COAL MINE CLOSURE AND EFFECTS ON WOMEN
A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE U.S.

FOURTEENTH SESSION GROUP OF EXPERTS ON COAL MINE METHANE
UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA
8 NOVEMBER 2019
PRESENTATION OUTLINE

1. The state of the coal mining industry in the US, and mine abandonment
2. The role of women in US mining communities, with emphasis on coal
3. Impacts of closure on communities and women
4. Specific challenges – the Appalachian Region
5. Challenges
6. Success stories and strategies
7. Final thoughts
PERSPECTIVE

[7-11]
Petroleum, natural gas, and coal continue to dominate U.S. energy consumption.
US COAL PRODUCTION

U.S. Coal Production

Year


Million Short Tons Produced

0 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400

Eastern US  Western US

[7-11]
US OPERATING COAL MINES

Number of US operating coal mines

-268 MINES

-779 MINES
Sixteen mines in the Powder River Basin produce 43% of U.S. coal

In the U.S., there has been a general contraction in production and the market, but also substantial regional changes, indicating that negative outcomes are more severe for some regions…

Coal mines are often the primary industry in a community, so as they close:

- Women in jobs in the service sector find their prospects depressed (e.g., food service, retail)
- Women in government jobs find prospects depressed (e.g., teachers, administration)
- Women who do not work outside the home may now have no income to the home (e.g., spouse was a mine worker or associated with mining)
Employment in mining, total private, January 2001–March 2018

Shaded areas represent recessions as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
LOOK AT THE APPALACHIAN REGION IN THE U.S.

“There are over a thousand fewer coal mine jobs in Letcher County than there were a decade ago, and virtually all of those lost jobs were held by men. The number of mining jobs, according to state figures, fell to under 50 in 2017, from over 1,300 at the beginning of 2009.”

“The mines have shut down and the women have gone to work,” said Billy Thompson, a district director of the United Steelworkers union, which represents thousands of medical support workers in the region. “It’s not complicated at all.”
...AND THE SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES ARE COMPLEX
RETRAINING AND LOCAL REVITALIZATION

Many nonprofit organizations have appeared in Appalachia offering retraining for miners – challenges are daunting:

• Little to no career counseling
• Difficulty relocating (even in the region)
• Lower wages than mining (even with retraining)
• Poor oversight of programs, credentialing
• Poor linkage between training and actually opportunities in the region

In 2017, at least 60 plaintiffs in Appalachia sued a non-profit organization which was training miners to code for software industries for inadequate training and failure to place workers in apprenticeships. [1]
RETRAINING AND LOCAL REVITALIZATION

....In 2010, Dennison formed a nonprofit called the Coalfield Development Corporation. With financial support from the Appalachian regional commission, the nonprofit launched new businesses that Dennison believes will generate sustainable jobs, everything from furniture making and solar installation, to home building and agriculture.

...So far, 23 crew members have completed their degrees and have been placed in full-time jobs; 55 are currently in the program, and 15 are on the waitlist. [6]

Successful programs appear to be:
• Small-scale
• Provide clear messaging about opportunities
• Concrete plans for success in the near term
• Partners in the community

Nonetheless, women appear to be missing in many cases....
Women are engaged in revitalizing communities, and not always in traditional roles...

*The documentary Heroin(e) tells the story of a judge, an activist, and a fire chief in a community in West Virginia* [5]
BEST PRACTICES
REVITILIZATION OF COMMUNITIES WITH ABANDONED MINES

- Retraining efforts that target women and men.
- Retraining efforts that improve the community, e.g., better, more accessible healthcare, improved community services (for children and elderly).
- Retraining efforts that are linked to real industry in the area with program oversight.
- Engaged civic leadership to attract industry and develop community culture, resources from state and federal government.
- Linkage with existing extractive industries to develop employment models, training models and STEM activities encouraging gender parity.
- Leverage the leadership in existing industries to attract other industries.
- Engage the community in an inclusive (women and other underrepresented groups) discussion of solutions.
REFERENCES


