Unlocking Regional Value: Leveraging the African Green Minerals Strategy to Drive Electric Vehicle and Battery Value Chains in Southern and East Africa

Summary

Africa holds a significant share of the world's transition minerals, which are essential to the global decarbonisation agenda. However, the continent's role in global value chains has primarily been limited to the extraction and export of unprocessed minerals, leaving much of the value addition and industrialisation benefits elsewhere. The African Green Minerals Strategy (AGMS), adopted by the African Union in 2024, aims to transform this paradigm, among other things, through promoting regional cooperation to develop battery and electric vehicle (EV) value chains. Looking at case studies in South Africa and Kenya, as well as the DRC-Zambia battery value chain initiative, this policy brief explores how AGMS implementation can overcome current challenges, enhance value addition, and enable sustainable and inclusive green industrialisation in Africa.

Introduction

The global push towards decarbonisation, epitomised by the Paris Agreement, necessitates a transformation of key sectors, especially transport, which accounts for a significant share of global greenhouse gas emissions. Africa, endowed with abundant transition minerals, is positioned to become a key player in green value chains, particularly for batteries and electric vehicles (EVs). Although still in their infancy, the EV markets in South Africa and Kenya provide good examples of current trajectories and promising upscaling potential. In this context, the African Green Minerals Strategy (AGMS) provides a continental framework to move beyond extractivism, fostering industrialisation and regional cooperation, thereby potentially growing the EV sector.

Problem Statement

Despite the continent's mineral wealth, Africa remains on the margins of value addition, with its mineral exports fuelling industrialisation elsewhere. Fragmented policies, infrastructure deficits and a lack of technological capacity hinder progress towards sustainable industrialisation. Regional collaboration remains weak and most countries continue to operate in silos, undermining Africa's collective bargaining power and opportunities for shared prosperity through green industrial growth.

Policy Options/Alternatives

Broadly speaking, there are three policy options or alternatives, which are: (i) maintain the status quo by continuing with fragmented, national-level approaches focused on raw mineral exports; (ii) rely solely on bilateral initiatives, emphasising bilateral or regional projects such as the DRC-Zambia battery value chain initiative, without broader continental coordination; and (iii) adopt a continental approach by fully implementing the AGMS, aligning national and regional mineral governance strategies within a common framework for value addition, infrastructure and skills development.

Analysis

Maintaining the status quo perpetuates Africa's marginal role in global value chains and limits socio-economic benefits. As a result of this, industries like the transport sector face challenges in scaling up e-mobility initiatives. While initiatives like the DRC-Zambia battery value chain initiative are a good starting point, there is a risk of exclusion, duplication of efforts and inconsistent standards within the region. A coordinated approach as presented by the AGMS enables economies of scale, regulatory alignment, infrastructure sharing, as well as skills and technology transfer. However, existing challenges such as the slow implementation of the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) still need to be addressed, otherwise the full operationalisation of the AGMS risks the same fate.

Recommendations

1. **Harmonise Transition Minerals Policies:** African nations can harmonise their policies to create a unified and coherent framework that supports the goals of the AGMS. This includes ensuring that regulations and incentives for mining, processing and EV infrastructure are aligned across borders.
2. **Increase Investments in Mineral Value Chain Infrastructure:** There is a critical need for significant investments in infrastructure that supports the production and distribution of EVs and batteries. This includes enhancing transportation networks, energy supply systems and manufacturing facilities.
3. **Establish Formal Regional Collaboration Agreements:** To enhance regional collaboration, African countries can establish formal agreements and collaborative frameworks to facilitate knowledge sharing, resource pooling and coordinated efforts in developing the EV and battery sectors. Initiatives like the DRC-Zambia Memorandum of Understanding exemplify this approach.
4. **Promote Local Content and Intra-African Trade:** Local content development and promoting intra-African trade are key in ensuring that a significant share of the value generated from mineral extraction and processing remains in Africa. By fostering local manufacturing of battery components and EVs, and promoting trade among African nations, reliance on imports can be reduced, ultimately driving economic development across the continent.
5. **Enhance Capacity Building and Skills Development:** Investment in human capital with the necessary skills for the EV and battery industries through targeted capacity building and skills development is critical. Training programmes (especially those coordinated at the continental level) can be developed to support this transition and to ensure that job creation aligns with new opportunities in these sectors.

Conclusion

The AGMS offers a transformative pathway for Africa to transition from an extractive to an industrial, value-adding region within the global transition minerals economy. Successful regional cooperation will unlock greater value, sustainability and resilience for Africa in the new green industrial era. Alignment among member states, leveraging continental tools and robust implementation of the AGMS, are critical to realising this vision.

Acknowledgements

This policy brief is based on research and analysis from a thematic chapter by Dr Chantelle G Moyo in the edited volume '**Beyond Extraction: Human Rights, Responsible Business Conduct and Africa's Just Transition**'. The volume explores African perspectives on just transition, as part of the '**Just Transition through Responsible Business Conduct in Africa 2024-2027**' project, made possible thanks to the financial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The project is implemented by a Consortium of the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Organisation (ZELO), HakiRasilimali, the Centre for Environment Justice (CEJ) and African Resources Watch (AFREWATCH). The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Consortium or Sida.

Sweden Sverige

Universiteit van Pretoria University of Pretoria Yunibesithi ya Pretoria | Centre for Human Rights University of Pretoria | Danish Institute for Human Rights | AFREWATCH African Resources Watch | CEJ | HakiRasilimali | ZELO Zimbabwe Environmental Law Organisation