Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is a form of subsistence mining providing direct or indirect livelihoods for thousands of people in response to persistent and widespread poverty in Mongolia. From the beginning, artisanal miners were marginalized from society for their destructive behaviours toward the environment. This prevented them from achieving their full economic potential and from developing sustainable environmental practices.

However, Mongolia’s artisanal miners are gradually becoming more formalized and are being recognized as contributors to the economy due to their demonstrated readiness to change their practices and to organize themselves into self-governing institutions for greater responsibility and economic opportunities.

The Engaging Stakeholders in Environmental Conservation Project (ESEC II) – an initiative of The Asia Foundation - is aimed at addressing the environmental challenges of ASM by helping to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of past and present mining practices through the provision of environmental tools, capacity-building, and encouraging a collaborative planning approach to permitting and environmental management.

The project complements the Sustainable Artisanal Mining Project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation by introducing responsible and sustainable ASM rehabilitation approaches that are economically affordable, socially acceptable, and ecologically viable for ASM communities and effected stakeholders. Throughout 2014 these “frugal rehabilitation” approaches were piloted on hard and alluvial gold and fluorspar ASM operations lands.

PROJECT GOAL

ESEC II aims to enhance the contribution of Mongolia’s artisanal mining sector to sustainable local development, including the realization of the right to a healthy environment and the right to decent work.

EXPECTED RESULTS

To achieve the goal, ESEC II has the following three objectives that will be pursued in the coming two years:

1. Competent authorities endorse sustainable green ASM rehabilitation approaches. Demonstrations of green ASM rehabilitation approaches will be developed in consultation with the relevant authorities. ASM rehabilitation approaches will be informed by an environmental rehabilitation methodology that has been developed and demonstrated across Mongolia.

2. Local partners agree on co-financed soum-level ASM environmental action plans. The protection of rights and the fulfilment of duties will be best achieved through dialogue and participatory decision-making by local stakeholders, seeking consensus through local multi-stakeholder councils (LMCs).

3. Local partners jointly implement and finance agreed soum-level ASM environmental action plans. The project will facilitate the implementation of action plans with stakeholders to help artisanal miners comply with environmental regulations and, through their inclusion and active participation in LMCs, secure both environmental and social licenses to operate.
RESULTS TO DATE
FRUGAL REHABILITATION DEMONSTRATION

The implementation of the Frugal rehabilitation demonstration (FRD) project on 73 hectares of ASM degraded and abandoned lands in nine sites showcased that apart from the techniques and technologies the committed collaborative approaches are required with relevant stakeholders. Over 350 ASMrs from 12 formalized ASM NGOs in five aimags put their forces together with local government and communities to demonstrate their readiness and willingness to perform environmental responsibility and contribute to local development. The main principle of such frugal rehabilitation is to be economically affordable, ecologically viable and socially acceptable.

The results and success of this demonstration activity is meant to encourage the stakeholders and ASM NGOs to initiate positive behavior change to issue appropriate policies to co-fund and undertake rehabilitation in additional areas, where ASM activity have had place.

Using the experiences from FRD and in consultation with high level government institutions and relevant experts the ESEC II has elaborated Frugal Rehabilitation Methodology for ASM rehabilitation purpose. Currently the project team with the support from partners and stakeholders is working on the endorsement of the Methodology, which, if successful, will become a valuable tool to increase environmental responsibility at all levels and underpin more solid and sustainable cooperation of stakeholders.

LOCAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS COUNCILS

In total 31 Local Multi-stakeholders Councils (LMC) established and composed of local governments, large and small-scale mining representatives and local communities, are operating to make informed decisions and strive for positive social, economic, and environmental changes at the local level. LMCs are becoming a starting point for assessment of ASM Rehabilitation Action Plans (RAPs) and soum-level Environmental Management Plans (EMPs), the realization of which is envisaged in 2015-2016.

HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Human rights-based approach (HRBA) is one of the key elements in the project’s implementation framework. Its concept is to ensure ASM development is based on international human rights standards. It works toward strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations. ESEC II developed an HRBA guide for government officials’ use and supports a systematic delivery of relevant trainings for them through local and national environmental NGOs.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS’ ENGAGEMENT

Multi-stakeholders’ engagement training (MET) is also a tool used to develop capacity-building. The tool is being used to facilitate a process of inclusion of artisanal miners into LMCs. This is an ongoing process that will be undertaken across all project soums through partner environmental NGOs. The recently revised MET guide is aimed at improving relations among different stakeholders and create a platform for cooperation and is based on stakeholder needs, environmental protection needs, and responsible mining.

ACCOUNTING FOR HIGH BIODIVERSITY VALUES AND RISKS

A high level biodiversity scoping study was undertaken across the 50 ESEC II Project soums, so as to identify risk areas for high value biodiversity. Such risks were largely associated with but not confined to the protected areas network, with more than half of the soums indicating the presence of protected areas and threatened species.

GENDER ASSESSMENT

An ASM gender assessment was undertaken and published so ensuring that, the project is better placed to ensure that gender-based issues in ASM are appropriately addressed and implemented throughout the project’s ongoing activities.