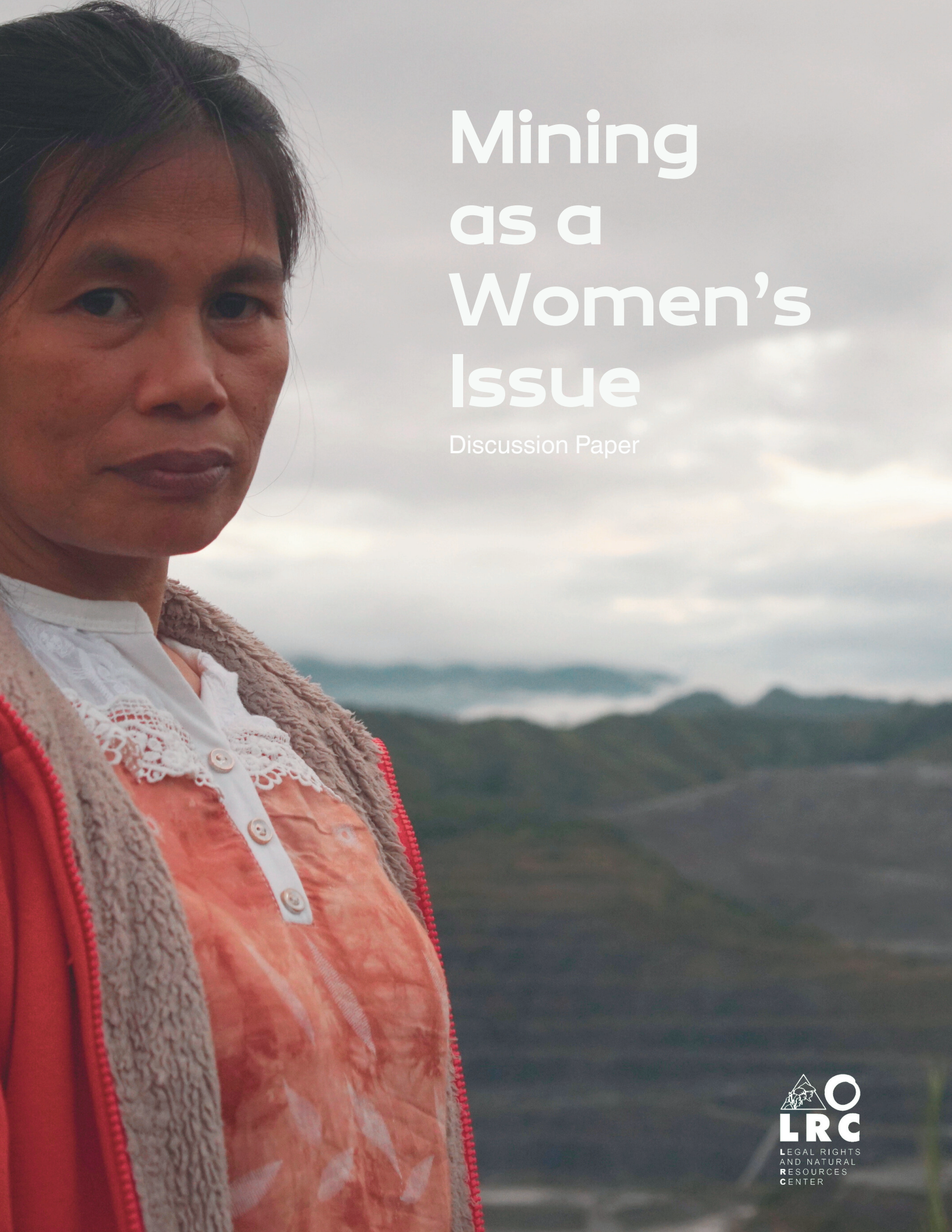

Mining as a Women's Issue

Discussion Paper

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Mining as a Women's Issue

Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center -
Friends of the Earth Philippines

The Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC) is a legal services, research and policy, and advocacy institution that works for the recognition and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and upland rural poor communities to land and environment. LRC is the Philippines member of Friends of the Earth International.

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"Mining as a Women's Issue" is an excerpt from the article "Critiquing the Alternative Minerals Management Bill from a Gender Justice Framework," written by Pocholo Velazquez of the University of the Philippines Center for Women's and Gender Studies, and E.M. Taqueban and Maya Quirino of LRC.

Cover Photo: Myrna Duyan, a Tuwali indigenous woman who has opposed the OceanaGold mining project in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya. Credit: LRC.

Mining as a Women's Issue

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Overview

The discussion of women and mining has mostly focused on the economic side, particularly on women's participation in labor. Studies have found that women often miss out on potential benefits from extractive industries and bear an unequal share of their burdens (Eftimie, Heller, & Strongman, 2009; UN Women, 2016). For instance, formal extractive industry jobs traditionally go to men rather than women, with men having better access to education, coupled with mining jobs being perceived as requiring a certain degree of physical strength, producing a profound effect on the employment of women in mining (Eftimie, et al., 2009; Chaloping-March, 2006a). Chaloping-March (2006b) highlights the "extremely faint presence of women" in formal occupations in the mining sector in the Philippines, with a total of 40 professional women engineers from 1927 to 2003.

Aside from the perception of women lacking the strength to do work in mining, women are prohibited from working in mines due to superstitious beliefs, such as women miners driving minerals further down the earth, and female spirits becoming jealous of women workers thus preventing mineral extraction. Additionally, women are seen as distractions within the mines, because mining work often forces workers to remove their clothes due to extreme temperatures inside the mining tunnels (Chaloping- March, 2006b).

Also, potential pregnancies may mean more time away from mining work, which poses potential health risks for women (Perks, 2012). The compounded effects of mining on women challenge the role of women within the community, where women are important in terms of food security, are critical to community stability, cohesiveness and morale, and are primary agents in facilitating change (Hinton, Veiga, & Beinho, 2003). These systemic factors have resulted in a loss of status for women and the entrenchment of male privilege due to mining activities (Jenkins, 2014). This inequity is transmitted from the mining industry to the community; the unequal economic and social relationships between men and women seemingly imposed by the mining industry feed into and reinforce the subordinate position of women in the community (Lahiri-Dutt, 2007).

Beyond women's limited participation in the industry, there are even more sinister risks that women face when they are able to directly or indirectly participate. Studies have called attention to the structural changes and challenges that the introduction of mining operations can bring to a community (Jenkins, 2014; ERI, HRRCC, & MWC, 2016; IFC, 2018; Tolonen, 2019; Atim, Mwangoka, Martins and Rickard, 2019). The rapid transition from subsistence to cash economies connected with the introduction of mining has been found to lead to tensions within families and communities around how finances and resources are managed, which can often lead to increased violations against women's rights (Jenkins, 2014).

A report on gender and mining in Africa (Atim, Mwangoka, Martins and Rickard, 2019) found that for women who work as large-scale mining employees there is a high rate of sexual harassment, "with evidence of women having to provide sexual services to men in return for assistance." Cases of rape as well as sexual harassment have also been reported. For women working in artisanal small-scale mining, their experiences are markedly gendered: "cultural beliefs around women, as well as gendered constraints to access and control over resources concentrate women in lower paid and often more hazardous tasks in the sector," which is ultimately constitutive of socio-economic violence (2019: 20).

The issues that women face in relation to mining demand broader frames of analysis. If mining is to provide fundamental improvements in women's lives, a frame that addresses the systemic roots of gender inequality and inequity must be considered. The rise of the mining industry is a manifestation of the valorization of nature, one of the hallmarks of capitalism (Polanyi, 2004). Today, natural resources in the Global South are harnessed primarily by and for Global North economies in support of an imperial mode of living (Wissen & Brand, 2018).

Ecofeminists contend that the exploitation of nature is a function of patriarchy, of which neoliberalism is its modern face. For ecofeminist Susan Griffin, the domination of women and nature is the result of a male conspiracy (Christ, 1991). Taboos against mining were smashed by new patriarchs to extract minerals, and science is largely based on the killing of nature as a living organism and its transformation into a huge reservoir of natural resources that can ultimately make Man independent of Mother Nature (Mies, 1998).

Large-scale mining activity, therefore, is a fundamentally destructive activity that proceeds from an extractive and transactional relationship with nature.

As traditional food gatherers and healers who turn to the environment as a natural pantry and pharmacy, women suffer immensely from destructive mining. Beyond viewing the detrimental effects of mining on women, however, ecofeminists point out that the destruction of nature and the exploitation of women's reproductive roles are inherent in mining. Mining is a model of accumulation shaped by male power.

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As such, from Masbate to Nueva Vizcaya, Palawan to South Cotabato, community and indigenous women leaders have resisted and continue to resist mining activities, risking life and limb. It is in part because of their struggles that foreign mining corporations have decried 'resource nationalism' in the Philippines (Galang, 2019). But such is the grip of the mining industry on the national development discourse that the government has continually propped up mining as a critical industry for economic growth.

Women's participation in mining must look beyond the outcome of gender equality in mining by appreciating how such an outcome also necessitates changes in existing practices of masculinity (Laplonge, 2016) and the interrogation of the modes of patriarchy. This appreciation must consider feminist interpretations of gender, otherwise it will fail to significantly impact on the lives of women (2016: 6). Moreover, the consideration of ecological costs, as part of the industry's responsibility, must be a core factor in determining the net effects of mining. Simply having more women in the mining industry will not suffice; rather, it must be ensured that women's participation does not "result in the dominant society increasing the damage done to nature, as more women would have access to a lifestyle which [already] places a burden on nature" (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000: 33 in Laplonge, 2016).

Women from different generations take up the cudgels for the Alternative Minerals Management bill, which seeks to transform the mining sector. Credit: Leon Dulce/ LRC.

These assertions must help frame any and all discourses around extractive activities. For example, the Alternative Minerals Management bill (AMMB), a legislative proposal in Congress, gives elbow room for mineral extraction—albeit only under stringent environmental, economic and social considerations. Women's autonomy and the gender-differentiated impacts of mining must inform the bill and other such frameworks. These frameworks must adopt a gender justice lens to respect women's agency and decision making over the sustainable, community-based management of natural resources. Such a frame is superior to the promise of economic benefits from mining.

Impacts of Extractive Industries on Women

Women have often been seen as unsuitable for large-scale mining work because of the entrenched perception, even among women, that the work involved is too strenuous for them (Chaloping-March, 2006a). As a result, women are relegated to informal or subsistence employment, such as household maintenance, finding and preparing food through subsistence farming, and washing clothes. It is the men who work in the mines, while women stay at home to manage and maintain the household. This poses a wide range of issues and risks for women. For women who work in the mining industry, this emphasis on the masculine nature of the sector may also serve to lend the excuse for, or diminish culpability of, mining corporations from the sexual and gender-based violence that occurs in the industry by framing the violations as an expected consequence of male dominated spaces, “painting men as inherently predatory, without reflecting on the power that mining operations hold over their employees and surrounding communities” (Atim, et. al., 2019: 18).

Under the Philippines' Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), the State must protect women from discrimination and rights violations—including those by private corporations and entities. This mandate explicitly applies to companies operating in extractive industries, holding them accountable under the law.

Women's livelihood and food security

Women's productive role in agriculture has been impacted by mining activities in their area (Cariño, 2002), thereby decreasing levels of food security (Hinton, et al., 2003). Subsistence farming and cash cropping have diminished due to loss of land appropriated toward mining activities (Bose, 2004). Farming fields where women traditionally work have dried up due to mining activities, and, coupled with low soil fertility, have forced women to seek informal jobs such as prostitution and other dangerous occupations (Cariño, 2002).

Access to economic benefits

When in control of financial resources, women are more likely to devote these to food, healthcare, and education. Since most families in mining communities are headed by men, women do not have direct or free access to the purported economic gains derived from the mining industry. The traditional economic assumptions of a unitary household wherein resources earned by men will be passed on to the family are not often followed, hence, economic resources are not spent on areas that women traditionally prioritize, such as family-related matters (Eftimier, et al., 2009). Instead, men spend on luxury items such as alcohol, cigarettes, prostitution, and gambling, which in turn generates their own sets of problems for the women and the domestic life of families (Eftimie, et al., 2009).

Without access to formal jobs in mining areas, women tend to become more dependent on their husbands and male family members (Hill, Madden, & Collins, 2017). This in turn facilitates exclusion from decision-making processes in the family and in the community in general. Additionally, the rapid transition from subsistence to cash economies pervasive in mining areas leads to tensions within families pertaining to who manages the finances and how, leading to a host of negative issues such as domestic violence (Jenkins, 2014).

> Mamamatay na ang ilog, at risk ang safety ng pagkain, apektado ang hangin, namamatay at pumapayat ang mga hayop dahil naiinom ang mga kemikal. (Nagkakaroon ng) fishkill o fish depletion.
> -Palaw'an woman
> [The river died. At risk is food safety. The air is contaminated. Animals are growing thin and are dying because they drink the chemicals. (This also results in) fishkill or fish depletion.]

> The Magna Carta of Women guarantees women in marginalized sectors equal rights to land, water, and natural resources within their communities and ancestral domains. This includes rights to enjoyment, use, and management of these resources, while also ensuring food security protections [sec 20 (b) (5)].

Conflict with traditional roles

Relegated to working in household maintenance and related activities, women are impacted adversely by the environmental effects of mining operations (Eftimie, et al., 2009). Loss of land used for subsistence farming may mean a diminished ability for women to provide food and potable water for their families, roles that are traditionally associated with women (Eftimie, et al., 2009; Cariño 2002). As a result, women need more time and effort to secure food and water for their families, further reducing time for other activities such as schooling for their children (Eftimie, et al. 2009). Additionally, women are forced to juggle domestic tasks with informal work associated with mining (Eftimie, et al., 2009). These produce more burdens for women in mining communities.

> They [mining companies] exposed the land, making the mountains color brown.
> - Abra woman

Health impacts

One of the most obvious impacts of the extractive industry on women relates to health. Derivatives of mining activities (mainly arsenic, lead, cadmium, copper, and mercury) cause harm to vulnerable subgroups in the community, particularly children, the elderly, and women (Eftimie, et al., 2009), when these toxic substances are expelled from mining activities and nd their way to rivers and basins that these communities rely on for sustenance. There is clear and undeniable evidence pointing to adverse effects of mining activities on the health of people living in mining areas: skin rashes, headaches, stomach pains, coughing up blood, blindness (Valderrama & Hudtohan, 2015); gastroenteritis, inflammation of the lungs and other respiratory diseases (McAndrew, 1999); stillbirths, birth defects, and miscarriages (Perks, 2012; Hinton, et al., 2003).

Aside from these, mining activities have also been implicated in the rise of HIV/AIDS in mining communities, especially among young women who work in mine-related jobs such as bringing materials and food to miners, and working in bars and restaurants (Macdonald, 2002). The spread of sexually transmitted infections has also been linked to labor migration, that is, from outsiders coming into mining communities for long-term work (Corno & de Walque, 2012).

DENR AO 2017-15 mandates public participation in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes—a prerequisite for Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) approval—its commitment to gender inclusivity is superficial. The order mentions gender concerns only once and without further elaboration.

Once again, the burden of these health-related impacts of the extractive industry disproportionately affect women more than men. This is because women stand as primary caregivers for family members who become sick due to the environmental waste from mining (Hargreaves, n.d.). This leads to increase care costs, and time spent caring for the sick for women in the household, which further diminishes the time women spend on schooling for their children and maintaining the household.

Male-dominated policies and practices in community consultation and decision-making processes

Women tend to be less involved or less participative in community consultations and decision-making involving all pertinent steps in the mining process, from the consent given to mining companies to how compensation should be allocated (Scheyvens & Lagisa, 1998; Byford, 2002; Lahiri-Dutt, 2007). Indeed, mining companies assume that men speak on behalf of the community (Scheyvens & Lagisa, 1998), which is unsurprising given the predominantly male workforce employed by such companies. Traditionally, cultural norms disadvantage women from speaking up and participating in community discussions (Byford, 2002; Macintyre, 2007).

This lack of involvement by women in mining areas affects the prioritization of funds generated by the extractive industry for the communities. Men tend to prioritize funds for relatively short-term, low-impact allocations such as infrastructure and construction, while women favor more sustainable and long-term projects such as nutrition and health-related priorities, education, and capacity-building (Eftimie, 2009). This difference in prioritization also trickles into the basic family unit: Lahiri-Dutt (2011a) found that "more money remained within the family and was spent on the creation of assets when women were part of consultations involving compensation for land."

> Hindi lang dapat puro kalalakihan kung hindi pati mga babae rin [It shouldn't be just men, but also women].
> - Abra woman

Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW Articles 13 and 14(2)(g), governments must ensure rural and indigenous women's equal rights to land and natural resources. This requires dismantling discriminatory customs and laws through policy reforms, legal protections, and institutional changes—guaranteeing women equal ownership and control, regardless of marital status.

T’boli women preparing food in Lake Sebu, where a coal mine threatens their livelihoods. Credit: Joolia Demigillo/LRC.

Violence against women and security issues

The presence of large-scale mining operations in communities have been accompanied by increased incidents of violence against women, attributed in part to the transition from a predominantly subsistence agricultural source of livelihood to a cash- economy (Jenkins, 2014). As men in the community have more access to cash through work for mining companies, this leads to higher levels of alcohol consumption and subsequently higher incidences of domestic violence (Perks, 2012; Byford, 2002).

The loss of accustomed livelihoods for women, coupled by their exclusion from opportunities provided by mining companies, force women to leave their communities, take on menial jobs, or even resort to prostitution and sex work to survive (Eftimie, et al., 2009). This is exacerbated by the demand for sex work from transient male migrant workers (Perks, 2012). The arrival of mining companies and cash economies, in e ect, spurs the opening of bars, nightclubs, and brothels to satisfy the demands of a predominantly male workforce (Werthermann, 2009). This is compounded by the macho culture often seen in male miners, leading to abuse of women (Hinton, et al., 2009).

Sexual and gender-based violence against women in the mining industry

The mining industry is largely a male dominated sector. In terms of employment, mining companies generally only have 5% female employees (Eftimie, Heller, & Strongman, 2009 in Atim, et. al., 2019). Women often occupy informal, non-core roles that reduce their opportunity for promotion and production bonuses. These positions are commonly subordinate to their male counterparts that in turn shape the power dynamics in the workplace, where female employees have been subjected to forms of sexual violence including rape and sexual harassment (Jenkins, 2014; Kaggwa, 2019 in Atim, et. al., 2019).

Even those not directly employed by mining companies are impacted by sexual and gender-based violence imputable to mining operations. Mining companies command considerable power over communities, either as employers or as service providers through their corporate social responsibility programs. Women who experience sexual and gender-based violence often do not report harassment for fear of reprisal—that their partners or family members who are employed by the mining company may lose their jobs, or that their community may stand to lose the services provided by the company (Atim, et. al., 2019: 19).

Intimidation, harassment and criminalization of women advocates

Women who defend their communities, the environment, and their land face risks and gender speci c challenges (Barcia, 2017; OHCHR, 2019). When women confront the mining industry, they are not only challenging corporate power but also a dominant development paradigm that is deeply entrenched in patriarchy (Barcia, 2017: 5). Women are at greater risk of being slandered and stigmatized[i] — gender inequalities and stereotypes are used to intimidate, if not silence, them (2017: 20).

Self-determination under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICCPR/ICESCR) Article 1 guarantees all peoples —including women—the right to shape their development. Especially for women, their participation must go beyond token inclusion: international law requires it to be equal, transformative, and free from barriers.

Particularly, indigenous women who assert their rights and ways of life from environmental destruction face grave danger. In Nueva Vizcaya, indigenous women of the Tuwali community who protested against mining corporation OceanaGold were forcibly restrained by the police (Flores-Obanil, 2020). Women are targeted both as defenders of rights and as women challenging gender norms. In many communities, women, cognizant of the life- giving force of nature, lead the right to manage their natural resources (Abano, 2020).

> Ako naman ay naging malakas dahil ayaw kong mangyari ang mga epekto ng mining sa aking pamilya at sa future generation, kaya't tumutulong ako sa pakikipaglaban sa mining.
> - Palaw'an woman
>
> [On my part, I found the strength to fight because I don't want these negative effects of mining to happen to my family and the future generation, so I help in resisting].

Conclusion: Gendered Ecology

This paper has sought to present the multifaceted impacts of mining on women, whose voices and struggles are often marginalized in both industry discourse and policy responses. Mining operations disrupt not only ecosystems but the social and economic fabric of communities, with women bearing the burden of long-entrenched gender inequalities.

Mining reshapes cultural landscapes. It displaces Indigenous and rural women from their traditional roles as stewards of land and water. They are sidelined from decision-making processes while they are exploited for their unpaid care labor. Environmental degradation increases their household burdens.

Mining economies reinforce patriarchal structures. The erosion of subsistence livelihoods forces many women into precarious informal labor, while the influx of extractive industry workers often heightens risks of gender-based violence and the commodification of women's bodies. Women's resistance and their movements—while powerful—are frequently met with repression, threats, and violence. This underscores the urgent need for gender-just policies that recognize their agency in environmental governance, protection. and conservation.

The toxic legacies of mining—polluted water, deforestation, and soil degradation—disproportionately affect women. Their daily survival and community roles are intimately tied to natural resources. Climate injustices compound these harms, as extractivism fuels ecological collapse.

These multiple, overlapping impacts pose considerable and immediate challenges to women in mining communities. These issues are inextricably interlinked, with one issue further compounding others, which lead to overwhelming negative effects on women's condition and position.

True sustainability cannot be achieved without dismantling the intersecting systems of exploitation that sacrifice women and the environment for profit. The path forward must be one of decolonization, ecological restoration, and feminist solidarity—honoring the resilience of women on the frontlines of resistance while forging systemic change.

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