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Working Title: An investigation of supplier firms' technological capabilities and performance in a changing mining sector environment in Zambia

Introduction

Mining, particularly copper mining, is Zambia's economic mainstay. This entails major economic activities revolve around mining especially that the mining sector ordinarily has significant linkages to other sectors such as the commercial, industrial, processing and manufacturing sectors. All major mines in Zambia are owned by multinational corporations (MNCs) whose technological endowments are immense. The complex nature of mining processes ranging from exploration and geo-technical services, plant construction/maintenance/repair, the actual extraction of ore to the ore refinement among others the mining MNCs engage in suggest the firms they procure to supply services and products possess optimum technological capabilities.

It is obvious that most supplier firms such as Sandvic and Atlas Corpc with immense technological endowment for supplying to the mines are foreign owned or are rather MNCs also. Of interest, however, are Zambian or local supplier firms. These are potentially a source of local backward linkages to the mining MNCs; and translate the resultant spill over benefits onto the country's industrial sector and contribute to GDP overall. Zambian supplier firms however hardly have technological endowments comparable to those of most foreign owned supplier firms making it one of the main constraints to their performance. Despite their perceived and/or actual lower technological endowments, Zambian firms cannot be completely eliminated from the supplying equation in the mining sector given the inexhaustible opportunities the myriad mining (and mining-related) processes avail besides government support. Furthermore, some local firms' technological capabilities are always improving given the cognisance such firms render to the changing environment in which they operate as demanding good performance without which their competitors (especially foreign firms) dominate.

Project objective

It is based on the foregoing that this PhD project's overall objective is to investigate how Zambian firms supplying to the mines create and improve their technological capabilities for successful performance. Thus, the specific objectives are:

1. To establish what the major technological capabilities required for supplying to the mines are
2. To examine how different supplier firms have established their technological capabilities
3. To ascertain whether the established technological capabilities among Zambian supplier firms constitute improved performance.
4. To analyse the major factors enhancing or impeding technological capability development among Zambian supplier firms in the mining sector