ADVANCING RESPONSIBLE ARTISINAL GOLD IN THE DRC:
THE BWENGE BUCHIZA PILOT PROJECT

The Pilot is part of the Capacity Building For a Responsible Minerals Trade (CBRMT) Project funded by The United States Agency For International Development (USAID)

The trading of illegally mined, taxed and smuggled gold has long been a source of funding in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for armed groups and other illicit actors. To combat this, the CBRMT project in association with DRC established a responsible gold pilot project, Bwenge Buchiza (meaning knowledge is golden in the local Mashi language). Located approximately 64 km southwest from Bukavu in South Kivu, the pilot is managed by La Cooperative Miniere et Agricole de Ngweshe (COOMIANGWE). Approximately 230 Congolese miners are active on the site.

The USAID-funded pilot project is supporting the cooperative’s ability to produce and sell legal conflict free, artisanal gold from the DRC that is compliant with international standards, including the OECD and the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA). The project is strengthening and reinforcing the capacity of the COOMIANGWE mining cooperative and DRC government; establishing due diligence and traceability systems to reinforce DRC law and OECD due diligence guidelines; monitoring risks; and building relationships and investor confidence with partners from mine to market.

BACKGROUND ON THE MINE SITE

Until 2012, Nyamurhale was occupied by illegal armed groups and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC). As a result, for many years no responsible supply chain could be established on site. CBRMT’s baseline survey of the site determined it met all the criteria for a pilot project, including but not limited to: security, accessibility, legality, a legal and functioning cooperative, no use of mercury on site, and sufficient production capacity. In March 2017, Nyamurhale was inspected by a joint qualification team and later certified (May 2017) as secure, legal, accessible and free of armed groups and child labor. Approximately 230 Congolese artisanal gold miners currently work on site.

The site is characterized by a highly specialized labor force with no less than eight types of labor (see drawing below). CBRMT used this data to map the ‘ecology’ of the Nyamurhale site, including the specialized roles of different types of workers and their interactions. Understanding the differentiated roles on site enabled CBRMT to improve artisanal production methods, implement security and safety measures, and identify critical socio-economic dynamics.
CAPACITY BUILDING

To date, CBMRT has conducted 13 trainings to 400 beneficiaries on a range of topics including governance and administration, the principles of due diligence, financial management, health & safety, environmental protection, conflict resolution and gender. Results include miners registering daily when they enter the site, daily gold production data is being collected weekly, meetings among cooperative members, and a strengthening of the cooperative’s administrative and financial capacity. CBMRT also focuses on the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of mining on site. Experts provide technical assistance to local miners teaching them how to construct efficient processing equipment using local materials. Subsequently, an Equipment Rental Pool maintains, repairs and replaces equipment for cooperative members.

TRACEABILITY & SITE MONITORING

Two traceability systems are being piloted simultaneously at Nyamurhale: the GeoTraceability System and the DRC’s Initiative de Traçabilité de l’Or d’exploitation Artisanale (ITOA). Data collection begins at the mine site, where locally trained field agents use a smartphone application to track gold from each pit to the point of sale where it is weighed and placed in secure tamper proof bags with individual RFID codes on which the date, weight, value, location, and other relevant data are recorded. The Better Sourcing Program (BSP) then connects the RFID codes with monitoring data including incidents, income, pricing, socio-economic indicators and working conditions enabling downstream actors to view and easily assess risks and improvements in the supply chain.

BSP uploaded information daily to a database within the mobile application allowing buyers to have relevant traceability (and due diligence) information about the source of their gold prior to export. Using traceability software, we can track the gold from site to export.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The pilot provided basic personal protection equipment (rubber boots, helmets and safety vests) to improve the safety and security of the artisanal miners on site. In addition, miners were trained to identify dangerous mining conditions resulting in the closure of numerous hazardous pits. Finally, a cadre of miners have been trained as first aid responders on site (in association with the Red Cross).

PARTNERS

CBMRT has established relationships and MoUs with a range of partners from the site to the end user in order to improve market access and create new responsible sourcing opportunities for international gold buyers. Partners include: