

## **SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNT ABOUT SMALL-SCALE MINING IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**

*Fifty persons from government, academe, civil society and the mining industry, including practitioners of small scale mining, from eight countries in the Asia-Pacific (Australia, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines), gathered in Manila, Baguio and Itogon municipality in the Philippines from 7 to 12 June 2005, to exchange experiences and views on small mining in the Asia-Pacific region.*

*This statement of the lessons learnt by the participants is based on a draft discussed in the final plenary session of the main meeting, and has been revised in the light of additional comments received since then. The summary outcomes of three workshops held before the final plenary session were used as the basis for drafting the summary statement. The following statement reflects the views of individual participants, and should not be attributed to the CASM Secretariat or any of the organizations which funded or organized the event.*

Experiences and perspectives on small-scale mining from eight countries were presented and discussed in the Asia-Pacific Learning Event. Based on these, we considered in plenary the following lessons on the state of, and interests in, small-scale mining in the region:

### **INTERESTS**

There is a wide diversity of interests in small-scale mining in the region. These include those of governments, small-scale miners, and many other stakeholders, including the families and communities of small-scale miners, big mining firms, civil society groups, and academics seeking to understand the economic, environmental and social features of the practice and traditions of small-scale mining.

It was concluded in workshops and plenary that:

- Governments often fail to recognize the potential economic benefits, tax revenues, and development outcomes that can be derived from small-scale mining. Government policies on mining are often confused and inconsistent, and frequently favour or focus on large-scale mining. Government neglect of the small-scale mining sector can be costly to governments in administrative, financial, political, and environmental terms.
- Small-scale mining is a significant contributor to the economic and social well-being of many people and households in rural, remote, and poor communities, who are often hardly reached by agencies responsible for the delivery of essential public services. When other stakeholders make life more difficult for small-scale miners, they may reduce the viability of rural livelihoods and encourage urban drift.

- Big mining firms can profit from harmonious, well-thought out, and equitable collaborations with small-scale miners. These benefits can be realized in terms of efficiency of production, social and political stability in mining sites, and long-term corporate prestige.
- Societies at large can be both positively and negatively affected by small-scale mining. Positive effects can include the promotion of efficient resource use, such as extracting ores from small deposits or from tailings, and providing rural incomes. Negative effects can include water pollution, the release of mercury and other toxic and hazardous wastes into the free environment, and social tensions that can lead to civil unrest.
- While governments have an interest in attending to the issues and plight of small-scale mining and small-scale miners, society as a whole should have an interest in promoting and strengthening the role of small-scale mining in national development, and in legalizing, regulating, and strengthening the developmental potential of the sector.
- Both women and men play important roles in the small-scale mining sector. These different gender roles are linked to their different needs and interests in mining communities. Through recognition of the diversity of these gender roles and interests in small-scale mining, gender mainstreaming becomes both practicable and desirable.
- It cannot be assumed that the interests of indigenous people are consistent with those of small-scale miners. While some indigenous people may secure their livelihoods from small-scale mining, there may be other cases in which non-indigenous small-scale miners threaten the livelihoods of indigenous people.

## ISSUES

Small-scale mining has definite social, cultural, historical, economic and environmental contexts that characterize its practice and traditions. But these are poorly understood by government policy makers and bureaucrats, the large-scale mining industry, and other stakeholders. It is this widespread poverty of appreciation and understanding of the issues in the small-scale mining sector that often (and too easily) lead to confusion and conflicts over it.

It was concluded in workshops and plenary that:

- Government policies for the sector have to be framed by the principles of growth, equity, and sustainability. They need to be realistic, equitable, and implemented effectively. Governments in the Asia-Pacific region have much to learn from each other on ways to develop such policies.

- Overlapping and conflicting laws, or laws and regulations that are not based on an understanding of the local context of small-scale mining, hinder and erode the sector's potential to contribute to sustainable development.
- Small-scale miners need more information, awareness, and education on the technical, economic, and environmental aspects of their activities. Small-scale miners can also improve their environmental performance and productivity by sharing their knowledge and technologies with each other. But there is often a lack of research, information, or public awareness about the livelihoods of small-scale miners and their communities.
- The main threats to small-scale miners (and to the sector) come from the combination of government repression, expropriations by large-scale mining companies, and uncontrolled immigration to small-scale mining areas. All three are partly driven by failures to understand the technology, history and social organization of small-scale mining and miners.
- Large-scale mining companies can benefit from a better understanding of the social and cultural environments of their mining sites. They will benefit from exercising high standards of corporate social and environmental responsibility when dealing with small-scale mining and miners, but they will also have greater capacity to engage local communities in participatory processes.
- Violence – in any form, against anyone – is always counterproductive for the development of both the small- and large-scale mining sectors.
- The contexts of control and power between women and men in small-scale mining communities are not the same, and this often means that women suffer more of the adverse impacts of mining activities while their interests are neglected in the development process. Small-scale mining as a livelihood must change these unequal power equations by bringing women as well as men into the decision-making process.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for small-scale mining to become a key sector for sustainable development, especially at a local level, can be created by governments, by small-scale miners themselves, and by other stakeholders. But this will only happen if they can work together to: (a) recognize the value of existing indigenous or traditional mining practices; (b) establish better networks for sharing information and advocating better policies and practices for the sector; and (c) develop an agenda for integrating the small-scale mining sector in national development plans and programs.

It was concluded in workshops and plenary that:

- Cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships can help to improve the technical and environmental performance of small-scale mining and miners, and facilitate the sustainable development of the small scale mining sector through the production of rational and responsible mining plans and programs.
- Civil society can function as a “conscience block” to mobilize public opinion to support the resolution of conflict within small-scale mining communities, to harmonize the interests and performance of the large- and small-scale mining sectors, or to reconcile the interests of small-scale miners with those of governments.
- Academic institutions can provide support through research, development of appropriate technologies, training and education. A comprehensive database of small-scale mining activities in different countries would be an invaluable research reference. Continuous education and training, extension and refresher courses, and technical advice in the areas of greatest need, such as occupational health and safety.
- The negative environmental and social impacts of small-scale mining may be the result of the sector being ignored by government and other stakeholders. Small-scale miners understand many of the negative environmental, social and health impacts of their activities, and are generally open to efforts by governments and other stakeholders to improve their productive capacities and technical capabilities to accentuate the positive impacts and reduce or mitigate the negative impacts.
- Many of the social and environmental issues in the small-scale mining sector (such as gender equity issues) are shared with other sectors and their stakeholders, so it is not always necessary to develop special sectoral policies to deal with these issues.
- Government policies and actions should be designed to both promote and properly regulate small-scale mining as a sector. Governments should enact appropriate, supportive and attractive laws affirming their development partnerships with small-scale miners. They need to provide or strengthen institutions that allow for formally articulating, advocating, and promoting the interests and well-being of small-scale miners. They should reduce red tape in order to promote small-scale mining. They need to be neutral in balancing the interests of small- and large-scale miners.
- Serious consideration must also be given to the decentralization of policy and regulation functions for the small-scale mining sector to local levels of government. This is especially the case where small-scale mining is a highly localized activity, the problems and issues in the sector vary from one location to another, and local governments have the capacity to manage the sector effectively.
- The clarification and integration of the tenure rights of small-scale miners and other stakeholders in small-scale mining areas are crucial to the sustainable development of the sector. One critical foundation for strengthening the development potential of small-scale mining is to respect, confirm, and affirm the locally-constructed (statutory and customary) property claims and rights of small-scale miners.

- Women and men have different concerns in small-scale mining. The small-scale mining sector overall is strengthened when the needs and concerns of both women and men are appreciated and understood by all involved in the sector. Empowering women has long-term effects on a community's well-being, leading to a form of sustainable development that does justice to both women and men
- Regulations on child labour may become a pretext for eliminating or marginalizing the interests of women who are lumped together with children. When this occurs, the potential of small-scale mining to promote development or alleviate poverty is eroded. Local customs or traditions associated with child labour may be inconsistent with principles of social justice or sustainable development. While these need to be understood in their social context, the provision of more education and opportunities will help to improve the life choices of the children.
- Small-scale miners need to organize themselves in order to do a more effective job of relating their interests to those of governments and other stakeholders. There is also a need to preserve, advocate and disseminate existing models of indigenous or traditional good practice in the sector by lining local, national and international institutions within the Asia-Pacific region.
- Large-scale and small-scale mining can co-exist. Big mining companies have the resources, in areas such as technology, safety, processing and marketing, to support the sustainable development of the small-scale sector. Small-scale miners have the experience and local knowledge to provide technical, environmental, social and cultural information which may be useful to big companies. Their co-existence and collaboration should not be a threat to either side, but an opportunity for both. Employment and subcontracting arrangements have good potential for harmoniously linking small and large miners, but such arrangements, in order to be beneficial to both sides, must be based on mutual respect and confidence and on the principles of social justice.
- Big mining companies can also work through their corporate or community affairs departments to develop forms of collaboration with national or local government agencies to deliver support and assistance to small-scale miners in the areas affected by large-scale mining operations.
- A policy and development consensus can be built among small-scale miners and other stakeholders, for the benefit of society at large, but only when anchored on mutual recognizance of each others' worth and dignity, on trust, and on social capital. Obstacles abound that prevent this from happening, but a consensus is possible, and so, too, is a future in which small-scale mining and miners find their rightful place in a nation's endeavours to achieve sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

The participants invite governments, small-scale miners, large-scale miners, civil society groups, academics, religious groups, international organizations, and all others concerned with mining and development, to consider these lessons, and if they agree with them, to translate them into action.

The participants propose these ways forward for the network of individuals and institutions established by means of this meeting:

- Establish better mechanisms for sharing information and advocating better policies and better practices for the sector.
- Establish more opportunities or venues for the sharing of relevant knowledge and experience within and between different countries and localities of the region.
- Advocate and disseminate existing models of good practice in the small-scale mining sector through the information network.
- Bring small-scale mining issues to the attention of donor agencies and non-government organizations, as well as government agencies.

And above all:

**invite all stakeholders with an interest in the sector to learn from concrete examples of equitable, effective, and sustainable local-level partnerships which include small-scale miners or their communities as a guide to the development of better policy and practice in the different jurisdictions of the Asia-Pacific region.**