

Operationalizing the SDGs in Mining for Emerging Economies

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As a result of unprecedented global participation and engagement, the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were drafted and adopted in September 2015 providing a vision and framework for a transformed world. To achieve this unique opportunity of social inclusion, environmental protection combined with economic development, it is necessary to translate these aspirational goals into innovative, implementable and measurable activities. This is not a trivial task and requires participation of all levels and sectors in society.

Universities have been established over the centuries as spaces of transformation. This is achieved through the primary activities of education, research and engagement with the society to which they belong. They are places of creative and deep thought, where complexities and challenges are wrestled with, to develop the tools and technology for innovative solutions. They provide disciplinary expertise and thought leadership to train and equip the next generation of leaders and human capacity for the future. Universities, thus provide the ideal catalyst and platform to shape implementation or operationalising the SDGs.

The Minerals to Metals Initiative hosted by the Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of Cape Town, has recognised the critical role that minerals and metals play in modern society. The initiative is a key player towards the achievement of the SDGs. Together with its partners it undertakes cross cutting interdisciplinary research and has pro-actively embraced the imperative of operationalising the SDGs in the mining sector. It has set out to establish what mining companies already contribute towards the SDG objectives, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. It will also identify ways in which the sector can adapt and improve, implementing new operating procedures or methods to more effectively embed the SDGs in governance, management systems, organisational culture and disclosure.

In this case study, the contributions of a multinational mining company towards achieving the selected three SDG objectives 6, 7 and 9, which focus on water, energy and industry, innovation and infrastructure are shown to be dependent on the region or location of the mining operation. The work shows the importance of addressing region specific developmental needs and recommends additional perspectives and actions that should be considered.