Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
My Country, Mine Country: Indigenous people, mining and development contestation in remote Australia

Research Publication:
Unpublished Ph.D Thesis

Name of Researcher(s):
B. Scambary

Time period:
2004-07

Geographic location:
Mining operations in the Pilbara (WA), the southern Gulf of Carpentaria (Qld.) and Kakadu National Park (NT)

Methodology:
A multi-sited ethnographic study involving intensive fieldwork at mining sites, regional towns, town camps, Indigenous communities, Indigenous organisations, government offices, and mining industry offices.

Aims:
This thesis examines the impact of mining agreements between the mining industry and Indigenous people in terms of their capacity to create sustainable economic futures for Indigenous people.

Selected findings and insights:
This thesis provides a wide ranging set of findings and insights regarding mining agreements, including the extent to which training of Indigenous people for sustainable employment is promoted. In this regard:

- **Training** was universally identified as a priority in agreements, though companies differ in their approach and the amount of resources they are prepared to dedicate to such programs.

- Nearly all training programs identified in the study were strongly oriented towards **mining-specific employment**. The majority of mining positions occupied by local Indigenous stakeholders appeared to be based on low or ‘entry-level’ skill and literacy/numeracy (i.e. shovel operators, truck drivers, etc).

- **Heritage work, environmental resource management, archaeological consultancy and cultural advocacy** were an increasingly important part of negotiations, and therefore potential employment, in areas where mining is occurring – though often training in these areas was not offered through mining training and employment programs.

- There were **exceptions**, with one Pilbara mining operation, in addition to the earthworks training, also conducting an Archaeological Assistants training course that focused on the identification, recording and management of archaeological sites and artifacts.

- In other mining areas some **financial support** had been offered to help Indigenous people in enterprises on related land, such as in conservation, rangers and land management (in places such as Kakadu) – though training for such work occurred outside the bounds of what is offered by the mining companies themselves.
• In most places only a marginal number of the local Indigenous people seemed to benefit directly from training and employment opportunities. Significant numbers of Indigenous people were precluded from engaging in mine-related training programs because of age, poor health, lack of education, or the nature of their criminal records.

To overcome low literacy levels at least one mining operation had on-site literacy assessment and assistance rather than relying on formal qualification (usually Year 10 is required). They also had on the job training (6 months) that was shortened to as little as 2 weeks depending on competency of the worker. This approach to training correlated with high Indigenous employment from the local area.

• Due to low levels of literacy and relevant skills of local Indigenous peoples, often much of the Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) work force had migrated into the mining location from other regions.

There tended to be a lack of integration of mining agreements with regional schools. Where such coordination had occurred, it tended to be ad hoc and lacking direction or long-term benefit. There was little investment, by funding scholarships etc through mining agreements, in developing broader educational outcomes for Indigenous people beyond the specifics of mine-related training.

• One mining operation mentored children from primary school through to university, and exhibited success, but criticism remained that it picks ‘winners’ and was not accessible to all Indigenous children. It was also suggested that its objective was narrowly prescribed to funnel qualified Indigenous people into the mining industry.

The problem of training for training’s sake was sometimes evident. People in all regions argued that they did the training offered, but there were not necessarily jobs at the end. Training was almost always mining industry specific – a common complaint being that skills offered through training programs (e.g. learning to drive a haulpac truck) were not applicable to community life. The long-term incentives to pursue and continue training were not built into the overall employment landscape.

Educational implications:

Mining industries are not a sufficiently large and continuing source of Indigenous employment to overcome existing levels of socioeconomic disadvantage in many Indigenous communities. However they do provide a good focal point upon which education and training authorities can work with Indigenous organisations to build the necessary skills to establish alternative forms of employment. [partnerships]

Whilst mining agreements offer opportunities, through the development of training programs, for increasing literacy and numeracy skills and competencies in a wide variety of potential employment areas (heritage, land and sea management, tourism etc.) this is not occurring to a significant level. Furthermore those skills being developed tend to address immediate employment needs of the mining industry and are not pathways to sustainable employment. [regional development]

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

- Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education
- Education and training content in native title, Indigenous land use and heritage agreements
Related papers: