

Gold Mining Activities in Zamfara State, 1996-2016

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Abstract

Mining activities have been going on in Zamfara State for a long time. People of the state and many others from different parts of the country and even from neighboring countries participate actively in these activities. The paper examines mining activities that produce gold. In this paper, discussions are centered on gold digging by traditional gold diggers and modern method of mining by licensed corporate miners. Economic and social effects of mining activities to individuals, and health hazards faced by the people and efforts of Zamfara State and Federal Government to remedy the hazards are also discussed. Historical method of enquiry is applied in gathering materials for this paper. The paper finds out that gold from Zamfara State is exported to some countries there by contributing to international market and world economy. Traditional method of mining could be improved and both traditional and modern methods of gold mining in Zamfara State could improve the revenue of the state and the federal government if properly regulated.

Keywords: Gold mining, health risk, processing, marketing, export.

Introduction

Zamfara State is one of the states created on the 1st October, 1996 by late General Sani Abacha, the then Head of States and Commander in Chief of the Armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The state got its name from 'Zamfarawa' the traditional appellation by which the people of Anka, an ancient town that had been the headquarters of the Zamfara Kingdom were called. Farming is the major occupation of the people, while some crafts and commercial activities are also thriving. The State is located in the North Western part of Nigeria. It has a land area of 38,418 square kilometers. It has Sokoto state to the north, Kebbi and Niger states to the west, Kastina to the east and Kaduna to the south as neighbors. It has a population of more than three million people. A temperature of 35^oc is registered from March to June.ⁱThe average rainfall fluctuates between thirty six and eighty millimeters in a year. Over 50mm of rainfall are recorded in June. In another account, the amount of rainfall ranges from 750 to 1000 millimeters.ⁱⁱ

Gold mining in Zamfara State is mostly practiced in Maru and Anka Local Government areas. There is traditional and modern gold mining in Zamfara State. Gold mining is done through extraction of gold by traditional gold diggers and modern mining by licensed corporate miners. In this paper, there is discussion on how mining activities are carried by individuals and corporate organisations. There are discussions on negative health effects of traditional mining as well as the economic benefits of mining activities to miners, Zamfara State and Federal Government.

Gold Digging

Gold scooping from surface and digging has been going on in traditional method in Zamfara State over time. This is based on the availability of gold bearing rocks mainly located at basement conflux that passes through Zamfara State.

Available evidence shows that mining activities started in the 1920s in southwestern part of Zamfara area by a person simply known as Mr. Roads.ⁱⁱⁱ By 1932, actual mining of gold began in Zamfara areas of, Anka, Bungudu, Gusau and Bukuyum Local Government Areas.^{iv} In 1937, the volume of gold extracted reached 308,000 ounces per annum.^v However, by 1939 due to World War situation, gold mining activities were almost abandoned.^{vi} Meanwhile, its impact in Zamfara valley area led to the establishment of a town called Kamfanin Kuba. The settlement is six kilometers from Anka. Because of the huge activity in gold mining, a Mining Inspector from the Jos Zonal Mining Office was posted to Zamfara and stationed at Gusau.^{vii} Artisanal gold mining continued in Zamfara up to 1960. With independence in 1960, some gold mining activities took place in areas around Bindin in Maru Local Government Area.^{viii} There is no record of transforming gold mining activity after 1960. Our sources informed the research that mining activity in Anka continued without any new developments from 1960 to 1970. Artisanal mining of gold continued without any new developments. During the 1980s and 90s however, some nationals of African countries began trooping to mining sites in Anka. These were found in mining sites at the outskirts of Kamfanin Kuba. Some of these miners were from countries like, South Africa, Burkina Faso and Benin Republic.

Some new developments also came when new mining sites were discovered by the turn of the century. This was a period when an upsurge in gold mining activities was witnessed. From 2004, artisanal gold miners discovered new sites at Daretā and Bagegavillages of Anka. By 2009, a large influx of expatriates came into Zamfara for gold prospecting and mining. This was a period when the price of gold in the world market surged. The price of gold appreciated, from around US\$800 per ounce, to US\$1653 in May 2012.^{ix} This brought about a renewed interest in gold mining in Zamfara State. Zamfara's gold by that period has already been known in the world market.^x The value of gold from Zamfara to the world market was put at, about \$500 Million per annum. Although due to informal nature of the mining, there is lack of data on the number of miners and related activities in the area. It was however, estimated in 2011 that 100,000 artisanal and small-scale miners, processors and traders were operating in Zamfara.^{xi}

The value of gold is determined by its classification in Carats. Zamfara's gold is classified from 16, 18, 19, 22 and 23 Carat. This is usually obtained in Anka area of Bagega, Kamfanin Kuba, Daretā, Kasumke, Bindin and Abari. The 23-Carat gold is obtainable around Bindin site. Some of

the dealers at Anka site are, Alhaji Ada Chika at Anka, at Kadauri is Alhaji Sani who sells his wares at Polo area in Gusau

There are over thirty communities along Anka, Gummi, Bukuyum, Maru, Maradun and part of Dansadau Emirates where people in the areas as well as migrants were fully engaged in the business of local mining of precious stones.^{xii} The process of obtaining gold was easy in few occasions. This was possible when rainfall and some gold deposit was washed away and deposited along the path of moving water, the deposit was scooped and filtered by gold scoopers. In most cases the procedure involves identifying of *jirgi* a gold path-way and also called *gira* in Hausa, digging of gold bearing rocks, sometimes to a depth of about twenty to thirty feet deep. The excavated gold bearing *gira* contains other metals simply named as *kwalli*, wheel former and oxide by our informant.^{xiii} The gold bearing gravels were grinded manually or through the use of diesel powered grinding machines that are usually located at gold mining areas.^{xiv}

The grinded gold bearing gravel was then packed in a *solo* or bag and moved to a *kwadarko* where water is available for washing. A carpet was placed on a sliding table where the washing takes place. The mud was washed away while gold deposit residue was left attached to the carpet.^{xv} A *solo* can produce one *digoa* unit measurement.

In Bagega, a gold digging village, gold was measured in digit called *digo* in Hausa and in grams. A solo can produce one *digo* and sometimes five or ten grams depending on the fortune of a miner. Ten *digowas* sold for about four hundred Naira, one hundred *digo* equal to one gram.^{xvi} One gram of gold was sold for between four and five thousand Naira in 2015.^{xvii} Gold diggers in Rafin Ruwa in Maru Local Government Area said a miner could sometimes dig gold worth about one thousand Naira in a day.^{xviii}

Village heads benefit from the mining activities in their communities. Payment was made in kind in Bagega, for every ten *solo* bags dug, a bag was given to *masugari*, village heads. The *masugari* do the washing and sold whatever quantity of gold they obtain from it to the buyers who are also known as dealers or agents.^{xix}

Some of the dealers who purchase raw gold from Rafin Ruwa gold miners in Maru Local Government Area were Shugaba Salihu Maijama'a Mayanci, Bello Umar, Usman Mina, Abdullahi Kotowa Lambata, Tasiu Maru and Mani London Maru.^{xx} Some dealers in Bagega and Derata gold mines were: Alhaji Lawal, Sabi'u, Abdullahi and Garba Umaru.^{xxi}

Traditional mining has been a difficult and risky activity in Zamfara State^{xxii}, but people continue to engage in it for survival reasons. There was no job in the dry seasons. While some engaged in cutting and selling of firewood in Dareta, Unguwar Mairakumi, Tungar Kudaku and nearer villages, there were no regular buyers.^{xxiii} The road from Anka that passes through Dareta to Bagega was under construction. There was less human and vehicular traffic that could induce purchase of fire wood and other economic activities. The situation made gold digging activities a priority for able-bodied men in the area.

Gold mining in Dareta became prominent in 1999. A miner Lawali Ta-rinjaya mentioned that lucky miners sometimes get as much as one million Naira worth of gold from a pit. Another miner Musa Kotale who mentioned that in 2012 some few group of miners in Dareta obtained

gold worth a million Naira supported this view.^{xxiv} That attracted more miners from the village and from other places to the mine site called *daba* in Dareta.

Some people in Dareta, Tungar Makera and Kawaya villages particularly became rich due to the gold digging activities in their village. While some were dealers, others were engaged in related activities such as: grinding of gold bearing gravels, production and selling of digging and grinding items, such as diggers, shovels and buckets. Rope, food, and related items were also sold. There was financial benefit to gold diggers. Many people purchased motorcycles and cars as a result of these activities. Others bought or built houses roofed with corrugated iron sheets.^{xxv} Gold mining is mainly a seasonal activity to many. Some do it in both rain and dry seasons. In Kuzawa village near Mayanci some miners practice gold digging throughout the year.^{xxvi}

There exist many gold miners in many gold mining sites in Zamfara State. In Bagega, Ahmed Mohammed and Kane Dayyabu, were among the gold diggers. In Dareta, Umaru, Audu Idi and Alhaji Hassan Dareta were gold diggers. In Farin Ruwa, Aliyu, Aminu Umar and Mohammed Abubakar were some of the miners. There are identified dangers associated with traditional gold digging. These are sudden collapse of mining holes and some ailments associated with un-protective contact with toxic and poisonous metals/chemicals.

Collapse of Mining Pits

This is a negative factor affecting artisanal mining in Zamfara State. Collapse of mining holes or pits is a common occurrence in traditional gold digging settlements in Zamfara State. In 2011, there was a sudden collapse at night in one of the mining sites at Dareta, people died.^{xxvii} There was a similar occurrence at Dogon Daji village site in 2012 where four people died in a mining pit of about eighteen meters deep.^{xxviii} Another mining disaster in Zamfara State occurred on March 29, 2013. It involved five local miners who were digging in search of precious stones.^{xxix} Of the five, two died, while three sustained various degrees of injuries.^{xxx} An eyewitness to the event mentioned that collapsed pits at the same site killed three people in the previous year.^{xxxi} The Jabaka mining pit was also reported to have been the fourth to collapse in two years and had claimed dozens of lives.^{xxxii}

There were claims of several death as a result of illegal mining activities by a director at Zamfara State Environmental Sanitation (protection) Agency. He maintained that there were other incidents where miners died without the state government knowing because a lot of influential people within and outside the state are involved in the illegal mining activities, stating that some even own pitches.^{xxxiii}

According to the director, almost every month a miner dies at a particular pitch due to illegal mining and officials at Federal Ministry of Mines and Steel Development does not enforce strict compliance with mining rules. Local miners were blamed for the methodologies they applied during operation, as the cause of rampant pit collapses established at Bagega, Dareta, Yargalma and some parts of Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State.^{xxxiv} Open mining processing pits like the ones that exist in Sunke community of Ankawere advocated for, to avoid mining pitch collapse.^{xxxv}

Recurrence of pitch collapse made the Zamfara State Government to take steps to ensure safe mining in all the affected areas in the state.^{xxxvi} The action was to ensure that all miners in the affected communities form co-operative societies so that government can reach and assist them easily through training in order to enhance the safety of their activities. Moreover, the state government was said to have procured wet milling machines for distribution to all registered miners' co-operative societies.^{xxxvii}

Led Poisoning

Another negative factor affecting artisanal mining in Zamfara is led poisoning. In Bagega a gold mining village near Anka, there was led poisoning incident in 2010. That attracted national and global attention. Over four hundred children,^{xxxviii} many animals and livestock were lost as a result of led and mercury poisoning that was associated with illegal gold and related minerals mining in the village.^{xxxix}

In order curtail the effects of poisoning and ensure practice of safer mining and remediation efforts in Bagega, Federal Government was called upon by the state government and the stake holders to release funds for remediation activities in the area. The stakeholders in Zamfara State also called on the Federal Ministry of Mines and Steel Development to provide an easier way for artisanal miners to become legitimate, access licenses and adopt safer mining techniques and equipment that could reduce the risk of poisoning.

Subsequently, the Federal Government has released the sum of one hundred and fifty eight million, three hundred thousand (₦158, 300, 000) Naira as intervention fund to the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development for safer mining operations to curtail led and mercury exposure and environment contamination in small-scale gold mining sites in Zamfara State. In all, about eight hundred million Naira was disbursed to several ministries, departments, agencies and international technical partners for implementation of the cleanup.^{xl} The cleanup which started in March 2013 involved cleaning of all habitable areas in the village including the mining equipment, clothes, walls, floors, pathways, e t c., it also involved the sequential and mechanical removal of exposed surface and replacement with new sand or cement materials.^{xli} Since April 2013, nine hundred and eighty one children have been screened. Nine hundred and forty one were designated for admission into led poisoning programme in Bagega, while one hundred and eighty one were listed for undergoing led related therapy.^{xlii}

In order to prevent re-occurrence of led poisoning, stakeholders called for sensitization campaigns in local, national and international media in both local and English languages on the promotion of safer mining practices, capacity building workshops and on the site training for artisanal miners, distribution of personal protection gears, banning of gold mining in Sunke mines because old ores in that site contains led in addition to other minerals, until safer mining practices and equipment are fully available for use there.

In addition, wet milling machines and provision of bore holes for gold processing and for cleanup of the miners and their equipment is also important. The use of modern and safer method gold processing machines is advocated.^{xliii} It is important to note that the effect of illegal mining activities is enormous. It exposes members of the various mining communities to risk of pit collapse that usually results in injuries and deaths, it could also manifest as risk of lead and mercury poisoning as experienced in Bagega village in Anka Local Government Area of Zamfara State. Again artisanal or illegal mining spelt a huge loss of revenue to the federal and state government as well as to the communities where illegal mining activities were taking place.

Official mining of gold could attract international investors and export of gold could earn Nigeria a huge foreign exchange.

Modern Gold Mining

There are corporate organizations licensed to undertake mining activities in Zamfara State. The companies own earth moving equipment for digging, scooping, grinding, washing and drying in the process of gold mining. Some of the licensed gold miners in Zamfara State are as follows: OCHIL Global mining with an office at Sokoto- Zaria road, Gusau. It has its presence in Daretta area. Others are Global Germs, Zaria road, Mural Mining Company at Kaudari near Maru, Maradun M.C. in Maradun, Three Different Miners Company in Bukuyum, and Bungudu Mining Company located in Bungudu. Bright Way Minerals and Mining Limited also has a central minerals processing and smelting plant located at KM. 80, Gusau- Sokoto road. The above mentioned modern mining companies apply modern method of mining through the use of explosives^{xliiv} instead of digging with crude implements. They are expected to produce a larger quantity of gold and subsequently increase output and revenue base of Zamfara State and Federal Government of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Mining works are practiced in Zamfara State by many people. The activity involves utilization of digging or mining equipment to produce gold. This paper discovered that traditional gold diggers and modern licensed corporate miners respectively carried out mining activities. This involved individual and group quarry activities through manual breaking of stones with chisel and hammers as well as modern quarry activities carried out mainly by corporate construction companies. The paper shows the economic and social effects of mining activities to individuals, Zamfara State and Federal Government and concludes that improvement in modern method of mining could reduce the health risks and could also improve the economic benefits to miners and government.

Endnotes

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- ^x An interview with Shehu Anka of Zamfara State Environmental Protection Agency, Gusau, 30th October 2016..
- ^{xi} Ibidum.
- ^{xii} *Daily Trust* News Paper, “Gold Mining in Maru Emirate,” 13th April 2013, 50.
- ^{xiii} . An interview with Ahmed Mohammed a gold digger at Bagega, 2nd July 2013.
- ^{xiv} . Ibidum.
- ^{xv} . Ibidum.
- ^{xvi} . Ibidum.
- ^{xvii} . Ibidum.
- ^{xviii} . An interview with Mohammed Abubakar, a gold digger, RafinRuwa, 26th September 2015.
- ^{xix} . An interview with Kane Dayyabu, a gold digger, Dareta, 26th September 2015.
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- ^{xxi} . An interview with Kane Dayyabu, a gold digger, Dareta...
- ^{xxii} . An interview with Muhammadu Lawal Anka 2nd July 2013.
- ^{xxiii} . An interview with Kane Dayyabu, a gold digger, Dareta....
- ^{xxiv} . An interview with Musa Kotala, Dareta 2nd July 2013.
- ^{xxv} . Ibidum.
- ^{xxvi} . An interview with Mohammed Abubakar, a gold digger, RafinRuwa..

- xxvii. An interview with Buhari Abdullahi Anka at the collapsed mining site Dareta where the victims of the collapse were buried, 26th September 2015.
- xxviii. *Weekly Trust News Paper*, "Zamfara Dangerous Mining Business," 13th April 2013, 50.
- xxix. *Weekly Trust News Paper*, "Zamfara Dangerous..."
- xxx. *Weekly Trust News Paper*, "Zamfara Dangerous..."
- xxxi. *Weekly Trust News Paper*, "Zamfara Dangerous ... " in an interview with Mallam Garba.
- xxxii. Ibidum.
- xxxiii. *Weekly Trust News Paper*, "Zamfara Dangerous.." in an interview with Mallam Garba..
- xxxiv. The blame was passed by Mr. Tayo, a consultant who gave lecture on the unsafe mining, during a NEREA's workshop in Zamfara State.
- xxxv. Ibidum.
- xxxvi. The former Commissioner for Environment, Muktar Mohammed Lugga made the statement following a visit to the Jabaka collapse site.
- xxxvii. Ibidum.
- xxxviii. *Blue Print News Paper*, "Group seeks 100% cleanup of Bagega Led Contamination," Thursday, July 4, 2013, 41.
- xxxix. *Leadership News Paper*, "FG Releases ₦158.3M to spearhead Fight against Led Poisoning in Zamfara," Thursday 28th February 2013, 20.
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- xli. *Daily Trust News Paper* 2nd May 2013, 37.
- xlii. *Blue Print News Paper*, "Group seeks 100% cleanup of Bagega Led Contamination," ...
- xliii. The advocacy was made in Gusau by a Federal Director of Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM), Obiora Azubuike who led a technical team for advocacy and sensitization visit to Zamfara State on led poisoning and illegal mining activities in the state.
- xliv. The researcher witnessed a mining activity that involved the use of explosives in old Maradun mining site, 6th January 2014.