



# FOCUS

## CHALLENGES IN ASM IN THE SOUTH ASIAN REGION

SRADHA

ASM LEARNING ACADEMY





Editors: Dr Sujitav Dash, Dr (Ms) Gitasri Pani & Ms Blaze Goldburst  
Contributors in this Issue: TEAM SRADHA & ASM LEARNING ACADEMY  
Sundargarh, Odisha, India PIN: 770001  
<https://www.sradhaasmlearn.tech>  
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# PREFACE

The artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector is a vital component of the mining industry in South Asia, providing livelihoods to millions and contributing significantly to local economies. However, it is also a sector fraught with challenges, particularly for women. This bulletin aims to shed light on the gender dynamics within ASM, highlighting the struggles, achievements, and potential pathways to a more inclusive and equitable mining environment.

In "Review: Action for Gender Equality in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining," we examine the initiatives and recommendations from the 2023 State of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) Sector report by the World Bank. This review focuses on analyzing the current state of gender equality within the ASM sector and identifying critical areas where targeted gender-focused interventions are required in South Asia.

"Equity in Extraction: Strategies for Mainstreaming Gender Equality in ASM" delves into practical strategies for integrating gender considerations into the mining activities. It provides actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and community leaders striving to create a more balanced and fair mining industry.

The article "Gender Barriers in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining: Women's Struggles in South Asia" presents a comprehensive analysis of the obstacles women face in this sector. From cultural biases to lack of access to resources and opportunities, this piece paints a vivid picture of the gender-specific challenges that need urgent attention.

"Gender-Responsive Legislation: Safeguarding Women's Rights in Mining in India" examines the legal frameworks necessary to protect and empower women in mining. It discusses existing laws, identifies gaps, and suggests reforms that can help create a safer and more supportive environment for female miners.

In "Health and Earnings of Women Miners: The Challenges in South Asia," we address the intersection of poor working conditions, sanitation issues, violence, and domestic responsibilities, and how these factors impact the health and economic stability of women miners. The discussion emphasizes the need for holistic approaches to improve both health outcomes and financial earnings.

Finally, "Advancing Gender Reforms in ASM: The Role of Women-Led Associations and Professional Groups in South Asia" highlights the critical role of women-led organizations in driving gender reforms. These groups are pivotal in advocating for policy changes, providing support networks, and fostering leadership among women in mining.



## **Review: Action for Gender Equality in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining**

2023 State of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) Sector report from the World Bank reveals that approximately one-third of the artisanal and small-scale mining workforce consists of women.

ASM holds immense importance within the global mining industry, providing employment to about 45 million individuals across 80 countries. As the largest mining workforce globally, this sector serves as a vital source of livelihoods and economic development, offering employment opportunities to millions of people. Despite attempts to formalize the ASM sector over the last four decades, substantial impact at scale has not been realized. There is a pressing requirement for additional interventions and assistance to enhance working conditions and opportunities for ASM miners, particularly focusing on women miners.

These miners play a crucial role in providing essential minerals for modern technologies and the global energy transition. However, entrenched gender discrimination within mining laws, along with inadequate attention to health, safety, and social protection, significantly restricts the rights and economic prospects of women in this sector.

The report sheds light on gender disparities within artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and outlines strategies to enhance gender equality and promote women's involvement. It offers distinctive perspectives on the significant hurdles women encounter in fully engaging in ASM endeavors and striving for gender parity. Examining mining regulations in 21 nations spanning Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America, the report provides valuable insights into the challenges women face in this sector.

Women engaged in artisanal and small-scale mining confront significant obstacles that demand immediate attention to guarantee their safety and well-being both within the mines and in their domestic lives. This groundbreaking report presents practical remedies aimed at fostering a mining sector that is more inclusive and fair, thereby yielding benefits not only for women but for all stakeholders involved.

The report promotes the implementation of gender-sensitive legislation to protect the rights of women in mining and foster the development of a more sustainable sector. This entails enhancing mining regulations, which frequently lack measures to facilitate women's engagement, and reforming discriminatory property laws and land tenure agreements that impede women's land ownership and their access to mineral resources for artisanal and small-scale mining.



The health and earnings of women artisanal and small-scale miners are significantly impacted by poor working conditions, inadequate sanitation, violence, and the burden of domestic responsibilities. This situation often confines them to low-paying positions and puts them at a staggering 90 times higher risk of mortality compared to men. Due to the perception of the mining industry as predominantly male-oriented, women's health, safety, and working conditions have been largely overlooked. The report emphasizes the importance of policymakers addressing the specific risks faced by women to enhance their occupational health and safety within mining environments. Additionally, it highlights the necessity of empowering women's associations and professional groups led by women, which play a crucial role in advocating for the visibility of women in artisanal and small-scale mining and driving gender reforms within the industry.

This bulletin addresses the challenges faced by women engaged in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in the South Asian region, as outlined in the 2023 State of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Sector report by the World Bank. It delves into the barriers hindering women's full participation in ASM activities, the necessity for gender-responsive legislation to protect women's rights in mining, and the detrimental effects of poor working conditions, sanitation, violence, and domestic responsibilities on the health and earnings of women miners in South Asia. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of empowering women miner associations and female-led professional groups to drive gender reforms within the ASM sector in South Asia, as evidenced by research findings.

Reference: McQuilken, J., Perks, R., Hope, S., Mutemeri, I., & Mutemeri, N. (2023: updated April 29, 2024). 2023 State of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Sector, World Bank.



## **Equity in Extraction in South Asia: Mainstreaming Gender Equality**

In South Asia, the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) sector plays a crucial role in local economies, offering livelihoods and contributing to regional development. Despite its economic potential, the sector often faces significant gender inequalities, presenting challenges for both social justice and sustainable growth. Addressing these disparities, efforts are increasingly focused on mainstreaming gender equality within the ASM sector. This overview highlights strategies for promoting equity in extraction across South Asia.

### **Empowering Women in Decision-Making**

Traditionally, women in South Asian ASM operations have been marginalized often relegated to lower-income roles such as panning and processing. To foster gender equality, it is essential to empower women to engage in decision-making within ASM cooperatives and associations. Providing training in leadership, financial literacy, and business management can equip women to assume leadership roles and make meaningful contributions to the sector's advancement.







## **Access to Resources and Opportunities**

Access to vital resources—such as land, finance, and technology—is crucial for ASM activities. However, South Asian women often face significant barriers to accessing these resources due to entrenched social norms and legal constraints. Mainstreaming gender equality involves dismantling these barriers and ensuring that women have equitable access to resources and opportunities. This includes advocating for gender-sensitive legal reforms, offering targeted financial support for women-owned ASM enterprises, and promoting technology transfer initiatives that benefit women miners.

## **Capacity Building and Skills Development**

Enhancing the skills and capacities of women in the ASM sector is essential for their economic empowerment. Tailored training programs that address women's specific needs can improve their technical expertise in areas such as geological prospecting, mine safety, and environmental management. Additionally, educating women on gender-sensitive mining practices can raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and encourage inclusive practices within ASM communities.





## **Supporting Women's Health and Well-being**

Supporting the health and well-being of women in ASM is critical given the unique risks they face. Ensuring access to healthcare through mobile health clinics, affordable health insurance, and partnerships with local health organizations can greatly improve women's health in mining communities. Implementing occupational safety measures, including the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety training, helps prevent injuries and exposure to hazardous materials.

Raising awareness about health impacts through educational campaigns and community workshops on reproductive health, mental health, and nutrition is essential. Engaging men and boys in these efforts helps foster a supportive environment for women's health. Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) with awareness programs, support systems, and safe spaces is also crucial.

Economic empowerment through alternative livelihood programs and microfinance initiatives can help women reduce their exposure to hazardous mining conditions and invest in health and safety improvements. Advocating for gender-responsive policies ensures that women's needs and rights are addressed at all levels of governance. Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of health and safety interventions ensure they meet the needs of women in mining communities. This holistic approach benefits both women's health and the overall sustainability of ASM communities. Prioritizing women's health and safety contributes to gender equality and creates a more supportive and thriving environment in ASM settings.



# Engaging Stakeholders and Building Partnerships

Achieving gender equality in South Asia's ASM sector requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, and private sector actors. Building partnerships can enhance efforts to mainstream gender equality by mobilizing resources, sharing best practices, and advocating for policy reforms. Involving ASM communities, particularly women miners, as active participants in decision-making processes ensures that interventions are contextually relevant and sustainable.

In summary, mainstreaming gender equality in the ASM sector is crucial not only for social justice but also for sustainable development. By implementing strategies that empower women, ensure equitable resource access, build capacity, support health, and foster collaboration, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous ASM sector where both women and men can thrive. Together, let us work towards achieving equity in extraction.

## Specific Recommendations for Advancing Gender Equality in the ASM Sector of South Asia

### Empowering Women in Decision-Making

- **Leadership Training:** Develop and implement leadership training programs specifically for women in ASM, focusing on skills like negotiation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship and networking opportunities for women to connect with experienced leaders in the mining sector.
- **Gender Parity Policies:** Advocate for gender parity policies within ASM cooperatives and associations to ensure equal representation in decision-making bodies.

### Access to Resources and Opportunities

- **Legal Reforms:** Push for gender-sensitive legal reforms to ensure women have equal rights to land ownership, financing, and technology in the ASM sector.
- **Targeted Financial Support:** Create funding mechanisms, such as grants or low-interest loans, specifically aimed at women-led ASM enterprises.
- **Technology Transfer:** Promote initiatives that facilitate access to modern mining technology for women, including training on its use and maintenance.



## **Capacity Building and Skills Development**

- **Tailored Training Programs:** Design and offer training programs in technical areas such as geological prospecting, mine safety, and environmental management, specifically for women.
- **Gender Sensitivity Workshops:** Conduct workshops on gender-sensitive mining practices to raise awareness and promote inclusive behavior within ASM communities.
- **Certification Programs:** Develop certification programs for women in specialized mining skills to enhance their employability and recognition in the sector.

## **Supporting Women's Health and Well-being**

- **Healthcare Access:** Establish mobile health clinics and collaborate with local health organizations to provide accessible healthcare services to women in mining areas.
- **Safety Equipment:** Ensure the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) tailored to women's needs and conduct regular safety training sessions.
- **Health Education Campaigns:** Run health education campaigns focused on reproductive health, mental health, and nutrition, and involve men and boys to foster a supportive environment.
- **GBV Prevention Programs:** Implement gender-based violence (GBV) prevention programs, including support services and safe spaces for women.

## **Engaging Stakeholders and Building Partnerships**

- **Multi-Stakeholder Platforms:** Create multi-stakeholder platforms that include governments, civil society, and private sector actors to coordinate and amplify gender equality efforts in ASM.
- **Community Participation:** Involve women miners in the planning and implementation of gender equality initiatives to ensure they address real needs and challenges.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Work with international donors and development organizations to secure funding and resources for gender-focused ASM projects.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- **Impact Assessment:** Develop and implement mechanisms for regularly assessing the impact of gender equality interventions in the ASM sector.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish feedback mechanisms to gather input from women miners on the effectiveness of policies and programs, and make adjustments as needed.
- **Reporting and Transparency:** Ensure transparency in reporting progress and challenges related to gender equality in ASM to maintain accountability and drive continuous improvement.

By implementing these specific recommendations, stakeholders can advance gender equality in South Asia's ASM sector, fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable industry for all.



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# **Gender Barriers in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining: Women's Struggles in South Asia**

## **Abstract**

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is a vital source of livelihood for many communities in South Asia. Despite their significant contributions, women in this sector face numerous barriers that hinder their full participation and opportunities for advancement. This article examines these barriers through an analysis of existing literature, case studies, and data from various South Asian countries. Key barriers include cultural and societal norms, limited access to resources and financing, lack of education and training, safety and health risks, legal and regulatory barriers, gender-based violence and harassment, and lack of representation and voice.

## **Introduction**

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) provides employment and sustenance to millions of people in South Asia. Women constitute a significant portion of the ASM workforce, performing various roles from panning and processing to trading minerals. However, the sector remains heavily gendered, with women facing systemic barriers that impede their full participation and advancement. This research article explores these barriers, supported by evidence and data from South Asian countries, to highlight the challenges and propose actionable solutions.

## **Barriers to Women's Participation in ASM**

### **Cultural and Societal Norms**

Cultural and societal norms play a critical role in defining gender roles within South Asian communities. In many regions, traditional beliefs and practices restrict women's participation in mining activities. According to a study by Hinton et al. (2003), cultural norms often confine women to domestic duties and informal mining tasks, such as panning and sorting, which are less profitable and recognized compared to men's roles in digging and transporting minerals.



## Limited Access to Resources and Financing

Access to resources such as land, equipment, and finance is crucial for successful participation in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM). However, women often face discriminatory practices that limit their access. A report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights that women in ASM have limited access to credit and financial services due to lack of collateral and financial literacy. For instance, in India, only 7% of women miners reported having access to formal financial services compared to 22% of their male counterparts. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions to enhance women's access to financial resources, including financial literacy programs and policies that address collateral requirements, thereby promoting gender equality and economic empowerment in the ASM sector.



## Lack of Education and Training

In South Asia, the educational disparity between men and women profoundly impacts women's participation in the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) sector. This gap not only limits women's access to essential technical training but also affects their overall efficiency, safety, and economic outcomes within the industry.

Women in South Asia face significant educational challenges that hinder their involvement in ASM. The literacy rate among female miners is notably lower compared to their male counterparts, with only 48 percent of women being literate according to recent data. This educational gap means that many women lack basic skills necessary for technical and safety training, which are crucial for improving their productivity and ensuring their well-being in the mining sector.



The limited access to education restricts women's ability to obtain specialized training in mining techniques and safety practices. As highlighted in the SRADHA (2021) study, female miners are less likely to receive formal training compared to their male peers. This disparity in training has several detrimental effects:

### **Reduced Productivity:**

Without proper training, women may struggle to adopt efficient mining techniques. This inefficiency not only affects their output but also limits their ability to compete with more skilled counterparts. Training on modern techniques and equipment could significantly enhance their productivity.

### **Increased Vulnerability to Accidents:**

Safety training is crucial in mitigating the risks associated with mining. Women miners who lack training are more prone to accidents and injuries due to inadequate knowledge of safety protocols and proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). This increased vulnerability poses serious health risks and can lead to long-term physical and financial repercussions.

### **Limited Access to Technology:**

Technical training often includes instruction on using advanced mining equipment and technologies. Women with limited education are less likely to access or effectively use these technologies, further widening the gap between male and female miners in terms of productivity and income.



## **Safety and Health Risks**

Mining is inherently dangerous, and women in ASM face additional health and safety risks. The use of toxic substances like mercury in gold processing without proper protective equipment exposes women to severe health hazards. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), women miners in South Asia suffer from higher rates of mercury poisoning due to prolonged exposure during gold processing. Moreover, gender-specific health needs are often ignored in the sector, exacerbating the health risks for women.

## **Legal and Regulatory Barriers**

Legal and regulatory frameworks in many South Asian countries do not favor women's participation in ASM. Women often lack awareness of their legal rights and the regulatory requirements governing mining activities. Bureaucratic hurdles and corruption further disadvantage women, who may have less access to networks that can help navigate these challenges. The ILO reported that in Nepal, women miners face significant difficulties in obtaining mining licenses and permits compared to men.

## **Gender-Based Violence and Harassment**

Gender-based violence and harassment are prevalent issues in ASM communities in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Women miners frequently report incidents of sexual harassment, exploitation, and violence. This hostile environment discourages many women from fully participating in mining activities. A study conducted in Bangladesh found that over 60% of women miners had experienced some form of gender-based violence in the workplace.

## **Lack of Representation and Voice**

Women are significantly underrepresented in decision-making bodies and organizations within the ASM sector. This lack of representation means that women's perspectives and needs are often ignored in policy and program development. In India, for example, women constitute less than 10% of the members in local mining cooperatives, limiting their influence on decision-making processes.



## Recommendations

To address these barriers and promote women's full participation in ASM, a multifaceted approach is required. Policy interventions should focus on:

- **Cultural Change and Advocacy:** Promoting gender equality through community engagement and challenging traditional norms that limit women's roles in ASM.
- **Resource Access:** Implementing policies to improve women's access to land, equipment, and financing, such as microcredit schemes and grants specifically for women miners.
- **Education and Training:** Providing targeted education and training programs that address the specific needs of women in ASM, including literacy programs and technical training.
- **Safety and Health:** Developing gender-sensitive safety protocols and providing access to protective equipment and healthcare services tailored to women's needs.
- **Legal Support:** Strengthening legal frameworks to protect women's rights in ASM and providing legal aid to help women navigate regulatory challenges.
- **Combatting Violence:** Implementing strict measures to prevent gender-based violence and harassment in ASM communities, including awareness campaigns and support services for victims.
- **Representation:** Increasing women's representation in ASM decision-making bodies and organizations to ensure their voices are heard and their needs addressed in policy development.

By addressing these barriers, we can create a more inclusive and equitable ASM sector that fully leverages the potential of women miners, contributing to sustainable economic development in South Asia.



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# **Gender-Responsive Legislation**

## **Safeguarding Women's Rights in Mining in India**

### **Abstract**

In India, artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is a significant source of livelihood for many, including women who play vital roles across the sector. Despite their contributions, women miners face numerous challenges, including limited access to resources, health and safety risks, gender-based violence, and underrepresentation in decision-making processes. This report examines the need for gender-responsive legislation to safeguard women's rights in the mining sector, supported by evidence and data. The report concludes with recommendations for policy interventions to promote gender equality and sustainable development in the mining industry.

### **Introduction**

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in India provides employment and sustenance to a large portion of the population. Women are integral to this sector, yet they face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation and advancement. This report explores these barriers and emphasizes the need for gender-responsive legislation to ensure the safety, health, and empowerment of women miners. By examining existing literature, case studies, and data, the report provides a comprehensive overview of the current situation and proposes actionable solutions.

## **Barriers Faced by Women in Mining**

### **Limited Access to Resources**

Women miners in India often have restricted access to essential resources, such as land, equipment, and financing. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), only 7% of women miners have access to formal financial services compared to 22% of men. This disparity limits their ability to invest in productive tools and technology, reducing their overall productivity and earning potential.

### **Health and Safety Risks**

The ASM sector is fraught with health and safety risks, which are exacerbated for women due to inadequate safety measures and lack of gender-sensitive protocols. A study by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) highlighted that women miners in India suffer from higher rates of mercury poisoning due to prolonged exposure during gold processing. Additionally, poor working conditions, including lack of protective equipment and inadequate sanitation facilities, increase the risk of accidents and illnesses.



## Gender-Based Violence and Harassment

Gender-based violence and harassment are prevalent issues in the mining sector in South Asian region. Women miners frequently report incidents of sexual harassment, exploitation, and violence. A survey conducted by the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI) revealed that over 60% of women miners had experienced some form of gender-based violence in the workplace. This hostile environment discourages many women from fully participating in mining activities.

## Underrepresentation in Decision-Making

Women are significantly underrepresented in decision-making bodies and organizations within the mining sector. This lack of representation means that women's perspectives and needs are often ignored in policy and program development. In local mining cooperatives and unions, women constitute less than 10% of the members, limiting their influence on decision-making processes.



## The Need for Gender-Responsive Legislation

To address these challenges, gender-responsive legislation is crucial. Such laws can help ensure that women's specific needs and rights are recognized and protected, creating a foundation for a more inclusive and sustainable mining sector. Key components of gender-responsive legislation should include:



## **Equal Access to Resources and Opportunities:**

- **Land Rights:** Legislation should ensure that women have equal rights to own and access land necessary for mining activities.
- **Financial Services:** Policies should promote women's access to credit and financial services, including microfinance schemes tailored to the needs of women miners.

## **Health and Safety Regulations:**

- **Safety Standards:** Implementing safety standards that address the unique risks faced by women in mining, including access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- **Healthcare Access:** Ensuring that women miners have access to health services, including reproductive health care and mental health support.

## **Protection against Violence and Harassment:**

- **Anti-Harassment Laws:** Enforcing strict anti-harassment policies with clear reporting mechanisms and penalties for violations.
- **Support Services:** Providing support services for women who experience violence or harassment, including legal aid and counseling.

## **Representation and Participation:**

- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Ensuring women's representation in mining cooperatives, unions, and decision-making bodies.
- **Leadership Programs:** Developing programs to train and empower women to take on leadership roles within the mining sector.

## **Case Studies**

### **The Role of Association of Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (AWASM)**





The ASM Female Miners' Association – India serves as a model for improving conditions for women miners in the ASM sector. The association has implemented programs offering training on alternative livelihoods, financial literacy, access to microcredit, and health and safety training. These initiatives have enhanced the economic and social status of ASM women miners across Odisha. By providing these resources and support, the association has empowered women miners, enabling them to secure better financial stability and safer working conditions, thereby promoting gender equality and economic growth within the ASM communities.

## **The Role of SEWA in Gujarat**

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Gujarat provides a model of how organized efforts can improve conditions for women miners. SEWA has implemented programs that offer financial literacy, access to microcredit, and health and safety training. These initiatives have significantly improved the economic and social status of women miners in the region.

## **Women Miners in Jharkhand**

In Jharkhand, women miners have formed cooperatives to collectively address issues such as access to resources and market linkage (Lohanchal MAHILA SAMMAN & UNYAUN SWALMBI SAMITI LTD. BOKARO, 2019). These cooperatives have negotiated better prices for minerals and improved working conditions. The success of these cooperatives demonstrates the potential of collective action in empowering women miners.



## Policy Recommendations

To promote gender equality and sustainable development in the mining sector, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Comprehensive Gender-Responsive Legislation:** Advocate for laws that specifically address the needs and rights of women miners, including equal access to resources, protection from violence, and representation in decision-making.
- **Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies and ensure compliance with safety and labor standards.
- **Promote Public Awareness and Education:** Conduct public awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms and promote the benefits of gender equality in the mining sector.
- **Strengthen Support Systems for Women Miners:** Provide access to support services, such as legal aid, counseling, and health care, to address the specific challenges faced by women in mining.
- **Foster Partnerships and Collaborations:** Encourage collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, industry stakeholders, and women miners to create a supportive environment for gender-responsive initiatives.

Gender-responsive legislation is essential to safeguard women's rights in the mining sector and build a more sustainable and inclusive industry in India. By addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women miners, such legislation can enhance their safety, health, and economic empowerment. The implementation of these recommendations will not only benefit women miners but also contribute to the overall development and sustainability of the mining sector.



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# **Health and Earnings of Women Miners: The Challenges in South Asia**

## **Abstract**

Women in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in South Asia play crucial roles in the industry, yet they face severe challenges that affect their health, safety, and economic well-being. This report examines the impact of poor working conditions, inadequate sanitation, violence, and domestic work burdens on women miners' health and earnings. Supported by data and case studies, the report highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve their living and working conditions, ultimately enhancing their contributions to the ASM sector and broader economic development.

## **Introduction**

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is a vital economic activity in South Asia, involving millions of people, including a significant number of women. Particularly in countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, the ASM sector employs approximately 10 to 15 million people and about 48 per cent are females. Women miners often engage in labor-intensive tasks such as ore processing, panning, and trading, which expose them to various risks and hardships. This report explores how poor working conditions, lack of sanitation, violence, and domestic responsibilities impact the health and earnings of women miners in South Asia. By examining existing literature, surveys, and case studies, the report provides a comprehensive overview and suggests actionable recommendations for improving their situation.

## **Poor Working Conditions**

### **Health Risks**

Women miners in South Asia frequently work in hazardous environments without adequate safety measures. Prolonged exposure to dust, chemicals, and heavy metals, such as mercury used in gold processing, leads to serious health problems. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), women in ASM suffer from higher rates of respiratory diseases, skin disorders, and mercury poisoning compared to their male counterparts (UNEP, 2018).

### **Economic Impact**

Poor health resulting from unsafe working conditions directly affects women's ability to work consistently and productively, thereby reducing their earnings. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that health issues among women miners lead to frequent absences and decreased productivity, which in turn lowers their income potential (ILO, 2020).



## **Inadequate Sanitation**

Lack of proper sanitation facilities at mining sites poses significant health risks for women. In many ASM areas in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, women do not have access to clean water, toilets, or washing facilities. This situation exacerbates the spread of waterborne diseases and infections. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that inadequate sanitation is a major contributor to poor health outcomes for women miners, including urinary tract infections and gastrointestinal illnesses (WHO, 2019).

## **Economic Impact**

Health problems caused by poor sanitation reduce women's working hours and productivity, leading to lower earnings. Additionally, women often have to spend time and resources on healthcare, further diminishing their income and savings.

## **Violence and Harassment**

### **Physical and Psychological Impact**

Women miners frequently face violence and harassment at mining sites, including physical assaults, sexual harassment, and exploitation. The Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI) conducted a survey indicating that over 60% of women miners had experienced some form of gender-based violence at work (FIMI, 2021). Such experiences lead to severe physical and psychological trauma, affecting their overall well-being.

## **Economic Impact**

Violence and harassment contribute to a hostile work environment, discouraging women from fully participating in mining activities. This not only limits their income-earning opportunities but also forces many to leave the sector altogether, further reducing their economic independence.

## **Double Burden Syndrome**

Women miners often bear a double burden of mining work and domestic responsibilities. After long hours at mining sites, they are expected to perform household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. This dual workload leads to chronic fatigue and stress, impairing their physical and mental health. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), women in South Asia spend an average of 4.5 hours per day on unpaid domestic work, compared to 1.5 hours for men (UNDP, 2019).



## Economic Impact

The time and energy spent on domestic work reduce the hours women can devote to mining activities, thereby limiting their income. Moreover, the lack of rest and recovery time affects their productivity and efficiency at work, further diminishing their earnings.

### Case Study-1: Women Miners in Jharkhand, India

A study conducted in Jharkhand revealed that women miners faced extreme working conditions with minimal safety measures. Many suffered from respiratory issues and musculoskeletal disorders due to prolonged exposure to dust and manual labor. The absence of sanitation facilities exacerbated health problems, leading to frequent illnesses and reduced work capacity. Additionally, incidents of harassment and violence were common, further hindering their participation in mining activities (Birsa Mineral, Mining & Transport Industrial Multi State Cooperative Society Limited 2024).

### Case Study-2: Women Miners in Odisha, India



From a recent study of a random sample of 197 female respondents, 9.84 percent female miners mostly from ASM gold sector were found exposed to chemical hazards like mercury inhalation, 7.25 percent female miners were suffering from neurological, kidney and autoimmune impairment.



8.29 percent were showing symptoms of neuropsychiatric symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, anorexia, shyness, withdrawal, depression, nervousness, irritability and memory problems, 19.69 percent were suffering from waterborne and vector-borne diseases, 2.07 percent were suffering from some or other sexually transmitted infections or HIV/AIDs, 6.22 percent were suffering from musculo-skeletal disorder - chronic injury and fatigue from carrying heavy materials over long distances, and bending over in awkward positions, 7.25 percent female miners were under drug and alcohol abuse, 16.58 percent had faced violence either at the family or at the mining sites, 19.70 percent female miners were found having nutritional deficit disorder, 6.74 were suffering from respiratory diseases such as silicosis, chronic bronchitis or tuberculosis, 4.15 percent ASM gold female miners who were pregnant were exposed to mercury. (SRADHA, DELVE, 2022).

## **Socio-Economic Exclusion**

- Regarding the reasons of feeling of exclusion of ASM miners from accessing assets, male miners said they had no direct access to credit from SHGs mostly run by females of the community but they avail cash through the female members of their households. The Jhara community engaged in gold extraction in the KBK region of Odisha has no social identity as a caste/tribe and they are not recognized as an occupational or social group by government according to their main occupation.
- Regarding the capacity and ability issues that constrain the access of ASM miners to assets, 74.42 percent miners said they lacked the technical and managerial skills to access to assets needed for participation in ASM value chain or availing alternative livelihood opportunity. 81.14 percent had no access to financial support, 77.52 percent had no technical and financial capacity for acquisition of new technology, 80.62 percent had no access to information on the scope of mining sector, particularly about the value chain, gender status was a major constraint for 60.21 percent miners to access to assets particularly for the female miners as shared by 92.23 percent of the female respondents and ascribed status like caste and tribe back ground of 80.89 percent were major constraints of the ASM miners to productive assets for mining, business and undertaking alternative livelihood activity.



## Participation in Power and Decision Making

- Mining operation in gemstone and gold extraction in ASM sector in Odisha, India is considered informal and illegal. When asked about participation in decision making at the mining operation, 59.95 percent ASM workers reported that they decide themselves about their access to mineral deposit. 67.44 percent said that they decide about production, 55.81 shared that they decide the selling of their product, 55.29 percent said that they decide the sourcing of inputs and 32.56 percent said they take decision on waste disposal.
- Regarding the constraints the ASM workers face in decision making in mining operation 40.05 percent miners said that they faced the constraint of exclusion in decision making in mining operation. While 33 percent of the male miner faced exclusion, 47.15 percent faced exclusion as a constraint in decision making at the mining operation.
- 41.86 percent shared that their views in decision making is disrespected by others and seldom accepted. While 33 percent of the male miners faced disrespect, disproportionately higher percentage of female miners (50.78) percent faced disrespect of their views and participation in decision making at the mining operation.
- 38.24 percent reported that they faced opposition often resulting in conflict and violence whenever they expressed their views in decision making at the mining operation. While 31.96 percent male miners encountered opposition, a disproportionately higher percentage of female miners (44.56) faced opposition often resulting in conflict and violence.
- Regarding participation in decision making in local government level, 44.84 percent male miners said that they participated in consultation in review and development at the local government (Panchayat) level while female participation was disproportionately low in local government periodic activity review and development consultations which were held through Gramsabha meetings. Unfortunately about 67.36 percent female miners never participated in decision making in local government level due to several constraints they encounter like males take the lead, gender status, exclusion etc as expressed by them.
- Regarding the constraints the miners face in decision making at the Panchayat level (local government) decision making process, 13.95 percent said that they are never allowed to participate even when present in Gramsbha meetings. 5.67 percent of the males and a disproportionately higher number of female miners (22.28 percent) faced exclusion in decision making at the local government level.
- 70.28 percent said that they were never allowed in consultation in Gramsabha meetings as government officials present in the meetings never allowed them to present their views and needs. While 69.07 percent males faced this, a slightly more number of female miners about 71.50 percent faced the disadvantage of no-consultation in meetings.
- 15.77 miners said that they want to present their community problems but others dominate and during consultation process, they never get full opportunity to express their views. While 25.26 males faced the problem of inadequate consultation as they take initiative and lead, only 6.22 percent females faced situations of inadequate consultation as they take less initiative and lead in the presence of male members of the communities and the government officials.
- The ASM workers shared that they had no platform or opportunity or channel to participate in decision making in the national government level neither in consultation in review and development nor in consultation in policy, by-laws, regulations, programs for ASM sector.
- Regarding at the national government level, the gemstone and gold ASM workers and informal associations expressed that they had no decision making role as their mining operation was informal in nature and considered illegal.



### **Case Study-3: Women in Gemstone Mining, Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, women engaged in gemstone mining reported significant challenges related to balancing mining work and domestic responsibilities. Despite their contributions, they earned substantially less than men due to lower productivity and frequent absences caused by health issues and domestic obligations. Lack of access to credit and financial services also limited their ability to invest in better tools and technologies, perpetuating a cycle of low earnings (Sri Lanka Mining Association, 2020).

### **Case Study-4: Women miners in Nepal**

The study by Tamsin Bradley, et al (2017) produces vital primary data and secondary analysis regarding the interaction of women's economic activity and violence against women and girls. The report highlights that women in Nepal often work in hazardous conditions in sectors like mining, facing risks to their health and safety due to inadequate safety measures.

- Limited access to clean sanitation facilities in mining areas contributes to health issues among women miners, exacerbating their vulnerability.
- Instances of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and exploitation, are reported in mining communities in Nepal, further compromising women's well-being and earnings.
- Women miners in Nepal struggle to balance their mining work with household responsibilities, leading to physical and mental strain and impacting their earnings.

### **Case Study-1: Women Miners in Pakistan:**

The study by Tamsin Bradley, et al (2017) emphasizes the physically demanding nature of artisanal mining in Pakistan and the lack of safety measures, exposing women miners to accidents and health hazards. Inadequate sanitation facilities in mining areas pose health risks for women miners in Pakistan, affecting their well-being and productivity. Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and exploitation, is prevalent in mining communities in Pakistan, undermining women's safety and earnings. Women miners in Pakistan face the dual burden of household chores and mining work, which affects their ability to earn and advance in the sector.

By synthesizing insights from Bradley's report and applying them to the context of Nepal, and Pakistan, we can draw parallels in the challenges faced by women artisanal and small-scale miners across South Asia, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address these issues and improve women's health and earnings in the mining sector.



## **Recommendations**

### **Improve Working Conditions and Safety Standards**

- Implement gender-sensitive safety protocols and provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for women miners.
- Conduct regular health and safety training programs to raise awareness about risks and preventive measures.

### **Enhance Sanitation Facilities**

- Ensure the provision of clean water, toilets, and washing facilities at mining sites.
- Promote hygiene practices through community education programs.

### **Address Violence and Harassment**

- Enforce strict anti-harassment policies with clear reporting mechanisms and penalties for violations.
- Provide support services, including counseling and legal aid, for women who experience violence or harassment.

### **Support Work-Life Balance**

- Develop community childcare centers to reduce the domestic burden on women miners.
- Encourage the sharing of domestic responsibilities through community awareness programs that promote gender equality.

### **Provide Economic Support**

- Facilitate access to microcredit and financial services tailored to the needs of women miners.
- Offer skills training programs to enhance women's productivity and income-earning potential.

Women artisanal and small-scale miners in South Asia face significant challenges that impact their health, safety, and economic well-being. Poor working conditions, inadequate sanitation, violence, and the burden of domestic work collectively diminish their productivity and earnings.

Addressing these issues through targeted interventions and gender-responsive policies is essential to improving their living and working conditions. By empowering women miners and ensuring their safety and health, we can promote sustainable development and gender equality in the ASM sector.



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# **Advancing Gender Reforms in ASM: The Role of Women-Led Associations and Professional Groups in South Asia**

## **Abstract**

Women play integral roles in the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector of South Asia, yet they often face significant barriers to full participation and recognition. Empowering women miner associations and female-led professional groups has emerged as a critical strategy for advancing gender reforms in mining. This report examines the role and impact of these associations and groups in promoting gender equality, advocating for policy reforms, and fostering sustainable development in the ASM sector of South Asia. Drawing on empirical evidence, case studies, and academic literature, the report provides insights into the effectiveness of such initiatives and offers recommendations for further action.

## **Introduction**

The ASM sector in South Asia is a vital source of livelihood for about 10-15 millions of people, including about a half of them are women. However, women in ASM face multifaceted challenges, including limited access to resources, poor working conditions, gender-based violence, and underrepresentation in decision-making processes. Empowering women miner associations and female-led professional groups has emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges and advance gender reforms in the mining sector. This report aims to explore the role and impact of such initiatives in South Asia, drawing on empirical evidence and scholarly research.

## **Women Miner Associations**

Although there are only a few women miner associations in South Asia, they serve as vital platforms for collective action, advocacy, and empowerment within the ASM sector. These associations play several key roles:

**Advocacy for Gender Equality:** Women miner associations advocate for gender-responsive policies and reforms in the ASM sector, including equal access to resources, improved working conditions, and protection from gender-based violence.



**Capacity Building and Skills Development:** These associations provide training, capacity-building programs, and technical assistance to women miners, enhancing their skills, knowledge, and leadership capabilities.

**Access to Resources:** Women miner associations facilitate access to resources such as land, equipment, finance, and markets, enabling women to engage in mining activities on equal terms with men.

**Networking and Knowledge Sharing:** These associations foster networking and knowledge sharing among women miners, enabling them to exchange experiences, strategies, and best practices.

### **Female-Led Professional Groups**

Female-led professional groups complement the efforts of women miner associations by focusing on innovation, entrepreneurship, and professional development. These groups play several crucial roles:

**Promoting Innovation and Technology Adoption:** Female-led professional groups promote innovation and technology adoption in the ASM sector, empowering women miners to improve productivity, efficiency, and sustainability.

**Facilitating Business Incubation and Market Linkages:** These groups provide support for business incubation, market linkages, and access to finance, enabling women miners to start and grow their enterprises.

**Networking and Mentorship:** Female-led professional groups offer networking opportunities, mentorship, and peer support, facilitating career advancement and skill development for women working in ASM.

**Advocating for Policy Reforms:** These groups engage in policy advocacy and research to address gender gaps and promote gender-responsive policies and practices in the ASM sector.



## **Case Study-1: Association of Women in ASM (AWASM)**

The Association of Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (AWASM) in India exemplify how organized initiatives can enhance the conditions for women in the ASM sector. Established and registered by SRADHA in 2021 with support from the Extractive Global Programmatic Support Trust Fund (EGPS) through its COVID-19 Emergency Response Support, AWASM has made significant strides in improving the lives of female miners.

AWASM together with SRADHA has launched a range of programs for women artisanal miners. Their initiatives focus on training female miners in alternative livelihood opportunities, enhancing financial literacy, and facilitating access to microcredit. Additionally, they provide health and safety training, conduct education and legal literacy programs to combat gender-based violence in the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector, and work to prevent child marriage. AWASM also tackles the issue of trafficking by offering skills training and community-based education programs designed to protect vulnerable girls and boys.

These efforts have improved the economic and social status of women artisanal miners in states like Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, and others, through a mix of physical and virtual programs.





## Case Study-2: ASM Learning Academy, India

With a message on empowerment through knowledge, the ASM learning academy runs a comprehensive capacity-building program for artisanal and small-scale mining communities specifically targeting female miners and children in mining. ASM Learning Academy's effort in creating a comprehensive capacity-building and knowledge exchange program for artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) workers, with a focus on female miners, is a significant step towards sustainable development in the mining sector. The Academy has initiated 15 modules as part of its ongoing program.





- **Health, Safety, and Occupational Hazards:** Addressing the physical and mental well-being of ASM workers, with a focus on preventing accidents and injuries in the workplace.
- **Livelihood Diversification:** Exploring alternative income-generating activities to reduce dependency on mining and enhance economic resilience.
- **ASM Value Chain and Supply Chain:** Understanding the journey of minerals from extraction to market, and the roles of various stakeholders in ensuring ethical and efficient practices.
- **Gender Issues and GBV:** Tackling gender-based violence and promoting gender equality within the mining communities.
- **Control on Minerals:** Learning about legal frameworks, rights to resources, and how to navigate the complexities of mineral ownership and control.
- **Institution Building:** Strengthening the capacity of institutions like the ASM Academy, ASM Association of Female Miners, and Self Help Groups to support miners.
- **Leadership and Decision Making:** Developing leadership skills and decision-making capabilities among ASM workers, particularly women.
- **Environmental Management:** Implementing sustainable mining practices to minimize ecological impact and promote environmental stewardship.
- **Financial Literacy and Management:** Equipping ASM workers with the knowledge to manage finances, including savings, investments, and credit.
- **Technology and Innovation in ASM:** Introducing modern tools and techniques that can improve efficiency and safety in mining operations.
- **Market Access and Negotiation Skills:** Training miners to better access markets and negotiate fair prices for their minerals.
- **Policy Advocacy and Legal Rights:** Educating miners on their legal rights and how to engage in policy advocacy for the betterment of the ASM sector.
- **Community Engagement and Development:** This module focuses on fostering strong relationships between ASM workers and the local communities. It aims to teach miners how to engage with community members, understand their needs, and work collaboratively to ensure that mining activities contribute positively to local development.
- **Legal Compliance and Advocacy:** This module provides knowledge about national and international mining laws, regulations, and standards. It also equips ASM workers with the skills to advocate for their rights and navigate legal challenges in the mining industry.
- **Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding:** Given the potential for disputes in mining areas, this module trains ASM workers in conflict resolution techniques. It promotes peacebuilding strategies that can help prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts within the mining sector.

These modules aim to empower ASM workers, especially women, by providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to improve their working conditions, livelihoods, and participation in the mining sector.



## The Modules Aim to:

- Enhance awareness and implementation of safety measures that protects the health and well-being of ASM workers.
- Provide ASM workers with the skills and knowledge to pursue alternative livelihoods, reducing their economic vulnerability.
- Educate ASM workers on the end-to-end process of mining, from extraction to sale, and to promote responsible supply chain practices.
- Address gender-based violence and discrimination, and to foster a safe and inclusive working environment for all genders.
- Inform ASM workers about their rights and the legal aspects of mineral ownership, empowering them to navigate the sector more effectively.
- Strengthen the organizational and operational capacities of ASM-related institutions, ensuring they can better support the workforce.
- Cultivate leadership qualities and decision-making skills among ASM workers, particularly women, enabling them to take on influential roles.
- Promote sustainable mining practices that minimize environmental damage and encourage conservation.
- Improve the financial acumen of ASM workers, enabling them to make informed decisions about their finances.
- Introduce innovative technologies and practices that can increase the efficiency and safety of mining operations.
- Equip ASM workers with the skills necessary to access markets and negotiate fair trade terms.
- Empower ASM workers to understand and advocate for policies that support the growth and sustainability of the ASM sector.
- Cultivate a deep understanding of the local community's culture, needs, and expectations among ASM workers. To develop skills for effective communication and collaboration with community members. To ensure that mining activities are aligned with the sustainable development goals of the community.
- Provide ASM workers with a comprehensive understanding of the legal framework governing the mining industry. To empower ASM workers to actively participate in advocacy for their rights and fair treatment within the sector. To equip ASM workers with the tools to navigate and comply with mining laws and regulations.
- Train ASM workers in conflict resolution methods that foster peaceful coexistence within the mining community. To promote strategies for proactive conflict prevention and effective dispute management. To build a culture of peace and cooperation that supports the overall well-being of the mining sector.

The emphasis is to empower ASM workers, especially women, by providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge to improve their work conditions, economic stability, and social standing within the mining community.



### **Case Study-3: SEWA in India:**

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India has been instrumental in empowering women in the ASM sector through collective action, capacity building, and advocacy. SEWA's initiatives have led to tangible improvements in the lives of women miners, including increased access to resources, improved working conditions, and enhanced economic opportunities.

### **Case Study-4: Women in Gemstone Mining, Sri Lanka**

Female-led professional groups in Sri Lanka have played a crucial role in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among women in the gemstone mining sector. These groups have facilitated access to technology, finance, and market linkages, enabling women miners to establish successful businesses and improve their livelihoods.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Based on the findings of this research report, the following recommendations are proposed:

**Investment in Capacity Building:** Allocate resources for capacity-building programs, training, and skill development initiatives targeted at women miners and female-led professional groups.

**Support for Entrepreneurship:** Provide support for entrepreneurship development, business incubation, and access to finance for women miners and women-led enterprises in the ASM sector.

**Policy Reforms and Institutional Support:** Advocate for gender-responsive policies, legal reforms, and institutional support mechanisms to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in ASM.

**Partnerships and Collaboration:** Foster partnerships and collaboration between government & multilateral agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector to support women miner associations and female-led professional groups.

Empowering women miner associations and female-led professional groups is essential for advancing gender reforms and fostering sustainable development in the ASM sector of South Asia. By driving collective action, advocating for policy reforms, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and providing support for capacity building and skills development, these initiatives can unlock the full potential of women in ASM and contribute to the overall growth and transformation of the sector. As we move forward, let us recognize the invaluable contributions of women in ASM and work together to create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for all.



## **Key Insights: Advancing Gender Equality and Sustainability in South Asia's Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Sector**

Discover the essential insights from our latest ASM bulletin on South Asia, where we delve into the region's vital artisanal and small-scale mining sector. Learn about the significant economic role of ASM and the pressing gender disparities impacting women miners. Our report highlights critical needs for gender-responsive policies, enhanced educational and training opportunities, and improved health and safety measures. We also emphasize the vital role of women-led associations and the importance of stakeholder engagement. By addressing these key issues, we can work towards a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous ASM sector for all. Dive into the details and drive positive change with us.

- **Economic Significance:** The ASM sector is a crucial economic activity in South Asia, providing livelihoods for millions of people, including a notable number of women. It contributes significantly to local economies and supports many communities.
- **Gender Disparities:** Despite its importance, the ASM sector in South Asia faces significant gender disparities. Women often encounter barriers such as lower educational attainment, limited access to technical training, and inadequate safety measures, which affect their productivity and well-being.
- **Need for Gender-Responsive Policies:** Effective gender-responsive legislation and policies are essential to address the challenges faced by women in ASM. This includes legal reforms to ensure equal access to resources, training, and opportunities, as well as enforcement of safety and health regulations.
- **Empowerment through Education and Training:** Enhancing educational and training opportunities for women is critical. Targeted programs can improve technical skills, safety practices, and leadership abilities, helping women to participate more fully and effectively in the ASM sector.
- **Health and Safety Challenges:** Women miners face unique health and safety risks, including poor working conditions and exposure to hazardous materials. Addressing these issues through improved safety measures, access to healthcare, and support for occupational health is vital for their well-being.
- **Role of Women-Led Associations:** Women miner associations, although limited, play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights, providing support, and facilitating access to resources. Strengthening these associations can enhance their impact and effectiveness.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and ASM communities is essential for advancing gender equality and improving the sector. Building partnerships and involving women miners in decision-making processes can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation of gender equality initiatives in the ASM sector are necessary to assess their effectiveness, gather feedback, and make informed adjustments to policies and programs.

SRADHA and ASM Learning Academy members, along with other key stakeholders, are committed to fostering a more inclusive and equitable ASM sector in South Asia, ensuring that both women and men can thrive and contribute to sustainable development.