

Socio-economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of micro-scale traditional gold mining in Vihiga county, Kenya

The fact that Kenya is poorly endowed with precious minerals such as gold is not in dispute! However, insignificant quantities of gold exist in various parts of the county in general and western part of Kenya in particular. Micro-scale traditional gold mining by local communities as a means of livelihood has been going on in Vihiga County, Western Kenya since the colonial era but the practice has received limited attention from researchers and scholars. This cross-sectional and descriptive study was mounted to identify and profile the socio-economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of this anthropogenic activity and make evidencebased suggestions for sustainable utilization of the non-renewable resource. A total of 80 questionnaire respondents were randomly sampled from two focal mining sites- Mukingi and Shaviringa Locations. The study relied heavily on primary data collected with the help of semi-structured questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions, interviews, observations and photography. Specific locations of mining operations were picked with the help of Global Positioning Systems (GPS). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to run frequencies for easy analysis of data. It was established that traditional gold mining is practiced by the male gender of various age groups using labour- intensive approaches aided by rudimentary tools. The lithosphere is mostly affected due to existence of open scars that keep water during rain season. Such open holes enhance pollution of underground waters sources and trap poisonous methane gas. Insecurity is also widespread due to false assumption that gold miners have money. The practice with negative impacts on human health has also lured the youth to drop out of school. It is not regulated at all despite the existence of relevant laws and poverty is the norm among the miners. This study suggests that traditional gold mining has negative long term implications on the society and the environment. It is not sustainable. Only organized and licenced groups should be allowed to practice gold mining in particular sites with the help of modern equipment.