



ALLIANCE FOR
RESPONSIBLE MINING



VOICES OF MINERS

Danilo López, owner of the “El Cristal” coal mine in Boyacá



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Danilo López, owner of the El Cristal mine in Boyacá, is 46 years old, and he has been working in coal mining since he was 12 years old. Back then child labor was fairly common. Young Danilo did not finish school, because his mother did not have sufficient economic resources to continue paying for his education. As a result, he started working in mining to support his family.

Today Danilo is both employer and employee of the mine El Cristal. If mining actually provided "good money", as many people think, he says he wouldn't have entered the mining business. He has no choice, however. With no other means of sustenance, he must work in the mines in order to provide his family with food, clothing and education. In his own words, "*I have to. If I don't work in the mine, we don't eat*".

Every day he walks an hour to reach his mine, and faces the same walk back home after a tiring day of work. For his children - should they decide to also work in mining - he hopes that they become technicians to not have to work so hard.

There are no good employment alternatives in the region. The only options are agriculture or transportation. Mining offers the more attractive potential for higher incomes.

Danilo treats his workers like his own children. We asked about the incidence of accidents in mines, and he affirmed that accidents happen in every business, but that nobody does it on purpose. In his opinion, the entire small-scale mining sector should not be stigmatized because of an accident, because sometimes it was just an unlucky occurrence. Bad things can happen, despite the fact that appropriate measures were implemented. Mining is a dangerous job, even with all of the security measures in place.

Most accidents are the result of mine cave-ins. Toxic gases are also very dangerous, but fortunately today we have meters that are always used for gas detection before entering the mine. Before these were invented, they used rustic gas-fueled lamps.

Government rules imposes rigorous demands on mining, so miners are constantly working to improve conditions both inside the mine and in its surroundings. For small-scale miners, however, it is very difficult to meet all of the requirements. Implementing the improvements requires large investments, and smaller operations lack both resources and access to credit.

Previously banks did not lend them money, and even now the government program designed to improve loaning requires very large financial guarantees that many small miners can not fulfill.



Workers with gas meters

Currently Danilo is paid \$70,000 Colombian Pesos for each ton of coal produced. Four miners extracting coal with a pick can generally get out two tons in one day. The payment received is very little compared to the expenses of wages, social security, and mine maintenance costs. "It's enough to survive, but that's it," said Danilo.

Since late 2014, the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM) has been supporting the "El Cristal" mine as part of Somos Tesoro, a leading project for the reduction of child labor in mining areas in Colombia. Together with the Alliance for Responsible Mining, the Somos Tesoro project is implemented by PACT, Fondo Acción, and Fundación Mi Sangre, and it is funded by the United States Department of Labor. Among the strategies implemented within the framework of Somos Tesoro for the prevention and elimination of child labor, ARM assists with the formalization of mining groups, which covers the issue of mining safety as an especially relevant aspect.

The miner emphasized how much the project has helped in improving their security. He has received recurring assistance in the form of training, evaluations, and specialized advice on improving conditions in his mine, in addition to one-time support with setting up a Workplace Health and Safety Management System, obtaining a stretcher, and updating his mine maps.

