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TURNING AN ADMONITION INTO ASPIRATION: HOW A SLAVERY-FREE MARS CAN SECURE
THE SPACE SECTOR'S ROLE AS A MAJOR DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The “Space2030” Agenda emphasizes “the contribution of space activities . . . to the achievement of global agendas, addressing long-term sustainable development concerns of humankind.” However, decent work and economic growth (Sustainable Development Goal 8) is an aspect of long-term sustainable development that is not directly acknowledged in the Agenda and is, as a result, at risk of being inadvertently undermined by other efforts outlined in the Agenda.

SDG 8, commonly linked in academic literature to “anti-slavery” or “anti-trafficking” frameworks, can become an unintended casualty of efforts to achieve other, more quantifiable or technical SDGs. For example, research shows that a focus on affordable, clean energy or climate action (SDGs 7 and 13), while not explicitly contrary to SDG 8, is linked to the use of forced labor in solar power supply and value chains (Cockayne et al., forthcoming). The objectives of the Agenda are not immune to the possibility of unwittingly undermining SDG 8 in addressing wider sustainable development concerns.

While this dilemma is not unique to the Agenda, the space sector is uniquely positioned to avoid this pitfall and provide an example to other global, cross-sectoral areas of focus. But if left unattended, this dilemma threatens a moral and, arguably, legal failing of space actors to uphold the values of the peaceful use of outer space and the exploration of space for the benefit of all.

I advocate for an explicit focus on SDG 8 in the implementation of the “Space2030” Agenda, synthesizing evidence from the fields of space ethics, business, and human rights. The introduction of SDG 8 to the Agenda is neither arbitrary nor forced, but a natural, timely application of space ethics and human rights knowledge for our present moment in history. With special focus on Objectives 1, 2, and 4 of the Agenda, this presentation elaborates on the “freedom dividend” (Griffith and Bales 2019); space-bound supply chains at high risk for forced labor (Walk Free 2018); and implications for space law and space ethics (Schwartz and Milligan, eds., 2016).

To demonstrate the above, “Slavery-Free Mars” is introduced as an aspirational, real-world undertaking that leverages the Strategic Vision of the Agenda and the cross-sectoral reality of the space sector to propel the space sector into the role of a “major driver of sustainable development” by realizing, simultaneously, SDGs that are commonly viewed as disconnected from one another or even at odds.