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# SUSTAINABLE MINING PUTTING GENDER ON THE AGENDA

COMMUNIQUÉ, MAY 2017

## INTRODUCTION

Oxfam Australia and the Melbourne Business School partnered to host the seventh Sustainable Mining Symposium in April 2017. The event, held under Chatham House rules, focused on gender in the extractives industries. The theme reflects Oxfam's experience that women enjoy fewer of the benefits of mining, oil and gas projects than men, while disproportionately suffering more of the negative impacts.

The symposium provided an opportunity for industry leaders to discuss the challenges and opportunities for companies in ensuring that the potential impacts of extractives projects on women and girls are mitigated, and that women are able to meaningfully participate in company-community decision making processes.

The event provided information and stimulated discussion on:

- the gendered impacts of the extractives industries in different contexts;
- industry experience of inclusive engagement;
- how the industry can facilitate access to the benefits of mining;
- women's participation in the sector; and
- the business case for gender equality and the realisation of women's rights.

The event was attended by 60 people, including representatives from mining, oil and gas companies, industry associations, financial institutions, legal firms, the Australian Government, academia and civil society. Speakers came from Laos, Papua New Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

While the past decade has seen increased attention and awareness to gender equality within the extractives industries, women still face discrimination in all phases of the extractives project cycle and along the value chain. Entrenched gender bias not only prevents women from engaging with and accessing the economic benefits of extractives projects, but manifests in how companies and governments engage with communities at all stages of project activities.

Participants heard that only a handful of the 38 global oil, gas and mining companies included in Oxfam's policy research in 2015 have any mention of women in their community engagement commitments. Similarly, whilst international financial institutions have a host of safeguards for managing the social and environmental impacts of their investments, these safeguards tend to pay limited attention to gender issues. Government policies and regulatory frameworks are also largely silent on the gender dimensions and impacts of extractives projects on women's rights.

Gender-blind policies and practices in community consultation and decision-making processes give rise to the systematic exclusion of women and a silencing of women's perspectives, agendas, and interests in relation to mining, oil and gas projects.

## CURRENT RESEARCH ON GENDER AND THE EXTRACTIVES SECTOR

Participants heard an overview of the latest research on gender in the extractives industries, highlighting some key issues in relation to the role of women – and gender more broadly – in the oil, gas and mining sectors, including:

- gendered impacts of the extractives industries and representations of women as passive victims of or active participants in the sector;
- women's role in resisting the expansion of extractives projects, particularly in the Americas;
- employment of women in the extractives sector, including estimations of the number of women engaged in both the industrial and small-scale sectors;
- the nature of extractives-associated sex-work and gender-based violence in different contexts; and
- industry efforts towards achieving gender balance and equity in the extractives sector.

There is a sense that despite the increased focus on women's participation in the extractives sector, little has changed. Similarly, while the industry has attempted to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, these efforts have not been particularly fruitful. Data on women's participation in the extractives industries from Australia, Canada and the United States has shown that women hold at best one-quarter of the jobs in the extractives sector, and usually under one-fifth. Women tend to occupy clerical or administrative support positions, and the resources sector has been ranked the ninth worst industry in terms of the gender pay gap.<sup>1</sup>

Some recommendations identified in industry reports to increase women's participation in the extractive industries include: marketing directly to women; encouraging more flexible work hours; promoting women as role models; establishing workplace groups for women; and providing training on equal opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

While there is no firm evidence that reaching a 'critical representation level' of women within a workplace will tip the scale in terms of cultural change, deliberate recruitment targets have been shown to have a greater impact on the numbers of women in the extractive industry workforce than other aspects of diversity programs.<sup>3</sup>

### CONTEXT MATTERS: THE STATE OF PLAY

Gender issues in relation to the extractives industries in Laos, Zimbabwe and across East and Southern Africa show surprisingly similar characteristics. There are high participation rates in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) but women are typically underrepresented in the large-scale sector, both in terms of employment and within community consultation and planning processes. Women also tend to be paid less for their work in the ASM sector than men, due to existing gender inequalities and their exclusion from the formal sector.

The impacts of the extractives industries on women across contexts also show parallels. While contributing to overall economic development, large-scale mining often threatens women's livelihoods by restricting their access to natural resources such as forests, which supply timber and non-timber forest products for income; land for cultivating food; and water sources such as rivers. This can also ultimately threaten a community's food security, and has particular impacts on women and girls who tend to bear the burden of any food shortages at the household level due to gender inequalities.

In both Laos and Zimbabwe, large-scale mining often brings about negative behavioural and social changes, such as increased alcohol consumption and extramarital relationships, which can lead to an increase in domestic violence, reproductive health issues, and family breakdown. ASM is also associated with a number of negative health impacts, including exposure to mercury which is used to recover gold.

Resettlement is a key issue for both men and women, but tends to have disproportionate negative impacts on women as they are often excluded from direct compensation benefits due to a lack of land rights and patrilineal systems. While women are more likely to prioritise health, education and water in development decisions, their voices are often excluded from decision-making and discussions around relocation and resettlement more broadly.

Across all contexts, participants heard that we are slow to learn lessons about the gendered impacts of mining, as the same issues keep arising again and again. Women's voices are missing from key planning and decision-making processes, meaning that their needs are not addressed.

Given the size and significance of the sector, there is great potential for the extractive industries to drive transformation and change. However, it is important that those countries in which the extractives industries are emergent, such as Kenya and Uganda, draw on lessons from the more established extractives economies with past experience, such as South Africa and Zambia. Such lessons include the development of gender-responsive legal frameworks, strategies to harness opportunities for women in the extractives value chain, and programs to encourage women and girls to gain the technical expertise necessary to participate in the sector.

## GENDERED IMPACTS AND THE ROLE OF GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Extractive industry projects impact on women and their rights in countless ways. When projects are not managed with gender as a clear priority and with clear strategies in place, the sector can undermine women's livelihood opportunities and their traditional status in the community or household, increase their economic dependence on men, negatively impacting on their health and sense of safety and security, and increase the unpaid work they do in the household. When companies do not make enough effort to ensure that consultation processes include both women and men, the result is that companies can end up perpetuating barriers that further disadvantage women, rather than creating opportunities.



Participants heard that a gender impact assessment (GIA) identifies the likely impacts an extractives project will have on women, men, boys and girls, their rights, and the relationships between them, in mine-affected communities. The information gained through a GIA allows companies to tailor the project towards mitigating negative impacts and enhancing positive outcomes for both women and men from project-affected communities. This can ultimately increase the benefits of oil, gas and mining projects to the women and men in communities surrounding projects.

A GIA can also assist in identifying the barriers to women's participation and encourage inclusive consultation and decision making processes that involve both women and men in project assessment and planning processes. This helps to ensure that mining projects gain and maintain a social licence to operate by respecting the rights of both women and men in affected communities.

Discussion at the symposium highlighted the financial and time burden that companies face in undertaking multiple impact assessments. In addition to the environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) required by regulatory processes, more specific impact assessments, such as biodiversity, health and human rights impact assessments, are increasingly being promoted as best practice. There were suggestions that integrating an assessment of gendered impacts into existing impact assessment processes may be a more practical way forward.

Participants discussed the fact that ESIAs are often developed by consultants to meet regulatory requirements, and are often left to "sit on the shelf" rather than being incorporated on an ongoing basis into extractives operations. While a GIA does not have to be undertaken as a standalone process, the analysis and approach – including engagement strategy – should become a standard operating procedure, and must inform project planning over the long term.

Oxfam is in the process of developing a GIA mobile application that it hopes will assist companies to address the gendered impacts of their operations in a more systematic fashion.

## INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE WITH INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Panellists outlined the factors that foster inclusive engagement and emphasised the importance of sharing and replicating best practice in mainstreaming gender. Relationship building (based on the principles of trust and respect), listening and learning were said to be key for increasing women's engagement and decision-making in the extractives sector. It is also important to have strong gender analysis across the operation and make efforts to remove any barriers to women's inclusion in company-community processes, including affirmative action processes where necessary.

Some specific examples were provided. One company insists that women are present during all community relations meetings, despite male community members attempting to exclude women from decision-making and negotiation processes.

Another company has used a mobile phone-based complaints mechanism, whereby community members could SMS in issues they were facing in relation to the mining project. The local staff would collate the data and communicate it back to the communities. It was noted that over time, women were speaking up more and more in open community forums because they gained confidence through hearing that the company was addressing the issues they had raised. This points to the value of new technologies to help amplify the voices of women.

The panel emphasised the importance of internal champions in pushing the agenda forward on gender issues. It is important to have leadership on gender both at the operational level, to push change on the ground, and at the senior leadership level, to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into corporate level processes. Acknowledging the business drivers for gender is important to gain traction. Building capacity at the site level – for example, having gender focal points – was also useful for promoting the consideration of gender issues. Gender should be integrated at the very outset of the project, and be included in standard operating procedures around the site, including auditing and performance appraisal procedures. It should not be seen as a standalone consideration. External change agents within the community are also important, and companies should identify and support these to bring about changes to gender power relations.

## FACILITATING INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE BENEFITS OF THE EXTRACTIVES INDUSTRIES

Positive economic impacts of the extractives industries at the local level can be classified into direct, indirect and induced impacts. Direct impacts result from expenditures associated with constructing and operating an extractive industry project, for example, labour, materials, supplies and capital. There are also indirect impacts resulting from the suppliers of the project purchasing local goods and services – such as site cleaning, catering and logistics – and hiring workers to meet demand. Induced impacts result from the employees of the mine purchasing goods and services from the local economy. There are opportunities for women's inclusion in each of these areas.

Affirmative action and quotas were mentioned frequently in the discussion about how to increase women's involvement in the extractives sector. It was said that quotas should be applied both "inside and outside the fence" – as well as trying to increase women's employment, companies should make sure community programs are conducted with a gender focus.

Participants discussed how companies can support community development programs that invest in women's economic empowerment, and provided examples of programs in other sectors that have successfully focused on women, such as inclusive agribusiness. Considering that there is generally not an abundance of jobs in the operations phase of a mine, it is vital that women have opportunities throughout the broader extractives supply chain and beyond the extractives industries. Companies can support programs in other sectors to ensure that there are opportunities for business development and income beyond the life of the mine.



Presenters and participants gave a number of examples of companies facilitating women's access to the benefits of the extractives industries. For example, one company created non-traditional employment opportunities in India by providing training so that local women could work for the project as drivers and security guards. The same company collaborated with the Government of Mongolia and local industry to influence a change in law to support women to be able to work in underground mines. Flexible work policies, work familiarisation and mentoring programs have been used to encourage the employment of Indigenous women in Australia.

There was discussion about the role of mining companies in broader social development and in relation to promoting gender equality, with the common dilemma raised about the extent to which companies should take on activities or roles which should be the responsibility of government. Participants emphasised that while it is not the role of companies to fill gaps in social service provision, there is potential for extractives companies to harness their influencing potential with governments to a greater extent, particularly on the promotion of gender equality.

## CONCLUSION

If extractives industries companies are serious about their potential to contribute to positive development outcomes, gender justice must be at the forefront of their reform agenda. Some international frameworks were discussed in terms of their ability to encourage companies to take gender more seriously. For example, discourse around human rights and the UN Guiding Principles have created opportunities or an "entry point" to talk about gender within that framework. The increased focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender also promotes increased attention to gender issues in terms of development.

There is a strong case to be made for companies to pay closer attention to gender in their work. Companies that ignore issues of gender or do not pay significant attention to women's rights may fail to meet their human rights obligations and face possible legal action or conflict with communities. Not engaging with half of the population at the community level means that companies lack the information and perspectives to avoid particular risks, which may have reputational and financial flow-on effects. Participants emphasised the importance of acknowledging the business imperatives or drivers for extractives companies to engage on gender issues – as well as identifying the business risks of not doing so – in order to advance the agenda.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## RESOURCES

Oxfam Australia publications on gender and mining can be found at: <https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/mining/the-gendered-impacts-of-mining/>

Macdonald, C, 2017, *The role of gender in the extractives industries*, UNU-WIDER, [www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/wp2017-52\\_0.pdf](http://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/wp2017-52_0.pdf)

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<sup>1</sup> Macdonald, C 2017, *The role of gender in the extractives industries*, UNU-WIDER, viewed 30 May 2017 <[www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/wp2017-52\\_0.pdf](http://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/wp2017-52_0.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> Laplonge, D 2014, *So You Think You're Tough: Getting Serious about Gender in Mining*. Perth: Factive, cited in Macdonald, C, 2017, as above

<sup>3</sup> Williams, C, Kilanski, K and Muller, C 2014, 'Corporate Diversity Programs and Gender Inequality in the Oil and Gas Industry', *Work and Occupations*, 41(4): 440–76, cited in Macdonald, C 2017, as above



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