

ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF SMALL-SCALE MINING

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For many years, large-scale mining has supported the social and economic development of many countries. In the developing world, it will continue to provide the technological development and employment, contributing over 90% of all foreign exchange earnings. In Africa, small-scale mining is also becoming an increasingly important source of livelihood for people particularly those in rural and semi-urban areas. The economic significance of small-scale mining is seen in the provision of basic necessities, particularly to rural communities in the developing world as source of income, though it slowly becoming an economic spinner for countries like Zambia. The environment aspects result from the small-scale mining activities, which include exploration, mine development, exploitation and refining stages. In these stages, methods and techniques used can have significant impact on the environment, such as inhalation of mercury vapours during gold separation. One adverse effect is that small-scale mining is often operating informal, and hence these activities have become uncontrolled resulting in environmental degradation including loss of biodiversity and ecological systems at mining and waste disposal sites, settlement areas, and generally degradation of suitable land. Health effects may include inhalation of toxic gases and vapours, and unsafe working conditions. This often results into social conflicts mainly over water and land. This paper outlines some of these vices in the hope that better methods would be found that would take into consideration the various activities of small-scale mining and their impact on the environment and society for a better future.