

Mining company, Vale, still has mandate to repair environment and community relations further

What is this research about?

The mining industry is vital to the economy of many countries. It is also considered to be highly unsustainable. Vale is the second largest minerals and mining company in the world. Founded in Brazil, Vale operates over 300 active mines in the Minas Gerais region of the country, most of which produce iron-ore. One such mine exists in Itabira, a town of just over 100,000 inhabitants, and has been in operation for 60 years. State-owned for 45 years, Vale was responsible for a large amount of environmental destruction and pollution, while also playing an important role in the health and prosperity of the local community. Following privatization, this relationship between company and community began to fail, and in 2000, a government-led environmental assessment resulted in new rules concerning Vale's operations and its treatment of the local environment and the community. This research paper provides a summary of the history between Vale and the community of Itabira, and examines Vale's response, and the community's reaction, to the new operating conditions.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers interviewed 22 key informants living in Itabira, Brazil, including local community activists. Topics discussed during the interviews included the relationship between Vale and the community of Itabira, and the outcomes of the 2000 and 2004 LOCs (Licença de Operação Correctiva – Corrective Operation License). The researchers also looked at government and company documents relating to Vale and its relationship with the local community and environment.

Keywords:

Brazil, Itabira, Vale, mining, environmental destruction, corporate social responsibility, environmental assessment, sustainability, community involvement

What you need to know:

Since the introduction of environmental and community improvement requirements, the mining company, Vale, has made improvements to their operation, such as building a waste treatment facility for its Itabira mine. However, Vale has yet to address and resolve issues of air pollution and access to clean water.

What did the researchers find?

Since the LOCs went into effect in 2000, Vale has made positive but uneven progress towards repairing the local environment and improving relations with the community of Itabira. Vale obeyed approximately 40 of the 52 LOC conditions. A number of projects were initiated including the installation of a state-of-the-art air quality monitoring system, the building of a waste treatment facility, and the development of strategies to deal with the old tailing (mine waste) ponds. However, several environmental and community issues remain, including failure to set aside land for conservation, and failure to establish sustainable fresh water sources for the community. While Vale has made progress, further work needs to be done to repair past damage. It is important that the community continues to advocate for further improvements.

How can you use this research?

Private companies can use this research to create more effective environmental and community development strategies, as part of their corporate social responsibility programs.

Government and non-profit organizations can use this research to better lobby private companies, and to create more effective environment- and community-improvement programs.

About the University of Guelph researchers:

John Devlin is an Associate Professor in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, at the University of Guelph. Email: jdevlin@uoguelph.ca.

Nonita Yap is a Professor in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, at the University of Guelph. Email: nyap@uoguelph.ca.

Denise Tubino is a graduate of the Rural Planning and Development Program of the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, at the University of Guelph. She is now an Associate Scientist (Social Practitioner) at ERM: Environmental Resources Management.

Article citation:

Tubino, D.I.S., Yap, N.T., & Devlin, J.F. (2011). Vale and its corporate sustainability performance in Itabira, Brazil: is the glass half full or half empty? *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 29(2), 151-157.

Cite this work:

University of Guelph, Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (2012). Mining company, Vale, still has mandate to repair environment and community relations further. Retrieved from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10214/5583>

This summary is a project of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES) at the University of Guelph, with project partners: the [Catalyst Centre](#), [SPARK](#) Program at the University of Guelph, and the [Knowledge Mobilization Unit](#) at York University. This project is part of the Pan-Canadian [Research Impact Network](#).

http://csahs.uoguelph.ca/pps/Clear_Research