Development-Oriented Corporate Social Responsibility

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MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

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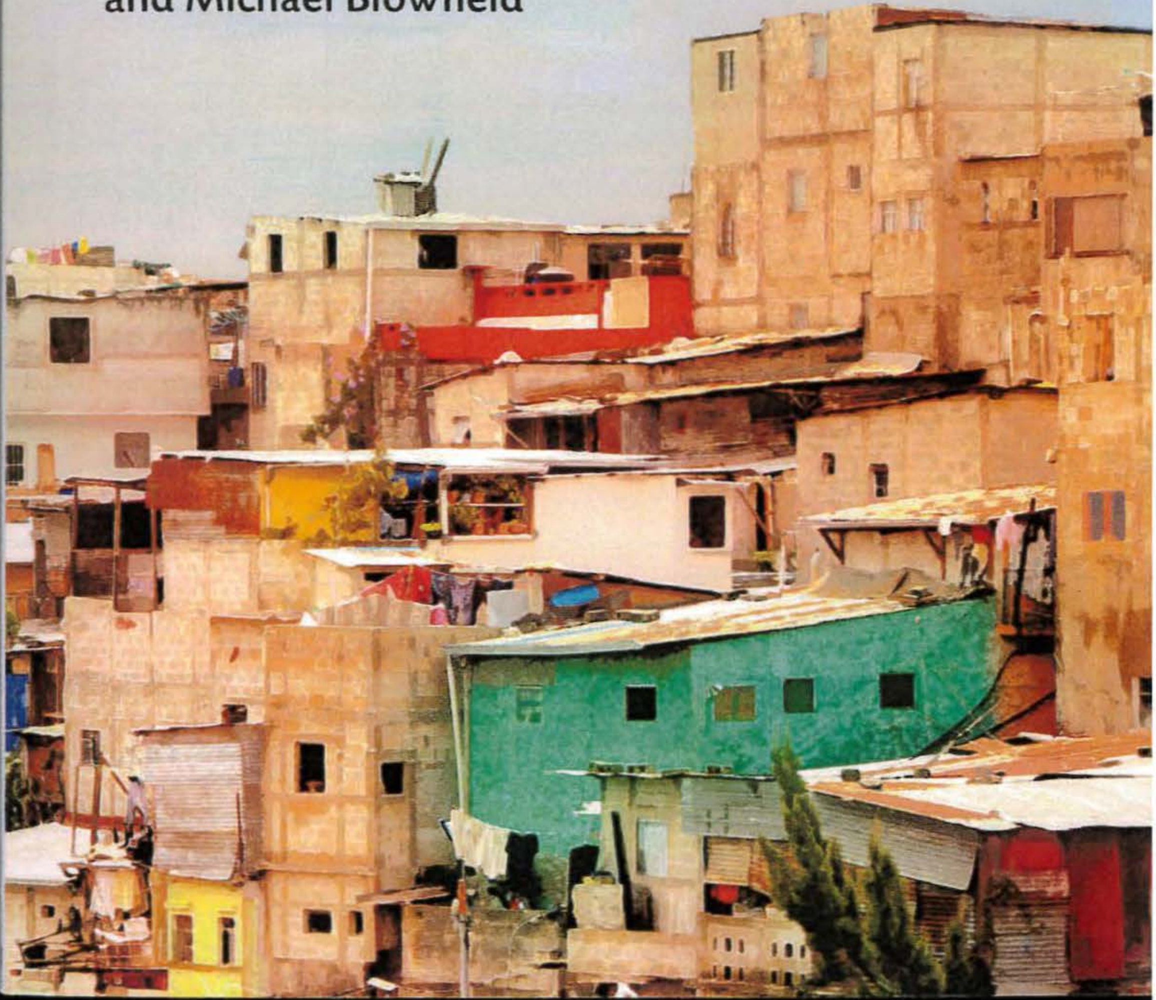

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Operational intent and development impact in mining

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This chapter focuses on contemporary debates about mining, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and development. The authors engage the question of how observers are to interpret the intentions and actions of a mining operation relative to its development impact. The authors draw on fieldwork data collected through a commissioned review of a community development program being implemented by a mid-tier mining company. By taking an "embedded" rather than an "isolated" reading of corporate contributions to community development, the authors conclude that the program represents a tactical move on the part of the company to pacify local stakeholders with developmental "gifts", while denying them legitimate access to meaningful influence over mining and associated activities. The program positions the interests of the community as secondary to the interests of mining and limits the company's ability to move towards a development-oriented approach to CSR.

John Lubbock, a nineteenth-century English banker, once quipped that "what we see depends mainly on what we look for". For social scientists, subjective interest and positionality are crucial elements in attempting to understand perspective and intent. In this chapter, the authors embrace Lubbock's remarks as a starting point for examining operational intent in relation to local-level "corporate community development" initiatives in the minerals sector. When operating in developing countries with weak or corrupt governance structures, mining companies often adopt a truncated view of their development contribution. This occurs in part because it serves to minimize corporate social responsibility (CSR) for areas that are perceived to fall within the domain of the state, and in part because some companies are either unable or unwilling to construct or negotiate a development proposition that takes account of the operating context. To support this line of observation, the authors draw on fieldwork data collected through a commissioned review of a discrete community development program being implemented by a mid-tier mining company operating in mainland Southeast Asia.

In undertaking the review, we took the community development program to be a practical reflection of the company's overall approach to development. A range of factors present in the operating context were taken into account, including community expectations, local-level impacts, and aspects of the state–company–community interface. Our premise is that the relationship between these factors provides a useful indicator of operational intent. Contemporary development scholars interested in mining and CSR suggest that "intentional" corporate community development cannot be viewed in isolation from the multifarious social, ecological and economic transformations wrought by mining (Banks *et al.*, 2013). In a similar vein, others argue that companies cannot offset harm by doing corporate "good deeds" elsewhere (Ruggie, 2008). The suggestion here is that "impact" and "contribution" cannot be viewed in isolation; either from each other, or the context in which they interact. Our case highlights the practical importance of ensuring that operational "impact" and development "contribution" are viewed as co-terminus relative rather than in isolation.

At its core, our analysis confirms that layered readings and multiple perspectives are required in order to understand corporate intent with respect to community development initiatives in mining and CSR, and its relationship with operating context, local impacts and organizational systems. A major constraint within the mining industry is its ability to identify the links between operational impacts and community development outcomes. Another constraint is in the industry's own understanding of the internal dimensions of community relations practice (Owen and Kemp, 2014). The industry is not adept at identifying the influence of its own interests over social processes, which means that companies often fail to read the social landscape and account for any more than the "business case" for contributing to community development. Some commentators reinforce this view by suggesting that "development contribution" and "business case" require compatibility (Harvey, 2014). A certain level of compatibility is certainly reasonable. Our findings suggest that when business priorities dominate all other dimensions, a transactional, "user-relationship" between company and community readily ensues (Kemp and Owen, 2013). In developing country contexts, this can lead to a situation where corporate community development can appear to serve local people, but is in fact configured to serve the interest of the business.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: The first section describes the programmatic context of the case study itself. It outlines the methodological approach used for the review, as well as a descriptive summary of the program. Section two presents a discussion of two leading themes from the fieldwork. The first examines the mining operation's rationale for engaging in community development. The second discussion follows the consequences of this rationalizing processes on internal and external relationships, and the effect that this has on the strategic direction and utility of the program. In the final section we conclude with a call for a more coherent approach to understanding community development that enables an "embedded" reading that accounts for the operating environment and the operation's full suite of organizational processes and systems and a set of final reflections.

3.1 Programmatic context

This chapter is limited by the need to maintain anonymity around the location of the project site. This limitation reflects two significant barriers to knowledge building and knowledge transfer on the social dimensions of mining. The first barrier is that researchers who are interested in learning about mining and social performance often struggle to gain access to or cooperation from mining companies. The second barrier is that professionals and academics who are able to gain access through commissioned work are typically bound by confidentiality clauses which prohibit the publication and public sharing of information about the company (Kemp and Owen, 2013). Of the options available to us, we have elected to present the findings on the basis of an anonymous case study.

Despite this limitation we are able to provide useful contextual and background detail that does not compromise the identity of the operation and the communities involved. The mine is owned and operated by a mid-tier company with the national government holding a minority share. The country context presents unique challenges in terms of legislation, governance and rights for both the company and affected communities. As one of two remaining single party states in mainland Southeast Asia, there are few contexts that allow for direct comparison, and given the deleterious effects of this style of governance on freedom of speech in particular, information on contentious issues and projects is often difficult to source or share. Transparency around national revenue and expenditure, policy development, together with the state's protection of human rights all remain active challenges for the government, lenders, developers, civil society and citizens.

The operation is located in a rural and remote part of the country, itself having a history of war and conflict as countries in the region sought independence from colonial rule. Poverty levels for communities in the areas adjacent to the mine are broadly commensurate with those in surrounding districts where large scale mining is not a factor. Small increases in human development indicators have been recorded, but these are largely attributed to employees of the mine, many of whom have migrated to the area in search of economic opportunity. The general poverty context has not improved in the 15 years since mining commenced, despite improvement in roads, water and access to electricity to a small number of surrounding villages. Agriculture remains the dominant form of livelihood, however mining and natural resource development are widely understood as having the largest impact on gross domestic product (GDP) and state revenue.

A major limitation to improved human development has been the incremental "land take" by the mine, which has impacted or excised areas that communities have historically used for crops, rearing livestock or foraging either for foodstuffs or other valuable materials. The company's pattern of "recompense" has been both inconsistent and minimalist, other than in circumstances where operational access was urgent, in which case, compensation rates were inflated, creating new local-level inequalities. Changes to land tenure, land availability, and an increasingly cash-based local economy have meant that affected communities have fewer natural resources by which to meet basic provisioning needs. Changes in the local economy have brought a system of progressive inflation. Communities in the local area remain vulnerable to food insecurity. Those without access to mining or other employment and who are reliant on subsistence farming increasingly find themselves in especially precarious circumstances.

3.2 Sample and methods

In undertaking the review of the mine's community development program, we examined background documents (e.g. project plans, communication materials, evaluation reports etc.) and conducted a range of interviews on two separate site visits. A total of 27 interviews with 58 people were undertaken for this review with representatives at the company's country office, and at the operation, including community development staff (see Table 3.1).

Women and men were evenly represented in the overall sample, although men were more prominent in higher-level discussions. Representatives from local government agencies were also interviewed, as were local community representatives, community and village groups in near-mine and exploration communities. Across the review, the research team visited a total of six villages that were actively participating in the project, several of which were ranked in the "poorest" category, according to defined government criteria.

A semi-structured interview protocol was applied, with individual and small group discussions conducted through interpretation in the national language and English. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the methods applied.

Table 3.1 Description of sample

Sample	Description
Size	58 individuals
	Approximate equal number of men and women
Interview participants	Senior managers at operational level [n=9]
	Company community development supervisors and staff [n=14]
	Senior local government officials [n=3]
	Community leaders and representatives [n=17]
	Other community members [n=15]

Table 3.2 Description of methods

Method	Description
Technique	Face-to-face, individual and group interviews and observations
Language	Official national language (with interpretation to-from English)
Instrument	Semi-structured interview protocol
Duration	45–90 minutes
Location	On-site at the mine, in villages, at local government offices
Recruitment	Voluntary, confidential
Data	Verbatim transcriptions
Analysis	Thematic coding for themes and sub-themes

3.3 The community development program

The community development program that was subject of the review is a small-scale program that supports village participation in managing a local grant scheme. The primary scope of participation is around needs identification, decision-making, planning and implementation of village development activities. The company funds a team of dedicated community development staff tasked with program coordination and ensuring that villages adhere to an agreed set of criteria. Criteria outline expectations relating to gender representation, processes for acquiring approval for program activities from local authorities, and a well-documented plan of implementation, monitoring and reporting. The team comprises three female and four male staff. Two of the male staff are members of an ethnic minority group from the local area. Other staff are from the national/dominant ethnic group and fly in from different (but urban) parts of the country.

At the time of the review the program was in its fifth year of activity. The program was established in 2007 in response to a collective request from six near-mine villages which had experienced the full weight of mining impacts. The local and regional government had excluded these villages from government-sponsored initiatives on the assumption that they were accruing direct economic benefits from the mine (e.g. preferential employment and local business contracts). The six villages requested that the mine address their exclusion through an assistance program where they received direct funds, and had decision-making power over allocation of grant monies. With approval from the local government, the mine agreed to establish the program with the six villages. One of the early objectives of the program was to build a program that provided an alternative to existing "top down" models of development and the dominant patron-client relationship between the company and community (or government and community). While the program has evolved in scope and size since inception, its emphasis on participation, community benefit and gender representation were described by most interviewees as a consistent feature of the program.

The geographic scope of the program has grown significantly since 2007. Additional villages have been added over time with each new round of grants, largely in response to requests from the local government. The company has also added villages in its exploration area, essentially as a pre-emptive relationship building exercise ahead of drilling activities. In the future, the company plans to add villages on the basis that they are ranked "poorest" against government poverty rankings. These villages are in the company's lease area but not all of them have immediate exploration potential. No villages from outside the permit area are included in the program. Land access for mining activities and geographic proximity to the mine are the primary criteria for inclusion.

The program comprises five per cent of the company's overall in-country development spend.[1] The village grants can be used for a defined range of projects, including: small-scale village infrastructure construction and/or renovation; livelihood development; training and skills development; access roads and tracks and/or water and sanitation projects. The mine's departmental budget, including for the program, is approved on an annual basis, so planning horizons are not long-term and there is no guarantee that the program will continue. Projects awarded under the scheme must be completed within the year. None of the original participating villages had been transitioned out of the program.

In summary, it is notable that compensation payments have increased exponentially in both quantum and frequency over the past decade. This is a reflection of the company's incremental approach to land acquisition and a community more prepared to "hold out" for higher rates. As the project has expanded, the company has systematically recorded impacts through a series of discrete studies that are required by regulators for project permitting. However, findings from these studies are not well aligned or integrated within organizational systems (e.g. impact

1 The remainder is comprised of regional and national level development initiatives much of which is spent away from the footprint area of the mine. The company also operates a donation program administered from the regional office.

management and mitigation planning, engagement, grievance handling or development initiatives). In this sense, impact studies make reference to development, but do not take the full suite of development impacts into account. As discussed below, the dominant discourse was that of social licence; a live and tacit discourse driving CSR and development strategy in mining. This approach privileges those villages, such as the original six, that are most vocal, and most able to influence, disrupt or affect land access or production goals.

3.4 Discussion

3.4.1 Different readings and surface analysis

In our introduction we casually referred to the English Banker John Lubbock, and his light remarks on the nature of human perspective. The point we are looking to emphasize here is that motive and intent are important drivers and need to be considered when constructing and (equally) deconstructing analysis. To understand organizational intent, we interviewed senior managers at the operation and at the regional office and asked each person what they perceived to be the objective/s of the program. What we found was that few participants were able to provide an empirically informed set of responses, and simply reflected a certain accepted wisdoms or assumptions about the community, its needs, and the role of the company as a private developer. The company's "surface" read looks stark against the backdrop of perspectives from other stakeholders, including the community, and the context within which the operation is located.

Managers who were involved in or familiar with the program referred to its origins as an "appeasement strategy" for the six near-mine villages. While the original intent of the program was to ease tension with immediate host communities, it was not configured as a remedy or redress mechanism but a "relational mechanism" with "development benefits" attached. In this sense, the program targets impacted communities without the intention of addressing impacts, but rather, of maintaining land access in exchange for development goods. The scheme is considered to be a capillary program that forms an extension of larger-scale contributions that have profile at the national level, but bear little relation to the aforementioned effects that the mine has had on the community.

What company representatives nominate as "effectiveness criteria" provides one indication of where corporate priorities may lie. Exactly what is considered to be effective was not always clear amongst those managers interviewed. One manager explained that while the expenditure is small, the program is effective as "micro-level" CSR initiative. Another manager explained that the program provided "reputational value" because villagers do not tend to recognize the company's other more financially significant contributions such as those made through the government Trust Fund, or as part of development partnerships at the national level. It was the direct nature of the donation from the company that was spent on visible village level infrastructure that was clearly important to the company. Most other managers simply explained the program as a vehicle that helped to "smooth the way" and to support the company's "social licence to operate".

To understand the logic and rationale of the program, we also asked managers to describe the main objectives of the fund. Most senior managers referred to the program as a "capacity building" or "empowerment" program. When prompted, none of the senior leadership team could provide further explanation regarding the status or effectiveness of the program. In the end, most said the program was a mechanism through which the company could provide a "donation", "gift", "grant" or, in one case, a "handout". One senior manager said that while it was not altogether clear what the program was about, his approach was to support the expenditure because it enabled the company to contain costs and restrict the operation's spend per village. The program clearly provides the company with a defined level of financial control. What the company tended not to define, however, were program aims or objectives. Nor were outcomes formally monitored via an agreed set of indicators. The process aspects were monitored by staff on an ongoing basis. Where monitoring proved to be less than rigorous was around demonstrating development impact.

In terms of aims and objectives, several managers claimed that there was an operational benefit to having a scantly defined strategy. They maintained that this absence provided the business with flexibility in terms of how it responded to requests from local government and meant that they could approve development expenditure "as required". At the same time, however, the absence of a formal strategy does leave the company open to what managers referred to as "demands for development" where stakeholders leverage benefits based on points of corporate vulnerability (e.g. time-frames for exploration, land access or mine infrastructure). During the review, it was clear that "leveraging" was fast becoming the dominant approach to securing resources for local development.

We asked other groups within the company about their understanding of the program, and motivations for being involved. Program staff said that, first and foremost, they were servicing the mine's agenda in terms of enabling land access to areas of interest, either for exploration or mining. In addition to enabling mining, a range of other priorities were mentioned including capacity building for local women and ethnic minority communities. Gaining the support of local government was also a nominated priority that the program itself targeted. Staff readily acknowledged that the program was not designed to prevent or mitigate impacts or serve as a redress mechanism. Nonetheless there was a strong sentiment that the program served as some kind of reparation for impacts to "address a sense of loss" in impacted communities, and "overcome negative feelings towards the mine". In this sense, staff believe that the project serves to demonstrate to villagers that the mine is at least trying, in some way, to repair the relationship, and make amends via development contributions.

When attempting to categorize the development program, interviewees from within the company tended to discuss the program in isolated terms, without reference to external context, or other company systems. In effect, the review team had to "patch together" an understanding of how the program related to other organizational processes and systems. This "isolated read" is indicative of how the company commissioned the review. The company was, in fact, interested in understanding the effectiveness of the program *in isolation* from its other activities, rather than understanding how the program related to the internal and external context in a broader sense. The next discussion considers the outcome of this kind of narrow reading and draws out how the program functions within the broader context.

3.4.2 Community development as a relational buffer

A major finding from the review is the effect of approaching development in primarily "relational" and "reputational" terms. In the main, villagers suggested that the program provided an important relational benefit. For managers outside of community relations, the attribution of a relational benefit was read with a measure of scepticism. Essentially, they took this as meaning that the team responsible had not adequately tracked or quantified the costs or benefits of the program. At the same time, casting the program as having relational outcomes also meant the mine management team could talk about the fund as contributing to its "social licence". The relational outcomes that village participants spoke of is referred to here as a "buffering" outcome—a term used by management theorists to describe a strategy that aims to seal a firm off from external disturbances and prevent the environment from influencing internal operations. "Bridging", by contrast, promotes interaction with the external context and adaptation to stakeholder expectations (Meznar and Nigh, 1995; van den Bosch and van Riel, 1998). Before considering the buffering effect in more detail, we describe the relational dimensions of the program from the perspective of program staff, local government representatives and program beneficiaries.

The task of "making amends" and improving the relationship with the six original villages was, according to program staff, achieved through personal interactions in each village as part of administering and implementing the program. In their view, this task has not been achieved through the provisioning of grants or the building of projects, which they observed as making only small improvements to people's lives. Rather, program staff attribute positive relationships to consistent personal interactions and the participatory methodology. Staff travel to each village, every week, to spend time talking to different groups within the community about the program and other matters that relate to everyday village life. Senior managers valued the "visible" aspects of the program, whereas program staff described the "process elements" as far more critical to securing social licence and any development impact, however small.

Local officials were complimentary of the program, indicating that the intent, participatory method and outcomes were a positive indication that the company was working to uphold its social responsibility to support local development. Local authorities indicated that the program had also helped them meet certain poverty alleviation criteria set by the Central Government, as they have no other funds to draw on to address those issues. Encouraging the inclusion of the poorest villages into the program is what local authorities were focused on at the time of the review. The company on the other hand was focused on adding exploration villages that aligned with its land access agenda. It was, nonetheless, becoming increasingly cognizant of the insistent nature of the government's requests to include poor villages, and there had been agreement that villages with high needs may be added in future rounds.

Clearly, different parties value the program for very different reasons. Senior managers prioritize a land access agenda and visible development, program staff emphasize the process and interactional elements, and local government supports the program as part of a poverty alleviation and peace keeping agenda. Participating communities also have a distinct perspective. Across the board, local villagers were complimentary of the project. They expressed gratitude that the mine offered a small grant program and appreciated the opportunity to interact with program staff. Nonetheless, near mine villages were necessarily more focused on impacts, land access claims and outstanding grievances. They explained that while relations with program staff were good, the program did not address mining-related impacts or help those in greatest need. The scheme does not, for example, address the needs of families whose livelihoods are under greatest pressure from mining. In fact, the program is designed *not* to privilege a particular group but provide a "whole of community" benefit. While frustrations amongst the most impacted communities were high, communities still indicated that their relationship with program staff was positive; in fact at times they said it was the only positive point of connection with the company. They also expressed frustration that program staff did not represent their issues internally or have any influence over the mine itself. The connection that staff have with villages is not utilized for anything other than the program. One advantage of this is that workers have been able to focus on village-level engagement, rather than their work being dominated by company-related priorities. The program's relative autonomy and small size also means that it has been unaffected by cost-cutting demands placed on other parts of the business. However, the lack of internal integration with other parts of the business is a lost opportunity given the depth of knowledge that the program staff have about village context, local change and the effect that the mine has had on livelihoods. Better utilization of this knowledge provides an opportunity to enhance social risk management and minimize/offset grievances early in the conflict cycle.

It is at this point then, that we ask what outcomes the program actually achieves. The scenario mentioned above infers a "buffering" outcome. Buffering occurs when the community is kept at arm's length, thereby protecting the company from unmanageable demands and insulating them from community complaints of impacts and exclusion from mining benefits. In this case, buffering works to prevent the second (potential) outcome—that of bridging. Bridging relationships would occur where the content of engagement serves to prompt change to operational-level decisions or actions based on community feedback, concerns, needs or development aspirations (Meznar and Nigh, 1995; van den Bosch and van Riel, 1998). During the review, there was no evidence that the knowledge or relationships built through the program were used to inform or influence operational-level strategies, whether for engagement, impact management, risk analysis, grievance handling or development planning. The program is used to build the capacity of local villagers to manage small infrastructure grants. It is not used to build the capacity of the organization to understand community perspectives, or adjust organizational processes so that they are more community-oriented, and less impactful. In fact, the program has become so "successful" that other community engagement activities have diminished and the program has become the default form of local-level engagement.

This relational construct may feel like a "bridge" to beneficiaries but for all intents and purposes it is merely serving as a "buffer" for the company. In terms of what the program actually achieves, we read the relational buffering effect as a tactical move on the part of the company to pacify local stakeholders with developmental "gifts", while denying them legitimate access to meaningful input or influence over mining and associated activities. This clearly positions the interests of the community as secondary to the interests of mining. It also throws new light on the interaction between buffering and bridging tactics of mining operations in the context of CSR and development.

3.5 Conclusion

There is an urgent call for the minerals sector to respond with greater consideration and sophistication to the social issues posed by resource extraction. The development component of this call is inextricably linked to questions about impact and benefit sharing, good governance and sustainability, participation and inclusive economic growth. Confusion over the role of development in the resources industry is not confined to companies, but the problem of all stakeholders who seek to clarify the responsibilities of project proponents. What is clear, however, is the role of "interest" and "intent" in determining which variant of "development" is applied and to whose benefit. Given the range of uses, and the many combinations that can be constructed, the question of how a development effort will support company and community interests should be treated as a priority.

The case example depicted in this chapter illustrates the importance of identifying the various interests attached to development programs and the implications these interests have across a number of fronts. Understanding which parties have which stake in a given development initiative is critical for understanding the approach to CSR and development. The formulation and roll out of an operational strategy is almost entirely dependent upon whose interests are in frame. The future direction of debates about the function of development in mining (and vice versa) will only have legitimacy if the substance of those debates is grounded in an honest appraisal of who is in control of and driving the agenda.

It is only possible to understand the outcomes and implications of the program through an embedded account of its nature. From this perspective, the program was understood as entrenched within a corporate system that prioritizes short term land access and reputational gain over other considerations. Without taking an embedded account of the program, the review itself would have provided a surface reading that aligns with the corporate view, which would have been limited to: (1) identifying the proactive nature of company-community relationships, (2) describing the program as an encouraging example of participatory development and (3) noting the provision of small but positive development outcomes. This reading has, at best, a tenuous and superficial relationship with corporate motivations, actions and intentions, and at worst, represents a complete misread of the context and the nature of a program that provides a relational buffer and prevents beneficiaries from having meaningful influence over the mine and its activities. Our analysis confirms that corporate community development in mining cannot be read in isolation. Any program review must demonstrate a grasp of the external context and hold the structure, process, effectiveness, value and consequences of community development in relation to other activities, impacts and systems attached to the mining operation.

3.6 Reflections on development-oriented CSR

This case highlights an incongruence that often exists between "development" and "CSR". Mining operations are themselves a function of a global push by developing nations to mobilize their natural resource base in order to fund national development. The activity, the impact and the benefits that flow from that activity can all rightfully be regarded as "development". The key question that must be asked is: What kind of development do we want to see driving the CSR agenda of companies in developing countries? In answering this question, we must be mindful that CSR consists of internal tensions. For instance, in order to deliver the revenue that supports national development, mining companies see themselves as needing to maximize production while minimizing cost. At the same time, both consumers and shareholders send companies strong signals about their expectations. To be a responsible corporate actor under these conditions requires high levels of reflection and awareness; not simply about the immediate pragmatics associated with their business activities, but the broader implications that come with "development".

These questions do not sit neatly within the conventional reading of either development or CSR. They do however, reflect a need for companies to understand and analyse the world in which they operate. Within that process of analysis, one would expect mining companies to arrive at a clear statement of purpose about how they contribute beyond production and profit and generate benefit for project-affected people. In our case, we found this basic level of awareness to be largely absent. There was virtually no awareness of the link between operational activity, social impact and program objectives. The mining company could readily displace local communities, have significant negative impacts on local livelihoods and food security, and yet claim a "positive CSR contribution" through the program, while using it as a buffer to maintain the status quo. The relationship between a company's interests, its perceived obligations and its development contribution (however defined) was unclear to almost every person we spoke with. A lack of strategy does not automatically preclude the possibility of companies generating social good. It does, however, mean that the allocation, implementation or effect of these social goods will almost certainly appear in the form of "uneven development".

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