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An Effective Formalization of Artisanal Mining Will Improve the Public Acceptability of the Mineral Extraction Industry in Mozambique

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The exponentially growing extractive industry in Mozambique is exposed to different risks; one of those is the lack of public acceptability, which has led to the interruption of mining activities, destruction and vandalization of mining company's properties, and uprising against the mining operators and central government. Based on an extensive literature review and assessment of companies' performances from reports and news, combined with field surveys in artisanal mining areas in northeastern Mozambique, we evaluated the key factors controlling the level of public acceptance of mineral extraction in Mozambique. Among the key factors identified is the ineffective artisanal mining formalization scheme. Mozambique's current approach for formalization of artisanal mining entails delimitating designated areas and issuing mining passes for artisanal mining within those areas. However, artisanal gold mining activities in Mozambique are more prevalent in undesignated areas, which overlap with large-scale mining (LSM) licenses. Interviews with artisanal gold mining (AGM) operators and local officials in Namuno district, one of the main mining districts in Mozambique, revealed that most of the designated areas for AGM were delimitated based on discoveries of gold by local farmers, rather than an extensive geological mapping. Furthermore, the compilation of LSM licenses and the designated areas for AGM in northeastern Mozambique showed an overlap of most of the LSM licenses and designated areas. Effective formalization of artisanal mining may lead to a better coexistence between both industries, which are equally indispensable. Considering the current formalization approach, we recommend the prioritization of detailed geological characterization of designated areas, outside the LSM licenses. In addition, providing AGM operators with easily understandable geological information about those areas will encourage them to apply for mining passes for those areas, rather than invading the LSM licenses; consequently, improving the acceptability of the mineral extractive industry.