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foundation of the supply chain. While the government, as with most of the world, appears to have strict laws on the books, they are rarely enforced and mines are left to operate without any oversight. The mine owners employ children as young as 8 years old, taking advantage of the lack of education of both children and parents,



where there are any, as well as the dire economic conditions of rural Tanzania. It's estimated that the majority of the children working in the mines are orphans or other vulnerable groups, frequently left out of society and forced to seek work in order to survive. The mine operators require miners to work up to 24-hour shifts in extremely dangerous and back-breaking conditions, without protective gear or proper equipment, and do not train miners or supervisors in the health risks, leaving scores of children open to mercury poisoning, among other diseases. Without enforced regulation, mining accidents are common, and children are at constant risk of serious

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injury and death. Where children are trying to balance education with working, the labor is so intensive and the health risks so severe that it creates a distraction from learning few can overcome.

Not that Tanzania is unusual – every country with high poverty combined with poor education and work opportunities is involved in sending the kids to work, from the USA to Europe to Africa – and there are global estimates of around 168 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 involved in labor, and their vulnerability and lack of education makes abuse inevitable.

The Human Rights Watch report states: “The children had no way of independently verifying the weight of the sacks or the grade of the ore, and so had to accept what the traders paid them, making them susceptible to exploitation”.

Lithium-ion batteries, used in electric cars and mobile devices globally, are made with cobalt. The 2016 Amnesty International report, “This Is What We Die For”, concerning child miners in the cobalt ore mines of Democratic Republic of Congo, outlines human rights abuses against children in exchange for the product that powers our technology.

Gold, coal, precious stones, semi-precious metals – products we use daily without a second thought - are frequently sourced from mines where children work. Aside from the hazardous conditions, these operations also open the way to prostitution, drug use, and crime. Temporary towns develop without an infrastructure, including access to potable water, and schooling is non-existent. The mines are often difficult to find, hidden in hills away from prying eyes of regulators and aid organizations,

and when someone does find them, they are able to shut down and relocate quickly.

Most of the small-scale ore mines found across the continent are privately owned and dug by the miner-owners themselves, and the product is then sold to traders or intermediaries, who then sell it to the large manufacturers, mostly in China. By not questioning the origin of the raw materials, companies along the supply chain like Apple, Microsoft, and Samsung, are able to claim no responsibility, all the while selling their version of “social responsibility”. In April 2016, the CEO of Thomson Reuters Foundation, Monique Villa, announced a “Stop Slavery Award” to encourage corporations to look a little closer at their entire supply chain, and work to eradicate human rights abuses. While mining practices are not usually considered “slavery”, this level of scrutiny might still reach the children who are working in these conditions. Reporting by groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch serve to spotlight large corporations, and the message is being sent that they do have the power to eradicate forced labor, as well as child labor, but clearly, they need incentives to do so.

While cigarettes come with a health hazard warning, perhaps it's time the products we use on a daily basis come with a warning that children have been abused, maimed or killed in their making, until the manufacturers – and the consumers – demand change.

*To link to the reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, scan this code:*

