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Report

# Documentation of planetGOLD Programme: Formalization Interventions in the Philippines

February 2025

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## Abbreviations/Acronyms

Abbreviation/Acronym	Definition
<b>AGC</b>	Artisanal Gold Council
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>ASGM</b>	Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining
<b>BAT / BEP</b>	Best Available Technologies / Best Environmental Practices
<b>BSP</b>	Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Philippines Central Bank)
<b>CNSC</b>	Camarines Norte State College
<b>DENR</b>	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
<b>DENR – EMB</b>	Environmental Management Bureau
<b>DENR – MGB</b>	Mines and Geosciences Bureau
<b>DILG</b>	Department of the Interior and Local Government
<b>DOF</b>	Department of Finance
<b>DOLE</b>	Department of Labor and Employment
<b>DOLE – OSHC</b>	Occupational Safety and Health Center
<b>DOST</b>	Department of Science and Technology
<b>DTI</b>	Department of Trade and Industry
<b>IFF</b>	Illicit Financial Flows
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>INC</b>	Inter-governmental Negotiating Committee
<b>LIPMA</b>	Loacan-Itogon Pocket Miners Association
<b>MAP</b>	Mercury-added Products
<b>MC</b>	Minamata Convention
<b>MIA</b>	Minamata Initial Assessment

<b>MPL</b>	Mineral Processing License
<b>MPSPC</b>	Mountain Province State Polytechnic College
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, small, and medium enterprises
<b>NAP – ASGM</b>	National Action Plan for ASGM
<b>NEDA</b>	National Economic and Development Authority
<b>NSBSSMAI</b>	Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc.
<b>PCO</b>	Pollution Control Officer
<b>PDP</b>	Philippine Development Plan
<b>PMRB</b>	Provincial Mining Regulatory Board
<b>PRC</b>	Professional Regulatory Commission
<b>SSMC</b>	Small-Scale Mining Contract
<b>SMBC</b>	Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Program
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization

# Executive Summary

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) plays a crucial role in the Philippine economy, providing livelihoods for many communities. However, the sector's informality presents significant challenges, including environmental impacts, unsafe working conditions, and limited access to formal markets. The planetGOLD Philippines project aimed to improve the sector, including reducing the use of mercury in ASGM, through formalization, improved technology, and better access to finance and markets. The project focused its formalization efforts on three key interventions:

1. **Intervention 1 - Policy Support for ASGM** – The project worked to review and strengthen the regulatory framework for artisanal and small-scale mining, promoting inclusive and sustainable policies that encourage legal and environmentally responsible operations.
2. **Intervention 2 - Formalization Capacity Development** – Through training and technical assistance, the project equipped miners and stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills to operate formally and responsibly.
3. **Intervention 3 - Support for the Formalization of ASM Organizations** – The project promoted and facilitated the formation and legalization of miner associations and cooperatives.

The key impacts of the formalization interventions include:

- Recommendations for policy reform and regulatory streamlining, gathered through a series of policy workshops, including simplified applications for Minahang Bayan declaration, Small-Scale Mining Contract (SSMCs), and mineral processing licenses, reducing bureaucratic barriers and making legal compliance more accessible for ASGM miners.
- Formalization of 805 miners in the project's target areas, with 20% (162 miners) being women, ensuring increased participation and compliance with legal mining frameworks.
- Support for 2 small-scale mining organizations, assisting in contract renewals, securing permits, and maintaining regulatory compliance, strengthening their role in the formal ASGM sector. Moreover, 20 mining associations were assisted in joining the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners in the Philippines, enhancing their collective representation, advocacy efforts, and access to sectoral resources and support.
- Creation of a DENR-MGB Core Group of Trainers, institutionalizing capacity-building programs to ensure long-term government support for ASGM formalization, extending beyond project sites and ensuring nationwide impact.

- Strengthening miners' access to formal gold markets, under another pillar of the project, included ensuring compliance with regulatory and certification standards, such as BSP accreditation. This has enabled partnerships with reputable buyers like Cebuana Lhuillier, reducing dependence on informal traders and further encouraging miners to pursue formalization.
- Establishment of the Council for Women Workers in the Informal Economy, creating a dedicated platform for addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by women in the sector.
- Development of a Knowledge Management Platform that serves as a one-stop shop where miners can engage and facilitate ASGM-related applications with relevant government agencies.

# 1. Introduction

## Background and Context

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) plays a crucial role in the economic development of the Philippines, contributing approximately 70% of the country's gold production and supporting the livelihoods of millions of Filipinos. Despite its significance, the sector continues to face major challenges in formalization, largely due to inadequate policies, bureaucratic obstacles, and limited financial access.

Existing regulations, including Republic Act No. 7076 (People's Small-Scale Mining Act), are often perceived as favoring large-scale mining operations, placing onerous documentary and financial burdens on small-scale miners. The lengthy and costly process of securing Minahang Bayan (Small-scale Mining Area) declarations, Small-Scale Mining Contracts (SSMCs), and Mineral Processing Licenses (MPLs) delays the formalization of the sector and discouraging other small-scale miners from entering the formal sector. Additionally, issues of corruption, bribery, and bureaucratic inefficiencies further complicate the legal registration process, making compliance resource-intensive and time-consuming.

The lack of formalization has also prevented ASGM miners from establishing stable and equitable partnerships with government agencies, financial institutions, and private sector stakeholders. Most miners remain undercapitalized, unbanked, or reliant on exploitative financing arrangements, such as high-interest informal lending schemes and pre-financing from gold traders, which often force them into unfavorable agreements.

The planetGOLD Philippines project has prioritized formalization interventions as an important enabling pillar of its overall strategy to transition the ASGM sector to mercury-free production. The project activities have included legal assessments, policy workshops, and collaborative planning with national and local government agencies, to help streamline regulatory processes, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and promote policy reforms that facilitate small-scale miners' transition to the formal economy. One of the important contributions of the project has been advancing discussions on amending RA 7076, ensuring that legal frameworks better reflect the realities of ASGM while promoting environmental sustainability and responsible mining practices.

The main formalization interventions included:

- **Intervention 1 - Policy Support for ASGM** – The project worked to strengthen the regulatory framework for artisanal and small-scale mining, promoting inclusive and sustainable policies that encourage legal and environmentally responsible operations.
- **Intervention 2 - Formalization Capacity Development** – Through training and technical assistance, the project equipped miners and stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills to operate formally and responsibly.

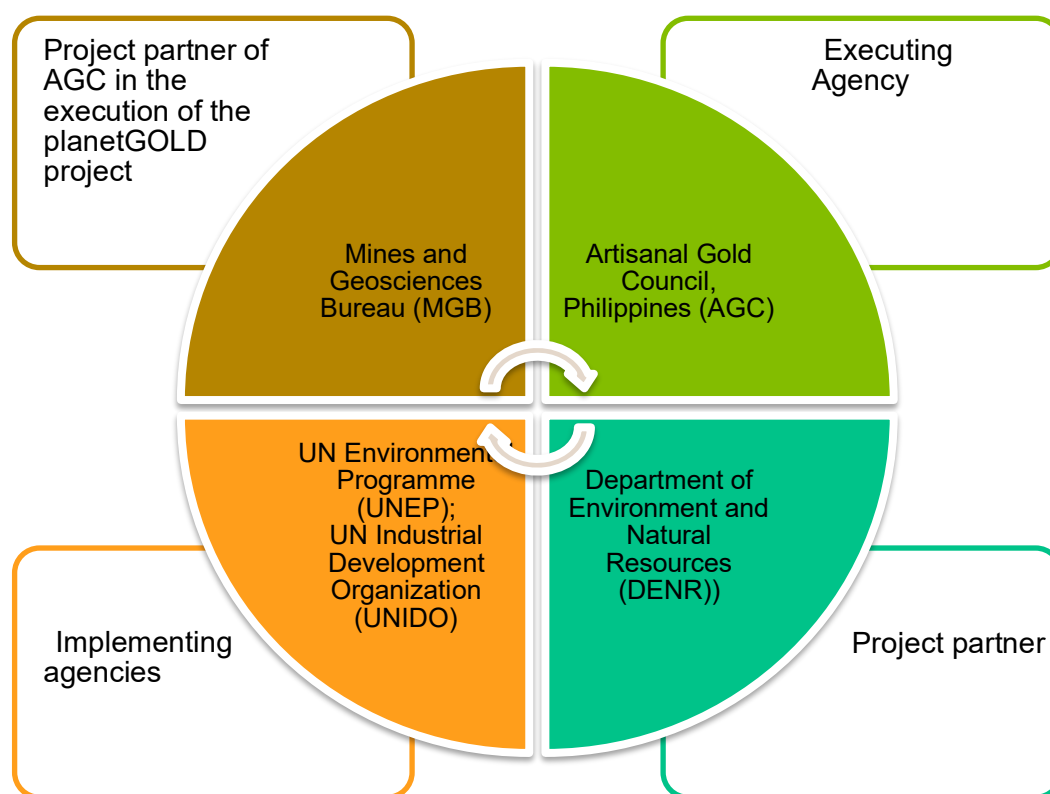
- **Intervention 3 - Support for the Formalization of ASM Organizations** – The project promoted and facilitated the formation and legalization of miner associations and cooperatives.

Further, by embedding formalization considerations within broader initiatives—including access to finance, market integration, and mercury-free mining technologies—the planetGOLD Philippines project has laid the groundwork for a more inclusive, legally recognized, and mercury-free ASGM sector. However, continued multi-stakeholder collaboration, policy adaptation, and financial inclusion efforts remain essential to ensuring long-term success and widespread adoption of formal mining practices in the Philippines.

## Partners and Key Stakeholders

Figure 1 showcases the core group of organizations executing the planetGOLD Philippines project.

**Figure 1: The planetGOLD Philippines Core Working Group**



Strategic partnerships and alliances were essential to achieving the project’s objectives. Relationships with partners and key stakeholders were needed to ensure effective implementation, consistent monitoring, and sustainable outcomes. The specific stakeholders engaged in each formalization intervention are detailed within the respective intervention descriptions.

# Project Target Areas

As part of the planetGOLD Philippines Project, two target sites were selected to address key challenges associated with mercury use in ASGM:

- Sagada, Mountain Province – A site where ASGM operates within an Indigenous community, with mining activities traditionally conducted without mercury or chemical use due to strong environmental and cultural values. Moreover, attached to the Sagada project site is Itogon, Benguet, where a cyanidation facility was provided to the Loacan-Itogon Pocket Miners Association (LIPMA) to primarily cater to the tailings generated from Sagada.
- Paracale, Camarines Norte – A historically significant gold mining hub, where mercury use has been widespread, requiring targeted interventions to transition miners toward safer, mercury-free practices.

These sites were chosen to represent diverse ASGM contexts, allowing the project to develop and implement interventions related to formalization, environmental, and financial solutions that can be replicated in the future to other mining communities across the Philippines.

**Figure 2: The planetGOLD Philippines project target sites**



## 2. Intervention 1: Policy support for ASGM Formalization

### Description of the Intervention

The planetGOLD Philippines project worked to strengthen the policy and regulatory environment for artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) by engaging with government agencies, local authorities, and stakeholders to harmonize national and local policies to create a more accessible and practical environment for formal ASGM operators. The project also conducted a review of the ASGM legal and regulatory framework, and discussed policy reforms that support sustainable ASGM practices, such as simplified permitting processes and incentives for responsible mining. The discussions included the need for alignment with global environmental and labor standards, particularly in mercury-free mining and worker protection. Furthermore, the project facilitated dialogues between miners and policymakers to remove barriers so that ASGM regulations can reflect the realities and needs of small-scale miners.

#### Interventions regarding the ASGM Legal Framework:

At the national level, the project began with a comprehensive assessment of the legal framework governing artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), resulting in the ["Gold with Dignity" report \(planetGOLD Philippines, 2022\)](#). The study applied a human rights-based approach to assess laws and policies on ASGM at national and local levels, focusing on the state's duty to protect miners' rights while ensuring ASGM compliance with labor, health, environmental, and financial regulations. It examined the government's obligations in enforcing social protections and international gold trading standards, highlighting the availability of legal remedies for rights violations. The study provided policy recommendations for the further formalization of the ASGM sector. A desk review of national and international ASGM regulations was combined with case studies from Paracale and Sagada to identify gaps in implementation and adherence to global standards.

Additionally, a policy workshop series was hosted to engage government agencies in discussions on legal and regulatory reforms. These efforts aimed to foster collaboration and improve the regulatory landscape for ASGM, such as the Administrative Order No. 2022-03 ("DAO 2022-03") which took effect on 29 April 2022, ensuring a more effective and expeditious implementation of the People's Small-Scale Mining Act, introducing a more orderly and systematic procedure, and regulating the small-scale mining industry with a view of enhancing its growth and productivity in an environmentally safe manner.

Further interventions involved facilitating consultations on proposed amendments to RA 7076, the

law that governs small-scale mining. This includes for instance the proposed amendments in HB 6408 which addresses the costs of ASGM formalization, the limited validity of mining contracts, and the legal barriers posed by the current definition of small-scale mining under RA 7076, among others. Support was also provided to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) to streamline documentary requirements for Minahang Bayan petitions, small-scale mining contracts, and mineral processing licenses. These actions were geared toward simplifying processes and enhancing compliance within the sector.

As part of the project's initiatives, the MGB conducted a nationwide workshop series in October 2024 for the Provincial/City Mining Regulatory Board (P/CMRB) to align national and local government roles and responsibilities under Republic Act 7076. The workshops aimed to enhance the Board's understanding of ASGM permitting procedures and requirements, provide updates on MGB's regulatory streamlining efforts, and strengthen coordination between government agencies and the ASGM sector. The workshop series, attended by 160 participants (105 men, 55 women) from P/CMRBs across 13 regions, sought to build regulatory capacity, promote responsible small-scale mining, and improve policy implementation at the local level.

### **Local Level Interventions:**

At the local level, the project assisted local government units (LGUs) in developing ASGM-related policies through provincial planning workshops. One example of such a policy is that the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) can mandate the LGUs where ASGM are significantly present to systematically include the ASGM actors such as the miners, women, local financiers, among others, in local development planning. Additionally, roundtable discussions on gender led to the creation of the Interagency Council for Workers in the Informal Sector in Paracale, established via an Executive Order. This council will provide a platform to discuss challenges and opportunities for women and informal sector workers in ASGM, as well as pool resources to conduct research and data gathering on gender-related ASGM issues.

The project also conducted site-based permitting workshops, equipping small-scale miners with essential knowledge and practical tools to navigate regulatory requirements and secure necessary permits. These hands-on sessions provided step-by-step guidance on applying for key permits, including SSMCs and MPLs, ensuring compliance with legal frameworks, and promoting responsible mining practices.

## **Partners and Key Stakeholders**

The key partners and stakeholders of the policy support for ASGM formalization intervention included:

- DENR Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) – Led policy development and reviews, permitting reforms, and oversight of ASGM formalization. As the primary regulatory body, the MGB formulates and evaluates policies governing ASGM, ensuring alignment with existing laws that

provide the legal framework for SSM operations

- Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) – Supported formal gold trading mechanisms and reduced reliance on informal markets.
- Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) – Facilitated ASGM inclusion in local development plans and governance.
- Local Government Units (LGUs) – Implemented permitting, monitored ASGM activities, and supported formalization efforts at the community level.
- National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) – Helped align ASGM formalization with national development strategies.
- UNEP and the Minamata Convention Secretariat – Provided guidance on mercury-free mining practices and regulatory alignment. They promoted global environmental policies and technical assistance aimed at reducing mercury use in ASGM.
- Small-Scale Miners' Organizations, such as Loacan Itogon Pocket Miners Association (LIPMA), Samahan ng mga Minero sa Barangay Casalugan (SMBC) and Northern Sagada Barangay Small-Scale Mining Association, Inc. (NSBSSMAI) – Played a crucial role in advocating for miner-friendly policies and ensuring community participation.
- National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners of the Philippines – contributed to discussions for aligning the formalization efforts of the project with national priorities.
- Provincial Mining Regulatory Boards (PMRBs) – Provided oversight of the implementation of mining laws, policies, and permitting processes within its jurisdiction, ensuring that SSM operations comply with local and national regulations.

## Main Outcomes

Overall, the project's efforts were successful in strengthening key national and local policies, streamlining regulatory processes, and promoting gender inclusion in ASGM governance. The combination of policy development, gender-focused discussions, and the establishment of the Interagency Council has created a more inclusive and efficient framework for managing ASGM activities.

### Specific Outcomes

- **Strengthened policy and regulatory frameworks that facilitate the formalization of ASGM**, namely by emphasizing the need to strengthen the Minahang Bayan framework, transitioning it from a mere extraction site to an ecosystem-based management unit. Government agencies, particularly the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and LGUs, were encouraged to lead policy reviews, enhance enforcement mechanisms, and integrate ASGM formalization into national and local development plans. The establishment of an inter-agency

task force and the drafting of a National Action Plan (NAP) were recommended to align ASGM regulations with international frameworks like the Minamata Convention. Additionally, improved documentation of ASGM actors, stricter enforcement against illicit financial flows (IFFs), and targeted social marketing strategies by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) were proposed to increase miners' participation in formal gold trading. Local governments were also urged to incentivize registration and reporting, while efforts to recognize and address the role of women in ASGM were highlighted as crucial for an inclusive formalization process.

- **Increased government engagement in ASGM formalization and mercury-free mining practices** by strengthening institutional frameworks, improving enforcement mechanisms, and fostering inter-agency collaboration. The intervention prompted the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) to take a more active role in reviewing and refining policies, particularly through the reassessment of the Minahang Bayan framework and the development of a NAP under the Minamata Convention. Additionally, local governments were encouraged to integrate ASGM formalization into their development planning, providing incentives for registration and compliance. Other agencies, including the BSP, also became more involved by refining policies to facilitate small-scale miners' access to formal gold markets and reduce illicit financial flows. Furthermore, the intervention promoted capacity-building programs, equipping miners with the knowledge and resources to transition to mercury-free mining practices, reinforcing the government's commitment to sustainable and responsible ASGM operations.
- **More streamlined and accessible permitting processes for small-scale miners through the KM Platform.** The development and institutionalization of the KM Platform revolutionized ASGM permitting by digitizing applications, standardizing documentation, and enhancing inter-agency coordination. Through the platform, miners can submit and track permit applications online, significantly reducing delays caused by manual processing. An interactive dashboard enables real-time progress tracking, automated notifications for missing requirements, and access to detailed compliance guidelines. By providing standardized templates for required documents, the platform minimizes errors and ensures consistency. Moreover, it strengthens inter-agency collaboration by facilitating real-time information sharing, allowing regulatory bodies to verify documents efficiently and track applications without unnecessary redundancies. These innovations streamlined bureaucratic processes, making legal compliance more accessible, transparent, and efficient for small-scale miners while accelerating permit approval timelines.

# 3. Intervention 2: Formalization Capacity Building

## Description of the Intervention

Many ASGM miners operate informally due to a lack of awareness or capacity to comply with formalization requirements. The planetGOLD Philippines project provided ASGM operators and stakeholders with proper training and technical assistance in topics related to the formalization processes. By enhancing their knowledge and skills, the initiative helps miners transition into the formal economy, ensuring compliance with legal frameworks while promoting responsible and sustainable mining practices. This capacity-building effort included regulatory adherence and the adoption of environmental good practices by the ASGM operations.

## Partners and Key Stakeholders

The key partners and stakeholders of the capacity development support for ASGM included:

- DENR - MGB - Led training programs to enhance the skills, knowledge, and regulatory compliance of miners and oversight bodies. Additionally, MGB formalized the creation of a DENR-MGB Core Group of Trainers and provided the safety training to the project team.
- Local Government Units (LGUs) – Assisted in the organization of the training sessions and in identifying training needs.
- UNEP & Minamata Convention Secretariat – developed an ASGM Governance toolkit that was accessed during the training sessions.
- Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) – contributed to the organization of the training sessions and training materials.
- Camarines Norte State College (CNSC) – provided institutional support for the training sessions in Paracale and in conducting training needs analysis.
- and Mountain Province State Polytechnic College (MPSPC)– provided institutional support for the training sessions in Sagada
- Local Radio Stations (Radyo Pilipinas Camarines Norte and Bontoc) - provided a platform for knowledge sharing, advocacy, and community engagement, ensuring miners, local communities, and stakeholders stay informed about key developments, policies, and opportunities in the ASGM sector.

## Main Outcomes

The planetGOLD Philippines project provided training and technical assistance to build capacity for legal and sustainable operations for miners and local authorities who oversee them. Training programs and technical workshops were organized to enhance the capacity of policymakers, regulators, and miners to operate within a legal framework, including:

- Training miners on legal compliance, permitting, taxation, and environmental regulations.
- Providing technical assistance on responsible mining practices, such as mercury-free processing technologies and improved health and safety measures.
- Raising awareness about the benefits of formalization, including better market access, financial support, and improved working conditions.
- Building the capacity of local government units (LGUs) to support and regulate ASGM in their jurisdictions effectively.
- National and local workshops were conducted to discuss critical topics such as National Action Plan (NAP) development, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, due diligence in ASGM operations, and gender issues.
- Organizing Basic Advocacy Training for Women to empower women in the sector and strengthen their participation in decision-making processes. These workshops provided technical knowledge and legal process information.
- Strengthening organizational development by assisting mining associations and cooperatives in governance, leadership, and financial management to improve their sustainability and operational efficiency.

This capacity building focused on equipping key stakeholders, including ASGM miners and government partners, with the necessary knowledge and skills to support the formalization of the ASGM sector. The trainings also sought to promote greater awareness of the economic and social benefits of formalization among ASGM miners.

As a result of this work, 305 governmental officials received technical support for the development and implementation of provincial plans on ASGM relating to EMS, traceability, and formalization, and 665 governmental officials, miners, industry, civil society, and other relevant ASGM stakeholders in each of the targeted areas that have participated in a forum on ASGM sector development

The efforts also resulted in the development of educational materials and a contribution towards the development of a toolkit on formalization and sustainable practices that could be used for future trainings of the planetGOLD Philippines project. One toolkit, named 'ASGM governance toolkit' provides guidance on formalization processes, regulatory compliance, and sustainable mining practices, serving as a valuable resource for future capacity-building initiatives and training

programs aimed at supporting small-scale miners in their transition to the formal sector.<sup>1</sup>

A significant achievement of this intervention was the establishment of a national Core Group of Trainers within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB). The group was established to implement an effective and efficient strategy for developing the small-scale mining (SSM) sector under Republic Act No. 7076. Focal Persons are responsible for formulating strategic plans, facilitating training, conducting research, maintaining databases, and ensuring compliance through reporting and coordination with relevant agencies. This group underwent specialized training on the revised implementing rules and regulations of the Philippine Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991, ensuring that they are well-equipped to guide ASGM stakeholders in regulatory compliance. Additionally, a workshop was conducted to assist in the development of small-scale mining work programs, providing practical tools for legal and more sustainable mining operations.

To institutionalize these efforts, the DENR issued a special order officially creating the Core Group of Trainers, ensuring the sustainability of capacity-building initiatives beyond the project's duration.

## 4. Intervention 3: Support for the Formalization of ASGM Organizations

### Description of the Intervention

The planetGOLD Philippines project also supported a more formal ASGM sector by promoting the formation and legalization of miner associations. By organizing miners into formal groups, the project enhanced their access to financial resources, legal markets, and improved working conditions. This intervention contributed towards encouraging miners to operate within a structured framework with emphasis on collaboration, resource-sharing, and long-term economic sustainability.

### Partners and Key Stakeholders

The key partners and stakeholders of the intervention to support miners' associations included:

- DENR-MGB - Supported SSM formalization by developing and enforcing policies, issuing permits, and ensuring compliance. MGB provided technical assistance and training to promote responsible, mercury-free mining. It collaborated with LGUs and stakeholders to legalize SSM

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<sup>1</sup> Dellavedova, M. 2022. GEF GOLD Mongolia-Philippines: Contribution toward the elimination of mercury in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector: from miners to refiners (Mid-Term Review – September 2022). planetGOLD project implemented by UNEP, UNIDO, GEF. [https://open.unep.org/docs/gef/MTE/9695\\_planetGOLDMongolia\\_Phillipines\\_MTR.pdf](https://open.unep.org/docs/gef/MTE/9695_planetGOLDMongolia_Phillipines_MTR.pdf)

operations and advanced social and economic development through responsible mining, alternative livelihoods, and community programs. MGB also streamlined permitting reforms, making it easier for miners to obtain legal status.

- Local Government Units (LGUs) – contributed to the discussions, as members of the Provincial Mining Regulatory Boards providing valuable insights and support in formalization policies and regulations for the small-scale mining sector. They assist in the Minahang Bayan declaration, endorse SSMCs, and monitor mining activities to ensure adherence to environmental and safety laws. LGUs also provide technical assistance, helping SSM associations meet legal requirements and adopt responsible mining practices.
- Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) – Developed Memorandum Circular No. 2012-1 that established the requirements for registration of ASGM cooperatives. They conducted an orientation for SSM associations on the advantages, requirements, and procedures of forming cooperatives, highlighting financial benefits, resource optimization, and enhanced collective capacity.
- DENR Environmental Management Bureau – Ensured environmental compliance in ASGM by issuing Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECCs), enforcing regulations, and monitoring operations to mitigate ecological impacts.
- The Provincial Mining Regulatory Boards (PMRBs) of Camarines Norte and Mountain Province played a pivotal role in deliberating on the establishment of People’s Small-Scale Mining Areas (Minahang Bayan) and approving Small-Scale Mining Contracts (SSMCs) and Mineral Processing Licenses (MPLs). As regulatory bodies, the PMRBs ensure that SSM activities comply with national mining laws, environmental regulations, and safety standards. Furthermore, the PMRBs work closely with local government units (LGUs), mining communities, and key stakeholders to assist ASGM associations in securing legal recognition, obtaining necessary permits, and strengthening governance frameworks within the small-scale mining sector.
- Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas - Through its gold-buying program, BSP offers small-scale miners a formal market to sell their gold at fair market prices, reducing reliance on informal and often exploitative buyers. BSP ensures that gold transactions adhere to national and international standards, promoting ethical sourcing and responsible gold supply chains. Additionally, BSP collaborates with government agencies, financial institutions, and mining communities to improve miners’ access to finance and economic inclusion.

## Main Outcomes

The project’s activities to organize miners into legally recognized cooperatives and associations included:

- Assisting miners in forming and registering cooperatives or associations that meet legal requirements.

- Providing guidance on cooperative governance, financial management, and business development to ensure the sustainability of these organizations.
- Linking miner organizations to financial institutions, government programs, and responsible gold markets, improving their economic prospects.
- Encouraging collective negotiation power to help miners secure fair prices, reduce costs, and enhance social protection.

By supporting the formation of miners' organizations, the project fostered a more structured, resilient, and economically viable ASGM sector. Overall the project supported the formalization of 805 miners (643 men, 162 women) within these organization.

The project also played an important role in strengthening the legal and institutional foundation of ASGM organizations by assisting miners' associations in securing contract renewals and ensuring compliance with contract provisions. Additionally, support was provided for the declaration of Mineral Processing Zones, creating designated areas for responsible mineral processing that adhere to environmental and regulatory standards.

To strengthen regulatory readiness, the project also supported the training of Pollution Control Officers (PCOs) and Safety Officers within partner mining associations—an essential requirement for obtaining and maintaining legal permits. Furthermore, the project extended its support to the small-scale mining association in Sagada, assisting in the preparation of documentary requirements for registration and accreditation as a gold buyer under the BSP's Gold Buying Program. This enabled miners to access a formal and transparent gold trading system, reducing reliance on informal markets and enhancing economic opportunities for ASGM communities.

The project also played a significant role in integrating 20 small-scale mining organizations into the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners of the Philippines, a national network that advocates for the rights and interests of ASGM communities. Through this coalition, miners gained a collective voice in policy dialogues, increasing their engagement with regulatory agencies and other key stakeholders. Additionally, the project facilitated the participation of small-scale mining organizations in the National Assembly of the coalition, providing them with opportunities to collaborate, share experiences, and discuss strategies for advancing formalization efforts. To support knowledge-sharing and capacity-building within the sector, the project also included the development of a Knowledge Management Platform. This platform is employed as a repository of best practices, legal guidelines, and technical resources, enabling ASGM organizations to access crucial information that supports their transition to formal operations. This intervention has contributed to the long-term sustainability and professionalization of the ASGM sector in the Philippines, encouraging collaboration, transparency, and regulatory compliance through miner's formal associations and cooperatives.

## 5. Sustainability

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the formalization gains made during the planetGOLD Philippines project requires strong engagement from key stakeholders, continued government support, and the empowerment of ASGM communities. One of the primary challenges reported by the project team is maintaining the project's achievements beyond its implementation period. Without sustained efforts from policymakers, financial institutions, and local mining associations, the progress made in formalization, capacity building, and mercury-free mining could be at risk. Strengthening local ownership of project initiatives is crucial to ensuring long-term success.

A key factor in the sustainability of formalization is the institutionalization of project interventions within government agencies and regulatory frameworks. For example, the establishment of the DENR-MGB Core Group of Trainers ensures that technical knowledge and capacity-building efforts continue even after the project ends. Similarly, the formalization of ASGM associations must be reinforced with access to finance, legal support, and market incentives to ensure they remain viable and competitive in the long run. If these associations find major difficulties complying with regulatory requirements or lack financial resources, they may revert to informal practices.

Finally, the general sustainability of the project depends on multi-stakeholder collaboration and continued advocacy for policy reforms that support ASGM formalization. The success of the project's exit strategy hinges on the commitment of government agencies, local authorities, and financial institutions to uphold and expand upon the project's initiatives. The establishment of partnerships with impact investors, local banks, and gold buyers can help create a more inclusive and responsible ASGM sector.

## 6. Interaction with Indigenous Peoples

The interventions of the planetGOLD Philippines project have taken a holistic and culturally sensitive approach, particularly in areas where small-scale gold mining (ASGM) occurs within Indigenous domains. Recognizing the unique governance structures, traditional land-use practices, and cultural values of Indigenous Peoples, the project has ensured that project efforts do not come at the expense of Indigenous rights but rather strengthen community-led development.

A key aspect of permitting/ formalization in Indigenous territories is the requirement to comply with the Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) process mandated by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). This ensures that any mining-related undertakings within ancestral domains are conducted with the full knowledge, participation, and approval of Indigenous cultural communities. The planetGOLD Philippines project actively supported ASGM organizations in navigating these legal and procedural requirements, facilitating a formalization process that aligns with Indigenous governance and resource management frameworks.

For example, in Sagada, the permitting of the mercury-processing plant faced opposition from a downstream Indigenous community because of the planned use of chemicals in the processing plant, specifically leaching reagents like cyanide. The mining community itself preferred the leaching plant, as it would significantly increase gold recovery from 40% to over 80%. However, because of consultations with the downstream community, the design for the Sagada plant was changed to a gravity-only approach, out of respect for the downstream community's preference for a chemical-free operation.

To balance the need for higher recovery rates with environmental considerations and to secure social acceptability of the project intervention among both the mining and downstream communities, the project also provided technical and financial support to the nearest existing leaching facility, owned by a different mining association, to help increase the plant's capacity to process the gold-rich tailings from Sagada's gravity-only plant. This solution allows the maximization of gold recovery, by coupling initial gravity methods with subsequent leaching of tailings (albeit at a different location), while addressing environmental and community concerns. The local government expressed gratitude that the project took the time to consult with the downstream communities, because lack of consultation could have sparked tribal conflict between the mining community and the downstream communities. This approach highlighted the project's commitment to sustainable and culturally sensitive development.

## 7. Findings, Experiences and Lessons Learned

### Highlights of Formalization Interventions

#### Formalization Intervention 1: Policy Support for ASGM Formalization

##### Findings and Experiences:

- A legal framework assessment was conducted, leading to the Gold with Dignity Report, which outlined gaps in existing ASGM policies. Some of the gaps identified are the need to revise the policies and align them with international standards, expand the scope of Minahang Bayan that is currently focused only on extraction and review the requirements of the BSP to simpler processes. , This is a basis for policy discussions and workshops with national and local government agencies.
- Workshops and consultations were held to discuss amendments to Republic Act 7076 (People's Small-Scale Mining Act), aiming to streamline the permitting process and improve miners' access to legal mining areas.
- At the local level, the project assisted provincial governments in developing localized ASGM policies, including simplified documentation for small-scale mining contracts,

- mineral processing licenses, and environmental compliance requirements.
- A major policy milestone was DENR-MGB's streamlining of documentary requirements, reducing administrative burdens for ASGM miners applying for Minahang Bayan declarations, small-scale mining contracts (SSMCs), and mineral processing licenses (MPLs).

## Formalization Intervention 2: Capacity Development for Miners and Government Officials

### Findings and Experiences:

- The project organized national and local training sessions for miners and government agencies on aspects such as: the Minamata Convention and ASGM legal obligations; due diligence in gold trading and supply chain transparency; gender mainstreaming in ASGM; basic advocacy training for women miners.
- A DENR-MGB Core Group of Trainers was created, strengthening the capacity of government regulators to support ASGM formalization. Training included: workshops on revised Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) for the Small-Scale Mining Act; guidance on developing Small-Scale Mining Work Programs; Special Order for the Core Group of Trainers to sustain knowledge-sharing beyond the project timeframe.

### Lessons Learned:

- Capacity-building must be continuous and tailored to local needs. Many miners and government officials lack technical knowledge of regulatory processes, requiring ongoing training and mentorship.
- Women's participation in ASGM remains limited. Gender training highlighted structural barriers—women often have lower access to mining claims, financial resources, and gold trading opportunities. More targeted support for women miners is needed.
- Government buy-in is critical for sustainability. The establishment of the DENR-MGB Core Group of Trainers ensures that knowledge-sharing will continue beyond the project, but local governments require additional support to sustain training initiatives.

## Formalization Intervention 3: Direct Support for Small-Scale Mining Associations

### Findings and Experiences:

- The project assisted 2 small-scale mining associations in achieving legal and operational compliance, including: renewing Small-Scale Mining Contracts (SSMCs); securing Mineral

Processing Licenses (MPLs); updating Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registration; obtaining a Good Standing Certificate for associations selling gold to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP).

- The project facilitated membership of 20 ASGM organizations in the National Coalition of Small-Scale Miners, enabling them to participate in national policy dialogues and advocacy efforts.
- A [Knowledge Management Platform](#)<sup>2</sup> was developed to document best practices, policy studies, and formalization experiences, serving as a resource for miners and government stakeholders.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Securing legal recognition is only the first step. Even after obtaining contracts and permits, many ASGM organizations struggle with compliance due to financial and technical constraints.
- Formalization must be linked to market incentives. Miners who lack direct access to formal buyers continue to rely on informal gold traders. Addressing barriers to selling gold legally (e.g., high transaction fees, logistical challenges) is essential for sustaining formal operations.
- Stronger institutional support is needed for newly formalized mining cooperatives. Many associations lack financial literacy, governance structures, and business planning skills, making long-term sustainability difficult without continued assistance.

## **8. Recommendations for Future Formalization Interventions in the Philippines**

The following recommendations for future formalization-related interventions were identified by the planetGOLD Philippines project:

1. Strengthen ASGM Regulations – Update the People’s Small-Scale Mining Act to provide more robust support for ASGM formalization, ensuring alignment with international standards such as the Minamata Convention.

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<sup>2</sup> The Knowledge Management Platform is an online portal introduced by the planetGOLD Philippines project that was designed as a one-stop shop for small-scale mining in the Philippines. It streamlines the application process for all permitting requirements of ASGM operations, replacing the current paper-based system.

2. Institutionalize the Use of the KM Platform for ASGM Regulatory Processes – Issue a formal policy mandating small-scale miners to use the KM platform as the official application channel for permits and regulatory compliance. Additionally, require government agencies to regularly update and maintain the platform as the primary source of ASGM-related information, ensuring streamlined processes, improved accessibility, and enhanced transparency in regulatory procedures.
3. Establish an Inter-Agency Task Force – Led by MGB in coordination with NEDA, DILG, and other agencies, to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) on ASGM formalization, integrating existing policies and avoiding duplication.
4. Develop ASGM Census and Baseline Data – Mandate the Philippine Statistics Authority to include ASGM-specific data in national census efforts, ensuring accurate information for evidence-based policymaking, resource allocation, and program development to support the sector’s formalization and sustainability.
5. Expand Capacity-Building Programs for Miners through the MGB Core Group of Trainers – Empower the MGB Core Group of Trainers to lead and implement training sessions beyond project areas, ensuring wider access to capacity-building programs. The capacity development activities will cover financial literacy, investment planning, responsible mining practices, and compliance with legal and regulatory frameworks, fostering sustainable and legally compliant ASGM operations nationwide.
6. Strengthen and support ASGM organization – Sustain efforts to promote formal registration and capacity-building of ASGM cooperatives or associations, enabling them to access financing, technical assistance, and regulatory support for long-term sustainability and compliance.
7. Continue the efforts to recognize Women’s Contributions in ASGM – Improve documentation of women’s roles in ASGM and ensure they receive appropriate support, training, and economic opportunities.
8. Address Gender-Based Violence and Exploitation – Strengthen local reporting mechanisms for violence against women and children in ASGM communities.
9. Enhancing Women’s Participation in Decision-Making – Actively support and empower women to take on leadership roles in ASGM associations and cooperatives, policy discussions, and formalization processes by providing training, advocacy opportunities, and inclusive decision-making platforms.

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