

Gender Issues in Artisanal White Clay Mining in Bangladesh

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Role of Mining in BD

- **Not a major economic activity**
- **Little large scale mining except for natural gas; or coal more recently**
- **Small artisanal mining and extractive activities**
 - **Stone quarrying – north-east & north-west**
 - **White clay mining – central north**
 - **Peat mining in south-central**

Role of Mining in BD

- **Share in BD GDP just above 1%, possibly much of it NG, oil and coal**
- **Small artisanal mining share is thus very tiny**
- **But in a small locality may be of significance**
- **Employment-wise artisanal mining may be of some importance as >42 th so employed**

Role of Mining in BD

- **Indirect employment effect of white clay mining may be of much more significance as nearly 140 th employed in ceramic industry based on white clay**
- **More importantly 22 of 140 th are women**

White Clay Mining in BD

- **Discovered in 1957**
- **Near Meghalaya border with India in the central north**
- **Deposits occur in series of hillocks as exposed deposits – so easy for artisanal mining**
- **In 2007, 11 companies were working deposits under lease from Bureau of Mining and DoE**
- **Open pit mining with shovels and baskets**

Method of Investigation

- **Secondary material**
 - very few
 - recent DoE report
- **Visit to area and FGDs**
 - Problem of finding people incl women due DoE ban on mining and dispersal of many workers
 - Talked to supervisors of mines
- **Talked to some of the ceramic company people**

Mining Method

- **Open pit – shovel and basket**
- **Land belongs to State and private individuals**
- **Individual lands often bought at 2/3 times of market price**
- **Deposits often at very shallow depths of 5-10 ft**
- **Leaseholder company usually employ others to work the deposits**

White Clay Quarry at Netrokona



White Clay Deposit Mixed with Gravel



Mining & Employment

- Mines usually are not deeper than 15 metres
- Each pit may be worked out by about 25-30 miners, about 15 of whom are women
- Men are usually local muslims – also hajong
- Women are mostly *garos* – a matriarchal society, some times hajong women; but rarely Bengali muslim women due *purdah*
- Men usually loosen the clay, women take those out in head loads in baskets
- Work usually in one shift half of the day – but in public companies work is for whole day
- Public co – weekend; private – no weekend

Mining & Employment

- **Among workers, slightly more than one half of 1500 or so employed as such in WC mining are women**
- **But of total employed in mines and transport and management, only some 750 out of 6000 or so are women**
- **Only 1 lady supervisor – a garo lady in the public company**
- **Average wage for men in pits is Tk 80-100/day; for women – Tk 60-70/day**
- **Slightly better and equal pay in public company – Tk 113/day**

Work Environment

- **Apparently little disharmony among workers**
- **Women usually get half day free to devote to family – but for women it is second shift, not for men, particularly the garo who idle away much of their time**
- **People not aware of health hazard due white clay as it is usually non-reactive, but long term close proximity may lead to chronic pulmonary fibrosis**
- **Bruises and cuts and fever due to working some times in standing water**

Work Stoppage and Aftermath

- **DoE ban on hill cutting for fear of land slides since Nov 2007**
- **Created much dissension among previously employed in pits and as transport workers**
- **Many men have left for work elsewhere**
- **Garo women workers left behind without any work**
- **Some are now employed in Tk 100/day employment guarantee scheme**

Concluding Remarks

- **Mining not a major activity but artisanal mining in small locality may be important**
- **Gender differential if not discrimination even in this microcosm**
- **But State intervention or bans may create more problems for women than men**
- **Certain environmental problems – how these affect people and women in particular remain largely unknown**
- **Again perhaps another case of “invisibility” of women**

THANK YOU