

Chapter 6

Mining and Women: Business and Community

ABSTRACT

Whilst CSR is significant for nearly all MNCs, CSR activities have been limited to certain activities and focus areas. In developing countries such as Thailand and Laos, CSR activities focus on economic and social development in many forms. However, we learn from this study that the CSR movement would advance if different types of MNCs actively participated in various socioeconomic activities in host countries. In most developing countries in Asia, such as Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, or Cambodia, CSR by MNCs is concerned with the integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations into business strategies and practices. However, this is not as simple as it sounds. Some argue that CSR is beneficial to MNCs that do integrate it into their everyday practices; others say that it is only a way for MNCs to promote new products and features. This chapter argues that although a feminist epistemology of mining would query the representation of women as ‘victims of mining’, there are various ways for mining MNCs to empower and promote women in the mining community. The authors discuss lessons from Laos and Thailand in order to stimulate a rethinking of mining itself, as an area representing an environment, which is both feminine and masculine.

INTRODUCTION

The most successful companies are those that integrate sustainability into their core businesses. (Jim Owens, CEO, Caterpillar)

This book argues that we can move away from the traditional masculine norm of the mining industry, well-explained by Lahiri-Dutt (2011, p.195):

The masculinity of popular images of the miner is ingrained in the corporate machismo of the globalised industry, controlled by shareholders based in the global North. Explorers' adventures and heroism fuel this machismo; vivid accounts of the first sightings of a famous ore body turn discoverers into cultural heroes who wander across usually hostile landscapes until they find the mineral deposit. Such corporate fuelled hyper-machismo is common in representations of mining entrepreneurs or overpaid executives which are found widely in popular media.

Business involvement in community issues is not uncommon. Communities face various issues in which business organisations can play various roles to show their commitment to the community. In this project, we have learnt that mining MNC motivations for addressing developmental issues, such as gender equality and poverty alleviation, could arise because of either a strong ethical commitment to their stakeholders in the community, or their strong practical interest in the issues of host countries.

Mining MNCs in this study demonstrated both old and new schools of CSR strategies and implementation. Both mining MNCs in this study are large scale and complex in terms of operations and people involved in the organisations. The nature of large-scale mining MNCs is to employ primarily male workforces, having more men than women in management and various other jobs and functions. They may make a series of gendered impacts on local communities. Where mining companies act as development agencies, their programmes may also cause further social change.

In many cases in both countries, we affirmed that CSR in mining has now moved beyond the occasional philanthropy of the past, where donations or the building of infrastructure required only minimal interaction with local communities. Many large-scale mining companies now have departments dedicated to community development and sophisticated policies for community

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