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CANADA IMPROVES ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINING GOVERNANCE FOR PEACE SUPPORT IN THE SAHEL

Key messages

Informal mining in the Sahel region compounds regional challenges of insecurity, food supply and environmental degradation due to weak natural resource governance. Two Canadian projects in gold mining regions of Burkina Faso and Mali target economic empowerment, especially for women involved in mining, and capacity building for local authorities. Both projects draw on local knowledge and aim to increase social cohesion to strengthen peace and conflict resolution in areas where unregulated gold mining attracts armed groups and fuels local disputes.

Keywords

Crises, fragility and humanitarian assistance | Gender equality | Poverty and inequality

Key partner

Canada

Challenge

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining has become widespread in some areas of the Sahel region, which faces multiple vulnerabilities from insecurity, food scarcity and climate change. Gold is accepted as currency across borders and used by armed groups who contribute to conflict. Yet the sector is important for local livelihoods: in Burkina Faso alone, it employs about one million people full-time at 2,200 mining sites nationwide. Artisanal mining is often unregulated, which prevents fair natural resources exploitation and contributes to communal conflict – further marginalising women actors in particular. National frameworks for natural resource governance are weak and exploitation of miners is rampant in both Mali and Burkina Faso. Despite this, development co-operation partners do not prioritise natural resource governance in their country development strategies.

Approach

Canada applied a human rights-based approach and a peacebuilding lens to local economic development through two projects in the informal mining sectors of Burkina Faso and Mali. Both projects aim to restore social cohesion through promoting local conflict resolution initiatives and awareness of land governance frameworks:

- The project Foundations for Peace in the Artisanal Gold Mining Sector targets three artisanal gold mining sites in the central north and central west regions of Burkina Faso. The intervention aims to **enhance the ability of men and women in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector to integrate into the legal gold trade**, thereby improving the stability and security of their communities. It also set up savings and loans associations for men and women local miners to boost their financial autonomy and economic resilience.
- Peacebuilding and Natural Resource Governance Support, implemented by the international non-government organisation International Alert, focuses on **improving natural resources governance to restore social cohesion** by promoting local conflict resolution initiatives in five regions of Mali. The initiative is based on the principle that building capacities, coupled with facilitation, and enhancing communities' understanding of statutory instruments, primarily the legal framework for land governance, are critical for local resilience to climate and environmental shocks.
- The projects **drew on localised and traditional knowledge**, complementing the transition to more regulated natural resources exploitation. Canada used its experience in conflict- and gender sensitive programming to empower women in the artisanal mining sector.

Results

- **54 local savings and loans associations had been established** by December 2021 in the Burkina Faso project locations, and around 12% of the total population had been sensitised to the project, 40% of whom were women. 142 community radio spots were aired to broaden project outreach. Three intermediate outcomes are defined in the log frame (women's inclusion, responsible trade and outlawing illicit business practices) and are on track for completion.
- In the Mali project, **all relevant women's groups at local and regional level were systematically consulted during 2021 and 2022** for engaging women in natural resources governance mechanisms, as well as strengthening their role in peace and reconciliation processes. Three intermediate results are foreseen in the log frame (inclusion, knowledge sharing and improved regulation). This is expected to contribute to enhancing women's knowledge and their socio-economic standing to reduce victimisation and gender-based violence.
- The two projects provide **a better understanding of peace dynamics in natural resources governance** to local communities. As an intended result, they are expected to contribute to lessening inequality as a driver of violent conflict in artisanal gold mining, with **positive effects on the levels of local conflict.**

Lessons learnt

- The successful local engagement shows that it is possible to **move artisanal and small-scale mining higher up on the national agenda.** Other development partners have similar experience to Canada in political dialogue and advocacy for generating peace and social cohesion, which can be replicated in other gold mining areas of the Sahel region where artisanal and small-scale mining also has a significant environmental and transboundary impact, due to water and soil pollution.
- Regulation is slowly encouraged and absorbed at local level through the approaches taken in the two projects. **Incentives to comply with new rules**, including through training and market access could tap into new tools and relevant digital solutions, and therefore speed up this process.
- As the artisanal and small-scale mining sector activity coexists with significant industrial gold mining in Burkina Faso, the experience from empowerment of the local actors in a stronger natural resource governance framework will help **codify good practice and set industry-wide standards**.
- **Scaled-up funding for adding several other project locations** could add visibility, for mainstreaming the initial projects among the many zones where gold fields are exploited.
- **Mechanisms for cross-learning** between the two project countries can amplify the impact of the projects and strengthen buy-in from the national authorities. Concerted government action can support better access to financial services and fiscal harmonisation across West Africa.

Further information

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OECD resources

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To learn more about Canada's development co-operation see:

OECD, "Canada", in Development Co-operation Profiles, https://doi.org/10.1787/aa7e3298-en.

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Last updated: 22-08-2022