

Exporting the Canadian advantage

Cultural mosaic is a resource to develop says consultant

By Peter Caulfield

The race to develop the vast mineral resources in Africa is growing more competitive. Canadian and Chinese mining and exploration companies are among the leaders competing for the best properties and for the all-important social licence to operate. The scale of Chinese investment is difficult to keep pace with but Canada has distinct strengths of its own, some of which the industry does not fully recognize. That was the case that Radcliffe Dockery, president and CEO of consultancy firm HigherEye Education and Training, made at a recent seminar in Vancouver on risk mitigation and corporate social responsibility.

Dockery explained that one of the ways that Chinese companies, many of which are state-owned enterprises with deep pockets, are winning the CSR battle is through massive investments in infrastructure and other forms of CSR programs. “China has invested billions of dollars in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Dockery said. “They’re real, tangible projects with real dollars.” In 2010, a mining company run by a Chinese contractor in Accra, Ghana, hired African clothing manufacturers to make clothing that was distributed to more than 2,000 school children, he said

In a telephone interview, Ron Thiessen, director, president and CEO of Vancouver-based HDI (formerly Hunter Dickinson Inc.), which has had several producing and exploration properties in Africa, offered his perspective on the Chinese approach to CSR. “Chinese companies are not as far up the CSR learning curve as Canadian companies,” Thiessen said. “In general, Canadian and Western companies have been doing CSR programs for much longer than the Chinese.”



Radcliffe Dockery appealed to Canadian mining companies to make good use of the country's cultural diversity in their CSR programs.

Thiessen added that most Canadian mining and exploration companies in Africa are public and therefore subject to much more legal scrutiny, such as Canada's Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act, than Chinese companies, many of which are state-owned enterprises and are not subject to the same stringent rules.

In an interview following his presentation, Dockery said that Chinese firms can provide valuable community engagement. He cited the case of a Chinese construction company that was expanding the Gabarone city airport in Botswana in 2008. It provided two-year training courses in electrical and mechanical engineering and IT to 350 young people aged 19 to 24. According to a 2007 United Nations World Youth Report, Sub-Saharan Africa has both the fastest growing labour force and youth unemployment in the world, which increased

by 34 per cent between 1995 and 2005. “Canadian CSR programs tend to focus on such things as HIV/AIDS prevention and child care,” he said. “However, the number-one youth challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa is unemployment. If it isn't addressed, there will be considerable financial and social costs to pay.”

Dockery said he believes that Canada has a distinct edge over China that it should make use of. The way to do it is through what he calls leveraging Canadian diversity. “There are 1.1 million people in this country with roots in Africa or the Caribbean,” he explained. “And many of them want experience in emerging markets, such as Africa.”

Dockery implored the audience to make use of Canada's cultural and linguistic diversity. “It's our competitive advantage over anyone else on the planet Earth,” he said. **ENR**