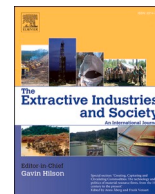




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“Local Content is politics”: An examination of the origins of local content policies in Guinea’s mining sector

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ABSTRACT

In a quest to overcome the resource curse and enclave extractivism, many resource rich countries opt to implement local content policies (LCPs), a popular type of mining reform. LCPs aim to facilitate inclusive resource-based development through the maximization of local direct and indirect employment, as well as the creation of linkages along and beyond the mining value chain. This paper examines why countries like Guinea – a low-income country extremely rich in bauxite and the focus of this article – are designing and implementing LCPs. In so doing, the reasons related to extractivism are highlighted, as well as the political motivations for implementing LCPs.

Both reasons expose problematic realities that harm successful LCP design and implementation. First, although the aim of LCPs is to overcome enclave extractivism and resource curse effects, LCPs operate alongside extractivism, thus reinforcing structural deficiencies. Second, the political motivations behind the implementation of LCPs, through a commitment to the African Mining Vision, as well as Guinean LCPs being a top-down presidential political project, make LCP implementation challenging. This Guinean case study showcases the processes through which mining reforms are entangled in national and regional politics and how the reality of ongoing extractivism can undermine reform efforts.

1. Introduction

In recent years, resource-rich countries across sub-Saharan Africa have increasingly introduced reforms in their extractive industries, aimed at achieving inclusive resource-based development. Local Content Policies (LCPs) that intend to maximise local direct employment and local procurement in and beyond the extractive value chain are a popular tool to reverse the negative impacts of extractive activities and in particular, limited employment opportunities. Academics and practitioners tend to focus on the design and execution of LCPs (Kalyuzh-nova et al., 2016; Lebdioui, 2020; Ovadia, 2014). What remains unexplored is the analysis of why countries opt for such reforms and what this motivation reveals about the potential dynamics that may impact reform design and implementation. Geenen (2019) and Hansen et al. (2016) have studied how the *implementation* of local content is embedded in political dynamics. The argument that I present in this paper is that the *origins* of LCPs are political and tied to reasons related to extractivism. My objective is to examine the reasons behind the implementation of mining sector reforms through local content in Guinea, thereby revealing the dynamics, particularly of a political nature, that

may impact LCP design and implementation. The findings from Guinea are pertinent to the region’s resource-rich countries and beyond them to those that have initiated local content reforms. Guinea is an interesting case, having greater experience on local content compared to some of its regional counterparts like Niger and Burkina Faso but less experience than the more advanced cases like Ghana and Nigeria (Maponga and Musa, 2021).

After discussing key literature and presenting the methodology, I present my analysis in three parts. I will discuss how countries like Guinea chose LCPs to overcome the negative impacts of extractivism. I will then explain that there are political reasons for Guinea opting for LCPs, and these are intertwined with extractivism-related motivations. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the conclusion.

2. Contextualising LCPs: Extractivism and the role of politics

The LCP debate has only partially addressed the question about why countries opt for mining sector reforms, local content being a popular type thereof. Tordo et al. (2013; p. 18) broadly define LCPs as “government interventions that look to increase, in the long term, the share

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of employment or sales to a sector that are locally supplied at each stage of the value chain.” The LCP literature partially acknowledges the historical development of LCPs and the socio-economic and political transitions that explain why countries opt for LCPs. [Buckler \(2021\)](#) briefly outlines the global historical, political, and economic context of local content policies. To fully grasp the context of LCPs, I combine LCP and extractivism literature. [Fig. 1](#) illustrates how mining sector reforms, notably LCPs, can be placed in context. [Tordo et al. \(2013\)](#) connect LCPs to productive development policies that are part of a wider range of older policies, namely protectionist industrial policies, resource nationalism and import substitution ([Buckler, 2021](#); [Kalyuzhnova and Nygaard, 2009](#); [Prebisch, 1962](#); [Tordo and et al., 2013](#)). Reforms like LCPs were reversed when neoliberalism was the dominant global ideology. The ideas of inclusive resource-based development have returned more significantly following neoliberal extraction ([Deringer et al., 2018](#); [Kalyuzhnova et al., 2016](#); [Ramdoo, 2015](#)). After decades of liberalisation, structural deficiencies were revealed that accounted for continuing poverty, enclave and Resource Curse effects, impeding the development trajectory in resource-rich developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa ([Campbell, 2009](#)). New kinds of extractivism, the so-called ‘neo’ and ‘progressive’ extractivism, emerged at the beginning of the 2000s, aiming to mitigate poverty by channelling extractive activities into social spending ([Acosta, 2017](#); [Burchardt and Dietz, 2014](#); [Gudynas, 2015](#); [Svampa, 2015](#)).

Bebbington’s (2011; 2013) theory of how inclusive development can be achieved in resource-rich countries resembles the objectives of LCPs defined by the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF) (IGF, 2018). The main feature of this theory relates to Hirschman’s linkages concept that argues that stimulating employment, supply chain management, social spending, and taxation through diversification of the extractive sector is vital ([Hirschman, 1958](#)). Linkages are key components of LCPs, as well as increased export, maximised government revenues from mining royalties and more economic development and transformation through inclusive economic development. LCPs are a way of not only creating resource-led development but also a tool to ‘get the institutions right’ in reversing the Resource Curse and enclave extractivism impacts ([Korinek and Ramdoo, 2017](#); [McKinsey Global Institute, 2013](#)). LCP literature continues to be dominated by studies that analyse the implementation of LCPs through analysis of the reasons that hinder effective LCP implementation. Scholars focus on studying the lack of technical, financial, and competitive skills as well as company performance ([Ackah-Baidoo, 2020](#); [Calignano and Vaaland, 2018](#); [Lebdioui, 2020](#); [Macatangay, 2016](#)). In terms of the more political and governance-related LCP literature, the role of transparency, human rights, and institutional and governance factors ([Ovadia, 2014](#)), as well as power dynamics, corruption and patronage ([Ayanoore, 2019](#); [Geenen, 2019](#); [Nwapi, 2015](#)) are studied. The political dynamics connected to LCP implementation is studied to some extent ([Geenen, 2019](#); [Hansen et al., 2016](#); [Wilhelm and Maconachie, 2020](#); [Buckler, 2021](#)).

The questions of why resource-rich countries opt for reforms like LCPs and what these motivations reveal about potential obstacles to LCP design and implementation have not been adequately addressed yet. I propose a novel manner to analyse LCPs. By using extractivism theory and acknowledging the historical and political context, I demonstrate how LCPs’ origins are embedded in political dynamics and ongoing extractivism. I call for considering the historical and political context when studying LCPs and related mining sector reforms.

3. Methodology

This research adopts the qualitative approach, combining fieldwork in Guinea in 2019 with subsequent remote data collection and document analysis. It includes 65 semi-structured interviews and considers, *inter alia*, 173 reports, 50 government publications, 26 internal government documents, 21 social media pages and 59 legal documents and laws. The

semi-structured interviews were conducted with government officials, mining company representatives, civil society representatives, and experts like consultants and representatives from financial institutions. The government interviewees were from various departments of the Ministry of Mines, mainly the directors and vice-directors of the departments, as well as administrators. Selected informants and “elites” with expert knowledge of LCPs and the mining industry in Guinea were contacted through email and phone. These early connections allowed for the establishment of a contact network through snowball effect. Interviews and documents were transcribed or digitized, then thematically coded and analysed using NVivo software. For participant protection, data was anonymised. Prior to obtaining written consent, all participants were presented with an information sheet and consent form, and ethical approval was obtained. In terms of power dynamics, positionality played a role. In the context of Guinea’s male-dominated mining sector, gender relations had to be carefully navigated to limit risks and manage expectations.

4. Motivations behind the design and implementation of LCPS in Guinea

4.1. Background

Since the election of Guinea’s President Alpha Condé in 2010, the Guinean mining sector has undergone several reforms. A fundamental pillar of these reforms is the idea of local content. According to [Maponga and Musa \(2021, p. 202\)](#), “Guinea has implemented one of the most elaborate local content policies for mining to date.” [Wilhelm and Maconachie \(2020\)](#) present what LCPs in Guinea resemble. The authors distinguish between (i) direct LCPs (employment, local procurement, and training programmes), and (ii) indirect LCPs (the broader business enabling environment through interventions to boost individuals and local firms’ capacities via state intervention or additional Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities by the private sector). Following this distinction, Guinea adopted a combination of mandatory and voluntary measures. In terms of direct LCPs, to boost direct employment and local procurement along and beyond the mining value chain, mining companies must respect quotas to contribute to a *Guinéisation* – the maximisation of direct and indirect employment of Guineans in the sector. Additionally, mining companies must organise training and capacity programmes for Guinean companies. The context of broader local content, indirect LCPs, includes measures that indirectly stimulate Guinean local content creation through capacity and skills programmes for Guinean companies and mining revenue funds. These funds not only provide the financial means to boost employment and company capacities but also create local content by financing community projects realised by local companies that can, in turn, provide the skill set and experiences to enable these companies to apply for tenders in and beyond the mining industry.¹ Other examples of indirect local content are programmes such as the Supplier and Partnership Marketplace platform to facilitate local procurement and boost the capacities of local firms, as well as entrepreneurship and employment initiatives by the Government of Guinea, technical and financial partners, and non-governmental organizations. CSR initiatives by companies to support small and medium sized enterprises with access to finance,

¹ Two new mining revenue funds, the National Local Development Fund (FNDL) and the Local Economic Development Fund (FODEL) are indirect tools of Local Content, as [Wilhelm and Maconachie \(2020\)](#) analyse. Mining companies directly pay a set percentage of their revenues into these funds that are then redistributed and used for local development activities. These activities have the potential to improve the business enabling environment, thereby leveraging opportunities for local content. The budgets of these two funds are significant. As an example, in 2019, the FNDL led to 791 microprojects with a budget of \$25million USD ([ANAFIC, 2019](#)).

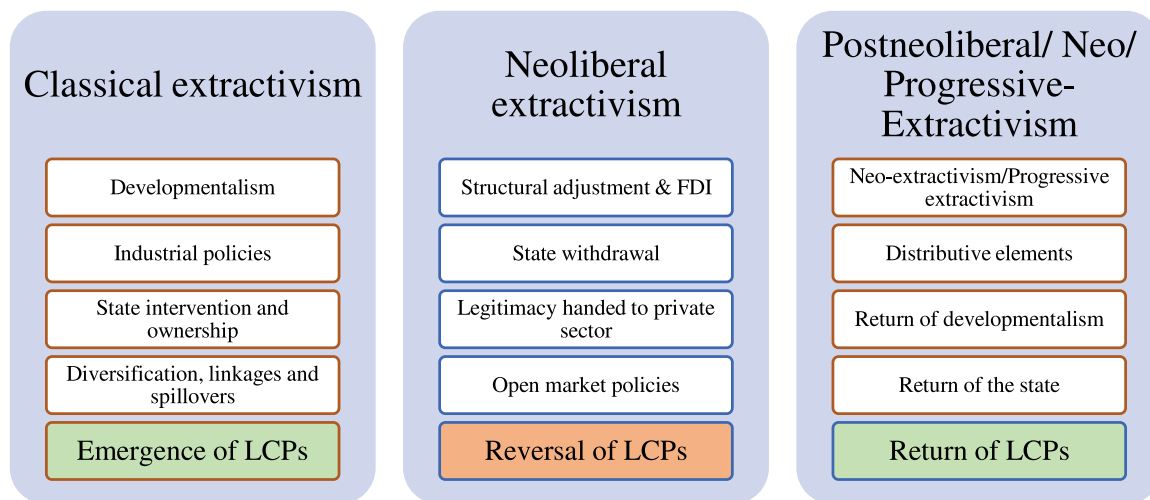


Fig. 1. LCPs and evolution of extractivism.

donations of equipment and infrastructure, and other types of assistance are further examples of indirect local content.

All these reforms occur whilst numerous new players continue to arrive in Guinea. The country has seen an exceptional boom in its bauxite production, and the licences and concessions that are awarded to bauxite mining companies continue to grow. Along with its quest to further stimulate investment in the bauxite industry, the Guinean government aims to combine this with its commitment to catalysing these investments into inclusive resource-based development through the following: (i) increasing the socio-economic impact of mining activities by maximising the share of Guinean direct and indirect employment (local content), (ii) diversifying and aiming to achieve more bauxite transformation domestically and (iii) improving mining revenue distribution.

4.2. Opting for LCPs: Extractivism-related reasons

Key documents on Guinean LCPs reveal to some extent why Guinea opted for LCPs in its extractive sector. Following Condé's election and his commitment to reforms, Guinea introduced a new and revised mining code in 2013. The broader vision and principles of how the mining sector should be transformed followed in the subsequent years (Ministère des Mines, 2018; Ministère du Plan et de la Coopération Internationale, 2012). These documents incorporate ideas of local content, specifying the goal to have a competitive, diversified economy that creates decent employment opportunities, economic hubs with a perfectly integrated mining sector and a private sector that is the motor for growth and progress.

LCPs were created to maximise the economic and social impacts generated from investments in the mining sector. The Guinean government emphasises that the mining industry will continue to play a major role in the Guinean economy and will be an imperative in promoting the country's socio-economic growth. Hence, it is necessary to ensure that the economy becomes diversified to generate spillovers. The government outlines, "These actions, which will include any necessary global and/or sectoral regulatory reform, will lead to concrete solutions to the current problems hampering the development of sectors connected to mining and the development of employment for the Guinean population" (Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2017a). This implies that certain problems correlate with extractive activities in Guinea that reforms and initiatives, including LCPs, aim to address. These problems are not directly specified, but the importance of mining-induced employment opportunities that are meant to stimulate socio-economic development continues to be outlined. Another key document on LCPs explains further how the strategy of the Guinean government is an open

economy that balances the partnership between investors and companies to achieve trickle-down impact by generating economic growth from resource extraction. The private sector that will generate employment and improve the currently precarious employment conditions is presented as a key asset. The document specifies that LCPs "have been elaborated to boost this dynamic of the creation of a local industrial framework that is productive and competitive where SMEs can generate employment and contribute significantly to the economic growth of the country" (Ministère de l'Industrie, des PME et de la promotion du secteur privé, 2017).

4.2.1. Resource Curse, enclavity, and employment expectations

On closer scrutiny, elements of extractive activities, notably the Resource Curse and enclavity, are identified as threats to achieving inclusive resource-based development. The *Vision Guinée 2040* mentions how Dutch Disease, which is a Resource Curse effect, can harm development in the long term (Ministère du Plan et de la Coopération Internationale, 2012). Moreover, the 2040 Vision notes that the Guinean mining sector is not well integrated with the economy. The government-commissioned Boké regional development strategy refers to the mining sector in Guinea directly as an enclave that "has been operating in a self-contained manner. It has either directly produced or imported all the goods and services it needs to construct the mines and maintain production levels" (Ergo Strategy Group, 2018; p.6). One of the consequences of this enclave extractivism in Guinea is that the industry expanded "without relying on a pre-existing network of suppliers or infrastructure" (Ergo Strategy Group, 2018; p.6).

The main deficiency of extractive activities including Resource curse and enclavity impact that LCPs aim to address is the lack of employment opportunities and diversification. Literature on extractive reforms indicate that reforms are implemented to achieve the following: (i) mitigate negative social and environmental impacts caused by resource extraction (Katz-Lavigne, 2017) and (ii) provide inclusion and resource-based development to counter enclave extractivism (Bebbington, 2013; Campbell, 2009). Bebbington (2011, 2013) specifically points to employment, supply chain management, and other channels of inclusion. Korinek and Ramdoo (2017) point to the deficiency of extractivism as a central motivation for countries to opt for LCPs. They argue, "The resurfacing of LCPs has been particularly strong in countries where the capital-intensive mining sector has developed as an enclave, with few links to the wider economy, and has not been successful in creating sustainable economic benefits. The benefits sought are potentially diverse and include employment generation, supply chain development and technological and knowledge spillovers" (Korinek and Ramdoo, 2017; p. 10). The Guinean government documents do not specify this

connection in detail. However, unemployment and the expectations for employment are major issues in the country, particularly in the mining areas. A 2017 Local Content Evaluation study commissioned by the Ministry of Mines reveals that the majority of the population (91% of the surveyed men and 61% of women) aspire to work for mining companies with an overall 68% voicing the wish to have employment in the mining supply chain (DAI, 2017). A 2019 Ministry report claims that extractive activities are a significant motor for growth for the Guinean economy that have the opportunity to create and develop local companies that “should effectively satisfy the needs for employment of the general population and their need to improve their living conditions” (Ministère de l’Industrie, des PME et de la promotion du secteur privé, 2019; p.9). A recent International Finance Corporation (IFC) report notes that despite the bauxite boom in Guinea in the past years, “this heavy concentration of investment creates risks, however, related to the lack of diversification of exports and the low employment generated from mining and hydropower” (IFC, 2020; p. 2). The report also points to Dutch Disease and Resource Curse risks that can be seen to some extent in Guinea. The hope that LCPs lead to employment growth and industrial diversification that will generate linkages that connect the mining sector with more labour-intensive opportunities that surmount these challenges is widespread in LCP literature (Kalyuzhnova et al., 2016; Ovadia, 2014). In countries like Zambia, Ghana, South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria, LCPs have delivered some promising results (Adewuyi and Ademola Oyejide, 2012; Bloch and Owusu, 2012; Bond and Fajgenbaum, 2014; Kaplan, 2012; Lippert, 2014) This echoes the solution proposed to Guinea by the IFC to promote diversification and spillover effects where the creation and development of employment opportunities are key, notably through “local content sourcing” from mining sector growth (IFC, 2020). The estimated revenues that local SMEs could capture seem significant. A 2017 government-commissioned report estimates that within the next 15–20 years, \$1.75bn will be spent on workforce cost and \$1.85bn on goods and services in the Guinean mining industry. This report estimates that 51% of the employment share and 40% of goods and services will be sourced locally (DAI, 2017; p. 50).

4.2.2. Need for solutions to reverse the deficiencies of extractive industries

What the reports are silent about is the sense of urgency that the negative impacts of extraction created. In 2017, the year when many of the documents on local content were written, the so-called “year of local content,” tensions in the bauxite mining area, Boké, reached unprecedented levels (Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2017b; Ergo Strategy Group, 2018). Violent protests emerged, fuelled by the frustration of the youth due to the failure to meet their expectations vis-à-vis mining activities. The railway line was blocked, and mining activities had to stop. Strikes and unrest regularly occur in the Boké region, and numerous studies have pointed to the lack of employment opportunities and precarious labour conditions in the mining sector as amongst the major factors causing tensions that can turn violent (Ergo Strategy Group, 2018; GIZ, 2017). As a representative of a Guinean NGO explained, “The obstacle is that many young people are impacted by unemployment. It’s unemployment that tires people here.” Another civil society interviewee described the situation in Boké as explosive, where the unemployed youth, in their frustration, can erupt into a violent protest at any moment. Even the little employment that is created in and beyond the mining value chain does not meet the expectations of the population.

LCP literature acknowledges that in extractive industries, employment opportunities are limited (Macatangay, 2016). Especially with increasing automation and a potential decline of extractive industries caused by the end of the current commodity supercycle, unskilled employment opportunities will become scarcer, limiting the potential benefits of LCPs (Bowman et al., 2021). Dauda (2020) has demonstrated how, even in countries that pursue LCP efforts, mining remains capital and not labour intensive. Even if local employment opportunities are created, these would not adequately respond to the needs. In Guinea, the

economy has not been significantly diversified and spillover effects into more labour-intensive industries, such as agriculture, have long been neglected. The characteristics of the mining industry have also meant that not enough employment has been created, and if employment opportunities arose, these have often not been captured by Guineans. The Guinean government still believes in the potential of LCPs to overcome these challenges and has, hence, opted for them as a tool to overcome some of the negative impacts of extractive activities.

4.3. Political motivations: “It is political. local content is politics.”

4.3.1. External motivations: The Africa Mining Vision (AMV) and regional politics

LCP literature has studied how the implementation of LCPs is often entangled with political dynamics, as in the case of Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique (Hansen et al., 2016), Angola and Nigeria (Oguine, 2011; Ovadia, 2014; Wiig and Kolstad, 2010), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Geenen, 2019), and other countries across sub-Saharan Africa (Hansen et al., 2014). However, to what extent the motivation to opt for LCPs in the first place is impacted by political circumstances, has not been fully studied. Ackah-Baidoo (2020), Dauda (2020) and Hilson (2020) mention that the AMV played a role in countries’ motivations to adopt LCPs.

Guinea, like its regional neighbours, implemented mining sector reforms in response to a major regional initiative, the 2009 AMV. The government’s legal application documents clearly outline this connection and state that the AMV adopted by the African Union (AU) is a “framework of reference” for the subsequent mining sector reforms in Guinea that include local content (Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2017c). The AMV is the framework for reforming African mining industries to achieve inclusive, resource-based development through sustainable and transparent mineral resource exploitation. The Guinean government states: “It is in this process of achieving the objectives of the AMV that the government has initiated a structural reform of the mining sector to promote a type of public regulations in favour of responsible and sustainable development” (Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2017c). The government’s voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility and local content guidelines for mining companies are instruments of this reform. The government emphasises that, as an active member of the AU, Guinea is obliged to implement the AMV (Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2017d). The timing of the design and implementation of LCPs and other mining sector reforms in Guinea reinforce this connection further. In January 2017, the “year of local content,” Guinea’s President was elected as the Chairperson of the AU. It was also decided in 2018 that the African Minerals Development Centre (AMDC), created to implement and monitor the AMV, would be based in Guinea’s capital. Mining analysts conclude that Guinea won the bid due to its “recent efforts to improve the sector [that] made it an attractive choice for the AMDC headquarters” (Mining Technology, 2019). The Guinean Ministry of Mines celebrated this achievement widely and declared that Guinea was chosen “thanks to the lobbying of Professor Alpha Condé.” The AU declared that Guinea was chosen as it was a “role model in terms of its mining experience” (Ministère des Mines et de la Géologie, 2019). This motivation of the Guinean government to use initiatives like the AMV to portray itself as a progressive and important regional actor has been communicated by various interviewees. An influential international NGO representative explained:

“What we see in a very clear way is that the authorities are committed to preserving the reputation of Guinea, internally and externally. They are committed to passing on the message ‘We are dynamic. We are successful. And we will become the ‘bauxite leaders’ of the world.’ ”

A consultant explained further that the Guinean administration is eager to demonstrate that it is an example of a progressive and democratic nation, a model state in a region surrounded by unstable states.

I have shown that regional political initiatives like the AMV are important in stimulating key mining reforms, including local content. This confirms earlier conclusions (Ackah-Baidoo, 2020; Dauda, 2020; Hilson, 2020). The arrival of Alpha Condé in the Guinean political sphere and his motivation for playing a role in regional incentives were integral to creating reforms. The interests are diverse ranging from a genuine interest to catalyse mining returns into inclusive resource-based development to political objectives linked to upholding a reputation of being a respected and progressive leader. A recent study by Buckler (2021) suggests further interests, namely (i) resource nationalism through identity politics; (ii) a populist rhetoric; (iii) a strengthening sense of national self-confidence in light of former neocolonialist experiences; and overall an increasing longing for (iv) authority and control over managing national economies.

4.3.2. Internal motivation: a top-down presidential political project

On closer scrutiny of the domestic political sphere in Guinea, I contend that opting for local content is a clear political decision that follows a top-down approach managed primarily at the President's level. This consciousness concerning local content in Guinea having political origins is clearly expressed. As one interviewee who has held senior management positions in a mining company in Guinea revealed:

"It [local content] came out of a political sort of standpoint. The President and the administration... local businessmen were saying, 'why aren't we getting contracts?' It came from a political angle and therefore the structure that needs to be for implementation wasn't there. It was more political."

The interviewee explained that it was a push that came from the people in Guinea who were complaining to the government. The latter then decided to find 'solutions' to problems. A Guinean entrepreneur and member of the Guinean Local Content Association clearly stated:

"It is political. Local content is politics."

The director of the local content department at the Ministry of Mines explained in a podcast that their department and the local content initiative come from the President himself and that there is a lot of hope in the President and communities that the mining sector will bring benefits (EITI Guinea podcast, 2019).

In numerous interviews, it was consistently outlined how local content is the favourite topic of President Condé and Prime Minister Fofana. A consultant expanded:

"In Guinea, we have a very strong commitment at the top (...) the strategic nature of local content (...) is very well understood by the key people at the top of the mining policy value chain."

This top-down approach continues to be applied. It is currently discussed that the observatory on local content to be created soon will probably be under the tutelage of the Prime Minister's office. The commitment to local content was highlighted in Condé's 2020 Electoral programme and campaign. The programme featured local transformation and local employment, as well as the two new mining revenue development funds, as part of his local content section in the electoral programme. One of the promises of the programme was that throughout his next presidency, 50% of the total mining industry spending would be local (RPG, 2020). Just like direct LCPs, indirect LCPs, notably the funds, are also regarded as presidential projects. When mayors receive the cheques from the mining companies and the government-managed revenue institution, this affiliation becomes clear. The first person they thank for the payments is the President, who they believe is behind these initiatives (Evasion Guinée, 2020; Mediaguinée, 2019).

4.3.3. Combination of circumstances: the political environment and extractivism

The aim to reverse the negative impacts of extractive activities and their political dimensions go hand in hand. This is in line with Korinek

and Ramdoo (2017), who aver that, in some cases, LCPs are implemented following political considerations based on pressure to distribute the gains from extractive activities. This shows that the political motivation paired with maintaining extractive activities whilst overcoming the latter's negative impacts are the reasons that countries opt for LCPs.

A government representative, when queried about the reason behind the creation of the supplier marketplace platform that is a local content tool, responded thus:

"When the President was elected in 2010, the investments kept coming in and doubled or tripled, we started to look at how do we ensure that our locals actually benefit from this investment."

Another government representative, when asked about the background and context of local content design, responded that the arrival of Alpha Condé was a key moment for structural mining sector reforms, including local content and that particularly in the aftermath of the Ebola epidemic, bauxite production really kicked off, and it became important for the government to transform this wealth and create employment.

4.4. What the motivations reveal about problematic LCP implementation

4.4.1. Overcoming the deficiencies of extractivism despite its continuation

I argue that it is questionable whether LCPs can reverse the Resource Curse and enclivity impacts, the common features of extractivism. It is unclear to what extent local content can lead to inclusive resource-based development with tangible impacts whilst continuing extractive activities with the central aim of attracting further investment increasing production and export levels. Researchers such as Bebbington (2011, 2018) and Gudynas (2015) argue that the reforms that channel extractive activities into social spending to address deficiencies (like lack of employment and local procurement) are merely compensating extractive deficiencies to a certain extent. The very nature of extractive activities remains unchallenged, where investment attraction and the ongoing focus on extractive activities hinder any structural reforms that create tangible and sustainable impacts reproducing enclivity and Resource Curse impacts instead. Béland et al. (2021) and Coderre et al. (2019) who study mining reforms in line with the AMV contend that although the AMV triggers innovative changes, these are limited due to the "perpetuation of the perspectives, norms and policy instruments inherited from the former liberalised mining regimes" (Béland et al., 2021; p.10). Hence, this message must be clear that reforms like local content bring limited benefits. What many of the interviewees recognise is the fact that the main mode of extractive activities will not change even with local content reforms. The mining sector remains capital intensive and not labour intensive, and it continues to be governed by prices, transnational actors and various external factors like "international trade regime practices, tariff import privileges and bilateral conventions" that "hinder the capacity of African states to implement their local content policies" (Béland et al., 2021; p.12). When asked if local content can create inclusive resource-based development and effective *Guinéisation*, a consultant responded thus:

"I have been told that in Guinea and I was very sad to hear that even some politicians have this message. It is totally misleading. It's going to create problems. The reality is that not everybody will get a job in the mining value chain. It is not going to solve any employment issue at the level of the country. To give these expectations to people is totally... it's not good. But I've been told in Guinea that some politicians have said that. Local content is just part of good governance in the mining sector. The linkages are part of the answer."

Some practitioners are pessimistic regarding local procurement. A consultant explained how maximising local procurement through LCPs in Guinea is like

“shuffling deck chairs on the Titanic. The numbers they [the government and its technical and financial partners] talk about are in hundreds of thousands of dollars. I’m sorry, but this is a multi-billion dollar industry and achieving a couple of \$100,000 or a couple of \$1mn worth of spend is firstly incidental and secondly, frankly, will be likely to happen anyway because you can’t buy everything internationally.”

The Guinean government seems to be aware of this to some extent, continuously stressing the importance of diversification of the industry and spillovers into more labour-intensive industries. It is unclear what the realistic potential of local procurement in the Guinean mining industry is, given that procurement data provided by the Guinean government or mining companies are currently non-existent. Hence, it is not possible for observers to track the progress in terms of local procurement and where opportunities may be captured. Even the DAI study presented earlier in this paper which estimates Guinean local procurement spending of \$240mn over the next 15–20 years in the mining industry, shows how little the impact may be. Morris et al. (2012) have revealed how in numerous countries, effective linkages were not achieved as integration between sectors was not realised, and more structural policies to promote effective linkages were not successful.

I thus find it questionable whether, in times of ongoing extractivism and the continuation of mining investment flowing into Guinea, direct local content will provide tangible opportunities in the mining supply chain, as well as beyond the mining industry through spillovers and linkages. I consider it doubtful whether indirect local content measures, mining revenue funds and supplier and employment projects and initiatives will create tangible benefits that would be sustainable even if the bauxite price falls or the bauxite demand in China becomes saturated. This end of the current supercycle, paired with automation, may seriously restrict LCP impacts.

4.4.2. A risky political promise

The top-level politicians who shape local content are not adequately transparent about this reality, which may create serious problems. The messages by politicians on the opportunities of local content are often misleading and have the potential to create tensions. A mining company representative shared that they worry about the conflict potential stirred by the “Conakry elite” on local content and that it is the technocrats of the government who declared the need for local content, building up expectations for the local population that will not be fulfilled, and when the wrong people will unfairly benefit from the opportunities, the mining companies will be caught in the middle. When asked about what is meant by conflict potential and tensions, a government representative said that especially in the mining areas, people tend to revolt due to frustration when their expectations are not met. The conflict potential that can become violent at times in the mining area, mentioned earlier in the paper, should not be underestimated. Unsuccessful local content and a local content campaign that may be perceived as false promises may stir these conflicts further. Local content discourse is highly prevalent in Guinea, and as a journalist from the Boké region explained, local content is increasingly discussed and often becomes the source of conflicts. The local population has conveniently, and sometimes narrowly, interpreted the message spread by the President, and many believe that any project and opportunity created in the area must be captured by a local inhabitant of Boké. He was concerned that some people interpreted the local content message to the extreme and apprehensive that, fuelled by political promises, this would create unrealistic expectations:

“It is true that the political discourse that is held is that it is about employment, that we are sending companies that will help us to get millions of jobs for the population. It is a political discourse, by the President himself. But there is a reality. A mine has a limited employment, which will be below the ambitions of the local population where 90% are unemployed.”

Another source of potential conflict is the fact that local content in Guinea is a top-down political project. Some of the interviewees expressed that for them, local content campaigns by the President and senior administrators are used for political purposes only and remain mere rhetoric. This is in line with findings by Knierzinger (2016) and Wilhelm and Maconachie (2020) who have shown that recent reforms in Guinea, including LCPs, lack effective implementation beyond the mere announcement of legal principles and visions. A consultant said, in a conversation about local content, that the government is enjoying the “pat on the back and the platitudes that come with it” but that it was not “stepping up to its rhetoric” and that other than announcing principles, it was not doing the necessary work to implement local content, as those concerned in the government do not want to “get their hands dirty.” An NGO representative expressed his concerns and made the connection to potential conflict clear:

“Everyone says ‘local content, local content!’ But we don’t even know what is meant by local content. Even the President of the Republic himself he says ‘Yes, local content, we will employ all young people!’ He says this while we don’t even have any understanding and execution of local content. Imagine, when the President of the Republic goes to Boké, an area where people rise² every day. He says, publicly, that because of local content all mining companies will employ you. This is how local content is being interpreted here! (...) It is a false promotion of local content. It’s just theories; you see nothing in practice, nothing at all. That’s the false promotion of local content (...) this is the problem; it is the problem of the political will.”

Another aspect the findings have revealed is the importance of initiatives like the AMV in stimulating local content. This may be problematic for numerous reasons. As Hilson (2020) posits, the AMV, despite the initial energy and enthusiasm, has lost its momentum. The long-awaited AMV implementation centre in Conakry is not operational yet, and it is unclear whether and how the AMV lives on. If new and ongoing reforms in countries depend on pan-African initiatives like the AMV, this may mean a halt to reform efforts once the momentum is lost. It is also uncertain to what extent such regional political initiatives are abused for political purposes and power games that will not lead to effective reform implementation. Katz-Lavigne (2017) indicates how mining reforms were used as tools by political parties for furthering their own interests in Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. The author points to the political dimension behind the AMV, recognizing certain patterns across countries.

Another aspect fraught with political risks is the strong association of Guinea’s LCP with its President. Guinea is in a time of transition since the removal of Alpha Condé in September 2021. How local content policies will continue in the current military regime and after the transition to democracy remains to be seen. The point is that if local content is a Presidential project that does not find a strong base in the ministries and amongst government administrators in Conakry and the regions beyond party lines, then local content may be exposed to political transitions and political power games. Wilhelm and Maconachie (2020) observe domestic political issues impacting local content implementation in Guinea, particularly due to the political transitions in and outside the capital and due to the conflict of interests between the national administration in Conakry and the local authorities. The authors also reveal that LCPs in Guinea remain theoretical, where the main principles are declared, but implementation and monitoring are lacking. The findings of this paper are in line with LCPs being to some extent political rhetoric, used for domestic and external political purposes, including populism and identity politics (Buckler, 2021). More research is needed to study the political dimensions of LCPs further to understand if and

² In the French original he says “où les gens se lèvent tous les jours”, which implies that they protest every day

how LCPs are misused by certain actors for political purposes, thereby limiting successful and effective LCP implementation.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that in the case of Guinea, the government opted for LCPs to surmount the negative impacts of extractive activities (notably lack of employment), as well as due to political reasons. I have analysed the limitations of LCPs in meeting employment expectations whilst extractivism continues in a structurally unchanged manner. I showed how in Guinea local content was an opportunity to take a leading role in regional political developments, and how it continues to be a domestic top-down presidential political project. I have discussed how this can be problematic, for local content can become entangled in polarised political rhetoric without actually being implemented.

For policymakers, I recommend the depoliticalisation of local content. The Guinean policymakers and politicians, in particular, are advised to be rational and honest about what local content can and cannot do to avoid the disproportionate expectations that are abused for political purposes and, when unmet, can lead to unrest and even violence. Local content should be included in the inclusive resource-based development toolkit through a collaborative approach, with bottom-up structures outside the political arena.

Overall, the message is not to expect miracles from local content in the industrial mining sector. The industry is not labour intensive and is limited due to the lack of structural changes in extractivism. An innovative solution could be Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) that has a long tradition in Guinea. ASM is highly labour intensive and can also create linkages. Supporting this industry, making it safer and less precarious, offering opportunities and support for linkages and diversifying and transforming it could boost the potential of ASM for local content. Sectors beyond mining should not be overlooked either.

Academics are advised to question the intentions and interests of governments in opting for LCPs. This can reveal the dynamics that can, possibly, harm LCP design and implementation. “Local Content is politics” in both design and implementation of LCPs. This consideration opens up new avenues for LCP research.

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