

Local manufacturing and engineering suppliers' technological capabilities development and industrial linkages in Zambia's mining sector

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In the literature, firm-level technological capabilities (FTCs) development is argued to be pivotal to interface the firm with the rest of the sector in which the firm is located, and subsequently to the rest of the economy through industrial linkages. In this regard, the FTCs make the “firm internal” productively and competitively co-exist and interact with “the firm external” which determines the market environment comprising policies, regulations, programmes and the competitors. The firm internal therefore has to constantly cautiously and strategically navigate through this complex mix of interests without which its competitive advantage is challenged and its position in industrial linkages weakened. Ultimately, the positive interaction between the firm internal and external may yield industrial linkages. If for instance, the interaction is otherwise, possibilities that industrial linkages are undermined are high. Using the National Innovation Systems (NIS) as the theoretical framework, this paper presents an analysis of findings on how and the extent to which FTCs development among local manufacturing and engineering suppliers in Zambia's copper mining sub-sector is a source of industrial linkages. The findings arise from mixed research methods comprising a survey targeting 44 firms in Zambia's Copperbelt and Northwestern Provinces; and out of this total number of firms, 20 were selected as cases studied through in-depth interviews and observations. Views from over 30 key informants also were critical to the analysis upon which this paper is based.

Key words: Zambia; firm-level technological capabilities; local suppliers; industrial linkages; National Innovation Systems (NIS);