

'Africa must define its own just energy transition' - Mantashe

Speaking during the first day of the Africa Energy Indaba currently underway at the Cape Town International Convention Centre, mineral resources and energy minister Gwede Mantashe said the African energy sector has the potential to catapult African economies towards sustainable growth and recovery.



Mineral resources and energy minister Gwede Mantashe. Source: Mke Hutchings/Reuters

“Energy must drive regional and continental economic development, as is the case with the advanced economies.

“We need to continuously share ideas on how we can collectively accelerate Africa’s energy sector development to be at the core of all socioeconomic development, and of continental growth and development,” he said.

Mantashe said the continent has the resources needed to catapult it into the forefront of global renewable energy.



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Global trailblazer on renewable energy

“Africa should be a global trailblazer on renewable energy. Our continent has all the minerals required to drive meaningful development at a fast pace. We need programmes to enable economic exploitation, beneficiation, and exportation. Investment in research and development, and technology, is an imperative, if we are to grow, develop and compete globally,” he said.

The minister said Africa will be able to “unleash this potential” if it is offered cooperation from international partners and through continental financial investments.

“We have reset our economic diplomacy work towards a clear bias on intra-African cooperation and trade. As such, we have and will continue to engage in both bilateral and multilateral platforms on the continent.”



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Transitioning to low carbon emissions

Mantashe told the conference that African countries must be given the opportunity to carve out individual transitions away from carbon intensive economies towards greener energy.

“Africa must define its own just energy transition that will economically empower and enable the continent to grow. Our own agenda, our own execution, where we cooperate, and invite others to partner with us to achieve the Africa we want.

“Transition must aid development and address historical inequalities, not undermine and exacerbate them. We must not be ambivalent about the just energy transition debate. The assumed pendulum swing... intent on replacing one system with another in a flash is both irrational and dangerous,” he said.

The minister said South Africa, in particular, remains “committed to contribute our fair share” to reduced carbon usage. No communities – especially those who will be directly affected – should be left behind, he said.



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Fair, balanced, inclusive transition

“Our overall response must be a fair, balanced and inclusive transition. At its centre must be the people and their livelihoods.

“The transition resets present economies, changes the nature of industries; gives newer logics to jobs and skillsets required. We, therefore, need to engage with this reality in a pragmatic manner, and refocus the debate away from the narrow techno-determinist view to one that focuses holistically on what this means for developing African societies,” Mantashe said.

He announced that the department is finalising its policy inputs into the Just Transition Framework for the energy and mining sectors.

“The bias [in the policy] is towards mitigating the expected socioeconomic impacts on our mining and energy communities [from the just energy transition]. It emphasises the re-skilling of workers, as well as creating alternative economic livelihoods for the communities surrounding such energy utilities and mines.

“We intend to commence with a wide-ranging public dialogue and consultation process in this year,” Mantashe said.

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