

1.6 Indigenous Peoples and mining

As documented in the ICMM position statement, Indigenous Peoples may be affected by, or have an interest in, mining and metals projects in several different capacities:

- They may have – or claim – some form of legally recognized ownership or control over the land, territories and resources that mining companies want to access, explore, mine or otherwise use.
- They may be customary owners of land, territories, and resources but without formal legal recognition of this ownership.
- They may be occupants or users of land, territories and resources either as customary owners or as people whose customary lands are elsewhere.
- The land may contain sites, objects or resources of cultural and spiritual/religious significance; and/or the landscapes have special significance because of association, tradition or beliefs.
- They may be residents of an affected community whose social, economic and physical environment are or will be affected by mining and associated activities.

In addition, they may be employees of and/or suppliers to the mining operations, and potential receivers of taxes and royalties (either directly or indirectly through government distributed funds).

Any impact of mining development on Indigenous Peoples may be positive, negative, or a mix of both, depending on a number of factors. These include geographical location, community characteristics, past experiences with mining, the nature of the mining activities and, critically, how the company approaches the management of community engagement and the impact of these factors. Where significant impacts occur, they may generate complex socioeconomic interactions introducing unexpected secondary impacts, which can be positive or negative in nature. The scale and nature of impacts will also vary over the life of the mining projects.

Table 1 highlights some of the ways in which mining projects may potentially impact Indigenous Peoples both positively and negatively.

“WHEN ALL THE
TREES HAVE BEEN
CUT DOWN, WHEN
ALL THE ANIMALS
HAVE BEEN
HUNTED, WHEN
ALL THE WATERS
ARE POLLUTED,
WHEN ALL THE
AIR IS UNSAFE TO
BREATHE, ONLY
THEN WILL YOU
DISCOVER YOU
CANNOT EAT
MONEY.”

Cree Indians prophecy