

Rights, Risk and Responsibility

Business-Community Synergies (BCS) and the London School of Economics, with sponsorship from the International Finance Corporation's CommDev (Sustainable Community Development Fund for Oil, Gas and Mining) and the Alcoa Foundation, organized a week of training for 30 representatives from civil society organizations from eight different countries. The objective was to build civil society capacities to negotiate more effectively with corporations using BCS's successful methodology to promote sustainable local development. The workshop was hosted by AngloGold Ashanti and Lonmin.

BCS founder Rani Parker co-facilitated the workshop with BCS consultant, Tom Lent. "BCS is pleased to share its Community-Company Assessment and other tools with civil society organizations here" said Dr. Parker "We have successfully worked with companies using these methods for corporate-community engagement that generates positive results. The method is rigorous and compelling in its depth and nuance. The approach helps civil societies and other stakeholders create greater respect, mutual understanding and cooperation than each might have accomplished alone."

"The objective of this week" says James Van Alstine, LSE project director, "is to equip civil society organizations with tools to work collaboratively with oil, gas, and mining companies for the benefit of local communities."

CommDev's Veronica Nyhan Jones points out the demand for this kind of training "Our corporate clients are searching for qualified local NGOs to help deliver positive community impact. "When investing millions in local development, they have trouble finding partners who understand the company and the community perspective. We're joining forces with companies, NGOs, consulting firms and academia to create a cadre of civil society organizations with practical expertise in implementing community development in challenging extractive contexts."

Participants echoed this need. Jacob Manyindo of the Uganda Wildlife Society observed, "We've been approached by many industries asking how we can work together and we've been very guarded. This training helps us to see how to work with them." Isak Pretorius of Joint Aid Management concurs. "The training has provided a platform for honest, open information-sharing between extractive companies, NGOs and other service providers...to work more harmoniously and serve one another better... increasing sustainability and improving services for communities affected by extractive industries."

Neto Vieira of the Brazil Sustainability Juruti Council says, "We have seen how different communities have similar problems -- weak government, poorly organized civil society. We have new ideas for institutional strengthening and empowerment, and see the importance of working with extractive industries in Juruti." Viviane Penna, Alcoa's representative in Brazil remarks, "This program has reaffirmed a practice in our unit to strengthen civil society partners for engagement between communities and companies."

