

Case study

Women in mining – the Brazilian experience

In Brazil there has been a certain resistance to the employment of women in underground mining positions in mining communities. In the past, a superstitious belief held that the presence of a woman underground would inevitably lead to a fatal accident.

In support of the company's philosophy that its employment profile should reflect the demographic profile of the communities in which it operates, AngloGold Ashanti launched a campaign in 2006 to recruit women to work in its Brazilian operations.

Workshops were held with existing employees in the areas for which women were recruited, to identify any areas of concern and dispel any residual prejudice. Other communication channels used included regular briefings and the company's internal newspapers. The first women employed effectively became ambassadors for the company and were included in the subsequent selection of women recruits.

At the end of December 2007, 147 women were employed at Brasil Mineração and 18 at Serra Grande, representing 8% and 3% respectively of the total labour complement at the two companies. The equivalent figures for 2006 and 2005 are 115 and 102 respectively for Brasil Mineração, and 12 and 13 for Serra Grande. At Brasil Mineração, 41 of the 147 female employees have been placed in various occupations in the core processes of geology, mining, engineering and metallurgy. The corresponding figure for Serra Grande is four out of 18.

Appropriate facilities for female employees are provided, for example, women's bathrooms and changing rooms have been

installed underground.

A comprehensive pre-employment medical examination (which includes psychometric testing and behavioural interviews) ensures – as for all employees – an alignment between the applicant's profile and physical and psychological attributes needed for the occupation concerned.

In the early days of the campaign, comprehensive support structures were put in place for female employees, such as regular counselling to discuss their adaptation and integration, particularly in underground positions. But, reports Human Resources Manager Ricardo de Assis Santos, the necessity for this has declined over time. "The presence of women in all areas of the workplace has now become an accepted part of life. The feedback we have had indicates a high level of satisfaction among women about working in jobs perceived as unusual for them, and a feeling that this represents an achievement for them, the company and the community as a whole."

Retention of the women recruited during this process has been good. By the end of 2007, only nine female employees had left the company during the year, which represents a labour turnover of 7%. Santos adds that it is of interest to note that all the women who left the company were employed in administrative rather than mining-related occupations, indicating some degree of success in the programme's objective of employing women in core operational positions.

