

# Unlocking DRC's mining potential through global standards adoption

A leading producer of copper and cobalt, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is also seeing exploration interest in commodities such as gold and lithium.



Source: © AVZ Minerals [AVZ Minerals](#) As the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) works towards leveraging its mining sector for broader economic upliftment, it will need to support the raising of standards across a wide range of mining disciplines. Pictured: The Manono-Kitotolo lithium project in the DRC

For instance, the Manono-Kitotolo lithium project is reported to contain 120 million tons of lithium ore at a grade of 0,6%. Production from this source could reach 720,000 tons of lithium, and there are also tailings from historical tin mining at Manono that could augment this figure.

But as the DRC works towards leveraging its mining sector for broader economic upliftment, it will need to support the raising of standards across a wide range of mining disciplines.

## Global standards

This is clear from the themes of sustainability, transformation and attracting global investment, which are prominent in the upcoming DRC Mining Week in Lubumbashi in June, according to Dominique Sambwa, chairman of SRK Consulting Congo.

“Recent development and investment in cities like Lubumbashi and Kolwezi show that mining is already having a significant impact on DRC’s economy, infrastructure and future.

“To maintain its positive momentum, the mining sector needs to adopt and apply international standards – underpin its operational resilience while also making it more attractive to investors and financial institutions says Sambwa.

Since we established an SRK Consulting practice in the DRC 15 years ago, we have seen a growing trend towards embracing higher standards in the mining sector,” adds Wouter Jordaan, partner and principal environmental consultant at SRK Consulting South Africa – also a director of SRK Congo.

“We have been proud to contribute by applying global standards through our work in the country, including exploration, resource estimation, mine planning, environmental permitting and social engagement.”

He noted that the adoption of geological codes helped to ensure accurate and reliable resource and reserve estimations for companies’ mineral assets in the DRC.

This benefited investors by building confidence in the local business environment and also assisted other stakeholders like government departments responsible for regulating and taxing the minerals sector.

He highlights that the company’s local team of professionals, working with their SRK colleagues in practice around the world, were able to provide a range of technical and strategic skills on the ground, while also nurturing younger professionals in the consulting field.

## **Compliance requirements for responsible mining**

Vis Reddy, chairman of SRK Consulting South Africa, pointed out that international financial institutions have been among the key players introducing compliance requirements for responsible mining.

“Organisations like these place scrutiny on the policies and practices of mining companies in the DRC who are looking for financing for their projects,” says Reddy.

“For instance, they place greater focus on the ESG aspects of mining, and how companies were addressing these impacts.”

All these factors have been positive influences on the evolution of mining in the DRC, he says, but these requirements and goals also needed to be driven by experienced scientists and engineers who could turn the theory into practice.

“SRK has been able to contribute our experience from the mining sector elsewhere in Africa and beyond, well as learning from our depth of local knowledge in the DRC,” says Reddy.

“Understanding best practice in various mining-related disciplines also allows us to assist clients to meet global standards, so that they are better placed to meet changing legal requirements in countries like the DRC.”

## **Social impact**

A key area of regulatory evolution in the DRC has been in the field of social impact, according to Jordaan. This has required innovations in areas such as exploration, tailings management, social development initiatives and mine closure.

“It is well accepted globally that the benefits of mining should be actively leveraged to uplift and diversify the host economy,” he says.

“This is an approach taken by governments and the leading international mining bodies such as the International Council on Mining and Minerals.”

He notes that the effective implementation of this imperative can only be achieved when progress is built on consistent quality and high standards, ensuring the viability and longevity of the mining projects that generate

and share value with their supply chain and other stakeholders.

“This dedication to high standards applies to all aspects of mining, and even beyond mining to the many industrial and commercial developments that spring up as a result of mineral development,” Jordaan explains.

“Fields such as infrastructure development, waste management and water stewardship are all essential to growing economy, creating an ecosystem for wide-spread economic and social development.”

## **DRC-China-SA collaboration**

With the growing presence of many China-based mining companies in the DRC, a collaboration initiative was launched between SRK Consulting teams in China, the DRC and South Africa in 2022.

According to Frank Li, director and principal geologist in SRK Consulting’s Beijing practice, this cooperation has been successful in assisting Chinese clients to meet their compliance requirements in terms of both local legislation and global standards.

Li, who travels regularly between Beijing, Lubumbashi and Johannesburg as part of this collaboration, notes that SRK’s role in the DRC has expanded well beyond its technical services and into international standard compliance.

“Clients are generally committed to compliance, but the process can be slow and confusing due to its complexity.

“Many of our clients have financiers who require compliance with one standard, while their supply chain might prefer another,” says Li.

The collaboration between SRK practices also contributed to insights regarding decarbonisation, which many mining companies were pursuing as a strategic imperative.

Li said that electric haul trucks, for instance, were already being used in fixed-route applications at harbours around China – with a simple battery-exchange process.

“As consultants, we continuously monitor these pioneering technologies and ensure that our mining clients know what is available – in case one or more of these could be relevant to their needs,” says Li.