The GLOGEPS - Policy Paper Research and Analysis in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Pillar

Geostrategic options to strengthen Kenya's foreign policy in the decarbonisation era

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Executive Summary

Kenya's indecisiveness on the climate-induced energy transition poses a challenge to her foreign relations and diplomatic strategy. The country's intention to commercialise her unexploited hydrocarbon resources contradicts her international commitments and threatens strategic relations with global actors pushing for low-carbon economies. The uncertainty stems from the influence of competing geopolitical actors on her energy transition. For instance, China is promoting carbon-heavy Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, while Western powers are promoting decarbonisation and climate change mitigation. The latter has securitised climate change as the greatest threat to the survival of the human race as it precipitates conflict, humanitarian catastrophes and economic crisis. This has heightened interest on the implementa-

tion of Kenya's Climate Change Act of 2016 and the National Climate Change Action Plan.

Photo credit: Energy Asia

Kenya's relations with key global players, emerging green energy powers, neighbours and powerful oil conglomerates is thus bound to be impacted by the underway energy transition. It will further affect geopolitical realignments, creating rivalries, winners and losers. This paper concludes that the ongoing developments are critical in international geopolitics with varied implications on Kenya's foreign policy, geopolitical relevance, national security and Vision 2030. The recommendations focus on reorienting the country's diplomatic strategy to attenuate the energy transition uncertainties while taking advantage of the emerging opportunities.







The inconsistencies in Kenya's energy transition implementation compromise Kenya's diplomatic posture and foreign policy due to competing geopolitical interests on the decarbonisation agenda. The West is securitising climate change; China is promoting hydrocarbon-intensive projects while neighbours are leveraging the transition to challenge Kenya's hegemony in the East and Horn of Africa. The transition continues to empower green-energy states while weakening those whose foreign influence is pegged on hydrocarbon resources.

The shift towards greener energy has put a caveat on future exploration of hydrocarbon resources. The pressure to establish a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty is bound to cap the development of new oil and gas projects. Environmental polluters will become the new pariah states. Thus, Kenya's intention to commercialise her hydrocarbon has the potential to weaken her capacity to harness climate finance, developmental funds, economic stability and geopolitical positioning as an environmental steward. This will further dent the diplomatic leverage she can reap from the shift.

Geostrategically, the shift from wood to coal and then to oil has shaped global relations and caused competition and conflict among nations. The race to green energy is now changing interstate realignments as green economies rise. The looming threat to Kenya is the impending relegation of her coal and oil resources to stranded carbon assets. She possesses the advantage of keeping off considerable investments in the waning hydrocarbon sector. Therefore, the country's decisive approach to this energy transition remains key to her geopolitical significance and Vision 2030. Given that she is working on a relatively clean energy slate, this study seeks to explore the geostrategic options for Kenya in navigating the energy transition and climate change geopolitics.







Context

Kenya's climate change policy framework is anchored in the Climate Change Act of 2016, which strategises to achieve sustainable development through climate change resilience and low carbon development. It was enacted as a rejoinder to the country's commitment to the Paris Agreement of 2015, which mandates states to deliberately shift from the current high-carbon to a low-carbon economy. In the pact, the country, in her Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), committed to lowering Green House Gases (GHG) emissions by 32% by 2030. Consequently, the National Climate Change Action Plan 2018-2022 was developed as the pathway to decarbonisation.

There is, however, a glaring disconnect between Kenya's climate change strategy and the 2019 Energy Act. The latter includes coal and petroleum as crucial energy resources to be commercialised. The focus of the legislation is on the affordability of energy rather than climatic sustainability, thereby contradicting her climate change mitigation and low carbon development agenda. These paradoxes showcase the country's uncertainty on the energy transition agenda and this further diffuses into her environmental foreign policy and diplomacy.

The foreign policy recognises natural resources as valuable national assets in which Kenya's sustainable development is affixed. This is cemented by the country's record and leadership in environmental diplomacy in the Global South and through the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) headquarters in Nairobi. However, the discovery that she possesses one of Africa's largest coal reserves and vast onshore and offshore oil and gas resources has compounded her dilemma on navigating the geopolitics of decarbonisation. Within this quagmire, the paper analyses the geopolitical manoeuvres available to Kenya during the energy transition era.



Key Issues

The study is centred on the fact that in the run-up to 2030, Kenya's energy transition will shape her foreign policy and diplomatic relations with the Gulf states, China, the US, UK, Europe, EAC neighbours and emerging economies within the green energy transition. Further, it will define Kenya's engagements with international financial institutions as well as multinational corporations. The following findings focus on the influence of the geopolitics of climate change and the current energy transition on Kenya's diplomatic tact and strategy.



Realigning with the US and Europe

Kenya's indeterminacy of aggressively pursuing climate cooperation while prospecting on some of her hydrocarbon resources will jeopardise her economic relations with the US, UK, and EU, which are anchored on mutual bilateral and multilateral climate change mitigation efforts. As these economic giants focus on decarbonisation, they leverage aid, development financing and access to markets to subdue and empower countries into low-carbon economies. They are also pressuring their multinationals and international financiers to divest and restrict funding to coal

and other carbon-intensive projects.

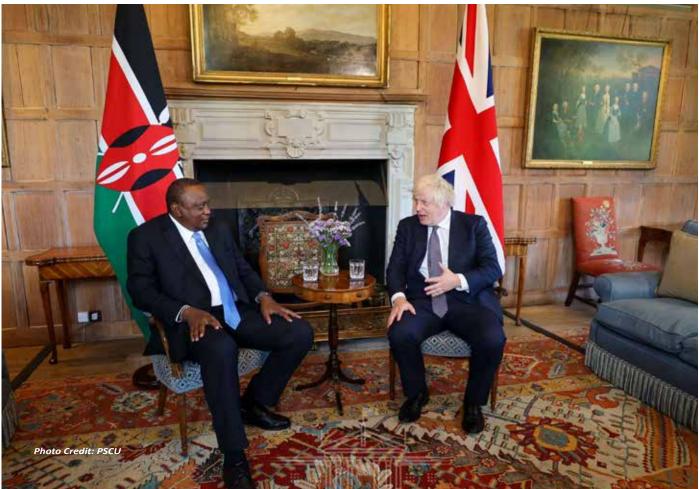
The oil conglomerates interested in Kenya's hydrocarbon have had to reassess their investment portfolios to fit within the underway energy transition and their commitments to the Paris Agreement 2015. The multinationals are now divesting from the hydrocarbon sector to investing in clean energy as they recognise that the shift to low carbon investments will happen much earlier than they had previously anticipated. Their focus is on extracting oil





cheaply in regions that do not need colossal investments and infrastructural development. This restructuring has dimmed Kenya's hydrocarbon exploration prospects and mandates her to conduct due diligence on joint ventures, to avoid expensive cost-sharing financial repercussions.

Western countries are using their diplomatic relations and geopolitical power to realign finance and development cooperation to support decarbonisation. US statesmen pressured the African Development Bank to stop financing the Lamu coal plant as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) moves to fund various renewable energy projects. Indeed, the subsidies and support for cleaner energy sources have caused a drastic drop in the cost of renewable energy technology, thereby making the energy transition inevitable. The ongoing developments will subject the key bilateral trade agreements such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Kenya-United Kingdom-Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), Kenya-European Union-EPA to periodical reviews. These pacts have been used to reward or punish deviant behaviour and their continuity is based on good bilateral relations. Already the US has stalled the progress of the Kenya-United States Free Trade Agreement (KUSFTA) negotiations as Washington seeks to realign trade agreements with President Biden's climate change agenda. If these agreements are jeopardised, Kenya's balance of trade with Europe and the US will dip and further increase her trade deficit. More so, weakened relations will lead to reduced support on climate change financing, including key Vision 2030 projects.



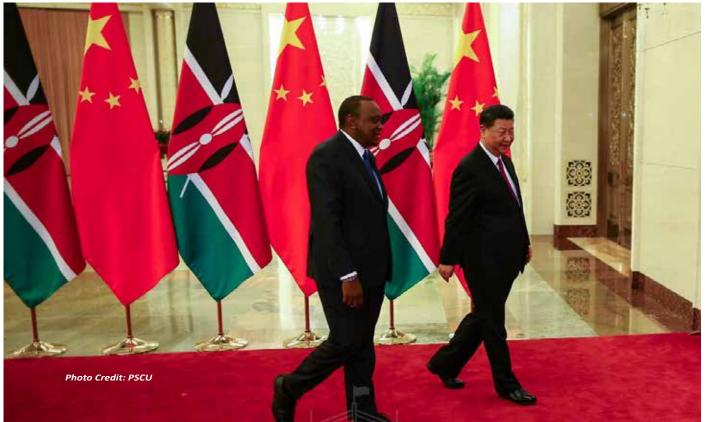


Re-evaluating China's ambivalence towards energy transition

China's support for Kenya's continued commitment to expensive carbon-intensive projects is bound to threaten Kenya's energy transition. Previously, Kenya had geo-strategically aligned with China, the only global power that was still willing to invest in coal and whose approach to the energy transition within the climate change discourse was a wait-and-see. The plan to establish the Lamu Coal almost catapulted Kenya into the centre of China's geopolitical patronage of climate change deviants. This partnership with China angered the US and Europe, who accused Beijing of using her outward investments to "export" her carbonintensive, economically moribund industries and transport infrastructure.

China surprisingly declared that she has stopped funding and building coal projects overseas, in an abrupt turnaround in September 2021. A year earlier, President Xi Jinping had called for a green revolution during the United Nations General Assembly. The country has also shut down the most inefficient coal mines and issued concrete plans to achieve net-zero carbon dioxide emissions. While this is a big blow to Kenya's hydrocarbon ambitions, it is also the clearest signal that coal is now a stranded resource. It further indicates that African countries who opt to intentionally drag on the energy transition will be exposed to macroeconomic vulnerabilities as they do not possess the financial muscle, capacity, and technological capability to fast-track energy transition as much as developed states. Nairobi is still stuck on her hydrocarbon aspirations even as one of her greatest benefactors, Beijing, begins to shift her climate change policy.

Indeed, Kenya and China face different challenges in this energy transition. China has carved a niche as the world's biggest solar photovoltaic producer and is the world's largest market for electric cars. She also possesses one





of the world's largest deposits of rare earth metals that will drive the transition as they power the electric vehicles and renewable energy sector. China and US are already competing to control the clean-technology industry and are using their huge markets and those of their allies to drive the transition. Beijing is well prepared for the energy transition, and her economic prowess allows her to begin her transition at any time she deems fit. Thus, while China is expected to massively benefit in any scenario, Kenya's ambivalence will be costly due to limited resources, technology and finances.

Kenya's economic growth continues to be hampered by foreign debt on high-cost redundant infrastructure. The country's climate change plan has outlined that the newly built, high-carbon emitting diesel-powered Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) model will need to

be electrified in line with the decarbonisation agenda. Thus, the impending revamp will be an expensive venture considering that the KES324 billion debt owed to China is yet to be paid. Moreover, the project is still far from making any profit or harnessing the funds needed to complete the Naivasha-Kisumu-Malaba section. But even as developed countries decommission their nuclear power plants, Kenya has still commissioned a Chinese company to develop her nuclear power capacity. While China's assistance to Kenya's development agenda and Vision 2030 remains critical, this support needs to be cognisant of the energy transition environment. Hence, Nairobi ought to re-evaluate her engagement with Beijing to fit in with the future energy demands and tap on potential areas for green-energy collaboration since China is already leading in some aspects of the transition.



Reshaping foreign policy on Petro-states

With the decline of fossil fuels, the geopolitical significance of the Middle East is bound to diminish or necessitate a foreign policy reorientation. The Arab Gulf is Africa's second-biggest investor, both by the number of projects and by capital investment. Kenya maintains good relations with the Gulf states, who import her agricultural commodities, surplus labour force, and share interests in the Horn of Africa stability. The relations are skewed toward the Gulf states who use their hydrocarbon resources to accumulate economic power and exert political influence globally. Their interests are concentrated in the energy, infrastructure, and agricultural sectors.

The energy transition is bound to destabilise the foreign policy of the Middle East states. New relationships and allegiances will replace the old state-led clubs such as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The newly developed Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization (GEIDCO), headquartered in Beijing, and championed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC), will dominate the Post 2030 era.

The Gulf states policies are rapidly diversifying their energy sources, economies and export portfolios to adapt to climate change and the energy transition. In October 2021, Qatar created the Ministry for environment and climate change, while Saudi Arabia is now diversifying into hydrogen exports. Nonetheless, experts foretell that the Gulf States will attempt to pump and dump their excess oil in the global market before the oil era is over. This has led to a push for the fossil fuels non-proliferation treaty. While it is not in the economic interests of petro-states to have new oil producers come up at this time, the energy transition gives Kenya a new avenue to engage the gulf states who feel threatened by the changing geostrategic positions. A few Gulf states, such as Qatar, are favourably positioned, as they also possess enviable Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) resources and will tap into its increasing demand.



The production of renewable energy is creating demand for natural resources, such as land used to set up wind and solar power plants. More so, the vagaries of climate change in Europe and Asia have threatened their food security. The Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar are now scrambling for farmland in Africa as food security becomes a key priority. The competition is bound to increase as the use of land for energy production will have implications on food and water security. The energy transition thus provides new avenues for engagement.

With the realisation of the finiteness of oil demand and petrodollars, Gulf states have embarked on domesticating their labour force, a move that will affect Kenya's labour exports and remittances. These states can no longer sustain their citizenry on oil dividends alone, and their new labour policies dictate that the citizens have to work to earn their money. It is estimated that Saudi Arabia's Saudization project will send home 80% of their workforce mainly comprising immigrants, as new policies require Saudi nationals, including women, to replace them. Similar projects are underway in Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman. These labour policies will impact how Africa engages with the Gulf states as the demand for Africa's surplus labour in the Middle East will plummet. This is a concern for Kenya's economic growth since these Gulf-states are one of the leading sources of remittances and foreign exchange. The need to make bilateral agreements to safeguard Kenya's labour exports to the Gulf remains a key priority for economic stability.







Artisanal miner holding up handfuls of cobalt ore

Wooing emerging Green Energy Powers

Kenya is yet to fully acknowledge the geopolitical significance of states that possess metals and rare earth elements critical for renewable energy African states such as the technologies. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and some South American states such as Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Colombia possess enviable reserves of copper, cobalt, graphite, and lithium, among others. These resources will meaningfully strengthen their economies and propel the states into geopolitical significance as the energy transition race intensifies. New strategic rivalries and geopolitical vulnerabilities will emerge as the demand and competition for these critical resources heighten.

While Kenya already maintains a fairly good relationship with these states, her diplomatic engagement still lacks clear strategic policy direction. Kenya engages Latin American states, mainly in forums such as the Organization of

Africa and the Caribbean Pacific states (OACPS), which President Uhuru Kenyatta currently chairs, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). These multilateral engagements provide a platform to induce engagements on climate change and energy transition, as they intend to present a united position at the COP26 forum in November 2021. During the first Extraordinary Inter-Sessional Summit of Heads of State and Government of the OACPS, in June 2020, the climate change and energy transition discourses were largely overlooked. There is need for more meaningful engagement to be reinforced through bilateral arrangements with specific states. This should be the priority for Kenya before other Global South states realise the significance of the looming geopolitical shift.

Kenya still primarily engages most of these resource-rich states through ambassadors operating in the neighbouring states. Her mission in Brazil caters to, among others, Chile

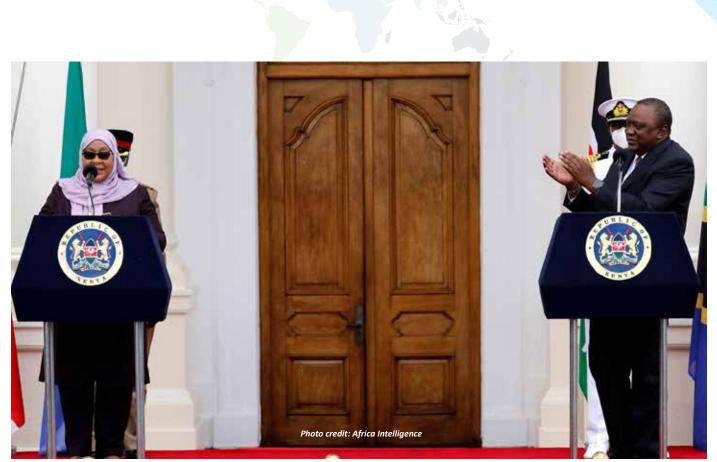


and Columbia. The plans to establish honorary consuls for these two countries are also yet to be implemented, and this may be injurious to Kenya's interests and positioning. President Kenyatta's diplomatic charm has largely focused on the Caribbean sub-region, with minimal engagement with the South American states such as Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Chile with crucial 'green energy' resources. Consequently, the need for the energy transition to take centre stage as the country plans for increased diplomatic engagement with the region remains paramount. Kenya therefore needs to craft a clear foreign policy agenda and strategically increase state to state interactions with these South American states as she plans her Post-2030 vision.

Regionally, the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has expressed interest in joining the EAC, possesses one of the world's largest cobalt and lithium deposits—the game-changer resources in renewable energy technology. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that by 2030 about 25% of global car sales will be electric. As DRC becomes heavily sought after by geopolitical actors, President Kenyatta was on cue to have made a state visit to Kinshasa in April 2021. While this move has strengthened the relations with Kinshasa, Nairobi cannot afford to falter on DRC as it is very vital to Kenya's regional geostrategic power play, in the run-up to Vision 2030 and beyond.

Kenya should be cognizant that Tanzania is seeking to displace her in DRC and has been pushing to have the minerals from DRC and Burundi pass through her Central Corridor rather than Kenya's Northern Corridor. The three countries have since signed an MOU on transport and economic cooperation that will tilt the scales in favour of Tanzania as they opt to use the Dar es Salaam port. Burundi and Tanzania have made a partnership to jointly process and market their nickel—another resource whose demand will surge due to its demand in the manufacture of the coveted lithiumion batteries. Tanzania is further positioning herself to host the company as President Suluhu positions Dodoma to control the resource-rich Great Lakes region. Nairobi will need to match these diplomatic overtures to secure her national interests within these states.





Steering the decarbonisation agenda in East and Horn of Africa

Kenya is lagging behind her East African neighbours, who have begun commercialising their hydrocarbon resources and are also attempting to displace her as a leader in the clean energy sector. Her inconclusiveness on the energy transition weakenina is her geopolitical anchorage as the decarbonisation of global energy systems continues to shake up status quo in the East and Horn of Africa. If poorly leveraged, the global move to green energy risks stalling her economic take-off and leaving her with stranded carbon assets, obsolete regional infrastructure and economic misbalance.

While Kenya is globally acclaimed for her extensive renewable energy value chain, she is yet to geopolitically leverage her position regionally. The surplus power from the Lake Turkana wind power project, the largest of its kind in Africa, is yet to be fully harnessed, next to the energydeficient South Sudan. Meanwhile, Ethiopia has unveiled a \$40bn roadmap to build 71 power projects as she aims to be the clean energy exporter across The Horn of Africa. This is one of the world's most significant policy shifts towards clean energy and has earned Ethiopia millions of dollars from energy exports to Djibouti and Sudan. With the competition to diversify clean energy production intensifying, Kenya can safeguard her geopolitical significance in the region by harnessing her energy and technological prowess ahead of her neighbours.

Kenya thus has the option of leading in clean energy transition in Africa instead of competing against her neighbours who are significantly ahead in hydrocarbon exploitation. Already, Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti and Tanzania have sought the expertise of Geothermal Development Company to activate their geothermal energy ambitions. More importantly, the shift gives Kenya limitless opportunities as the Kenya Generating Company (KenGen) scouts for ways to extract lithium (a rare-earth metal) from its

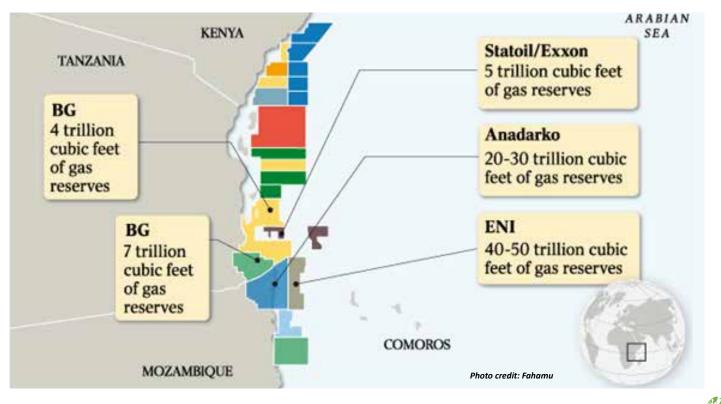


geothermal brine. Her strategy needs to focus on exporting her expertise to other countries seeking to manage their respective energy transitions.

The country needs to be cognizant of the regional geopolitical shakeup emanating from the timely commercialisation of Tanzania's natural gas, which is being touted as a safer alternative to fossil fuels. Its surging demand and upward price volatility will significantly strengthen Tanzania's economy. Instead of prospecting her gas reserves in the offshore Lamu Basin, Kenya has made a bilateral arrangement to import the latter's gas. Meanwhile, Dodoma is expediting the LNG exports deal as her investors have warned that the time to develop new gas investments is also very limited. Suppose Kenya's resources are as considerable as Tanzania's reserves, then delayed exploitation will leave her battling another curse of stranded carbon assets. Thus, the viability and relevance of the proposed Dar es Salaam pipeline is debatable. Even if Kenya inserts a break clause in agreement, there

will be a high risk of redundant infrastructure if she starts her own gas extraction. It is logical that Kenya explores her natural gas potential before committing to regional infrastructural projects. Locally extracted gas will allow her to become self-reliant and earn the needed foreign exchange. The proposed Tanzania-Kenya natural gas pipeline will tilt the balance of trade in favour of Dodoma and amplify her regional position. While Kenya's energy market offers a carrot and stick to control Kenya-Tanzania relations and her overtures in the EAC region, it is imperative that Kenya fortifies her economic muscle in the region.

Kenya's intention to commercialise her hydrocarbon resources will further weaken her geopolitical posture since the window to exploit her oil is fast elapsing and the monumental costs make it an economically unrewarding venture. Her neighbours have a competitive advantage. Tanzania will be the first East African gas exporter and Uganda is set to host the East African refinery to process oil products for the entire

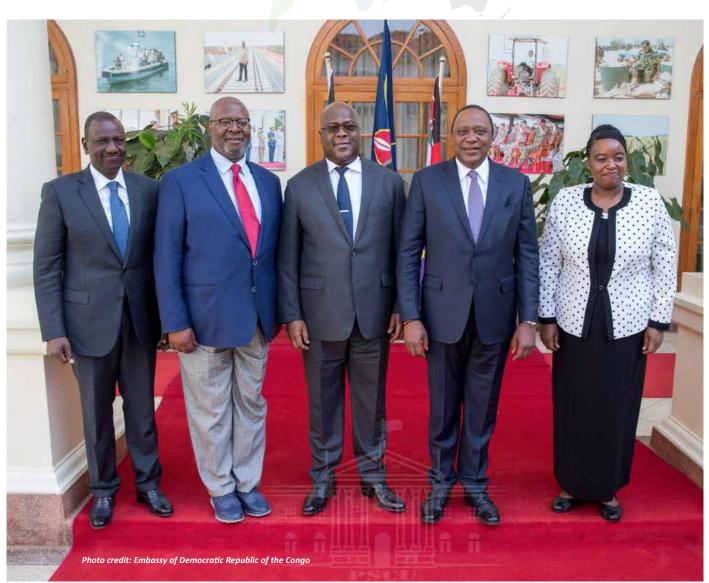




region. The country has also been geostrategically isolated by the Uganda-Tanzania comradeship in the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). Nonetheless, the uncertainty in insuring and financing the EACOP is a warning of the turmoil she should expect if she opts to go forward with hydrocarbon exploration.

The viability of the South Sudan-Lamu pipeline project is also in limbo. The LAPSSET pipeline project is part of the grand Vision 2030, just nine years away, at a time when the world expects the effects of carbon neutrality to begin settling in. South Sudan is not in a position to fund the pipeline as the drop in crude oil prices has compromised even the day to day functions of Juba. The Lokichar pipeline will essentially be a Kenyan affair and despite the magnitude of the investment, it will be running against the resilient climate change infrastructure being adopted globally.

Generally, it is in Kenya's geopolitical interest to decarbonise earlier than her regional counterparts, as this positions her to attract investments and financing in low-carbon energy projects. The country's incoherent strategy on the energy transition is likely to make her lose out more on the financing that will be awarded to early adopters of the energy transition in the global south. Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda have been able to attract investments locally to assemble electric vehicles and infrastructure for electric mobility. If these states get ahead of Kenya, she will lose her relevance as the economic anchor and her de facto status as the leader of climate change mitigation in the East African Region.



Conclusion

Kenya's geopolitical positioning in the Post-2030 era will depend on how she strategises to conquer the uncertainties and reap on opportunities in the pathway to the energy transition. She has to balance her foreign relations with China and the West against her economic prosperity while safeguarding her regional anchorage of East Africa. She also has to leverage investment and financing from Petro-states before the petro-dollars wind up. Kenya's coal is now a stranded asset, and extracting her oil may be a risky and expensive venture as powerful geopolitical actors are championing natural gas as a cleaner energy source to wean off the use of oil globally. However, opportunities abound in low-carbon electricity generation. A strategy towards low-carbon energy sources will strengthen her relations with the West and create new opportunities for engagement with states that possess the resources that will drive this energy transition. The recommendations below are action measures that the country should undertake to avoid putting herself in a position of vulnerability as she scales up her Nationally Determined Contributions and commitment to global climate change mitigation.







Recommendations

The following recommendations are geared towards enabling Kenya to maintain her geopolitical relevance during the transition.

- 1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should:
 - a) court competing geopolitical actors to accelerate the commercialisation of Kenya's gas resources.
 - b) create new geopolitical partnerships and alignments with the leaders of the energy transition while strengthening existing ones.
 - c) scout foreign investments in electronic mobility and renewable energy sources.
 - d) develop proactive approaches to intensifying demand for climate-change financing.
 - e) strengthen the partnerships with DRC to cement Kenya's place through post-conflict reconstruction, trade, transport, security and infrastructure development.
 - f) use her position as the OACPS president to advance a Latin American (South America sub-region) Foreign Policy as it is the next focus of geopolitics beyond 2030.
 - g) organise a state visit to the South American subregion to engage Bolivia, Columbia, Peru and Chile in trade deals, investment and collaborations
 - h) expedite the plans to appoint honorary consuls for Bolivia, Columbia, Peru and Chile inorder to start actively entrenching our nationals in the respective states.





- i) pursue international cooperation with the G7 states (particularly the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom) to finance low-carbon energy technology subsidies, and acquire capital transfers for sustainable development in Kenya.
- seek Middle-East investments into Kenya's economy while the petro-dollars are still flowing. The gulf states are focused on infrastructural development and investments in the agriculture, hospitality, water security energy and education sectors.
- k) make bilateral agreements with the Gulf states to safeguard Kenya's labour export flows before the competition for jobs locks out Kenyan workers.
- I) engage the South Sudan on the possibility of exporting surplus power from the Turkana wind power project to Juba.



- 2. The National Climate Change Council should:
 - a) provide leadership on reorienting Kenya's energy policy to fit within a coherent energy transition strategy.
 - b) give subsidies and incentives for energy transition technology, investments in solar, wind and LNG to encourage national adoption of cleaner forms of energy.
 - c) collaborate with the Ministries of Environment and Energy to seek partnerships with international non-governmental organisations such as UNEP, IRENA, GEIDCO to expedite the infrastructure for electric mobility countrywide.



- 3. The Ministry of Energy should:
 - a) forego the exploitation of coal in Mui basin but use her strategic partnership with the G7 states to negotiate for equivalent investment in the LNG sector.
 - b) put pressure and incentives for licenced companies to hasten the exploration and commercialisation of Kenya's natural gas resources.
 - c) aggressively encourage diversification on sustainable energy sources and create new partners willing to help her leapfrog the energy transition.
 - d) stall feasibility studies of the LNG pipeline with Tanzania until gas reserves in the Lamu basin are ascertained.
 - e) expedite the completion of power transmission infrastructure to reduce electricity costs, encourage connectivity and use of electricity over fossil fuels.
 - f) give incentives to renewable energy industry players and reduce legal hurdles for Kenyans to adopt cleaner energy forms such as solar energy.
 - g) increase the capacity to produce cheap zero-carbon energy for export, either as electricity or in the form of fuels such as hydrogen, to neighbouring countries. This will enable Kenya to market herself as an electro-state regionally.



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