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SNAPSHOT

Farming Diamonds: Women-Led Agriculture Empowering Miners

By taking gender into account, a project charts a path away from bonded labor in diamond mining.

Photo: Sabine Jlejak



A woman in Bobi uses an old diamond shaft as a well in the dry season for her chili pepper fields.

Photo: Honorine Kofie



By taking gender into account, miners like these will be able to break free from unfavorable financing arrangements.

USAID's Property Rights and Artisanal Diamond Development II Project (PRADD II) considers the artisanal diamond mining sector an engine of economic growth. During boom periods of diamond extraction, the rural economy often flourishes. But when diamonds are mined out or diamond prices fall due to international market forces, the local economy often collapses. To mitigate this, PRADD II encourages household income diversification in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Recently, the project began providing technical and material support to small groups of highly motivated women to plant manioc, peppers, rice, and other crops.

The effort was launched in March 2015 in the village of Dona, Côte d'Ivoire, in the presence of Kimberley Process (KP) officials from a dozen countries meeting there to evaluate diamond governance.

Women in Dona are famous for their manioc-based *attieke*, a specialty dish, but few can afford quality digging implements for the hard work of manioc growing or the money to crush the tuber at a mill at a nearby village.

"Today we are ready to work," said Dosso Aminata, the vice president of the women's association as a PRADD II-purchased manioc crushing machine started whirring.

"When I invited PRADD II to Côte d'Ivoire in 2012, I never thought that it would help our mothers," said an emotional Madame Thes, Côte d'Ivoire's head of diamond compliance.

On the surface, the new equipment pools and training support have nothing to do with diamonds, an activity mainly conducted by men. However, PRADD II believes that empowering women is not just good for women but good for miners as well. The reason is diamond finance and diamond risk.

In a recent survey of miners, PRADD II found that over half had not found a rough diamond stone in over six months. During that time, miners still had to eat, purchase quality tools, and buy fuel for pumps to remove water from flooded pits.

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Photo: Alex Kouassi



The KP Permanent Secretary, PRADD II Côte d'Ivoire Deputy Country Director, and village leaders test the manioc processing machine in the village of Dona.

Most miners have a “patron” who covers those costs. But in recent years, as miners have become more settled and diamonds scarce, the cost of financing has gone up.

“When I started financing I’d give a sack of rice a week and that was it,” said Ali Bah, a local collector. “Now I have to pay money and food each week, not just for the miner but for his whole family. Plus cover health costs. School fees. It’s too much!”

This translates into less income for miners if they find a stone, since the patron will deduct all he spent from the price. The result is poor miners and poor mining households.

If women bring in more money and sources of food, this can make a big difference. “We mine but find little these days, so women selling manioc helps us,” said Diomande Segbe from Sangana.

PRADD II aims to help the women in Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea become more productive and organized. The project even has plans to train women’s groups to rent out mining equipment like motor pumps—a highly profitable venture.

These PRADD II initiatives to work with women’s associations will not in themselves change diamond financing, but the project can play a role. This initiative shows that even though most women do not mine diamonds, when it comes to mining economics, gender matters.

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