

# Mainstreaming gender in the mines: results from an Indonesian colliery

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## Engendering the mines

Gender mainstreaming, defined by the UN Economic and Social Council as '[t]he process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels...' (United Nations 1997) is now commonplace in development programmes worldwide. If the extractive mining sector bears any relation to 'development' then this traditionally masculine industry must adopt policies favouring gender equity. How could the gender-mainstreaming process become standard practice within the sector? Globally, certain trends can be discerned (Lahiri-Dutt 2004) in the mining industry:

- Mining is finding 'new ground' in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which in turn is contributing to national development in these regions (MMSD 2002). For example, Indonesia is now the fifth largest producer of coal after the USA, China, India, and Australia.
- It is increasingly recognised that throughout the 'developing world', informal, artisanal, and small mining is being carried out by many more people than are employed in the formal sector (Hentschel et al. 2002).
- The potential of both formal and informal mining to reduce poverty, and the role mining can play in creating livelihoods in mineral-rich areas, is now acknowledged by development planners (McMahon 1998).
- Mining is increasingly mechanised, more 'hi-tech', safer, and cleaner, and employees are becoming better paid.

The mining sector has conventionally left women at the periphery of its vision, despite women's active participation over the years. Consequently, 'engendering' or gender mainstreaming can be seen as the right direction to be followed if mining is to yield benefits for ordinary people in the communities in which the mines are sited.

An awareness of gender issues has come to the mining sector through four distinct routes:

- The rising demands of gender equity in all walks of life.
- The unearthing of the history of women in the mines ('we too were there') has made people conscious of their past roles and present contributions.
- The increased awareness of the economic potential of artisanal and small mining, both of which involve a large number of women in developing countries. Little is known as yet about this form of mining or about the livelihoods created by women in different locations.

- The highly controversial issue of whether mining actually fosters development in the communities and nations in which its operations are located. This has been the subject of intense debate and is now being tackled through global initiatives such as the Mines, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD) process, the Extractive Industries Review (EIR), and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

The differential positions of women and men in mining reflect the gender relations that prevail in the wider society and are perpetuated by gender ideologies, whereas economic differences among women result from the inequalities of class and ethnicity, and are structured by the mode of production. Within mining companies, women's share of managerial positions is commonly small or non-existent and their rates of career progress slow and uneven. Men generally form the majority of managers, top executives, and higher-level professionals, while women are still concentrated in the lower categories of managerial positions. In offices, they are in 'soft' jobs such as office administration and clerical tasks.<sup>1</sup>

The question that follows is that of how to 'engender' the mining sector because, despite good intentions, there is as yet no set of best practices for companies to follow. In other words, the sector needs to develop its own processes to ensure gender equity, and thereby turn the mining process into one that benefits both women and men. However, before we turn to the tools, let me briefly describe why it is so important to engender the mines.

Gender mainstreaming in mining is justified for four reasons:

- Women often are the weakest and poorest in the local community. In traditional cultures, such as those in the remote regions of Indonesia that will be described in this paper, women feel they should keep quiet and hide their opinions and feelings. Consequently they become double victims, within the community and outside it.
- Women are often the most affected by the adverse impacts of mining. Many multi-country studies have shown that women find it difficult to cope with the social, economic, and cultural changes brought about by mining expansion. Resettlement and rehabilitation often mean the loss of a livelihood base for the poorest families where women have the least power to stand up and express their difficulties.
- Women in poor communities are often responsible for household survival by collecting food, fodder, and fuel for the family's subsistence as well as caring for children—roles that are often not formally recognised or officially accepted.
- The basic right to be heard, enabled, and empowered applies equally to women (ILO 2003). Planning processes have neglected this right, taking it for granted that planning for men by men would automatically improve the condition of women.

More effective mining and more sustained economic development in mining regions can only happen when women and men alike, especially those in leadership roles, see the relevance of strategies to promote gender equity within the company as well as outside it. Apart from the greater efficiency of working in this way, mining can only be an effective vehicle of economic development in the Third World if gender concerns are built into every aspect of project development.

### *In search of tools*

The various gender-mainstreaming initiatives that have been taken up by international funding agencies or mineral associations provide useful guidelines, but do not in themselves constitute a sound theoretical base from which to speak convincingly and with authority. The water sector,

however, has produced some tools for gender mainstreaming, which can be used in the mining sector.<sup>2</sup> One such tool is ‘gender audit’ (Swirshi 2002).<sup>3</sup>

The gender bias in the mining industry starts in the workplace but has multiple effects in disempowering women and entrenching gender inequalities in its region of operation and influence. A gender audit examines every aspect of an organisation’s employees using quantitative and qualitative data in order to take stock of the issues involved (Hunt 2001). Some of the questions that it asks are: Why does the company hire women? Is it simply opportunism? Is it in response to any company or government policy? Who are the female employees and what are their attitudes to what is still an uncommon job for women? What opportunities and limitations do women face in a large mining company? How do women perceive their position within the company?

## Engendering the masculine corporate culture

The gender assessment and appraisal described in this paper was undertaken through field-work at the Kaltim Prima Coal (KPC) mine, which is located about 50 kilometres north of the equator in the remote settlement of Sangatta, the capital of East Kutai Regency (Kutim) in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. An ISO 14001-registered company, awarded for its sound environmental management, KPC has been employing women in its workforce since 1987, though without having a defined gender policy. Started as a joint venture by BP and Rio Tinto as a mining concession in 1982, KPC is now a fully Indonesian-owned company, with a lease over 90,000 hectares until the expiry of the concession in 2021. Its production has risen steadily turning KPC into one of the world’s largest export collieries. The mine has attracted immigrants from around Kalimantan, and it is vital for KPC to build good relations with its employees and with the surrounding community. For Indonesia, mining is an important revenue source and has a potentially major role to play in eradicating poverty and fostering development in the remote and inaccessible islands (Tandjung and Sutomo 1998; Hull 2001; Hayes 2000).

The masculine corporate culture is particularly prevalent because KPC is not only a mining company but is located in an Asian country with its own distinct gender norms and values. Male views dominate and many male managers feel that women are not fit to occupy high positions. The small proportion of women in KPC’s workforce is indicative of such attitudes and exemplifies culturally and socially rooted perceptions.

The gender audit I undertook in KPC was qualitative in nature and backed up by KPC employment data. Whereas some aspects are more measurable than others (such as the percentage of females in various job categories), the eliciting of attitudes and perceptions of/towards the female workers requires alternative research techniques. Since much of the research sought to understand the attitudes of women and men towards women’s involvement in mining, the research process was essentially participatory. This means that after briefly introducing myself and my work, I went on to describe my research intentions and areas of enquiry. Before starting the conversation, I usually obtained the person’s consent to participate in an informal interview.

The research explored participants’ accounts of their experiences through unstructured and free-flowing conversations about themselves; their work and the work of those they know; questions of identity and relationships with colleagues, superiors, and family members; questions of power and change. Casual conversations initially focused on everyday chores at home and at work as well as perceptions of work. There was no conscious effort on my part to do ‘scientific’ or ‘statistically sound sampling’, though I in fact interviewed a representative proportion of women in KPC.

In the audit, I classified the interviewees by employment category, ranging from machine operators through supervisors and administrative staff to Indonesian and expatriate managers. Most conversations were conducted on site or at home, by arrangement.

## Some results

Cultural and social attitudes towards what constitute 'male' or 'female' jobs often result in occupational segregation, its extent varying according to the specific nature of the job and to the country in which the operation is located. Women comprise fewer than 5 per cent of all KPC employees, though they make up 31 per cent of the Indonesian workforce as a whole. The rather small percentage of women in KPC is therefore worth further examination.

Since 1987, 308 women have entered the KPC workforce, of whom 161 have since left for one reason or another. The trend since 1992 has been a slight decrease in the proportion of women in the total workforce. Just over half of female employees are in the 'white collar' or administration-related sections, the remainder working in various operational areas. The preponderance of women in the office environment is not uncommon, and has to do with reasons of comfort, status, inclination, and ability. In addition, girls from middle-class households are more likely to be educated. However, the small proportion of women in mining operations (3 per cent of total) is also significant because it represents 34 per cent of the total female workforce. I therefore gave particular attention to this category of worker. The female operators in the mines, driving heavy machinery and trucks day and night, provide an example of women 'out there' doing a hard 'masculine' job. The most noteworthy point to emerge from the interviews is the enormous job satisfaction these women experience. They feel proud and self-confident about doing a job that is commonly seen as difficult, and their earnings lead to far-reaching changes in improving community welfare in their remote places of origin.

The ages of women in KPC ranged from 22–49 years, averaging 33 years; women's average length of employment is currently about nine years, but this might rise as KPC itself matures. Almost all of the long-term women employees are in the 'administrative' sections. The average length of employment of the 161 women who have left KPC was only four years. Many of these had left for reasons of ill health or because the job they had been taken on to do had been completed. It appears that women face a difficult time after they have been working for about four years, often because they marry and have children. The lack of childcare facilities is a main reason for women leaving KPC, often because they have migrated from elsewhere and do not have traditional systems of family support while they are at work. Socially accepted gender roles have changed little and often women bear the burden of the proverbial 'double shift' of work at both home and workplace. Of the married women, 32 per cent married after they joined the workforce and 56 per cent have husbands who are employed by KPC.

## Issues arising from the audit

The interviews revealed various difficulties facing women employees, of which some of the main ones are described below.

### *Conflicts in negotiating gender identities*

Working in the mines as operators of heavy machines may or may not bring changes in gender identity: the main job of a 'traditional' good woman is to mother children and look after the household, while these women are working in a 'male' job on an equal basis with men. I asked one female operator whether she was aware of being 'special' by virtue of her work.

She said not, because her female and male colleagues are doing the same job. When she goes back home, she just behaves like any other housewife, so that the neighbours see that she is just 'like them', nothing different. Another from a farming family of Sulawesi said that her girlfriends tell her that 'working in the mines is a man's job', giving her the feeling that she might indeed be different and special. If she has a daughter, she hopes that she too will work in the mines. However, in the same breath, she added that she hopes her daughter would be higher up in the mining hierarchy.

### *Productivity, promotions, and career prospects*

So far, no woman has been promoted from the position of operator to that of supervisor. Consequently, women's career aspirations turn towards getting office jobs or staying at home to care for children. This is despite women operators seeming to be more efficient than men.

### *Risk-taking, safety, and discipline*

A union leader underlined the correlation between discipline/safety and gender codes, claiming that women operators are careful and safer than men, but often are more exhausted during night shifts after the birth of a child. Lack of childcare support from spouses and family leads to chronic fatigue for some women, a condition that could be potentially fatal.

### *Culture at work*

Indonesia has strong gender codes outlining what a person can or cannot do. Culture also influences the workplace in other ways. A female trainer noted that female operators react differently to training, mentioning that women who have 'zero experience'—first-generation workers from rural areas—feel embarrassed to move about freely. This leads to uneasy body language at work, and could perhaps be tackled by providing special induction for women.

Another cultural constraint lies in the belief among female and male operators alike that certain areas of the mine are dominated by evil spirits.

KPC has brought many changes in the area of its operation and in the lives of its employees in particular. For instance, it introduced denim jeans as a convenient and sensible workplace uniform for all employees. Those aspects of culture that are specific to gender issues need to be dealt with openly.

### *Gender-specific amenities*

Out on the mining site, women complained of the inadequate number of female toilets, lack of drinking water, and poor lighting at night.

### *Period leave*

A complicated issue in KPC involves the cultural practice whereby because women who are menstruating are conventionally treated as 'impure', they tend to want to stay at home during their periods and are offered a performance-related cash bonus to continue work. The KPC policy is at odds with that of the Indonesian Government.

## Ergonomics

Both women and men complain of lower-back pain mainly caused by the fact that the mining machines are meant for bodies that are larger in size than the average Indonesian.

## The Indonesian government's approach

Over the past 30 years the Indonesian government has moved from a position focused on home and family to promoting women's role in the welfare of the family alongside the promotion of both parents' roles and responsibilities in their children's education. It places great emphasis on gender equity in the workplace as well as in the wider society. However, Indonesian laws also prohibit women from doing night-shift work and from working in the actual mines – though government policies at various levels are not entirely clear-cut on the latter. To hire women in round-the-clock shifts, KPC has had to obtain special permission from the local government.

## Gender policy: the first step

The knowledge base for building a gender-mainstreaming policy in the mining sector has so far been rather narrow and incomplete. Gender has been an unresolved issue for mining companies like KPC particularly as it brings to the fore conflicts between the traditional value-systems of the employees and the local communities from which they are drawn, and modern methods and the global nature of operations and processes within the company. Undertaking a gender audit is a first step towards resolving these conflicts.

Mining can play a catalytic role in developing countries in bringing about overall changes in the physical, social, and cultural landscapes in the areas where the mining company is based, and communities would naturally expect that the companies should pay attention to questions of gender equity both in their own operations and in terms of their wider impact.

Creating a workplace that offers equal opportunities for all means turning the existing gender equations around. This can be done only with the goodwill and support of a company's leadership. A gender audit of the kind described here is only one step towards creating policies and practices to mainstream gender in mining companies. It is not going to be easy. Cultural and social attitudes towards what constitute 'male' or 'female' jobs result in occupational segregation and tend to become cemented as a belief system about the 'natural' division of labour. The extent of the problem of course varies according to the specific nature of the job being done, and also according to the legal, cultural, social, and economic backdrop of the country in which a mining operation is located.

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## Notes

1. This gendered occupational segregation is common in other organisational hierarchies and is by no means unique to mining.

2. The website of the Gender Water Alliance ([www.genderandwateralliance.org](http://www.genderandwateralliance.org)) provides free material on gender mainstreaming.
3. A number of organisations provide guidelines on conducting a participatory gender audit (for instance, SNV), while the ILO and others have published useful accounts of their own experiences of undertaking such audits.

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