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MANGANESE IS AN ESSENTIAL MINERAL IN THE GREEN ECONOMIC TRANSITION PROCESS

Zambia is richly endowed with a vast number of mineral resources within its geographical confines including base, gemstones, energy, precious, and industrial minerals. However, over the past years, the country has been heavily reliant on the copper mining sector dwarfing the exploitation of other mineral resources. This has subjected the country to fiscal risk emanating from copper price and production volatility. This being so, presents the dire need for the country to undertake a robust diversification strategy within and outside the mining sector. It is therefore worth mentioning that manganese presents itself as a low-hanging fruit in this quest.

Zambia boasts of a large amount of manganese reserves mainly situated in the Central, Northern, and Luapula provinces. This mineral is strategic owing to its wide number of uses which include metallurgical and non-metallurgical. For instance, manganese is an important deoxidizer in the manufacturing of steel thereby imparting high strength. The mineral is also used as a micronutrient in agriculture and animal feeds. To the back of this, manganese is an important cathodic material in the manufacturing process of batteries. It is for this reason that the famous Mansa batteries was situated in the Luapula province to exploit manganese as an important feedstock in the production process.

Exploiting manganese as a green economic mineral is centered on its strategic use in batteries. It is important to mention that batteries are an integral component of electric vehicles which subsequently are an important element in the green economic transition process. Therefore, the country needs to start positioning itself in the green economic transition agenda through the exploitation of manganese and other important minerals including cobalt.

The MoU signed between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to develop battery value chains provides an opportunity to exploit this mineral. However, to successfully do this we need to grow the Artisanal and Small-scale manganese sector. As the Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) we place too much emphasis on this sub-sector because these are the dominant players in the mining process of manganese in Zambia. Therefore, any interventions that aim to grow the sector must be done through their lens. It is worth mentioning that the Artisanal and Small-scale manganese mining sector faces several challenges ranging from technical, and financial to problems around safety, health and the environment. For instance, the current taxation system levied on the manganese sector is excessive thereby dwarfing the formalization process. Additionally, artisanal and small-scale manganese miners do not possess the technical skills to efficiently exploit their reserves. To the back of this, they lack the capital to ensure mining is done safely and sustainably. These problems or issues have led to a vicious cycle trapping these miners and surrounding communities in perpetual poverty.

As a call to action, CTPD recommends the government and the country at large to take advantage of the green economic transition process by exploiting minerals such as manganese. Additionally, the government needs to address and resolve the many challenges that the artisanal and small-scale manganese sector continues to face through the lowering of fiscal fees, facilitating access to finance, and skills development.

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Editor's Note

The Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) is a not-for-profit, membership based trade policy and development think tank. The organization was established in 1999 and existed as the civil society trade network (CSTNZ), until 2009 when it was rebranded as the Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD).

The mandate of CTPD is to influence pro-poor trade and investment reforms at national, regional and multilateral levels as well as facilitate the participation of various stakeholders including member organizations in ensuring that trade is used as a tool for poverty eradication.

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