



## THE AFRICA MINING VISION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

By *Treasure Mphanga*

Treasure Mphanga is an Afro-optimist, an Agenda 2063 advocate, who is dedicated to working for the continent to improve the lives of all citizens through trade and investment, especially women and youth.

In what follows I am going to reflect on my own lived experience in policymaking and take you behind the scenes in the making of the African Mining Vision (AMV). My central focus will be on the action and implementation processes of the AMV. I will reflect on the policy making process itself from the vantage point of the present and try to share my insights and thoughts on how the AMV symbolises a framework that is very inspirational. It goes far beyond just being a simple policy framework. It talks to the spirit of Africa's own emancipation and attempts to plot a deliberate path for member states to follow for the prudent use of their mineral resources for development purposes.

The AMV is a framework that was created out of a process of consultation. There was an International Study Group and there were a lot of experts brought in with different perspectives in shaping the document that now presents itself as the AMV. When it was presented to Heads of State, their first response was that we need an Action Plan to make it actionable. One of the things that the AU is well known for is having a number of important continental frameworks while at the same time struggling with a history of implementation, monitoring and evaluation challenges. While the process of drawing up the AMV demonstrates valiant efforts to transform a blueprint into an actual action plan, there are still a number of lessons that one can draw from this experience.

Two key decisions were made during the action planning stage of the AMV. First, was the decision to have a resource mobilisation plan. The second was the importance of setting up an African Minerals Development Centre as an institution that would provide the policy research, undertake continuous advocacy and information dissemination as well as monitoring and evaluation. However, the African Minerals Development Centre was only established in 2018, nearly a decade after this decision was made, and is now hosted by the Republic of Guinea.

There has been great commitment and drive behind the process of crafting the AMV and its action plan. Expertise was pulled in from partner institutions working with the African Union, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank, United Nations Development Program and many others. Third World Network-Africa and other stakeholders have been continually active in promoting the AMV to the citizens of the continent and engaging them to have an awareness of its importance. They have also encouraged member states to implement the AMV's sound policy options and prescriptions.

### MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the achievements listed above, the AMV has not been owned and deliberated at the highest levels of governance on the continent. This presents a missed opportunity worth highlighting. Although the AMV was adopted by heads of state and government, it is not a policy framework



that has enjoyed much discussion at that level. In fact, compared with another framework which many of you are also following closely, the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the AMV has little traction and popularity. I have been reflecting deeply on why this is the case.

Notably, the AfCFTA had a champion leader that was appointed to lead advocacy and this has been key in sparking political engagement with the AfCFTA both within and outside Africa. The AfCFTA had the benefit of having His Excellency, Mahamadou Issoufou, the President of Niger as the figure that symbolises the collective will by the countries to move forward on the framework. Heads of states in Africa are championing a variety of causes. Yet the area of natural resource sovereignty and governance lacks such a champion.

The lack of speedy implementation of the AMV also speaks to the challenge of resource governance more broadly. I was working in the Department of Trade and Industry that was responsible for the implementation of AMV however I observed that when I joined the AU there was no division or unit for this area of work. It just did not appear in the structure. This gap needed to be filled and the AMV had to be positioned within an industry division that already had limited capacity for the broader mandate of industrialisation.

If we have an important framework that does not have the coordination mechanisms and capacities to drive and monitor its implementation, then what eventually transpires is up for grabs. Anyone who has resources can grab hold of the agenda and say, 'I am going to go ahead and implement this aspect and that aspect.' This leads to incoherence and a loss of momentum. In fact, in the Department of Trade and Industry, the interpretation was that mineral resources were to be a part of the portfolio that includes oil and gas, land and water. This fragmentation and lack of coordination within the AU was also a weakness.

### **AVENUES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND POLITICAL TENSIONS**

The agenda of the AMV has had its share of political tensions. This is revealed by the dynamics which have occurred at various platforms for engagement. There have been various meetings across the continent where discussions on the AMV have taken place. These include Mining Indabas, where the mining community, the private sector meets to discuss mining policy. The fact is that that has not yet been a platform available for the AU or member states to drive the agenda at these events. So while mining indabas are fruitful to raise awareness, deeper engagement around its contents and implementation remains lacking.

For example at the 2014 Mining Indaba, there was a sudden announcement made by one of partners of the AU that they were launching a big programme which was called the Billion Dollar Map. This was an initiative to map all the mineral resources on the continent of Africa. This came as a big shock to the delegation from the AU who had not heard of this and created a very tense situation. Out of this eventually emerged an impetus to establish a technical committee for African minerals geosciences. What is notable in this case is that another private sector role player grabbed the agenda of minerals governance in the absence of continental leadership. The effect was to wake up the structures who were responsible for rolling out the coordination of the AMV to take on their responsibilities.

As discussed above, there was an effort to establish an African Minerals Development Centre. What was striking about this was the bidding process that ensued, revealing it to be a contested





space for member states. To put it bluntly, there was almost a scramble by different countries to position themselves as the best custodians for the Centre. I thought that perhaps this was an indication of how member states were starting to appreciate the importance of this Minerals Governance and the need for member states to drive the agenda collectively and to provide an environment for which all stakeholders may benefit.

To conclude, if I reflect on the challenges of institutional arrangements, capacities, resourcing, and the reform agenda that has taken place at the AU, my personal regret is that we have not yet been able to see the fruits of the decisions that were taken way back in 2011 on the AMV. It has been a whole decade since then. It has taken far too long, and the losses have been enormous due to the delay in implementation.

Looking at things from another point of view, I think that collaborative work has given us the opportunity to reflect on lessons learned and how we can improve implementation. Perhaps it is time to review the processes that we have gone through with the AMV to breathe new life into it. This should reflect the new environment that we are now in, a digital age, an age where we are talking about regional value chains driving industrialisation. I hope that the effort to drive industrialisation and reform our minerals regimes continues to be part of our discussions.