OUR RIGHTS,
OUR RESOURCES
DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF COMMUNITIES
AFFECTED BY OIL, GAS, AND MINING
Godfried Ofori, a member of the Concerned Citizens Association of Prestea, Ghana, looks out over an open pit at the Bogoso/Prestea Mine.
More than 60 percent of the world’s poorest people live in countries rich in natural resources, but they rarely share in the wealth. Too often, communities have no say in the extraction of resources from their land and receive little information about these projects. Oil, gas, and mining companies can help to right the wrongs of poverty and powerlessness. They can help communities overcome these challenges if they honor and respect two fundamental human rights...

THE RIGHT TO KNOW
THE RIGHT TO DECIDE
THE IMPACT ON PEOPLE

It’s known as the “resource curse”: many countries rich in natural resources are burdened by their bounty instead of blessed by it. Though international companies make a profit, communities can actually become poorer when large-scale mineral, gas, and oil companies operate on their lands. Why?

FEW LOCAL BENEFITS
Oil, gas, and mining are an important part of the economy in more than 50 developing countries. But while governments and companies may benefit, the people most directly affected by these industries often do not. These industries generate few jobs, follow an unpredictable boom-and-bust cycle, and can displace people from the lands and farms where they earn a living.

THE PRICE OF SECRECY
Too often, companies and governments keep their contracts and revenues a secret, allowing mismanagement and corruption to flourish and preventing the funds from reaching those who need them most. Although gold is the top export in Mali, its people are among the world’s poorest. Most Malians have little information about mining revenues, so they are unable to determine if they are receiving their fair share according to the law.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE
In western Ghana, cyanide spills from a gold mine contaminated community water sources. Residents of Prestea, Dumase, and other neighboring villages reported serious health problems. Despite protests from local environmental groups, the mining company is now negotiating to expand its operations in the area.

LACK OF DECISION-MAKING POWER
In northern Peru, residents of the Yanta and Segunda y Cajas communities are locked in a struggle with the Rio Blanco Copper mining company, which wants to build a copper mine on their lands without their consent—endangering fragile cloud forests, rivers, and farms. Communities voted against the mine in a nonbinding referendum, but the future remains uncertain.
Residents of Sadiola village in Mali—like this young mother—have seen few benefits from the gold mine in their community. “Youth have no jobs, and the men don’t have work at the mine,” said community leader Sora Sakiliba. “These days, men usually have no money.”
At dusk, a boy from Taveng Lou village gillnets fish along the Sesan River in northeast Cambodia. Cambodia’s abundant natural resources have attracted the interest of oil and mining companies. Oxfam America and local partners are working to ensure that these industries respect the rights of communities and protect the environment.
RESPECTING RIGHTS

For more than a decade, Oxfam America has supported communities affected by extractive industries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Oil, gas, and mining companies need not harm these communities; we believe that they can contribute to reducing poverty, but only if they respect people’s fundamental rights. These include the following:

A COMMUNITY’S RIGHT TO KNOW
Companies must provide complete and timely information about how their work affects communities—environmentally, socially, and economically. They must disclose how much they are paying governments for natural resources so that poor communities get a fair share of the profits, which in turn can fund education, health care, and jobs. Local people also have the right to information about how oil, gas, and mining projects will affect their lives. Will people be forced to relocate? Will there be real jobs for locals? How could the environment be harmed?

A COMMUNITY’S RIGHT TO DECIDE
Companies must obtain the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of all affected communities. Once they have the information, local people have a right to determine whether or not they want oil, gas, and mining companies to begin or expand operations on their land. Under FPIC, a mine cannot begin operations, or expand existing work, without seeking the consent of communities. FPIC is an established concept, rooted in international human rights law and global precedents. For indigenous peoples in particular, FPIC is critical to the survival of entire cultures, as well as local economies, that are closely linked to natural resources.
YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The right to know if a mine could pollute your water supply. The right to decide if you want an oil well drilled in your backyard. The right to benefit from a profitable mining project in your town. The right to information that would help you make the best decisions for your family. These are the rights of each individual and every community.

At Oxfam, we work at the global, national, and local levels to increase transparency and strengthen people’s right to decide on the kinds of development that are most appropriate for them.

In 2010, Oxfam and supporters pushed Congress to pass revenue transparency legislation that requires oil, gas, and mining companies to make public what they pay the governments of developing countries. Today, we are continuing our campaign to call on the oil, gas, and mining industries to respect the rights of people in the communities where they operate.

LEARN MORE

Oxfam America is working with communities affected by oil, gas, and mining projects in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. To find out the latest on our campaign activities in these countries, and meet the people on the frontlines of this struggle, visit our website: oxfamamerica.org/rights-resources
I am just a humble peasant who hasn’t studied. But they are not going to convince me that cyanide isn’t poison. I know it is.

—Antonio Membreno at a community meeting on mining near Ilobasco, El Salvador. Some mining company representatives claim that the cyanide used in gold extraction, which can contaminate local waterways, is harmless.
A worker in front of the pit at the Sadiola Hill Gold Mine, western Mali.
YOU CAN HELP RIGHT THE WRONG BY HOLDING THE POWERFUL ACCOUNTABLE AND CHALLENGING COMPANIES TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY OIL, GAS, AND MINING PROJECTS. JOIN OXFAM AMERICA’S ECOMMUNITY TO RECEIVE PERIODIC MESSAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION.

OXFAMAMERICA.ORG/JOIN
Oxfam America is a global organization working to right the wrong of poverty. We are undertaking a campaign to ensure that oil, gas, and mining companies respect the rights of poor people and contribute to the long-term reduction of poverty.

oxfamamerica.org/campaigns

Cover: Mary Amo, 33, is a community activist in Ghana. She was trained by Oxfam’s partner, WACAM, to represent her village, Anwiam, in negotiations with a mining company that stopped flooding from wastewater drainage and blasting that destroyed homes.

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