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## Mitigating Social and Environmental Problems Caused by Gold Mining in Upland Myanmar

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### Abstract

Mining and agricultural expansion are major drivers of deforestation. Myanmar has the largest remaining area of forest in the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, but is experiencing high rates of deforestation. Minimizing deforestation and other environmental and social problems caused by gold mining is a policy priority of the regional government of Sagaing (northern Myanmar) which includes large areas of forest such as in the Htamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary. Discussion with policy-makers suggested that increased law enforcement and livelihood-based interventions (such as bamboo plantations) are the key policy approaches under consideration. We interviewed 226 respondents in the agricultural and gold mining sectors, including both the formal and informal mining sectors, to understand the context for livelihood-decision making and the likely effect of proposed policy interventions. Low agricultural incomes were a key driver of mining participation, with many respondents reporting that gold mining was their best, or only, livelihood option. However, among farmers that did not participate in mining, the most popular reason for not mining was insufficient money to invest into mining. The informal mining sector had its own parallel governance system, whereby miners paid fees for village and monastic development and for village authorities to pay law enforcement, resulting in law enforcement being viewed as a tax or cost of business, rather than an effective deterrent. Livelihood-based approaches alone are unlikely to succeed in mitigating mining-related problems as they may simply enable more people to invest into gold mining. Likewise, increased law enforcement intensity alone is unlikely to succeed without governance reform to reduce corruption.

**Keywords:** Deforestation, gold mining, livelihood, northern Myanmar