

WOMEN IN MINING

– THE MINORITY CONCERNS – THREATS, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES
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INTRODUCTION

Women in mining face similar problems as women in any other technical industry. The problems of lack of skills, due partly to lack of interest, prejudice, cultural restrictions, combine to rob this huge chunk of the nation's human capital from development and application.

IN THE BEGINNING.....

The little recorded account of women in mining is captured in "The African Legacy of the World's Most Precious Metal - Ashanti Gold" by Prof. Edward S. Ayensu where we read about the beginnings of the now AngloGold Ashanti as follows:

"On 22 November 1897, Cade, along with the mining engineer, John Daw and a team of 15 miners, surveyors, fitters and assayers, arrived at Cape Coast Castle. They brought with them 40 tonnes of machinery and equipment, including a five-battery stamp mill, tubular boilers, a sectionalized engine and saw-milling plant, all of which was landed on the beach by canoes that had to battle through dangerous surf. Local carriers, women, as well as men, were hired to struggle with the heavy machinery, dismantled into 27-kg head loads for 200km (120miles) through forests, across rivers and along bush paths until they finally arrived at Obuasi on Christmas eve 1897. (P. 12). At this stage, the managers of the mine were all men".

This state of affairs continued for a very long time, and even today women can be seen employed as porters or carriers in, especially the construction areas of mining.

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Ghana, since 1957 has had a history of equal work for equal pay. The challenge faced by women when pregnant was the sticking point which was addressed in the 1960s, and remains part of the current Labor Act.

While legislation itself has not prevented women from making careers in any area including mining, our cultural values have continued to undermine our efforts, for the challenge to combine housewifery and childbearing with career development is a tough one which has prevented many a woman from leaving indelible footprints in the workplace including mining. And I dare say if men faced these same challenges, the results would be no different.

THE LABOUR ACT (2003) - A FRIEND INDEED

While Articles 55, 56, 57 are all devoted to protecting the woman, her health and that of her unborn child (and baby for some time after birth) from exploitation and discrimination and intimidation by the employer. Article 10 enjoins employers to train their employees, both male and female as a means to achieve higher productivity. Indeed the Labour Act, by itself, is, seeks to create an equitable workplace for the female, and issues like sexual harassment are well taken care of.. But like all laws the Labor Act is clinical. It challenges people of goodwill to make it work.. While it seeks to protect the rights of both employer and employee, it can be limited by lack of interest, unavailable resources, and apathy on either side.

WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY MINING

In spite of what the Labor Act seek to offer by way of support for women, available statistics show that women appear not to be interested in pursuing mining as an academic subject, much more practice it.

The University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, between 2002 and 2006 admitted 158 students with a gender breakdown of 150 males to 8 females as follows:

	Male	Female	Total
2002	36	0	36
2003	26	2	28
2004	29	0	29
2005	33	1	34
2006	<u>35</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>40</u>
Total	150	8	<u>158</u>

The proportion of women engaged in mining (assuming all these young women offering mining decided to work in mining) would reflect the proportion of women graduating with degrees. The number that would choose to stay and develop a career in mining would be another story.

STATISTICS OF OBUASI EMPLOYEES BY GENDER

The chart on *Appendix I* shows the breakdown of employees at the Obuasi Mine by gender.

These figures show a gloomy picture.

I would like here, to encourage the mining companies to support these women by sourcing them, employing them, and developing them into other areas of mining, depending on their interest. It should not be beyond the capability of our mining companies to employ women with first degrees in mining, and giving them exposure in industrial relations, law, or environmental studies to enrich their skills base, in order to encourage multi-skilling and also retain these women as a means to strengthen the mining companies' skills base and the retention strategy.

Right now, we find a few women employed by the mining companies predominantly in the areas of law, medicine, nursing and teaching.

What is the jinx that prevents women from offering mining as an area of study in the first place and then pursuing it as a career?

CHALLENGES, & THREATS

A CASE OF CHICKEN AMONG HAWKS?

1. Society has defined the role of women and boxed us into a corner – raise children and care for the family. Those women who choose otherwise are faced with the problem of leaving their traditionally approved environment to the disapproval of family, and friends, a state of affairs many cannot deal with. Women find certain professions more ‘friendly’ because these professions allow them to carry on their traditional roles more easily. Hence, nursing, teaching, trading, etc.

In the area of mining, especially, many feel that girls who pursue this career will not bear children and who says any Ghanaian girl will knowingly expose themselves to this situation with the stigma that goes with it?

It is generally accepted that the problems of women and work is more cultural than anything else, but it must also be emphasized that the onus is on women themselves to organize their lives so as to take full advantage of the provisions in the Labour Act.

2. Men both deliberately and unknowingly make this male dominated area almost inaccessible to women. Topics that inform their conversation, jokes, may scare the stout hearted, but the women should join in this. Accept this as a workplace practice and develop a positive attitude to it and just get along with your key objective – to develop a career in mining. Having male colleagues can be fun, but sometimes disconcerting. But challenges are meant to be overcome.

There is comfort in numbers, and women find the few numbers in core mining both unexciting and intimidating. The opportunity here is to score a first and make a difference.

Education is major key to disabusing women's minds from this notion. Not only is it medically unproven, the Labor Act ensures the protection of all women during pregnancy and childbirth, such that any woman in core mining ought not to be overly concerned with this.

3. The respective unions, senior staff associations, should make a conscious effort to organize soirees and programs for their female members as a means of recognizing their presence and assisting them with their peculiar individual problems as a means to nurture this minority group with the ultimate aim to ensure their retention.

OPPORTUNITIES

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

The few females who venture into this area should be mentored and their individual problems assessed and solved. They should be made to feel needed and encouraged and helped to build their confidence levels in order to face the challenges in this macho dominated industry.

- TRAINING
- SUPERVISION

YOU TOO CAN FLY - LESSONS FROM MARY PARKER FOLLET

By our peculiar nature, women are very practical, down to earth, and industry will add to its own value by assisting them to develop their innate talents and bring these to bear on the bottom line – high productivity.

In my area of professional development – Human Resource Management – the story of Mary Parker Follet raises a huge challenge for contemporary managers to balance the sexes in order to achieve harmony, unearth talent and use these to improve economic growth. This woman, as far back as the 1930s, emphasized the importance of human problems as central to the success of organizations.

In her “Dynamic Administration” published in 1941 after her death in 1931, Mary defined conflict resolution by three means – by domination, by compromise, or by integration. In modern parlance,

Integration - win- win

Domination - win- lose

Compromise lose-lose

As a female in a male dominated enterprise at that time, nobody took her seriously. Today, her ideas on the social psychological school of motivation are being acknowledged, and we are told that “if more attention had been paid to the ideas of Mary Parker Follet in those years, we may have moved earlier from the era of Social Man towards that of Self-Actualizing man” (Cole, 6th Edition p.34 ELST).

Today’s unions and indeed the world, including the U N spend about 80% of their time resolving conflict. A little attention to this woman would have helped shape the framework for conflict resolution a lot earlier. If only men had paid attention.

I have dwelt on this woman, because I believe that the few women in the boardrooms, core activity and support areas should be given every encouragement, for, like Mary Parker Follet, we continue to look at issues from a refreshing perspective.

The presence of Ms Joyce Aryee, within the Ghana Chamber of Mines, to my mind has done more than volumes could have to give the Chamber its current image and

interest the average Ghanaian in its work. Women should see jobs as such, and their career development with the same passion of their male counterparts

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EMPLOYER

When I joined Ashanti as an Asst. PRM my interest was more in the community than the external public. Subsequent events were to prove me right, and this led to the creation of a Community relations Dept. a decision other mining companies have seen fit to devote enormous amounts of human and financial resources to in order to prevent so much energy and resources virtual wasted chasing shadows in the community.

HIV/AIDS

One cannot discuss the community without mentioning HIV and AIDS, one area where education holds the key. In this case, the education ought to include families as well.

CONCLUSION & THE WAY FORWARD

Mining companies exist to make return on investments. A key objective towards realizing this objective is to explore, recruit, and develop human capital. It is primary to widen the field of human sourcing for a narrow field will not yield a wide area for selection. It is now accepted through scientific research that a good male/female mix creates the needed talent base for business growth. Therefore the presence of the female factor has become indispensable to key decision making. (The case of Shell).

My Challenge

I challenge the mining companies to

- Educate emerging undergraduates at the SSS level to understand the options available in the mining industry
- Educate in order to break the jinx associated with having mining as a career
- Encourage career development that will encourage women, especially to be multi-skilled as apart of their retention strategy.
- Create opportunity for those in the industry to accelerate their development and promotion in order to encourage this minority.
- Ensure that boardroom and key management decisions are made by a good mix of male and female employees.
- My best wishes to the likes of Genevieve Tettey of AGA - keep the torch burning.