



'Orpaillage' or artisanal mining at Sigiri – finding the path to co-habitation

Sigiri gold mine in Guinea is located in the heart of an ancient gold mining region, reputed to have been known since the 13th century as the basis of the Mandingo Empire. Unlike in many other areas in Africa, the *orpaillage* (literally translated as gold-washing), or artisanal mining system is highly formalised and forms an integral part of village structures.

The Sigiri mine is 800km from the Guinean capital Conakry and 300km from Bamako, the capital of Mali. A majority stake in the mine (85%) was acquired by Ashanti Goldfields in 1996 and became a part of AngloGold Ashanti in 2004 following the business combination between AngloGold and Ashanti. The government of Guinea holds a 15% interest in the mine. The first shipment of gold from Sigiri took place in April 1998.

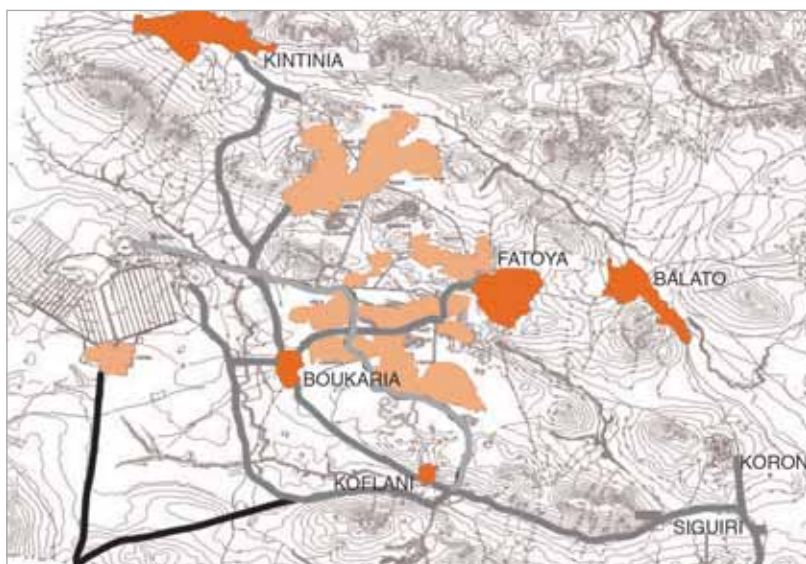
The Boure area, where Sigiri's current mining activity is focused, is home to around 40,000 people in 12 villages – Kintinian, Boukaria, Balato, Fatoya, Kofilani, Samany, Kourouni, Kamatiguiya, Setiguiya, Kourouda, Lenkekoe and Fenserekolen – all within the sub-prefecture of Kintinian. The villages have grown in size over the years as people have ventured from other

areas in Guinea to seek a livelihood. The villages are dotted around the mine lease area and there is virtually no separation between the mine, the artisanal mining areas and the large-scale mining pits and plants. (See map).

The Mandingo Empire

In the 13th century, the territory governed by the Mandingo Empire, a major group in West Africa, stretched across an area as large as the United States. With a rich cultural history that has its origins in the ancient Mali Empire, the Mandingo population currently includes some 5.3 million people residing in approximately 10 West African countries. Between 800 and 1400 AD, many of the Mandingo people converted to Islam. This trend, combined with a series of Islamic holy wars that occurred between 1855 and 1890, has resulted in over 99% of the Mandingo people currently practising Islam. Mandingo culture is dominated by tradition, music, spiritual ritual, and oral storytelling. The passing down of oral history through music, sung by praise-singers or griots and accompanied by drums or the kora (a harp-like instrument), has ensured global recognition for the Mandingo. In contemporary Guinea, the Mandingo comprise some 30% of the population and are mostly found in the east, particularly around the Kankan and Kissidougou Prefectures.

The development of the Mandingo Empire is fundamentally linked to their fabulous resources of gold. Until their independence from the King of Ghana in 1230 AD, the Mandingo people had served as little more than middlemen in the gold trade. After this however, the Mandingo used their gold resources and their position in the trade to develop an empire of their own. Legend tells of the sensational arrival of the Mandingo ruler, Mansa Musa, in Cairo in 1324 AD, on his way to Mecca to perform pilgrimage. Mansa Musa apparently crossed the Sahara with thousands of followers and 100 camel-loads of gold, attended by 500 slaves, each bearing a golden staff weighing almost 3kg. Today, the gold in the Mandingo areas of West Africa is similarly, and justifiably, legendary.



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By far the most important economic activity in the region is artisanal mining, with at least one member of each family household engaged in working either formal orpaillage sites or other uncontrolled sites. This is followed by subsistence farming and small-scale hand craft and trading. The male/female ratio is around 52:48, and many women are involved at the lower end of the artisanal mining work chain. Historically artisanal mining has been a seasonal activity, as the orpaillage holes tend to fill up in the rainy season.

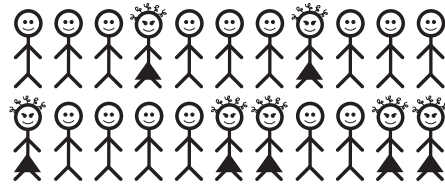
The apparent chaos in the small mine workings belies the highly structured orpaillage system within this region, which is largely led in each village by the village elders' council, which in turn is led by the village founder family member. He is usually also the landowner of the area in which the village is located.

Each orpaillage site (dama) has a chief (dama tiguï) who is the eldest member of the village's founding family who first practised orpaillage in the area. He is charged with managing all issues relating to orpaillage within the village. The day to day management of orpaillage issues is overseen by the village orpaillage committee (tombolina), led by the Tombolina kutigui.

Each village has well-known orpaillage sites within its territory called placers, which are divided into surface units (be) by the village orpaillage committee. The village committee allocates places to dig subject to payment of fees (around 25,000GNF per season in 2007 – equivalent to around US\$5). These individuals then need to join a five-person team led by one villager (autochthon). On average each orpaillage hole is exploited by 22 people (see diagram).

Orpaillage system at Siguiri

On average, each orpaillage hole is exploited by 22 people



5 owners of the hole who expose the ore-bearing reef



Diggers hired by the hole owners



Motor pump owner who dries the hole when/if it is flooded



Women hired by diggers to pull ore to surface and wash the ore



Other fees are also collected by the orpaillage committees:

- motor pump owners pay between 100,000 and 25,000GNF to access each unit in each places, from the proceeds they earn by pumping water from holes;
- gold buyers operating in the area pay around 3,000GNF per week; and
- traders doing business in the area (food and other articles) pay around 3,000GNF per week.

Certain rules are associated with the orpaillage and punitive fines of around 10,000GNF may be instituted by the committee.

Every orpaillage committee pays an amount of money to:

- the Communauté Rurale de Développement (CRD) as a contribution towards the development of the village;
- the Prefectoral Office of Mines, which in turn returns 60% of the fees paid back to the CRD in which the place is located; and
- a tax to the Prefectoral Office of Forest Resources for using wood to support their hole walls.

In addition to the income provided to household members, orpaillage is an important source of funding for the villages and, in addition to goods and services for the village, is used for larger scale projects, such as the construction of a water reticulation project in Kitinia and the planning and construction of the Fatoya High School.

Because there is alluvial gold throughout the concession area, there are unregulated artisanal mining sites – large and small. These artisanal miners – mainly women and children – operate outside the traditional orpaillage sites either because they do not have the means to operate within the regular placers, or because they do not want to be employed by other orpailleurs.

The clash of interests between the mine and the artisanal miners and orpailleurs arises in a number of ways:

- When artisanal miners operating outside the traditional system move into new areas within the mine's lease area or operate in close proximity to Siguri's operations. In the case of the former, the damage done to the area by the artisanal miners is problematic for the company if and when it decides to mine a certain area owing to environmental degradation that may have occurred.
- Artisanal miners operate illegally within the company's current and old pits – often at night – causing damage to pit walls, endangering themselves and Siguri's own employees.
- There have been large-scale pit invasions (upwards of 10,000 people at a time) often during the rainy season when artisanal workings are flooded or inaccessible. Again, this has an impact on Siguri's own operations and creates a safety hazard.
- Through the theft of mine property, such as diesel and electrical cables.

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- Finally, there have been a number of instances when mine security personnel and mining and plant employees have been attacked by artisanal miners, which has heightened the tension between employees and the communities.

In an attempt to better understand the issues and to identify a joint solution, the mine contracted a local consultant, ESDCO, to assist in developing a strategy to improve the co-habitation between the mine and its communities. ESDCO undertook extensive public consultation to understand the issues and develop a way forward.

ESDCO's findings confirmed the presence of two separate artisanal mining groups operating in Siguiri – the local, traditional *orpilleurs* and the artisanal miners who come from outside the Siguiri area and, in most cases, are not Guinean. Specifically, ESDCO highlighted the existing tension and conflict between these two groups who compete for the same mining sites. The conflict has also caused increased instability in the generally cyclical behaviour of the traditional miners who normally move from seasonal farming to mining activities; this shift has also added strain to the existing relationship between the mine and the local community.

Siguiri has undertaken to explore mechanisms to resolve these issues. ESDCO has been contracted to support this initiative and has planned a stakeholders' workshop as an interim step. As a longer-term goal, the mine is also looking to the possibility of undertaking a collaborative project with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to eliminate child labour from the artisanal small mining workforce around the mine.

