Keeping an eye on the beasts: Social monitoring of large-scale mines in New Guinea

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Abstract
Since the late 1980s, mining agreements in Papua New Guinea contain a clause that says or implies that there should be something called social monitoring carried out around the mine site. This tends to be an addendum to the much more comprehensive environmental monitoring requirements. There is also a (somewhat reluctant) recognition within the industry that some form of social monitoring is ‘best practice’. In this paper I begin with my vision of where social monitoring in New Guinea is in terms of ‘best practice’. Two developments in social monitoring apparent over the last seven years are then discussed: greater community control over the monitoring programmes, and the apparent loss of interest in social monitoring by all parties involved, but primarily by the sponsors, the companies. I conclude with some possible reasons why there is effectively no social monitoring currently being carried out in the industry in New Guinea, and provide some thoughts on future directions.
Keeping an eye on the beasts: 
Social monitoring of large-scale mines in New Guinea

Introduction
This paper is essentially a self-indulgent reflection on my involvement at a number of mining projects in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya (hereafter referred to together as New Guinea). In the context of forthcoming work by John Burton (in press) and Colin Filer (in press (a)), both of whom trace in some detail the rise and decline of social monitoring programmes, particularly at the Porgera gold mine, I work through the question of why the monitoring of social and economic impacts of the large scale mines in New Guinea is simply not happening. Given the critical economic importance of the industry to the respective provincial and national economies, and the regular pronouncements from resource companies of the lessons they learnt from social and commercial disasters such as Bougainville, Ok Tedi, and Freeport, I find the continuing lack of rigorous social monitoring programmes astonishing.

My involvement in social monitoring dates from 1992 when I was talking to Dr Colin Filer, then Projects Manager in the Unisearch (PNG) Pty Ltd office at the University of Papua New Guinea. Colin had been approached by the Environmental Manager at the Porgera mine to propose a comprehensive programme to monitor the social and economic impacts of the project. Colin then asked if I was interested in being involved. As I had just started my PhD at the Australian National University (ANU) on the social and economic effects of the industry, it seemed an opportunity too good to refuse, despite the advice of one ANU academic that Porgera ‘was just too dangerous’ for fieldwork!

After an initial six week visit I subsequently returned to Porgera on three separate occasions as part of the Porgera Social Monitoring Programme (PSMP) over the next two years. I completed four consultancy reports on mostly economic issues in the local community based on this work (to be published, along with other papers, in Filer in press (b)). In between I was briefly involved in writing a manual on socio-economic monitoring for Chevron at the Kutubu oilfields (Banks 1994).

Subsequent to the submission of the last of the Porgera reports in late 1994, the PSMP went into recession for two years, coinciding with me concentrating on finishing my PhD (Banks 1997). In 1996-97, Susy Bonnell and I were asked by the company to resurrect the PSMP and set about doing so along different lines, only to discover midway through that the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) had also, independently, decided to re-establish a new Porgera Social Monitoring Committee (PSMC) without any Porgera Joint Venture (PJV) involvement. After some very confusing meetings with local representatives, governments, and company, our work was subsumed within the process that the government had formed. This involved regular meetings of central and local government officials with local representatives and company personnel to report and assess progress towards mutually agreed social and economic goals. Annual (or biannual) reviews of social and economic change would generate new negotiated and agreed goals.

Although we produced a blueprint for a social monitoring process that we were happy with, and the committee seemed to approve of, the programme rapidly lost the support of the company, and the lack of leadership of DEC on the issue was again exposed. Then in late 1998 Susy Bonnell and I again designed a social monitoring programme at the invitation of the PJV (essentially building on the previous efforts) and, after an initial rush of support, it again floundered, this time largely on the rocks of corporate cost-cutting initiatives.

In 1997-98 I carried out Social Monitoring work as part of the UNCEN-ANU Baseline Studies project around the Freeport mine in Irian Jaya, a project that Chris Ballard and I had been involved in putting together since 1994. Although there are other aspects of the work that I will talk about below, this project was notable for the absence of any institutional support or framework: it was not linked directly with any other government, company, or community planning process. Although we have tried to graft it on to village level government and community organisations, my strong suspicions are that it will again be a one-off exercise, although it has had various more productive spin-offs.

In the context of that brief personal potted history, I begin by spelling out what I believe the principles of social monitoring should be, and then compare what I know of other social monitoring...
programmes in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya against these. Following this I address two not entirely unrelated aspects of social monitoring that are integral to the development of best practice, and yet at the same time appear to have limited its application in New Guinea. On one hand, there is now greater community involvement in, and control over, social monitoring projects that assess the changes that the communities are going through. On the other, there appears to be a loss of commitment, and perhaps interest, among companies (as sponsors) in having independent, external socio-economic monitoring of their projects.

**What should social monitoring be? A best practice framework**

In brief, social monitoring should be about the regular assessment of the social, economic and cultural effects of mining. Where appropriate it should also seek ways to mitigate negative impacts. This is a simple matter on paper, but for several reasons it is more complicated than it appears. For one, there is rarely agreement on the nature and magnitude of the changes because of the different perspectives that the various stakeholders have of these changes. To give a simple example, from the corporate perspective relocation is often described in terms of the numbers of households moved, and benefits provided. A community perspective may well emphasise other things: social dislocation and adjustment problems, for example. A second problem confronted by people wishing to monitor the impact of a mine operation is that it is often impossible to separate out the impacts of the mine from other changes that the community are experiencing. As Colin Filer (1996:59) has described, there is not a simple unilinear relationship between a mine and the surrounding community.

Social monitoring has to be framed in such a way, then, that it remains open to different interpretations of change, and that it is cognisant of the full range of influences on the local society. Given the difficulty of this, and the fact that there are effectively no guidelines on what social monitoring should involve, it is perhaps not surprising that there have been a range of markedly different motivations and approaches adopted towards social monitoring.

To my way of thinking, best practice in social monitoring should aim to adhere to the following principles:

- **Community participation.** The programme must have significant community input into the design and implementation of the programme. The extent and nature of this ‘significant’ input may well vary depending on a range of factors, including the political status of the community, their interest in the process, and their ability to access external advice. This does not mean necessarily handing over control of the process to community members, as to be effective the process needs to be regarded as valid by all the stakeholders, and community controlled processes are unlikely to regarded as neutral by companies.

- **Independence.** The social monitoring programme should not be carried out solely by the company, or solely by the community. Independence is widely regarded as a prerequisite for credible environmental and social monitoring of the industry. This issue is returned to below.

- **Transparency.** For the programme to be above suspicion, it should be transparent. One mechanism that assists in transparency is for the results of any monitoring to be publicly available. Monitoring which is not transparent is unlikely to be regarded as valid by all internal and external stakeholders.

- **Beyond compliance.** By advocating the notion of best practice I am essentially arguing that the current regulatory regime is inadequate. It is inadequate because it is inconsistent across the industry (the only consistency is in the vagueness with which the notion of social monitoring is written into agreements), and it is inadequate because the limited resources (financial and technical) of DEC do not allow them to effectively police the existing agreements. This principle has been accepted by all the miners in terms of environmental monitoring.

- **Coverage.** Social monitoring should provide a rigorous assessment of all the changes in, and effects on, the community. This assessment should be acceptable to all stakeholders, and cover the range of issues that concern the various stakeholders. In my experience this requires collecting a variety of data, ranging from quantitative measures of economic and social change (compensation and royalty payments, business contracts, household economics and livelihoods,
school enrolments, health trends, police arrest records, etc) to much more qualitative material on aspirations, opinions, concerns and problems. To simply collect material on predetermined ‘indicators’ is to miss the point that the processes and patterns of change within the community are not able to be predicted in advance.

In geographic terms, the monitoring should take in all areas that the mine or its infrastructure has a significant and direct effect on. Depending on the location and configuration of the mine, this may include both the immediate mine vicinity, areas of major infrastructure (towns and airports, for example), and communities in areas downstream of the mine.

- **Programme life.** A programme must, as a minimum, continue from the start of the mine through to the end of the mine life, and probably beyond. It should ideally build on the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment - ‘emerge seamlessly’ from the SEIS process (John Burton pers. comm.) - and a structure and agreed process for the monitoring should certainly be in place by the time construction begins.

- **Integration.** The programme should go beyond simply observing change and should be integrated with local and regional planning structures. A simple description of the changes occurring is a useful first step, but unless that information is integrated with, and used as the basis for, future planning (corporate and/or government) then there is little other than academic value in the work. The absorption of the monitoring results into the way in which corporate and government planning takes place is, in my experience, one of the weakest aspects of social monitoring (see also O’Faircheallaigh 1999:66).

- **Funding.** Ideally the programme should be jointly funded by government and company. For reasons discussed below it would be better, though less realistic, to get a community contribution as well. This is primarily so as to provide the programme with a degree of ownership and credibility among the key stakeholders.

I should note that while I regard these principles as being the basis for effective social monitoring (and they largely correspond with other initiatives such as the Environment Protection Agency (1995a)) I doubt whether they are what communities would value, or even accept. This is because the principles above continue to draw heavily on a progressive, liberal, western notion of impact assessment (see O’Faircheallaigh (1999: 63-66) for a recent review of the issues), and issues such as independence and transparency do not necessarily carry the same weight in highlands Melanesian societies, for example. In this case, what is needed is a form of social monitoring which has credibility with local communities, and one way to do that is to attempt to utilise indigenous notions of assessment. What these indigenous forms of assessment might be are not clear and would no doubt vary significantly between the societies, but given the nature of communication in these societies they are likely to emphasise personal relationships (the state of personal relationships between community members and company employees, for instance) and practical action (in the sense of social monitoring both recording what has been done - and not done - and in actually generating practical outcomes itself, rather than just talk). The notion of negotiation-based social impact assessment advocated recently by O’Faircheallaigh (1999) may also have relevance in this context. In the absence of a clear alternative, however, the rest of the paper proceeds on the basis of my best practice model.

**The current state of social monitoring in New Guinea**

How do the present social monitoring regimes in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya measure up to the above list of principles? To date, social monitoring has been carried out primarily because companies are required to do it under the terms of their Environmental Management and Monitoring Plans (EMMP). The nature of these social monitoring clauses varies, but the relevant clause from the original EMMP for Porgera is not atypical. It should be noted that this occurs in the context of 35 pages of detailed environmental monitoring requirements.

8.13 **SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEILLANCE**

A demographic survey was carried out in June 1990 to collect data on human settlement in areas around the mine. The results will be used in the assessment of changes in the population that are
associated with mine construction. The timing of subsequent surveys will be determined by agreement with the PNG Government and will depend upon the significance of any changes determined from the 1990 data.

A socio-economic liaison committee has been formed comprising representatives from Porgera, Enga Provincial Government and PJV to monitor issues of concern to local people. Although communication channels are well established with the local people by means of the PJV Community Relations Department, the committee will establish a formal link between the PJV, the community and the Government (PJV 1991: 8.13).

Despite some limited progress in terms of later agreements, the above illustrates the very limited (and exceptionally vague) nature of the regulatory requirements in Papua New Guinea; at Freeport in Irian Jaya there are none. It is noteworthy, as Richie Howitt pointed out at the seminar at which this paper was presented, that the language of the above clause - ‘surveillance’ - implies that this proposed social monitoring was regarded as a detached exercise, without the involvement and engagement of the local community that is implied in the best practice principles I sketched above.

In spite of the lack of clear regulatory requirements, various forms of social monitoring have sprung up from time to time at the resource operations in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya. The progress and current status of social monitoring that I know of at the minesites is summarised in Table 1, while in Table 2 the various programmes (existing and previous) are assessed against the principles listed above.

The brief notes on the programmes in these Tables require some expansion. In the case of Lihir, the impetus behind the social monitoring programme comes not from the government or the company, but from Export Finance Insurance Corporation (EFIC), the Australian government guarantor of some of the finance used to establish the mine. Social Monitoring Annual Reports have been prepared for each of the last three years (since the start of construction) by a consultant. Both DEC and the company get to comment on these before they are submitted to EFIC, and the report is presented at a meeting of the Lihir Social Monitoring Committee although these are infrequent events (M. Macintyre pers. comm.). The ability of the consultant to discuss and publicise the results of the monitoring is severely restricted by the terms of the contract with EFIC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mine</th>
<th>Current Status of Social Monitoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porgera</td>
<td>Last Review and Action Plan 1996/97. Porgera Social Monitoring Committee still exists and meets quarterly. Current company plan to shift to more internal and monitoring of agreements, along with direct company-community negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ok Tedi</td>
<td>No social monitoring around mine site. Limited social monitoring currently being carried out in Lower Ok Tedi villages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lihir</td>
<td>Lihir Social Monitoring Committee exists. Role unclear. Annual Social Monitoring reports prepared for EFIC, and submitted jointly to DEC, company and Lihir Social Monitoring Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misima</td>
<td>Internal Reporting only. Unclear if reports submitted to DEC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolokuma</td>
<td>Internal Reporting only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutubu/ Hides/ Gobe/ Moran</td>
<td>None recently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeport</td>
<td>Baseline Study completed 1998, reporting to community organisations, company and local government. No plans for continuation. Internal company programme reporting, and direct company-community negotiations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Current status and nature of social monitoring in Melanesia
The case of social monitoring at Ok Tedi is very different. There has never been any social monitoring programme among the Wopkaimin who live around the mine site itself at Ok Tedi. In the early 1990s, Drs Colin Filer and John Burton developed an extensive programme over a number of years covering the downstream communities, under the auspices of the Ok Tedi Mining Ltd (OTML) Environment Department. This involved a number of anthropologists and other social scientists and resulted in the production of twelve reports to the company, two of which were subsequently published (Filer 1991, Kirsch 1995). With the completion of the initial surveys of all the communities, the growing distraction of the lawsuit, and having served its role in the internal politics of the company (Burton in press), the programme ended. The settlement of the lawsuit did include mention of a variation on social monitoring for the lower Ok Tedi communities (but not the Fly River or the mine site area), and I understand that a limited form of this is currently under way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mine</th>
<th>community participation</th>
<th>independent</th>
<th>transparent</th>
<th>beyond compliance</th>
<th>inclusive coverage</th>
<th>length of mine life</th>
<th>integration</th>
<th>funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porgera (1996/97)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porgera (1992-94)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ok Tedi (1991-95)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lihir</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misima</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeport</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(✓ = yes, X = no, ? = uncertain)

Table 2: Social Monitoring Programmes and Best Practice Principles compared

In the wake of the decision by the PJV not to proceed with the social monitoring proposal that Susy Bonnell and myself put to them in late 1997 (at their request), the company has decided to keep the process essentially in-house. The emphasis for social monitoring at Porgera is to shift to the monitoring of agreements that they have reached with the local community, particularly the recent (1998) agreement over reducing the Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO) component of the workforce and the subsequent development of a township at Paiam.

At Kutubu, there have been spasmodic attempts at establishing a formal programme (such as my involvement in 1993), but the bulk of the company’s efforts have been directed at the establishment and, to a
much lesser extent, maintenance of local Incorporated Land Groups (ILG) (see Weiner 1998). There has been no systematic attempt to monitor or document social and economic change in the community.

Clearly, by my reckoning, social monitoring programmes around mines in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya have a long way to go to meet one notion (mine) of what social monitoring should be. I was particularly disappointed at the shift in direction at Porgera, from what I believed was one of the better regimes. From here I want to focus on two trends in social monitoring that have been apparent to me from my work since 1992, both of which relate to the principles and problems outlined above.

David gets a slingshot
One of the frustrating parts of being involved in social monitoring in recent times has been the lack of feedback from any of the stakeholders. I know that I am not alone in this frustration - John Burton has a legion of complaints on this score and Martha Macintyre (pers. comm.) has indicated the same for the Lihir case. If there is feedback, it tends to come from the company, often second or third hand from one’s colleagues, and more in the form of gossip than formal feedback. The unit that should be the key coordinator, DEC, is rarely seen or heard from.

In some ways the most disappointing but least surprising silence is from the local communities. Least surprising because we can come up with a number of reasons why communities may not provide feedback on the reports we produce and the processes we have advocated: the relatively specialised nature of the reports, the language used, the way in which we report to ‘communities’ (i.e. the same way we report to companies and government, through the representatives), and the difficulties in being accessed by these people. My feeling is that while all these may be important, the major reason there is no feedback from communities is because of the relative irrelevance of much of this social monitoring work to local communities. This is the issue I want to address here.

When I first became involved in social monitoring in 1992 it was at the invitation of the PJV. In a variation of a familiar story in the industry we were engaged to work by the Environment section, on issues that were really the domain of Community Affairs. Project design was effectively done by myself, Colin Filer, and PJV staff with limited consultation with DEC, local government, or landowner representatives. Once we had decided on the details of the work programme, landowner representatives were approached for their consent to the proposed work. Copies of the final reports were lodged with DEC and the landowner representatives.

The other social monitoring work at Porgera as part of the initial social monitoring programme proceeded on essentially the same basis. In the Kutubu case I was asked to design a social monitoring programme consisting largely of household surveys which the company wanted to be able to administer themselves: I didn’t participate in the (apparently limited) implementation of this project, but at no time were community representatives involved in the design of the programme.

When Susy Bonnell and I returned to Porgera in late 1996 we did make a more concerted effort to run our proposals past several local representatives, and received requests for certain topics to be investigated as part of our brief, which we readily did. The representatives also approved the process which we had suggested, as did a number of relevant government officials in DEC and the Department of Mining and Petroleum (DMP). We reported back initially to a revised and enlarged PSMC, an entity that had met officially only three times before, the two most recent times without any company involvement. This enlarged committee included several community representatives and a number of local public servants. As I indicated above, I was generally pleased with the revised programme, at least as a first attempt at establishing a more regular and inclusive process.

The introduction of social monitoring at Freeport in Irian Jaya proved somewhat problematic, but thanks to the excellent groundwork done by Chris Ballard the project proceeded to what I think is a worthwhile conclusion. We made it clear to the company, who were funding the work, that community participation in, and indeed control over, the project was non-negotiable. The community representatives were consulted over the project design, at least one community-designated assistant accompanied us at all times in the field, they were briefed at the end of each period of fieldwork, and received a report from us for their consent prior to any work being discussed with, or handed over to, the company. They also had a veto over any aspect of the work, a right which they exercised on several occasions. Given the context of the
project, there was ethically no other way of working in the area. To my mind it sets a new benchmark for community involvement in a social monitoring programme.

Community involvement in these programmes has not been unproblematic. In the Porgera case, community representatives have focussed on two of almost 80 recommendations, which tie in which other issues that they have been pursuing with the company for several years. The monitoring of progress towards the bulk of the agreed required actions has rarely happened. Quarterly meetings of the PSMC have therefore become antagonistic and unproductive and, as a result, the company is loath to support further work along the lines of what was carried out in 1997. The lesson here is that community involvement, and cooption of the process by them for selected ends, can be problematic, to the extent that the sponsor may decide not to fund the continuation of the programme.

A variation of this is the Freeport case, where the project’s close links with the community were viewed with suspicion by some company personnel, who at times believed we were too closely tied to representing or serving community interests. Allied to this was a suspicion that our work was venturing into areas which were of central concern to the community (specifically human rights abuses), but which the company were reluctant (at best) to have to deal with. Again the end result was the non-continuation of the project.

It can also be argued that if the monitoring is primarily to assist in local, provincial, or national government department planning (which is a solid, pragmatic use of social monitoring work), then it should focus on issues that relate to this planning, and not necessarily serve as a forum to rehash community concerns against the company, which strong community involvement tends to lead towards, at least in the initial stages of the social monitoring process.

Not all my academic colleagues are comfortable with the notion of an integral community involvement in all stages of social monitoring programmes: one recently asked for a description of social monitoring but, he said, could I leave out the ‘ideology’, which I took to mean the emphasis on community involvement and coping with the ethical issues involved. The integration of community interests into the programmes in a meaningful way does take time, and often the companies as clients make pressing demands which dictate against this kind of extended negotiation with communities. It is sometimes easier to simply get on with the work.

Finally, and perhaps most centrally, despite the advances that have been made, I have an uneasy feeling that while the recent social monitoring work I have been involved in may have some utility for communities, much of it is still irrelevant to them. My hunch is that this relates to the fact that Melanesian societies have traditionally had little interest in impartial observers and viewpoints: they want interested parties, not disinterested assessments. Hence the social monitoring programmes have only been of utility to them when they have been able to use the social monitoring process to support a particular position or argument. In this way they see social monitoring as a resource to draw on in on-going disputes with the company. There is no doubt that communities are involved in social monitoring programmes to a far greater extent than they were previously, but the challenge remains to make such programme of value to all the stakeholders. This would, I believe, help secure the continuity of these programmes.

**Goliath loses interest**

The second aspect I want to deal with is the loss of interest among the companies (as sponsors of the social monitoring work) in having independent socio-economic monitoring of their projects. Having now been involved of the design of essentially the same programme three times over seven years for the PJV, it is tempting to believe that the company is simply not happy with the proposals that my colleagues and I have been doing for them. You have to ask though, first why do they keep coming back to us?, and second why do they keep on saying yes initially, only to lose interest and end up shelving the proposals?

There seem to be a number of related reasons, which vary in importance from one site to another. They include:

- **Cost cutting.** Although they are relatively cheap programmes compared with the extensive environmental programmes that companies operate, social monitoring has not established itself...
as an indispensable of the industry, and so is often an early casualty of the cost-cutting provoked by falling commodity prices or rising operating costs.

- **Lack of enforcement.** A major concern is the inability of DEC to ensure that companies carry out their minimal regulatory obligations in regard to social monitoring. In this sense there is still a serious requirement for capacity building within the social monitoring side of DEC, despite AusAID and European Union projects within the department that have sought to do just this. It certainly doesn’t help that the department is chronically under-staffed and under-resourced.

- **Lack of relevance.** As with the communities, I believe companies do not find the existing social monitoring programmes of great relevance. They rarely ‘solve’ problems for them or tie in directly with the practical, day-to-day concerns of community affairs. Indeed, as I suggested above, companies have felt that such work creates additional problems, or at least additional avenues for community complaints. There is even one recorded instance of a senior community affairs executive suggesting that social surveys may have helped precipitate the Bougainville crisis. At best, then, companies often struggle to see the value (and hence the worth, in a monetary sense) of these programmes.

While I am groping somewhat to explain how to make programmes relevant to community interests, this is much easier for companies. Relevance essentially equals directed, issues-focussed, pragmatic, and utilitarian programmes, which are relatively easy to design and implement. The danger of social monitoring becoming this is that it would only essentially serve the interests of the company, with social monitoring turning into an arm of Community Affairs departments within companies. Wider community issues and concerns would not necessarily be canvassed by such work. What we need to work on here, then, is both an examination of the utility and relevance of the social monitoring work we are involved in, and a widening of corporate interests in the social monitoring process and in the communities that surround them.

- **Not playing the game.** Linked to the issue of the lack of relevance is an occasional perception on the part of the company that consultants have ‘taken the side of the community’ on issues. In part we can put this down to a suspicion of social scientists and their methods among the geologists, engineers, and other ‘real’ scientists who inhabit senior management ranks in most of these corporations. Given that they are paying the bill, they feel somewhat aggrieved to find they are not painted as the good guys. In my experience this has been most explicit in the Freeport case, where at one stage our ‘ideology’ meant that a number of key company people didn’t want to be seen to be associated with our project!

- A final reason is an apparent corporate preference in both the Porgera and Freeport cases for direct negotiations between the company and the community. These are seen as a substitute for more rational, but also more complex and messy negotiated planning processes involving a wide range of stakeholders (government at different levels, NGOs, academics, etc.). This may well come back to the lack of relevance I cited above: why have a lengthy, complex social monitoring programme that doesn’t produce agreements when you can get more tangible results from direct negotiations with the other major stakeholder?

As a result of a combination of these various factors there has been a decline in the quality and direction that social monitoring has taken within Papua New Guinea over the last five years. There appears to be a loss of interest in the concept at the industry level. Thus, despite the World Bank conference in Madang in 1998 at which notions of ‘best practice’ were tossed around merrily, there has been limited support from the PNG Chamber of Mining and Petroleum for a proposal to produce a ‘Code of Best Practice’. Goliath, it would seem, has other concerns.

**Conclusions**

Given the pessimistic tone of much of the above, perhaps the title of the paper should more appropriately be ‘Turning a blind eye’. After all, the bottom-line is that a fully-fledged, inclusive, and transparent social monitoring programme has yet to be established and continued at any of the mine sites in New Guinea.
Who should we point the finger at? The obvious candidates are the government and the companies. To what extent can we lay the blame at the foot of the regulators? DEC’s monitoring of the physical environment is little better than the social environment: they receive impressive tomes of environmental numbers every quarter that are quietly shelved and (presumably) never read, and are certainly in no position to critique the existing extensive environmental programmes. So DEC’s limitations as a regulator, while obviously not assisting the development of rigorous standards, haven’t prevented the development of comprehensive environmental monitoring programmes by the companies.

Instead, these programmes appear to have been developed and refined in relation to ‘expected’ corporate behaviours elsewhere - a notion of best practice, in other words. A recent review and critique of the PJV’s downstream environmental monitoring programme highlights this. The company-commissioned audit (CSIRO Environmental Projects Office 1996) indicated that ‘the present EMMP is too narrowly focussed on compliance monitoring and reporting’ (pg ES-5), a critique that was accepted by the company, who have moved, in accordance with the report, towards ‘a more detailed understanding of the riverine system and how it functions, so it can better identify potential risks and strategies needed to reduce them’ (ES-5). This is in line with international best practice for environmental monitoring which is far more advanced than for social monitoring (see, for example, Environment Protection Agency 1995b).

These extensive monitoring programmes have developed despite the lack of an effective big stick approach from the government regulator, and have gone a long way beyond compliance although, in line with the principles outlined above, there are continuing question marks concerning the degree of community involvement in the design of the programmes and their independence and transparency. It is also interesting to contrast the effectiveness of statements about the need for a ‘more detailed understanding of the river system and how it functions’ with the apparent lack of interest in the ongoing need for a detailed understanding of the community and the changes it is going through. The spectre of Bougainville - the classic example of losing touch with community change, aspiration, and sentiment - and all the attendant potential risk associated with it, appears to be fading.

In terms of social monitoring, though, companies have little idea what is required of them (in the continuing absence of DEC guidelines or international best practice principles) and often less idea what they want. As a result they have selectively dipped into aspects of social monitoring, instead of aiming towards a long-term rigorous programme. Their choices (of programme and personnel) have been opportunistic, depending on the contacts, the politics, and the inclinations of the people who make such decisions. The external reporting requirements of EFIC appear to have forced a strait-jacketed form of monitoring on Lihir, and this is one possibility for the future, but hardly a desirable one from anyone’s perspective.

Part of the problem, and one of the things that I wanted to begin addressing with this paper, is that there is virtually nothing on the public record that spells out the nature and direction that social monitoring should take (in contrast to environmental impact assessment, environment monitoring and social impact assessment). There is now a substantial body of knowledge concerning social monitoring, and it is time that this was codified into a guide for best practice, to assist all parties in the process. As a first step, there is an obvious need for a more complete review of previous and existing social monitoring programmes, both within New Guinea and elsewhere, so as to better evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different models. This paper is an initial attempt towards this, and will hopefully provide a direction for future efforts in this area, leading eventually to the production of a best practice guide for social monitoring in the region.

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