



How IRMA Benefits Affected Communities

Modern societies rely on mined minerals and metals to function. Buildings, roads, computers, cars, and buses -- all contain material mined from the Earth. As we shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, even as we change consumption patterns, we will need more raw materials. Some of these materials will come from recycling and reuse, but other materials will come from new mines.

Though we will need more materials, finance professionals, indigenous groups, mine workers, governments, and local communities are debating whether the benefits outweigh the expected outcome. Mining-affected communities are the often-forgotten voice of the mining industry. As such, they are necessary to creating a responsible mining future in the face of increased demand for more mine materials.

The Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) offers a solution to our problem. IRMA was founded on the belief that every individual impacted by mining should have a say in how responsible mining is defined and measured.

By convening experts, advocates, and industry leaders across six key sectors, we have developed an independent, best-practice standard for responsible mining, as well as a transparent process for assessing mine performance against that standard.

The IRMA Standard for Responsible Mining defines what mining should look like. Our independent assurance system checks how mines are performing. Investors, customers, NGOs, trade unions, and local communities all use our audit reports to ask for change. Six diverse stakeholder groups, mining-affected communities, NGOs, labor unions, finance, downstream purchasers, and mining companies all sit on [IRMA's board](#) and have an equal say in the decision-making process. IRMA is a force to create a responsible mining sector, no matter where mining happens in the world. IRMA works for all its sector members and provides concrete benefits to each one.



The IRMA audit reports assist us in carrying out our advocacy work and provide us with information to participate in national, regional, and international dialogues such as Alternative Mining Indabas.”

SHURUGWI COMMUNITY MEMBER, ZIMBABWE, 2022

IRMA Benefits Mining-Affected Communities

- * **IRMA helps communities access information about how a mine is performing:** IRMA gives communities access to otherwise obscure or hard-to-find information about a mine. The information includes what the mine is doing well in terms of social and environmental conditions and what can be improved. Communities at the Unki mine in Zimbabwe [describe](#) how there is improved trust between them and the mine. Community leaders point to how the [audit](#) led to a permanent forum that allows community representatives to engage with the mine to discuss and resolve issues. Additionally, the audit recognized that a signature need of the community was representation on the mine’s emergency response committee. As such, today, there is now a permanent community representation on the emergency committee as a result of the audit, showing how the IRMA audits can be used as a tool to facilitate continued engagement and dialogue.
- * **IRMA audits put community voices front and center:** An IRMA audit allows community members to voice their concerns about how a mine is performing. In an IRMA audit, auditors **are required to** reach out and invite community representatives and leaders to tell them how the mine is performing. Most audits today do not require this. Information provided by a mine to an auditor is not enough. Community and worker interviews are needed to ensure the audit is accurate. When this happens, those who read the audit reports – end brands, investors, regulators – can hear directly from communities and workers.
- * **IRMA provides a grievance mechanism for complaints:** A [key lesson](#) from the first IRMA audits was that the people most impacted by a mine are central to how the impacts from a mine are assessed. The community and workers can also submit their complaints – anonymously or not, and in any language – regarding an IRMA audit and the audit firm through the available independent grievance mechanism of IRMA. Complaints in the past have caused concrete changes in how audits are conducted, highlighting the importance IRMA places on acting on grievances when they are submitted. Anyone can provide feedback to the IRMA process, with the process outlined on our [website](#).



“The BCAFN Chiefs-in-Assembly endorse the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (“IRMA”) Mining Standard and call on the government of British Columbia to support and adopt the IRMA mining standard.”

BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATION CHIEFS, OCTOBER 2024

- * **IRMA helps communities remediate past harm:** Although it would be ideal to begin the IRMA process before a mine has begun any production, legacy mines are a reality that must be faced. For mining-affected communities in these regions, ongoing improvement is not enough; remedy for past harms must also be possible. This is why the IRMA standard includes specific provisions around remedying past harm. Further to this, IRMA is currently in the process of developing a stand-alone Remedy Framework, a tool that will set out processes to address past and ongoing environmental or social harm for mining companies engaged in the IRMA system.
- * **IRMA is a tool to advocate for stronger mining laws:** IRMA offers a definition of responsible mining that goes beyond most national regulations. This makes it a benchmark to identify where national mining regulations fall short. NGOs use benchmarks like IRMA to rank their “asks” to policymakers and make the case for mining law reform in their countries. Governments also value IRMA because of our consensus approach, bringing together stakeholders ahead of time. This shows that consensus can be reached, and stronger mining laws are possible and necessary.
- * **IRMA is used by Indigenous Peoples to support their engagement with governments and companies:** IRMA is the only mining industry standard today that fully aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). One of the most important international legal norms protected by UNDRIP is the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). FPIC reflects the fact that Indigenous Peoples have the right to manage, protect, and make decisions about their traditional and ancestral lands. It was developed over a decade with the direct involvement of Indigenous Peoples. Because IRMA requires FPIC to complete its audits, IRMA is the preferred mining standard for Indigenous Peoples. IRMA’s respect for FPIC is used by Indigenous Peoples in [their own mining reform strategies and agendas](#).

“First Nations, in their sole and absolute discretion, may require all mineral projects, including critical minerals projects, be assessed and audited by the world’s leading mining standard created by the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (“IRMA”). The IRMA audit process is transparent, independent, and voluntary.” (BC First Nations Mining and Energy Council, First Nations Critical Minerals Strategy 2024, p.63-64)



“Companies must recognize and respect the right to FPIC, which also means the right to say no, in their policies, procedures, and practices in all projects, recognizing and emphasizing the self-determined development of Indigenous Peoples. The Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) policy on FPIC must be the minimum standard for mining companies.”

[Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Participants in the Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Just Transition,](#)
April 2024, New York

IRMA is a Tool That Can Support Community Organizing Efforts

IRMA is a tool to help understand the impacts and benefits of an existing or proposed mine. Understanding the short, medium, and long-term impacts, risks, and benefits of a mining project is a herculean task for anyone, not least for those communities who may have limited resources. Mine Measure is a tool developed by IRMA that allows anyone to conduct a Self-Assessment against the IRMA Standard. Mines often perform audits, but there are documented cases of communities using Mine Measure for their needs.

In New Mexico, an IRMA member uses the Mine Measure tool to identify where they should invest their limited resources to achieve the biggest impact. They populated the Mine Measure tool using the available information as a way to begin a dialogue with the mining company in their community. In Nevada, community members are using the Mine Measure and the IRMA Ready tools to collect community feedback on a proposed lithium project.

[Mine Measure](#) is made available for free to community members of IRMA.

IRMA Creates Space for Communities to Become a Unified Voice for Change

Part of engaging with IRMA is the community of groups that are a part of the IRMA ecosystem. As an IRMA member, you get an insight into what other communities affected by mining are going through to get a sense that no community is alone. Regular calls between communities, civil society organizations, labor union members, and IRMA board representatives provide insights into common grievances, strategies for change, and the opportunity to discuss and address differences offer unique insights.

There is power in numbers, and IRMA allows community members to connect with other communities. A united front can allow for more effective advocacy; changes for one can be a change for all.

IRMA is Here to Help

IRMA can help the communities mitigate risks in the mining sector and across the mineral supply chain. We invite affected communities to learn more by reaching out to IRMA's Civil Society Sector Lead at info@responsiblemining.net.