



Gender

Burkina Faso

How including women's experiences has changed a traditional, male-dominated mining sector



Context

Burkina Faso's political and legal framework is conducive to women's full participation in socio-economic development. The national "Gender" policy, adopted in 2009, is the main point of reference for promoting equal opportunities for men and women. This policy formed the basis for a guide to mainstreaming gender issues in sectoral policies: in practice, this acts as a strategic planning and governance tool for public actions that support participation by both men and women in the development process in Burkina Faso.

Mining is one of the most dynamic sectors in the country's economy. In 2010, the sector contributed 22.68 trillion CFA francs to the national budget, and in 2018, the 52.62 tonnes of gold and 165,000 tonnes of zinc produced on an industrial scale generated 1.54 trillion francs in export revenues. The proportion of these revenues paid into to the state budget was 266 billion CFA francs, i.e. 17.27% of the sector's annual turnover.

Alongside the major industrial mining sites, there is also a form of small-scale mining, which in most cases, is not subject to any regulatory framework. Just 34 of the more than 800 sites listed by the national agency responsible for overseeing small-scale and semi-mechanised mines (ANEEMAS) in 2018, had a valid operating permit. The sector employs over 1.5 million people, including women. However, it must be said that it is a sector in which gold smuggling,



child labour, prostitution, violence, drug taking and other offences are commonplace.

In spite of a theoretically positive legal framework, the mining sector still lags behind on incorporating gender issues in the way that it should. The distribution of mining revenues and social expenditure, in particular, fail to take gender into account. The number of women employed in industrial mines remains low. The implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) has not yet provided an opportunity to bring gender equality to the fore as a major topic. **The EITI Report 2016 indicates, in this respect, that women represent 2.93% of the total workforce in industrial mines.** Apart from reporting strictly numerical data, the EITI Reports don't place sufficient emphasis on women's participation in and contribution to development. In small-scale mines, women play a secondary role – relegated essentially to tasks such as transporting or cleaning the ore – and are underpaid.

There are numerous reasons for the limited success of the gender policy. Its implementation has been ineffective and the guide to mainstreaming gender issues into public policies appears to be defunct; another factor is the influence – still very dominant – of socio-cultural traditions that view work in the mining sector as inherently for men, and which relegate women to household chores.

Introduction: Paving the way for gender mainstreaming

In practice, therefore, women are in an unfavourable situation. As a result, a number of key actors in civil society and the mining industry are involved in promoting women's rights and taking their specific needs into account in the governance of natural resources.

AFEMIB is one of these key actors: it is aimed exclusively at women, working either for the public authorities, in mining companies, or in businesses that supply mining goods and services. It is currently running advocacy campaigns to encourage more consideration of women in municipal and regional development plans and in this case, in the governance of the mining sector's local development fund (FMDL), so that women too can benefit from it. It works with small-scale mining sites and argues for a switch in economic activities for women, who work in them under appalling health and hygiene conditions. In 2019, AFEMIB helped over 200 women working in small-scale mines to obtain official documents, including birth certificates and national identity cards. This has allowed the women concerned to take out microloans, with the aim of developing income-generating activities.

In addition, several mining companies run initiatives that contribute to addressing the specific needs of women. The mining company Essakane S.A., for example, has implemented



Registration of birth certificates and delivery of CNIB (National Identity Cards Burkinabe): these documents help facilitate access of women to vital records and allow them to apply for micro-credits. The CNIB were symbolically given by the head of the village to the Mayor of the town of Bourdry.

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Delivery of certificates: Certificates received by these women about their training in shea butter processing, handed out in by the Mayor of the commune of Boudry.

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a specific policy to support women that allows them to be redeployed to less strenuous work during pregnancy. In addition to the three months' leave provided for in law, women who wish to can, on an exceptional basis, extend their maternity leave by 14 months. This allows them to stay at home to look after their children on half pay, with the reassurance that they will be able to return to their job at the end of the period.

Actions taken by key actors

AFEMIB: Placing community voices at the forefront

AFEMIB was formed on 3 December 2000 and officially recognised in 2004.¹ Its authorisation to operate was renewed on 16 January 2017. Its main aim is to *"Contribute to capacity building for women and increase their responsibilities in the mining sector to provide an optimal response to their specific socioeconomic needs"*. AFEMIB is an association born from the commitment of a small number of women working in the mining sector. It currently has over 100 members

1. Authorisation No. 2004-420/MATDS/SG/DGLPAP/DOASOC.

from various backgrounds, including mining companies, the Ministry of Mines and Quarrying, suppliers of mining goods and services, gold panning, etc.

Its actions are part of the broader conversation on more effective consideration of gender-related issues and aim to reduce inequalities in the mining sector, which is dominated by men. It places significant emphasis on the most vulnerable women, children and girls, who are the main target audiences for its activities.

Although AFEMIB initially concentrated on the small-scale mining sector, it has expanded the scope of its activities over the years and now also targets the industrial sector, where it works to defend women's rights.

Ensuring women at small-scale mining sites are included

■ Gaining an understanding of the reality of women

The association visits small-scale mining sites to observe women's living and working conditions and has recorded the inequalities that exist between men and women. The site managers, who are responsible for



Awareness: Awareness raising session run by AFEMIB on the sites of Boudry gold panning, about 120 km from Ouagadougou. The sessions focused on retraining, health, hygiene and non-presence of children on mining sites.

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buying and selling the gold, are generally men, while women are assigned to tasks such as transport, crushing and washing the ore, for which they receive a paltry level of pay. As a result, even though the women's work contributes to generating income, it is the men who benefit most. Moreover, the women have no choice but to bring their children to the sites with them, which exposes them to disease and takes them out of school. In brief, "the women are subject to a different kind of slavery", according to Aida Tamboura, president of AFEMIB.

■ **Awareness-raising activities**

The association tackles a range of themes, from gender equality to good hygiene and sanitation practices, women and children's health, environmental protection, entrepreneurship, education and human rights, particularly women's rights.

■ **Keeping children away from mining sites**

The association has funded the building of nurseries close to sites, with all the mothers helping to run them by taking turns looking after the children, while others work.

■ **Combating the harmful effects of mercury**

Mercury is a hazardous chemical substance used in processing the ore. AFEMIB has given women a device called a "retort", which recovers the mercury and prevents it from being released into the environment. The mercury recovered is reused by the women. According to the president of AFEMIB, however, women working on small-scale mining sites do not always comply with protecting the environment by using the retort because they say that "processing is slower".

AFEMIB actions at industrial sites

The 2015 Mining Code sought to mitigate the inadequate support provided for local development by the industrial mining sector by setting up a number of funds, including the FMDL, to fund projects by local authorities (municipal and regional councils). AFEMIB has found that women's concerns are inadequately addressed in not only the 2015 Mining Code, but also the decree creating the FMDL and its implementing legislation. It is concerned about the consequences for women from communities impacted by the opening of new mines and their



limited access to the fund, and therefore engages in advocacy with a particular focus on:

- Informing and raising awareness about the specific needs of women, which must be taken into account in using the fund;
- Allocating 30% of the fund to projects that benefit women;
- Adopting measures to ensure gender is taken into consideration in the governance of the fund.

Its advocacy campaign includes a range of activities, such as:

- Drafting and adopting an advocacy strategy, combined with an advocacy document;
- Setting up a group of 10 people with responsibility for organising activities, monitoring and reporting;
- Press conference for the launch of the advocacy campaign in Ouagadougou;
- Organisation of a major conference in Ouagadougou, alongside the 2018 West Africa Mining Activities Week (SAMAOW);
- Presenting radio programmes and debates in Ouagadougou and in the provinces;
- Presenting television programmes, including one broadcast on the national public television channel;
- Handing over a memorandum to the Prime Minister;
- Direct meetings with the authorities, including the Ministry of Women's Rights, the Ministry for Decentralisation and the Ministry for Mines and Quarrying;
- Organisation of four local information workshops in four municipalities: each conference brings together members of

the municipal council, women's associations, traditional and religious leaders, journalists and other relevant people; the workshop is covered by the media and a dedicated radio broadcast.

Targets of activities

- Associations of female gold panners
- Associations and unions of male gold panners
- The government of Burkina Faso (the Ministry of Mines, Ministry of Women and Ministry of Finance)
- Mining companies
- Representatives of decentralised authorities
- Association of municipal authorities in Burkina Faso (AMBF)
- Association of regional authorities in Burkina Faso (ARBF)
- Association of mining communities in Burkina Faso (ACMB)
- Donors to Burkina Faso

Barriers to AFEMIB actions

- Some civil-society organisations believe that the fact that some AFEMIB members work in mining companies is an obstacle. They refuse to enter into partnership with it, because the president of the association is also the managing director of a mining company.
- The insecurity in the country has slowed down awareness-raising, monitoring and advocacy activities, because mining sites are located in areas targeted by terrorist attacks.
- The weight of tradition: it is common for gold panners working on site to refuse to listen to AFEMIB, because it is made up of women.



- Women sometimes stand apart during awareness-raising activities at small-scale mining sites, since they can be censored by the men if they want to speak up without their permission.
- Voluntary involvement: all members of the association are in salaried employment and therefore do not always have the time to devote themselves to its work.
- AFEMIB does not have access to reliable, long-term funding; it doesn't have its own head office or staff to ensure its continued operation, monitor its activities or in particular, seek funding.

Results achieved

- The creation of a national monitoring and funds distribution committee was planned as part of the operational arrangements for the FMDL. Civil society organisations occupy two seats on the committee and one has been allocated to AFEMIB in response to its advocacy campaign to include gender issues in the governance of the fund.
- Men have been made aware of messages communicated through the advocacy

campaign at some small-scale mining sites, through gold panners' associations and unions. Women are now treated better and receive income from secondary gold processing. They own hangars that they let out to gold panners, while some of them manage mines and pay those who extract the ore.

- One woman from Ghana, who was working as a prostitute at one of the sites, responded directly to awareness-raising messages about the necessity of switching to a different sector and is now a wholesaler selling bottled water in Tamalé, a town 200 km from the border with Burkina Faso.
- Provincial directors of education have responded to awareness-raising activities by implementing measures so that the parents of children forced to leave school to go to gold panning sites are called in by head teachers and asked not to take their children out of class.
- According to evidence from health workers, the number of people visiting health centres has increased in response to the same awareness-raising activities. Women are



Sesame: this woman, a previous mining site gold digger from Yeou, about 200 km from Ouagadougou, has been able to convert to a new income-generating activity working a sesame field, thanks to AFEMIB.

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coming forward voluntarily for HIV testing and seeking medical help for respiratory diseases.

- Entrepreneurship: clear messages have also been communicated on the opportunities for economic development in the sector and women have started to believe in their potential. At the mining site in Bounbou, in the Eastern region, a woman submitted a bid and won the catering contract for daily workers: she now serves 400 meals a day.
- In Yéou, in the Centre-North region, 40 women have switched to working in agriculture, livestock farming or vegetable growing; some are producing potatoes, which they sell in Ouagadougou, the capital.



Shea Butter: Women gold panners at the Boudry mining site, located about 120 km from Ouagadougou, have reconverted to other income-generating activities, including the manufacture of shea butter, thanks to AFEMIB.

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- In Boudry, in the Central Plateau region, trained women are now engaged in modern forms of poultry farming and others have switched to making soap from shea butter. AFEMIB has intervened to facilitate access

to credit from the Caisse populaire, a microfinance organisation.

- AFEMIB has also helped people to access their official documents by funding the production of birth certificates and national identity cards: 217 birth certificates and 174 identity cards were issued in Yéou in 2019, with 71 birth certificates and a similar number of identity cards issued in Boudry.

Lessons learned

- AFEMIB is the only civil-society organisation in the mining sector open only to women. It is a prime example both within the country and elsewhere, which explains why multiple partners (including Canada, the World Bank and the Chamber of Mining) organise activities with it.
- AFEMIB is a pioneer in its field, having highlighted the inequalities in the mining sector and working to remedy them. It contributes to sharing best practices, including with the mining companies concerned.

Testimonials from other stakeholders on AFEMIB's actions

- **Mr Issaka Yameogo** is the mayor of Yalgo and president of the association of mining municipalities in Burkina Faso. His town has been particularly involved in AFEMIB's advocacy campaign around the FMDL. He acknowledges the association's *raison d'être* on the basis that without women, there can be no development. The advocacy campaign helps him to identify the right arguments for ensuring women are in a better position on the municipal council and the fund's monitoring committee. The mayor has committed to setting over 50% of the FMDL aside for activities that benefit women in particular.



- For the Ministry of Mines and Quarrying, AFEMIB is an officially recognised institution, which is why it can be consulted as a stakeholder.
- AFEMIB is a member of the EITI-Burkina Faso Multi-Stakeholder Group representing civil society, which has six seats.
- It also has a voice in the National Office of Environmental Impact Assessments, the public body responsible for approving the environmental and social impact studies produced by the mining companies.
- It is a partner of the project to improve and monitor the extractive industry in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa (PASIE) set up by the country's National Audit Office.

Essakane S.A.: a mining company taking steps for more gender inclusion

Essakane S.A. is a subsidiary of the Canadian group IAMGOLD and operates the largest mine in Burkina Faso. It began operating in 2010, after investing a total of FCFA 408 billion. It is the country's largest employer, with 2,430 employees, of whom 267 (11% of the workforce) are women.

According to the company's Director of Communications, Marie Diop, it applies management standards based on the principle of "respect for the right of all employees to fair treatment, equality of opportunity and a working environment free from any form of discrimination or harassment".

Measures to address needs specific to women have been adopted at the mine:

- **Working arrangements for pregnant women**
Pregnant women who do strenuous work (such as driving heavy machinery, geological work that requires the use of force, etc.) are

reallocated to less physically demanding jobs for their own well-being and that of their child. Women who experience difficulties during their pregnancy can start their maternity leave early. They continue to be paid until they give birth.

■ **Protecting maternity leave**

At Essakane S.A., women who wish to can extend their maternity leave by up to 14 months after their three months' statutory leave. This allows them to stay at home to look after their child, while continuing to receive half their salary.

In contrast, maternity leave entitlement through the country's Labour Code is for the duration of three months. In practice, motherhood is often a reason why women lose their jobs: some companies refuse to hire women to avoid having to find a replacement during their three months' maternity leave, while others take advantage of maternity leave to dismiss their female employees. In some cases, women are



Awa Karembega: Working at the department of Health and Safety. She benefited from 14 months of maternity leave.

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pushed to resign from their job when becoming a mother.

Under the country's Labour Code, all women are entitled to "breastfeeding leave" after giving birth, which sets aside one hour a day for breastfeeding. Essakane S.A. has introduced different working hours for breastfeeding women, so that their working days start at 8am and finish at 3.30pm. Each relevant department will adapt its work during these periods to cover the person who is absent.

Children are prohibited on site, so the women concerned are given accommodation in the neighbouring town of Dori, 45 km away; a special shuttle bus takes them from home to the mine in the morning and back in the evening, free of charge.

■ Testimonials from beneficiaries

Lawyer Fatoumata Barry, Adèle Ouédraogo, a photographer who works for the communications department, and Dicko Mariam, a member of support staff, all took advantage of the "exceptional" maternity leave of 14 months. They believe the arrangements are beneficial for both women and their babies, particularly because they



Francine Traoré: Working at the department of Health and Safety. She benefited from 12 months of maternity leave. When she returned from her leave, her role was waiting for her.

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knew they will still have a job at the end of their leave. In their view, these measures help reassure women at work, offer them a sense of job security and help them to thrive professionally. ■

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