

# Corporate sustainability and indigenous community engagement in the extractive industry

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## Highlights

- Engagement with indigenous communities is key to obtain a social licence to operate.
- The importance of stakeholder engagement with indigenous communities is underlined.
- The 2030 Agenda and Five Ps are useful to assess sustainable community engagement.
- A set of unconventional issues needs to be integrated into sustainability practices.
- The Five Ps are a good framework to develop indigenous community engagement.

## Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore the initiatives for community engagement with indigenous people implemented by extractive organizations and their possible alignment with the integrative framework of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. A qualitative study based on 33 semi-directed interviews with practitioners and experts in managing relationships with indigenous communities shows the interconnectedness of the requirements of these communities with the main priorities of the 2030 Agenda. Our findings shed more light on the complexity, uncertainties, and risks associated with collaborating with unconventional stakeholders who play an increasingly important role, for example attaining a social licence to operate for extractive activities. They also show the critical importance of issues that tend to be neglected in corporate sustainability and the need to align organizational commitments with global priorities in sustainable development objectives. Contributions to the literature and avenues for future research are described in the discussion.

**Keywords:** Corporate sustainability; Community engagement; Indigenous communities; 2030 Agenda; Sustainable development goals (SDGs); Social licence to operate

## 1. Introduction

Involving stakeholders in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and more specifically, in corporate sustainability management, is increasingly considered to be essential to identify and implement relevant sustainability initiatives (Engert et al., 2016, Kepore and Imbun, 2011, Manetti, 2011, Parsons, 2008, Yakovleva and Vazquez-Brust, 2012). Such involvement tends to

better align corporate sustainability with the expectations of stakeholders and to enhance the legitimacy of organizations or the social acceptability of controversial projects (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002, Van Marrewijk, 2003, Van Marrewijk and Werre, 2003). In sectors that face strong institutional pressures and that may have significant environmental impacts—including the extractive industry—community engagement has become a basic requirement to gain a social licence to operate, particularly when these projects impact indigenous communities (Baba and Raufflet, 2014, International Council on Mining and Metals, 2015, Meesters and Behagel, 2017, Moffat and Zhang, 2014). Although the literature in this area remains scattered, the importance of community engagement is highlighted in guidelines and standards (e.g. on CSR and/or on corporate sustainability). For example, according to the ISO 26000 standard, organizations should “systematically consult representative community groups in determining priorities for social investment and community development activities and recognize the rights of community members to decide about the life of their community” (ISO, 2010, p. 60). The need for greater collaboration with various stakeholders has also been emphasized by international frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereafter “2030 Agenda”), which was adopted by the UN and world leaders in 2015 (Caiado et al., 2018, United Nations, 2015, United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

Although these calls for community engagement are continuous and prominent, there is need to further investigate how organizations implement community engagement and the main challenges they face in collaborating with stakeholders. The complex relationships between community engagement and corporate sustainability practices have not been fully investigated, particularly in the case of indigenous stakeholders who may have specific needs (e.g., employment, better healthcare, social programs, and quality education).

This paper analyzes the initiatives for community engagement with indigenous people implemented by extractive organizations and the extent to which these initiatives can contribute to the main priorities defined by the 2030 Agenda. The focus on community engagement and the 2030 Agenda leads us to revisit the concept of corporate sustainability. Its elastic definition, which has led to a range of interpretations too vast to be useful, has been widely criticized in the literature (Aras and Crowther, 2009, Crane, 2000, Gray and Milne, 2002, Harris and Crane, 2002, Milne et al., 2006). More specifically, this paper analyzes the initiatives for community engagement with indigenous people according to the “Five Ps” (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership) of the 2030 Agenda. The paper also bridges the gap between the literatures on sustainability practices and corporate community engagement that have developed independently.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, the literatures on corporate sustainability and community engagement with indigenous populations are described. The methodological section explains the approach used in this qualitative study. The data analysis describes the main findings on the interconnectedness of community engagement and sustainability practices through the Five Ps of sustainable development. Contributions and avenues for future research are elaborated in the discussion.

## **2. Corporate community engagement and the 2030 agenda**

## *2.1. Aligning corporate sustainability with the 2030 agenda*

Corporate sustainability has been the object of an increasing number of studies (Bansal and Song, 2017, Engert et al., 2016, Lozano et al., 2015, Meuer et al., 2018, Van Marrewijk, 2003), as have the motivations and driving forces behind the organizational adoption of this multifaceted concept (Engert et al., 2016, Lozano, 2015, Schaltegger and Burritt, 2018). The implementation of strategies and practices for sustainability (Baumgartner and Ebner, 2010, Engert et al., 2016, Salzmann et al., 2005) and the proliferation of standards and reporting frameworks (Bansal and Hunter, 2003, Boiral, 2007, Hahn, 2013) have both also been widely studied in the literature. Yet despite the proliferation of research in this area, the definition and meaning of corporate sustainability are still much debated (e.g., Amini and Bienstock, 2014, Bansal and Song, 2017, Gray and Milne, 2002, Montiel, 2008, Van Marrewijk, 2003). For example, in their study based on the mapping of 986 publications on corporate sustainability, Meuer et al. (2018) identified 21 definitions from seminal articles in this area. These definitions are characterized by various levels of ambition, integration, and conceptualization of corporate sustainability. Most definitions are based on the search for balance and integration of various issues (essentially environmental, economic, and social) or responsiveness to stakeholders' expectations (e.g., Bansal, 2002, Bergman et al., 2017, Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002, Engert et al., 2016). Some definitions also rely on the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), which emphasized the importance of considering the needs of the generations to come. For example, Dyllick and Hockerts (2002, p. 13) define corporate sustainability as “meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders [...] without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well.” Although it reflects the very broad nature of sustainable development, this definition is not necessarily helpful to address the various facets of sustainability or to define priorities for organizations and society as a whole. As highlighted in the literature, sustainability objectives are often conflicting and respond to different institutional logics that may be difficult to reconcile (Hahn et al., 2014, 2018; Testa et al., 2018, Wijen, 2014).

The lack of clarity surrounding the meaning and priority of objectives for corporate sustainability has been widely criticized (e.g., Boiral and Henri, 2017, Dahlsrud, 2008, Gray and Milne, 2002). First, the fuzziness in definitions of corporate sustainability is conducive to divergent interpretations of this concept, particularly on the part of managers, who may implement measures that are inconsistent with the original meaning and implications of sustainable development (Crane, 2000, Gray and Milne, 2002, Harris and Crane, 2002, Milne et al., 2006). Second, organizations' actual commitment to sustainability tends to be disconnected from salient issues and to reflect corporate interests rather than those of stakeholders and future generations (Boiral, 2007, Milne and Gray, 2013, Wijen, 2014). Third, critical sustainability issues that are strongly emphasized at a global level—including biodiversity loss, poverty, inequalities, and rights of indigenous populations—remain neglected in the managerial literature (Boiral, 2016, Caiado et al., 2018, Milne and Gray, 2013).

In working to repair the disconnection between internationally established global priorities and corporate sustainability initiatives, it seems essential to go back to the roots of sustainable development and reconsider the objectives that were agreed upon internationally. In this perspective, the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda, including its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), can be useful to define corporate commitment to sustainability, assess corporate

alignment with global issues, and undertake the necessary changes. The SDGs were developed through a consultation process with international experts and agreed upon by 193 countries, who also adopted the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Caiado et al., 2018, United Nations, 2015, United Nations Development Programme, 2015). This Agenda represents an ambitious plan to define the priorities for sustainability actions and stimulate initiatives from different sectors of society, including businesses (Annan-Diab and Molinari, 2017, Palmer, 2015, Villeneuve et al., 2017). The 2030 Agenda is focused on five main areas, called “the Five Ps”: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership (see Table 1). The 17 SDGs and their 169 related targets are also classed according to the Five Ps (Caiado et al., 2018, Singh, 2016, United Nations, 2015, Villeneuve et al., 2017).

**Table 1.** The five Ps and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.

<b>The “Five Ps” and corresponding statement from the 2030 Agenda<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>17 SDGs (summary)</b>
<b>People</b> “End poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and (...) ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment” (p. 3).	SDG 1 ( <i>No poverty</i> )
	SDG 2 ( <i>Zero hunger</i> )
	SDG 3 ( <i>Good health and well-being</i> )
	SDG 4 ( <i>Quality education</i> )
	SDG 5 ( <i>Gender equality</i> )
<b>Planet</b> “Protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change” (p. 3).	SDG 6 ( <i>Clean water and sanitation</i> )
	SDG 7 ( <i>Affordable and clean energy</i> )
	SDG 12 ( <i>Responsible consumption and production</i> )
	SDG 13 ( <i>Climate action</i> )
	SDG 14 ( <i>Life below water</i> )
	SDG 15 ( <i>Life on land</i> )
<b>Prosperity</b> “Ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature” (p. 3).	SDG 8 ( <i>Decent work and economic growth</i> )
	SDG 9 ( <i>Industry, innovation and infrastructure</i> )
	SDG 10 ( <i>Reduced inequalities</i> )
	SDG 11 ( <i>Sustainable cities and communities</i> )
<b>Peace</b> “Foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence” (p. 4).	SDG 16 ( <i>Peace, justice and strong institutions</i> )
<b>Partnership</b> “Mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” (p. 4).	SDG 17 ( <i>Partnerships for the goals</i> )

<sup>a</sup> Excerpts from the 2030 Agenda (United Nations 2015).

The integration of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in corporate sustainability can improve its legitimacy by focusing corporate actions on issues considered to be priorities at an international

level. In this perspective, if properly used, the SDGs could improve corporate accountability by reducing the materiality gap between critical sustainability issues and corporate priorities. This gap tends to reflect the managerial capture of sustainability practices—particularly in reporting practices—and has been widely criticized in the literature (Burritt and Schaltegger, 2010, O'Dwyer, 2003, Smith et al., 2011, Talbot and Boiral, 2013). The SDGs could also help to reduce misinterpretations of sustainability (Boiral and Henri, 2017, Crane, 2000, Gray and Milne, 2002, Milne et al., 2006) by proposing a set of pre-defined objectives and targets that can be adopted in full or in part, depending on the organizational context. Finally, the SDGs are focused on partnership and on issues that are often ignored in corporate sustainability (e.g., life on land and below water, good health, poverty and hunger reduction, education, peace and justice), which may encourage corporate engagement with unconventional stakeholders—particularly indigenous populations—that are highly affected by these issues but who tend to be neglected by organizations (Newenham-Kahindi, 2011, Parsons, 2008).

## *2.2. Corporate sustainability and community engagement*

Although businesses are expected to play a key role in implementing and achieving the SDGs (Caiado et al., 2018, PwC, 2017, Villeneuve et al., 2017), their integration of sustainability practices remains underdeveloped. According to a study of 470 large companies from 17 countries, SDGs were mentioned in 62% of sustainability reports (PwC, 2017), though only a third of these companies disclosed clear and complete information supporting their commitment to the SDGs. This may be partly explained by the relative newness of the 2030 Agenda and the time needed to integrate the SDGs into sustainability commitments and reporting practices. The SDGs can nonetheless be used as a general evaluation framework, rather than as prescriptive tools to implement new objectives (Villeneuve et al., 2017), and may help to assess the legitimacy of sustainability commitments in light of the 2030 Agenda priorities. Its relevance as an evaluation framework partly depends on the sector of activity and the sustainability issues faced by the company. For example, certain SDGs such as “No poverty” (SDG 1) or “Life on land” (SDG 15) may not appear very material for a given organization. Conversely, for organizations whose activity impacts a wide range of sustainability issues, the Five Ps and most of the SDGs can be used as a sort of compass to assess corporate engagement and reduce the materiality gap.

The extractive sector (mining, energy, and forestry exploitations) impacts a wide range of sustainability issues. First, because this sector is based on the extraction or harvesting of natural resources, these companies must address a large variety of environmental issues (Garvin et al., 2009, Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2015, Jenkins and Yakovleva, 2006), including those covered in the SDGs (e.g., biodiversity preservation, clean water and sanitation, use of natural resources, waste management, and adaptation to climate change). Second, the extraction of natural resources raises critical sustainability issues at the heart of the definition of this concept—namely, not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Third, because extractive activities are often located in remote areas marked by poverty, lack of social services, and the presence of marginalized indigenous communities (Basu et al., 2015, Garvin et al., 2009, Ruwhiu and Carter, 2016), they may have significant impacts on sociopolitical issues, which are covered by the SDGs but most often overlooked in the mainstream literature on corporate sustainability (e.g., end of extreme poverty, health issues, food security, access to quality infrastructure, partnership, and peace).

These issues may be addressed by corporate community engagements, which can be defined as the implementation of measures to collaboratively identify and solve the sustainability issues faced by communities as a result of corporate activities (Idemudia and Ite, 2006, Kemp et al., 2011, Newenham-Kahindi, 2011, Parsons, 2008). Corporate-community engagement is based on a collaborative process consistent with the multi-stakeholder approach proposed by the 2030 Agenda, which seeks to “encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships” (United Nations, 2015, p. 32). Moreover, collaboration between companies and stakeholders—including indigenous people—addresses the need for more stakeholder inclusiveness in corporate sustainability initiatives (Engert et al., 2016, Hart and Sharma, 2004, Kepore and Imbun, 2011, Manetti, 2011, Murphy and Arenas, 2010, Parsons, 2008, Yakovleva and Vazquez-Brust, 2012). Relationships with indigenous communities have often been marked by confrontations and disagreements over the use of natural resources (Banerjee, 2000, Morrice and Colagiuri, 2013, Munarriz, 2008, Szablowski, 2002). However, if community engagement initiatives are properly implemented and based on a substantial collaboration process, there is reason to believe they can be adapted to the needs of stakeholders (Kepore and Imbun, 2011, Lertzman and Vredenburg, 2005, Missens et al., 2007, Ruwhiu and Carter, 2016). These community engagement initiatives may also cover a wide range of measures for sustainable development, depending on the needs and requirements of the communities involved. For example, in their extensive literature review on community engagement in the mining sector, Wang et al. (2016) identify five factors that can significantly influence community perceptions of the effectiveness of corporate community engagement initiatives: social impact (e.g., infrastructure improvement and cultural impact), governance (e.g., decision making process and communication), demographic aspects (e.g., education and income), environmental impact (e.g., water pollution and air pollution), and economic impact (e.g., job opportunities and increase in local incomes). Those factors clearly cover the main sustainability issues and are in line with the Five Ps of the 2030 Agenda.

### *2.3. Toward sustainable community engagement in the extractive industry*

One can assume that community engagement is essential for the extractive industry to improve corporate sustainability and relationships with stakeholders—particularly indigenous communities—for at least three interrelated reasons.

First, community engagement is increasingly a prerequisite to obtain a social licence to operate from stakeholders directly impacted by extractive projects (Baba and Raufflet, 2014, International Council on Mining and Metals, 2015, Meesters and Behagel, 2017). In the absence of community engagement measures, the opposition of local populations can seriously undermine the sustainability of extractive projects prior to or after their implementation, with major financial implications (Martinez and Franks, 2014, Ruwhiu and Carter, 2016). For example, Canada's Tahoe Resources' Escobal silver mine, located in southeastern Guatemala, has been strongly opposed by the Xinka indigenous community, who protested against the impacts of the mine and the lack of consultation in its development (McSheffrey, 2018). According to Tahoe, nearly CAD 1.7 billion was invested in the mine, which has contributed to the prosperity of the region. Nevertheless, protests from the indigenous community have led to huge financial losses and to the suspension of

the mine's operating license as of July 2017, due to a failure to properly consult with Xinka people prior to the granting of the license in 2013.

Second, the consultation and participation of indigenous populations is often a regulatory requirement covered by international, national, or regional standards. At an international level, various treaties and conventions (e.g., the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, or the Indigenous and Tribal Convention of the International Labour Organization), define the rights of indigenous communities, including in terms of consultation processes, conservation of natural areas, management of natural resources, culture, education, and health (United Nations, 2008). In some countries, more constraining regulations have been implemented at national and regional levels (Keenan et al., 2016, O'Faircheallaigh, 2013, Szablowski, 2002). For example, in Australia, the Indigenous Land Use Agreement requires extractive activities to develop contractual agreements with relevant native title groups. These agreements are generally based on community engagement measures (e.g., consultation of indigenous communities, biodiversity conservation, economic compensation, employment measures, and land and water management).

Third, a lack of substantial community engagement by extractive companies exposes them to significant financial, reputational, and commercial risks. The growth of socially responsible investment is accompanied by new requirements for corporate sustainability, and relationships with indigenous communities are increasingly scrutinized (Nikolakis et al., 2014). Funding for extractive activities in developing countries can also take into account community engagement issues (Laurence, 2011, Mason, 2008). For example, according to the Equator Principles, which were signed by a large number of financial institutions, “projects affecting indigenous peoples will be subject to a process of Informed Consultation and Participation [which] will need to comply with the rights and protections for indigenous peoples” (The Equator Principles Association, 2013, p. 7). Noncompliance with these requirements can also have reputational and commercial impacts on a global scale. This was the case of organizations involved in the exploitation and commercialization of “blood diamonds” from Africa (e.g., Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea), the mining activities of which often had disastrous impacts on local communities, surrounding ecosystems, and peacekeeping efforts in affected regions (Akiwumi, 2014, Locka, 2017). International pressures and boycott campaigns against this activity has resulted in the development of more sustainable supply chains, the implementation certifiable standards (e.g., the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme), and multi-stakeholders initiatives (e.g., the Diamond Development Initiative), which are all assumed to encourage responsible practices consistent with the needs of affected communities (Baker, 2015, Carrigan et al., 2017, Haufler, 2009, Macedo et al., 2018, Yeomans, 2018).

The increasing institutional pressures for community engagement and sustainable extracting activities have led to the development of various tools and policies to address this challenge. For example, the UN has implemented a set of forums on human rights and businesses to facilitate the implementation of the Global Compact Principles and the SDGs in companies. Most of those forums propose various examples and suggestions based on community engagement measures and the respect of indigenous peoples' rights (United Nations Global Compact, 2018a, United Nations Global Compact, 2018b). Guidelines for community and stakeholder engagement have also been proposed by sector-specific international organizations such as the International Council on

Mining and Metals (ICMM), the Alliance for Responsible Mining, and the International Finance Corporation (Alliance for Responsible Mining, 2018, International Council on Mining and Metals, 2012, International Council on Mining and Metals, 2015, International Finance Corporation, 2007). For example, the ICMM offers a community development toolkit based on 20 different measures that can be used throughout the mining project cycle (International Council on Mining and Metals, 2012). A more specific good practice guide on indigenous people and mining also provides measures and case studies for various sustainability issues, including impact mitigation and enhancement, working conditions, environmental protection, rehabilitation and monitoring, and discrimination (International Council on Mining and Metals, 2015). The ICMM guidelines have been implemented by various mining companies. For example, BHP Billiton has developed an indigenous peoples policy statement and a set of measures based on the ICMM guidelines (BHP Billiton, 2018). The BHP policy and commitment includes “undertaking participatory and inclusive social and environmental impact assessment; seeking to agree on and document engagement and consultation plans with potentially impacted indigenous peoples; [and] working to obtain the consent of indigenous peoples to BHP Billiton activities consistent with the ICMM Position Statement” (BHP Billiton, 2018).

Nevertheless, how these commitments are translated into practice remains unclear, and the topic has been overlooked in the literature. Likewise, the extent to which community engagement measures can be used as an effective tool to promote sustainability initiatives consistent with both the 2030 Agenda priorities and stakeholder requirements still needs to be empirically investigated.

### **3. Method**

The objective of this qualitative study is to analyze extractive organizations’ community engagement initiatives with indigenous peoples and to examine the possible alignment of these initiatives with the integrative framework proposed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As underlined in the scholarly literature (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, Maxwell, 2012), the qualitative perspective is well suited for this type of exploratory and complex works.

#### *3.1. Data collection*

Most respondents were involved in mining, energy, or forestry organizations with indigenous populations present near their operations in countries such as Canada. The initial selection of extractive organizations was based on the Global Reporting Initiative database, which contains 49,767 sustainability reports.<sup>1</sup> The keywords “aboriginal people,” “indigenous communities,” and “First Nations”<sup>2</sup> were used to select organizations involved in community engagement with indigenous peoples. A preliminary list of contacts was established using information from these sustainability reports. Professional databases, such as LinkedIn, were also searched using the keywords “aboriginal relationships” and “indigenous affairs” to further improve the potential contact list. Finally, snowball sampling (i.e., the identification of further respondents using information collected during the interviews), a technique commonly used in explorative and qualitative studies (Noy, 2008, Robinson, 2014, Suri, 2011), helped find other relevant potential

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://database.globalreporting.org/>(Consulted on September 24, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> This term is used in Canada to refer to the constitutionally recognized groups of aboriginal people.



respondents. All respondents had significant experience in managing relationships between extractive organizations and indigenous people.

Potential respondents were then contacted by email. Prior to the interview, respondents interested in participating in our study had to sign a consent form assuring their anonymity, as requested by the research protocol approved by the Laval University ethics committee. Due to the geographic dispersion of the respondents, interviews were mostly conducted either by telephone or by Skype. As highlighted by many studies, there are no significant differences between face-to-face and telephone interviews (Holt, 2010, Midanik and Greenfield, 2003, Stephens, 2007, Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Our semi-directed interviews were based on a guide covering the main objectives of the study (i.e., main trends, benefits, and drawbacks of the relationships between extractive organizations and indigenous peoples, and sources of conflicts with indigenous peoples). The framework of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs offer a great opportunity to analyze the relationships between extractive organizations and indigenous peoples; they were not, however, the primary focus of the interviews. The 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs were rather used as framework to interpret and evaluate information and perspectives provided by the respondents. On average, interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min and were conducted either in English or French or, to a lesser extent, Spanish. Overall, 33 respondents were interviewed between 2014 and 2016 (see Table 2). Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed in their source language.

**Table 2.** Status of respondents.

	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Auditors/ Consultants</i>	<i>Researchers / Scientists</i>	<i>Other Experts</i>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
<i>Mining Sector</i>	9	3	0	0	<b>12</b>
<i>Energy Sector</i>	5	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
<i>Forestry Sector</i>	1	4	2	0	<b>7</b>
<i>Natural-Resource Sector Related<sup>a</sup></i>	3	1	1	1	<b>6</b>
<i>Other</i>	0	2	1	0	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>33</b>

<sup>a</sup> “Natural-resource related” is used to designate respondents from organizations that provide services to more than one of the sectors mentioned above.

### 3.2. Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis was based on grounded theory, in which the main themes emerge from the data rather than from the validation of pre-determined hypotheses (Glaser and Strauss, 2017, Suddaby, 2006). Interviews were first transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word and totaled 515 single-spaced pages. Transcriptions were then exported to QDA Miner software (version 4), which was used to perform the qualitative analysis. A preliminary categorization grid was established by the research team on the basis of the data from the transcribed interviews. Each individual category was clearly defined to ensure the consistency of the categorization process. As grounded theory is an inductive and iterative process, this categorization grid was dynamic and continued to evolve throughout the categorization process. Discussions among coders help to create new relevant categories, merge categories together, or eliminate irrelevant categories. All transcriptions were

categorized, and a double-blinded categorization was performed independently by two coders on about 30% of the interviews to ensure the validity and reliability of the process. This double-blinded categorization revealed no significant differences between the work of the two coders. Overall, 71 relevant categories were created, comprising 830 passages related to the relationships between extractive organizations and indigenous peoples. These categories were grouped according to three main themes:

- Main trends, benefits, and drawbacks of the relationships between extractive organizations and indigenous peoples;
- Sources of conflicts with indigenous peoples; and
- Possible alignment with the Five Ps of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Finally, representative passages of these main themes were selected and translated into English by the research team when necessary. Key findings related to these main themes were also summarized. When deemed relevant, some trends were estimated, even though quantification is not usually appropriate with the grounded theory approach (Gephart, 2004, Pratt, 2009).

#### **4. Contributing to the Five Ps of sustainability through sustainable community engagement**

##### *4.1. Gaining a social licence to operate*

Most respondents considered the development of sustainability initiatives in collaboration with indigenous communities to be a prerequisite to obtaining a social licence to operate and necessary to avoid resistance to extractive projects. As summarized by a manager in the mining sector, “I think the relationships between the First Nations and the companies are very, very important, and really are drivers for the success or the failure of the project.” The establishment of good relationships with indigenous communities does not depend on specific, predefined measures such as paying royalties, but rather on collaboration to integrate a set of multidimensional and interdependent sustainability issues. Although the 2030 Agenda was not explicitly mentioned by respondents, its broad perspective and Five Ps model offer a relevant integrative framework to analyze the sustainability challenges faced by extractive companies in their engagement with indigenous communities.

Table 3 summarizes the main findings in terms of the sustainability issues of extractive operations, measures implemented, and challenges related to community engagement. The specificities of these sustainability issues are mostly related to the remoteness of many mining operations and the presence of indigenous communities, who require customized sustainability and community engagement measures. These measures need to be adapted to cultural, socioeconomic, and ecological aspects that may differ from one community to another. Interestingly, some SDGs such as SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and 17 (partnerships for the goals) are well covered in the measures mentioned by respondents (see Table 3), while these issues tend to be overlooked in the managerial literature. Conversely, issues that are widely debated in the literature on corporate sustainability, such as climate action (SDG 13) and clean energy (SDG 7), were virtually not mentioned by respondents. Finally, the challenges faced in community engagement initiatives show the complexity, uncertainties, and risks associated with

relationships with indigenous populations, irrespective of the sustainability policies adopted by companies.

**Table 3.** Sustainable community engagement in the extractive industry.

	Specific sustainability and community issues for extractive operations	Sustainable community engagement initiatives and related SDGs	Challenges in engaging with indigenous communities
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of health and education services</li> <li>• Extreme poverty</li> <li>• Isolation and exclusion</li> <li>• Recognition of local culture and traditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding various social programs (adult education, childcare, reduction of school dropout rate): SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10</li> <li>• Consultation and listening process: SDG 17</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties in understanding and adapting to cultural differences</li> <li>• Misunderstanding community priorities</li> <li>• Lack of expertise in social programs</li> </ul>
Planet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly dependent on natural resources</li> <li>• Hunting and fishing activities near operations</li> <li>• Preservation of sacred natural sites</li> <li>• Emphasis on biodiversity and protection of certain species</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting communities on environmental priorities: SDGs 14, 15, 17</li> <li>• Conservation programs: SDGs 14, 15</li> <li>• Implementation of long-term measures (restoration and rehabilitation): SDGs 6, 14, 15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embeddedness of environmental and spiritual issues</li> <li>• Understanding traditional knowledge</li> <li>• Developing a holistic rather than instrumental view of nature</li> </ul>
Prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsistence economy</li> <li>• High unemployment rate</li> <li>• Dependence on governmental aid</li> <li>• Poor infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of structured economic activities and business expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial compensation for communities: SDGs 1, 2, 8</li> <li>• Recruitment of indigenous people: SDGs 1, 5, 8, 10</li> <li>• Long-term infrastructure investment: SDGs 6, 8, 9, 11</li> <li>• Sourcing locally and supporting indigenous businesses: SDGs 8, 9, 10, 11</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserving the cultural heritage and lifestyle of communities</li> <li>• Lack of entrepreneurial spirit</li> <li>• Costs of infrastructure investments that should be footed by the government</li> </ul>

Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of conflicts between extractive companies and indigenous populations</li> <li>• Mutual mistrust</li> <li>• Lack of confidence in governmental institutions and judicial system</li> <li>• Lack of recognition of local institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipation of possible conflicts through early discussions prior to decision-making: SDGs 16, 17</li> <li>• Explicit recognition of indigenous rights: SDGs 10, 16</li> <li>• Search for balance between the Five Ps: SDG 16</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time required to establish a climate of trust</li> <li>• Risks of sabotage or protests, whatever the nature of the project</li> <li>• Mistrust in companies and the judicial system complicates agreements with communities</li> </ul>
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependence on various stakeholders in implementing agreements and establishing partnerships with communities</li> <li>• Both companies and communities have misgivings about whether partnerships will be respected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiation of mandatory or voluntary written agreements: SDGs 16, 17</li> <li>• Recruiting consultants to develop partnerships; implementing multidisciplinary teams: SDG 17</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties in identifying the right counterpart for discussions</li> <li>• Divisions within and between communities</li> <li>• Misunderstandings over the implications of partnerships</li> <li>• Lack of internal resources</li> </ul>

4.2. People

Although a consideration for people (i.e., health, well-being, poverty, and quality education) tends to be overlooked in the literature on corporate sustainability, the importance of impacts on people was spontaneously highlighted by 39% of respondents. First, indigenous communities and extractive activities are often located in remote regions where there are often insufficient quality health services, higher incidence of various diseases, and a fast-growing population. Second, the poverty rate of these areas is generally much higher than in urban settings, including in wealthy countries such as Australia and Canada. Third, the lack of educational infrastructure and low enrolment in schools tend to fuel poverty, isolation, and feelings of exclusion among indigenous peoples. Last but not least, 64% of respondents highlighted that the lifestyle, culture, and traditions of these populations need to be carefully considered prior to defining and implementing sustainability initiatives. In this perspective, the issues related to the “people” category tend to shape other sustainability aspects (planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership) and therefore need to be considered first. Understanding the indigenous population's lifestyle, culture, and specific needs prior to the implementation of sustainability measures (e.g., school assistance, adult education, child care, health program) requires listening and a consultation process that may seem time-consuming and for which organizations are not necessarily well prepared. Consultation can lead to various and customized measures that account for the cultural diversity, economic situation, and specific sustainability issues faced by each community:

“The company funded a building at [name of a place] that provides child care for adult education. This allows women with children who want to go back to school to have a daycare service right next to the school. This problem mainly concerns the Algonquian people, who really have great needs. They are indeed poorer than the Cree communities, for example.” (Manager in the mining sector)

“There is often collaboration between companies and indigenous communities regarding social aspects. For example, there are programs to reduce school dropout rates and entrepreneurial funding programs. All kinds of assistance programs for aboriginal communities have been implemented.” (Consultant in the mining sector)

“Sometimes they don't feel listened to, but I think it's mostly a misunderstanding of their culture. I think that this leads to some frustration on their part, because they claim certain things, but we don't really understand what they are exactly asking for.” (Manager in the mining sector)

#### *4.3. Planet*

Integrating environmental issues into corporate sustainability and community engagement is essential for most indigenous communities and was mentioned by virtually all respondents. First, as highlighted by 76% of respondents, the culture and traditions of most indigenous communities are inseparable from the environment in ways that tend to be ignored by companies (e.g., sacred natural sites, spiritual meaning associated with certain animal and plant species, or use of natural materials in traditional rituals). These traditions clearly need to be respected and, when necessary, considered in developing sustainability measures. The concept of “Mother Earth” was mentioned by a few respondents to translate the embeddedness of indigenous communities in natural ecosystems, in contrast with extractive organizations' more instrumental view of the environment. Conceptualizing the environment as “Mother Earth” also reflects a more comprehensive and holistic view of environmental issues that seems in line with the concept of sustainability and the 2030 Agenda. Second, indigenous communities tend to depend on natural resources for their survival, particularly when hunting and fishing activities are their main means of obtaining food. The metaphor of nature as a “pantry” for indigenous communities was cited by several respondents to explain the dependency of these communities on the surrounding ecosystem and the importance of nature conservation efforts to preserve the health of existing populations and that of generations to come. Third, most indigenous communities are aware of the significant impacts of extractive activities on the environment, although the extent to which these impacts affect the lifestyle of communities is not necessarily clear. Community engagement must therefore clarify the environmental effects of extractive activities, at all stages of these activities' lifecycles, and take the necessary measures to prevent or offset those effects. According to most respondents, measures in this area should be planned and implemented in collaboration with indigenous communities insofar as possible. Such collaboration seems essential to adequately accounting for issues important to indigenous communities and adapting environmental actions to the specificities of surrounding ecosystems. The importance of biodiversity conservation and the preservation of natural habitats were particularly emphasized by respondents:

“Before implementing biodiversity conservation plans in the mining sector, it's very important to consult indigenous communities to understand their special relationship with biodiversity.” (Manager in the mining sector)

“You often have situations where there are sacred mountains, sacred places, burial sites, or areas where there can be no operations because they are close to watercourses or because, according to the elders, it's an ancient territory or an ancient grave. These values must be respected.” (Consultant/Auditor in the forestry sector)

“I think we must not overlook indigenous peoples' knowledge of their natural environment, where they have evolved historically, and which they still use today. I think it's super important not to ignore that.” (Legal advisor involved with various natural resource sectors)

#### *4.4. Prosperity*

The importance of prosperity issues (e.g., employment, decent work, infrastructure, innovation, and reduced inequalities) in community engagement was mentioned by more than half of respondents. These issues cannot be reduced to the short-term economic objectives generally associated with extractive activities (e.g., payment of taxes and royalties and financial compensation to indigenous communities). First, the unemployment rate in remote regions is often very high, and it is not uncommon for most people to depend on social assistance. As a result, extractive activities can be seen as an opportunity to reduce dependence on government subsidies and promote social integration. As highlighted by several respondents, decent job opportunities in extractive companies appear more important for the sustainability of communities than paying royalties or other forms of financial compensation. Recruitment also fosters workforce diversity and the integration of the company in the community. Second, community engagement should include specific measures to support the indigenous economy by sourcing products locally and developing business opportunities in collaboration with these communities. According to respondents, considering indigenous people as potential business partners and granting contracts to local companies may be critical for the social acceptability of industrial activities. Nevertheless, this approach may be constrained by a lack of structured economic activities in these communities, the importance of preserving local culture, and occasionally, a lack of entrepreneurial spirit in some communities. Third, respondents also highlighted the necessity of a long-term perspective and of planning measures for the area post closure of their operations, particularly for the mining sector. Site closure plans should not be limited to environmental measures (e.g., remediation, restoration and rehabilitation of ecosystems) but should also consider the sustainability of local economies. Respondents mentioned various measures including infrastructure investment, road construction, better housing, capacity-building, and development of local entrepreneurship:

“For short-term projects, there's not really that much of a benefit to the indigenous communities, and we have to make sure that we are not setting up a situation where we're building capacity that's only going to hurt them in the long run. [...] The company should make sure that there are economic benefits, and if it can't be jobs because it's a short-term project, then it should be community investment.” (Scientist involved with various natural resource sectors)

“We need to create business opportunities. So we will favour First Nations if they have relevant businesses and, when we have contracts to give, we will favour an aboriginal business, even if it costs a little more.” (Manager in the mining sector).

“The first thing is always employment. It's not just about money; it's about making their people work. When people work, it eliminates a lot of social problems.” (Manager in the mining sector)

#### *4.5. Peace*

The search for peace, justice, and strong institutions was mainly mentioned in relation to the conflictual relationships with indigenous populations that have often marked the development of extractive activities. These conflicts and their negative impacts on the reputation and sustainability of extractive companies were mentioned by 45% of respondents. Preventing such conflicts was considered to be one of the main objectives of community engagement and sustainability programs. Although most respondents felt that relationships with indigenous people have significantly improved over the past decades, they recognize that, for many indigenous communities, a climate of mistrust still shapes their perceptions of extractive activities. This climate is also reflected in indigenous peoples' lack of confidence in governmental institutions and general perception of unfair treatment by governmental agencies and companies alike. Respondents mentioned a wide variety of reasons for conflictual relationships at all stages of the life cycle of extractive activities, including a lack of trust in contractual agreements and the judicial system, impacts on biodiversity, territorial disputes, payment of royalties, and disposal of waste materials. Whatever the project proposed, high-profile conflicts (which may include sabotage, demonstrations, or aggressive actions against employees) can be very detrimental to the company's reputation and are considered by respondents to be an ever-present risk. One of the main solutions is therefore to establish trust, confidence, and a cooperative climate prior to extractive projects and to develop sustainability initiatives in collaboration with indigenous peoples. Establishing this trusting climate tends to be perceived as a long process without a guaranteed result. It requires the company to anticipate possible sources of conflict—which are mostly related to one of the Five Ps or an imbalance between them—and a careful discussion of the issues involved:

“There must be a certain level of respect before meetings are established. Before starting to talk about a subject, it's very important to take the time to get to know them well and to establish a trusting relationship.” (Manager in the mining sector)

“I think environmental protection is one of the main sources of conflict.” (Consultant in the mining sector)

“There are conflicts when First Nations feel that they should benefit from economic activities on their traditional land, but in the end, not only they do not benefit from these activities, but the environmental degradation undermines long-term opportunities for them to benefit from the natural wealth located on their land.” (Researcher in the forestry sector)

#### *4.6. Partnership*

Partnership is an intrinsic part of community engagement measures. Its importance in sustainability initiatives with indigenous populations was highlighted by three quarters of respondents. Partnership appears to be a basic requirement for regulatory, institutional, and operational reasons. Although negotiating formal agreements with indigenous communities prior to the development of extractive activities is a statutory requirement in some places, these agreements are most often based on voluntary approaches intended to prevent conflicts with communities and gain a social licence to operate. Nevertheless, negotiated written agreements are not in and of themselves sufficient to ensure the sustainability and social acceptability of extractive projects. One challenge is the identification of the right counterparts for discussion, as mentioned by 36% of respondents; complicating factors include the diversity of communities involved in certain projects, the existence of divisions within or between those communities, and frequent misunderstandings regarding the agreements. Developing sound partnerships with the main stakeholders impacted by extractive projects through discussions and collaborations can be very time-consuming and may not fit within the company's time frame. Moreover, the wide range of issues covered in these agreements requires a diverse set of skills that the organization may not have, particularly for small and short-term projects; respondents mentioned environmental, social, and anthropological knowledge, legal expertise, and some fluency in the languages used by communities. The complexity of partnerships with indigenous communities requires multidisciplinary teams that include representatives of various stakeholders (e.g., managers, consultants, academics, indigenous people, and government experts):

“You have to have competent people, to work with people who have experience in this field. So teamwork between technical people like me and people who know how to interact with aboriginal peoples is essential. We can't work in silos on our own because it won't work.” (Consultant in the mining sector)

“There are many companies that hire consultants to improve their relationships with indigenous people.” (Legal advisor involved with various natural resource sectors)

“We have a few very good examples of long-term partnerships between companies and First Nations that have really lasted the test of time, and benefits have been obvious. But depending on who you talk to, who is running to be chief and council, you do not always get a consistent response as to whether or not these things have been positively or negatively received within the communities.” (Scientist involved with various natural resource sectors)

## **5. Discussion and conclusions**

### *5.1. Contributions*

This study provides a broader perspective on the specific sustainability challenges faced by extractive organizations operating in remote areas. Despite their critical importance in supplying natural resources, the environmental vulnerability of remote locations, and the presence of indigenous communities who have inhabited these areas for a very long time, activities located in remote areas have clearly been neglected in the literature. Overall, the analysis of corporate



community engagement with indigenous peoples reveals a wide range of unconventional issues that need to be better integrated into sustainability practices.

This paper shows how the frameworks of the 2030 Agenda and the Five Ps can be used as assessment tools to promote a comprehensive approach to sustainable community engagement. The article responds to the call for more empirical studies on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs (Spangenberg, 2017) by showing the applicability of this framework for extractive organizations operating in areas located near indigenous communities. It also sheds light on the importance of stakeholder engagement with indigenous communities. Although these communities are increasingly considered to be important stakeholders, particularly for the extractive sector (Baba and Raufflet, 2014, International Council on Mining and Metals, 2015, Meesters and Behagel, 2017, Parsons, 2008), how organizations manage their relationships with those communities in practical terms remains overlooked in the literature on corporate sustainability.

### *5.2. Implications for managers, public decision makers, and other stakeholders*

This paper has relevant managerial implications for organizations that may face pressures from indigenous communities, as well as for other stakeholders. Most examples of measures for sustainability and community engagement provided in this paper are applicable to various organizations affected by these pressures. The challenges of corporate engagement with indigenous communities as described by respondents can help other companies better anticipate and manage the difficulties that may arise. Overall, the Five Ps model offers a flexible, adaptable, and comprehensive framework to develop programs for sustainable community engagement. Organizations can first use this framework to define or revisit their priorities at the corporate level (sustainability strategy or policy) or at the local level (engagement with specific communities). Organizations can also, as a second step, use the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets proposed by the 2030 Agenda to identify more precise objectives depending on the specific issues they face. Similarly, it was evidenced in our analysis that complex socio-political aspects, such as inequalities, justice, peace, strong institutions and partnerships for the goals, which tend to be overlooked in the managerial literature, are mentioned as key challenges faced in community engagement initiatives. In our perspective, this disconnection may have been due to the greater importance attributed to the environmental factors with respect to other types of aspects in the development of the so-called sustainable community engagement. In the same vein, and beyond the sustainability policies adopted by companies, public decision makers might be aware of the need to promote public policies aimed at considering all aspects of the “Five Ps” in an integrated and balanced way in order to improve community engagement with the type of organizations analyzed. Other stakeholders, such as NGOs, activists and researchers might consider these findings in the wider socio-political context of sustainability issues that shapes the sustainability approach, as underlined by Hope (2017).

### *5.3. Limitations and avenues for future research*

An analysis of the limitations of this study can help identify possible directions for future studies.

First, this study is focused on the extractive sector and activities in remote areas. As a result, our observations cannot be extrapolated to all organizations. Most companies do not have direct

relationships with indigenous communities or impact them only indirectly. It would be interesting to investigate these impacts from a broader perspective that includes various sectors of activity. For example, distribution companies can have significant impacts on the sustainability of remote areas through their purchasing policy and by promoting fair trade products that are supposed to respect the human rights of the indigenous people involved in the production process. How these measures are applied in practical terms, their impact on indigenous communities, and the effectiveness of labels or standards for purchasing, fair trade or CSR (e.g., Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, Forest Stewardship Council, ISO 26000) need to be further investigated through larger scale studies.

Second, this qualitative study is based on a limited sample and is not suitable for quantification. The qualitative interviews in this study cannot measure the degree to which organizations achieved specific SDGs, how organizational or regional differences may impact community engagement, or the influence of regulatory frameworks. These relevant issues need to be further investigated through a quantitative study based on a much larger sample of respondents. For methodological and technical reasons, this study did not analyze the perceptions of indigenous peoples. Given the remoteness of certain extractive activities, language differences, and the time required to study the range of perceptions within those communities, interdisciplinary and anthropological approaches could be useful in conducting further studies. Such research would shed more light on the differences in how companies and indigenous communities perceive the sustainable community engagement initiatives of the extractive industry. Whatever the methodological approach used—either qualitative or quantitative—, researchers might consider that the opinions of the respondents could be affected by different types of distortions, such as the social desirability bias (Zerbe and Paulhus, 1987).

Third, this study does not focus on the formal implementation of the 2030 Agenda or SDGs, which were unknown to most respondents at the time of the study, but on the relevance of this framework to assess and structure extractive sector initiatives in sustainable community engagement. Further research could investigate to what extent companies have effectively used the SDGs and the benefits of their adoption. With the exception of a recent study on sustainability reporting conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC, 2017), this question has not been investigated. According to the PwC study, a small proportion of large organizations have substantially incorporated the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. The effects of this integration should only be observable in the long term. In the meanwhile, case studies could investigate how organizations—including extractive sector organizations—that are considered to be proactive in this area have internalized the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the reasons behind such internalization, and its possible impacts on sustainability practices.

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