

Quarantine can lead to frustration, fear and high levels of stress. Therefore, implementing programmes that help to guide families in good health and wellbeing practices is key. But it requires a joint effort.

Interview with Rafael Sáenz, Gold Fields Communications Manager in Peru

The Coronavirus outbreak in Peru has had a great impact on all economic sectors of the country – there have been economic losses, large and small companies stopped working, and increased unemployment, among other problems. But the pandemic has mainly affected people's lives, drastically changing their habits and daily lives.

Many of us were shocked to find it difficult to adapt, and as we have many educational and cultural gaps in our country, Government efforts have not always been seen as the most adequate to mitigate the crisis; hence, there are many doubts. The lack of information about the disease has also been evident, making many people feel unprotected, especially those communities in the highlands and jungle, for whom, perhaps, the intervention of the State is not appropriate during the pandemic.

Communities and their needs

According to Rafael Sáenz, Gold Fields Corporate Communications Manager in Peru, communities play an essential role in deciding and creating opportunities that contribute to their own wellbeing and that of their neighbours. Good relationships, commitment and open dialogue are necessary to promote collaboration between a private company and their communities. With the Covid-19 outbreak in the Cajamarca region, Gold Fields has tried to redouble its efforts to support all the communities in its area of influence, as well as the Cajamarca people who needed its solidarity.

“Gold Fields is a mining company that has been working responsibly for 12 years and has been important to the development of the district of Hualgayoc and Cajamarca, contributing to an increase in productivity in the country. As a respectful neighbour concerned about our communities, the company has built a humanitarian team led by our Community Relations area to address and plan, together with the relevant authorities and residents, projects that meet the most important needs of local families such as health, education, food, access to water and sustainable entrepreneurship,” says Rafael.

Fighting shoulder to shoulder against the pandemic

None of the regions in Peru is immune to the virus. For example, in Cajamarca, infections have already exceeded 30 000 cases and a thousand deaths were recorded. However, joint efforts between health authorities, civil institutions and private companies have helped to suppress the spread of Covid-19 in this region.

In this fight, Gold Fields was glad to contribute in a small way, working shoulder to shoulder with the Emergency Operations Center of the Regional Government and the Regional Health Directorate of Cajamarca, with which it was possible to provide the National Police of Peru and the Armed Forces, Volunteer Firefighters and the Peasant Patrols with masks and PPE. We also donated medical equipment to the ICU ward of the Hospital de Cajamarca.

"To start supporting our neighbours, first we ensured that we didn't have possible infections at our operation, in line with our Number One Value: "If we cannot mine safely, we will not mine". In this way, we were completely sure that it was safe to get in touch with people and the authorities to arrange necessary help, beginning with our communities in the Hualgayoc district. As of today, we have mainly supported Cajamarca, Hualgayoc and Bambamarca. We are about to donate a medical oxygen plant, oxygen concentrators and 2 mechanical fans," adds Rafael.

A crisis that calls for solidarity

Rafael remembers that when the pandemic began in the country, many people who lived in the capital started to return to their places of origin and undertook extreme long walks, putting their families and themselves at risk. For this reason, the mining company, together with the authorities and other stakeholders, offered transport to residents from Cajamarca, Bambamarca and Hualgayoc, in compliance with biosafety and timely diagnosis measures so that people arrived home safe and sound.

The State continues to provide financial assistance for families with limited economic resources. However, due to some gaps and deficiencies existing in the system, almost 200,000 households in regions with poverty rates have not received this benefit to cover their basic needs. In the case of Hualgayoc, Gold Fields, in coordination with local authorities, helped to distribute food baskets in the communities of Coimolache Bajo, Cuadratura, Sector Punta

Hermosa, El Tingo, Pilancones, Coimolache Alto and in the own city of Hualgayoc.

Tools for emotional support

We are aware that we are living in an atypical, unexpected and uncertain situation. We may have to learn how to live responsibly with the virus until health authorities find the long-awaited vaccine. Against this background, many people experience fear, anxiety and depression during quarantine. With regard to communities, most families fear a possible infection and might feel frustrated as they do not know what to do and how to protect themselves.

In view of this need of information and considering limited access to the media, Gold Fields has created two initiatives aimed at educating and guiding families in good health care practices to prevent the spread of infection.

“One of our major achievements during quarantine has been creating the “Know to Cure” radio programme which is broadcast on an independent radio and has more than 200 000 listeners. This show helps to resolve concerns or fears; for example, a mother who worries about her child getting a cough or a runny nose, how a pregnant women should take care of herself, people having doubts about the efficacy of homemade medicine in curing the illness, a parent asking for guidance on how to explain their children what Covid-19 means, how to take care of older adults who suffer from chronic diseases and how to help them maintain their health considering that they must stay at home,” says Rafael.

The “Know to Cure” programme is a reliable source of information and was created with the intention to assist and provide emotional support for people during quarantine. It is currently presented by a physician specialising in family health who helps and guides listeners via phone.

Likewise, the second initiative complementing good information for communities is the information microprogram called *“El Ronderito de Gold Fields”*, a creation that compiles a number of tips and practical information that help improve the quality of life of people living in the communities surrounding the company. This information is broadcast via 50-second radio spots. This micro programme is significant because it is inspired by the culture of our communities.

Dreams of young people cannot stop

Quarantine as a measure to control the pandemic has also impacted the lives of young and adolescent students, their learning processes and professional aspirations. In this sense, the entire educational system has overcome a great challenge and today virtual classes are possible thanks to technology. At Gold Fields, we have been aware of this process and focused on the continuity of our educational programme aimed at schoolchildren in the Hualgayoc district.

“At Gold Fields we have a real commitment to education, especially the education of schoolchildren from Hualgayoc. For this reason, having resettled our strategies for quarantine, we have decided to continue, for the fifth consecutive year, with our signature educational programme where students in the third, fourth and fifth year of secondary school demonstrate their knowledge in a competition,” says Rafael.

Over the last four years this has been a face-to-face contest where students of each participating school competed at the local radio station’s facilities. For this fifth edition, participation will be 100% virtual making use of technology to guarantee the connectivity of participants, hence complying with the relevant safety measures.

The contest has promoted the participation of more than 200 male and female students of four schools in the district with the aim to reduce the gaps in education, improve the capacities and abilities of students and encourage healthy, free and transparent knowledge competition among secondary-level students of the Hualgayoc district communities.

"This initiative also contributes to encourage staying in contact and building relationships among the youngest in such a way that they do not give up on their goals to be better students, and continue to add experience and leadership at school."

Current progress

- Gold Fields continues to contribute to projects that will improve the quality of life of its communities. It has recently invested more than a million dollars to acquire heavy machinery to contribute, with the local authority, to the construction of 2,000 water reservoirs that will benefit farmers in times of drought.
- The company has also just granted property easement to the Hualgayoc District Municipality to begin construction in the potable water project for this city, an initiative that will improve the quantity and quality of water benefiting more than 4 000 people.