

→ Features

Six trends shaping African mining

African mining in 2026 is best understood as a contest over architecture. By **KIRSTY DELANEY**, senior associate, **TOM JAMIESON**, partner, **RO LAZAROVITCH**, partner and **DARREN SPALDING**, partner at **BRACEWELL (UK) LLP**

The decisive question is no longer only who owns a resource, but who can finance, permit, power, transport, market, and crucially, direct the resulting production into specific industrial ecosystems. Geology and commodity prices clearly still matter, but they now sit inside a larger set of constraints: infrastructure corridors, power availability, state bargaining over value capture, refining capacity and the strategic priorities of downstream manufacturers and governments.

Three dynamics give this period its distinctive character. The first is the rewiring of mineral capital. Many strategic investors are less focused on outright ownership and more focused on controlling the terms of flow, through offtake, marketing rights, access corridors, and financing structures that shape the destination for that material. The second is a more assertive, more pragmatic policy posture across many African states, where fiscal terms, local participation, and value addition are treated as tools of statecraft as much as development policy. Third, execution variables have become first-order determinants of bankability. Mines are no longer evaluated as standalone assets, but as integrated systems: mine plus power plus logistics plus a credible route to market. What follows is our impression of an outward-looking map of the major trends shaping African mining in 2026 and beyond, including from our observations at the recent Mining Indaba conference held in Cape Town.

From ownership to flow control

A defining shift in 2026 is the movement from ownership as the primary objective to flow control as the strategic prize. In practical terms, long-term offtake, marketing rights, structured prepayments, or privileged access corridors can replicate many of the economic benefits of ownership while limiting operational exposure and political friction.

The commercial logic is straightforward. Many critical minerals projects face financing constraints, midstream bottlenecks, and a buyer landscape that increasingly rewards certainty of supply and provenance. “Directionality” rights solve those problems for the buyer or strategic backer by creating predictability. They can also solve problems for the project by enabling bankability, because lenders tend to prefer contracted cashflows, clearer sales channels, and the comfort of a strong counterparty.

Legally, this shifts negotiating leverage into contracts that sit above the pit. Marketing agreements, prepayment structures, streaming or royalty arrangements, and take-or-pay logistics commitments become central to value. The hard work is in pricing formulas, auditability, transparency around deductions and penalties, change-in-law risk allocation, and the interaction with host-country rules on exports and domestic processing. The market’s direction in 2026 is that these instruments are becoming standard features of the transaction landscape, not exotic add-ons.

Corridor geopolitics

The second trend is the elevation of trading corridors from policy aspiration to project finance reality. In 2026, a mine’s competitiveness is increasingly determined by whether it has a credible, resilient route to port and a reliable power solution. This is particularly true in landlocked regions and in provinces where existing infrastructure was built for earlier eras of extraction and is now being re-purposed, expanded, or contested.

The Lobito Corridor is a clear example of how this plays out. It is anchored on Angola’s Benguela railway and the Atlantic port of Lobito, aiming to provide an Atlantic export route for copper and cobalt from the Central African Copperbelt.

In late 2025, the project secured a US\$753m financing package, including a US\$553m loan from the US International Development Finance Corporation. The funding, which supports the rehabilitation of approximately 1,300km of rail infrastructure in Angola, linking the mineral terminal at the Port of Lobito to Luau near the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, alongside capacity expansion along the corridor, also demonstrates that the US is still willing to commit capital to Africa, for certain strategic (and “westward facing”) projects. The Lobito Corridor will enable the development and commercialisation of mining projects that would otherwise not be practicable.

This is also where geopolitics meets competition in a tangible way. The corridor model is not singular. A rival eastward route is being promoted through the rehabilitation of the Tanzania-Zambia railway, commonly referred to as TAZARA Railway. China signed a US\$1.4bn agreement with Zambia and Tanzania to modernise the line, which links Zambia to an Indian Ocean port route that can shorten sailing times to Asian markets. This infrastructure contest is also a contest over where African minerals are processed and sold.

Partnerships

Across African mining, partnerships have become a common transaction format for large or strategically sensitive projects. This is partly a response to risk, and partly a response to complexity. Many mines now require integrated solutions across power, water, transport, security, and community systems. That integration is easier to deliver when risk and capability are spread across a consortium rather than concentrated in a single sponsor.

There is also a political reason. In many jurisdictions, governments want local participation, demonstrable domestic value capture, and clearer accountability for social and infrastructure commitments. Partnerships can be structured to include state vehicles, domestic investors, regional development banks, and strategic industrial counterparts. The result is a more layered ownership and governance landscape, with more reserved matters, more deadlock planning, and more attention to how benefits are distributed.

In practice, this trend changes how transactions are timed and structured. Early-stage project development increasingly focuses on building an investable coalition, not merely on proving the resource. For some assets, the

→ Features

decisive step is not the feasibility study alone but the ability to anchor a consortium that can credibly deliver financing and a stable route to market. The legal centre of gravity therefore shifts toward governance design, minority protections, transfer restrictions, and the alignment of offtake and financing rights with shareholder control – these have long been features of shareholder arrangements, but the complexity of ownership and stakeholder structures has elevated their importance.

Value chain finance

Mining finance is being reallocated towards value chain enablers and risk-managed structures. A single mine finance solution is less common. Instead, capital stacks are assembled through layered instruments that match different risk appetites to different parts of the project.

Two forces drive this. The first is execution risk. Power and logistics are often the binding constraints, so financing increasingly targets enabling assets like rail upgrades, ports, power generation, and regional interconnectors. The second is strategic competition. External partners are more willing to support finance where it improves supply security and creates alternative routes to market, which again pushes funding toward linked infrastructure.

The market is seeing continued use of prepayment, structured offtake, and trade finance, particularly for projects that can offer near-term production or quick expansions. These structures can shorten time to cashflow, but they also amplify the importance of transparency in pricing and deductions, clarity on delivery obligations, and careful allocation of change-in-law and export restriction risk.

A further factor is that downstream policy in major markets is shaping upstream finance. The European Commission has set explicit supply chain capacity benchmarks under the EU Critical Raw Materials Act, including targets for extraction, processing, and recycling capacity by 2030, as well as a diversification goal limiting dependence on any single third country at key stages. The enhanced US focus on critical minerals and security of supply, with the launch of the “Forum on Resource Geostategic Engagement” (FORGE) will also have an impact. Even though African countries are not bound by EU law nor US priorities, these policy targets influence buyers, lenders, and strategic investment committees, which in turn influences what financing structures look like and what kinds of projects are prioritised.

The missing middle

A structural fault line in African mining finance is the “missing middle” between junior-led exploration and fully derisked construction finance. Conventional commercial lenders typically avoid preproduction exposure due to geological uncertainty, permitting risk, infrastructure deficits, weak sponsor balance sheets, and fiscal volatility. Yet without capital at this stage, discoveries cannot mature into bankable projects capable of utilising new corridors or meeting critical mineral demand.

This gap is increasingly addressed by catalytic institutions such as the US International Development Finance Corporation and the Africa Finance Corporation, alongside private capital providers, which deploy minority equity, mezzanine instruments, political risk insurance, structured

offtake prepayments, and other tailored solutions to absorb early-stage risk and mobilise private co-investment. The result is growing capital stack complexity: layered financing packages combining development finance, commercial debt, royalty or streaming capital, offtake-linked facilities, and sponsor equity. Bankability is no longer a binary condition achieved at feasibility; it is engineered through deliberate risk allocation across institutions with differentiated mandates and time horizons.

Fiscal sovereignty

A sixth trend is the return of fiscal sovereignty as a front-line issue. Across many African jurisdictions, governments are seeking to capture a larger share of upside during high price periods while keeping investment pipelines alive. The result is a pragmatic, often experimental approach to fiscal tools, rather than a single ideology of resource nationalism.

Sliding-scale royalties are a prominent example because they are politically intelligible and mechanically adaptable. For example, Ghana’s gold output hit a record in 2025 and highlighted industry concern that proposed royalty reforms, including a price-linked sliding scale, could affect investment and production assumptions. The broader takeaway is that governments want fiscal regimes that move with prices, while investors want predictability and protection against discretionary shifts.

Local content requirements and state participation models remain central. These tools are increasingly negotiated in tandem with infrastructure and processing ambitions. The policy logic is that value capture is not only about tax. It is also about jobs, domestic enterprise creation, and the political narrative of ownership and benefit. For sponsors, the challenge is to structure participation that is durable, fundable, aligned with operational accountability and consistent with broader geopolitical forces.

Conclusion

African mining is moving towards an integrated model in which flow control, corridors, partnership structures, and value-chain finance matter as much as ore bodies. The Lobito Corridor and the renewed attention to eastward alternatives like TAZARA illustrate how infrastructure has become a strategic instrument for directing mineral flows and shaping processing geography. Fiscal sovereignty and value capture politics are rising at the same time, with more price-linked fiscal tools and stronger expectations of domestic participation and visible development outcomes.

The global context is tightening competition for capital and market access. Africa is not only navigating US, European and Chinese strategies, but is also competing with other mining frontiers for the next wave of investment, particularly South America, where copper and lithium pipelines, investment forecasts, and new critical mineral agreements are pulling attention and capital. Recent reporting on increased copper investment in Argentina and the scale of Chile’s mining investment pipeline is a reminder that capital is mobile.

How these forces combine over the coming period will shape not only Africa’s fiscal and industrial future, but also the structure of global mining. If Africa can translate corridor buildout into lower logistics costs, pair that with credible power solutions, and strike stable bargains on value capture and processing, it can move from being a strategic supplier to being a strategic value-chain node. ■