

ROUNDTABLE

Rare Earth Mining in Myanmar: Environmental Degradation, Gender-Based Exploitation, and Shifting Governance in Chipwe

Coordinator

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Roundtable Description

After the military coup, rare earth mining in the Chipwi area of Kachin State, Myanmar, has caused severe environmental, social, and livelihood impacts on local communities. In addition, significant political and administrative changes have also occurred. This panel brings together local Kachin activists and researchers to deepen understanding through multiple perspectives: environmental, gender, and governance issues.

The first presentation examines the consequences of environmental degradation caused by rare earth mining, including river contamination, large-scale deforestation for mining sites and firewood, and impacts on biodiversity and community health. The second panelist discusses the experiences of ethnic women working in and around rare earth mining sites, highlighting sexual exploitation, coercive labor practices, and weak labor protection mechanisms for female workers in mining companies. The last presenter examines the new administration in the mining area, discussing how the transfer of territorial control from the Border Guard Force (BGF), a pro-Myanmar military armed group, to the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) has initiated changes in local administration, security, and natural resource management.

By examining environmental, social, and political perspectives together, the panel seeks to deepen understanding of how the extraction of a critical element for advanced technologies and a sustainable, low-carbon future is reshaping a conflict-affected border area in Myanmar and affecting local ethnic communities. Through these three perspectives, the panel raises broader questions about how global technological progress and carbon-free development can better recognize and protect the rights, livelihoods, and well-being of Indigenous and ethnic communities living at the source of these critical minerals.

Keyword: Rare Earth, Environmental Degradation, Shifting Governance