

# The US–DRC Trade & Strategic Partnership Agreement

In December 2025, the United States and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a **Strategic Partnership Agreement** that expands their economic ties — especially in the mining and trade sectors — beyond a traditional buyer-seller relationship into long-term cooperation on investment, infrastructure, and responsible resource development.

While often described in news reporting as a *critical minerals trade deal*, the official framework covers much more than minerals: it promotes economic cooperation, infrastructure development, investment growth, mining reform, transparency, and shared access to resources.

## Benefits to the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congolese)

### 1. Increased Investment and Economic Growth

- The agreement aims to attract U.S. private sector investment into the DRC’s mining, energy, transport, and industrial sectors.
- This can translate into job creation, infrastructure projects, and growth of local industries.

### 2. Local Value Addition & Industrialization

- The partnership encourages processing and beneficiation inside the DRC, rather than exporting raw minerals exclusively.
- This promotes higher-value jobs and boosts long-term economic development instead of just mining extraction.

### 3. Improved Regulatory Environment

- The deal supports DRC reforms for clearer, more transparent mining laws and labor practices, attracting more stable investment.

### 4. Infrastructure & Connectivity

- Part of cooperation includes support for regional infrastructure corridors (e.g., Sakania-Lobito and rail upgrades) that help reduce trade costs and link Congolese goods to global markets.

### 5. Enhanced Peace and Stability

- Although not purely economic, the partnership is tied to broader U.S. diplomatic efforts — including a peace agreement with Rwanda — that aim to create more stable conditions for investment and commerce.

# Benefits to the United States (Americans)

## 1. Secure Access to Critical Minerals

- The DRC is home to some of the world’s largest deposits of cobalt, copper, lithium, and other metals essential for batteries, renewable energy, electronics, and defense industries.
- The partnership ensures more predictable, transparent access to these minerals, vital for U.S. industrial and energy goals.

## 2. Diversifying Supply Chains

- It reduces U.S. reliance on any single global supplier (notably China) for critical minerals — supporting national security and economic competitiveness.

## 3. Investment Opportunities for U.S. Companies

- U.S. firms gain priority access to exploration, development, and offtake agreements, creating new markets and business contracts.

## 4. Strengthening Strategic Influence

- The deal boosts U.S. geopolitical influence in Central Africa and supports long-term trade relationships in a key region.

## Key Focus Areas Covered

Area	Description
<b>Mining &amp; Minerals</b>	Secure, transparent critical mineral supply chains (cobalt, copper, lithium)
<b>Investment</b>	Promote U.S. investment and local economic development
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Support transport, rail, energy projects
<b>Regulatory Reform</b>	Improve business climate and labor standards
<b>Peace &amp; Stability</b>	Linked with diplomatic efforts for regional peace

This U.S.–DRC agreement is not just a simple trade agreement like tariff cuts — it is a strategic economic cooperation framework designed to link the DRC’s vast resources and growth potential with American investment, technology, and markets.

- For **Congolese**, it promises jobs, infrastructure, investment, and value-added industry.
- For **Americans**, it supports secure access to key minerals and economic opportunities for U.S. businesses with reduced geopolitical supply risks.

# What Is the Lobito Corridor?

The **Lobito Corridor** is a major railway and logistics infrastructure project designed to connect the mineral-rich regions of Central Africa — notably in the DRC and Zambia — to the Atlantic Ocean via the Port of Lobito in Angola. It revitalizes the historic Benguela Railway and extends it to create a faster, cheaper, and more reliable export route for goods, especially copper, cobalt, and other critical minerals. The project is backed by a combination of G7/United States investment (as part of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment), the European Union’s Global Gateway initiative, and private sector partners.

## Benefits for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

### 1. Better Access to Global Markets

The corridor links Congo’s mining areas to the deep-water Atlantic port at Lobito, significantly reducing the distance, time, and cost of exporting minerals like copper and cobalt compared with traditional East African routes.

### 2. Economic Growth and Trade Expansion

- Export volume and efficiency are expected to increase, boosting foreign exchange earnings.
- Local industries (mining, logistics, agriculture) can grow thanks to improved transport infrastructure.

### 3. Job Creation and Regional Integration

The project supports employment in construction, rail operations, and related sectors while strengthening trade links with neighboring Zambia and Angola.

### 4. Lower Transport Costs & Time

A rail corridor can replace long, expensive truck routes, reducing transport costs, which helps make Congolese goods more competitive internationally.

## Benefits for the United States (Americans)

### 1. Securing Critical Mineral Supply Chains

The Lobito Corridor can become a strategic export route for critical minerals such as copper and cobalt, which are essential for batteries, electronics, renewable energy, and defense industries — helping the U.S. diversify supply chains beyond reliance on a single source.

## 2. Economic & Geopolitical Leverage

By supporting the Corridor, the U.S. gains stronger economic ties in Central Africa, expanding American influence and offering an alternative to Chinese-led infrastructure investments in the region.

## 3. Investment & Trade Opportunities

U.S. companies can benefit from logistics contracts, service provision, and mineral offtake agreements as the rail line expands trade between Africa and global markets.

## 4. Supporting Regional Stability

Improved economic integration, connectivity, and prosperity can enhance stability in Central Africa, which aligns with U.S. diplomatic and development goals.

## Strategic Importance

Feature	Description
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Rehabilitated railway from Lobito (Angola) to Kolwezi (DRC) and onward to Zambia, unlocking regional logistics potential.
<b>Mineral Exports</b>	Eases export of copper, cobalt, and other minerals to global markets, reducing reliance on other corridors.
<b>U.S. Involvement</b>	Supported through U.S. financing and partnerships under PGI to secure supply chains and increase economic cooperation.
<b>Regional Impact</b>	Promotes economic growth, job creation, and broader regional trade integration.

The Lobito Corridor is not just a railway; it's a transformational trade and transport route with the potential to accelerate economic growth in the DRC, strengthen U.S. access to critical minerals, and deepen economic ties between Africa and global markets — though realizing its full potential depends on strong governance, investment, and social safeguards.

## **What Is AGOA?**

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is a U.S. trade preference program enacted in 2000 that gives eligible sub-Saharan African countries duty-free access to the U.S. market for many products. It aims to stimulate economic growth, advance market reforms, and deepen U.S.–Africa trade and investment ties.

Under AGOA, eligible countries can export thousands of products to the U.S. without paying tariffs, provided they meet certain eligibility requirements (e.g., good governance, rule of law, human rights protections).

## **Benefits for the Democratic Republic of Congo**

### **1. Duty-Free Access to the U.S. Market**

DRC businesses can export many goods to the United States without tariffs, making Congolese products more competitive and profitable in U.S. markets.

### **2. Expanded Export Opportunities**

AGOA applies to a wide range of goods — including agricultural products, value-added manufactured items, and some minerals — allowing Congolese producers to diversify their export base beyond raw commodities.

### **3. Encourages Local Industrial Growth**

By providing preferential access, AGOA creates incentives for local processing and manufacturing instead of exporting only unprocessed goods, helping grow domestic industries and jobs.

### **4. Attracts Investment and Business Development**

The program signals that the U.S. market is open to DRC goods, which can help attract foreign investment into Congolese agriculture, manufacturing, and other export-oriented sectors.

### **5. Strengthens Structural Reforms**

To stay eligible for AGOA, countries like the DRC must pursue economic reforms, improve governance, and protect workers' rights, which boosts the overall business environment.

## **Benefits to the United States**

### **1. Access to Diverse African Goods**

AGOA gives U.S. consumers and businesses access to competitively priced products from AGOA countries, fostering trade diversity.

### **2. Supply Chain Diversification**

U.S. firms can source materials and products from Africa, helping diversify supply chains and reduce dependence on a few foreign suppliers.

### **3. Promotes Economic Development**

Supporting economic growth in the DRC and other African nations can lead to stable markets and stronger partners for U.S. exporters of machinery, technology, and services.

### **4. Geopolitical and Strategic Engagement**

AGOA reinforces U.S. economic influence in Africa by deepening trade partnerships and offering an alternative to other global powers seeking influence in the region.

**AGOA** is a U.S. trade program that lets eligible African countries like the DRC export many products to the U.S. duty-free, helping:

- DRC businesses expand into U.S. markets, increase competitiveness, and attract investment.
- The DRC economy grows by promoting diversification, manufacturing, and jobs.
- **U.S. companies and consumers** access new products and benefit from diversified trade ties.

DRC's continued eligibility depends on reforms, including rule of law and labor protections, which encourage stronger institutions and business conditions in the country.