

5 Takeaways from the CIBJO Congress



The [World Jewellery Confederation](#) held its latest gathering in Jaipur, India, from October 3 to 5. Here are some of the hot topics that came up at the event.

Increasing education

The need for more training was a key issue for speakers on the congress's "Responsible Sourcing, Sustainability, and ESG" panel. In particular, they said, small and medium-size businesses need guidance to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other green benchmarks.

"We need to frame what [environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG)] is, because it's bewildering for businesses," said Jon Key, an ESG consultant working with CIBJO.

The [Watch & Jewellery Initiative \(WJI\) 2030](#) aims to make its educational resources openly available to the industry, said Iris Van der Veken, the trade body's executive director.

"Every business needs to get ready for what's to come and help [small and medium-sized enterprises] understand the steps," added Alba Cappellieri, who heads the jewelry and accessory design program at the Politecnico di Milano.

Helping women

Gender equality and support for women was another timely subject. Kimberly Collins, board president for the [American Gem Trade Association \(AGTA\)](#), recalled her early days working in east Africa and how important women were at mine sites.

Still, there is much work to be done on this front, stressed the WJI 2030's Van der Veken: "Our industry is so influenced by women, yet our gender efforts are 300 years away from fulfillment."

Gemfields CEO Sean Gilbertson acknowledged some of his mining firm's failings in this regard.

"When we first acquired the Kagem emerald mine, there was a no-women policy," he said. "Women were considered unlucky for emerald production. That was one of the early things we changed. We started heavy equipment training, though it was not an altruistic move; it was done based on an Australian study that revealed that women looked after equipment and fuel consumption better."

Responsible supply

The colored-gemstone pipeline is fraught with issues, from limited supply and high prices to increased demand in China, export and disclosure challenges, and an industry-wide desire for sourcing transparency.

“Complete transparency is near-impossible for most gemstones,” said Damien Cody, president of the [International Colored Gemstone Association \(ICA\)](#). “We should be encouraging [traders’ best] efforts to improve ESG in the supply chain of command, but pushing too hard can have unintended consequences that are felt where people can least afford them — in the artisanal mining sector.”

Breaking down the layers of better sourcing practices, [World Diamond Council \(WDC\)](#) president [Ferial Zerouki](#) defined “responsible sourcing” as “meeting international laws — doing no harm — while ‘ethical sourcing’ builds on that with social aspects like being good to employees and understanding different cultures. ‘Sustainability’ builds on these two platforms to ensure longevity in social environments.”

Natural vs. lab-grown

Many at CIBJO rejoiced over De Beers’ renewed marketing investment in natural diamonds, including its \$20 million revival of the [“A Diamond Is Forever”](#) ad campaign for the holiday season. The news was particularly welcome given the recent price drops for both lab-grown and mined diamonds.

“We’re coming back to naturals,” said Udi Sheintal, president of the CIBJO Diamond Commission. “Played correctly, the market can expand because the natural-diamond business is linked with consumer emotions.”

Mahiar Borhanjoo reminded attendees that diamonds were a cyclical market. “More goods will be available at better prices, and retailers will need more natural diamonds,” forecast the CEO of trading platform Uni Diamonds.

As for synthetic stones — which he and others say have eaten up market share for lower-quality mined goods of late — he considers them a product for entry-level shoppers: “Lab-grown diamonds are for a first purchase, but for a second, buyers want the real thing. That’s what our retail partners tell us.”

What gem-miners really want

One of the most talked-about presentations at CIBJO revealed candid feedback from people on the ground in gem-producing countries. The presenter was researcher Jenna White — a PhD student from the [Colorado School of Mines](#) whom AGTA had [enlisted to investigate best practices](#) in the gemstone supply chain.

“AGTA is seeking facts versus fairy tales,” explained the group’s CEO, John W. Ford, who also took part in the CIBJO session.

Among White’s initial findings was the importance of clarifying terms. For instance, many interview subjects told her they were miners, but that often just meant they worked in the supply chain, not in hard-rock mines as diggers. More told her they wanted fair prices and to be treated like business partners, and most didn’t want companies using photos of them or of local orphans to sell gems.

Image: The opening ceremony of the CIBJO conference. (CIBJO)