

Bauxite Mining in Fiji: A Preliminary Discussion of Economic and Development Issues

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Abstract

Fiji's mining industry is experiencing significant increase in activity with a number of foreign investors interested in exploring and extracting Fiji's mineral wealth. While most mining is concentrated in Viti Levu (Fiji's largest island), Vanua Levu (Fiji's second largest island) is also attracting interest with bauxite mining in Bua, exploration of copper and zinc in Udu point and the proposed reopening of the gold mine in Mount Kasi. The mine in Bua is Fiji's first ever bauxite mine and is suggested to provide significant economic benefits to Vanua Levu in terms of export earnings, employment and infrastructure development. However, given the Pacific's torrid experiences with mining, some feel that this may be another case of developed countries exploiting the resources of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and where the economic benefits of mining will not outweigh the associated environmental, health and social costs. As bauxite mining in Vanua Levu is still in its early stages, this paper will not conduct a cost benefit analysis of bauxite mining. Rather the paper will provide an overview of bauxite mining in Vanua Levu, the purported economic benefits of the mine, risks, costs and concerns raised by various stakeholders and the mechanisms and strategies in place to mitigate the risks of bauxite mining.

Keywords: *Bauxite Mining, Fiji, Vanua Levu, Economic Implications, Development Issues*