

## *The Women of Lonmin*

# A Mine of Their Own

By Alex Burger and Benedicta Sepora

**M**aternity leave programs, sexual harassment awareness programs, accommodations for pregnant women and those who are breast-feeding. All this, plus women's bathrooms up to 1.3 kilometers below the earth's surface. This is all part of Lonmin—the world's third-largest primary platinum producing company, with over 25,000 employees and three facilities across South Africa. And where 25 percent of all new hires are women.

Lonmin is committed to its compliance with the South African Minerals and Development Legislation/Social Labor Plan, which requires all mining companies to integrate women into mining operations, with a set target of 10 percent women representation by 2010.

To achieve inclusiveness, Lonmin partnered with IFC. The first step was to conduct an audit to understand potential barriers to reaching the gender equality compliance target. The audit laid the groundwork for a 13-point "Women in Mining" initiative.

Following the initiative's recommendations, among other measures, 11 change houses and 197 underground sanitation facilities were built for women, with an additional 212 forthcoming. Lonmin and IFC also designed a sexual harassment awareness campaign and workshops to ensure that all employees are educated on workplace behavior that constitutes sexual harassment.

The results have exceeded expectations: since the beginning of the Lonmin-IFC partnership in November

2007, over 597 new positions have been filled by women who now constitute 6.2 percent of the workforce, a 42 percent increase from the end of FY07 to FY08. The women retention rate has also improved from a 15.5 percent turnover rate for women at the end of FY07 (13.5 percent for men) to 0.7 percent as of January 2009 (3.2 percent for men).

"For us to unlock and liberate the workplace of any gender bias, we needed to accelerate this program, and as such a new culture of tolerance and acceptance is beginning to emerge" says, Barnard Mokwena, Vice President: External Affairs. "Notably, we are dealing with an industry with more than 100 years of legacy, systems, behaviors and practices that were not designed to be women-friendly."

In October 2008, the IFC-Lonmin program was awarded a top prize in the socio-economic category of the Nedbank Green Mining Awards, which celebrates responsible mining. Going forward, the program plans to capture the impact of women's employment on the well-being of their households and the community at large. ☺

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While the Lonmin project did not benefit from any funds under *Gender Equality as Smart Economics*, the GAP has been funding projects to better integrate gender issues in mining, such as "*Power to the Women: integrating gender concerns in energy, hydro and mining operations in Lao PDR.*"

## *Walking the Talk on Gender Equality*

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equality shows that the Bank's top leadership believes in the Bank's gender work and its results. We must be doing something right.

### **How do you hope to see the Bank's gender work evolve, and what are the biggest challenges going forward?**

I cannot emphasize how important it is for the work and the initiatives started under the GAP to continue beyond the plan, which is meant as a catalyzing force to institutionalize gender concerns into the Bank's work.

The biggest challenge the GAP currently faces is the global economic and financial crisis. This is hitting women hard and advances in women's economic oppor-

tunities may be compromised due to the increasing lack of resources. Young women will often be the first ones to be pulled out of school to lend a hand finding more resources for the household. Micro-lending institutions, which cater to women who often cannot obtain loans through commercial banks, are increasingly lacking capital and female employment will suffer as exports decline. The Bank and the GAP program are facing an uphill task protecting social safety net expenditures and supporting the small and medium-sized enterprises and microfinance institutions that are crucial to women's well-being. Under the plan, some US\$3 million this year will be allocated to mainstreaming gender in the Bank's response to the crisis. But this is a drop in the bucket, so all who are committed to this agenda need to have our voices heard. ☺