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THEME:

Unlocking Eastern Africa's Mineral Wealth for Security, Economic Transformation, and Strategic Autonomy

Eastern Africa's mineral wealth can support industrialisation, employment and economic transformation. Nonetheless, this will depend on how effectively governments govern and negotiate the sector. Stronger negotiating capacity can help states secure local value addition, technology transfer, and skills development from strategic mineral partnerships. At the same time, digital traceability, interoperable government systems and stronger financial intelligence can help curb illegal mining, illicit mineral flows and resource-related insecurity. The region also needs to move beyond exporting raw minerals by developing processing, manufacturing and supplier industries that create opportunities for young people and local enterprises. Achieving these outcomes requires harmonised laws, capable institutions, transparent resource management and meaningful community participation. Regional and continental frameworks, including the East African Community Mining Bill, Africa Mining Vision, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Africa Green Minerals Strategy, provide a basis for stronger governance and sustainable mineral-led development.

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Leveraging Strategic Mineral Negotiations for Mineral Sovereignty and Strategic Autonomy in Eastern Africa

Eastern Africa's critical minerals are becoming increasingly important in the global race for strategic resources. The region holds vast deposits of critical minerals which are essential to clean energy technologies, advanced manufacturing, defence systems, and digital infrastructure. As demand for these resources grows, external powers are deepening their economic, diplomatic, and security engagement with Eastern Africa. This creates new opportunities for investment and infrastructure development, but it also raises questions about who controls the region's mineral wealth and how much value remains within local economies.

The growing competition is already visible through major infrastructure and connectivity initiatives. The US- and EU-backed Lobito Corridor and the China-backed TAZARA railway demonstrate how mineral access, transport infrastructure, and geopolitical interests are increasingly interconnected. These initiatives can help Eastern African countries address infrastructure gaps and attract capital. However, without clear national and regional priorities, mineral-rich states risk entering negotiations mainly as suppliers of raw materials rather than as partners shaping the terms of investment and development.

A stronger negotiating position begins at home. Governments need clear critical minerals strategies that identify priority resources, strategic investors, and areas where foreign participation is desirable. Such strategies should also establish expectations around local ownership, processing, technology transfer, employment, and environmental protection. Negotiations should focus on what economic and strategic value countries derive from their mineral resources.

Technical capacity is equally important. Mining agreements are often complex and involve geological, financial, legal, environmental, and technological considerations. Governments therefore need skilled negotiating teams that can assess the long-term implications of contracts and challenge unfavourable terms. Stronger access to independent geological data and contract analysis would also reduce information asymmetries between governments and multinational companies.

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Regional coordination can further improve bargaining power. Eastern African states could harmonise aspects of their mining frameworks, share information on contracts and investors, and develop common principles for negotiating strategic mineral partnerships. This would reduce the risk of countries undercutting one another by offering increasingly generous terms to attract investment.

Transparency is also central to this approach. Clear disclosure of beneficial ownership, fiscal arrangements, environmental obligations, and contractual commitments can reduce opportunities for corruption and ensure that mineral deals serve public interests. Most importantly, future partnerships should move beyond extraction towards processing, refining, manufacturing, technology transfer and skills development. This approach is consistent with the Africa Mining Vision and the African Green Minerals Strategy. The objective should not be to limit foreign investment, but to negotiate it on terms that build domestic capabilities.

Tuesday 11th August 2026

Harnessing Technology to Mitigate Resource-Driven Conflict and Insecurity in Eastern Africa

Eastern Africa's mineral wealth presents a significant opportunity for economic transformation, but weak governance can turn this advantage into a source of insecurity. The growing global demand for critical minerals is increasing the value of deposits across the region while also creating stronger incentives for illicit extraction, smuggling, corruption and environmental exploitation. In areas affected by weak state presence or armed conflict, competition over mineral sites and revenues can deepen local tensions and provide income for armed groups. Technology can help address these risks by making mineral supply chains more visible and easier to monitor.

Digital traceability systems offer one practical entry point. By creating a digital record of minerals from extraction and trading to processing and export, governments can better establish where resources originate and who handles them along the

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supply chain. Such systems can help identify suspicious transactions, undeclared production, revenue leakages, and potential points of diversion. They can also make it harder for illegally extracted minerals to enter formal markets by providing buyers and regulators with greater information about their origin.

Indonesia's SIMBARA provides a useful example of how digital government systems can improve oversight of mineral production and revenues. The platform brings together information from different parts of the mining value chain, allowing authorities to monitor transactions and strengthen coordination between institutions. Eastern African countries can draw lessons from this approach while adapting it to their own regulatory and institutional contexts.

Several countries already have mineral licensing databases, customs platforms, tax systems, and environmental monitoring mechanisms. The greater challenge is connecting these systems. Governments should establish interoperable systems linking mining authorities, revenue agencies, customs services, environmental regulators, and security institutions to enable real-time information sharing and strengthen oversight of mineral flows. Cross-border information sharing is equally important because illicit mineral networks transcend national boundaries.

Technology, however, is not a substitute for effective governance. A sophisticated digital platform will have limited impact if licensing agencies lack capacity, data are poorly managed, or officials can bypass established controls. Governments therefore need to invest in institutional capacity alongside digital infrastructure. Independent audits, stronger inspection systems, and clear enforcement mechanisms are essential to ensure that technology translates into accountability.

Communities should also have a meaningful role in monitoring mining activities and determining how benefits are shared. Fair employment opportunities, transparent revenue-sharing arrangements, and mechanisms for reporting environmental or governance violations can reduce local grievances. Technology should therefore be viewed as an enabler of better mineral governance rather than an end in itself.

Wednesday 12th August 2026

Countering Illicit Financial Flows from Illegal Mining in Eastern Africa

In Eastern Africa, illegal mining is increasingly connected to sophisticated financial networks that conceal, transfer, and integrate illicit mineral proceeds into the formal economy. This weakens state revenues, enables corruption, and finances other forms of organised crime. Across Eastern Africa, profits from illegal mining and conflict-linked mineral trade move through trade misinvoicing, shell companies, informal financial channels and increasingly digital and virtual asset platforms. This makes illicit financial flows difficult to detect and allows criminal networks to operate beyond the mining sites where their activities begin.

The scale and sophistication of these networks expose weaknesses in the region's anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism systems. Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and South Sudan have remained under increased scrutiny through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) monitoring process.

This reflects weaknesses in areas such as beneficial ownership transparency, enforcement, and financial investigations. Tanzania's exit from enhanced monitoring in 2025 demonstrates that progress is possible when countries strengthen their frameworks and address identified deficiencies. The broader lesson for Eastern Africa is that strong laws alone are not enough. Their consistent implementation is what matters.
A major weakness is the limited integration of institutions responsible for overseeing different parts of the mineral and financial value chains. Mining authorities may have information on production and licensing, customs agencies monitor cross-border trade, tax authorities track revenue and financial intelligence units analyse suspicious transactions. When these systems operate in isolation, important connections can be missed. A mining company, trader or exporter may therefore appear legitimate to one agency while raising concerns with another.

Eastern African states should strengthen the implementation of existing anti money laundering frameworks and improve coordination across these institutions. Greater interoperability between agencies would help authorities identify unusual transactions and trace suspicious flows. Beneficial ownership verification should be particularly prioritised. Authorities need to know who ultimately owns or controls companies involved in mining, trading, and exporting minerals.

Regional cooperation is equally important because illicit financial networks operate across borders. The East and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) can play a stronger role in facilitating information exchange among Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs), supporting joint investigations, and improving regional capacity for asset tracking and recovery. Cooperation should also extend to screening politically exposed persons and identifying unexplained wealth linked to mineral activities.

The strategic priority should therefore shift from focusing only on the movement of illicit minerals to following the money generated from them. Seizing an illegal shipment may disrupt one transaction, but tracing the financial proceeds can expose the wider network behind it. Financial investigations can reveal intermediaries, financiers, company owners, and beneficiaries of illegal mining. Recovering illicit assets should form part of this effort. Stronger mechanisms for freezing, confiscating, and repatriating criminal proceeds would reduce the profitability of illegal mining.


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Leveraging Mineral Wealth Value Chains to Address Youth Unemployment in Eastern Africa

Eastern Africa's mineral wealth presents a major opportunity to address the region's persistent youth unemployment. However, this potential will remain limited if countries continue to export minerals with little domestic value addition. Mining creates direct employment, but the larger and more sustainable employment opportunities lie across the wider mineral value chain. Processing, refining, manufacturing, equipment supply, logistics, technology and related services can generate jobs at scale while creating local industries and productive capabilities.

The challenge, therefore, is to move from an extraction-based model towards integrated mineral value chains. When raw minerals leave the region with limited processing, much of the economic value and potential employment is created elsewhere. Developing domestic processing and manufacturing capacity can retain more value locally and create opportunities for young people with different levels of education and skills. These include engineers and geologists, but also technicians, machine operators, transport providers, software specialists, environmental professionals and entrepreneurs.

International experience offers useful lessons. Indonesia has demonstrated how policy measures can encourage greater domestic value addition by linking access to mineral resources with downstream processing and industrial development. Chile, meanwhile, illustrates the importance of investing in human capital, infrastructure, research and strong institutions to build competitive industries around natural resources. Eastern African countries can adapt these lessons to their own economic circumstances rather than simply replicating foreign models.

A key priority should be better alignment between mining, industrialisation and skills policies. Governments need to anticipate the skills required at different stages of mineral value chains and ensure that technical and vocational education responds to actual market demand. Partnerships


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between mining companies, universities, technical institutions and governments can help develop training programmes linked to emerging industries. Apprenticeships and workplace-based training can also give young people practical experience and improve their transition into employment.

Technology transfer should form part of investment agreements. Foreign companies can contribute more than capital if partnerships create opportunities for local workers and firms to acquire technical knowledge and develop new capabilities. Local content policies can further support youth-owned enterprises by creating opportunities in transport, maintenance, equipment supply, information technology, environmental services and other sectors.

Regional integration can expand these opportunities. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a platform for Eastern African countries to develop regional markets and specialise in different stages of mineral processing and manufacturing. The African Green Minerals Strategy can also support cooperation around responsible mineral development and regional value chains. Environmental safeguards are equally important to ensure that job creation does not come at the expense of communities and future livelihoods. Women and marginalised groups should also have meaningful access to training, employment and enterprise opportunities.

Friday 14th August 2026

Building Effective Governance to Unlock the Economic Value of Eastern Africa's Mineral Resources

Eastern Africa's mineral endowment presents a strategic opportunity to accelerate industrialisation, diversify economies, and generate employment. However, weak enforcement, fragmented regulations, and limited transparency continue to constrain these benefits. Effective governance is therefore essential to ensure mineral extraction generates lasting economic value. A coherent regional regulatory framework is central to this objective. Differences in mining legislation, licensing regimes, fiscal terms and environmental standards can create regulatory arbitrage and weaken the bargaining position of individual states.

The proposed East African Community Mining Bill provides an opportunity to establish common regional standards while allowing partner states to retain appropriate national policy space. Harmonisation should focus particularly on licensing, fiscal governance, local content, environmental safeguards, mine closure and disclosure requirements. Common standards would reduce regulatory inconsistencies and create a more predictable environment for responsible investment.

Regional governance mechanisms can complement these efforts. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region promotes mineral certification, traceability, transparency, mineral-flow monitoring, formalisation of artisanal and small-scale mining and whistleblowing mechanisms. These measures are particularly relevant to addressing illegal exploitation and conflict-linked mineral trade. At the continental level, the Extractive Industries Transparency

Initiative, Africa Mining Vision, and Africa Green Minerals Strategy provide broader frameworks for transparency, responsible resource governance and value addition. Their effectiveness, however, will depend on national implementation, institutional ownership and credible enforcement.

Institutional capacity remains a critical constraint. Effective mineral governance requires regulators with the technical capacity to assess geological data, negotiate complex contracts, monitor production and evaluate fiscal returns. Stronger coordination among mining authorities, revenue agencies, customs services, environmental regulators and financial intelligence units would also reduce governance gaps across the mineral value chain.

Political commitment must underpin these reforms. Even well-designed legislation will have limited impact where enforcement is selective, regulatory agencies lack independence or powerful interests can circumvent established procedures. Governments should strengthen institutional accountability, establish clear sanctions for non-compliance, and subject major mining agreements to appropriate public and legislative scrutiny.

Effective monitoring and evaluation are also essential for determining whether institutions are delivering on their mandates and whether mineral development is generating tangible economic and social outcomes. Eastern Africa therefore needs governance frameworks that translate mineral extraction into productive investment, local value addition, skilled employment and stronger public revenues. Delivering these outcomes will require coordinated regional action, capable and accountable institutions, transparent decision-making, robust oversight and sustained political will.

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