Jeanne d’Arc, empowering women miners

Jeanne d’Arc Itangishaka is 28 years old and a proud miner. She works for Wolfram Mining and Processing Company, leading a team of other miners in the Bure-ra district of Rwanda in a mine site called Gifurwe. In 2014, Jeanne d’Arc started working in Gifurwe with other women, digging for and washing wolframite minerals, earning around 50,000 Rwandan Francs (around 60 US$) per month. Gifurwe mine is part of the iTScI due diligence and traceability programme, through which Jeanne’s minerals can be sold on the international market at fair prices, improving the livelihood of miners in Rwanda.

The income earned by Jeanne when she started mining helped her build a house for her parents and pay school fees for her brothers and sisters. As time went by, she participated in specialised and technical trainings offered by Wolfram Mining and Processing company and soon began to learn how to operate heavy machinery. This used to be unusual in Rwanda, where women working in mines often face cultural stigmas and gender discrimination, and where they are not permitted to engage in heavy work, are paid less and are only allowed to carry out lighter tasks such as washing and transporting minerals or cleaning the mine sites.
After doing well, Jeanne was promoted to subcontractor in August 2016. With her newly-acquired skills, she signed a contract with the company to manage her own team and was provided tools, such as jackhammers, mine carts, and compressors, to enable her and her team to increase their production and double their incomes. According to Jeanne, “when I started mining, it was not easy for my parents to understand how a young girl like me could carry out the heavy work done in the mines. But now they are proud and have benefitted from the positive results of my hard work”.

For now, Jeanne d’Arc is leading her own team of miners, made up of 11 women and 3 men, who are very happy to be part of her team. Her goal now is “to be a model of women empowerment in the mining sector and to show others, especially women, that it is possible for women to work hard and well in the mine”. Regarding mineral traceability, Jeanne says that she is very happy that “my minerals and those from my colleagues will reach the international market with good prices and that they are without a doubt, conflict-free.”