

LE MONDE AFRIQUE

US Pivots African Aid Toward Critical Minerals and Energy Infrastructure

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American overseas development finance is undergoing a strategic realignment in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the United States shifting its aid priorities firmly toward energy infrastructure and extractive industries. The reorientation signals Washington's intent to compete more directly with Chinese influence across the continent by tying development financing to commercially and strategically valuable assets rather than traditional humanitarian programs.

On April 22, the US overseas infrastructure financing agency concluded a formal partnership with Ivory Coast aimed at modernizing the country's electricity network. The agreement represents one of several energy-sector deals the US has been structuring across West and Central Africa, leveraging development finance tools to crowd in private capital and secure long-term access to power infrastructure in fast-growing economies. Ivory Coast, as the economic anchor of Francophone West Africa, is a particularly significant target: the country has ambitious electrification targets and a growing industrial base that requires reliable grid capacity.

In December 2024, Washington secured preferential access to Congolese mining assets, cementing a deal that places American capital at the center of the Democratic Republic of Congo's vast critical minerals sector. The DRC holds some of the world's largest reserves of cobalt, coltan, and lithium — materials central to the global energy transition and advanced defence manufacturing. By obtaining easier access to these mines, the US positions itself to reduce reliance on Chinese-controlled supply chains for battery and semiconductor inputs, while offering the Congolese government an alternative patron for infrastructure investment.

The broader pattern is clear: US development finance is now being deployed as a geopolitical instrument, with Africa's energy and mining sectors serving as the primary theatre. Countries hosting major hydrocarbon or mineral assets — including those along the Gulf of Guinea, the Congo Basin, and East Africa's emerging gas corridor — can expect increased American engagement, both through direct financing and through pressure on host governments to diversify away from Chinese and Russian partners. For African governments, this creates genuine leverage to extract better terms from all external partners.

For the European and Norwegian private sector, the US pivot has dual implications. On one hand, increased American-backed infrastructure spending expands the overall project pipeline and can accelerate final investment decisions on energy projects that have stalled for lack of financing. On the other hand, US development finance often comes with requirements favouring American contractors, meaning Norwegian and European service companies must position themselves early — ideally as technology partners or subcontractors to US-led consortia — rather than competing head-on for prime contracts.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

Norwegian oil and gas service companies should monitor US development finance dealflow in Ivory Coast and the DRC closely, as American-backed energy infrastructure projects frequently require international technical partners with deepwater, FPSO, and grid-integration expertise that Norwegian firms can supply. Companies should consider proactive engagement with US development finance institutions and American EPC contractors operating in West and Central Africa to secure subcontractor or technology-licensing positions ahead of project launches.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Subsea/FPSO:** Ivory Coast's offshore Block CI-205 and adjacent acreage could benefit from US-backed financing momentum — Norwegian FPSO and subsea contractors should track whether US development finance extends to offshore production infrastructure.

- **Drilling:** Increased US engagement in the DRC and West Africa may accelerate drilling campaigns on acreage held by American-aligned operators, creating rig and well-services demand for Norwegian drillers already active in the region.
- **LNG:** East Africa's LNG corridor and West African gas monetisation projects align directly with US strategic interests in displacing Russian LNG in European markets, making US co-financing of LNG infrastructure increasingly plausible.
- **Pipeline:** Grid modernisation in Ivory Coast and broader US energy infrastructure deals may include gas pipeline components where Norwegian pipeline engineering firms can offer competitive technical proposals.
- **Service:** Norwegian well-services and inspection companies should engage early with US development finance-backed operators in the DRC and Ivory Coast, where procurement pipelines are forming and technical credibility matters more than price alone.

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