

Guest lecture Marc Craps, HUB, 6th of march: A perspective of the South on CSR. The case of gold mining in Bolivia

CATAPA organised the academic week. It's takes place Flanders during the period 6th until the 15th of March. On the 6th of March CATAPA in cooperation with the Hogeschool held a lecture about the gold mining in Bolivia. Academic week includes the speeches of four Bolivian activists, two of them was giving the speeches. The theme of the speech was the gold mines in Bolivia and the environmental impact of the mine industries. Approximately 250 master and post master students Bussiness and economy attended the lecture.



Professor Marc Craps made an introduction about the chronicle of the gold mines in Bolivia. The mining sector in Bolivia has a long history which goes back to the Spanish Colonial conquest for precious metals, subordinating the indigenous citizens. His speech was focused to economic data and explain the nowadays situation where demands are growing the reserves are shrinking and the value of gold is raising. He pointed the fact that gold even during in the time of crises keeps its value. He suggested that people should limit the extraction actions that don't cause any development. Señor Clemente analysed further this paradox that takes place in Bolivia too. It was also suggested that the civil society should be reinforced, better organised and the awareness of the society about ecological concerns should be raised. Three positions of the people takes place in Bolivia. The first position is supporting the mining industry because as local people say "they just want the money". The second position supports the mining but under certain conditions, they propose small scale mines, strict environmental regulations, fair distribution of benefits. Last position is completely against all kinds of mining. Professor Marc Craps also suggested a few strategies NGO should follow to react on those irresponsible mining activities: Negotiation? Claims? Public shaming campaigns? Often a combination of different strategies is recommended.

Señor Clemente Paco Huanca is a BSc Juridical Sciences, postgrad Human rights, legal advisor for environmental and human rights issue, he works for the centre of ecological investigation and enforcement of Adean people (CEPA). He started the speech introducing as to the current situation in Bolivia explaining with numbers. The number of the gold mines increased in his country, 20 years ago only one mine was in the area but now 5% of the Bolivian land is exploited for mining purposes and it is the second economical sector (18,4% GHP). Also a lot of Bolivian gold is exported to Belgian, we are in the 4th position of this list of countries. Her it is used for jewelry, financial investments and in electronics. The main message of the presentation is that how is it possible that we are so rich country in reserves and how is it possible that they are so poor? Bolivia has the lowest rank of poverty among the South America countries. The answer to that paradox is that the exportations take place without added value. A very good example to explain as how the situation is in Bolivia is the department of Oruro. This area is 4 times bigger than Belgium and 4 rivers were contaminated by mining industry. He closed his speech with giving as a list of countries that Bolivia exports the gold. Belgium is at the 4th place... We all share responsibilities we all must do something. He concluded to his speech about CEPA that they are trying to solve the problems with activities based on resistant and rising the awareness on a local and governmental level as well as inform people at an international level. They already have been written 9 open letters, addressed to the president: Evo Morales, to ask him to listen to their store and adapt the mining law in is country in a way that multinationals only can operate in a responsible way. Clemente also explained the that Cepa, together with CATAPA, are working on two cases: Kori Kollo, who is already closed and Kori Chaka, the large-scale open pit mine near to the city of Oruro.

Dona Maria Louisa Rafael Ticala is a nurse, she is involved in trainings in environmental and political leadership, woman rights and she works for CEPA. She explained the facts about Bolivia economy society and made an introduction to the Open Pit mines. Bolivia economy is based on agriculture, livestock, fishery. She marked that they are not against the mining. However if it is not limited, the water gets contaminated or disappears so the fish can't survive, the earth can't be cultivated. Families are forced to leave the territory and they are being separated. First companies told them that they will built touristic places, the only thing they have seen until today, is contamination and their land being destroyed. Until this particular moment 300 mining exportations took or still are taking place in Bolivia. The method the companies are using is the most dangerous for the environment and for the human health. They use cyanide to process the ground. Because cyanide is lethal to human, a resolution to forbid the Cyanid method was accepted in the European Parliament in 2010. Bolivian inhabitants aren't satisfied at all. Companies are extracting hole mountains, use millions of water without paying for it, pollute lakes with tones of cyanide. So, the underground resources and the air are polluted too. Animals can't eat the polluted plants, cattle becomes sick and dies and the companies do nothing for the areas to recover. People are forced to leave the territory and families are being separated. Maria also explained that the contamination caused by the mining industry, affected the whole family, especially women. As responsible for the education, cooking, field,...without any clean water, they do suffer the most.

Questions

1. In Columbia the state takes care of its people. What's going wrong in Bolivia? How much power they have considering the mining block?

When Evo Morales came to power we were happy. But from mining area there are still mining groups. Just the employers at the minings are 3500. Imagine if you multiple this number with the number of the people in each family. It is a huge number, so if they ask something from the president they take it. New constitution was issued, it is modern constitution but not taking in account environmental tasks. Evo Morales won 8 years in a row the elections, however this year

upcoming elections might show the power of people. Also corruption is a widespread problem in Bolivian politics.

- Columbia is not taking care of its people at all, there are a lot of eco-social conflicts with local communities caused by extractive industries. The government is looking to the other direction and the multinational has the power.

2. The companies are trying to pull people on their side, people lose their subsistence in agriculture. Do the mining companies employ the local people? Are the local people convinced to stay out of the mining industries?

This issue involves not only sociological but environmental problems too. Women are more aware of the environmental issues. Men just see the gold, usually they move away, leave their families behind and sometimes start a new one. Mines only offer jobs for a few years, but the contamination stays for centuries. Those fields and lakes can not be used any more for agriculture or fishing activities, even not for tourism. On the large scale, you lose a lot of jobs!

3. I was wondering if Bolivia has also the same programs for the better mining, is there any regulation under United Nations or European Union level, are they putting more pressure on the mining companies?

Yes, we can trace how much gold we export, Evo Morales has everything under control. But we think the problem is that the gold should be in our hands, we should take the action. For instance, the lack of the information in the press it's only written in London mining where gold has added value but I don't see nothing about the effects: the social and ecological impact is not mentioned at all.

4. Is there an existing pattern for labeling the gold as it's on diamonds?

There is an investigation but it is hard to track it because the gold is melted and again remelted. But there is the fair trade gold which is still not in common. We are also lobbying to install a label for recycled gold. Beside the Fair trade gold, all the gold you use or buy is extracted in an unsustainable way.

5. What about the group pressure? What are you going to do to stop mining?

Of course we used pressure but we are not using any violence in any case including the companies employees because we respect their lives. We will continue to press pressure to the government to protect the environment. We are doing this plan for 5 years now, we will continue doing it because for us is a matter of life and death. Agua si, oro no. Agua es vida!