



Mining for Development Conference 2013

Sydney, Australia

SESSION SUMMARY - PLENARY THREE

Addressing gender issues in mining for development

Katherine Heller, Dr Helen Szoke, Ume Wainetti, Doris Eaton

With the extractive industry becoming more prevalent in developing countries, the importance of consulting the men and women of the community is essential, as discussed in a panel session addressing gender issues in today's Mining for Development Conference 2013.

At the PNG Community mining consultations in 2001, it was attended by women of the local community, but none spoke. On consultation, women were interested in the issues surrounding local mining, but they didn't feel they had a voice.

"It was only when they were consulted privately, and a women's only space was created that the women's perspective could be understood. This perspective is essential in sustaining the local community," said Ms Katherine Heller, Social Development Specialist, Oil, Gas and mining, The World Bank.

"The creation of a women's only space enabled women to be heard. The subsequent women in mining program has been instrumental in the development of mining in PNG," continued Ms Heller.

Women hold a key role in developing countries. They are the social caretakers and yet receive an unequal distribution of benefits

Dr Helen Szoke, CEO of Oxfam Australia agreed.

"Gender is a critical issue for the mining industry. If a country is to be sustainable and equitable, it needs to support the participation of women. And often it's not there," said Dr Szoke.

"The impacts of mining are not gender neutral. Women do not obtain the same benefits as men from mining. Women are often the homemaker, finding food and water for their family. If the land they use to farm is extracted through mining and the village is moved on, they lose their ability to be able to feed the family and may also have to walk further for their water supply," said Dr Szoke.

Oxfam has created a gender impact assessment that gives a voice to women and helps to understand how women are impacted by mining.

"The gender impact assessment helps identify potential gender impacts of mining projects and introduces approaches that mining companies can use to combat any potential negative impact.

"The assessment ensures more women have control over their lives and live free from violence through changes in attitudes about gender relations. It also facilitates increased

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involvement and leadership in institutions, decision-making and change processes,” Dr Szoke continued.

It is important women feel safe in their own community and mining can generate multiple threats.

“With the introduction of new mining development it can bring many transient men, creating a threat of violence and sexual harassment to women. It is important that women are made to feel safe, and that resources are not taken from them and not replaced,” said Dr Szoke.

“For a long time organisations and government have assumed what women want,” said Ume Wainetti, National Program Coordinator, Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee PNG. “Women are not empowered. There is a lack of resources and when programs are developed, if they don’t consult the local women, nothing is done.”

“The national counsel of women has been appointed in the assembly generating awareness for women. Community programs have tried to address the needs of women, but it is only the start and more needs to be done,” continued Ms Wainetti.

If actions are taken without consultation, it is unlikely to deliver the assistance that is required.

“The needs of women and the community are at the ground level. Simple measures can be made such as the need for government to put in standards for companies and workers to abide by. Everything is in its infancy, there is a long way to go before changes are implemented to the desired results achieved.

For Doris Eaton, Co-chairperson, Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation, she has seen the Aboriginal land excavated by mining companies and it is only now that agreements are acknowledging the original owners of the land.

“Native title groups do not have equal power in negotiation with mining companies and yet the land is our heritage. It was given to us from our ancestors and it needs to be passed to the next generation.

“Mining companies should respect the original land owners and shifting attitudes are appearing,” said Ms Eaton

In 2011, mining company Fortescue and the Njamal People in the Pilbara region of WA, entered into a project area land access agreement in relation to Fortescue’s North Star magnetite project.

“It is projects like the North Star project that helps protect our country and protects our culture. We need to think about our children, and ensure they have a secure a future.”