

1

Ban purchasing from conflict mines and ensure transition to conflict-free mineral production chain profitable for Congolese citizens.

We need to take bold action to remove incentives for leaders of militant groups to exploit both mines and miners in exchange for the profitability of tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold. Human rights violations fueled by the demand for conflict minerals have impacted millions of Congolese, especially those made most vulnerable by existing social and political structures. Sexual violence, in particular, has been used by militant groups as a tactic of restoring certainty to their own lives amidst an economy that has proven itself unable to support the needs of average Congolese citizens. The dependency of one person's economic success and stability on the exploitation of their neighbor represents a flawed economic system. In order to support every person's right to meeting the needs fundamental to sustaining life, we must ban purchasing from conflict mines and ensure a transition to a conflict-free mineral production chain in which Congolese citizens can earn fair wages and enjoy just labor practices. This option, while it seeks to promote social justice and guarantee human rights, will likely require complicated international cooperation as well as the imposition of regulation upon a country whose history is riddled with exploitative colonialism. Some people, communities, and businesses may be disproportionately impacted by this action if it is executed poorly.

Examples of What Could Be Done:

Some Tradeoffs to Consider:

Initiate a global coalition, similar to the Paris Agreement, in which countries ratify an agreement to invest in conflict-free certification for mines while assisting their businesses in transitioning away from purchasing conflict minerals.

This could negatively impact taxpayers, who often bear the burden of costly initiatives at regional, state, national, and global scales.

Require businesses to incorporate costs traditionally externalized (i.e. the costs to society of human rights violations resulting from conflict minerals) into their products, placing the money acquired from increased costs into a global fund to transition supply chains to be conflict-free.

While this would ultimately incentivize businesses to transition to conflict-free sourcing by increasing operational costs associated with continuing to use conflict-minerals, companies would likely try to pass this cost off to consumers and initially prevent those unable to pay higher prices from purchasing products they needed before prices become realigned to reflect the new demand for conflict-free products.

Increase funding for United Nations intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, breaking up militant groups and lessening their control on the mining industry.

This method relies on potentially violent international intervention rather than working to shift market demands, and could reinforce or perpetuate the historical colonialism that has plagued the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Increase support for NGOs leading educational campaigns and small-scale, localized interventions such as community centers for survivors of sexual violence.

While it seeks to support existing organizations who are doing good work, this option may further disperse resources and power among multiple efforts rather than a singular, sustained initiative.

2

Invest in managerial infrastructure and auditing for conflict-free certification.

We need to improve the economic conditions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to support stable and comfortable futures for communities. Companies and institutions have a responsibility to provide the systems needed to begin and sustain long-term economic development. If we fail to identify economic justifications for innovating our industries and supporting sustainable economic development for Congolese communities, it is likely that businesses, institutions, and corporations may never willingly support a transition to conflict-free mineral products.

Examples of What Could Be Done:

Some Tradeoffs to Consider:

<p>Contract a third-party auditing service to conduct formal inspections of all mines in the Congo, rating each mine based on ethical working conditions, independence from militant control, etc.</p>	<p>Third-party services can be expensive, and may require difficult international cooperation to select an auditing service that all involved countries can trust.</p>
<p>Increase the security of present and future livelihoods for Congolese communities by making microfinance opportunities more accessible and helping community members to diversify the economy by beginning start-ups in industries other than mining.</p>	<p>With limited funds, microfinance opportunities cannot be made available to everyone. Additionally, these opportunities may fund projects with varying degrees of success or applicability for Congolese communities.</p>
<p>Investing in leadership, managerial, and crisis prevention trainings for local business owners to increase the success and profitability of alternative industries besides mining.</p>	<p>Providing trainings could quickly become costly, and may require multiple iterations to ensure that small businesses do not fail. With mining being such a lucrative industry, moving towards less profitable industries such as agriculture or textile work may be less attractive for community members hoping to improve their quality of life.</p>
<p>Lead innovation campaigns to design new versions of products we need (cell phones, laptops, medical technologies) that require less minerals to create.</p>	<p>By creating new products, we feed into planned obsolescence - this means that social demand for newer products causes people to put products that are in perfect working order into the waste stream in favor of a newer model (think of the iPhone 6 vs. the iPhone 7). Additionally, when technology increases the efficiency with which a resource is used, consumption and demand of this resource may also increase.</p>

3

Enact legislation that minimizes the impact of the mining process on ecological and human health.

The mining of tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold occurring around the world is having a devastating impact on ecological and human health. Mining these minerals requires digging in streams (leading to soil erosion and water contamination), cutting down forested lands (removing necessary habitat for endangered species), and exposes miners to toxins associated with extracting these minerals. Furthermore, mining is a labor-intensive job that puts extreme strain on the human body. There are many cases of child labor in the mines, with under 18-year-olds accounting for about 40% of all workers in some mines at any given time. Children and adults alike work without breaks or basic protection from accidents, resulting in physical injury. Additionally, sexual violence is used as a tactic and bargaining tool for mine operators, which can result in physical and mental health trauma. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has recently passed legislation which strengthens the regulations regarding environmental degradation, specifically with mining companies. This legislation requires new standards for the conditions under which mining may occur. However, there is no current legislation that protects the planet or people from mining impacts, only laws that make companies consider the damage they will inflict upon the planet and communities.

Examples of What Could Be Done:

Some Tradeoffs to Consider:

<p>Strengthen current environmental laws so that assessment leads to the implementation and enforcement of sustainable mining practices.</p>	<p>Revising legislation can be a drawn-out process that can take a lot of effort to achieve a small amount of meaningful change. Bureaucratic resistance is typically at play, and those with wealth and power to influence the decision-making process often oppose a departure from the status quo.</p>
<p>Create or reform an agency to make sure that environmental and social assessments by mining companies are thorough and complete, leaving out no impacts and making the most sound decisions in accordance to those impacts.</p>	<p>Creating agencies, whether governmental or third-party, can be a difficult and expensive task. Finding the funds and the right people for the job could possibly take more effort than what the outcomes are worth, especially because an additional agency might contribute to bureaucratic stagnancy.</p>
<p>Enact labor laws that provide adequate health care and safer conditions for miners. Laws will provide enforcement that ensures mining companies are living up to international human rights standards. These laws will create preventative measures for accidents as well as sanitary standards under which mines must be operated under.</p>	<p>Getting governmental leaders to care about the conditions in which people are working under might be a difficult task, since they have been aware of conditions for quite some time. Legislation can be difficult to pass without consent from those with influence, and the influential members of the mining supply chain will likely put for every effort to disable workers from receiving fair conditions.</p>
<p>Create a health center for victims of physical overexertion, violence, and sexual violence. This center will help the victims of this oppression recover, both mentally and physically.</p>	<p>Since the violence and oppression that citizens of the DRC face is both physical and mental, militant leaders and government officials will not want to give up their control over the citizens by providing them with resources that will empower their victims. Opposition will make creating such a center nearly impossible.</p>