

UN Panel recognises the issue of transition minerals in its updated Global Resources Outlook

London Mining Network (LMN) initial statement on launch of the International Resource Panel's Global Resources Outlook 2024

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Today, at the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, the International Resource Panel (IRP)¹ has launched an update of its 2019 Global Resources Outlook (GRO) report. While the GRO covers the sustainability of all resource use, the issues of the increasing consumption of minerals and metals looms large in the report, particularly regarding supplying the energy transition from fossil fuels.

Andy Whitmore, Co-Chair of London Mining Network notes "The IRP make a number of key recommendations in the GRO, which include the need for 'decoupling' resource use from improving well-being while boosting economic growth in the Global South. These recommendations mirror calls by LMN, and its partners, that it is essential to consider resource efficiency and supporting policies that can reduce demand for minerals and primary mining, especially in the Global North."

In terms of the scale of recent mining the GRO notes: "The share of metals (metal ores) has grown slightly from 9 per cent to around 10 per cent in 2020. While it is the smallest share of all material categories, it has experienced a more than threefold increase since 1970 (from 2.6 billion to 9.6 billion tonnes) and contributes significantly to global climate impacts (8 per cent) and particulate matter health related impacts (13 per cent) ... while the key role of metals, especially those essential for energy transition technologies, is projected to lead to very high increases in material demand up to 2050"²

The GRO further elaborates on transition minerals in a section called 'worrying trends and new challenges' where it stresses "the scale of current mining conflicts ... [and] ... the

¹ The IRP was established to provide independent, coherent and authoritative scientific assessments on the use of natural resources and their environmental impacts over the full life cycle. The Panel aims to contribute to a better understanding of how to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation while enhancing well-being. Benefiting from the broad support of governments and scientific communities, the Panel is constituted of eminent scientists and experts from all parts of the world, bringing their multidisciplinary expertise to address resource management issues.

² UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p. 12

negative and social impacts of extractive activities”, particularly on indigenous and land-based communities. As a result it calls for “concerted action to decrease material requirements for transitions to renewable energy systems – including by applying sustainable consumption and production, resource efficiency and circular economy strategies.”³

Andy Whitmore notes that “while it is gratifying to see recognition of the impacts of transition minerals highlighted so strongly in the report - and we agree with many of the solutions stated - it is unfortunate that there is no significant exploration of the necessary safeguards, such as free, prior, informed consent (FPIC) for Indigenous Peoples, the Right to Say No for communities or Safety First Guidelines for Responsible Mine Tailings Management.”⁴ The

proposed solution of a Sustainable Development Licence to Operate is not sufficient given the immediate and urgent risks. Also the proposal to add transition minerals into the definitions of sustainable taxonomies could be counter-productive without adequate safeguards.”⁵

The report also highlights concerns around transition minerals which include:

- the high material intensiveness of the potentially huge upscaling of electric vehicles;⁶
- specific problems with mining waste streams, including a rise in emissions and pollution from mining;⁷
- the particular of increases in copper mining which occurs at low grades and thus produces very large quantities of tailings (mine waste);⁸
- the potential impact from captive coal to process metals;⁹

³ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, , p.5 (box 1.3)

⁴ Safety First Guidelines for Responsible Mine Tailings Management - <https://earthworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Safety-First-Safe-Tailings-Management-V2.0-final.pdf>

⁵ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p.121

⁶ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p.11 & 137

⁷ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p.18

⁸ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p.69 (box 3.3)

⁹ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p. 12

- a much needed recommendation on internalising the environmental & social costs of resource extraction.¹⁰

Andy Whitmore concluded “It’s vital that people understand the impact that could result from our increasing demand for minerals and metals, both in general and in relation to the energy transition. We are on a pathway to an unjust transition dominated by a corporate agenda to increase extraction. As such the GRO does a great job of highlighting key concerns and proposing solutions that address the root causes of that increasing demand. Civil society now needs to take up these challenges, with the call of affected communities at the heart of how we can collectively ensure well-being for all on a finite planet.”

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Notes for Editors

The GRO can be downloaded from 1st March at:-
<https://www.resourcepanel.org/reports/global-resources-outlook-2024>

¹⁰ UNEP/EA.6/INF/9 Global Resources Outlook 2024: A report by the International Resource Panel, p.119