

Mining industry's commitment to SDGs mostly rhetoric

With just 10 years left to achieve the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - and as one of the few sectors with links to all 17 - the mining industry has a significant role to play in contributing to their achievement. But as the new report,

https://www.responsibleminingfoundation.org/app/uploads/RMF_CCSI_Mining_and_SDGs_EN_Sept2020.pdf *Mining and the SDGs - a 2020 status update*] reveals, the sector as a whole is falling short.



Image source: Getty/Gallo

While most of the world's largest mining companies now mention the goals in their sustainability reporting, and while a few frontrunners have integrated them into their business strategies, most SDG-related reporting by mining companies is, the report finds, purely cosmetic – and there is little public reporting of firms' negative impacts on progress towards meeting the goals. There is a real risk of companies being accused of "SDG-washing" while reporting remains unbalanced.

Mixed results

And when looking for evidence that companies are taking practical actions to help deliver the goals, the results are very mixed.

Published by the Responsible Mining Foundation (RMF) and the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment, the study bases its findings on the Responsible Mining Foundation's RMI Report 2020, which assesses the policies and practices of 38 large-scale mining companies around the world. It found that there are some examples of good practice within the sector, with relatively widespread action on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). However, the report also found that no one company is taking strong action to address all 17 goals, and the sector's action on four goals in particular – SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) – is especially weak.

There are multiple and striking mismatches between companies' rhetoric and action. The report found, for example, that SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) are two of the goals that many firms claim to be prioritising, yet they also account for some of the weakest levels of action. In a recent [research article](#) RMF highlighted the striking contrast between companies' materiality analyses and their actions on these SDGs.

Working towards the SDGs is about more than doing the right thing: there is a strong and well-established business case

for companies to integrate the goals into their business strategies. As the report states, mining companies that embed the SDGs into their core operations will strengthen their ability to meet future challenges – and will build trust among all stakeholders, including an investment community increasingly concerned about sustainability matters. To that end, the report details nine practical steps companies can take to demonstrate their commitment to meeting the SDGs, and to responsible mining in general.

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