ILLEGAL GOLD MINING

The illegal extraction of alluvial gold involves destructive processes that devastate the Amazonian communities, their forests and their ecosystems. USAID works together with the Government of Peru, local communities, Peruvian research organizations, private companies, NGOs and U.S. universities to address the threat of mining in the Amazon. The United States and Peru signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2017 to combat illegal gold mining, the first of its kind, and a demonstration of our strong bilateral partnership and shared priorities.

Over the last decade, Peru’s fast-growing economy was fueled by high prices in the mining, oil, and gas sectors, which has had the unfortunate effect of increased intrusion of organized crime and threats to environmental defenders. As gold prices climbed, illegal alluvial gold mining expanded into sensitive ecosystems, including protected areas and indigenous lands, in areas such as Madre de Dios, a biodiversity hotspot in the heart of the Peruvian Amazon. Illegal mining is a complex issue that threatens Peru’s efforts to balance natural resource management and the health of local indigenous communities, with its economic growth and development goals. It also affects Peru’s overall security and the rule of law. In partnership with Peru, USAID works with affected communities to rehabilitate degraded land, promote legality in the sector (e.g. mining formalization) with social and environmental safeguards, and prevent the expansion of illegal mining into protected areas, indigenous lands, and other forested lands.
OUR WORK

RAISING AWARENESS AND STRENGTHENING SCIENTIFIC CAPACITY

Illegal gold mining strips lands of its resources, destroying forests, water, and soil quality, leaving behind barren landscapes polluted by mercury. The conversion of forest to mine site generates significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while also removing the capacity of that land to absorb future GHG emissions. USAID partners with local and international organizations to support environmental education and inform the public and policymakers about the impacts of illegal gold mining in the Amazon. USAID helps strengthen local scientific capacity to analyze the impacts of illegal gold mining in the environment and in local populations. In collaboration with Peruvian and U.S. researchers, USAID helped establish the first Mercury and Analytical Chemistry Laboratory in Madre de Dios. Additionally, USAID supported the use of drones for the analysis of deforestation and reforestation sites and expanded research into impacts on critical ecosystems. USAID’s partners also developed scientifically sound restoration alternatives for impacted areas due to illegal mining operations in Madre de Dios.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

In December 2020, USAID signed a new Cooperative Agreement with the Local NGO, Capital Humano y Social Alternativo to work with the Government of Peru (GOP) in joint efforts to eradicate human trafficking and combat other gender-based violent crimes. We have continued providing technical assistance to Peru’s Permanent Multisectoral Commission Against Trafficking in Persons to strengthen legislation, prosecution, and victim services. With targeted support provided by CHS Alternativo, the GOP approved, in July 2021, a new National Policy Against Human Trafficking, and the Peruvian Congress passed a law that strengthened the legal definition of human trafficking, updated judicial formulas for determining trafficker compensation to victims, and codified government services available to victims. USAID trained 293 justice sector and care services officials to work with victims of human trafficking and provided legal and psychosocial services to 48 new cases brought by victims.

PREVENTING AND COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES

Illegal mining threatens protected areas and indigenous lands and the key Amazonian resources they contain. USAID’s Prevent activity reduces threats to biodiversity in the Peruvian Amazon by helping Peruvian authorities and communities to more effectively prevent and address environmental crimes, including: illegal gold mining, illegal logging and illegal wildlife trafficking. Additionally, Prevent works with environmental defenders in protected areas, on indigenous lands, and in other relevant forest management units in the Amazon who face increasing threats from narcotraffickers, illegal miners, illegal loggers, and land traffickers. USAID works closely with national and regional authorities to promote the prevention and reduction of illegal mining in Madre de Dios. An MoU has been signed with CITE Mining and Environment and Center for Amazonian Scientific Innovation (CINCIA) to promote innovative solutions including research, capacity building and engagement of miners in the use of better mining practices and mercury free alternatives. USAID is also promoting the use of environmentally sound mining closure procedures, mining formalization with social and environmental safeguards.

INNOVATING SOLUTIONS

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is a threat to biodiversity across the Amazon region. Conservation X Labs (CXLab) is a technology and innovation company harnessing a global community of solvers and entrepreneurs to incentivize bold, unconventional approaches to conservation. CXLab operates Grand Challenges, which are global competitions that reward monetary prizes to the best solutions for specific conservation problems. Grand Challenges source scalable solutions from individuals and teams with diverse backgrounds, leading to new ideas, increased global attention, and strong resource partnerships. The ASGM Grand Challenge will bring together leading conservation organizations, world class health and scientific institutions, governments, as well as technology,
manufacturing and mining companies to conserve biodiversity and improve the health and security of communities living in the Amazon basin. Partnering with Conservation X Labs, USAID will engage with diverse innovators across the region, and, with support from the private sector, will develop and implement solutions to make legal ASGM operations more environmentally responsible and socially equitable.

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MISSION

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