The stone forum: implementing a consensus building methodology to address impacts associated with small mining and quarry operations

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Abstract

Small-scale mining, including quarry operations, continues to play an important social and economic role in hundreds of communities throughout Brazil. Often operating outside the formal economy, conflicts between the owners of small-scale mining operations, the mineworkers, various government agencies, and other stakeholders have contributed to the progressive degradation of the environment, poor health and safety standards, and low productivity. The Centre for Mineral Technology (CETEM) of Brazil is implementing a consensus building methodology in order to produce dimension stone by small-scale miners on a more sustainable basis in the Pândua region, located in the northwest of the State of Rio de Janeiro. The approach being used by CETEM is based on its own experience in working with gold prospectors in the Amazon, and lessons and experiences learned from Canadian officials and industry representatives. The lessons and insights gained from this project may prove to be useful to those involved in addressing similar problems elsewhere in Brazil, South America and around the world. © 2000 United Nations. Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction: background

1.1. Purpose

Brazil is among the largest producers of mineral commodities in the western hemisphere. It is the home of Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD), the world's largest iron ore producer, and the host to many well known international mining firms. At the same time, small-scale mining continues to play an important role in the Brazilian mining sector in gold, gems and dimension stones. These small-scale operations, generally operating outside the formal economy, often produce conflicts between the owners, the mineworkers, various government agencies, and other stakeholders. Conflict has contributed to the progressive degradation of the environment, poor health and safety standards, and low productivity.

This paper presents a project now underway to implement a consensus-building methodology as a way of finding practical solutions to the environmental, social and economic impacts associated with the production of dimension stone by small-scale miners in a region located in the northwest of Rio de Janeiro State in Brazil. The lessons and insights gained from this project may prove to be useful to those involved in addressing similar problems elsewhere in Brazil, South America and around the world. In order to understand the issues and challenges of promoting consensus building in the small-scale mining sector in Brazil, it is important to have some understanding of Brazilian history.