Responsible production and consumption of mineral resources: mobilising geoethics as a framework for mining companies, manufacturers and other stakeholders

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Geoethics is intended to provide a conceptual and practical framework for all human agents engaging with the ethical challenges that arise from their interaction with the Earth. In recent years, it has chiefly focused on the professional roles of geoscientists and allied professionals. Great progress has been made towards putting geoethics in its rightful place at the heart of all geoscience, elaborating and applying its principles across a wide variety of disciplines and sectors, and promoting its importance in geoscience education, training, research and professional practice. Geoethical thinking has been developed and applied in the mining sector, through initiatives such as the IAPG White Paper on Responsible Mining, through multidisciplinary research on responsible and sustainable mining, and through responsible exploration, production and associated activities in mining companies.

Addressing the global challenges expressed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals will depend on a vast range of mined raw materials. It is vital that we find, extract, manage and use these resources in a responsible way, minimising environmental and social harm, and sharing the benefits we derive from them equitably. But achieving these objectives cannot depend on geoscientists and their colleagues in the mining sector alone. It will also require the active engagement of manufacturers sourcing raw materials across complex mineral supply chains; investors and other value chain actors; and a wide range of other stakeholders including civil society organisations, policy-makers and citizens.

There is rapidly growing recognition among this wider set of actors of the need for a transition to more sustainable systems of production and consumption of raw materials, and of the roles they can play in delivering these alongside responsible mining companies. This presentation will consider the suitability of geoethics, as currently framed and articulated, as a basis for engagement and action by this wider set of actors, in particular for manufacturers seeking to behave responsibly. It will draw lessons from a recent project to help a multinational consumer-facing company to develop its responsible sourcing programme, and will suggest how the principles of geoethics can best be operationalised and communicated in such settings.