The prevalence of COVID-19 within GOLD-ISMIA’s project locations

As at 1st April 2020 there were no reported COVID-19 cases in any of GOLD-ISMIA’s ASGM mining communities.

GOLD-ISMIA’s field facilitators surveyed 50 respondents across six project locations to assess miner awareness of COVID-19, and the impact of the virus on their mining activities.

Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 outbreak had become a pandemic; a term used for a disease that is spreading in multiple countries around the world at the same time. The WHO recognized that the measures implemented in response to the pandemic are taking a heavy toll on societies and economies. As a consequence of social distancing, sectors involving physical works and person-to-person interactions will likely be hardest hit, and this includes the mining sector.

In response to the pandemic announcement, the Global Opportunities for Long-Term Development – Integrated Sound Management of Mercury in Indonesia’s Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining (GOLD-ISMIA) Project conducted a rapid survey to understand ASGM miners’ response to Covid-19 in: (1) Logas and Logas Hilir Villages (Kuantan Singingi, Riau); (2) Kalirejo Village (Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta); (3) Buwun Mas Village (Lombok Barat, Nusa Tenggara Barat); (4) Anggai and Air Mangga Villages (Halmahera Selatan, Maluku Utara); (5) Tatelu Village.
(Minahasa Utara, Sulawesi Utara); and, (6) Hulawa Village (Gorontalo Utara, Gorontalo). GOLD-ISMIA is working with ASGM communities in these villages to curb the use of mercury from gold processing, by at least 5 metric tonnes per year and by at least 15 tonnes at the end of the project.

Situation Analysis

Respondents included hard-rock miners, workers involved with gold processing, mine and processing facility owners, medical workers, and service-industry workers. 44 respondents were concerned about COVID-19. Respondents were worried about the ease of transmission and difficulty of detecting the virus.

Government measures to control the virus are being applied at all locations:
1. Social distancing
2. The restriction of workers moving in and out of mining areas
3. Recommendations for increased personal hygiene and maintaining a healthy lifestyle

Impact of COVID-19 on mining activities

GOLD-ISMIA’s data shows that 34% of miners have stopped working, but this is very dependent on location. Miners who continue to mine do so because they have no other source of income. Mining is their livelihood.

Data suggest mining has been less impacted by COVID-19 in remote areas (Minahasa Utara, Halmahera Selatan, Gorontalo Utara and Kuantan Singingi) than in the more populated areas of NTB and Java. This may be related to both the perceived effectiveness of government responses to limit transmission, and alternative livelihood options for communities connected to areas of greater population density.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Miners surveyed</th>
<th>% still mining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lombok Barat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minahasa Utara</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halmahera Selatan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorontalo Utara</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kulon Progo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuantan Singingi</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. A worker at gold processing in Buwun Mas Village wearing a mask to protect himself from COVID-19

Analysis by the GOLD-ISMIA project team

There is no indication of widespread COVID-19 related ASGM disruption in Indonesia. However, miners are concerned about their safety, and have requested masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE).

Gold market prices have increased, but there is no evidence that increased gold prices are leading to increased profits for miners. A reduced workforce is reducing labour availability, and this is increasing costs in the gold value chain.

Continued isolation of remote mining locations is a good strategy to protect miners and their community from COVID-19. Government appears to be effectively policing the movement of people between communities in remote mining areas.