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Phone and electric car batteries are made with cobalt mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Cobalt Red author Siddharth Kara describes the conditions for workers as a "horror show";

This series explores the impact of securing the minerals needed to build and power electric vehicles on local communities, workers and the environment.

The world's electric vehicle and battery manufacturers who use cobalt from Congo's industrial mines should use their influence to press mining companies to supply cobalt that is truly "clean" and "sustainable".

Mobile power, human toll. The world has grown reliant on lithium-ion batteries that power smartphones, laptops and electric cars. But the desperate search for the ingredients carries a steep...

Yet the growing market for electric cars may be causing harm to people in one of the world's most vulnerable countries. A legacy of conflict and exploitation. Dangerous working conditions, risks to people's health, and child labour are a huge problem in the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This will only take a second!

"The world needs Congo's cobalt to hit net zero targets, but the energy transition is not benefitting hundreds of thousands of Congolese people living in the shadow of the big industrial cobalt mines. They are not driving EVs nor enjoying a healthy environment. Instead, they are plagued by water pollution that's making them sicker and poorer. We all need a sustainable future, but this must apply equally to those in the global North as well as to those in the DRC."

"Our research reveals a glaring disconnect between the industry's "clean cobalt" claims and the stark reality faced by Congolese communities. The right to clean water and a healthy environment is non-negotiable for everyone and should not be sacrificed for some as part of the green energy transition. EV companies buying cobalt need to ensure it is responsibly sourced and should demand that mining companies clean up their act."

A new report released today reveals that toxic pollution from industrial cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is having devastating human and environmental impacts. The findings challenge the narrative of "clean" and "sustainable cobalt" frequently promoted by multinational mining companies. Cobalt is a critical raw material used in the rechargeable batteries of electric vehicles and renewable energy technologies, and is largely sourced from the copper and cobalt belt of southern DRC.

The 110-page ground-breaking report, "Beneath the Green: A critical look at the cost of industrial

cobalt mining in the DRC," authored by UK corporate watchdog RAID and DRC-based African Resources Watch (AFREWATCH), is one of the first in-depth studies of the environmental impacts of industrial cobalt mining on the human rights of hundreds of thousands of Congolese people living in and around Kolwezi, the heart of DRC's cobalt industry. Focused on the impacts of water pollution, it finds that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is routinely being violated for fenceline communities living in the shadow of the world's largest cobalt and copper mines.

Communities visited by RAID and AFREWATCH said that the toxic contamination is harming their health and having destructive consequences on local ecosystems and agriculture. Local residents said there is not enough clean water to drink, let alone enough for washing and personal hygiene, forcing them to use contaminated water for their everyday needs. A staggering 56% of those interviewed report that the pollution is affecting the gynaecological and reproductive health of women and girls, resulting in irregular menstruation, urogenital infections, more frequent miscarriages and, in some cases, birth defects. More and more young girls and teenagers also appear to be affected.

Local residents also said they are suffering from regular skin diseases and were particularly worried about the health of their children, who seem to be more seriously impacted. Nearly everyone (99%) said crop and fields yields are dramatically reduced due to water contamination, with drastic impacts on people's income. In addition, 59% said they have reduced their food intake to one meal a day, 59% have taken their children out of school due to lack of funds, and 75% said they can no longer afford healthcare or medicine. The interviewees all trace the decline in their living standards to the recent cobalt mining boom.

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