

Best practice in small-scale gemstone mining

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Mining for gemstones goes back more than 2000 years in some parts of the world (e.g. Sri Lanka), whereas in other countries it is a relatively modern development (e.g. Kenya, Tanzania). The industry is dependent for its survival upon the labour of many thousands of miners, even in relatively modern mines using mechanised equipment. A growing number of people in developing countries are taking up small-scale gemstone mining due to job losses in other sectors, and natural calamities such as drought. The lure of 'striking it rich' is a powerful inducement and often overrides local cultural and social conventions.

In many countries, the miners employed in the industry are often wholly dependent on gem mining for their livelihood with many migrating from other parts of the country or even across borders to work in the gem fields. The general operational process followed by small-scale miners often skips the con-

ventional exploration and development stages, triggered by the miners' economic need to produce immediately.

The purpose of the *Best practice in small-scale gemstone mining* project was to enhance the ability of small-scale gemstone miners to make a living for themselves and their families from gem and semi-precious stone mining in Sri Lanka, and to identify elements of best practice in gemstone mining and valuation that may be transferable to other contexts.

The project undertook a socio-economic survey of Sri Lankan miners and produced a case study (or fact sheet) of the country's gem industry including sections on geology, techniques, institutions, marketing and finance. The project also implemented a practical training course on gemstone identification and the factors that influence a gem's value with the aim of helping miners achieve a fair price for their

gems. The information and source material produced as a result of this work is available in English and Sinhala. Much of the information contained within this document is readily transferable to other gem-mining contexts because the principles of gem identification and the factors influencing a gem's value remain the same regardless of the source country. The report will soon be available on ITC's website at www.itcltd.htm/final_reports.htm

Project findings

The project identified a considerable number of problems facing the small-scale gem mining industry in Sri Lanka including: lack of information about the location and extent of reserves; lack of record-keeping about previously mined areas; lack of knowledge about rarer gemstones; inefficient prospecting and mining techniques; restrictive state-control on marketing; and dealer price-fixing. There is often a lack of clarity over responsibilities and rights under the law, and miners find it almost impossible to borrow from mainstream banks and financial institutions.

Recommendations were made to promote better practice in gem mining and to help ensure the ability of small-scale miners to make a living from gem and semi-precious stone mining. These covered:

- gemstone prospecting and mining
- operational practices
- regulatory practices
- health, safety and environment
- finance and marketing
- institutions
- training needs.

As a result of the project, the miners in Sri Lanka have decided to organise themselves into a co-operative to support their activities. This initiative is a result of the information and the confidence miners gained from being involved in this project.

For further information contact:

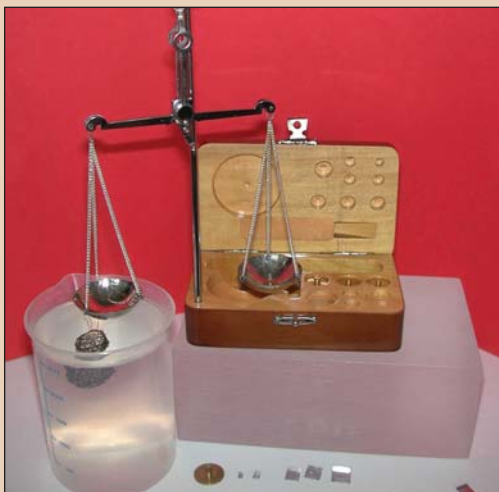
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