

Research Insight

February 10, 2022

Why is gender still off the agenda of mining companies?

The Responsible Mining Foundation has been tracking gender action by mining companies since 2016 and the latest results are just in. The findings again show striking contrasts in what companies choose to focus on – gender balance in headquarter teams is quite widely addressed while gender in affected communities and in the workplace is largely ignored. And despite much talk about gender and women (these terms are typically mentioned dozens of times in companies' sustainability reports), gender action is still very thin on the ground at mine sites, including for women mine workers.

At the same time there is an increasing wealth of guidance and frameworks on gender in mining showing what needs to be done to ensure that women share the benefits of mining and that women as well as men are protected from any harmful impacts. This begs the question: what are companies waiting for before taking gender action where it matters most?

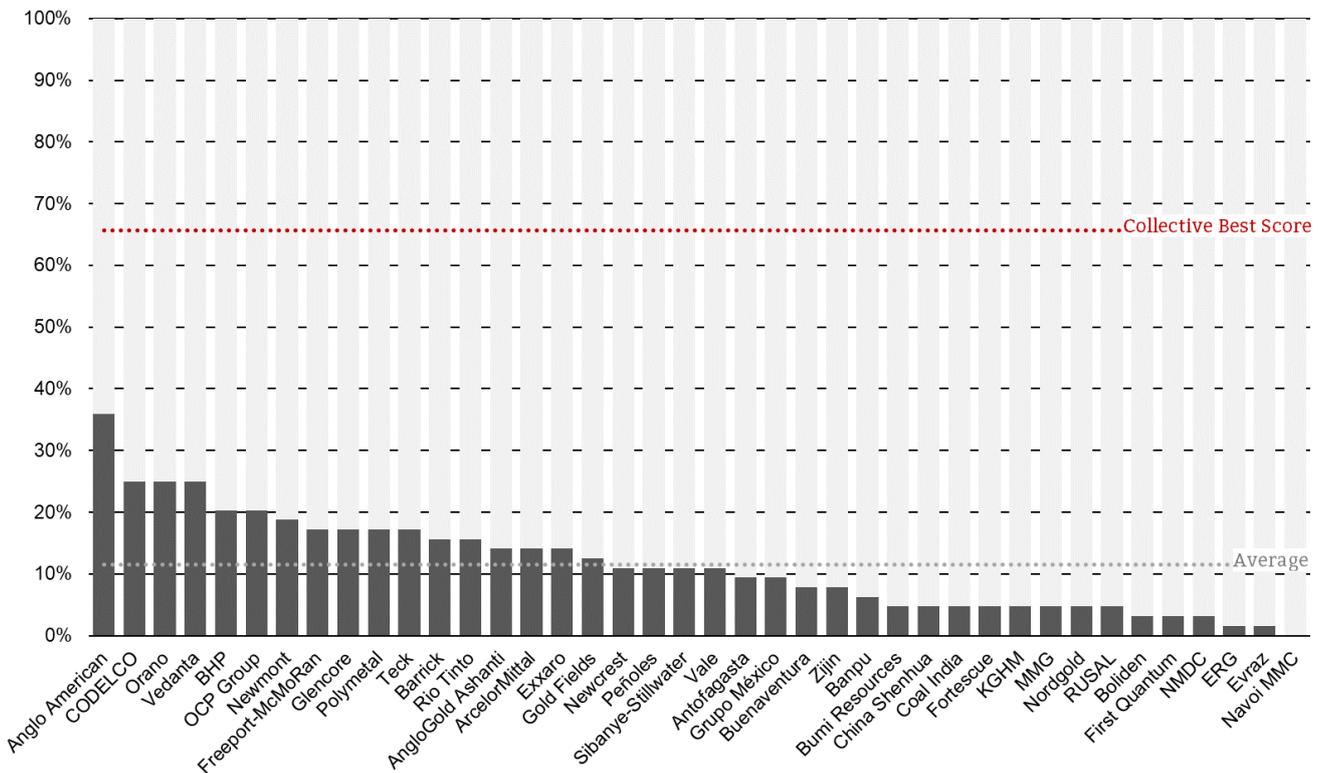
Corporate measures on gender: scarce and scattered

The gender-related findings in the RMI Report 2022 show that systematic, company-wide action on gender is still clearly missing. The overall results on gender are very weak (see Figure 1), reflecting a generalised lack of evidence of corporate measures to ensure all mining operations:

- Engage with women as well as men in mining-affected communities;
- Ensure women are included in support programmes for local business development and local procurement;
- Assess mining-related impacts on women and track how effectively these impacts are being managed;
- Protect women workers from sexual harassment and gender-based violence;
- Ensure women workers have fit-for-purpose PPE; and
- Provide women workers with safe and separate sanitation facilities and gender-appropriate health services.

Figure 1. Corporate actions on gender: Overall results

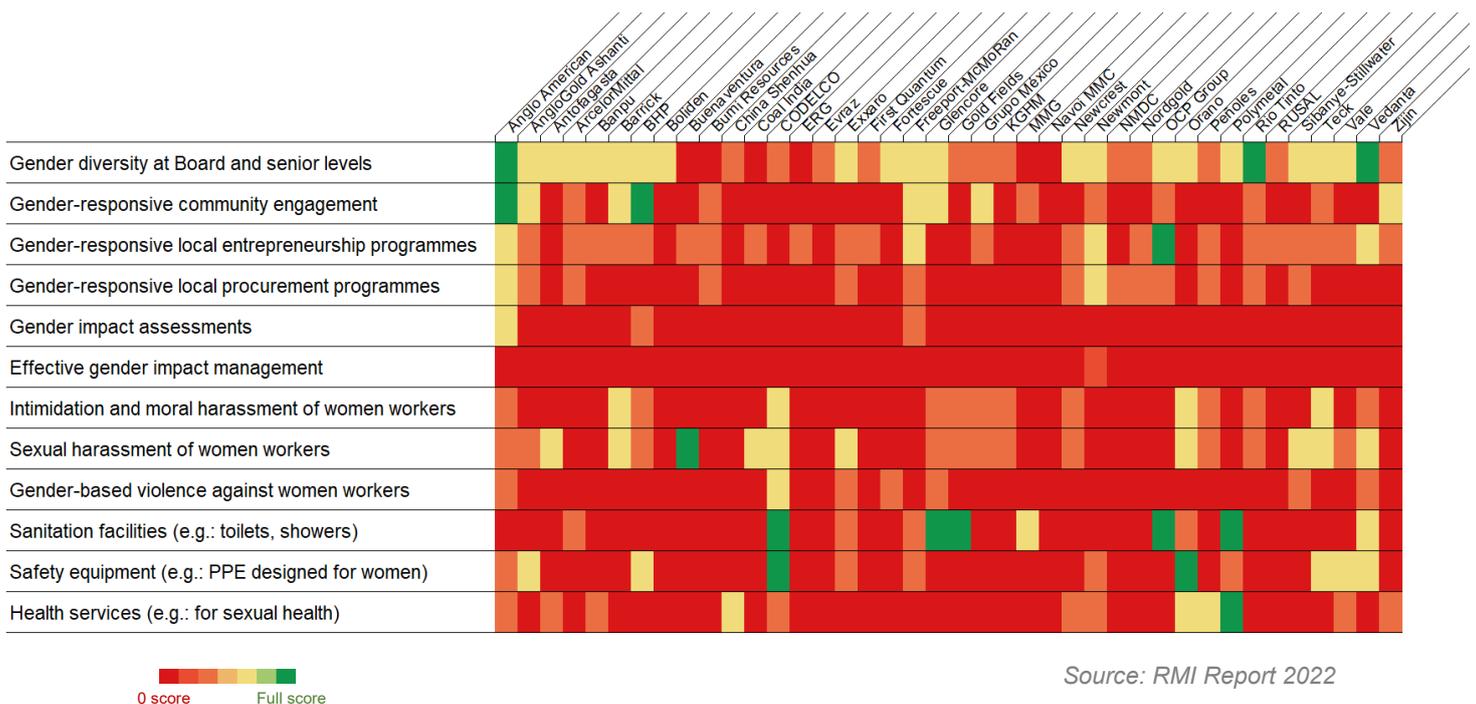
(Results from the RMI Report 2022 – 16 metrics)



Scant progress. The best performing company scores only 36% on these gender actions and the 40 companies score on average only 11%. Progress has been minimal, with only a two percentage-point increase in this average since the previous assessment, the RMI Report 2020. And as these large companies are among the best resourced and most scrutinised in the industry, their limited level of effort on gender issues doesn't reflect well on the industry as a whole. In other words, most other companies are likely doing even less on gender.

Strategic approach missing. Furthermore, the results show that even those companies that demonstrate somewhat stronger action on gender have been very selective in the issues they address. This is reflected in the large gap between the individual company results and the Collective Best Score, which is an aggregate measure of the best results seen among all the companies across all the gender-related indicators. The Collective Best Score of 66% indicates that if any company were to adopt all the good practices already being demonstrated by their peers, it would greatly improve its performance on gender equality. And the fact that no company comes close to this score suggests that no company is taking a strategic approach to managing the range of gender equality issues at stake. The current 'patchy' approach to gender is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Topic-specific company performance



Source: RMI Report 2022

So why are gender issues still largely off the agenda of mining companies, and why have we seen so little improvement over the last five years?

We present here some potential factors hindering progress on gender.

Gender action is most often optional

One reason why gender issues are commonly neglected is because the legislative and regulatory frameworks of many producing countries rarely include provisions for gender action. This is particularly the case for gender issues in affected communities. A recent [study](#) by NRGi and WRI, examining the gender-related content of legal and policy frameworks governing extractives in 12 resource-rich countries, found that very few of these instruments address the gender dimensions of local impacts of mining. And a follow-up [report](#) points to the common problem of a lack of capacity and political will that often results in ineffective implementation and weak enforcement.

Government-mandated requirements and norms on gender action do make a difference. For example, efforts by some South African companies to provide women workers with fit-for-purpose PPE stem directly from government guidelines and legislation on this issue. (Disappointingly, these companies do not show similar practices in other countries, where they are not subject to the same requirements.) And CODELCO, as a Chilean state-owned enterprise, scores relatively well on this and some other gender-in-the-workforce measures as it follows a national standard on Gender Equality and Work-Life Balance.

More generally, throughout the entire assessment the companies show much better results on compliance issues than they do on discretionary issues. For example, the companies score an average of 53% on the disclosure of payments to governments (mandatory in many home countries and producing countries) and 63% on the disclosure of tailings-related information (an investor-led requirement that applies to nearly all of the assessed companies). And the highest-scoring gender issue (on improving the gender balance of company boards), averaging 18%, is mandatory in some jurisdictions.

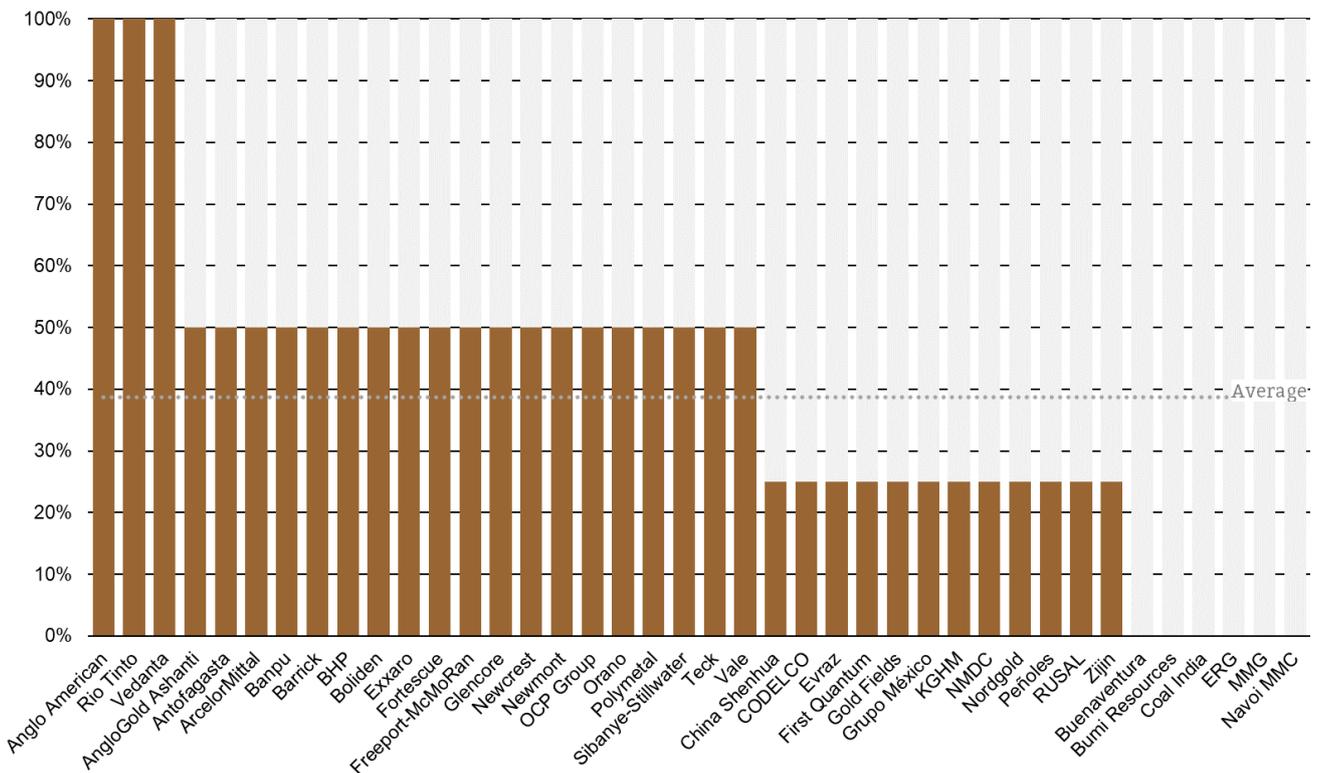
What is missing is evidence that companies are adopting a proactive approach to tackling gender equality, and applying gender-aware practices across all jurisdictions in which they operate – beyond compliance.

Given the widespread lack of external requirements on gender equality, companies can be expected to take proactive measures, particularly on the proven risks facing women workers and women in affected communities. Clearly this is not common practice. Companies tend to act on gender only when they are obliged to do so. As the industry has not proven it can self-regulate on gender, governments, regulators, investors and financiers have important roles to play in driving corporate action on gender.

Gender action in companies: easiest measures prioritised over most important?

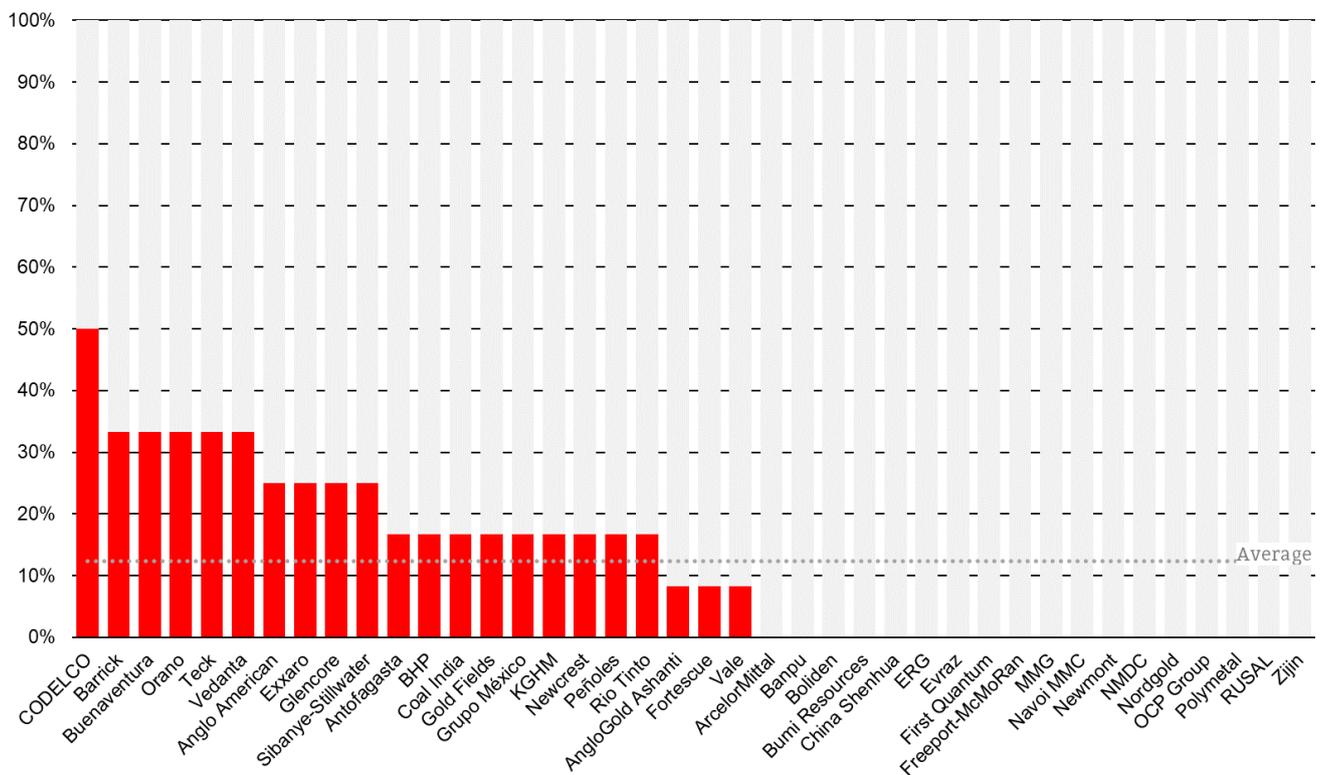
Companies show very mixed results on gender issues internal to their businesses. On the one hand, many companies are addressing the issue of women’s representation on their boards of directors and in their management teams (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Tracking and disclosing gender balance of Board and senior management teams
(Results from the RMI Report 2022 – B.02.2.a)



This is an important issue and the relatively strong results are encouraging. In contrast however, far fewer companies can demonstrate they are addressing much more salient issues for women workers at mine sites. For example, 45% of the companies show no evidence of systems to protect women workers from harassment and violence (see Figure 4) and a similar share of companies cannot demonstrate systems to address the health and safety needs of women workers.

Figure 4. Corporate measures to protect women workers from harassment and violence (Results from the RMI Report 2022 – E.01.3)



One likely reason for these contrasting results is that companies have chosen to focus on ‘gender balance at the top’ as this issue – unlike the health and safety for women workers – is visible (in corporate reporting); easily managed (i.e., not dependent on mine site implementation); and conducive to tracking and reporting progress (e.g., to show action on SDG5 on Gender Equality). While it is understandable that companies are focusing on this ‘low-hanging fruit’, this is not a reason to ignore the fundamental rights of women workers to a safe and healthy workplace.

Sexual harassment and violence: overwhelming evidence, underwhelming action

The very limited measures seen to protect women workers from sexual harassment and violence is particularly striking given that these issues have long been reported as commonplace within the industry. It is only recently that companies have begun to publicly recognise the existence and scale of these problems. A 2021 parliamentary inquiry in Western Australia, set up following high-profile incidents, resulted in public [submissions](#) by BHP, Rio Tinto, Fortescue and other companies on sexual harassment and sexual assault at mine sites. BHP for example reported that 48 workers from its Western Australia workforce had been dismissed over the past two years as a result of offences including rape and attempted rape. Rio Tinto has recently released the [report](#) of a survey it commissioned, which reveals that 30% of women in its global workforce report having been sexually harassed at work over the last five years and 21 women workers report having been raped or sexually assaulted, over the same time period.

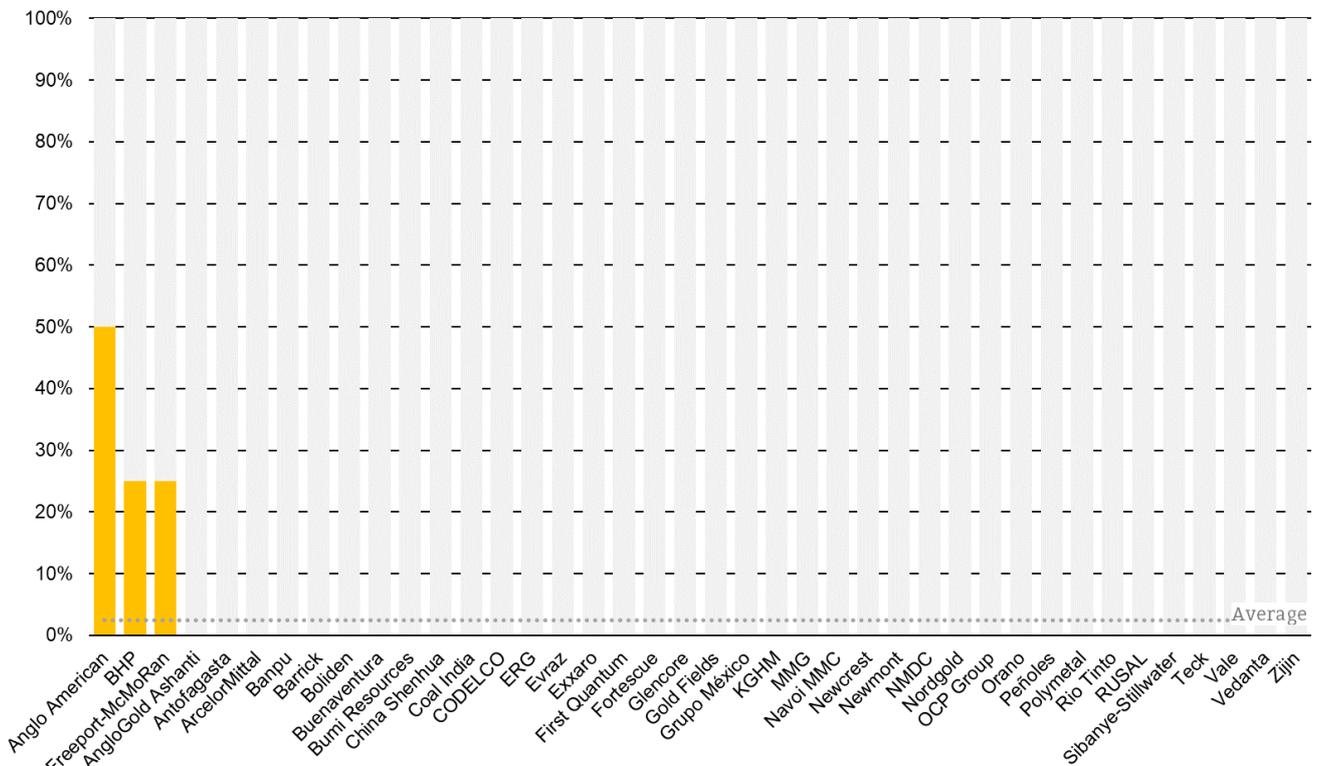
Gender action in affected communities: rarely expected by industry standards

Assessing gender impacts

Paradoxically, one of the lowest-scoring gender measures – the use of gender impact assessments – has been one of the most well-established in guidance literature. Toolkits, guidelines and frameworks on gender impact assessments in mining have been around for more than 20 years, thanks to the work of [Oxfam](#) and others on this issue. Yet only three of the 40 companies show any evidence of having some level of system to conduct gender impact assessments (see Figure 5). If companies do not conduct regular assessments of their potential impacts on women in affected communities, either as stand-alone exercises or as part of their Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) or Human Rights Impact Assessments, they risk exacerbating any harmful impacts and missing opportunities to positively impact women's lives and livelihoods.

Figure 5. Very little evidence of companies assessing impacts on women

(Results from the RMI Report 2022 – D.04.3.a)



One factor likely perpetuating the neglect of gender impact assessments is the common lack of any formal expectation from site-level ESG standards. While the IRMA standard does mention the need to consider potential impacts on women, certification schemes such as Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM), the CERA Performance standard, and standards produced by the Responsible Minerals Initiative and the Copper Mark are weak or silent on this issue and indeed on any other gender-in-communities issue. Without taking special measures to consult and engage with women on potential harmful impacts of mining, companies will have only half the picture of how their operations may be affecting local people.

Industry association requirements and principles tend to be similarly weak or silent on gender impact assessments. This includes, for example, the World Gold Council’s Responsible Gold Mining Principles, and the Due Diligence Guidelines of the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals and Chemicals (CCCMC). And while the ICMM Performance Expectation on social and environmental impact assessments mentions that consultations need to be gender sensitive, it simply lists gender as one example of the kinds of issues to be assessed, without giving any further guidance.

It is difficult to see how gender impact assessments will become the norm, as a sensible tool to help improve gender equality and mitigate potential harmful impacts of mining, while they are excluded from most mining-related standards and industry-led requirements.

Gender-aware community engagement: from theory to practice

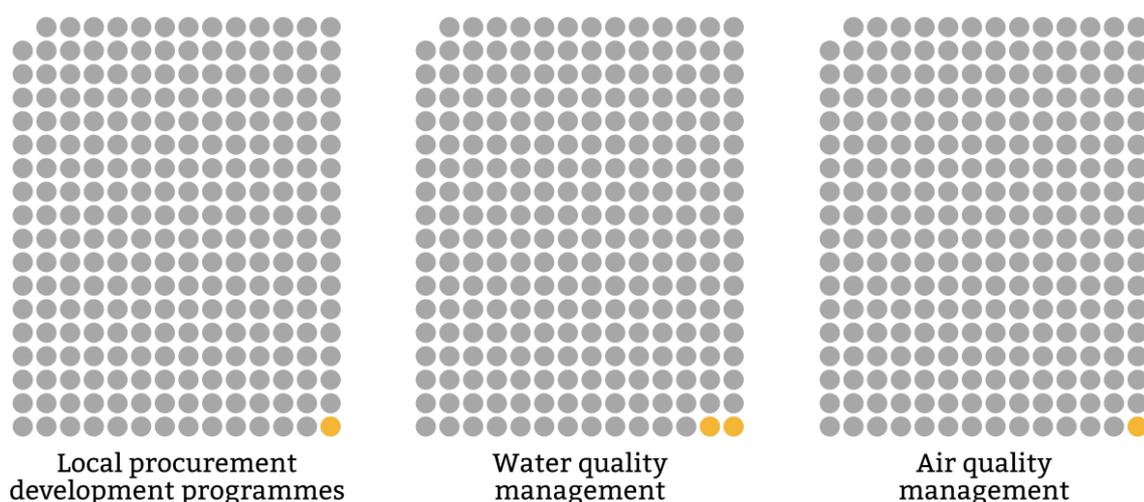
An assessment of 250 mine sites as part of the RMI Report 2022 found virtually no evidence of any mine-site-level actions to engage with women in affected communities on issues that directly impact their lives. In fact, some 98% of the mine sites show no evidence of involving women on any of the following issues:

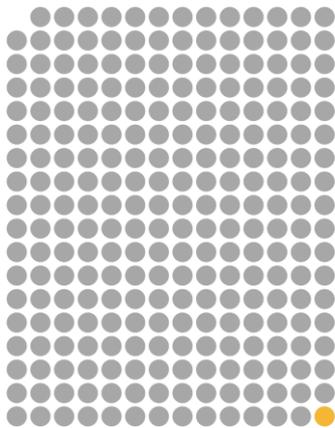
- development/implementation of local procurement programmes;
- decisions on the management of air and water quality;
- discussions on managing access to shared water resources;
- development of rehabilitation and post-closure plans; and
- testing of emergency response plans.

Only one or two mine sites show any evidence on each of these issues (see Figure 6).

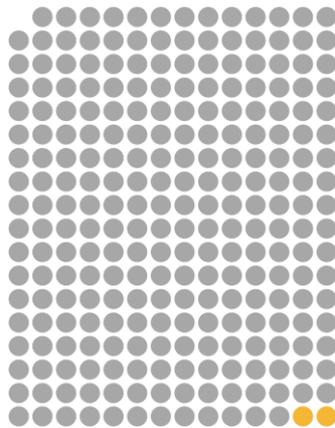
Figure 6. Barely any evidence of engagement with women in affected communities

(Results on 251 mine sites from the RMI Report 2022 – MS.02.c, MS.03.d, MS.04.d, MS.05.c, MS.06.d, MS.08.d)

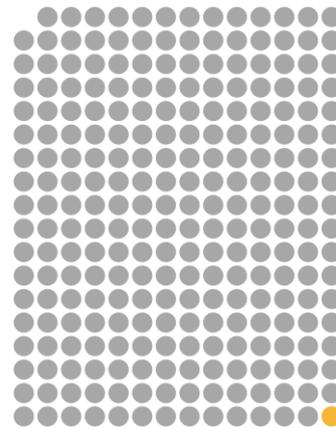




Management of and access to water resources



Rehabilitation and post-closure plans



Testing of emergency response plans

- Mine sites with no satisfactory evidence
- Mine sites with some satisfactory evidence

The lack of evidence of efforts to engage with women as well as men contrasts with the fact that several companies have established management systems to ensure gender-aware community engagement. Without evidence that corporate systems are being implemented at mine-site level, the credibility of these systems will be limited.

It is possible that a lack of evidence does not always mean a lack of action. Mine sites may be engaging with women on these issues but not documenting or reporting on their efforts. In general, mine-site-level disclosures on ESG issues have been very limited, with companies usually providing consolidated reporting and aggregate figures rather than site-disaggregated data. With growing demand for site-level data, from investors, regulators, civil society, local communities and other stakeholders, it is in companies' interests to share site-specific information on their ESG activities – including gender action.

Again, most industry standards are not playing a supportive role – on normalising gender-aware engagement or mine-site ESG disclosures. TSM, CERA and Copper Mark for example exclude any mention of involving women in community engagement. And by not providing the evidence behind any publicly available certification report, all site-level ESG standards miss the opportunity to improve the availability of site-disaggregated data.

It can be done

While gender measures are still very much the exception to the norm, some companies are taking action, particularly on workplace-related gender issues. In a few cases companies have developed corporate systems (such as Anglo American's Social Way toolkit that includes gender dimensions on social performance, and Buenaventura's internal regulation on preventing sexual harassment). In other cases, action is limited to only some of a company's mine sites.

The examples listed below illustrate the kinds of issues that some companies are addressing to support gender equality in the workforce:

- Revising recruitment methods to prevent discrimination of women candidates;
- Establishing career development programmes designed specifically for women workers, including training and mentoring by their peers;
- Creating family friendly working schedules;
- Developing corporate requirements and company-wide programmes on preventing sexual harassment and violence including awareness raising, training, and practical measures (such as security locks on female toilets or panic buttons on women's workwear);
- Organising awareness raising programmes to help prevent discrimination in the workplace;
- Setting incentives and KPIs for managers to employ more gender balanced teams;
- Involving women workers in programmes to ensure PPE fit-for-purpose for women's bodies, including assessments on the need to redesign existing workwear;
- Providing health services for family planning or for sexual health;
- Ensuring women workers have the right to be reassigned during pregnancy;
- Providing breastfeeding breaks during the working day; and
- Providing dedicated rooms for breastfeeding or expressing and storing breastmilk.

It is much harder to find examples of gender action in communities, beyond philanthropic-type projects that offer limited impact. However, some of the better practices seen include for example:

- Developing tailored programmes to support female entrepreneurs in affected communities;
- Including women-owned businesses as one target group for local procurement support;
- Stipulating that mining operations must engage with women as well as men, for example discussing with women's groups any problems in accessing and using operational-level grievance mechanisms;
- Supporting the creation of and engaging with women-only focus groups among affected communities; and
- Ensuring that operational-level grievance mechanisms have both male and female staff to hear claims so that if they wish, women from communities can speak to someone of the same sex.

Recommendations: what can companies do to fill the gender gap?

Companies can take straightforward, practical steps to develop strategic and proactive action on gender within their governance and leadership teams, within their operational workforces, and within affected communities.

Some of the following recommendations were highlighted in an earlier Research Insight on gender equality. They are repeated here as these measures are still far from becoming common practice. Companies are encouraged to:

- Develop a company-wide gender equality strategy 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 issues are adequately addressed.
- Track and report gender-disaggregated data on recruitment, retention and representation in different levels of the workforce. Use the data to identify any corrective actions required (e.g., in recruitment procedures, terms of employment, professional development programmes).

- 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 fit-for-purpose PPE and gender-appropriate 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. Review the effectiveness of the measures taken and implement corrective action plans/audit recommendations.
- Track and report site- and gender-disaggregated data on, for example:
 - local employment and local procurement;
 - health and safety of workers and local communities;
 - workers' wages;
 - participation of women in engagement activities and collaborative decision-making.
- On the basis of this data, develop the necessary strategies to reduce and eliminate gender inequalities and specific risks faced by mining-affected women.
- Apply the gender questions in the Mine Site Assessment Tool as self-assessment exercises by each mining operation, as the basis for identifying priorities for implementing – and demonstrating – gender-aware action.

Appendix

Gender-related content of RMI Report 2022: full scope

Company-wide measures (metrics used for the assessment)

Improving gender balance at board and senior management levels

- Track and disclose data, against targets and across successive time periods, on the percentage of women at board and senior management levels.
- Conduct audits and/or reviews of the effectiveness of interventions (programmes, initiatives, etc) to improve gender balance at senior management level.
- Take responsive action, on the basis of the findings of these audits and/or reviews, to seek to improve gender balance at senior management level.

Engaging with women in affected communities on issues impacting their lives

- Corporate systems to ensure operations take specific measures to enable the participation of women in discussions and decision-making on matters that may impact them.

Ensuring women's access to local business development support programmes

- Corporate systems to ensure operations actively include women in strategies and plans to develop local entrepreneurship and businesses.

Ensuring women's access to local procurement opportunities

- Corporate systems to ensure operations actively include women in strategies and plans to develop local procurement opportunities.

Conducting gender impact assessments

- Corporate systems to ensure operations conduct and disclose regular assessment of the impacts of their activities on women.

Improving effectiveness of measures to manage impacts on women

- Track and disclose data, against targets and across successive time periods, on company's performance on managing the impacts of its activities on women, including mine-site disaggregated data on the regular implementation of gender impact assessment processes.
- Conduct audits and/or reviews of the effectiveness of measures taken to manage the impacts of company's activities on women.
- Take responsive action, on the basis of the findings of these audits and/ or reviews, to seek to improve the effectiveness of measures taken to manage the impacts of company's activities on women.

Protecting women workers from harassment and violence

- Corporate systems to ensure operations take specific measures to prevent intimidation and moral harassment of women workers.
- Corporate systems to ensure operations take specific measures to sexual harassment of women workers.
- Corporate systems to ensure operations take specific measures to gender-related violence against women workers.

Addressing the health and safety needs of women workers

- Corporate systems to ensure operations provide gender-appropriate sanitation facilities (e.g.: toilets, showers).
- Corporate systems to ensure operations provide safety equipment (e.g.: PPE designed for women).
- Corporate systems to ensure operations provide health services (e.g.: for family planning and sexual health).

Mine site measures (metrics used for the assessment)

Local employment

- Publicly disclose the number of women workers from affected communities who are hired as employees and hired by contractors.

Local procurement

- Actively involve women from affected communities in the development of local procurement programmes.

Air quality

- Actively involve women from affected communities in making decisions to manage air quality.

Water quality

- Actively involve women from affected communities in making decisions to manage water quality.

Water quantity

- Actively involve women from affected communities in discussing how to manage access to shared water resources.

Rehabilitation and post-closure

- Actively involve women from affected communities in the development and validation of rehabilitation and post-closure plans.

Community safety

- Actively involve women from affected communities in testing emergency response plans.

Community grievances

- Ensure that male and female staff members are available for receiving and processing community grievances so that women from affected communities can speak to someone of the same sex.

Health and safety of workers

- Ensure that all women workers have access to suitable sanitation and changing facilities that are safe and separated from those used by male workers.

Women workers

- Take measures to prevent harassment of women workers.
- Take measures to prevent gender-based violence against women workers.
- Ensure the provision of working clothes and personal protective equipment that are appropriate for women's bodies to all women employees and the women who work for contractor.
- Provide gender-awareness training for all their employees and the people who work for contractors.

Workplace deaths and injuries

- Ensure that women workers are represented in joint occupational safety and health committees.

Training of workers

- Ensure access for women workers to all training programmes and learning opportunities.

Decent living wage

- Publicly disclose the lowest salary level for female and male workers for each job level.

Worker grievances

- Ensure that male and female staff members are available for receiving and processing worker grievances so that women workers can speak to someone of the same sex.

The full RMI framework is available in 7 languages at:

<https://www.responsibleminingfoundation.org/rmi-framework-2022/>

Responsible Mining Foundation

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