

Gold mining's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

In developing the Responsible Gold Mining Principles, the World Gold Council has set out an overarching ESG framework for the gold mining sector which underpins sustained social and economic development



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It is sometimes easy to forget that gold plays a critically important role in many aspects of human society, and all of us have gold in some part of our lives. We rely on it every day in our electronic devices. We wear it as jewellery. It is present in medicines and testing kits. Indeed, gold is a unique metal that does not corrode or tarnish over time, meaning it has become intimately linked with legacy and inheritance in society, and why in many cultures around the world we give and receive gold as ceremonial gifts. And because it is a highly liquid, long-term store of value, gold has provided financial security for individuals and countries for millennia. In short, gold's value reflects its unique and ingrained role in society and in the global economy.

Gold is also a scarce natural resource. Mining companies have a responsibility to work together with governments and communities to extract gold in a way that creates sustainable benefits for the people of the countries where gold is found. To guide the industry, the World Gold Council (WGC), in collaboration with its member companies and after extensive consultation

with third-party stakeholders including governments, civil society and NGOs, launched the Responsible Gold Mining Principles (RGMPs) in September 2019.

The RGMPs are an ambitious set of 51 individual principles that cover all material aspects of environmental, social and governance (ESG) related to gold mining, including water management, climate change, gender diversity, anti-bribery and community engagement, to name just a few. These principles set very clear expectations for the entire industry as to what constitutes responsible gold mining.

To meet societal expectations for transparency and credibility, company performance against the RGMPs will be publicly disclosed and independently verified. Third-party oversight will set these principles apart from many others and provide confidence to the market that the product is responsibly sourced. Implementation and full conformance with the RGMPs is mandatory for WGC members, and we know that many investors expect that all responsible gold mining companies follow these principles.

Extensive consultation

During the development of the RGMPs, extensive consultation was conducted over a two-year period, during which considerable input was received and incorporated from a variety of stakeholder groups including civil society, supply chain participants and governments. The SDG targets were also reviewed and mapped to ensure meaningful alignment between the two sets of goals. By design therefore, implementing the RGMPs effectively means contributing to the realisation of the SDGs.

To help communicate some of these activities and gold mining's development potential, the WGC recently released a report entitled *Gold Mining's Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals*. This reviews how leading gold companies contribute to the SDGs. Importantly, it also addresses how responsible miners



A haul truck driver, trained under Endeavour Mining's initiative to open up jobs that have not traditionally welcomed women



Left: children at a school in Mali, funded by Resolute Mining. Right: a worker on an anti-malaria initiative, a partnership between AngloGold Ashanti and the Ghanaian government

mitigate the negative social and environmental impacts of the industry, which if left unchecked could otherwise slow progress towards meeting the SDGs. The report also looks at key challenges for the industry, such as COVID-19, improving social and environmental practices in the artisanal mining sector and reducing the industry's impact on climate change.

The WGC report highlights almost 40 case studies, which are grouped under five themes: Global Partnerships (SDG 17), Social Inclusion (SDGs 5, 10, 16) Economic Development (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9) and Responsible Operations, Energy and the Environment (SDGs 6, 7, 12, 13, 15). We highlight how companies are tackling disease, showcasing, for instance, AngloGold Ashanti's partnership with the Ghanaian government in the fight against malaria. Their outreach programmes, together with improved community access to diagnostics and therapeutics through the mine's hospital facilities, resulted in the incidence of malaria being reduced by 74 per cent over three years and resulted in the methodologies of this programme being used to reduce malaria in other parts of the country

Effective partnerships

Building on strong partnerships, the gold mining industry is also working on improving social inclusion as set out by SDGs 5, 10 and

16. Historically, women and minority groups have been seriously under-represented and the industry is working on addressing these challenges and providing more inclusive working environments.

Endeavour Mining, for instance, focuses on helping women take on jobs that are traditionally seen as not welcoming to women, such as driving haul trucks (the evidence from mines in Chile is that they are better at it than their male colleagues). The report also highlights how companies help women in communities surrounding Kinross Gold's mine in Mauritania establish economic opportunities through small business training and funding of micro-projects.

Gold mining also supports economic development through the construction of schools, livelihoods programmes for communities, teaching farming and business skills, creating direct and indirect jobs and improving infrastructure. WGC members are doing incredible work to support local communities, from Golden Star Resources building 43 school classrooms and dormitories near its operation in Ghana to Resolute Mining investing in 20 micro-projects near its mine in Mali, which were selected by the local authorities to help improve integration with the local economy and ensure sustainability.

The report also looks at how responsible miners are protecting the environment, including water resources and contributing

to the transition to a low-carbon economy.

An example is Newmont's Borden mine, the first all-electric underground mine. Another is IAMGOLD's project, which provides potable water for over 100,000 people in Burkina Faso, a collaboration with both government and community leaders.

COVID-19 has made working in effective partnerships even more important, and WGC members were quick to respond to some of the immediate challenges created by the pandemic. As described in the report, leading gold miners have embarked on humanitarian initiatives and provided vital assistance to their host nations, ranging from making sizeable financial contributions to launching screening tests and offering mine-funded hospitals to enhance critical healthcare for local communities.

Opportunity and growth

Ultimately, if they are to be successful and be welcome neighbours, gold mining companies strive to work with their host communities to turn mineral wealth into a means of advancing human development. Gold mines bring opportunities and act as an engine of economic growth, especially in poorer, rural locations where there are often few alternative avenues for community advancement.

Looking ahead to 2030, there is much that needs to be done and COVID-19 has meant that achieving the SDGs will require even more of a concerted effort from government and businesses. The gold mining industry is well placed to further advance the SDGs and the leading gold mining companies are committed to doing their part in supporting their host governments and communities over the next decade and beyond. ■



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