

Practice Note: Social Investment

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How has COVID-19 impacted social investment programs?

On August 26th, 2020 Community Relations Connect held a session in collaboration with the Devonshire Initiative focused on social investment in the context of COVID-19. This Practice Note includes selected highlights from the session.

The session highlighted the central role and limitations of social investment programs. Participants were challenged to think about the potential for long term changes to social investment programs to contribute to community-led sustainable development.

Angela Harrison is the Economic Development Manager for Aurora Wind Power, which is the Project Company that owns the 94MW West Coast 1 Wind Farm that is situated on the West Coast of South Africa. She has over 10 years of experience in working within sustainable development, of which 8 years has been dedicated to working in Economic Development under South Africa's Renewable Energy Procurement Programme. Angela holds a Master of Science degree in Biotechnology from the University of the Witwatersrand and has also undertaken courses in Social Innovation.

Aaron Steeghes is the Director of Health, Safety and Sustainable Development at Yamana Gold Corporation. With a background in CSR and Community Relations, he is responsible for building collaborative approaches to the design and implementation of both corporate and site objectives for community relations, environment and health & safety. Prior to Yamana, he worked in the sector for IAMGOLD, Breakwater Resources and Canadian Business for Social Responsibility. He has also worked for several Canadian and Peruvian-based development NGOs including the Stephen Lewis Foundation and the Coady International Institute. Aaron holds a BA in Anthropology from St. Francis Xavier University, an MA in International Development from Dalhousie University and an International MBA from the Schulich School of Business.

“It’s about more than a social license to operate”

“I’ve never seen programs budgeted and approved so quickly.”

“How do we tell an 80-year-old woman the food parcels will stop?”

INSIGHTS

The response has required flexibility, creativity and innovation from site teams and local stakeholders. The urgency of COVID led to quick decisions and less internal bureaucracy related to cost and budget approvals. There is an opportunity but also risks associated with this, including governance concerns.

It's about more than a social license to operate. COVID19 will illustrate if the company was 'there' for the community or not. However, it is seen as more than obtaining / maintaining a social license to operate. We have a moral duty to support each other during this time.

Organizations have moved from people intensive development programming to immediate needs-based initiatives. In the immediate wake of COVID-19 social investment has moved from sustainable programming (e.g. training) to immediate needs-based initiatives (e.g. food parcels, face masks, supporting schools with sanitation equipment).

The online space presents opportunities and challenges. Some people centred social investment programs can be delivered online. For example, wellness checks and psycho social supports can be delivered using messaging and video apps.

We can learn a lot from the community-led response to COVID. For example, many of the local responses in townships have been very effective. How can we take use these principles in a post-COVID world and support communities to be at the centre of their development planning and programming.

COVID can shift our thinking and strategy around social investment. COVID-19 presents an opportunity to shift traditional thinking about social investment. As we build back better we can position mining activity as a catalyst for, not leader of, development.

ACTIONS

Consider the sustainability of programs. Identify which programs will be shorter term and start conversations about how to transition thoughtfully. Discuss with stakeholders how to manage the expectations and communicate how immediate needs and programs will be transitioned.

Manage expectations. Be clear about what you're going to do, and record obligations and commitments. Communities are facing more pressure because of the economic and social impacts of COVID and their expectations of NGOs and companies are increasing.

Understand the long term impacts of COVID on communities. These include access to food; access to education and training opportunities; psycho-social impact of COVID-19; and long-term concerns for the future and lack of trust in government/ systems, especially amongst younger population.

Work across stakeholder groups to determine the role of NGOs and companies when the government is overwhelmed. Determine the practical role companies and NGOs play in supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

Leverage company and NGO skills around crisis management and emergency response. Form working groups to support communities using digital tools, processes for crisis/risk management and scenario planning.

Double down on good governance. Emergencies require us to act fast but we must continue to manage concerns around fraud and corruption.

Community Relations Connect

An African Practitioners Forum

Community Relations Connect is an emerging network for community relations and social performance practitioners working throughout Africa.

It is a community of practice for people to come together to share, learn and improve their practices.

Community Relations Connect has grown out of the urgent need to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, although the seed was planted long before the pandemic, and the aspiration is to build a community which flourishes beyond the pandemic.

CRC is hosted by Synergy Global Consulting and is supported by the International Council for Mining and Metals (ICMM).



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Devonshire Initiative

The Devonshire Initiative is a multi-stakeholder forum focused on improving development outcomes in the mining context.

We provide support and resources to drive cross-sector collaboration, including training on cross sector collaboration and collaborative through leadership.

Our members include mining companies, non-profit organizations and other practitioners.



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