CHAPTER 3
MANAGING IMPACTS

PART ONE
GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MINING
GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

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3.3
Environmental protection, rehabilitation and monitoring

The natural environment is of central importance to many Indigenous Peoples, not only because they often depend wholly or partly on it for their livelihoods, but also because it has strong cultural, and often spiritual, significance. For these reasons, when projects adversely impact the environment, they may also be impacting Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests.

Companies can deal proactively with these issues by partnering with Indigenous Peoples in identifying, planning, mitigating and monitoring environmental impacts, for example by:

- including representatives from the indigenous community in environmental assessment panels (although this has generally been initiated or required by governments rather than companies)

- consulting widely with indigenous communities to understand their environmental concerns about mining and how these can be addressed, and incorporating traditional knowledge into environmental impact assessments

- including Indigenous Peoples on environmental monitoring committees and involving them in the collection and analysis of monitoring data (eg water samples).

There are also many opportunities to involve Indigenous Peoples in environmental protection, rehabilitation and restoration. Examples include gathering seeds of native plants for use in rehabilitation, fire management and wildlife management. Indigenous Peoples have often been the guardians of their territories for centuries and can bring traditional knowledge and natural resource management practices to complement the company's technical expertise.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

Martu ranger program in Western Australia (Newmont), see page 104.

Respecting the cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples (Barrick), see page 105.

3.4
Preparing for mine closure

It is good practice for closure planning to commence early in the life of a project – ideally, at the design stage – and remain a focus across the life of the mine. This planning should incorporate indigenous perspectives wherever possible to help address the socioeconomic, as well as environmental, aspects of closure. In terms of socioeconomic impact, closure can bring further significant changes to communities, particularly where the mine has been a major source of income, employment and/or services (eg medical services, transport, support for local schools). From an environmental perspective, if properly managed and resourced, high standards of environmental rehabilitation are possible during the mine closure stage, including restoration and/or enhancement of the natural resources that Indigenous Peoples may use to sustain their livelihoods.

As discussed in Chapter 4, there are a number of actions that responsible companies can take to mitigate these impacts and build or enhance local environmental, social, cultural and economic resilience. Companies, in partnership with local and national government, should be supportive of diversifying the local economy throughout the project life cycle. Companies should engage openly with indigenous communities where a diverse post-mine closure local economy is not possible because of local social, environmental and economic constraints. To increase the chances of sustainable and diverse local economic development, companies should take the following actions:

- ensuring that people know from the beginning, and are kept informed, about the eventuality of the mine closing and the likely impacts this will have on the community and region

- engaging actively with community groups and organizations on how this impact should be addressed

- working with organizations representing the indigenous community to develop benefit streams that will continue beyond mining (eg by creating "future generation" trusts and other forms of long-term investment)

- if desired by the local community, helping to develop alternative forms of economic activity, such as tourism or livestock raising, that are not dependent on mining

- designing low-technology physical infrastructure (eg water supply systems) that can potentially be maintained by the local community post-closure

- equipping employees with skills and qualifications that are potentially transferable to other industries in the region and assisting local employees who are interested in finding future work post-closure in other locations

- helping to build community governance capacity.