

Tanzania partners with DRC to process cobalt



A man carries a bag of copper at a mine quarry and cobalt pit in Lubumbashi on May 23, 2016. PHOTO | JUNIOR KANNAH | AFP

The Democratic Republic of Congo is looking to establish a smelter in Tanzania to minimise transport costs of raw cobalt shipped to markets outside Africa.

Under the arrangement, the Congolese government will use smelters and other mineral processing plants in Tanzania to process its raw cobalt for export.

Tanzania's Minister for Minerals Angela Kairuki said recently that the country is developing mineral and mineral conglomerate plants to process its raw minerals that the DRC can use.

“We are negotiating with the DRC to process cobalt and other minerals in Tanzania as an option to reduce transport costs of raw minerals to markets overseas,” Ms Kairuki said.

The DRC produces over 70 per cent of the world's cobalt, but lacks the electricity and key facilities to process it.

“Tanzania and the DRC are looking at key alternatives that would allow us to share mining and mineral expertise and supervision of the mining industry,” Ms Kairuki added.

Regulatory systems

DRC Minister for Mines Martin Kabwelulu and other officials from the ministry were in Tanzania last week on a fact-finding mission.

“We need to forge a joint strategy that will see us really benefit from the mining sector,” he said.

Mr Kabwelulu said that the DRC would send its minerals and mining experts to study at the Mineral Resources Institute in Tanzania to learn about production methods through the cadaster model, as well as to improve regulatory systems to monitor smuggling chains.

The amended DRC Mining Act requires investors to be more responsible, pay higher royalties of 10 per cent, up from two per cent, and to ensure mining pits are filled in as soon as activities end, he added.

Leading in copper and cobalt production in Africa, the DRC had banned the export of unpolished or raw copper and cobalt about four years ago to encourage local industry to shift production to higher-value finished metals.

However, due to lack of electricity to process the minerals domestically, the government relaxed the ban of copper and cobalt concentrate exports. About 30 per cent of the metals continue to be exported in concentrate form.