ASM and COVID19 remote data collection in Colombia

Narrative summaries

2nd data collection phase

29.06 – 03.07.2020
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Front cover: gold dredge on the Caquetá river, Colombia.
Back covers picture: gold panners in Sur Bolivar, Colombia.
About this research

The data presented here has been collected under the auspices of Delve, a global platform presenting data on the ASM sector funded by the World Bank. It has been collected by Afai Consulting under the coordination and guidance of Pact World, as part of Delve’s larger data gathering exercise looking to monitor and record COVID-19 impacts in ASM communities in countries across the globe¹.

Approach

Respondents

The two regions singled-out for data collection are the departments of Antioquia and Chocó. In the case of Antioquia, the sample is completed with 2 respondents from the department of Santander chosen for the similarity of their operations to those of Antioquia.

Antioquia and Santander

Selected miners work in SSM operations in Antioquia in the municipalities of Barbosa (5 miners, all male), Remedios (3 miners in total, including 1 female miner), and in the case of Santander the municipality of Vetas (1 male and 1 female miner), respondents either live in the same municipality or in a neighbouring municipality. The gender split of the sample is broadly representative of the sector.

Respondents include: miners, transporters, ore processors, mechanical maintenance, OHS and environment teams, mining team bosses.

Operators in Santander also extract silver as a by-product of gold extraction.

Chocó

Interviewed barequeros² are located in the municipalities of Istmina (6 miners, including 1 male miner) and Condoto (4 miners, all male). Overall the gender split of respondents is 50/50, in line with trends in the Chocoan gold panning sector.

All respondents are barequeros and most of them also extract some platinum as a by-product of gold extraction. These artisanal activities are not complex and there is neither sub-division of roles nor is there a processing step in addition to gold panning.

¹ For more information visit: https://delvedatabase.org/covid-data
² Barequero(s) (♂)/ Barequera(s) (♀) are gold panners working exclusively above-ground and using manual labour. This type of mining activity does not require a mining title but registration with the municipal authorities.
Results

SSM miners in Antioquia and Santander

Synthesis of Key Informant Response

Health & Safety

Only one respondent mentions a possible (non-confirmed) COVID19 case within her close social circle. Overall respondents feel they are well informed on COVID19 but they are split on whether they would receive appropriate care or not (3 [yes] vs 7 [no]), this represent a shift from the prior data collection period with 1 more respondent not believing they would receive adequate treatment.

As all interviewees are workers of SSM operators, their place of work has been highlighted as a key channel for information dissemination and very importantly practice dissemination. COVID19 mitigating measures having become part of the daily OHS routine and thus forming habits for the miners that take them home with them. As a rule, all recommended mitigation measures are implemented on site and are often complemented with either shoe disinfection and/or daily temperature testing at the mine, in line with existing guidelines from the Colombian government on COVID19 mitigation in SSM operations.

Gender

Overall men have been more impacted by the COVID19 pandemic and the government mandated mitigation measures as a higher percentage of them have been furloughed due to the impact of these on mining operators.

Women in SSM mining typically have roles that require more training such as OHS and environmental monitoring. As a result, they are now typically in charge of the implementation of COVID19 mitigation measures and have been less furloughed as mines did not interrupt their maintenance works and environmental monitoring during the production stoppage caused by the Government mandated lockdown.

Human Security

With one exception respondents characterize the insecurity situation as similar to pre-COVID19. Compared to the prior data collection period only 1 respondent noted a limited increase in insecurity. According to the respondents this was caused by the people external to the community coming to sell goods during the lockdown, no further details at which kind of insecurity this has generated were provided.

The noted increase in illegal mining activities from the first data reporting exercise is no longer mentioned suggesting a decrease of the issue with the gradual uplift of lockdown measures.

It should be noted that while most respondent qualify the security situation as ranging from [Safe] to not worse than [Not that safe] areas of Antioquia and Santander are areas where the historical and ongoing presence of armed groups and violence will have influenced the perception of respondents compared to a more peaceful baseline somewhere else in the world.
Food Security
While half of the respondents report no change in food security and half of them report a rise in food insecurity not a single respondent household has had to skip meals.

Causes of raising food insecurity are linked to more limited incomes (furloughs) and local price inflation.

Compared to the first data collection period food insecurity created by mobility limitations is no longer mentioned by respondents suggesting a disappearance of the issue with the gradual uplift of lockdown measures.

Service Delivery & Government Engagement
All respondents have received information on COVID19 and mitigation measures through a number of channels, including radio, TV, WhatsApp, social media and crucial the mining operator they are working for.

Only two miners have received some sort of COVID mitigation package, from a government agency and a school, in the form of foodstuffs and household sundries.

Markets & Supply Chains
Respondents do not sell their minerals as they are employed by the operators.

Their mining activities and thus income have been impacted by the Government mandated lockdown, which shut them out of the mines for a time.

Once mining work resumed Government mandated restrictions have disrupted the supply of productive inputs (in particular explosives[^3]), which has slowed the rate of production, and have made their commute more difficult. Supply stores earlier closing hours (15:00) has been noted as being problematic for mining operations.

Key summary findings
i. Based on the interviews, it can be seen that, despite the fact that COVID19 has had an impact on mining, especially in the first month, it has not made the continuation of activities impossible and has apparently not generated major/irreversible consequences to the employment stability and living conditions of the miners within our sample.

ii. Due to their participation in activities that are not linked directly to mineral extraction but require a higher level of education, women have been less affected by furloughs as mine maintenance has continued during lockdown. With mining activities resuming women have taken up the additional tasks related to the monitoring and implementation COVID19 mitigation measures. Additional work that falls under the scope of the scope of their work in OHS.

[^3]: In Colombia the sale of explosives for mining (and any other) purposes is the monopoly of Indumil a Colombian SOE manufacturing arms and ammunitions.
iii. One of the greatest difficulties faced by mining operators is shortages of productive inputs, and especially explosives. Fittingly this issue is particularly stressed by respondents that are in charge of organizing mining operations in one way or another (mining team leaders and OHS implementers).

Quotes

i. COVID19 has affected the role of women in the mine, now they are the ones who have to check that the different protective measures against the virus are complied with – “COVID ha afectado el rol de las mujeres en la mina porque ahora son ellas las que se deben encargar de revisar que se cumplan las diferentes medidas de protección frente al virus”.

ii. To be honest, if I get sick with COVID19, I don't think I'll get proper care; the health service was already bad, it's worse now – “Para ser honesto, si me enfermo con COVID, no creo que me vayan a atender de manera adecuada porque si la prestación de servicio de salud ya es mala, en estos momentos, está peor”.

iii. I don't just take care of myself because of what the government says and the company orders, but also because of my conscience and self-care. You have to take care of yourself and others – “No me cuido solamente por lo que ordena el Gobierno y el jefe de la empresa, sino también por conciencia y autocuidado. Hay que cuidarse y cuidar a los demás”.

Barequeros in Chocó

Synthesis of Key Informant Response

Health & Safety

There are no known cases of COVID19 amongst the respondents and their social circles.

Respondents seem relatively well informed about the different measures that can be used to prevent the spread of COVID19, government messaging seems to have played a key role in informing miners.

However, few measures that are not already part and parcel of gold panning (outdoor activity with a certain distance between the participants) are implemented. The use of a face mask is noted as being very uncomfortable and thus eschewed on site. However respondent report using them, in some cases along with gloves, while commuting to the gold panning sites.

No respond believes that they would receive the appropriate care in case they would contract the virus, which is seen as a being [not probable] or [somewhat probable]. Only two respondents see infection as [probable].

Gender

While there is some variation in the number of people on site (no discernable trend in Istmina, decrease observed in Condoto) the roles or presence of men and women do not vary based on their gender. Gold panning does not have an ingrained gender attribution of roles in the region as traditionally women make half of the workforce in the activity.
Human Security
Most respondents state that the security situation has not changed. 3 respondents have noted some decrease in it and 1 has noted a small increase linked to unrest (both at home and in the neighborhoods) due to the lockdown measures.

It should be noted that while most respondent qualify the security situation as [Safe] and not worse than [Not that safe] Chocó is one of the Colombian departments where the historical and ongoing presence of armed groups and violence will have influenced the perception of respondents compared to a more peaceful baseline somewhere else in the world.

Food Security
As in the prior data collection exercise, with a single exception, all respondents have mentioned lower food security. However, “only” 7 respondents have mentioned their household having had to skip a meal, a decrease of 2.

The factors impacting food security are related to lower family income, and in half the cases the inflation of the prices of foodstuffs. Personal mobility limitations as part of the Government-mandated lockdown measures is no longer noted as affecting the capacity of respondents to buy foodstuffs as these are being progressively lifted. However, these measures are still noted as impacting the number of hours panners can work and thus impacting their income.

Service Delivery & Government Engagement
All respondents report having heard about COVID and how to protect themselves from it. Radio and TV as well as WhatsApp and social media, and face to face interaction are the relevant channels of information dissemination.

All respondents have received support, in the form of foodstuffs and household sundries. Compared to the prior data collection period the role of government agencies in relief and support appears to have increased and the role of gold buyers to have somewhat decreased.

Markets & Supply Chains
Similar to the information collected during the prior data collection period levels of mine-site activity have diminished due to the Government-mandated measures.

Mineral buyers continue to work shorter hours which makes it difficult for panners to sell their gold daily, creating some cash availability constrains.

While noted as being lower and sales more complicated by 9 respondents, there is no trend in relation to the gold and platinum selling price as miners report lower, higher, and similar prices with no trends at the municipal level. However, the two respondents mentioning different trends for gold and platinum both indicate that gold is now purchased higher than prior to the COVID19 pandemic while platinum is now purchased lower.

Key summary findings
i. In contrast to what the people surveyed in Antioquia and Santander said, in Chocó, several male and female miners expressed their doubts about adopting new measures to protect themselves from COVID19, since they were not willing to stop the activity nor
create obstacles to achieving their day-to-day livelihoods. It is widely believed among respondents that COVID19, like other diseases such as malaria or dengue, could be treated and cured by traditional medicine, using herbs and natural treatments.

ii. COVID19 has affected gold panning activities in two opposing ways (i) it decreased the number of people dedicated to the activity due to the different government-mandated restrictions, and, (ii) it increased the number of people dedicated to gold panning as it is the only activity that can be carried out without a high risk of infection due to taking place outdoors. It is not possible to assess the overall balance of these measures from our sample.

iii. Less respondents have reported having to skip a meal and the presence of government agencies amongst relief providers has increased. This could be indicating a gradual catch-up to the needs of local community by government agencies.

Quotes

i. While you're gold panning there's no risk of catching COVID19 because it's an outdoor activity taking place away from populated areas – "Mientras que se barequea no hay riesgo de contagiarse de COVID porque es una actividad que se hace al aire libre y en lugares apartados"

ii. COVID19 was not felt so much here and is confused with dengue. In any case, people are medicating/curing themselves using herbs – "Acá el COVID no se ha sentido tanto y se confunde con el dengue. En todo caso, la gente se está curando con el uso de hierbas"

iii. We cannot implement additional protection measures because that means no work and no work means no food – “No podemos implementar medidas adicionales de protección porque eso significa no trabajar y no trabajar significa no comer”

Research limitations and difficulties

In contrast to Antioquia and Santander where no such issues were noted, in Chocó phone connectivity has proven to be an issue with respondents and frequent cuts have made interviews longer than they ought to have been under better circumstances, difference in education levels has also required longer explanations. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the data collection process went much more smoothly and efficiently than during the first data collection and that interview times where reduced by about 7 minutes in average or about 30%. As can be seen in the summary table.

In Antioquia, due to the short notice of this data collection exercises, the sampling is biased towards miners working in formal mines and does not include miners working in less formal structures or the chatarreros, AM miners that are authorized to work on the tailings of mining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Data collection 1</th>
<th>Data collection 2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antioquia and Santander</td>
<td>Average: 21'13&quot;</td>
<td>Average: 14'02&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum: 16'46&quot;</td>
<td>Minimum: 11'25&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum: 25'17&quot;</td>
<td>Maximum: 17'40&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocó</td>
<td>Average: 26'58&quot;</td>
<td>Average: 19'43&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum: 21'17&quot;</td>
<td>Minimum: 15'48&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum: 40'25&quot;</td>
<td>Maximum: 26'48&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of interview times
companies. Our sample is also more likely to be receiving support from projects dedicated to the implementation of better mining practices such as the Better Gold Initiative.

In Chocó there are no representatives of indigenous communities in this sample (due to more pronounced phone coverage issues) and albeit Colombians hailing from indigenous communities only represent a minority of gold panners their higher vulnerability makes their perspective a point of interest that should be incorporated in future data collection exercises that do not depend on remote data collection.

The use of quantifying terms such as “probably”, “somewhat likely” etc… would benefit from standardization, in other words assigning a fix probability range to each of these terms to ensure consistent data collection. However, this can no longer be for this data collection as it risks creating an artificial shift in the data collected. This measure would thus have to be considered for any new subsequent data collection exercise. Note that the deployment of this approach risks making the interviews somewhat “clunky” if not managed properly.
For any question or comment, please contact Nicolas A. Eslava:
nicolas@afaiconsulting.com