

# The Critically African

# NEWSLETTER



- CMAG PARTNERS WITH THE ROYAL AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR A BUISNESS LUNCHEON
   ANALYSIS: SOUTH AFRICA'S CRITICAL MINERALS STRATEGY
   ESG WEBINAR HIGHLIGHTS

# **CMAG updates and highlights**

# Dear Members and Stakeholders,

Welcome to the third edition of the Critical Minerals Africa Newsletter. We are delighted to share with you the latest updates, insights, and developments shaping the critical minerals landscape across Africa and beyond.

This quarter, we had the privilege of attending several key industry events, which provided valuable opportunities to engage with stakeholders, explore emerging trends, and strengthen our collaborations. We are pleased to share highlights from these engagements, along with key takeaways that will shape our strategic outlook moving forward.

A particular milestone was the Critical Minerals Advisory Group's (CMAG) first partnered event with **The Royal African Society** and Sotheby's in Mayfair. Our panel discussion welcomed perspectives from **UK Export Finance, Anglo American,** and a former Executive Director of the **Africa Finance Corporation**. The conversation touched on both the successes and challenges in this fascinating space — more on this within the newsletter!

In the news section, we spotlight recent coverage of CMAG, which continues to play a vital role in shaping policy and fostering investment in Africa's critical minerals sector. We are especially excited to have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Guinea Chamber of Mines, through which we will support efforts to drive inward investment into Guinea's burgeoning mining industry. Guinea currently accounts for over 25% of global bauxite production, making it a critical player in the global aluminium supply chain and a country of growing strategic interest for investors.

Additionally, we are pleased to feature a guest article from our esteemed Advisory Board member, Richard Morgan, who offers expert insights into the evolving landscape and the strategic importance of Africa's resources.

On the geopolitical front, recent developments underscore Africa's growing significance in global critical mineral supply chains. Recently, the United States and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) recorded over \$160 million in bilateral trade, much of it tied to strategic minerals essential for clean energy technologies. High-level engagements at the White House emphasised mutual interests in resource security, sustainable development, and economic cooperation. These initiatives highlight Africa's strategic position as a cornerstone in the global transition to renewable energy and advanced technologies.

As always, CMAG remains committed to providing timely and relevant insights into this dynamic sector. Thank you for your continued support and engagement. We look forward to keeping you informed and inspired as we navigate the critical minerals revolution together.

Lastly, don't forget to sign up for our upcoming events!

Warm regards,

Veronica Bolton Smith Chief Executive Officer

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### **United Kingdom**

# Aperio Intelligence | Critical Minerals: Identifying and Managing Risks in the Supply Chain



The panel explored how geopolitical instability, corruption, indigenous rights, and environmental concerns are shaping mining investment. A key takeaway: rising risk premiums are making it harder for Western firms to advance critical projects for the energy transition.

While this may boost commodity valuations, it also threatens to slow progress and raise costs—posing major challenges for policymakers and investors alike.

# United Kingdom

# The London Mining Indaba



The panel explored the question: "What is critical and why is it critical?" The discussion examined how perceptions of criticality differ across the value chain. Downstream markets often define critical minerals based on supply risk and industrial demand, while producer nations tend to view them through a strategic lens—emphasizing their role in driving development, economic growth, and geopolitical leverage. An important conversation in the context of Africa's role in global supply chains.

# **Celebrating excellence**



We are delighted to share that our CEO, Veronica Bolton Smith, has been awarded the 'International Trade Excellence' award by the African Business Chamber.

This recognition reflects not only Veronica's two decades of dedication to African trade, policy, and development—but also her tireless commitment to reframing Africa's narrative and unlocking opportunity through critical minerals.

From the very beginning, Veronica's vision for CMAG has been clear and unwavering: to ensure that Africa's mineral wealth directly translates into jobs, growth, and long-term economic agency for the continent's people.

## **CMAG** in the News

Africa Legal: June 2025

'Challenging (mis)perceptions and accelerating economic growth'

Feature on Veronica Bolton Smith and CMAG.

# **READ HERE**

Reuters: July 2025

'Guinea bauxite exports up 36% to 99.8 million tons on Chinese demand'

Comments from Dr Theo Acheampong, Head of Markets and Research, CMAG

# **READ HERE**

# Event highlights

# Africa's Critical Mineral Investment Opportunities and Challenges Business Luncheon by Royal African Society and The Critical Minerals Africa Group in partnership with Sotheby's

DATE: 8 JULY 2025 | LOCATION: MAYFAIR, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM



The Royal African Society and The Critical Minerals Africa Group recently hosted a business luncheon where we gathered policymakers, mining industry leaders, and financial institutions to explore Africa's role in the global critical minerals supply chain, highlighting both opportunities and persistent challenges for investors.

# **KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR INVESTORS:**

# 1. Strategic Focus from the UK – UK Export Finance Perspective;

- UK Export Finance (UKEF) is actively supporting bankable projects in Africa that align with the UK Critical Minerals Strategy, prioritising value-added processing over raw exports.
- There is a strong emphasis on credit risk, not just project viability—underscoring the need for scalable, technically sound proposals.
- Investor caution: Overambitious local beneficiation policies in Africa may fall short without proper scale, technical standards, or qualified partners.
- Ethics & ESG: UKEF has declined projects on ethical grounds (e.g. forced labour concerns in solar supply chains), reinforcing the importance of sustainability and compliance.

# 2. Market Trends & Risks - Anglo American;

- Anglo is focusing on copper, iron ore, and other core critical minerals.
- Copper demand is surging—not only for EVs but also for AI and data centres, suggesting an underestimated global supply gap.
- Despite growing demand, smelting capacity is facing profitability issues, particularly in China, where processing fees have dropped below zero.
- Africa, especially the Copperbelt, is central to the supply pipeline, but country and regional risks require strong governance and risk mitigation frameworks.
- Anglo supports global responsible mining standards (via ICMM), but a concern was raised about the lack of genuine African miners in these bodies.

# 3. Mobilising Local Capital – Africa Finance Corporation;

- Blended finance models are essential, combining local and global capital to improve project bankability while maintaining local ownership.
- Africa's renewable energy potential makes it an ideal base for green industrialisation and manufacturing in response to shifting global supply chains.
- The Lobito Corridor is a strategic game-changer for infrastructure, minerals, and agriculture underscoring the importance of local financial institutions and knowledge in project development.

# 4. UK Government Outlook;

- The UK is catching up in the global critical minerals race, aiming to leverage innovation from UK academia and startups.
- A third UK Critical Minerals Strategy is due shortly, designed to align with industrial policy and attract strategic partnerships.

# 5. Democratic Republic of Congo – Audience Contributions:

 Investors were urged to consider communityfocused concession models that link resource extraction to local development and employment.  Sustainable investment in the DRC must be locally embedded, context-specific, and aimed at reversing migration pressures by creating meaningful economic participation.

## **INVESTOR IMPLICATIONS**

- High Opportunity: Africa offers unmatched resource potential, particularly in copper, iron ore, and bauxite, driven by the green transition and Al.
- Complex Risk Landscape: Viable returns depend on navigating political, ethical, and technical hurdles—local partnerships are essential.
- Strategic Timing: Infrastructure initiatives like the Lobito Corridor, upcoming UK policy shifts, and evolving ESG frameworks suggest that now is a critical moment to position capital in Africa's mineral value chains.

For serious investors, Africa is not just a frontier—it is fast becoming a critical pillar of global industrial strategy. But success hinges on aligned interests, ethical integrity, and collaborative capital.



# CMAG View

# Critical Minerals, Fragile Foundations: South Africa's Strategy Can't Skip the Basics

OLIMPIA PILCH, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, CMAG

South Africa's critical minerals endowment is a once-ina-generation opportunity. Platinum group metals, vanadium, manganese, and rare earths place the country in the global spotlight as nations scramble for resources to fuel the green transition. The government's Critical Minerals **Strategy** recognises this potential—framing mineral wealth as the foundation of industrial development and economic transformation.

But strategies are only as good as their implementation. And without addressing infrastructure collapse, power insecurity, and policy misalignment, South Africa risks squandering its moment on the world stage.

# STRATEGY AT A GLANCE: AMBITION MEETS REALITY

The strategy outlines six core pillars:

- Exploration
- · Beneficiation at source
- · Research and development
- · Regional integration
- · Financial instruments
- · Energy security

It's a comprehensive framework, underpinned by values of sustainability, social justice, and **economic equity**—all commendable goals. It links critical minerals to key downstream sectors: **renewables**, **EVs**, **hydrogen**, **and advanced manufacturing**.

Yet, the Strategy says little about how these goals will be achieved—especially in a political economy where corruption, institutional decay, and energy collapse undermine industrial confidence.

# **CRITICAL LIST, STRATEGIC CONFUSION**

South Africa's critical minerals list diverges from global norms. Rather than prioritising supply chain vulnerability, it emphasises domestic economic contribution. This upstream approach leads to the inclusion of:

# CRITICALITY: HIGH

- · Chrome ore
- Coal
- Iron ore
- Manganese
- Platinum

Minerals of significant economic contribution to South Africa's GDP.

# **CRITICALITY: MODERATE TO HIGH**

- Gold
- Palladium
- · Rare Earth Elements
- Rhodium
- Vanadium

Minerals of moderate economic contribution to South Africa's GDP. Minerals of interest to international partners. Rhodium production is tied to PGM extraction, which, if disrupted or discontinued in RSA, would cause significant challenges for defence procurement.

# **CRITICALITY: MODERATE**

- Cobalt
- Copper
- Fluorspar
- Graphite
- Lithium
- Nickel
- Phosphate
- Titanium
- Uranium
- Zirconium

Mainly strategic minerals required for downstream ambitions across renewable technologies, EVs and advanced manufacturing, as well of growing importance to developed economies looking to establish ex-China supply chains.

However, many of these are better defined as strategic minerals—those with developmental potential—rather than critical in the supply-risk sense used by international partners. This mismatch could dilute cooperation opportunities and misguide policy interventions.

# **GEOPOLITICAL PUZZLE: PLAYER OR PAWN?**

South Africa plays a key role in minerals like PGMs, manganese, and vanadium, crucial to Western supply chains. Yet despite historic ties with Europe, China is now South Africa's largest trade partner—and simultaneously, its most direct competitor in mineral beneficiation and component manufacturing.

India, too, while an import partner, poses a growing competitive challenge as it builds its own downstream capabilities.

Bilateral agreements abound:

- **Nigeria:** Joint mining cooperation and geological mapping.
- Chile: Beneficiation and battery value chains.
- Ghana: Capacity building and R&D.
- South Sudan: Critical minerals development.
- UK/EU: Strategic clean-energy minerals partnerships.

Yet partnerships alone cannot substitute for capability. To move from pawn to player, South Africa must deliver on the fundamentals.

# THE BARRIERS ARE BIGGER THAN BUREAUCRACY

- Power Paralysis: No mineral strategy succeeds
  without electricity. Decades of corruption and
  underinvestment have left Eskom synonymous
  with dysfunction. Load shedding is the norm. Even
  hydrogen ambitions—touted to revive PGM
  demand—are hampered by the simple fact that
  hydrogen is a carrier, not a source of energy. No
  reliable, affordable baseload? No hydrogen
  economy.
- Broken Infrastructure: Rail, road, and port networks are deteriorating. Transnet is a bottleneck. Maintenance is delayed, investment lacking. This alone cripples South Africa's ability to move minerals from pit to port—let alone develop domestic manufacturing capacity.

Challenging Market Dynamics: Even if South
Africa could produce battery components or EVs,
the market size is limited. Poor roads, expensive
vehicles, lack of charging infrastructure, and
income inequality dampen regional uptake.
Meanwhile, the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment
Mechanism penalises coal-powered exports, and
Chinese brands dominate Southeast Asia.

# PATHS TO PROSPERITY: A STRATEGY WORTH SAVING

The Critical Minerals Strategy is not misguided—it's ambitious, forward-looking, and grounded in national developmental needs. But it is overly aspirational without accounting for the deeply practical hurdles that lie ahead.

What must come first:

### Infrastructure

- Urgent repairs and upgrades to rail, roads, and ports.
- Long-term planning and investment for efficient mineral logistics.

### **Energy**

- Ramp-up cheap, stable electricity.
- De-politicise and professionalise Eskom and regulatory agencies.

## **Exploration**

- Incentivise exploration across new mineral types.
- Ensure reliable geological data gathering and maintenance through properly funded institutions.

# Governance

- · Clear, investor-friendly regulations.
- · Transparent permitting and land-use processes.
- Real consequences for corruption—especially in SOEs.

# YOU CAN'T BENEFICIATE YOUR WAY OUT OF BAD GOVERNANCE

South Africa has the minerals. It has the world's attention. But what it lacks is execution capacity. Critical minerals strategies don't fail because of poor ideas—they fail because the foundations are rotten.

If South Africa wants to be more than a **source of rocks**, it must invest in the **infrastructure**, **institutions**, **and incentives** that turn resources into real value. Otherwise, the strategy will remain just that: a document, not a destiny.

# **Announcement**

# CMAG Partners with Africa Briefing to Amplify African Voices in the Energy Transition

# AFRICA BRIEFING News. Analysis. Comment

The Critical Minerals Africa Group (CMAG) is proud to announce a strategic media partnership with Africa Briefing, a leading platform dedicated to African agency in policy, development, and geopolitics.

This collaboration will spotlight the continent's pivotal role in global critical mineral supply chains through indepth coverage, expert commentary, and thought leadership across Africa Briefing's digital channels, bimonthly magazine, and podcast series.

"This partnership is a natural fit for Africa Briefing," said Publisher Jonathan Offei-Ansah. "CMAG's advocacy resonates with our editorial mission to highlight Africa's leadership in shaping its own future. Together, we will amplify informed perspectives on how critical minerals can drive inclusive development and industrial sovereignty."

Veronica Bolton Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Critical Minerals Africa Group, welcomed the alliance: 'We are thrilled to partner with Africa Briefing Media, a pivotal platform that will amplify our mission to harness Africa's critical minerals for sustainable growth and development. This partnership marks an exciting milestone for CMAG, and we look forward to showcasing Africa's vast mineral potential to a global audience."

CMAG's long-term vision is to accelerate Africa's economic transformation through localisation of value-adding activities and the integration of mineral wealth into national development strategies.

The partnership comes at a critical time as demand for lithium, cobalt, graphite, and rare earth elements soars—positioning Africa as a key actor in shaping a more equitable global energy future.

### **ABOUT AFRICA BRIEFING**

AfricaBriefing is a bi-monthly magazine designed to provide news and information on Africa to Africans at home and abroad, and the wider global audience that has a committed interest in the continent's political, economic and social developments.

Set up by a group of UK-based African journalists with a combined total of nearly 95 years' experience, AfricaBriefing aims to provide accurate, unbiased and authoritative news and analysis as well as trenchant opinion pieces on political, economic and social developments in Africa.

With a network of seasoned correspondents across Africa and the major European, American and Asian cities, AfricaBriefing will have a commitment to publish news content that will serve as a source of record and information for all manner of readers including government officials, business leaders and academic institutions.

**Learn More** 

# INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PARTNER?

CMAG actively partners with like-minded institutions and businesses that are committed to supporting Africa's development.

Our partnerships include:

- · Media partners
- · Event partners
- Strategic partners

To find out more contact us at info@cmagafrica.com

# ESG: A Must or a Barrier to Developing Critical Minerals Projects Across Sub-Saharan Africa?



## THEMES AND KEY INSIGHTS

# ESG as Strategic Imperative:

Participants unanimously agreed that ESG is no longer optional—it's a non-negotiable foundation for securing capital, managing risk, and accessing global markets. Far from being a barrier, ESG is increasingly seen as a competitive differentiator. Buyers and investors now demand demonstrable standards to avoid reputational and operational exposure.

# Standards and Flexibility:

While global frameworks are evolving, participants highlighted the need for ESG approaches that adapt to local realities. What works in mature jurisdictions may not suit early-stage projects in Africa. Standards must be both ambitious and flexible—providing room for gradual compliance without sacrificing integrity. Companies need clarity and consistency, but also room to navigate cultural and regulatory differences.

# The Burden of Complexity:

The ESG landscape is fragmented, with multiple overlapping frameworks, legal obligations, and evolving disclosure rules. This creates confusion and resource strain, especially for smaller firms. There's a growing need to streamline reporting and focus on impact rather than bureaucracy. Despite this, companies with strong values and leadership are finding ways to embed ESG effectively—even in highrisk jurisdictions.

As global demand for critical minerals surges, Africa finds itself central to the energy transition. But the question remains: does ESG accelerate or hinder progress? In a recent webinar, experts explored how environmental, social, and governance factors are reshaping the investment and operational landscape for mining across the continent.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

# Moderator:

Richard Morgan – Advisory Board Member, CMAG;
 Former Head of Government Relations, Anglo
 American

# **Welcome Remarks:**

 Veronica Bolton Smith – Chief Executive Officer, CMAG

## **Panellists**

- · Sarah Gordon, Co-Founder & CEO, Satarla
- · Laura Hall, Head of ESG, TechMet Ltd
- Davidzo Muchawaya, Africa Lead, Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA)
- Natasha Buchler, Head of ESG, Aperio Intelligence
- Cecilia Mattea, Europe Lead, Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA)

# ESG as Trust-Building, Not Box-Ticking:

Beyond compliance, ESG must be grounded in purpose and accountability. It's about building trust with stakeholders—local communities, regulators, financiers, and customers. Success hinges on transparent performance, ethical supply chains, and shared value creation. This is especially crucial when operating in fragile governance environments, where trust and social license often matter more than formal permissions.

# **Supply Chain Scrutiny**

Global scrutiny of supply chains is intensifying, particularly in relation to human rights and forced labour. Mining companies and manufacturers alike are under pressure to map and clean up their supply chains, even when visibility is limited. Geopolitical tensions and sourcing risks—especially related to China—further complicate compliance and investor expectations.

### Conclusion

ESG is not an obstacle to African mining—it's the key to unlocking its full potential. But with weak regulatory oversight, limited enforcement capacity, and often outdated legal frameworks, companies operating in Africa must raise the bar themselves. Leadership, not legislation, will determine whether the continent's mineral wealth drives sustainable development—or replicates the mistakes of the past.

# ESG CONCEPTS IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

### **Environmental**

- · Emission reduction
- Preservation of biodiversity
- · Waste management
- · Water management
- · Land rehabilitation
- Monitoring and mitigation of environmental impacts

### **Social**

- Human rights
- · Fair working conditions for employees
- · Community engagement and initiatives
- Health and safety
- Resettlement

### Governance

- Compliance with local and international standards
- · Transparent reporting and ethical conduct
- · Anti-bribery policies
- · Corporate governance frameworks



# Guest article Making the Most of the Critical Minerals Opportunity for Africa

RICHARD MORGAN, ADVISOR, CMAG (FORMERLY AT ANGLO AMERICAN PLC)

I moderated the recent CMAG webinar on "Whether ESG Was a Must or a Barrier for Mining in Africa." The consensus of the panel was very positive. Mining was seen as a definite opportunity for Africa, and ESG was considered the key to delivering it. But it is worth looking into the wider context, because mining is a difficult industry, and for various reasons, many prospects never actually turn into mines.

# What is ESG?

The panel discussion took us through a definition of ESG. At root, ESG is quite simple - it means taking full account of the impact of mining activity on people and planet. It should therefore never be just an add-on or a tick-box measure. In fact, the current backlash against ESG - in the US in particular - is linked to the misperception that it is merely window-dressing or a distraction from the business of doing business. In mining, especially, ESG needs to be integral to the project from the very beginning – starting before the first exploration hole is drilled and lasting through to after the mine is actually closed. It means that the mine is emotionally and beneficially co-owned with the host community and government. What could therefore be seen as "the ESG elements" are not dependent on separate external funding but are priced into the mine plan. I remember a former CEO quantifying this sort of supportive community relationship as worth 30% of the mine's operating value.

# The Challenge for Companies

Whatever the view of the CEO, there is the short-termist view of the markets to contend with. Investors tend to want returns now, not in the future. Mining requires a very high level of upfront capital (typically some \$6–8 billion for a major mine) and a very long timescale (some 15 years from discovery to "first ore on ship"). Big tech firms have none of those start-up costs and are more attractive to investors as a result. So mining companies have to be relatively careful investors themselves. This has not always been their reputation, but they are in a difficult position. If they want to build their future pipeline and generate growth, they have to take risks in an uncertain environment.

# The Price of Copper

Copper is a good indicator. It has sold for about \$4,000–6,000 per tonne for most of the past 10 years. It has increased recently due to Trump tariff threats, but in general there is little to suggest that the markets are pricing in the 30% supply shortfall that the IAEA and others predict by 2035. So where does the capital come from to build the new copper mines that need to start now (or indeed should have started some years ago already) if we are to provide the extra copper to meet the future gap? Very few mining companies have deep enough pockets to take on the financial risk entirely on their own.

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# **China vs. the West: The ESG Opportunity?**

The West has not had to worry very much until now because China has done most of the heavy lifting for the world's mineral supply chain. China invests in mines in Africa where Western companies have found it difficult (e.g. the DRC) and takes on processing of just about everything – often in pragmatic ways that have not put them at the top of the ESG list. But a) Chinese ESG practice is improving, and b) we are now entering a period of geopolitics that seeks to establish an alternative, sustainable supply chain that is less Chinadependent and more in line with a rights-based 21stcentury perspective. Hence, in both scenarios, there is an uptick for more comprehensive ESG. Western governments and multinational bodies like the EU or the Minerals Security Partnership are trying to articulate their versions through their various critical mineral strategies, but they offer relatively little capital in support and tend to under-consult the mining industry that has to deliver them.

# **The African Opportunity**

Africa has the minerals – including copper – has potential for fresh exploration, and increasingly has governments prepared to work on longer-term, win-win mining plans. This should help bring in external "patient investor" capital. To support this at the producer end, we need to help establish reliable political, fiscal, and physical infrastructure, matched with realistic host government expectations on in-country beneficiation. At the consumer end, we need to establish more value for accountably ESG-sourced product, building on existing schemes like the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) that can verify that planet and people are being respected.



# **Getting the Politics Right**

As a government relations person, I generally have to make the argument that politics is the crucial determining factor in project risk. Geology, engineering, logistics, and even finance are based on facts and logic. Politics sometimes is not. It can be emotional and even go against what appears to be its own wider national interest. So companies need to engage with a wide body of involved parties in a way that earns their long-term trust. As one of our CMAG panel defined it, that rests on competence, integrity, and inclusion. There are multi-stakeholder bodies that are trying to put a wider structure on this, such as the EITI (the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative). We should help give them more traction.

Not all African countries are in the right place to be a proactive partner on this, but others are — and it will be the job of CMAG and other likeminded stakeholders to make sure we reinforce this positive consensus. The wider geopolitical world may be uncertain and war-afflicted at present, but the right response for business, growth, and the UN SDGs in the mining sector in Africa is to deliver well-founded, workable local solutions based on shared values. The world needs minerals, needs them delivered fairly, and needs to include Africa.

# **Events**

# **Partner Events**



In-person

**Fastmarkets: European Battery Raw Materials** 

Conference 2025
16-18 September 2025
Lisbon, Portugal
REGISTER HERE



In-person
Africa Mining Week

1-3 October 2025 Cape Town, South Africa REGISTER HERE



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Investing in Africa
14-15 October 2025
London, UK
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In-person
Resourcing Tomorrow
2-4 December 2025
London, UK
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Interested in collaborating with CMAG, finding out about membership, interviewing one of our experts, or featuring your opinion in the next newsletter?

Send us an email at info@cmagafrica.com

We look forward to hearing from you!

