Divinas en Brillo de Oro: Broadening Market Participation Among Women Miners in Peru
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In August 2018, as part of a United States Department of State funded project, the Colorado School of Mines, in partnership with the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM) (https://www.responsiblemines.org/en/) and Sissai jewelry company based in Lima (http://sissai.com), embarked on an initiative to train women miners in Peru in jewelry making techniques. The overarching goal was to provide women with alternative sources of income and build their capacity for greater participation in sustainable mineral supply chains.

The project team recruited women from the formalized small-scale mining company CECOMIP, located in Ananea, in the Puno district of southern Peru. CECOMIP is a certified Fairmined coop, meaning that they adhere to a set of socially and environmentally responsible standards, giving them access to a higher premium for their gold and insuring traceability in the gold supply chain. Eliminating mercury from mineral processing is not a requirement to become Fairmined certified. Instead, coops must demonstrate that they are using chemicals responsibly and working to gradually reduce their use. The majority of the women who work in CECOMIP work as bateadoras, or panners, although panning is only one part of their job. Their primary task is to concentrate the crushed ore with mercury to form an amalgam.

Several of the bateadoras from CECOMIP participated in a series of workshops with the project partners during which they received training on business skills, including accounting and business plan creation, and they defined their mission, vision, and organizational structure. They nominated a board of directors, named their group Divinas en Brillo de Oro, and in November 2018, formally registered their organization.

In January 2019, several of the women participated in a weeklong jewelry making training in Lima with Sissai, a jewelry company owned by two native-Peruvian sisters, Ximena and Pamela Ceballos. After the workshop, the women purchased jewelry making equipment and established their workshop in Juliaca, the urban center closest to Ananea, where many of them live. In July and October, the women participated in two 15-day jewelry making trainings in their own workshop with a jeweler from Lima.

Photo credit: ARM
During this time, they continued to participate in trainings on entrepreneurship and small business management, as well as topics they identified as important, such as nutrition and disease prevention.

After the training in Lima, the women received their first jewelry order from Sissai, as well as the necessary materials. Sissai determined that it would be best for the women to start working with silver since the error margin would be much less than gold. Five months later (June 2019) they sent the jewelry back to Sissai, who was only able to use 20% of the pieces. After the second training in July, Sissai gave a second jewelry order to the women. Upon returning the finished products, Sissai was able to use 80% of the pieces. Lastly, in August 2019, the women received their third order, and Sissai used 95% of the pieces; only seven pieces were rejected from a total of 143. This represents a great improvement from 80% error to 5% error.

Over the past year, the group has drafted their organization bylaws and refined their mission and vision. They have grown from 12 members who were involved since the beginning to 28 members. Expanding women’s economic opportunities has come at a critical time for *bateadoras* at CECOMIP, as CECOMIP is currently transitioning to mercury-free mineral processing with the goal of becoming Ecological Gold certified. The *bateadoras*’ work will soon become obsolete, and therefore, jewelry making may become a viable livelihood strategy.