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SRK panel discusses mine closure at Canadian Mining Symposium

CMS | Experts talk about the transition to a post-mining economy



The SRK Thought Leadership Panel at the Canadian Mining Symposium on Zoom. Clockwise from top left: Moderator Jeff Parshley, group chairman and practice leader at SRK Consulting; Boubacar Bocoum, World Bank mining specialist; Charlene Wrigley, group sustainable development manager with Gold Fields; and Kevin P.C.J. D'Souza, Centerra Gold's vice president of security, sustainability, and environment.

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Part of The Northern Miner's Canadian Mining Symposium held online in mid-June was a thought leadership panel that looked at the social impact of mine closures.

The discussion, entitled *Beginning at the End: How Can We Optimize the Socio-economic Legacy of Mine Closure*, centred on how a community, region, or country can successfully transition from a mining economy to a post-mining economy.

Jeff Parshley, group chairman and practice leader at SRK Consulting, led the panel. He was joined by Boubacar Bocoum, a leading

mining specialist from the World Bank, Kevin P.C.J. D'Souza, **Centerra Gold's** (TSX: CG) vice president of security, sustainability, and environment, and Charlene Wrigley, group sustainable development manager with **Gold Fields** (NYSE: GFI).

"We've made considerable progress in the technical aspects of mine closures," Parshley said. "Although the socio-economic impacts of mine closures have been required for decades in several jurisdictions, it wasn't until the publication of the Mining and Minerals Sustainable Project report, in 2002, that the socio-economic impacts of mine closures were raised."

The release in 2008 of the International

Council of Mining and Metals' (ICMM) mine closure tool kit, he noted, also increased awareness of the key concepts behind the social closure of mines, with its revised *Integrated Mine Closure: Good Practice Guide*, published in 2019, providing a more descriptive term for what the industry has been trying to express for the past couple of decades by describing it as 'socio-economic transitioning.'

Parshley asked the panellists what they would consider to be the critical requirements of a good mine closure governance framework.

"As we learn more about integrated mine closure planning and practices our approach has moved from a physical approach to a more socio-economic approach," Goldfield's

SRK PANEL DISCUSSES MINE CLOSURE AT CANADIAN MINING SYMPOSIUM, continued

Wrigley said. “We realised the importance of good communication and engaging with all stakeholders, including government, host communities, employees, and even shareholders.”

It was also important, she said, to consider all stakeholders and ensure that communities become more self-sufficient and less dependent on mining companies by the time they transition or mine closure occurs.

Bocoum from the World Bank pointed to key elements that should be considered when starting a mine closure plan, “including the costing of the plan, the plan’s veracity, land-use issues following the mine closure, and clarity around the methodology and practices adopted in the plan.”

Centerra Gold’s D’Souza noted that a mine closure plan should be worked out at the beginning of the project and should be agreed upon by all stakeholders, particularly the future custodians of the land.

Much of Bocoum’s work with the World Bank has involved working with developing nations and Parshley asked him to outline what the biggest concerns are for host governments.

“One key element is the sustainability dimension,” Bocoum said, “and the need to emphasise the sustainable development aspects of mine closures rather than just the environmental side, which has traditionally been the approach.”

The conversation then turned to the experiences that Bocoum and D’Souza have had working in the states of the former Soviet Union and how companies there have approached mine closure planning.

Bocoum noted that many of the cities in those states were built around the mines, which led to unique challenges when the mines were

closed, making the socio-economic issues even more prevalent.

“It’s perhaps the negative social and environmental legacy of abandoned mines, especially from abandoned uranium mine tailings, that are the biggest concerns for some of these states,” added D’Souza.

Although there has been considerable improvement in the last few decades factoring in mine closure plans at the very beginning of a project, one challenge, D’Souza noted, is that often communities in the vicinity of mines, “simply don’t want to hear anything about mine closure and is a very sensitive subject to bring up too early on in the process.” Still, he said, companies have a responsibility to address the issues earlier in the process, and that “interactive consultation and planning process approach for understanding land use should be adopted from day one.”

Wrigley pointed out that the industry is getting better and that many of the elements of mine closure were starting to be considered at the beginning of a project, citing the co-disposal of waste, and final landforms, such as landscapes that meet agreed-upon land use goals, as two examples.

The panel also talked about post-mining land use and, in accordance with good practice guidelines, the need for the mine site to be beneficial and sustainable for the affected communities in the long-term.

Wrigley noted that there are “biophysical considerations around post-mining land uses,” and that “there are several scientific and engineering tools to help companies understand what the land could be used for once mining ceases.”

From a socio-economic perspective, Wrig-

ley said, “one of the most important tools were the people, who will often give a very clear idea of their expectations.”

Bocoum also noted that multilateral non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can also be useful in helping to catalyse post-closure planning and activities.

Parshley then referenced responses from the audience, which were polled on whether they felt the mining industry was effective in collaborating with stakeholders to develop mine closure strategies and post-mine closure land uses.

About 50% of those who responded believe that the industry is “moderately good,” with the other half stating that it was “not very good,” and Parshley noted that this response reflected the opinion of the panel, too.

The conversation closed with the panel discussing the impact of the loss of mining jobs once a mine has closed, given that mining salaries nearly always exceed national average salaries for many countries.

“This is where the focus of the sustainable development plans must be,” D’Souza said, “to ensure that social investments are not just philanthropic but focus on economically sustainable projects.”

Job replacement and an alternative economy is “not a silver bullet,” Wrigley added, and “although it’s a fantastic aspiration,” these cannot easily be achieved, she said.

Furthermore, she added, mining companies must ensure that the communities in which they operate are less dependent on mining activities and more self-sufficient after mining has ceased. These goals must be factored in during the mine closure planning process. ^{TNM}