

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING & EARLY RESPONSE NETWORK

# WARN

*Policy Brief*

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# BURKINA FASO



## Illegal Mining

A Contributory Factor to Current Peace and Security Crisis?



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# Illegal Mining in Burkina Faso:

## A Contributory Factor to Current Peace and Security Crisis?

### 1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s, mining has been an integral part of Burkina Faso's economy. The recent boom in the prices of minerals, especially gold in the world market has led to a significant increase in the contribution of mining to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which has trebled from 3 percent in 2009 to 9 percent in 2016 with its share of exports also increasing from 43 percent to 69 percent<sup>1</sup>. Owing to this, the mining sector has attracted both domestic and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), causing significant expansion in the industrial and artisanal mining sectors in Burkina Faso<sup>2</sup>. This has led to proliferation of small-scale artisanal mining, which has become the mainstay of livelihood security for many people, especially those in rural communities<sup>3</sup>. In particular, expansion in small-scale artisanal mining has generated an increase in wealth for rural households<sup>4</sup>. However, the hike in international gold prices in recent years has also contributed to a surge in the illegal mining activities in the country. Currently, there is an estimated 200,000 artisanal small-scale mining sites mostly in remote communities in the North, East and South-west of the country<sup>5</sup>. Out of this figure, there are only 200 artisanal small-scale gold mining sites are legally registered and recognized<sup>6</sup>.



Brief Information on Burkina Faso:

- Population: 18.6million
- Artisanal goldmining makes an important source of income to 1.5 to 2 million people
- Gold account for 70% of export earnings
- Fourth largest gold producer in Africa (after South Africa, Ghana and Mali)

Credit: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)

Though illegal mining activities continue to yield economic dividends for many people in mining communities, it portends security threats that could exacerbate the current security deterioration in the country. Notable trends emerging in extremist activities indicate continual exploitation of illegal mines for trafficking of gold and other minerals by Ansarul, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Nusrat Al-Islam, Al-Mourabitoun and ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) to finance their operations in the West African Sahel<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>World Bank Group. Country Partnership Framework for Burkina Faso for the Period FY18-FY23, Report No. 123712-BF. June 2018. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/989871531020679064/pdf/BURKINA-FASO-CPF-06112018.pdf> (Accessed on 2/03/2019).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Muriel Cote. 'Striking Gold in Burkina Faso', Focus on Land in Africa Brief, November 2013. Available at: <http://www.focusonland.com/countries/striking-gold-in-burkina-faso/> . (Accessed on 2/03/2019).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>PBC News Hour, Child Labour in Burkina Faso's Gold Rush, July 10, 2013. Available at: <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/child-labor-burkina-fasos-gold-rush> (Accessed on 02/03/2019).

<sup>6</sup>See <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-86/burkina-faso-the-problem-of-gold-smuggling/> (Accessed 26/07/2019).

<sup>7</sup>Olawole Ismail and Alagaw Ababu Kifle, New Collective Security Arrangements in the Sahel: A Comparative Study of the MNJTF and G-5 Sahel. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New Approaches to Collective Security. 2018. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/14346-20180606.pdf> . (Accessed on 30/06/2019).

## West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

Additionally, these extremist groups have exploited prevailing economic conditions in the country to recruit vulnerable youth population through the lure of financial gratification from illegal gold mining<sup>8</sup>.

Another cause for concern is the current surge in violent extremist and terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso which presents a critical risk factor that contributes to spikes in illegal gold mining activities to sustain terrorist operations in the country. While some criminal networks and conflict entrepreneurs engaged in illegal mining activities to keep their operations thriving, others also create and sustain insecurity in order to optimize the dividends from illegal mining proceeds. Already, the consequences of recent upturn in illegal gold mining activities is manifesting in the influx of migrants in mining communities, health, food and environmental security challenges. While growing insecurity in Burkina Faso has gained prominence in recent regional and global security conversations, attention to illegal mining and how it is fueling insecurity in the country is relatively minimum. These trends are worrying, particularly in light of the upcoming 2020 elections.

In light of the foregoing, the policy brief highlights the implications of illegal mining activities in the context of recent surge in security deterioration in Burkina Faso and provides recommendations for response and mitigation. The analysis in the brief is also situated within the context of the 2020 elections and the potential of an increase in incidence of violence that would undermine the conduct of the elections.

## 2. Prevailing Dynamics

Burkina Faso has been dogged by surging terrorist and violent extremist attacks as well as communal violence since the fall of President Blaise Compaore's rule in 2014. Timeline analysis indicated initial attacks were confined to the northern part of the country and was perpetrated by terrorist and extremist groups operating along the Mali and Niger borders. However, prevailing challenges with weak capacities of State security institutions provided the leverage for expansion of operations and attacks by insurgent groups to the upper west, east and the southern regions of the country. From April 2015 – June 2019,

Burkina Faso has witnessed over 283 terrorist attacks, resulting in 524 deaths and 308 injured<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, as of July 2019, the Government had extended state of emergency to 14 out of the 45 provinces of the country due to increased terrorist attacks and armed violence<sup>10</sup>. Amidst the state of insecurity, Burkina Faso has witnessed significant growth in the mining industry with cascading effect its socio-economic indicators including increased GDP and livelihood support.



Small-scale artisanal mining in Burkina Faso  
Credit: [www.journals.openedition.org](http://www.journals.openedition.org)

However, the dividends of these positive socio-economic trends are being overshadowed by the nexus between illegal mining and operations of extremist and armed groups in communities. Over the years, the activities of illegal miners are mostly confined in rural poor communities where the presence of security is fragile. Given that 43.7 per cent of Burkinabè live on less than \$1.90 a day, coupled with a high rural population of 70 per cent<sup>11</sup>, illegal mining serves as a viable livelihood support for most of the rural poor communities. Also, 80 per cent of Burkina Faso's active population is engaged in the agriculture sector, which accounts for about 35 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs about 90 per cent of the labour force in the country<sup>12</sup>.

Paradoxically, illegal mining offers alternative livelihood support for most subsistence farmers in rural communities whose farming activities have been devastated by climate risks. This economic disempowerment has also led to unemployment among population, especially the youth who find illegal mining lucrative to support their livelihood. In the two poorest

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>WANEP NEWS (January – July 2019). Available at: [www.wanepnews.org](http://www.wanepnews.org) (Accessed on 30/06/2019).

<sup>10</sup>See <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/248426/burkina-faso-state-of-emergency-extended-in-14-provinces-july-11-update-4> (Accessed on 26/07/2019).

<sup>11</sup>USAID. Climate Risks Profile. Climate Risks in Food for Peace Geographies – Burkina Faso. August 2017. Available at:

[https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/20170807\\_USAID%20ATLAS\\_FFP\\_Bur](https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/20170807_USAID%20ATLAS_FFP_Bur) (Accessed on 3/3/2019).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

regions in Burkina Faso – the North and East Regions - where there is a sense of abandonment and frustration at the failure of the State to provide basic public goods, illegal mining provides support to the local economy<sup>13</sup>. The illegal mining sector accounts for over 1 million people who engage in the exploitation of gold and other minerals<sup>14</sup>. In view of this, Government authorities tolerate illegal gold mining despite its illegal character because it is undertaken by a number of poor rural dwellers and thereby filling the gaps in Government's responsibilities in provision of human security needs of the many poor rural population. Therefore, the laws on illegal mining becomes difficult to enforce by the Government<sup>15</sup>. In terms of its impact on households, illegal artisanal small-scale mining is key in sustaining the livelihood of over 3,200,000 people, which corresponds to 18 percent of the country's population<sup>16</sup>. Studies on the income of the miners have revealed that in spite of the challenges associated with illegal artisanal small-scale mining, they generally earn a living which varies between CFAF 4,000 and 100,000 while sometimes peaking at more than a million CFA francs (US \$2000)<sup>17</sup>.



Women engage in illegal mining in Burkina Faso  
Credit: [www.journals.openedition](http://www.journals.openedition)

Additionally, the sector has spillover benefits to other income generation sectors of rural economy. These include the sale of water, food, drinks, mobile phones, motorcycles, clothes and fuel among others.

It is also worthy of note that there are a number of women involved in the illegal mining industry in Burkina Faso. Between 45,000 and 85,000 women are engaged in illegal gold mining alone<sup>18</sup>. Also, women mostly participate in illegal artisanal small-scale mining in the country as a result of limited economic empowerment. Women participate to shoulder the responsibilities of catering for their households needs including provision of basic necessities of life and paying their children's school fees<sup>19</sup>. In view of the economic incentives illegal artisanal mining provides for youth and women population, it also has the capacity to minimize the population of youth involved in violent extremism despite the spread of extremist groups activities across the country.

### 3. Illicit Mining and Implications for Security

Since mid-2018, terrorist groups operating in Burkina Faso have often acted in concert with local bandits to occupy large areas in the north, east and south-eastern parts of the country<sup>20</sup>. Such alliances facilitate the efficacy of terrorist attacks and exploitation of community vulnerabilities including gold and other mineral resources to finance their activities<sup>21</sup>. This is evident in the exploitation of the thriving artisanal gold mining activities in rural communities by terrorist and armed groups in Burkina Faso<sup>22</sup>. Foreign gold mines have also become targets of terrorist, extremist and armed groups attacks in several provinces, especially in the north of Burkina Faso<sup>23</sup>. In particular, kidnapping of foreign mining workers for ransom has become part of the criminal activities of armed groups operating in the country. Between December 2018 and February 2019, SEMAFO, one of the largest gold miners for instance experienced not less than three deadly attacks<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, a suspected terrorist group attacked Progress Mineral Inc., a Canadian mining company in Tiabongou in the eastern region, leading to the kidnapping and killing of one Canadian mine worker in January 2019<sup>25</sup>. Apart from this, local militia groups,

<sup>13</sup> Augustin Loada and Peter Romaniuk. Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Towards National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity. Global Centre on Cooperative Security. June 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Remi Bazilliers and Victoire Gerard. "The Gold Digger and the Machine: Evidence on Distributive Effect of the Artisanal and Industrial Gold Rushes in Burkina Faso". AFD Research Paper Series, No. 2018-77.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit. Muriel Cote. November 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Burkina Faso: The Challenge of Export Diversification for Landlocked Country'. Diagnostic Trade integration Study for the Integrated Framework Program. September 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer J. Hinton et al. "Women and Artisanal Mining: Gender Roles and the road Ahead", The Socioeconomic Impact of Artisanal Mining and Small-Scale Mining in Developing Countries, in G. Hilson and Pub A.A. Balkma (eds) Swets Publishers, Netherlands, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Maame Esi Eshun. "Not Just Counting their Numbers, But Making Women Artisanal Miners Count". Southern Voice. Africa Up Choice. Wilson Centre. A Blog for the African Program. Available at:

<https://africaupclose.wilsoncenter.org/not-just-counting-their-numbers-but-making-women-artisanal-miners-count/>. (Accessed on 4/03/2019).

<sup>20</sup> Australian-Africa Mineral Mining and Energy Group (AAMEGO). 'West Africa Mining Sector Conference – Summary of Key Conclusions'. Available at: [https://aamego.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/20190715\\_Media-Release\\_AAMEG-West-Africa-Mining-Security-Conference\\_KEY-SUMMARY.pdf](https://aamego.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/20190715_Media-Release_AAMEG-West-Africa-Mining-Security-Conference_KEY-SUMMARY.pdf) (Accessed on 28/07/2019).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See African Times. <https://africetimes.com/2019/01/17/canadian-man-idd-in-burkina-faso-mine-abduction/> (Accessed on 11/03/2019).

especially 'Koglweogo' - a guarantor of security for the local population in remote communities of the eastern region - also continues to exploit the same sector to sustain their operations<sup>26</sup>. The group has also been accused of abuse of human rights and other criminalities against local population. These suggest that mineral resource exploitation is increasingly becoming a tool for insurgents and other non-state armed groups to finance and strengthen their operations in the country.

The influx of migrants, especially young people and their involvement in illegal mining in communities is another critical security threat. Currently, illegal mine sites attract migrant workers from both within and outside Burkina Faso, particularly those displaced by instability in northern Mali whose identities are often not known<sup>27</sup>. In view of this, irregular and undocumented migrants could be infiltrated by extremist and criminal groups operating in the Sahel region to link up with armed groups in Burkina Faso to sustain their operations. Some of the communities mostly affected by the influx of migrants engaging in illegal mining include Central Plateau, Baskouda, Bakou and other northern provinces<sup>28</sup>. Also, with the arrival of about 24,400 refugees and returning residents from Mali as of June 2018 and 27,300 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) devastated by instability in the country<sup>29</sup>, there is the likelihood of an increase in competition over limited resources such as water, food and lands. This could also trigger resource-based conflicts in host communities. As of July 2019, nearly 220,000 IDPs were seeking refuge in communities or clustering in sites in the Sahel, North, East and the North Central Regions<sup>30</sup>. A number of such populations who find themselves in mining communities also participate in illegal mining to sustain their livelihoods<sup>31</sup>. With this, the risk of tensions and violence between local communities and migrant miners as a result of competition over limited resources is inevitable. Given the rising attacks by insurgents and influx of migrants in mining communities, the potentials of armed groups to exploit existing insecurity to expand their operations is high.

Illegal Artisanal Small Mining (ASM) activities further raise concerns about its consequences on agriculture and food security in Burkina Faso. More than a third of the country's Gross Domestic Product stems from agricultural production, especially cotton<sup>32</sup>. Subsistence agriculture and livestock are the main livelihood activities that support the country's rural populations. Already, the country is susceptible to recurrent climate shocks which continue to affect food production in the country. This is further compounded by rising security deterioration that threatens food security. Particularly in the semiarid areas, water and access to irrigation are critical for agriculture. A 2018 UN Report indicated that more than 954,300 Burkinabes in need of food security<sup>33</sup>.



A child works underground in an illegal mine near Dori, Burkina Faso  
Credit: www.southworld.net

In addition, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that an estimated 187,200 children under 5 years of age will experience severe acute malnutrition (SAM)<sup>34</sup>. This reinforces the threat posed to food security by the attraction of illicit mining and land grabbing to local communities and organized criminal groups. The recent favourable prices of gold in the global market presents an alternative to low yield and income from agriculture and drives poor rural communities and the youth population into illegal artisanal small-scale mining, making

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Op. cit. Muriel Cote, November 2013.

<sup>30</sup>Sabine Luning "Liberalisation of Mining Sector in Burkina Faso". Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 35. No. 117. Scrambling to the Bottom? Mining, Resources and Underdevelopment (Sep. 2008). Pp. 387-401. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20406528.pdf>. (Accessed on 14/03/2019).

<sup>31</sup>USAID. Food Assistance Fact Sheet, Burkina Faso. Updated August 3, 2018. Available at: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FFP%20Fact%20Sheet\\_Burkina%20Faso\\_08.03.2018.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FFP%20Fact%20Sheet_Burkina%20Faso_08.03.2018.pdf). (Accessed on 14/03/2019).

<sup>32</sup>See <https://netafrique.net/burkina-faso-pres-de-220-000-personnes-deplacées-internes-a-la-date-du-10-juillet-2019/> (Accessed on 01/08/2019).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Benno Pokomy, Sidzabda Djibril Dagamba and Christian von Luebke. 'All the gold for Nothing? Impacts of Mining on Rural Livelihood in Northern Burkina Faso'. World Development. March 2019. Research Gate.

<sup>35</sup>USAID. Food Assistance Fact Sheet, Burkina Faso. Updated August 3, 2018. Available at: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FFP%20Fact%20Sheet\\_Burkina%20Faso\\_08.03.2018.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FFP%20Fact%20Sheet_Burkina%20Faso_08.03.2018.pdf) (Accessed on 28/07/2019).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

agriculture increasingly an aging population sector<sup>35</sup>. The impact of this manifests in low productivity in food, cash crop and animal farming production<sup>36</sup>.

Also, while 18 percent of land in Burkina is cultivatable<sup>37</sup>, about 470,000 hectares are degraded every year by climate change and human activities<sup>38</sup>. The clearing of trees and shrubs, digging of wells, creating embankments and use of hazardous chemicals in processing of gold mining communities further contribute to desertification which affects soil fertility for crop cultivation<sup>39</sup>. This also compounds food insecurity which largely affects poor populations. Food shortages often result in increases in food prices that impact on household nutritional needs, particularly among children and pregnant women in poor rural communities. According to March 2019 "Cadre Harmonisé" report, about 346,000 people needed food assistance in the Sahel and Central-North Regions of the country<sup>41</sup>. This is likely to be substantially higher due to the severe impact of escalating violence on livelihoods and trade. Already, more than 10 percent of children in the country suffer acute malnutrition<sup>42</sup>.

In addition to the above, illegal mining continues to have far reaching consequences on the health security of population in mining communities. The use of harmful chemicals such as mercury, nitric acid and mills causes water and air pollution in mining communities. The consequences of this are shown in prevalence of health conditions including respiratory infections – bronchitis, pneumonia, cough, and cold – skin and eye diseases among local population in the affected communities<sup>43</sup>. Also, disposal of harmful chemicals by the illegal miners often flow into the White and Black Volta rivers, affecting fish resources and water quality<sup>44</sup>. This has implications on communities in neighbouring countries, especially Ghana

where the two rivers serve a host of communities in their crop and fish farming.

Another case in point is that most women and girls in illegal ASM camps are subjected to sexual exploitations and other forms of violence. They continue to suffer the drudgery of walking long distances to fetch firewood and water, as most of the nearby streams are either dried up or contaminated and areas laid bare by clearing of vast expanses of land for illegal ASM activities. This heightens vulnerability of women and young girls to incidents of rape and other sexual and gender-based violence as well other crimes including kidnapping, abduction and human trafficking by criminal networks and armed groups in the communities affected by insecurity<sup>45</sup>. In furtherance of this, pregnant women and girls who work in illegal artisanal mines are further exposed to harmful chemicals and unhygienic conditions, which often results in infant and maternal mortalities as well as a number of health complications.

Closely related to the above, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) has also revealed that about 700,000 adolescent and young children are involved in illegal small-scale mining in the Sahel, Central – North, West, Central and Central Plateau regions<sup>46</sup>. The average worker in Burkina Faso earns less than \$2USD a day<sup>47</sup>. Meanwhile, a family employed in illegal artisanal gold mining can earn between \$5 and \$40 (USD) a day, depending on the mines<sup>48</sup>. This has led many parents to pull out their children from schools to help in gold mines<sup>49</sup>. Already, the Ministry of Education, as of May 2019, reported that 1,933 schools have been closed due to increased insecurity, depriving 326,152 school children access to education and 9,042 teachers affected<sup>50</sup>. With this, increase in drop out in education and illiteracy among

<sup>35</sup> African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET). "The Impact of Expanding Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining on Small Holder Agriculture in West Africa: A Case Study of Burkina Faso, Ghana and Sierra Leone. Synthesis Report. [http://acetforafrica.org/acet/wp-content/uploads/publications/2017/11/ACET\\_ASMSynReport\\_OCT2017\\_FinalSinglePages-1.pdf](http://acetforafrica.org/acet/wp-content/uploads/publications/2017/11/ACET_ASMSynReport_OCT2017_FinalSinglePages-1.pdf) (Accessed on 1/08/2019).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> World Bank. (2011). Vulnerability, Risk Reduction, and Adaptation to Climate Change: Burkina Faso. Climate Risk and Adaptation Country Profile Series. World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, Climate Investment Funds, and Climate Change Team ENV, Washington, DC. Available at: [http://sdwebx.worldbank.org/climateportal/countryprofile/doc/GFDRRCountryProfiles/wb\\_gfdr climate\\_change\\_country\\_profile\\_for\\_BFA.pdf](http://sdwebx.worldbank.org/climateportal/countryprofile/doc/GFDRRCountryProfiles/wb_gfdr climate_change_country_profile_for_BFA.pdf) . (Accessed on 16/03/2019).

<sup>38</sup> Landscape News. 'Holding Back the Desert: Restoring Land in the Sahel Region in Burkina Faso'. August 27, 2018. Available at: <https://news.globallandscapeforum.org/29341/holding-back-the-desert-restoring-land-in-the-sahel-region-in-burkina-faso/> . (Accessed on 16/03/20219).

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Burkina Faso: Food Security Situation Deterioration in the Northern Areas due to Heightened Violence". GIEWS Update. 17 July, 2019. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5486en/ca5486en.pdf> (Accessed on 17/07/2019).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> See World Food Programme (WFP). Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/burkina-faso> (Accessed on 17/03/2019)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Edy Blom, 'Towards a More Responsible Mining Sector in Burkina Faso'. National Communities of The Netherlands. 12 November, 2018. Available at: <https://www.iucn.nl/en/updates/towards-a-more-responsible-mining-sector-in-burkina-faso> (Accessed on 29/07/2019).

<sup>45</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.arabnews.com/news/546916> (Accessed on 29/07/2019).

<sup>47</sup> Op.cit PBC News.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

children in the country is being compounded by illegal mining. Children are currently engaged in performing precarious tasks including digging, crushing of rocks and mercury, extraction of granites, carrying water, installing dynamites and working underground in mines, threatening



Children crush rocks at the Gorol Kadje mine, Burkina Faso  
www.unicef.org

their lives. Besides the prevalence of child labour, young girls continue to be vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and gender-based violence in illegal mines. This further exposes them to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy and early marriage. In addition, children in illegal mines are exposed to drug use and abuse which heightens their vulnerability to crimes, violence and recruitment by armed groups and organized crime networks in communities<sup>51</sup>. Illegal artisanal mining camps are also destination points for kidnapping, child and domestic human trafficking. Considering the growing activities of extremist and organized crime networks and their incursions in mine sites, the risk of recruitment of children is eminent.

In a nutshell, despite the positives associated with illegal mining activities in Burkina Faso, there are also security dimensions that need to be curtailed in efforts to mitigate the current security deterioration in the country. Disregarding this will further aggravate the growing insecurity quagmire facing the country. Also, insecurity generated by illegal mining, if ignored, will continue to undermine efforts by ECOWAS and other multilateral

actors to stem the tides of insecurity. Additionally, given the influx of migrants in mining communities and continued exploitation of illegal mining to sustain the activities of extremists and armed groups, the risk of strengthening the operations of transnational criminal networks and potential southwards spread of extremism in the sub-region is high. It could also be gleaned that the security threats associated with illegal mining activities portend some implications for Burkina Faso's Presidential and Legislative elections in 2020, if terrorist, armed groups and other conflict entrepreneurs continue to leverage on it to advance their interests in the country.

#### 4. Pitfalls in Existing Regulatory Mechanisms

The artisanal small-scale mining sector in Burkina Faso is mainly regulated by the 2003 mining code which replaced the 1997 Mining Code. In 2015, the Parliament of the political transition, "Conseil National de la Transition" revised the 2003 mining code. However, it is yet to be implemented. The Government regulates artisanal mining activities by creating a permit regime known as Authorization for Artisanal Mining (AAM). The AAM is mandated to grant permits exclusively to Burkinabè nationals or majority Burkinabè-owned companies, which is valid for two years or infinitely renewable and non-transferable<sup>53</sup>. However, in practice, AAMs are rarely held by small-scale miners. Conversely, majority of small-scale miners operate without an AAM as illegal but tolerated and thus referred to as *orpaillage* in Burkinabè parlance<sup>54</sup>.

The complexity of the procedures in acquisition of AAM permit also limits the attainment of its objective and purpose. The AAM's goal of regulating the artisanal mining sector continued to be undermined by the cumbersome procedures which inhibit majority of the miners who are predominantly illiterate<sup>55</sup>. Ultimately, permits are mostly acquired by wealthy entrepreneurs from the cities who often coerce *orpaillage* miners to sell their gold at a lower price compared to the market price. This has resulted in exploitation and disempowerment and denial of opportunities for potential miners in rural communities and has thus increased smuggling of gold to neighboring countries for better price. Such exploitations continue to

<sup>50</sup> See <https://netafrique.net/burkina-de-2015-a-2019-283-attaques-terroristes-ont-fait-524-morts-bilan-officiel/> (Accessed on 30/07/2019).

<sup>51</sup> Op.cit [www.arabnews.com/news/546916](http://www.arabnews.com/news/546916)

<sup>52</sup> Lala Safiatou Oudraougo and Patrick Mundler, 'Local Governance and Labour Organizations in Artisanal Gold Mining'. *Sustainability*, 2019, 11 (3), 616. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030616> (Accessed on 6/8/2019).

<sup>53</sup> Op.cit. Muriel Coté, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. Lala Safiatou Oudraougo and Patrick Mundler (2019).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

fuel local violent conflicts, often multiplying nationally and resulting in loss of lives<sup>56</sup>. It also results in loss of revenue to the Government.

Another pitfall in the AAM regulatory regime is that it does not confer tenure of security. This makes it prone to be overriden by industrial mining licenses. The AAM makes provisions for only one permit to be held over a single area. However, if a site under an AAM proves to be more prolific, wealthy entrepreneurs may acquire industrial mining license that entitles them to exclude pre-existing AAMs<sup>57</sup>. This arrangement is a potential source of tension and violent conflicts in communities.

Again, overcentralization of mining license limits the space for rural dwellers to participate in decisions regarding allocation of AAM. Mineral resources in Burkina Faso are legally the property of the State and therefore all licenses are acquired through the central authorities. For this reason, municipal authorities are required to give their consent for AAM to be granted by the central authority. This often limits community participation in the acquisition of AAM permit. The bureaucratic processes involved in the acquisition of permit also strain the capacity of rural poor miners.

Illegal mining activities are also governed by customary rules which have been developed endogenously over the years. Customary institutions and practices are usually relied on for allocation of lands for mining. However, there are variations in the rules and its applications depending on the traditions, customs and beliefs, especially related to land in mining communities. To this end, harmonization of rules in mining camps is a challenge.

To boost agriculture, food security and mitigate the threat of climate change on the agricultural sector, the Burkinabé Government enacted a new Agriculture Investment Code in June 2018. This is aimed at promoting productive investment in livestock, fisheries, forestry and management of fauna. It is further envisaged by the Government to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable rural farmers and population against food insecurity in communities. While the policy or project seeks to add value to agricultural production and services, it does not extend to industrial processing and marketing of products,

which are key to acceleration of agricultural growth in the country<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, although the policy is covered in principle, a crucial segment of activities necessary for enhancing sustainable growth in the agricultural sector is excluded. Additionally, provisions on employment incentives and prioritization of local agricultural products and services are also inadequate<sup>59</sup>. These fault lines continue to limit the necessary growth required to make agriculture attractive to the growing young population in the country.

## 5. Scenarios

With respect to the foregoing analysis, the policy brief envisages the following hypothetical scenarios.

### Best Case Scenario (Unlikely)

Given the increasing cases of illegal mining in Burkina Faso and its security implications, the Government and its authorized mining and security agencies ensure appropriate enforcement coordination of mining laws and policies as well as reorganize the sector to maximize its economic potential. These encompass enforcing laws governing foreign companies, cost and access to mining licenses for artisanal miners, create job opportunities for young people, provide basic social services for rural mining communities and ensure environmental preservation. This brings about sanity in the mining sector and reduces illegal mining and communal conflict, especially land disputes in mining communities. Similar to this, the Government's robust security strategies resulted in the defeat of extremist and armed groups and establish authority across affected regions facilitate the implementation of mining and agricultural regulations as well as climate adaptation policies to reduce illegal mining and its impact on the environment and livelihoods of communities.

### Most Probably (Middle) Case Scenario (Very Likely)

The Government and mining authorities continue to ignore the enforcement of laws and appropriate

<sup>56</sup>Op.cit.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Institute for Sustainable Development. "Burkina Faso Adopts a New Agricultural Investment Code: How Does it Contribute to Sustainable Development?" Available at: <https://www.iisd.org/library/burkina-faso-agricultural-investment-code> (Accessed on 11/09/2019).

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

implementation of policies to address illegal gold mining in the country. The sector continues to be exploited and mining communities are overwhelmed by illegal mining and other criminal activities. State and local authorities are constrained to provide basic social services for mining communities and reduce land related disputes. Furthermore, destructive extraction and processing of gold contaminate waterbodies used by communities and endanger public health in Burkina Faso. Government introduced revised agricultural policies hinder private sector investment and incentives for youth participation in the sector, creation of decent jobs and improvement of socio-economic livelihoods.

### **Worst Case Scenario (Likely)**

The triple effect of illegal gold mining, terrorism and organised crime remain critical to human security in Burkina Faso. While local communities are encumbered by dwindling agricultural revenue and food security, land grabbing, illicit mining and communal disputes over limited resources continue to rise. Extremist groups continue to expand their operations and cease gold mining sites including licensed operating sites which affects government revenue and FDI. Government Security Agencies including the G5 Sahel operations increase their military operations in affected communities to take back mining sites. Communities are further displaced with involvement of more illegal immigrants and youth population in illicit mining. Low farm and livestock yield are reported with global reports and concerns on food security in Burkina Faso.

## **6. Recommendations (Options for Response)**

In view of the above scenarios and analysis, the policy brief proposes the following for early response and mitigation of security threats associated illegal mining in the country.

### **The Government and Development Partners**

- The Government and relevant State institutions should review the 2015 Mining Code to align with security strategies to respond to the current realities in the mining sector and ensure effective implementation and enforcement, especially in the artisanal mining sector;
- Relevant State institutions and security agencies should intensify collaboration with the G5 Sahel mechanism, ECOWAS National Response Centres

and other development partners to strengthen the capacity of regulatory agencies to enhance enforcement of laws and improve information sharing at the community, district, regional and national levels to address the issues of illegal mining and its associated human security threats;

- The Central and Local Governments should intensify collaboration and coordination with community leaders including traditional authorities, religious leaders, land owners, women and youth groups, farmer associations and other relevant stakeholders to enhance enforcement of the AAM mining regulation and also manage the influx of migrants and available local resources to avoid communal and land related conflicts;
- The Government and development partners should strengthen cooperation to provide sustainable economic alternatives to mining for especially women and youth in communities including agroforestry, aquaculture and eco-tourism. This should also lead to a review to strengthen agricultural policies to attract increased private sector investment and youth participation;
- The Government should develop comprehensive policies to support and subsidize local small-scale enterprises to sustain the economic livelihoods of population as mechanism to mitigate their vulnerability to extremist recruitment.

### **Civil Society, Traditional Authorities and the Media**

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the media should strengthen engagement with local authorities and landowners to promote and sustain public education and sensitization on illegal mining and threats to the environment;
- Civil society and the media should promote domestication of reforms on AAM 2015 laws and host community-government partnership for development as well as promotion of partnership of broad security plan that deals with the environment, violent extremism and youth unemployment in communities.

## 7. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, mining plays a significant role in the socio-economic livelihoods of most mining communities in Burkina Faso. However, most of the activities in this sector are illegal as a result of weaknesses in the enforcement of regulations which have contributed to the surge in illegal mining activities in the country. It has been established that beyond the health, food and environmental security risks associated with illegal mining in communities, the current surge in the attacks of extremist and armed groups as well as their persistent incursions into mining communities reveal a growing evolution of the economies of conflict. What is critically required is the need to review and align the mining code with security strategies to respond to the current security dynamics in the country. It is imperative for relevant actors at national, regional and global levels to address the critical issues dominating the sector in order to mitigate the threats of violence, particularly ahead of the country's elections in 2020.

W A N E P

Building Relationships for Peace



# BURKINA FASO

West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

Trinity Avenue, Off Mile 7 Road, Achimota, Accra

P. O. Box CT4434, Cantonments, Accra-Ghana

Tel: +233 302 411638 | 302 406340 | 302 426004 | 302 408224

Email: [wanep@wanep.org](mailto:wanep@wanep.org) | Website: [www.wanep.org](http://www.wanep.org)