

**Lorenzo D'Angelo & Eleanor Fisher**

# HAVE YOU EVER FOUND GOLD?

**Drawings by  
Elena Mistrello**



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### **Credit roles**

**Lorenzo D'Angelo:** field research; storyline and text.

**Eleanor Fisher:** editing

**Elena Mistrello:** drawings

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### **Ethics and consent**

Ethical clearance was granted for the project by (i) The School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading: 1353D 2020; and, (ii) Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda: MUREC 117, 27/02/2020.

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# PREFACE

Across the world, an estimated sixteen million people depend on artisanal and small-scale gold mining. These are miners who work with their hands, with simple tools, in landscapes shaped by hope as well as hardship. Most miners live in low-income countries, where gold is not only a mineral but a livelihood. Artisanal mining is often linked to environmental damage, inequality, and difficult working conditions. Yet it also sustains communities, supports families, and holds the potential to contribute to equitable futures.

GOLD MATTERS was born on these premises and these tensions. It was a transdisciplinary and transcontinental project that, between 2018 and 2022, brought together academics, artists, and mining communities to ask a simple but far-reaching question: “How can small-scale mining become part of a sustainable future?”. The project drew on the strengths of partners across Europe, Africa, and South America, including the University of Reading, the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Hamburg University, Campinas State University, Mbarara University, and the Nordic Africa Institute.

Together, we explored four interconnected aims. We examined how sustainable futures might grow out of miners’ lived realities – their “gold lifeways.” We listened to how people inside mining communities define what is sustainable or unsustainable in their environment, their livelihoods, and their relationships. We reflected on how understanding these perspectives can improve governance and wellbeing, especially in relation to gender and local community priorities. And we experimented with new forms of communication, creative forms that brought different

visions of the future into dialogue and helped to imagine possibilities beyond the present.

The East Africa Team focused on the shifting landscapes of artisanal gold mining in Uganda. We studied how people make sense of their surroundings, their work, and their futures: how knowledge is shared, how technologies travel from one site to another, and how miners describe what sustainability means to them. Our approach combined remote sensing, ethnography, participatory methods, archival research, and visual art, weaving together different ways of understanding a complex world.

The Ugandan research team included Eleanor Fisher, Lorenzo D'Angelo, Ronald Twongyirwe, Esther van de Camp, and Margaret Tuhumwire. In southwestern Uganda, Lorenzo and Eleanor explored how households combine farming (e.g., plantain bananas, coffee, and other crops) with the search for alluvial gold. They showed how mining and farming support each other in Buhweju, a district where land is fragmented, soil fertility is declining, and young people face limited opportunities. Gold, in this context, becomes not only a source of income but a way of sustaining rural life.

This short graphic novel is one of the visual works created to share these insights with the people of Buhweju and to keep alive a reflection that, we think, it is still timely. It is also a way of returning stories to the communities who inspired them honouring their knowledge, their struggles, and their visions for the future. We hope you will enjoy it.

Lorenzo D'Angelo and Eleanor Fisher

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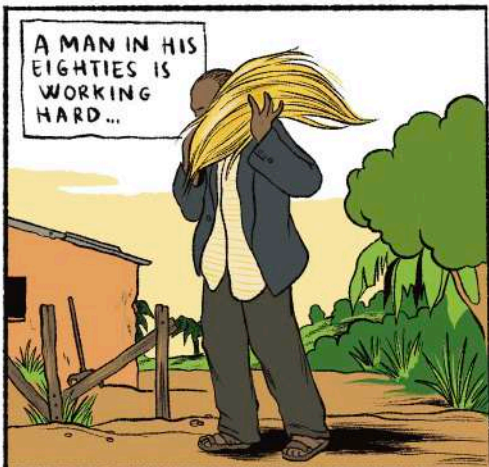


IN THE MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF BUHWEJU,  
SOUTH WEST UGANDA, PEOPLE CULTIVATE  
BANANAS, COFFEE AND OTHER PRODUCTS.

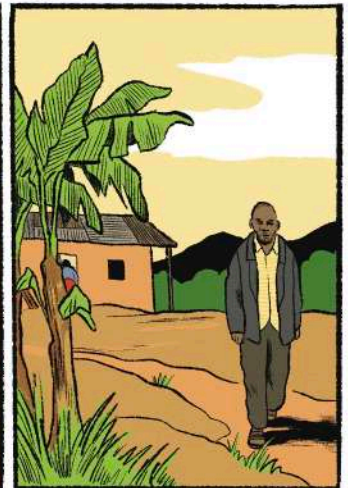
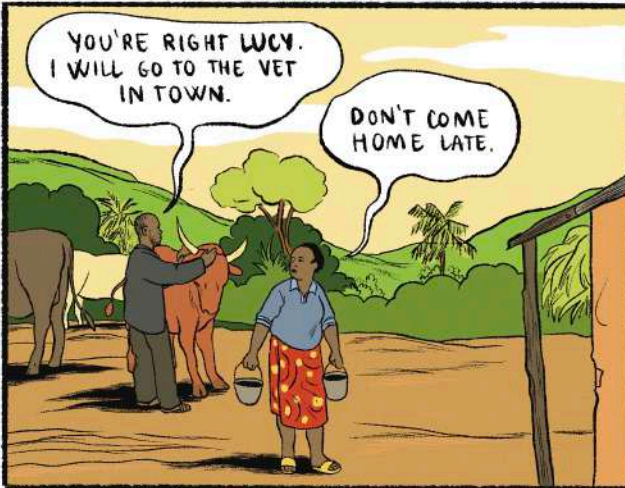


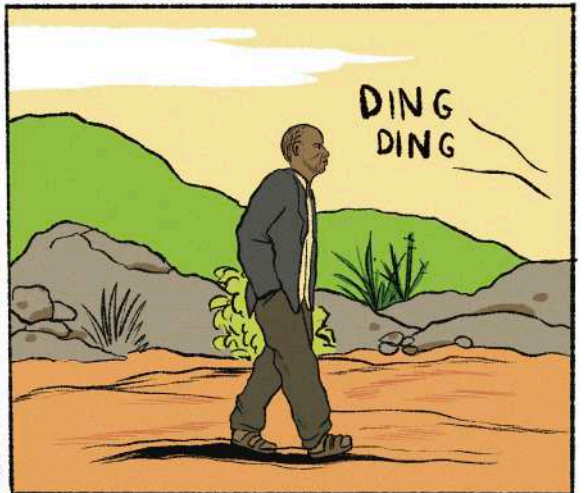
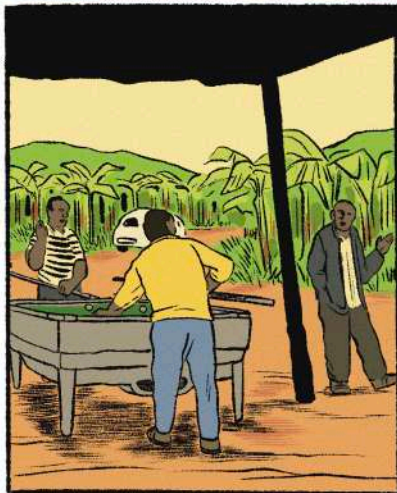
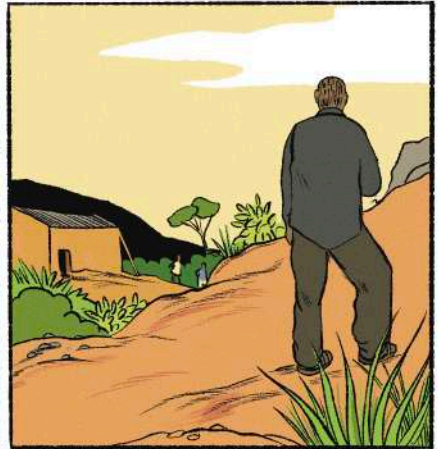
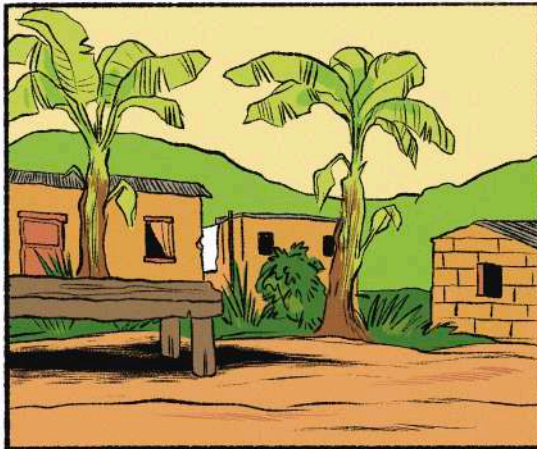
SOME ALSO KEEP CATTLE...

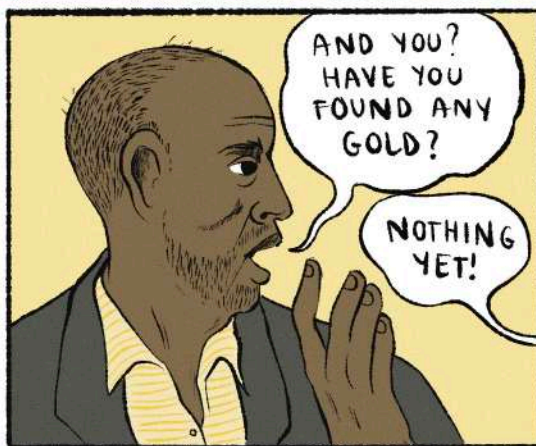
A MAN IN HIS  
EIGHTIES IS  
WORKING  
HARD...

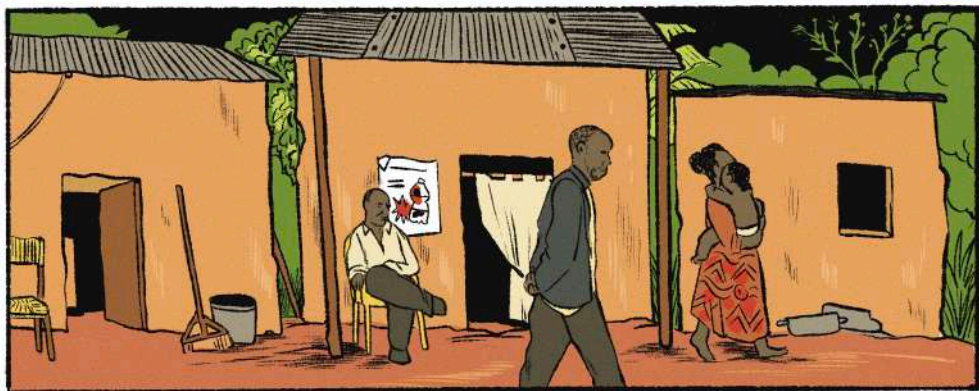
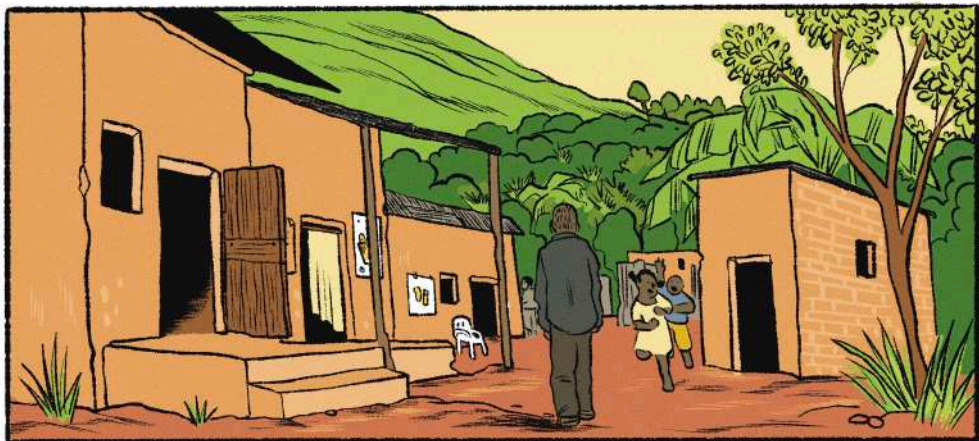


STEPHEN!

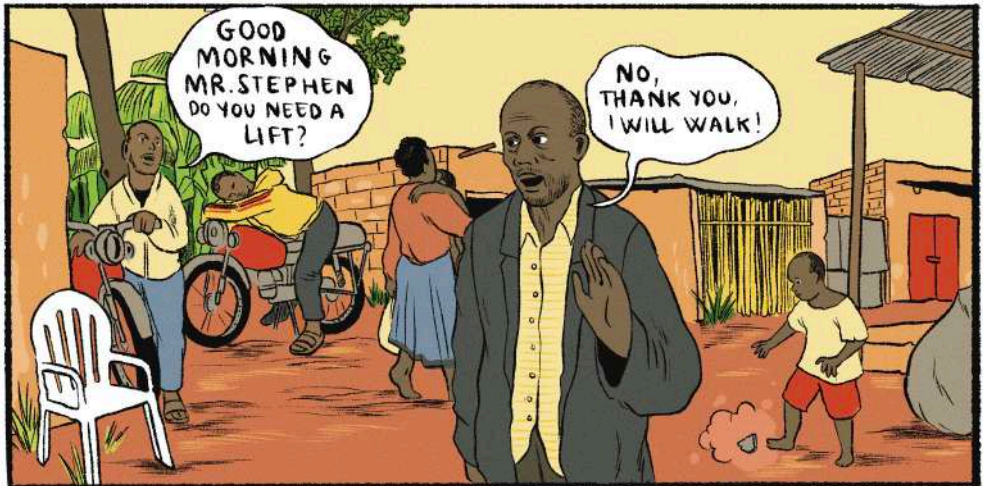
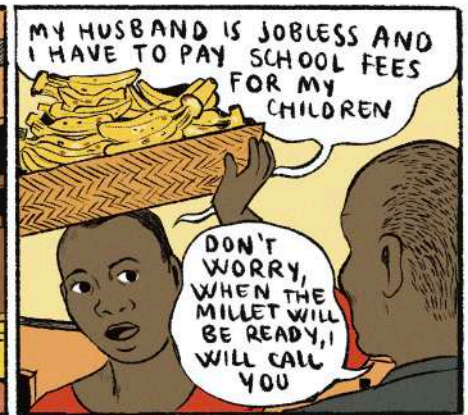
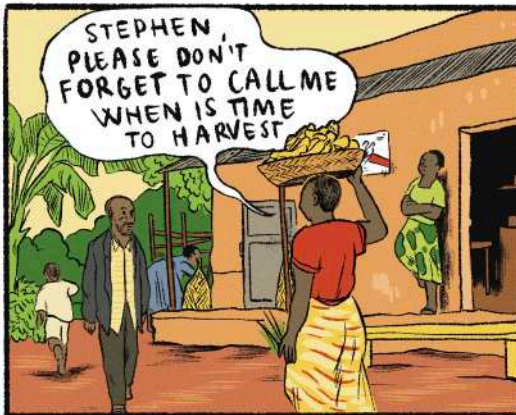


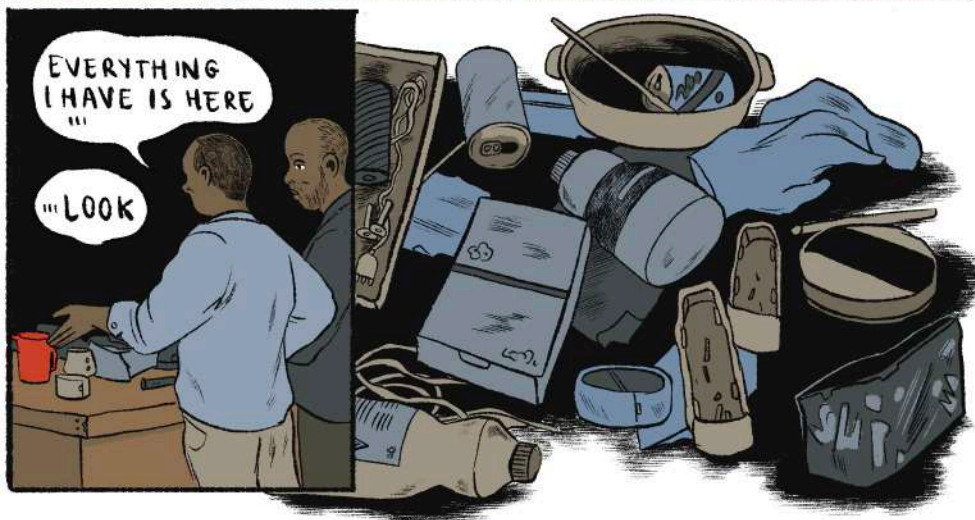














WAIT,  
WHAT IS  
THAT?



THIS IS A WEIGHING  
SCALE FOR GOLD. A MINER  
GAVE IT TO MY FATHER  
LONG  
TIME AGO.



BUT IT DOESN'T  
WORK WELL  
I HAVE TRIED  
TO FIX IT  
BUT...

DO YOU SEE?  
IT IS  
UNBALANCED





I REMEMBER THE FIRST WHITE MEN  
SEARCHING FOR GOLD.

I WAS  
BORN IN 1938,  
THAT IS, 3 YEARS  
AFTER THEY STARTED.

AT THE TIME, THERE WERE FEW  
PEOPLE IN BUHWEJU.  
YOU CHOSE A PLACE AND  
BUILT YOUR HOUSE.  
THE LAND WAS FREE.

THE ENTIRE AREA  
WAS A FOREST INHABITED  
BY MONKEYS, ELEPHANT AND  
MONGOOSES. THERE WERE FEW  
CULTIVATED AREAS.

PEOPLE GREW MILLET,  
CASSAVA, POTATOES, BEANS, GROUND  
NUTS AND PEAS. WE DIDN'T SELL  
BANANAS, WE ATE THOSE AT HOME.


RIWZI RIVER

An illustration showing a man in a white checkered shirt and a hat holding a map, walking through a forest. He is accompanied by two shirtless men, one carrying a large bundle on his head. In the background, there is a small hut and a person standing near it.

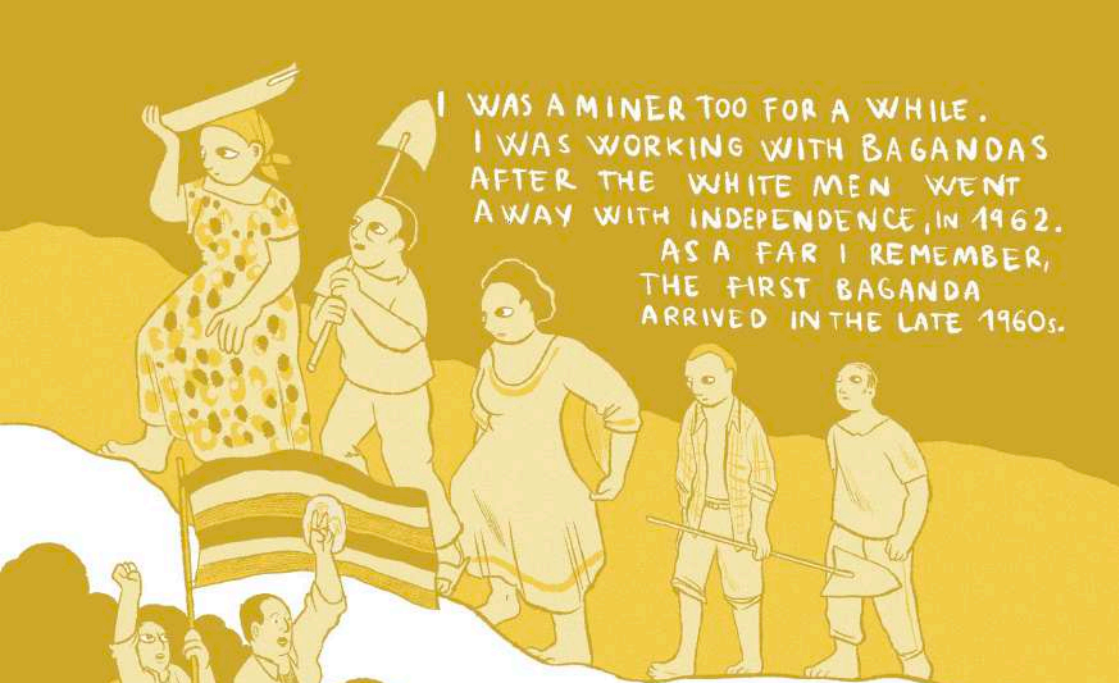
THE FIRST MINERS WORKED ON A SMALL SCALE. THEY BROUGHT IN HELPERS, INCLUDING SOME CONGOLESE WHO LATER REMAINED IN UGANDA.

An illustration showing two shirtless men using axes to cut down a large tree. A large log lies on the ground in the foreground.

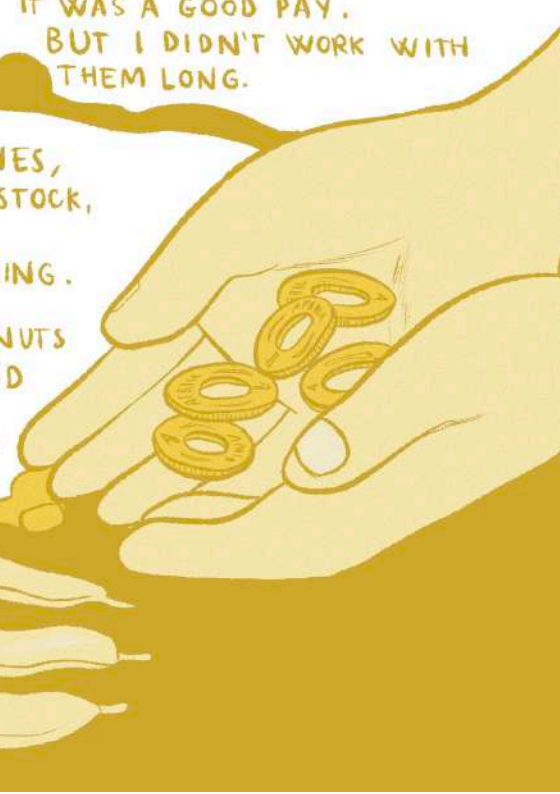
IN THE 1960s THERE WAS STILL A LOT OF VEGETATION, THEN THE POPULATION BEGAN TO GROW, THEY BEGAN TO CUT DOWN TREES TO MAKE ROOM FOR AGRICULTURE AND TO SEARCH FOR GOLD.

An illustration of a logging truck filled with logs, parked on a dirt road. There are stacks of logs and a tree stump in the foreground.

IN THE 1980s, THE NUMBER OF PRIVATE MINING COMPANIES AND FOREIGN INVESTORS GREW. THE LANDSCAPE UNDERWENT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES WHOSE EFFECTS YOU CAN STILL SEE NOWADAYS.



I WAS A MINER TOO FOR A WHILE.  
I WAS WORKING WITH BAGANDAS  
AFTER THE WHITE MEN WENT  
AWAY WITH INDEPENDENCE, IN 1962.  
AS FAR I REMEMBER,  
THE FIRST BAGANDA  
ARRIVED IN THE LATE 1960s.



I WAS PAID 15  
SHILLINGS A MONTH.  
IT WAS A GOOD PAY,  
BUT I DIDN'T WORK WITH  
THEM LONG.



AFTER 2 YEARS IN THE MINES,  
I DECIDED TO FOCUS ON LIVESTOCK,  
FARMING AND TRADING.  
I BOUGHT AND SOLD EVERYTHING.  
MOSTLY LOCAL PRODUCTS:  
MILLET, BEANS, PEAS AND PEANUTS  
BUT ALSO LOCAL BEVERAGE AND  
SECONDHAND CLOTHES.

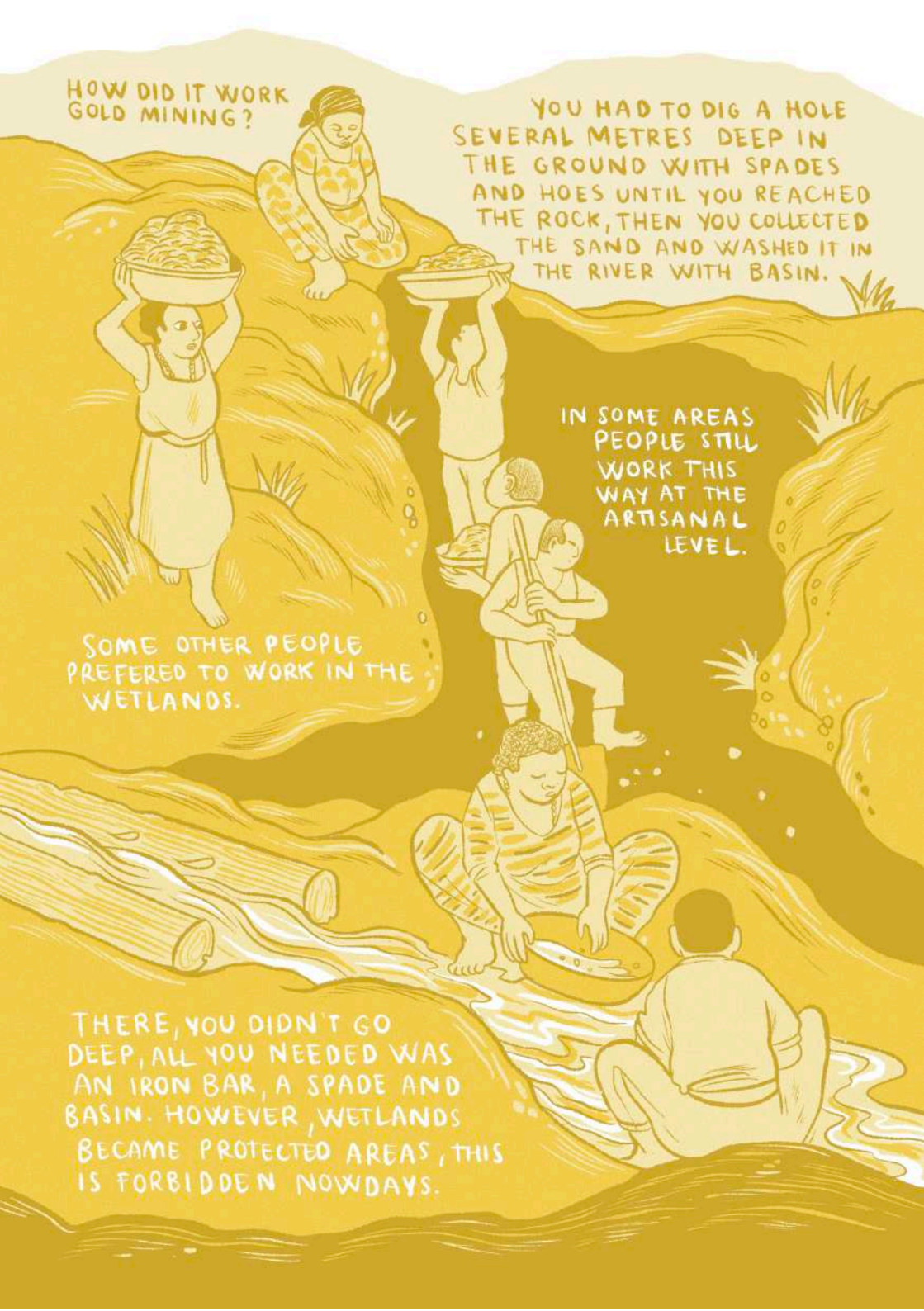
HOW DID IT WORK  
GOLD MINING?

YOU HAD TO DIG A HOLE  
SEVERAL METRES DEEP IN  
THE GROUND WITH SPADES  
AND HOES UNTIL YOU REACHED  
THE ROCK, THEN YOU COLLECTED  
THE SAND AND WASHED IT IN  
THE RIVER WITH BASIN.

IN SOME AREAS  
PEOPLE STILL  
WORK THIS  
WAY AT THE  
ARTISANAL  
LEVEL.

SOME OTHER PEOPLE  
PREFERRED TO WORK IN THE  
WETLANDS.

THERE, YOU DIDN'T GO  
DEEP, ALL YOU NEEDED WAS  
AN IRON BAR, A SPADE AND  
BASIN. HOWEVER, WETLANDS  
BECAME PROTECTED AREAS, THIS  
IS FORBIDDEN NOWDAYS.



WHILE WAITING TO SEE THE RESULT OF OUR EFFORTS, WE CHAT ABOUT HOW WE WILL SPEND THE MONEY. IF YOU WAS EMPLOYED BY A COMPANY YOU RECEIVED A SALARY BUT IF YOU WERE ON YOUR OWN, THE MONEY WERE DIVIDED EQUALLY.



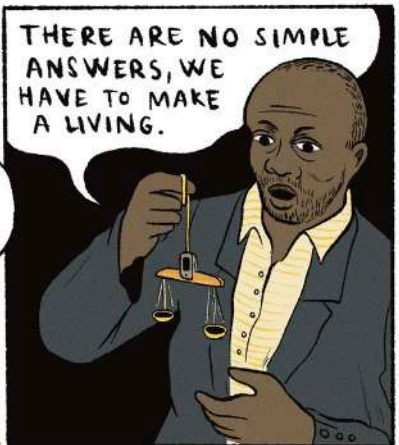
TO SOME, GOLD GAVE HOPE. ESPECIALLY THOSE WITHOUT LAND TO CULTIVATE.

CAN YOU BLAME THEM FOR THIS?



TODAY THE EXPERTS TELL US THAT THE ACTIVITY IS UNSUSTAINABLE.

I DON'T DENY IT BUT...

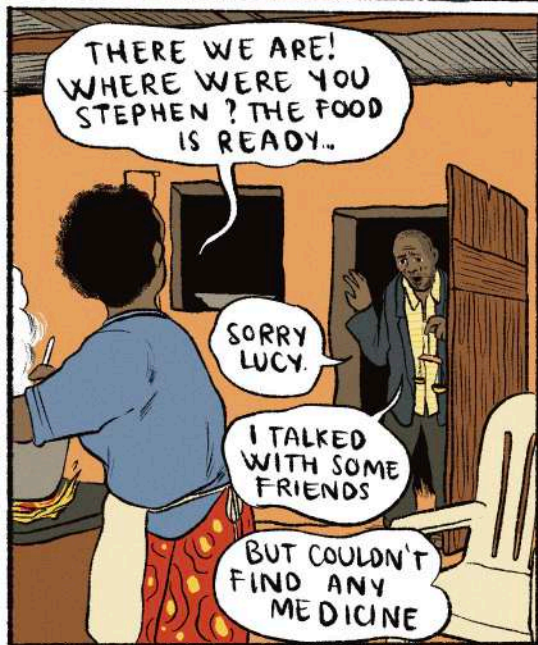
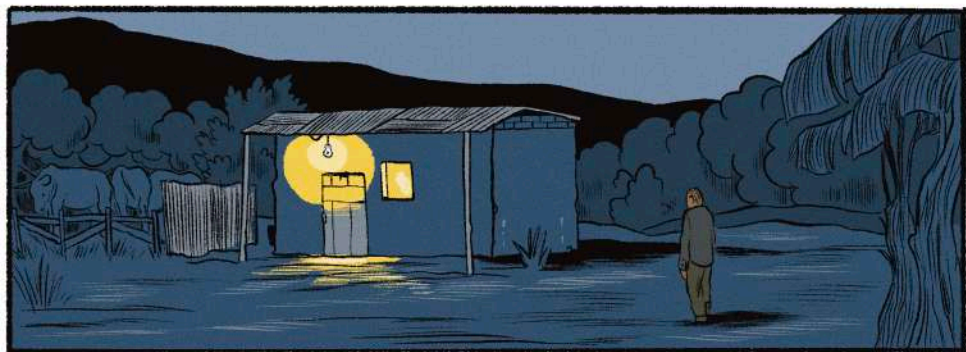


THERE ARE NO SIMPLE ANSWERS, WE HAVE TO MAKE A LIVING.









THERE WE ARE!  
WHERE WERE YOU  
STEPHEN? THE FOOD  
IS READY..

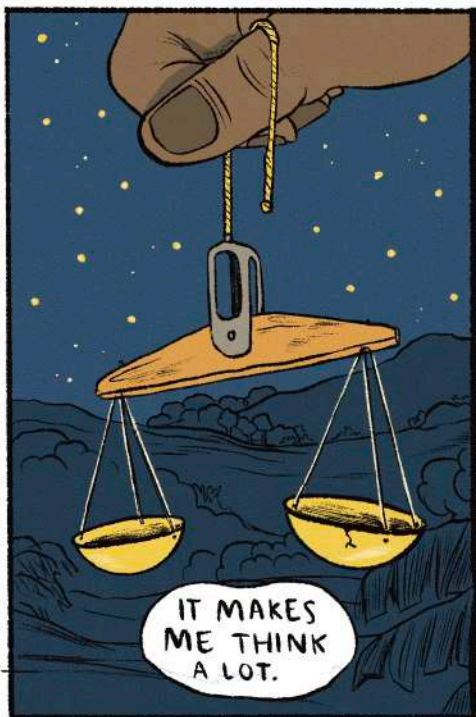
SORRY  
LUCY.

I TALKED  
WITH SOME  
FRIENDS

BUT COULDN'T  
FIND ANY  
MEDICINE



WHAT'S THAT  
THING IN  
YOUR  
HAND?



## **Author bios**

**Lorenzo D'Angelo** is a socio-cultural anthropologist at Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. His research interests include natural resources, extractive industries, environmental anthropology and economic anthropology. He has conducted historical and ethnographic research in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda.

**Eleanor Fisher** is Professor of International Development at the Nordic Africa Institute. As a social anthropologist, her work engages with critical social science perspectives on society and environment, including on artisanal and small-scale mining.

**Elena Mistrello** is a comic book author and illustrator. She has collaborated with various publishing houses, international magazines and organisations to create short comics, murals, illustrations and projects. Her work focuses on real-life comics addressing diverse themes ranging from social to environmental issues.

