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MEETING REPORT

Legal Tools for Gender Equality in Critical Mineral Governance

Partner session at the 21st IGF Annual General Meeting

Organized by Women's Rights and Mining Network

Geneva, Switzerland

November 5, 2025

Summary

On November 5, 2025, the Women's Rights and Mining (WRM) network hosted a session at the annual general meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF) in Geneva. The session, Legal Tools for Gender Equality in Critical Mineral Governance, covered frameworks to protect women's rights in all aspects of the supply chain and communities in a fast-paced critical minerals environment. Discussions focused on the role of mining contracts,

labour laws, and environmental and social impact assessments as tools to advance gender equality, while highlighting the importance of transparency, anti-corruption, and clear legal provisions to safeguard women's participation and protection across the value chain.

The panel was moderated by Elena Cornaro, Policy Advisor at the IGF. Participants included experts from the legal sector, international organizations, civil society, and government negotiation support advisors, with the following speakers:



- **Camila Pereira Rego Meireles**, Extractives and Energy Specialist, International Labour Organization (ILO)
- **Lynn Gitu**, Program Lead at IMPACT Uganda
- **Cynthia Urda Kassis**, Partner at A&O Shearman and global co-head for Energy, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure
- **Sarah Gebhardt**, Advisor at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit's (GIZ's) CONNEX Support Unit
- **Aida Diop**, Director of the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) Senegal office

Opening remarks were provided by Tim Schlösser, head of project of the sector program Extractives and Development at GIZ, commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Germany, and Paula Valencia, Senior Development Officer, Global Affairs Canada.

Key Takeaways

1. The global energy transition must be just, as well as green.

Tim Schlösser's (GIZ/BMZ) opening remarks emphasized that the global energy transition must depend not only on critical minerals, but also on justice and human rights. He underlined that gender equality is a cornerstone of Germany's development cooperation, as societies thrive when women and marginalized groups can participate equally in decision making and benefit fairly from resource revenues.

The German government's GIZ agency is a founding member of the WRM network. WRM brings together governments, NGOs, and researchers to advance women's rights in the extractives sector. Since its creation, the group has raised global

awareness, developed a widely endorsed stakeholder statement on gender-responsive due diligence in mineral supply chains, and organized high-profile events internationally. In a time of global setbacks for women's rights, international solidarity and multistakeholder collaboration remain essential to ensuring women are not left behind in shaping mineral governance.

2. Women must be able to participate in the economy and decision making.

Paula Valencia (Global Affairs Canada) reaffirmed Canada's support for gender equality in mining governance and stressed the importance of strong, gender-inclusive frameworks for a sustainable and equitable energy transition. Referring to Canada's work under the G7 presidency and its action plan on gender equality, Paula highlighted key pillars, including building institutional capacity within mineral supply chains, increasing women's participation in the economy, and supporting women's decision making in public spaces.

3. International and national legal frameworks are key for labour rights in mining—but they depend on national adoption to become instrumental.

Camila Pereira Rego Meireles (ILO) stressed that with rising production and demand for critical minerals, strong international legal frameworks to protect women's rights are more vital than ever to prevent the reproduction of existing inequalities. These frameworks create a shared language for governments and help them align national laws, labour regulations, and company due diligence practices. Only when international standards are translated into national laws and practical frameworks do they become instrumental. Gender-responsive legal frameworks must go beyond vague outcomes to create decent, well-paid jobs



for women, contributing to both stability and equity in the energy transition.

4. Impact assessments for critical minerals must incorporate the voices of women in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM).

Lynn Gitu (IMPACT Uganda) highlighted the barriers faced by women working in ASM. These include women's exclusion from policy processes and decision making, unequal access to land and mineral rights, limited access to credit, and high exposure to health risks, particularly from the mercury used in gold recovery. Lynn also drew attention to gender-based violence, extending beyond physical harm to include economic and psychological violence, such as perceptions that women are "too weak" to work in mining. IMPACT's Impact Assessment Toolkit provides practical guidance for integrating gender and intersectionality (including ASM) into impact assessments. Lynn explained that by asking questions about local decision-making processes and land-use practices, actors can develop greater awareness of social dynamics and identify entry points for inclusive financing mechanisms at the government level.

5. For many women in mining, interpersonal safety and harassment concerns outweigh fears related to physical hazards.

One of the most important steps that the sector must take to change its legacy, increase women's participation, and protect communities is to address gender-based violence. Camila Pereira Rego Meireles (ILO) presented ILO's new program addressing sexual and gender-based violence through workers' health and safety rights. During their engagement with the ILO, women miners and labour unions noted that their concerns were less about the physical conditions of mining and more about behaviours from male colleagues, highlighting the need to broaden

how occupational safety is understood. The ILO now recognizes gender-based violence and harassment as an occupational hazard requiring specific training and information to be provided, risk management, and accountability measures. Camila emphasized that protections should extend to women in informal settings, including ASM, and called for community-based risk assessments and codes of conduct developed through multistakeholder collaboration to ensure women miners' voices are heard.

6. Mining contracts offer unique entry points for private sector actors to help strengthen gender equality.

Cynthia Urda Kassis (A&O Shearman) described how gender considerations can be incorporated into mining contracts between mining companies and governments. Contracts must align with national laws, reflect best industry practices, and respond to findings from environmental and social impact assessments to be most effective. An upcoming toolkit with the International Senior Lawyers Project and the IGF on gender equality in mining contracts outlines a seven-pillar approach, covering

1. Recruitment and hiring practices
2. Equal pay and opportunities
3. Safe working conditions and protective equipment
4. Zero tolerance for gender-based violence, bullying, and discrimination
5. Extended standards to contractors
6. Clear internal and public reporting mechanisms
7. Incentives to enhance compliance with the above six pillars

Cynthia underlined the importance to pillar seven of including remedial frameworks and explained that the clarity of provisions is a critical aspect in retaining investor confidence in the intent of the provisions while scaling up gender equality in the



sector. Ambiguity can create fear of disputes, while clear and objective clauses improve compliance and relationships between governments, communities, and investors.

7. Solid gender-responsive contracts are critical for the social licence to operate.

Sarah Gebhardt (CONNEX Support Unit, GIZ) shared the challenges that governments face during mining contract negotiations and how these affect their ability to consider including gender provisions. Negotiators often work under significant time pressure with limited capacity, small teams, and competing investor demands. The absence of reliable data and clear institutional responsibilities makes it difficult to integrate gender considerations. While many countries have gender equality laws, the lack of practical tools prevents these from being translated into actionable and measurable contract provisions.

Despite these practical constraints, clear, measurable provisions on gender equality enhance the social licence to operate and help prevent costly delays. Sarah encouraged governments to adopt gender-responsive codes of conduct, supplier diversity plans, skills-training initiatives, and fiscal measures that allocate a portion of royalties to women and marginalized groups. Governments could benefit from using initiatives such as CONNEX, which offer

expert support across multidisciplinary fields, including the integration of gender and other environmental, social, and governance aspects. Data collection and follow-up are crucial: “you cannot manage what you cannot measure.”

8. Transparency and anti-corruption have far-reaching results for gender equality.

Aida Diop (NRGI Senegal) emphasized that the rush for critical minerals increases the risks of corruption and reduced oversight. This includes sexual corruption as a recurring but under-addressed issue in mining, as highlighted in recent dialogues between NRGI, the World Bank, Women in Mining Senegal, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative on collective action to end such practices. Aida advocated defining sexual corruption as a crime and for including gender markers in laws and contracts. The Women in Mining of West Africa’s collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States and its creation of a regional gender strategy are a promising example of practical action that could be scaled up with international support.

At the IGF Annual General Meeting, the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals also signed onto the women’s rights and mining stakeholder engagement statement, committing to the implementation of gender-responsive due diligence and ensuring the human rights of women in mineral supply chains. Find out more about the statement here: <https://womenandmining.org/stakeholder-statement/>





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