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# POLICY BRIEF HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUST ENERGY TRANSITION: THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE AND AFRICA



JUST ENERGY  
TRANSITION





# INTRODUCTION

This policy brief outlines the nexus between human rights and just energy transition. Although issues discussed in this policy applies to countries within different contexts, the brief nests its discussion in the context of Africa and specifically on Zimbabwe.



# BACKGROUND

Energy transition is a pathway toward transformation of the global energy sector from fossil-based to zero-carbon by the second half of this century. At its heart is the need to reduce energy related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to limit climate change. Decarbonisation of the energy sector requires urgent action on a global scale, and while a global energy transition is underway, further action is needed to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change<sup>1</sup>.

Africa unlike other continents still has a growing population and a huge need for industrialisation and increased urbanisation which have a huge demand for minerals, metals, and coal for energy. The UN<sup>2</sup> estimates that, the number of people living in cities will increase from 4.2 billion currently to 7.3 billion by the end of the century. Of these growth prospects, Africa is expected to have the biggest share as it is projected that by 2050, Africa's cities will be home to an additional 950 million people<sup>3</sup>.

Africa's role in averting a climate disaster without compromising the continent's growth and poverty reduction remain a key aspect for policy and development planning. Although the world needs to transition away from fossil fuels because of its impact on the environment, Africa still needs to meet the developmental need and the human right to electricity as enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)<sup>7</sup>. Electric power is vital to Africa's prospects for economic development and the level of the continent's poverty makes it difficult to push for the relegation of development and fossil-based energy because of the need to curb global climate crisis- a move that is impractical and inconsiderate of the fact that the continent remain the least polluter but the most severely affected. Forty-eight sub-Saharan African countries outside of South Africa are responsible for just 0.55 percent of cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> emissions<sup>4</sup>. Yet, 7 of the 10 countries<sup>5</sup> most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa.

Currently, coal still accounts for up to 38 percent of electricity generation worldwide, with China, India, the U.S., and the EU remaining the world's largest consumers of coal<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, international financing institutions are restricting investment in electric power projects in Africa to wind and solar on grounds of environmental concerns. Africa's current energy demand is estimated at 700 TWh, which is 4,000 times the 175 GW of wind and solar capacity the entire world added in 2020. Africa cannot industrialize on wind and solar energy alone<sup>7</sup>. Transitioning Africa's energy as it stands mean relegating Africa's development when it is the most in need continent considering the levels of poverty that its citizens face. The transitioning of energy in Africa is also argued to be of less significance because of the low levels that the continent pollutes as compared to other developed continents. In sub-Saharan Africa, 12 million new people enter the workforce every year<sup>8</sup> and to support this, the need for electric power remains significant. Today, nearly 600 million Africans lack access to electric power, a number that the International Energy Agency (IEA)<sup>9</sup> projects will increase by 30 million due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To create jobs for Africa's working-age population (aged between 15–64) which was estimated to be 750 million in 2019 and is forecast to exceed 1 billion before 2030 and to reach 1.1 billion by 2035<sup>10</sup>, there is urgent need to power the continent's industrialization.

Further to constraining development, the demand for Africa to transition requires adequate management as this 'transitioning out' of sectors of the economy such as coal as this could lead to massive losses of jobs and livelihoods for millions of workers and communities in fossil fuel rich African countries already experiencing poverty and inequality such as South Africa, Mozambique, Nigeria, Angola, Chad, and Gabon, hence the notion of a Just Transition. According to ILO<sup>11</sup>, a Just transition means greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities, and leaving no one behind. The transition has also the potential to ruin the excitement of new discoveries of fossil fuels in countries like Uganda, and Mozambique<sup>12</sup>, which shatters hopes for long term economic prosperity. African countries therefore are left with the dilemma of dealing with stranded workers, communities, and assets.

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# THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN AFRICA

For Africa, Climate change presents one of the greatest threats to achieving development outcomes as floods, droughts, cyclones, and other natural hazards continue to ravage the continent. In 2020, climate-related disasters displaced 30 million people, more than three times the number of people displaced by conflict and violence<sup>1</sup>. These numbers are an all-time high and predicted to increase significantly in the coming years. Although Africa's growth trajectory has been positive in the last decades with initiatives such as the "Africa Rising" symbolising the positive strides that African economies have been making, the impacts of climate change seem to be reversing the positive gains.

Although the climate crises remain a critical crisis for Africa, after COP 26, developing countries criticized rich countries for evading the language of loss and damage compensation that recognizes that the countries most affected by climate change have contributed the least to planet-warming greenhouse gases. Crucially, the language on coal was also changed from 'phasing out' to 'phasing down,' which underlines the reticence of emerging market economies like India, China, and South Africa to end coal dependence for electrification and commit to halting public subsidies for fossil fuels in many countries<sup>2</sup>.

There is a general notion that the current climate change narrative absolves polluters and puts pressure on developing countries. What this narrative advance is that the industrialised world is largely absolved from their political culpability in perpetuating the crisis, and developing countries face increased pressure to extract their natural resources for the green transition. By framing climate change as a collective action dilemma requiring 'global efforts,' existing inequalities between countries and communities are set aside<sup>3</sup>. African countries therefore should hold strong and push a collective agenda and voice around how climate change issues should be addressed within a just framework which acknowledges the past inequalities as well as propose some actions for Africa to catch up on its own development aspirations.

As a phenomenon that continues to affect most of the African continent, especially those in poor communities, responses to climate change requires a comprehensive reaction that is couched in an effective climate justice framework and driven by political will. Although some efforts have been directed at curbing the effects of climate change, the concept of climate justice is not adequately understood and applied across interventions on climate change and there are limited efforts and initiatives to push for climate justice within the continent. One of the most fundamental gaps involves understanding the equity dimensions of climate change. Climate change at its heart should be addressed from an understanding of how the stark divides in resources, development paths and emissions contributions between rich and poor nations, and rich and poor people within the country.

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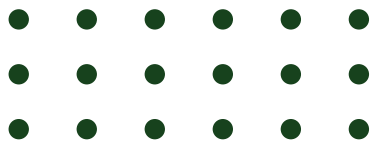




# ZIMBABWE'S MINING AND JUST TRANSITION

Zimbabwe's mining sector is expected to be one of the key drivers for economic growth as it accounts for between 12 and 15 per cent of the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Ministry of Mines and Mining Development anticipates the sector to contribute significantly to the Zimbabwean economy due to fresh capital injection on new and existing projects. Exploration of minerals, recovery in output and revival of closed units are also expected to increase operations in the sector. Zimbabwe has a rich and diversified mining industry technically classified into three categories namely large-scale mining, small-scale and artisanal mining. According to the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development, the country has over 60 known minerals that are being explored and mined which include significant deposits of diamonds, chrome, platinum, copper, coal, nickel, and gold.<sup>1</sup> The country is the only African country among the world's top producers of lithium and will be capable of meeting 20% of the world's demand. Hence the mineral is earmarked by the government to be key in its mining industry with the potential to change the development prospects of the country's mining industry.

The envisaged growth of the country's mining sector is also expounded in the Strategic Roadmap to achieving a US\$12 billion mining sector by 2023 launched in 2019. The Mines and Minerals Amendment Bill provides what are termed "strategic minerals" which are defined as a mineral, declared or designated as strategic in terms of this section on account of their importance to the economic, social, industrial and security development of the country<sup>2</sup>. Amongst the listed strategic minerals includes lithium, platinum group metals, chrome, tin, rare earths elements, natural graphite, magnesite and tungsten. Lithium production is currently concentrated in only seven countries namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Portugal and Zimbabwe. Lithium can only be accessed through large-scale industrial mining operations, either by mining hard rock or by extracting the metal from brines. The process of extracting lithium from brines, however, is extremely water-intensive and prone to high pollution rates.



### Zimbabwe's Mining And Just Transition Continued

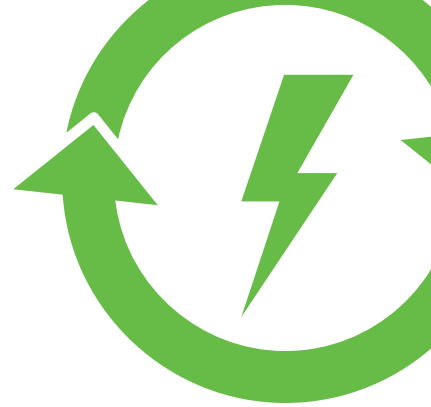
It is important that Zimbabwe as a developing country with large reserves of lithium to leverage opportunities that can help better position itself to take advantage of the future commodities market responding to climate goals and related SDGs. The country has the comparative advantage given that it is the only African country among the world's top producing countries of lithium. Hence the mineral is earmarked by the government to be key in its mining industry. Zimbabwe's abundant lithium reserves are earmarked to attract various investors which change the development prospects of the country's mining industry. Zimbabwe is cognizant of the critical role of lithium in stimulating its industrial development in the future of clean energy used to produce lithium batteries and ICT products.

To give impetus to spurring economic growth from the country's natural resources, there is the Zimbabwe National Industrial Development Policy (ZNIDP). The ZNIDP acknowledges the country's diversified industrial sector which needs to be well-integrated with the rest of the economy, exhibiting strong linkages with the mining sector. Mineral beneficiation and value are set to open new opportunities for lithium production and processing for use as energy and motor vehicle manufacturing offering opportunities for the country to move to higher nodes of global and regional value chains by beneficiating and value-adding local raw mineral products. It is commendable that the Industrial development policy is cognizant of the critical role of lithium in stimulating its industrial development in the future of clean energy used to produce lithium batteries and ICT products. The beneficiation and value addition of lithium, platinum group of metals is very important to the Zimbabwean economy which has failed to diversify given the exporting of raw minerals which translates to the export of jobs and industry. Industrial development through mineral beneficiation and value addition of the strategic green minerals will, however, need to be backed by the necessary economic infrastructure. The continued exportation of these strategic green minerals in their raw form by Zimbabwe without any value addition and beneficiation remains a key concern on why the mining sector has not contributed to diversified growth to the economy. It is countries that will be able to innovate on the opportunities availed to the low carbon economy that will also be able to reap the industrial and economic benefits of this transition, generating jobs and economic growth. It is, therefore, important that the government of Zimbabwe invests in research, development and financial capital reaching out to the private sector in a bid to turn its comparative advantage of being host to these strategic minerals to a competitive advantage. The result will be a well-governed and innovative mining sector that capitalises on its strategic green minerals key in reducing carbon emissions towards a low carbon economy yet diversifying its economy through industrialisation, more jobs, improved infrastructure and increased revenues to the state from taxes and royalties.



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# HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUST TRANSITION

The presentation on the history and state of both democratisation and natural resources governance in Africa demonstrates a closely knit relationship between the two. The political economy of the extractives industry is about power and control of the most important resource of the country and in turn determines the democratic outlook of the state. As argued in the paper, the more countries rely on natural resources rather than taxes from citizens the more such countries are authoritarian and have a poor human rights record because of a weaker fiscal relationship that exists between the government and its citizens.

The democratisation process and state of human rights of the African continent is historically hinged on how natural resources have been exploited and utilised. From the colonial times, natural resources have been used to support the colonial regimes in their minority rule and wealth generated through these resources undermined democracy and the realisation of human rights for the black majority. Post-colonial African state has also seen the use of natural resources in consolidating the power of first-generation government that were formed by the liberation movements to consolidate their power and move towards one party states. In the other countries, natural resources fuelled and sustained internal conflicts as different groups fight for control of the resources or use natural resources to finance their fighting. Since 1990, oil-producing countries have been twice as likely to have a civil war compared with non-oil-producing countries. Political scientists point to examples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Niger Delta, Iraq, Libya, and Angola to illustrate this tendency<sup>1</sup>. There is enough evidence to lead to the conclusion that resource-rich countries are prone to instability more than non-resource-rich countries.

In contemporary African statecraft, natural resources governance has been at the centre of how democratic the state is in allowing for citizen participation and enjoyment of civic rights. In cases where resource revenues are secret, citizens do not have a clear sense of whether the resource revenues are being spent well or not. Those who outline this theory suggest that the tendency toward authoritarianism can be mitigated by increasing transparency of revenues and strengthening the links between government and citizens through citizen participation in budgeting or direct distribution of wealth (e.g., cash transfers)<sup>2</sup>.

Conversely, authoritarian states have become more invested in the governance of natural resources to maintain and consolidate their power. Shumba (2018)<sup>3</sup> explores the interdependencies and power mechanisms of the party, military, and business complex. He presents explanations of the patterns of accumulation, the structures of corruption and lawlessness and their implications for development problems in Zimbabwe's "Predatory State". Shumba's thesis exposes the widespread corruption, the development trajectory and dysfunction of governmental institutions that are supposed to provide basic infrastructure and the prerequisites of a functioning modern economy. He outlines how development became hijacked and transformed into an accumulation project of the power elite (high ranking politicians and former army chiefs). To ensure that Africa's democratisation process flourishes and that rights of mining host communities and workers in the sector are upheld, there is need for improved natural resources governance and vice versa. Improved democracy is intricately linked to how each country and the continent decides to manage its resources.

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# ENERGY TRANSITION, CRITICAL MINERALS, CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS AND RIGHTS


The issues of energy transition, critical minerals, climate change crises and rights cannot be discussed in isolation because of the symbiotic relationship and implication that each has on the other. These require attention if Africa is to go on a growth trajectory that is sustainable. A new World Bank Group report (2020) reveals that the production of minerals such as graphite, lithium, and cobalt, could increase by nearly 500% by 2050 to meet the growing demand for clean energy technologies<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that over 3 billion tons of minerals and metals will be needed to deploy wind, solar and geothermal power, as well as energy storage, required for achieving a below 2°C future. The mineral intensity is such that even if the recycling rate for copper and aluminium is 100%, recycling and reuse will still not meet the steep demand. These levels of resource intensity will require adequate attention on ensuring that mining is done responsibly and in a way that does not leave the world worse off that it currently is and with respect of mining host communities rights.

As already established in this paper, the clean energy transition will be significantly mineral intensive. Although on the surface the growing demand for minerals and metals provides economic opportunities for resource-rich developing countries and private sector entities alike, significant attention should be placed on ensuring that the clean energy transition is managed responsibly and sustainably especially for Africa which remains vulnerable to climate change and abuse of community rights more than any other continents.



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Africa should collectively be worried with the fact that current discussion and debates are not focusing on how increased demands for the critical raw materials that power the green transition are likely to exacerbate and create inequalities between resource-rich (developing) and consuming (developed) countries. The International Energy Agency's latest report<sup>2</sup> says that to meet the Paris Agreement goals, the total demand for clean technologies by 2040 will require an increase of more than 40 percent for copper and rare earth elements, 60 to 70 percent for nickel and cobalt, and almost 90 percent for lithium. Some of these minerals are heavily concentrated in only a few countries, such as Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina for lithium; Brazil for niobium; Democratic Republic of Congo for cobalt; South Africa for platinum-group metals; and China for REEs and other critical minerals<sup>3</sup>. There is concern if one considers that key African policy frameworks and programmes such as the Agenda 2063, Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Africa Mining Vision and the more recent Africa Green Stimulus Programme (2021) have not put attention on the linkages between minerals, climate action, rights and green recovery. Missing this important nexus in key African policy frameworks indicates that the continent might once again miss an opportunity to address mining issues and be left more vulnerable to the effects than ever before. It is a fact that the minerals driving the clean energy transition will bring social and environmental costs especially to the mining host communities as well as adding to the very carbon footprint that the world is battling with in the first place. A new threat to Africa is how Land-based mining has been moving into more remote, ecologically and biodiversity sensitive areas such as wildlife areas<sup>4</sup>. With the huge appetite for the critical minerals that the energy transition is demonstrating, African countries are at a risk for more devastating environmental degradation, relocation of local communities, creation of mountains of often toxic waste and pollution of freshwater ecosystems which if unwatched could worsen the crisis that the continent finds itself in.

African countries need to renew the conversation around the concept of the triple bottom line. The concept of the triple bottom line has gained momentum as a business concept that posits firms should commit to measuring their social and environmental impact in addition to their financial performance rather than solely focusing on generating profit, or the standard "bottom line." The concept can be broken down into "three Ps": profit, people, and the planet. The conversation on the triple bottom line for Africa should be both retrospective and futuristic because of how mining corporations that are currently mining in the continent continue to degrade the environment unabated. Without mining companies running operations failing to account for their impact on the environment and the community that they operate, Africa will struggle to enforce the same principles in the future. Although past and current mining operations remain key, more attention however should be put on how the conversations on the energy transition are managed with the intention of ensuring that the people and the planet are not once again overlooked in the pursuit for profits because of how the current discourse offers a new opportunity to reopen negotiations and re-engagements.



# POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed in this paper, it is important to re-state that the drive towards energy transition is gaining momentum and that the proposed cleaner energies have a huge appetite for Africa's critical minerals. Africa's key mining policy frameworks (specifically the AMV) seem to be lagging in their articulation of how the continent will address the nexus of energy transition, critical minerals, climate change and rights and this must be urgently addressed. Furthermore, Africa still has other equally pressing challenges besides the impact of climate change, and these include a deficit in its infrastructure, poverty amongst many of its citizens as well as a bulging youth population that has no employment and whose agitation continues to grow. As a continent, Africa has failed to leverage on its competitive and comparative advantage and this new drive for green transition offers an opportunity for restart.

Conclusions and recommendations on Africa's Energy Transition, Critical Minerals and Climate Change Crisis are made around:

- Revamping Africa's Mining Vision to meet the new and current demands for transition.
- Ensuring Africa's Environmental challenges are at the centre of the transition.
- Meeting Africa's Infrastructural deficits responsibly.
- Creating a Green Transition that addresses Africa's pressing needs and challenges; and
- Leveraging on Africa's Demographic dividend.

## **Revamping Africa's Mining Vision to meet the new and current demands for transition**

The continent's AMV adopted in 2009 though still relevant on many aspects require adjustments that reflects the current realities of the intersection between climate change, mining, energy transition and rights. The review of the vision should at this stage focus on bringing every stakeholder to the table especially mining communities, civil society and the business community who are central to ensure a balanced conversations that upholds the triple bottom line concept of focusing on profits, people, and the planet. Although Africa's attention in the AMV was on attracting FDI into the mining sector, a renewed focus around creation and incubation of local businesses and partnership in mining and the mining value chain is crucial in also addressing the challenge of unemployment and continued poverty amongst Africa's growing youth population.

## **Ensure Africa's Environmental challenges are at the centre of the transition**

Africa's documented battle with environmental impacts and the attendant climate change should be enough bases for the continent's focus and attention on ensuring that the drive towards energy transition has sustainable mining at its centre. To also avoid the "resource curse" Africa needs to enter mining arrangements that do not leave it worse off that it currently is by failing to place the interests of its citizens at the centre of the new mining regime. Africa's development prospects, projects and status of economy is heavily affected by the impacts of climate change and its vested interest on the energy transition from a climate justice perspective is key. Africa needs to focus on ensuring that negative impacts from mining on already vulnerable communities should not persist but be fully managed within the new drive for its critical minerals.

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### Meeting Africa's Infrastructural deficits responsibly

Africa still has massive infrastructural development needs and post COVID-19 pandemic it has an urgent need to jump start development which will increase demand for critical minerals. As the continent reboots its economies shattered by the pandemic, it is important to adopt an economic development model that lessens environmental, climate and disaster risks and one where social and economic benefits trickle down to those at the bottom of the pyramid, the so called “inclusive, green and resilient recovery”<sup>1</sup>.

### Create a Green Transition that addresses Africa's pressing needs and challenges

Challenges of equality, poverty and unemployment persists in Africa and there is need for developmental imperatives that adequately focus on these to be meaningful. For Africa to “Build Back Better”, tenants of a just transition should be fully upheld, and these entails a clean energy transition that adheres to international standards for labour, health, safety, and human rights, particularly the rights of the child and women and social protection of vulnerable groups who are often left out from decision making and development planning.

### Leverage on Africa's Demographic dividend

With Africa undergoing a phenomenon that has seen youth constituting the biggest demographic cohort than any other time in the continent's history the centrality of this demography to the development and aspirations of the continent is key. Young people between the ages of 15 and 35 constitute one-third of Africa's population, and a fifth of the world's youth population<sup>2</sup>. The strategic role and significance of youth is acknowledged at continental level. The AU has declared that Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population and through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead<sup>3</sup>. Even though youth are dominating the numbers game, it has been observed that they are often left from key development planning, and they are mostly unemployed, and this has been noted as creating fertile ground for violent extremism, civil conflict, and other social ills. It is in the interest of Africa therefore that the transition should also harness Africa's youth dividend to curb the high rates of youth unemployment whilst at the same time securing a good environment for them and their future.

### Specific recommendations and options for Zimbabwe

For Zimbabwe, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Investing in geological and mineral data knowledge systems to identify potential deposits of the strategic minerals particularly those that have still not been exploited in Zimbabwe such as the rare earth minerals.
- Investing in Research and Capacity Development is required at the national level to fully understand and develop a path forward that aligns a potentially growing market for key strategic minerals commodities with a sustainable climate-friendly future within the mining sector. Research and development will also be key in predicting technology choices based on supply constraints and demand patterns. Understanding where supply constraints may lie, and where prices are most likely to rise, may help inform the possible direction of some of these choices, which, in turn, can help clarify demand.

Although these issues require continued debates and arguments, this paper has made attempt to outline some of the key issues that Africa can consider in managing its critical minerals in a more sustainable manner to meet both its developmental agenda as well as protection of its environment from further damage as well as uphold community and workers' rights in the energy transition efforts.

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