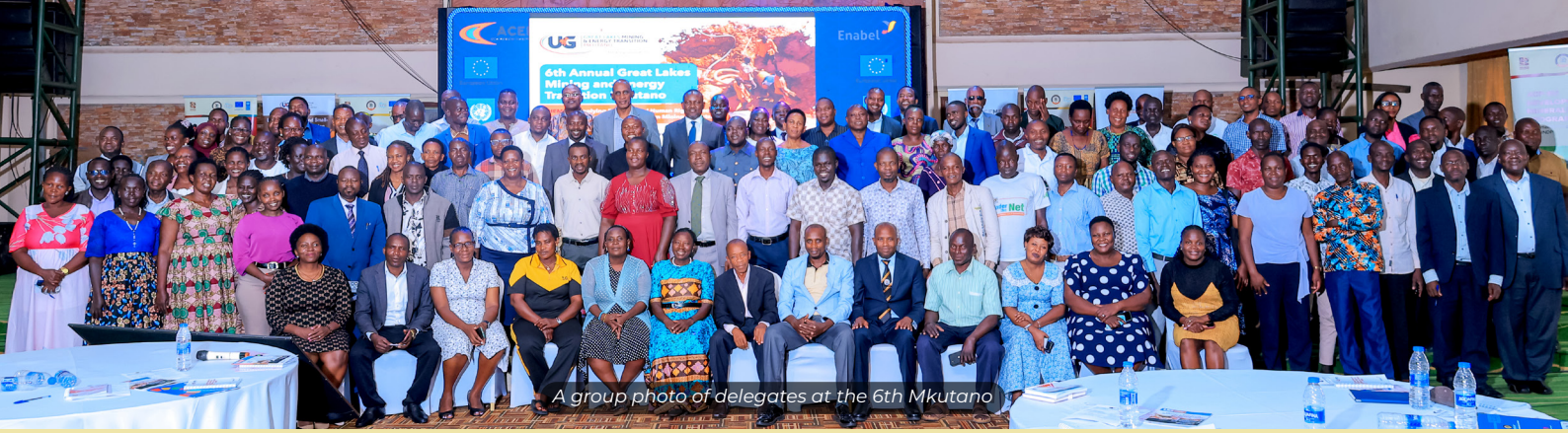
UGAASM, supported by ACEMP and Solidaridad East and Central Africa, presented a comprehensive Policy Document to the Government of Uganda. In a major victory for the sector, at least 60% of these recommendations were directly adopted into the final Mining and Minerals Act 2022.

Subsequent Regional Convenings: Expanded scope across Northern Uganda and Kampala, tackling supply chain transparency, human rights standards, and local value addition in mineral-rich areas like Kitgum's Orom East graphite deposits and Makuutu's rare earths.

July 23 (6th Annual Convening, Kampala): Audited six years of regional progress under the banner of Business and Human Rights (BHR) and ASM formalization, assessing key legal milestones while tackling ongoing challenges in licensing backlogs and access to formal finance.







A group photo of delegates at the 6th Mkutano

Elevating the Voices of Miners and Stakeholders

The Mkutano's true power lies in its ability to transform informal worker advocacy into recognized policy leadership. As Paul Twebaze notes:

"Overtime, the ASMQs has now grown into a very well established, popular and strong platform in which the Miners, private sector, civil society, media, sit at the same table with government mandated agencies, policy makers, technocrats, to generate recommendations that influence the design of pro-people policies in Uganda's Mining Sector. It's this kind of interaction that brings the government closer to the Miners and mineral host communities so that policy and regulatory compliance is achieved with ease."

Partner organizations and regular attendees also emphasize how the platform has consistently prioritized regional equity and gender inclusion:

"To me, the growth has been exceptional and excellent. ACEMP has really demonstrated how ASMs are the anchor of Uganda's mining sector. The conferences have also been very empowering and impactful from the way they ensure inclusive participation - delegates were regionally and gender balanced... I wish we had more regional conferences of the same nature and added participation of more private sector actors so that we demystify mineral value and supply chains."

Formalization as a Driver for Sustainable Development

A central theme across all six years is that formalizing ASMs into structured cooperatives is far more than an administrative task; it is a vital catalyst for human rights and sustainable development. Formalization delivers concrete benefits across the sector:

Legal Protections & Human Rights: Grants miners formal recognition, shielding them from predatory middlemen and corrupt practices while securing fair wages and labor rights.

Health & Safety Enforcements: Promotes strict adherence to safety protocols and the mandatory use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), significantly reducing mining accidents and fatalities.

Gender Inclusion: Actively elevates the role of women - who make up a large portion of the informal workforce - by guaranteeing equitable economic opportunities and leadership roles.

Direct Representation: Gives miners a permanent "seat at the policy table," ensuring their needs directly inform national and regional regulatory reviews.

As Don Binyina, executive director ACEMP, summarises: "The Great Lakes Mining and Energy Mkutano has accorded ASMs, the Ugandan Government, Local Governments, Civil Society, the Mining Industry, and international development partners a much-needed platform to address issues within the Artisanal and Small-scale Sub-sector. To date, Uganda is leading other sub-Saharan mineral-rich economies in the formalization, licensing, and governance of ASMs."

Looking Ahead

While the adoption of the Mining and Minerals Act 2022 marked a historic victory, the recent 6th Mkutano underscored that work remains to be done - from resolving licensing bottlenecks and improving community awareness around Community Development Agreements (CDAs) to expanding affordable credit for small-scale operations. By maintaining a space where miners, government officials, refiners, and civil society meet as equal partners, the Great Lakes Mining and Energy Transition Mkutano continues to prove that artisanal mining, when formalized and supported, is an indispensable engine for inclusive socioeconomic development across the region.


(L-R) ACEMP ED Don Binyina; UGAASM legal advisor Ojok Geoffrey; PAP representative from Makuutu Rare Earths Project



Panelists at the 6th Mkutano

Unlocking the Full Potential of ASM in Uganda – Supporting their formalization journey.



Ms. Nwanne Vwede-Obahor giving a certificate of recognition to a cooperative during the 6th Annual Great Lakes Mining and Energy Transition Mkutano

The Transition to Formal Enterprises

A large proportion of Uganda's aggregated mineral production stems from artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). ASMs account for more than 90% of Uganda's metallic, industrial, and building minerals output. Other official government reports estimate that ASMs contribute to more than 75% of the country's overall mineral production.

Within the development minerals sector (which includes materials like clay, sand, and stone aggregate), ASMs are responsible for an estimated 83% of all production by value. Data shows that if all production from ASMs within Uganda's Development Minerals sector were accurately captured, Uganda's GDP figures would grow by 1.4%. Unfortunately, majority of these ASMs largely operate informally and out of reach by technical service providers. Therefore, their contribution to Uganda's economic growth has not been adequately covered and their access to necessary technical support has remained limited.

A recent discussion during the 6th Annual Great Lakes Energy Transition and Mining Mkutano organized by the Africa Centre for Energy and Mineral Policy in Kampala, Uganda, sought to delve deeper into the options and opportunities for Uganda to fully capitalize on its growing ASMs aligned with Uganda's 10-fold growth strategy.

Registration and Licensing

The Africa, Caribbean and Pacific – European Union (ACP-EU) Development Minerals Programme's primary ambition for formalization in Uganda is to integrate the informal ASM sector into the formal economy. Hereby transforming it into a productive, profitable, and sustainable industry. This initiative, which is implemented by the UNDP, has been supporting miners to transition beyond mere subsistence to production that is accompanied by access to appropriate technical support. Further, enabling them to participate in processes that enable them to become legally compliant artisanal and small-scale mining enterprises (ASMEs) with recorded contributions to national development.

Central to this transition is the Mining and Minerals Act of 2022. A landmark law that established a legitimate licensing framework and led to the issuance of the nation's first small-scale mining license to a grassroots association in 2025. A license for such associations is an important step. There are nonetheless associated processes required to support these institutions in ways that address costs of production and predatory intermediaries. Subsequent processes include for instance the professionalization of mining cooperatives, transforming them into viable small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through structured business development services, improved financial literacy, adoption of sustainable mining practices and other support to make them strong enterprises. Decentralized support necessitates that Uganda must move beyond legal licensing, toward holistic transformation that integrates informal miners into the formal economy as productive, profitable, and responsible ASMEs.

Support through Multiple Government Channels

To achieve sustainable formalization of Uganda's

ASM sector, informal miners must be integrated into the formal economy as productive and responsible enterprises. This requires a structured transition from basic organization to registered entities supported by stronger local government capacity for permit management and extension services. In this way, formalization remains a multi-stakeholder process that includes different ministries, agencies, and stakeholders with unique roles in the transformation. Specifically: the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives would provide business development services to newly formed mining cooperatives to support them manage and access additional financing better; a district natural resource office would regularly interface with newly formed mining cooperatives to provide guidance about managing the environmental impacts of mining; the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development would intensively follow up and support miners to manage the occupational health and safety aspects of their mining operations. Correspondingly, institutions and other actors would support the ASM sector in processes that involve adherence with strong social and environmental safeguards, the elimination of child labour, and greater gender equity among all mining cooperatives. This approach ensures that formalization directly delivers the benefits of decent employment for miners and their communities, and the miners and other sector stakeholders would derive meaning, benefit and strategic positioning after the first step of legal formation and registration.

Collaborative Institutional Governance

Finally, collaborative governance and strengthened collaboration between ASM and large-scale mining companies is essential with a view of expanding business and investment opportunities, reducing conflicts and stabilizing mineral supply chains. Benefits such as improved access to new mining technologies, equipment and skills can arise as a result of well-organized and governed cooperatives collaborating with larger mining companies. Governments, the private sector, and other development actors should help build responsible actors around ASM, including specialized equipment suppliers, service providers, and legal consultants tailored to the sector's unique needs.

Bridging the "Missing Middle" of Finance

Formalized ASM operations often face a missing middle. They are too large for microfinance but seen as too risky for commercial finance. Bridging this gap requires an investment continuum that moves the sector from donor reliance toward private capital. Demystifying mineral value chains for financial service providers will facilitate development of appropriate products for ASMEs. It is therefore necessary that the financing sector is fully brought on board to engage and better appreciate mining sector dynamics, opportunities, and strategic positioning in Uganda.

Furthermore, development partners and other public financial institutions should provide technical assistance and patient capital to establish a track record through training, grants and subsidized financing to ASMEs. For instance, in the Philippines, miners are exploring supplier agreements with the Central Bank to use as collateral for bank loans. Other elements include using geological data or production history to prove creditworthiness. Combining public/philanthropic capital with private investment can therefore de-risk the sector through risk-sharing facilities that cover a portion of potential losses for commercial lenders.

To achieve long-term sustainability, formalized cooperatives must move up the value chain. Investing in community processing facilities or shared mills, which then allows cooperatives to transition away from charging fees to non-member miners to generating consistent revenue. In addition, by registering as a social enterprise, cooperatives can reinvest a portion of their profits into an ASM Fund. This fund can finance local education, health services, and environmental rehabilitation, ensuring mineral wealth translates into community prosperity. Strategic win-win agreements between large-scale mining (LSM) and ASMs can provide artisans with access to professional labs and safer processing while securing a social license to operate for large companies.

Formalization is the cornerstone of a sustainable sector, but it is not enough on its own. The future of ASM depends on a fundamental shift where ASMs are seen as legitimate economic development players. By providing the necessary financial inclusion, technical capacity, and market access, the global community can ensure that for millions of miners, the question of what next? is answered with growth, safety, and economic dignity.

The writer is the Uganda Country Coordinator for the ACP-EU Development Minerals Programme at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Uganda must move beyond legal licensing, toward holistic transformation that integrates informal miners into the formal economy as productive, profitable, and responsible ASMEs.

MUMA Acquires Mineral Digital Traceability System

By Our Reporter



UGAASM and DGSM officials chat with miners amidst stockpiles of ore ready to take for processing. Courtsey photo

From pit to buyer, a new digital registry is helping transform Uganda's artisanal gold production into a verifiable record for miners, regulators, financial institutions, and investors.

For generations, artisanal and small-scale miners in districts like Kassanda and Mubende relied on paper ledgers, memory, and word of mouth to track gold-bearing ore. A single lot of ore often changes hands multiple times from mining pits to buying centers, processors, assayers, and exporters. Hand-written notebook entries were easily lost, damaged, or separated from transactions.

While this informal system supported thousands of livelihoods, it created a severe barrier to formalization. Banks and SACCOs struggled to lend against unverified gold production. Regulators found it difficult to separate legitimate material from illicitly sourced gold. Miners themselves could not prove the scale or consistency of their output, limiting their ability to capture full economic value.

To close this gap between physical production and verifiable proof, the Mubende United Mines Assembly (MUMA) and the Uganda Association of Artisanal & Small-Scale Miners (UGAASM) partnered with Ugandan technology firm Tehutira Technologies Limited to launch a digital chain-of-custody platform: the MUMA Chain of Custody Registry (MUMA CoC).

From Paper to Data Trail

At the center of the MUMA COC is Form A, a digital record accompanying each lot of ore as it moves through the supply chain. The form records critical details: Handlers involved throughout the process; Mining methods used and ore types extracted and Quantities mined and downstream destinations.

Instead of fragmented notebooks, information is stored in a shared database to create an auditable history. "The objective is not simply to digitize a paper form," notes developer Tehutira Technologies Limited. "It is to create a reliable record of the material and the people responsible for it at every stage."

The platform aligns directly with the miners' real-world terminology. Dropdown options for mining methods, ore types, and outputs draw from standardized lookup tables managed by MUMA and UGAASM administrators. This uniform vocabulary eliminates ambiguity caused by varying clerical definitions.

Furthermore, the platform features nine distinct user roles—ranging from Mine Pit Owners to Bank of Uganda observers. Role-based access ensures users only see information relevant to their duties. Changes move through clear status stages (draft, submitted, verified, rejected) backed by complete audit trails.

Turning Production Data into Operational Visibility

The registry provides immediate operational benefits for MUMA, which coordinates miners across multiple sites including Bukuya, Kagaba Hill, Rwebituti, and Kamalenge.

Previously, resolving origin disputes or measuring site output required manually searching through paper records and relying on personal recollections. With digital logging, site supervisors and MUMA administrators access production data immediately upon entry and verification.

This real-time oversight allows MUMA to identify production trends, target support where needed, and address operational issues before they escalate. It transforms MUMA's view of mining activity from isolated paper entries into a connected, real-time picture across all operations.

Verifiable Production Attracts Financing

Exclusion from formal financial systems has long plagued artisanal miners. Without verifiable production histories or traditional collateral, miners were cut off from formal bank loans and forced to rely on unfavorable informal financing.

A verified chain-of-custody record acts much like a financial statement, giving lenders concrete evidence that an operation is active, legitimate, and producing.

The MUMA system integrates this data directly into a SACCO module designed to offer production-linked financing. By formalizing production records, the platform serves as critical infrastructure for financial inclusion.

Building Trust Across the Supply Chain

Establishing trust among diverse stakeholders—miners, associations, processors, buyers, regulators, and banks—remains a core challenge. The MUMA registry addresses this through shared, role-specific visibility.

Key bodies, including the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, the Directorate of Mines and Survey, and Bank of Uganda observers, hold tailored viewing access to verified records.

By replacing reliance on individual verbal accounts with a shared, single source of truth, provenance becomes straightforward to verify. This transparency is vital for formal gold markets requiring strict regulatory compliance, export documentation, and institutional accountability.

A System Built for Ugandan Mining

Unlike off-the-shelf software adapted from foreign markets, the MUMA CoC system was designed specifically for Uganda's artisanal sector:

- Tailored Role Hierarchy: Reflects actual accountability chains from pit workers up to national regulators.
- Adaptable Architecture: Lookup tables allow mining methods, ore classifications, and reporting criteria to be updated as regulations or field practices evolve—without rebuilding the platform.

This flexibility supports planned expansions to additional mining sites and deeper integration with SACCO lending systems.

From Compliance Tool to Economic Infrastructure

When information becomes as traceable as the physical commodity, artisanal mining can fully connect with the formal economy.

"Operations improve when data replaces memory. Financing improves when production becomes verifiable. And trust improves when everyone with a stake in the outcome can see the same record," *says Stuart Tumusiime.*

Ultimately, the MUMA CoC System provides: stronger, verifiable proof of output for miners; clearer operational oversight for associations; transparent view of material moving through the supply chain for regulators; and reliable data to underwrite and trust artisanal operations for financial institutions.

MUMA secretary and UGAASM national coordinator Emmanuel Kibirige contends that this is a game changer for the sector especially where access to finance remains a challenge.

"We hope to roll out the system to all our interested members who want to actually know where exactly they are putting their money, and that we can finally break that deadlock with financial institutions to give credit to our miners," he says.

As MUMA and UGAASM expand adoption, the registry positions legitimately produced Ugandan artisanal gold to be easier to trace, finance, and integrate into global markets.

From the Ground Up: Redefining Africa's Mineral Wealth

By Edward Ndirangu



For decades, Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) was viewed through a narrow lens—often dismissed as an informal, chaotic survival strategy plagued by environmental challenges. Today, a profound paradigm shift is underway across East Africa. Governments are increasingly recognizing that when properly structured, ASM is a powerful engine for national economic growth, job creation, and genuine citizen co-ownership of mineral resources.

At The Impact Facility (TIF), we work at the heart of this transition, collaborating with miners, financial institutions, and governments to turn local mineral wealth into sustainable prosperity. The data speaks for itself: ASM has a vastly superior social footprint compared to Large-Scale Mining (LSM). For every single individual employed by an LSM operation, ASM employs 20 people. Furthermore, small-scale mining retains up to 80% of its generated value within the domestic economy. This capital circulates locally up to six times—spent on local agriculture, retail, and housing—fostering deep community resilience and preventing the capital flight often associated with large multinational concessions.

Power of Transformative Policy: Tanzania Blueprint

The speed at which ASM can be integrated into the formal economy depends entirely on state policy. Tanzania stands as a world-class example of how progressive legislation can unlock the sector's potential. By streamlining formalization, protecting land tenure, establishing legal mineral markets, and providing robust extension services, Tanzania has successfully incentivized miners to step out of the shadows. This formalization loop enables tax collection, which the government has effectively reinvested.

The resulting economic multiplier is clear. Tanzania now boasts highly specialized metallurgical degrees at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, a thriving local equipment fabrication industry, and state-of-the-art

mineral assaying laboratories.

This enabling environment has allowed TIF to elevate its equipment lease-to-own program to unprecedented heights. In Geita, we have partnered with a tier-one commercial bank to disburse formal loans directly to the ASM community. While the bank manages financial due diligence, TIF oversees environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards. We guide our mining partners up an "impact escalator," steadily improving safety and operational standards throughout the loan life cycle to ensure their value chains meet global benchmarks.

Navigating the Landscape: Kenya and Uganda

In contrast, onboarding financial partners in Kenya remains a hurdle, primarily due to a less mature regulatory framework for small-scale operations. To bridge this gap, TIF operates an independent equipment leasing program designed explicitly as a proof of concept for financial inclusion. By demonstrating that ASM cooperatives can honor repayment schedules and maintain profitable operations, we are actively showing cautious commercial banks and donors that the sector is fundamentally bankable.

Meanwhile, Uganda is aggressively rewriting its mining narrative. Driven by the recent Mining and Minerals Act, the government is replacing informal panning with a structured, licensed, and digitalized cooperative system. A clear milestone occurred recently when the Mubende United Miners Assembly received its formal license—an event TIF was honored to attend as a guest speaker. Through a domestic gold purchase program and targeted extension services, Uganda is systematically securing both its borders and its revenues.

Regional Synergy and Continental Ambition

The lessons of East Africa are echoing across the continent. In 2025, TIF served as the core technical coordinator for a high-level peer exchange visit, bringing a delegation from Ghana's Gold Board (Gold BOD) to study Tanzania's ASM framework. The delegation met with the State Mining Corporation (STAMICO) and the Bank of Tanzania to master how to redirect gold away from illicit markets and into central bank reserves. When Africa's leading gold producer dedicates significant resources to learning from its peers, it is clear that ASM has taken center stage in continental strategy.

This momentum was equally visible at the West and Central Africa Mining Summit, where Ghana's Gold BOD highlighted that its central buying scheme expects to capture between 30% and 40% of the country's artisanal gold production this year. Representatives from Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Nigeria shared similar visions for formalizing their respective small-scale sectors.
International investor confidence is following this regulatory maturation. TIF has been brought onboard as a consultancy firm to guide a $6m - $7m investment project in southern Tanzania aimed at fully commercializing anchor ASM gold mines. This funding will introduce modern, mercury-free processing equipment and align local operations with the London Baullion Market Association (LBMA) ASM toolkit, proving that the sector can now attract serious capital.

International investor confidence is following this regulatory maturation.

Balancing the Scales: Rules of Engagement

While the opportunities are vast, the risks of poor management are catastrophic. Without clear rules, ASM can devolve into a destructive cycle:

The Risks of Neglect	The Rewards of Structured Engagement
Poverty Cycles: Marginalization leads to exploitative middlemen, low revenue, and zero reinvestment.	Clear Rules: Defined land tenure, transparent taxation, and accessible grievance mechanisms.
Environmental Harm: Heavy reliance on toxic chemicals like mercury due to lack of capital for proper machinery.	Incentivization: Fast-tracked licensing and targeted training in occupational health and safety (OHS).
Security Threats: Illicit black markets that invite smuggling, money laundering, and loss of state revenue.	Value Retention: Safe, high-yielding, mercury-free supply chains integrated into global legal markets.

Building an Equitable Future

Artisanal and Small-scale Mining is no longer a marginal sector to be ignored or suppressed. It is an immense economic force capable of delivering an equitable, inclusive economy where African citizens are true co-owners of their natural resources. To realize this prosperous future, governments must move away from punitive enforcement and instead focus on clear rules, technical training, and financial incentives. Supported by the right policies and strategic partnerships, Africa's small-scale miners can lead the continent into its next era of sustainable growth.

The writer is the East Africa Gold Programme Manager at The Impact Facility

Kayungwe Gold Rush: Institutional Betrayal, Extortion, High-Stakes Politics spiraling Out of Control



Mid this year a gold rush was reported deep in the often mist-covered hills of Kanoni Village, Kayungwe Sub County, Kanungu District. For the locals of the area, according to LCI chairperson Enoth Byaruhanga, this was hailed as an economic lifeline. Like any other, the gold rush drew thousands of miners, as is their nomadic tendency following a rush, presenting an opportunity for a path out of poverty. The expectations and dreams of many, however, have since paled into oblivious chaos - a hotbed of systemic extortion, human rights abuses, institutional infighting, and political confrontation.

It has evolved into a cacophony of bitter accusations among security chiefs of facilitating illicit mining and government, officials clashing over legalities, with frustrated local miners and surrounding communities finding themselves caught in a cycle of exploitation.

Closure, Dislocation, and the Unregulated Vacuum

The crisis came to a head in July 2026 when the State Minister for Minerals Development, Hon. Phiona Nyamutoro, ordered the immediate closure of Kayungwe Gold Mine. Citing public health hazards, severe environmental degradation, and the lack of proper licensing, the government shut down all operations at the site. The 236.95 sq. km area, where thousands of artisanal miners had flocked in search of a livelihood, falls within Exploration License EL00315, held by Shiye Mining Limited.

While intended to bring order to a chaotic sector, the sudden shutdown left thousands of local miners without a livelihood. Deprived of income, desperate miners who had since made investments, faced a stark choice: abandon the goldfields or find ways to circumvent the ban. This set the stage for an underground economy driven by extortion and illegal access.

Security bosses trade counter-accusations over extortion, torture

Rather than enforcing the legal closure, security personnel deployed to guard Kayungwe

Gold Mine allegedly turned it into a lucrative racket. During an extraordinary crisis session convened by the Kanungu District Council on September 10, 2026, local leaders leveled serious allegations against the security machinery.

As reported by Uganda Radio Network, Kanungu District Chairman Francis Byamukama, alongside local councilors, revealed that security personnel were actively facilitating illegal gold extraction. Miners reported paying bribes to security officers to gain entry into the closed mine at night. Shockingly, after collecting these bribes, security forces allegedly turned on the miners, arresting, beating, and torturing them to silence complaints.

The crisis reached a tipping point when internal security fractures embarrassingly burst into public view:

Deputy Resident District Commissioner (RDC) Dan Rugaaju Ahimbisibwe openly accused his superior, RDC Ambrose Mwesigye Amanyire, and Mineral Police officer ASP Kansiime of turning a blind eye and facilitating illegal operations.

In his defense, RDC Amanyire denied complicity, claiming he had only seen videos of torture on social media and that formal complaints had not been lodged with the police, though investigations were underway.

To contain the embarrassment, Regional Police Commander Caesar Julius Tusingwire apologized to the Council for any wrongdoing by officers, though he cited a lack of personnel to monitor the vast mining terrain and cautioned residents against bribing officers.

Local frustration amidst uncertainty

For the local community, the transformation of the gold rush into an extraction scheme run by security forces has caused deep resentment. District Councillor Baptista Tukwasibwe summed up the sentiment, noting that the gold discovery, once considered a divine blessing, has become a curse due to state-sponsored abuse.

Miners and residents face a stark reality: while poor locals are violently beaten and chased away, those who can afford heavy bribes, or those connected to security officers, continue to extract gold unhindered. Outraged by this double standard, local communities are demanding an explanation as to why state security has replaced law enforcement with syndicate mining.

Minister clashes with army veteran over cooperative

As local government wrestled with security abuses, high-level political tension flared within the district council hall. A heated exchange erupted between Minister Phiona Nyamutoro and Col. Samson Mande over the representation and licensing of artisanal miners.
The central points of contention highlight the bureaucratic and political barriers facing local miners:
Minister Nyamutoro revealed that three local groups- Rugyeyo, Kanungu, and Kayungwe Artisanal Miners Associations, had officially applied for licenses and were close to being legalised. However, she declared the Kanungu District United Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners Cooperative Society Limited, led by Col. Mande, null and void from the ministry's perspective.

She argued that despite being registered by the Registrar of Cooperatives, Mande's group had violated Ministry of Energy procedures, submitted improper committee numbers, and created confusion among miners. She guided that a cooperative registration does not grant mining rights
.
Col. Mande on his part protested fiercely, maintaining that the cooperative acted on the guidance of the District Commercial Officer and possessed valid legal standing. He accused the ministry of misleading the public. The minister countered, warning Mande against using his status to push personal interests at the expense of vulnerable artisanal miners.

A region at crossroads

The situation in Kanungu illustrates the severe pitfalls of Uganda's mineral boom. What began as an opportunity for grassroots economic transformation has devolved into institutional paralysis. With security officials trading blame over illicit kickbacks, political heavyweights locking horns over representation, and local miners facing torture and economic ruin, the Kayungwe gold rush is rapidly spiraling beyond control, necessitating immediate transparent accountability and a fair path to legal licensing.

This report has been sourced from Uganda Radio Network

From Licence to Protection: Managing Risk in ASM

Formalisation gives artisanal and small scale miners legal standing. Without a plan for the risks that come with it, it can also leave them carrying liabilities they cannot afford.

By Ahmed Luttamaguzi



Uganda's artisanal and small scale mining sector has reached a turning point. In June 2025 the Mubende United Miners Assembly in Kassanda District received what has been reported as the first small scale mining licence issued under the Mining and Minerals Act, 2022, and government and development partners are backing further formalisation in Mubende, Kassanda and other districts.

Yet Solidaridad estimates that roughly 85 per cent of artisanal miners in Uganda still operate without a licence. And for those who do formalise, the conversation tends to stop at registration, fees and royalties. The question left unasked is this: once miners become a licensed legal entity, who carries the risk when something goes wrong?

What we have seen on the ground

Minet has conducted study trips to gold mining communities in Mubende, Kassanda and Buhweju to understand how miners work and live, and to meet association leaders at the workings rather than in boardrooms. Three things stood out. The associations are remote and spread over a wide area, often several hours of murram road apart. The work is high risk, carried out in deep pits with basic tools. And while the belt is served by Health Centre III and IV facilities and by Mubende Regional Referral Hospital, there is no system for emergency response or care at the sites themselves. When a miner is hurt, the journey to treatment depends on whatever transport happens to be available.

The incidents keep coming

Recent events show why this matters. On 31 December 2025 a pit collapse in Bukuya Town Council, Kassanda, killed one miner and injured others after heavy rains. In late February 2026 five miners, one aged 16, died when a closed gold mine

in Kyamuhunga, Bushenyi, caved in. In Kaabong, three miners died in a tunnel collapse in March 2026 and two more in a pit collapse in April. In July 2026 six miners died when a pit more than 50 feet deep collapsed at Mabuka Village, Namayingo. In Buhweju, four miners died in a cave-in at Runengo Village in December 2022.

That is at least 17 reported deaths in about seven months, and many incidents go unreported. The risk is not only physical: in 2022 Mubende and Kassanda accounted for 134 of the 164 cases in Uganda's Sudan virus disease outbreak, according to the World Health Organization.

Formalisation turns hazards into obligations

What formalisation changes is who is accountable. Legal commentaries on the 2022 Act note that holders of mineral rights are expected to show proof of insurance for mining and related risks before operations begin, and to operate safely in line with the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2006. A licensed association that suffers a pit collapse faces questions an informal site never did.

What risk advisory actually does

Risk advisory is often confused with selling insurance. Insurance is one tool, and usually the last one applied. Good advisory works on five fronts. The first is identifying and measuring risk: there is no published Uganda-specific data on injury or occupational disease rates among artisanal miners, so site surveys, health screening and incident records give associations an evidence base of their own. The second is reducing risk through pit support, safe pit spacing, dust and mercury control, and emergency plans, which cost far less than the losses they prevent. The third is financing what remains by pooling it across many members through cover designed for how miners actually work and earn. The fourth is compliance: helping associations meet their licence obligations and keep the records regulators and partners will ask for.

The fifth, and often the most decisive, is governance. Pooled schemes rarely fail for lack of a policy; they fail when contributions are collected informally, mixed with association funds, or controlled by a few individuals. Part of our advisory work is helping mining communities design low risk governance structures: a dedicated vehicle or ring-fenced fund that holds members' contributions separately from association accounts, clear collection and remittance rules, member representation on the body that oversees the fund, independent audit, and regular reporting back to miners. Structures like these are what allow contributions to be pooled sustainably, and what keep a health care delivery system funded and running year after year rather than collapsing after the first season.

Managed risk makes miners bankable

There is a commercial case too. An association that can show a documented risk profile, sound governance, a safety programme and appropriate cover is a more credible partner for buyers, financiers and joint ventures. Associations, and a national body such as UGAASM, are the right level for this work, because individual miners cannot commission a risk survey, build a fund structure or negotiate cover alone.

Formalisation that ends at the licence leaves miners legally visible but still exposed. Miners take extraordinary risks to earn a living. The purpose of formalisation should be to make that living safer and more secure, not simply more official.

The writer leads business development for the energy, mining, oil and gas and transport sectors at Minet Uganda Insurance Brokers Limited, an Aon Global Network Correspondent.



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UGAASM conducts countrywide mine-site safety drive, business aspects sensitisation

Uganda Association of Artisanal and Small-scale Miners, with support from UNDP's ACP-EU Development Minerals Programme is conducting a countrywide onsite sensitisation and training for artisanal miners in areas of occupational health and mine site safety, environmental protecrion business aspects, technical aspects including exploration, geological reporting and compliance.

The trainings, delivered by OHS experts, with support from UGAASM resource personnel in different regions, have seen the team traverse parts of western, eastern, Kigezi and Karamoja regions



Sensitisation and training at Karukochom Hill, Rupa Sub County



A woman miner gestures during the sensitisation workshop at Karukochom



Training and sensitisation workshop of Wolfram miners in Kisoro



UGAASM mobiliser for eastern region Gilbert Pamba supporting the training in Buhere, Namayingo



Gold miners during a training and sensitisation workshop in Morulem Sub County, Abim District



Gold miners pose for a photo after a training and sensitisation workshop in Bukhana



Gold miners pose for a photo after a training and sensitisation workshop in Bukhana



Wolfram miners during a training and sensitisation in Kisoro



Wolfram miners during a training and sensitisation in Kisoro



Iron ore miners have a chat after the training sessions in Rubanda



Tin miners pose for a photo after a training and sensitisation workshop at Nyinamaherere, Ntungamo



Limestone miners pose for a photo after training at Kambisi, Moroto

