CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS SOBRE CHINA Y ASIA-PACÍFICO
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SHARPENING THE GENDER LENS ON CHINESE INVESTMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

WORKING PAPERS SERIES

Gender, Chinese Investment and Mining Governance in Peru and Colombia. Implications for a More Inclusive Energy Transition

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About this initiative

The ***Sharpening the Gender Lens on Chinese Investment in Latin America*** project examines how gender dynamics intersect with the growing presence of Chinese investment in Latin America, with particular attention to the mining sector in Peru and Colombia. Led by the Center for China and Asia-Pacific Studies (CECHAP) at Universidad del Pacífico, the project brings together research on public policy, corporate practices, international standards, and the experiences of women in mining-affected territories.

The project starts from a central question: as Chinese companies become increasingly important actors in Latin America's mining sectors, and participate more in global responsibility initiatives, how are gender considerations incorporated into the governance of their operations? The research finds considerable variation across companies and countries, challenging the idea of a single "Chinese model". Corporate practices are shaped by the interaction of Chinese overseas investment guidelines, host-country institutions, international industry standards, and company-level decisions.

The project team is led by principal researcher Kehan Wang, with Nifta Lau, Alicia Zegarra and the research assistance of Lucciana Rengifo. This working paper series presents their principal findings from Peru and Colombia, alongside evidence from Chinese mining policies and overseas investment regulations, and a review of the existing literature. Together, the four papers identify advances as well as persistent gaps in gender governance, particularly beyond workplace equality and in mining-affected communities, and consider how governments, companies, civil society, and international organizations can strengthen gender-responsive governance of extractive investment.

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Abstract

As global demand for minerals rises again, gender equality has become a crucial aspect of responsible mining governance. International bodies, industry groups, and ESG frameworks increasingly acknowledge that mining impacts women and men differently, affecting employment, livelihoods, community participation, resettlement, and territorial development. Yet little is known about how Chinese mining companies, now major global investors, manage these issues in their overseas ventures. This report is part of the "*Sharpening the Gender Lens: Examining China's Investments in Latin America*" project led by the Center for China and Asia-Pacific Studies (CECHAP) at Universidad del Pacífico. Based on original fieldwork, interviews, policy analysis, and literature review, it summarizes findings from detailed studies of Peru and Colombia to explore how gender is governed in the context of Chinese mining investments.

This document contends that there is no uniform Chinese model of gender governance in overseas mining operations. Instead, Chinese companies demonstrate a wide range of practices and visible gender outcomes. While national policies on gender in China are significant, their influence on overseas investments is relatively limited compared to host countries' policies, voluntary industry standards adhered to by these companies, and decisions made by local executives. In countries like Peru and Colombia, notable progress has been achieved in advancing gender equality within the mining workforce, yet gender issues are still not fully incorporated into the governance of related territories. The report concludes that achieving more gender-responsive mining necessitates stronger links among public policy, corporate practices, and community realities, and provides practical recommendations for Chinese and local stakeholders involved in this sector.

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“Gender, Chinese Investment and Mining Governance in Peru and Colombia. Implications for a More Inclusive Energy Transition”

Kehan Wang

Introduction

As global demand for minerals has accelerated in recent years, the extractive industries have taken on renewed strategic importance in Latin America. Copper, zinc, lithium, gold, and other minerals are essential inputs in traditional industries such as infrastructure construction, military and defense, as well as in the technologies essential to the global energy transition. Countries such as Peru and Chile are world leaders in minerals, while Argentina and Colombia are among those seeking to reposition themselves in a changing landscape shaped by intense competition for these resources. The expansion of mining across South America, while offering new economic opportunities, also poses new challenges to social and economic governance, many of which are gendered.

Gender equality is increasingly integrated into global efforts to promote responsible mining and ESG performance. Initiatives like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), and the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) are incorporating gender-related standards into their reporting, benchmarks, and guidelines. Although these efforts differ in scope and enforceability, they mark a significant shift: gender equality is no longer viewed solely as a workplace diversity issue but is becoming a key aspect of social governance and the legitimacy of mining activities.

Chinese companies have become increasingly important actors in this process. In Peru, Chinese firms already hold a big presence in large-scale mining, including operating mines and projects in the national investment pipeline. In Colombia, Chinese capital has grown in mining, infrastructure, and renewable energy, even though the country’s relationship with China remains more recent than in Peru. As Chinese mining companies expand overseas and position themselves as global players, Chinese firms are also increasingly becoming voluntary signatories to international norms and industry-led sustainability initiatives aimed at closing gender gaps and promoting equality across their global operations.

Despite China’s growing influence in global mining and critical mineral supply chains, there is limited systematic evidence on how Chinese companies implement gender-related commitments in their foreign operations. While China has long officially supported gender equality through domestic laws and international statements and has issued ESG and sustainability guidelines for overseas investments, the gender impacts of Chinese mining projects abroad remain largely understudied. Little attention has been paid to how these projects affect women differently, both at work and in local communities; whether Chinese companies operate under different standards or practices; or whether they have unique impacts on gender issues.

These core questions guide the project “Sharpening the Gender Lens: Examining China’s Investments in Latin America,” led by the Center for China and Asia-Pacific Studies (CECHAP) at Universidad del Pacífico. As part of the broader research and policy dialogue initiative “Capitalizing on the New Climate Economy in the Americas,” the project explores the gendered effects of Chinese investments in South

America's extractive and energy sectors. It specifically examines how these investments influence women's lives and local opportunities and seeks mechanisms to promote more equitable outcomes.

Focusing initially on Peru and Colombia, the project uses mixed methods, combining primary and secondary literature with original field data from the Toromocho and Las Bambas copper mine sites in Peru and Buriticá in Colombia to assess whether and how Chinese firms incorporate gender equity into their corporate practices and community engagement. Its key outputs include dedicated country reports for Peru and Colombia, along with a literature review on gender issues in modern mining and development. This document combines data from both country reports to highlight cross-cutting insights and policy recommendations.

This report advances two related arguments. First, there is no universal Chinese model of gender governance in overseas mining operations. Chinese companies demonstrate considerable diversity in their corporate policies, alignment with international and local industry norms, and gender outcomes on the ground. These differences are shaped less by Chinese domestic standards or policy traditions than by host-country governance systems, the voluntary frameworks companies adopt, and company-specific management decisions.

Second, although gender equality is increasingly recognized in China and Latin America, it has not yet been fully integrated into the public policy frameworks governing mining. In both China and the countries hosting Chinese mining investments, gender considerations are only partially included in mining legislation, environmental and social governance, and project-level regulations, especially for communities affected by mining. Consequently, much of the progress in gender equality has been achieved through voluntary industry initiatives and international ESG standards rather than government regulation. The impact of these initiatives, however, depends on the overall governance environment.

In more developed and globally connected mining sectors, such as Peru's, where international companies, industry associations, and global standards are more influential, voluntary frameworks have helped promote gender equality, especially in the workforce. Conversely, in Colombia, where Chinese mining investment is relatively new, and the sector is less globally integrated, gender governance is more fragmented and less institutionalized. This comparison indicates that while industry-led standards have become significant drivers of change, they cannot replace the need for stronger public policies that embed gender considerations across the governance of mining investments.

The rest of the report begins with an overview of the main gender issues in the mining industry, followed by a sketch of gender-specific governance frameworks in China and Peru. It shows that while government policies on gender are lacking, voluntary industry norms and standards are picking up the slack, yet alignment and implementation remain uneven. This finding is then illustrated by summaries of the Peru and Colombia cases and the cross-cutting discussions. The report ends with policy recommendations and a brief conclusion.

1. A Gender Lens on Mining: Where the Main Issues Lie

To look at mining through a gender lens requires considering several interconnected dimensions. The first is the workplace itself. Across Latin America, and in Peru and Colombia in particular, women remain underrepresented in this sector, and their employment is concentrated disproportionately in low-paid areas such as administration and logistics, rather than in technical or operational positions. This also reflects unequal access to education and training opportunities, workplace discrimination, and persistent masculine labor norms in the industry (Bebbington et al., 2026). However, important advances have also been observed. Women's participation in mining has increased in recent years, thanks to public and corporate awareness of these gaps (Méndez et al., 2023). There have been booming industry-wide standards to promote women's participation and gender equity that are increasingly adopted by large multinationals. Networks such as Women in Mining have also helped make gender inclusion a more visible issue in the sector.

The second dimension is the territorial impact of mining on community life. Large-scale extractive projects reshape local economies, land use, mobility, and household organization (Bebbington and Bury, 2013). These changes often affect women and men differently. Women may lose access to livelihoods tied to land, water, and informal economic activities (León, 2016; Pérez et al., 2019). Mining-related environmental and health risks can also have differentiated effects, particularly in contexts where women are more directly responsible for water, food security, and family well-being (Adomako and Hausermann, 2023). Mining booms usually bring rapid social change to communities, which may trigger increases in gender-based violence and other social problems (Kotsadam et al., 2017). These gendered external costs are often heavier on indigenous and rural communities.

The gender gap in the affected communities is even more stark when it comes to participation in mining-related decision-making and access to benefits and compensation. Women are often less visible in formal spaces of consultation, negotiation, and representation, despite being deeply affected by extractive activity (Cuadros, 2010). This has implications for what issues are prioritized, how compensation and benefits are distributed, and how social legitimacy is built or lost. As part of the results, new jobs and economic opportunities created by mining also skewed heavily towards men, as benefits are often understood at the family level, and men are usually the head of household. Formal decision-making procedures and negotiation mechanisms are not designed to offset the male-dominated social and cultural norms in remote communities affected by mining, widening the gender gap (Orihuela and Gamarra, 2019; Romero, 2019).

Despite these challenges, the mining industry and related activities have also created new opportunities for women's economic participation and social mobility, and these developments deserve recognition. In many countries, women's participation in the industry has gradually increased, albeit from a historically low base, as companies have broadened recruitment beyond traditional male occupations and introduced diversity and inclusion initiatives. Women are increasingly found not only in administrative positions but also in technical, professional, and, to a lesser extent, operational roles.

The mining sector has also generated opportunities beyond direct employment. The expansion of new operations often stimulates demand for local services—including catering, accommodation, transportation, cleaning, maintenance, and small businesses—where women frequently play prominent

roles as workers and entrepreneurs. In some cases, corporate procurement programs and initiatives supporting women-owned enterprises have further expanded these opportunities. Improved infrastructure, education, and access to public services associated with mining investments may also increase women's mobility, economic autonomy, and participation in community life (Castillo, 2023). While these gains remain uneven and should not obscure persistent structural inequalities, they demonstrate that mining can create new spaces for women's empowerment when supported by inclusive policies and effective governance.

2. China's Domestic Gender Commitments and Overseas Investment Governance

China's domestic policy framework recognizes gender equality as a formal legal and political commitment. Since the famous Mao-era slogan "women hold half the sky," the Chinese state has long emphasized women's participation in national development, and gender equality has been enshrined in laws and public discourse. However, within heavy industries such as mining, women remain underrepresented, and Chinese laws formally restrict women's participation in certain mining jobs, which are justified as protective measures for physically unsuitable groups (Liu and Kang, 2025). This legal restriction reinforced the negligence of equal opportunities for women in core operational roles in the mining industry.

This domestic context matters because Chinese mining companies operating abroad come from an institutional environment in which gender equality is formally endorsed but rarely applied within the industry. Meanwhile, it would be misleading to assume that Chinese companies simply transplant domestic norms into overseas projects. Evidence from Peru suggests a more nuanced picture: rather than ignoring gender issues, Chinese companies adapt to host-country rules, international standards, and local industry expectations. Their gender-related practices, instead of reflecting the absence of gender in Chinese policy space and industry norms, are diverse and shaped by multiple institutional pressures.

China also has an expanding overseas investment governance framework made of guidelines from various Chinese ministries, financial institutions, and industry regulators and associations on green development, social responsibility, and overseas environmental conduct (See Appendix A). These norms reflect growing recognition that Chinese companies abroad need to meet certain standards to manage reputational, social, and environmental risks. However, most of these instruments remain voluntary or non-binding. They also do not treat gender as a separate issue and therefore do not make concrete requirements. As a result, gender considerations in overseas mining projects are largely left to host-country regulations, voluntary standards, and company-level choices.

3. Peru: Governing Gender in Chinese Mining Investment

3.1. Peru's Mining Governance Framework: Sophisticated but Gender-neutral

Peru provides a strong test case because Chinese companies operate within one of Latin America's most developed mining governance systems. First, Peru has comprehensive laws and policies on gender equality and labor protections, such as maternity leave, equal pay, and anti-discrimination and workplace

harassment (Vaccaro, 2022). Concurrently, the country has built a sophisticated social and environmental management framework for the mining industry, centered on environmental certification and monitoring, prior consultation, citizen participation, and social responsibility (Merino, 2018; 2026). This framework imposes significant procedural requirements on large-scale mining projects through specialized institutions such as SENACE[1], OEFA[2], and DGAAM[3]. However, these mining-specific governance instruments do not systematically reflect the gender elements in the national laws.

Environmental impact assessments, prior consultation procedures, and citizen participation mechanisms are generally framed in gender-neutral terms. They refer to "communities," "populations," or "affected persons" without considering how mining affects women and men differently (Wang, Lau and Zegarra, 2026). This gender neutrality in governance particularly harms women in mining-affected communities, as they are often underrepresented in local decision-making processes, less likely to control land titles or compensation, and bear a greater burden of the social and environmental fallout as mining projects develop.

Chinese companies in Peru are formally subject to demanding social, environmental, and labor standards (Merino, 2026), but because Peruvian mining laws are gender-neutral, compliance with Peru's social and environmental framework does not necessarily yield gender-responsive outcomes, especially in mining-affected communities. Chinese mining companies may comply perfectly with Peruvian law while still operating within a system that does not require gender-sensitive planning, monitoring, and mitigation, which matters most for the most vulnerable group of women in the mining territories.

3.2. International and Industry Standards Carry Much of the Weight

Because neither China's overseas governance framework nor Peru's mining regulation provides strong gender-specific requirements, voluntary international and industry standards have become important. While these standards cannot replace state regulation, they shape the definition of responsible mining practice and serve as essential reference points for ESG government policy, corporate reporting, lender requirements, and stakeholder expectations. For companies seeking to secure financing and operate within global supply chains, alignment with these standards has become increasingly consequential.

Peru has opened its mining industry to multinational conglomerates for decades, and it is highly mature and heavily influenced by international norms and standards. Several mechanisms are especially relevant. Peru has been an implementing country of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) since 2007. The initiative initially focused on revenue disclosure and anti-corruption, but the new 2023 standards require implementing countries and participating companies to disclose gender-disaggregated employment and wage data and to integrate gender perspectives into multi-stakeholder governance processes (EITI, 2023). Even though Peru's reporting as of June 2026 had not yet aligned with the 2023 standards, some elements from the new standards will be applied in the process. Since all major Chinese

[1] Servicio Nacional de Certificación Ambiental para las Inversiones Sostenibles
[2] Organismo de Evaluación y Fiscalización Ambiental
[3] Dirección General de Asuntos Ambientales del Ministerio de Energía y Minas

mining companies in Peru participate in the country's EITI reporting, EITI is one of the few mechanisms that may indirectly affect their operations through gender-specific disclosures.

The International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) plays a central role in defining the industry's best practices, as its members include most of the largest multinational companies and one-third of the global industry (ICMM, 2023). ICMM requires its member companies to adhere to its Mining Principles that include a series of Performance Expectations for high ESG standards. ICMM has been updating its Performance Expectations to incorporate gender equality and inclusive corporate culture criteria since the early 2020s. ICMM standards are well regarded by major international mining companies operating in Peru and are influential in shaping industry norms in the country.

Certification-based initiatives such as the Copper Mark and the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA) are also influential in Peru. Five copper mine sites have obtained the Copper Mark (The Copper Mark, 2024), meaning the mines have passed an independent, rigorous third-party assessment verifying they meet strict ESG standards, including gender. None of the five is owned by Chinese companies. Many major global mining companies in Peru (e.g., Anglo American) are also adopting IRMA's Standard for Responsible Mining, which integrates gender equality and protections across both the workforce and affected communities (IRMA, 2022).

There are also national mechanisms in Peru that help reinforce gender expectations in the mining sector. For example, the PERUMIN Seal of Excellence in Gender Equality (*Sello PERUMIN a la Excelencia en Equidad de Género*) recognizes mining companies and suppliers that demonstrate progress in closing gender gaps (Instituto de Ingenieros de Minas del Perú [IIMP], 2024). Women in Mining Peru (WIM Peru) operates as a professional and advocacy network promoting women's participation in mining. The Aequales Ranking evaluates organizational performance in gender equality across dimensions such as talent management, harassment prevention, work-life balance, and transparency (Aequales, 2025).

These mechanisms and standards are important because they show that the industry itself is already working on indicators and tools to improve gender equality; gender governance in mining is not starting from zero. Although most of the Chinese mining companies in Peru do not expressively align with the standards mentioned above, (as discussed below), one of the two Chinese industry associations, China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals, & Chemicals Importers & Exporters (CCCMC), under China's Ministry of Commerce, has been working with these international associations and initiatives to synchronize Chinese ESG standards in the industry with the international ones (ICMM, 2017; IRMA, 2025). It is worth noting that Industry norms create strong incentives and reference points, but they do not guarantee systematic gender mainstreaming, as it often depends on individual companies' circumstances rather than on binding public requirements.

3.3. Chinese Mining Companies' Corporate Policy Alignment

One of the key findings of the Peru study is that Chinese mining companies do not display a single pattern of gender-related governance. Instead, their alignment with international and Peruvian gender standards varies significantly across firms[4].

Minerals and Metals Group (MMG) Limited, operator of the Las Bambas copper mine and whose main shareholder is China Minmetals Corporation, shows the strongest integration into international mining governance frameworks among Chinese companies in Peru. Perhaps this is not unusual, given that MMG is legally based in Australia, where the industry has made greater progress on these and related ESG issues. Furthermore, MMG is one of only two Chinese firms that are members of ICMM, and as such, it is subject to external validation and performance expectations related to inclusive workplaces, harassment, discrimination, and responsible mining practices. MMG also participates in Peru's EITI process, as do all the major Chinese mining and oil companies with local operations in Peru, and is expected to disclose gender-disaggregated workforce data in its sustainability reporting. The company claims that women now make up approximately 13.4% to 15% of the workforce (MMG Limited, 2025), which is similar to the national average in Peru. It is also the only Chinese mining company identified as an institutional ally of Women in Mining Peru, and in 2025 it received the PERUMIN Seal of Excellence in Gender Equity (Wang et al., forthcoming).

Zijin Mining Group, Ltd. first arrived in Peru in 2007, as a largely unknown firm acquiring a problematic copper concession on the country's northern border, which it has been unable to develop to date due to local resistance (Sanborn, 2009). Today, Zijin is one of China's largest SOEs and the fourth-largest metals miner in the world by market value, with operations spanning Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe (Ren, 2026). In recent years, it has increasingly referenced international ESG reporting standards, responsible mining principles, and gender-related workforce indicators, such as the World Gold Council's Responsible Gold Mining Principles and the IFRS S1 & S2 sustainability disclosure standards (Zijin, n.d.). Its corporate reporting includes female representation on the board and global workforce figures. In South America, Zijin has major operations in Peru, Colombia, Argentina, Suriname, and Guyana. However, at the level of its Peruvian operations, especially La Arena I, a copper-gold project acquired in 2025, there is less publicly available evidence of measurable gender-equality targets or independent verification through initiatives such as ICMM, IRMA, or the Copper Mark.

The Aluminum Corporation of China (Minera Chinalco), another major global mining firm, has an approach to gender in its Peruvian operations that is more closely anchored in formal regulatory compliance and broader sustainability commitments than in externally validated gender standards. Among the top five mining companies in China, the parent company's articulation of ESG principles has gained recognition in China (China Nonferrous Metals News, 2024). Chinalco references workplace policies related to equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-harassment mechanisms, and childbirth support in its ESG reports (Chinalco, 2025), and these were confirmed in interviews with company

[4] By 2025, Chinese companies were operating five producing large mines—Shougang Hierro Perú, Shouxin, Toromocho, Las Bambas, and La Arena I —and control eight projects in the Ministry of Energy and Mines' investment pipeline (Wang, 2026).

representatives in Peru (Wang et al., forthcoming). However, Chinalco is not an ICMM member and has not pursued certification under IRMA or the Copper Mark. Gender-disaggregated reporting and measurable diversity targets are less visible in its Peru-facing materials.

Shougang Hierro Peru, a subsidiary of one of China's major global steel producers and the oldest Chinese company with operations in Peru, shows the most limited public articulation of gender-related commitments among the major Chinese mining companies examined. Its public materials reference compliance and social responsibility, but there is little evidence of structured engagement with international gender-focused governance mechanisms, detailed gender-disaggregated disclosure, or strategic gender objectives. In this sense, Shougang Hierro Peru's gender governance remains primarily anchored in domestic regulatory compliance rather than voluntary international benchmarking.

Box 1. Toromocho: From Corporate Policy to Gendered Territorial Change[5]

Most traceable gender-related corporate policies and practices in the mining sector focus on the workforce: non-discrimination, anti-harassment, equal opportunity, maternity leave, women's participation in technical or operational roles, etc. These are indicators most visible in voluntary standards and corporate sustainability reports. Gender dynamics in mining-affected communities are equally important but much harder to capture through company disclosures alone. Evidence around Chinalco's Toromocho copper mine helps illustrate how gendered outcomes emerge not only from formal corporate policies but also indirectly from interacting with the community (in this case, resettlement), restructuring the local labor market, territorial change, and the organization of local livelihoods.

Toromocho is one of the largest Chinese mining investments in Peru and a useful case for understanding these dynamics. Unlike mining projects developed mainly in agrarian or indigenous territories, Toromocho involved the relocation of a historically mining-dependent urban settlement. Between 2012 and 2014, around five thousand residents were moved from Old Morococha to Nueva Morococha, a planned town financed by Chinalco. In material terms, the relocation brought visible improvements: standardized housing units, paved roads, potable water, sewerage networks, schools, and health facilities. The changes improved daily life for many residents, including women. To strengthen women's formal asset ownership, titles of the new homes were given to both husband and wife, an unusual feature in Peru.

At the same time, the move from the old settlement to Nueva Morococha reorganized the local economy in ways that affected women and men differently. In Old Morococha, women's livelihoods were closely tied to the dense urban setting and the labor rhythms of older underground mining operations around the town. Many women sold meals to workers, provided laundry services, rented rooms, ran small shops, or carried out other informal services. Women could rely on clientship built over time with miners to generate incomes from or near their homes while carrying out their caregiving responsibilities. In Nueva Morococha, the planned layout and standardized housing weakened these

[5] This case study draws on fieldwork conducted within the same project: Sharpening the Gender Lens on Chinese Investment in Latin America: The Case of Peru (Wang, Lau and Zegarra, 2026) and builds upon existing scholarly work on the topic (Sanborn and Chong Ching, 2017; Cano, 2019).

informal economic circuits. To make matters worse, workers linked to Toromocho are largely housed in company camps, and food and laundry services are contracted out to formal providers rather than local street vendors. As a result, many women lost their income opportunities after the resettlement.

The broader restructuring of mining employment compounded these effects. Toromocho's modern operation is more capital-intensive and technically specialized than the older underground mines that historically sustained Morococha. The expansion of Toromocho in the neighborhood coincided with the contraction and eventual closure of the underground operations. As the old mines are gone, demand for older, less technically trained mineworkers has also plummeted. Chinalco has prioritized qualified workers from Morococha as part of its community relations strategy, but many new operational jobs require training and credentials that locals, especially women and older male miners, often lack. Some miners had to leave their families behind and migrate in search of job opportunities. While women were directly affected by the erosion of informal local economies, the decline of traditional mining jobs for men inevitably affected women's family life and economic stability, too.

The Toromocho case, therefore, shows a mixed picture. On the one hand, the project generated material improvements, better mining jobs and public services, formal housing, some gender-sensitive measures such as joint titling, and community initiatives specifically to help women (such as the Illari weaving collective, organized by local women and supported by Chinalco). On the other hand, the resettlement and the shift toward a modern, camp-based, capital-intensive mining model disrupted local livelihoods that had sustained women and men in the old town. The case also shows that negative outcomes for women in the affected communities often arise from gender-neutral development planning around the mining projects. The company and the state treat the community only as household units, without fully accounting for how women and men participate differently in local economies, care systems, and decision-making spaces.

The lesson from this case is also clear: corporate gender policies focused solely on the workforce are insufficient. Mining companies, including Chinese firms, need more gender-sensitive approaches in their community relations work, such as resettlement, local procurement and employment, livelihood restoration, and benefit-sharing. Likewise, the government should adopt gender-sensitive approaches in development planning and institutional building for affected communities, to ensure women's voices are heard in environmental and social impact assessments and monitoring systems, ongoing participation mechanisms, and public project development. Without these, even projects that improve infrastructure and comply with existing regulations may still reproduce or deepen gendered inequalities in mining territories.

The Peru case points to a lack of systematic gender governance by Chinese mining companies in Peru, but it does not indicate a universal pattern among the companies examined. The outcomes stem from the institutional landscape that shapes Chinese companies' practices: China recognizes gender equality but provides little gender-specific guidance for overseas mining; Peru has a sophisticated mining governance system but does not mainstream gender into core mining instruments; international and industry standards increasingly address gender, but their voluntary and uneven application leaves significant gaps. As a result, Chinese companies generally comply with formal requirements but only adopt stronger industry

standards and practices in some cases. Even there, commitments remain fragmented and, more importantly, focus primarily on employment rather than the full range of community-level impacts. Through the Toromocho case, this report shows that slack in gender governance in affected communities may leave more vulnerable women behind.

4. Colombia: A Case at the Intersection of Mining, Energy, and Gender[6]

Colombia presents a different context from Peru. While Peru has a mature, diversified mining sector in which major multinational mining companies, including Chinese firms, operate large-scale metallic mineral mines, Colombia's relationship with Chinese mining investment is more recent and still taking shape. This does not mean that mining is new to Colombia. Gold mining has deep historical roots, and Colombia was one of the world's leading gold producers in the late nineteenth century. Coal has also played a central role in the country's export economy, and nickel is part of its large-scale mineral production. However, Colombia's mining trajectory differs from those of Peru and Chile. Its extractive economy has been shaped by a combination of large-scale fossil fuel extraction, artisanal and informal mining, illegal economies, armed conflict, territorial disputes, and uneven state presence.

Chinese companies have entered Colombia's mining industry in recent years and are playing important roles in infrastructure, electromobility, and the development of renewable energy projects (Wang, 2026). Unlike in Peru, where Chinese mining operations can be assessed through producing mines and established corporate practices over several decades, evidence from Colombia remains more preliminary. There is still very little systematic research that brings together gender, Chinese investment, mining, and the energy transition in the country. This makes Colombia a useful comparative case, as Chinese investment and the energy transition are beginning to converge in different institutional and territorial settings than in Peru.

Furthermore, Colombia's recent energy transition agenda has sparked debates about coal phase-down, renewable energy expansion, economic diversification, and the potential development of minerals considered strategic for the transition, including copper, nickel, and gold (Arond et al., 2024; Defelipe and Diaz, 2026). Recognizing that the global energy transition hinges on raw inputs for green technologies, the Petro government outlined an ambitious shift in its 2022-2026 National Development Plan to position the country as a strategic provider of metallic minerals. In practice, this ambition takes shape as a targeted push for mineral expansion, with roughly 27.3% of Colombia's territory designated as prospective areas (Bedoya et al., 2024). This ambition intersects with a complex mining landscape where formal large-scale extraction coexists with artisanal and informal mining and organized crime, potentially exacerbating the vulnerabilities of local women.

Meanwhile, policies such as the National Economic and Social Policy Council's official energy transition plan and the Ministry of Mines and Energy's Roadmap for a Just Energy Transition frame the shift not only as a technical move toward cleaner energy but also as a social, labor, and territorial process that would involve communities and aim for a more equitable distribution of benefits (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social [CONPES], 2022; Ministerio de Minas y Energía, 2025). In this policy

[6] This section draws upon another report in the same project: Sharpening the Gender Lens on Chinese Investment in Latin America: The Case of Colombia (Wang, Arond & Lau, 2026).

context, a key question is whether governance will integrate inclusive institutional frameworks and community-centered, territorial realities, including gender considerations, to prevent old patterns from reemerging in new developments.

Gender issues are already evident in Colombia's mining territories, especially in coal. Colombia has long been among the world's leading coal exporters, but coal-producing regions now face uncertainty as international demand shifts, importing countries adopt stronger climate policies, and Colombia itself seeks to reduce fossil fuel dependence (Arond et al., 2024; Vega-Araújo et al., 2023). Beyond the gendered impacts of extraction, mine decline and closure create additional gendered consequences. Coal mining has supported local employment and economies in regions such as Cesar and La Guajira, but production declines or closures can disrupt livelihoods, social mobility, and household organization in mining communities.

Women are often overrepresented in the indirect and informal economies that grow around mining, including food sales, domestic services, laundry, room rentals, and small-scale commerce. When mining activity contracts, these livelihoods may disappear without being counted in formal labor statistics, compensation schemes, or transition policies. At the same time, caregiving responsibilities and entrenched gender roles can limit women's ability to migrate or access new employment opportunities in former coal-producing areas. This creates forms of economic vulnerability that differ from those experienced by formal male mineworkers (Torres, 2024; Holguín, 2020). As a result, women's specific experiences are often overlooked by standard labor market adjustment policies, economic diversification programs, and formal livelihood restoration frameworks.

Although Colombia is rich in nickel, coal, and other minerals, Chinese investment has centered to date on the country's gold sector. The Buriticá gold mine in Antioquia is the only active mine owned by a Chinese firm in Colombia, and provides early insight into Chinese corporate mining practices in the country. This case also highlights how a Chinese company operates amid challenges such as illegal mining, armed-group influence, limited municipal resources, environmental issues, and fragile trust between the company, the government, and local communities.

The Buriticá case also indicates that Chinese ownership does not necessarily imply weaker ESG practices regarding gender issues than Western ownership. Zijin has preserved and even advanced certain practices from Continental Gold, the company from which it acquired the mining project. These include formalizing women mineral sorters through contracts with women-owned businesses, supporting women's entrepreneurship, and promoting inclusive supply-chain programs (Zijin, 2023, 2024; DeFelipe and Díaz, 2026). Such initiatives are significant because they acknowledge women's existing livelihoods in the mining sector and aim to formalize and dignify them. However, they operate within a challenging governance environment, highlighting that company-led programs alone cannot replace the need for stronger territorial governance.

The prospective El Alacrán project in Córdoba is the other confirmed Chinese presence in Colombia's mining sector and represents a different stage of Chinese mining investment. The project is owned by Beijing Jin Cheng Xin (JCHX), a private company that trades on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Unlike Buriticá, El Alacrán is not yet operating. It is a copper-gold-silver project and is currently undergoing environmental licensing and social negotiation processes. The project is in a territory with long histories

of artisanal mining, conflict, and claims by Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant communities. Issues such as relocation, water and forest management, artisanal mining formalization, local employment, and community participation are already emerging (Gamboa, 2026). These are precisely the areas where gender-sensitive planning matters. Failure to identify women's roles in artisanal mining, informal service economies, care work, and community leadership early on risks institutionalizing gender inequalities within the project's governance framework long before they appear in formal metrics.

Gender dynamics are also critical to navigating Colombia's own energy transition efforts. While new renewable infrastructure brings vital investment and local opportunities, it also intensifies struggles over land use, community consultation, and benefit-sharing. These challenges are already starkly apparent in regions such as La Guajira and Cesar, where large-scale wind, solar, and coal transition projects overlap with vulnerable Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories (Vega-Araújo et al., 2024). Without early gender integration in planning and consultation, green energy projects risk replicating the exclusionary patterns of traditional extraction—leaving women to bear the brunt of livelihood disruptions without an equal voice in project design. As Chinese companies increasingly spearhead these transition sectors in Colombia, as in the mining industry, ensuring that these entities look beyond national-level compliance to adopt a localized, gender-inclusive approach to territorial governance becomes a critical mandate.

For this report, Colombia serves as both a warning and an opportunity. The warning is that mining and energy-transition projects can reproduce gendered inequalities if governance focuses only on investment, infrastructure, production, and formal employment. The opportunity is that Colombia's strategic mineral and renewable energy agendas are still evolving, and Chinese mining investment remains relatively new. Lessons from Peru suggest that waiting until projects are already operating, communities have already been transformed, and corporate practices have already stabilized makes gender mainstreaming much harder. Colombia can avoid some of these limitations by treating gender as part of the governance architecture for mining and the energy transition from the outset.

5. Cross-Cutting Discussion

The Peru and Colombia cases show that the "China factor" matters, but not in a deterministic way. Chinese companies are playing an increasingly important role in mining, infrastructure, and energy-transition-related sectors in both countries. However, the available evidence does not support the idea of a single Chinese model of corporate governance, at least in gender issues. Chinese mining companies' operations in Latin America largely align with Chinese policy guidelines and host-country regulations but exhibit varying levels of alignment with international and local industry ESG standards. Their gender outcomes are shaped less by nationality than by the governance system (both obligatory and voluntary) in which Chinese companies are embedded and the choices individual companies make within those systems.

Beyond the main argument, the first cross-cutting finding is that gender governance in public policies remains fragmented. China formally endorses gender equality, yet gender remains largely absent from domestic mining-specific laws and regulations. There is an expanding collection of ESG guidelines for overseas operations, but none of them address gendered outcomes. On the host-country side, Peru has one of the most developed mining governance frameworks in Latin America, yet its core instruments remain

largely gender-neutral. Colombia has had a more explicit energy transition-related discourse around critical mineral mining, but the integration of gender into mining and Chinese investment governance remains incipient. Across China and host countries' public policies, gender is recognized in general terms but is not consistently translated into project-level requirements, monitoring tools, or accountability mechanisms.

The second finding is that voluntary industry standards are increasingly important, but they cannot carry the full burden. Initiatives such as EITI, ICMM, IRMA, the Copper Mark, Women in Mining, and other national recognition schemes have helped make gender more visible in mining governance. They encourage companies to improve reporting, workplace inclusion, anti-harassment systems, and internal diversity policies. However, not all Chinese companies participate in these initiatives. More importantly, many of the voluntary standards are still stronger on workplace indicators than on the territorial dimensions of gender.

The third finding is that the most difficult-to-improve gender issues often appear in affected communities rather than in corporate offices and production lines. While the latter can be easily tracked through employment numbers, diversity commitments, and anti-harassment protocols in sustainability reports, how mining reshapes gender relations and women's lives in affected communities is harder to measure. These impacts often manifest in non-quantifiable ways, such as changes in women's livelihoods, unpaid care burdens, physical and social mobility, community participation, access to compensation, decision-making power, and so on. The Toromocho case and Colombia's transition from coal both show that gendered impacts go beyond women working in mining – they also concern how mining and energy projects reorganize local economies and territories.

Finally, both cases show that gender-responsive mining governance requires stronger connections among public policy, corporate practice, and community realities. Progress is already visible in some areas, especially through international standards, women's professional networks, company-level initiatives, and community initiatives and activism by local women. But without more concrete, gender-sensitive requirements in specified policy areas such as environmental and social management, consultation, closure planning, resettlement, and local development, gender will remain peripheral to the governance of Chinese mining investments.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this project point to a policy agenda that seeks to integrate gender into the rules, tools, and everyday practices that already structure mining investment and corporate-community relations.

6.1. For governments in Peru and Colombia

First, government agencies should strengthen gender-sensitive indicators in monitoring and enforcement across environmental certification, labor inspection, and mining oversight. The indicators could include gender-disaggregated employment data, complaints related to harassment or violence, women's participation in environmental monitoring committees, access to compensation, or procurement from women-led businesses.

Second, gender-sensitive analysis should be incorporated into environmental and social management throughout the mining project cycle, rather than treated as a one-time requirement at the approval stage. The goal is to ensure that gender-differentiated impacts are identified, monitored, and addressed from baseline studies through construction, operation, closure, and post-closure. This should include impacts on employment, subcontracted work, informal livelihoods, land and water access, health, care responsibilities, mobility, compensation, and participation in decision-making.

Third, participation mechanisms should be designed around the realities of women's lives in mining territories. This should apply to decision-making processes for both the mining projects themselves, and public projects funded by mining revenues. Public hearings and consultation meetings should be scheduled at times and locations accessible to women with care responsibilities. Separate focus groups or preparatory meetings for women only may be necessary before formal assemblies to create a safe space for women to express themselves without male family members present. Project information should be shared in accessible formats and, where relevant, in local languages. Authorities should maintain a gender-disaggregated attendance list and track who speaks, whose proposals are incorporated, and whether women serve on follow-up committees.

Fourth, national and subnational governments should ensure that mining revenues (in Peru's case, *canon minero*) and local development investments address gender-differentiated needs. While ensuring women's participation in project decision-making would help achieve this goal, budget audits in mining regions should also ensure that public investment accounts for childcare, health services, safe transport, technical training for women, digital access, water infrastructure, and support for women's production collectives or other economic initiatives. These are not peripheral social programs in mining regions – they are essential to ensure women can benefit from mining-induced local development.

6.2. For Chinese companies and financial institutions

First, Chinese companies should go beyond mere compliance and develop site-specific gender strategies that address both employees and local communities. Known for their engineering expertise and large-scale project delivery, Chinese companies should also incorporate gender considerations into their core ESG management rather than viewing it as a minor CSR concern. It is important to assign dedicated responsibility for gender issues within ESG or sustainability teams. This may involve appointing staff to monitor gender-related aspects and ensure that senior management regularly reviews these metrics across areas such as human resources, community relations, procurement, and occupational health and safety.

Second, workforce inclusion should be tied to concrete pipelines. Companies should publish gender-disaggregated data in a consistent format. They can also partner with technical institutes, universities, local governments, and Women in Mining networks to create more training and apprenticeship programs to recruit women, especially from the mining-affected regions. These programs should include scholarships, mentoring, childcare considerations, and pathways into technical and operational positions rather than only administrative roles.

Third, companies should ensure that resettlement, livelihood restoration, and closure plans are gender-sensitive from the outset. Before relocating communities or implementing major operational changes, they should map women's formal and informal livelihoods, care networks, mobility patterns, and

access to land, housing, and compensation. Plans should be informed by local cultural norms around gender to safeguard women's interests. While joint titling, as in the Toromocho case, is beneficial, it should be combined with livelihood measures that acknowledge women's income sources beyond household assets.

Fourth, community programs should evolve from mere welfare support to more meaningful integration within the mining project's supply chains. While initiatives like support for women's organizations, craft groups, or entrepreneurship are beneficial, they need to be connected to actual procurement opportunities, service contracts, market access, and business formalization. When companies run camps or contract for services such as food, laundry, cleaning, transport, or maintenance, they should evaluate whether local women or women-led businesses can participate in these supply chains.

Fifth, banks and investors funding mining and energy transition projects should incorporate gender action plans into their environmental and social due diligence processes. These plans need to include baseline diagnostics, measurable indicators, responsible personnel, budgets, timelines, and community verification mechanisms. Since Chinese companies' projects often involve financing from Chinese public development financial institutions and commercial banks, it is also important to promote alignment between Chinese overseas ESG guidelines and international gender standards.

6.3. Non-Governmental Organizations

In addition to ongoing efforts to promote social justice and women's empowerment in mining-affected communities, non-governmental organizations and their international partners can further strengthen support for women's participation in negotiation and oversight processes. This can include promoting legal literacy, providing technical training on EIAs, supporting independent gender audits, and facilitating peer learning across mining regions. Such NGOs can play a crucial role by providing essential resources, such as transportation, access to information, translation services, and, most importantly, training and safe spaces for discussion, to enable women's participation in local mechanisms.

6.4. Academia

Universities and independent research institutions can also play important roles here, starting with the need to train professionals for these industries and related organizations who are aware of gender-related issues and able to formulate viable strategies to address them. This would be especially important for universities located in mining regions and serving local communities in various ways.

More fundamentally, a significant knowledge gap persists at the intersection of gender, mining, and Chinese investment. As a related paper in for this project by Nifta Lau shows, although scholarship on gender and mining has expanded considerably in recent years, very little research has systematically examined how Chinese companies address gender issues in their overseas operations or how Chinese investment shapes gender dynamics in mining-affected territories (Lau, forthcoming). This lack of evidence limits both academic understanding and the ability of governments, companies, and civil society to design informed, evidence-based policies.

Researchers produce knowledge that can be essential to formulating and implementing effective policies. For example, they can prioritize longitudinal and mixed-methods studies that track communities before, during, and after project development, resettlement, expansion, or closure. Beyond publicly available

gender-aggregated data, more attention should be paid to women in indirect economies, subcontracted work, informal services, and local leadership roles. In Colombia, research should pay particular attention to coal transition territories and emerging critical-mineral areas before governance patterns become entrenched.

6.5. International Organizations and Industry Initiatives

Finally, multilateral frameworks and industry-led platforms involving China, Latin American governments, companies, and civil society, such as the China-CELAC Forum and the China-LAC Business Summit, should incorporate gender into discussions on green and sustainable investments. Gender is not just a separate social issue after investment decisions are finalized; it needs to be integrated into conversations on ESG, critical minerals, supply chains, responsible mining, and the legitimacy of the energy transition.

7. Conclusion

Chinese investment in mining and energy-transition-related sectors has become an important part of Latin America's development landscape. This brief cross-cutting analysis and the more in-depth case studies it draws on have examined gender governance in Chinese mining investment through the cases of Peru and Colombia. A central finding is that Chinese investment matters because of its scale and growing visibility, but there is no universal Chinese model for gender dynamics in overseas mining operations. Chinese companies vary widely in their corporate policies, alignment with international and local industry standards, and the gender outcomes associated with their projects. These disparities are influenced more by local governance, industry standards, and companies' choices to exceed regulatory requirements than by Chinese norms alone.

The evidence further indicates that understanding gender in mining extends beyond workforce participation, despite employment, occupational segregation, and workplace discrimination remaining key issues. The more complex governance challenge exists in territories impacted by mining, where large-scale projects alter livelihoods, raising issues such as care responsibilities, women's access to compensation and benefits, and involvement in decision-making. These effects are less visible in corporate sustainability reports and difficult to quantify with standard ESG metrics, yet they are fundamental to understanding how mining influences women's lives.

As the global competition for various minerals increases, these questions will become even more pressing. Mining such materials as copper, nickel and lithium will continue to be vital for the material foundations of low-carbon technologies, while iron, gold and other minerals that Latin America has in abundance are also in high demand. However, the legitimacy of mining in the 21st century hinges on whether governments, companies, and civil society can better manage its social and territorial impacts. For Chinese investments in Latin America, this requires moving beyond broad ESG commitments to adopt more specific, gender-sensitive practices. Peru demonstrates both the progress made and the limitations of current efforts; meanwhile, Colombia presents a chance to view gender not as a secondary social issue but as a core element of governance in extractive development, especially as new mining and energy transition initiatives develop.

Appendix A. Major Chinese Official Norms for Overseas Operations

Key Policies	Year	Institutions Involved
Green Credit Guideline《绿色信贷指引》	2012	CBRC
Guideline of Environment Protection for Overseas Investment and Cooperation《对外投资合作环境保护指南》	2013	MEE, MofCom
Guidelines for Establishing the Green Financial System《关于构建绿色金融体系的指导意见》	2016	PBC, MoF, NDRC, MEE, CBRC, CSRC, CIRC
Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road《关于推进绿色“一带一路”建设的指导意见》	2017	NDRC, MEE, MFA, MofCom
Guiding Principles on Financing the Development of the Belt and Road《“一带一路”融资指导原则》	2017	MoF
The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan《“一带一路”生态环境保护合作规划》	2017	MEE
Green Investment Principles《“一带一路”绿色投资原则》	2018	PBC
Green Development Guidance for BRI Projects《“一带一路”项目绿色发展指南》	2019, 2021	BRI International Green Development Coalition (MEE)
Guidelines for Green Development of Outbound Investment and International Cooperation《对外投资合作绿色发展工作指引》	2021	MEE, MofCom
Opinions on Jointly Promoting Green Development of the Belt and Road《国家发展改革委等部门关于推进共建“一带一路”绿色发展的意见》	2022	NDRC
Green development guidelines for overseas investment and cooperation《对外投资合作建设项目生态环境保护指南》	2022	MEE, MofCom
Work Plan for Improving the Quality of Central SOE-controlled Listed Companies《提高央企控股上市公司质量工作方案》	2022	SASAC
Guiding Opinions on Central Enterprises Fulfilling Their Social Responsibilities with High Standards in the New Era《关于新时代中央企业高标准履行社会责任的指导意见》	2024	SASAC
Guidelines for Self-regulation of Listed Companies - Sustainable Development Report (Trial) (Draft for Comments)《上市公司自律监管指引——可持续发展报告（试行）（征求意见稿）》	2024	CSRC
Corporate Sustainability Disclosure Guidelines - Basic Guidelines (Trial Implementation)《企业可持续披露准则——基本准则（试行）》	2024	MoF, MFA, NRDC, MIIT, MEE, MofCom, PBC, SASAC, NFRA
Guidelines for Overseas Social Responsibility Fulfillment by Enterprises《企业境外履行社会责任工作指引》	2025	MofCom

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