Women in Community Development –
Experiences from the Kainantu Gold Project

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Introduction
The mining industry in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has come a long way since the 1998 Community Affairs Conference when Susan Bonnell brought to our collective attention the almost unheeded silent heart cries of the women in mining communities. This led to the creation of gender development desks at most resource projects in PNG and the development and articulation of the 2003 Women in Mining Vision Statement, and with contribution from the PNG Department of Mining in sustainable development policy change, considerable progress has been made towards reaching the still-elusive milestone of equitable consideration for women in mining development in PNG.

Making the most from past resource project experiences in PNG (and elsewhere) was the commitment which Highlands Kainantu Limited (HKL) subscribed to with the writing of its Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which included gender development, in its core community development activities in mine area communities.

Project Overview
HKL is the company formed to operate the Kainantu Gold Project. The company is owned 95% by Highlands Pacific Limited and 5% by the people of Bilimoia through a trustee company, is leading the way in the revival of the PNG mining industry with the development of the country’s first new mine in the past decade.

The MOA signed among all stakeholders - Landowners, HKL, and the PNG Government (Local Level, Provincial and National) – in December 2003 was the first after the Department of Mining, under the guidance of the World Bank, undertook an extensive review of sustainability factors relating to communities and mining in 2002. The result was a MOA, and the mining operation itself, designed around World Bank sustainability and environmental guidelines – a first for PNG.

The mine is located on the edge of the highlands plateau in the Kainantu District of Eastern Highlands Province. Landownership of the area is presently being reviewed by a Land Titles Commission appointed by the PNG Government as there are sixty-four different groups from Eastern Highlands, Morobe, and Madang Provinces claiming ownership over various parts of HKL’s four mining leases and easements.

Construction of the mine and associated infrastructure began in April 2004 and is well advanced. The current project plan estimates the production of 100,000+ oz. of gold per annum from the underground mining operations. The shipment of gold concentrate from site is expected to commence in the 4th quarter of 2005.

At full production HKL will employ a workforce of over 400 people. The current HKL construction-phase workforce stands at 329 employees and 251 contractor employees. We are

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proud that 51% of the HKL workforce and 30% of our contractor workforce come from the local Kainantu area.

At present, women make up five percent \( (n=18) \) of the HKL workforce (and twelve percent \( [n=29] \) of contractor employees). These women hold responsible positions in different areas and levels of the company – human resources (manager); health services; social programs; environment; accounting; payroll; and supply. One of our long-term goals is to eventually have women employed in the underground operations.

The feasibility of the project was initially based on a 5 year mine life but with the discovery of extensive gold deposits in the existing mining lease and adjacent areas, the forecasted life of mine has now been increased to 15 – 20 years.

The Challenge
HKL’s MOA stakeholders had agreed for shared support toward gender development during the life of the mine development. Both the Kainantu Rural Local Level Government (KRLLLG) and HKL undertook to providing assistance in cash and kind to establish a mine project area Women’s Association in the mine affected areas to further advance the aims and aspirations of women through life skills training programs, micro credit programs, agriculture, health, and literacy programs.

During the construction phase of the mine development, the KRLLLG was supposed to have taken responsibility for gender development and HKL agreed to commence women’s program inputs at the start of production. Unfortunately, and true to form as experiences at other mining and petroleum projects in the country have shown, the Government has let the women down (once again).

After all the work that had gone into forming the “first of its kind” MOA for a PNG resource project, HKL was left with the unfortunately not so unusual challenge facing resource developers in PNG – that of working with project area women in three provinces with no prospect of support from other MOA partners.

HKL’s Response
In response to the challenge facing HKL, we set about designing a women’s program that would see us through construction with a review of the activities prior to commencement of production.

Community Consultation
Constant communication with the women leaders of each community is considered a priority for HKL. Programmed meetings are called to inform the women of company activities. In instances with time constraints, letters are often sent to women leaders to inform them of company-community programs. We have experienced communication break down at times, leading to frustrations and confrontations from the women. It has been realised that non-delivery of letters or women leaders not doing their part in getting the message through has caused the problems.

Women’s Group Registration
The company has also ensured that the two major groups of women – the Bilimoians and Associated Impact Group (AIG) area (Unantu, Pomasi, Waterais, and Musuam) have registered women’s associations to help sustain them even after mine operations.
The women of Bilimoia (the mining lease landowners) have established Breido Women’s Association Inc.

The AIG women are presently working towards having their group registered but the geography of the region, and the fact that they are in three different provinces, is making this difficult.

As is the case with such matters, the difficulties will be overcome and there will be two women’s associations to represent the women of the Kainantu Gold Project and be the main drivers of the gender development agenda in the mine impact area in partnership with HKL and other stakeholders.

The main women’s programs that HKL has been supporting during construction, and possibly will be supporting during operations depending on their success, include:

**Women’s Project Funding**
Since construction began in 2004, funding has been made available for mine area communities with a certain percentage allocated specifically to assist projects identified and implemented by women including literacy and sewing. More tangible projects (those involving land) such as women’s resource centres are being planned for 2006 when more substantial royalty-based development funds will be available.

**Small Business Opportunities**
With small business ventures, individual women groups were assisted with minor contracts including sewing of curtains for the camps, rehabilitation of deserted camps, camp-cleaning services contracts. The main aim has been to ensure income generation to support the work individual groups in their respective communities.

**Training**

**Sewing (Train the Trainer)**
The Lutheran Women’s Training Centre of Kainantu initiated the train the trainer-sewing program with HKL. The opportunity was taken to train 12 women’s leaders from the community, who were then utilised to train women in their own communities. HKL in turn hired the trained local women through their groups to do further training in other communities. Through the program the women were able to be trained, see that a skill is being transferred, and the product of the program used to make money for the group.

**Basic Bookkeeping**
With the income generating opportunities, and given the lack of proper education gave rise to the need of ensuring the women are made aware of proper bookkeeping practices. Training was conducted for women’s group treasurers by HKL’s Senior Payroll Officer (also a woman).

**Women’s Literacy**
We have identified the need and are supporting women’s literacy training through community-based programs run by the Evangelical Brotherhood Church, the Seventh Day Adventist (ADRA), and the Lutheran Church.

**Floriculture**
A floriculture workshop for the community was held in September 2004. The workshop involved two days of field investigations in the local communities and a day of floral arranging in a workshop setting. The workshop was attended by over 40 women and men.
from the Kainantu area. The participants were quite excited about the prospect of starting this cottage industry in the area.

Community Health Support
HKL employs a Community Health Worker who conducts medical patrols in the remote areas of Bilimoia, Pomasi, Unantu, and Musuam to address common health concerns in the communities – malaria, TB, typhoid, and HIV/AIDS. HKL has also provided support with Government immunization programs and continues to supply much needed drugs to aid posts in the mine impact area. With HIV/AIDS, HKL is partnering with Ramu Sugar Limited and a number of local and international NGOs to prevent the spread and lessen the impact of this disease of global proportion on its employees and the local communities.

Donations/Other Assistance
The company maintains an open door policy to women in ensuring that we assist and provide things which help in sustaining them. The company has donated sewing machines, and other sewing accessories to assist them to sew and continue with income generation. Church activities are also supported, as most women are engaged in these activities which promote peace and harmony in the community.

Response of Mine Area Women
Given the general perception in most communities that women are not so important in the race for development, programs targeted for women by a developer are embraced with both hands. The women’s enthusiastic grasp on the programs relay two messages, the first is to proudly show to their male counterparts that they are recognised by the developer as equal, and secondly they try to use the program as a means of getting even with the long neglect they have faced with their respective District Women’s Councils.

With some of our programs, we have found that some women have not been prepared to put in the effort needed to make the program work – the give and take exchange is lacking. Willingness to take on programs and making them sustain lacks a lot of support. Generally it is common for Papua New Guineans to accept programs which have an instant value (cash or kind), and do not take too kind the programs which are meant to be sustained for a long time and which provide for the general well being of the community.

We have witnessed during the course of programs that generally, most women in the project area are very receptive to ideas of development. But there has never been knowledge to empower them to understand that the acceptance of development requires an input from them. The difficulty of program delivery was often realised after we have agreed for a program and is being brought to the community, with the belief that it be capably under control by the women, we only come to realise that there are issues where we need to negotiate our way in with more cash or kind or being there physically to see the program start and end.

There also exists misunderstanding between and among women’s group leaders and the general women’s population in the community. The general population of women in the community see company programs as only for the leaders, and are not too helpful. Women are also held back in fully participating due to family obligations.

Good timing and patience in delivering programs with community acceptance are among the lessons learned in working with women in the project area.
Responses of Other Groups

Churches
We have realised that church influence in a community plays a major role in the acceptance of a program. In some instances, the community will not accept the company using a non-represented church to come and run a program in their community.

With a community mind-set such as this we are now liaising with specific churches to get them to visit their congregated communities and carry out training through their social development groups. To the wishes of the communities, the Evangelical Brotherhood Church and the Seventh Day Adventist’s ADRA, and the Lutheran church are currently being tasked the major role in literacy training.

Although the church program delivery is an issue, there is more sense of direction with church run programs than the other NGOs, and that, women with church roles seem to take lead and are more influential. Most of the women leaders we work with in the communities are church elders and leaders themselves.

NGOs
We have experienced some NGOs being reluctant to have anything to do with development programs concerning communities impacted by mining companies. It may be because they believe that all of the needs of the community will be addressed by HKL.

However, with the long-term mind set of sustainable programs for the women, we are pursuing linkages with several enlightened NGOs who are cooperative and we anticipate forging some more productive links in the near future.

District & LLG Response
When we began our women’s programs, we were surprised to learn that Bilimoia village, 30 minutes by road from Kainantu, did not know about the District Women’s Council or that the KRLLG even had women representatives.

It is bad enough that the women in the communities are left in the dark regarding their right to representation in the KRLLG but what was even more disturbing to HKL was the negative response by the District Administration to the visit in early-2005 by the Department of Mining-sponsored Genfund team. Unfortunately, their attitude demonstrated to HKL, the Department of Mining, and mine area women the significance placed on women, development, and mining in Kainantu District even though the mine will produce significant benefit streams for development once production commences.

Correspondence to and meetings with Provincial, District, and KRLLG women’s representatives relating to development priorities have left HKL and mine area women very disappointed. There is, as experienced elsewhere, little or no feedback and certainly no action. It makes one wonder whether or not those in responsible positions do really care about development? Working alongside the mine area women’s associations, we will progress – with or without the assistance of the Government.

Lessons Learnt
Women’s Groups
It has also been evident that women’s groups are normally formed around the mining projects because of the development process, and as such the women tend to think that their formation
and roles have to be centred only on the mining community activities. There is need for women to understand that their groups are vital in terms of the powerful lobby they could potentially bring to bear for social development in the community with all stakeholders – LLGs, District Community Development Offices, aid donors, NGOs, and Churches.

**Stakeholders**

The understanding each others’ roles among the different stakeholders has to prevail, and the realisation that each of us function for a common goal, which is to help develop the community, has to make us cooperate. We all must know our boundaries, as to where and when we each contribute to the development process. This will hopefully improve the stagnant communication that is currently in existence.

**Companies**

Although making progress at the other fronts with women’s development, we still have a lot to do especially in ensuring that the presence of women is felt at all levels of participation. Women’s presence has to be at all negotiating tables to holding positions in Landowner groups and business ventures. Women presence in high places with men is still lacking. Having the upper hand, companies can turn the tide around and make equal participation a reality.

**The Way Forward**

The advocacy role in bringing to light the need for women to be recognised is making good progress; however the challenge which resource development companies need to continue to address in a strategic manner is how to make community development programs and projects targeting project area women sustainable. Venues such as this conference are good for sharing information and experiences but the learning must continue after the conference ends.

The call made by Lady Carol Kidu, PNG’s Minister for Community Development during the first Women in Mining conference in 2003 to work in partnership with the District Community Development Officers (CDOs) to see the implementation of community programs has to be enhanced, and that extra effort has to be put in order to see proper development as opposed to mere window dressings. It will be very encouraging for CDOs of Districts working aside company Community Affairs Officers, which will help in changing the mindset of the people who see company as solely responsible for all programs, and never getting to understand that the company does have a social responsibility but not the total responsibility in areas where the Government has never been effective. The mutual presence of equal stakeholders will help reinforce new mindsets and assist in the general understanding towards embracing community development.

With the expectation of a significantly extended life of the Kainantu Gold Project, HKL will become a major agent of change in the Kainantu region. We have learned critical development-related lessons during the construction of the mine and are now preparing ourselves for development programs which will commence with mine production towards the end of 2005. HKL is not a social development organization but rather a mining company and we favour a partnership approach to development and want to learn from the experiences of others and engage with like-minded organizations to realize the development dreams and aspirations of men and women in the communities in which we operate.