

Confronting Modern Slavery in DRC-UK Mineral Supply Chains

London Workshop Briefing

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The UK is committed to ending modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking worldwide by 2030, including the eradication of child labour, as unanimously adopted in the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

This was the message from Sophia Willitts-King, the UK Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, as she opened proceedings at a multi-stakeholder workshop on confronting modern slavery in DRC-UK mineral supply chains in London last week.

Part of a larger research and training project funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) via the British Embassy Kinshasa, she credited the number and diversity of stakeholders present, as well as their passion for collective active action on such an important topic.

5,000 miles away in Eastern DRC, and a series of parallel workshops, including people engaging in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM),ⁱ have also been taking place hosted by Pact's specialist Mines to Markets programme. The aims being to better understand the challenges and perspectives on the issue along mineral supply chains, provide training and awareness raising, and to share ideas, spark collaboration and identify actions.

The workshops focused mainly on cobalt, of which ASM in the DRC produces approximately 12-24% of the world's supplyⁱⁱ and employs 60,000-80,000 people directly.ⁱⁱⁱ This metal is a key component of electric car batteries helping to fuel the UK's 'clean energy revolution' and innovation drive to become a world leader in cutting-edge battery technology spearheaded by the Faraday Battery Challenge.^{iv}

The importance of other metals which originate in smaller amounts from the DRC including tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold (3TG) and are vital to the electronics industry were also discussed, along with the lessons from organisations such as the International Tin Supply Chain Initiative (ITSCI)^v that since 2011 have been addressing modern slavery issues in these supply chains.



What are the ingredients of a responsible mineral supply chain?

The day began with mining companies, traders, downstream industry, associations, development practitioners, academics and representatives from multiple arms of the UK government working through an initial survey to determine their existing understanding of modern slavery and capture what measures they think are needed to address it.

Next, participants broke out into groups to identify the ingredients of a responsible mineral supply chain and share their experiences and challenges with addressing modern slavery. Reporting back to the room five key themes began to emerge:

1. **Transparency, traceability and accountability are needed** by all actors in order to know the origins and labour conditions under which minerals and downstream products are produced, and, as a tool to support wider formalisation efforts and initiatives.
2. **Must understand ASM dynamics and the local context**, these include the incentives and barriers to wider formalisation of the sector, recognition that it is in fact highly organised with varying social, economic, and political drivers, and that the daily reality for many impoverished miners is that they need to provide food and an income for themselves and their dependents.
3. **Working through existing structures and the importance of trust** was also highlighted by many to ensure that initiatives addressing modern slavery are sensitive to local dynamics and build on the existing relationships and human capital where possible.
4. **Recognising the global interconnectedness and circularity of supply chains** is key because the decisions made in the UK can have direct impacts on people's lives in the DRC. For example, a transition away from cobalt use in batteries to other metals due to modern slavery issues can result in thousands of people losing their livelihood, a lost national development opportunity, and could displace the issue to other minerals and geographies.
5. **Partnerships and collaboration at all levels and between all stakeholders** in all parts of the supply chain and related service sectors is needed to share ideas and models, such as that in operation at Mutoshi cobalt mine in Kolwezi,^{vi} and to work together to address the modern slavery issue.

'You give us the answers; we go away and help you implement them'

Leading by example, Sophia Willitts-King had announced earlier in the morning that the government will, for the first time ever, also publish a modern slavery statement – required by every UK company with a turnover of £36 million or more – setting out how they are working to identify and prevent exploitation in their own supply chains. But what challenges are the government, like companies, likely to face, how far back should they trace their supply chains, and to what extent should the mining of raw minerals and materials be included?

It was during the second part of the day that participants grappled with these questions. Examining key extracts of the 2015 UK Modern Slavery Act, they then mapped at-risk areas for exploitation to occur and possible remediations onto flip chart diagrams. Reporting back to the room again, it was clear much more work and collaboration is needed on these issues and that the Act itself is unclear on definitions, accountability, and enforcement as they relate to mineral supply chains, and, that supportive measures are needed to help companies and ASM communities go beyond a 'tick-box' exercise.

Yet, far from suggesting that ASM should simply be removed from mineral supply chains to become compliant with the legislation, there was a very clear consensus from the room that in addressing the issue of modern slavery a genuine market-driven opportunity exists to improve the lives of ASM operators and their communities as well as for national wealth creation.

By working together, continuing the dialogue, empowering the voice of miners in the debate, and building consensus on the issue effective programmes can be co-designed and implemented. This will ensure that the UK can deliver on the credentials of its green energy revolution *and* help realise the development opportunity for DRC and its ASM communities in the process.



For more information

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Pact builds systemic solutions in partnership with local organisations, businesses, and governments that create sustainable and resilient communities where those we serve are heard, capable, and vibrant. On the ground in nearly 40 countries, Pact's integrated adaptive approach is shaping the future of international development.

ⁱ ASM comprises low-tech, labour intensive mineral extraction and processing. It provides a direct livelihood for an estimated 1.5-2 million people in the DRC. Find out more about the sector on Delve, a global database for ASM data: <https://delvedatabase.org/>

ⁱⁱ DRC produces 60% of the world's cobalt, of this 20-40% comes from ASM: Darton Commodities Ltd. 2017. Cobalt Market Review.

ⁱⁱⁱ Direct communication with Service d'Assistance et d'Encadrement de l'Exploitation Minière Artisanale et à Petite Echelle (SAEMAPE).

^{iv} Faraday Battery Challenge. 2019. Faraday Battery Challenge: funded projects to date. UK Research and Innovation, Industrial Strategy.

^v International Tin Supply Chain Initiative: <https://www.itsci.org/>

^{vi} The Mutoshi semi-mechanized, small-scale cobalt mining project in Kolwezi (DRC), a unique responsible sourcing collaboration between concession-holders Chemaf, Trafigura, the cooperative COMIAKOL and Pact, with the support of DRC authorities: <https://www.trafigura.com/>