



Analysis of wage disparities in two large companies in the copper-cobalt sector in the DRC.

1. Introduction

- Background and rationale

The DRC has one of the largest mining potentials in the world, the exploitation of which has gradually become more structured. These resources attract many investments related to modern technologies and the energy transition, thus strengthening the responsibility of the industries involved. Their framework is mainly based on the [Mining Code](#) and its implementing measures, which are based on the Constitution. But also other commitments made by the DRC or by their parent companies at the international level.

These extractive activities represent one of the main drivers of economic growth in the DRC, both in terms of their contribution to gross domestic product and the formal jobs they generate.

However, behind this economic dynamic lies a strong disparity in the distribution of the wage bill between national and expatriate employees. This wage inequality is further accentuated when analyzed from a gender perspective. Women remain underrepresented and are mostly concentrated in administrative or support positions, most of which are less well paid.

Moreover, this disparity is more pronounced among Congolese women, who have a double disadvantage related to their status as local workers and their gender, compared to expatriate women benefiting from more favourable contractual conditions.

The contribution of the extractive sector to employment in the DRC fell from 167,720 positions in 2021 to 102,240 positions in 2023, a decrease of 65,480 jobs, corresponding to a significant reduction in the absorption capacity of the workforce in these industries, according to figures reported to [the EITI-DRC in its 2023 report](#).

To date, the extractive sector has [about a hundred industrial mining companies](#) in the copper-cobalt sector, contributing to the creation of about 101,064 jobs in



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2023. Among them, Tenke Fungurume Mining (TFM) which generated 20,049 jobs, while Kamoto Copper Company (KCC) created only 6,499.

Thanks to this contribution and a production of 2,842,021 tonnes of copper in 2023, increased to 3.3 million tonnes in 2024, representing about 14% of global production, the DRC is ranked as the world's second largest producer of copper. In the same year, with a production of more than 140,000 tonnes of cobalt, or more than 70% of the world's supply, it positioned itself as the world's leading producer of cobalt.

Companies such as TFM and KCC together represent a production of 486,697 or 17.12% tonnes of copper and 49,192 or 35.14% tonnes of cobalt at the national level and contribute significantly to the DRC's positioning on an international scale.

TFM alone produced 280,297 or 10% tons of copper and 21,592 or 15% tons of cobalt, while KCC recorded a production of 206,400 or 7% tons of copper and 27,600 or 20% tons of cobalt, making these two companies major and strategic players in the copper and cobalt sector, both in the DRC and globally in 2023.

Of the 101,064 employees who make up the human resources sector in the industrial mining sector, only 5,094 are women (5.04 per cent), of whom 4,716 are Congolese and 493 are expatriates. This reality illustrates a persistent under-representation of women and highlights the structural inequalities they suffer, in particular due to their very low salaries and their local origins.

These human resources are the central pillar of the sector and ensure responsible and equitable management, while contributing to the increase in the income of local communities through the jobs created.

The industrial mining sector accounts for 20% of GDP and generates nearly a third of the State's revenue in the national economy. However, although women make up about 13% of the sector's workforce, their economic contribution amounts to only 2.6% of GDP.

Women's wages, included in their contribution to GDP, are on average 77% lower than men's, and close to or more than 80% in the private sector, according to the [World Bank](#). These differences, which are particularly marked in the private



sector, are added to the gaps between local and expatriate workers, revealing a double disparity linked to gender and professional status.

- **Objective**

In this context, AWRN aims in this analysis to compare the annual wage bill between local and expatriate workers of two major copper and cobalt companies in the DRC. In addition, this analysis not only highlights persistent inequalities, but also identifies levers that can promote greater pay equity, both between nationals and expatriates and between men and women.

- **Methodology**

Data on the wage bill in the mining industries in the DRC remain confidential and inaccessible to civil society. As AWRN did not conduct the field research to obtain the number of women, it had to interview remotely anonymously with only 3 women, including 2 from the companies that appear as examples in this analysis and one from a subcontractor called SRK Consulting collaborating with these industries.

In parallel, AWRN also relied on the reports of the EITI-DRC 2020-2023, [Human Rights Due Diligence, HRDD](#), the [World Bank](#), [the NGOs RAID&CAJJ](#), articles and related publications, in particular those on the [DRC: mining employees trapped by a low-wage system \(RAID\)](#) and the [DRC-mining sector: between Congolese and expatriates, one grade, two salaries](#) denouncing the wage disparity between employees (local and foreign) of mining companies in the DRC.

2. Payroll Benchmarking:

a) Between national and expatriate executives;

In Lualaba Province, the living wage was estimated at a minimum of USD 402 in the report by the [NGOs Raid and Cajj](#). In this report, research conducted by these NGOs showed that the majority of workers hired directly by companies such as KCC and TFM receive a salary above this threshold.

However, a significant portion of [the mining workforce in the DRC](#) is employed through subcontracting, estimated at between 57% and 70% at several large sites. Of these outsourced workers, more than 63% earn less than the living wage, leaving them unable to cover their basic needs as well as those of their families.

On the other hand, the same report reveals that, in some mining companies, the monthly salary of directly employed workers remains below the estimated living



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wage of USD 402 in the province and stands at USD 355, unlike that of expatriates. This situation is even more pronounced for workers recruited by subcontractors, whose monthly salary reaches more or less USD 330.10, as is the case for the company TFM, which grants a monthly salary of USD 332.10 to subcontracted manual workers and apprentices.

This unequal treatment of local employees is even more marked for women, because of their gender and the functions assigned to them, and is contrary to the Congolese Labour Code, in its article 86, which stipulates that workers in the same company must receive equal pay for equal work, regardless of age, gender, ethnic or national origin.

Indeed, expatriate senior managers in several mining companies earn significantly more than national executives for equivalent functions; despite their lower numbers, these foreigners capture a higher share of the wage bill thanks to higher salaries and benefits, thus revealing [a structural wage inequality](#) based on nationality.

For example, TFM, whose internal policy provides for a monthly salary of about USD 13,194 for a local senior manager, without benefits, while an expatriate in an equivalent position receives a slightly higher salary than the local and estimated at about USD 15,176, including accommodation, transport, insurance and various bonuses. This data, taken from the 2023 EITI-DRC report, highlights internal inequalities within the company.

In addition, TFM's managers, in one of their internal reports on the [Human Rights Due Diligence \(HRDD\)](#), acknowledged the existence of perceptions of discrimination between Congolese and expatriate employees, mainly related to differences in salaries, benefits and working conditions, which would be at the root of serious tensions within the company.

At KCC, on the other hand, internal policy provides for an annual salary package of USD 22,852,719 for the same grade for 176 Congolese senior executives. This equates to an average salary of around \$10,820 per month. At the same time, the same company provides an envelope of USD 2,347,399 for its three expatriate senior executives. According to this data, their monthly salary is US\$65,202, six times more than what a Congolese senior executive earns. This does not include other social benefits such as housing, catering, recreational circle.

In addition, for 140 expatriate senior and middle technicians, the company expects an annual payroll of USD 31,806,996.04, or an average monthly salary of USD



18,932.74, which is 4 times more than their local counterparts in the same position, who receive only USD 4,686.5 per month.

KCC is not the only company to enforce this policy. Other companies that are part of the Glencore group, such as KCC, also adopt a similar salary policy.

These disparities are observed at all levels in the majority of mining industries in the DRC and unfortunately, the data published by [the EITI-DRC in its 2023 report](#) prove that expatriates earn 4 to 6 times more than local executives and 70 to 100 times more than Congolese labourers, which constitutes a loss of income for the Congolese state and does not promote the increase in income in local communities.

b) Between the national executives and the manoeuvred.

[At KCC](#) , for example, the analysis of salaries reveals very large differences between professional categories. The 176 senior managers receive a salary of about USD 10,820 per month, which is 2.3 times more than the senior technicians; 5.3 times more than technicians and skilled workers, and 7.5 times more than workers and apprentices.

The company provides its 930 senior and middle technicians with a monthly salary of about US\$4,686.5, while these 4,856 technicians and skilled workers, who make up the bulk of the operational workforce, earn US\$2,053.5 per month, significantly lower than the upper categories despite their central role in production. In addition, these 126 workers and apprentices are at the bottom of the salary scale, with a monthly income of about USD 1,451.

However, at TFM, these wage inequalities are particularly marked at the level of operators, especially drivers. A driver employed directly by TFM would receive about USD 1,300 per month, while a driver doing the same work via a subcontractor would receive only USD 580, less than half, according to [the report by the NGOs RAID and CAJJ](#). In addition, national senior managers earn up to 10 times more than directly employed drivers and nearly 23 times more than those employed by subcontractors.

These significant differences generate social tensions, lead to a drop in motivation and affect the cohesion of staff within the company.

In summary, the salary structures of KCC and TFM highlight strong inequalities in pay, where national senior managers concentrate the highest incomes, while the technical and manual categories, although in the majority, receive significantly lower salaries. This reality was confirmed during our interview with one of the



employees, who requested anonymity.

3. Women's compensation as a percentage (%).

In mining companies in the DRC, women receive only between 2 and 8% of the annual payroll, while men receive well over 90%. This distribution highlights [the structural wage inequalities](#) that women encounter due to, among other things, their gender, nationality and their under-representation in the best-paid positions.

As observed at KCC, where out of a total workforce of 6,499 employees, representing an annual payroll of USD 241,148,559.41, women are estimated at 268, including 260 Congolese women and 8 expatriates. They benefit from an annual salary share of USD 9,986,183.60, or about 4% of the total wage bill, which also represents 4% of their workforce, according to data reported to the EITI in 2023. This is a significant increase compared to the 2% of their representations revealed in 2022 by [the SARW report](#).

However, the incomes of the 13 female senior executives are lower than those of their male counterparts, who receive US\$10,820 per month, while they receive only US\$9,126.88. Their situation deteriorates even more compared to expatriate women labourers occupying the positions of senior and middle technicians, who receive USD 14,131.14 per month, even though these Congolese senior managers are hierarchically better placed than these expatriates. This situation reveals a wage inequality based on both gender and nationality.

For its part, TFM has 20,069 employees for an annual payroll of 452,270,392,224.28 FC. Of this amount, only 18,321,287,555.80 FC, or about 4% of the annual payroll, is allocated to women, who represent only 3.5% of the staff, or 693 women employed at TFM.

Of these 693 women, only 161 are directly employed (112 Congolese and 49 expatriates), while 532 are contract employees, mostly concentrated in clerical and apprenticeship positions, including 488 local and 44 foreign. According to the testimony of an employee interviewed by AWRN, working for the subcontractor SRK Consulting, Congolese women contract workers, although more numerous, receive salaries of about USD 320 per month, which is lower than the living wage and significantly lower than that of their female expatriate counterparts in the same positions, who enjoy much higher salaries. This wage gap also applies to women employed directly by TFM.

Unfortunately, several mining companies in the DRC condone these inequalities where expatriates earn significantly more than nationals regardless of the position and despite their lower number.



4. Social challenges in the industrial mining sector.

Wage disparities and unequal access to benefits are the main consequences of these inequalities, posing a challenge for women employees in the mining sector, who continue to face these gaps despite their skills and responsibilities.

Mining companies frequently resort to subcontracting to obtain the cheaper labour needed for their operations. However, this recourse sometimes goes beyond the regulatory framework.

This situation contributes to accentuating inequalities of opportunity and sometimes goes against article 41 of the Congolese Labour Code, which provides that temporary contracts may not exceed two years or be renewed more than once. Beyond this period, when the employment relationship continues, a permanent position must be offered to the contract workers. However, in practice, many workers are kept on fixed-term contracts for more than two years, most often through subcontractors, with limited benefits and very low wages.

In addition, this reality has led to the introduction of wage deductions applied to subcontracted workers, further reinforcing their economic precariousness, especially those of women. Although this deduction is not formalized as an explicit deduction, it is carried out systematically through remuneration that is lower than the minimum required and that of directly recruited or even expatriate employees.

For example, the local agents of the mining company TFM, part of CMOC Group Limited, who denounced the repeated exceeding of the legal duration of their fixed-term contracts, precarious working conditions and unjustified wage gaps in [a memo addressed to TFM superiors](#). They are demanding direct integration, fair remuneration and equal treatment for expatriate workers, including foreign trainees whom they have trained themselves and who now receive higher salaries.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, AWNR notes that inequalities in social and wage conditions in the mining industry in the DRC mainly affect local workers, especially women, due to their low positioning within mining companies.

Despite the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution, the lack of operational mechanisms to ensure socio-economic gender equality in the industrial mining sector creates a gap between legal norms and the reality observed on the ground.



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Local workers suffer from wage inequalities compared to expatriates in the same or even lower positions. Women are even more excluded from the functions (technical, operational and decision-making) that concentrate the highest levels of pay. When they are in these positions, they receive lower salaries than their male counterparts, whether local or expatriate, and sometimes even those of female expatriates in lower positions. This further limits their access to a fair share of the industrial mining sector's wage bill.

This disparity towards Congolese women can be likened to a form of economic marginalization, contrary to the spirit and objectives of the Mining Code.

In the face of this, AWNR calls on mining companies, in particular TFM and KCC, to adopt more inclusive internal policies, based on equal treatment, fair access to professional opportunities and pay transparency.

At the same time, AWNR recommends that the Congolese Government strengthen its control system with industrialists, civil society and technical or financial partners to raise awareness among industrialists about the adoption of fairer social working conditions and contribute to the training of local employees, in particular women, whether they are already active or aspiring to join the industrial mining sector in order to: to promote their access to technical, operational and high-level positions. This is an essential condition for the sustainable improvement of their incomes and their economic empowerment within the Congolese economy.

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ABOUT AWNR

African Women for Natural Resources (AWNR) is a non-profit organization committed to social justice related to the exploitation of natural resources aimed at developing Africa and environmental conservation.

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