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## Moving to a “Governance Model” to Prevent and Resolve Conflicts over Mining

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Recently, I was invited to attend a new round of GEMM (Global Exploration of Minerals and Metals) multi-sectoral dialogues held in Canada. At Fundacion Cambio Democrático (FCD), we have been working to address mining conflicts through dialogue since 2008. This initiative was promoted by the [Responsible Minerals Sector Initiative](#), and the first International Learning Day was launched by the Canadian International Institute for Extractive Industries and Development. This event permitted me to exchange experiences and learn from the diverse mining conflict mitigation processes that are being undertaken in different countries and continents, and hopefully enrich the initiatives that FCD are running in Argentina and 5 other countries in Latin America.

From the examples shared at the events, I found some similarities in the key causes of conflicts, the main concerns in countries with established mining industries, and the concerns in countries with new and expanding extractive operations. Among these concerns, I find important to highlight:

- The role of the exploration companies, and the transition from the exploration stage to operation, especially regarding the expectations generated during exploration and the relationship of the different companies to the local communities;
- How to convert the economic benefits of mining into sustainable development for communities;
- The distance between the social and environmental protocols which companies are implementing and the perceived reality in the territory;
- The difficulty of synchronizing the different timeframes held by investors (making profits in the short term), communities (time to inform themselves and decide, long-term vision) and the governments (usually linked to electoral cycles)

### **From Business Model to Governance Model**

This list leads us to the crucial underlying question for understanding sustainability in the context of mining operations: how do we move from a “business model” to a “governance model” in which all economic, social, environmental and cultural factors are included, and the focus is on the importance of relational, interpersonal and inter-institutional linkages? The “governance model” requires a reassessment of the role of the state, recognizing that in most developing

countries, relationships are not just between companies and communities, but include the state as a central actor in the production and relational process.

Thinking in terms of a “governance model” also implies a need to incorporate so-called “soft data” (information related to perceptions, opinions, and feelings of local stakeholders and their different interpretations of the positive and negative impacts of mining activities) into the creation and dissemination of information. This simple step would help companies and other stakeholders achieve a better understanding of community dynamics and actual or potential local conflicts.

### **Who Needs Their Capacity Strengthened?**

In many situations, differences in worldviews between companies, governments, some international organizations, and communities have led to thinking that every community requires a “capacity building” scheme. Analyzing the situation in terms of creating sustainable relationships leads to a better understanding of each stakeholder’s cultural competencies. Who needs to be strengthened and in what capacities?

Companies need to strengthen their capacities for understanding and building relationships with communities

Many times, it is the companies themselves that need to strengthen their capacities for understanding and building relationships with the communities around the mining operation.

This also reinforces the necessity of including the government as an actor whose capacity can be strengthened. In many cases, it is the small sub-national government units (provinces or municipalities), without much preparation or tools, who receive millions of dollars in investment, have significant increases in their populations, and have to deal with the impact of new businesses, among other effects that alter their normal development.

In both Latin America and Africa, the major challenge is identifying how the proliferation of multi-actor dialogue platforms can contribute to the substance and visibility of these debates, ensure the participation of all the actors involved, and achieve consensus on the structural basis for a new sustainable development model that focuses on **good governance** for our regions, countries and continents.

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