



Promoting Gender Equality in the Private Sector— Hiring Women in Mining Production Jobs

Gender Entrepreneurship Markets

Issue - Women are Under-Represented in Mining Production Jobs

Worldwide, between eighty and one hundred million people are directly and indirectly dependent upon non-industrial forms of mining for their livelihoods. Of these, an estimated thirty-percent are women.¹ Yet increasing evidence indicates that women do not generally benefit from mining operations. In fact, they tend to bear a greater share of the negative impacts.² Mining not only creates few employment opportunities for women, but it also displaces farms and other sectors in which women are traditionally employed. As a high risk environment and a demanding physical activity, mining has traditionally been a male-dominated sector. The participation of women in the mining labor force is usually confined to administrative tasks. A very small percentage of women work as engineers and managers, and an even smaller share operate heavy machinery equipment and trucks.³ However, advances in technology have increased opportunities for women to participate and benefit from mining operations. The growth of mining in the traditional Latin American mining countries such as Brazil, Peru and Chile has only increased the importance of integrating women better into the sector, so that both women and men can benefit from the increased employment and growth opportunities.

A Best Practice Solution - Recruiting Women to Operate Heavy Mining Equipment

Programa Mujer, which promoted the hiring of women in mining production jobs in Chile, is an innovative example of how to break with tradition that excludes women from mining operations. Supported by Chile's Ministry for Women's Affairs (*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*), the program was an initiative of IFC client Minera Escondida, the world's largest copper producing mining company, located in the Atacama Desert in the north of Chile. Minera Escondida today accounts for 2.5% of Chile's Gross Domestic Product and is vital to the Chilean economy. The company provides direct work for more than 2,300 people, 1,900 permanent jobs through contractor companies, and more than 8,000 additional permanent jobs in

various productive activities.⁴ The unemployment rate for women in Chile is 36%, one of the highest in Latin America. Considering the company's role in the local economy and as a job creation source, it was important for Minera Escondida to take special steps to include women in its labor force.

Programa Mujer marked the first attempt within Minera Escondida to integrate women into the operation of heavy mining equipment since production started in 1990. The program operated on two fronts. First, it sought to hire experienced women who had been operating heavy equipment in other Chilean mines. Second, it offered an opportunity to women without experience in the industrial sector to be trained and start a new career. The name and image of Minera Escondida was used country-wide to promote and disseminate the emerging role that women are playing in the Chilean mining industry.



A total of four experienced female equipment operators met the selection criteria through Escondida's recruitment process and were contracted in 2003 after completing the usual training and certification procedures. Escondida management approved the concept of hiring women with no experience in September 2003. The recruitment ads were published two months later. The ads generated a flood of responses. The company received 936 applications from women with no prior experience, of which 238 were pre-selected and invited to participate in the recruitment process. The applicants came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were teachers and secretaries, others train operators, and yet others security guards and fork-lift operators. The applicants passed through a series of evaluations and a rigorous 3-month long selection process.

The final group of applicants attended a 3-month training period that included technical, mechanical and practical matters as well as a focus on safety and corporate values. Practical training started with operating haul truck simulators. The next step was a training and evaluation period (1 to 4 months), during which the women operated equipment at the Escondida Norte Mine. Mine Operations Instructors tutored the trainees.



A formal ceremony at the mine site in September 2004 marked the end of the program. Attended by the Minister for Women's Affairs, Cecilia Perez, the event was widely reported in the national press and created a strong national profile for the program. "This is the beginning of a historical process in Chile, particularly because we have one of the lowest participation rates for women in the labor force in Latin America," noted Ms. Perez. Ms. Perez congratulated the company on the program and expressed her hope that such initiatives be repeated in the future. The Ministry for Women's Affairs features the program on its website as a best practice example and has thus helped attract additional publicity.

Results

- The eleven women who were hired on a permanent basis are today part of the mine operations team, operating 360 ton haul trucks, graders, and 90 ton water trucks.
- While it was not easy to integrate women into shifts where only men had worked over the last fifteen years, women's determination allowed them to position themselves among their workmates by demonstrating that their technical work was safe, of high quality and productivity. They gained acceptance by proving that they were competent.
- The operational workforce of Minera Escondida became more inclusive, and the women's presence generated a positive impact on workplace attitudes and behaviors.

- Early results indicated that high productivity rates and attention to maintenance detail made this a sound business decision as well as the right thing to do.
- The project generated excellent PR for the company and enhanced support from the Ministry for Women's Affairs.

Lessons Learned

- Measures and programs specifically targeting women can be effective at increasing women's employment in the mining industry, even in the traditionally male-dominated activities.
- The company received almost 1,000 applications for 11 jobs, challenging the notion of workplace stereotypes and the idea that women are not interested in mining production jobs.
- The women were able to gain the respect and recognition of their co-workers, challenging the belief that only men can perform heavy equipment operations.
- This public-private partnership between Minera Escondida and the Ministry for Women's Affairs has helped generate an important change and has opened new career opportunities for women and their professional development in the mining industry in Chile.



Recognizing that aspiring businesswomen are often prevented from realizing their economic potential because of gender inequality, IFC launched the **Gender-Entrepreneurship-Markets (GEM)** initiative in December 2004. The program aims to mainstream gender issues into all dimensions of IFC's work, while at the same time helping to better leverage the untapped potential of women as well as men in emerging markets. If you would like more information on IFC GEM's work, please visit our website at: <http://www.ifc.org/GEM> or contact:

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¹ <<http://earthrights.org/burma/MiningGenderEnviro.shtml>>

² Oxfam Community Aid Abroad. 2002. "Tunnel Vision: Women, Mining, and Communities." <www.caa.org/au/campaigns/mining/>; World Bank Energy Week 2004. Presentation by John Strongman and Adriana Eftimie. "Women in Energy and Mining Voices for Change: A Vision for a Better Future."

³ Latinamerica Press. "We look to strengthen the empowerment of women miners." Interview with Yesenia Echavarria Zuleta. 3 March 2005.

⁴ Minera Escondida website - <http://www.escondida.cl/Escondida/ingles/index.html>.