

# UNEP GLOBAL MERCURY PARTNERSHIP

## Artisanal and small-scale gold mining Area\*



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### ISSUE

Mercury releases to air, water and land from artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) are estimated to be over 2000 tonnes each year<sup>1</sup>. It is the sector demanding the largest quantity of mercury, with virtually all of the mercury used released to the environment. The sector produces about 12 to 15% of the world's gold. An estimated 10 to 15 million miners, including 4 to 5 million women and children, are involved in the sector.

ASGM is a complex global development issue. Introducing alternatives to mercury amalgamation continues to be a key challenge, one that is being tackled by many partners. Alternatives should be affordable, cleaner and more efficient at extracting gold, a combination that is well recognized by international agencies, governments, NGOs and academics. However, such a major change in processing requires continuous efforts in formalization, education and organization of miners. Bottom up approaches, involving the miners, are essential.

The Partnership Area brings together a wide range of partners from Governments, IGOs, NGOs, academia and the private sector, who, together, can identify, design and implement sustainable solutions for the sector.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Environment Programme 2019. Global Mercury Assessment 2018.



### STRATEGY

The Partnership Area fosters dialogue among practitioners, government policy makers and donors about practical and effective ways to reduce mercury use while strengthening the economic benefits of the sector; disseminates information at national, regional and international events and through active experts networks and on-line platforms; and contributes to the formulation and implementation of innovative approaches to reduce mercury use, from national policies and planning, to on-the-ground projects in ASGM communities.

In addition to finding alternatives to mercury amalgamation, alternative business practices may also be considered. Increasing technical and regulatory assistance as well as government support in mining areas and increased consideration of miners' needs, motivations and skills may enable changes in reducing polluting practices, as well as supporting law enforcement against illegal mercury importers, smugglers and sellers.

### RELEVANT PROVISIONS OF THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY:

Pursuant to **Article 7 (Artisanal and small-scale gold mining)** of the Convention, each Party that has within its territory artisanal and small-scale gold mining and processing in which mercury amalgamation is used to extract gold from ore shall take steps to reduce, and where feasible eliminate, the use of mercury and mercury compounds in, and the emissions and releases to the environment of mercury from, such activities.

In addition, if it determines that artisanal and small-scale gold mining and processing in its territory is more than insignificant, the Party shall amongst others notify the Secretariat and develop and implement a national action plan in accordance with **Annex C**.



### OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Partnership Area is the continued minimization and elimination, where feasible, of mercury uses and releases in ASGM.



## CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINAMATA CONVENTION

Throughout the negotiations of the Minamata Convention, the Partnership Area provided key information that assisted negotiators in the development of the provisions relating to ASGM. At its first meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention agreed to the use of the guidance developed by the Partnership Area for countries to develop their National Action Plans (NAP) on reducing mercury use in ASGM.

The Partnership Area now focuses on assisting governments prepare to address ASGM related obligations, by: creating guidance material for ASGM NAPs development; assisting governments in the development of their own NAPs; and helping to identify and implement practical projects.



## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Partnership Area has regularly participated in and sponsored participation of partners in international fora, including two Global Forums on ASGM, regional conferences, and the International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant.

The Partnership Area has produced important technical and policy guidance material, including a technical guide for mercury management in the sector and a study on formalization.



## FEATURED PROJECTS

The Partnership Area is overseeing the global knowledge management, communications and outreach component of the new planetGOLD programme funded by the GEF, which is working to significantly reduce mercury use by artisanal and small-scale miners in nine countries. The programme aims to help close the financing gap, support formalization, and connect mining communities with mercury-free technology and formal markets. In its coordination role, the Partnership Area is bringing together a range of key stakeholders, including governments, financial entities, refiners, jewelers, NGOs, academics and other partners, to collaborate and provide inputs to this effort.



## FUTURE PLANNED ACTIVITIES

As some countries are now finalizing the development of their NAPs, the Partnership Area will focus on activities that support implementation of these plans, as well as support sharing of NAP experience among governments.

Given the critical role of the private sector in reducing mercury use through creating clean supply chains, the Partnership Area will also work to attract more private sector partners and foster their collaboration and engagement.

Additionally, as further research is undertaken to develop technical solutions and to monitor the success of the Convention, the Partnership Area will continue to act as a critical information sharing mechanism amongst Parties to the Convention.



## COLLABORATION WITH OTHER PARTNERSHIP AREAS AND RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

ASGM generates tailings which, when mercury is used in the process, pose a risk of mercury contamination. Therefore, the Partnership Area will explore collaboration opportunities with the Mercury Waste Management Partnership Area. In addition, the Partnership Area will continue to collaborate with the Mercury Air Transport and Fate Research Partnership Area to better understand how ASGM emissions and releases impact the local, regional and global environment.



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**Read more about the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership and how to become a Partner:**

[web.unep.org/globalmercurypartnership](http://web.unep.org/globalmercurypartnership)

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