



ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE GOLD MINING

What is artisanal and small-scale gold mining?

- Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is gold mining conducted by individuals or small enterprises with limited capital investment and production.
- An estimated 10 to 15 million miners are engaged in ASGM globally, including 4 to 5 million women and children.
- ASGM occurs in over 70 countries, almost exclusively in the developing world.
- Mercury is often used in ASGM to capture gold particles through amalgamation. The mercury is then vaporized to recover the gold.
- More than 1400 tons of mercury are released into the environment annually from ASGM, making it the largest source of mercury pollution in the world.
- ASGM is a major contributor to global gold supply, producing an estimated 12 to 15% of the world's gold.
- ASGM is also an important source of livelihood for millions of people in the developing world who have few other income-generating alternatives.
- ASGM should not be viewed as a problem to be stamped out. Rather, efforts should focus on bringing miners into the formal economy and encouraging practices that do not use mercury and minimize negative environmental and social impacts.

What are the impacts?

- Miners and their communities are directly exposed to toxic mercury, presenting a serious health hazard. The rights and health of children engaged in and affected by artisanal and small-scale mining are an issue of major concern.
- According to the World Health Organization, several studies examining children in ASGM communities have found associations between mercury levels and increased deep tendon reflexes, poor leg coordination, decreased performance on visuospatial organization tests, and reduction in motor function, attention, visual contrast sensitivity and manual dexterity.
- The International Labor Organization estimates that about one million children aged five to 17 are engaged in artisanal and small scale mining (of all types, not just gold mining). Almost all work performed by children in ASGM is hazardous and has characteristics that fit the definition of a "worst form of child labor" under ILO Convention No. 182.
- Children's involvement in ASGM using mercury is well documented. For example, children have been observed spending time in gold shops where mercury-gold amalgam is vaporized. It is also not uncommon for miners to process mercury-gold amalgam at home, with children present, in order to keep the activity secret.



What are UN Environment and the Minamata Convention doing about it?

- Under the Minamata Convention, some countries are required to develop and implement ASGM national action plans. UN Environment is developing guidance, providing technical assistance, and implementing enabling activities funded by the Global Environment Facility to help governments meet their obligations.
- At its first meeting held in Geneva from 24 to 29 September 2017, the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention will be presented for consideration and agreement to its use by Parties a guidance document on the preparation of national action plans for artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
- The UN Environment Global Mercury Partnership serves as a hub for information, best practices, and data on technical, social, gender, and labor aspects of ASGM.
- Through the Global Mercury Partnership, UN Environment is assisting governments, communities, and miners to reduce mercury use in ASGM while maintaining livelihoods.
- UN Environment will continue to work with countries affected by ASGM to promote mercury-free methods, raise awareness of the health and environmental impacts of mercury, and ensure that environment and development goals are complimentary.

Where can I discover more about ASGM in the coming days?

At the International Conference Centre in Geneva (CICG), the venue for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention taking place in Geneva from 24 to 29 September:

- **Conference room 3, Tuesday 26, September - 13:15-14:45:** Experiences of countries with artisanal and small-scale gold mining activities will be featured as part of an “MIA (Minamata Convention Initial Assessment) Clinic organized by UN Environment, UNIDO and UNDP, with representatives from Guyana, Lao PDR and Senegal
- **Exhibition space, Wednesday 27 September – 18:15-19:00,** Knowledge Lab on “Collecting, managing, and translating data into National Action Plans for ASGM” organized by UN Environment, UNITAR, Artisanal Gold Council
- **Conference room 2, Thursday 28 September - 13:30-14:45:** “High-Level dialogue on ASGM” hosted by the secretariat of the Global Environment Facility
- **Exhibition space, from 24 to 29 September 2017,** ASGM related work will be presented by exhibiting stakeholders along the “Minamata Journey”

For detailed programmes, visit the COP1 website at: <http://cop1.mercuryconvention.org/>

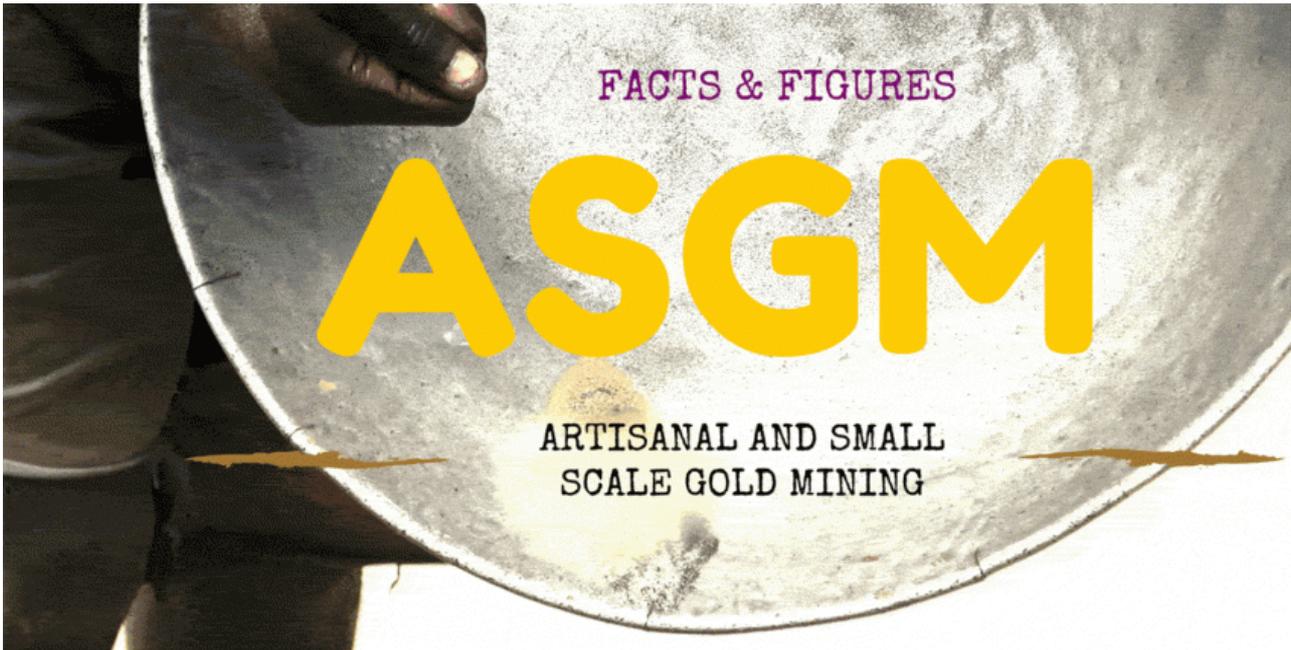
Around Geneva, as part of a series of event organized during the “Hg Week”:

- **Place des Nations, from 23 to 29 September,** discover the works on ASGM in Burkina Faso, Indonesia and the Philippines of Larry C. Price, Pulitzer award-winning documentary photographer and multimedia journalist as part of a picture exhibition organized by UN Environment in cooperation with the City of Geneva.
- **Maison de la Paix, Wednesday 27 September - 13:00-14:45:** The Graduate Institute with the support of Transparency SA and the Geneva Environment Network, with the participation of UN Environment Executive Director, Erik Solheim will host a special session on gold “Make Mercury History along the Gold Supply Chain”. The session will explore how each actor of the gold supply chain - many of which are represented in Switzerland – has a responsibility and a role to play towards mercury-free gold production and the sustainable development of the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector. Register online at: www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/?q=fr/hg-week-gold

Where can I learn more?

Visit the website of the UN Environment Global Mercury Partnership:

www.unep.org/chemicalsandwaste/global-mercury-partnership



FACTS & FIGURES

ASGM

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SCALE GOLD MINING

10-15 million miners



source: Global Mercury Project 2004

including 4-5 million women and children

12-15 % of world
gold supply



source: UNEP, 2013, Mercury: Acting Now!

More than 1,400
tons of mercury per
year released to
the environment



largest source of
mercury pollution
in the world

source: 2013 UNEP Global Mercury Assessment

over 70
countries
affected

source: www.mercurywatch.org



selected ASGM locations

designed by M. Stylo



Mercury in artisanal and small-scale gold mining

