Title: Improving Mining Community Benefits Through Better Monitoring and Evaluation

The mining sector is highly controversial despite its centrality to economic growth and quality of life. A rich literature questions whether mining can be the source of a “natural resource curse.” Concerns about mining operations relate not only to economic concerns related to corruption, commodity cycles and “Dutch disease” effects, but also environmental destruction experienced most acutely by local communities near mine sites. Such issues often undermine the potential for mining operations, by nature a long-term enterprise, to be carried out in stable and consensual conditions, thus increasing the risk of shifting terms and/or expropriation. Protests, sometimes, violent, abound in the sector.

Recognition of these problems has led to a series of industry-led initiatives, including the Global Reporting Initiative and the Extractive Transparency Initiative. While such efforts have improved the ability of companies to point to the significant revenues that they contribute to national coffers, they touch only superficially upon benefits to local communities. Into this vacuum, has emerged innovation around Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) to formalize the wide variety of benefits of mining, from employment to procurement to investment in infrastructure by mining companies.

In this article, we examine more specifically the ways that such agreements, and their informal counterparts (those without an explicit document) create monitoring and evaluation systems for community benefits. We find that very few CBAs have any explicit monitoring and evaluation system. We then examine two mining sites where leading edge companies are seeking to improve community outcomes. Based on intensive field research and surveys in Ghana and the Dominican Republic, we find alarming ambiguity around how mining benefits are conceptualized, including how “community” is defined; how they are monitored; and the roles and responsibilities of the mining company vs. local authorities. We close with some suggestions for a more participatory approach to identifying mining benefits, geared towards a long-term vision of local community development.