

Mining Dialogues: From Troubles to Transformation

Episode 8 overview

The Evolution of Sustainability and Resource Management: Reflections and Challenges

The concept of sustainable development will gain prominence through initiatives like the Rio Conference and the Brundtland Commission, which will highlight the critical interdependence of environment, economy, and society. Sustainable development will be initially defined to ensure intergenerational equity, enabling future generations to enjoy the earth's resources as previous generations have. Over time, the term will evolve to encompass a more holistic view of development, beyond mere economic growth.

In the late 1980s, particularly in regions like British Columbia, the environmental movement will push for a balance between economic development and environmental protection, coining the term "sustainability." However, the broad application of "sustainability" will lead to a dilution of its original intent, with numerous new terms and acronyms emerging, such as "social license" and various standards and norms. This proliferation will often fragment the holistic vision initially proposed by the Brundtland Commission.

Effective decision-making in sustainable development will require an inclusive approach that integrates different values, interests, and power dynamics. This will mean engaging all stakeholders, including government entities, in the decision-making process. The legitimacy and effectiveness of sustainability efforts will depend on the participation of those responsible for implementing decisions and those directly affected by them.

Traditional economic measures will often overlook critical aspects that contribute to societal well-being, such as prenatal care, early childhood education, and gender equity. The Human Development Index (HDI) and other indices, like the gender-based development index, will provide a more comprehensive view of development by incorporating these factors. These measures will highlight the importance of investing in human capital for long-term societal benefits.

Sustainability will be best understood and implemented at the local level, where real people face real problems. For instance, managing fisheries will involve balancing aesthetic, recreational, and subsistence values, reflecting the complexity of sustainability in practice. Building sustainable relationships at the ground level will be crucial for achieving sustainable outcomes.

Global standards will need to include local and national governments to enhance effectiveness and legitimacy. The principle of subsidiarity will suggest that decisions should be made at the lowest possible level, involving all stakeholders with a serious interest in the outcome. This decentralized approach will ensure that local contexts and needs are adequately addressed.

In the mining sector, major companies will have a responsibility to manage their supply chains, including the actions of junior miners and artisanal operations. Due diligence will need to



encompass community relations and environmental practices to prevent inheriting unresolved issues. Market-driven forces will also encourage responsible sourcing, tracing materials back to their origins, and ensuring they meet social and moral standards.

Various professions within the resource sector, including geologists, accountants, and engineers, will have roles to play in promoting sustainability. Professional ethics and standards will need to guide their actions to ensure that they contribute positively to the communities and environments in which they operate.

The journey towards sustainable development will require a multifaceted approach, integrating local realities with global standards. By fostering inclusive decision-making processes and maintaining a focus on human development, society will achieve more meaningful and lasting sustainability outcomes.