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Corporate Social Responsibility and development in Africa: Redefining the roles and responsibilities of public and private actors in the mining sector

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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), suggesting the usefulness of adopting a holistic and historical perspective. It underlines the importance of taking into account the evolving regulatory frameworks within which mining activities take place in order to consider the changing roles played by the various actors involved, whether multilateral, national or local, public or private. In this broad context it then becomes possible to revisit issues of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability, which CSR strategies aim to address. The article draws attention to the shortcomings of strategies, whether bilateral or multilateral, public or private, which, in an attempt to respond to problems of risk and legitimacy faced by mining companies, have put forward measures in the name of CSR that do not address the origins that give rise to such problems and, in so doing, tend to mask the very nature of the difficulties at hand. The analysis leads to quite different conclusions as compared to those that result from the adoption of a shorter term and investment-led perspective.

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Introduction

Analyses concerning the implications of mining investment in mineral-rich countries of Africa have evolved rapidly over the last decade. In contrast to the initial - very positive - presentation of investment being much needed and fully justifying the negative impacts, which were seen as marginal side effects to be mitigated by voluntary measures, there developed a widespread recognition of the disappointing results with regard to the capacity of activities in the mining sector to contribute to social and economic development as well as environmental impacts. As a result, a great many actors representing different arenas became engaged in a process of attempting to explain observed shortcomings and recommending changes, as illustrated by the World Bank Group's Extractive Industries Review (EIR, 2003). This process of reflection took place in different organisations of the United Nations (UNCTAD, 2005: UNECA and African Union (AU). 2010), at a bilateral level and notably in Canada (Advisory Group, 2007; DFAIT, 2005, 2009b), within industry organisations (Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD), International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), Mining Association of

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Canada (MAC), and Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC), and in the academic milieu.

In an attempt to explain the disappointing impacts of mining, an important current of thought has tended to draw attention to the dysfunctional administrative and political processes within the governments of the countries in which activities take place. In this perspective, these "governance gaps" need to be remedied in order for the sector to better contribute to development and poverty reduction. In a parallel manner, and in the face of the weakened capacity of the institutions in the countries in which mining companies often operate, a vast and growing body of literature has sought to explore the role that strategies of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of the companies at present could contribute to improving the results. The premise is that the roles and impacts of corporate actors go "beyond providing revenue and employment and maximising profits and hence increasing shareholder's value, that they have power and influence (actual and potential) beyond their formal location within legal and political structures, particularly those of developing countries and that they should be recognised as conscious and influential participants in activities with a broad range of consequences" (UNECA and AU, 2010). In this regard, "the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development asserts the need for corporate accountability and the duty of the private sector to 'contribute to the evolution of equitable and sustainable communities and society'" (UNECA and AU, 2010, p. 124).

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According to one definition

"Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a framework for formulating and implementing the expanded roles and responsibilities of the corporate sector to include incorporation of the expectations and needs of a wider community in the business model. Central to the issues around which CSR initiatives have been articulated in the mining and other extractive industry sectors are: (a) the Environment; (b) Social and Community Development; (c) Employment and Labour; and (d) Human Rights" (UNECA and AU, 2010, p. 128).

Corporate Social Responsibility has been redefined over the years. The practice of CSR is much debated. Proponents argue that there is a strong business case for CSR, in that corporations benefit in multiple ways by operating with a perspective broader and longer than their own immediate, short-term profits. Proponents of CSR also posit a virtuous relation between the increased presence of foreign investment and the promotion of growth and development in the countries concerned. These links have led private sector actors in the mining sector to turn to multilateral institutions and bilateral agencies not only for financial support of various kinds for their business operations (loans, export credits for example), but also, more recently, for support for their projects in the area of CSR. Critics, however, argue that CSR distracts from the fundamental economic role of businesses; others argue that business engagement in social and community development is, more likely than not, destined to be superficial, short termed, and neither equitable nor sustainable.

This paper revisits the role of CSR, suggesting the usefulness of adopting a more holistic and historical perspective. Drawing on the work of Szablowski (2007) in the area of legal pluralism the article underlines the importance of taking into account the evolving regulatory frameworks within which mining activities take place in order to consider the changing roles played by the various actors involved, whether multilateral, national or local, public or private. In this broader context it then becomes possible to revisit issues of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability, which CSR strategies aim to address. This approach leads to quite different conclusions as compared to those that result from the adoption of a shorter term and investment-led perspective.

Historical perspective

As is now well documented, the reforms made to regulatory and legal frameworks for mining in a number of African countries have helped to establish a more favourable environment for foreign investment (Campbell, 2004). These changes, however, have entailed a process of redefining the role of the state that is so profound that it has few historical precedents. In large part because of this the reforms have had the effect of reducing institutional capacity, as well as driving down norms and standards in areas of critical importance for social and economic development, and the protection of the environment in many countries in Africa in which mining activities take place. Strong evidence suggests that the latter tendency will continue in an increasing number of situations if policy changes are not introduced (Campbell, 2009).

The redefinition of the role and functions of the state and the new delineation between public and private spheres of authority that have accompanied this redefinition and that have occurred through the process of reform have had implications for the legitimacy of activities of mining companies and of states themselves—implications that do not seem to have received the attention that they deserve. In the policy environment of the

1980s and 1990s and under the leadership of the World Bank Group:

[...] the new agenda advocated comprehensive privatisation of state companies, an end to restrictions on foreign ownership and the repatriation of profits, lowering rates of taxation and royalties, restructuring labour laws to permit greater flexibility, and the termination of performance requirements such as those mandating local sourcing or local hiring. In addition, mining legislation had to be rationalised, administrative processes simplified, technical services to the industry (such as modernisation of the mining cadastre) improved and 'subjective' elements of bureaucratic discretion removed from the permitting and approvals processes (Szablowski, 2007, p. 34).

The World Bank made it very clear in its 1992 study A Strategy for African Mining that the role of government was to create a suitable environment for the private sector. This required "[a] clearly articulated mining sector policy that emphasises the role of the private sector as owner and operator and of government as regulator and promoter" (World Bank, 1992, p. 53). As one author whose work concerned mining in Latin America noted, government was to stop "being an owner-operator pursuing social or political goals through its operational involvement in the mining industry" (Szablowski, 2007, p. 34). Instead, governments were encouraged "to become efficient and 'apolitical' regulator[s]" (Szablowski, 2007, p. 34). Its role was to facilitate private investment. The myriad of policy reforms that the World Bank promoted through its packages of privatisation and liberalisation was accompanied by the assertion that the early reformers were ahead of their competitors. Africa's experience over 20 years has been a cumulative process of reform leading to several generations of increasingly liberalised mining regimes. In this regard while the article refers to the mining sector in Africa in general, which one would be justified in finding questionable, it draws on over ten years of collective research based on specific case studies that illustrate the enormous diversity among countries and regions that are characterised by very different mineral resources, policy traditions, trends, and objectives, reflecting an enormous variance with regard to history and context (Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell, 2004, 2009).

The reform process has had as a result the reshaping of institutional arrangements, which have had very direct implications for the operation of mining activities for various reasons. First is the fact that the strong retrenchment of the state from the sector has also been accompanied by parallel processes: the redefinition of its role and functions has led to a reduction of state sovereignty. Second the process of redefining the role of the state in the mining sector is accompanied by the reduced autonomy and authority of states, as well as their reduced capacity to influence the evolution of their own structures. Finally the narrowing of the margin of manoeuvre of mineral-rich states and of their policy space as a result of having to respond to an externally driven reform process has, in certain circumstances, been accompanied by the institutionalising of particular modes of reproducing domestic power relations. This has especially been the case in countries where mineral resources are plentiful. In a manner similar to the experience of petroleum-rich countries, notably Nigeria, where authors such as Obi (2004) have identified and analysed a "politics of oil", the particular "politics of mining" that has emerged in certain mineral-rich states and perpetuated in countries such as Guinea or the Democratic Republic of Congo is often severely lacking in transparency and accountability.

Implications for the legitimacy of corporate strategies

In view of the legal and practical conditions introduced through reforms in the sector to attract foreign investment the lack of or little room to manoeuvre has led some states to adopt new strategies in order to respond to, if not reconcile, competing internal and external pressures. These strategies involved at times "a formal award of rights to the investor accompanied by an informal delegation of local regulatory responsibilities" (Szablowski, 2007, p. 27). It led the states to effectively "transfer legal authority to mineral enterprises to manage social mediation" (Szablowski, 2007, p. 27). One important consequence of liberalisation of the African mining sector has therefore been the way in which past public functions of the state are increasingly being delegated to private operators. These include service delivery and also rule setting and implementation. The tendency has been for "an increased (and often reluctant) assumption of state-like responsibilities by transnational mining enterprises at the discreet behest of weak governments" (Szablowski, 2007, p. 59). Such strategies, also described by Strange (1996) as illustrative of a process of the "retreat of the state", are presented by Szablowski (2007, p. 28) with reference to the way states deal with new mining regimes as strategies of "selective absence" in which the state "absented itself from substantial parts" of the legal regimes intended to help "mediate between investors and community interests" (Szablowski, 2007, p. 45).

In an attempt to reconcile different competing imperatives that have accompanied globalisation, as suggested above, the state has difficulty in offering legitimacy through legal processes. Moreover, these trends have had very important consequences for mining companies as well:

For example, mining enterprises operating in the Global South are not able to respond to their critics, either locally or transnationally, with the simple assertion that their responsibilities begin and end with compliance with a host state's legal requirements. It may be that in a globalising era, for many audiences, states appear too weak or too complicit to offer a convincing check on the actions of corporate giants. Or perhaps, curiously, the retreat of the state from the mediation of socio-economic relations has left private enterprise increasingly subject to social claims (Szablowski, 2007, p. 60) (author's italics).

The resulting blurring of responsibilities and ambiguities that such situations may at times produce explains why companies may find themselves dealing with the demands and expectations of communities, with the risk of potential degeneration into conflicts and concern over the "securitisation" of mining activities.

The issue of weakened institutional and political capacity, and consequently the regulatory capacity of host governments, is, therefore, particularly salient. As legitimacy and regulation are interdependent products of legal processes, absence of attention to such issues can only detract from establishment of regulatory terms that are deemed legitimate.

Responses to problems of legitimacy

There have been different types of responses arising from different arenas of intervention in an attempt to rectify a heritage of past reforms that have undermined regulatory processes deemed legitimate and consequently, have given rise to problems of legitimacy for the operations of mining enterprises. One set of responses has in large measure had its origin in the multilateral arena. In this regard, and as analysed by Szablowski (2007),

the World Bank Group (WBG) has developed an elaborate set of standards in a wide variety of areas, whether with regard to environmental impact assessments (EIAs) or involuntary resettlement (IR), which collectively can be seen as the WBG safeguard policy regime. They are applied to mining activities that go far beyond those supported by the WBG. While the body of these continually evolving standards is obviously very detailed and substantial, these transnational norms and practices raise several difficulties. To summarise, the process of redefinition of the role and functions of states in the mining sector over the last twenty years has been accompanied by the emergence of a body of norms that Szablowski (2007) refers to as a "transnational legal system". However the issue of the local appropriation of the new body of norms that have their origin in the multilateral arena, or again, of the often unresolved problem of the capacity of states to monitor, enforce, and if necessary, bring remedial solutions, raises a series of challenges for the legitimacy of mining operations in the future, which past regulations were intended, but have largely failed, to resolve.

Another set of responses to the weakened institutional and political capacities of many of the mineral-rich countries of Africa has been the tendency on the part of multilateral financial institutions and certain Western governments to suggest that such issues, which are, in fact, deeply rooted structurally and historically, can be treated as "weak governance", resolved by the introduction of the right set of good administrative and procedural measures and monitored by "governance indicators". Such a perspective appears strikingly insufficient. On one hand the increasing technicisation of decision-making processes runs the risk of sidelining important substantive debates and notably depoliticizing the issue of resource distribution, which may then be treated as a technical issue when it is clearly a political one. On the other hand, in the context of the overriding emphasis on technical and administrative aspects of "governance", proposals, notably those put forward by bilateral and multilateral agencies, which recommend "capacity building for resource governance" in developing countries, miss the key point. This is that past reform measures that sought to open up the extractive industries to investment did so in a manner that has severely weakened the political and institutional capacity of local governments. Consequently it becomes a circular argument to call for the reinforcing of local capacity if the nature of past and ongoing reforms that weaken local capacity is not questioned.

There are several difficulties that result from attempts to ensure the legitimacy of mining operations while failing to address the issue of the weakened institutional and political capacity of the states themselves. One is the preference for technocratic over political legitimation processes among project sponsors and corporate-oriented transnational law-makers, such as the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC; Szablowski, 2007, p. 300). This option raises problems of legitimation for state policies and therefore for mining operations, which have not yet been addressed. For, in the routine application of its social provisions, the WBG safeguard policy regime lacks the oversight required to ensure that its goals are being achieved. Then there is the difficulty related to the forms of participation that accompany the implementation of the WBG safeguard policy regime. Finally, and most importantly, in a context of states having to respond to the legal and practical conditions to attract foreign investment and weakened institutional capacity, the emergence of a body of norms and standards that have their origin in the multilateral arena (as in the EIAs) legitimises the activity of private operators while failing to clarify the regulatory responsibilities of governments. These responses to problems of legitimacy may allow governments to shift the locus of responsibility for what were previously considered state functions (monitoring, infrastructure, roads, clinics, security, etc.) to the private operators of large-scale mining projects.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Part of the solution or of the problem?

The context in which mining investments take place in Africa is often one of weakened capacity of governments to ensure the respect of their regulations when these exist, of the absence of measures to ensure more transparent and equitable negotiation of regimes and contacts, and of the disappointing contribution of the extractive sector to local and national development. These are some of the factors that contribute to the problems of legitimacy of the activities of mining companies. It is consequently in this broader framework that current discussions of CSR need to be situated.

For certain analysts, CSR provides firms with a strategic response to the risks that systemic dynamics present, by addressing governance gaps that can, in turn, increase the potential for obtaining a "social licence to operate". From this perspective, it may be seen as part of a good business plan. A broad and growing body of literature analyses these issues from the standpoint of the business drivers for CSR, which are underpinned by theories of how firms work. While an important point of entry, this is not the perspective adopted here, which in a manner similar to the current work at the UNECA, adopts the perspective of how best to ensure the implementation of longer term, sustainable development strategies by governments specific to the mineral-rich countries concerned.

Moreover, the analysis presented here suggests that approaches adopted to examine broader social and economic development issues but that focus above all on the perspective and the logic of firms may be problematic for several reasons. While clearly aiming to resolve problems of legitimacy faced by mining companies, such approaches neglect the fact that these issues are but the manifestation of much deeper structural problems. These problems will be merely masked temporarily by strategies that aim to mitigate the manifestation of the problem rather than addressing the root causes. The underlying difficulty is that such CSR proposals are conceived and put forward as short-term "solutions" to resolve the problems of corporate actors. With regard to their conceptualisation, they fail to question the problematic and in fact incorrect hypothesis to the effect that the promotion of investment strategies will necessarily coincide with the promotion of local development objectives. With regard to their origin, they are most often the result of externally driven initiatives rather than ideas emanating from a domestic policy process and as integral parts of locally owned public policies. On the contrary, they tend to perpetuate a perspective that has characterised reforms in the mining sector in Africa over the last two decades and that is very much the investment perspective of mining companies. This perspective is premised on a mono-sectoral approach rather than one that might seek to articulate the contribution of the mining sector to macro-economic objectives involving inter-sectoral linkages, with a view of seeing to what extent the sector could contribute to broader developmental objectives. This explains why, in the past, little provision-if any-was made to build eventual backward and forward linkages, such as the possibility of facilitating valueadded processing of minerals, which in a resource extraction economy would normally be considered an important development objective. Such a mono-sectoral approach can be seen as quite distinct from the perspective of government and it foresees a transformative role for mining: where the sector serves as a catalyst to spur activity in other sectors of the economy. Within an investment-led perspective, environmental effects of mining activity and social impacts have been and continue to be seen as side effects (considered as secondary and marginal to the positive consequences), which can be regulated by the introduction of voluntary performance standards. The application of such standards has been seen to rest above all with companies rather than being considered as issues that were clearly interrelated and integral parts of development strategies entailing overriding government responsibility.

Much of the thinking that has accompanied debates and strategies concerning CSR appears to perpetuate past investment-led perspectives, in spite of the fact that these have shown their limitations with regard to contributing to development objectives of the countries concerned and often, as well, at times fallen short of preventing environmental degradation and respecting human rights. Moreover, and for the reasons given above, the manner in which problems of legitimacy have been addressed by investment-led perspectives-notably with regard to CSR strategies-has failed to resolve this dimension. This is because strategies favouring an extended role for CSR are likely to contribute to the continuous transfer of what were previously considered state-like functions to private operators, whether private companies or NGOs, often at the behest of weakened states. These trends further blur the demarcation of lines of responsibility and therefore accountability of private and public actors with the result of perpetuating problems of legitimacy for the operations of companies themselves. Moreover, to the extent that the multilateral financial institutions continue to favour measures that encourage the bypassing of the state, whether with regard to revenue collection or in defining guidelines for relations between companies and communities, they run the risk of contributing to the erosion of what may be considered essential developmental functions of the state. Such processes may well contribute to delaying the establishment of political processes that allow the population to hold its leaders accountable, and consequently to state legitimacy. At the bilateral level, strategies that propose to use aid budgets to reinforce CSR or again to produce tools to manage conflicts without addressing the origins of such conflicts may, in fact, be contributing to further blurring of lines of responsibility and accountability in the sector.

When the governments of the countries of origin of companies become more involved in the extractive sector of mineral-rich countries through their aid strategies, as for example the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) appears to have become, it would seem essential that such interventions be defined and implemented in such a manner as to reinforce the longer term socio-economic development strategies of the countries concerned. In the Canadian case, given CIDA's development mandate, there is serious reason to question whether the focus should be on individual projects that seek to promote the CSR objectives of specific companies. However, there is at present significant receptivity on the part of large Canadian NGOs such as Plan Canada, World Vision Canada, Save the Children Canada, Engineers without Borders Canada, CARE Canada, AMREF Canada, TechnoServe, Search for Common Ground, and World University Service of Canada to "partner" with Canadian mining companies in supplying their services to undertake CSR projects. Such proposals have been accompanied by discussions that suggest that the resulting CSR projects should be funded by CIDA. While debate continues CIDA funds have already been allocated to fund the initial phases of such initiatives in several African countries, including Ghana.

There are several problems with such strategies, of which only a few will be mentioned here. The first concerns the question of responsibility and accountability. Who is considered to have responsibility and who will be held accountable for the services provided by a company to affected local communities? More specifically, is it the company, the NGO, or the government? Furthermore, what happens when the company leaves, and how can such a project be considered sustainable?

What about the communities that lie outside the area affected by the mine and do not have access to the services provided? In this regard, how can such CSR projects be considered as contributing to the equitable development of a region or country?

These questions underscore the imperativeness of recognising the legitimacy and indeed the right of governments to provide services to their population, which are also conditions for them to be held accountable. They also underline the importance of the mandate of bilateral aid agencies, such as CIDA, which, through their programmes, seek to reinforce the medium and longer-term development objectives, promoted through strategies put forward by the countries concerned, and again, for which their governments are held accountable.

With regard to conflicts arising from mining activities, given that current strategies have in general failed to address the reasons that give rise to problems of legitimacy, and rather risk contributing to blurring issues of responsibility and accountability, the possibility of increasing conflicts between affected communities and companies is, in fact, becoming a reality (CCSRC, 2009, p. 11). The result is that some of the countries in which companies are headquartered are becoming increasingly involved in managing such conflicts in order to reduce risks that such situations present for their companies. In the Canadian experience (Campbell et al., in press), this has been the perspective adopted by government initiatives as illustrated in a recent document:

Unresolved disputes directly affect businesses through expensive project delays, damaged reputations, high conflict management costs, investor uncertainty, and in some cases, the loss of investment capital. [...] there [is] strong support for a mechanism to enable the sector to resolve CSR disputes related to the Canadian extractive sector active abroad in a timely and transparent manner (DFAIT, 2009a, 2009b).

As a result, through its aid programme, Canada has launched projects that aim to integrate social issues within an integrated framework for socially responsible and efficient mining. To this end, CIDA has set up programmes that produce tools for industry and communities in an attempt to resolve or better manage conflicts arising from mining activities. The multi-stakeholder dialogue tools that result from such government initiatives and which are supported by the aid budget imply, however, a particular conception of the nature and sources of conflicts and of the appropriate means to resolve them. For the Canadian Government "[the] existence of conflicts, latent or potential, is intrinsic to social relationships, making imperative the creation of a favourable climate for the development of mining operations and the training of stakeholders in conflict management" (PERCAN, 2010). Therefore, and as noted in one government sponsored project: "conflict management is an important element in the strengthening of the industry as a whole" (PERCAN, 2010).

The industry perspective adopted by such initiatives results in issues being formulated in terms of the compensation to "stakeholders" who may make monetary claims, as opposed to recognising "right holders" who would place those affected by mining in the position of being able to refuse a project. To summarise, such initiatives by bilateral actors are often undertaken without necessarily taking into account the root causes of conflicts, without clarifying the issues of rights as opposed to compensation, and, above all, without contributing to the clarification of lines of

accountability whether public or private. If bilateral actors are to become involved in promoting responsible mining practices, it would seem important that bilateral involvement of the countries of origin of the companies present be undertaken within a framework that considers the overall policy coherence on the part of all the different government actors and departments concerned. In this regard, with a view of providing additional certainty to investors, many developing countries have gone beyond opening up to foreign investment in extractive industries by locking policy changes into fiscal stability clauses as well as by signing various international investment agreements (IIAs). The most important international investment agreements have been bilateral investment treaties (BITs) on the promotion and protection of foreign investment. According to a 2007 UNCTAD study, in many mineral-rich countries, the number of bilateral investment treaties has increased rapidly during the past decade (UNCTAD,

More generally, policy coherence on the part of multilateral and bilateral actors implies as well that all agencies and ministries concerned assume their respective roles to ensure public, as well as corporate, accountability, in this critically important area.

Conclusion

This article has drawn attention to the shortcomings of strategies whether bilateral or multilateral, public or private that, in an attempt to respond to problems of risk and legitimacy faced by mining companies, have led to measures in the name of CSR that do not address the origins that give rise to such problems. One of the difficulties with such approaches is their tendency to mask the very nature of the problems at hand. Beyond the shortterm nature of such strategies, which seek to respond to and at times silence the concerns of communities affected by mining operations, are much more fundamental issues. The first and most imperative results from the fact that investment in mineral-rich countries of sub-Saharan Africa has not contributed to the social and economic development and the protection of the environment of the countries concerned over the last decades. Moreover, past forms of liberalisation, state retrenchment, and the on-going transfer of what were formerly considered public functions to private actors, have contributed to the blurring of the lines of accountability among the various actors present in such a way as to create further problems of legitimacy for the operations of the mining companies present.

No quantity of CSR can correct these deeply rooted and country-specific structural issues. Rather current approaches to CRS tend to reproduce the shortfalls of the past disaggregated agendas imposed by external actors, to the detriment of the appropriation of coherent inter-sectoral social and economic development objectives and their implementation through public policies. More generally, it is not for industry to substitute itself for government initiatives and pursue "development objectives". If companies are to contribute to these objectives, it is through negotiating equitable and transparent contracts, paying adequate revenues according to directives set out in national regulatory frameworks, and respecting the laws of the country.

As called for in the current work of the UNECA (2010), what is needed is an important paradigm shift away from past perspectives and a simple focus on "mineral extraction" for the role of the mining sector in Africa, to a broader framework that will permit integrating mineral policy with development policy. Beyond the need to reinforce institutional capacity, such a shift implies an increasingly important role for public policies and an appropriate institutional environment. In bringing this about much more careful attention needs to be paid not to CSR but to the role to

be played by pro-active development states, which are needed to develop a vision of linkages, to achieve fair and equitable fiscal and investment regimes, and to maximise the benefits derivable from mineral resources exploitation. It is within such a broader framework that issues of responsibility and accountability of private and public actors need to be reset.

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