

Without certification, mining companies will find it hard to sell their minerals at good prices

By John Odyek

Uganda has started mining tantalite, a mineral used in making of tantalum capacitors for electronic equipment like mobile phones, computers and DVD players. It is also used in nuclear reactors, aircrafts and the spaceship industry.

Tantalite is being mined at Namayumba sub-county in Wakiso district.

3T Mining Ltd, the company that is mining the tantalite, has also started the process of certifying the mineral mined in Uganda as a non-conflict mineral if it has to be exported.

International regulations bar export of minerals classified as "conflict minerals" to ensure that they are not got from the conflict area, which encompasses the Democratic Republic of Congo and 10 adjoining countries, including Uganda. The ban is to ensure that the proceeds do not fund conflict and human rights violations. The minerals include tungsten, tin, tantalite and gold.

Also, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed guidelines on conflict minerals. OECD, a Paris-based organisation, has guidelines to curb irresponsible sourcing of conflict minerals by consumers in the developed world.

According to Ikrom Muminov, the operations manager of 3T Mining Ltd, the company had asked UK-based Tin Supply Chain Initiative (iTSCi) to audit the company and issue the relevant certification. iTSCi has a system that monitors minerals from the point of extraction to the smelters and to where they are processed.

Muminov said the company produces five tonnes of tantalite

Mining company starts tantalite certification



Workers operating a tantalite ore processor. The mineral is used in nuclear reactors and aircrafts

monthly. They are exported to China and plan to resume exports to Europe once the traceability and certification system is complete.

He said they acquired a 21-year mining licence after successfully exploring for the mineral. The company currently employs 50 people.

Vincent Kedi, the principal mining engineer in department of geological survey and mines, said the Government was in the process of developing a certification programme.

Kedi said in the meantime, companies can pursue certification using international organisations, such as the ITRI and iTSCi.

"Big buyers of the 3T and G require certification. Without certification, mining companies will find it hard to sell their tin, tantalite, tungsten and gold at good prices. They can sell to middle men who have access to international certification service providers," Kedi said.

He added that other companies, like

African Panthers Resources, which mines tin in Isingiro district, had pursued certification and were able to sell their tin.

According to Fidel Kagame, the executive director of 3T Mining Ltd, the company is carrying out more exploration to see if they could discover more of the mineral.

Certification

The iTSCi, together with ITRI, implement internationally accepted,

operational due diligence and mineral traceability for the conflict minerals commonly called the 3T minerals.

iTSCi works with the Regional Certification Mechanism that was developed under the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) mineral certification to tackle the issue of conflict minerals.

Rwanda

An official for ITRI and iTSCi based in Rwanda, Ildephonse Niyonsaba, said a mineral tagging system in Rwanda was being jointly implemented by the Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board, ITRI and iTSCi since September 2010.

Niyonsaba said under iTSCi, they conduct mine baseline studies to assess when sites are able to enter the system and support governments in implementing the mineral tracking system. They ensure that international guidance for 'conflict-free' minerals is respected so that there is no human rights abuse, child labour, armed conflict or corruption.

He said the system ensures access to fair and competitive markets for miners. It ensures miners earn a dignified living and build a better future for themselves and their families.

Don Binyina, the executive director of the African Centre for Energy and Mineral Policy, said Uganda's failure to set up a regional certification mechanism has for the last 10 years denied the country billions of shillings as the minerals are smuggled across the borders cheaply.

Dr Jennifer Hinton, the director at Auranda Minerals, said Uganda was missing out on the global premium prices on the 3TGs because of lack of certification of the minerals.