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# Global Ecology and Conservation

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/gecco](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/gecco)



Original research article

## A profile of corporate social responsibility for mining companies present in the Santurban Moorland, Santander, Colombia



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### article info

#### Article history:

Received 19 October 2015

Received in revised form 28 December 2015

Accepted 29 December 2015 Available online 13 February 2016

#### Keywords:

Corporate social responsibility

Stakeholders

Mining

### abstract

This work is an attempt to develop a corporate social responsibility (CSR) profile based on the practices and processes used by the mining companies present in the Santurban moorland, in the department of Santander. To achieve this, a census was applied based on 82 variables in 6 planes related to corporate social responsibility and the stakeholders. Information was collected between June of 2013 and May of 2014 using a census that was applied only to those mining companies with current registrations in the Bucaramanga Chamber of Commerce and with more than 10 employees each. The results enabled the evaluation of sectorial strengths as well as those elements that need to be improved in order to achieve an optimal level of CSR. The weaknesses found in the gold companies include: lack of clear and transparent hiring practices; lack of programs for employees who are mothers with small children; and lack of sufficient tools for identifying the needs of the closest community to the sites. They do practice diverse social investment strategies but do not track the impact of applying these in the region. It was also found that they have no clear processes for identifying, selecting, contracting and evaluating their suppliers. The greatest weakness found was with respect to the Client given that they have no client service department.

The strengths found amongst the Mining Companies in the Santurban Moorland include that most of them do have a CSR policy or strategy and demonstrate a positive attitude towards implementing this kind of program. In addition, they have gender equity and anti-discrimination policies and agreements that go beyond the law.

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### 1. Introduction

There is no doubt about the importance of the mining and energy sector for Colombia. In 2011 this sector contributed 2.3% to GDP, showing a considerable increase from 1.8% in 2000. We find that coal contributes 68%, metals 18% and other minerals 13% to this sector of the economy (Martinez Ortiz and Aguilar, 2012).

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At present, mining in Colombia is divided into 33 districts located in the Andes, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Diverse minerals such as coal, gold, nickel, emeralds and others minerals are exploited in these regions ([Ministerio de Minas y Energía, 2015](#)). With respect to gold, the focus of this article, it was equivalent to 2.89% of total Colombian exports in 2014 and 9.92% of mining exports according to figures from the DANE<sup>2</sup> and the DIAN,<sup>3</sup> calculated by the Mining/Energy Planning Unit (UPME), ([Ministerio de Minas y Energía, 2015](#)).

Of the 26 departments that produce gold and silver in the country, Santander occupied eighth (8th) place up until 2008, with a participation of 0.2% of the national total. A report by Ingeominas for the same year (2008), claims that 71.3% (63.135 g) of the 88.5504 g of these minerals (gold and silver) produced in Santander is extracted in the municipalities of Vetas y California. With respect to employment, it is estimated that 4500 people are directly employed in this activity. Current statistics for gold and silver production in the country are not reliable due to the existence of a parallel market which primarily serves jewelry workshops and small smelters, as well as the reticence of the mining companies to share data. This makes it difficult to come up with a real figure.

In the region of Santander and Northern Santander, great mineral wealth can be found in the form of gold and silver. At the same time, this region known as the Santurban Moorland is of supreme importance for the preservation of fauna and flora, and people. The Santurban Moorland is the richest zone of flora, fauna and headwaters in all of Colombia; at the same time 60,000 of the 95,000 hectares that comprise it abound in gold, silver and other commercially valuable metals, which makes it very attractive and susceptible to mining exploitation. There are 80 lakes and headwaters which feed the main rivers of Northern Santander such as the Rivers Zulia, Pamplonita and Sardinata, and the rivers that provide water to Bucaramanga, its metropolitan area and 20 other municipalities start there too.

According to the Humboldt Institute (2009) “. . . this region is the habitat for 457 plant species, 201 bird species, 58 mammal species, 17 amphibian species and 17 reptile species. It is worth noting that a number of these species are threatened with extinction. In Northern Santander, deforestation has been accelerated by anthropogenic intervention (human intervention) with possible deleterious effects on the water bodies that begin there, thus disturbing the communities that develop there. . . .” However, this entire ecosystem is affected by mining exploitation carried out there. Thanks to the group of activities related to exploration, and extracting minerals (gold, silver or copper) below the earth’s surface, a chain of environmental problems and pollution is triggered for one of the most important mineral resources for conserving life, the water. The impacts generated by the mining extraction of these metal minerals can vary according the type of materials used and what is being extracted. However, whatever the method used, the environmental impacts are irreversible because non-renewable resource are being exploited using processes that created destruction and pollution.