

## **LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES**

Ensuring Community Members  
Have a Voice in Mine Audits

LEARNINGS  
2022 – 2023

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### LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES

Ensuring Community Members Have a Voice in Mine Audits — November 2023

IRMA — Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance  
[responsiblemining.net](https://responsiblemining.net)

## Listening to Communities

### Ensuring Community Members Have a Voice in Mine Audits

For companies that depend on mined materials to make their products, any assessment of supply chain impacts must include a focus on the point where minerals are extracted from the earth.

Mining operations present many of the greatest social and environmental risks in these supply chains, as well as opportunities to create positive outcomes. It is at this crucial first stage in production, therefore, that manufacturers and consumer-facing brands need clarity, backed by evidence-based insights, in evaluating the effects of their business activities.

There are various tools companies can use to better understand impacts at the point of extraction, including assessment of a specific mine's performance against an established standard for responsible mining. The value of such an assessment depends on the quality of the standard and on the rigor and independence of the actual audit process. Among the diverse ways auditors assess a mine's environmental and social impacts, one of the most crucial is direct engagement of communities and Indigenous rights holders.

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## Community Engagement in Mine Audits

- ▶ Digging Deeper into Community Engagement
- ▶ Working to Ensure More People are Heard
- ▶ How Firsthand Insights Create More Meaningful Audit Reports
- ▶ Examples of Effective Engagement
- ▶ Exploring New Dimensions of Community Engagement





## Digging Deeper into Community Engagement

The people most affected by a mine's operations must be central to any assessment of its long-term impacts.

Community members should have the opportunity to ask questions, to express concerns or outright opposition, and to learn firsthand how a mining company intends to address their needs and share the long-term benefits. People everywhere want a say in decisions that will shape their lives — *nothing about us without us* is the well-known phrase — and they rightly expect their voices to be heard.

Building this kind of dialogue takes time and focused effort — especially with mining companies, where individual operators are often saddled with the larger industry's history of broken trust and inadequate communications. Audits must ensure meaningful representation from communities that are often heterogeneous and include a diverse array of vulnerable groups. Listening closely to local voices requires a significant investment from all sides, with outreach efforts that extend deep into communities through both group consultations and one-to-one conversations. It requires energy and patience to realign expectations or, in some cases, to understand a steadfast resistance to mining.





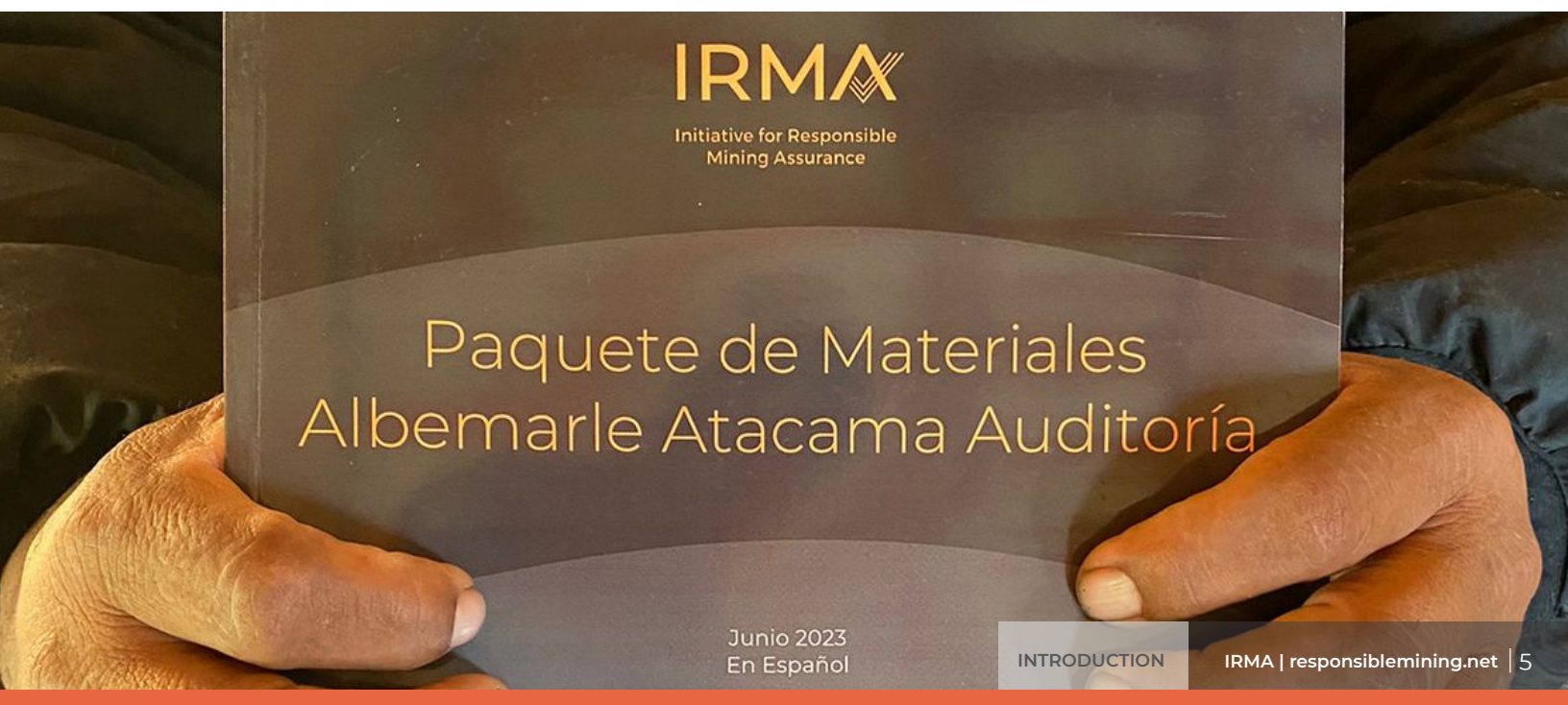
## Digging Deeper into Community Engagement, CONT.

An emphasis on truly listening to communities is at the core of the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA).

Community members, including Indigenous leaders, have always had a place on our board. They have shaped both our standard and our system, and they continue to oversee IRMA alongside five other governing constituencies: labor unions, NGOs, mining companies, purchasers of mined materials and the finance sector.

Over the past several years, as we've overseen an increasing number of independent audits, we've been exploring various approaches to better include communities living near mines in the process. We're doing a great deal of testing and learning along the way, making small refinements and a few major course corrections, guided by insights from the six diverse constituencies who govern our initiative.

This work continues today as we strive to make audits more rigorous, transparent and inclusive. By including input from all groups and individuals affected by mining operations, we hope to push past economic and cultural barriers to shed as much light as possible on what is happening at this crucial point in the supply chain.



IRMA

Initiative for Responsible  
Mining Assurance

## Paquete de Materiales Albemarle Atacama Auditoría

Junio 2023  
En Español

INTRODUCTION

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## Working to Ensure More People are Heard

Supporting us in this effort is Mercedes-Benz Group AG, an IRMA member since 2020.

The automaker, like many other companies managing complex and constantly changing supply chains, is generally many steps away from individual mines. Mercedes-Benz therefore sees an opportunity to leverage insights from IRMA's audit reports as part of the company's own due diligence, integrating the findings into risk prioritization and management processes.

In 2022, Mercedes-Benz provided funding for IRMA to enhance and further explore how best to engage with mining communities. By implementing new practices and experimenting with alternative approaches to the auditing process, we've found ways to improve the community engagement already built into IRMA's audit process.

The result of our collaboration is the following report. It will guide our own practices as we continue to improve and, we hope, illustrate to all purchasers of mined materials — as well as mining companies, investors, regulators, other standards systems, NGOs and, of course, affected communities — how assessments in the industry might be strengthened, ultimately accelerating our common aim: to protect human rights and make mining more responsible.





## How Firsthand Insights Create More Meaningful Audit Reports

By meeting directly with nearby communities, auditors gain a deeper understanding, beyond documentation alone, of what is happening at a mine site and in the surrounding region.

Hearing from those directly affected by day-to-day operations also sheds light on what is transpiring at the site beyond the narrow point in time when an audit occurs. These insights, whether corroborating or diverging from the accounts of mine management, ensure a more balanced and accurate assessment.

There's another, even more crucial element that community members and rights holders add to an auditor's report: specificity. An impact assessment becomes far more real when it is grounded in the first-person stories of people who live, work and support households in the area around a mine.





## Three Examples of How Effective Engagement Helps Reveal the Full Extent of a Mine's Impact on Neighboring Communities

1

When a mine's entrance is far from the nearest town, it could be assumed that the effects of underground blasting will be of no consequence to local residents. However, a mine's working tunnels often extend miles from the main access point, and they are constantly changing as managers focus on optimizing access to the ore body. Over the course of months and years, such blasting could in fact become extremely disruptive to residents if those tunnels extend in the direction of nearby homes. This is an impact auditors can miss if they only review mine maps and don't interview people living nearby.

2

To cite another example, a mining operation and its various service providers might make heavy use of public roads, restricting access and increasing hazards for people living in the area. This can have a significant impact, whether residents are commuting to work or simply managing daily life and find they have limited access to schools, healthcare, shopping and other services. Again, these are impacts beyond the mine site that can only be discovered through direct engagement.

3

In a third scenario, a mine whose development requires damming a stream might decide to replace this source of household water with a modern, high-quality well. However, planners may overlook that the stream is also used to irrigate farms, yielding crops to feed families and produce income. Here, too, an auditor who only verifies the documentation will miss a critical part of the story local residents know well.

These are just a few examples of social and environmental factors that come to light through community interviews. People living near a mine may be concerned about dust blowing from the site, the safety of traditional food sources, the quality of their drinking water, the protection of biodiversity, in-migration of workers from other places, mine worker safety, emergency preparedness, mining waste management, the preservation of sacred sites and much more. Only through direct conversations can we gain a complete picture of a mine's current and potential impacts.



## Exploring New Dimensions of Community Engagement

Taking the time to foster trust and build relationships that lead to meaningful input is not yet common practice in most audits. IRMA is still learning, too.

Indeed, to some degree, this is uncharted territory. By sharing the insights we've gained in the following report, we hope to accelerate a number of important changes, both within IRMA and in the broader movement to advance responsible mining assessment:

- ▶ The quality of mine site audits will improve, leading to better performance and greater responsiveness to the concerns of communities.
- ▶ Communities will see how their participation creates more meaningful audit reports, and how the insights from those reports can be used to foster evidence-based dialogue with mining companies.
- ▶ Companies that depend on mined materials will understand the attributes of a credible audit report in relation to their supply chain due diligence.
- ▶ Mine sites will gain a deeper understanding of IRMA's audit process and how it benefits all who contribute to and gain value from the mining industry.
- ▶ Other responsible mining standards, whether originating within the industry or governed by broader-based oversight bodies — will be able to leverage our work and promote greater community engagement in their own processes.

**In the following sections, we present some of the key lessons from a year of listening, learning, discussion and reflection. Our hope is that these insights and recommended practices will help improve due diligence in the assessment of all social and environmental impacts, including the protection of human rights.**



## 1 **Meaningful Community Engagement** Is a Long-Term Commitment

Community engagement isn't just one more process step followed by an audit team conducting a mine assessment. Relationship building with community members should begin long before auditors arrive at the mine site and, to be effective, it needs to continue long after they're gone.

Meaningful engagement is best initiated by the organization that oversees the mining standard and system, often in collaboration with local partners. These representatives can explain the standard's aims and how it connects to the interests of the community.

Before an audit, we stress the importance of independent assessment and encourage community members to participate in audit interviews. To build trust, we first share information on IRMA's model of equal governance, our commitment to transparency and our unique third-party auditing process. At the same time, we avoid going into specifics on the performance of the local mine, or of any mine that has had an IRMA assessment, to ensure the audit process remains unbiased and free of preconceptions.

At the end of the process, when the audit report is released, we share the findings publicly on IRMA's website. We also reach out proactively to affected communities to help them find information in the report, to demonstrate how their perspectives are reflected in the performance assessment, and encourage them to use the audit as a tool for engaging with the mining company on commitments to further improve practices. The goal is to keep the dialogue active and to build trust in the value and accountability of audits over time.

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### Spotlight

Face-to-face conversations are crucial to help communities prepare for an audit and to ensure they feel they're on a more equal footing with mine site staff, who generally will have had months to prepare. Also, traveling to meet in person demonstrates that we're willing to invest the same precious resource we're asking communities to give: time. IRMA is still new to most communities. We have much more work to do in showing people what our organization does and how a mine audit can be a useful tool as they seek improved practices — and also in building trust that their perspectives will be reflected in audit reports and IRMA's overall system.



## 1 Meaningful Community Engagement Is a Long-Term Commitment, CONT.

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In Chile and Argentina, IRMA's regional outreach coordinator has spent time traveling in the high Altiplano Plateau to meet with community leaders and share more about the IRMA Standard's requirements and assessment process. The discussions have covered a wide range of topics, including the concept of auditing, the types of questions auditors might ask and how the audit process considers a community's right to free, prior and informed consent.

When the audit reports for mines operated by Albermarle and SQM were released in 2023, IRMA team members printed copies and sat down with representatives of affected communities to carefully review the documents. It was an opportunity to dive into the details, discussing any points that were unclear while inviting suggestions on how we can improve reports in the future.

This high-touch approach before and after audits helps IRMA remain relevant and accessible, demonstrating our openness to input and willingness to improve.

### REACHING OUT BY RADIO

Advance outreach by IRMA has typically been conducted in person, with staff or local partners traveling to as many locations as possible for face-to-face conversations. At some mine sites, though, affected communities are spread out over a wide, sparsely populated area, making it difficult to reach everyone. Other mines, by contrast, have a large concentration of people living nearby — more than could be accommodated even with an extended series of public meetings. For these scenarios, we've begun exploring live Q&A sessions broadcast on local radio stations. In this way, we can in effect have "conversations" with community members in their own homes, providing answers to questions about the audit process that our experience has shown are top of mind.

## 2 Effective Relationship-Building Is Anchored in Collaboration

There's more to community engagement than the interaction between auditors and people living near a mine site. Fostering an open, productive dialogue typically takes a larger collaborative effort — one that includes the organization behind the responsible mining standard, often working with government officials, NGOs, community development experts, mine management and even the mining company's customers.

Participants bring their own perspectives, approaches and relationships to the process, extending the range of insights that inform auditing, as well as the scope of its impact. In IRMA's experience, including manufacturers and consumer-facing brands directly in relationship building provides everyone at the table with a deeper understanding of the impacts of complex global supply chains. This can be especially important for community members, enabling their voices to be heard far beyond the locale where extraction occurs.

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### Spotlight

In Chile's Salar de Atacama basin, the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue Table brings together 15 representatives from communities, civil society, academia and various public and private sector organizations, including mining and tourism companies. Established in 2021, it's a forum for dialogue and collaboration aimed at bridging information gaps around the vast salt flats region and reaching agreements on priority issues for sustainable development.

The project was created by GIZ, the German development agency, with the participation of Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Daimler Trucks, BMW, BASF, and Fairphone — companies that are committed to improving knowledge-sharing about the potential impacts of resource extraction, and to exploring concrete actions that will help address them. GIZ invited IRMA to participate in the initiative by providing an overview of our standard and assessment process, showing how it can be used by communities to foster dialogue with mining companies.

These efforts complement IRMA's ongoing collaboration with GIZ on the MinSus project: Regional Cooperation for the Sustainable Management of Mineral Resources in the Andean Region. Launched in early 2023, the joint initiative focuses on piloting innovative ways to disseminate IRMA's independent audit reports across the region and promote discussion of their findings.

## 2 Effective Relationship-Building Is Anchored in Collaboration, CONT.

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Objectives of this collaboration include:

- ▶ sharing relevant audit reports and answering questions on how audits are conducted
- ▶ gathering feedback on how to make audit reports and our issues resolution process more accessible
- ▶ identifying barriers that could impede communities and NGOs from participating in mine audits.

### EXPANDING INCLUSION

Sometimes community engagement extends beyond the immediate area around a mine to include the voices of those who may live further away but nevertheless have a deep interest in local impacts. In South America, IRMA was approached by a group of researchers who had established a base to study flamingoes in their natural habitat. The scientists welcomed the opportunity to participate in relevant audit activities, expressing the hope that it would lead to an ongoing dialogue. As they summed it up: “There are many biologists, conservationists, and NGOs who prefer not to talk to mining companies because they have the perception that their words will be ignored or misused. We [believe] that there has to be a dialogue. If there is no dialogue, there is no possibility of change.”



## 3 Communities Can Take Advantage of Hands-On Assessment Tools

Mines considering an audit of their responsible mining performance should begin by conducting a thorough internal assessment. IRMA supports this best practice by providing a comprehensive self-assessment tool whose step-by-step methodology is aligned with the sequenced chapters of the IRMA Standard.

While the tool is primarily used by companies preparing for an independent audit, we also make it available to communities living near mine sites, as it spells out the criteria for responsible mining and makes the technical requirements of the assessment process more accessible.

IRMA has also created a unique suite of tools designed specifically to advance community engagement. The toolkit includes the following guides, presentations and information-gathering templates (some translated into Spanish and Indonesian):

- ▶ What is IRMA?
- ▶ IRMA: A Tool for NGO, Community and Labor Leaders
- ▶ How is Free, Prior and Informed Consent Addressed by the IRMA Standard?
- ▶ How to File a Complaint: The IRMA Issues Resolution Procedure
- ▶ a sample letter for communities encouraging a local mine to undergo an audit
- ▶ a questionnaire to help community members prepare for an audit

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### Spotlight

A community organization in the southwestern United States worked with a professional mining engineer to use the IRMA self-assessment tool in evaluating a mining operation that directly affected the community. The assessment results revealed the degree to which the operator was following best practices for responsible mining as defined by the IRMA Standard. The findings also provided a structured, evidence-based framework for direct engagement with the mining company on issues the community organization wanted to see addressed. Being able to assess the mine's performance against objective measures helped the community engage on a more equal footing with company management. It also informed a potential future communications strategy highlighting differences between what the operator claimed and what the IRMA self-assessment tool revealed.

## 4 Auditors Must Have a Robust, Transparent Outreach Plan

To ensure meaningful and representative community engagement, auditors should begin by creating a proactive outreach plan in advance of a mine audit. We've made this crucial preparatory step a prerequisite of the IRMA assessment process. A mine may share its engagement plan, which auditors can use as a starting point, but this will typically need to be augmented to yield a more diverse sampling of insights and perspectives.

Crafting an effective outreach plan requires a combination of desk research — identifying the political context in which the mine operates, including any contentious issues — and connecting directly with community leaders, public officials, NGOs, labor unions and even other mining operations in the area. The auditors' plan should manage this expanded outreach strategy, establishing how meetings and interviews should be structured, where and when they can be arranged, who should attend as participants or intermediaries, and so on.

Another dimension of local politics to be considered in a successful outreach strategy is whether there are norms that should be followed to avoid controversy. For instance, some traditional leaders, including elected officials, will expect to be consulted before auditors contact their constituents directly.

Successful outreach planning takes time and effort, along with creative approaches to tackling sometimes complex logistical challenges — in contrast to traditional audits, which tend to focus primarily on the validation of existing information. Effective outreach also depends on a thorough understanding of the local context, including any practical, social or cultural barriers that may limit the participation of specific individuals or groups. This may even mean planning distinct engagement opportunities for specific groups — for example, bringing together people of the same gender or ethnicity, or meeting separately with communities that are in conflict with each other.

## 4 Auditors Must Have a Robust, Transparent Outreach Plan, CONT.

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### Spotlight

IRMA's mine liaison team, based on extensive field experience, has developed step-by-step guidance on how auditors can create a list of organizations and individuals for proactive outreach. This work should begin well before the public announcement of the onsite audit, so proactive outreach can get underway during the formal 30-day notice period before auditors arrive at the mine site.

The audit team begins by conducting research via the web and other information sources to review, for example, media stories related to the mine, which often will include names of local groups and individuals. It's also vital to reach out to NGOs working in the area for their guidance. When necessary, auditors should also establish initial contact with community leaders — after determining whether they prefer communicating by phone, video conference, email or even letter. This pre-audit information gathering not only yields important outreach contacts but also surfaces issues of concern that have been raised in communities around the mine site.

The auditors then take the list of individuals and organizations they've created and compare it to the list provided by mine management. There will naturally be some overlap — but a cross-check typically reveals important voices that might otherwise have been left out of the audit process. Using the combined list, auditors can begin focused outreach to ensure that the community engagement to come is more representative, productive and illuminating.

A final insight gained through experience is that the challenge of gathering outreach contacts varies greatly with the size of the mine's surrounding community (or communities), which may range from a few hundred people to tens of thousands. Setting clear stakeholder engagement objectives early on can help to identify during the planning process the level of effort that will be needed during the audit and creates a shared understanding among all parties.

## 5 Communities Welcome Clear, Direct, Tailored Communications

Once outreach planning is complete, the next step is to communicate when an audit will occur to prospective community participants. This too requires a deep understanding of local perspectives and concerns. The goals of the mine audit must be conveyed in clear, non-technical language and presented in ways that align with community values and priorities.

It's especially important to determine the best ways to connect with communities. Local access to technology plays a key role here, as the audit team determines whether it's best to share information, for example, via email or social media or printed newsletters — or some other means entirely. One recommended practice is to look at the modes of communication that are most actively used in the area, whether radio, newspaper, paper flyers or messaging services such as WhatsApp. Often community meetings, or even traditional door-to-door canvassing, are the best way to ensure residents are contacted and properly informed.

Deciding how best to reach community members — and planning and budgeting accordingly — is critical to avoid a disconnect between the anticipated investment of time and energy in a mine audit and what is actually needed to gain valuable on-the-ground insights. Direct and independent community outreach is not a typical component of ESG auditing, and identifying the most effective methods of communication requires an understanding of each community's unique norms rather than applying a standard, one-size-fits-all audit approach.

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### Spotlight

Auditing teams conducting assessments under the IRMA Standard often test several ways of reaching out to communities, refining their approach as they try various communications channels. During the outreach phase at one mine site, auditors posted flyers around the community, advertised on a nearby radio station and communicated directly with local leaders. When there was virtually no feedback, the team then consulted community members and learned Instagram was by far the most popular method for sharing information. The auditors posted a notice to the social media platform and immediately received a flood of responses from people interested in learning more about participating in the audit.

In several countries, notably Argentina and South Africa, IRMA field teams have found that a good way to reach communities — and hear back from them — is via WhatsApp messaging, as most people communicate using mobile phones rather than computers. We have set up dedicated WhatsApp lines for auditors to use in their on-site interviewing, as well as for follow-up consultations and general information gathering. This experience speaks to a larger point about engagement communications: an audit team has to be adaptable, connecting with local communities in ways that work best for them.



## 6 It's Vital to Respect Participants' Time, Values and Expectations

Auditors reaching out to community members must be alert to their diverse needs and perspectives. Some may expect payment for participating in interviews or group consultations, if only to cover gas or travel costs. Others may ask whether childcare is available, or if food and refreshments will be provided.

In planning the overall audit schedule, it's crucial to allow for some flexibility around when and where participants will likely be available. It may be possible, for instance, to have a public session coincide with a previously arranged community meeting or church gathering. Or some participants may prefer to connect during non-work hours, or while their children are at school. Being sensitive to cultural dynamics and the local way of life is essential for a successful engagement plan.

Budgeting sufficient time is also key to ensuring a balanced and nuanced representation of local views. By extending community engagement, auditors gain opportunities to corroborate what the mine has reported — or possibly hear a different appraisal of its impacts. Based on what we've learned through this study, IRMA is now able to better advise auditors on gauging the effort required for community consultations. We also know that some community members may have little interest in the nearby mine and see no value in participating in an audit — and even though we hope to engage as many people as possible, we have to respect that point of view as well.

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### Spotlight

During a recent audit, mine managers made a company-owned recreational facility available for community meetings and worker interviews. The intent was to streamline the engagement process by conducting all sessions at a single location. But while this common meeting place was convenient for the auditors, it was far from both communities they hoped to engage with. Even though the mining company offered free transportation, few people took advantage of this. The resulting low attendance at interviews was attributed to the “busy schedules” of community members and “shift conflicts” among mine workers. Auditors, meanwhile, had to remain at the meeting point for other scheduled sessions and couldn't venture out to connect with people closer to where they lived. In retrospect, the team saw that a better approach would have been to arrange dedicated transportation for each auditor, giving them the freedom to meet with community members and mine workers at places that were convenient for them.

## 7 Interviews Should be Authentic, Thoughtful Conversations

Interviewing community members, whether one-to-one or in groups, requires a deft mix of empathy, curiosity, patience, diplomacy and respect. Balancing all these considerations while also conveying a sound grasp of local issues takes careful preparation.

While we recommend that auditors outline or even script questions and remarks in advance, it's also important to leave room for spontaneity, responding to cues from participants as they arise.

Introductory remarks should frame the purpose of the conversation, emphasize the value of participants' candid input and reassure them that their comments will be treated with care and kept in confidence.

Closing remarks should express gratitude, reiterate the confidential nature of the interview, provide ways to follow up and describe next steps in the audit process.

With the on-site portion of more than 10 IRMA audits now complete, we can share some key lessons learned about effective interviewing, including how much time to plan for meaningful conversations:

### Interviews with communities

- ▶ When interviewing a group of community members, it's best to schedule a two-hour session. This allows time to come together, honor cultural norms (such as greetings, acknowledgements and even community tours), and then allow the conversation to build momentum as the group gains confidence and speakers inspire one another. For a large group, we recommend having at least two facilitators to help guide participants, take notes and observe group dynamics.
- ▶ One-to-one interviews with community members entail many of the same factors as group conversations, but each interview can typically be completed in one hour.

### Interviews with workers

- ▶ For one-to-one interviews with mine workers, we recommend 30 minutes. Often the first 20 minutes are devoted to building trust, after which interviewees share more frank insights. Interviews with small groups of workers need at least 45 minutes. In both scenarios, the focus should be on areas where employees have direct knowledge or experience. Auditors should listen for hints of underlying issues and then explore those more deeply. We also recommend providing the option of having labor union representatives present at interviews if it will help workers feel confident and safe in sharing their views — and also, of course, if this is a union expectation under the mine's collective agreement.

## 7 Interviews Should be Authentic, Thoughtful Conversations, CONT

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### Interviews with NGOs

- ▶ Interviewing representatives of NGOs usually requires an hour. With these participants in particular, it's important to first listen to their point of view, then share information about IRMA and ask questions — and then end with more careful listening.

### Interviews with government officials

- ▶ Interviewing government officials and public service representatives generally requires 30 to 60 minutes. Auditors begin by sharing information about the IRMA Standard and explaining how an audit can benefit the interviewee's department or role. The balance of the meeting should allow time for both asking and answering questions.

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## Spotlight

As discussed above, having a standard list of questions is helpful for consistent data gathering, but an interviewer who sticks too closely to a script can miss chances to gain valuable input or unearth underlying issues based on interviewees' personal experiences. Interviews should be about guided listening rather than completing a checklist of questions.

In one interview we observed during the course of this study, a community member clearly expressed their desire to discuss an issue that was important to them — to the point of becoming visibly agitated. The auditor, however, was too focused on covering the full list of prepared questions to read those cues and respond accordingly. As a result, the interviewee stopped trusting the process and declined to proceed, without sharing information they felt was crucial to assessing the local mine's performance.

## 8 We Grow Engagement, By Earning, Building and Sustaining Trust

Successful engagement with communities must be anchored by trust — and that's a foundation that can only be built over time. In some cases, when auditors arrive at a mine site, they may be able to take advantage of existing relationships between the mine's management and community representatives. In most cases, however, they'll be seen as newcomers conducting an assessment that is likely unfamiliar to most people; they can expect it will take some time to earn local residents' confidence and support.

Many communities are understandably wary. Sometimes people mistakenly assume auditors are mine company employees, or representatives of an NGO, or academics conducting a research study — any of which could carry negative past associations. Even when auditors have clarified their independent role, they may encounter resistance. Some in the community may be opposed to any form of mining, regardless of whether it's done responsibly and meets a recognized standard. Those who express tentative or outright support may nevertheless wonder how their comments will be heard or reflected back to the company, and so they too may come to the conversation with a sense of caution or even unease. Auditors must consider all of these nuances as they work to build open, trustful relationships.

IRMA audit teams have learned specific techniques for building trust. For example, they try to arrange interviews and community meetings in neutral locations with no corporate, political or religious associations. In talking to community members, they start with lighter topics and slowly guide the flow of conversation toward more complex and potentially weighty subjects. However, the fact remains that a foundation of trust can't be built during a brief on-site visit. It's a long-term commitment that ideally has begun long before the auditors' visit, will be strengthened by their work — and will continue growing stronger into the future.



## 8

**We Grow Engagement,****By Earning, Building and Sustaining Trust, CONT**

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**Spotlight**

How auditors present themselves can have unintended consequences, especially in communities where trust has not gained a firm footing. Mine sites often provide visitors with coveralls, protective vests and hard hats to help ensure a safe visit. However, when auditors meet with community members, and particularly with mineworkers, wearing gear that bears the mining company name and logo can create the impression that they are representatives of the audited site. We recommend that auditors wear clothing and gear that are either unbranded or display the audit firm logo. They should also wear badges that clearly show their name and organization, along with the designation “independent auditor.”

For the same reasons, we advise auditors to avoid traveling in mining company vehicles and instead arrive for interviews and meetings by independent means. Of course, sometimes safety or access issues make it necessary to rely on the mine for transport. But where possible, this seemingly small gesture can go a long way to reinforce that auditors are third-party, non-partisan investigators with a mandate to listen, analyze and report on the facts.

## -----> The Conversation Continues...

### Community Engagement

The concept of integrating more community engagement into the process of auditing mine sites seems straightforward on paper. In practice, however, it can be nuanced, complicated and sometimes a bit challenging. It takes time, energy and focus to create the kind of open dialogue, underpinned by trust, that leads to productive long-term relationships between a mining assurance system and mining-affected communities.

We believe the lessons learned by IRMA and our auditing teams through this study will be helpful to other mining standard organizations and their auditors. We join our funding partner, Mercedes-Benz, in the hope that this report will also be valuable to purchasers of mined materials, as well as to communities, mining companies, NGOs, governments and all other proponents of an inclusive, adaptable approach to mine audits that more fully incorporate perspectives of those living nearby.

The insights we've gained, and the tools and practices we've developed as a result, are just the beginning of our ongoing commitment to building deeper understanding and trust with communities affected by mines. In other words, our journey continues.

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### Accepting the Challenge

As this collaboration was nearing completion, we were pleased to learn that IRMA's efforts have been recognized by the JET Minerals Challenge, an initiative launched by USAID in partnership with Amazon, the BHP Foundation and the Chandler Foundation. Its goal: "to catalyze the development, application and scaling of innovations to counter corruption and strengthen transparency, accountability and integrity in the global rush to meet the unprecedented demand for green minerals."

One of 11 honorees, IRMA has received the highest-level award of \$400,000 to co-create, pilot, refine and share tools with affected communities, NGOs and workers. We're now convening a global working group — as well as site-specific working groups in Indonesia and South Africa — aimed at improving community access to and engagement with our audit reports. We're also working to make IRMA's feedback and complaints mechanisms more accessible, and to improve our community impact surveys.

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## The Learning Never Stops

As we explore how to better engage with community members during mine audits, their voices are more appropriately represented in subsequent audit reports. These added perspectives help to contextualize information shared by the mine — sometimes, in the spirit of transparency, illuminating tensions between divergent points of view. At IRMA, we believe that surfacing such tensions and discussing them frankly is the key to finding consensus, fostering trust and advancing positive change.

As we hope this report makes clear, community engagement is not an added feature of select mine audits; it's essential to producing more robust and impactful audit reports. The participants in this collective initiative don't claim to have all the answers. There are points of difference among us that remain difficult to resolve. However, one thing we all agree on is that the learning never stops.

Our quest for greater transparency in the mining industry extends to our own organization as well. We're committed to sharing full details of IRMA's systems, processes and practices as we constantly seek opportunities to learn and improve. If this report prompts questions or inspires suggestions, please contact us. We look forward to hearing and discussing your ideas.

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