International Conference
Mining and Mining Policy in the Pacific: History, Challenges and Perspectives

Organisation: IRD, IAC, CPS, CIRAD, CNRT “Nickel and its environment”

Location: Nouméa (New Caledonia).
Date: 22-25 (or 21-24) November 2011.

Steering committee:

– Gilles Fédière, Director of the IRD Noumea Centre, Delegate for the South Pacific
– Jacques Wadrawane, Deputy General Secretary to the High Commissioner of French Republic in New Caledonia
– Elise Huffer with Inoke Ratukalou (CPS)
– Pierre-Yves Le Meur (IRD)
– Fabrice Colin, Research, innovation and technology consultant to the government of New-Caledonia
– Sonia Grochain (IAC)
– Jean-Michel Sourisseau, Géraud Magrin and Geert van Vliet (CIRAD)
– Gilles Pestaña, (CNEP, University of New Caledonia)
– Colin Filer, University of Canberra, Australia
– Glenn Banks, Massey University, NZ
– Martha Macintyre, University of Melbourne, Australia
– Marcia Langton, University of Melbourne, Australia
– Christina Hill, Mining Advocacy Officer, Oxfam
– Aroha Mead, UICN and Victoria University of Wellington
– Henry Ivarature, Secretariat Pacific Islands Forum
– Raphael Mapou, Rhebuu Nuu
– Alban Tremblier, President of the CNRT “Nickel and its environment”
– Aurélien Louis, Director of DIMENC (Direction des mines et de l’énergie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie)
– Representative of the mining industries’ trade union of New-Caledonia
– Representative of the International Council on Metals and Mining (to be confirmed)
– Regis Vendegou, representative of the government of New Caledonia – Director of Culture, Citizenship and Women’s Affairs
– Representative of associations for the advancement of the status of women (Papua New Guinea)
– Representative of the Northern Province (to be confirmed)
– Representative the Islands Province (to be confirmed)
– Representative the Southern Province (to be confirmed)

Organising committee

Pierre-Yves Le Meur & Mina Vilayleck on behalf of IRD
Laurent L’Huillier & Sonia Grochain on behalf of IAC
Jean-Michel Sourisseau & Geert van Vliet on behalf of CIRAD
Elise Huffer, Brigitte Leduc & Linda Petersen on behalf of CPS
Bernard Robineau & Laurence Berthault on behalf of CNRT “Nickel and its environment”
Background

Mining in the Pacific region has both a long history that is closely linked to colonization, and immediate currency with the fluctuations in raw materials prices, the massive investments of multinational mining companies, the rise of Indigenous and environmental concerns and voices, and the renewed interest in sea-bed mining.

Mining in the Pacific has been diverse, extending over both the colonial and postcolonial eras, as seen in Nauru (phosphate), Fiji (Vatukoula gold mine) and in New Caledonia where nickel has been extracted for over 130 years. Copper has been mined in Bougainville (with renewed prospecting currently fuelling tension) and prospecting has been ongoing in Fiji for a number of years; phosphate was mined in French Polynesia (Makatea) and Banaba, and manganese in Vanuatu (Efate). The mining sector has been booming for several decades in Papua New Guinea and the country has had a resource-dependent economy since independence in 1975 – the extractive sector accounting for more than 50% of the export value at the time of independence and around 75% today. In Solomon Islands, the Gold Ridge mine accounted for 30% of GDP at the time of its forced closure in 2000. Large-scale mining projects are underway in PNG (Porgera for gold, Ok Tedi for copper, Lihir, as well as the Ramu nickel/cobalt project) and in New Caledonia with the Goro and Koniambo nickel projects adding to SLN’s singular history, attracting greater scrutiny from neighboring communities, environmental NGOs and local government. Expansion phases and booms have generated economic and political upheavals and accelerated social change, as was the case during the nickel boom years of 1968 to 1972 in New Caledonia and the gold exploration boom in PNG during the 1980s. Environmental footprints (loss of biodiversity, chemical releases, erosion, lagoon and river silting up) have also been significant.

There are a range of parameters which make the mining sector diverse and complicated: differences range according to the type of ore extracted, techniques used, communities involved, geographical location (inland, on the coast or on offshore islands), the size of investments and projects, the profile of the national/multinational firms, as well as the relative importance of mining to the local/national economies. The social, environmental, economic, political and cultural impacts are varied and context-dependent, making broad generalizations difficult, despite the obvious similarities.

Mining has often been conflict-ridden as money, power and resources, and peoples’ future, are at stake. Information is therefore a strategic asset. Information on the different mining sites exists but it often remains the property of firms or government ensuring that debate, though tense, remains constrained and localized. More accessible information, such as academic articles or reports on mining is often limited to specific sites or to the mining history of particular countries or areas. Studies on impacts are often focused on particular communities and on context-specific environmental issues. A key area of national importance, the regulatory and legal frameworks established by countries to manage the mining industry, has also been assessed and documented. But to date, there has been no regional perspective on or assessment of mining across the Pacific, even though there is a growing need to understand the growing complexity of financial and legal arrangements, the increased role of global NGOs and the concerns of Indigenous communities, in a context of deep asymmetries between bargaining powers and time frames among stakeholders.
Objective and originality

This conference does not cover new ground. In recent years, there have been several such events concerning the issue of mining in New Caledonia, both at regional and international levels (cf. the 4th New Caledonia Nickel Conference in November 2010). The originality of this event lies in the combination of the following factors, which was not provided by any of the recent or planned conferences:

- The participants are not from a single group of actors (professionals, researchers etc.) as the objective is to create a forum for debate between the different groups.1
- This is not exclusively a conference of “professionals” – the active participation of the representatives of the riparian communities, associations and NGOs has been requested.
- Attention is deliberately focused on the societal aspects and governance challenges of mining, from the local level to higher levels, i.e. ultimately also the South Pacific.
- The entire industry is taken into account; the conference is not limited to one mineral (e.g. nickel) and includes the industrial processing sector.
- Finally, this conference is regional in its intention and scope, from both the perspective of the topic and that of the organisers and participants.

The primary objective of this conference is to take stock of the diversity of the situations at local and national levels through case studies and analyses carried out by experts in the sector who come from the academic context, mining companies, the NGOs or public service. These analyses will involve different social scientific disciplines and can take the form of research studies or discussions focusing on development policy. These will enable the adoption of a comparative perspective through the contrasting of contexts, approaches, levels and points of view. From a practical perspective, the aim is ultimately to identify, first, the extent to which the development of a regional perspective on mining is justified in the Pacific and, second, how the production and dissemination of knowledge and the adoption of joint strategic and regulatory strategies can be intensified.

This conference has the dual aim of gaining a better understanding of the differences and commonalities in the mining industry at regional level, past and current practices, and more urgent issues, and to provide the possibility to all of the participating parties to meet and exchange information. The approach taken should be pluralist which is why it is essential to bring all of the actors involved in the issue of mining to the table: i.e. academics and researchers, representatives of the mining communities, the mining industry, international, national and local NGOs, and representatives of the public authorities and regional organisations.

Subject

The subject of the conference is mining and all its aspects. It will examine the relationships between the mining companies, the public authorities and local communities, the NGOs, the officials, experts, consultants and representatives of civil society. It will also investigate the role and importance of the aid donors and of international financial institutions and organisations. Four major areas of interest have been identified:

1. The activity of mining itself, i.e. the nature of the resources involved, technical processes, company strategies, financial context etc.
2. The impacts of mining on different levels (ecological, economic, social, political, cultural and gender), and the interaction between these issues in the dynamics of mining conflicts and in the negotiations that follow them or can enable their avoidance.

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1 Based on the workshops which were organised in November 2008 by the IAC and Northern Province on “Ruralité et développement durable” (“Rurality and Sustainable Development”) and included a round table on mining and sustainable development.
3. The existing (and desirable) institutional, regulatory and legal frameworks, measures, policies and innovations relating to mining, including case studies on provisions at national level (for example Papua New Guinea’s extensive experience in the sector), international level (“best practice”) and at company level (development and implementation of frameworks for corporate social responsibility).

4. The community strategies regarding inter alia the management of the revenue generated by the exploitation of mining resources (forms of organisation, justification discourse, strategies, conflicts, negotiations, agreements etc.).

These questions will be examined on the different levels, i.e. local, national, regional and international.

**Organisation**

**Call for papers**

The four areas identified constitute the basis for a call for papers which will be aimed at experts working in the field of mining in the Pacific. The call for papers is inclusive, in principle, however we would like to suggest some orientations that would appear to us to be of particular relevance. Priority will be given to two main dimensions:

- Case studies focusing on the dynamics generated at local level by large-scale or smaller mining projects and, hence, on the interaction between mining operations and local actors: i.e. political and traditional authorities, trade unions, environmental organisations, NGOs, sub-contractors etc.
- The conference will also provide an opportunity for analyses at national level based on an institutional or economic approach, for example focusing on the interaction between mining sectors and development dynamics.

Welcome in both cases are:

- historical perspectives and
- comparative perspectives (for example, between several sites operated by one and the same company or, conversely, different company strategies implemented on nearby sites).

Based on the four pre-defined areas and the outcome of the selection of the papers received, workshops will be organised on specific topics and involving presentations by different types of actors (not only researchers). The workshops will operate with a “chair-based” system.

**Keynote lectures**

For each of the major topics identified, one conference participant will be asked to present a keynote presentation which will be followed by two contributions that respond to the presentation: these two contributors will come from different fields to the main contributor, e.g. if the main contributor is the representative of a mining company, the other two will include a researcher, NGO or community representative.

**Round tables**

Round tables will be organised on the four major topics (mining, impacts, regulatory frameworks and community strategies) also taking into account the different levels (local, national, regional and international). They will focus on more specific topics and will complement the work carried out at the workshops (for example: corporate social responsibility, sharing of revenues obtained from mining, regulation, monitoring of compliance with regulations and the effectiveness of the public authorities, processes for the prevention or resolution of conflicts).

**Site visit**

A site visit will be organised for the purpose of illustrating the different aspects of mining (extraction, transformation, impact, regulation).
Potential official partners

The following institutions have been officially approached for both contributions to the content of the conference and financial support: the provinces of New Caledonia, the government of New Caledonia, the state (through the Pacific Fund, the ministries approached: MEDD, MRE, MAE), mining industrialists, SIM, European Union, engineering practices that work in the mining sector, BRGM, World Bank, UICN, International Council on Metals and Mining, Aus AID.

Conference schedule

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