





THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines














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Published by the Artisanal Gold Council
through the planetGOLD Philippines Project



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THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

is more than a collection of stories and snapshots—it is a tribute to the people, places, and partnerships that have shaped the journey of the planetGOLD Philippines Project.

We express our deepest gratitude to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) for their support in making this global initiative possible.

At the core of the Philippine implementation are our national partners—the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and its Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB)—whose leadership and commitment have helped bring this project from vision to reality.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the provincial and municipal local government units of Paracale, Camarines Norte, and Sagada, Mountain Province. Your on-the-ground support and active engagement have played a vital role in connecting policy with the realities of local communities.

To the people of Paracale and Sagada—thank you for opening your communities and sharing your stories with us. Your culture, courage, and wisdom have grounded this project in truth and humanity.

Most of all, to the **artisanal and small-scale gold miners of the Philippines**—this book is dedicated to you. You are the heart of this endeavor. Your willingness to embrace mercury-free methods, your perseverance in pursuing safer and more responsible practices, and your unwavering call for dignity, security, and a better future have inspired every page of this work.

This is your story—and it deserves to be told with heart, with hope, and with honor.



planet GOLD
Philippines
MERCURY-FREE PROCESSING
SYSTEM & TRAINING FACILITY

UN @ environment programme
Making a world of difference
in small-scale gold mining

#MAKE
MERCURY
HISTORY

Welcome Message

Dear Partners, Friends, and Fellow Advocates,

With deep gratitude and a soul enriched by this journey, I welcome you to this special collection of stories, images, and milestones that capture the impact of the planetGOLD Philippines Project.

Since 2019, I have had the immense honor of serving as the National Project Manager for the Artisanal Gold Council in the Philippines, and of walking alongside so many dedicated partners, resilient miners, and passionate changemakers. This book is more than a keepsake—it is a reflection of our shared vision, our well-earned progress, and the relationships we built through trust, perseverance, and hope.

Through the pages of this book, you will see stories of courage—from miners who took risks and embraced change for the sake of their families and communities, to local leaders who championed responsible mining practices. You will see landscapes that are both breathtaking and bruised

by decades of extraction, and the collective effort we've made to bring about balance between livelihoods, nature, and community well-being. You will read about the technologies we introduced, the policies we strengthened, the knowledge we co-created, and the voices—especially of women and youth—that we helped amplify.

More importantly, you will feel the heartbeat of a movement.

Together, we established mercury-free processing systems, advanced the formalization of small-scale mining, and created pathways to financial inclusion. We confronted uncomfortable truths, challenged long-held norms, and planted seeds of transformation in places like Paracale and Sagada—communities that have taught us that real change can only be created when it is owned and led from within.

As we close this chapter, let us

remember that this book is not an ending. It is a reminder of what we've started, and a call to keep moving forward. Because the work continues, the vision endures, and the stories we've written together must now inspire the stories yet to be told.

To the Global Environment Facility, UNEP, UNIDO, the DENR-MGB, and our many partners from government, civil society, media, academe, and the private sector—thank you for walking with us. And to our miners—you are, and will always be, at the heart of this narrative. This book is for you, about you, and because of you.

Indeed, the future of artisanal and small-scale gold mining can be safer, more inclusive, and more equitable. And through collective action, we can continue to #MakeMercuryHistory.

With heartfelt thanks and hope for what lies ahead,

*“You will feel
the heartbeat of
a movement.”*



Abigail D. Ocate

National Project Manager
planetGOLD Philippines Project
Artisanal Gold Council Philippines

Foreword

The planetGOLD Philippines Project stands as a powerful example of what can be achieved when vision, partnership, and perseverance come together to address a pressing global environmental and human health challenge—the reduction of mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM).

Since its inception in 2018, this project has embodied UNEP's mission to support countries in implementing solutions that protect both people and the planet. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), jointly implemented with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and in close partnership with the Government of the Philippines through the the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR–MGB), key national government agencies, local governments, community leaders, and the miners themselves, the planetGOLD Philippines initiative has made exceptional progress toward transforming an informal and often marginalized sector into one that contributes to greater formalization, improved practices, and enhanced social and economic inclusion.

The highlights captured in this coffee table book celebrate more than just numbers. Around 800

miners across project sites have successfully formalized their operations, and 1,071 kilograms of responsibly sourced gold have been produced according to planetGOLD criteria—which ensure the elimination of mercury, promote improved environmental practices, and uphold better social and labor conditions. These milestones represent not only measurable progress but also transformed lives, strengthened communities, and safeguarded ecosystems.

At the heart of this work lies a holistic approach: delivering locally adapted technical solutions while simultaneously supporting miners in navigating regulatory frameworks, improving health and safety, accessing formal markets, and unlocking financial opportunities. The deployment of mercury-free technologies in Paracale and Sagada is particularly noteworthy. These systems are not only reducing the environmental and health risks associated with mercury use but are also serving as tangible symbols

of change that can be replicated across the ASGM sector. The combined impact of these systems and the capacity-building efforts around them is expected to prevent up to 1,160 kilograms of mercury.

Through inclusive capacity development, community engagement, and support for women and indigenous groups, the project has built a foundation for long-term change. Educational roadshows, media engagement, and youth-focused activities have helped shift perceptions and inspire new advocates for a safer, cleaner, and more profitable ASGM sector. Likewise, notable work to improve access to formal markets and finance—through collaboration with the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, loan schemes, and social enterprise models—is creating viable livelihoods and sustainable solutions for small-scale miners and their families, while also enabling them to invest in mercury-free technologies and equipment, thereby facilitating a long-term transition to more

sustainable and legally compliant operations.

The success of the planetGOLD Philippines Project is a shared achievement. This book is a tribute to all those who have undertaken this journey with us—often under challenging circumstances—and serves as a reflection of how collaborative action can drive progress towards environmental protection while supporting more inclusive and responsible livelihoods.

As we look ahead, the lessons learned and stories contained within these pages will continue to inspire. They remind us that responsible mining is not only about policies or technologies—it is about the miners, their families, and communities who are at the heart of the transition.

We hope this publication encourages continued collaboration, innovation, and investment in building an ASGM sector that uplifts communities while protecting the environment for generations to come.



Ludovic Bernaudat

Head of Knowledge and Risk Unit, Chemicals and Health Branch, Industry and Economy Division
United Nations Environment Programme

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is a lifeline for millions around the world—supporting livelihoods and driving local economies. Yet for far too long, this vital sector has also been associated with serious risks to human health and the environment, particularly due to the widespread use of mercury in gold extraction.

The planetGOLD Philippines Project stands as a powerful example of what inclusive and well-coordinated action can achieve. It shows how targeted interventions can help transform the sector into one that is economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially equitable.

This publication chronicles the remarkable achievements resulting from the project's dedicated efforts to free the ASGM sector in the Philippines from the harmful use of mercury. At the heart of this transformation is a steadfast commitment to a genuine bottom-up approach—one that empowers miners and their communities to adopt and take ownership of safer, more sustainable practices. By directly involving them in shaping the policies and technologies that affect their lives, the project has helped ensure lasting, meaningful change.

As a co-lead agency, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) brought its distinct technical expertise to spearhead the introduction of cutting-edge, mercury-free processing technologies. These innovations are designed not only to safeguard health and improve gold recovery, but also to promote long-term environmental sustainability. More than just technical upgrades, these advancements represent new opportunities for dignified work, improved incomes, and the restoration of our planet's precious ecosystems.

The remarkable progress documented in these pages is the result of exemplary collaboration with our lead agency, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); our executing agency, the Artisanal Gold Council; and our national partner, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Mines and

Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB).

Crucially, none of this would have been possible without the unwavering dedication and active participation of the local communities themselves. We extend our deepest appreciation to all partners, both national and local, who contributed to this project.

Together, we are not only advancing the formalization of this essential sector, but also laying the foundation for a truly clean, transparently traceable, and responsibly sourced gold supply chain—from the hands of the miners to the processes of the refiners.

This publication serves a dual purpose: it is both a reflection on what has been achieved and a compelling call to action. We hope that this account will spark further investment, foster meaningful dialogue, and strengthen the

At the heart of this transformation is a steadfast commitment to a genuine bottom-up approach—one that empowers miners and their communities to adopt and take ownership of safer, more sustainable practices.



Rodica Ella Ivan
Project Manager
United Nations Industrial
Development Organization

commitment to scale up mercury-free, community-led mining solutions—not only across the Philippines, but also beyond its shores, inspiring global change.



The Realities of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in the Philippines

500,000
miners

2 Million
supported
people

40 Provinces
with ASGM
activities

80%
PH's annual
gold reserve
produced by
ASGM

63
Minahang
Bayan areas

From the misty mountains of Luzon to the river valleys of Mindanao, the search for gold continues to shape life in the Philippines. It is a practice older than colonization—deeply rooted in community and culture. Across provinces, the sight of miners panning in creeks, hauling sacks of ore, or crushing rock with worn hands tells a story of survival, ingenuity, and quiet perseverance.

This is the world of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM)—a sector that employs an estimated 500,000 small-scale miners and indirectly supports about 2 million people in the Philippines. For many Filipinos, ASGM is not just work. It is the only work. It fills the gaps left by unstable agriculture, limited industry, and distant services. It sends children to school, pays for food, and keeps communities alive—often in places where few other opportunities exist.

What is often overlooked is that ASGM also contributes

significantly to the national economy. Around 80% of the gold in the country's Gross International Reserves (GIR) comes from the ASGM sector—an astounding contribution from a sector that largely operates without formal support. This makes ASGM not only a local lifeline but also a critical player in the Philippines' macroeconomic stability.

But the pursuit of gold also brings complex challenges. Mercury use, informality, unsafe working conditions, and gender inequality remain widespread. And while the sector is rich in people, it remains poor in protection—caught between legality and tradition, sustainability and survival.

Understanding ASGM means seeing it not in black and white, but in gold dust and grey areas. It is a sector defined not by simplicity, but by contradiction—and, potentially, by transformation.

ASGM operations are estimated to be present in around 40

provinces. Yet, with only 63 declared *Minahang Bayan* areas and just 26 small-scale mining contracts (SSMC) issued to date, the vast majority of these operations remain informal. Without legal recognition, miners face eviction, harassment, or unsafe working conditions. Without access to finance, they rely on middlemen who pay below-market prices for their gold. And with a lack of technical support, they continue to use outdated—and often dangerous—methods, including the widespread use of mercury.

Mercury is still commonly used because it is readily accessible and has been employed for centuries to capture gold particles. But it is a hazardous chemical that poses serious risks to both health and the environment. It contaminates waterways, seeps into soil, and accumulates in the bodies of miners, their families, and even unborn children. The Philippines' ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in 2020 marked an important step

toward reducing—and eventually eliminating—mercury use in ASGM. But translating that commitment into meaningful change on the ground remains a complex and ongoing challenge.

Meanwhile, efforts to formalize the sector through mechanisms such as the *Minahang Bayan* system have had mixed success. While some communities have benefited from legal recognition, many still struggle with unclear land rights, complex requirements, and bureaucratic delays. The reality is that many miners work within a grey area—not illegal, but not protected.

And yet, despite these difficulties, the sector holds enormous potential. ASGM contributes significantly to local economies. It is dynamic, adaptable, and rich in local knowledge. With sufficient support—legal, technical, financial, and cultural—ASGM can evolve into a safer, cleaner, and more profitable livelihood in the Philippines.



Overview

Global Context

Mercury pollution is a global concern—and at the center of it is ASGM, identified as the largest source of anthropogenic mercury releases worldwide. In response, the international community adopted the Minamata Convention on Mercury, a landmark treaty that includes Article 7, which specifically addresses the ASGM sector and calls on countries to take action.

To help put this commitment

into practice, the Global Environment Facility (GEF)—as the Convention’s financial mechanism—supported the launch of the global programme called planetGOLD (Global Opportunities for the Long-term Development of the Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining sector), helping countries reduce mercury use in ASGM and address the sector’s most pressing challenges.

planetGOLD Programme

As of June 2025, the planetGOLD programme operates in 27 countries worldwide. In its first phase, the programme supported nine countries—Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru, and the Philippines—working closely with governments, the private sector, and local communities to formalize mining operations, improve access to finance, introduce mercury-free technologies, and raise awareness of key issues in the ASGM sector.

At the core of the initiative are four components designed to address the root causes of mercury use and informality in the ASGM sector:

Formalization

Bridging miners into the formal economy.

Access to Finance and Markets

Connecting miners with financial services and recognized gold buyers.

Better Technology and Techniques

Promoting mercury-free methods of gold extraction.

Communications and Knowledge Management

Showcasing community champions and sharing best practices.

Implementation in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the project formally began implementation in 2019, led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and its Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB). The Artisanal Gold Council (AGC) serves as the project's executing agency, providing technical expertise and on-the-ground coordination to advance the initiative's goals.



To guide implementation, ensure policy alignment, and oversee key decisions—including project site selection—a Project Steering Committee (PSC) was established through DENR Special Order No. 2020-530. The PSC is composed of representatives from DENR, MGB, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Department of Finance (DOF), the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), and

the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). Since then, planetGOLD Philippines has engaged with concerned stakeholders to pursue its mission of making small-scale gold mining safer, cleaner, and more profitable for ASGM communities.

Based on site assessments conducted across five ASGM areas, the PSC agreed to focus on two key sites: Sagada in Mountain Province and Paracale in Camarines Norte—selected for their deep-rooted mining traditions and the diversity of challenges each community faces.

Sagada

Mountain Province

Sagada is a fifth-class municipality with a population of 11,127, comprising 2,641 households. In earlier years, Sagada's economy was heavily dependent on agriculture and livestock; however, tourism has since grown significantly in the municipality.

The livelihood generated from small-scale mining in Barangay Fidelisan became well-known in the 1980s. The continued engagement of Sagada's indigenous people in ASGM activities has influenced their traditions, economic practices, and social organization within the mining community.



MINAHANG BAYAN *Brgy. Fidelisan, Sagada, Mt. Province*

The petition for the *Minahang Bayan* declaration was submitted in 2018 and approved in 2020 through Mountain Province PMRB Resolution No. 001, series of 2020.

Spanning 10 hectares, the area is currently mined by a single formal small-scale mining association—the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI).

Paracale

Camarines Norte



Paracale, a third-class municipality in Camarines Norte, is home to 59,149 residents across 13,096 households. Long recognized as a “gold town,” it is one of the Philippines’ most historically significant gold-producing regions. The municipality hosts several small-scale mining operations, which serve as a primary source of livelihood for the majority of its population.



MINAHANG BAYAN *Brgy. Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte*

Petitioned by the Provincial Government, the application for the *Minahang Bayan* was approved through Camarines Norte PMRB Resolution No. 11-2018.

The *Minahang Bayan* covers an area of 26.4319 hectares. Among the small-scale mining associations granted contracts to operate within this area is the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan (SMBC)*—a key partner of the planetGOLD Philippines Project.

Results at a Glance



805

target small-scale
miner beneficiaries
under the project



643

MALE



162

FEMALE

263 in Sagada | 233M / 30F

542 in Paracale | 410M / 132F



100%

of beneficiaries formalized
and granted improved
access to formal gold
markets



2 Mercury-Free Processing Systems (MFPS) installed

4 baseline studies and assessment reports completed to inform implementation

68% of miner beneficiaries trained in improved technical and operational methods

89% adoption rate of safer mining practices among targeted small-scale mining communities

1,160^{kg} of mercury eliminated or prevented since project inception




1,071^{kg}
of responsibly produced gold sold through formal market channels, meeting planetGOLD criteria



120+

IEC and awareness materials produced, including children's storybooks, posters, training modules, videos, songs, poems, newsletters, infographics, and documentaries



60+ journalists engaged through Media Kapihan sessions, trainings, and site immersions

70+ media features published as a result of sustained media engagement



70+

published articles on ASGM, including field updates, interviews, and community stories



34

government agencies engaged through ASGM forums, sharing information on programs and services accessible to small-scale miners and community members

19
SAGADA,
MOUNTAIN
PROVINCE

15
PARACALE,
CAMARINES
NORTE

665

stakeholders participated in ASGM forums



337
MALE

328
FEMALE

22

small-scale mining associations supported in securing membership with the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in the Philippines

3 Million+

people reached through traditional, digital, and in-person campaign efforts

01

COMPONENT



THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

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FORMALIZATION

Across the Philippines, ASGM is both a vital livelihood and a long-standing tradition. Yet for many small-scale miners, the work remains largely informal—not for lack of laws, but because of persistent challenges in enforcement.

While Philippine legislation—such as Republic Act (RA) 7076, or the People’s Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991 and DENR Administrative Order 2022-03 recognizes and seeks to regulate small-scale mining, gaps in enforcement, overlapping mandates, and lengthy application processes continue to prevent many miners from accessing legal status, protections, and support systems designed to ensure safety, fairness, and sustainability.

The challenges faced by small-scale miners in the Philippines are not unique. Similar issues persist across many countries where ASGM is practiced. Recognizing this, the planetGOLD Programme

identified formalization as a core component of its global strategy. But formalization isn’t just about legal compliance—it’s about building a system in which miners can thrive. This means securing land and mining rights, organizing into cooperatives, accessing credit and formal gold markets, and ensuring decent working conditions. It’s also about ensuring that the voices of miners—especially those from Indigenous and rural communities—are heard in the policy spaces that shape their futures.

In sites like Sagada and Paracale, the project supported small-scale miners in renewing their contracts, complying with regulatory requirements, and strengthening associations to operate legally and sustainably. Since the project began implementing activities in 2019, a total of 21 workshops have been conducted for male and female miners, focusing on environmental permitting, regulatory compliance, and the development of monitoring

systems. These efforts engaged over 240 ASGM stakeholders in co-developing streamlined processes to support legal operations. The *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC) and the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI)—the project’s targeted beneficiaries—have also been formalized.

The planetGOLD Philippines Project also worked closely with government institutions, training 617 officials on ASGM policy and the obligations of the Minamata Convention, and providing technical support to 493 others in developing and implementing provincial ASGM plans. Through sustained multi-level engagement, national and local authorities identified eight key solutions and opportunities to accelerate formalization, including:

1. Development of a Knowledge Management (KM) platform
2. Establishment of the MGB

Core Group of Trainers

3. Policy recommendations for amending RA 7076
4. Creation of a Subcommittee on Women and Livelihood under the Local Development Council in Paracale
5. Formation of a Multipartite Monitoring Team under the Provincial Mining Regulatory Board (PMRB) in Mountain Province and Camarines Norte
6. Supplier agreement between the BSP and a small-scale mining association
7. Camarines Norte Provincial Government Action Plan addressing recommendations from the Rapid Health and Environmental Assessment conducted in Paracale in collaboration with the Department of Health
8. Expansion of the PJ Lhuillier, Inc. (PJLI) Gold Buying

Program to include Sagada and Paracale

To further strengthen collaboration, two regional forums brought together over 860 stakeholders—from miners and government agencies to civil society and the private sector—fostering a shared commitment to building a formal and inclusive ASGM sector.

These collective efforts are part of a broader transformation—bringing the ASGM sector out of the margins and into the formal economy, where it can be recognized, supported, and held to higher environmental and social standards.

Formalization is rarely quick or easy. It requires coordination across agencies, trust-building with communities, and a human rights-based approach that honors tradition while promoting a just transition. Yet where it succeeds, it creates lasting benefits—not only for small-scale miners but also for local economies and ecosystems.

Bridging the Gap

A CLICK CLOSER TO FORMALIZATION

How a new knowledge platform is empowering small-scale gold miners in the Philippines

Unearthing Barriers to Formalization

In many communities across the Philippines, small-scale gold mining is more than a livelihood—it's a way of life. Yet for thousands of artisanal and small-scale gold miners, the journey from mine to market has long been marked by systemic barriers that limit their growth, safety, and inclusion in the formal economy—barriers such as limited access to government support and the inability to sell their gold through official channels.

Formalization is meant to address these challenges. Republic Act No. 7076—the People's Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991—was created to promote, develop, and protect viable small-scale mining activities in the Philippines. It laid the groundwork for designating *Minahang Bayan*

areas and facilitating miners' registration and regulation. However, in practice, formalization has remained out of reach for many miners due to gaps in enforcement and limited awareness of formalization requirements.

In 2021, the planetGOLD Philippines project team conducted a comprehensive contextual study in the two project sites—Sagada, Mountain Province, and Paracale, Camarines Norte—to better understand the sector's realities. The study revealed persistent and interconnected challenges: inconsistent enforcement of regulations, insufficient government support, limited technical capacity among miners, and unclear or complex application processes for the permits and licenses needed to legalize mining operations. As a result, many miners face years-long delays just to secure

the necessary documentation, leaving them in a prolonged state of informality despite their willingness to comply. The study also found that reliable, up-to-date data on the ASGM sector was sorely lacking, limiting the ability of policymakers and regulators to plan and provide adequate support.

The planetGOLD Philippines project team then recognized that any effort toward formalization needed to be rooted in accessibility, connectivity, and empowerment. The project set out to build a platform that would not only simplify processes but also strengthen trust and connection among small-scale miners and government agencies.

The KM Platform: Building a Digital Bridge

The Knowledge Management (KM) Platform is a pioneering

digital tool that bridges long-standing gaps between small-scale miners and the regulatory agencies meant to support them. Designed to simplify formalization processes and make them less intimidating, the platform centralizes vital sector information and fosters real-time collaboration among stakeholders.

The concept for the KM Platform was co-created by the project team and the DENR-MGB through thoughtful discussions and collaborative sessions, beginning with a review of existing MGB systems and platforms. This was followed by a series of meetings with key divisions within the MGB Central Office, in an iterative process of design and refinement. Together, they envisioned something both practical and transformative: a one-stop digital hub where miners could submit applications for registration,

small-scale mining contracts, mineral processing permits and licenses, and petitions for *Minahang Bayan* declarations—all in one place.

But the platform doesn't stop at transactions. It's a digital library, community space, and governance tool rolled into one. Users can access news and updates, policy issuances, infographics, datasets in machine-readable formats, downloadable forms, and directories of relevant government offices. It also provides an online help desk for inquiries, digital dashboards for both miners and government offices, and even a map generation tool to visualize SSM sites.

From the perspective of MGB Central and Regional Offices, the KM Platform improves efficiency in facilitating formalization requirements, reporting,



monitoring, and feedback. For miners, it offers simplicity, transparency, and access—cutting through red tape and bringing government support within reach.

“This platform is more than just a digital tool—it’s a bridge between miners and government,” said Mr. Donald Ofalsa, Chief of the Mining Technology Division, MGB Central Office. “By consolidating reliable, real-time data on the small-scale mining sector, it equips us with the insights we need to craft better policies, respond to issues faster, and ensure that support reaches those who need it most.”

Testing the Digital Waters: Co-Designing the KM Platform

On 30 August 2024, planetGOLD Philippines conducted the initial testing of the KM Platform at the

MGB Central Office in Quezon City. Seventeen participants from MGB Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), MGB Region V, and the provincial governments of Mountain Province and Camarines Norte gathered to explore the platform’s features and provide feedback.

The hands-on session gave users the opportunity to test key modules such as miner registration and the online application for permits and licenses. Feedback was both candid and constructive—ranging from technical enhancements like integrating Google Maps to visualize mining activities, to functionality suggestions such as enabling mining associations, not just individuals, to register.

Beyond this initial testing, the KM Platform was also showcased during the Provincial/City Mining Regulatory Board (P/CMRB) Workshops organized by DENR-MGB and AGC Philippines.

These workshops brought together local government units and MGB Regional Offices across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Participants evaluated the platform’s design and its potential to improve service delivery, transparency, and coordination among ASGM stakeholders.

Through these collaborative sessions, the Platform is being shaped by the very people who will use it, ensuring that it responds to the realities on the ground and delivers meaningful benefits to both miners and regulators.

A Step Toward a More Inclusive Mining Future

The KM Platform embodies the planetGOLD Philippines Project’s commitment to transforming the small-scale gold mining sector through systems change. Anchored in the project’s core

pillars of Formalization and Knowledge Management, the platform is both a product of multi-stakeholder collaboration and a catalyst for more inclusive, responsive, and transparent governance.

“We know that helping miners begins with formalization,” said Ms. Mildred Arucan, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist of the AGC Philippines. “This tool is a game-changer—not just for miners within our project sites but also for those beyond them, including those mining resources other than gold.”

By putting accessible information and support at miners’ fingertips, the platform helps turn intention into action and informal operations into legally recognized, safer, and more responsible livelihoods. With the KM Platform, formalization is no longer a distant goal—it’s just a few clicks away.



planetGOLD Philippines Capacity Development Series

Empowering
Communities
Through Knowledge
and Partnership

The planetGOLD Philippines Project has made significant strides in strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in the ASGM sector. Through a comprehensive series of capacity development activities conducted in its project sites—Paracale, Camarines Norte, and Sagada, Mountain Province—the project has empowered miners, local officials, women, youth, and other community members to embrace responsible mining practices.

What truly sets this initiative apart is not just the breadth and depth of the training delivered, but its foresight in ensuring lasting impact—through the creation of the MGB Core Group of Trainers and the comprehensive compilation of training modules.

A Holistic Learning Approach

Capacity enhancement is a cornerstone of social and economic development in the ASGM sector. While communities may face similar challenges, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Interventions must be context-specific—responsive

to the unique social, economic, and cultural dynamics of each community. To ensure long-term impact, these efforts must also take into account various factors that support the sustainability of capacity-building activities.

The Capacity Development (CapDev) Series of the planetGOLD Philippines Project was designed to directly address identified gaps in the two project sites, focusing on the social, economic, and cultural challenges faced by ASGM communities. At the same time, it aims to strengthen the capacities of both national and local government agencies to respond more effectively to the sector's needs. This includes offering policy recommendations that support sustainable livelihoods for small-scale miners.

While most of the trainings focus on ASGM-related topics, the CapDev Series intentionally expands to include interrelated issues—recognizing the need for a holistic approach to community empowerment and sectoral reform.

To provide a structured learning experience, the activities were

organized around four key thematic areas:

- Policy and Regulatory Compliance
- Financing and Supply Chain
- Technological and Improved Mining Practices
- Leadership and Organizational Development

Since the project began, more than 70 training sessions and workshops have been conducted, reaching more than 1,500 individuals across various sectors. These efforts mark a significant step toward building resilient, informed, and empowered ASGM communities.

Linking Communities to Institutions

The project's strategy relies heavily on building strong partnerships, particularly with academic institutions and government agencies—who serve as both knowledge holders and enablers of change.



In Paracale, Camarines Norte, the Camarines Norte State College (CNSC) took a lead role in delivering and contextualizing training programs. Their faculty members facilitated: Entrepreneurial Skills Training; Strategic Development Planning Workshop; Basic Business Management Training; Financial Planning, Recording, Reporting, and Monitoring; and Organizational Development and Women's Leadership Training for miners.

In Sagada, Mountain Province, Mountain Province State University (MPSU) provided subject matter specialists who delivered training on Leadership, Financial Skills and Basic Business Management, and Primary Health Care. The academe partners also helped adapt the modules to the specific geographic and cultural contexts of their respective regions, ensuring relevance and resonance for participants.

Beyond academia, the project closely collaborated with government agencies, particularly the MGB, which actively participated in both the technical design and delivery of the training activities. MGB officials served as facilitators in sessions on

Basic Occupational Safety and Health (BOSH), Mining Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH), Permitting, Ventilation, and Alternative Livelihood Training. Their involvement ensured that participants were not only made aware of the technical knowledge and legal obligations but were also guided on the pathways to formalization and environmental compliance. Other government bodies provided their technical support, helping build a holistic curriculum rooted in policy, practice, and community.

To further enrich the learning process, the project also engaged professionals from large-scale mining companies who contributed technical knowledge on topics such as ventilation, rock support and drainage, tailings storage facilities, and mine rescue. These exchanges fostered dialogue between large- and small-scale miners, breaking down traditional silos and building bridges of shared understanding and mutual respect.

Sustaining Impact Through Institutionalization

As part of its exit and sustainability

strategy, the planetGOLD Philippines Project is finalizing a comprehensive compilation of training materials developed throughout the project's life. This curated and technically vetted package includes training modules, session agendas, concept notes, presentations, and reference materials produced by project partners. Developed in collaboration with government agencies, academic institutions, and community stakeholders, the compilation reflects localized ASGM realities while aligning with national regulations and international environmental and safety standards. It is designed to be a practical and adaptable resource for continued learning and capacity building of small-scale miners.

These modules will be formally turned over to the MGB, which has committed to using them as part of its ongoing capacity development initiatives for small-scale miners nationwide. This handover marks a significant step toward ensuring that the project's capacity-building legacy endures well beyond its operational life.

The turnover of these modules

also aligns with the MGB's ongoing efforts to strengthen its internal capacity to support the ASGM sector. In May 2024, the MGB officially established the Core Group of Trainers on ASGM through Special Order No. 2024-83—a move that reflects its growing institutional commitment to delivering consistent and localized training nationwide. The availability of the planetGOLD Philippines training modules will significantly enhance the core group's resources, equipping them with tested materials that have been piloted and refined in real ASGM settings.

A Roadmap for Change

Ultimately, the project's commitment to sustainability is rooted in the belief that capacity development is not a one-off intervention but a continuous, evolving process. The compilation and turnover of the training modules represent more than a simple handover of documents—they embody a transfer of ownership, responsibility, and opportunity—from a time-bound project to a permanent institution capable of carrying the work forward.

As the planetGOLD Philippines Project approaches its conclusion, it leaves behind a tangible legacy: a body of knowledge, a team of trained individuals, and a replicable model for multi-stakeholder collaboration in the ASGM sector. Most importantly, it leaves behind a roadmap for change—grounded in community empowerment, responsible mining practices, and institutional sustainability.

Now is the time to build on this momentum—and turn progress into permanence. We call on government agencies to champion this legacy by fully integrating the compiled modules into existing government training programs—ensuring that every small-scale miner has access to the knowledge and tools they need. We urge local governments to commit to ongoing capacity-building as a cornerstone of community development and responsible mining. We invite academic institutions to deepen their partnerships with mining communities—co-creating solutions grounded in local realities. And we encourage development partners and the private sector to invest in and expand this inclusive, sustainable model—because real transformation happens when everyone moves forward together.

Transforming the ASGM sector into a safer, more formalized, and environmentally responsible industry requires both long-term vision and shared commitment. The knowledge is there. The tools are ready. The next step is action—let us take it together.



Building Capacity for Responsible Mining

MGB Establishes Core Group of Trainers to Support the Small-Scale Mining Sector

The Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) sought to strengthen its support for small-scale miners by establishing a Core Group of Trainers dedicated to the sector. More than just a technical team, the group embodies a long-term commitment to responsible mining and community empowerment. It reflects the belief that meaningful change begins with people—those who build local capacity, share knowledge, and help communities gain the skills needed for a safer, more sustainable future.



Why the Core Group Was Formed

The Core Group was formed not just as a strategic move—but as a response to a genuine and pressing need. Across the country, many small-scale miners continue to operate under difficult conditions, often without adequate guidance, resources, or support. In response, MGB created the Core Group to serve as a dedicated mechanism for enhancing service delivery, strengthening policy implementation, and improving capacity-building efforts at the local level.

Each MGB Regional Office appointed a staff member as the Small-Scale Mining Focal Person, forming the foundation of the Core Group. Together, they are tasked with a broad mandate: coordinating with government agencies, developing programs, conducting training, preparing publications, and managing research and data. They also compile reports and maintain national and regional small-scale mining databases to support evidence-based planning and monitoring.

At its core, the initiative seeks to institutionalize consistent, responsive, and field-informed support for small-scale mining operations. The Core Group enhances MGB's ability to deliver effective training, technical assistance, and knowledge-sharing across regions—laying the foundation for a more responsible,

compliant, and empowered ASGM sector nationwide.

“This isn’t just a group of trainers—it’s a circle of leaders lighting the way for change,”

said Engr. Jan Jeremiah V. Villaroman of MGB’s Mining Technology Division.

“They are carrying the torch for a future where livelihoods and the environment thrive side by side—where every miner is seen, heard, and supported.”

Building a Capable and Confident Core Group

To ensure the Core Group’s effectiveness in delivering training and technical assistance, members underwent a series of capacity development activities in 2022. These sessions were designed not only to build their technical knowledge but also to enhance their ability to communicate, mentor, and support small-scale mining communities.



The first writeshop, held in February 2022, introduced participants to the preparation and monitoring of work programs for small-scale miners, aligned with the provisions of Republic Act No. 7076. Facilitated by the Mining Technology Division (MTD) and experts from other MGB units, the sessions focused on standardizing templates for key documents such as the Community Development and Management Plan (CDMP), Potential Environmental Impact Management Plan (PEIMP), and Annual Safety and Health Plan (ASHP). By the end of the workshop, participants had simplified these templates and prepared slide decks and training materials for use in future sessions with P/CMRBs and other stakeholders.

A follow-up writeshop in August 2022 deepened the training by reviewing the policy context of small-

scale mining, including the revised implementing rules and regulations under DENR Administrative Order No. 2022-03. Fifty-seven personnel from MGB Central and Regional Offices participated—highlighting the bureau’s commitment to developing a technically equipped and policy-informed Core Group. Members were not only trained as facilitators but also encouraged to raise field-level challenges and coordinate with national offices to close implementation gaps.

These activities reflect MGB’s long-term vision: a capable, confident, and connected Core Group equipped to advance responsible small-scale mining practices across the Philippines.



From Capacity To Impact

HOW GOVERNMENT CAPACITY TRANSLATES TO BETTER MINING SUPPORT

Government agencies play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the ASGM sector in the country. Their capacity to manage, regulate, and support the sector is fundamental to lasting transformation.

Strengthening this capacity goes beyond enforcement—it involves equipping agencies to become true partners who can guide miners toward safer, legal, and more sustainable practices.

During a three-day policy workshop in November 2022, DENR Assistant Secretary Engr. Nonita Caguioa emphasized this point, reminding participants:

“It is our duty in the government to promote, develop, protect, and rationalize viable small-scale mining activities in order to generate more employment opportunities and provide

equitable sharing of the nation’s wealth and natural resources, giving due regard to existing rights provided by law.”

This recognition of duty underscores the need for government officials to move beyond regulatory roles and take on active support and partnership. “When we understand the miners’ realities, we can support them better,” said a local government official. “We don’t just enforce laws—we can help them improve their lives.”

When government officials are equipped with the right knowledge, skills, and resources, they can evolve from distant enforcers into trusted allies of mining communities. This shift is essential to building a mining sector that is not only compliant, but also supported—where miners and

government walk hand in hand for the benefit of both people and the environment.

The Heart of Capacity Development

Capacity development is a multi-dimensional process that empowers government partners—at local, regional, and national levels—to address the complex challenges of ASGM with both confidence and empathy. Through the planetGOLD Philippines Project, government personnel have strengthened their ability to:

- **Interpret and implement complex regulations**—such as the Minamata Convention on Mercury—not as abstract policies, but as practical tools for protecting public health and the environment;

- **Streamline and simplify permitting processes**—turning them from bureaucratic hurdles into clear, accessible pathways toward legal and responsible mining;

- **Enhance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms**—with a focus not on punishment, but on safeguarding miners, their families, and natural ecosystems;

- **Engage mining communities with empathy**—listening to their needs, concerns, and aspirations, and responding with informed, constructive action;

- **Promote the adoption of safer technologies and mercury-free**

alternatives—supporting miners in reducing toxic exposure and environmental harm;

- **Foster financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills**—enabling miners to build sustainable livelihoods and achieve economic security beyond mining.

“But it’s not just about enforcing rules, it’s about creating a system where miners feel guided and valued, not just policed. That changes everything,” said one DENR representative.

Capacity development is about transforming mindsets—helping government staff view miners not as problems to control, but as partners in building a safer, more sustainable future.



What Happens When Government Agencies Are Empowered?

The ripple effects of empowered government agencies are profound and far-reaching. When institutions are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to fulfill their mandates effectively:

- **Regulatory implementation becomes more consistent and effective**—enabling clearer guidance, reducing delays and confusion in permitting, and fostering compliance with environmental and safety standards.
- **Monitoring and enforcement improve in both reach and fairness**—allowing

authorities to address illegal practices while also supporting miners in transitioning toward legal and mercury-free operations.

- **Stakeholder engagement becomes more inclusive and responsive**—with government personnel better able to communicate, consult, and collaborate with mining communities, resulting in increased trust and cooperation.

With strengthened capacities and renewed commitment, government agencies are now better positioned to extend their support beyond the two project sites—reaching small-scale mining communities across the Philippines. They hold the key to enabling more miners to transition to safer, more responsible practices that safeguard both their health and future livelihoods.

By embracing this broader mandate, government partners become true champions of responsible mining—walking alongside miners with both firm guidance and genuine support.

“Together, we are building a sector where everyone has a chance to thrive,”

said a regional government official.

Carrying the Work Forward: Lasting Change Through Government Leadership

As the planetGOLD Philippines Project draws to a close, the real question is not only what progress has been made—but whether that progress will endure. The answer rests with the government partners

now equipped to carry this work forward. Their strengthened capacity is more than a technical milestone—it is a commitment to a future where miners are not left behind, where regulations guide rather than penalize, and where gold is mined responsibly, for the good of all.

Behind every legal framework are real people. Behind each policy, a story worth hearing. Empowering government partners does more than shift institutional practices—it lays the foundation for a future where miners and their families can live with health, dignity, and security, supported by systems that understand and respond to their realities.

It is a future shaped by trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility—where government and miners walk side by side toward common goals, and responsible mining becomes a source of pride, resilience, and opportunity for communities across the Philippines.



A close-up photograph of a person wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, using a wooden-handled hammer to break a grey rock into smaller pieces. The person's hands are visible, one holding the hammer and the other holding the rock. The background is blurred, showing more rocks and a yellow bag. The overall scene is set against a warm, golden-brown background.

Integrating planetGOLD Philippines Initiatives into the Mines and Geosciences Bureau's Strategic Priorities

In recent years, the ASGM sector has emerged as both a vital source of livelihood for millions and a central focus of environmental reform and policy integration. As momentum builds for sector reform, the MGB has seized the opportunity to align development

initiatives with national priorities—integrating planetGOLD Philippines Project activities into its strategic agenda.

This approach leverages tested models and best practices, while also advancing the broader vision of the

project's implementing agencies—to transition ownership of planetGOLD Philippines' key initiatives to government leadership. In doing so, it helps ensure sustainability, long-term impact, and deeper institutional integration.

From Impact to Institutionalization

Over the past six years, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at supporting mining communities and addressing the sector's most pressing challenges. These include promoting safer and more efficient technologies, advancing the formalization of small-scale operations, expanding access to formal markets, and reshaping the public narrative around ASGM. Thousands of miners and stakeholders have benefited, and collaboration among government, civil society, and the private sector has grown stronger.

Today, the impacts of these initiatives continue to ripple across small-scale mining communities. Encouraged by clear results and strong cross-sector collaboration, the MGB has taken steps to institutionalize key project successes.

“When we work with miners, we're not just supporting individuals—we're building a sector that can contribute meaningfully to the national economy and environment,” says Engr. Donald M. Ofalsa, Chief of the MGB Mining Technology Division.

MGB undertook strategic planning and identified clear priorities for integration. Priority 1 was deemed critical and earmarked for immediate execution. Meanwhile,

Priorities 2 and 3 were identified as long-term goals, contingent upon the development of appropriate strategies to ensure their effective and sustainable implementation. This structured approach reflects MGB's commitment to preserving progress while expanding its impact through thoughtful, phased implementation.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity

A key success of the project was the rollout of Provincial/City Mining Regulatory Board (P/CMRB) Workshops—identified as a Priority 1 initiative for their strategic importance. These sessions enhanced the capacity of the Board's core support staff by facilitating knowledge transfer from key government agencies involved in ASGM development.

Following the workshop, MGB began collaborating with the Department of the Interior and Local Government – Bureau of Local Government Supervision (DILG-BLGS) to strengthen the organizational and technical capacities of local government units, enhancing their ability to consistently support the P/CMRB. More than a one-off training, the initiative reflects a shift toward institutionalizing support systems—empowering P/CMRBs to better fulfill their mandate, promote compliance, and create a safer, more accountable small-scale mining sector.

Grounded in Communities, Reflected in Strategies

At the heart of the project was a commitment to listening to mining communities. Every activity, training, and initiative was shaped by their voices—ensuring solutions were practical, relevant, and grounded in lived experience.

Responding to calls for better health and safety protections, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) classified essential training courses—such as Basic Life Support (BLS), Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), and Mine Rescue—as Priority 1, integrating them into its strategic plans. These trainings address urgent safety needs on the ground, equipping miners to respond to emergencies and work more safely in hazardous environments. Beyond their life-saving value, these certifications also serve as formal proof of compliance with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Administrative Order (DAO) 2022-03 or the Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations for the People's Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991.

“Miners told us what they needed, and we listened,” says Engr. Joven T. Battung, Chief of the Small-Scale Mining Development Section (SSMDS). “These training sessions aren't just boxes to tick—they're about protecting lives and building a culture of safety in the sector.”

To ensure the sustainability of these

life-saving skills—which require periodic refresher courses—the MGB is preparing to coordinate and explore partnerships with key agencies including Disaster Risk Reduction & Management Offices (DRRMOs), the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) to institutionalize these trainings at the national level. By harmonizing with existing programs, the goal is clear: in small-scale mining, safety and preparedness must be foundational—not optional.

Sustaining the Future of Small-Scale Mining

The MGB has identified the continued operation and management of the MFPS as a Priority 2 initiative—critical to ensuring long-term community benefits beyond the life of the project. In collaboration with the P/CMRB, MGB is set to strengthen local capacity to manage and maintain the facility—ensuring that communities continue to benefit well beyond the project's conclusion.

To deepen sustainability, MGB is also introducing Alternative Livelihood Training under Priority 2. This initiative is designed to diversify income sources, reduce dependency on mining alone, and open up new opportunities for miners and their

families. Working with PMRBs, MGB will identify and engage local trainers to deliver practical, context-appropriate skills development.

By addressing both the technical and economic aspects of sustainability, these planned efforts reflect the MGB's comprehensive approach—one that weighs the risks of mining alongside the resilience and long-term well-being of the communities that depend on it.

Beyond the Project

As the project approaches its conclusion, what remains is more than a list of completed activities—it is a foundation for lasting, community-led change. Rooted in the real needs and aspirations of mining communities, these initiatives reflect meaningful, grounded progress.

MGB is committed to sustaining and scaling these successes. Key project activities will be adopted into the bureau's regular programs and strategic plans, including capacity-building initiatives, institutional support for regulatory bodies, and the promotion of mercury-free technologies. By embedding these initiatives into the national plans, the government ensures that the momentum built by the project becomes part of a broader movement—one that empowers communities, values their contributions, and supports a mining sector that works not just for survival, but for the future.

Profile

Atty. Jonas R. Leones

*A Leader in Sustainability,
a Leader in Change*

For thirty years, Atty. Jonas R. Leones has been a prominent and steadfast figure at the DENR, bringing together his legal acumen, technical expertise, and visionary leadership. He currently serves as Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and International Affairs—a role that places him at the crossroads of national priorities and international commitments.



The Making of an Environmental Leader

Undersecretary Leones's journey towards environmental governance took root early on. Holding a Bachelor's Degree in Forestry and a Master's Degree in Environmental Science, his academic background reflected his deep-rooted commitment to ecological stewardship. This dedication eventually led him to public service and legal reform—prompting him to pursue a law degree and become a lawyer in 2006. Each academic milestone laid the foundation not just of knowledge, but of purpose: to influence systems, reshape policies, and promote a responsible, sustainable, and inclusive approach to natural resource management.

He began his career as a forester at the DENR in the early 1990s and has grown alongside the agency through shifting political climates and advancements in climate and conservation science. His rise through the ranks is a testament not only to his technical and legal expertise, but also to his ability to bridge disciplines and bring together diverse stakeholders.

Now, as the Undersecretary for International Affairs at the DENR, he has coordinated the country's engagement with international agencies and environmental treaties—ensuring that the Philippines upholds its global commitments, forging partnerships with development organizations, NGOs, and governments. With his leadership, the country's voice in climate negotiations and environmental diplomacy has grown more assertive, collaborative, and strategic.

Championing Environmental Justice in Mining

Undersecretary Leones's global perspective also brings critical relevance and synergy to domestic environmental efforts—most notably the planetGOLD Philippines Project. Since the project's inception, he has been deeply engaged, offering institutional support and policy guidance as a key member and Co-Chairperson of the Project Steering Committee (PSC). In this role, he plays a pivotal part in inter-agency coordination, reviewing milestones, and endorsing key deliverables that

advance the country's transition to mercury-free ASGM practices. He has also been instrumental in aligning the project with the DENR's #MineResponsibility campaign—an initiative promoting responsible mining, environmental accountability, and community empowerment.

Central to his leadership is a commitment to inclusive and participatory planning. He has ensured that local governments, mining cooperatives, and environmental advocates are not only consulted but also actively engaged in decision-making processes. This collaborative approach has helped ground the project in real-world needs and foster local ownership of its outcomes.

“Beyond empowerment, this offers something equally valuable: a space for dialogue. By creating a platform for meaningful interactions between miners and government representatives, the opportunity is not just about informing miners, it's about listening to their concerns, and understanding their needs, and shaping policies that are more responsive to the realities from the ground.”

Under his guidance, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has evolved from a technical intervention into a transformative platform—one that supports mercury-free technologies, builds regulatory capacity, and ensures fair and sustainable livelihoods. He has been instrumental in navigating institutional challenges and securing high-level support to replicate the project's outcomes and lessons learned nationwide. His influence underscores his commitment to building a health-conscious and environmentally responsible mining industry.

As the planetGOLD Philippines Project nears completion, Undersecretary Leones stands as a pillar of its success. He has nurtured a vision—one where environmental sustainability is seamlessly integrated into national development strategies—cultivated over more than three decades of public service. His leadership is a powerful reminder for the public that meaningful environmental change is not born of quick wins, but of persistent, purposeful actions, anchored in science, guided by law, and driven by deep respect for both people and planet.



Profile

Atty. Analiza Rebuelta-Teh

Heeding the Call to Action: *Championing Environmental Governance*

The planetGOLD Philippines Project has long recognized that the success of transforming the ASGM sector hinges not only on technological solutions and local engagement, but also on strong, inclusive, and science-informed environmental governance.

At the forefront of this effort is Atty. Analiza Rebuelta-Teh, the DENR Undersecretary for Finance, Information Systems, and Climate Change. A seasoned advocate for sustainable development and climate resiliency, Undersecretary Teh exemplifies the kind of leadership needed to address deeply rooted challenges in the ASGM sector.





Her professional journey in the DENR began as Attorney III, quickly rising through the ranks due to her sharp legal acumen and unwavering commitment to environmental law. With a Commerce degree major in Marketing, followed by a Law degree and bar certification in 1998, Atty. Teh brought a unique mix of legal and strategic expertise to public service. Her previous roles include Assistant Secretary for Legal Services and for Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Services (FASPS), as well as Chief of Staff to the DENR Secretary—positions where she played an instrumental role in forging partnerships with NGOs, international agencies, and development organizations.

As the country’s GEF Operational Focal Point (OFP), Undersecretary Teh ensures that global environmental initiatives, including planetGOLD, align with national priorities. Her stewardship has positioned the

planetGOLD Philippines Project as a significant policy platform for responsible mining.

In her role as a champion of the planetGOLD initiative, she has facilitated cross-sectoral dialogues and guided key policy discussions on formalizing the ASGM sector. During the May 2025 Policy Workshop, she emphasized the DENR’s approach:

“At the DENR, we view environmental governance not merely as regulation, but as a catalyst for inclusive, resilient, and science-informed development.”

Undersecretary Teh has consistently stressed the need for inter-agency coherence:

“Across the DENR, we must continue clarifying the internal goals and responsibilities of the different bureaus, particularly as they relate to small-scale mining regulation, environmental permitting, social development, and monitoring. We also need to explore how our frameworks can better reflect the increasing importance of the ASGM sector.”

Her leadership in mining reform is rooted in the belief that environmental integrity and economic development can coexist. In 2019, she spearheaded the #MineResponsibility campaign—a landmark initiative to reshape public perception of mining in the Philippines. The campaign promoted transparency, community engagement, and policy reform, advancing responsible and sustainable mining practices

aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Through her advocacy, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has successfully engaged high-level stakeholders and spotlighted the critical role that environmental governance plays in the formalization and transformation of the ASGM sector. Her leadership is not just about policy and procedure—it’s about fostering enabling conditions for inclusive, resilient communities where responsible mining becomes a shared national commitment.



Profile

Governor Ricarte R. Padilla

From the Ground Up:
*A Legacy of Service
and Leadership*

In Camarines Norte, one of the Philippines' most historically productive gold mining regions, Governor Ricarte R. Padilla, fondly known as "Kuya Dong," has emerged as a key champion of responsible and inclusive artisanal and small-scale gold mining. He has played a leading role in transforming ASGM from informal livelihood into a more formalized, community-driven sector.





Before becoming governor, Padilla served three consecutive terms as Mayor of Jose Panganiban, where he earned national recognition for his progressive and community-focused governance. His leadership is rooted in the values of inclusive growth, environmental stewardship, and social equity—as seen in his efforts to improve access to education, housing, healthcare, and sustainable livelihoods, along with major infrastructure projects like a proposed free

port zone, airport, and a push for renewable energy.

Governor Padilla’s public service has earned several national recognitions, including the *Gawad Agila* Top 10 Most Outstanding Men in Public Service and Good Governance, the Superbrands Most Outstanding Mayor (2014), and the “*Magiting na Manggagawa*” award for his contributions as a businessman and philanthropist.

Under his administration, Camarines Norte strengthened its commitment to responsible ASGM through strong collaboration with the planetGOLD Philippines Project. A key milestone was the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Provincial Mining Regulatory Board (PMRB) and the Artisanal Gold Council Philippines, formalizing joint efforts to support ASGM development in the province. Governor Padilla also supported

the capacity-building of local institutions—most notably the Provincial Information Office, which received Communications and Media Relations Training from AGC to help shift public narratives around ASGM. Notably, his term saw the approval of a *Minahang Bayan in the Municipality of Jose Panganiban*—a significant step toward formalizing small-scale mining in Camarines Norte.

“Since the time that I was the Mayor of Jose Panganiban, my advocacy has been to have environmentally-balanced, progressive, and sustainable mining in the province of Camarines Norte. We always wonder if there really is a future in ASGM. I always tell our small-scale miners here in the province that they should have learned already, especially when it comes to the issue of environmental degradation, because we have seen the impact of mining on our

environment,” Gov. Dong shared during the ceremonial signing of the MOA between the PMRB and AGC, witnessed by the Provincial Government of Camarines Norte and the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC).

Drawing on a deep understanding of grassroots realities, Governor Padilla has consistently worked to bring marginalized communities into the mainstream. He advocates for cleaner, mercury-free mining technologies, environmental restoration, and the better integration of miners into formal markets. His governance is guided by the principle “*Alay sa Diyos, alay sa Bayan*” (“An offering to God, an offering to the Nation”)—a reflection of his commitment to servant leadership and sustainable reform, where small-scale miners are not sidelined, but embraced as partners in the province’s progress.



Profile

Wilma Chalotag

*Championing
Responsible Mining in
Mountain Province*

Wilma Chalotag's journey from full-time mother to Indigenous leader reflects a profound commitment to her community, culture, and environment. Now serving as the Provincial Environmental Management Specialist in Mountain Province, Wilma plays a pivotal role in guiding artisanal and small-scale gold miners toward safer, mercury-free practices—while deeply honoring their Indigenous identity and traditions.





Her path into public service began at home, where motherhood nurtured her values of care, responsibility, and stewardship for the land and future generations. These values became the foundation for her advocacy, shaping her approach to environmental governance as one rooted in cultural respect and community partnership.

In her government role, Wilma works closely with local mining associations, helping them navigate complex processes like legal registration, organizational strengthening, and securing essential permits. Her leadership is not about

imposing change from above but about building trust through consistent presence, dialogue, and shared goals. She ensures that development initiatives respect ancestral wisdom and the lived realities of Cordillera communities.

Wilma has been instrumental in supporting miners in Mountain Province to adopt mercury-free technologies and safer mining practices. Through steady guidance and empowerment, she helps miners transition not only to new methods but to a vision of mining that is sustainable, responsible, and culturally grounded.

Her vision is simple yet powerful:

“To live in a place where families can breathe clean air, drink safe water, and sleep peacefully at night. A healthy life in a peaceful environment—that’s what I dream of for every mining community.”



Wilma’s story exemplifies the power of quiet, humble leadership—one that listens, accompanies, and uplifts. Her work reminds us that sustainable development thrives when it is grounded in culture, inclusion, and dignity. Through her efforts, she is not only helping to protect the environment but also building a future where responsible mining is a source of pride, well-being, and shared stewardship for generations to come.

In Photos

Policy Workshops



Legazpi City Leg



The final leg of the policy workshop, held on 15 May 2023, brought together key offices within the DENR. The objectives of the sessions were to:

- Identify which recommendations are feasible for immediate or near-term implementation based on current institutional capacities, mandates, and priorities.
- Prioritize recommendations for integration into DENR's programs, policies, or operational strategies.
- Develop initial action points or a roadmap for adopting and implementing the priority policy recommendations in coordination with relevant stakeholders.



In November 2022, the planetGOLD Philippines Project launched a series of policy workshops titled "Making Mercury History in the Philippine Small-Scale Gold Mining Sector: Stories from the planetGOLD Philippines Project." These workshops provided a platform for agencies to discuss challenges in the ASGM sector, collaborate on actionable solutions, and develop policy recommendations.

The workshop series began with the Manila leg, held on 23–25 November 2022 in Quezon City, and was

attended by 40 representatives from selected national and regional government agencies. This was followed by a policy workshop for ASGM stakeholders in the Cordillera Administrative Region, conducted on 22–24 February 2023 in Brgy. Fidelisan, Sagada, which gathered over 30 participants from central, regional, and provincial offices. Another policy workshop was conducted for Region 5 partners on 17–19 May 2023 in Legazpi City, drawing 40 attendees.



Manila Leg



Sagada Leg

Luzon Leg



In Photos

PMRB Workshops

In October 2024, the planetGOLD Philippines Project organized a series of workshops for Provincial/City Mining Regulatory Boards (P/CMRBs), engaging representatives from Provincial Local Government Units (PLGUs) and Mines and Geosciences Bureau Regional Offices (MGB ROs) from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

The series began with the Mindanao leg, held from 15–18 October 2024 in Koronadal City, followed by the Luzon leg from 22–25 October in Quezon City, and concluded with the Visayas leg from 28–31 October in Cebu City. In total, the workshops brought together 160 participants from across the country.

Each four-day session provided a platform for PLGUs and MGB ROs to strengthen their understanding of roles and responsibilities in the small-scale mining sector. Participants reviewed the provisions of DENR Administrative Order No. 2022-03, clarified the coordination between national and local agencies, and shared experiences and good practices. The workshops also emphasized the critical role of local stakeholders in promoting responsible ASGM.

Visayas Leg



Mindanao Leg



ASGM Forums

More than 600 stakeholders from Sagada and Paracale came together for the ASGM Forums—united by a shared commitment to advancing responsible and inclusive small-scale gold mining.

Held in Sagada, Mountain Province on 19–20 September 2023 and in Paracale, Camarines Norte on 22–23 November 2023, the forums drew a total of 665 participants—including miners, community leaders, indigenous peoples, women’s representatives, civil society organizations, local government units, and regional and national government agencies.

Designed as community-centered “one-stop shops,” both events enabled participants to directly engage with government agencies providing programs and services for the ASGM sector. In Sagada, 19 government offices participated; in Paracale, 15 agencies and one private sector partner joined the effort.

At the core of both forums was open dialogue. Facilitated plenary sessions and open forums provided space for miners and community members to share real-world challenges and propose practical solutions. Key issues raised included the complexity of permitting processes, the health impacts of mercury exposure, and the urgent need for institutional support for safer, cleaner mining technologies.



Sagada

In Photos ASGM Forums



planetGOLD Philippines

SALAMAT planetGOLD!

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY!

Still searching for a heart of GOLD!

Salamat gedan MGB

WE EMPOWER BUSINESSES!

Planet Gold

Planet GOLD GOOD JOB!

Thank you planetGOLD for this event!

ABU-ABU KUNA BALIK HA!

MORE POWER!

Supporting your adventures and looking forward to more activities by SECWE More Power!

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY!

OH MY GOLD

JPM was here!!!

Meon ka bang lemon?

SAMA ALL may Gold!

DREAM BIG FOR A BETTER FUTURE and BETTER BATHING

WALANG KANINAY! MANGPITALAGA SI KEMANAN UNLIVELER. PAKA SA ALA MINERO!

Masaming Sala Sa pagbabantog!

Thank you for inviting me to be a TESDAN Lete pro! I'll be on your side! Secwe Linear Monday

#MakeMercuryFree

THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

47

fb.com/planetgoldphilippines planetgoldph@artisanalgold.org planetgold.org/philippines

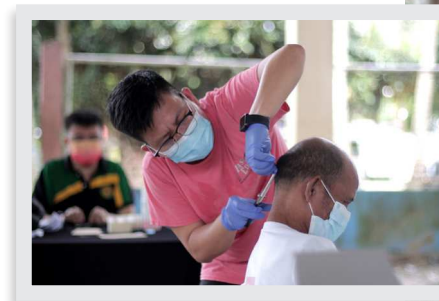
Environmental and Health Assessment

During a community seminar in Camarines Norte, the Municipal Health Officer (MHO) of Paracale shared a troubling observation: several children in the area had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, raising concerns that chronic mercury exposure may be a contributing factor. While definitive causes require further study, the potential link between mercury use in ASGM activities and adverse health outcomes underscores an urgent call for action.

In response, a joint environmental and health assessment was conducted in October 2022 in Barangay Casalugan, Paracale. The initiative was spearheaded by the Department of Health–Health Promotion Bureau (DOH-HPB), in collaboration with the Regional Poison Control Centers (East Avenue Medical Center, Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center, and Bicol Medical Center), the Center for Health Development (CHD) Bicol, the Paracale Local Government Unit, and the planetGOLD Philippines Project.

This multi-agency effort aimed to assess the extent of mercury exposure in both the environment and the local population. Key objectives included:

- Collecting environmental samples—including drinking water, soil, sediment, ambient air, and agricultural products—for laboratory analysis;
- Conducting health assessments of miners and residents to identify signs of mercury-related illnesses;
- Evaluating environmental risks and recommending both urgent and long-term interventions;
- Identifying individuals with elevated mercury levels for clinical management and follow-up care;
- Establishing baseline data for sustained health and environmental monitoring.



“We at the Mines and Geosciences Bureau–Cordillera Administrative Region hope to see the miners of the Fidelisan *Minahang Bayan* become a model for responsible small-scale mining in the region.

Our vision is for them to uphold socially and environmentally sound practices, working hand in hand with their community to drive development—not just for today, but for future generations.

We hope to see them thrive and, through their work, build a better, more secure future for their children and their municipality.”

Fay Apil
Former Regional Director
Mines and Geosciences Bureau–
Cordillera Administrative Region



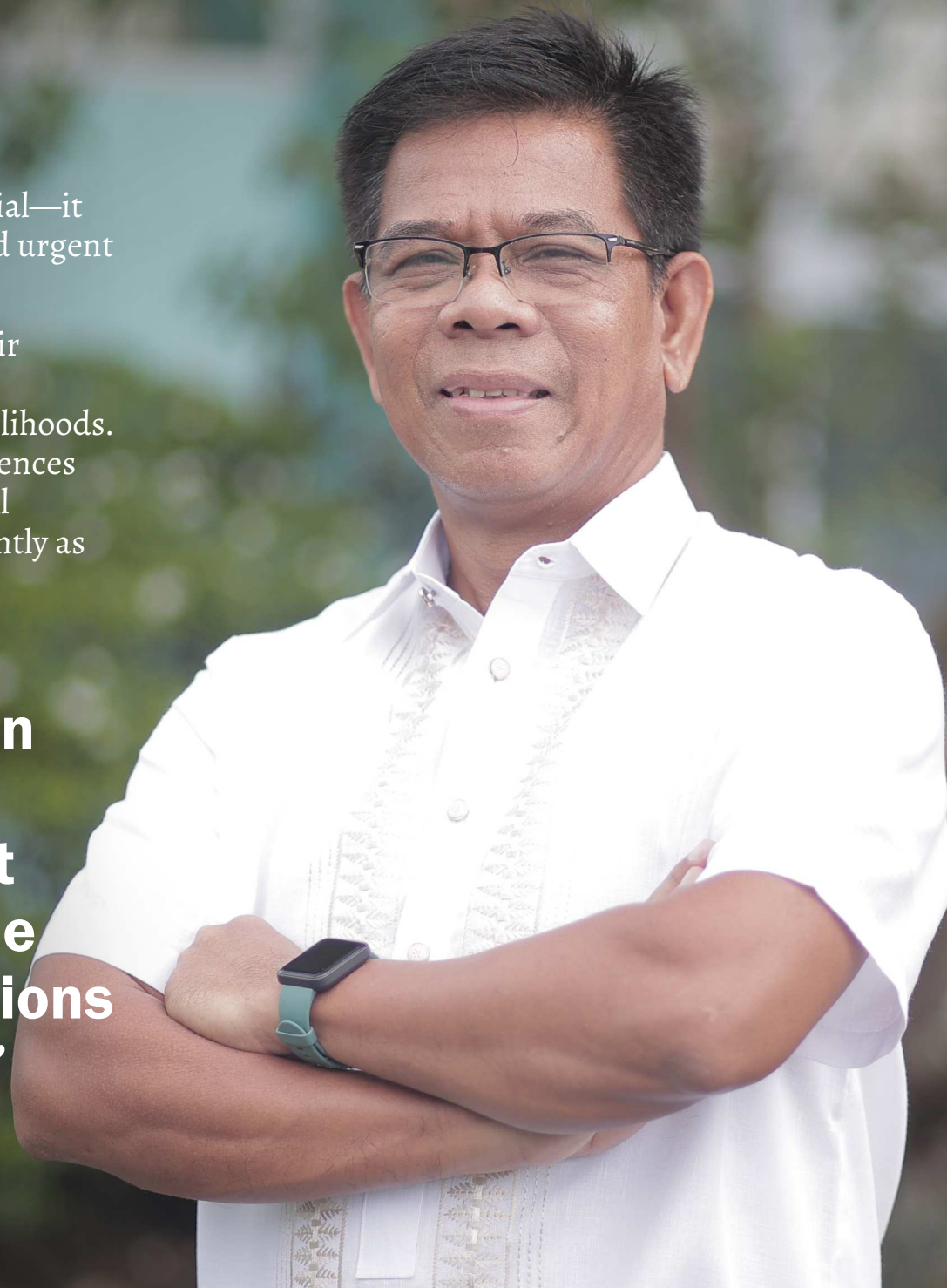
In Words

“The concept of *Minahang Bayan* is crucial—it exists to address the social realities and urgent needs of our small-scale miners.

Formalizing and professionalizing their operations is not just a legal step; it's a pathway to safer, more sustainable livelihoods. That's why we at the Mines and Geosciences Bureau are committed to processing all *Minahang Bayan* applications as efficiently as possible—that's our promise.

We also stand with small-scale miners in their call to amend the current law, so it can better reflect the realities and aspirations of the sector today.”

Engr. Guillermo A. Molina Jr. IV
Regional Director
Mines and Geosciences Bureau–Region V





“**Gold is a blessing from God**—that’s why

we must use it to uplift our communities and support our families. But with this blessing comes responsibility. For me, responsible mining means allowing farming and mining to co-exist, just as our ancestors have practiced here in Sagada. As Indigenous Peoples, we have always lived in harmony with nature. That’s why we must sustain our livelihood while protecting the environment. As miners, we must also respect and follow the guidance of our elders and the policies of our barangay.”

Alfredo “Manong Fred” Somebang

Gold Miner and Farmer
Sagada, Mt. Province, Philippines

02

COMPONENT



THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

ACCESS TO FINANCE AND MARKETS

For many small-scale miners in the Philippines, the real obstacles to progress lie not only in the tunnels they work in, but in the systems they are locked out of. With limited access to capital, formal banking, and fair markets, most miners are caught in a cycle of informal lending, price manipulation, and economic uncertainty. Without financing, they cannot invest in safer and more profitable technologies and techniques. Without trusted buyers, they remain underpaid for the gold they risk their lives to produce.

The Access to Finance and Markets component of the planetGOLD Philippines Project was designed to address this. By connecting miners to financial institutions, socially responsible investors, and traceable gold

supply chains, the project enables small-scale mining communities to take meaningful steps toward formal economic participation. It aims to build trust—between miners and banks, between local producers and authorized buyers, and between ASGM communities and the systems that too often exclude them.

From developing investment toolkits to piloting financial solutions and business models tailored to the realities of mining communities, the project seeks to reframe miners not as high-risk actors, but as viable partners in sustainable enterprise.

To date, the project has helped generate an estimated 1,071 kilograms of responsibly produced gold that meets planetGOLD Criteria and is sold

through formal market channels. A social enterprise business model was developed to institutionalize the role of small-scale gold miners in community development. The NSBSSMAI in Sagada was accredited as a formal gold trader with the BSP. A potential financier has been engaging with partners in the project areas, while 142 socially responsible investors were engaged through meetings, forums, and workshops. In addition, risk assessment tools and traceability forms were developed—all aimed at making investment in the ASGM sector more accessible and transparent. As part of its commitment to continuous improvement and responsible sourcing, the partner mining associations also conduct regular reporting in alignment with the CRAFT Code requirements.

Blazing a Trail for Financial Inclusion in the ASGM Sector

The Supplier Agreement Between the BSP and SMBC

Empires have risen and fallen over the pursuit of gold. Fortunately for the Philippines, its gold supply is theoretically almost guaranteed—small-scale gold miners are required by law to sell their produce to the BSP or its accredited gold traders.

This arrangement is designed to benefit both the national economy and small-scale miners. Gold producers gain access to a reliable formal buyer—the BSP—which offers

competitive rates, often higher than those found on the black market. At the same time, the central bank, which needs gold reserves to support monetary stability and strengthen the country's financial position, secures a steady domestic supply.

But this system only works if small-scale miners can meaningfully access formalization. Without it, the promise of mutual benefit breaks down.

This system only works if small-scale miners can meaningfully access formalization. Without it, the promise of mutual benefit breaks down.

The current reality, however, is far from ideal. In the Philippines—as in much of the world—the artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) sector continues to operate largely in the informal economy. This informality creates multiple bottlenecks that prevent small-scale miners from fully benefiting from the law mandating exclusive gold trading with the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

Barriers to formalization remain among the most critical challenges limiting the sector’s development. These barriers not only restrict small-scale miners’ access to legal markets but also impede their inclusion in formal financial systems—undermining efforts to scale responsible mining practices and limiting the sector’s potential contribution to national economic growth.

To help address these challenges, the planetGOLD Philippines Project—together with its partners at the BSP and the MGB—developed tools aimed at formalizing partner mining associations and boosting their production capacity. These efforts support the shared goal of increasing the Philippines’ gold reserves while advancing the rights and livelihoods of small-scale miners.

One such tool is the Supplier Agreement (SA), a document designed to formalize the gold trading relationship between a small-scale mining association or cooperative and the BSP. The SA functions not only as a commitment to responsible trade but also as a potential “proof of income” for the cooperative—strengthening its case for accessing formal financing and investment opportunities.

The SA is the result of months of negotiation, interagency collaboration, and thorough legal review. It was carefully crafted to protect all parties involved, clarify roles and responsibilities, and avoid overlap with existing mechanisms. Once signed by the BSP, the agreement will be piloted with the planetGOLD Philippines partner small-scale mining association in Paracale—the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC). This pilot will serve as a crucial proof of concept, demonstrating how formal agreements can help bridge the gap between informal mining practices and formal systems.



It Takes Two to Tango

Demonstrating How Close Collaboration and Open Communication Are Essential to Expanding Small-Scale Gold Miners' Access to the Formal Gold Market



For the members of the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI), few moments were as rewarding in January 2025 as holding Certificate No. 002-00042. This document marked the official registration of the NSBSSMAI under the BSP gold buying program—a formal recognition that empowers the association to sell gold directly to the BSP under its responsible gold sourcing policy.

Receiving the certificate marked the culmination of several months of navigating registration and formalization requirements—made possible through the guidance of the BSP North Luzon Regional Office (RO). The registration

process revealed several organizational, documentation, and record-keeping barriers within NSBSSMAI—barriers they overcame with the assistance of the planetGOLD Philippines Project. In turn, the NSBSSMAI met the project team's efforts with grace and a strong spirit of cooperation, recognizing the significant benefits the outcome would bring to their organization, families, and communities.

One of the most significant challenges was the physical distance: the BSP North Luzon RO is about five hours away from Sagada. This made each in-person visit especially meaningful. Additional documentary requirements—such as certifications from

the MGB—also added to the logistical and financial burden. Yet these steps were essential for the BSP to uphold due diligence protocols under its responsible gold sourcing policy. Fortunately, the BSP North Luzon RO demonstrated flexibility throughout the process. To ease the burden on the NSBSSMAI, physical visits were kept to a minimum and reserved only for transactions that could not be conducted remotely.

The successful completion of the registration process stands as a powerful example of what can be achieved through true collaboration. While the BSP maintained its mandate and adherence to due diligence, it also extended

patience, understanding, and responsiveness—recognizing the structural barriers that often prevent small-scale miners from accessing formal markets.

For NSBSSMAI, the registration process provided a significant learning opportunity. The association is now reorganizing its internal systems to better align with formalization and financial compliance standards. Meanwhile, the planetGOLD Philippines team has also documented key lessons from this process and is using them to support the BSP in identifying more efficient and sustainable ways to engage the small-scale gold miners in its gold buying program.



Better Technologies for Better Communities

Utilizing the Mercury-Free Processing Plant in Paracale,
Camarines Norte to Uplift the Community

As part of its mission to ensure that project activities—most notably the installation of the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) for partner mining associations—benefit the broader community, the planetGOLD Philippines Project worked to establish the MFPS in Paracale, Camarines Norte as a Social Enterprise. This initiative was formalized through a Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC), the Municipal Government of Paracale (Paracale MLGU), and the AGC, which serves as the executing agency of the project.

The MOU is the product of years of dialogue and several months of careful negotiation among the three signatories. It reflects a shared, long-term commitment to the development of the ASGM sector in Paracale, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each party.

Through this agreement, the AGC—through the planetGOLD Philippines Project—pledged to ensure that the MFPS is safe, environmentally sound, and aligned with best practices. By the end of the project, SMBC will be fully equipped to manage the MFPS independently—technically, financially, and organizationally—ensuring its sustainability for years to come.

“SMBC and the local government of Barangay Casalugan would like to thank planetGOLD Philippines, AGC Philippines, and our partners from the Provincial Government of Camarines Norte and Local Government Unit of Paracale, who were all instrumental in the signing of this agreement—the signing of the MOU is a huge step towards a safer, more orderly, and formal livelihood for us miners. May these initiatives serve as a good example for other barangays in our municipality.”

— **Demver Suzara**
President, SMBC and Brgy. Captain, Brgy. Casalugan

In addition to managing and maintaining the MFPS, ensuring legal compliance through proper documentation, promoting gender balance in the workforce, and overseeing daily operations, SMBC also committed to allocate at least 1.5% of additional profits from MFPS operations to fund community-based social development projects that benefit the community.

“We are grateful to the planetGOLD Philippines Project team for its unwavering commitment towards the betterment of our community, and we commit to continuing our shared work in supporting our small-scale gold miners and the community as a whole.”

— **Romeo Y. Moreno**
Municipal Mayor
Paracale MLGU

Under the Tripartite MOU, the Paracale MLGU pledged to monitor SMBC’s operations and provide technical assistance to support the continued formalization and professionalization of both SMBC and the MFPS. The local government also holds responsibility for identifying and implementing the social development projects to be funded by SMBC, in line with its broader mandate to uplift community welfare and economic resilience.

The Tripartite MOU was formally signed on 13 January 2025 in Paracale, Camarines Norte, witnessed by the Paracale Sangguniang Bayan, MGB Region V, and members of SMBC.

This milestone represents more than just local progress—it is a national demonstration of the transformative potential of



responsible small-scale gold mining. Small-scale miners are essential contributors to the country’s economy. As such, stronger, sustained support is crucial to unlock the full promise of this sector and ensure it benefits both people and the planet.



A New Chapter in Responsible Mining

How a Strategic Partnership Is Transforming Market Access for Small-Scale Gold Miners

FORGING A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The P.J. Lhuillier Group of Companies (PJLI), through its Sandbox Project, has taken a critical step toward improving small-scale miners' access to formal gold markets—and it couldn't have come at a more opportune time for the planetGOLD Philippines Project. The two organizations first formally connected during the 2023 National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in the Philippines, Inc. gathering in South Cotabato, where PJLI introduced the Sandbox as a regulatory innovation designed to pilot mechanisms that enable small-scale miners to transact within formal systems.

Recognizing their shared mission to advance financial inclusion and formal market access for small-scale gold miners—who play a vital role in national development—planetGOLD Philippines and PJLI forged a partnership. This collaboration extended the Sandbox's pilot activities to two of planetGOLD's project sites: Sagada, Mountain Province, and Paracale, Camarines Norte.

Through this partnership, PJLI established local gold trading stations, dramatically improving accessibility for mining associations in Sagada and Paracale. Prior to this intervention, the nearest BSP-accredited gold buying stations were five to seven hours away. Today, members of the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI) and the *Samahan ng mga Minero*

sa Barangay Casalugan (SMBC) can sell their gold just minutes from their operations—reducing transport time and costs, and enhancing their participation in the formal economy.

“We graciously accept and are very grateful for Auro's gold trading station. It signals a bright future for small-scale gold mining in Sagada where we can have greater access to the formal gold market and, in turn, to formal financing which can help develop a more sustainable and safer livelihood for us.”

— **Joseph S. Patil-ao Jr.**
President, NSBSSMAI

Gold trading operations under the sandbox are now carried out by Auro Resources Trading, Inc., a PJLI subsidiary formed through the initiative and now accredited by the BSP as an official gold trader. Through Auro, the innovations tested under the Sandbox are now being scaled, allowing more small-scale miners to directly access the formal gold market—reducing reliance on informal channels, improving transparency, and ensuring fairer pricing for their gold.

ADVANCING FINANCIAL ACCESS AND PROTECTION FOR MINING COMMUNITIES

Beyond gold trading, PJLI has introduced Miners' Protect, the country's first microinsurance policy designed specifically for

small-scale miners. NSBSSMAI and SMBC members enrolled in Miners' Protect, which helped shift their perception of mining from a risky, informal livelihood to a viable and protected profession. The insurance not only covers miners working underground but also includes others in the production chain, emphasizing the inclusive nature of the policy.

“The beauty of this is that it is not only for miners working inside the tunnel. We know that in mining sites, there are other people working outside the tunnels. For example, the wives who help prepare food or process [gold]. They can also be covered by Miners' Protect. So, that would really help not just the miners but also the families of miners. People are saying it's a risky industry, but once you manage, you mitigate those risks.”

— **Cliff Cabuncal**
Chief Finance Officer,
PJ Lhuillier Group
of Companies

This forward-looking approach recognizes that the mining ecosystem is broader than tunnel operations. It encompasses the full range of contributors, including those who formalize operations, maintain workspaces, process gold, or provide food—many of whom are women. PJLI's business model views labor protection and inclusion as essential pillars of nation-building.

Additionally, PJLI is also conducting

significant work towards providing formal financing for small-scale gold miners. They are navigating areas that may seem too risky or unfamiliar for other financial institutions—but thanks to the freely shared knowledge and data from the planetGOLD Philippines Project, their efforts are well-supported in advancing financial inclusion and expanding access to formal gold markets for small-scale gold miners.

Through the establishment of local gold trading stations and the introduction of credit-building mechanisms, the partnership between planetGOLD Philippines and PJLI is demonstrating that responsible and inclusive progress in the ASGM sector is not only possible—but achievable through meaningful collaboration.

As these initiatives gain momentum, they are not only enhancing the economic security of small-scale miners but also laying the groundwork for a more equitable and accountable gold trading landscape in the Philippines. What began as a pilot is now emerging as a replicable model—proving that access to formal markets can be systematically expanded through strong partnerships, forward-thinking leadership, and a shared commitment to uplift communities that have long operated on the margins of the formal economy.



Profile

Erizelle N. Linaban

*Affecting Change Through
Effective Leadership,
Her Dedication to Serve
ASGM Communities*

“Our work in the BSP as a market and refiner of gold for the ASGM goes beyond buying and converting the gold to tradeable forms. It requires engaging and enabling formalization towards a more lasting partnership borne by trust.”

— **Erizelle N. Linaban**

Director, Mint and Refinery Operations Department
Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas





Erizelle N. Linaban, Director of the Mint and Refinery Operations Department (MROD) at the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), exemplifies leadership grounded in integrity, innovation, and inclusive service. With almost two decades of service to the BSP, she has been a driving force in enhancing gold trading operations that contribute to nation-building and economic resilience in the Philippines.

While large-scale mining companies are not mandated by law to sell their gold to the BSP, Director Linaban's strategic engagement and leadership have helped secure the commitment of certain companies. Her efforts have significantly contributed to the increase in gross international reserves (GIR) in the country, strengthening the Philippine economy for decades to come.

Director Linaban's forward-thinking approach has brought global best practices to the BSP's operations. Under her stewardship, the MROD has fostered strong partnerships with key industry stakeholders and upheld the BSP's long-standing accreditation by the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA).

Since 1979, the BSP has remained the only central bank refinery on the LBMA's Good Delivery—an achievement that underscores the department's operational excellence.

While beyond the scope of her immediate responsibilities, she served as the BSP representative to the planetGOLD Philippines Project Steering Committee. Her dedication to serving the ASGM communities was apparent as she was among the main actors who helped facilitate small-scale gold miners' easier access for small-scale gold miners to the BSP, the formal gold market in the Philippines.

This was achieved through her active coordination in expanding information, education, and communication efforts for miners, ensuring they were well-informed about the benefits

and processes of formal gold trading. She also worked closely with BSP's Regional Operations Sub-sector to drive the review and clarification of the BSP's gold trading accreditation requirements and procedures—making the path to formal engagement more transparent and attainable for small-scale miners.

Additionally, as a close partner and collaborator, Director Linaban played a crucial role in facilitating the production of the Supplier Agreement (SA) between the BSP and the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC). The SA is envisioned to be a landmark document that will solidify the gold trading relationship between the BSP and the SMBC. It also aims to facilitate easier access to formal financing for the SMBC.

Her openness and dedication were instrumental in achieving the project's goals of helping small-scale gold miners gain access to formal financing and the formal gold market—outcomes that today reflect not just success, but long-term, meaningful change. Her leadership brought the project's vision to life, turning ideas into action and creating progress that continues to make a real difference.



Profile

Emy T. Dongail

Groundwork for Change:
*Strengthening Systems,
Protecting Communities*

Some roles require being the steady hand behind progress—quietly ensuring that things work, people are heard, and standards are met. Emy T. Dongail embodies this kind of leadership. As the CRAFT Code focal person of the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI), she has helped lay the foundation for the group's integrity, organization, and growing capacity.





“My work as a focal person is one of the hardest,” she shares. “Sometimes people misunderstand my role when I bring up issues or remind them of the rules. But I continue because I know these efforts benefit everyone. I’m working for the betterment of the association and every miner.”

Her reports are more than technical documents—they help identify safety concerns, improve practices, and inform better decisions. She engages directly with miners, listens to their concerns, and supports them in complying with standards—bridging the gap between formal systems and everyday realities.

Emy also serves on the grievance committee of NSBSSMAI, where her calm and fair approach helps resolve conflicts with care. Guided by *inayan*—an Igorot value that promotes mindfulness and respect—she ensures disputes are handled with empathy and a focus on long-term harmony.

Beyond her formal roles in NSBSSMAI, Emy is also a

barangay secretary in Bangaan, a mother of three, and an active member of community life. Whether organizing documents or offering a listening ear, she brings the same dedication and quiet strength. Her advocacy for responsible mining is rooted in a vision of a safer, more secure future for the next generation.

Emy Dongail is proof that structure and care can go hand in hand. Through her dedication, she ensures that small-scale mining in Fidelisan is not just safer and more organized—but more rooted in community values and inclusive of every voice.



Through her work with the planetGOLD Philippines Project, Emy has been instrumental in implementing due diligence protocols that uphold environmental and social safeguards in small-scale gold mining. She carefully tracks the mining process—from extraction to sale—ensuring documentation is in order and practices align with both national and international standards.

In Photos

CRAFT Code Workshops

To promote responsible gold sourcing in the ASGM sector, the planetGOLD Philippines Project conducted a series of workshops on the CRAFT Code planetGOLD version for small-scale miners and government partners.

The CRAFT Code planetGOLD version is a practical, field-ready tool that translates key international due diligence standards—from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA)—into actionable guidance for miners.

The workshops aimed to equip participants with the principles, knowledge, and skills needed to uphold due diligence standards and ensure that gold is mined and sourced responsibly in the country.



Workshop on Gold Trading Strategies for the ASGM Sector

On 30 March 2023, the planetGOLD Philippines Project conducted a workshop with the BSP and the MGB to explore gold trading arrangements and strategies for engaging financial institutions. The activity aimed to create a platform for discussing opportunities for miners' participation in initiatives such as establishing a credit surety fund, signing a forward purchase agreement, and developing social enterprises.

A key outcome of the workshop was the BSP's agreement to move forward with piloting a supplier agreement with a partner small-scale mining association under the project. The agreement is intended to further formalize the gold trading relationship and enhance the credibility of the association. By serving as proof of income, the supplier agreement demonstrates a steady revenue stream from BSP transactions—making small-scale mining associations more attractive to formal financial institutions and increasing their access to credit and investment. Approximately 20 participants attended the activity at the BSP Head Office.



In Photos

Workshops on the Minamata Convention

From the mountains of Sagada to the coast of Paracale, communities came together for a series of workshops on the Minamata Convention on Mercury—spaces of learning, dialogue, and local action. The Minamata Convention is a global treaty that seeks to eliminate the use and release of mercury where feasible, particularly in sectors such as ASGM.

Captured in these moments: miners, women, and local leaders gathering around presentations, tracing mercury's path through the environment, and sharing stories of its impact on health and land.

In Sagada, where ancestral land is sacred, discussions centered on protecting future generations. In Paracale, where mining shapes daily life, the workshops sparked urgent calls for safer alternatives.

These were more than information sessions—they were platforms for trust-building, shared visioning, and community-led solutions. Participants explored mercury-free technologies, policy options, and ways to monitor impacts locally.





We met the project team during an event on small-scale mining in the country. We recognized that our activities shared vertical relationships, particularly in financing and gold buying.

While planetGOLD Philippines aims to educate miners on why they should sell their gold to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), our focus is on how to facilitate that process.

This alignment has fostered a collaborative relationship between the Project and Cebuana Lhuillier. Moreover, the Project also supports miners through financial literacy initiatives, which further reinforced our decision to formally engage and collaborate with planetGOLD Philippines.

Cliff Cabungcal
Chief Financial Officer
PJ Lhuillier Group of Companies

In Words



The planetGOLD Philippines Project has shown remarkable effort in promoting the formal gold market in Bicol and in the Philippines. Its innovative initiatives are a testament to its dedication to improving the lives of small-scale gold miners and their communities. Their close collaboration with the BSP, government agencies, and other stakeholders demonstrates their commitment to driving sustainable solutions for the ASGM sector and notably encourages miners to join the formalization efforts of the government. This is a good start for ASGM. Though we are still on a very long road on this journey, these small steps assure us that we are on the right track.”

Neptalie D. Clacio, Jr.

Bank Officer IV / Gold Buying Section Head
BSP South Luzon Regional Office





“We are in the midst of a triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Small-scale gold mining exemplifies these challenges—when unregulated, it can drive deforestation (worsening climate change), destroy habitats, and emit toxic pollutants like mercury.

However, responsible mining practices offer opportunities to mitigate these harms.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas’ Responsible Gold Sourcing Policy is crucial in steering the sector towards ethical practices. By ensuring that gold is sourced responsibly, it helps prevent illegal and environmentally harmful mining while also promoting fair labor conditions.

**The planetGOLD
Philippines is a key
driver of compliance.”**

Atty. Noel Neil Malimban
Regional Director
BSP North Luzon Regional Office

OS

COMPONENT

Mercury-Free Mining
Uplifting Communities, Protecting Environment.

planet GO
Philippines

gef environment
UNIDO
DENR
AGC



THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

#MakeMercuryHistory

BETTER TECHNOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES

In ASGM communities across the Philippines, the clang of metal against rock remains familiar. For generations, miners have depended on basic tools—and the toxic shimmer of mercury—to extract gold from ore. This process has been passed down out of necessity, not choice. Mercury has long been accessible, easy to use, and—until recently—unquestioned.

But what if there were another way? What if small-scale miners could access safer, cleaner, and more efficient technologies—without sacrificing productivity or livelihood?

This is the driving idea behind the third component of the planetGOLD Philippines Project: Cleaner Technology and Techniques. Its goal is simple: to help communities move away

from mercury use by introducing safer, cleaner, and more profitable mineral processing technologies. These innovations aim not only to protect the environment and miners' health but also to improve working conditions and increase gold recovery, directly translating to higher profits.

Yet introducing new technology is rarely about hardware—it requires trust, training, and a deep understanding of local mining contexts. That's why the project begins with people—working closely with governments, small-scale miners, associations, and communities to determine what works, what doesn't, and how the changes will affect miners technically, socially, and economically.

From remote workshops to on-site demonstrations, the project

blends scientific knowledge with practical, hands-on learning. In the two project sites, more than 68% of women and men small-scale gold miners received training on improved technical and operational methods. As a result, nearly nine in ten miners adopted improved processing practices—signaling a major cultural shift toward a more responsible gold extraction.

At the center of this transformation are two newly installed Mercury-Free Processing Systems (MFPS)—one at each project site. These facilities demonstrate safer alternatives to amalgamation, using advanced gravity concentration methods and cyanide-amino acid leaching to increase gold recovery, without the dangers of mercury.

The results speak for themselves: an estimated 1,160

kilograms of mercury have been eliminated or prevented across both project sites since planetGOLD Philippines began—a small but vital step toward protecting both miners and surrounding ecosystems. To support this shift, four comprehensive assessment reports were completed, covering mercury use, legal frameworks, socio-economic dynamics, occupational safety, and gender roles in the ASGM sector.

Moving away from mercury is not merely a technological change—it's a generational shift. It challenges old habits, disrupts informal norms, and urges miners to reconsider long-standing practices. With sustained support, communities are beginning to prove that safer, more responsible mining can become the new norm.

Re-engineering Tradition

Mercury-Free Gold Processing in the Highlands of Sagada

Barangay Fidelisan's small-scale miners have long balanced deeply rooted traditions with the urgent need for innovation. In a community where mining sustains families yet faces environmental and technological challenges, a new chapter is unfolding. Through close collaboration among miners, local leaders, government agencies, and project partners, Barangay Fidelisan is pioneering mercury-free gold processing methods—demonstrating that responsible mining can honor heritage while embracing progress.

Thanks to the partnership between the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI)—the project's key local partner—and a committed network of stakeholders, an engineered mercury-free processing facility now stands at the heart of Fidelisan's *Minahang Bayan*. Designed, built, and continually refined through shared expertise and ongoing dialogue, this facility marks a significant leap

forward in responsible small-scale gold mining in the Cordillera region.

On 3 February 2025, the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) was officially handed over to NSBSSMAI, signaling the community's commitment to a cleaner, safer, more efficient, and responsible mining future.





A SHIFT IN STRATEGY: From Complete Circuit to System Improvement

The journey to establish the MFPS in Sagada was far from straightforward. Initially, the project envisioned a comprehensive MFPS akin to the one built in Paracale, Camarines Norte—complete with a cyanide leaching circuit. However, this plan required reconsideration.

An existing agreement between NSBSSMAI and the surrounding barangays prohibits the use of any chemicals in mining and mineral processing. In recognition of this, the project team launched a series of community consultations between February and March 2022 to ensure the social acceptability of the proposed centralized cyanide processing plant and to gather feedback directly from the communities. The proposed MFPS design was presented in detail, including an explanation of how the system would operate and the chemical management protocols that would be in place to ensure safety

and environmental compliance. To strengthen community engagement and support effective communication, the project team enlisted the help of key government agencies—including the MGB Central and Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) offices, the Provincial and Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Offices, and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The MGB-CAR played a key role in conveying project details in the local language, Kankana-ey

Despite these efforts, barangay and community leaders ultimately reaffirmed their commitment to the agreement banning the use of chemicals in the area, including cyanide.

Following this, the project team redesigned the MFPS. In September 2022, the Project Steering Committee approved a revised approach that shifted the focus from implementing a full processing circuit to enhancing existing practices—aligning more closely with local preferences and environmental considerations.

A key milestone followed on 9 November 2022, when the PMRB declared the proposed MFPS site as a Mineral Processing Zone, pursuant to Section 18 of Republic Act 7076, or the People’s Small-Scale Mining Act

DESIGNING FOR SAGADA: A Tailored Mercury-Free System

The final design of the Sagada MFPS reflects a unique balance of local policy and practical realities. In response to the community’s firm opposition to cyanide, the facility relies exclusively on gravity-based gold recovery methods.

Situated within the declared *Minahang Bayan* in Brgy. Fidelisan, the system consists of three independent processing lines, each featuring a crushing circuit for size reduction, a grinding circuit to liberate gold particles, a gravity concentration circuit for gold recovery, and a tailings storage facility for safe residue management. It is designed to process three to four metric tons of ore daily.

A series of commissioning and optimization activities conducted to improve the performance of the MFPS led to an increase in gold recovery from around 40% to over 60%, confirming the system’s effectiveness compared to traditional methods.



MFPS Sagada

A MODEL ROOTED IN CULTURE, BUILT ON PARTNERSHIP

While distinct from the Paracale system, the Sagada MFPS shares a common goal: to demonstrate that mercury-free gold processing is feasible, scalable, and adaptable to diverse local contexts. Through cultural sensitivity, flexibility, and strong community ownership, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has paved a new path for responsible ASGM in the highlands.

As the machinery hums and gold is recovered without mercury, a new model of mining emerges—one that respects tradition, protects health, and empowers local miners to thrive on their own terms.





Forging a Mercury-Free Future

Empowering Small-Scale Gold Miners in Paracale

In the gold-laden hills of Paracale, Camarines Norte, gold mining has been a way of life for generations. Here, entire communities rely on small-scale mining for their livelihoods—passing down techniques, tools, and knowledge over time. But while the industry has long sustained local economies, it has also come with hidden costs. The widespread use of mercury, a toxic substance used to amalgamate gold particles, has led to devastating impacts on human health and the environment.

In 2021, a baselining study by the Artisanal Gold Council estimated that Paracale’s

annual mercury use had reached a staggering 832.2 kilograms. Despite growing awareness of mercury’s dangers, many small-scale miners continue to use it because, as they say, “it’s easy to use,” and, more tellingly, “it’s the only method we know.” These statements reflect a deeper reality—limited access to alternative technologies, lack of

training, and the absence of viable infrastructure to support safer methods.

Against this backdrop, the planetGOLD Philippines Project set out to introduce a new paradigm—grounded in science, shaped by collaboration, and rooted in community.

MFPS Paracale



THE BIRTH OF PARACALE MFPS: Designed with the Community, for the Community

The centerpiece of the project in Paracale is the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS), a purpose-built plant that demonstrates how gold can be responsibly and profitably processed without the use of

mercury. Located within the officially declared *Minahang Bayan* area of Barangay Casalugan, the facility occupies a 2,475-square-meter site awarded to the *Samahan ng mga Minero ng Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC).

What makes this facility unique is not just the technology it houses but the process behind its creation. From day one, the project prioritized collaboration and local ownership.

The design and process flow of the MFPS were developed in close consultation with the MGB, particularly the Mining Tenements Division (MTD) and the Metallurgical Technology Division (MetD). These discussions ensured that the facility complied with national guidelines while remaining practical for local miners. The collaboration didn't end there. Multiple rounds of consultation meetings with SMBC helped tailor the design

to their operational realities. Additionally, a barangay-level public consultation was held to gather feedback from the broader community, reinforcing transparency and inclusivity throughout the process.

Further strengthening the partnership, MGB provided critical support not only through guidance but by donating essential processing equipment, underscoring the government's commitment to mercury-free mining at the grassroots level.

FROM TOXIC TRADITIONS TO CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES

Traditionally, small-scale miners in Paracale follow a sequence of steps: the ore is first crushed and ground using locally fabricated rod or ball mills. The ground material is then washed and panned. To capture the fine gold, mercury is introduced to form an amalgam. This amalgam is then burned—often without any safety gear—releasing toxic mercury vapors into the air and posing serious health risks. The leftover material, or tailings, is frequently treated again with excessive amounts of cyanide in backyard leaching facilities, further compounding environmental and health hazards.

The MFPS offers a safer, more efficient alternative. This facility combines modern gravity concentration techniques with cyanide-amino acid leaching—processes designed to maximize gold recovery while minimizing harm. Through the use of glycine, a naturally occurring and biodegradable amino acid, cyanide consumption is significantly reduced without compromising gold recovery efficiency. Optimization tests conducted by the technical team showed leaching recoveries exceeding 90%, demonstrating the effectiveness of this cleaner method.

Gravity concentration technologies not commonly used in the region were also introduced: a helicoidal concentrator, a centrifuge, and a shaking table. These tools work by exploiting differences in specific gravity between gold and gangue minerals, enabling clean separation without the use of chemicals. In one optimization run, the helicoidal concentrator alone achieved a gold recovery of 86.29%—a stark improvement over traditional panning.

Together, these technologies provide miners with a system that is safer, cleaner, and more productive.



A WIN FOR HEALTH, THE ENVIRONMENT—AND LIVELIHOODS

One of the most significant impacts of the MFPS lies in its economic viability. Beyond safety and environmental gains, the facility offers a cost-effective alternative to conventional ore processing methods still widely used in Paracale.

Local small-scale miners currently pay an average of ₱232 per sack to process ore in existing facilities—many of which still rely on mercury or unsafe cyanide use. In contrast, the calculated operating expense (OPEX) for the MFPS is only ₱175 per sack, covering costs for sodium cyanide, activated carbon, lime, glycine, and the plant charge. Other expenses such as smelting, loading, and hauling are not included, making this comparison conservative.

This ₱57 difference per sack—roughly \$1—may seem small, but it adds up quickly. For instance, a miner processing 300 sacks at the MFPS stands to gain an additional ₱17,100, or around \$300. These savings can be reinvested into their operations or used to support household needs, ultimately contributing to more resilient livelihoods.

CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

The road to completing the MFPS was anything but easy—literally and figuratively.

One of the most persistent challenges was logistical. During the early stages of the project, access roads to Barangay Casalugan were severely underdeveloped, making it extremely difficult to transport construction materials and equipment. The problem was worsened by frequent typhoons—common in the region—which often rendered roads impassable. These conditions led to significant delays and higher transport costs, extending the timeline beyond initial projections.

Today, the facility faces a new challenge: sourcing enough ore to operate at full capacity. While SMBC is actively rehabilitating its mine shafts, current production levels remain limited. Still, the facility remains operational, and the project continues to assist SMBC in optimizing its system.

These challenges have tested the project's resilience—and have also demonstrated the power of community determination and multi-stakeholder cooperation.



MORE THAN A FACILITY—A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The Mercury-Free Processing Facility in Paracale is more than an engineering achievement—it is a milestone in the fight for safer and more sustainable small-scale mining. It stands as a concrete example of what's possible when communities, government, and development partners work hand-in-hand.

Through science-backed

innovation and community-centered design, the MFPS offers a blueprint for mercury-free gold processing in the Philippines—and beyond. It proves that traditional practices can be replaced with smarter alternatives; that economic growth doesn't have to come at the cost of human health; and that small-scale miners can thrive in a cleaner, safer, and more just mining ecosystem.

In time, with continued support and replication of this model, mercury use in Paracale may become not just obsolete—but unthinkable.



Profile

Joseph S. Patil-ao Jr.

Rooted in the Highlands

*A Legacy of Community
and Purpose-Driven
Leadership*

Joseph S. Patil-ao Jr. didn't set out to lead—he simply kept showing up when it mattered. Over time, his quiet consistency, deep empathy, and commitment to fair solutions naturally earned him the trust of a community often overlooked. Today, as President of the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI), he leads not through force or formality, but through example.





With over a decade of mining experience and previous service as a barangay kagawad, Joseph understands the daily realities of small-scale miners—from health risks to documentation gaps to unstable income. When he assumed leadership, the association was struggling with internal division and limited direction. Anchored in the belief that thoughtful reflection and consultation—especially with elders and the board of trustees—should precede action, Joseph focused on rebuilding trust and restoring collaborative decision-making.

Under his leadership, NSBSSMAI became a key partner in the planetGOLD Philippines Project, supporting the transition to safer, mercury-free technologies. He led

efforts to install and sustain the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) in Fidelisan, ensuring its maintenance ever after project turnover. Through a revived culture of bayanihan, Joseph mobilized members for communal work to improve pathways, clean surroundings, and comply with reforestation requirements. “When we call for *galatis* (voluntary assistance), they come,” he said. “This is a good custom we hope to continue—for the betterment of the *Minhang Bayan* and our workplace below.”

The project’s support—from legal guidance to organizational strengthening—allowed the association to formalize its operations and better serve its members.

“Malaki ang pasasalamat namin sa planetGOLD... ang dami nilang naitulong sa amin—mapa-financial, papel, advices, at marami pang iba,” he shared.

“Kaya nagpapatuloy ang aming kabuhayan.”

Joseph’s leadership extends beyond paperwork and process. He is a trusted mediator, a dependable volunteer, and a father who leads by listening. His ability to bring people together—regardless of background or belief—has set a tone of unity and quiet strength within the organization.

In a sector where change can be slow and complex, Joseph S. Patil-ao Jr.’s story reminds us that leadership isn’t always loud—it’s often patient, grounded, and deeply rooted in community.



Profile

Demver Suzara

*One Miner's Dream of
Mercury-Free Gold and
a Better Life for All*

Demver Suzara grew up with gold dust in his veins. The son of a mining engineer, he was introduced early to the rhythms of small-scale mining in Paracale, Camarines Norte—a community where mining is not just a livelihood, but a legacy. As a young boy, he learned every aspect of the trade, from panning to processing, working alongside miners whose grit shaped both the land and their lives. He understood the value of hard work and the unspoken bond among miners who shared the same dust-covered dreams. Today, as President of the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (Association of Miners in Barangay Casalugan) or SMBC, Demver stands not only as a miner but also as a leader—advocating for the formalization of the sector so his fellow miners can dream beyond survival.





“Gold mining is a big part of our lives. You can’t take it away, because if you take mining away from us, it’s as if you also took the food that we will put in our mouths. It’s like you took away our right to food. That’s what we are trying to accomplish, to make all mining sites in Paracale, Camarines Norte, legal.”

For Demver, the dangers of mercury are not abstract—they are personal and lived. Having spent most of his life in the mines of Paracale, he has witnessed firsthand the cost of traditional gold processing. His cousin, a fellow miner in his 40s, died of lung disease after a year of being in and out of the hospital, plagued by splitting headaches. He left behind a wife and nine children—a devastating loss for the family.

Like many in his community, Demver grew up using mercury because it was what was taught: accessible, effective, and long accepted. But even then, he saw the harsh realities behind the sector—the toll of unsafe practices, informal operations, and unstable incomes. This is why he champions a future where miners are not just surviving but thriving in stable, legal, and dignified work. He believes it’s time for the tradition of mining to evolve—not to be erased, but transformed into something safer, cleaner, and more sustainable.

A Model for Change

At the core of this transformation is the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) introduced by the planetGOLD Philippines Project. Demver immediately recognized its potential—not just as

a technical upgrade, but as a lifeline. Beyond addressing the serious health risks of mercury, the system offers higher gold recovery, resulting in more gold, less waste, and better income for miners and their communities.

As one of the few groups in the region who have taken steps toward mercury-free gold processing, the Association, under Demver’s leadership, is setting an example of responsible, community-driven mining. It is a model that prioritizes safety, boosts profitability, and significantly reduces environmental harm. And while the journey is far from over, their progress sets a precedent: small-scale miners can be champions of both environmental protection and economic resilience.

With the support of the planetGOLD Philippines Project, the Association began to envision a better, more organized system—one that supports their work and secures their future. Processes that once felt slow and overwhelming, especially when it came to paperwork and legal requirements, became more manageable. The guidance they received helped them navigate the complex regulatory landscape with greater confidence, bringing them closer to formal, stable operations.

Building Dreams Beyond Gold

That dream—of every miner having a permanent job, a decent home, and a life of stability—is what defines Demver’s mission. He knows the realities of informal mining all too well: the unpredictability, the absence of legal protection, and the constant struggle to make ends meet. By pushing for legal operations and standardized systems across all mining sites in Paracale, he advocates not just for technical reform but for justice and dignity in a sector long overlooked.

“My dream? My dream for us, SMBC, is that every miner will have their own house, and eventually have a permanent job in the Minahang Bayan.”

Demver understands that change doesn’t happen overnight—especially in a community shaped by generations of tradition. But with every step toward safer practices, legal recognition, and stronger systems, he sees hope taking root. His leadership proves that small-scale mining can evolve—without leaving its people or the planet behind. For him, true success isn’t just about finding gold; it’s about building a future where every miner has secure work, a safe environment, and a home to come back to.



Profile

Vilma Padilla

A Woman Miner's Journey from Riverbanks to Mercury-Free Mining

Vilma Padilla, 55, is a small-scale gold miner, a mother of five, and a proud member of the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan*.





Like many in Paracale, gold mining has been her bread and butter. She started young, just 10 years old, panning for gold in rivers and streams. Over the years, she tried various mining methods, including sluicing and the use of mercury, as many small-scale miners do.

As her body could no longer endure long hours in cold water, Vilma transitioned into other roles. When the *Minahang Bayan* was established, she

became a cook for tunnel miners—preparing meals, cleaning, and supporting their daily needs underground.

Everything changed when planetGOLD Philippines arrived in Paracale. Vilma eagerly joined every training, quickly becoming a familiar face—always present, always learning. Her hard work paid off: she became one of the first women miners trained to operate the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS).

Today, she confidently demonstrates the MFPS to visitors and stakeholders, showing that women can manage the plant safely and effectively.

“Here at the MFPS, we’re happy that women are not just part of the project—we’re directly involved in running and managing the plant. We have a space here, not just as participants, but as active contributors to the project’s decisions and direction.”

From panning gold in rivers to managing a mercury-free plant, Vilma’s journey proves that with the right support, women miners can lead the way to safer, more responsible small-scale mining.

“We felt it—yes, we are miners. Women miners. And little by little, the contributions, strength, and intelligence of women in the small-scale mining sector are finally being recognized.”

She hopes the growing movement for responsible mining continues to recognize the quiet, consistent contributions of women in the sector.

“We hope to serve as examples of a more just and inclusive economy. Because of the planetGOLD Philippines Project, we truly felt what it means to be valued as women.”



Profile

Jeofrey Bomowey

Safeguarding Lives:
*A Commitment to
Safety, Family, and
Community*

Some responsibilities are measured not in tasks completed, but in lives protected. As the Safety Officer of the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI), Jeofrey Bomowey carries that responsibility every day—ensuring that miners work safely and return home to their families.





Raised in a family of life-saving volunteers and trained early in rescue and first aid, Jeffrey brought this mindset into the mining sector. With his background as a teacher and his deep sense of care, he became a natural leader in enforcing health and safety standards. He leads inspections, coordinates rescue protocols, documents incidents, and oversees compliance across NSBSSMAI operations.

“The best gift that miners can give their family is their safety and good health,” he says—a belief that drives both his professional actions and personal sacrifices. He often stays beyond working hours to assist miners in emergencies, even when it means delaying time with his own children.

Given the remoteness of the

mining site—accessible only by long treks and far from medical facilities—Jeffrey also serves as the community’s primary first-aider. His foresight led him to initiate the distribution of first aid kits to every mining team, ensuring they’re always within reach. “Even a simple bag of supplies can be the difference between life and death,” he shares.

His commitment to safety deepened through his involvement in the planetGOLD Philippines Project, particularly through mine safety training programs. These efforts not only expanded his skills but also allowed him to train others—building a network of miners who now understand the critical need for preparedness in high-risk work environments.

Beyond protocol enforcement,

Jeffrey teaches safety as a shared value. He emphasizes that precautions are not just rules to follow, but ways to protect what matters most—families, futures, and the dignity of work. “Gold is gold, but it cannot turn back life,” he reminds his peers.

“We owe it to our children to come home safe.”

A miner, educator, and father, Jeffrey Bomowey’s leadership is grounded in both skill and compassion. His tireless efforts ensure that safety is not an afterthought—but a foundation for a stronger, more resilient mining community.



In Photos

Sagada MFPS Turnover Ceremony

On 3 February 2025, the AGC Philippines, through the planetGOLD Philippines Project, conducted the Turnover Ceremony for the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) at Barangay Fidelisan, Sagada, Mountain Province. During this event, the project team formally transferred the operation and management of the MFPS facility to the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI). The MFPS will enable small-scale gold miners to process gold more safely, cleanly, and efficiently through a purely gravity-based concentration method.

The ceremony brought together around 100 project partners and key stakeholders, including representatives from UNIDO Philippines, DENR-MGB, local government units, academia, the media, and miners from Paracale, Camarines Norte, and Itogon, Benguet, as well as community members from Sagada.

This handover marked a significant milestone for the ASGM sector in Sagada, highlighting the project's commitment to supporting and empowering ASGM communities, as well as the collaborative efforts of AGC, MGB, NSBSSMAI, and local government stakeholders to implement system improvements aligned with Sagada's environmental policies.





In Photos

Paracale MFPS Turnover Ceremony

On 2 April 2025, AGC Philippines, through the planetGOLD Philippines Project, formally handed over the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) and Training Facility to the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan (SMBC)* in Paracale, Camarines Norte. The facility is designed to eliminate the use of mercury in gold extraction by combining modern gravity concentration methods with cyanide-amino acid leaching, enabling small-scale miners to recover gold more efficiently, safely, and profitably.

The event was attended by 54 participants, including representatives from UNIDO Philippines, the DENR's MGB and Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), the BSP, local government officials, and members of the media.

The turnover of the MFPS to SMBC marks a significant step in advancing the project's mission to enhance working conditions in small-scale mining communities. Through technology transfer and capacity building, the initiative promotes safer, mercury-free practices and supports the long-term transition toward a formalized, sustainable, and environmentally responsible small-scale gold mining sector.



In Photos

Paracale MFPS Visits

01. On 20 September 2022, members of the planetGOLD Mongolia–Philippines Regional Project Steering Committee visited the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) site in Paracale, Camarines Norte.

02. On 24 July 2024, miners from Sagada visited the MFPS in Paracale's *Minahang Bayan* for a peer learning exchange with SMBC—underscoring shared efforts to promote safer and more responsible small-scale gold mining.

03. On 21 September 2024, global journalists participating in a solutions journalism workshop visited the MFPS in Paracale.

04. On 8 June 2024, delegates from the 2024 planetGOLD Global Forum on ASGM visited the MFPS in Barangay Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte—highlighting international support for safer, cleaner, and more responsible small-scale gold mining in the Philippines.





In Photos

MOU Signing for Paracale MFPS

With hands firm and goals aligned, the tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed to establish a social enterprise linked to the MFPS in Paracale—marking a milestone in community-centred, responsible mining.

planetGOLD
Philippines

Making a
world of
diff



planetGOLD Philippines

ARTISANAL GOLD COUNCIL PHILIPPINES

Commitment Statement for the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS)

We, the Samahan ng Mga Minero ng Barangay Casalugan (SMBC), the Municipal Government of Paracale (MLGU), and the Artisanal Gold Council (AGC) Philippines stand united in building a safer, cleaner, and more profitable artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) sector for Paracale, Camarines Norte.

With the installation of the MFPS, donated by the AGC Philippines and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Mines and Geosciences Bureau through the GEF-funded planetGOLD Philippines project, we are taking a big step forward. This Project is not just about improving ASGM – it's about improving lives.

- The SMBC takes the lead, committing to operate and maintain the MFPS responsibly, ensuring it complies with environmental standards and promotes gender equality and safety for all.
- The MLGU Paracale pledges its full support, working alongside SMBC to make sure the MFPS delivers real benefits to all Paracaleños.
- The AGC Philippines reaffirms its support for formal, socially responsible mining practices and community empowerment in Paracale.

Together, we are proving that ASGM can be safer, cleaner, and better for the community and the nation. Signed this 13th day of January 2025, in Paracale, Camarines Norte, Philippines.

HON. ROMEO MORENO
MAYOR
MLGU Paracale

HON. BERNADETTE ASUTILLA
PRESIDENT
SMBC

DEMVER DICHE SUZARA
PRESIDENT
AGC Philippines

ARIGAIL D. OCATE
MAYOR
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OF PARACALE



The agreement—signed by the local mining association, government stakeholders, and the planetGOLD Philippines Project—seeks to build sustainable enterprise that reinvests the benefits of formalized gold processing into the community. More than a business model, the social enterprise reflects a shared commitment to inclusive economic growth, environmental protection, and lasting community empowerment.

Rooted in lessons from past mining practices and present aspirations,

the MOU represents a shift—from profit-driven extraction to value-driven enterprise that puts people before profit. It envisions a future where miners are not just workers, but co-owners of change—where responsible gold production supports social services, diverse livelihoods, and community resilience.

This partnership affirms that when communities are part of the process, they become stewards of progress—ensuring that the value of gold reaches beyond the mine and into the heart of Paracale.

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

In Photos

Community Consultations

To gain social acceptance for activities related to the construction and operation of the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) within the *Minahang Bayan* area in Sagada, the planetGOLD Philippines project team conducted a series of community consultations from February to March 2022. These consultations involved both host and neighboring communities to ensure that concerns, expectations, and recommendations from affected stakeholders were adequately heard and considered.

A total of ten barangays were identified as concerned communities. These included six barangays in Northern Sagada, considered the primary impact areas due to their proximity to the MFPS site: Fidelisan, Pide, Aguid, Bangaan, Tanulong, and Madongo. In addition, four barangays in Eastern Sagada—Kilong, Antadao, Tetep-an Norte, and Tetep-an Sur—were identified as downstream communities, potentially affected by environmental or water-related impacts associated with the facility.

The consultations aimed to foster transparency, build trust, and ensure that the development of the MFPS aligned with local priorities and environmental safeguards. Community input from these sessions helped inform project planning, risk mitigation strategies, and stakeholder engagement moving forward.



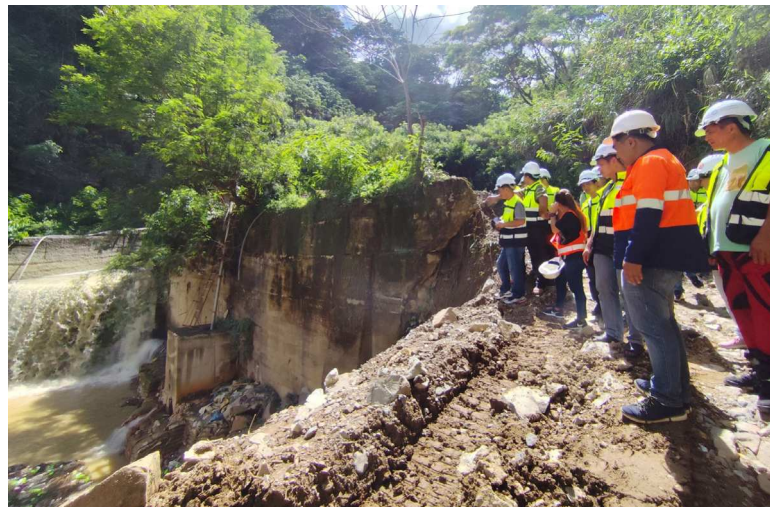
In Photos

Big Brother– Small Brother Approach

The planetGOLD Philippines Project forged partnerships with large-scale mining companies to promote collaboration rooted in mutual respect, shared responsibility, and a collective commitment to safety across the extractive sector. Through these partnerships, experienced mining professionals and institutions mentor small-scale mining communities, sharing practical knowledge and promoting safer, more sustainable practices that strengthen livelihoods at the grassroots level.

One of the key initiatives under this collaboration was the Underground Mine Ventilation and Rock Support Training, conducted from 12–13 July 2023 by the MGB in partnership with Itogon-Suyoc Resources Inc. (ISRI). Designed to improve underground safety and hazard mitigation, the training reached 35 participants, focusing on mine assessment techniques and highlighting the importance of proper ventilation, rock support, and drainage systems in reducing underground mining risks.

Another significant activity was the Tailings Storage Facility (TSF) Training, held from 22–26 April 2024 in Itogon, Benguet, in collaboration with Benguet Corporation–Benguet Gold Operations. This five-day training equipped 33 participants with foundational knowledge on TSF design and management. Topics included risk assessment, structural monitoring, water management,



emergency response protocols, and continuous improvement strategies to ensure TSF safety and integrity.

The final installment in the series was the Mine Rescue and Safety Training, conducted from 24–28 March 2025 in Fidelisan, Sagada, Mt. Province, in partnership with ISRI and the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO). A total of 48 members from the NSBSSMAI participated in the training, which focused on life-saving techniques, safety

awareness, and emergency response. To reinforce the lessons learned, the project also provided personal protective equipment valued at approximately PHP 420,500.00, helping improve on-site working conditions and reduce occupational risks.

Together, these initiatives exemplify how shared expertise and coordinated action between sectors can drive meaningful improvements in safety, resilience, and sustainability for small-scale mining communities.



In Photos

MFPS of Paracale and Sagada

01. The Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) and Training Facility was officially turned over to the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* on 2 April 2025, at the *Minahang Bayan* in Barangay Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte. The facility marks a key milestone in the project's efforts to eliminate mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining.

02. On 3 February 2025, the MFPS Facility was inaugurated at the *Minahang Bayan* in Barangay Fidelisan, Sagada, Mountain Province. Donated to the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc., the facility reinforces the project's commitment to promoting safer, mercury-free gold processing in ASGM communities.



“As both a farmer and a miner, I’ve learned that everything begins with water. We make sure the waterways remain clean and undisturbed because our farms depend on it—and so does our community.

Responsible mining means always putting the environment first and making sure no one is harmed in the process.

We take care of our land and our people, because this is our home. We grew up here, and we want it to thrive for generations to come.”

Nelson Lomiwes
Gold Miner and Farmer
Sagada, Mt. Province, Philippines





UNIDO believes that sustainable development is not solely about economic growth; it is also about safeguarding our environment, preserving our rich cultural heritage and traditions, and protecting human health. This is the future we're building together: mining that doesn't sacrifice health or nature for livelihood.

The road to sustainability is not always easy, but it is always worth it.

The fight for a mercury-free ASGM sector is not just a project—it is a movement. A promise we will continue, a cause we will fight for, for a safer and brighter future for our miners and communities, where no one is left behind.”

Teddy Monroy
Country Representative
UNIDO Philippines

“Our mining activities should be responsible—It should not be solely about making a profit. We need to take care of our environment.

As we strive to improve our lives, we must also protect the environment we operate in.

This ensures the next generation has something to rely on and can still experience the beauty of nature.”

Sheryl Dasco
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



04

COMPONENT



THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

In the world of ASGM, change rarely starts in policy halls—it begins with a story. A story that unpacks the complex reasons why mercury is still used, challenges long-standing misconceptions, and reveals that small-scale miners are not merely laborers. They are innovators, decision-makers, and essential contributors to their communities and local economies.

Yet in many mining areas, outdated practices persist—not only due to limited technology or funding, but also because miners often lack access to clear, relevant, and trustworthy information. In the absence of such information, miners often rely on inherited practices or informal networks that seldom address safety, legality, or sustainability. Meanwhile, public narratives continue to portray them as threats rather than potential allies in responsible resource management.

To address this, the Communications and Knowledge Management component of the planetGOLD Philippines Project focuses on transforming how information is shared, how stories are told, and how connections are built. It connects miners with

policymakers, rural communities with institutions, and the Philippines with global ASGM networks. Through videos, printed materials, performances, storybooks, roadshows, websites, social media, and public events, the project fosters inclusive, people-centered communication that empowers communities to tell their own stories.

Since its launch, the project has achieved the following:

120+
IEC and awareness-raising materials

produced and distributed, including children's storybooks, posters, training modules, videos, songs, poems, newsletters, infographics, and documentaries

70+
published articles

including field updates, interviews, and community stories

3M+
reach

through traditional, digital, and in-person campaigns

Key initiatives include the following:



6
Media Kapihan sessions

under the theme "Tungo sa Responsableng Maliitang Pagmimina"

20+
episodes of The Gold Talk

the first and only Philippine radio program dedicated to ASGM

National #ASGMChampions

social media campaign promoting responsible small-scale mining

Youth for Responsible Gold

interactive educational roadshow which engaged more than 500 students and teachers

The Power of Gold: Stories from the Ground

an ASGM documentary series

Mina Minera and Miko, Maya, and the Golden Valley

produced children's books which reached more than 50 schools

To foster more informed and meaningful media engagement, the project collaborated with over 60 journalists, resulting in more than 70 media features and deeper reporting through conferences and a Solutions Journalism workshop. These efforts helped move the conversation beyond headlines—highlighting real people, challenges, and progress in ASGM communities.

Online, the project launched a dedicated knowledge-sharing platform, built an active Facebook community with over 10,000 followers, and released more than 10 newsletters to a growing network of over 900 subscribers.

From national dialogues to international platforms, the

planetGOLD Philippines Project made sure that the voices of the ASGM sector were heard. The project team actively represented the sector at key events such as the National Assembly of Small-Scale Miners of the Philippines and the 2023 Mining Philippines Summit, as well as on global stages including the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) convention in Toronto, the Fifth Conference of the Parties (COP-5) to the Minamata Convention in Geneva, the Africa Environmental Health and Pollution Management Program conference in Tanzania, and the OECD Forums in Paris. Through these engagements, the project helped elevate ASGM concerns, shared local innovations, and promoted inclusive, sustainable solutions

In just six years, the project has helped shift the narrative—showing that miners are not merely part of the problem, but part of the solution. It built bridges between miners and media, students and storytellers, communities and policymakers.

With communications grounded in respect, inclusion, and evidence, planetGOLD Philippines is changing how the world sees ASGM—and how miners see themselves.

Turning the Tide

How the planetGOLD Philippines Project is Rewriting the Narrative of Small-Scale Gold Mining through Media Engagement

Did you know that 80% of the Philippines' gold reserves are mined by small-scale miners? Probably not—because for decades, ASGM has typically made headlines only in the wake of disasters: collapsed tunnels, environmental damage, corruption, and labor issues. While these incidents are real and serious, they paint an incomplete picture of the sector. These events, regardless of their frequency or scale, have shaped public and government perception, casting ASGM as dangerous, exploitative, and environmentally destructive.

But beyond the headlines are thousands of miners and communities working toward a better, safer future. ASGM remains a vital source of livelihood for many Filipinos, contributing not only to local economies but also to the nation's gold reserves.

To break this cycle of stigma and shine a light on the ongoing reforms in the ASGM sector, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has prioritized engaging with one of the most powerful forces of influence: the media.

MEDIA AS PARTNERS IN REFORM

Recognizing the media's role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy, the project launched a series of strategic media engagement initiatives to tell a different story—one of transformation, empowerment, partnership, and hope.

"We realized early on that if we want to change the narrative around ASGM, we need to actively engage the storytellers. That means opening our doors, inviting them in, and showing—not just telling—the realities on the ground."

— **Abigail Ocate**
National Project Manager,
Artisanal Gold Council
Philippines

One of the project's flagship strategies is the "*Kapihan Tungo sa Responsableng Minahan*" (*Coffee Talk Towards Responsible Mining*), which consists of informal roundtable discussions with journalists. These brown bag sessions serve as safe spaces where reporters, editors, and project staff can speak candidly about issues, gaps in information, and story angles in the ASGM space.

Since launching this effort, the project has hosted six Media Kapihan sessions, attended by over 60 journalists from both national and local media outlets. These sessions have created a network of informed media professionals who are now better equipped to write about ASGM with context, accuracy, and balance.

STORYTELLING FROM THE GROUND

Beyond the media Kapihans and conferences, the project took it a step further by offering journalists

the opportunity to visit ASGM communities. One of the biggest wins in this effort came when a major national TV network took interest and produced a one-hour documentary on ASGM, filmed in Paracale, Camarines Norte—one of the project sites .

The documentary, coordinated closely by the planetGOLD Philippines team of AGC, featured small-scale miners sharing their stories of struggle and resilience, project staff discussing innovations in mercury-free gold processing, and government officials outlining policy reforms. The segment didn't shy away from challenges—but more importantly, it also captured the progress being made. It provided a rare, humanizing look at ASGM, one that was balanced, nuanced, and ultimately hopeful.

The documentary featured interviews with miners, community members, and the AGC project team. For once, national television didn't just show the dangers of ASGM—it showed the innovations, the reforms, and the dreams that miners hold for a better future.

"It was a proud moment for us," says Abigail Ocate, the National Project Manager for planetGOLD Philippines. "For once, ASGM was on TV not because of a tragedy, but because of transformation."

To date, more than 50 media outlets—including national newspapers, radio stations, online platforms, and television networks—have featured the project or reached out for expert interviews, with the planetGOLD

Philippines team at AGC frequently serving as a trusted resource.

FROM COVERAGE TO CREDIBILITY

A key driver of this media attention has been the project's proactive and consistent presence on social media. Through timely posts, engaging infographics, miner stories, and project updates, the communications team has positioned the project as a credible, go-to source for information on ASGM in the Philippines.

By showing up consistently, telling honest stories, sharing data that matters, and being open about both the challenges and the wins, the project has started to build something deeper: credibility. And that credibility is what gets people—especially journalists—to pay attention. Little by little, the narrative around small-scale mining is changing, not just because the work is happening, but because people are finally seeing it.

One standout initiative is the ASGM Champion Spotlight Series, an online campaign that profiles miners, community leaders, and reform advocates who are championing responsible mining. These stories showcase real progress in the sector—from the establishment of mercury-free processing facilities to the rise of empowered women miners now leading associations in their communities.

These stories resonate not just because of their content, but because of their tone—they are human, hopeful, and honest.





A CALL FOR CONTINUED COLLABORATION

Another initiative to strengthen collaboration with journalists is the Solutions Journalism Workshop, designed to equip reporters with the tools and perspectives needed to explore ASGM issues with greater depth.

In September 2024, six international journalists traveled to Paracale, Camarines Norte, to look beyond the usual narratives of risk and informality in ASGM. As part of the workshop *Beyond the Headlines: Co-Creating a New ASGM Narrative Through Solutions Journalism*, they engaged with ASGM experts, responsible gold processors, and members of the community—including miners, local leaders, and social workers.

The immersive experience challenged participants to shift their focus from what's wrong to what's working—fostering more balanced, solutions-centered, and human-centered coverage of the ASGM sector.

The ultimate goal? A more informed public, more nuanced storytelling, and a more respected, accurately represented ASGM sector.

“Our miners are not the villains in this story—they're often the victims of a system that has long denied them the tools, support, and recognition they need,” says Ocate. “By working with the media, we're helping to rewrite that narrative—one headline, one segment, one story at a time.”

“One thing I've learned from reporting on ASGM is that it's legally, ethically, technically, and scientifically complex. That's why solutions journalism matters. It's not just about hope—it's about going deeper, asking better questions, and recognizing the full weight of that complexity. For issues like ASGM, solutions journalism has so much to offer.”

— **Daniel Leslie Shailer**
Journalist
The Guardian / Mongabay

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION, INFLUENCING POLICY

Why does this matter?

Because the media doesn't just inform the public. It reaches policymakers, regulators, and national decision-makers. For a sector like ASGM, which often slips through the cracks of national development agendas, visibility in the news is more than just awareness; it's a step toward being included in policies, budgets, and long-term planning.

Every story that highlights progress in ASGM—whether it's a community adopting mercury-free technology, a mining association securing legal permits to operate, or women miners taking on leadership roles—adds weight to the call for responsive, equitable policies. It moves small-scale mining from the margins to the mainstream of development discourse.

In many ways, the partnership between the project and the media is about more than just good publicity. It's about reclaiming the narrative, pushing

for just policies, and creating space for small-scale miners at the table where decisions are made.

Transforming the ASGM sector is a long-term effort—it demands inclusive policies, strong partnerships, capacity building, and continuous innovation. Equally essential is the role of storytelling: speaking the truth, celebrating the progress, acknowledging the setbacks, and engaging the public every step of the way.

By amplifying the voices of small-scale gold miners and placing media engagement at the heart of its strategy, the planetGOLD Philippines Project is doing what few have dared: challenging deep-seated stereotypes and showing the world that behind every gold nugget is a dignified miner who deserves to be seen, heard, valued, and included in the better future we're building together.

The Sound of Change

INSIDE THE PHILIPPINES' FIRST RADIO SHOW FOR SMALL-SCALE MINERS

In the mining towns of Camarines Norte and Mountain Province, the familiar crackle of radio static now carries more than just music or headlines—it carries the lived realities, daily struggles, and rising hopes of the country's ASGM communities.

"The Gold Talk: Sa Responsableng Pagmimina, Lahat Giginhawa!" marks a transformative milestone in development communication. Launched by the planetGOLD Philippines Project, it is the first and only radio program in the country solely dedicated to ASGM—a sector that has long been marginalized and often misrepresented in mainstream narratives.

For years, many small-scale miners have faced stigma, often depicted in the media as threats to the environment or public safety. This negative portrayal has made some miners hesitant to speak out, fearing that attention might lead not to support but to the closure of their operations. *The Gold Talk* breaks this silence by providing a safe and affirming space for miners to share and discuss their experiences.





More than just a public service broadcast, *The Gold Talk* serves as a platform of possibility. It educates listeners on safer, more ethical practices, outlines the path to formalization, and features the voices of miners who are successfully transitioning to responsible mining. Women hear inspiring stories that encourage them to take on leadership roles, while all listeners begin to envision futures where gold mining is a dignified, community-centered livelihood. Most importantly, it offers miners something they seldom encounter in national media—something to be proud of.

Conversations here do not focus solely on risks and failures; they celebrate progress, share solutions, and build collective confidence. In doing so, they gradually reshape how this long-stigmatized sector views itself—and how it is perceived by others.

RADIO FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE

While the internet is undeniably powerful, radio remains the dominant communication medium in remote areas of the country where connectivity is limited and smartphones are not always available. Findings from the 2021 planetGOLD Philippines Contextual Study confirm that radio is one of the most trusted and accessible channels—particularly in rural regions where internet access is scarce and literacy levels vary.

Recognizing this, the project—in partnership with the Camarines Norte Provincial Information Office—launched *The Gold Talk* on Radyo Pilipinas 96.9 FM in Daet on 25 June 2023. This innovative initiative aimed to provide small-scale miners with a dedicated platform to learn, share, and be heard. The program quickly became a hub of engagement for miners and their communities, offering project updates, technical advice, expert interviews, and even trivia contests with prizes to captivate listeners.

The interview setup is intentional, presenting a well-rounded view of the sector. One host comes from the government radio station, while the other is from the project team of AGC, joined by guest experts and miners. The term “Kakulipaw,” affectionately used to address the audience, draws inspiration from the local tradition of *kulipaw*—a spirit of community and sharing that embodies the strong bonds within ASGM communities. The show honors this tradition, creating not just a broadcast, but a true gathering place.

Building on the success of the Camarines Norte edition, planetGOLD Philippines replicated the model in the north. On 29 April 2024, *The Gold Talk: Bontoc Edition* debuted on DZRH 107.3 FM Radyo Pilipinas Bontoc, bringing the ASGM conversation to Mountain Province. This expansion reflects the project’s commitment to inclusivity, recognizing that each mining community has its own-unique stories, challenges, and solutions.

The Mountain Province edition began with updates on mercury-free mining practices and the project’s initiatives in Sagada. Through local hosts and grounded discussions, the show connects with listeners in ways few other mediums can—through language, culture, and lived experiences.

“At Radyo Pilipinas Bontoc, we’re glad to support this kind of public service. Many still don’t fully understand small-scale mining, and through *The GOLD Talk* programs, miners also learn how to be more responsible.”

— **Donalyn Kawis Balio,**
Station Manager
Radyo Pilipinas Bontoc

To date, approximately 20 episodes have aired on the radio programs in both Camarines Norte and Mountain Province. Each episode is crafted

to be accessible and engaging, and can also be livestreamed or replayed via the official Facebook page of planetGOLD Philippines—extending its reach beyond the airwaves to digital audiences across the country and even internationally.

TALKING ABOUT REAL ISSUES – AND REAL SOLUTIONS

What makes *The Gold Talk* truly impactful is its fearless approach to addressing the most pressing concerns in the ASGM sector—unsafe mining practices, environmental degradation, lack of formalization, and other related issues. These topics are often complex and sensitive, but *The Gold Talk* handles them with empathy and transparency, offering nuanced insights and practical solutions.

In one of its premiere episodes, National Communications Officer Dawn Po Quimque explained the project’s holistic approach to change:

“By sharing timely and reliable information, addressing real issues faced by miners, and promoting the path to formalization, we aim to empower small-scale gold miners and encourage more responsible, environmentally sound mining practices.”

The show doesn’t just talk about problems—it highlights solutions. It brings in voices from the ground: miners, women in mining, community advocates, technical experts, and government partners. By doing so, it helps listeners understand that transitioning to safer, cleaner, and legal mining practices is possible. It also demonstrates that small-scale miners are not obstacles to development, but partners in progress—when given the proper support and platforms.

Camarines Norte Radyo Pilipinas has committed to continuing the production of *The Gold Talk* episodes even after the project ends—underscoring the importance of sustainability in bringing miners’ livelihoods into the spotlight.

As host Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado shared, “This program is deeply relevant to our province, where three municipalities rely on mining as their main source of livelihood. It’s important that we are inclusive—that miners know we are here to help them, and that they are not alone.”





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A MODEL FOR INCLUSIVE CAMPAIGN

The success of *The Gold Talk* underscores the importance of grounded, community-based communication strategies in development work. By tapping into the enduring reach of radio and anchoring its content in the lived realities of miners, *The Gold Talk* helps bridge divides—between miners and government, science and tradition, policy and practice.

What began as a local conversation could become something far bigger.

Across the Philippines, there are at least 40 provinces with ASGM communities. In many of these places, miners still go unheard—

disconnected, hesitant to speak out for fear of being sanctioned or misunderstood. Their realities are often invisible, and their hopes unspoken.

The Gold Talk is changing that. It's more than just a radio show—it's a catalyst. A model that can be adapted in other regions to reach those who are still left in the dark. With the right support, it has the potential to spark a nationwide campaign—one that brings miners into the conversation not as subjects of scrutiny, but as true partners in progress.

As the planetGOLD Philippines Project pushes forward in building a mercury-free and responsible ASGM sector, *The Gold Talk* proves that real change doesn't come from top-

down orders—it begins with honest, inclusive, and respectful dialogue.

In the words of Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado, the ever-passionate host from Camarines Norte:

“Through this platform, we can move closer to a future where responsible mining uplifts lives, protects nature, and where—truly—lahat ginhawa.”



Youth for Responsible Gold

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION THROUGH SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



For generations, the use of mercury in ASGM has been passed down as common practice—often without full understanding of its harmful effects on human health, the environment, and entire communities. But change is possible—and it begins with the youth.

In a strategic effort to shift mindsets and build a safer, cleaner, and more equitable ASGM sector, the Artisanal Gold Council, through the planetGOLD Philippines Project, launched the *Youth for Responsible Gold: Fostering Communities Towards a Safer, Cleaner, and More Equitable ASGM Sector* educational roadshow.

The initiative targets elementary and high school students and teachers, engaging them as partners in advocating for responsible, mercury-free mining. More than just an information campaign, the roadshow highlights the social, cultural, and economic contributions of ASGM while cultivating a deeper understanding of its environmental impact.

Held in 2023 at Fidelisan Elementary School and Bangaan National High School in Sagada, Mountain Province, and in 2025 in Barangays Casalugan and Gumaus in Paracale, Camarines Norte, the roadshow engaged over 500 participants—including students, teachers, and local

officials. Each two-day event combined education, creativity, and storytelling to bring the message of responsible gold mining to life in meaningful and memorable ways.

“Most of our students are children of miners, so it’s important for them to understand what their parents do—and how they, as youth, can help protect the environment. Through the roadshow, we realized that mercury-free gold processing is possible. All of us—teachers, parents, and students—learned the value of using our natural resources responsibly.”

— **Isidro S. Ganaden**
Teacher-in-Charge
Fidelisan Elementary School

Interactive sessions featured storytelling with *Mina Minera* and *Miko, Maya, and the Golden Valley*—highlighting the role of women miners and how mining can coexist with environmental stewardship. Students participated in art contests, mural painting activities, and games, while a screening of the *Power of Gold: Stories from the Ground* documentary sparked critical conversations about the dangers of mercury and the often-overlooked contributions of women in the mining sector.

The youth emerged as champions. Through their

artworks, performances, and reflections, young participants demonstrated leadership, creativity, and a strong commitment to a mercury-free future.

“We are very delighted that our school was chosen for the roadshow. It opened our students’ eyes to the realities of small-scale mining and the importance of doing it responsibly—without mercury. As educators, we also learned a lot. The activities brought students outside the four corners of the classroom and helped them discover their talents and potential as future advocates for responsible gold mining. They are now bearers of the message of change—not just for today, but for future generations.”

— **Evelyn Cayabas**
TLE Teacher
Bangaan National High School

After the unveiling of the mural painted by the students, participants, guests, and other stakeholders placed their handprints on the wall as a symbol of their commitment to raising awareness about the significant contributions of ASGM to local and national economy, and the collective move toward mercury-free and responsible mining practices.



“The youth play a vital role in shifting mindsets and shaping the future of responsible gold. By engaging them early, we’re not only raising awareness—we’re building a generation of advocates who will carry forward the values of environmental stewardship, health, and community empowerment.”

— **Dawn Po Quimque**,
National Communications
Officer, planetGOLD
Philippines Project

Profile

Ezra Soliaban

Youth for Responsible Gold Champion (Elementary)

Sagada, Mt. Province

At just 12 years old, **Ezra Soliaban** is already raising her voice for responsible mining. A graduating student of Fidelisan Elementary School in Sagada, Ezra stood out as one of the key participants in the 2023 educational roadshow of the planetGOLD Philippines.

Curious, enthusiastic, and full of heart, Ezra eagerly participated in every activity—from mural painting and film viewings to slogan-making and storytelling sessions. She listened intently, asked thoughtful questions, and even pitched in to help with painting when others slowed down. In the slogan-making contest, she not only won first place but also delivered a heartfelt speech urging miners and fellow students to care for the environment and manage waste responsibly.

“We should keep our place beautiful and not ruin it,” she said.

“Since our place has mines, we need to be responsible—for our health, our environment, and for the future.”

Ezra’s energy, compassion, and leadership inspired both her peers and the project team. Whether assisting with registration or helping younger children, Ezra embodied what it means to be a **Youth for Responsible Gold Champion**—a young voice standing strong for a cleaner, safer, and more equitable future in mining communities.

“I learned that chemicals like Mercury should not be used in mining because they’re dangerous to our health and environment.”



Profile

Josef Macalo

Youth for Responsible Gold
Champion (Elementary)
Sagada, Mt. Province



*“When it’s our
turn, we must
do better.”*

Known as the “Kuya” of Fidelisan Elementary School, **Josef Macalo** is a natural leader with a kind heart and a strong voice for responsible mining. During the 2023 planetGOLD Philippines educational roadshow in Sagada, Josef demonstrated quiet but steady leadership—volunteering to lead the mural painting, joining contests, and helping younger students feel included and cared for.

He embraced every opportunity to learn—especially about the impacts of harmful mining practices and the importance of protecting both people and nature.

“Responsible mining means not using harmful chemicals, not burning trash, and never throwing waste into rivers,” he said.

Josef’s words during the closing program left a mark—encouraging fellow students to be advocates for their community and the environment. With his strong sense of responsibility and care for others, Josef truly embodies what it means to be a **Youth for Responsible Gold Champion**.

“I enjoyed the educational roadshow and learned a lot. That’s why I’ll encourage my classmates to join next time, so we can all grow and help our community.”

Thank you, planetGOLD Philippines, for the roadshow. It gave me new knowledge and helped me believe that even kids like us can lead the way.”





“No amount of money from mining can ever pay for a life lost. That’s why we must always be careful and responsible. Mining is not owned by one person, and it won’t last forever. If we want it to benefit more people for a longer time, we need to take care of it.

As students, we also have a role to play. We should help teach our younger schoolmates what’s right and wrong—so we can protect the environment and avoid harm.

We are the next generation, and it’s our responsibility to build a better future.

Thank you to planetGOLD Philippines for helping the miners, the students, and the entire community. You gave us the chance to learn, to show our talents, and to dream bigger.”

Aira Mae Patong
Youth for Responsible Gold Champion
Bangaan National High School
Sagada, Mountain Province





“

“Through the educational roadshow, I learned how dangerous mercury is—not just to people, but to our entire environment. It opened my eyes and inspired me to take action. I joined the jingle-making contest and wrote my own original song, drawing from what I saw in our community—many young people dropping out of school to work in the mines.

I realized I could use my voice and creativity to speak up, to remind others that education matters more and that we need to protect both our future and our environment.

As a Youth for Responsible Gold Champion, I’m committed to encouraging my fellow students to stay in school and seek safer ways to support their families. There are other options—like part-time jobs in local businesses. But above all, we must put our studies first.”

Reiner Ligayo
Youth for Responsible Gold Champion
Bangaan National High School
Sagada, Mountain Province

Profile

Maricel B. Gacos

*A Young Voice's Advocacy
for Responsible Mining*

Maricel B. Gacos grew up in Paracale, Camarines Norte, a town where mining runs deeper than tradition—where almost every family has someone working beneath the earth. As the eldest of three siblings and the daughter of small-scale gold miners, she grew up with the mines etched into her daily life—not just as a backdrop, but as a reality that shaped her world. Each day, she witnessed the weight of sacrifice and the true price of gold.

Recognized for her strong voice as a youth advocate in the community, Maricel was chosen as the Youth for Responsible Gold Champion in Paracale. She now speaks for her parents, her peers, and the environment—carrying a voice that connects, one grounded in experience and driven by purpose. She stands for what many young people in her community quietly hope for: a future where mining is safe, fair, and sustainable.





From Witness to Advocate

Maricel's parents raised her and her siblings amid the uncertainty that comes with working underground. There were good days, and days when the gold didn't come at all. It's why she holds deep respect for them—and why every opportunity she has now feels hard-earned, built from their sacrifice.

She also saw dignity: how her parents' labor, though invisible to most, kept her in school and shaped her sense of responsibility. That lived experience drew her to advocacy.

As a Grade 12 student at Gumaus National High School, Maricel joined the 2025 planetGOLD Philippines Educational Roadshow—Youth for Responsible Gold: Fostering Communities towards a Safer, Cleaner, and Equitable Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining Sector—where she learned about the environmental and health risks tied to mercury, and the urgent need for change in mining practices.

The project aimed to help ASGM communities understand the

dangers of mercury use—how it harms miners, their families, the environment, and future generations. Through this, Maricel came to truly understand what mercury does—not just to the soil and water, but to the brain, lungs, and body.

During the Roadshow, she listened to stories and saw the lives of communities in Sagada, Mountain Province that mirrored her own. It helped her see her parents' long hours underground in a different light. Her deep understanding of the sacrifices made by families like hers has since become a powerful drive to advocate for responsible mining and environmental protection.

Because this time, there are solutions: safer alternatives, cleaner technologies, and a path forward that doesn't force communities to choose between survival and sustainability.

When asked about her advocacy, Maricel shared:

“As a student, my advocacy for mercury-free ASGM focuses on awareness and education—

informing peers and communities about mercury's health and environmental dangers through school campaigns, workshops, and accessible materials. I also engage in policy advocacy, supporting the formalization of the ASGM sector. Finally, collaboration and youth engagement are key—forming student groups and using creative expression to amplify our messages and connect with other young advocates.”

As the Youth for Responsible Gold Champion in Paracale, she is channeling her story into action—engaging fellow youth, raising awareness about responsible mining, and pushing for a future where livelihoods don't come at the cost of lives or land.

From Tunnels to Tomorrow

Maricel represents what's possible when education, lived experience, and heart come together. She connects with fellow youth—not as someone removed from their reality,

but as one of them. Someone who knows what it's like to grow up waiting for the sound of footsteps returning safely from underground. Someone who knows her parents worked underground so she could rise above.

And now she's doing the same—for them, for her community, and for a world that still doesn't always see the people behind the products it consumes. Their story isn't always glamorous. But it's real. And it deserves to be heard.

Maricel shows the quiet power of young people who are choosing a different path—not away from mining, but toward a safer, smarter way to do it. She's a miner's daughter making her mark not with a pickaxe or a gold pan, but with a voice strong enough to echo underground and far beyond.

Today, as a college student, she brings with her the experience and knowledge she gained from the planetGOLD Philippines Project, carrying forward the work that shaped her into the advocate she is now.



Beyond the Mines

HOW PLANETGOLD PHILIPPINES IS MOVING ADVOCACY FROM THE GROUND TO THE GLOBAL STAGE

planetGOLD Annual Programme Meeting
Nairobi, Kenya
November 14-18, 2022



Advocacy is most powerful when it steps off the screen and into real spaces.

In an era shaped by endless scrolling and clicks, it's easy to think that raising awareness begins—and ends—online. But there is something irreplaceable about presence: being in the room, hearing stories without filters or hashtags. Advocacy

isn't just about visibility; it's about connection. Nowhere is this truer than in the ASGM sector.

To many, ASGM is an unfamiliar acronym—if not a complete mystery. When people hear

“mining,” they often picture towering machines, giant corporations, and environmental destruction. Rarely do they imagine mountain barangays, hand tools, and families whose lives revolve around just a few grams of gold.

But that's exactly what ASGM is: communities striving to make a dignified living through work passed down through generations. It's a story of survival, resilience, and hope—one that planetGOLD Philippines Project is determined to bring to light.



THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE GOLD

For the planetGOLD Philippines project team, ASGM has never been just a development issue. For the team, every gram of mercury-free gold represents a life transformed, a dream rekindled, and a community choosing a safer, more sustainable path.

From the start, the project's goal extended beyond technical support. It sought to humanize the ASGM sector—to help the public see miners not as statistics or stereotypes, but as hardworking individuals, modern-day unsung heroes, and agents of change.

That commitment took shape in 2023 through *Behind the Gold Rush: People Advocating for the Advancement of ASGM in the Philippines*, a traveling photo exhibit that debuted in project sites across Camarines Norte and Mt. Province. Timed to coincide with local festivals, the exhibit was more than a visual showcase—it became a space for recognition, conversation, and pride.

“For us miners, we are often invisible to society,” said Esther Camiling, a small-scale miner from Sagada and one of the featured champions. “This exhibit highlights our hard work. We feel seen.”

The exhibit traveled to schools in Paracale and Sagada, engaging elementary and high school students—many of whom grew up

around mining but had never been part of conversations about its future.

ADVOCACY BEYOND PROJECT SITES

Recognizing the need to influence both policy and public perception, planetGOLD Philippines brought its advocacy to national platforms where broader conversations and decisions take place.

From 2022 to 2024, the project actively participated in and sponsored the National Assemblies and Summits of the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in the Philippines, Inc. (NCSSMPI). These key gatherings brought together miners, regulators, academics, and civil society representatives to address urgent issues such as formalization, environmental protection, and community development.

At these events, planetGOLD Philippines shared lessons from its pilot sites and showcased scalable models such as the Knowledge

Management (KM) Platform, the implementation of the CRAFT Code, and a documentary spotlighting women in mining. The project also championed national policy discussions, including the proposed Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy (MACWIE Bill), which aims to uphold the rights and welfare of informal workers, including those in ASGM.

“Conversations about women in mining are not just essential; they are crucial for creating an equitable ASGM sector,” said Meggy Katigbak, National Gender Specialist. “Our dialogue can pave the way for meaningful change.”

These platforms provided small-scale miners from the project sites the opportunity to engage in national conversations, connect with broader networks, and influence the sector's evolving agenda. In 2022, the project facilitated the inclusion of 20 mining associations as official members of NCSSMPI, amplifying grassroots voices and promoting collective action.

“While our project focuses on two pilot sites, we are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the sector at large through events like this,” expressed National Project Manager Abigail Ocate.

“We remain committed to promoting formalization, sustainability, and responsible growth in the small-scale mining industry throughout the Philippines.”

At one assembly, a chance encounter with PJ Lhuillier's Finance Group led to a partnership that extended their existing gold-buying and insurance programs to include the planetGOLD Philippines project sites in Sagada and Paracale. This meant no more minimum volume requirements, no more long travel times, and no costly processing fees for miners in these areas.

The program addresses critical gaps in financing and market access—especially where miners often fall prey to black market buyers due to urgent cash needs. Now, miners in places like Sagada and

Paracale can access fair pricing and immediate transactions—restoring not just value but dignity.

The project also brought ASGM to the forefront at *Mining Philippines 2023*, the country's largest mining industry conference hosted by the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP). With over 300 stakeholders in attendance, the event marked a milestone for ASGM's visibility. As the only ASGM exhibitor, the planetGOLD Philippines Project team showcased responsible mining practices, community-led innovations, and compelling narratives that challenge outdated perceptions.

Since then, COMP has expressed support for the project's educational roadshows.

The team engaged in discussions on how large-scale mining (LSM) companies and ASGM can coexist, explore opportunities for collaboration, and address long-standing tensions around resource access, environmental management, and regulatory compliance.



A SEAT AT THE TABLE, GLOBALLY

The planetGOLD Philippines Project has consistently showcased local insights on the global stage, sharing best practices and lessons learned through international exchanges.

At the 2022 planetGOLD Programme Annual Meeting in Kenya, project representatives highlighted key accomplishments from the Philippines, including a video demonstrating the initiative's on-the-ground impact. During communications sessions, the team facilitated discussions on improved community engagement and reshaping public perception.

The momentum continued at the 2024 planetGOLD ASGM Global Forum held in Batangas, Philippines. Several team members spoke and led sessions on financial inclusion, gender, formalization, advocacy and communication, and mercury-free technologies.

With over 300 delegates worldwide, the forum positioned the Philippines as a leader in responsible small-scale mining.

What makes the advocacy model of the planetGOLD Philippines compelling is its ability to bridge local and global perspectives.

In 2023, the team represented ASGM voices at major international policy events, including the Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) convention in Toronto and the Fifth Conference of the Parties (COP-5) to the Minamata Convention in Geneva.

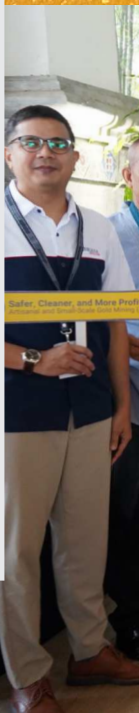
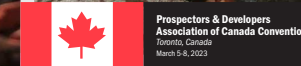
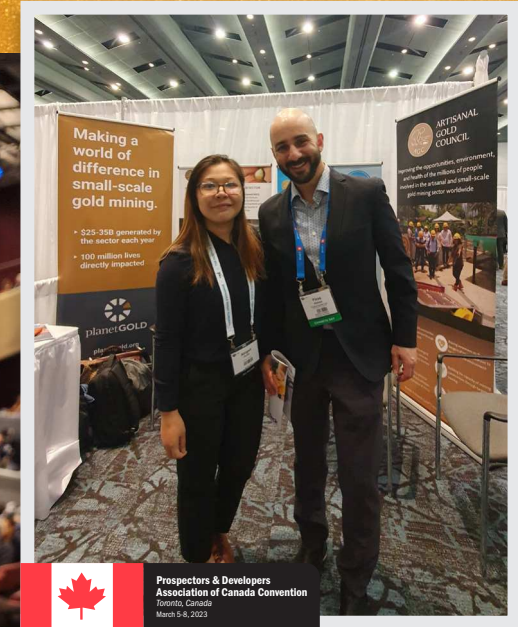


In 2023 and 2024, the project shared its lessons learned at the OECD Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains in Paris. In 2024, the project was also invited to present its initiatives during the Africa Environmental Health and Pollution Management Program event held in Tanzania.

Participation in these global events helps ensure that the contributions of small-scale miners are recognized in the global gold supply chain.



These platforms highlight the progress and responsible practices emerging from communities, allowing their voices and efforts to gain the attention they deserve.





TOWARD A MOVEMENT, NOT JUST A MESSAGE

More than raising awareness, planetGOLD Philippines is deepening the conversation around ASGM advocacy. It moves beyond policy briefs and reports—engaging through school visits, photo exhibits, cross-sector partnerships, and face-to-face conversations.

This is a campaign grounded in storytelling and science. Empowerment and evidence. Dignity and development. “We’ve learned that to make real change, we have to go where the people are—not just miners, but policymakers, students, industry leaders, media, academe, and global partners,” said National Project Manager Abigail Ocate.



“Only by bringing the stories and science of responsible gold mining to different arenas can we inspire collective action.”

Because advocacy doesn't end at the mine—it starts there.

And from there, it moves the world.

Profile

Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado

Championing Responsible Mining and Community Empowerment

In the gold-rich province of Camarines Norte, where ASGM has been a vital source of livelihood for generations, Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado—affectionately called Ate Sarah—has become one of the most trusted voices for responsible mining and inclusive development.

Wearing many hats—advocate, public servant, academic, wife, and mother—Sarah is known for her tireless work in supporting marginalized communities, especially miners long overlooked by the system. Her approach is grounded in empathy and a deep understanding of the realities on the ground.



A Public Servant with a Purpose

Sarah's career in public service began in her hometown of Jose Panganiban, where she served as Municipal Councilor for three terms. During her tenure, she championed progressive legislation focused on children, women, Indigenous Peoples, education, and small-scale mining. In 2015, her leadership earned her recognition as one of Camarines Norte's "Most Outstanding Legislators."

Between those councilor terms, she served as Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer (MENRO), working closely with the mining sector and witnessing firsthand the environmental and health challenges facing local miners. These roles gave her a unique vantage point—both legislative and operational—on the urgent need for change in the ASGM sector.

She reflects, "God is my ultimate employer who knows every detail of my being. He knows my strengths and weaknesses as well as my deepest hopes and wishes. That is why every crossroad and 'new assignment' from God is welcome in my life."

This belief drives her to give the same passion and dedication to each of her roles. To her, they are not merely jobs—they are a calling.

Advocacy Through Academia

A lifelong learner and advocate, Sarah pursued a Doctorate in Public Administration, where she deepened her focus on small-scale mining. Her dissertation, "Small-Scale Gold Mining Practices and Compliance with Dynamite and Mercury Prohibition in Camarines Norte," examined the persistent use of hazardous methods and the lack of enforcement in mining communities. Her

research underscored the urgent need for safer, cleaner practices.

She also bridged academia and grassroots work through a partnership with the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development. As MENRO, she welcomed and mentored students enrolled in the Field Instruction Program (FIP)—a hands-on academic and service-oriented program where students immerse themselves in community to apply, validate, and critique development theories in real-world settings.

"It wasn't just an academic requirement," Sarah said. "It was about building solidarity, respect, and real understanding."

Under Sarah's leadership, five batches of FIP students were deployed to ASGM communities in Jose Panganiban, Camarines Norte. They stayed in the communities for two months at a time, living with and learning from miners while working on community-driven projects.

This initiative not only strengthened the miners' sense of community and self-worth, but also planted the seeds for long-term advocacy among future social workers and development professionals. Sarah ensured that the experience was not merely academic—it was transformational, rooted in empathy, solidarity, and empowerment.

"The youth who has the energy, knowledge, passion, and idealism must be immersed with the realities on the ground. This will naturally result to pragmatism and purification."

—Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado



Strengthening the ASGM Movement

In 2012, Sarah co-founded the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in the Philippines, serving as its first secretariat. The coalition became a key platform for miners to assert their rights and advocate for reforms at the national level. She also organized small-scale mining associations in Jose Panganiban, which led to the formation of the first municipal federation of miners in Camarines Norte. As the founding adviser of the *Samahang Magkakabod ng Camarines Norte* (SAMACANO), she remains a trusted adviser to both the coalition and local groups—a testament to her long-standing dedication.

Today, she continues to champion the sector through her current role as Provincial Information Officer. She spearheaded "The Gold Talk," a pioneering radio program launched in partnership with planetGOLD Philippines Project, where miners can access reliable information on health, safety, and responsible mining practices.

She also led communications training sessions for the Provincial Information Office to enhance public awareness on mining and help shift the narrative toward dignity and sustainability. But her work didn't stop there. Believing that real change begins at the grassroots, Sarah brought communication training directly to the miners themselves—teaching them how to confidently engage with government agencies, non-government organizations, and the media. Her belief is simple but powerful: when miners are informed, empowered, and organized, they can be part of the solution—and powerful advocates for responsible mining.

A Voice in the Global Conversation

Sarah's impact extends beyond local borders. In 2024, she joined the Philippine delegation to Mongolia, exchanging lessons on formalizing ASGM and connecting miners to formal markets. Her presence in international forums demonstrates how local leaders like her can shape global discussions from the ground up.

One of her key advocacies is eliminating mercury use in small-scale mining. She works closely with national agencies, non-profits, and academic institutions to promote safer, mercury-free technologies—a critical goal aligned with global environmental standards and health safeguards.

"The world who claims to care for the voiceless should learn to listen to them, never imposing what he/she thinks as solution to their problem, but with sincerity and respect, work 'with' them to achieve a common goal."

—Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado

A Legacy of Empowerment and Change

Sarah is a woman of conviction, compassion, and quiet persistence. Her leadership spans multiple sectors—but it is always grounded in people. With a rare blend of policy expertise and deep community immersion, she has helped transform how small-scale mining is perceived and practiced in Camarines Norte.

To many, she is more than an official—she is an ally, a mentor, and a trusted

advocate. To the ASGM sector, she is a true champion.

Her multifaceted career—as a public servant, academic, mentor, and leader—reflects a deep-rooted commitment to social justice and environmental stewardship. Her work has not only improved the lives of small-scale miners but has also set a model for inclusive and sustainable development in mining communities.

Through her unwavering dedication, Sarah has shown that meaningful change happens when advocacy is grounded in action, and when communities are empowered to shape their own futures.

From high-level meetings to grassroots gatherings, Sarah has been a steadfast ally of planetGOLD Philippines since day one. Her presence—whether at a policy dialogue, a youth-led contest, a media conference, or the signing of a local agreement—is never just symbolic. It is driven by genuine care for the miners and their families.

She does not seek recognition. But in every space where responsible small-scale mining is being discussed, Sarah shows up—not just in her official capacity, but as someone whose heart beats for the sector.

She is a champion of good governance. A champion of planetGOLD Philippines. And above all, a champion of the miners themselves.



Profile

Dr. Virginia Barrameda -Mazo

*A Force of Change
for Paracale's
Mercury-free Future*

Paracale, Camarines Norte – Known for its gold reserves and deep-rooted small-scale gold mining tradition, Paracale is also home to a woman who has long fought to protect its people and environment. For 35 years, Dr. Virginia Barrameda Mazo, the town's long-serving Municipal Health Officer (MHO), stood at the forefront of public health and responsible mining advocacy. Petite and soft-spoken, Dr. Mazo was a force to reckon with—especially when it came to addressing the dangers of mercury use in ASGM.





A Lifelong Public Health Advocate

Early in her career, Dr. Mazo chose to return and serve her hometown, fully aware of the health risks tied to small-scale mining. In the 1990s, she was already raising concerns about mercury exposure—challenging a male-dominated industry and exposing the quiet but deadly symptoms affecting miners and their families: unexplained bleeding, chronic illnesses, and developmental delays in children.

Determined to act, she launched a mercury surveillance initiative and established the Association of Small-Scale Miners on Gold Extraction (ASOGE) through the Paracale Rural Health Unit (RHU). These efforts combined clinical research with community education. From barangay halls

to mining sites, she brought information materials and her signature persistence, believing that informed miners could make safer choices.

“Alam naman ng mga minero na nakakaperwisyo sa kalusugan at kapaligiran ang paggamit ng mercury sa artisano at maliitang pagmimina,” Dr. Mazo shared.

“Kaya kung mabibigyan ng pagkakataon ang mga minero na gumamit ng mas ligtas at malinis na method ng pag-recover ng ginto, sigurado kami na gagamitin nila ito.”

Throughout her tenure, Dr. Mazo integrated environmental health into local medical practices, trained community health workers to detect mercury poisoning, and consistently lobbied local leaders to take action. Colleagues fondly called her “small but terrible”—a nod to her size and unwavering resolve.

A Trusted Ally of planetGOLD Philippines

Her decades of work made her a natural partner of the planetGOLD Philippines Project, where her credibility and grassroots presence were key to deepening community engagement. With her help, the project conducted environmental assessments and launched educational roadshows—this time using updated science and reaching broader audiences.

Her leadership helped introduce mercury-free processing methods that not only protected the environment but also sustained miners’ livelihoods. Dr. Mazo also pushed for local ordinances to restrict mercury use, engaging local government units, mining associations, national agencies, and the academe to promote sustainable practices.

“Basta may suporta at kaalaman ang komunidad, hindi imposibleng maabot ang ligtas at malinis na pagmimina,” she emphasized.

A Legacy That Inspires

Even in retirement, Dr. Mazo remains an active voice in Paracale’s path toward responsible mining. She continues to support health campaigns and mentor young professionals, always reminding others that lasting change takes time, but it’s possible with compassion, education, and community engagement.

In a world often dominated by loud voices, Dr. Virginia Mazo proved that meaningful change can begin with quiet persistence, guided by a deep commitment to care—and the belief that people can do better when given the chance.



I am for a responsible gold mining.

I am for formalization of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM).

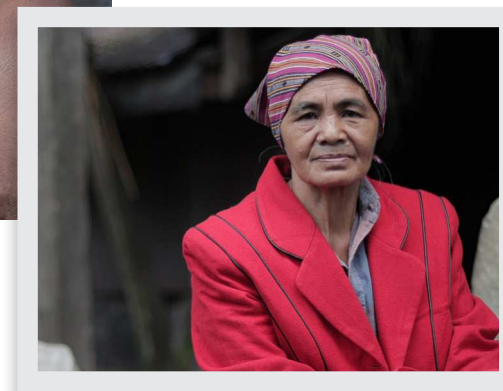
Profile

Nellie Bolinget

A Keeper of Balance:
*Leading with Wisdom,
Culture, and Care*

Nellie Bolinget doesn't just hold a leadership title—she carries a community. As the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of Barangay Fidelisan, Sagada, she ensures that ancestral values, customary law, and indigenous rights remain central in local governance. Whether it's mining, farming, or community disputes, she brings clarity, calm, and cultural grounding to every decision.





“For us, culture is our strength,” she says. “It teaches resilience, respect for nature, and the importance of community. We must ensure our children understand and cherish these traditions. *Isuru tako!* (Let’s teach it to them!)”

Her leadership draws from *inayan*, a guiding principle in Igorot life that promotes mindfulness, harmony, and accountability. Known for her skill in resolving conflicts, Nellie ensures all voices are heard—honoring the elders’ wisdom while remaining open to younger perspectives. “In resolving disputes, we need to truly listen before we speak,” she says. “The decision must heal, not divide.” She is also a strong voice in balancing tradition with modern challenges. In a community navigating the impacts of small-scale mining, Nellie advocates for responsible practices that sustain

livelihoods while protecting their ancestral land. “*Dapat balansien tako* (We should strike a balance),” she says.

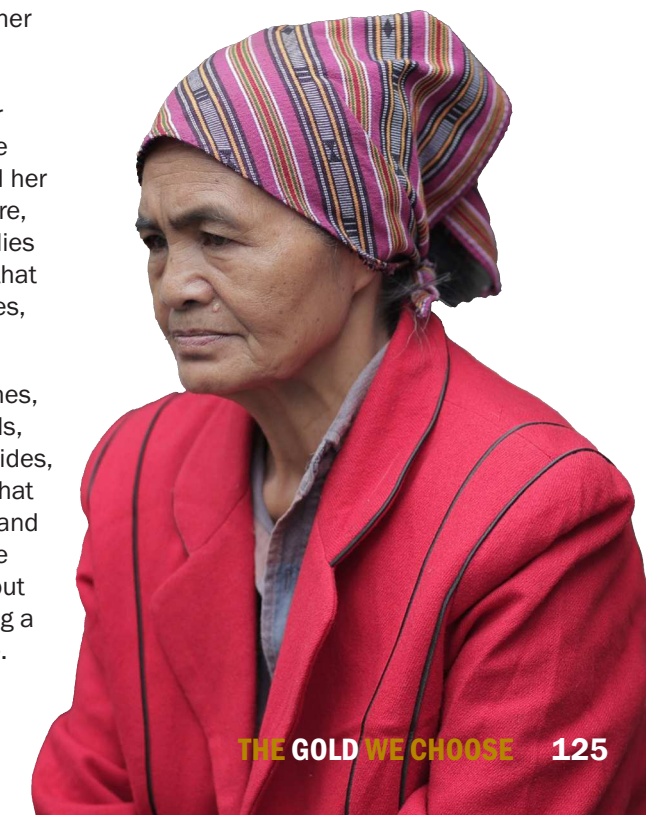
“The mountains have provided for us—so we must care for them for the next generation.”

As a partner in the planetGOLD Philippines Project, she supported initiatives to improve the *Minahang Bayan* and not allow mercury use, aligning economic progress with environmental stewardship.

Her quiet strength and conviction helped the community embrace sustainable practices without losing their cultural compass.

More than a policymaker, Nellie is seen as a mother figure in Fidelisan—approachable, present, and deeply trusted. Her home is open, her voice measured but firm, and her leadership rooted in care, not control. She embodies the kind of leadership that nurtures not just policies, but people.

In every song she teaches, every forest she defends, and every youth she guides, Nellie Bolinget proves that indigenous knowledge and women’s leadership are not relics of the past—but essential forces shaping a resilient and just future.



In Photos

ASGM Global Forum

In a compelling demonstration of global unity and shared purpose, the 2024 planetGOLD Global Forum on ASGM convened a diverse group of stakeholders in Batangas, Philippines, from 3 to 5 June 2024.

Organized under the GEF-funded planetGOLD programme, the forum served as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration, uniting miners, government officials, technical experts, and private sector actors. Over three days of plenary and parallel sessions—complemented by a hands-on practicum—the forum explored collective strategies to professionalize the ASGM sector and eliminate mercury use.

The group photo, taken at the height of the forum, captures not just attendees—it captures a shared mission. From discussions on mercury-free gold processing technologies to dialogues on financing mechanisms, tax policy, and the protection of vulnerable groups, the event underscored a vision of small-scale gold mining that is both responsible and inclusive.

As the host country, the Philippines presented both its innovations and on-the-ground challenges, offering valuable real-world context to the global conversation. The final day featured interactive workshops designed to build practical skills and foster deeper collaboration among participants.





In Photos

Behind the Gold Rush

Photo Exhibit in Daet

As Camarines Norte celebrated its history during the vibrant Bantayog Festival—a tribute to Dr. Jose Rizal and the heroes of the 1898 Daet revolt—planetGOLD Philippines joined the festivities by mounting *Behind the Gold Rush: A Photo Exhibition Featuring People Advocating for Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM) in the Philippines from 17 to 22 April 2023*.

In partnership with the Provincial Government of Camarines Norte, the exhibit highlighted the efforts of individuals and institutions across sectors—government, civil society, private organizations, academia, and mining communities—working to make ASGM more responsible, inclusive, and sustainable.

Through powerful portraits and stories, the exhibition honored today's advocates who are helping transform the sector. It served as a visual reminder that behind every effort toward responsible gold mining is a network of changemakers committed to community empowerment and environmental protection.



In Photos

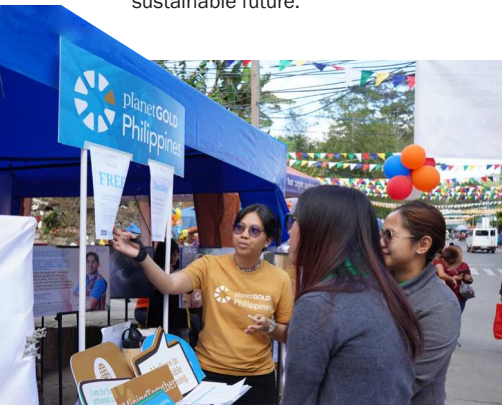
Behind the Gold Rush

Photo Exhibit in Sagada

Coinciding with Sagada's vibrant Etag Festival, planetGOLD Philippines launched *Behind the Gold Rush: A Photo Exhibition* on 2-3 February 2024 at the Sagada Municipal Hall Plaza.

The exhibit featured powerful portraits of miners, local leaders, and advocates working to make small-scale gold mining safer, more responsible, and more inclusive. It brought together the Sagada LGU, the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI), and planetGOLD Philippines in celebration of people behind the push for a better ASGM sector.

More than a visual showcase, the exhibition honored the often-unseen individuals driving change—reminding us that behind every piece of responsibly mined gold are communities striving for a more sustainable future.





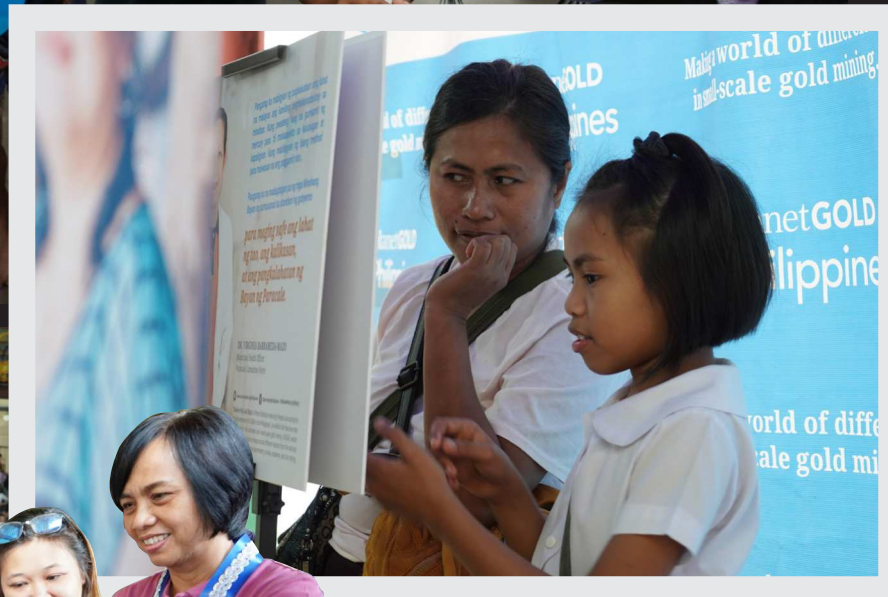
In Photos

Behind the Gold Rush

Photo Exhibit in Paracale

Launched during the Pabirik Festival on 25–26 January 2023, the Behind the Gold Rush photo exhibit was showcased at the Bulwagan in front of the Paracale Municipal Hall. The event brought together Vice Mayor Hon. Bernadette Asutilla, members of the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC), and the planetGOLD Philippines team to honor the people behind responsible small-scale gold mining.

Through powerful portraits and stories, the exhibit shines a light on miners, community leaders, and advocates working to transform ASGM into a safer, more inclusive, and sustainable sector. Each face tells a story of resilience, reminding us that behind every responsibly mined piece of gold are lives dedicated to meaningful change.



Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

In Photos

Mining Philippines

The Mining Philippines 2023 International Conference and Exhibition was held on 19–20 September at the EDSA Shangri-La Hotel, Manila, bringing together over 300 delegates and 1,500 visitors from across the mining sector. With the theme “SEEING GREEN: Shaping a Sustainable Minerals Development Industry,” the event featured dynamic discussions on responsible mining and sustainability innovations.

The planetGOLD Philippines Project was the only exhibitor focused on artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM). Its interactive booth showcased documentary films, project highlights, and educational games—drawing attention to the often overlooked contributions of the ASGM sector.

By highlighting its work and engaging a diverse audience, the project underscored the importance of inclusive, responsible practices in shaping a more sustainable future for the mining industry.



In Photos

International Conferences



01

01. Africa Environmental Health and Pollution Management Program (AEHPMP) Regional Dialogue on Mercury and E-Waste Pollution Management

4–12 November 2024
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



02

02. 2024 planetGOLD Global Forum on ASGM

3–5 June 2024
Talisay, Batangas, Philippines



03

03. 2024 OECD Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains

21–24 May 2024
Paris, France



04

04. 2023 OECD Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains

24–28 April 2023
Paris, France



05

05. Fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury (COP-5)

30 October to 3 November 2023
Geneva, Switzerland



06

06. 2023 Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC)

5–8 March, 2023
Toronto, Canada



07

07. 2022 planetGOLD Annual Programme Meeting

14–18 November 2022
Kisumu, Kenya

In Photos

Regional Project Steering Committee Meeting 2022



On 22 September 2022, the Regional Project Steering Committee (RPSC) of planetGOLD Mongolia and Philippines convened in Manila to review project accomplishments, assess progress, discuss midterm review recommendations, and align plans for the final phase of project implementation. The meeting also included project site visits, mine tours, and engagements with partners to provide firsthand insight into on-the-ground project activities.





In Photos

Regional Project Steering Committee Meeting 2024



On 24 September 2024, the RPSC convened again—this time in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia—to share country updates, assess progress, discuss partner contributions from DENR and MECC, present MFPS facilities, and approve the project’s extension until September 2025. Afterwards, delegates visited the project sites of planetGOLD Mongolia and engaged with local stakeholders.



THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered
Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

GENDER COMPONENT

Behind every ounce of gold lies the quiet resilience of women whose labor sustains the heart of ASGM communities in the Philippines. From sluicing ore and cleaning tailings to preparing meals and managing household finances, women play essential—but often invisible—roles. For decades, their contributions have been overlooked: missing from data, absent from policymaking, and undervalued in the communities they help hold together.

The planetGOLD Philippines Project set out to change that. It began with *Golden Opportunities*, a baseline gender study that mapped

women’s roles in ASGM—from income generation to unpaid care work—within a system that routinely treats their labor as supplemental rather than central. Through a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach involving interviews, focus groups, and a high-level roundtable discussion, the study helped lay the groundwork for inclusive policy reform. One major outcome: the establishment of an inter-agency council for women workers in the informal economy in Paracale—a step toward more coordinated, gender-responsive action.

Beyond research, the project invested in women’s empowerment. It hosted

capacity-building and advocacy workshops to strengthen leadership, entrepreneurship, and organizing skills, and conducted gender sensitivity training to help communities challenge harmful norms and practices.

In March 2025, the project celebrated International Women’s Day with Unite for All Women: A Just, Green, and Inclusive Economy—a national forum spotlighting women’s leadership in environmental sustainability and economic justice. Creative advocacy also played a powerful role: *Mina Minera*, a children’s storybook, reimagined women’s roles in mining, while *Isulong ang*

Pagkilos (Ginto ng Bayan), an original song, called for solidarity across labor sectors in championing women’s rights and visibility.

As the sector evolves, one truth becomes increasingly clear: the future of responsible gold mining cannot be built without women. They are not merely supporting players—they are laborers, leaders, decision-makers, and change agents whose contributions have long been overlooked. Elevating women in mining requires rethinking systems, rewriting narratives, and reshaping the industry to value equity as much as gold. When women rise in mining, entire communities move forward.



Golden Girls

Gender Study
on Increasing
Women's Visibility,
Access to,
and Support for Work
in ASGM

GOLD THAT GLIMMERS: Recognizing Women's Contributions in ASGM

For centuries, women's labor in the ASGM sector has remained invisible, often treated as marginal work. As a result, there is limited data to understand their situation and how to support them. Without proper support, many women are unable to access sustainable income or regular employment in the sector. Their work is often undervalued, and they are paid less than men for similar roles that are seen as "non-essential."

"Even if working as a mucker is difficult, we still work day and night whenever we can because it gives us a better source of income for our household and our children's needs. It's still not enough—because I'm sending all nine of my children to school—but at least we don't have to borrow money for their rent and allowances anymore. When you work here as a mucker, you have to wait four to six months before the waste ores are processed. But at least you know something is coming that can help with debt. Before, earning money was really tough."

— **Harriet Reyla**
Member, Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Incorporated

Despite the lack of support, many women still choose to work in ASGM because it offers slightly better pay than other local options like fishing or farming. However, unlike men, women in ASGM carry a triple burden: reproductive labor (domestic and unpaid care work), productive labor (paid work), and community work (such as maintaining safety, participating in religious events, and helping with fiestas and other community activities).

Women's work in small-scale gold mining is a vital part of the gold production process in mining communities. Supporting and recognizing their roles has been shown to improve development outcomes and increase productivity. Acknowledging the importance of women's contributions, the planetGOLD Philippines Project conducted a study to identify ways to increase women's visibility, access, and support in small-scale gold mining.

THE VALUE OF DATA: Developing A More Systematic Analysis of Women in ASGM

"It is a significant document which has provided our office with vital information that can help inform our work in the government."

— **Diory Carr**
Gender and Development Focal Person, Mines and Geosciences Bureau

The gender study is a landmark document that offers valuable insights into the realities faced by women in the ASGM sector. It also provides a detailed analysis of how the public sector can collaborate more effectively to support women's labor in ASGM.

The study amplified the voices of women miners in Sagada and Paracale through a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. These conversations revealed the everyday challenges women miners face. One key finding was that women's reproductive labor limits their ability to fully engage in meaningful work in the ASGM sector. This burden—combined with limited access to training and education—restricts women to flexible, low-paying, and seasonal jobs.

The study also found that many women miners take on multiple paid roles to support their families. Aside from mining, they also work as cleaners, cooks, laundrywomen, and travel guides, among others. Additionally, women are more likely to seek and access government services for their households. These findings highlight the urgent need for gender-responsive policies and stronger public support mechanisms for women's labor in the ASGM sector.

"This is the first time that I have ever heard anyone speak about our issues. It feels liberating and empowering to know that

our stories and realities are being shared and heard."

— **Eliza Cawi**,
Member, Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Incorporated

When the study was presented to the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in 2023, women miners emphasized how important it was for them. They shared that, for the first time, they felt "seen" and heard. It was the first time they witnessed their experiences being acknowledged in a large forum with government officials, fellow miners, and other stakeholders.

The study also included key informant interviews (KIIs) with government officials and members of the academe, along with a roundtable discussion (RTD) that brought together key government agencies to foster dialogue and collaboration on supporting women's visibility, access, and work in ASGM. One of the key recommendations was the creation of an inter-agency council for women workers in the informal economy. This council could help pool public resources to deliver more comprehensive programs and services that sustainably support women in both the informal economy and the ASGM sector.

In addition, the study helped shape the content and direction of innovative

knowledge management and communications materials developed by the planetGOLD Philippines Project. These materials have been well-received and appreciated by women miners and other project stakeholders.

CALL TO ACTION: Strengthening Research and Policy to Enhance Support for Women in ASGM

As demonstrated above, rigorous study of the unique situation and roles of women in our communities can be utilized to create lasting change, not just for the women, but for the community and the nation as a whole. Moving forward, more research and analysis needs to follow this study to amplify more women's voices and to provide a clearer picture of their situation.

The study must also be followed by subsequent action which aims to transform lives and communities. ASGM is present in around 40 provinces in the Philippines and in each of those provinces, there are thousands of women who experience similar situations within unique contexts. Let us make it our role to understand these unique contexts and to develop local solutions that may, one day, develop into a national plan towards supporting women in ASGM.



Interagency Council for Women Workers in the Informal Economy

FOSTERING COLLABORATION TO ENHANCE WOMEN'S VISIBILITY, ACCESS, AND SUPPORT IN THE ASGM SECTOR

In 2023, the planetGOLD Philippines Project released a groundbreaking gender study focused on practical ways to support women in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) sector. One of the study's most significant achievements was inspiring the creation of an inter-agency council for women workers in the informal economy. Hosted by the Municipal Government of Paracale (Paracale MLGU), the council was officially established through Executive Order No. 25 S. 2024, signed by Paracale Municipal Mayor Romeo Y. Moreno.

The formation of the council emerged from the regional roundtable discussion (RTD) co-hosted by the AGC and the Paracale MLGU on 22 November 2023. During the RTD, participants shared the specific challenges their agencies faced in providing services for women in ASGM and the informal economy. A key realization was that

many government offices were working in silos, implementing overlapping alternative livelihood projects without awareness of each other's efforts. This lack of coordination prevented agencies from learning from one another's experiences, sharing lessons learned, and ensuring their initiatives complemented each other effectively. Recognizing these gaps, the RTD served as a platform to build the blueprint for an inter-agency council aimed at fostering collaboration and enhancing gender equality efforts in Paracale.

The establishment of the council underscores the planetGOLD Philippines Project's commitment to sustainably supporting women's roles in ASGM through government initiatives. It also highlights the strong partnership between the project and the Paracale MLGU. The AGC collaborated closely with the Paracale MLGU to draft the Executive Order (EO) that formally established the council

and institutionalized the MLGU's efforts to advance women's labor rights in Paracale. EO No. 25, Series of 2024, outlines the council's duties and functions, which include but are not limited to:

- Providing platforms to facilitate discussions on women and workers in the informal sector;
- Pooling resources from various offices and agencies, including their Gender and Development (GAD) budgets, to conduct research and collect data on issues affecting women and workers in the informal economy and related sectors such as ASGM; and
- Promoting simplicity and efficiency in women's access to social and labor-related services within the informal sector.

The formation of the council represents a significant milestone for the province. With conscientious leadership, it has the potential to inspire the creation of similar councils in other cities and municipalities. Such replication could drive a broader movement advocating for the passage of the Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy (MACWIE) bill, which aims to provide greater support and improve the lives and livelihoods of women workers in both the ASGM sector and the informal economy at large.

In January 2025, the AGC initiated and co-hosted the council's inaugural meeting. The discussion centered on key cross-cutting challenges faced by women in the informal economy, including those in the ASGM sector, such as unpaid care work, limited access to regular income, and unsafe or unsustainable working conditions. During this first gathering, the council identified institutional

and financial gaps that could hinder full commitment to their duties and functions. The meeting concluded with a resolution to address these barriers and strengthen the council's capacity to fulfill its mandate.

The council holds the potential to deliver vital resources that can significantly improve the lives of women workers and their families. Moreover, supporting these women contributes to broader development within the municipality and its citizens, creating a ripple effect that can benefit the entire province.



The Power of Art

DRIVING CHANGE AND ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS THROUGH MUSIC AND STORYTELLING

Through numerous activities, interactions, and collaborations with women miners in Sagada, Mountain Province, and Paracale, Camarines Norte, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has developed a deep understanding of the experiences of women in the ASGM sector. This insight stems from the strong camaraderie and close partnership between the AGC Philippines and the women miners, who have played a crucial role in shaping the project's work.

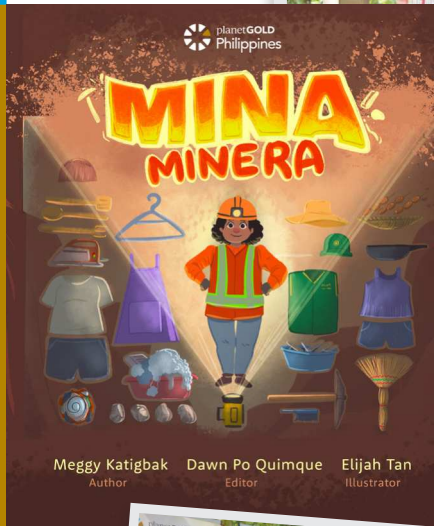
As part of its innovative communications and knowledge management initiatives, AGC Philippines drew upon its understanding of women miners' experiences to create a song and a children's storybook. Both the song and storybook depict the daily hardships faced by women miners while highlighting their resilience and celebrating their vital contributions to their families, communities, and the nation as a whole.



Mina Minera

"I am so grateful that *Mina Minera* was produced by the planetGOLD Philippines Project. It is so comforting to know that our situation is being discussed by a broader audience. I hope that this storybook can help shape a better perception of what we experience as women, and I hope it can lead to greater support for our work."

— **GRACE OANA**
CRAFT Code Focal Person
Samahan ng mga Minerero sa
Barangay Casalugan (SMBC)



Meggy Katigbak Dawn Po Quimque Elijah Tan
Author Editor Illustrator



Teary-eyed and grateful, Grace Oana expressed how *Mina Minera* spoke volumes about her situation. It captured her reality as a woman miner and a mother. She echoes the story's call for support for women workers.

The AGC believes that knowledge management should encompass people of all backgrounds and ages, as supporting women's work requires the participation of the entire community. Furthermore, it also aims to inspire young girls and boys in their communities to challenge the gendered division of labor and to ensure that both learn to perform reproductive tasks—also known as domestic work—for their households.

Mina Minera is a children's storybook that creatively narrates the unique experiences of women miners in their homes, communities, and the mines. It calls on the community—

including the children, daughters and sons of women miners—to actively support their mothers as they navigate the triple burden of reproductive labor, productive labor, and community management.

The storybook was presented to elementary and high school students from selected schools in the project sites, and their responses to the story were gathered through artwork. These artworks reflected how the storybook changed the students' perceptions of their mothers. Having recognized their mothers' strength, the students committed to supporting them in their work. To foster community participation and ownership, and in addition to utilizing knowledge co-created with the women miners, the third and final version of *Mina Minera* incorporated artwork from students in Sagada and Paracale.

Isulong ang Pagkilos (Accelerate Action)

"*Gawis ya* (Beautiful it is!)! The song highlights the power that women possess and encourages the continued promotion of their abilities and roles, not only in the mining sector but also in the community."

— **EMY TOYOKEN**
CRAFT Code Focal Person
Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI)



ISULONG ANG PAGKILOS
(BINTO NG BAYAN)
MEGGY KATIGBAK & NICOLE NIEVERA

"Isulong ang Pagkilos," a Tagalog phrase meaning "Accelerate Action"—the theme for International Women's Month 2025—is a song sung from the perspective of women miners, particularly from Sagada and Paracale. The song begins with the women narrating the daily realities they face, emphasizing their significant contributions to their families and communities. It calls on listeners to accelerate action in support of women's roles in nation-building.

The song was eagerly embraced by women miners in Sagada and Paracale. Though nervous and unaccustomed to performing before a large audience, the women miners were empowered by the song's message and delivered a heartfelt performance at the Gender Forum co-hosted by AGC Philippines and its partners—the UNIDO Philippines, Clean Air Asia, and BAN Toxics—where AGC hosted a side event entitled *Mina Minera: Celebrating Women in ASGM and the Informal Economy*.

The song was regarded by the women miners as an empowering tool that has inspired them to work together to ensure all women—especially their daughters—have a brighter future; one that includes, and more importantly supports, women in leadership and nation-building.

Through these creative initiatives celebrating women's roles in the ASGM sector, AGC Philippines aims to leave a legacy appreciated and utilized by its community partners, with the hope of fostering community support for women and girls for generations to come.



Profile

Councilor Bernadette Epino Asutilla

*Empowering Women
and Advancing
Environmental
Stewardship*

Hon. Bernadette Epino Asutilla has a proud history of merit and civic duty. With nearly 18 years of dedicated public service, she has served Paracale in various roles, including Municipal Councilor and Vice Mayor, where she received several accolades for her outstanding performance.



Earlier in her political career, she served as Municipal Councilor from 2007 to 2016, during which she was recognized as one of the Outstanding Local Legislators in Camarines Norte by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Vice Mayors' League of the Philippines (VMLP) – Camarines Norte Chapter in her final term. As Vice Mayor, she also received the Excellence in Public Service Award from the VMLP National. Additionally, under her leadership, the Sangguniang Bayan of Paracale was awarded Rank 1—the Most Outstanding Sangguniang Bayan for 2024—by the DILG Camarines Norte. Continuing her commitment to public service, she now serves once again as a Municipal Councilor of Paracale.

Through her work, Hon. Asutilla has been a strong advocate for the development of small-scale gold mining in Paracale, the labor rights of miners, and environmental protection and restoration. Her legislative and policy efforts reflect her commitment to the professionalization of the ASGM sector in her municipality and to ensuring that small-scale gold miners are protected through insurance and sustainable income.

“Makukuha natin ang ginto na wala tayong masyadong nasisira na environment kung ito ay ireregulate, magtutulungan, makakaintindihan yung lahat ng stakeholders at bawat sektor. So unang-una, paniniwala ko ay sa ngayon, dapa yung pag-mina lalo ng small-scale mining sa bayan ng Paracale ay matulungan o ma-amend yung batas na ang batas ay ibatay sa reyalidad na nangyayari sa ground kasi yung small-scale mining na tinatawag namin dito ay hindi na pwede yung katulad ng sinasabi ng artisanal mining.”

As a steward of the environment, she also managed the community-based resource management system (CBRMS) in Paracale, which aims to mitigate the harmful impacts of ASGM on the environment. Under her leadership, the CBRMS organized several activities, including mangrove planting and reforestation.

Apart from her professional achievements, Hon. Asutilla has proven to be a staunch advocate for gender justice and women's rights. From 2020 to 2021, she was a fellow of the Angat Bayi Political Empowerment Fellowship (AB PEF) Program, where she organized the “Samahan ng Magbabalaw Para sa Kababaihan”—an initiative aimed at uplifting vulnerable women in Paracale by promoting both economic and personal independence.

Hon. Asutilla has been an integral part of the success of project activities in Paracale. She has dedicated time from her busy schedule to support and welcome these activities in the municipality and has been a devoted champion and partner in the project's goal of advocating for gender equality and equity in the ASGM sector. She has openly shared her

influence, knowledge, time, and resources to raise gender issues in ASGM to a wider audience. Despite her busy schedule, she wholeheartedly participated in *The Gold Talk* discussions in Camarines Norte about gender equality in the ASGM sector.

During her tenure as Vice Mayor of Paracale, she facilitated the project's collaboration with the Municipal Government of Paracale to establish a Council for Women Workers in the Informal Economy, which was signed by Mayor Romeo Y. Moreno. Through her office and the project's shared goal of supporting vulnerable women in the ASGM sector, this historic initiative came to fruition. Under her leadership in the Sangguniang Bayan of Paracale, the project co-hosted the council's first meeting.

Hon. Asutilla is the foundation that will keep the legacy of the planetGOLD Philippines Project's work on gender equality and equity in the ASGM sector in Paracale alive. Without her eagerness to serve, openness to collaborate, and dedication to effect change, many of the project's accomplishments would not have been realized or as effective as they are today.



Profile

Gloria Langbayan

*Championing
Women's Voices in
Sagada's Mining
and Community Life*

Gloria Langbayan has been a steadfast advocate for women's empowerment and social welfare in Sagada, especially within the ASGM sector. As the former Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Person for the municipality and a longtime staff member of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), she led gender-focused initiatives that elevated the visibility and rights of women miners.





Through her work with the planetGOLD Philippines Project, Gloria strengthened her commitment to supporting women in a traditionally male-dominated industry. She emphasized the critical but often overlooked roles women play, balancing their responsibilities as both mothers and key contributors to mining operations. As Gloria explained,

“Usually, when you hear the word mining, it is associated with jobs considered suitable for men. However, there is indeed an important role of women in mining.”

Gloria tirelessly worked to dismantle stereotypes and champion women’s leadership, envisioning accredited women’s organizations that can secure government support:

“Ang dream ko as GAD focal person, makapag establish talaga sila ng women’s organization group... na maa-accredit para may way ang government na mag support sa kanila.”

She also highlighted the essential support women provide in mining activities, stating,

“The usual role of women in mining involves low-paying positions, auxiliary jobs, and seasonal tasks carried out in the mines. Women have important roles in mining because they greatly support the work of the men. They may be low-paying jobs, but they are important.”

Gloria’s advocacy extends beyond recognition—she actively contributed to successful

initiatives like the Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS), helping create safer and more sustainable mining practices.

Her call for increased female leadership in mining and other sectors is clear:

“Women leadership! Hindi lang naman kalalakihan ang pwedeng mag lead. There are also women who possess leadership skills.”

Gloria Langbayan’s work exemplifies how dedicated gender advocacy can transform mining communities by uplifting women’s roles, promoting equality, and fostering sustainable development.



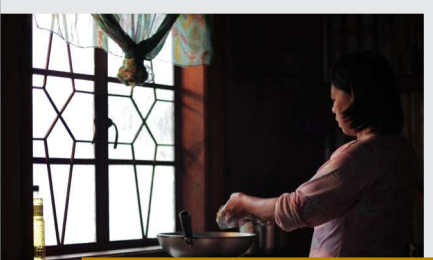
Profile

Harriet Reyla

*Strength and
Leadership
from the Mines
of Sagada*

Harriet Reyla's life is a powerful testament to resilience and female leadership in Sagada's small-scale gold mining community.





A devoted mother of nine and a hardworking “mucker,” Harriet balances the demands of family and mining with unwavering strength. As she puts it,

“A woman has a lot of responsibilities. As a woman, you will take care of your family, and you will take care of your house... after doing that, you will still have to go to the mines to work for your family to have something. A woman has a big responsibility like me, which also shows our big role in society.”

Her journey to the mines began out of necessity—seeking a more stable livelihood after unpredictable farming conditions and economic challenges. Now a respected community leader, Harriet was elected auditor of the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI), championing transparency and accountability within the organization. She also serves on the local barangay agriculture committee, utilizing her skills for the wider community’s benefit.

Harriet’s dedication earned her national recognition at the 2025 planetGOLD Philippines Gender Forum, where she spoke as a panelist, sharing how mining strengthened her roles as a mother, provider, and leader. She actively pursues personal and professional growth through workshops on financial literacy,

mine safety, and first aid, equipping her to better serve fellow miners.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Harriet’s resourcefulness helped her family weather economic hardships by exploring alternative income sources like a small sari-sari store. Her story exemplifies how women miners navigate multiple roles, breaking barriers and building resilient, empowered communities.

Harriet’s leadership is grounded in both lived experience and continuous learning, showing how dedication and empowerment can transform not only her family’s future but also uplift an entire mining community. From rugged riverbanks to the national stage, she embodies strength, resilience, and the powerful impact of women miners in shaping more inclusive and sustainable futures.



Profile

Janice Abanes-Galero

*A Woman of Courage
—Mission for Safer,
Inclusive Mining*

Janice Abanes-Galero has dedicated over 15 years to transforming the ASGM sector in the Philippines. Hailing from the unassuming village of Barangay Casalugan, Janice entered a traditionally male-dominated industry, embracing the challenges of long days, environmental hazards, and societal barriers with quiet strength and determination.





Her firsthand experience witnessing the devastating effects of mercury poisoning and environmental degradation fueled her commitment to safer, healthier mining practices. Rising to become a Barangay Councilor and leader of the *Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan* (SMBC), Janice championed the introduction of mercury-free processing systems in partnership with planetGOLD Philippines—an advancement that brought new hope to her community. Reflecting on this milestone, she shared,

“The day we switched to mercury-free processing, I felt like I could finally breathe. We weren’t just mining gold; we were protecting our children’s futures.”

But Janice’s fight extends beyond environmental health. She advocates fiercely for women miners, whose vital contributions have often been overlooked. At national forums, she has emphasized, “In mining communities, women are often the silent supporters behind every operation—managing households, contributing labor, and caring for families affected by unsafe practices. Recognizing their contributions and empowering them to lead is essential to making the mining sector more responsible and inclusive.”

Janice’s story is one of resilience, compassion, and unwavering commitment. She embodies the belief that meaningful change begins with one person’s resolve and grows through collective action. “Change doesn’t always come from the top; sometimes it begins with one determined voice, one community, and a vision for a better future,” she reflects. Today, she stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration—showing that a better, more inclusive future is possible for miners, their families, and their communities.

In Photos

Gender Forum

On 7 March 2025, the planetGOLD Philippines Project, in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Philippines, Clean Air Asia, and BAN Toxics, co-organized a gender forum titled “Unite for All Women: A Just, Green, and Inclusive Economy.” The event was attended by over 200 representatives from government agencies, civil society organizations, students, and private sector offices, celebrating the remarkable contributions of women in the ASGM, health, and transport sectors.

The AGC hosted a parallel session titled “Mina Minera: Celebrating Women in ASGM and the Informal Economy,” attended by over 70 participants. The event highlighted AGC’s contributions to advocating gender equality, equity, and justice within the ASGM sector. More importantly, it emphasized the vital role of community partnerships in advancing the broader struggle for women’s rights.



Livelihood Training for Women Miners

In April 2024, the planetGOLD Philippines Project, in partnership with the Negoskwela Technology and Livelihood Training Center (NTLTC), hosted a three-day Alternative Livelihood Training for women miners from the Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI) and the Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan (SMBC), along with selected members of the local communities.

The training was conducted from 2-4 April 2024 in Sagada and from 23-25 April 2024 in Paracale, and was attended by around 132 participants. It introduced participants to various alternative livelihoods, providing small-scale gold miners and stakeholders with practical skills to pursue income-generating opportunities.

The training aimed to economically empower communities, reduce vulnerability through income diversification, and support poverty alleviation through sustainable livelihood options.

Facilitated by NTLTC, the program combined discussions and hands-on activities tailored to the interests and skill sets of the majority of women miners—identified during prior entrepreneurial skills training—to ensure that the livelihoods explored aligned with their capabilities and aspirations.



In Photos

Spoken Word Poetry

Performed by Women Miners from Sagada, Mountain Province, and Paracale, Camarines Norte

ALL (Sabay-Sabay):

Babae ako, Minera Ako!

Sagada 1: Ako ay isang babae.

Sagada 2: Ako ay malakas.

Sagada 3: Ako ay matalino.

Sagada 4: Ako ay magaling.

Sagada 5: Ako ay maganda.

Sagada 6: Ako ay natatangi.

Sagada 7: Ako ay mahalaga.

Sagada 8: Ako ay bahagi ng kabuhatan, ng komunidad, ng kasaysayan.

Sagada 9: Ako ang kamay na humuhukay;

Sagada 10: Braso na bumubuhay;

Paracale 1: Puso na bumabalot sa bawat ginting butil ng pag-asa.

Paracale 2: Ako ay tahanan,

Paracale 3: Isang ina, asawa, anak.

ALL:

Ako ay hindi babae lang.
Ako ay babae!
Ako ay Minera!



Paracale 4: Ako ay tagapagtaguyod ng kabuhatan.

Paracale 5: Ako ay tagapangalaga ng kalikasan.

Paracale 6: Ako ay tagapagtanggol ng karapatan.

Paracale 7: Ako ay kasama sa paghubog ng mas ligtas, mas makatarungan, at mas makakalikasang pagmimina.

ALL:

Ako ay hindi babae lang.
Ako ay babae!
Ako ay Minera!

Paracale 8: Ako ay tinig na humihingi ng pagkilala.

Paracale 9: Ako ay liwanag na gumagabay sa pagbabago.

Paracale 10: Ako ay ginto sa loob ng lupa—matibay, dalisay, at hindi matitinag.

All (Sabay-sabay, mataas ang boses):

Kami ay mga babae.
Kami ay malalakas.
Kami ay matatalino.
Kami ay magagaling.
Kami ay mahalaga!

All (Unti-unting humihina, sabay taas ng kamao):

Kami ay hindi babae lang.
Kami ay babae.
Kami ay kakaiba.
Kami ay Minera!



Isulong ang Pagkilos (Ginto ng Bayan)

As part of its mission to uplift the voices of women in the ASGM sector, the planetGOLD Philippines team launched an original song titled *Isulong ang Pagkilos (Accelerate Action)* on 7 March 2025 to commemorate International Women's Day. The song was performed with women miners from SMBC and NSBSSMAI.

The song highlights both the struggles and resilience of women in ASGM. It celebrates their extraordinary contributions to their families, communities, and the sector—and calls for greater support for their work, both paid and unpaid.



Verse

Sa inyong pag-gising sa umaga,
Pagkain at damit n'yo'y nakahanda.
Hindi mo ba naisip at kinilala
Ang nagsikap para ito'y magawa?
Kami'y ginto ng lupang tinubuan,
Pundasyon ng Inang Bayan.
Samahan kami at nawa'y maunawaan
Ang aming halaga sa ating bayan.

Chorus

Isulong ang pagkilos—
Kaming kababaihan,
Kasapi mo sa laban
Sa pag-unlad ng ating bayan.
Isulong ang pagkilos
Para sa pagbabago,
Para sa lahat ng tao,
Isulong ang trabaho—

Verse II

Mga responsibilidad na pinaako,
Parang sa bahay ako ay pinako.
Ngunit 'di alam ng nakararami,
Nakapagtrabaho sa lahat ng dako.
Ako'y nasa bahay at sa lansangan,
Ako ay minera sa minahan.
Ako'y nasa bawat sulok ng sambayanan—
Ang kailangan mo'y aking ipaglalaman.

Chorus

Isulong ang pagkilos—
Kaming kababaihan,
Kasapi mo sa laban
Sa pag-unlad ng ating bayan.
Isulong ang pagkilos
Para sa pagbabago,
Para sa lahat ng tao,
Isulong ang trabaho—

Bridge

Babae ako, minero ako, 'di n'yo man pansin,
Sa bawat gintong nakamit, nandito aking diin.
'Di lang ako anino, 'di lang ako kwento—
Naririto ako, bahagi ng mundo.
Babae ako, minero ako—
May lakas, pangarap, at puso.
Huwag kaming limutin, ting ay dinggin;
Sa bawat butil ng ginto, sipag at galing ang bigay ko.

Chorus

Isulong ang pagkilos—
Kaming kababaihan,
Kasapi mo sa laban
Sa pag-unlad ng ating bayan.
Isulong ang pagkilos
Para sa pagbabago,
Para sa lahat ng tao,
Isulong ang trabaho—

Coda / Outro

—Para sa kinabukasan,
Kumikinang ang ginto ng bayan.
Kailangan lang kaming suportahan
Sa pagsulong ng aming karapatan.



bit.ly/AGC-IsulongAngPagkilos



In Photos

Inspire Inclusion

In March 2024, the planetGOLD Philippines Project joined the International Women's Day campaign, with the global theme #InspireInclusion—emphasizing the need to build a more inclusive world for women in all sectors, including mining.

To amplify this message, the project featured photos of stakeholders—including miners, funders, government officials, and private sector partners—making the hand heart gesture, accompanied by their personal reflections on the importance of including women in responsible mining. Stakeholders shared bold messages such as “Empowering women empowers humanity” and “Women get the job done.”

The initiative offered a powerful platform for raising awareness, celebrating women's contributions to ASGM, and reaffirming the collective commitment to advancing gender equality in the sector.





I used to feel ashamed to enter the mine—as if it wasn't a place for women. But now, I stand proud.

We're not 'just women'—we carry the weight of the world.

We are essential to our families, our communities, and the future.”

Nieves Mago

*Barangay Councilor and Small-Scale Gold Miner
Brgy. Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte*





What I love about the *Mina Minera* storybook by planetGOLD Philippines is that it tells the real stories of women miners like me—our struggles, our hopes, and our dreams. For once, people can truly see the work we do, and that recognition matters.

Women play a vital role in mining. Many of us take on responsibilities like managing finances and ensuring accountability. That's why promoting gender equality is so important.

As women, we have the right—and the need—to be empowered in the realities of mining life.

It's essential that we stay informed and engaged, so we can become a voice for other women in our communities."

Cherry Almeda
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



In Words



“Women are change leaders—and they deserve to be seen, heard, and valued in every space, especially in sectors where their contributions often go unnoticed. Events like this give us a platform to highlight the work they do on the ground: leading programs, listening to communities, and bringing knowledge that truly matters. At the DENR, we actively engage women because we know they are key drivers of progress.

My message to all women: keep going, stay empowered, seek knowledge, and raise the next generation—especially young girls—to believe they too can make a difference.”

Noralene M. Uy, Ph.D.

*Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning,
International Affairs, and Climate Change
Department of Environment and Natural Resources*

During planetGOLD Philippines' "Unite for All Women: A Gender Forum on a Just, Green, and Inclusive Economy," held on 7 March 2025



“During the investors training of planetGOLD Philippines, I realized that to make mining safe, we need enough capital—for better equipment, safer methods, and the development of our community.”

Analyn Abanes
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Before, all our knowledge was passed down from one miner to another—based only on experience and tradition. But now, with the help of experts through planetGOLD Philippines, we’re learning safer and more responsible ways to mine.”

Augusto Dasco
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“We’ve partnered with the planetGOLD Philippines Project to establish an interagency Council for Women Workers in the Informal Economy in our municipality. This council strengthens women’s leadership and helps us address gender-specific issues in ASGM more effectively.”

Coun. Bernadette Asutilla
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“We used to think there was no other way but to use mercury. But now, we know there are safer technologies. Thank you, planetGOLD Philippines, for opening new hope and opportunities for us miners. The project has helped us in many ways—not just through trainings and legal support, but by recognizing us as legitimate miners. Now, we truly feel the dignity in our work.”

Demver Suzara
President, Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan
Barangay Captain, Casalugan, Paracale,
Camarines Norte



“We may not have felt fully protected before, but with the MFPS Facility provided by planetGOLD Philippines, we now have hope. This plant is a big step toward protecting our health, our environment, and the people who live around the mining area. We are deeply grateful. This is not just about safer mining—it’s about securing a better future for our families and the land we depend on.”

Cherry Almedat
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Science should be within reach of the people. Thank you for building bridges between knowledge and communities. Our partnership with planetGOLD Philippines has been truly enriching. We were able to share our expertise with the ASGM community—and in the process, we learned just as much. It deepened our understanding of the sector and showed us the vital role of the academe in improving their livelihoods.”

Girly Naval, DBA
Extension Director
Camarines Norte State College, Daet, Camarines Norte



“In my 35 years as Municipal Health Officer of Paracale, I’ve seen many miners suffer from mercury-related illnesses. That’s why the planetGOLD Philippines Project—and its Mercury-Free Processing System—is a huge help to our people, our environment, and the entire community. It offers a safer alternative to toxic mercury. I hope the LGU of Paracale sustains and fully implements this for the well-being of all Paracaleños.”

Dr. Virginia Barrameda-Mazo
Former Municipal Health Officer
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Because of the MFPS, I now feel more confident working in the mine—knowing that my family and I are better protected.”

Erlinda ‘Indak’ Bulan
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“We used to risk our health just to make a living—our lungs filled with mercury, and we thought that was normal. But things have changed. Now, we work safely and responsibly, thanks to the planetGOLD Philippines Project. I used to think being a Safety Officer didn’t matter. Today, I know better. Safety is at the heart of responsible mining, and I’m proud to apply what I’ve learned to protect our people and improve our operations.”

Fernando Gallero
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Brgy. Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte



“It’s important for Camarines Norte to give our miners the opportunity to work legally and with support—without having to fear for their livelihood. This isn’t just for Paracale, but for other towns where mining is a primary source of income. The planetGOLD Philippines has played a big role in bringing attention to small-scale mining. What we’ve learned in Paracale, we plan to replicate in other municipalities.”

Hon. Ricarte ‘Dong’ Padilla
Governor
Provincial Local Government of Camarines Norte



“Because of the Mercury-Free Processing System training from planetGOLD Philippines, we learned how to process ore in safer ways—ones that don’t harm our health or the environment. Now, it’s the women who are leading the way in responsible mining.”

Janice Galero
Barangay Councilor and Miner
Brgy. Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Because of planetGOLD Philippines’ Mercury-Free Processing System, there’s been a big change in our area. We no longer use mercury, yet we’re still able to recover even more gold.”

Jessie Novano
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Thank you for giving the youth space—to learn, to take part, and to become agents of change in our community. By truly recognizing our potential, we bring to life the spirit of “The youth are the hope of the nation.””

Maricel Gacos
Youth for Responsible Gold Champion
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“From capacity building to policy support, the planetGOLD Philippines Project has been our partner in advancing a mercury-free and legal ASGM sector.”

Engr. Guillermo A. Molina Jr. IV
Regional Director
MGB Region V



“Thank you, planetGOLD Philippines. We no longer have to choose between earning a living and protecting our health—now, we can have both.”

Miriam Dasco
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Many of us here didn't really know how dangerous mercury is. But through training and materials brought by the project, people slowly became aware. That knowledge can save lives.”

Velma Ramos
Nurse, Rural Health Office
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Through the project's partnership, we conducted various training sessions for women miners—teaching them how to manage finances, write reports, and formalize their associations. This is empowerment in action.”

Prof. Luvy S. Asis, CPA
Accountancy Program Chairperson
Camarines Norte State College, Daet, Camarines Norte



“I've seen mining all my life here in Paracale, but it's only now that I truly understand how important responsible mining is. I realized that we, the youth, have a vital role to play in helping our community improve—especially in standing against the use of toxic mercury.”

Renhard C. Lunas
Youth for Responsible Gold Champion
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“Through the right information, the negative perception of ASGM is starting to change. We’re grateful that the role of the media in this shift is being recognized. With every episode of *The GOLD Talk*, we’ve given voice to miners and community leaders—stories long unheard, now reaching a wider audience.”

Dr. Sarah Marie Pante-Aviado
Provincial Information Officer
Provincial Government of Camarines Norte
Radyo Pilipinas - Camarines Norte



“With knowledge comes the power to make the right choices. Thank you for bringing education into our school and our community.”

Gilbert O. Naing
Teacher I, Alfonso Dasco Elementary School
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“They used to say women were bad luck in the mines. But with education and support, we became leaders of change. Through the support of PJ Lhuillier, we received 200 street lights that now brighten our roads—including the routes to the *Minahang Bayan*. Thank you to planetGOLD Philippines for bridging the way and helping them reach us.”

Lainie Abanes
Barangay Councilor and Small-Scale Gold Miner
Brgy. Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte



“For a long time, it has been the miners’ dream to become legal. With the help of planetGOLD Philippines, the path is now clearer. Thank you for the guidance and support for our *Minahang Bayan*.”

Vic Almeda
Barangay Councilor and Small-Scale Gold Miner
Brgy. Casalugan, Paracale, Camarines Norte



“I used to just cook and do the laundry. But now... I have a voice in our organization. I’ve learned how to speak up—and to lead.”

Yolanda Rada
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Paracale, Camarines Norte



“In today’s modern world, our vision is for the small-scale mining sector to keep up with the times. Through the Knowledge Management Platform, we are optimistic that we can achieve this—from streamlining applications to monitoring and maintaining records and reports, everything will be online. This will greatly benefit not only the miners but also the government. With the support of those on the ground, we believe this initiative will succeed, and rather than being a barrier, technology will encourage small-scale miners to formalize and operate legally.”

Engr. Donald Ofalsa
OIC Chief, Mining Technology Division
MGB Central Office



“The planetGOLD Philippines became like our ‘John the Baptist’ in the mining communities—they opened doors and introduced us to government agencies, which made our work more efficient, especially in setting up the necessary groundwork for our gold-buying station. We’re truly grateful for the collaboration, and we hope this kind of support continues, because it’s something the small-scale gold mining industry really needs.”

Rose Ellaine Ferrer
Gold Buying Division Head
PJ Lhuillier, Inc.



“As Indigenous Peoples, we safeguard our land, culture, and livelihood. With planetGOLD Philippines, we’re formalizing small-scale mining in a way that honors our traditions and protects our environment. This is how we move forward—guided by unity, respect, and our shared identity as IPs.”

Atty. Raul Edan
OIC Mountain Province Environment
and Natural Resources Officer
Provincial Government of Mountain Province
Bontoc, Mountain Province



“Mining is our livelihood—but being responsible is the key to true progress. Not just for us, but for the whole community, because it’s just as important to protect our health and our environment.”

Benjamin Suyam
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“Before, when people hear ‘small-scale miner,’ it always sounded negative. But now, they see that we’re taking steps to be responsible and safe.”

Bernard Malecдан
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“Thank you for helping us organize our association, fix our documents, and connect with the government. With planetGOLD Philippines, it’s more than just technology—they took time to understand our culture and made sure the solutions fit our way of life.”

Peter Patong
Barangay Captain
Brgy. Fidelisan, Sagada, Mountain Province



“Before, we used to sell our tailings at a very low price because our processing methods were limited—we couldn’t make the most of what we had. But now, with the help of planetGOLD Philippines and the new facility in the neighboring town of Itogon, we will earn more and finally see the real value of our resources.”

Dhea Balintag
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“For a long time, we were unseen—ignored. They used to call us just ‘muckers.’ They said we weren’t real miners. But through the help of the planetGOLD Philippines Project, our perspective changed. We realized we are miners—women miners. And now, little by little, our contributions to the sector are finally being recognized.”

Eliza Cawi
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“Being the planetGOLD Philippines’ CRAFT Code Focal Point is a big responsibility—because due diligence is essential to making mining truly responsible. It’s not just about extracting gold; it’s also about understanding the limits, so that our work remains safe, ethical, and well-managed.”

Emy T. Dongail
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“Because of the series of training and policy workshops from the planetGOLD Philippines Project, we are now better prepared to respond to the needs of the ASGM sector.”

Engr. Brent Pagteilan
Former Chief of the Monitoring and Technical Services Section, Mine Management Division
MGB Cordillera Administrative Region



“The consultations and workshops with planetGOLD Philippines were invaluable. They created a space for shared understanding and alignment among communities, miners, and government agencies. Through these conversations, the path forward for the small-scale gold mining sector becomes clearer—grounded in collaboration and a shared vision for responsible progress.”

Engr. Frenzel Thomas Paatan
Science Research Specialist
MGB Cordillera Administrative Region



“In five years of working together with planetGOLD Philippines, we’ve learned so much from the various training sessions—not just about safe mining, but also about strengthening our organization and growing as individuals.”

Gedion Martinez
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“The project reminded us that responsible mining must be inclusive. The planetGOLD Philippines opened our eyes to the many women in ASGM and helped us empower them through trainings. That knowledge now ripples through families, communities, and the nation.”

Gloria Langbayan
Former Gender and Development Focal
Sagada, Mountain Province



“As a woman miner, we used to be unseen. But now, we have a voice—in our association and in the community. Thank you for recognizing the role of women. What the project gave us was more than just resources or training. It gave us the opportunity to understand ourselves more deeply, to realize that we matter—and that as women, we have the power to help build a stronger, more inclusive community.”

Harriet Reyla
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“The training has been a big help in keeping us safe. Before, we didn’t know about proper ventilation or rescue, and we only used improvised tools. Now, we feel more confident going down into the mine.”

Ian Sagmayao
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“Our mining association is now an accredited gold seller to the BSP, thanks to the continuous and dedicated support of planetGOLD Philippines. Because of this, we now get the right price for our gold—it’s fairer and higher than before.”

Ignacio Malecda
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“We used to feel ashamed and afraid to admit that we were miners. But today, we can proudly say we are responsible small-scale miners. As a Safety Officer, it’s my duty to ensure our team’s well-being. Because of the series of training from planetGOLD Philippines, I now know the right steps to make our mining practices safer and more organized.”

Jeffrey Bomowey
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“My mother is a miner. I didn’t really understand her work before. But now, through the storybooks, IEC materials, and school activities from the project, I see how strong and important she truly is—not just to our family, but to the whole community.”

Jerny Bomil-ong
Student
Sagada, Mountain Province



“I used to think I was meant to stay at home. But now, I teach fellow miners how to work safely and responsibly. There’s nothing like the feeling of being heard—and believed.”

Joan Tomeg
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“It used to be very difficult here in Sagada. At times, we didn’t know where to start or how to move forward with the requirements. But with the guidance of planetGOLD Philippines, the path to legality became clearer. From an informal group to a registered association—planetGOLD Philippines has been with us every step of the way. We are truly grateful.”

Joseph Patil-ao Jr.
Small-Scale Gold Miner
President, Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Gold Mining Association, Inc
Sagada, Mountain Province



“While we were teaching, we were also learning from the miners. Thank you for opening the doors of learning for everyone. We are truly grateful to the planetGOLD Philippines Project for extending their services to our *kailyan* in Mountain Province.”

Lerma O. Mangallay
Faculty
Mountain Province State University



“As a heritage town, Sagada has always been sensitive to the issue of mining. But if the process is legal and well-managed—just as planetGOLD Philippines has shown us—it can become a source of benefit for the whole community. On behalf of the people of Sagada, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for all the support you have given to our municipality.”

Hon. Felicito Dula
Municipal Mayor
Sagada, Mountain Province



“The consultations and workshops with planetGOLD Philippines were invaluable. They created a space for shared understanding and alignment among communities, miners, and government agencies. Through these conversations, the path forward for the small-scale gold mining sector becomes clearer—grounded in collaboration and a shared vision for responsible progress.”

Nellie Bolinget
Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative
Brgy. Fidelisan, Sagada, Mountain Province



“I am both a miner and a farmer. The land is our life—it’s how we survive. That’s why mining must be done in a way that does not harm nature. Thank you for teaching us safer, more sustainable ways to mine.”

Nelson Lomiwes
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“As a Youth for Responsible Gold Champion, I implore my fellow youth to prioritize education. Let us refrain from engaging in any mining activities and concentrate on our studies. We have a voice in shaping a better future.”

Reiner Ligayo
Student
Sagada, Mountain Province



“The Gender Roundtable Meetings and the Gender Study by planetGOLD Philippines truly opened our eyes. One key takeaway was the importance of forming a Council for Women in the informal economy, including the mining sector—because women miners also play a crucial role in protecting the environment and supporting livelihoods.”

Sheila Sanqui
Gender and Development Focal Person
MGB Cordillera Administrative Region



“Before, many of us worked quietly in the background. Our struggles— invisible. But through the planetGOLD Philippines Project, we found the courage to step forward. We’re not just helpers anymore. We are leaders.”

Viernesa Doyog
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“It’s a good thing there’s now a Cebuana gold buying station here in Sagada. We no longer have to travel far just to sell our gold. We can sell it right away—and at a fair price. Thanks to planetGOLD Philippines for connecting us with them.”

Vincent Lay-os
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Vice President, Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Gold Mining Association, Inc
Sagada, Mountain Province



“We won’t waste this opportunity. We will continue to strengthen our commitment to mining with care for the environment and caution for the future of the next generation. We will pass on everything we’ve learned so that this positive change can continue.”

William Dongail
Small-Scale Gold Miner
Sagada, Mountain Province



“Formalization is a significant step forward for our province. The technical and legal support from the planetGOLD Philippines Project is vital to our journey toward responsible mining.”

Wilma Chalotag
Environment Management Specialist
Mountain Province Environment and Natural Resources Office



“Thanks to planetGOLD Philippines, we were able to build stronger, faster connections with small-scale miners. They’ve become more willing to be accredited and to sell their gold legally through the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. This shift not only supports responsible mining but also strengthens our national gold reserves and, in turn, the economy.”

Atty. Dante Cambri
Bank Officer IV
BSP North Luzon Regional Office



"Here at Radyo Pilipinas, we are glad to support a public service like *The GOLD Talk*. Even today, many still don't fully understand what artisanal and small-scale gold mining truly is. This platform allows miners to hear how they can become more responsible—and just as importantly, it lets us share knowledge in a way that reaches them. Storytelling, when done right, is powerful. Because of your work, we now understand responsible ASGM more deeply."

Donalyn Kawis Balio
Station Manager, Radyo Pilipinas
Bontoc, Mountain Province



"As a journalist covering Paracale—our gold town—I've witnessed the impact of illegal mining and environmental threats. The planetGOLD Philippines has been a game-changer, showing that responsible mining and environmental protection can go hand in hand. Following this project helped me understand and share that balance with the public."

Jayson San Fernando
Journalist
One Radio News FM Daet & ABS-CBN News



"Solutions journalism offers a more balanced way of telling stories—but community journalists rarely have access to this kind of training. That's why it's promising that planetGOLD reached out to us. It helped us see small-scale mining not just in terms of environmental impact, but also for its contributions to the economy and community. I believe more efforts like this should be made to give journalists these kinds of opportunities."

Kath Cortez
Senior Reporter
Davao Today



"The Media Kapihan and our continued engagement with planetGOLD Philippines deepened my understanding of ASGM in the country. Their support helped us tell its story truthfully, with access to resources that made responsible mining easier to explain."

Lucita "Manang Lucy" Monsanto-Exconde
Journalist - Chair - Board of Directors
The Baguio Chronicle



"As a journalist, I'm inspired by the stories of these women miners. The project's initiatives and storytelling give us rich, authentic narratives to share with the public, breaking stereotypes and showing the vital role women play in small-scale mining."

Mariejo Ramos
Inclusive Economies Correspondent
Thomas Reuters Foundation



"I am grateful for the opportunity to be chosen as one of the journalists to tell the story of the small mining community there who moved to ban mercury, and proved that responsible mining is not just possible, but also doable."

Gabriela G. Baron
Senior Reporter
Daily Tribune

Insights and Learnings from the planetGOLD Philippines Project

The implementation of the planetGOLD Philippines Project has yielded valuable and practical insights into the realities of supporting the ASGM sector. Working in culturally rich and complex settings such as Sagada and Paracale, the project encountered a range of implementation challenges—including delays caused by poor weather conditions, the need to navigate complex formalization processes, and the importance

of respecting local cultural sensitivities. At the same time, it had to respond to deeper systemic issues within the ASGM sector, such as financial exclusion and gender inequality, which shaped both the needs of the communities and the project's interventions.

This section brings together key lessons drawn from the project's engagements, technical activities, and adaptive strategies. These

lessons highlight the importance of trust-building, flexibility, and inclusivity in achieving lasting impact. They also emphasize the need for long-term support—particularly in legal formalization, financial empowerment, and gender integration. By documenting these lessons, the project aims to inform future ASGM interventions—ensuring they are rooted in local realities, community values, and evolving needs.



01

Stakeholder Engagement is Foundational

Building trust with mining associations, government agencies, civil society, and the private sector was essential to advancing progress. Forums, roundtables, and ongoing consultations created inclusive spaces for dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. In sites like Sagada, where cultural norms and environmental preservation are paramount, this engagement shaped the project's direction and fostered mutual understanding.

Lesson: Early and sustained multi-stakeholder engagement ensures that interventions are culturally appropriate, community-supported, and aligned with local governance structures.

02

Flexibility and Local Context Must Guide Project Implementation

In Sagada, the planned full-scale operation of a Mercury-Free Processing System (MFPS) was not permitted by neighboring communities and

the local government units due to strong environmental and cultural concerns. The project adapted by shifting its focus to capacity building and the improvement of existing practices. This pivot underscored the importance of aligning with local values and development priorities—even when it requires scaling back technical ambitions.

Lesson: Project plans must remain flexible and responsive to evolving local perspectives. Successful technology deployment in ASGM is not solely about technical feasibility—it must also honor sociocultural values, governance dynamics, and community-defined risks and benefits.

03

Infrastructure Timelines Must Account for Environmental and Accessibility Challenges

In Paracale, poor road conditions significantly affected the timely delivery of construction materials and heavy equipment needed for the MFPS. Frequent rainfall and flooding worsened the situation, rendering



already difficult routes nearly impassable. These challenges resulted in significant delays in project implementation and increased costs. This experience highlights a common challenge across many ASGM sites in the Philippines, which are typically located in far-flung areas with limited infrastructure and are highly vulnerable to climate-related disruptions.

Lesson: Infrastructure development in ASGM communities must consider both geographic isolation and climate sensitivity. Project timelines should include flexibility for transport delays and weather-related disruptions,

04

Formalization Requires Sustained Technical and Legal Support

Navigating the complexities of small-scale mining contracts and *Minahang Bayan* applications required close coordination with the MGB, PMRBs, and local

while infrastructure designs should favor modular, locally sourced, and climate-resilient solutions suited to remote and environmentally sensitive areas.

associations. With technical assistance from the project, partner associations were able to formalize—enhancing transparency and legitimacy in their operations.

Lesson: Formalization is achievable but demands sustained, hands-on support—particularly in navigating bureaucratic processes and ensuring legal compliance.





08

Reframing the ASGM Narrative

The ASGM sector is often stigmatized as illegal, unsafe, and environmentally destructive—without fully acknowledging the socio-economic realities faced by mining communities. This persistent negative perception fuels public misunderstanding, discourages miners from participating in formal processes, and leads to policy responses that are often punitive rather than enabling. Through storytelling, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive communication strategies, the project helped humanize the sector and amplify the voices of miners.

grounding engagement in cultural awareness. Working with ASGM communities requires more than technical knowledge—it demands a deep respect for local customs, beliefs, leadership structures, and histories. Dedicated cultural sensitivity sessions for project staff helped equip them with the tools to engage respectfully and meaningfully. This was particularly crucial in sites like Sagada, where cultural heritage strongly shapes community life and decision-making.

For instance, Sagada observes *Obaya*—a customary rest day or period of closure tied to community rituals or agricultural cycles. During an *Obaya*, certain areas, including the *Minahang Bayan*, may be closed to outsiders. Since *Obaya* schedules are often unannounced or determined only shortly beforehand, they can lead to the postponement of project activities. Over time, these delays can accumulate, significantly impacting project timelines.

Lesson: Culturally sensitive engagement fosters trust, improves project acceptance, and enhances the relevance and sustainability of interventions. Understanding and accommodating local practices like *Obaya* is essential for realistic project planning and respectful partnerships with ASGM communities.

09

Building Respectful Engagement Through Cultural Understanding

A key insight from the project was the importance of

05

Market Access and Financial Inclusion Are Critical Enablers

By facilitating access to BSP-accredited gold buyers (e.g., PJ Lhuillier) and introducing loans, insurance, and investor relations training, the project helped miners strengthen their bargaining power and reduce dependence on informal buyers.

Lesson: Building inclusive financial ecosystems must go hand-in-hand with capacity development—and be tailored to each community’s level of readiness and unique circumstances.

06

Gender Integration Expands Equity and Impact

In both Paracale and Sagada, the project elevated women’s roles in ASGM through leadership training, roundtable discussions, and the creation of a local women’s council in Paracale. These efforts amplified women’s visibility, voice, and access to resources—especially in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

Lesson: Gender-responsive strategies enhance project reach, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability. These strategies must be intentional, context-specific, and integrated from the outset.

07

Adaptive Management Is Essential in ASGM Projects

From delayed implementation to strategic pivots in Sagada, the project consistently had to recalibrate. Its ability to listen to communities, learn from setbacks, and adapt approaches was key to maintaining credibility and achieving results.

Lesson: Adaptive management—grounded in real-time feedback and continuous learning—is essential to effective ASGM programming.



Mercury-Free Mining
Uplifting Communities, Protecting the Environment.



UN
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Artisanal Gold Council Philippines Team Members





planet GOLD Philippines



Message from Artisanal Gold Council HQ

This book tells a story of tenacity and hope.

It speaks to the unwavering resilience of the mining communities with whom we—the Artisanal Gold Council, Executing Agency of the planetGOLD Philippines Project—have had the immense privilege to work with. It also reflects the deep hope that has guided our shared journey: hope for a better, more sustainable, and more dignified future for artisanal and small-scale gold miners in the Philippines.

From the very beginning, we set ambitious goals. We aimed to support the formalization of mining communities, expand access to financial services, eliminate mercury use through safer, modern technologies, and increase productivity and incomes while protecting the environment. At the heart of our vision was a commitment to inclusivity—ensuring that women, youth, and other vulnerable groups would not only be safeguarded, but thrive as integral participants in the

professionalization of the ASGM sector.

While we may not have achieved everything we initially envisioned, the lessons we learned—and the successes we achieved—are meaningful, lasting, and worth celebrating. This book stands as a testament to that journey.

As Executive Director of the Artisanal Gold Council, I extend my deepest gratitude to our exceptional team in the Philippines, our valued government partners—particularly the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB)—and to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for their steadfast support and guidance throughout this endeavor.

Together, we have laid the foundation for a brighter future.

“At the heart of our vision was a commitment to inclusivity...”



Roger Tissot
Executive Director
Artisanal Gold Council



Closing Message

As we turn to the final pages of our project through this coffee table book, let us be reminded that we are not merely closing a publication—we are celebrating a milestone, a chapter of transformation, hope, and collective action.

The planetGOLD Philippines Project has been more than an environmental initiative. It went beyond being an environmental initiative—embracing human rights, advancing gender equality, and promoting economic viability. The project brought together communities, governments, and partners to reshape the ASGM sector.

For decades, the ASGM sector has been a vital source of resilience and livelihood in many rural areas. Yet it remains largely informal, environmentally risky, and often overlooked by formal institutions. We've seen this firsthand in places like Sagada and Paracale—our project sites—where small-scale mining has been practiced for generations. Despite its economic contributions, the sector continues to face pressing challenges: unsafe working conditions, persistent mercury use, weak regulations, and

limited institutional reporting. And these are not abstract problems. They are specific, well-documented, and squarely within the mandate of the DENR to address.

Through the project, we have witnessed the beginning of change. We introduced mercury-free technologies that protect both miners and the environment. We laid the groundwork for financial inclusion and launched capacity-building initiatives. We saw miners—once hesitant—become champions of safer, greener practices. The stories captured in these pages are a testament to what can be achieved through genuine commitment.

The planetGOLD Philippines Project has also strengthened the institutional backbone needed to support lasting change. Through this support, we built a substantial body

of evidence—including health assessments, legal reviews, gender analyses, and stakeholder consultations, that directly informed the project's outcomes and this publication.

Perhaps the project's greatest contribution is the hope it has inspired—that a better future is truly within our reach. A future where miners no longer have to choose between earning a living and protecting their health. A future where gold carries not only economic value, but also the pride of ethical sourcing and environmental stewardship.

As the GEF Operational Focal Point, I have high hopes that the seeds planted by this project will continue to grow. I envision a future where the outcomes of planetGOLD Philippines are not only remembered, but also replicated, institutionalized, and scaled up through our policies and programs.

Let this book stand as a testament to what we have accomplished throughout the project's lifetime. May it serve as a reminder of the future we've envisioned—for the sector, for the ASGM communities who opened their hearts and homes to this initiative, and for the Philippines as a whole.

Together, let us continue to champion a gold sector that is rich not only in minerals but also in dignity, equality, and accountability.

*Together,
let us make
Mercury
History.*



Atty. Analiza Rebuente-Teh
Undersecretary for Finance, Information Systems, and Climate Change, DENR
GEF-Operational Focal Point
Champion, planetGOLD Philippines Project

THE GOLD WE CHOOSE

Paving the Way for a Mercury-Free and Empowered
Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Gold Sector in the Philippines

Artisanal Gold Council

Through the planetGOLD Philippines Project

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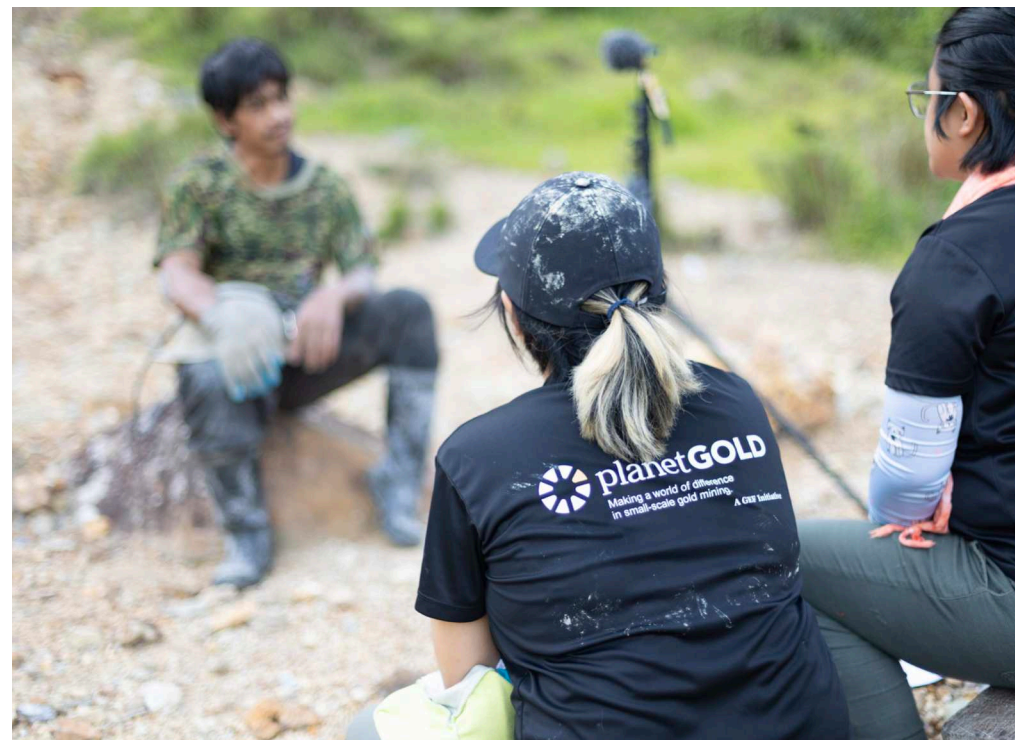
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For more information, visit:
www.planetgold.org/philippines
artisanalgold.org





Making a world of difference in small-scale gold mining.

The Gold We Choose explores the legacy of the planetGOLD Philippines Project, capturing its milestones, partnerships, and the lives it has transformed. Through compelling stories from the ground, striking images of change, and the voices of miners, leaders, and communities, this book honors a sector often overlooked, yet vital to both local and national economies.

More than a record of achievements, it is a powerful testament to what becomes possible when people come together to build a small-scale gold mining industry that is mercury-free, safer, cleaner, and truly inclusive.

From the mining tunnels of Paracale to the highlands of Sagada, this is a celebration of gold that empowers lives, safeguards nature, and redefines what responsible mining can be – **this is the gold we choose.**

Making Mercury History in the Philippines

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