

Research Insight

June 22, 2020

Gender inequality runs deep in mining

Gender equality is clearly a challenge for the mining industry. In mining companies and mining-affected communities, women are most often at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. Companies' gender-biased policies and practices, such as recruitment processes that discriminate against female candidates or land compensation payments that exclude women, are clearly part of the problem.¹ However, the more insidious problem of gender-blindness, which ignores or neglects gender-based realities, is often more difficult to recognise and address. For example, impact assessments that consult only with formal community organisations may inadvertently miss the perspectives and concerns of women, if they are underrepresented in these groups.

Mining companies need to take pro-active measures to counteract these potential biases and avoid unintended impacts on women. This will require systematic action across all levels of the business, from corporate governance and working conditions to community engagement and investment activities.

Are companies taking adequate action on these issues? Evidence suggests not. The [RMI Report 2020](#) shows huge gaps in how mining companies address gender equality. The Report, an evidence-based assessment of 38 large-scale mining companies' policies and practices on economic, environmental, social and governance (EESG) matters, covers gender as a transversal issue that touches on many different aspects of company actions. The overall gender-related results of the companies are very weak, showing very limited actions to address gender in mining-affected communities and within their governance bodies, leadership and workforce (see Figure 1).

This Research Insight provides a few examples of what the results reveal about gender-related efforts of mining companies.

Reducing gender inequalities: a responsibility to respect human rights

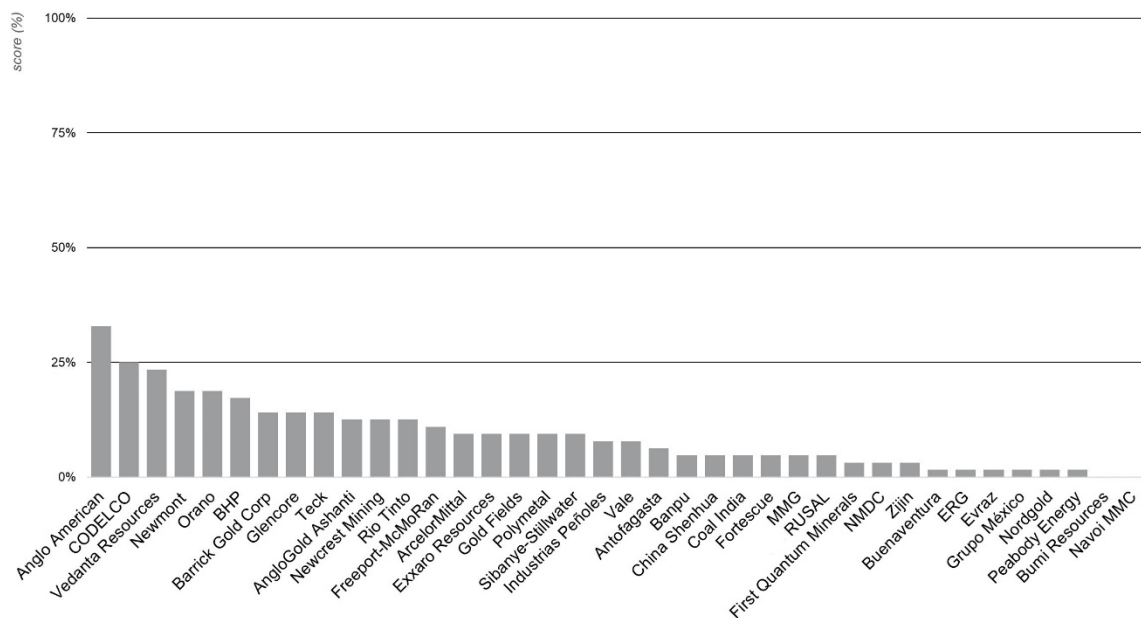
Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), companies have a duty to respect human rights by taking action to identify, assess and address human rights risks associated with their presence or their activities, and provide remedy for any adverse human rights impacts which they cause or to which they contribute.

Last year, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights produced [guidance](#) for states and businesses on how to integrate a gender perspective in implementing the

UNGPs. The guidance sets out illustrative actions that companies can take to fulfil each Principle. Commenting on the results of the RMI Report 2020, Professor Surya Deva, Member of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, said:

“ The gender-related findings of the RMI Report 2020 show that leading mining companies are not adequately responding to differentiated and disproportionate impact of mining on women and girls. The Gender Guidance for the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights offers a practical tool to prevent and address adverse impacts on women and girls by adopting gender-responsive policies and actions.”

Figure 1 Overall results on companies' gender actions
(Results from RMI Report 2020 - 16 gender-related metric questions)



High-profile action at the top, but little protection for female mine-site workers

Perhaps the most publicised gender actions by mining companies have been the growing number of programmes to improve the gender balance of Boards of Directors and strengthen gender diversity within senior management. Companies frequently cite these programmes as evidence of their contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goal on Gender Equality (SDG-5). The RMI Report 2020 reveals that the majority of companies can show at least some action on tracking and reporting the percentage of women at board and senior management levels, with some companies setting targets for female representation at these levels (see Figure 2). Such efforts are encouraging and there is ample evidence that gender-balanced leadership leads to stronger ESG performance.

However, there is much less evidence of companies addressing a more fundamental issue of critical importance to female mine workers – the provision of gender-appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). An issue that has caught wider public attention during the Covid-19 crisis, the lack of PPE that is appropriate, effective, safe and ergonomic for use by female workers poses a daily risk to women working in mine sites. As Figure 3 shows, the results on this issue are markedly weaker than those on Board-level gender diversity.

Figure 2 Tracking and reporting gender diversity of Boards and senior management
(Results from RMI Report 2020 - B.02.2.a)

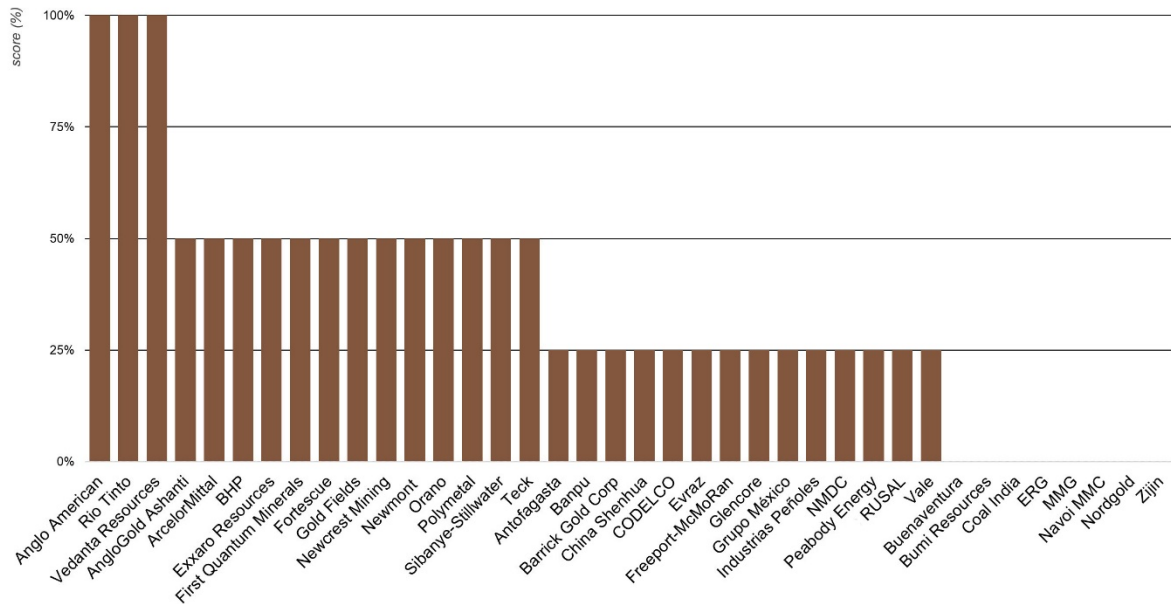
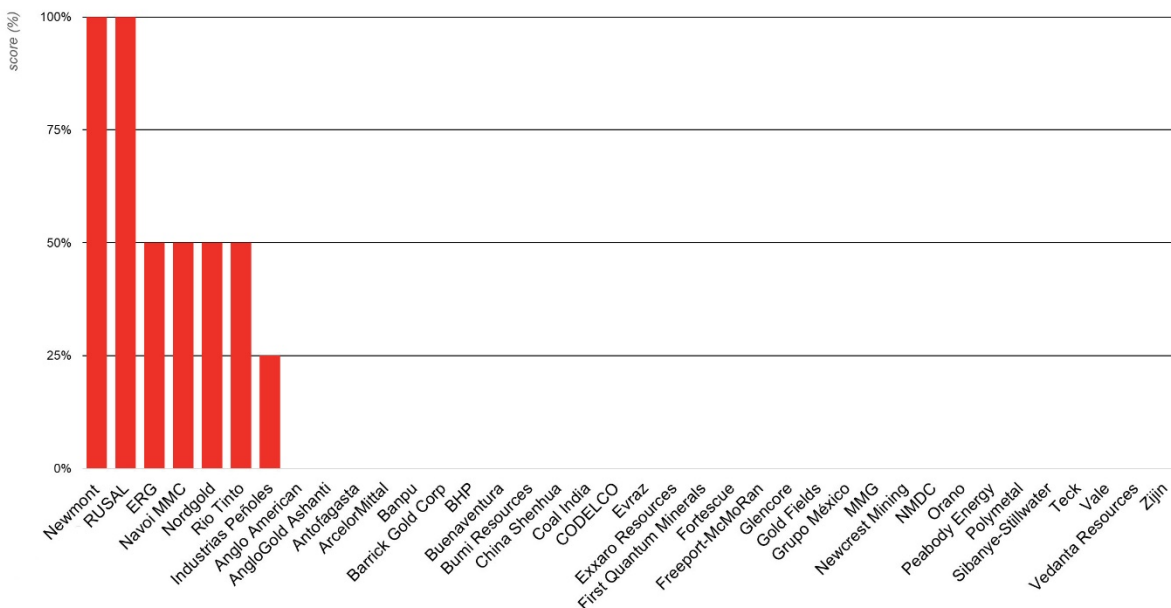


Figure 3 Provision of gender-appropriate PPE
(Results from RMI Report 2020 - E.01.4.b)

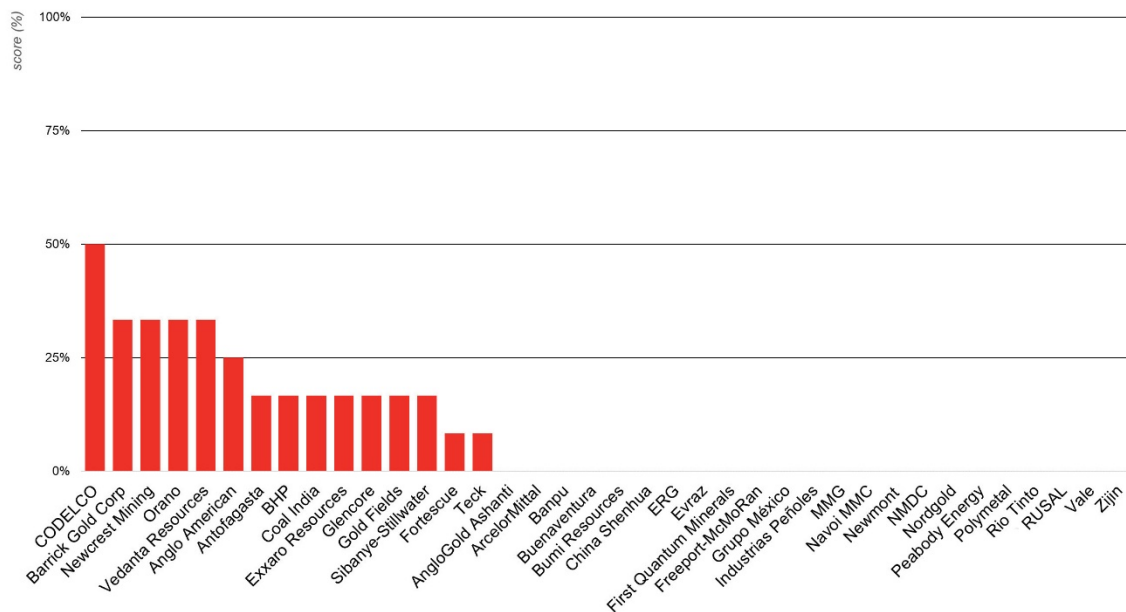


Producing country governments can positively influence the provision of gender-appropriate PPE. Some governments are already taking action to normalise this. For example, it is encouraging to see that the South Africa's Mining Health and Safety Act (MHSA) and guidelines of the country's Department of Mineral Resources require companies to prepare mandatory Codes of Practice on the provision of PPE for women mine workers. However, without strong enforcement, these measures will be of little impact. Commenting on this, Lydia Nkopane, Chairperson of the South African National Union of Mineworkers' women structure said:

“ Despite the MHSA, most mines in South Africa still do not systematically provide gender-appropriate PPE. And context is often misunderstood by mining companies and lawmakers. Extreme heat and dust are extremely harmful and damaging for women's bodies, but the women workers who have been asking for adequate protective underwear have been experiencing daily bullying and mockery from their male colleagues and managers.”

The companies' results are even weaker on another basic issue for women workers – protection from gender-based harassment and violence. While industry-related initiatives are tackling these risks, none of the assessed companies is able to show systematic action on this issue (see Figure 4).²

Figure 4 Protecting women workers from harassment and gender-based violence
(Results from RMI Report 2020 - E.01.3)

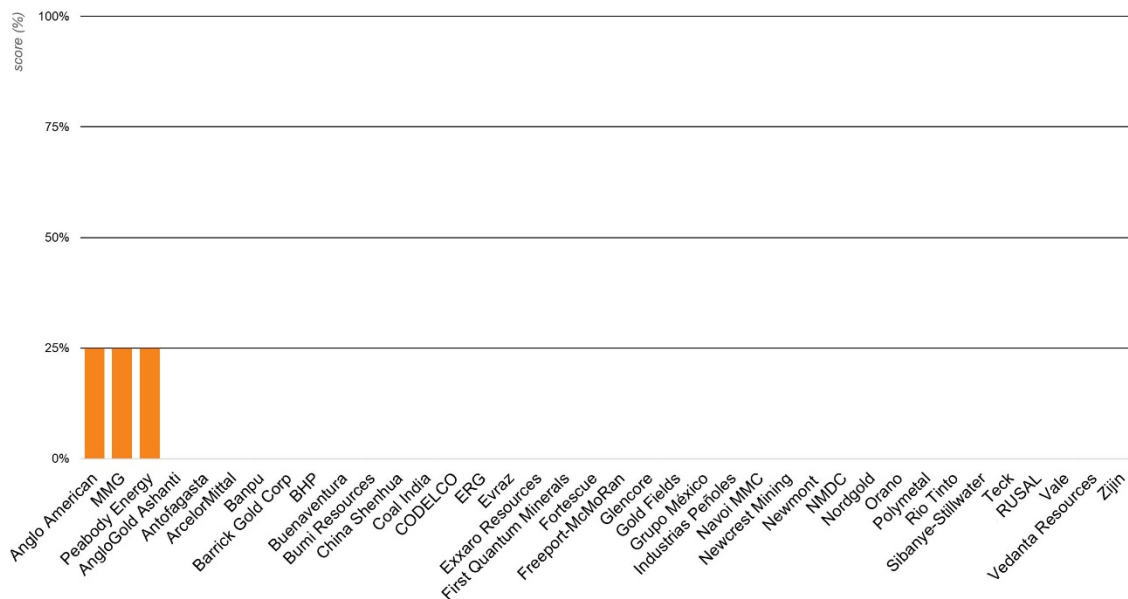


Companies are not assessing their impacts on women

An essential requirement for an informed approach to supporting gender equality in mining-affected communities is awareness of the status quo, including the current impacts of the company's operations on women. This would seem to be an obvious step for any mining company that takes seriously its responsibility to avoid negatively impacting women. The potential impacts are wide-ranging and include, for example, disruption of social and family life, increased risk of gender-based violence, and loss of access to land. Yet the RMI Report 2020 results are very weak on this issue: there was virtually no evidence of companies having systems to regularly assess the impacts of their operations on women (see Figure 5).

These results are striking, given that guidance on Gender Impact Assessments in mining has been available for some years.³ Whether companies conduct Gender Impact Assessments as stand-alone exercises or as part of their Environmental and Social Impact Assessments or Human Rights Impact Assessments, these assessments can provide valuable learnings that enable companies to pre-empt or avoid negative impacts on the lives and livelihoods of women.

Figure 5 Company systems for conducting regular assessments of impacts on women
(Results from RMI Report 2020 - D.04.3.a)



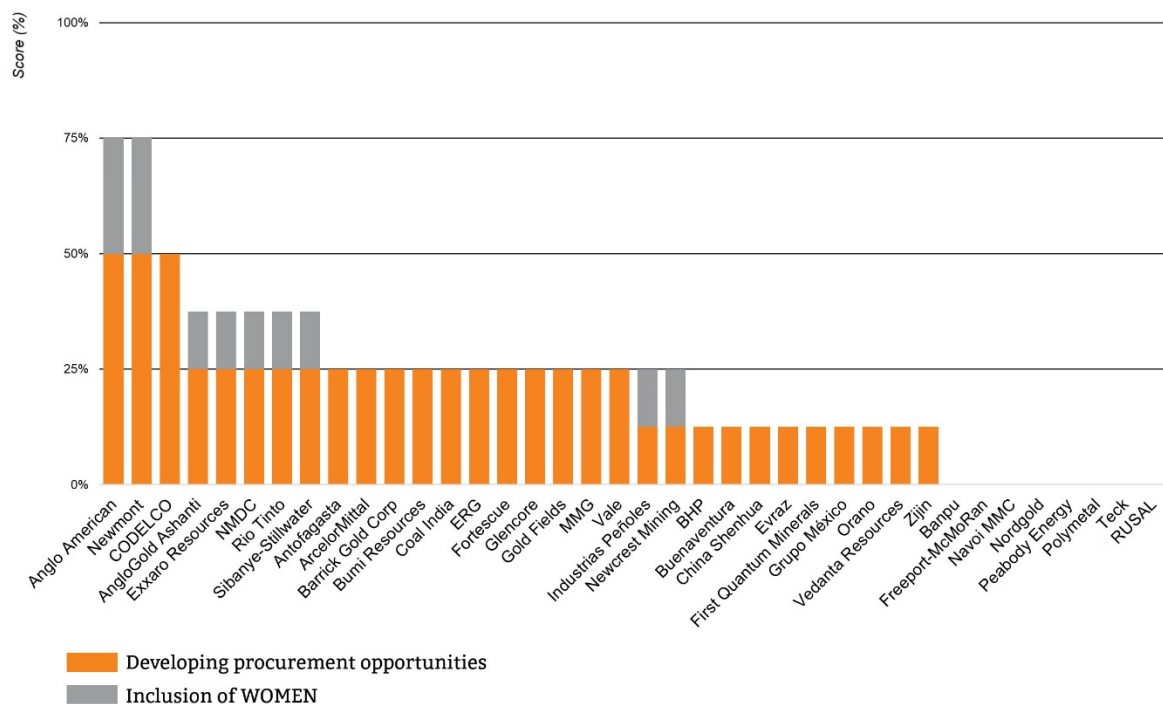
Gender-blind local procurement marginalises women-owned businesses

It is well established that women are disproportionately impacted by mining activities compared to men. Reports by IFC, Oxfam and others document that women tend to face increased risks to their health, economic and social status due to the presence of mining companies.⁴ Yet even positive actions on community engagement and investment, if conducted without due consideration of gender issues, can further disadvantage women. Such gender-blind interventions at best perpetuate, and potentially exacerbate, existing

discrimination and marginalisation of women. This is particularly true where women face additional barriers due to, for example, their age, religion, ethnicity, or access to economic resources.⁵

The RMI Report 2020 results suggest that many mining companies' efforts to develop local procurement opportunities are indeed gender-blind and therefore risk negatively impacting gender equality. As Figure 6 shows, only a small minority of companies take proactive measures to include women in their local procurement support measures, and without such measures, women will most likely be excluded. Companies may not see the value of taking the extra effort to reach out to local women-owned businesses, or they may find it difficult to identify such businesses that meet their procurement needs.⁶ Whatever the reason, these companies are losing out on valuable opportunities to improve their supplier diversity, contribute to gender equality, and strengthen relations with local communities. Further, as reported by IFC, supporting locally-owned women-led businesses produces broader benefits of community stability and economic development.⁷

Figure 6 Measures to include women in local procurement support activities
(Results from RMI Report 2020 - D.04.2.a & b)



Immediate steps for companies to take on gender equality

A mining company can take immediate and practical steps towards addressing gender equality in a systematic manner. These steps include, for example:

- Develop a company-wide gender equality policy that covers gender issues related to company governance and leadership, workforce and working conditions, and community-level impacts and initiatives.
- Review existing policies, procedures and systems to check for any unintended gender bias and to ensure that gender equality issues are adequately addressed.
- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and gender-based violence within the workforce and take firm measures to protect women workers from these risks, including gender sensitive training.
- Ensure gender-appropriate PPE and health and sanitation facilities for women workers.
- Establish systems to ensure operations conduct regular gender impact assessments, and act on the results of these assessments.
- Track and report gender-disaggregated data on, for example, recruitment, retention and representation in the workforce; local employment and local procurement; health and safety of workers and local communities; and workers' wages. On the basis of this data, develop the necessary strategies to reduce and eliminate gender inequalities.

Perhaps most importantly, companies can begin by asking women, in affected-communities and in all levels of their workforce, about the mining-related gender equality issues that affect them and the measures they would want to see put in place to address their concerns. Based on open discussion of these matters, companies can systematically include women in decision-making and performance monitoring around priorities that matter to them.

Ultimately, it is only by involving women as co-designers, co-implementers and co-evaluators of policies and programmes that companies can ensure that their gender actions will be truly gender-transformative.

¹ Oxfam International (2017). Position Paper on Gender Justice and the Extractive Industries

(https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/EI_and_GJ_position_paper_v.15_FINAL_03202017_green_Kenny.pdf).

² See for example Minerals Council South Africa (2020). Women in Mining. White Paper

(<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/special-features/1064-women-in-mining-in-south-africa>); IndustriALL

Global Union (2019). Our Future, Our Union: IndustriALL Women Conference Report (http://www.industrialunion.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/2020/women_conference_report_eng.pdf); IFC (2018).

Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Workforce. Unlocking Opportunities for Women and Business: A Toolkit of Actions and Strategies for Oil, Gas and Mining Companies. Tool Suite 4

(https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/resources/unlocking-opportunities-for-women-and-business); MeTooMining Association

(<https://www.metoomining.com/>).

³ See for example Hill, C, Madden, C and Collins, N. (2017). A Guide to Gender Impact Assessment for the

Extractive Industries. Oxfam, Melbourne (https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-PA-001-Gender-impact-assessments-in-mining-report_FA_WEB.pdf); Rio Tinto and the Centre for Social

Responsibility in Mining (2009). Why Gender Matters. A resource guide for integrating gender considerations into Communities work at Rio Tinto (<https://www.commdev.org/pdf/publications/Why-Gender-Matters.pdf>).

⁴ IFC (2018). Women and Community Engagement. Unlocking Opportunities for Women and Business: A Toolkit of Actions and Strategies for Oil, Gas and Mining Companies. Tool Suite 3

(https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/resources/unlocking-opportunities-for-women-and-business); Hill, C., Madden, C. and Ezpeleta, M. (2016). Gender

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(https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016-PA-004-Mining-and-Gender-report_FA3_web.pdf).

⁵ United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights (2019). Gender Dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

(<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/BookletGenderDimensionsGuidingPrinciples.pdf>).

⁶ IFC (2018). Women-Owned Businesses and the Supply Chain. Tools to help companies identify and develop women-owned suppliers and suppliers with significant numbers of female employees. Unlocking Opportunities for Women and Business: A Toolkit of Actions and Strategies for Oil, Gas and Mining Companies. Tool Suite 2

(https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/resources/unlocking-opportunities-for-women-and-business).

⁷ *Ibid.*

Responsible Mining Foundation

The Responsible Mining Foundation (RMF) is an independent research organisation that encourages continuous improvement in responsible mining across the industry by developing tools and frameworks, sharing public-interest data and enabling informed and constructive engagement between mining companies and other stakeholders.

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