

MANAGING CONFLICT AND ENSURING PEACE IN THE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY

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OVERVIEW

Mining activities and competition to access natural resources and mineral wealth can give rise to conflict. Areas of contention emerge out of latent inequalities in power relations, particularly when related to gender, inter-generational or geopolitical disparities. The participants in the roundtable on managing conflict and ensuring peace discussed political strategies to address inequalities in the extraction of mineral resources. Drawing on perspectives from civil society, the private sector, multilateral organizations and academic research, the roundtable highlighted initiatives that aim to mitigate the potentially negative economic, social and environmental impacts of mining activity. In addition to regional views, focused on Africa in particular but with mentions of Latin America, specific cases were presented on Burkina Faso, Zambia and Sweden. The examples highlighted the commonalities in experiences across extractive locales and the different scale of effort required to ensure peace and engagement between mines, communities and the state.

Disputes in the extractive sector are often connected to who benefits from mining activity, changing land use rights, environmental concerns and the rapidly shifting socio-economic landscape. These changes affect young people and women in particular, especially those in rural areas where mines in effect create an enclave economy that socially and economically separates those who work directly in the extractive sector and those outside it. Participants in the roundtable presented initiatives to create a bridge for dialogue between these different stakeholders, as well as examples of pragmatic engagement with mines and the state. While acknowledging that some of these efforts have been successful on a local or regional scale, the often lucrative nature of the global demand for mineral resources means that not enough effort is invested in them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Recognition of the highly unequal position of communities affected by mining, in comparison with the influence of mining companies and the state, has led some civil society organizations to adopt an increasingly pragmatic approach. In Zambia, a civil society organization representing a community that lost its lands to mining activity and was forced to relocate decided to identify and persuade sympathetic influential state actors to work with the affected community to negotiate mitigation. As in similar cases around the world, the rural community in Zambia, particular the women, had lost access to water, their smallholdings, firewood and access routes. Without their means of production, their dignity was also taken away. Thus, rather than agitating for the community to be embroiled in cycles of protest, with little hope of a positive outcome given the politically marginalized situation of rural women and youth, an alliance of influential church leaders worked with the communities to get state actors involved. Such alliances can lend a weightier voice to otherwise excluded groups, forcing often reluctant mining companies to take community concerns seriously. These strategic partnerships have grown up across Zambia and are addressing emerging concerns, such as the capacity and wisdom of a country with weak environmental regulatory mechanisms mining toxic mineral resources such as uranium.

Strategic relationships between communities affected by mining and state-owned companies, like some in Sweden, can create a lack of clarity over who is responsible for addressing the impacts of mining, such as the damage to land and the relocation of homes. However, state-owned companies might be more responsive to



redistributing mining revenues than privately owned ones. Nonetheless, fluctuations in commodity prices can negatively affect a company's best intentions to address the impact of mining or reimburse the local community. Such concerns highlight the need for overarching institutions that consider overlapping rights, in particular for indigenous groups that the world over experience underdevelopment and loss of their way of life through degrading mining practices.

There are cases of mining companies working closely with local communities to ensure that they are having a positive impact on the areas in which they operate. In Burkina Faso, for example, a mining company operating in a city of over 100 000 inhabitants must consider the complex interests exposed by working in such a context, especially when it comes to identifying leaders considered legitimate to work with. Furthermore, the company is attempting to develop programmes that provide women with jobs, while at the same time navigating cultural sensitivities around local gendered expectations, such as the view of some local men that women should look after the domestic sphere. Tensions in mining can be exacerbated by cultural misunderstandings and failures to identify legitimate leaders or brokers. The Burkina Faso example highlights the need for companies to tailor their corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices to local needs rather than non-reflexively transferring policies from other contexts.

However, most CSR programmes are voluntary and governments in Africa are moving towards imposing legal obligations on mining companies to mining-affected communities. The aim is to allow for dialogue between multiple parties and for expectations to be understood in advance. To achieve this, more transparency is needed around the mining process. One initiative by a World Bank project, the Africa Mining Legislation Atlas, makes a database of all of Africa's mining laws accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. The database also has a guide template that can be used by local communities to formulate agreements with mining companies. The comparative aspect of the database allows different country governments and regions to identify regulatory gaps. Initiatives such as these, which are on an international scale, aim to highlight and address regional inequalities, and to steer policies in the extractive sector towards those that invest in people, focus on healthy rural sectors rather than rapid industrialization and minimize mining's footprint by careful land mapping.

Issues over land use and mapping apply not just to large-scale mining, but also to small-scale artisanal and informal mining. The repercussions of the uneven distribution of mining revenues sometimes mean that youth and women engage in informal mining activity, bringing them into conflict with larger mines and the state. Initiatives that recognize the need for informal mining livelihoods and provide support for them can bridge the gap between small-scale and large-scale mining.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

A wider comparative perspective should be taken of the mining communities affected by the extractive sector. In the context of weakly regulated mining sectors in some countries and the invisibility of certain groups, such as youth and women in rural communities or those who belong to marginalized indigenous groups, the scale of the issues around mining tends to be underestimated. The most important mining companies around the world tend to be multinational giants consolidated into a small number of commodity traders. An intersecting international response is needed to ensure peace in the extractive sector. There might be a need to map not only legislation, but also the state of affairs in each extractive locale around the world, creating an open platform for communities, in particular youth and women affected by mining, to highlight their grievances and expectations, and seek redress. The roundtable discussion indicated that there are initiatives to manage relations in the extractive industry, but they are not shared and tend to focus on narrow issues, which limits the potential for fruitful engagement between communities, mines and the state.