Suits. In 2017, a Chinese company, Hubei Jiu Zhou Geological Exploration Company Limited, sued artisanal miners in Buhweju for encroaching on its gold site.



GOLD EXPORTS. According to the Auditor General's report for Financial Year 2016/2017, only 16kgs in gold exports were authorised while Uganda Revenue Authority records show that more than 8,000kgs were actually exported. Yet those who care about the dark web of this trade and rip off the fortunes have little to care about the plight of the people of Buhweju.

Women exploited in **Buhweju gold mines**

Wages: From dawn to dusk, women in Buhweju toil in gold mines for as low as Shs100 per basin of rocks they have to lift from the pits, writes **Emmanuel Mutaizibwa**

> new dirt road snakes through the evolving hills of Buhweju A the evolving hills of Bullwege District across the ochre-red

> The climate here is cool and occasionally rain may pound the grounds to disrupt the serenity of this land-

To the farmers, it is harvest time as they carry their produce to the markets.

Here, it is a commonplace to find women and children engaged in hard labour to provide for their families.

This group of women and children eke a living by crashing these rocks into stones.

Even when it is considered one of the poorest areas in Ankole Sub-region by some people, Buhweju is en-dowed with minerals.

The area MP, Mr Francis Mwijukye,

borrows popular parlance to refer to it as 'the Karamoja of Ankole'.

Karamoja, a semi-arid area, isperhaps the poorest sub-region in Uganda even when it has vast mineral

In every pocket of Buhweju District, there lies a gold mine, yet there is lit-tle to show of this mineral wealth as social services lie in ruin.

At this vast wasteland, in Katenga Village, women toil from dawn to dusk to earn household income to fend for their families.

With shovels in their hands, they

cut across hills of rock to fill their ba-sins and improvised jerry-cans.

sins and improvised jerry-cans. In the desolate lands where gold is buried, they straddle these giant pits on bare foot to carry the flecks of these precious stones. Painfully, they navigate these trips from the bottom to the top. It is a balancing act, which requires skill. Beads of sweat drip down the face of this woman. Yet she must remain unwavering if the family is to have a meal.

meal.
Each of the women is paid a paltry
Shs100 for the basin of rocks they
carry from the pit.
They have to make several routes to
earn a small fee.
With bare hands, they have no pro-

tective gear and so are their male

counterparts.

It is difficult to fathom that without the exploitation of these rural women, these precious stones that fetch staggering prices may not reach the department stores.

Daily Monitor could not speak to these women because we feared that

Shaloh

Loss. Uganda lost more than Shs10 billion in royalties from undeclared gold

this could place their employment in jeopardy. But their leaders offered to

speak on behalf of those affected.

Ms Florence Kasende, the chairperson for Buhweiju Women Miners Association, reveals: "We have been in these mines for sometime. We don't have protective gear and that is the challenge. The pit can also fall on you, in addition to chemicals affecting

Her deputy, Ms Jane Ahimbisibwe, adds: "The problems we have among others are; women have no boots and chemicals affect their legs. The and chemicals affect their legs. The women are poorly paid and there is no food. They travel here at dawn from their homes and they work till dusk. They have to walk back to their

Across this expanse are hounds which guard the pits. They are ready to strike if anyone steals gold. The proprietor, Mr Godfrey Kyerromba, says whereas he could im-

prove conditions, he has helped to of-fer employment to these women.

fer employment to these women. "They are paid according to what they do. I start from Shs15,000 to Shs25,000 on a daily basis. The workers in the pit who collect the sand, which we crush, earn Shs25,000 because they are using a lot of energy. For the women, we pay them Shs10,000 on a daily basis," reveals Kyerromba.

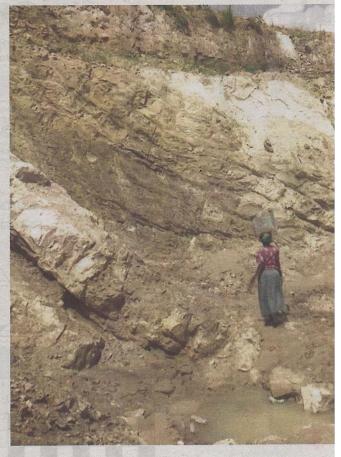
Kyerromba.

Exploitation is not only in the mines but other enterprises such as tea, according to the district authorities.

"We have a district labour officer to ensure that children are not exploited and this applies to women too. You and this applies to women too. You realise they Iwomen] are in the mines for longer hours, day in day out, their families are collapsing and their children have left school," reveals the Buhweju District chairperson, Mr Ju-

venal Asiimwe.

He adds: "There is a lot of exploitation. There is need for central govern ment and district local government to sensitise these women especially on how much they should be paid and



Hard work. Women carry rocks from the pits to the

what they can invest in."

Ms Caroline Nakajjubi Amena of Global Rights Alert, a watchdog organisation, said: "The working conditions of women in gold mines is alarming. The issues range from un-fair payments that are not adequate and do not come on time and the fact that they are exposed to chemicals as they work. Most women do petty work of gold washing and they come in contact with chemicals. The work ing condition is completely unsafe.

Domestic violence
She also reveals that there are cases

of domestic violence.
"Women go back home and they are

beaten. Men do not think that women should be in gold mines because of the

snould be in gold mines because of the cultural norms. A woman is seen as a menace. The man beats you and takes your money," she reveals.
Global Rights Alert has since sensitised these women on the right to a safe working environment and has tried to educate women on the right to occupation health safety and to work with notacting near, among others.

with protective gear, among others.

Not far away from here is another gold mine. The roaring sound of mortars filters through the hills of this

landscape.

Women at this site offer cheap labour. Here, they collect the gold dust, which will later be carefully sifted.

Gold exports from Uganda recorded an 89 per cent increase in thé year ending 2016, a Bank of Uganda (BoU) report showed. Although Uganda is not a big miner of gold, experts said the re exports saw the country register \$340 million (Shs1.2 trillion) revenue up from \$36 million (Shs129 billion) exported in 2016

This performance makes the commodity the country's second largest export product after coffee. According to the report, most of the gold was destined to United Arab Emirates (UAE). Because of this, UAE became the leading export destination recording 20 per cent of Uganda's



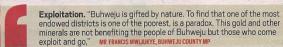
CHALLENGES. According to experts, the working conditions of women in gold mines is alarming. The issues range from unfair payments that are not adequate and do not come on time and the fact that they are exposed to chemicals as they work. Most of the women do petty work of gold panning and they come in contact with chemicals.

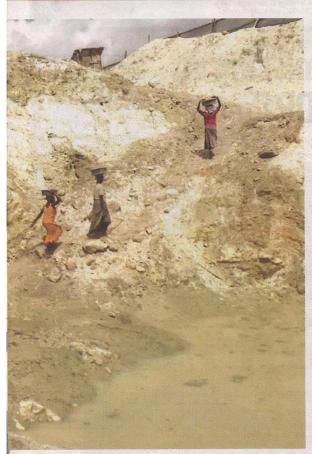


Daily Monitor MONDAY, JULY 9, 2018

10,000

Gold miners facing evictions







Washing, A man pans gold from the rocks



It is time for a meal as they take a break ahead of the day. Like their counterparts, there is a risk at some of these mining

One of the men lost his relative, Grace Bonabana, at one of the mines when a heap of soil caved in.

He takes us to a place where this woman was buried in a banana plantation.

She left behind orphans who live in a

mud and wattle home.

Another woman, whose husband is in jail, says there are people trying to grab one of the mines where the family has an interest. She says the mine is their only source of livelihood.

"Nobody can throw me out of the mine. That is my land and even if my husband

Grace Kyomuhangi.

Whereas many would expect better social services, Buhweju remains a basket

There are hardly any good schools, roads and hospitals. This is a concern, which is shared by the district chairper-son, Mr Asiimwe and area MP Mwijukye.

"Buhweju is gifted by nature. To find that one of the most endowed districts is one of the poorest, is a paradox. This



Working. One of the women balances a basin with rocks at the gold mines.

gold and other minerals are not benefiting the people of Buhweju but those who come exploit and go. Even when they are mining, they use primitive means. You saw women with bare hands. The health hazards emanating from this-----. The people are not only being cheated but exploited," says Mwijukye.

"The locals are cheated by middlemen.

"The locals are cheated by middlemen. They don't know the actual value of gold. Gold is one of the biggest resources God Gold is one of the biggest resources God gave us. Local revenue generation is the technical function of the CAO. As politi-cal leaders, we can only guide. We have not been able to collect tax from there," .says Asiimwe.

Even as investors, including Chinese, eye lucrative mining deals in the district, there is fear that Buhweju is up for grabs and as the treasures buried in these lands are spirited away, all that will remain is environmental destruction and a people at the mercy of their masters.

As the space for artisanal miners in Uganda gradually shrinks in 2017, a Chi-nese company, Lubel Jiu Zhou Geological Exploration Company Limited, sued arti-sanal miners in Buhweju for encroaching

One of the pulleys being operated at the gold mines in

on its gold site. In a suit that Hubei has filed, the company says nearly 10,000 artisanal gold miners are operating illegally on its site, and, therefore wants them evicted. "We have a case where the Chinese

took the people of Buhweju to court. That people of Buhweju are mining Chinese Gold. As a member of Parliament, I am disturbed that somebody goes to Kam-pala, picks a licence without consulting the local authority here without consultthe local autnority here without consuit-ing some of us, and you come and start taking away gold. As if that is not bad enough, you even expose the life of our people to what you have just seen," says Mwijukye.

Mwijukye.

Mr Asiimwe alos says: "You find some-body with a licence and trying to displace people. The Chinese came and acquired a licence but they found it rough because the people resisted. We have been en-gaging government to overhaul the legal regime and involve local leadership in licensing. You can't just displace people who are putting something on the ta-

Uganda lost more than Shs10 billion in royalties from undeclared gold trade