REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Towards a Fair Water Footprint in the mining sector: A stocktake of mining supply chains and implications for shared water security in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia.

2 February 2026

Consultant to conduct a study entitled: Towards a Fair Water Footprint in the mining sector: A stocktake of mining supply chains and implications for shared water security in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia.

I. About Water Witness International and Fair Water Footprints

Water Witness International (WWI) is an International Non-Governmental Organisation based in Edinburgh, Scotland. WWI leads action, research and advocacy for a fair water future so that all people can access the water they need to thrive, and are protected against floods, drought, pollution, ecosystem degradation and water conflict. Working with global civil society partners and vulnerable communities, WWI stands at the sharp end of the global water crisis to shine a light on its impacts, understand its root causes and activate an effective response. Since 2009, we have been working to improve water security by driving improved water governance, practice and investment.

WWI co-leads the Fair Water Footprints programme - a global initiative uniting governments, businesses, financial institutions, and civil society to trigger action and investment on water and climate risks in global supply chains. It aims to reshape the political economy of water through trade, policy, incentives, and knowledge, making water stewardship a business norm for sustainable, resilient, and inclusive growth. This initiative builds on the Glasgow Declaration for Fair Water Footprints, launched at COP26 in 2021, which commits Signatories to ensuring fair, sustainable, and resilient water footprints by 2030.

A Fair Water Footprint is defined as one which demonstrates: **zero water pollution, sustainable water withdrawals, nature protection and restoration, universal WASH access, and drought, flood and conflict resilience.** The programme seeks to: 1) Generate and share knowledge for systemic change; 2) Empower communities and civil society organisations 3) Strengthen governance and accountability for responsible water use in key supply chains and markets. By 2030 we aim to establish water stewardship as the business norm in high-risk supply chains, and to improve water security for over 20 million vulnerable people, and to trigger transformative change in governance, policy and practice.

With Funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Fair Water Footprints is one of three innovative approaches contributing to the Just Transition for Water Security Programme.

II. Background

Across Africa, the mining-water nexus has often been characterized by tension between economic contribution and profound environmental and social impacts, including pollution incidents, damage to biodiversity and impacts on downstream water users. This consultancy seeks to take stock of the mining and minerals sector, contributions and role within global supply chains, stakeholder relationship, water impacts and environmental and social governance performance in three selected countries of Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi. The study will play a key role in shaping engagement strategies for the Fair Water Footprint initiative for the purpose of advancing shared water security and climate resilience.

An adequate global supply of metals and critical minerals is needed to support the energy transition in order to meet urgent goals for climate mitigation. However, many of these resources are found in countries already facing profound water stress and water insecurity, where stubborn governance, capacity, infrastructure and financing challenges persist alongside highly sensitive ecosystems and highly vulnerable communities. At the local scale, mining can significantly alter hydrological systems, reducing water availability for local communities and exacerbating water stress in already vulnerable regions. Recent estimates show that approximately 16% of the world's critical mineral mines are in regions already experiencing high or extreme high levels of water stress (Lakshman, 2024). Water pollution produces significant toxic environmental consequences for communities (Cacciuttolo, Cano and Custodio, 2023). The interactions between growing demand and spiralling water challenges underscores the need for identifying how policies, practices and incentives can be adapted to embed sustainable, equitable and resilient water use at the heart of the global trade in metals and minerals – to improve responsible sourcing and to ensure a Fair Water Footprint across producer and consumer countries.

III. Objectives and guiding questions

The main objective of this consultancy is to equip Water Witness, our partners and wider stakeholders, both global and local, with an up-to-date and evidence based understanding of the mining and minerals sectors in each of Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia, with a particular focus on their implications for shared water security, and priorities for ensuring a fair water footprint. To achieve this objective, the consultancy will conduct research and assess performance in relation to available deposits of key metals and minerals, current and future exploitation, water use, performance and implications, key trading relationships, trends,

relevant initiatives, governance frameworks, networks and stakeholders and their performance in ensuring equitable, sustainable and resilient water use. This will be used to guide further investigations, advocacy and engagement over the next 3-5 years to trigger, facilitate and support shared water and climate security.

1. **Sector stocktake and trends:** Provide a contemporary understanding of the mining and minerals sectors across Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia, now and in the future, including:
    a. Focusing on key minerals and mineral deposits, provide an illustrated and tabulated understanding of:
        i. Key mineral resources by country, their locations, scale, and significance in the global mineral landscapes (e.g. importance as critical/ETMs, trade statistics and buyers).
        ii. Current, planned and potential future levels of production.
        iii. Considering the current and future demand, what are the linkages and flows between Artisanal Small-Scale Mining (ASM), global supply chains, and contribution to national trade? What proportion of demand is being met by ASM – for which minerals/metals and where are they coming from?
    b. The sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to employment, and local economies, and the role of and importance of the sector in national economic strategy.
    c. The major issues and implications from a water perspective, including water-related risks, impacts and dependencies, and likely interactions with climate change.

2. **Review of institutional and governance frameworks (regulatory, legal and policy)**
    a. What are the key strategies, policies, laws and regulations governing the mining and minerals sectors, and their environmental, water and social impacts, and which bodies have responsibility for implementation?
    b. What voluntary standards and sectoral initiatives are used or underway in the selected country?
    c. How well are institutional and governance frameworks performing – including through application, enforcement and compliance? How transparent and accountable is the sector?

3. **Stakeholder and political economy analysis:**
    a. Identify and analyse relevant stakeholders across mining and mineral supply chains including the key national and international companies, traders, NGOs, government departments, investors, initiatives, networks and affected populations. Provide names and contact details of key stakeholders in an annotated bibliography.
    b. Provide a light political economy analysis which maps relationships, power dynamics, interests and levels of influence and coordination among actors.

4. **Case study analysis:** Identify and document cases of water-related incidents and problems which have occurred in the mining and minerals sector over the past 20 – 25 years and through selected case study analysis identify:
    a. Whose water and climate security is impacted by the mining and minerals sector? What is the evidence of impact and how has this changed over time?
    b. Performance of the sector against the 5 pillars of a Fair Water Footprint.
    c. Opportunity and gap analysis: What do these case studies tell us about the performance of environmental and social governance regimes? Where are the key gaps and opportunities for change?

5. **Opportunities and strategic entry points.** Drawing on the stocktake, assess the priority opportunities for advancing sustainable, equitable and resilient water use. Specifically:
    a. What are the major opportunities and constraints for sustainable, resilient and equitable water use, and for improved governance and accountability towards this across the sector?
    b. What are the major opportunities, entry points and recommendations for the Fair Water Footprint Initiative to trigger, facilitate and support the sector – towards a Fair water Footprint for mining and minerals, within the country context.

IV. Scope, approach and methodology

In order to provide an up-to-date analysis within the budget envelope available, the study will be based on a review of available data and literature, institutional and case study analysis and stakeholder engagement through Key Informant Interviews (KII) with a balanced group of stakeholders in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia,

The KIIs will validate and enrich the knowledge generated and will be conducted with not less than 12 selected stakeholders per country, including those from government agencies, regulators, civil society organisations, community representatives and technical experts. These will be used to validate findings, test assumptions and refine opportunity and change pathways and/or set priority actions.

The consultant will liaise with WWI throughout the study, and in particular, will present findings at a workshop in order to refine and agree the content of section 5.b, ahead of publication. The study will be fully referenced and illustrated with tables, maps and diagrams to enhance easy interpretation, and is intended to be published and made available in the public domain.

V. Deliverables, timelines and budgets

The following are the deliverables envisaged and will be agreed with the successful consultant across a mutually agreed schedule.

Table 1: Shows the deliverables per country

Deliverables	**Description**
Detailed Workplan	Full workplan including the methodology to be applied, work schedule and timelines
Desk review and sector synthesis	A comprehensive desk review of existing data, literature and reports on the mining sector
Case studies and Key informant interviews	Country specific case study analysis. Key Informant Interviews delivery and analysis.
Workshop	Key findings and recommendations presented to WW and partners in a 1-day workshop for the purpose of calibrating change pathways.
Final report and summary of briefing note	Full report and summary synthesis of findings including identification of priority levers for advancing FWF across the mining sector

The consultancy will commence as soon as possible (Feb/March 2026) and the workload is anticipated to span 30 days for each country study including report writing – or around 90 days for all three countries.

Deliverables will include a 30-page report plus annexes and a four-page briefing note highlighting the importance of the sector and priorities for ensuring sustainable, equitable and resilient water use and management. These outputs should set a stage for engagement to advance efforts for improving water security outcomes through water stewardship, accountability tracking, engagement and advocacy for fair water footprints.

The consultant shall debrief the focal point at Water Witness International every 2 weeks with the frequency increased or decreased as needed. Deliverable dates will be agreed upon signing of the contract though note that the studies should be completed by June 2026.

There is an indicative budget envelope of £40,000 available for these studies which can be delivered via a single study per country, or collectively.

VI. Requirements and proposal submission

The consultant(s) shall submit a separate technical and financial proposal, either as a collective submission or as independent submissions for each country. The technical proposal will set out their understanding of the assignment, proposed approach and workplan, alongside details of the qualifications, experience and the track record that makes them suitable for the assignment. Contact details of two referees who can attest to the quality and rigor of the consultant's work should be provided. Proposals should also include CVs of the consultant team, detailed roles and responsibilities for those involved, and confirmation of availability to undertake the work. The work will be completed by June 2026.

All proposals shall be submitted by 23rd February 2026 to Charleswight@waterwitness.org and Justinamuchelenje@waterwitness.org. Administrative support and contract management will be led by Justina Muchelenje. All inquiries can be directed to: justinamuchelenje@waterwitness.org.

References

Cacciuttolo, C., Cano, D. and Custodio, M. (2023) 'Socio-Environmental Risks Linked with Mine Tailings Chemical Composition: Promoting Responsible and Safe Mine Tailings Management Considering Copper and Gold Mining Experiences from Chile and Peru', *Toxics*, 11(5), p. 462. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/toxics11050462.

CDP (2019) *In Too Deep: Analysis for institutional investors of critical water security issues facing the metals and mining sector*.

Kunz, N.C. (2020) 'Towards a broadened view of water security in mining regions', *Water Security*, 11, p. 100079. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wasec.2020.100079.

Lakshman, S. (2024) 'More Critical Minerals Mining Could Strain Water Supplies in Stressed Regions'. Available at: https://www.wri.org/insights/critical-minerals-mining-water-impacts (Accessed: 3 November 2025).

Meißner, S. (2021) 'The Impact of Metal Mining on Global Water Stress and Regional Carrying Capacities—A GIS-Based Water Impact Assessment', *Resources*, 10(12), p. 120. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/resources10120120.