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Women and Mining: the Role of Gender Analysis

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There is no doubt that mining has gendered impacts. Late in 2007 Oxfam Australia convened the 'Pacific Women and Mining conference' held in Papua New Guinea. At the conference women talked about the devastating impacts that mining can have on both their local environment and their own lives. As one of the participants from Papua New Guinea said, "When you have environmental damage done to oceans, rivers and jungles, it affects families and because women take on board family issues it is a woman's issue".

Before I talk more about the gendered impacts of mining and the role of gender analysis let me first introduce you to Oxfam Australia and our mining advocacy program.

Oxfam Australia is an independent, secular and community based aid and development organisation. Oxfam Australia is part of the Oxfam international family – along with 12 other 'Oxfams'. Oxfam's vision is a world in which people control their own lives, their basic rights are achieved and the environment is sustained. We aim to help people achieve their basic rights including their right to sustainable livelihoods, basic services, life and security, to be heard and right to equity.

Oxfam works in countries across the Pacific, East Asia, South Asia and Southern Africa, well as with indigenous communities here in Australia. We work in the areas of long term community development, emergencies, and campaigning and advocacy. Our campaigning and advocacy work is important as it addresses some of the root causes of poverty and injustice – this includes climate change, unfair trade practices, and poor business practice including in the mining sector.

For over a decade, Oxfam Australia has been working with overseas communities affected by Australian mining companies and established the Mining Ombudsman in 2000. Through the Mining Ombudsman project we work with affected communities to help them understand and defend their rights, and where appropriate, bring together companies and communities to address community grievances.

The Mining Ombudsman takes up a case at the request of communities affected by the operation of an Australian mining company, or at the request of their local support organisations. Community claims are checked through site investigations and by consulting with the community, company and other stakeholders before taking action. If the company is not responsive we may then make our findings public through publication of Mining Ombudsman reports for example.

It is important to understand that Oxfam is not against mining. We believe that mining and other private sector investment is capable of generating economic growth, employment and reducing poverty. In fact our Mining Ombudsman work in Fiji involves working with communities who want a mine – one that provides safe working condition and decent wages though. As we have seen through our work, mining can have negative consequences for human rights, women's rights and the environment.

Through our Mining Ombudsman work, various workshops and conferences for mine affected women that we have hosted over the years and through the International Women and Mining Network, we have seen, and women have told us, that the impacts of mining are not gender neutral.

Women often experience the direct and indirect consequences of mining in different and often more pronounced ways than men do.

For example:

The payment of compensation and royalties to men 'on behalf of' families and communities denies women access to and control over the financial benefits of mining. This encourages women's economic dependence on men, disempowering them and may exacerbate existing inequalities. Additionally, women headed households may not receive payments if they do not have a male representative.

Displacement and the shift from a traditional subsistence economy to a cash-based economy often leads to the loss of traditional values and way of life. This can result in the diminishing of women's traditional status in society, particularly where newly-created gender roles emphasise women's work in the domestic sphere only and undermines their productive and leadership roles.

The effects of environmental damage can undermine women's capacity to provide food and clean water for their families, and subsequently lead to an increase in their workload such as having to walk greater distances to access water, fuel/wood, forest products and land to plant food crops. For example women in Gaigafu, Papua New Guinea, are reluctant to drink the water from boreholes and hand dug wells in their village because they believe that the groundwater has been contaminated by the river which has been contaminated by the Tolukuma Gold Mine which dumps its waste into the river. These women face a 1 hour walk through the jungle to find clean water – alternatively they use water they do not consider clean and therefore use less with negative consequences for health and hygiene.

Women also tell us that when children get sick, due to pollution of waterways or air pollution, it is the women who are responsible for their care including travelling long distances to get proper treatment. Taking care of sick children adds to women's work loads.

As men gain employment in mines, there is can be a withdrawal of male labour from traditional subsistence activities. This results in an increased work burden for women, who become solely responsible for subsistence activities and providing for families. Additionally there may also be a breakdown of family structure with men sometimes leaving their families to seek employment at a distant mine.

Women also tell us that due to the decline of traditional mechanisms of social control and the influx of a transient male workforce, social and health problems become more prevalent in communities. These problems can include increased alcohol use, domestic violence, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS – a particular problem in countries where HIV is prevalent or on the rise – and prostitution.

Women can also experience discrimination in the mine workplace. Often employment and training opportunities are prioritised for men and women are only allowed to work in the most menial, low paid positions. For example, women from Fiji told us that the type of jobs that women can do at the Vatukoula mine is severely limited with many women working as 'hand-pickers' which is part of the ore sorting process. Women are paid F\$1.35 per hour, which is approximately A\$1 per hour, for their work which is less than what men would receive for the same work. Women work long shifts of ten hours and are required to stand on their feet the whole time often having to lift very heavy stone. Maternity leave is not provided and women are required to reapply for their jobs when they wish to return to work after child birth.

Finally, the failure to consult with women when negotiating access to land, compensation and royalties disempowers women, and may go against traditional decision-making structures. Women are often excluded from decision making processes all together even in areas where there are matrilineal systems of land ownership and inheritance. The absence of women in decision making processes and leadership positions are areas of particular concern to many women that Oxfam works with.

Little attention is typically paid by mining companies to gender. This lack of attention results in real impacts on women as I have just described. Mining cannot be said to be contributing to sustainable livelihoods or sustainable development outcomes where women are ignored.

So how do we address this? Mining companies should respect human rights ensuring that they do no harm to local people and communities, and protect the environment. Oxfam Australia also believes that Australian mining companies should the high social, environmental and labour standards expected of their Australian based operations to all their overseas operations.

Social and environmental impact assessments must be undertaken. A gender analysis is a key part of the social impact assessment process and a critical part of the planning process.

Gender analysis allows project planners to consider the impact that a project, such as a mining project, may have on women, men, boys and girls, and on the economic and social relations between them. Gender analysis can ensure that neither women nor men are overlooked or disadvantaged by development projects, increase the effectiveness of projects, assist project staff to identify barriers to women and men participating in and benefiting from a project, and assist project planners and implementers to identify appropriate strategies for involving both women and men and meeting their needs.

Various gender analysis frameworks have emerged in the last few decades. There is no 'one size fits all' and each has strengths and weaknesses. Their suitability depends upon the context in which they are being used but all have the potential to be useful when considering the gender impacts of a mining project.

Oxfam Australia recommends that mining companies should consider the established frameworks and the tools and concepts contained in each as a starting point, and consider how these could be used to draw out the information needed to assess the gender impacts of a mining project.

Oxfam is about to release a new report on mining, women and gender analysis. In this report we propose a framework for assessing the gender impacts of mining projects. I will now briefly describe this framework.

An essential first step in gender analysis is the collection and compilation of baseline data that is disaggregated by sex, and other categories such as ethnicity and socio-economic status/level of poverty. Information must be collected in consultation with women, men, Indigenous Peoples, members of different ethnic groups and classes, women's organisations and other community organisations. The analysis that then follows must also be done with participation from both women and men.

A thorough context analysis should follow and allows mining companies to gain an understanding of the communities that may be affected by a mining project, how they are structured, how they function, and the roles and responsibilities of women and men in these communities.

To understand the way a community functions and the diverse impacts a mining project could have, it is essential to analyse the roles and of women and men, and how the relationships between women and men determines these roles and responsibilities. Key questions to ask are who does what, and who has access to and control of resources and the benefits derived from these resources. Next it is important to understand what influences the differences in the division of labour and access to and control of resources.

Finally, the context analysis should consider an analysis of the various institutions that are relevant to the community and that may also perpetuate gender inequality. This is important because the causes of gender inequality are not found in the household or the family only. It is important to understand that nature of the relationship between relevant institutions such as the police and army, or local council of chiefs, and the company.

The previous steps have established how gender relations and gender roles are structured within a community, and what influences this. The next step is to identify the issues introduced by the mining project, and examine how they intersect with and impact upon gender relations and roles.

Examples of factors commonly introduced by mining operations are displacement and loss of land, environmental impacts, the availability of formal employment to community members and the influx of a transient male workforce. The intersectional analysis should examine how the development of the mining project will interact with and impact on:

- Gender and power relations within the community;
- Women's access to and control over resources, including the potential benefits of the mining project;
- Gender roles and responsibilities,
- Women's participation in community management and decision-making processes including in relation to the mining project;
- The gender division of labour and workload of women; and
- Community well-being, including health, livelihood and education

Having explored the gender impacts of the mining project on members of a community, the next step in the gender analysis is to examine how the project specifically responds to women's needs. The first step is to identify the practical gender needs and strategic gender interests of women in the community.

A Gender Needs Assessment asks:

- What do women need to assist their current activities, ie what are women's practical gender needs?
- What do women need to achieve greater equality in the community, ie what are women's strategic gender interests?

At this stage of the gender analysis and project planning, it is important to check that women have equal participation in the decision-making process and that women have some control over the decision-making process to achieve equality of control over resources and the distribution of benefits. By focussing on this, mining companies can avoid situations where they might otherwise fail to consult with women when negotiating access to land, compensation or royalties.

The next step in the gender analysis requires the development of recommendations designed to ensure that the negative gender impacts of the mine can be avoided or minimised, and that the project promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. To ensure continued attention to gender issues during the lifecycle of the mining project, an internal checklist should be developed to ensure that decision-making and other activities incorporate a gender perspective.

Following completion of the gender analysis, it is important to conduct gender audits or reviews to monitor how the company actually addresses gender issues and to identify any unforeseen gender impacts. Gender audits should be undertaken at regular intervals throughout the life of the mine and should comprise both independent external and community-based analysis.

This proposed gender analysis framework will not provide all the answers, and importantly not all of the questions, but rather is intended to assist mining companies identify the potential gender impacts of their operations, and to get companies thinking about how they might do their own gender analysis.

Gender analysis is a tool with enormous potential. It ensures that gender is included in the planning and implementation of mining projects, and enables projects to be more responsive to women's issues. This offers mining companies an opportunity to contribute to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in affected communities. By undertaking gender analysis mining companies can show their commitment to women, women's rights and human rights.