

Research shows link between sustainability and competitiveness in mining

- Recycling is not an imminent threat to primary commodity supply
- Valuable metals like gold can be linked to higher country risk
- GHG emissions per production unit are an indicator of profitability

Robeco views sustainability as a long term-driver of companies' performance. In a recent study, we analyzed the link between sustainability and financial performance for three metals with distinctive mining processes, i.e. copper, iron ore and gold. We looked into three aspects: the impact of recycling, the degree of country risk and the link between a miner's greenhouse gas emissions and cost base.

Mining operations have a considerable impact on the environment and the community in which they operate. Miners are increasingly expected to demonstrate responsible stewardship in order to secure access to shared resources such as land and water. As mining companies have had to broaden their operations in emerging countries, risks are being exacerbated. Adding up lower ore grades, corruption and dewatering, the industry's ESG risks require proper consideration and management.

Copper, iron ore and gold

Iron ore operations are simpler than copper or gold operations, due to open pit mining and high grades (50%-60% Fe). Copper and gold on the other hand involve complex processing methods. However, many copper miners do not go through the whole processing chain, but often only sell copper concentrate (\approx 20%-30% Cu). Copper concentrate, which is the result of the flotation process, is the most basic form of sold copper product. The concentrate is



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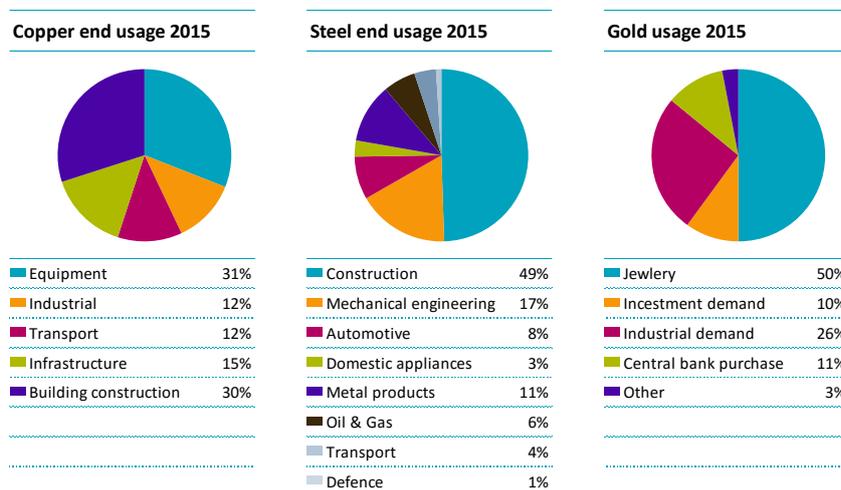
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'Miners with lower GHG emissions also have lower costs'

afterwards smelted and refined by third parties. Mining and milling the ore remains the dominant factor determining the emission profile of copper, accounting for 57% (Memary et al. 2012) of emissions. Smelting ranks second by 27% of total emissions.

Copper is mainly used in equipment (31%)¹ and construction (30%), due to its high conductivity of heat and electricity and corrosion resistant specificity. In steel, the end product of iron ore, even 50% is used for construction. As for gold, half of global production goes into jewelries.

Figure 1 | Use of copper, steel and gold



Source: International Copper Association, World Steel Association, Thomson Reuters

Recycling as a proportion of supply is expected to remain stable

The first ESG aspect we researched is the impact of recycling on commodity supply. From an ESG point of view, recycling is a positive development. Generally the recycling rate is linked to the stage of development of a country or region. Further development of countries like China can lead to more secondary recycled material coming onto the market and is competing with primary sourced material by the mining industry. Is this an imminent threat to the mining industry?

We looked at trends in recycling rates over the last decade. In Table 1 we can see that the copper recycling input rate² has been stable over the last decade. Global copper demand is forecasted to increase by 2% per year. Recycling is expected to follow the same trend. As a consequence, the recycling input rate is foreseen to remain stable in the 30% - 35% range. The Chinese market, as one of the main domains in copper usage, has been favoring primary

¹ 2015 figures

² Recycling input rate = (Scrap used/Total copper usage)

sourced copper concentrate to secondary supply. The financial crisis, new supply and a more mature economic growth in China led to lower copper concentrate prices. The relatively competitive price of primary mined copper is hindering significant new recycling investments there. More demand combined with higher prices is a better environment for more recycling capacity to come online.

A similar pattern can be drawn for iron ore. Scrap is integrated into ore production through Electric Arc Furnaces (EAF) as an alternative method of steelmaking to Blast Furnaces (BF). Table 1 displays EAF production market share as well as scrap purchases for steelmaking. New EAF capacity is now only being built in Saudi Arabia given low construction costs, a higher variable base and proximity to ports.

Table 1. Recycling rates in copper, iron ore and gold

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Copper										
Word scrap use	7,696	8,456	8,082	8,093	8,244	8,804	8,351	8,276	7,968	
Recycling input rate	35%	36%	35%	35%	34%	35%	33%	32%	29%	
Iron ore										
Scrap purchases for steelmaking		343	335	265	340	370	370	375	378	355
<i>Change</i>			-2%	-21%	28%	9%	0%	1%	1%	-6%
EAF steel production %	32%	32%	32%	29%	29%	30%	29%	26%	26%	28%
Gold										
Recycled gold (% of total gold supply)	35%	33%	39%	42%	39%	37%	37%	30%	26%	27%

Source: International Copper Study Group, World Steel Association, Thomson Reuters

Gold recycling is closely related to the gold price as well as economic indicators. The gold price is strongly correlated with the general price level (inflation) in the long run, but it fluctuates considerably in the short run due to political and financial turmoil, as well as changes in exchange rates and real interest rates. In periods of distress, when prices go up due to the safe haven effect and more economic distress in countries and households, there is a higher incentive to sell gold for recycling. If an economic crisis will return we expect to see higher recycling rates in gold coming back.

The conclusion is that the recycling of the three metals will remain rather stable in the near term and will not impact primary supply. With more secondary material becoming available

in Asia over the next decades, the balance is likely to shift slowly but only when it becomes economically attractive vis-à-vis primary supply.

Country risk: largest for gold

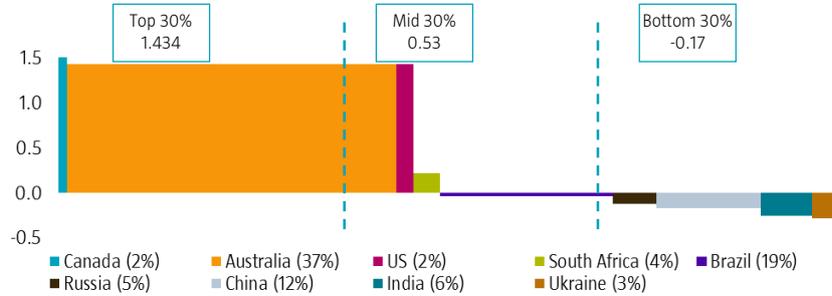
The second topic of our research is the degree of country risk involved in the mining of the three metals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some mining operations are more risky than others. We take an empirical approach by testing the hypothesis of country risk differences across metals. We constructed a tailor-made country risk index based on indicators we consider relevant for the mining sector. We built an equally weighted index considering four components being: environmental policy, political stability, institutional framework and competitiveness of countries. The methodology uses a weighted z-score to rank the world's countries. The most stable countries have the highest z-scores and vice versa.

We use the RobecoSAM Country Sustainability Ranking, which builds on the results of RobecoSAM's semi-annual country sustainability assessment. RobecoSAM evaluates countries via a structured framework covering a broad range of ESG factors that we consider to be relevant for investors from a risk-return perspective. The resulting scores offer insights into the investment risks and opportunities associated with each country and provide investors with a better frame of reference for making comparisons among countries and regions. For a more detailed outline of the methodology used, please refer to the brochure "Measuring Country Intangibles"³. We display the country risk distribution within iron ore, copper and gold operations by comparing the riskiness profile of the countries contributing up to 90% of global production. The remaining 10% was neglected as it was usually labelled under other countries.

The three figures below show a country's share in global production on the x-axis, and the z-score on the y-axis. Figure 2, for example, shows that Australia accounts for the largest part of global iron ore production and that this country is also very sustainable, as it has the second highest z-score after Canada. In Figure 3, we see that Congo, where a relatively large amount of copper is mined, has a very negative z-score.

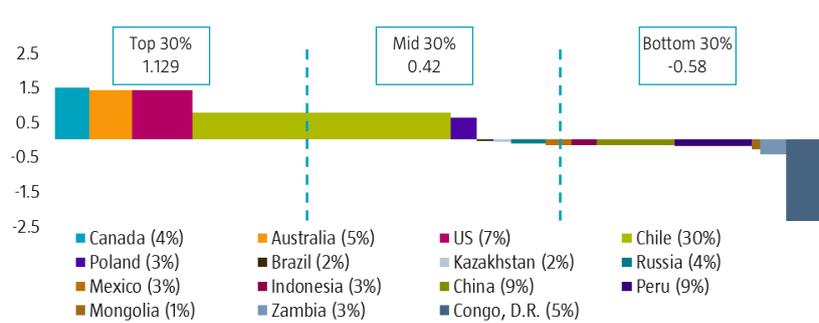
³ Measuring country intangibles", June 2015, available on www.robecosam.com

Figure 2 | Iron ore - country risk distribution



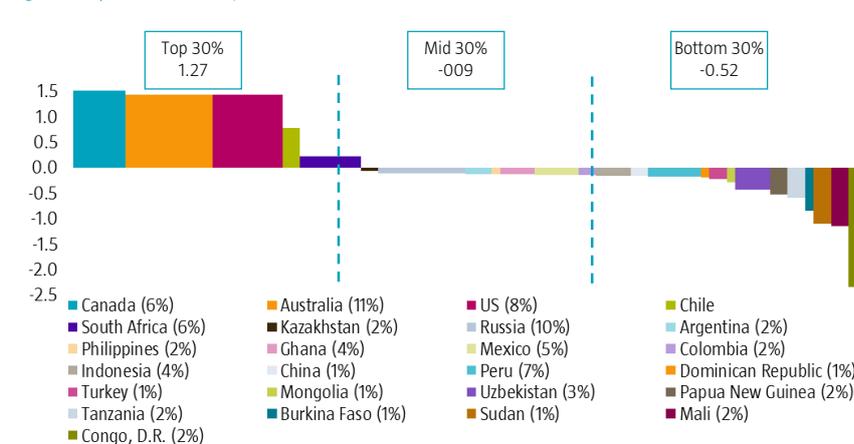
Source: RobecoSAM, Statista

Figure 3 | Copper - country risk distribution



Source: RobecoSAM, Statista, Bloomberg

Figure 4 | Gold - country risk distribution



Source: RobecoSAM, Metals focus

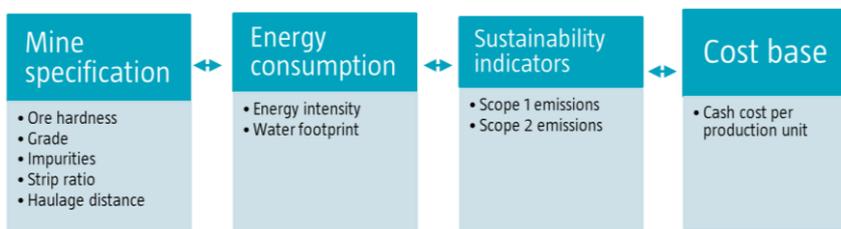
Gold operations involve a larger 'tail risk', followed by copper and iron ore. We interpret this as a tendency of gold miners to extend their operations into more risky countries. This is not only because of the price reward but also due to the fact that the geological deposits tend to

be found in less stable regions. The opposite takes place for iron ore which, being a bulky product at considerably higher grades (50%-60%), is mainly mined in more stable countries. Nevertheless, one should be careful to generalize as iron ore can be found in less stable countries as well, such as Liberia, and gold in more stable countries such as the US and Canada. We take this type of information into account in the investment analysis.

The link between sustainability and profitability

The Greenhouse Gas Protocol has been very influential in defining how organizations should manage and report their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, including the establishment of three categories of emissions (Scope 1, Scope 2, Scope 3):

- Scope 1: Direct GHG emissions occur from sources that are owned or controlled by the company
- Scope 2: GHG emissions from the generation of purchased electricity consumed by a company
- Scope 3: All other indirect emissions; scope 3 emissions are rarely reported by mining companies



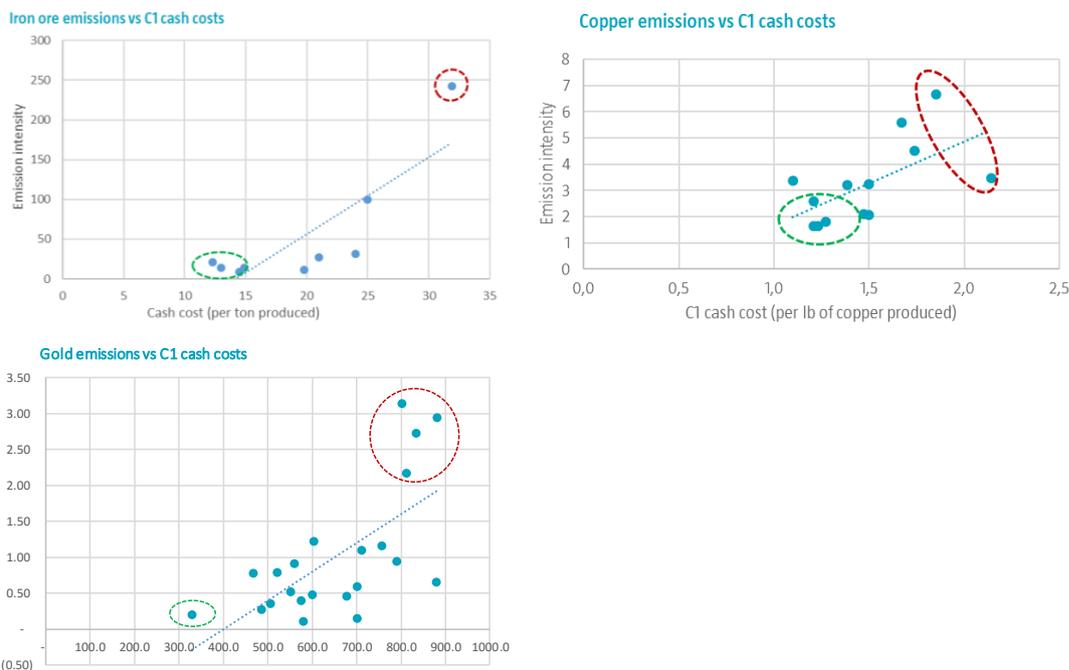
Geologic features, such as grade, ore hardness, and stripping ratio⁴, have a direct impact on the energy and water intensity of operations. For instance, low grades, deep underground mining with long haulage distances and a large stripping ratio, result in more energy and water intense operations and, consequently, significant greenhouse gas emissions. The question is whether more emissions (Scope 1 + Scope 2) also imply a higher cost base. Although the relationship may seem straightforward intuitively, Macquarie, BofA Merrill Lynch and Citi Bank estimate that energy accounts for only 10% to 20% of the total cost depending on location. Labor has a larger impact, as it is the most significant cost factor in both copper and iron ore mining regardless of the location.

We collected the information on cash cost, production, Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions from annual reports, sustainability reports and climate change reports from the CDP (Carbon Disclosure Project) on pure copper, iron ore and gold miners. We excluded operations in their end-life to ensure we only analyze mines on a going concern basis. For copper mines, we considered only copper concentrate producers.

⁴ The ratio of the amount of waste material required to extract a tonnage of ore

The evidence we find suggests a significant positive relationship between miners' cost base and emissions per unit of production of iron ore, copper and gold. The relationship is more significant for iron ore, where we calculate an R-squared of 69% compared to an R-squared of 38% for copper miners and 42% for gold producing companies. The best performing low emission, low cost miners are located in the bottom left area while the worst producers are located in the top right segments in the graphs below.

Figure 5 | Relationship between emissions and costs



Source: Company reports

Conclusion: emission level is an indicator of competitiveness

We conclude that miners with lower emissions per unit of material produced are also miners with a lower cost base. For investors, we therefore regard emissions per production unit as a valuable indicator to assess miner competitiveness. On top of that, from a portfolio perspective, investors should allocate their money not only to competitive low emission mines but also to a mix of assets with lower country risk when possible.

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