

Mineral Partnerships for a Sustainable Future: Ensuring Mutually Beneficial Partnerships for African Industrialization

Link to the recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1FYEEL3Okc&list=PLhHMwTfbaJ0RiWgIQAmehXhnREx0GHhzs&index=24>

This Roundtable, held on October 30th at the 2025 Paris Peace Forum and moderated by **Djaheezah Subratty, Head, Consumption and Production Unit, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, explored how to build mutually beneficial partnerships that contribute to African industrialization, ensure investments, coordinated policy and value creation across African resource-rich countries.



Africa holds over one-third of the world's critical minerals needed for the global energy and digital transitions, yet continues to capture only a small fraction of the value generated by these resources due to limited processing, manufacturing capacity, and persistent structural challenges. At a time when geopolitical tensions rise and countries multiply strategies to secure their own supply of minerals, partnerships that are mutually beneficial are crucial. Minerals value chains, when conducted

responsibly, represent a transformative pathway to create economic value, generate jobs, empower youth and women, strengthen societal resilience, and elevate Africa's global standing in the emerging green economy.

Since 2022, the Paris Peace Forum has sought to address these global governance challenges through the [Global Council for Responsible Transition Minerals](#), a global, independent and high-level platform advocating for coordinated responses to the complex and interconnected challenges surrounding transition minerals. This roundtable was organized as part of this policy initiative to inform the work of the Global Council.

Throughout the session, speakers highlighted that Africa's minerals endowment represent an opportunity for industrialization and sustainable development, only if the right conditions are met. They stressed that stronger governance, peace and security, regional harmonization and coordination, and transparency are essential to attract investment and



support value addition on the continent. Participants also underlined the importance of genuine partnerships between governments, the private sector, financial institutions, and communities to build resilient value chains and ensure that mining benefits local populations. Inclusion emerged as a central theme, with several speakers emphasizing the need to embed community participation and gender equality from the outset. Innovation, skills development, local industrial ecosystems, and responsible environmental standards were also seen as essential to building resilient and sustainable mineral sectors.

Emmanuel Makumba Mali, Director for Democracy and Good Governance Programme, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) began by underscoring a stark economic paradox: despite



the Great Lakes region - and Africa more broadly – accounting for a large share the world’s mineral production, the continent continues to capture a disproportionately small share of the global trade value. He cited data showing that Africa benefits from less than 3 percent of global mineral trade, while producing 30-35% of the minerals essential for energy and digital transitions.

Much of this imbalance can be attributed to instability and conflict, particularly in the resource-rich eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Conflicts continue to erode the foundation for stable, long-term investment: without peace and security, value-adding industries struggle to flourish, and the risks of exploitation and illicit trade intensify. In the 2010 Lusaka Declaration of the ICGLR Special Summit to Fight Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in the Great Lakes Region, ICGLR member states explicitly linked mineral exploitation to conflict escalation – showing the great relevance of peace for responsible minerals value chains.

Regional institutions such as the ICGLR play a critical role in ensuring that mineral resources support development rather than conflicts. The ICGLR continues to coordinate initiatives against illegal exploitation of natural resources, encouraging member States to adopt regional certification mechanisms aligned with OECD Guidelines, inspecting mine sites, protecting the chain of custody, and ensuring an enabling environment for trade, mutually beneficial partnerships, and value creation.

Currently, existing mineral partnerships with Great Lakes region countries suffer from a narrow vision, focusing on securing the supply of raw materials to importing economies rather than investing in the underlying infrastructure, energy supply, transport networks, and communications systems. As they stand, partnerships often sideline regional integration cross-border complementarities, human rights, good governance, transparency, and accountability which are essential to political stability, peace and security. Emmanuel Makumba Mali warned that without robust mechanisms to ensure good governance,

equitable financing, and value creation elements in agreements, mineral partnerships risk perpetuating poverty, marginalization, and insecurity.



Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director-General, Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), European Commission reiterated Africa-EU long partnership, culminating in the upcoming 7th African Union - European Union Summit, which will be held on 24-25 November in Angola. She recalled that the EU is Africa's largest trading partner, its leading source of foreign direct investment, and its top provider of development and humanitarian assistance.

Despite the increasing focus on diversification and strategic autonomy worldwide, the EU continues to prioritize greater value creation and industrial development in resource rich countries, including through the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA). The CRMA includes an external dimension focused on developing sustainable, resilient, and mutually beneficial partnerships with international partners. In this context, the EU has signed 14 MoU, including four with African countries, aimed at deepening cooperation across the entire raw materials value chain. These partnerships are designed to be aligned with national development strategies and grounded in the partners' own priorities. They reflect EU's commitment to cooperate on training, skills development, ESG standards, research and technology, and investment in enabling infrastructure. She described this as a comprehensive "360-degree approach" that supports an enabling environment, coupled with investments, technical assistance, grants, blended finance, and guarantees. However, Marjeta Jager emphasized the crucial role of the private sector in making available viable projects, off-take agreements, and demonstrable business opportunities.

The EU's support also extends to programs such as PanAfGeo+ which promotes knowledge exchange, geoscience development, capacity building, and mutual learning, support to transparency and value creation programs with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Last but not least, the EU announced at this roundtable its support to the World Bank's RISE Program (Resilient and Inclusive Supply Chain Enhancement).

Marjeta Jager stressed the importance of regional integration to move beyond raw material exports towards higher value creation, including through building regional value chains, harmonizing trade rules, strengthening physical connectivity, and increasing cross-border flows. The EU has continuously supported Africa's own economic integration, including through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which, if fully implemented, could become the world's largest free trade area.

Bandi Mbubi, Executive Director, Fair Cobalt Alliance (FCA) highlighted both the progress and persistent challenges in mineral sourcing in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While he reported some progress since the early 2000s, when companies completely lacked the ability to trace their minerals, certification system continue to be corrupted and overly legalistic, with companies prioritizing compliance over genuine action.



A major shortcoming remains in the lack of meaningful participation of local communities. Many initiatives, particularly traceability and transparency programs, are imposed top-down, leaving communities without a voice in decisions that affect their livelihoods.

To address this, the Fair Cobalt Alliance (FCA) has developed a model in Lualaba that actively involves local communities throughout the mineral value chain. The FCA brings together mining companies, technology firms, and local civil society organizations to ensure that community perspectives shape ethical sourcing practices. Their approach prioritizes involving local communities in setting standards, addressing risks, and shaping the solutions themselves, rather than imposing external systems from the outside. This has led to concrete improvements, including child labor remediation, better safety conditions, and support for miners to earn dignified livelihoods. Sustainable partnerships must reflect this approach and combine progress in corporate accountability with inclusive local participation, making the benefits of mineral value chains tangible for those most affected.

Vincent Dufief, Group Corporate Affairs Vice President, Imerys emphasized the crucial role of mining companies in Africa's industrialization and outlined three pillars that guide Imerys' approach: responsible mining practices, local industrialization and value creation, and equitable financial benefit-sharing.



First, responsible mining requires companies to conduct environmental stewardship and operate on social licenses. In many African countries where regulatory frameworks are weaker, Imerys seeks to apply higher environmental standards used in more regulated jurisdictions, particularly in areas such as water management and biodiversity protection. He stressed the need to engage with local communities, which is fundamental to a good and resilient business, as mining operations inevitably have major social and economic impacts.

Imerys is currently developing two major lithium projects in Europe to support global decarbonization and electrifications goals. The lithium project in central France has been designed from the outset to meet

the highest environmental standards, including by choosing a more expensive but more sustainable underground mine to minimize surface impact and protect biodiversity, and by using rail transport to move ore to the refining site, eliminating emissions from road transport.

Second, **local industrialization and value addition, involve both supporting local business ecosystems and building skills.** The company works to develop strong local contractor networks, helping domestic firms meet required standards and integrating them into the supply chain. Similarly, investing in training and workforce development is essential to ensuring a skilled labor force capable of supporting mining operations and broader industrial growth.

Finally, equitable financial benefit-sharing based on principles of transparency, ethical business conduct, and adherence to international standards is paramount to ensure that the economic value generated by mining is shared fairly with host countries and communities.



Zenzi Awases, President, Association of Women in Mining in Africa (AWIMA) affirmed that, alongside progress on traceability and community engagement, there has also been notable improvement in women's participation in the mining sector discussions - who have historically been excluded from the benefits of mining. **When done responsibly, mining can convert mineral wealth into long-term social and economic value, funding schools, hospitals, jobs, and industrial**

development. Yet, this transformation requires strong stewardship, responsible management of resources and inclusive decision-making. Women's participation goes beyond fairness and equity but is a matter of effectiveness: when women are meaningfully included, social, environmental, and economic outcomes consistently improve.

Gender equity in mining and resource projects must be built in from the very beginning. Inclusion must be embedded in project design, for example through gender impact assessments and early discussion of how women will participate and benefit from the project. Zenzi Awases also highlighted the importance of targeted investment in initiatives that support women directly, as well as making gender equity and sustainability core performance indicators rather than philanthropic add-ons.

Sven Renner, Program Manager, Energy and Extractives, **World Bank** emphasized that today's mineral landscape is fundamentally different from previous decades. Geopolitical tensions and rapidly rising global demand - driven not only by the energy transition but also by Africa's industrial needs – is reshaping mineral markets. He pointed to the role of minerals in fueling broader economic development beyond the sector itself, such as energy, electrification and green industrialization.



In this context, the World Bank's RISE Program (Resilient and Inclusive Supply Chain Enhancement) helps governments link mining potential with infrastructure development, skills upgrading, and value addition by assessing geological resources, power and transport needs, cross-sector linkages, and workforce readiness. The program has already produced roadmaps in Zambia, Malawi, and Burundi, with work expanding to Tanzania and South Africa.

Sven Renner stressed that regional collaboration is essential to achieving the scale needed for competitiveness. Beneficiation strategies, moving up the value chains to promote smelting and refining within one's territory, remains economically difficult due to global overcapacity, with facilities closing in most regions except China. **Overcoming this structural barrier, he argued, will also require new financial instruments, which the World Bank is now designing with partners to make local and regional value chains viable.**

Further, accelerating investment in mineral value chains will require strong foundations such as clear regulations, capable institutions, transparency, environmental safeguards, and attention to gender equality. No single country can address these challenges alone - collaboration and financial partnerships remain essential.



Adane El Ktiri, Chief Integration Officer, SBU Mining, OCP Group, drawing from OCP's long experience in the phosphate value chain, explained how translating good practices from other sectors into the mining sector can help the mineral sector unlock local value. OCP has built decades of successful international partnerships across the phosphate value chain, beginning with its first joint venture in Europe in 1996 and expanding over time to industrial cooperation globally. **Just as phosphate is central to food security and**

national sovereignty, minerals are now essential for economic resilience, as demonstrated by recent geopolitical tensions among the EU, the US, and China. Five transferable best practices were identified.

First, because mining is a capital-intensive industry, **strong *win-win* partnerships are essential to build industrial facilities, fuel in capital and ensure long-term success.** Second, **building an ecosystem of local companies around the mines and processing sites** is crucial to ensure easy access to proximity services. Third, investing in **building knowledge ecosystems**, beyond the sector itself, has been deemed crucial in supporting OCP's operations. This could range from traditional training centers to the creation of a university, educating students on economics, finance, and other topics. Fourth, **collaboration with financial institutions** is critical to attract capital for mining projects – too often suffering from reputational risk and little return on investment. **Finally, environmental aspects, including low carbon operations, are deemed fundamental to attract green investments.** He underlined the need for major investment in low-carbon infrastructures, as global markets and financiers increasingly require environmentally responsible products. OCP has committed \$13 billion to green infrastructure, enabling water self-sufficiency by 2027, shifting mining operations from diesel to electric equipment within four years, and investing heavily in green ammonia to become fully self-sufficient by 2032.

Adane El Ktiri also emphasized the shared responsibilities of governments and the private sector in driving investments in the mineral sector and co-creating industrial development. **Governments must set a clear vision, create an enabling legal and policy framework, and provide incentives, while the private sector drives investment, job creation, and industrial development.** Large-scale mineral projects are capital-intensive and cannot be financed by governments alone.