

# De beers environmental impacts

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Corporate Environmental Obligation: An examination of the performance of De Beers Nowadays, diamonds are one of the most precious luxury items where people are purchasing for large sums of money without knowing the facts that the mining industries are affecting the natural environments around them. As more people are purchasing the diamonds, the more diamonds are produced from the factories and more negative impacts are resulted on the environment.

For diamond companies like De Beers is recently engaging with the community and finding ways to reduce the amount of negative impacts on the environment such as energy use and emissions, waste and recycling, use of water and impact on biodiversity. This essay analyses the performance of De Beers specifically how the company is contributing to the environmental and communities. The aim of this paper is to show a balanced argument between positive and negative impacts affecting the environment and the company. The case against De Beers

De Beers is among the mining industries that are constantly dealing with the environmental challenges such as land disturbances, energy use and emissions, waste and recycling, use of water and the impacts on diversity (Alessandro Bertoni, MDBC 2011). Land disturbance is one of the key challenges because large numbers of soil from the earth are removed when extracting minerals from the underground. The company also admits that its industries' actions are somewhat damaging the environment directly because of the necessities of accessing land and water resources.

Almost all of the countries, mineral rights are possessed by the state and the lands are managed by the government as De Beers claim to recognize the fact that natural resources are provided by the national assets (David Van Wyk 2011) and the company has to use in an effective way and minimize the negative impacts so that there won't be any conflicts between the company and the government. There are four types of mining processes to get the diamonds from the ground and those are open pit and underground mining, coastal and inland alluvial mining, marine mining and informal diamond digging (Alessandro Bertoni, MDBC 2011).

Among those four processes, De Beers desires the method of open pit mining in Botswana because every diamond mines have different environment due to different geographical, social and ecological situation. In open pit mining, Kimberlite pipes (funnel-like tubes of rock) are mined to extract diamonds but because diamonds are located often way below the ground, the other minerals such as rock, sand and soil are suck out first in order to reach to the diamonds' position. Ultimately, this drilling process could pose a threat to the existence of plants and animals inhabiting in that surrounding.

For extraction, diamond mining uses large amount of water instead of chemicals (Alessandro Bertoni, MDBC 2011). Underground mining or open pit process required massive amount of water not only to cool machines, to wash gravel, and to supply potable water to the residents of the mining towns but also for the dewatering (David Van Wyk 2011) surrounding areas of open cast to facilitate the mining operation to manage in dry condition. In

fact, most parts of the Africa are having a major compact of water scarcity including the area of Botswana.

There is an analysis of water samples showing the signs of nitrate pollution which the quality of the underground resources might somehow affect by pollution. Even though the researchers are fail to explain how the water supplies got cut out to the surrounding communities, they still believe that this incident happen from the result of mining. Energy use is another type of threat to the surrounding when mining and diamond exploration because electricity and hydrocarbons (Alessandro Bertoni, MDBC 2011) are used.

Both electricity and hydrocarbons are one of the causes of global warming and climate change releasing the carbon gas into the air. The ozone layer has become thinner and thinner because of this incident happens. The people who are living in that surrounding can also affect by these carbon emissions which is totally harmful to their health and environment. Diamond mines can also be compared to large industrial operation because both are affecting the natural environment and wasting the same amount of natural resources including oil, paper, scrap metal, batteries, tires and small quantity of plastic and glass.

Lastly, humans are posing a threat not only to the existence of different kinds of plants and animals, but also from humans to even farm animals and crops. From Canada to Africa, the diamond mining exists in a wide variety of environments across the world. In recent news, De Beers is proposing a new diamond mine in the Northwest Territories of Yellowknife, Canada which

causes the caribou herds (De Beers' mine plans 2011) to head other directions farther away from their common migration routes.

Chief Antoine Michel interviewed with the CBC News saying that the key reason why the caribou herds are migrating is definitely because of the noise created by the trucks drilling and exploring the diamonds. The case for De Beers On the contrary, De Beers hosted the 2007 Annual Environment and Community Conference where all operations across the De Beers Family of Companies are met in Gaborone sharing the knowledge and experiences to improve the field of Environment Management.

De Beers came up with the theme “ Environment through the Diamond Pipeline” bringing the communities all together to reassure that De Beers is concerning about the environment. De Beers is lately engaging with the community including help from governments, local communities and non-governmental organizations to identify local issues, as well as influencing environmental management within the industry. Because engaging with these groups would later gain profit for the De Beers industries from knowledge, constructive conversation and improved relationship which is an essential to robust and successful environmental anagement.

De Beer strongly suggested to their employees to improve the environmental impacts and come up with a plan to reduce the amount of using natural resources and energy use. Firstly, mining industries are in charge of removing, storing and returning the topsoil or waste to return the area to its previous stage after the drilling and extraction of diamonds have succeeded. Secondly, the hazardous materials are used at the mining sites

to explode mountain and ground areas so these materials needed a thorough management for environmental safety.

All hazardous materials have been labeled and classified according to the TDG and WHMIS regulations. The Training Department also ensures that the workers need to be knowledgeable of the potentially hazardous products and any employees working with these hazardous materials must be trained on the procedure for the storage, handling, and disposal of these waste products. Thirdly, the scarcity of water in Africa is a major problem for both people from the surrounding area and the industries' use in extracting the diamonds from the ground.

Because massive amount of water is required to dewatering the mining sites to extract in dry condition, DBCM and Debswana operations provided policies and guidelines to conserve water as well as to prevent pollution. Across the diamond mining industry, energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes are used and the energy use and carbon emission are monitored by emission levels. A range of schemes are introduced such as installing timers on boilers, shutting off pressurized fans over weekends, running mud pumps in off-peak periods and battery-powered vehicles that do not emit harmful gases to reduce the amount of energy use.

Lastly, De Beer establishes a number of Nature Reserves, where there are breeding programmes for rare and endangered species and numbers of native plant life have been harvested and the seeds are planted around the mining site. De Beers Company believes that this process of harvesting plant life will keeps the native species without harming them from the mining

process but protecting wildlife animals can be difficult since the animals are sensitive to change. Conclusion

The conflicts between the industries and the environment are still investigating on ways to solve the reduction of natural resources that would emit harmful substances or gases into the air causing a threat on existence of human and wildlife lives. The noise that comes from the drilling into the ground from the motor trucks disturbs the people and wild animals that are living in that surrounding. The water is scarce in most parts of Africa and the diamond mines consuming up the massive amount of water while the people from that surrounding only have less amount to spend or use.

However, the company is now engaging with the community to improve the environmental surrounding way better. The combination of knowledge from different group of communities will contribute to the environment in different and better ways in using less energy use and natural resources. The department also trains the employees who have contact with hazardous materials so that they gain knowledge more about how to control and keep in safe mode. DBCM and Debswana operations provided policies and guidelines to conserve water and prevent from pollution.

The company starts using battery-powered vehicles that emit non-harmful gases and other programmes in order to limit their carbon emission. De Beers trying its best efforts to maintain the balance of positive and negative impacts on environment even though there are evidences that mining sites are still affecting the natural environment, making the caribou herds and other wild animals to migrate farther away from their inhabitant places.

Before the government don't intervene the distraction of the De Beers' diamonds mining, the causes of the negative impacts will increase infinitely.