

Catholic Approaches to Mining: Cases of Impact

The Kibali Gold Mine, Diocese of Isiro-Niangara, Democratic Republic of the Congo

**City of Durba, Kibali chiefdom, Watsa territory, Haut-Uélé Province,
Northeast of Democratic Republic of the Congo**

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Summary

In 2015, the Commission for Natural Resources of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Congo (Commission Episcopale pour les Ressources Naturelles, CERN) and the Dutch-branch of Pax Christi, PAX, published a report on the situation of the Kibali gold mine near the Ugandan border. The report documented many human rights and environmental abuses from the company Kibali Goldmines. Those who organized to demand their rights had been repressed by armed forces leading to some serious incidents. This case study tells the story of how CERN partnered with international organizations to document human rights violations and gathered evidence to support advocacy for improved coexistence and better revenue distribution. It highlights how the publication of the report led to opening a dialogue between the Congolese state, Kibali Goldmine, and local communities. The dialogue led to the company collaborating with civil society to strengthen regulations and increase revenue distribution. The case also emphasises the importance of training local populations on the Mining Code and their rights to ensure mining royalties promote their integral human development.

1. Background

In the DRC, the Catholic Church acts as a watchdog to protect communities from abuses that often come along with mining activities. Observing and documenting human rights violations, advocating for change, and supporting stakeholders to ensure a more equitable distribution of mining revenues: this is the work of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (*Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo*, CENCO) in relation to the social and ecological consequences of mining. This section provides an overview of mining in the DRC and the reasons that led CENCO to respond through advocacy and other actions.

The DRC is endowed with immense deposits of various minerals, some of which are considered “strategic” or “critical”. It holds nearly 50% of the world’s cobalt reserves and is ranked as its leading producer, accounting for 70% of global production (African Green Minerals Observatory, n.d). In 2025, the DRC was the world’s second-largest copper producer, after Chile (Bloomberg News, 2026a). It also has the world’s largest reserves of coltan and is its largest producer, though Rwanda is its main exporter because of illicit trade in eastern DRC, whose proceeds from sales fuel conflict in the region (Global Witness, 2025). The DRC also has lithium reserves. The world’s largest hard-rock lithium mine is currently being built in southern DRC and is operated by the Chinese group Zijin Mining (Bloomberg News, 2026b).

Mining is a key economic sector. In 2023, the African Development Bank (n.d.) estimated that it accounted for 39% of the country’s GDP, 95% of its exports, and 42% of government revenues. The Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI, 2025, p. 17) estimated similar figures for 2023, with an overall contribution to the country’s GDP of 37.9%, totalling 99.57% of its exports, 47.68% of government revenues, and employing 20.39% of the country’s labour force. In terms of production, copper leads with 2,842,022 tonnes extracted in 2023, followed by cobalt (139,838 tonnes), gold (34,524 tonnes), cassiterite (29,239 tonnes), and diamonds (8,308 carats). Copper is estimated to have generated 24,189 million USD in 2023, followed by cobalt (5,057 million), gold (2,367 million), and diamonds (85 million) (EITI, 2025, p. 18).

However, the mining industry faces a number of challenges, such as the government’s failure to regulate the industry effectively, a lack of awareness among the population of their rights, and geopolitical influences. The country’s abundance of natural resources has not translated into better living conditions. 73.5% of the

Congolese population is estimated to live on less than US\$2.15 a day in 2024 (World Bank, n.d.), and 64.5% are estimated to live in multidimensional poverty, that is, lacking health, education, access to water and electricity, and other deprivations (OPHI, 2025).

The most obvious manifestations of this paradox of widespread poverty in the midst of resource wealth are, among others, the lack of decent living conditions for populations living near mining sites, the lack of basic infrastructure, shortcomings in the state's administration of social services, environmental damage, recurring conflicts and wars, and human rights violations. Recent examples of human and environmental rights violations include the collapse in November 2025 of a containment dam of a cobalt mine in Lubumbashi, which flooded three neighbourhoods of the city with millions of cubic meters of toxic water, forcing residents to flee and depriving the population access to clean water (Business and Human Rights, 2025), and the coltan mine collapse in Rubaya, North Kivu, in January 2026, which killed more than 200 people, followed by another collapse in March 2026 which also killed more than 200 people (Mongabay Africa 2026). The mines in the region supply 15% of the world's coltan and are controlled by the Rwanda-backed rebel group M23, which is estimated to profit 800,000 USD a month from coltan trade (Global Witness, 2026).



This situation, of which the Church is both witness and victim, has prompted CENCO to become involved in mining issues. Given its identity and mission, CENCO's actions have consisted mainly of pastoral letters, statements, messages, advocacy, and the involvement of certain episcopal commissions, dioceses, religious congregations, and educational institutions. Among its achievements are case documentation, community support, advocacy, human rights education, and at times, mediation between the state and mining companies.

This case study primarily focuses on the work of CENCO's Episcopal Commission for Natural Resources (*Commission Episcopale pour les Ressources Naturelles*, CERN), which is its twelfth technical commission.¹ Whilst other commissions were already dealing with social and environmental justice issues, such as Caritas Development, Justice and Peace, and Christian Education, CENCO decided in 2007 to establish an ad hoc commission that would be entirely dedicated to natural resources (CENCO, 2007). This decision stemmed from an observation: the paradox of natural resources abundance on the one hand, and widespread poverty and successive wars that have torn the country apart on the other, the main cause of which was natural resources exploitation. The United Nations Group of Experts on the DRC described the wars in the DRC as economic wars or wars of plunder of natural resources (UN Security Council, 2003). The idea to establish CERN was proposed by the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace, on the basis of a series of field investigations which revealed the difficulties faced by women in accessing arable land due to mining and its associated wars. The creation of CERN was also inspired by the work of the Centre for Social Action Studies, a Jesuit social centre in Kinshasa.² CERN has been tasked with gathering all available and reliable information regarding natural resources

¹ CENCO is not the only Church institution working on mining issues in the DRC. A number of religious congregations are also involved such as the Jesuits, the Comboni Missionaries, the Salesians, the Claretians, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and others. Some universities are also involved such as the Catholic University of Bukavu. Given its coordinating role in the country, this case study focuses on CENCO.

² CEPAS coordinated the work of the Civil Society Forum of the DRC in 2007 in its analysis of twelve mining contracts that had been signed by the Congolese government during the transition period 2003-2006. In 2007, the newly elected government commissioned a review of these contracts, and CEPAS's work fed into the work of the commission. See Global Witness (2007) for a discussion of the review process of these mining contracts.

exploitation and making it available to CENCO and organisations at the diocesan level in order to advocate for a fairer exploitation of natural resources, which respects human rights and ecological balance and benefits the people. CERN works on both policy and grassroots levels. At the policy level, the aim is to influence laws and decisions in favour of better governance of natural resources. At the grassroots level, the aim is to educate, inform, and mobilise the population so that they are aware of their rights and obligations. It also works, when appropriate, with local, national, and international civil society organisations, as well as with national and local government, mining companies, and communities through its diocesan representatives. CERN has been funded by sister church organisations, and governments or international institutions through grants.³

To fulfil its mission, CERN has gradually established a structure which encompasses both the national and diocesan levels. At the national level, like other episcopal commissions, CERN is statutorily composed of four bishops and an Executive Secretary who coordinates the staff.⁴ It also includes six member bishops who represent CERN in each of the six ecclesiastical provinces of the DRC.⁵ At the diocesan level, CERN acts as a focal point with a flexible structure, which comprises, where possible, a representative from the Justice and Peace Commission, Caritas, the Commission for Christian Education, and civil society organisations. This diocesan structure was initially called the “Natural Resources Observatory” (*Observatoire des Ressources Naturelles*, ORN), though some dioceses have also come to call it “Diocesan Commission for Natural Resources”.⁶

The mission of the ORNs is to collect field data and document cases, pass on information to CENCO and the CERN Secretariat, support local populations through education and information, mobilise community members, and carry out advocacy at the local level. These relate to the five areas of citizens’ action laid out by CENCO in its “Vade mecum for Congolese citizens on natural resource management” published in 2009, and which remain the structuring guidelines for CENCO’s work today: 1) Awareness-raising and capacity-building; 2) Support and social mobilisation; 3) Monitoring; 4) Participatory action research, documentation and publication; and, 5) Lobbying and advocacy. In the case discussed in the sections below, the CERN Secretariat worked mainly with the ORN of the diocese of Isiro-Niangara and PAX, a church organisation based in the Netherlands. The author of this case study served as CERN Executive Secretary from October 2008 to September 2023, under the leadership of Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, now Archbishop of Kinshasa.⁷

2. The Kibali Gold Mine project

The gold mine in Kibali was acquired in 2009 by Kibali Goldmines from the DRC state-owned company SOKIMO. The Oriental Province in north east DRC, where mining operations were to take place, had been ravaged by

³ Funding organisations include Swiss Fastenopfer, CAFOD, Caritas Luxembourg, Catholic Relief Services, CCFD Terre Solidaire, CIDSE, CORDAID, Development and Peace, Missionary Aid, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Diocese of Stockholm, Franciscans International, Misereor, Bread for Neighbours, PAX, Southern Africa Resource Watch, Secours Catholique, Caritas France, European Union, World Vision, WWF, and the Holy See.

⁴ Staff has varied between two and six depending on funding, and included the posts of Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator, Research and Monitoring Officer, Finance Officer, Communications Officer and Logistics Driver.

⁵ The Catholic Church in the DRC comprises 48 dioceses grouped into six ecclesiastical provinces (archdioceses).

⁶ Staff of these diocesan observatories are volunteers. They may receive allowances for funded projects.

⁷ When assuming the first CERN presidency, Cardinal Ambongo was bishop of Bokungu-Ikela. The second president was Mgr. Sébastien Muyengo, Bishop of Uvira, and the third, current, president is Mgr Libère Pwongo, Bishop of Basankusu. The current CERN Secretary is Jeanne Marie Abanda.



war for more than two decades.⁸ Following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo waged a war that led to the departure of President Mobutu Sese Seko, and to Laurent Désiré Kabila becoming president in May 1997. In August 1998, another war broke out, led by the Congolese Rally for Democracy, supported by Rwanda, and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo. These two rebel groups occupied the eastern provinces of the DRC (North and South Kivu, Maniema, Oriental Province, part of Equateur, and part of Katanga). Rwandan and Ugandan troops clashed in the city of Kisangani in 2002 over control of mining areas. Despite the withdrawal of foreign troops, some armed groups remained active. In the Oriental Province, these included Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army and Thomas Lubanga's group in the Province of Ituri.

The area was difficult to access. The roads had been made impassable by the war, and there was limited access to basic necessities. To secure the mining investment, the state had to deploy soldiers as police forces were not sufficient to provide enough security to prevent a possible resumption of war. This militarised security made rights abuses more likely as their methods were heavy-handed, even with peaceful demonstrators, as will be discussed below. Reports were circulating locally, and beyond that, human rights violations were taking place.

Despite this increased militarisation, Kibali Goldmines brought capital to a region that had long been neglected and improved its economic situation to a certain extent. It is estimated that between 2009 and 2015, the company injected about US\$ 160 million into the local economy through electrification, road infrastructure, housing provision, HIV/malaria prevention, and various community projects (PAX and CERN, 2015). At the time of acquisition in 2009, gold reserves were estimated at 1.5 million ounces. The first gold bar was produced in September 2013. In 2017, the mine produced about 18.7 tonnes of gold (600,000 ounces), generating a profit of US\$ 287.7 million (Fualdes, 2018).

There were, however, a number of challenges, notably the difficult coexistence between industrial and artisanal mining and the resettlement of the population, which some considered unsatisfactory. Statistics on the number of artisanal miners working the area, and of people displaced and resettled, are difficult to compile. This lack of data reflects wider attitudes of neglect of the central and provincial governments towards local populations. The state was not fulfilling its responsibilities in economic and social monitoring, and in basic social services provision. But gold mining progressed nonetheless, with the company providing the infrastructure and services it needed to operate. In 2018, the mine's gold reserves were re-estimated at 8.7 million ounces (Fualdes, 2018). The section below analyses the actions that CENCO has undertaken, via CERN and the Isiro-Niangara ORN, to document human rights violations and gather evidence to support advocacy for improved coexistence between the company and local communities

⁸ The Oriental Province is now divided into four Provinces: Ituri, Tshopo, Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé, where the gold mine is located (in the territories of Watsa and Faradje).

3. Analysis of CENCO/CERN's actions

Documentation

Participatory action research and documentation were CERN's first response to the situation, in collaboration with the Isiro-Niangara ORN and PAX. Initially, ORN provided CERN with information on the situation on the ground using a pre-designed form, which addressed some questions regarding key facts and events. It was in this way that the head of Isiro-Niangara ORN had already reported to CERN an incident on 18 January 2015 which involved a 28-year-old man, Héritier Wembo, thrown by soldiers into a tire fire lit by artisanal miners who protested against being stripped of their quarries by Kibali Goldmines. After spending the night bound in a cell, Wembo was paraded through the streets by soldiers in their pick-up truck to intimidate and deter the local population from demonstrating. The District Administrator retrieved him later that day so he could be admitted to the state hospital in Watsa. As his burns were severe, he was referred to the private hospital in Kibali, where the company treated its workers. But Wembo refused, and he sought treatment instead from traditional medicine. His story became a focal point of CERN's emerging advocacy (see section 3.3). As there were other reports of human rights violations, CERN had been approached by PAX to conduct a joint study of human rights violations, published in 2015 under the title "Kibali the Mining Giant: To remove impurities so that gold be pure" (PAX and CERN 2015).⁹ PAX provided the funding, and CERN contributed its field expertise. The study's aim was to help put an end to human rights violations, enable peaceful coexistence between the company and local communities, and ensure that they benefited from mining operations. Before its publication, its findings were discussed in Kinshasa by Kibali Goldmines' managing director and CERN's Executive Secretary.

Research on its own, however, is not sufficient. It must be followed by advocacy so as to change the situation, and change depends on the actors who hold decision-making power or influence at various levels. These include company managers, state officials, investors, citizens of the countries where mining companies are registered, international regulatory bodies, and mining-affected communities themselves. One important learning point was careful consideration of the risks of publishing the research findings. In this case, it was critical to discuss these with Kibali Goldmines before publication. The study's provocative title could have affected the company's share price on the Toronto or New York stock exchanges. To mitigate this risk, a decision was taken to facilitate direct and peaceful communication between the company and the community before publication in order to capitalise on the company's "openness to dialogue with the community" to rebuild its image and work on its social licence.

After the publication of the research, work was needed to ensure its acceptance by the targeted company, affected communities, national and provincial governments, as well as the local administration and the army, which was the main party accused of rights violations. Throughout this process, the Church's image and credibility had to be preserved by ensuring the scientific and ethical rigour of the research and appropriate dissemination of its findings. This is why a decision was taken to launch the report in the town of Durba, where mining activities took place and human rights violations had been committed. This strategy had both advantages and risks. On the one hand, presenting the research to a wide audience, and bringing to light what the victims of human rights violations were unable to express due to a lack of resources, offered some consolation to the communities and hope for improving the situation. On the other hand, exposing and reminding people of the harms they experienced could be rubbing salt into the wound. This was what the company feared for the security

⁹ The French original, "Géant minier Kibali. Ôter les impuretés pour que l'or soit pur" plays with the image of "pure gold" and the figurative "impurities" of human rights violations as a consequence of gold mining.

of its investments. To avoid any mishaps, psychological preparation meetings were organised the day before the launch. The CERN-PAX team held working sessions with the Administrator of the Watsa territory, local civil society organisations, the Bishop of Isiro-Niangara, and the management of Kibali on site in Durba. The most sensitive issue was the case of Hérítier Wembo (see section 3.3).



The launch took place in August 2015 in a packed parish hall – the parish had been relocated by mining activities, and the company financed its new buildings. It was moderated by CERN’s Executive Secretary, who allowed political and administrative authorities, religious leaders, and civil society and community members to express themselves freely. Company representatives answered the many questions without hesitation. After the launch, the tense situation which had persisted for months finally eased. The foundations for dialogue between the company and the community were re-established. The task was now to act upon the study’s recommendations. These concerned, among others, the company’s relocation scheme, the suppression of peaceful demonstrations by security forces and their harassment of the population, coexistence between the company and artisanal miners, lack of areas reserved for artisanal mining, revenue redistribution, lack of employment, the population’s lack of awareness of their rights and obligations, mechanisms for redress of human rights violations, and access to justice.

With regard to security, the research recommended that training be organised, that the role of security services within the mining concession be defined, their actions monitored and evaluated, and sanctions imposed in the event of misconduct. With regard to communication, it recommended to inform the population about the agreements and contracts binding the company to the state, the laws relating to the mining sector, and the company’s relocation plans. Consultation with communities and dialogue to resolve problems were presented as essential. Finally, with regard to coexistence, it recommended training and organising the population into human rights associations for citizen oversight, supporting the creation of mining and agricultural cooperatives, diversifying the economy, and creating alternative employment opportunities. For artisanal miners, the state was called upon to create viable artisanal mining zones. Regarding income redistribution and lodging complaints, civil society was invited to train and support the population, particularly in the management of mining revenues, as well as to dialogue with the company and state authorities. To mitigate the risk of unforeseen consequences such as vandalism of the mine’s infrastructure in response to the revelation of human rights violations (and consequent arbitrary arrests among the local population),¹⁰ CERN undertook further actions, including advocacy, support, and training for communities.

Advocacy

In July 2015, the then Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace¹¹ organised a Day of Reflection in Rome on the “cries” that mining caused (Francis 2015) and invited representatives from communities affected by mining activities to give their testimonies. CERN was invited to attend. Its Executive Secretary was accompanied by two community representatives, including Hérítier Wembo (see section 3.3). This international platform, before the launch of the report in August 2015, offered a first venue for advocacy on the basis of the report’s findings.

¹⁰ In a two-hour preparatory session with local government and company representatives before the launch, one company manager reacted to seeing the photo of Hérítier Wembo in the report saying: “Your study risks lighting a fire in the city of Durba”.

¹¹ It became in 2019 the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.



Another leverage platform for change was greater collaboration between civil society and mining companies on the revision of the Mining Code. One of the challenges of mining in the DRC is that it does not sufficiently benefit the Congolese population. The 2002 Mining Code was intended to attract investors, but its implementation showed that investors had gained more than the local populations. It was therefore revised between 2012 and 2018. As member of the platform “Coordination of Civil Society Advocacy Actions for Natural Resource Governance” (*Coordination des Plaidoyers de la Société Civile sur la Gouvernance des Ressources Naturelles*), CERN was part of this revision process, which involved government, mining companies and civil society, supported by community representatives.¹² The main objective of the Coordination platform was to protect the interests of local populations in social, economic, and environmental matters. During the revision process of the Mining Code, however, deadlocks arose, and civil society acted as mediator between companies and the government. Given its credibility, CERN hosted in its office several consultation and coordination meetings between civil society and mining companies to overcome divergences between the government and mining companies.¹³ Some of the Coordination platform’s main successes were: to secure that the share of mining royalties attributed to local governments be transferred directly to their bank account (as the central government had not always redistributed local government shares of the royalties), to agree on terms of references (*cahier de charges*) about what the company will provide and finance to respond to community needs, and to allocate a minimum of 0.3% of a mining company’s turnover to local development. With regard to the latter, after agreeing to a figure of 0.3% during meetings with civil society and mining companies, the government reduced it to 0.1% in the revised Mining Code submitted for parliamentary approval. The change had been recorded. Thanks to civil society vigilance and to the cooperation of certain members of Parliament, the CERN Secretary and a staff member of another NGO part of the *Coordination* platform asked a member of parliament to raise in Parliament the discrepancy between what has been agreed and what has been submitted. The Parliament voted to maintain the agreed minimum share of 0.3%.

A third advocacy opportunity arose during an interrogation by an officer of the National Intelligence Agency (*Agence Nationale de Renseignements*, ANR). The publication of the report in Durba had aroused the attention of the country’s security services. On his return to Kinshasa, CERN’s Executive Secretary was questioned by an

¹² The Coordination organised four preparatory meetings: one in Kisangani, one in Lubumbashi and one in Kinshasa, with civil society organisations active in natural resource governance advocacy in these provinces. A fourth meeting in Kinshasa produced a final document on the basis of these consultations. CERN organized its own consultations with the ORNs across dioceses to receive feedback on the weaknesses of the 2002 Mining Code. These fed into the final document.

¹³ Among these divergences was the increase of royalties related to cobalt, which went from 2.5 to 10% in the revised Mining Code. Some companies tried to block the entire revision process on the ground that such an increase could not be justified given that the state does not provide electricity and they have to finance themselves the public infrastructure necessary for mining operations.

intelligence officer – the launch of the report was regarded in certain circles as a security matter. The interview took place in a restaurant at CENCO's headquarters, after CERN's Executive Secretary refused for it to take place in ANR offices. Over the meal, the Intelligence officer appeared to be recording the conversation with a pen camera, which the Executive Secretary anticipated. He was therefore also recording the conversation on his mobile phone. Another precaution taken was to be accompanied by a person from MONUSCO (United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), whose identity and role were not revealed to the Intelligence officer. Due to the direct link between ANR and the President, the ANR reports directly to the President of the DRC. The CERN Secretary used the meeting to press for a trial to bring to justice the military responsible for human rights violations, and to request a state review of the security services assigned to the Kibali concession.

Accompaniment

Throughout the research, publication, and advocacy stages, accompanying community members, especially Hérítier Wembo, whose being thrown into the fire by the military prompted the research to take place, was critical. To obtain a passport and visa for his travel to Rome, CERN had to bring him to Kinshasa. Given that his case had angered some, and that they were prepared to sabotage the Kibali investment¹⁴ – including vehicles, machinery, offices, and other equipment – his journey happened quickly and in secret. Wembo travelled at night from Durba for Kisangani (300 km away) to then fly directly to Kinshasa. He was taken into the care of CERN, who hid him away.

A week after leaving Durba, Wembo was sought at his home by a person who identified himself as someone from a civil society organisation, on the grounds that MONUSCO wanted him to receive treatment in Uganda. CENCO suspected a trap to make him disappear – Wembo was an embarrassment to the state and the company, as his abuse undermined their image. How could anyone otherwise seek treatment in July for someone whose second-degree burns had been sustained in January? This incident made CENCO take extra care when facilitating Wembos' testimony of human rights violations so as not to put his life in danger for witnessing to an international audience the abuse he suffered. Thanks to financial support from Misereor (the German Catholic bishops' conference development NGO), Wembo gave his testimony in the Vatican. It was a vivid and captivating account of the situation in Kibali; however, two new challenges arose. First, Wembo and his family members wanted him to remain in Europe, even if illegally at first. Second, it was too dangerous for him to return to Durba as he had tarnished the reputation of the company by seeking justice for the human rights violation he experienced. CERN could not allow Wembo to remain undocumented in Europe. He returned to Kinshasa, looked after by CERN until it was safer for him to return to the Haut-Uélé province. He left for Isiro, the provincial capital, and CERN supported him (thanks to a symbolic help from CAFOD) to start a tailoring business as his burns no longer allowed him to be an artisanal miner, and he had prior tailoring skills. He has been living there with his grandmother since.

Following the PAX-CERN report, an investigation took place, and the Military Justice system organised a mobile court hearing in Durba to bring to trial those accused of human rights violations. Commander "Coup par coup" ("Hit by hit"), who was in charge of security in the Kibali concession, was the main defendant.¹⁵ The MONUSCO Human Rights Office contacted CERN to arrange for Wembo to testify at the hearing. Wembo's journey from

¹⁴ To the eyes of the local population, the company and the state act together as it is the state that allows a company to operate, and it is the state that guarantees the company's security. When state security harms the population, there is a risk for citizens to harm the company's infrastructure in return.

¹⁵ His real name is Capitaine Ngongo Shungu Paul. He was given the surname "Hit by hit" because he mercilessly whipped the people he arrested. He has also been accused of torture.

Kinshasa to Durba was organised in secret at MONUSCO's expense. Wembo gave evidence, and this led to Commander 'Coup par coup' being sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and dismissed from the army. CERN was unable to follow the appeal hearings in Kisangani due to a lack of resources.

One of the key demands of civil society organisations during the revision of the Mining Code was that a portion of mining royalties intended for the local authorities where the minerals are extracted should be paid to the province, the Decentralised Territorial Entity (*Entité Territoriale Décentralisée*, ETD) such as a city, commune, sector or chiefdom, and to the Mining Fund for Future Generations (*Fond Minier pour les Générations Futures*, FOMIN). During a visit to Durba by three civil society organisations (including CERN), at the invitation of Kibali Goldmines to provide training for local communities, the heads of the ETDs affected by Kibali's operations complained that they had never received their share of the royalties (15%). In the presence of the invited civil society organisations, Kibali Goldmines provided evidence which confirmed the royalties payment to the central government (50%) and the government of the Haut-Uélé Province (25%), but there was no evidence of the 15% of the royalties destined to the ETDs and the 10% to FOMIN. Given that in the past the ETDs had been embezzled by the outgoing provincial governor, CERN denounced the situation with other civil society organisations, and issued a statement endorsed by the Coordination of Civil Society for Natural Resource Governance who circulated it on social media. This made the situation public, and the provincial governor transferred as a consequence the royalty share to the bank accounts of the relevant ETDs.

Training

As mentioned in the Background section, the revised Mining Code stipulates that local entities affected by mining operations be allocated a minimum of 0.3% of a mining company's turnover, as well as terms of reference (*cahier de charges*) which define the agreed community projects and other local needs that the mining company commits to funding and providing. It is therefore important to train the affected communities in the management of mining royalties and the negotiation of terms of reference as they are often unaware of the realities of mining, and they lack the capacity to negotiate in full knowledge of the facts. Given the trust that both Kibali Goldmines and local communities had for some civil society organisations because of their expertise and professionalism, including CERN, the company invited them on three occasions to provide training to build these capacities.

4. Summary and critical reflections

The Kibali case study provides some insight into the vision and direction of CENCO's work in the mining sector. The documentation of human rights violations in the Kibali concession was a starting point, which was followed by an in-depth research report and then some actions such as the protection of Hériter Wembo, the facilitation of his testimony to an international audience and the trial of those who abused him, dialogue with Kibali Goldmines to improve community relations, and training of local communities in negotiation skills and awareness of the Mining Code. The case study also highlighted the care that needs to be taken when publishing research results so that local communities are not negatively impacted by a possible backlash.

What the case also reveals is the dilemma the state is often faced with: on the one hand, it needs to reassure mining investors as they contribute to public revenues; on the other, it needs to protect local populations from risks of abuses and guarantee their human rights. Caught between protecting mining investment and guaranteeing the security of mining operations and tied by contractual agreements with companies on the

one hand, and protecting the rights of local communities affected by mining operations on the other, the state often prioritizes the security of mining investment over the security of communities' livelihoods and the rights of local populations. Understanding the dynamics of action in this case study could be approached from three perspectives: its underlying structure, its execution, and its outcomes.

The structure that supported the range of actions described above was CERN, the technical arm of CENCO. For its actions to be successful, CERN had to meet at least four key criteria: 1) credibility and legitimacy; 2) the ability to establish or manage networks and maintain good relations; 3) the availability of financial support; and 4) the ability to manage risks and demonstrate resilience. First, to be credible and legitimate, CERN had staff at the national office level and focal points at the diocese level. Appointed by the local bishop, they worked under the leadership of an Executive Secretary who understood CENCO's vision and was able to translate it into action. Focal points were made familiar with this vision through training and consistent operating principles, clear objectives and working methods. In addition, CENCO's moral backing was essential not only for credibility but also for mobilising funding. Second, CERN's Executive Secretary needed to manage networks of organisations both within and outside the Church, whilst also maintaining relationships at various levels such as the network of Natural Resource Observatories, civil society organisations, state institutions and the private sector—without compromising principles. Third, funding was crucial for the implementation of all the actions. With no funding of its own, CERN has to rely on external support, which is a source of insecurity. In this case, funding came from PAX, Misereor, MONUSCO's Human Rights Office, and some anonymous partners, especially to cover the travel costs of the two community representatives to the July 2015 Vatican conference. CERN's Executive Secretary had sometimes to draw from his personal resources to facilitate Wembo's clandestine stay. Fourth, the entire process involved several risks. During the field research, there was a risk that investigators might be harassed by miners. Because they sometimes face harassment from state authorities, miners adopt a distrustful attitude towards anyone who comes to photograph them or ask questions. Once the research was published, there were fears of a popular uprising against the company – the questioning of CERN's Executive Secretary by a National Intelligence Agency officer illustrated that the situation was a national security issue. That Wembo was sought after his departure from Durba also posed a risk, as did his temptation to remain in Europe. His return to Kinshasa after testifying against the company in Rome was as risky as testifying against Commander 'Coup par coup' during the court hearing in Durba. CERN therefore needed to develop risk management mechanisms and build resilience.



The action plan was structured around the local, diocesan, provincial, national and international levels. At the local level, several bodies were involved: the ORN of the diocese of Isiro-Niangara and its bishop, the Administrator of the Watsa territory, sector and chiefdom leaders, local civil society organisations, community members, the media and the mining company. The province was little involved, except for a press release aimed at unblocking the mining royalties of the ETDs. CERN was unable to take action at the provincial judicial level during the appeal of the trial of Commander "Coup par coup". At the national level, CERN engaged with PAX, CENCO bodies, senior management of the Kibali Goldmines, civil society organisations, some other mining companies, the Italian Embassy, the Apostolic Nunciature, the National Intelligence Agency which played a role in organising the mobile court hearing, Wembo's

close relatives, and the MONUSCO Human Rights Office. At the international level, the initiative involved the then Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at the Vatican, Misereor, PAX, CAFOD and relatives of Wembo, as well as the media.

Regarding its results, the publication of the report produced unexpected effects far beyond its three main areas of recommendations of security, communication and coexistence. This was only possible thanks to the maintenance of relationships with various networks. The image and credibility of CENCO, CERN and PAX have been preserved, notably by maintaining high standards in the quality of work. Since the report was published, the company grew, and its mine is now regarded as a benchmark in Central Africa. Production appears to have reached full capacity. In 2025, approximately 670,000 ounces of gold were produced, generating revenues of US\$ 2.3 billion. The mining company now organizes quarterly conferences where dialogue with various stakeholders appears to be fruitful. In 2022, Kibali GoldMines signed terms of references (*cahier de charges*) of a value of US\$ 8.7 million over 5 years, which includes the financing of new schools and hospitals, safe water provision, agricultural projects, and other local development projects, as well as skills and employment to young people in the community in the area of renewable energy (hydro-electric power plants).

Despite this success, CENCO/CERN's response to mining has several limitations. One main limitation is that decisions regarding mining operations are the prerogative of the state, which enters into agreements with the companies. The Church plays only a watchdog role by monitoring the situation on the ground. It educates, denounces, challenges, mediates, supports, and advocates. This raises many challenges and questions:

- Is it possible to establish a sincere and ongoing dialogue between mining companies and affected communities in a context where the state fails to fulfil its duties towards the population? Where can they find a platform to express their grievances?
- Many dioceses face financial difficulties. A company operating within the diocese's jurisdiction might be generous in funding projects for the Church, either at the Church's request or of its own accord as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility. In this case, would the Church not have its credibility undermined? By remaining silent in the face of possible harm resulting from the company's operations, would it not be seen by the public as complicit?
- The work of the Church requires financial support. Where to find the needed resources? Can the Church accept funding from the public or private sector without feeling compromised?
- How would the Church address internal weaknesses in the management of funds received, at the risk of being tarnished or accused of corruption?
- How can security concerns be addressed in the face of threats from businesses, the state or communities?
- How can we increase the capacity of local communities, especially through parishes, to inform themselves, receive training and get involved in mining-related human rights and ecological concerns?
- Should a national structure oversee all dioceses, or should it focus on a single region for the sake of greater efficiency?

This case study has illustrated how the Catholic Church in the DRC has fulfilled one aspect of its prophetic mission in the mining sector. Based on a socio-pastoral analysis, CENCO established an ad hoc commission responsible for natural resources, CERN, which produced in 2009 a "Vade mecum for Congolese citizens on natural resource management" to guide this pastoral work. This document provided an analysis of the country's context, the issues and concerns, as well as the population's expectations regarding natural resources. It then sets out the principles which, according to the Church's social tradition, should guide the exploitation of natural resources and proposed possible solutions to problems that can often arise in mining areas.

Today, this pastoral work continues amidst fraught relations between the Catholic Church and the Congolese state. The “Pact for Peace” initiative, which was intended to lead to a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue,¹⁶ was given a cool reception by the government. This would have been an opportunity to reflect on the management of natural resources, and mineral resources in particular. The work carried out by CERN requires funding. Mobilising resources at the national and international level presents a significant challenge, and CENCO should address this issue.

The case study shows how the Catholic social teaching principles of human dignity, solidarity and care for our common home were translated into action by mobilising people, structures and resources to restore hope to a population whose cries for help had been heard from the local to the international level. The actions undertaken restored confidence in a mining company. Its concession, guarded by soldiers known for abuses and which had become a place where human dignity was violated, was transformed. The population now benefits from mining royalties and other funds earmarked for community development. This was not without major risks and challenges. Faced with limited financial resources, mistrust, suspicion and the need for skilled human resources, CENCO, CERN, and PAX have managed to maintain their reputation for credibility and dignity.

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¹⁶ The initiative “Social pact for peace and coexistence in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes Region” was launched in December 2024 by CENCO and the Church of Christ in Congo, which brings together Protestant and evangelical churches. See Kambashi and Zengarini (2025) for further information.

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