

Why there's a dire need for China-Africa Dialogue on critical minerals in promoting responsible business conduct.



The global energy transition is at a critical crossroads. As nations and international organizations increasingly embrace greener and cleaner energy resources, the growing demand for critical minerals creates an expanding market opportunity for Electric Vehicle (EV) batteries, solar and wind power, and other alternatives to fossil fuels. As Africa's largest trading partner and foreign direct investor, China has become a major trade partner for the continent. It crucial examine the involvement of Chinese actors in Africa's mining industry in promoting Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) because the continent's critical mineral reserves risk perpetuating the resource curse narrative if don't have interventions aligned to promoting a rights-based approach in the extractives sector.

The China-Africa dialogue platform should be established against the

backdrop of significant Chinese investments in the transitional minerals across Africa which are crucial for economic growth and development and hence leaving a trail of social, environmental and cultural concerns among various stakeholders.

Worth noting that the Africa we want (Agenda 2063) and the Africa Mining Vision focus on ensuring that Africa's mineral resources are exploited transparently, equitably and optimally to contribute to broader sustainable development across the continent, Therefore, the establishment of China-Africa Dialogue would reshape conversations around the future of the continent's green mineral investments, The dialogue should aim at tackling the challenges that arise from China's growing role in Africa's mineral resource extraction in general and green minerals in particular. With a particular focus on responsible

investments and sustainable mining practices, this platform should bring together African civil society organizations (CSOs), local communities, Chinese businesses and industry players, Chinese CSOs to push for responsible investments in green minerals across Africa.

According to the Africa Green Minerals Strategy, the continent stands on the brink of an economic transformation, fueled by the global demand for clean energy minerals such as lithium, copper, cobalt, manganese, graphite, and rare earth elements. These minerals are essential for the world's clean energy and technological future, and Africa, with its vast mineral wealth, is poised to be a central player in this shift. China, Africa's largest investor in mining sector is significant player in the mining of green minerals, including processing and refining. Chinese mining and battery companies have also invested close to USD 4.5 billion in lithium mines in recent years, driving many lithium projects in countries like Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Mali. Rare earth elements projects in Uganda. Similarly, China is the largest buyer of Africa's minerals.

In 2020, it imported about a third of Africa's minerals and metals exports worth USD 16.6 billion, an increase of 28% from 2018. This highlights China's increasing reliance on African minerals and an opportunity for African players to leverage these resources for greater benefits. While these investments from China are bringing much-needed infrastructure and economic growth, they have also raised questions about resource

depletion, environmental impacts, and governance concerns especially as mining operations often disregard local communities' rights (including, land rights, Free Prior and Informed Consent). Essentially, these investments leave unintended consequences and negative externalities such as environmental degradation, forced displacement, and lack of adequate consultation of communities. Considering these challenges communities and CSOs often struggle to navigate the complexities of holding Chinese companies accountable for operating under a different set of regulations.

For decades, African civil society organizations (CSOs) and communities have expressed concerns about the lack of effective channels for accessing information and seeking remedies when their rights are violated. These concerns are valid and demand long-term solutions. One way to address this is by collaborating with Chinese CSOs that are familiar with China's regulatory frameworks, business culture, and operational methods. This collaboration would create a platform for African stakeholders to build and strengthen relationships with Chinese CSOs, who have the knowledge and strategies to hold Chinese corporations accountable.

This platform would address key challenges through the following strategic pillars, by promoting better information sharing and monitoring of mining activities, Knowledge Building, and Influencing Corporate Behavior, through cross-cultural dialogue, African CSOs can engage with their Chinese counterparts to

drive more responsible corporate behaviors, advocating for transparency and accountability from Chinese mining companies operating in Africa.

It will also explore the utility of other initiatives and mechanisms such as Mediation and Consultation Mechanism for the Mining Industry and Mineral Value Chain, which is the first grievance redress mechanism applicable to Chinese corporations engaged in the mining and mineral value chain.

The overarching goal is to ensure that China's investments in Africa's green mineral extraction can lead to sustainable development and equitable benefits for local communities. The initiative will work towards the following objectives:

Identifying key challenges and opportunities in transition minerals including governance, environmental sustainability, and economic equity, Enhancing cooperation between African and Chinese CSOs to promote transparency and accountability in the management of Africa's resources, Developing Actionable Solutions to foster responsible investment practices in transition minerals that benefit both investors and host communities and Strengthening Cross-Border Partnerships between African and Chinese stakeholders to address environmental, social, and governance risks in transitional minerals project and promote transparency and accountability

In conclusion, the future of Africa's mineral wealth and its role in the global clean energy transition is at a crossroads.

Through this initiative, Africa can harness the power of its resources for sustainable and inclusive growth, while ensuring that its communities, environments, and future generations thrive.



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