

“Are My Hands Clean?” The Cost of Conflict Minerals

Whether we mean to or not, when we purchase goods and services we support the businesses that produce, deliver, and sell them. As consumers, our choices directly or indirectly sustain the industries and practices that go into making the products we buy. This includes not only the materials and energy used in manufacturing, but also the human labor involved in every step of the process. We may not always be aware of the full supply chain or the labor and environmental practices behind the products we purchase, but it's essential to look beyond the label and consider the hidden costs.

1. Consider your cell phone. Do you know where the minerals used to make it come from? (e.g., coltan, tantalum, tin, and tungsten)
2. Imagine the journey these minerals took to get from the mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to your hands.
 - Share information about the DRC, its history of colonialism, and the ongoing conflict fueled by the demand for these minerals.
 - Discuss the distances these minerals travel and the complex supply chains involved.
3. How many steps are involved in mining, processing, and incorporating these minerals into your cell phone? How many hands have touched these materials before they reached you?
 - Play a recording of the song "Are My Hands Clean?" by Sweet Honey in the Rock.
4. What are the "costs" associated with your cell phone beyond its price tag? Can we identify the impacts on people and the environment? Who benefits from the mining and production process? Who suffers?
 - Share stories about the exploitation of miners in the DRC, including forced labor, child labor, and dangerous working conditions.
 - i. [Powering Change or Business as Usual](#) article by Amnesty International. It includes a link to the [report](#) by the same name.
 - ii. YouTube Video [The Horror of Cobalt Mining in the DR Congo, The Listening Post](#) by Al Jazeera English.
 - iii. NPR article, [How 'Modern-Day Slavery' in the Congo Powers The Rechargeable battery Economy](#)
 - Discuss the environmental damage caused by mining activities.
 - Explore the concepts of transparency and accountability in addressing human rights and environmental abuses.
5. As consumers, are we accountable for the unseen supply chain behind our electronics? What are the faith-based implications? How can we be mindful and responsible?
 - Reflect on relevant Christian scriptures and teachings that call for justice, compassion, and responsible stewardship of the Earth. (e.g., Micah 6:8, Matthew 25:31-46, James 5:1-6)

- Discuss how we can contribute to greater ethical sourcing of minerals, support initiatives promoting peace and justice in the DRC, and make conscious choices about our consumption habits.

Ideas: Support organizations working to promote responsible mining practices and fair trade.

Learn more about conflict minerals and advocate for greater transparency and accountability in the electronics industry. Consider purchasing electronics from companies committed to ethical sourcing. Reduce, reuse, and recycle electronics to decrease demand for new products.

Explore ways to support peace and development efforts in the DRC. What other ideas do you have? What actions, big or small, can you take to make a positive impact?