

IM4DC

Action Research Report

SUMMARY

Researchers:

Kathryn Robb, Mark Moran, Victoria Thom* and Justin Coburn*

School/Centre:

Institute for Social Science Research

University/Institutions:

The University of Queensland

*World Vision Australia

Key themes:

Governance and Regulation

Community and Environmental Sustainability

Key countries:

Bolivia

Completion:

April 2015

Research aims:

The objective of this study was to explore how foreign mining companies can better work to advance Indigenous governance and sustainable socioeconomic development. This was achieved through:

- a review of the existing literature
- a review of Bolivia's legislative framework
- 91 interviews across government, Indigenous organisations, NGOs, the mining industry, academia and consultants
- case studies in two mining communities

For further information on this action research:

Contact person: Mark Moran

issr@uq.edu.au

Indigenous Governance and Mining in Bolivia

Bolivia, like many other Latin American countries, is set to expand its extractive industry and much of this will take place on the lands of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous organisations in Bolivia are well organised, easily mobilised and have a long history of conflict with state-run mining companies, foreign mining companies and more recently, local mining cooperatives. Given the complexities, some mining companies seem to take the short-term view that it is easier to bypass representative Indigenous organisations, working instead directly with preferred community members and other local organisations

This study has demonstrated the negative impacts of this approach, both to the Indigenous communities involved and ultimately to the mining operations themselves. Even when acting with good policy and intentions, mining companies have often failed to understand the complexity of Indigenous governance and their unique needs and capability constraints. They have also invested in development projects based on preconceived notions of development, which may differ from or exclude Indigenous people's own visions. Furthermore, the significant sums that companies pay in government taxes and royalties are not necessarily translated by the state into improved services for Indigenous people.

In Bolivia, there is an increasing demand and many opportunities for mining companies to undertake a more purposeful developmental approach when entering and living alongside Indigenous communities. Mining companies can take an intentional role to develop sustainable partnerships, to contribute to local participatory development and to complement, rather than displace or duplicate, municipal government and international Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) efforts. A number of proactive measures can be followed, including facilitating Free, Prior and Informed Consent, community agreements, and Indigenous and municipal development planning processes.

The report lists 12 major findings of the study grouped within three themes: (1) the politics of mining policy and legislation; (2) Indigenous territorial management and visions of development; and (3) approaches to Indigenous community engagement and sustainable development in practice. It provides a series of 12 guidelines based on these findings for mining companies working with Indigenous organisations and for international NGOs that are partnering with mining companies and Indigenous organisations.