Tanzania: Safety Around Mining Sites

Acacia Mining (then African Barrick Gold), one of the largest gold producers in the world, operates gold mines in Tanzania, including in the remote areas of Mara and Shinyanga Provinces. Although its operations were authorised since 2002 by the Tanzanian government, the company has been unable to protect the mine from intrusions by members of the local community.

The intruders were trying to steal gold or get access to ancestral territory. There was implicit support for the intruders by the local community; many felt the company was not investing enough in community development, was not hiring local staff, and had not properly compensated people years back. When the intrusions became more frequent, Acacia Mining hired Tanzanian police and private security companies to try and protect the mine from the intruders.

The challenge
There were tensions between the communities surrounding a mining site and the security forces protecting the mine.

Theory of change:
Joint capacity building and joint assessment of the challenges built trust between groups.

This further polarised relationships between the company and the community, who accused the police of corruption and extortion. The violence increased, and the police responded with excessive force. One day, thousands of intruders armed with machetes tried to invade the mine; the resulting clash led to many deaths and serious injuries.

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) partnered with Acacia Mining in 2011, using the framework of the Voluntary Principles of Security and Human Rights (VPSHR) to strengthen the company's efforts to improve relationships with local communities.

SFCG's initiative aimed to open channels for raising grievances, sharing accurate information, and enabling collaborative problem solving. SFCG also identified skills to build across the different stakeholders, including conflict transformation, common ground advocacy, rumour management and leadership. These trainings enabled the different stakeholder groups to be ready and prepared for the face-to-face meetings with each other.

SFCG organised and facilitated meetings with local village elders, religious leaders, sub-village

and hamlet leaders, local police, Acacia Mining security and community relations staff, and local and district-level government representatives. Women, youth, and other marginalised groups were also engaged.

Through facilitated dialogue, the various parties were able to understand each other's concerns and identify joint strategies to act upon. Of particular concern was the violence around the incursions and the response by the police and the security companies. A solution to this was identified

Photo 23: A community meeting in Tanzania with community members, local government leaders, and members of Acacia mining. Photo Credit:

and agreed upon: the hiring of men from the local village as security guards. The selection process of the guards was managed by the village elders and it was agreed that the guards would re-invest ten per cent of their income back into village development. It was also agreed to train the local police on how to manage situations without resorting to violence as a first reaction. Through the project, SFCG trained 1,500 police officers, 300 key community decision-makers, 1, 500 women and 1,500 youth.

The renewed sense of trust and collaboration was reinforced and highlighted through community outreach, including participatory theatre and sports tournaments reaching more than 13,000 women, men and youth. By 2015, Acacia Mining reported that there was a significant drop in violence around the mine.