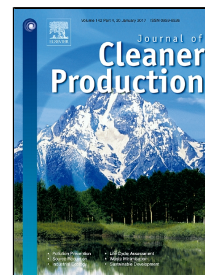


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# Socio-technical study of small-scale gold mining in Suriname

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## ABSTRACT

Small-scale gold mining is Suriname's main economic sector, producing about two thirds of the nation's gold. Despite this, the sector is only very loosely regulated and most small-scale mining activities are informal. Surinamese miners are only a minority: the majority are Brazilian migrants, who have no right to the land and therefore have to pay a percentage of their production for land use. This study reports the findings of a field mission to small-scale mines in the region of Brokopondo reservoir. We document the technical aspects of small-scale gold mining in Suriname and contextualize this technology to social issues to identify links with cultural, political and sociological factors. Our findings show that informality and insecurity lead to a mine management culture that applies short-term solutions, such as cheap but polluting and inefficient technologies, and fails to produce stable, long-term mining conditions for clean, efficient technology and secure business planning. We conclude that the social context of the mining economy in Suriname strongly interacts with the technologies employed

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Suriname, small-scale gold mining – the country's main economic sector – started in the 1990s in what is sometimes called the 'second gold rush'. The first gold rush happened hundred of years earlier, at the end of the 19th century, when new gold finds attracted miners from the Caribbean, the United States and Europe to the three Guianas (then British Guiana, Dutch Guiana (Suriname) and French Guiana). After 1910, the production of gold waned and after the First World War many workers moved to the bauxite industry, leaving the gold mines rather abandoned in the interior (Buddingh', 2012; Dijck, 2001). Starting in the 1980s, gold mining was rediscovered. In 2011, gold mining accounted for 60% of total export value, and this figure is still increasing (Central Bank of Suriname, 2014). Small-scale gold miners produce about two thirds of this gold. In 2013, the number of small-scale miners in Suriname was estimated at 20,000 (Cremers et al., 2013), among a population of around half a million.

Since 2004, Iamgold Corporation has run a large-scale mine north of Brokopondo reservoir. Newmont Mining Corporation is about to start mining in the eastern part of the country (Nassau mountains). To make way for the two mines, small-scale miners were removed from the area. The Iamgold plant is close to the Okanisi village Koffiekamp. Notwithstanding protests since the first prospection in the area in the early 1990s, the local population never received compensation and there are still local miners working on the concession under the constant threat of removal (Heemskerk and Duijves, 2013; Heemskerk et al., 2014; MacKay, 2002; Theije et al., 2014). Despite the important contribution

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