



Her place in the mine: Women's struggles and aspirations in the gemstone sector of Kalalani, Tanga

HakiMadini

Her place in the mine: Women's struggles and aspirations in the gemstone sector of Kalalani, Tanga

Arusha, September 2025

Front cover image:

Women in Kalalani sorting gemstones from piles of residual sand (HakiMadini, November 2024).

Author:

HakiMadini

Editor:

International Peace Information Service (Hans Merket)

This publication is part of IPIS' *"Voices from Tanzania"* series and its edition on *"The participation and inclusion of women in Tanzania's extractive sector"*.

"Voices from Tanzania" presents evidence-based case studies by selected civil society organizations from Tanzania which aim to draw attention to pertinent issues of access to justice and human rights in extractive resource governance in Tanzania. Through these case studies, we seek to shed a light on the experiences of communities affected by natural resource extraction in order to amplify their voices in the broader debates on resource governance in Tanzania.

The publication does not represent IPIS' research or views. It is based on the surveys and analyses conducted by Tanzanian civil society organizations and solely belongs to them.

Suggested citation:

HakiMadini (2025). *Her Place in the Mine: Women's Struggles and Aspirations in the Gemstone Sector of Kalalani, Tanga*. Voices from Tanzania, IPIS.

About the author

HakiMadini is a Tanzanian non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting the rights and well-being of small-scale miners and communities affected by mining. It was established to address the social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by marginalized groups in the extractive sector, especially in rural and resource-rich areas. Contact: info@hakimadini.org.

About the editor

International Peace Information Service (IPIS) is an independent research institute providing tailored information, analysis, capacity enhancement and policy advice to support those actors who want to realize a vision of durable peace, sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights.

D/2025/4320/11



This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). The contents of this document can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the Belgian Development Cooperation.



Table of contents

Editorial	1
List of abbreviations	3
Acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	5
1. Introduction	7
1.1. Background information	7
1.2. Problem statement	7
1.3. Description of the study area	8
1.4. Objective of this study	9
2. Methodology	10
2.1. Sampling design	10
2.2. Data collection methods	10
2.3. Data analysis	11
2.4. Ethical considerations	11
3. Findings and analysis	12
3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study sample	12
3.2. Status of women's participation in Kalalani's gemstone sector	13
3.3. Barriers to women's participation	15
3.4. Opportunities for supporting women's participation in the gemstones value chain	18
Conclusions	21
Recommendations	23
References	24

List of abbreviations

ASM	Artisanal and Small-scale Mining
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ML	Mining License
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PML	Primary Mining License
TAREMA	Tanga Regional Miners Association
TAWOMA	Tanzania Women Miners Association
TEITI	Tanzania Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
USD	United States Dollar





Acknowledgements

First and foremost, glory is to the Almighty God, through whom everything is possible and who enabled the accomplishment of this study. Our sincere thanks go to IPIS for selecting HakiMadini to take part in this Voices series and for their tireless and timely support to ensure the smooth execution of this work.

We extend special thanks to the Korogwe Rural District authorities, and specifically to the Head of the Community Development and Social Welfare Department, for their collaboration and for granting permission to conduct the study in Kalalani ward. We further appreciate the efforts and commitment shown by local authorities in Kalalani, including the Ward Executive Officer, Ward Community Development Officer, Ward Chancellor, and the Village Executive Officer, for guidance and cooperation before, during and after the field work.

Our heartfelt appreciation equally goes to the community members of Kalalani, whose openness, time and insights laid the foundation for this report. Without their contributions, we would not have accomplished this study.

We also extend gratitude to HakiMadini staff who dedicated time and effort to support the field officers and who provided valuable input during the report's review process. We are indebted to them and may God bless them abundantly.

Any errors, omissions, or inconsistencies that remain in this document are solely the authors' responsibility.

Executive summary

In Tanzania, the extractive sector plays a pivotal role in the national economy and in shaping local livelihoods, especially in rural areas endowed with natural resources. However, participation in the sector remains highly gendered. Women are often excluded from decision-making and are particularly underrepresented in lucrative roles within the gemstone sub-sector. The gemstone mining area in Kalalani ward, Korogwe district of Tanga region, offers a valuable case study to assess women's participation in this male-dominated sector and to explore both the challenges and opportunities for inclusive development.

This study was conducted to identify and analyze the barriers limiting women's participation in Kalalani's gemstone sector. This serves to explore available opportunities and propose actionable strategies for enhancing their involvement. The research is timely, given the increasing economic vulnerability of rural communities where agriculture—traditionally the primary source of income—is under pressure due to prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall. In this context, the gemstone sector holds potential as an alternative or complementary livelihood opportunity for women.

The study addressed three key research questions: What are the main obstacles limiting women's full participation in Kalalani's gemstone sector? What opportunities exist to support and expand women's involvement? What strategies can stakeholders implement to improve women's participation in gemstone mining and trade?

A qualitative research approach was used, involving focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and direct observation. Respondents included women miners, local government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders engaged in the gemstone sector. Fieldwork was conducted in Kalalani and surrounding villages within Korogwe district.

Findings indicate that women face numerous structural and systemic barriers, including deeply rooted socio-cultural norms that discourage their involvement in mining, limited access to capital and equipment, inadequate technical knowledge, and exclusion from land ownership and decision-making platforms. Women also have limited access to mining licenses and face occupational health risks without adequate protective gear or health services. Environmental degradation caused by unregulated mining activities disproportionately affects women, especially those who rely on farming and water sources near mining sites.

Despite these challenges, the study identified several opportunities that could be leveraged to promote women's participation in the sector. These include employment in mining-related activities such as sorting, crushing, and washing gemstones, as well as non-mining roles like food vending and service provision around mining sites. Moreover, the presence of supportive legal and policy frameworks, including Tanzania's Mining Act and gender policies, offers a foundation for targeted interventions. In addition, some women expressed interest in forming cooperatives or small-scale mining groups to increase their bargaining power and collective voice.

However, the study also found that policy implementation at the local level is often weak, and awareness of these frameworks among women is very limited. The lack of sustained capacity-building and outreach programs further compounds the exclusion of women from the sector's benefits.

In conclusion, while the gemstone sector in Kalalani offers both direct and indirect economic opportunities for women, their meaningful participation remains minimal due to institutional, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts among stakeholders, deliberate implementation of existing policies, and continuous engagement with the community to promote inclusive and equitable development.

Key recommendations include:

- Raise awareness among women about their legal rights and entitlements through targeted education and capacity-building programs.
- Support the formation of women's groups and cooperatives to enhance their collective voice and influence.
- Enforce legal provisions that require gender inclusivity in licensing, employment, and resource distribution.
- Integrate gender-responsive budgeting and programming into local government planning processes.
- Improve occupational health and safety standards for women working in and around mining sites.
- Facilitate women's access to finance, technology, and training to engage in value-added activities along the gemstone value chain.



1. Introduction

1.1. Background information

Tanzania is globally recognized as one of the leading producers of colored gemstones. In addition to being the exclusive source of tanzanite—a gemstone that bears the country’s name—Tanzania is also a major producer of other high-value stones such as tsavorite garnet, known for its rarity and vibrant green hue. Many of these gemstones are of exceptional quality and often require no heat treatment before being sold on the international market.

Although smaller in scale compared to the gold mining industry, Tanzania’s colored gemstone sector is economically significant. In the 2021/2022 fiscal year, the country exported approximately 6.3 million kilograms of rough gemstones (excluding diamonds), with a total value of USD 21.5 million.¹ The gemstone trade is part of a rapidly growing mining sector that plays a vital role in the national economy by generating foreign exchange, creating jobs, and increasing government revenues. Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) forms the backbone of Tanzania’s gemstone sector. This sub-sector is estimated to support the livelihoods of over one million people, many of whom depend on informal mining as their primary source of income.²

Despite its potential, gemstone exploration in Tanzania remains largely underdeveloped. Most mining operations continue to rely on artisanal and small-scale methods, often with limited access to technology, financing, and formal markets. Key gemstone-producing regions across the country include Mirerani in Manyara, which is renowned for tanzanite; Morogoro’s Mahenge area, known for rubies and spinels; Ruvuma, including Tunduru and Songea, which produces a diverse range of sapphires, garnets, and chrysoberyl; Arusha’s Longido area, a source of ruby and spinel; Dodoma’s Mpwapwa district, which is emerging as a garnet source; and Tanga’s Uimba Valley, including Kalalani, which is

famous for a variety of sapphires and other gems. The richness of Tanzania’s gemstone deposits, coupled with the sector’s potential to contribute to local development, makes it an important focus area for policy, investment, and research.

1.2. Problem statement

Women play a vital yet undervalued role in Tanzania’s gemstone mining sector. They support the industry through small-scale commerce, catering, water supply, ore crushing, sieving, and other essential services that keep operations running. Estimates indicate that women comprise around 25–30% of those active in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).³ However, they are often limited to lower-paying and less secure roles—such as ore processing and vendor activities—and face systemic barriers, including restricted access to education, finance, land rights, technical training, and formal mineral rights. These limitations result in lower incomes, poor working conditions, and little opportunity for advancement, while also exposing many women to harassment, unsafe work environments, and health risks.

Barriers to women’s participation include limited access to capital and geological data, the burden of household responsibilities, and restricted capacity – or social acceptance – to negotiate for better deals or positions. Overall, a male-dominated mining culture results in both explicit and implicit forms of discrimination and marginalization. Consequently, women are generally relegated to low-value tasks such as rubble picking, washing, and sieving. It is rare to find women owning mining pits, and those who do often lack adequate equipment and resources. In trading, women face limited opportunities to acquire skills in gemstone valuation and value addition. Their access to external markets tends to be constrained, forcing reliance on local markets where prices are typically lower.

1 Tanzania Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (TEITI). (2024). *14th TEITI Report for the Fiscal Year 2021/2022*, p. xviii.

2 International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). (2017, September 26). *Small ventures, big hopes*.

3 Pact. (2023, January 25). *Artisanal miners: A hidden but critical force in the global economy*.

1.3. Description of the study area

Tanga region hosts a variety of gemstone deposits in Lushoto, Mkinga and Korogwe. Kalalani ward, located in Korogwe rural district, comprises the villages of Kalalani and Mtonibombo. The main gemstone

mining areas are in Kalalani Center and Kigwasi sub-villages, located approximately 100 km northwest of the town of Tanga (Figure 1). Mining in the area is predominantly artisanal and small-scale, typically managed and financed by independent miners focusing on small pockets where gemstones are found.

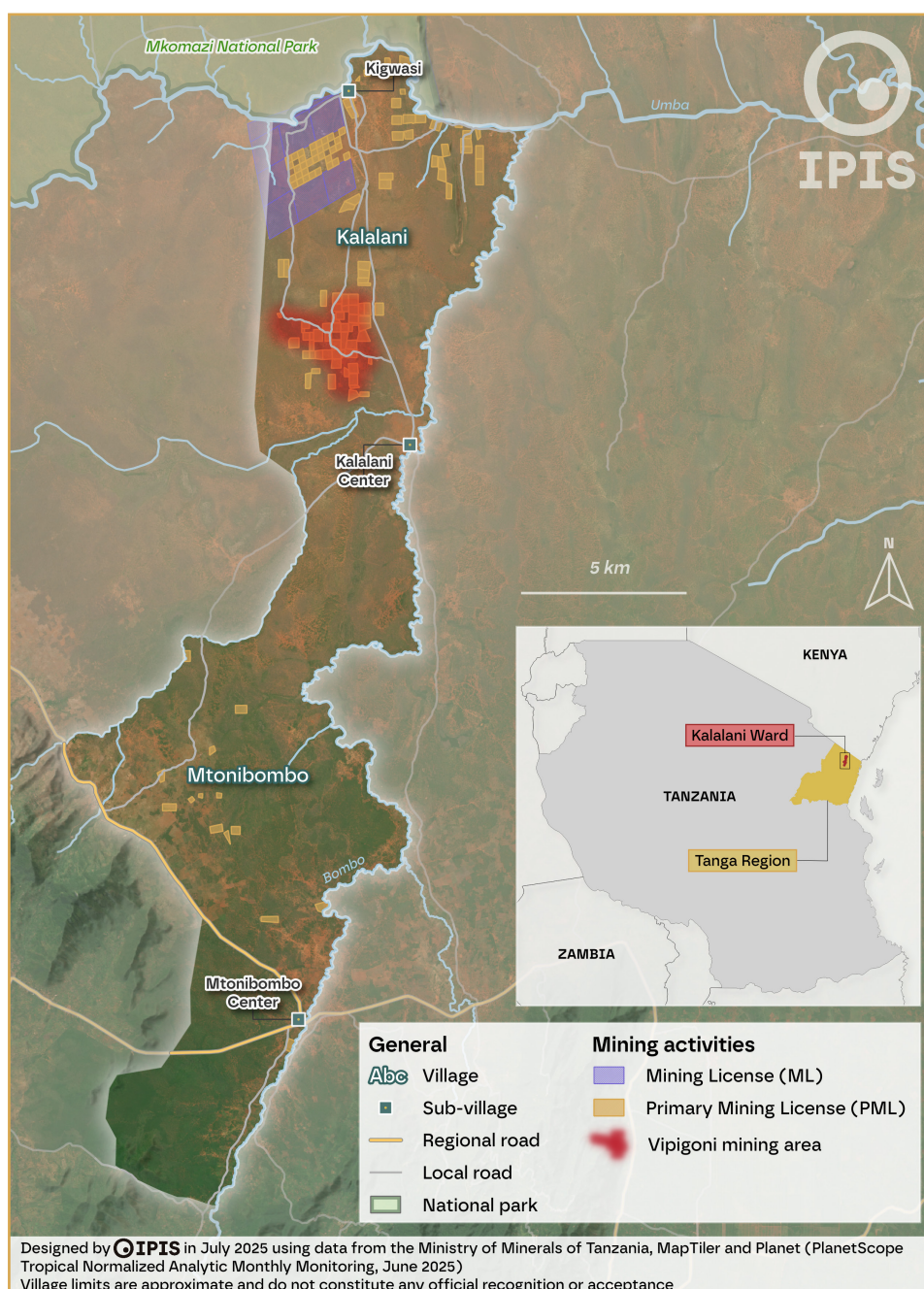


Figure 1: Location of Kalalani and the Vipigoni mining area.

The ward has a population of 3,654, of whom 2,167 are male and 1,487 are female.⁴ Besides mining, the local economy is driven by farming, livestock keeping, and small commerce. The noticeable gender imbalance

may be partly explained by the presence of mining activities, as men are more likely to migrate into the area to engage in artisanal mining, while women tend

4 United Republic of Tanzania (URT). (2022). *National Census 2022*.

to have fewer opportunities or face greater barriers to enter the sector.

The terrain in Kalalani is flat and characterized by red-brown lateritic soil, thick bush vegetation and grasslands. The mining area, called “*Vipigoni*” by locals, lies 5 km northwest of Kalalani village, from where it can be accessed by a rough dirt road. During the rainy season (December–May), access to the area becomes challenging, slowing down mining operations. Gemstones extracted in this area include red zircon deposits, as well as a wide range of other gems like rhodolite, tourmaline, tsavorite garnet, Malaya garnet, ruby and sapphire.

According to local accounts, Kalalani ward has a long history of gemstone mining, dating back to the colonial period. The Maasai and Kamba peoples are said to have first arrived in the area in search of pasture, but shifted to mining following the discovery of surface-level gem deposits.⁵ They sold these stones to outsiders, including members of the Sambia community, who were drawn by the business and later settled permanently to begin a more systematic exploration for gemstones in Kalalani.

In the 1960–70s, Uмба Ventures Ltd, owned by George “Papas” Papaeliopoulos, carried out the first commercial gemstone mining operation in the area. The company developed three shallow open pits to access pegmatites - coarse-grained rocks known to host gem-quality mineral deposits. Despite indications of deeper, untapped gemstone reserves, no further or systematic exploration has taken place.⁶

Today, artisanal and small-scale gemstone miners typically dig only to depths of 5–7 meters. Accessing deeper deposits would require more advanced methods, such as drilling, blasting, and substantial reinforcements of pit walls to ensure safety and prevent collapse. Although the Tanzanian Mining Cadaster Portal indicates the presence of over 300 mineral licenses - including Primary Mining Licenses (PMLs) for ASM, Mining Licenses (MLs) for industrial mining, and Prospecting Licenses - in Korogwe Rural District, local authorities report only

one active ML and approximately 50 operational PMLs.



▲ Some of the gemstones mined in Kalalani, including green and black tourmaline, as well as rose and red garnets. (HakiMadini, November 2024)

1.4. Objective of this study

This study aims to identify and unravel existing barriers, explore available opportunities, and propose strategies for enhancing women’s participation in Kalalani’s gemstone sector. This is particularly important as an alternative and complementary source of income amid challenges in agriculture due to prolonged droughts and unpredictable rainfall.⁷

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the main obstacles limiting women’s full participation in the gemstone sector in Kalalani?
- What opportunities exist to support and expand women’s involvement in the sector?
- What strategies and actions can relevant stakeholders implement to improve women’s participation in gemstone mining and trade?

5 Focus group discussions, Kalalani, November 2024.

6 Seifert, A. V., & Hyršl, J. (1999). *Sapphire and garnet from Kalalani, Tanga Province, Tanzania*. *Gems & Gemology*, 35(2), 108–120. Gemological Institute of America.

7 Poignant, A. (2023). *Small-scale mining and agriculture: Evidence from northwestern Tanzania*. University of Gothenburg, Department of Economics.

2. Methodology

This study was exploratory in nature and employed a cross-sectional design. Qualitative data was collected through a literature review and a single field trip conducted during the first two weeks of November 2024.

2.1. Sampling design

A qualitative approach was employed, using purposive sampling to identify key respondents relevant to the study objectives. Community members not involved in gemstone mining were also selected to gather broader perspectives.

2.2. Data collection methods

The field research employed multiple techniques to gather data, including semi-structured interviews, open-ended surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person with key informants, including 14 women miners, four brokers, 12 support service providers, 5 districts and village officials, and the Tanga Resident Mines Officer (RMO). Using a flexible interview guide, researchers were able to explore participants' individual experiences in depth while adapting questions to the specific context of each respondent.

To capture a wider range of perspectives, we conducted an open-ended survey with 12 community members (7 women and 5 men), including both miners and non-miners. Unlike structured surveys with fixed response options, these surveys featured open-ended questions that allowed respondents to express their views in their own words. This approach generated rich qualitative data while also reaching individuals who may not have participated in interviews or focus group discussions.

Five focus group discussions (FGDs), each with four participants, were conducted to capture a range of perspectives across gender and occupation. The groups were intentionally structured as follows: two FGDs consisted exclusively of women (one with miners, one with non-miners); two included only men (similarly, one with miners and one with non-miners); and one mixed-gender group included both miners and non-miners. This design aimed to elicit both gender-specific experiences and broader community insights related to gemstone mining and its socio-economic impacts.

Direct observations were carried out at mine sites and trading centers to examine work practices and gender roles within the gemstone mining and trading context.

Relevant documents from the village office and online sources were also reviewed to complement interviews, discussions and observations.



◀ Focus group discussion with women miners in Kalalani. (HakiMadini, November 2024)

2.3. Data analysis

Following data processing, qualitative data was assessed through content analysis to identify and categorize emerging themes and trends. These findings informed the discussion and formulation of recommendations.

2.4. Ethical considerations

In line with ethical research protocols, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting interviews, focus group discussions and taking photographs. All personal information, including names and contact details, has been kept strictly confidential.



3. Findings and analysis

This chapter presents the study's findings and analysis, including the key characteristics of the study sample, the current state of women's engagement in the gemstone sector, the main obstacles to their full participation, and the opportunities for enhancing their involvement.

3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study sample

A total of 50 respondents participated in the study through semi-structured interviews and FGDs. Of these, 14 (28%) were women engaged in the gemstone sector in Kalalani, while 12 (24%) were women not involved in mining activities. Another 10 (20%) were

men working in the gemstone sector, and five (10%) were men not engaged in mining (Figure 2).

Four respondents (8%) were leaders from ASM associations, including the Tanzania Women Miners Association (TAWOMA) and Tanga Regional Miners Association (TAREMA). TAWOMA supports women miners by addressing mining-related challenges, advocating with government bodies, providing capacity-building opportunities, and facilitating information sharing and networking. TAREMA represents small-scale miners in Tanga, supporting formalization, capacity-building, advocacy, and coordination with authorities. The remaining five respondents (10%) were government officials.

Table 1: Frequency of participants by gender and professional status

Unit	No. (Frequency)	
	Female	Male
Women in the gemstone sector	14	0
Non-mining women	12	0
Men in the gemstone sector	0	10
Non-mining men	0	5
District officials	0	1
Resident Mines Officer (RMO)	0	1
Local government leaders (ward and village)	0	3
Miners' association leaders (TAWOMA, TAREMA)	2	2
Total	28	22

The majority of respondents (81%) were between 33 and 58 years old, while the rest (19%) were above 58. In terms of education levels, 14% had never attended school, 52% had completed at least primary education, 18% had reached secondary school and 16% had attained college or university education (Figure3). Among women respondents engaged in mining, 32% had never attended school, compared to 9% of male respondents in the same sector. This suggests that

educational disparities are more pronounced among women in mining, which may limit their access to technical roles, licensing processes, or leadership opportunities within the sector.

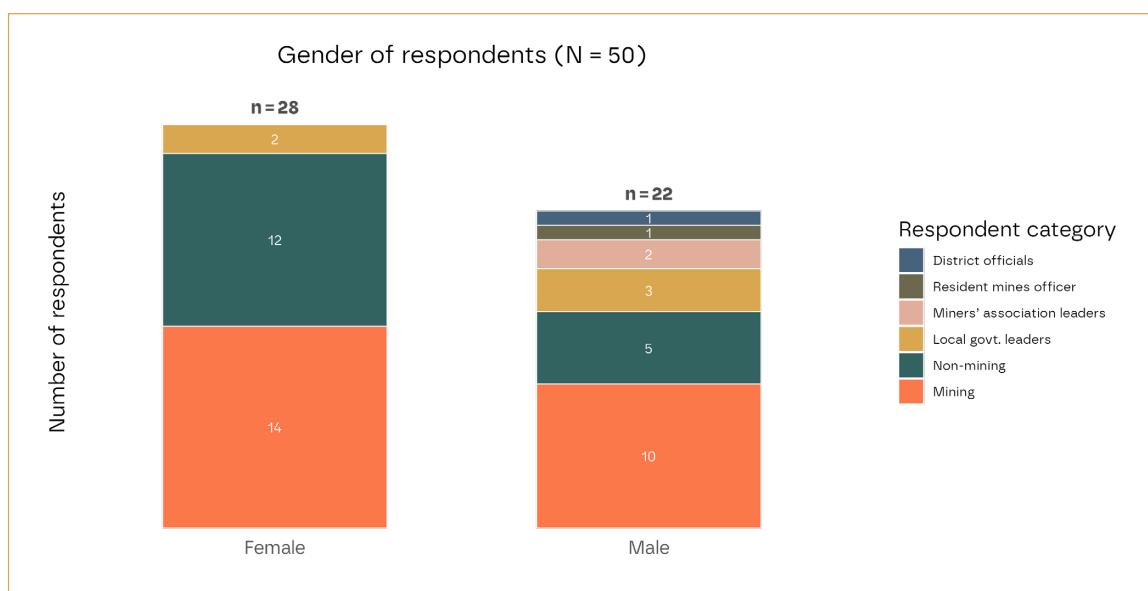


Figure 2: Diversity of study respondents.

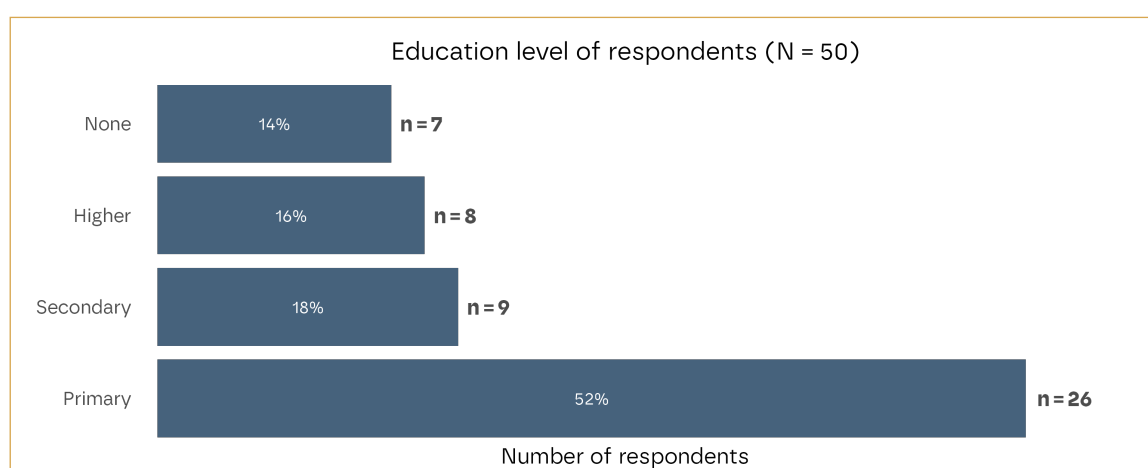


Figure 3: Respondents' levels of education.

3.2. Status of women's participation in Kalalani's gemstone sector

Women primarily participate in the gemstone sector through support services such as food vending, cleaning or small commerce. Those more directly involved in the sector mainly perform secondary tasks, including gravel washing and rubble picking – the labor-intensive activity of sifting through discarded mining debris in search of overlooked gemstones.

A small number of women have moved into more central roles, such as gem brokering or financing mining operations. Among the 50 active PMLs in Kalalani, one is owned by a woman. She is affiliated with TAWOMA and plays a central role in all aspects of her operation, including financing, management, and hiring laborers for underground mining activities.

From Mine to Market: TAWOMA and Moyo Gems Collaboration

The Kalalani branch of TAWOMA has partnered with Moyo Gems, a pioneering miner-to-market initiative dedicated to ethical sourcing. Operating in both Tanzania and Kenya, Moyo Gems works directly with women artisanal miners to build transparent, traceable supply chains for gemstones.

In collaboration with Pact, an international nonprofit organization, Moyo Gems supports women miners through training in gemology, occupational health and safety, and market preparedness. The initiative helps ensure fair prices and reliable access to formal markets.

In Kalalani, TAWOMA and Moyo Gems co-host semi-annual gemstone markets, where women (and their male allies) can sell directly to vetted international buyers. This model seeks to strengthen women's financial security, promote equitable trade, and build lasting resilience for artisanal mining communities.

Women's participation in the gemstone sector in Kalalani is often irregular. Many engage only when time allows, after fulfilling domestic duties. Even while onsite, they often remain preoccupied with duties at home, which limits the consistency and depth of their involvement. As a result, many women view mining as a supplementary activity rather than a long-term livelihood. Some join the sector out of curiosity, to follow others, or out of hope rather than clear economic planning.

Earnings among women vary significantly depending on their roles and the time they can invest. For example, a food vendor may earn between 15,000-50,000 TSH (ca. 5-16 EUR) per day, while those offering cleaning services – an infrequent opportunity – may earn only 7,000-10,000 TSH (ca. 2-3 EUR) per week. Rubble pickers face unpredictable income: some days they earn nothing, whereas in rare cases, earnings can reach up to 200,000 TSH (ca. 65 EUR) per month, depending on luck and the rubble source.

Women who finance mining operations, though they may have to wait longer for returns, can earn between 300,000-1,000,000 TSH (ca. 98-328 EUR) per month. However, these earnings are often undermined by challenges such as limited market access, swindling, or theft—factors that disproportionately affect women due to their more vulnerable position in the value chain.

Beyond the generally lower earnings, women frequently encounter discrimination and harassment. These include denied or delayed payments for services rendered, being underpaid in small installments,

deception or fraud, verbal abuse, unwanted physical contact, and unsolicited or coercive sexual advances.

These challenges reinforce persistent gender disparities. Compared to women, men generally benefit more from mining, as they are more involved in the core extraction processes and leadership positions. They also have fewer domestic responsibilities, greater access to financial resources and loans, and are more likely to own collateral such as land or equipment – all of which enable deeper and more sustained engagement in the sector.



▲ Artisanal miners eating after a shift.
(HakiMadini, November 2024)

3.3. Barriers to women's participation

The study revealed that women in Kalalani face a wide range of obstacles limiting their full participation in the gemstone sector. These challenges are rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic inequality, political exclusion, environmental and health risks and limited access to markets, know-how and technical skills.

3.3.1. Socio-cultural norms and gender roles

Cultural traditions and entrenched gender norms in Tanzania - particularly in rural areas like Kalalani – since long discourage women from participating meaningfully in the mining sector. Women are often perceived as physically weak and unsuited for a ‘masculine’ industry like mining. Society expects them to prioritize family responsibilities, such as caring for children, or the elderly, and managing the household. They are supposed to defer to male authority, limiting their autonomy and decision-making power - even over resources they have earned themselves, such as cash or gemstones. As one respondent shared:

“I once requested my husband if we could employ a house girl to assist with household chores while I worked at the mining site, but he did not accept the idea”.

The study clearly showed that within the mining sector, men often view women as suitable only for ‘soft’ support roles. From this perspective, women are expected to serve the men who perform the hard, physical labor in the quarry, by preparing food, selling drinks or cigarettes, and charging mobile phones. A respected Maasai elder expressed surprise that the current generation supports women’s involvement in mining, something he said was unheard of in his time or that of his ancestors. He added that women “should know their place” and not compete for difficult jobs, which he claimed are suitable only for men.

These attitudes not only limit women’s economic opportunities in mining but also reinforce their marginalization in society, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency.



▲ Male miners walking back from work in Kalalani. (HakiMadini, November 2024)

3.3.2. Economic constraints and lack of control over resources

Many women lack independent access to income-generating assets. Property such as houses, land, livestock, and family businesses are usually owned and controlled by men. This severely limits women’s economic freedom and entrepreneurial potential, making it difficult for them to make savings to invest in mining equipment or opportunities. One middle-aged woman explained:

“We have land, livestock and even a motorbike used for passenger transport, but they all belong to my husband. I am just there to guard them. I don’t even know how the money this generates is spent.”

In these patriarchal communities, women often need permission from their husbands or male relatives to engage in economic activities like mining. Even when granted this opportunity, it is rare for men to offer meaningful financial or other support. As a result,

women are pushed into low-yield activities such as rubble picking that require little or no investment, but also generate the least income.

These low-value activities make it difficult for women to build savings, access better markets, or move up

the value chain. Their limited bargaining power and restricted access to information on pricing, market opportunities and licensing processes. This further exposes them to exploitation by brokers, reinforcing a vicious cycle of economic marginalization.



▲ Women engaged in service provision (food vending) in a mine site in Kalalani. (HakiMadini, November 2024)



▲ Women collecting low quality, leftover gemstones from a rubble heap previously sorted by male miners. (HakiMadini, November 2024)

3.3.3. Political and legal barriers

Despite Tanzania's legal frameworks promoting gender equality, women face significant political and legal barriers in accessing rights and opportunities in the gemstone sector. Due to limited exposure, time constraints and reduced freedom or opportunities to travel and network, women have far fewer chances to learn from peers or be trained on procedures for acquiring mining or brokering licenses, understanding cost implications, or navigating legal avenues to claim their rights when violated.

Respondents also noted that geological data and technical support are extremely limited. Of the little that is available, women benefit the least due to gendered dynamics in information and skills sharing. Consequently, women are even more reliant than their male peers on trial-and-error approaches to mining. As one woman explained:

“We waste time, energy and the little resources we have digging without proper knowledge. Some women give up entirely. A few of them even turned to degrading survival strategies like prostitution out of desperation”.

In addition, women miners expressed concerns that leaders of associations such as TAWOMA and TAREMA appear to prioritize their own political ambitions over the interests of their members. They noted that even women in leadership positions often fail to advocate for the specific needs of women miners, leaving them without the support they require. Compounding this issue, some male respondents criticized the perceived passivity of female representatives in governance structures, arguing that their lack of assertiveness in defending women’s issues contributes to a sense of abandonment and isolation among women in the sector.

3.3.4. Environmental, health and safety challenges

The work women perform at mining sites – such as sorting and washing gravel or picking rubble – exposes them to a range of health and safety risks. Many reports frequent respiratory illnesses caused by prolonged exposure to dust, as well as chronic headaches from spending long hours under the hot sun, without any shelter or protection. Often using the most rudimentary tools, they are also vulnerable to physical injuries such as cuts, bruises,

or musculoskeletal strain due to repetitive, labor-intensive tasks without protective equipment or proper training.

Inadequate sanitary facilities further discourage women from spending extended time at the mining sites. Access to clean water is limited, and available toilets often lack privacy, safety, and basic hygiene standards. These conditions, combined with the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse, verbal harassment and sexual intimidation, heighten the physical and emotional risks for women. Many respondents expressed feelings of shame and loss of dignity. While some would prefer to return home to use private sanitary facilities, repeated travel back and forth is costly and exposes them to further danger.

This risk is amplified by the location of the mining site, which lies over five kilometers from the nearest village in a dense, bushy area bordering Mkomazi National Park (Tanzania) and Tsavo National Park (Kenya). Wildlife—including elephants—frequently cross onto paths and into village areas, increasing the risk of encounters that can result in injuries, crop destruction, or even fatalities. Women are particularly vulnerable, as they are often the ones working in the fields, collecting firewood, fetching water, and carrying children—while men are typically occupied at the mine. As one woman shared:

“Even if we get compensation after a wild animal attack, it cannot bring back the person we lost. It leaves families broken and women too afraid to work.”



◀ Mining environment lacking adequate sanitation, health and safety measures. (HakiMadini, November 2024)

3.3.5. Unequal access to markets and information

Kalalani's remoteness, poor road infrastructure and weak mobile network mean that few gemstone traders visit the area. The lack of competition reduces local market options, requiring those who want to sell for better prices to travel to larger trading centers such as Arusha and Dar es Salaam. However, cultural norms requiring women to seek permission whenever they want to go away from home limit their ability to access market information, develop bargaining skills and confidence, build business relationships, and engage in peer learning through visits to other mining communities.

While the Moyo Gems initiative has empowered a number of women in the sector, many respondents reported that they lack awareness and practical skills in gemstone valuation and value addition, which would allow them to maximize earnings from their stones. Respondents pointed to limited support from NGOs, government agencies, and successful miners as another key barrier to scaling up their activities.

Financial constraints further restrict women's options, often confining them to trade in low-quality gemstones, which minimizes their market leverage and potential gains. Additionally, there were also claims—though not directly observed—of mineral theft by male laborers, compounding the risks faced by women, who are already disadvantaged by broader social and economic structures.

3.4. Opportunities for supporting women's participation in the gemstones value chain

Despite the many challenges women face in the gemstone sector, the study also identified several opportunities that – if leveraged effectively – could significantly enhance women's participation and benefit in mining-related activities. This section explores key enablers, including legal frameworks, collective enterprises, access to finance, institutional platforms, employment opportunities, and governance mechanisms that can be strengthened to support women across the gemstone value chain.

3.4.1. Legal and licensing pathways to support equal participation

Tanzania's legal framework offers important opportunities for women to formalize their participation in the gemstone sector. Section 19(4)

of the Mining (Mineral Rights) Regulations of 2018 upholds a first-come, first-served approach to license allocation, granting equal access to both men and women. While this provision ensures that women have, in principle, the same rights as men to obtain mining licenses, its implementation presents significant barriers. Respondents highlighted that the high costs associated with license applications, along with limited support from officials at the Ministry of Minerals, discourage many women from exercising their legal rights. These officials are often viewed as unresponsive or biased, especially when women attempt to formalize claims in areas traditionally dominated by men. Consequently, many women are discouraged from applying for mineral rights or asserting ownership over mining plots, ultimately hindering their progression in the sector.

One practical avenue for women to explore under Tanzanian mining law is a group application for both PMLs and broker licenses. This option enables women who may lack individual capital or technical expertise to pool resources and skills to apply collectively. The one PML in Kalalani owned by a female miner and TAWOMA member has become a positive example, allowing more women to work as miners within the licensed area. Respondents highlighted that expanding the number of women-held PMLs could be a powerful enabler of greater female participation in the sector.

3.4.2. Women's enterprises and access to finance

One important pathway for improving women's participation in the gemstone sector is the formation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) led women's groups. In Kalalani, eight women-led SMEs are currently registered at the district level, many of which focus on gemstones-related businesses as a primary income-generating activity. These enterprises offer a collective approach to overcoming individual barriers, enabling women to share responsibilities, pool resources, and build collective bargaining power.

However, these groups face several internal challenges that hinder their effectiveness and limit their potential for growth. Common issues include weak organizational management and unequal member contributions – both financial (such as capital inputs or membership fees) and non-financial (including labor, equipment, or time). Many groups also trade primarily in low-quality or ungraded gemstones, largely due to limited access to value-addition services.

Furthermore, unclear or informal benefit-sharing arrangements often give rise to mistrust and internal conflict, weakening group cohesion and threatening long-term sustainability.

A key opportunity to support these enterprises lies in the district-level development funds managed by Local Government Authorities (LGAs), which are specifically intended to benefit women and youth entrepreneurs. These funds are issued as interest-free loans – not grants – and are sourced from 10% of each council’s own-source revenue, with allocations of 4% for women, 4% for youth, and 2% for persons with disabilities. In principle, they could provide critical financial support for gemstone-related ventures. In practice, however, access is severely limited by partisan politics, bureaucratic red tape, and allegations of corruption. Despite being eligible, none of the eight women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kalalani had received a district loan at the time of the study.

Barriers include lack of key documentation—such as National Identification Cards (NIDA)—unclear or incomplete business plans, and difficulty meeting other administrative requirements. When combined with the internal weaknesses of the groups themselves, these obstacles severely limit women’s ability to benefit from existing financial opportunities.

To unlock the potential of women-led SMEs in the gemstone sector, there is a clear need for dedicated support, including training in business development, assistance with fulfilling documentation requirements, greater transparency in grant allocation, and more inclusive outreach by district authorities to ensure women are meaningfully included in economic development efforts.

3.4.3. Support from miners’ associations

The presence of recognized miners’ associations – TAWOMA and TAREMA – in Kalalani provides a valuable platform for support, representation, and advocacy. Although headquartered at the national and regional levels, both organizations have local representatives who are themselves miners based in Kalalani. These local leaders act as key points of contact for coordination, information-sharing, and mobilizing support, particularly for women and youth. Their active involvement helps maintain Kalalani miners’ connection to broader networks, capacity-building initiatives, and policy dialogue.

Both associations have a mandate to advocate for the interests of small-scale miners, including women. However, they face significant constraints, including limited financial resources, gaps in technical capacity, and political challenges. Notably, their influence remains limited in key decision-making spaces at the district and national levels, where critical policy and licensing decisions are made—further impacting their effectiveness and reach.

Women respondents, in particular, acknowledged the valuable efforts of TAWOMA, but often wondered whether more could be done to increase its impact. They suggested that the association could expand its services by strengthening entrepreneurship training, promoting value addition, improving networking opportunities – both locally and nationally. If TAWOMA were able to mobilize more capital from development partners, government programs and private sector investors, it could, in their view, significantly scale up its support and help women address the financial and operational barriers they continue to face in the mining sector.



◀
**Gemstones
found in Kalalani.
(HakiMadini,
November 2024)**

3.4.4. Source of employment and income

Respondents emphasized that gemstone mining in Kalalani serves as a vital source of livelihood for both educated and uneducated members of the community. The sector offers a combination of daily wage labor and more stable employment opportunities. Some individuals—particularly men—have secured long-term positions as security guards, receptionists,

cleaners, cooks, and technical specialists such as blasters and geologists.

“We have at least three mining enterprises that have employed members of our community in various roles. Some receive monthly salaries, while others are paid a percentage of production.”

The Kalalani Ward Development Officer.

The diversity of gemstones found in Kalalani supports continuous mining activity and helps stabilize market demand, even during periods when high-value stones are scarce.

While women contribute significantly to peripheral services—such as food vending, water provision, and lodging—their involvement in the core gemstone value chain remains limited, highlighting untapped potential for more inclusive participation. Formalizing these informal roles and providing access to business development services or micro-loans could enhance the stability and profitability of women-led enterprises. With targeted support, women can move beyond support roles to become skilled workers, entrepreneurs, and active rights-holders within the mining sector.

3.4.5. Women’s representation in local governance

Tanzanian law mandates that women be represented in all village-level administrative and management

structures, offering them a platform to voice their concerns and influence local decision-making. In practice, however, the potential of this opportunity is seldom fully realized, as it is often hindered by deep-rooted gender norms, limited education, and social expectations that prioritize male authority. One elderly woman and village council member testified:

“It is true that the law gives us the opportunity to represent our fellow women in decision-making bodies, but we were raised on traditional foundations where men make decisions. This is further exacerbated by the low levels of education among women. Still, we believe that the younger generation is coming with more education and courage, and will therefore make better use of this opportunity to defend the rights of women more effectively.”

She added that many older women are mentoring the younger ones to break with oppressive traditions, advocate for girls’ education and develop the confidence to advocate for women’s rights. Over time, this generational shift may help translate legal representation into meaningful participation, including in mining-related governance and resource allocation.



◀ Artisanal miner holding a gemstone found in Kalalani. (HakiMadini, November 2024)

Conclusions

This study has shown that while gemstone mining is a vital livelihood opportunity in Kalalani, women remain largely excluded from its full benefits. Their participation is limited by entrenched gender norms, economic dependency, lack of capital, minimal control over productive resources, and working conditions that are often unsafe or unsuitable. Many are confined to informal, low-paying roles, while structural and cultural barriers prevent them from advancing into more profitable or decision-making positions.

At the same time, Kalalani's rich variety of gemstones—including ruby, sapphire, and garnet—ensures ongoing market demand and offers a strong incentive for women's greater participation in mining and trade. This geological diversity supports sustained operations and creates the potential for broader, more inclusive economic benefits within the community.

The study identified a number of opportunities that, if effectively leveraged, could help overcome the barriers women face. Tanzania's legal framework allows women to obtain mining or brokering licenses, especially through group applications. In Kalalani, one woman-led Primary Mining License has already enabled others to participate, demonstrating the potential of this approach. Women's representation in local governance, though not fully realized, provides a platform to advocate for greater inclusion. Associations such as TAWOMA and TAREMA—despite their own limitations—offer vital support and could play a stronger role with targeted investment and capacity-building.

To translate this potential into progress, coordinated action is essential. Women miners, local authorities, associations, government actors, civil society, and development partners must work together to develop a clear strategy for inclusive sector development. This must include targeted training, simplified and transparent access to finance, stronger implementation of gender-equality provisions, and improvements to infrastructure, safety, and market linkages. Moving forward, meaningful transformation will depend not only on formal inclusion, but on dismantling the structural and cultural barriers that have kept women at the margins.





Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following priority actions are proposed to enhance women's participation in the gemstone sector in Kalalani:

1. Increase capital investment and financing support for women miners

Access to capital remains one of the most significant barriers preventing women from meaningfully participating in gemstone mining. Government and development partners should work to expand financing opportunities for small-scale miners—particularly women—through targeted loan schemes, grants, or in-kind support such as tools and equipment. Reducing these financial barriers will not only improve women's productivity and economic independence, but also strengthen formalization and output in the sector, ultimately increasing government revenues over time.

2. Strengthen skills development and gemstone value addition for women

Most women in Kalalani work with low-value, unprocessed gemstones, which limits both their earning potential and access to broader markets. There is a clear need for targeted training in gemstone valuation, cutting, polishing, and other value addition techniques. Government institutions, miners' associations, private companies, and development partners should collaborate to deliver tailored capacity-building programs that meet the needs of women in the sector. These efforts should be complemented by initiatives that connect women to formal markets—such as support to participate in gem trade fairs and exhibitions.

The Moyo Gems initiative, which links women artisanal miners to responsible international buyers through training and transparent market access, offers a valuable model for how such efforts can be designed and scaled to benefit more women.

3. Enforce and expand Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments in mining areas

Mining companies operating in Kalalani should be required to support local infrastructure development through meaningful CSR contributions. In collaboration with the village council, priorities should include improving access roads to mine sites, ensuring water supply, and supporting health and education facilities. Importantly, companies should be encouraged to invest in gender-sensitive infrastructure at mine sites, such as safe and private sanitation facilities and basic accommodation, to ensure a more inclusive and safe working environment for women.

4. Promote awareness and shared responsibility at the community level

Cultural norms and gender roles continue to limit women's autonomy and opportunities in the sector. It is essential to launch awareness-raising efforts that encourage community-wide recognition of women's economic contributions, starting at the household level. Village councils should include gender equality and women's economic empowerment as a standing agenda item in community meetings. These efforts should also actively engage men, promoting shared responsibility for domestic duties and encouraging supportive roles in enabling women to participate more fully in income-generating activities, including mining.



References

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). (2017, September 26).

Small ventures, big hopes.

Pact. (2023, January 25).

Artisanal miners: A hidden but critical force in the global economy.

Poignant, A. (2023). Small-scale mining and agriculture: Evidence from northwestern Tanzania.

University of Gothenburg, Department of Economics.

Seifert, A. V., & Hyršl, J. (1999).

Sapphire and garnet from Kalalani, Tanga Province, Tanzania. *Gems & Gemology*, 35(2), 108–120.

Gemological Institute of America.

Tanzania Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (TEITI). (2024). *14th TEITI Report for the Fiscal Year 2021/2022*, p. xviii.

United Republic of Tanzania (URT). (2022).

National Census 2022.

VOICES FROM TANZANIA

The “Voices from Tanzania” is a publication series supported by IPIS dedicated to case studies by Tanzanian civil society actors which aim to draw attention to pertinent issues of human rights, corporate accountability and resource governance in Tanzania.

Central in these case studies are experiences of communities affected by business activities, resource extraction and related governance frameworks. The “Voices from Tanzania” seek to amplify local civil society and communities’ voices in the broader debates on human rights, resource governance and corporate accountability.