



Original research article

A profile of corporate social responsibility for mining companies present in the Santurban Moorland, Santander, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to develop a corporate social responsibility (CSR) profile based on the practices and processes used by the mining companies present in the Santurban moorland, in the department of Santander. To achieve this, a census was applied based on 82 variables in 6 planes related to corporate social responsibility and the stakeholders. Information was collected between June of 2013 and May of 2014 using a census that was applied only to those mining companies with current registrations in the Bucaramanga Chamber of Commerce and with more than 10 employees each. The results enabled the evaluation of sectorial strengths as well as those elements that need to be improved in order to achieve an optimal level of CSR. The weaknesses found in the gold companies include: lack of clear and transparent hiring practices; lack of programs for employees who are mothers with small children; and lack of sufficient tools for identifying the needs of the closest community to the sites. They do practice diverse social investment strategies but do not track the impact of applying these in the region. It was also found that they have no clear processes for identifying, selecting, contracting and evaluating their suppliers. The greatest weakness found was with respect to the Client given that they have no client service department.

The strengths found amongst the Mining Companies in the Santurban Moorland include that most of them do have a CSR policy or strategy and demonstrate a positive attitude towards implementing this kind of program. In addition, they have gender equity and anti-discrimination policies and agreements that go beyond they law.

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1. Introduction

There is no doubt about the importance of the mining and energy sector for Colombia. In 2011 this sector contributed 2.3% to GDP, showing a considerable increase from 1.8% in 2000. We find that coal contributes 68%, metals 18% and other minerals 13% to this sector of the economy (Martinez Ortiz and Aguilar, 2012).

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At present, mining in Colombia is divided into 33 districts located in the Andes, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Diverse minerals such as coal, gold, nickel, emeralds and others minerals are exploited in these regions (Ministerio de Minas y Energía, 2015). With respect to gold, the focus of this article, it was equivalent to 2.89% of total Colombian exports in 2014 and 9.92% of mining exports according to figures from the DANE² and the DIAN,³ calculated by the Mining/Energy Planning Unit (UPME), (Ministerio de Minas y Energía, 2015).

Of the 26 departments that produce gold and silver in the country, Santander occupied eighth (8th) place up until 2008, with a participation of 0.2% of the national total. A report by Ingeominas for the same year (2008), claims that 71.3% (63.135 g) of the 88.5504 g of these minerals (gold and silver) produced in Santander is extracted in the municipalities of Vetás y California. With respect to employment, it is estimated that 4500 people are directly employed in this activity. Current statistics for gold and silver production in the country are not reliable due to the existence of a parallel market which primarily serves jewelry workshops and small smelters, as well as the reticence of the mining companies to share data. This makes it difficult to come up with a real figure.

In the region of Santander and Northern Santander, great mineral wealth can be found in the form of gold and silver. At the same time, this region known as the Santurban Moorland is of supreme importance for the preservation of fauna and flora, and people. The Santurban Moorland is the richest zone of flora, fauna and headwaters in all of Colombia; at the same time 60,000 of the 95,000 hectares that comprise it abound in gold, silver and other commercially valuable metals, which makes it very attractive and susceptible to mining exploitation. There are 80 lakes and headwaters which feed the main rivers of Northern Santander such as the Rivers Zulia, Pamplonita and Sardinata, and the rivers that provide water to Bucaramanga, its metropolitan area and 20 other municipalities start there too.

According to the Humboldt Institute (2009) "...this region is the habitat for 457 plant species, 201 bird species, 58 mammal species, 17 amphibian species and 17 reptile species. It is worth noting that a number of these species are threatened with extinction. In Northern Santander, deforestation has been accelerated by anthropogenic intervention (human intervention) with possible deleterious effects on the water bodies that begin there, thus disturbing the communities that develop there..." However, this entire ecosystem is affected by mining exploitation carried out there. Thanks to the group of activities related to exploration, and extracting minerals (gold, silver or copper) below the earth's surface, a chain of environmental problems and pollution is triggered for one of the most important mineral resources for conserving life, the water. The impacts generated by the mining extraction of these metal minerals can vary according to the type of materials used and what is being extracted. However, whatever the method used, the environmental impacts are irreversible because non-renewable resource are being exploited using processes that created destruction and pollution.

In their natural state, all these metal minerals are found in amalgams with diverse chemical elements. On some occasions it is possible to find significant deposits of gold and silver which make it possible to generate economic benefits. Regardless of the type of mining practiced, be it subterranean Estudios Mineros del Perú S.A.C. (2006), open-cast (Piscoya Arbanil, 2011) or leaching (Miranda, 2003), it is necessary to use different chemicals such as sulfuric acid, mercury, cyanide, sodium, among others. Independent of which element or mixture is used, it has been shown that these elements are highly polluting to water and the environment in general (Folchi, 2001). In addition to these solutions, they also transport heavy metals such as cadmium, meaning that surface and ground water are also contaminated.

This exploitation is carried out by individuals (natural persons) and companies (legal persons). When it is carried out by individuals, it is usually artisanal mining which due to its informal nature and impact could generate more contamination.

On the other hand there are the legal persons, which due to their greater presence and technical norms, affect the ecosystem to a lesser degree although there will still be negative environmental impacts anyway. This is in contrast with the social impact that they can generate since, according to a complementary study carried out by Biocolombia and CDMB⁴ (Fundación Biocolombia, 2012), it is estimated that up to 95% of the inhabitants in the municipality of Vetás, and a lesser yet still significant percentage of the inhabitants of the California, relate to some mining company.

It becomes important to take a sustainable development approach where the three dimensions of environment, the social component and the economic component (the last two of which are closely linked) come together (Soto and Rascón, 2012; Fernández and Gutiérrez, 2013). In this sense it is crucial to apply ethical, financial, and community principles, including that of Corporate Social Responsibility, as tools for achieving balance amongst stakeholders (García, 2011), as well as create tools for achieving viability and sustainability in these mining zones (Gómez Santrich and León Saavedra, 2012).

Using a descriptive approach, a profile for Corporate Social Responsibility in Mining Companies that carry out silver and gold exploration and extraction in the Santurban Moorland is presented. Using a holistic and systematic starting point which integrates the ontological, axiological and epistemological with praxis, a diversity of dimensions and actions has been taken into account with an eye to reach optimum levels for all stakeholders in the search for sustainable development (Bédard, 2003).

² DANE = Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas, in other words the National Statistics Bureau for Colombia.

³ DIAN = Dirección de Impuestos y Aduanas Nacionales de Colombia, or the National Customs and Tax Bureau.

⁴ CDMB = Corporación Autónoma Regional para la Defensa de la Meseta de Bucaramanga (the Autonomous Regional Corporation for defending the Bucaramanga Plateau).

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