

# Big miners' community engagement doing more harm than good?

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(Phys.org) —The corporate social responsibility programs of big mining companies in remote towns are often disconnected from community needs, reactive and ad hoc.

A study by University of Melbourne researcher Dr Sara Bice has found the big miners' well-intentioned activities can have unforeseen and undesirable consequences.

"Mining companies are pumping millions of dollars into certain remote towns. But as mining booms, [ports](#) expand and exports increase, these communities are facing an identity crisis," said to Dr Bice, from the University's School of Social and Political Sciences.

"Communities are often given money for infrastructure or projects they don't want or need, while some organizations are becoming dangerously reliant on the [miners'](#) money.

"This raises the question of whether programs to promote 'sustainability' are, themselves, sustainable?" she said.

The study, 'No more sun shades, please: Experiences of [corporate social responsibility](#) in remote Australian mining communities', appears in the current edition of the *Rural Society Journal*.

The research was based on an analysis of five leading Australian mining companies' [sustainability](#) reports across five years, interviews with 11 senior mining managers and the experiences of residents in two remote mining towns.

It found some [community organizations](#) in towns where multiple mining corporations maintained a presence often felt pressure to "align" with one company, while other institutions were able to "leverage companies" to achieve a greater benefit.

"The mining companies all want to be prominent in town, so certain organizations have learnt to 'play' one company off against another to garner funding or services," Dr Bice said.

"And all this is going on with extremely limited, formal or third party oversight.

"Companies and communities are in complex relationships. Many companies try to do the right thing without realizing that well-meaning CSR programs can create a troubling dependency over the long-term.

"Australia's mining companies are leaders in adopting corporate [social](#)

responsibility programs, but much work remains to improve their understanding of long-term community development, including making good community program choices ."

The study stops short of calling for regulation of CSR programs, but suggests companies could do more to better target and manage their own corporate responsibility expenditure.

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Provided by University of Melbourne

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