

SPOTLIGHT ON AFRICAN DIAMONDS



Gleaning diamond laden gravel in Ngotto, Central African Republic. Few rough diamonds are sifted out of large amounts of gravel from sand and gravel deposits in West and central Africa.



Diamond miners are filmed as they sift for rough diamonds in Ngotto, Central African Republic, as part of a media campaign conducted by the PRADD project.



Staff from the PRADD project records property rights claims information from a diamond miner in Ngotto, Central African Republic.

Africa's Diamond Trade: Bringing Justice to Miners through Property Rights

It is ironic that diamonds, the beautiful stones that many cultures use to celebrate love and marriage, have also been used to finance violence and oppression.

The trade in illegal diamonds in Africa, worth billions of dollars, has been used by warlords and rebels to buy arms to fight wars in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. These wars have not only cost millions of lives, but also have shattered weak economies, spread disease, fueled government corruption, and created millions of refugees.

Miners and their families have been kept in near slavery conditions, digging diamonds for little return as others reap the profits and their families, communities, and governments remain poor. The land around their communities is stripped of nutrients as they mine along streams.

USAID is part of an international effort to combat the trade in these “conflict” diamonds. Since 2002, the United Nations and governments of diamond producing and trading countries, including the United States, have been working with the diamond industry and civil society groups on a program known as the Kim-

berley Process. It requires participating countries to certify their shipments of rough diamonds as “conflict free” through clear accounting and tracking. Diamonds must be legally mined and sold from source to export.

Despite the high prices that diamonds command in the international market, mining communities in central Africa are desperately poor. The people are easily exploited by warlords, criminals, and dishonest buyers who cheat them on price.

In 2007, USAID began piloting the Property Rights and Artisanal Diamond Development (PRADD) project in the Central African Republic.

It is a collaborative effort—created and implemented by USAID with funding and diplomatic support from the Department of State to meet the requirements of the U.S. Clean Diamond Trade Act. And its aim is to establish clear ownership of land on which diamonds are mined. For years, property rights in mining areas were rooted in customary rules that were not recorded, making it difficult to trace the source of diamonds.

The PRADD project uses community meetings and surveys as well as geospatial infor-

mation to help miners establish their property rights. This also helps the government comply with the Kimberley Process by identifying the exact source of the diamonds. Once a property right is validated, the miner is able to acquire a diamond mining license from the government.

To help stop miners from being swindled, PRADD provides training in diamond valuation. To address the environmental effects of open pit diamond mining by large numbers of artisan miners, PRADD supports rehabilitation of damaged areas and the adoption of techniques to limit degradation.

Educating miners about environmental rehabilitation is accompanied by training focused on alternative livelihoods and agricultural productivity, allowing miners and their families to earn more from alternate sources and grow more of their own food.

Madeleine Wékombo, the owner of a diamond mining claim in the heart of the PRADD pilot zone, said: “I’m very happy for the PRADD training. Before this project, we didn’t know that much about diamonds. We didn’t know the real value of our diamonds and usually we sold them at a very undervalued price.”

Because of PRADD’s success in pilot zones in the Central African Republic, it is now being expanded to other artisanal diamond mining areas in the country’s southwest.

USAID is also expanding the PRADD program to Liberia and other donors who hesitated to address conflict diamonds in the past are becoming involved.

The PRADD project, designed and managed by USAID’s Office of Natural Resources Management in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, is one component of a global USAID program on land tenure security and property rights. A USAID-produced documentary on the PRADD project recently won an award at the Houston International Film Festival, and is available in the video archive at www.rmportal.net.

For more information on this program, contact Gregory Myers or Timothy Fella at <http://usaid.landtenure.net/contact>. ★

Sierra Leone's Blood Diamond

One country where the Kimberley Process has helped limit the trade in illegal diamonds is Sierra Leone. Activists estimate that during the civil war, the Revolutionary United Front rebels raked in around \$125 million a year from smuggled diamonds. Sierra Leone’s civil war raged for several years until 2002, and the country became synonymous with blood diamonds, serving as the backdrop to the Leonardo DiCaprio movie “Blood Diamond.”

Back then, legitimate exports of diamonds from Sierra Leone were worth a little more than \$1 million a year. Although some smuggling still goes on, official exports are now worth well over \$100 million a year, providing much-needed funds for the government.