

# Documentation of planetGOLD Programme: Communication Interventions in Guyana

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The planetGOLD Guyana project concluded its activities in February 2023. The project was implemented by Conservation International and executed in partnership with Conservation International-Guyana, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, National Toshias Council, Guyana Women Miners Organisation, and the National Mining Syndicate Inc.

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## Abbreviations/Acronyms

Abbreviation/Acronym	Definition
ASGM	Artisanal and small-scale gold mining
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GGMC	Guyana Geology and Mines Commission
GGDMA	Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners' Association
RMI	Responsible Mining Initiative

## Executive Summary

This report summarizes key developments made under Component 6, “Communications and Knowledge Management”, of the planetGOLD Guyana project financed by the Global Environment Facility. It combines findings contained in reports produced under planetGOLD Guyana with feedback from interviews with key project staff to profile the major interventions made under the “Communications and Knowledge Management” strand of the project.

It focuses on three interventions:

- 1) Audiovisual and communicative tools produced under the project. The videos of the project itself, and demonstrations of technologies targeting miners, as well as community radio broadcasts that sought to raise broad awareness.
- 2) Direct engagement in the field with miners. The interactions with miners on the ground through communication pieces (posters and pamphlets).
- 3) Engagements with decision-makers. Participation in steering committees and working sessions with multistakeholder groups, foremost government actors.

The report summarizes on the impacts of each intervention, and the challenges faced with operationalizing each. The broader lessons learned from the Communications and Knowledge Management component of PlanetGOLD Guyana are also shared.

# 1 Introduction

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) has been a staple economic activity in Guyana for centuries, providing direct employment to tens of thousands of people across the country. The sector has also jumpstarted and created demand for other economic activities in many rural communities across Guyana, spawning complex webs of supply chains, each populated by an array of actors and spanning a multitude of industries. In Guyana, ASGM takes place in remote locations, most of which are only accessible by boat or plane. The country has, since the colonial period, experienced a number of mining booms that have attracted an eclectic group of merchants and labourers to gold-producing localities, along with influxes of skills, people, culture and technology from neighbouring Brazil.<sup>1</sup> This was most recently on display during the period 1996 – 2016, a time when there was no large-scale gold mining in Guyana. Between 2006 and 2016, the sector expanded by 246 percent, peaking at over 700,000 ounces, up from less than 100,000 ounces in the late-1990s.<sup>2</sup>

This growth, however, has also left a legacy of environmental destruction in Guyana, which has, in recent decades, ignited a fairly comprehensive policy response in the country.<sup>3</sup> The most recent intervention, “A GEF Gold/Supply Chain Approach to Eliminating Mercury in Guyana’s ASGM Sector: El Dorado Gold Jewelry Made in Guyana” Child Project (henceforth referred to as “planetGOLD Guyana”), a 48-month project that commenced in May 2018, was launched to stimulate innovation, catalyze public-private partnerships and promote environmentally-friendly practices in AGSM, with the intention of facilitating a transition toward a mercury-free sector by 2025.<sup>4</sup>

Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the project was led by Conservation International-GEF as the Implementing Agency, Conservation International Guyana as the lead Executing Agency, and the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA) as cooperating agencies.<sup>5</sup> The project prioritized technology transfer and education to facilitate production and the sale of mercury-free systems. Work was carried out in three of the country’s most important ASGM localities: Barima-Waini (Region 1),

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<sup>1</sup> Laing, T., Moonsammy, S. 2021. Evaluating the impact of small-scale mining on the achievement of the sustainable development goals in Guyana. *Environmental Science & Policy* 116: 147-159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Laing, T., Edwards, R., Yusuf, S., Sparman, C. 2023. Assessing the economics and finances of Artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Guyana. *Journal of Rural Studies* 97: 438-448.

<sup>4</sup> Conservation International. 2021. A GEF GOLD/Supply Chain Approach to Eliminating Mercury in Guyana’s ASGM Sector: El Dorado Gold Jewelry – Made in Guyana. Mid-Term Review, Conservation International and Report Prepared for the Global Environmental Facility, Washington DC.

<sup>5</sup> Conservation International and the Global Environmental Facility. 2019. Project Implementation Report (PIR) for the project: A GEF GOLD/Supply Chain Approach to Eliminating Mercury in Guyana’s ASGM Sector: El Dorado Gold Jewellery – Made in Guyana FY19 May 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019. Report prepared for Conservation International for the Global Environmental Facility, Washington DC.

Cuyuni-Mazaruni (Region 7), and Potaro Potaro-Siparuni (Region 8).<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this document is to summarize key developments made under Component 6, “Communications and Knowledge Management”, of planetGOLD Guyana. The report draws on findings contained in documents produced under the project as well as feedback from interviews with key project staff.

## Background and Context

The objective of the communications component of planetGOLD Guyana was to “develop a strategic communication plan and materials targeting key stakeholders within the supply chain for awareness and policy advocacy”.<sup>7</sup> The goal was to produce four outputs under this component, as follows:

- (6.1) A strategic communication plan prepared and implemented, and materials prepared (e.g., policy papers, factsheets, videos) aimed at key stakeholders, including miners, decisionmakers, and other local and international actors within the supply chain for awareness raising and policy advocacy.
- (6.2) Biennial conference and annual dialogues organized to promote Project Findings and Responsible Gold Mining.
- (6.3) Coordination with the global project on Knowledge Management activities.
- (6.4) Education and awareness on options and benefits of responsible gold production and education targeting policymakers to build national commitment to a sustainable responsible gold value chain in Guyana.

These outputs were meant to build on previous work carried out under Conservation International’s broader Responsible Mining Initiative (RMI). In developing planetGOLD Guyana’s Communications and Knowledge Management strategy,<sup>8</sup> therefore, a “rights-based” approach was adopted to diagnose environmental and social issues. This entailed working in consultation with local partners (the GGMC, EPA, Ministry of Natural Resources, Guyana Women Miners Organization, National Toshaos’ Council and the GGDMA),<sup>9</sup> and analyzing information obtained from a KAP survey and baseline study

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<sup>6</sup> Bakx, J., Gómez, B.R., Tufo, R. 2024. Documenting planetGOLD programme experiences with ASGM supply chain mechanisms Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru, and the Philippines. Report prepared by Levin Resources for planetGOLD, Washington DC.

<sup>7</sup> Conservation International and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). 2017. CI-GEF PROJECT AGENCY GEF Project Document A GEF GOLD/Supply Chain Approach to Eliminating Mercury in Guyana’s ASGM Sector: El Dorado Gold Jewelry – Made in Guyana 21. Report prepared by Conservation International for the Global Environmental Facility, Washington DC.

<sup>8</sup> “Charting the future of Guyana’s artisanal, small and medium-scale gold mining sector”, <https://conservation.org.gy/project/el-dorado-gold/#:~:text=CI%20is%20supporting%20Guyana%20to.place%20less%20pressure%20on%20forests>. (Accessed 12 December 2024).

<sup>9</sup> “Charting the future of Guyana’s artisanal, small and medium-scale gold mining sector”, <https://conservation.org.gy/project/el-dorado-gold/#:~:text=CI%20is%20supporting%20Guyana%20to.place%20less%20pressure%20on%20forests>.

carried out by the organization that focused on improving understanding of (mine) practices, and operators' knowledge and attitudes.<sup>10</sup>

The KAP survey and baseline study engaged 280 miners, as well as residents of localities where ASGM operations take place. They sought to elicit perspectives on what communication products they have and continue to be exposed to. Ideas around final products, whether videos or posters, therefore, were conceived in direct consultation with these community-level actors, in order to pinpoint what the most effective communication tools should be with these target audiences. Further, because the project was an extension of existing activities under RMI, they were able to avoid some of the barriers typically encountered when attempting to foster conversations with high-level stakeholders, in this case, representatives from the President's Office, GGMC and the GGDMA, which was seen as an important foundation for the policy advocacy element of the strategy.

As with all elements of the project, the communications work was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel and meetings were restricted, which impeded efforts to connect with miners and communities. The planetGOLD Guyana team was forced to rely more heavily on the Internet and WhatsApp to communicate and utilized digital media and radio to educate and raise awareness about mercury-free processing. Some field activities were further scaled back to avoid potential clashes with campaigning during the build-up to the regional and national elections, which were held in March 2020.

## Communication Interventions Chosen

The initial focus of communications included a strong emphasis on describing mercury-free technologies and their benefits. During the course of the project, however, as it became clear that the development of a financing mechanism would not be forthcoming during the project lifetime, the communications work pivoted towards showcasing the impacts of mercury more, with simultaneous de-emphasis on mercury-free processes. The key planetGOLD Guyana communications interventions were identified on the basis of the planetGOLD Guyana project being a part of a “continuum” of multiple projects being implemented under Conservation International Guyana's RMI, and *not* as a standalone initiative. Three interventions were identified by planetGOLD Guyana staff as the most important/impactful under the its communications component. They are as follows:

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[gold/#:~:text=CI%20is%20supporting%20Guyana%20to.place%20less%20pressure%20on%20forests](#). (Accessed 12 December 2024). A Toshao is what an indigenous village leader is referred to in Guyana.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Senior Official, Conservation International Guyana.

- Intervention 1: Development and dissemination of audiovisual and communicative tools produced under the project. These included the assortment of videos (educational work, demonstrations of technologies, etc.) and radio broadcasts aimed at raising broad awareness.
- Intervention 2: Demonstrations in the field with miners. Engagements with miners on the ground were facilitated through the communications efforts, including the distribution of posters and pamphlets, WhatsApp messages and videos.
- Intervention 3: Engagements with decision-makers. The project sought to communicate about key messages on mercury reduction efforts through participation in steering committees and working sessions with multistakeholder groups, foremost government actors.

The planetGOLD Guyana team prioritized these interventions because of the fundamental importance of building rapport with miners. They pointed out that it was “not about us all the time talking about responsible mining but us being a preferred partner because we [i.e., planetGOLD Guyana] really value our relationship with miners”.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 Communication Intervention 1: Production of audiovisual and communication tools

### Description of the Intervention

The planetGOLD Guyana team produced a range of communication materials that sought to raise awareness of mercury’s environmental and health implications and the merits of pursuing substitute strategies. During the course of the project, there was a pivot towards educational materials and direct engagements with miners about mercury to discuss its environmental and health-related impacts, and to deprioritize demonstrations of substitutes.

### Partners and Key Stakeholders

The planetGOLD Guyana team repeatedly stressed that the goal with all of these materials was to connect with *all* individuals operating within Guyana’s ASGM sector, and to ensure that the ideas being shared were presented in ways that resonated with them. Because the sector was “not a

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, Conservation International Guyana official, Georgetown.

homogenous group”, a range of visual aids needed to be employed. As such, one challenging aspect was the need to develop (and subsequently continuously refine) the short videos and messaging for these many *different* actors working in the ASGM sector, a list that includes the (licensed) small miners, the punters, Amerindians and the “pork knockers”, each of whom has different legal statuses, titles and rights. The more influential medium-scale miners were engaged through the GGDMA and GGMC, and Indigenous communities were engaged directly through village councils, and by showing videos and sharing illustrative materials.<sup>12</sup>

In every case, emphasis was placed on “taking complex technical things and breaking them down into accessible messages”, and “processing them into digestible ideas to which miners could relate”.<sup>13</sup> It was discovered at an early stage in the project that focusing on the themes of “profitability” and “productivity”, whilst at the same time emphasizing environmental and social goals, was the most effective way of engaging miners. In some cases, to ensure that messaging was received, Guyanese Creole was used to communicate and share ideas. The team spent time ensuring that the language of the videos and posters was accessible to miners, and that images were clear.

## Main Outcomes, Outputs and Impacts

The planetGOLD Guyana team developed 20 strategic plans and awareness materials targeting key stakeholders on responsible gold mining in Guyana (e.g., policy makers, mining and indigenous communities, concessionaries and gold shop owners), and 23 types of communication materials aimed at these same actors,<sup>14</sup> including posters, and videos, radio programs. The planetGOLD Guyana staff used findings from the KAP survey and views solicited from partners (the GGMC, EPA, Ministry of Natural Resources, Guyana Women Miners Organization, National Toshaos’ Council and the GGDMA) to pinpoint who they should engage and what types of visual materials that would be most effective in doing so.

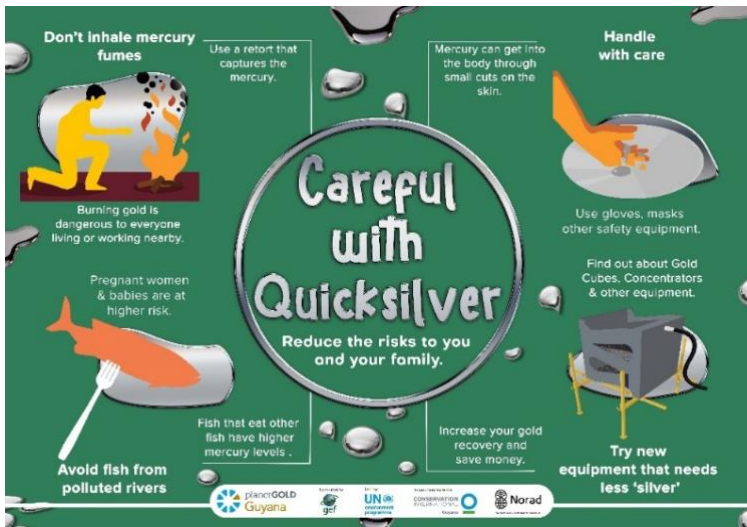
Figures 1 and 2 show types of posters created by the project. Posters and other print material was distributed by the team in the project areas, while the team relied on officials at the Ministry of Labour to distribute posters in areas where the project did not have a presence, and were pleasantly surprised when, later on in the project, they arrived in ASGM town where they would see them on display.

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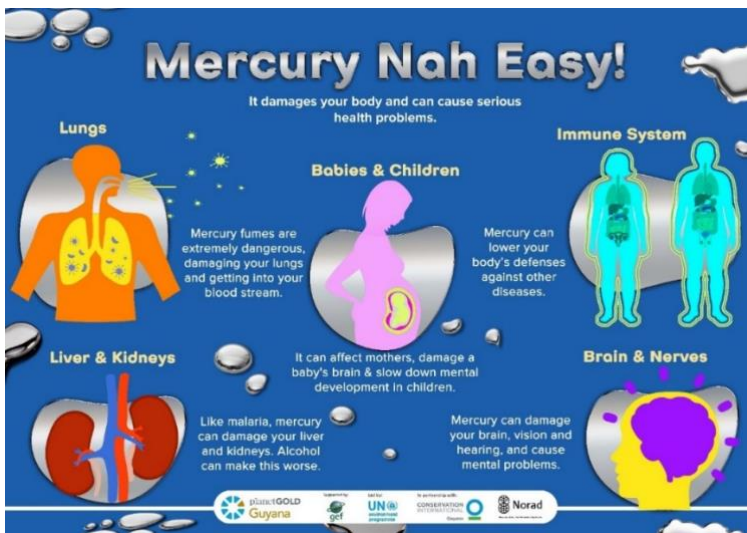
<sup>12</sup> Interview, Conservation International Guyana staff, Georgetown.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

**Figure 1:** Sample poster communicating messages about mercury



**Figure 2:** Sample educational material used to engage local-level actors in Guyana on the environmental and health-related impacts of mercury in ASGM



In areas where the Internet was intermittent and COVID-19 made regular travel impossible, the team relied heavily on radio programs to reach broad audiences. For example, between November 2020 and March 2021, a program was included regularly in the national daily radio show "Merundoi" (<https://merundoi.org.gy/air-times/>). The program reached an estimated 5,000 people, with targeted audiences in Mahdia and Bartica, two major ASGM localities.

Additional “conversational” radio pieces (i.e. broadcasts depicting two miners communicating with one another) were also employed. The conversations featured (mostly in Guyanese Creole) such as

the dialogue shared in Figure 3 centered on methylmercury and its toxicity and were circulated over social media and uploaded on to dedicated internet platforms. Short videos communicating important messages about mercury were also made accessible via YouTube, with the goal of targeting audiences in Georgetown. An example of such a video is presented in Figure 4 which, at the time of writing, had over 385,000 views.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 3:** Dialogue on a radio program on ASGM targeting miners

**El Dorado Gold ASGM Radio**

**Miner 1:** Eh Charlie boy, I hear you're having a meeting with them conservation people.

**Miner 2:** Yeah Tony. Was Conservation International the Guyana Office. They shown a video of half a mine without silver.

**Miner 1:** Oh yeah?...You are doing the responsible mining thing no?

**Miner 2:** Yeah, well. I find out it is really two projects under the initiative. The mercury one is "GEF Gold" and the other one name umm..."Addressing Drivers of Deforestation".

**Miner 1:** Was that one about again?

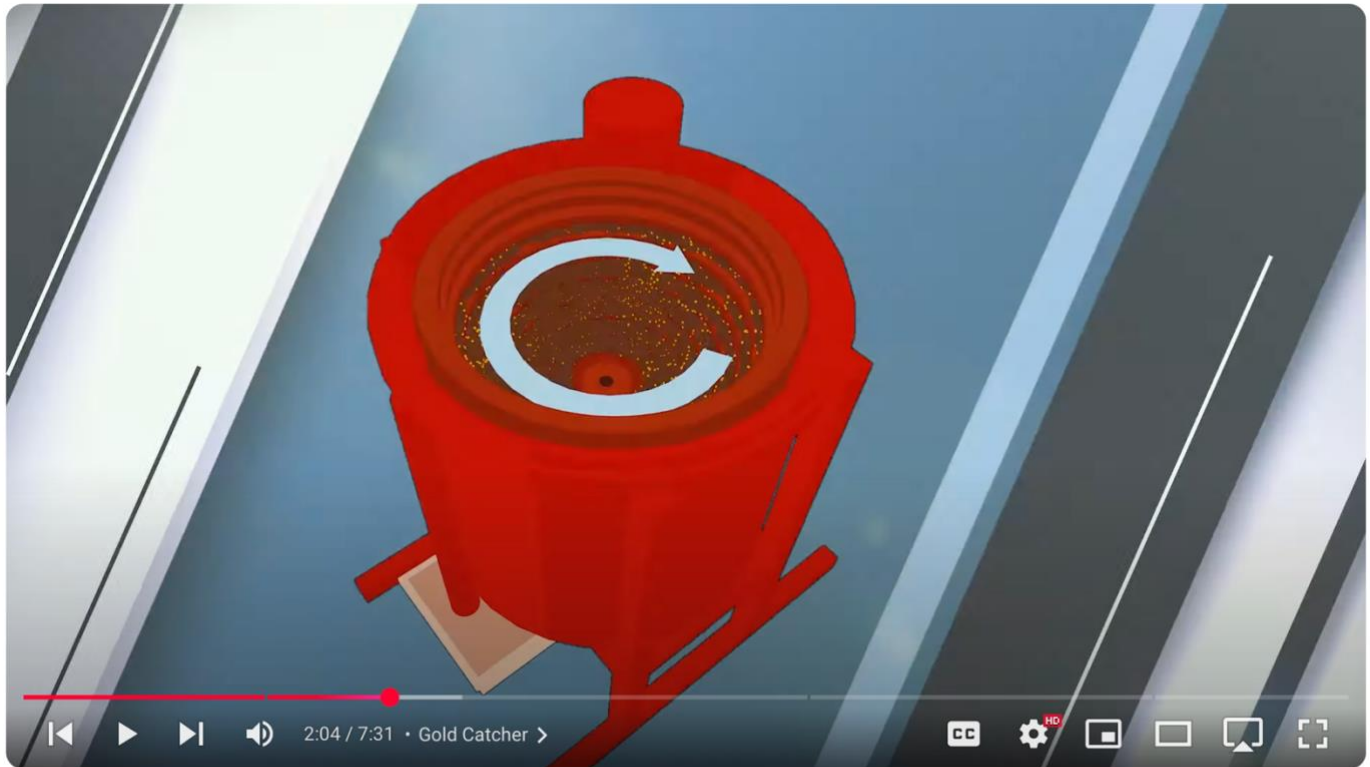
**Miner 2:** That one looking at how to check for gold quick, before you decide for moving in the excavator and start to clear all dem trees.

**Miner 1:** ...as if the good work is less time a for use.

**Miner 2:** Well brother man if you really want see all these new ting look out for when they come again and find yourself at the meeting.

<sup>15</sup> <https://youtu.be/3fGB2fLRUJU?si=ONUgc0XCcTSzmUaA>

**Figure 4:** Sample video shown at sites and circulated via WhatsApp and other online platforms



### Demonstration of equipment for mercury-free gold mining in Guyana



Subscribed

3.3K



Share

Clip

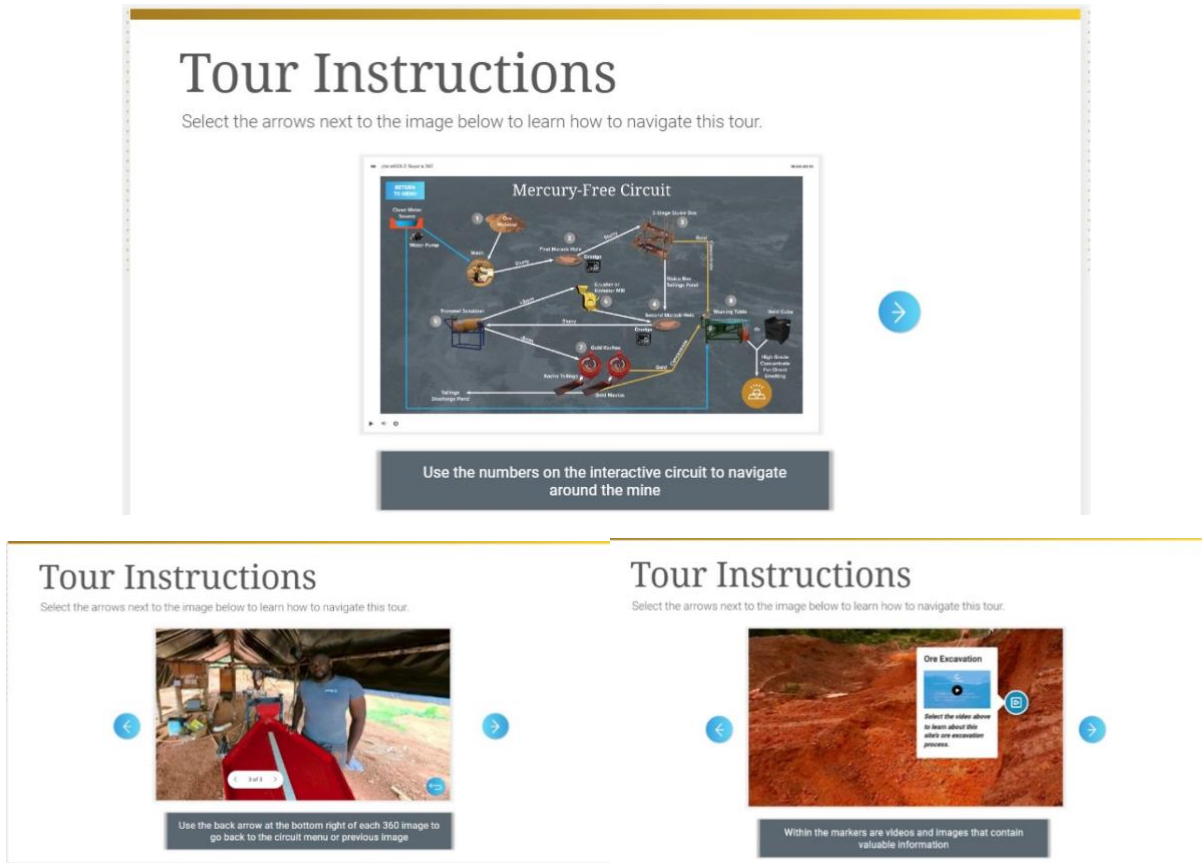


The Guyana project team also collaborated with the planetGOLD global communication team to develop a 360-degree, interactive tour of its Region 8 Mercury-Free Demonstration Project at an alluvial gold mine site.<sup>16</sup> The demonstration site in Region 8 featured a series of mercury-free technologies that could be readily adopted by any small and medium-scale miner in Guyana. The objective of the 360-degree interactive virtual tour was to provide an immersive, educational introduction to each step in the mercury-free gold processing circuit (see Figure 5). Reliance on a strong Internet connection meant there were limitations for disseminating the 360-degree tour among miners while in the field, as most areas of the country do not have access to reliable Internet connection. Nonetheless, the 360-degree tour can be used for meetings and trainings for miners, government officials and other stakeholders in locations (such as Georgetown) where Internet connectivity is strong enough to facilitate the interactive tour. It is a robust tool for the Government of Guyana to continue using among those for whom traveling to a remote mine site would be

<sup>16</sup> See “planetGOLD Guyana 360”, [www.planetgold.org/explore-guyana-360/](http://www.planetgold.org/explore-guyana-360/) (Accessed 4 January 2025).

impractical, including potential financiers and investors. For example, the 360-degree tour was featured during the Responsible Mining Conference, held in Georgetown in 2023 as the closing event of the planetGOLD Guyana project. The Guyana tour was also later incorporated in planetGOLD’s global “360 Experience” which was featured at an exhibit at the 7th GEF Assembly in August 2023 and via an exhibit at the Minamata Convention on Mercury 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties in November 2023.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 5:** The planetGOLD Guyana 360-degree virtual tour



The Guyana project produced 23 additional communications materials, notably:<sup>18</sup>

- 1) A field video, “[Changing Minds about Mining](#),” demonstrating the key strategies and activities the project undertook.
- 2) A [tutorial video](#) demonstrating the use of small-scale prospecting equipment, including augur and flush drill.

<sup>17</sup> See “planetGOLD 360 Experience” <https://www.planetgold.org/360-experience/> (Accessed 4 January 2025).

<sup>18</sup> More details can be found in Conservation International, 2021; Cynosure, 2023.

- 3) A [booklet](#) developed in collaboration with partner agencies, informing miners of the COVID-19 virus and its symptoms, and how travel safely between and within mining camps.
- 4) Video interviews of miners for its “[Women in Mining](#)” series and a booklet “[Equipment for Responsible Mining](#).”

Separately, the team created a blog on [Humanizing Gender Dynamics within ASGM in Guyana](#) that showcased the experiences of women in the sector, with the goal of understanding gender-based differences.

## 3 Communication Intervention 2: Direct engagement in the field with miners

### Description of the Intervention

Demonstrations at pilot sites, along with one-on-one engagements with miners, went hand-in-hand with communication materials produced under the project. Although field demonstrations were considered part of the technology transfer component of the project, the team used the communications tools strategically, to create rapport with miners, and build their interest, prior to the demonstrations. For example, in the initial stages of the project when COVID-19 restricted movements to sites and thus direct engagements with miners, the project nonetheless managed to initiate and build excellent rapport with individual operators over WhatsApp. planetGOLD Guyana staff credited partners, in particular the GGDMA and GGMC, with helping to facilitate these engagements.

Further, after restrictions were lifted, the technological demonstrations were preceded by video presentations on mercury management and (mercury-free) processes to communities, distribution of posters, handing pamphlets out to individual families, and visits to sites.

### Partners and Key Stakeholders

The two main stakeholders targeted under Intervention 2 were small-scale miners and representatives from Amerindian communities (also engaged in ASGM). They were consistently engaged with messaging under the themes of “profitability” and “productivity” because it became apparent very quickly that these groups were most responsive when communications were framed using messaging around economics, mineral recovery and technological improvement. An engagement with one miner in particular in Port Kaituma provided much-needed direction for the

team. He stated, in Guyanese Creole, that “stupidly gold done”, a reference to how the accessible alluvial deposits had been exhausted and as a result, small-scale miners needed to “go to university” now to get gold. The latter point was a reference to how miners require better mining methods, which provided planetGOLD Guyana staff an idea for an additional strategy for engagement: through discussions on prospecting. Buoyed by the organization’s RMI, emphasis shifted toward discouraging miners from digging pits recklessly with their excavators and to think about undertaking more coordinated, less environmentally-damaging prospecting.<sup>19</sup>

The team prioritized engagements with indigenous Amerindians in the South Rupununi, where Conservation International Guyana had worked previously with local communities. It was explained during interviews that an influential Amerindian captain named “Gavin” had made the point that even though he was an environmentalist, who specializes in work on headwaters management and mine monitoring in the South Rupununi, that “water is life, but gold prices are high”. This provided inspiration to the team to study more closely Amerindian communities engaged in ASGM, and to emphasize how to maintain profits whilst pursuing more environmentally-sound techniques, beginning with prospecting.

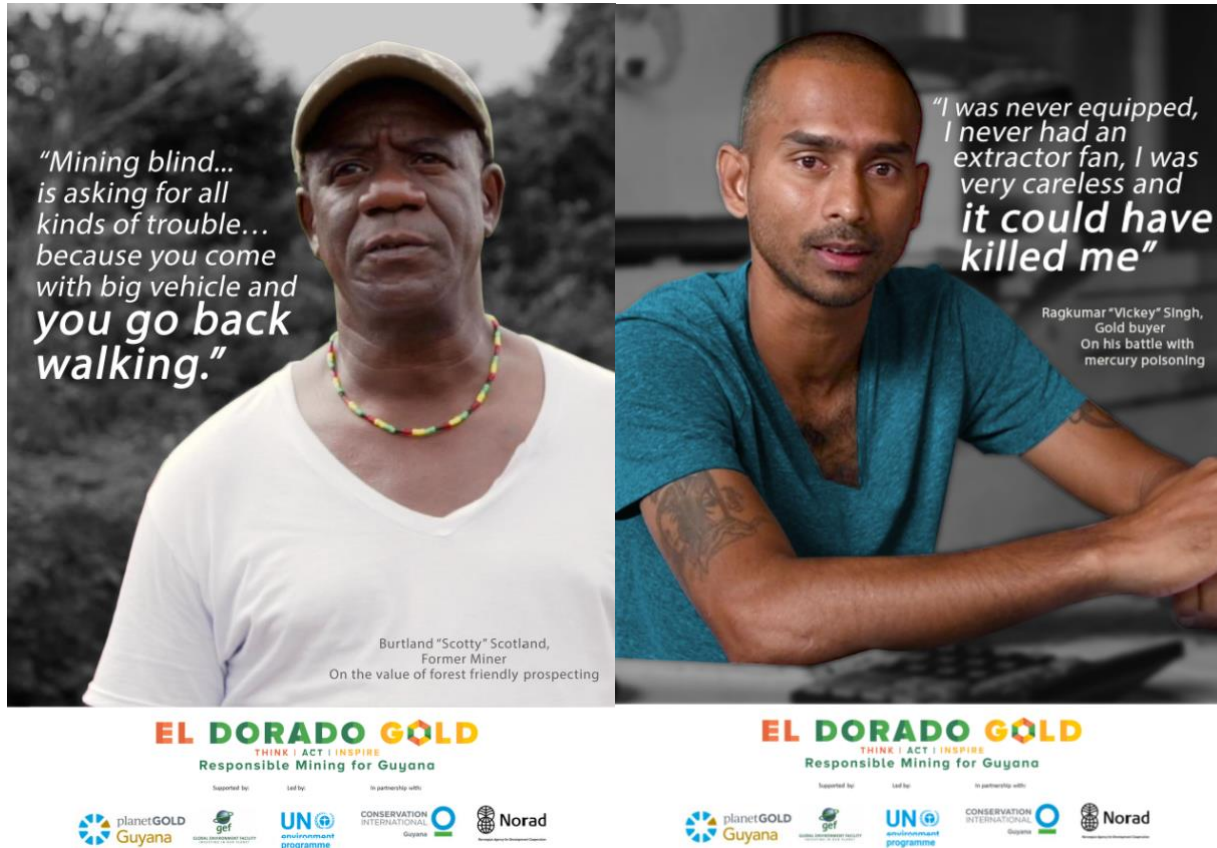
## **Main Outcomes, Outputs and Impacts**

Navigating COVID-19 restrictions and pivoting to mercury-impact focused communications (in the absence of a finance mechanism) led the team to engage directly with miners more so than they had anticipated doing. This development was viewed positively by the team. planetGOLD Guyana’s approach of putting miners first and being proactive in fostering partnerships with them led to many miners becoming even more personally involved than anticipated in communications. Examples included “Burtland” and “Rajkumar” (Figure 6), seasoned miners known and respected highly in their respective communities and who were therefore featured on posters. Many of these partnerships were unplanned and spontaneously nurtured.

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<sup>19</sup> Interviews, Conservation International Guyana staff, Georgetown.

**Figure 6:** Miners featuring on planetGOLD posters



Gold buyers also expressed interest in partnering with planetGOLD to pilot mercury capture technologies in their shops.<sup>20</sup> One gold buyer in Mahdia in particular was extremely communicative about his life story and history of mercury poisoning. He complained of a reduced libido and sex drive, attributing this to continuous overexposure to mercury, and agreed to share these views on video. It was decided in the end, however, that this was not appropriate because other miners and community members indicated that they were not comfortable showing videos to families that covered what they believed to be very private issues. But the planetGOLD Guyana team would use these stories to engage and connect with other miners.

The planetGOLD Guyana team was in a position to pivot to a more direct-engagement strategy with miners, despite not having any established (community mining) programs in place prior to the launch of the planetGOLD Guyana. This was possible because of previous experience with the RMI, which provided a foundation for launching this work.<sup>21</sup> The focus of demonstration and engagement work linked to Intervention 2, therefore, was on consensus building and testing ideas using information

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

gathered from target mining groups and their operating environments.

Despite their best efforts and the general positive reception shown by miners toward demonstrations, mercury was still being used (albeit in reduced quantities in some situations). As documented in the [technology transfer summary report](#), miners who attended demonstrations at the main pilot site quickly adopted certain mercury reduction strategies (e.g. they stopped pouring mercury directly into extraction pits), as evidenced by lower mercury purchases, but they did not go completely mercury-free. Overall the team did not observe significant impact on the ground, as people were still using mercury in their sluice boxes and burning amalgam indiscriminately, despite planetGOLD campaigns. Without a financial mechanism to support alternatives, the fear is that they would continue to do so. Where some of the technology may have caught on is, as indicated, with the aspect of prospecting. Upon reflection, as miners “need to see it, feel it and touch it and so on” if they are to be convinced of a new technology, efforts were made, during the pandemic, to demonstrate how using equipment such as the hand auger and flush drill. These are technologies that could “reduce your costs for a year”, and in demonstrating these, the team explained, the attention of miners was secured.<sup>22</sup>

## 4 Communication Intervention 3: Engagements with Decision-Makers

### Description of the Intervention

One key element of the communication strategy sought to engage stakeholders at the decision-making level, principally through steering committees, working sessions, direct communications (individual meetings) and conferences. At each, presentations were delivered, results were shared and recommendations were made. This was largely made possible by a culture of dialogue with high-level stakeholders from government and industry bodies fostered under the RMI, which provided a platform for discussions on planetGOLD work. The policy dialogues were initiated to build consensus at the government level for transitioning toward mercury-free processes in ASGM in Guyana, without marginalizing those engaged in the sector. This activity will be on-going and will complement the stakeholder platforms, clinics and other awareness-raising activities of the project.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Conservation International, 2017.

## Partners and Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders (i.e., actors at the decision-making level) targeted under Intervention 3 were Guyana’s policymakers (i.e., officials from GGMC and the EPA) and the GGDMA. It was more difficult to engage officials at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Natural Resources and Ministry of Amerindian Affairs on planetGOLD priorities due to Guyana’s changing political economy at the time, namely transitioning from gold being its major source of foreign exchange to oil and gas. At the time of the project, the government was shifting its focus away from gold, which required the team to package ideas in ways that could be communicated simply and visually, and to engage one-on-one frequently with policymakers.

## Main Outcomes, Outputs and Impacts

Throughout the project, the team held numerous meetings and workshop with relevant policy makers. Meetings detailed the aims and goals of planetGOLD Guyana, specifically how the project sought to raise awareness of the risks and benefits associated with mercury-free gold mining, strengthen the long-term legitimacy of planned activities, and facilitate the adaptive collaborative management of its components. They were intended to establish a platform, at the highest level of government, for civil society and vulnerable groups to share their views on ASGM. The products of these discussions were used to inform policy decisions relevant to planetGOLD and the governance of ASGM in Guyana more widely. A concerted effort was made under this intervention to replicate the approach taken to develop the country’s National Action Plan, a process through which issues were raised and responded to effectively.<sup>24</sup>

Because the circumstances demanded a lot of one-on-one engagements with partners, the team ensured that it had on hand items that could be shared quickly (e.g., videos and policy briefs) with individual advisers and ministers.

The intention at the outset of the project was to organize and host a “Biennial Conference and annual dialogues organized to promote project findings and responsible gold mining”.<sup>25</sup> Delayed due to COVID and other matters, such a conference was ultimately held 18 – 20 January 2023. The *Eldorado Gold Responsible Mining Conference*, held under the theme “Responsible Mining with Better Equipment Leading to Bigger Production”, was held in Georgetown (See [https://www.planetgold.org/sites/default/files/Responsible%20Mining%20Conference%20Report 0.p](https://www.planetgold.org/sites/default/files/Responsible%20Mining%20Conference%20Report%200.p)

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<sup>24</sup> Conservation International Guyana, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Conservation International, 2017.

df). More than 120 stakeholders attended, including miners of all types, academics, researchers, state agencies, training institutions, leaders of Guyana’s Indigenous communities, and the private sector.<sup>26</sup> The team singled out the conference as the biggest achievements of planetGOLD Guyana.

A multiple day event, the conference brought together an eclectic group of people and was well-attended. It very importantly brought representatives from the GGDMA and the government officials together, stakeholders who normally do not engage with one another. Moreover, small concentrators, shaking tables and gold cubes were demonstrated at the conference, which had the effect of convincing even the most skeptical of miners. It also helped planetGOLD Guyana build trust with miners and to alleviate their suspicions about the organization potentially being against the sector. Specifically, many miners had believed that in appointing Conservation International Guyana as the lead Executing Agency, planetGOLD was seeking to bring their activities to a halt.<sup>27</sup>

While the team expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of the direct, one-on-one engagement with decision-makers, the working sessions and steering committees, the team believed that this conference was transformational because it brought actors together who rarely converse and mostly disagree on ASGM matters. The fact that there were “different people in the room discussing these issues from different viewpoints: indigenous, government, private sector and small and medium and large miners” and “other regulators, other environmental NGOs, women's organizations”, the team was able to engage different people and to break down some of the barriers in communicating with them. Having indigenous people and miners, as well as representatives from the GGDMA and National Tashaos Council, in the same room, discussing challenges linked to ASGM was a signature moment. They shared their perspectives on alternatives to mercury in the ASGM sector, and were encouraged that appropriate actions would be taken because again, there was a commitment on the part of Conservation International Guyana to continue working in this space following the conclusion of the planetGOLD project under the RMI.

## 5 Sustainability

The planetGOLD project’s sustainability is imbedded in its link to the broader RMI program at Conservation International Guyana. The RMI work and website goes beyond planetGOLD, and the organization is trying to build on the groundwork laid under planetGOLD Guyana by “being opportunistic” (i.e. by having a presence on steering committees and engaging the government and encouraging it not to repeat the same mistakes on future projects).

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<sup>26</sup> Conservation International Guyana. 2023. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT (PIR) for the project: A GEF GOLD/Supply Chain Approach to Eliminating Mercury in Guyana’s ASGM Sector: El Dorado Gold Jewelry – Made in Guyana FY23 July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. Conservation International Guyana, Georgetown.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, Conservation International Guyana staff, Georgetown.

The systematic approach adopted under planetGOLD Guyana is seen as key to maximizing the sustainability of the work conducted under the communications component, as was aligning it with other project outcomes (such as technology transfer). The team also credited a dynamic Communications and Knowledge Management strategy, with facilitating demonstration work and community engagement, namely: a) it galvanized technical teams to conduct environmental assessments and prospecting required to determine the suitability of technologies piloted on concessions in Region 7 and Region 8; and b) it informed the design of the Sustainable Landscape Framework and Sustainable Villages Framework.<sup>28</sup>

## 6 Cross-cutting Issues

### Gender

Women were identified as a “vulnerable group” and were therefore a major focus of the Communication and Knowledge Management Strategy. To reach women miners, the Guyana Women Miners Organisation (GWMO) was engaged from the outset, and the Project hired an independent consultant in 2020 to study the gender dynamics of the ASGM sector and to undertake gender analyses for addressing mercury.<sup>29</sup> The project acknowledged from the beginning that women work in many areas of Guyana’s ASGM economy. The GWMO reported that there were 14 women small-scale licensees in Region 7, 32 in Region 8 and 21 in Region 1.

It was also reported that many women were also working as vendors and employed at many shops close to sites.<sup>30</sup> The GWMO was viewed as an appropriate NGO partner because it works to improve conditions for women in mining by a) decreasing physical abuse and exploitation of women, b) promoting the rights of indigenous and local communities, and c) educating stakeholders on mining laws and regulations.<sup>31</sup>

Women featured in a number of the videos produced and on posters distributed in communities and were engaged and interviewed throughout the project. Moreover, the planetGOLD Guyana facilitated women miners participating in demonstration activities, and in video interviews for the “Women in Mining series”. Approximately 40 percent (359 of 886 persons) of individuals engaged in the project were women. This aligned closely with the objectives of the project’s “Gender Mainstreaming Plan: 1) providing equal opportunities for men and women to benefit from and contribute to the project; 2)

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<sup>28</sup> See Cynosure, 2023, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Conservation International, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Conservation International, 2017, p. 7.

mitigating potential adverse effects on male and female genders; and 3) ensuring respect for the dignity and human rights of men and women involved.<sup>32</sup>

## Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples were identified as a second key “vulnerable group.” Indigenous communities are not only affected by ASGM activities but also engage in them; as quoted from an Indigenous miner above, in Guyana, “water is life but gold prices are high.” The planetGOLD Guyana team worked closely with Indigenous Amerindian groups at pilot sites, as indicated, particularly in the South Rupanuni.

Indigenous Peoples do hold titles to their land in Guyana and, following implementation of the *Amerindian Act, 2006*, can partake in small-scale mining but do not have absolute rights over the extraction of minerals.<sup>33</sup> This governed the decision to heavily involve Amerindian groups in the work carried out under communications: to work with those who are transitioning into ASGM to educate them about mercury and to demonstrate to these groups new to mining the mercury-free technology that is available in Guyana, such as sluice boxes and hydraulic processes.

The planetGOLD Guyana team had built a good rapport with Amerindian groups. Team members genuinely believe that in promoting these rather basic technologies and demonstrating their merits, they had broken down some of the structural and operational barriers Indigenous Peoples faced in transitioning to mercury-free processes. The team managed to engage Amerindian leaders, through the National Tashaos Organization, and foster changes at sites through education and demonstrations.

## Other Vulnerable Groups

The only other “vulnerable group” identified and which were targeted were “pork knockers”. These are the individuals who have small claims and are armed with small dredges and/or metal detectors. They are vulnerable to the shocks in the sector and are excluded from many policymaking processes and programs. As a significant share of the technologies being promoted under the planetGOLD Guyana were not ideal for pork-knocking, the team engaged carried out more educational work with these individuals, mostly one-on-one, and engaged them through GGMC and the GDMA.

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<sup>32</sup> Conservation International 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Conservation International, 2017, p. 7.

# 7 Findings, Experiences and Lessons Learned

## Highlights of Communication Interventions

The aim of the planetGOLD Guyana project was to “develop a strategic communication plan and materials targeting key stakeholders within the supply chain for awareness and policy advocacy”.<sup>34</sup> In this report, three key interventions were showcased, identified by planetGOLD Guyana staff as “priority”. The first, “Intervention 1”, entailed the Development and dissemination of audiovisual and communicative tools produced under the project. Highlights included illustrative sample posters, dynamic radio programs aired in mining communities (in Guyanese Creole), and an array of demonstration videos, including its flagship planetGOLD 360 Program. The second, “Intervention 2”, included Demonstrations in the field with miners. Engagements with miners on the ground were facilitated through the communications efforts, including the distribution of posters and pamphlets, and WhatsApp messages and videos were generated. The third and final intervention included engagements with decision-makers. These included dialogues with policymakers from key institutions, notably GGMC and the EPA, as well as the main conference held in Georgetown at the conclusion of the project.

## Alignment with planetGOLD program-wide communications strategy

The planetGOLD Guyana team aligned its Communications and Knowledge Management strategy with the communications strategy of the broader planetGOLD programme. The team received significant support from the planetGOLD global project, its communications team fielding regular call about capacity building and knowledge sharing both online and in person. The team also received considerable support in-country from the planetGOLD global project on filming and visual outputs. Further, the planetGOLD programme branding affected the Communications and Knowledge Management by bringing a level of consistency in the way the team carried out activities. Doing so assisted with the organisation’s own internal standards, ensuring that the interventions identified here were continuously refined with the goal of being high-quality throughout.

However the team’s initial strategy was not as focused on stimulating behavioural change amongst miners to improve ASGM practices. This was why the team prioritized more heavily direct

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<sup>34</sup> Conservation International and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). 2017. CI-GEF PROJECT AGENCY GEF Project Document A GEF GOLD/Supply Chain Approach to Eliminating Mercury in Guyana’s ASGM Sector: El Dorado Gold Jewelry – Made in Guyana 21. Report prepared by Conservation International for the Global Environmental Facility, Washington DC.

engagements with miners to educate them about mercury and to recalibrate messaging to emphasize how improved technology yields more efficient productivity, which leads to increase profitability.

## **Changes Observed in Perceptions or Coverage of ASGM**

While the planetGOLD Guyana team did not return to the field to take stock of fresh developments and to document any changes, anecdotally, there is evidence some of its communication tools (posters, pamphlets, etc.) has raised awareness of the dangers of mercury. Messaging anecdotally appeared to be resonating with target groups; for example, following a demonstration/community engagement or radio broadcast at a study location, the project team would be approached by local residents who would initiate conversations about the ideas being shared. This was assurance to the team that messaging was, in fact, reaching target audiences and awareness was being raised.

Throughout the course of the planetGOLD Guyana project, Conservation International Guyana had an excellent partnership with the government, which helped to amplify the messages which the former was communicating to miners.

Where there has been notable change is within the conversations shared amongst ordinary citizens there is more of an openness when it comes to talking about mercury, and a visible change with how people discuss it. There is also greater hope that miners would adopt mercury-free processes if finance mechanisms were available to do so, a radically different attitude to what has been observed in the past. Where communications tools have yet to make an impact, however, is in the financial sphere. There have been some bankers in the past in Guyana who have entertain the possibility of financing green technology for ASGM but it's rarely followed through with promises, although they are now aware of what exists, courtesy of the planetGOLD project. The Bank of Guyana appears interested but has yet to respond comprehensively to the ideas shared through steering committees and meetings with government.

## Broader Lessons Learned and Recommendation for Future Interventions

The biggest challenge with the communications activities with the project was that the communications were promoting a series of mercury-free processes which miners could not access due to a shortage of funds. As indicated, consequence of this was that the team pivoted to providing education about mercury and its environmental impact and shifting away from the technology capable of facilitating change. The team expressed concerns over promoting processes which required loans to purchase but which could not happen because of a lack of commitment from both the public and private sector to make finance available for this purpose.

Another lesson learned was scalability. The project was not carried out with this goal in mind. As Conservation International Guyana already had a number of other mining projects linked to the RMI, it struggled to align these projects completely with the work carried out under planetGOLD in the area of Communications and Knowledge Management. Perhaps better integration of the planetGOLD project into the RMI from the outset and a fusing of goals linked to Communications and Knowledge Management across parallel components in other projects would have positioned the planetGOLD Guyana for more success.

A final lesson learned is the importance of understanding the dynamics and composition of a target audience, and to keep messaging simple using local voices. This is best accomplished working with partners, even if it means standing beside them and not taking the lead at times. In the case of the planetGOLD Guyana, had the focus been behavioural change from the outset, then the tools and educational materials promoted under would have been different. The team could have used some of the tools available in Guyana on community-based social marketing to help overcome barriers to implementing mercury-free processes in ASGM. Further with more resources, the project could have spent more time on the ground engaging with miners with the goal of developing superior communications tools and carrying out more effective demonstrations of technology. One team member suggested that had they found some influencers in the ASGM sector, this could have led to more focused messaging about management of operations and financing. Future communications efforts would also benefit from building in tools from the beginning to measure the impact of the communications messaging, to understand better what were the most effective messages and media of communication. Finally, as mentioned earlier of the country's oil economy impacted efforts to engage policymakers about planetGOLD and about the ASGM sector generally. Since oil and gas have become the largest foreign exchange earner in the country, the focus on gold has diminished markedly. Efforts to develop communication tools for the ASGM sector would likely have been more effective and widely-publicized in the absence of a burgeoning oil and gas economy.



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