

The time is right... to talk about ~~mine closure~~
social transition

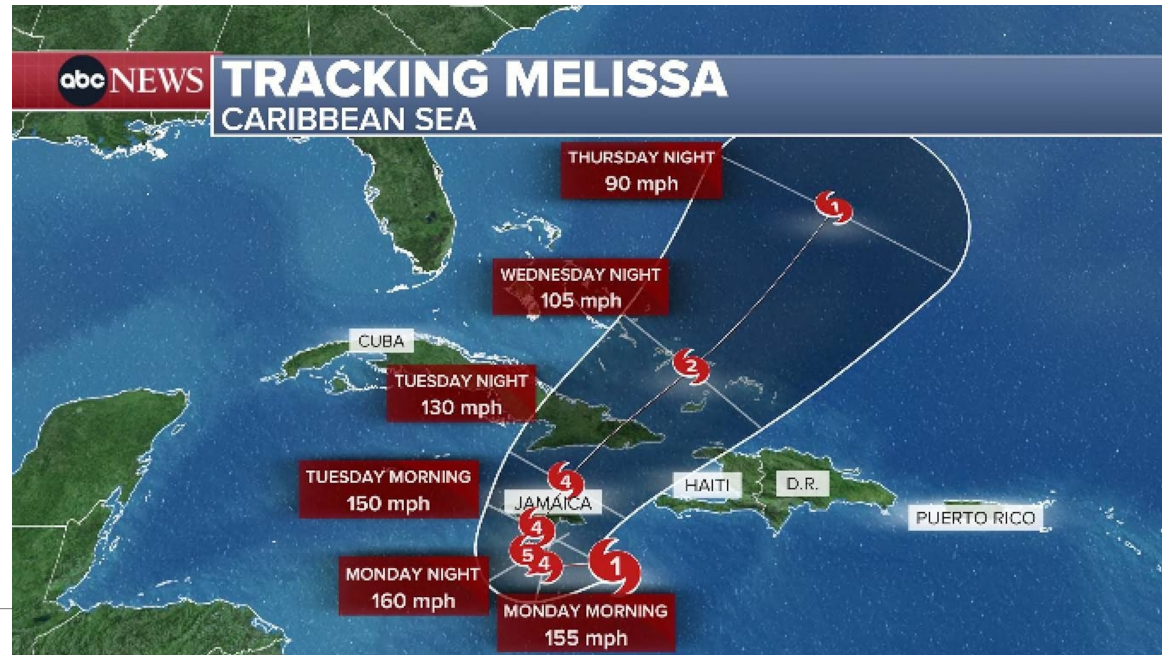


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Source:
<https://abcnews.com/International/tropical-storm-melissa-expected-intensify-strength-weekend/story?id=126857615>

THE “CYCLONIC” NATURE OF RESOURCE
EXTRACTION (HAROLD INNIS)

Mines Open



Source: <https://www.mining.com/web/chinas-vice-premier-attends-simandou-launch-in-guinea/>

Mines Close



Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-02-16/argyle-diamond-mine-closure-traditional-owner-concerns/106339850>

**And, generally speaking,
communities continue...**

Community Resilience and Agency

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Understood to refer to a community's ability to **resist** or **adapt to change**

Frequently held up as a key indicator of community strength, with building community resilience an oft cited objective



Thomas Kokta/Getty Images

AGENCY

Agency is “the capacity of persons to transform existing states of affairs” or “the capacity of the individual to **plan and initiate action**”

Often used as a synonym for a sense of control, agency can exist at individual or collective levels



Why is community agency important in social transitions?

Ensuring impacted communities have a say in the shaping of new mines is a regulatory requirement in most jurisdictions BUT regulatory stakeholder engagement requirements at mine closure are notably absent or weak

Advocating for community agency goes beyond advocating for improved stakeholder engagement. it requires **an intentional shift in the way social transition is planned and implemented**, replacing the company centric models with ones where those most impacted by the pending change have not only a seat at the table, but a level of control over the change

FROM:

Consulting on mine closure

TO:

Engaging on social transition

1. Unsustainable state: Mining operating in its own interests, seeing itself (and being seen by others) at the centre of the universe



2. Desired state: Mining operating as a development partner within a network of stakeholders



Adapted from: ICMM and the Partnering Initiative.
2021, *Partnering For Our Common Future: Optimizing
mining's partnering capability to contribute to
community resilience and thriving societies.*

Source: <https://www.icmm.com/en-gb/guidance/social-performance/2025/multistakeholder-approaches-socio-economic-transitions>

If protecting and fostering agency is the goal, what are the critical ingredients?

Adequate time

Structures and processes which ensure actors have a “seat at the table”

Sufficient and inclusive information

An openness to diverse thinking



“If we start talking about mine closure, do we need to make financial disclosures about our mine plans?”

“Let’s wait for the regulatory process”

“They want to start talking about mine closure but we haven’t resolved all the concerns about mine development yet!”

The Goal: Consult early and consult often

“The mine has said it was going to close in the past, and it didn’t so why would we bother engaging on this now - let’s wait a bit, we have other more urgent priorities”

“We can’t start consulting yet, we don’t know what the mine closure plan will be”

“We can’t talk about closure options until we understand the cost and technical feasibility of those options”

“We’re talking about expansion options with the community, it will be TOO CONFUSING if we start talking about closure at the same time”



Early
engagement
can be
challenging...

Control - Tension between early engagement and perceived risk of loss of control

Optimism bias – the power (sometimes misplaced) of “hope”

Commercial & regulatory impacts

Stakeholder fatigue



... But the cost of not engaging early can be the loss of viable future options for communities, loss of opportunities for asset transitions, and increased likelihood of socio-economic slump when a mine closes

The social impacts of mine closure can be similar BUT different in every case

Nanisivik Mine, Nunavut – closed 2002

Research conducted by Lim et. al (2023) based on stakeholder interviews highlighted the relatively limited felt experience of job losses within Inuit community, while noting the overwhelming importance (and lingering sadness / frustration) of failed asset transfers



Source: Nunatsiaq News, Aug 31, 2015

Having a seat at the table

Gove Mine, Northern Territory

Gove Traditional Owners will own all of the Gove Peninsula Area when mining and related leases expire. Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group (GPFRG) was established in 2019, bringing together Traditional Owner representatives and Govt bodies. The Traditional Owners prepared a vision for the future of Nhulunbuy (township established and supported by the mine) and the peninsula. A socio-economic impact assessment was prepared for closure and impacts assessed against defined vision.



Source: Gove Futures, www.govefutures.net.gov.au

Conclusion

An intentional shift is needed to place communities at the centre of discussions on social transitions associated with mine closure

Engage early with a view to supporting the agency of communities to direct and decide what their futures may look like

Irrespective of the multiple agendas / scenarios which might be at play for a company at mine closure, don't let the excuse of it being "too confusing" prevent early engagement with communities





Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.

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