

ECOWAS

Harmonizing Governance and Transparency in Mineral Value Chains across ECOWAS

Target Audience: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)



01 / CONTEXT

BACKGROUND

The Equity in Extraction Conference emphasized that the rapid rise in global demand for critical minerals presents both strategic opportunities and serious risks for West Africa. Fragmented national regulatory regimes, weak environmental and social safeguards, limited transparency, and illicit financial flows undermine the region's ability to retain value, protect communities, and negotiate fairer terms in global mineral markets. Participants stressed that without regional coordination and harmonized governance frameworks, West Africa risks reproducing extractive dependency rather than achieving inclusive industrial transformation.

The conference called on ECOWAS to lead the development of a regional minerals and critical elements governance framework that harmonizes baseline standards for environmental protection, licensing, monitoring, revenue transparency, artisanal small-scale mining (ASM) formalization, and conflict-sensitive approaches. Participants recommended establishing regional traceability systems to curb illicit mineral flows, promote responsible supply chains, and strengthen customs cooperation. Moreover, ECOWAS was encouraged to support domestic value addition, skills development, and industrial integration through coordinated regional policies and investment frameworks.

POLICY FOCUS

This policy brief presents priority actions for ECOWAS, drawn directly from the conference outcomes and communiqué, to strengthen regional governance, enhance transparency, prevent illicit financial flows (IFFs), and promote equitable and sustainable mineral development across West Africa.

The conference highlighted that regional cooperation is essential to securing equitable, transparent, and sustainable mineral governance in West Africa.

02 / EVIDENCE

Key Findings

The conference highlighted that:

- 01** Fragmented national mineral governance regimes weaken regional bargaining power and policy coherence.
- 02** IFFs, smuggling, and weak traceability systems undermine revenue mobilization and accountability.
- 03** Environmental and social standards vary widely across countries, enabling regulatory arbitrage.
- 04** Weak regional coordination limits domestic value addition and industrial upgrading.
- 05** Rising demand for critical minerals increases pressure on ecosystems and vulnerable communities without harmonized safeguards.

03 / ACTION

Policy Recommendations

The Conference urged ECOWAS to:

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- 01** Develop a regional minerals and critical elements governance framework for member states
 - 02** Strengthen transparency, traceability, and accountability in the minerals value chains to prevent IFFs and improve domestic revenue mobilization.
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- 03** Support environmental protection and climate-smart mining
 - 04** Promote regional value addition, skills development, and industrial integration
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- 05** Embed climate resilience and community protection in extractive governance frameworks

Conclusion

The conference highlighted that regional cooperation is essential to securing equitable, transparent, and sustainable mineral governance in West Africa. ECOWAS is urged to act decisively to harmonize governance standards, strengthen accountability, and promote value-added industrial transformation across the region.