



CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION

By

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The current issue of *MEM* focuses on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting environmental stewardship globally within mining and other industrial sectors. NGOs have had a measurable impact in raising public awareness and sensitivity not only of the need for environmental protection globally but also the human element locally within developing nations. There has been a transition from emphasizing traditional environmental themes to supporting more direct financial involvement through sustainable development and poverty alleviation programs. At times the methods employed by NGOs have been controversial resulting in a seemingly widening ideological gap with industry.

Mining as an industry is vitality important and expanding rapidly throughout the world as the desire for progress grows in countries such as China and India. Some hard lessons have been learned and mistakes made in some Latin American countries as noted in the outcome of recent federal elections, public demonstrations, and movements toward nationalization of resources. Globalization is encouraging formation of large multinational diversified mining companies as the demand for metals and minerals moves the industry into every environmental, cultural, and economic setting imaginable. The acknowledgement of this level of diversity is essential to understanding the difficult task of conducting mining on a planetary scale. There is little value in merely attacking the mining industry since the people we are collectively trying to help generally lose in the end. Tremendous progress has been made by many mining companies toward doing “the right thing”.

There is a need to recognize and encourage this progress by the public, governments, and NGOs. The environmental NGOs should lead the way in pointing out those mining companies and operations that are in their opinion doing the right thing.

Collaboration not confrontation through an affiliation of truth, transparency, and trust is much more effective in reducing poverty, providing hope, and protecting the environment. Economic development arising from primary industries such as mining should be fundamental to this goal. To say no progress has been made at all and the mining industry as a whole does not “get it” would be unjust in light of actual facts and figures. For example, examine the websites of the major mining companies such as Alcoa, Barrick, BHP Billiton, and Rio Tinto. These and other mining and manufacturing companies are spending hundreds of millions of dollars not only on the environment, their employees, and state of the art equipment, but also on sustainable development issues through their corporate responsibility and community investment programs. These accomplishments should be commended regardless of the prodding the industry may have needed in the past. The job is not finished but certainly the transformation is well underway from mining companies changing not only the physical but also philosophical landscape.