

Governing conflict minerals in Eastern Congo

Summary/Zusammenfassung

Broadly, this project contributes to the debate about the relationship between transnational governance, natural resources and armed conflict in the global South – a question which, over the last three decades, has raised considerable attention both in the social sciences and in international policy. Its more specific objective has been to deepen critical knowledge about the relationship between (transnational) resource governance and political violence, with a specific focus on the African Great Lakes region and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

A cross-cutting theme in this research project lies in the nexus of transnational regulation of 'conflict minerals' and their impact on the negotiation of local economic institutions. Thus, it contributes not just to the growing interest in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) but also to a deeper understanding of how economic markets are shaped in a complex interplay of transnational intervention, economic agency, political violence, and social networks.

A first aspect of research concerns the way mineral markets are actively made and unmade within cyclical waves of (dis)articulation and (en)closure that characterise capitalist expansion in so-called resource frontiers. This highlights the ways in which capital, labour, and political power flow through interconnected prisms of mineral extraction and mobile regulatory frameworks in a space that is actively modelled by brokers of economic wealth.

A second aspect concerns the idea of public authority as ability 'to define and enforce collectively binding decisions' (Lund 2006:676). In orthodox political theory, 'authority' refers to the idea of a state enjoying a monopoly on the legitimate means of force over a given territory and population. Using the notion of access, the project investigates an actually very fragmented landscape of public authority across DRC's natural resource markets.

A third aspect is the investigation of a central segment in eastern DRC's mineral supply chains to dissect the actual transformation of regulation along their upstream part, meaning from the mine to the smelter. The project zooms in on the role of commercial intermediaries ('*négociants*'), who – despite being considered the 'turntables' that negotiate access to mineral wealth, navigate uncertain spaces and produce political agency.

A fourth aspect lies in the role of patronage in context of violent conflict. Here, the project researches the functional logics of longstanding political patronage networks, involving customary authorities, politicians, and security providers. A key point of interest is to understand in which ways such networks prevail in eastern DRC's post-'conflict-minerals' era, either in convergence, competition or in parallel to formalised production.

Finally, the analysis of the relationship between formalisation and political legitimacy is considered to generate insights into two questions: how has the formalisation of eastern DRC's resource markets, through traceability and certification, altered the socio-economic dynamics around artisanal mines and trading routes? What is its actual impact on the everyday life of miners and their communities?

Keywords/Suchbegriffe

Mining, DRC, conflict

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Funding source(s) / Unterstützt durch

SNF

Duration of Project / Projektdauer

Sept 2014 to Sept 2018