

Uranium mining operations in Kyrgyzstan

Case study

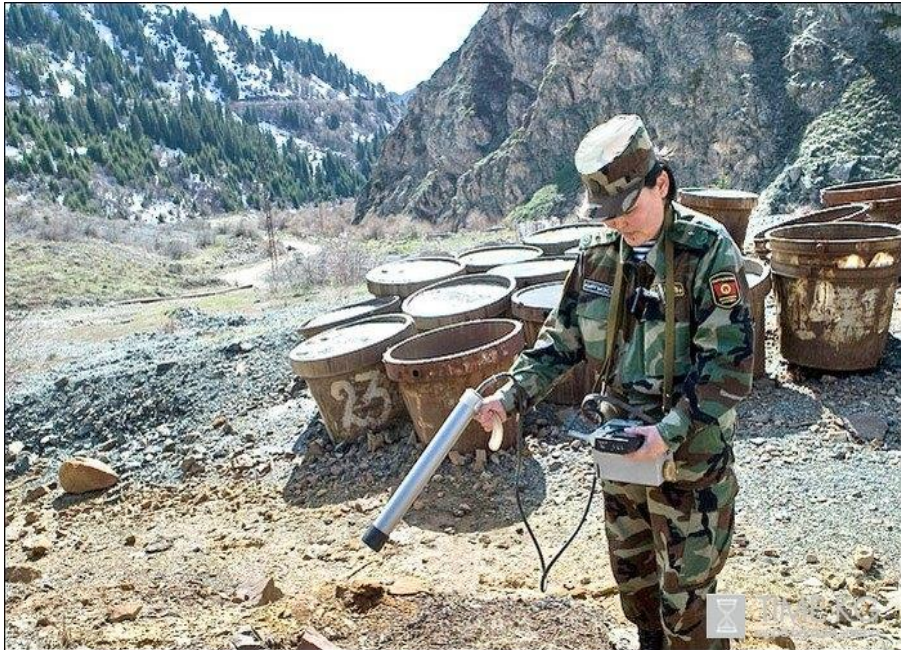
Gulnaz Baiturova

Location



Mountains cover over 80% of the Kyrgyz Republic with the remainder made up of valleys and basins.

Uranium – a sensitive issue for Kyrgyzstan



Extensive uranium mining projects of the Soviet era (until 1989) have left numerous high-risk uranium tailing dumps in Kyrgyzstan

Uranium tailing dumps pose serious risks for local livelihoods, public health, and the environment.

"UrAsia in Kyrgyzstan" LLC



- In 2010 the company received a license to use the subsoil of the Kyzyl Ompol area for the purpose of geological exploration.
- In 2013 "received a license for geological exploration of uranium, thorium, zirconium, iron, titanium, phosphor, rare earth, and feldspar.

Public hearings in 2018 in Kok-Moinok village and Balykchy city

- attended by company representatives heads of local authorities, deputies, youth activists, and the local public.
- Residents were dissatisfied with the fact that in a short time, a company will begin the extraction of a radioactive element not far from their homes.
- The company has initiated the creation of a special commission, which will include all stakeholders. Yet, some residents of nearby villages and towns were not satisfied.



Wide protests against uranium mining



- April 2019 – wide protests against uranium mining, in Balykchy and in the capital city.
 - Almost 29.5 thousand people signed “*We are against the development of the uranium deposit.*”
- April 2019 - following the protests KR Prime ordered to suspend its operations in the uranium field in Kyzyl Ompol site until completion of the environmental impact audit.
- December 2019 - former president signed a law that banned uranium and thorium mining and radioactive tailings and waste dumps.

Rights holders

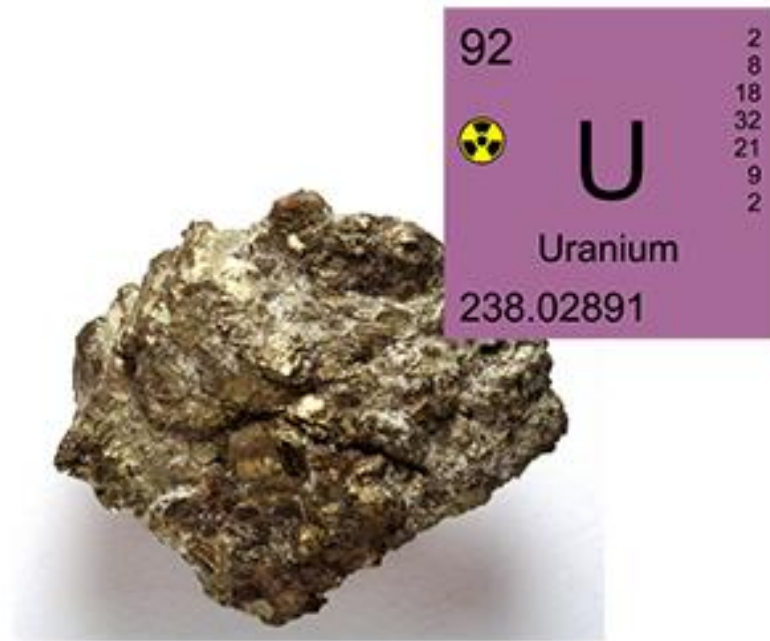
- Local population
- Employees/workers.



Stakeholders

- Active citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic (activists, bloggers etc)
- Local environmental NGOs and scientists
- State authorities
- The State Agency on Geology and Mineral Resources of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Local government/political parties.

Human rights risks



Uranium is a radioactive material, so any mining activity – is intrinsically linked to risks to health and life.

Uranium mining entails human rights risks both workers and the local population:

- **risk of negative impact on health and right to life**
- **environmental risks**
- **socio-economic impact risks**

Human rights adversely affected



- the right to health
- the right to life (in extreme cases);
- the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment:
- private property rights.
- human rights of the workers:

What should have been done to prevent the adverse impact?

- People in Kyrgyzstan are sensitive to uranium exploration close to their homes
 - because the problem of existing hazardous waste and radioactive tailing dumps legacy is still not solved by the state or any organisation.



What should have been done to prevent the adverse impact?

Effective and Transparent communication of steps towards ensuring the safety of people and the environment

Attempts to organise the public hearings in 2018, the process of involving stakeholders in the risk assessment and risk mitigation process was insufficient.

- In accordance with UNGP 17: **'In order to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their adverse human rights impacts, business enterprises should carry out human rights due diligence.'**
- The process should include:
 - assessing actual and potential human rights impacts,
 - integrating and acting upon the findings,
 - tracking responses, and
 - communicating how impacts are addressed...



What should have been done to prevent the adverse impact?



Transparent policy commitments

on how it operates and on the means with which the company was planning to prevent or mitigate impacts on the livelihood of the residents so they would trust the company.

As stated in the UNGP 15, UrAsia in Kyrgyzstan enterprise could have started to demonstrate its commitment by adopting and communicating that it has adopted policy commitments to meet its responsibility to respect the local population's human rights as well as processes that enable the remediation of any adverse human rights impacts to which they contribute.

What should have been done to prevent the adverse impact?

UrAsia in Kyrgyzstan could have also proposed the creation of an **effective grievance mechanism to handle complaints and ensure that a remediation system was in place.**

For instance, these could be mixed composition bodies that would also involve representatives of the local population – selected by the population themselves.



Thank you for your attention