

Kenya: State to adopt safe practices in gold mining

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Kenya is one of the eight countries that will get financial and technical support to eradicate mercury during gold mining and processing.



Photo: Capital FM Kenya

The recently launched Global Opportunities for Long-term Development of the Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining project of the UN Environmental Programme will invest \$21m into the Kenyan effort.

Health hazard

The project is expected to devise environmentally-friendly mercury-free methods of gold extraction.

During a meeting between the UN, the government and stakeholders to draw a plan for the project, experts said there was serious threat of mercury exposure as a new gold rush picked up.

"Mercury is highly toxic but it is used in artisanal gold mining and processing," Raymond Mutiso, the director of mines at the mining ministry, said. "It pollutes rivers, air and contaminates land. It can also cause illness in people and animals."

Environmentally friendly

He said the continued use of mercury posed a danger to miners, their families and the environment.

"The ministry, therefore, supports this project whose objective is to reduce mercury release through introduction and promotion of best practices and techniques for gold extraction," he said.

Small-scale mining has thrived since the 19th century and is concentrated in the Lake Victoria belt.

Most gold mining is carried out in Narok, Migori, Homa Bay, Siaya, Vihiga, Kakamega, Siaya, Nandi, West Pokot and Turkana counties.

Environment principal secretary, Charles Sunkuli, said as small-scale mining grew, haphazard processes had led to health hazards.

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