

Reinventing Africa's Natural Resources Enterprises: Navigating Governance Challenges and Embracing Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Africa's vast natural resources present significant opportunities alongside ongoing challenges. Although the continent holds 30 - 50 percent of the world's mineral reserves, hydrocarbons, forests, arable land, and renewable energy potential, many African nations still make limited progress in development. This research critically examines the governance structures that have influenced resource extraction and management since 2020, situating the discussion within broader debates on the resource curse, institutionalism, political settlements, sustainability transitions, and climate governance. Drawing on recent peer-reviewed research, it argues that Africa's resource development depends not only on resource abundance but also on institutional strength, fiscal transparency, community participation, climate issues, and strategic industrial policies. The study reviews current evidence on extractive governance, illegal financial flows, artisanal mining formalization, renewable energy transitions, sovereign wealth funds, and regional integration within the African Union's development strategies. It concludes that sustainable change requires integrating natural resource governance into a comprehensive model that promotes ecological resilience, intergenerational equity, regional cooperation, and economic diversification.

Keywords

Resource Curse, Political Settlement, Extractive Governance, Sustainable Transition, Ecological Modernization, Governance Challenges, Integrated Model of Sustainable Resources Transformation, Fiscal Governance Accountability

1. Introduction

The paradox of abundant resource capital persists as a key theme in the African

political economy. The continent holds large shares of global reserves in cobalt, platinum, manganese, diamonds, bauxite, uranium, and gold, along with important oil and gas deposits and extensive renewable energy resources. Nevertheless, resource wealth has rarely led to structural change or lasting human development. Since 2020, academic discourses have shifted from simple explanations of the “resource curse” to more complex views that emphasize institutions and governance (Hilson & Maconachie, 2008). Therefore, the article closely examines the utilization of extractive resources and their impact on service delivery, while also briefly addressing non-extractive resources.

More importantly, three global trends are escalating the need to transform Africa’s natural resources. First, the worsening climate crisis is altering environmental risks and energy consumption patterns (Fonjong et al., 2024). Second, the shift toward cleaner energy sources is driving up demand for key minerals used in electric vehicles, batteries, and renewable energy systems (Ali et al., 2026). Third, economic pressures after the COVID-19 pandemic have increased dependence on local resource collection, including revenues from extractive industries (Osawe & Uwa, 2023).

This research contends that transforming Africa’s natural resources requires a comprehensive governance strategy that emphasizes institutional reform, sustainability, fiscal transparency, climate alignment, and regional cooperation through continental frameworks such as the African Union. The transformation should balance short-term developmental priorities with long-term ecological sustainability and justice for future generations.

Reinventing Africa’s natural resources enterprise is a model that will enhance the effective utilization of resources, improve accountability, and strengthen governance in delivering services to underprivileged citizens. The development of extractive resources has been overlooked and hampered by a lack of transparency and accountability in governance, leaving citizens in poverty (De’Nyok & Adea 2024).

Nevertheless, Africa’s natural resources account for 30 - 50 percent of the total wealth, while 70 percent of sub-Saharan African countries depend on arable land. The African resource capital embodied the potential impacts as demonstrated in the table below.

Description	Statistics
Economic Impact-natural Capital Account For	30% - 50%
Mineral Exports (Extractive Resources)	70%
Fisheries & Aquaculture-Value Added	USD 24 Billion
Revenue Potential with Improved Governance	9% - 31%, over 10 years if governance is improved
GDP	28%
African Natural Resources	USD 66 billion in loans from foreign investors
Dependency Risks	70% of Sub-Saharan African communities depend on forests and woodlands for their livelihoods

Therefore, investment by foreign investors and African management of resource capital present emerging challenges that contribute to corruption in systemic management of resources, which scholars refer to as the resource curse. The malpractice of the endowed natural resources capital should have been harnessed to drive Africa’s sustainable socio-economic prosperity; however, the lack of transparency and leadership consistently undermines the capacity to transform Africa into an energy-driven economic powerhouse and a global player. African extractive governance is driven by collaboration with foreign investors focused on profit and return on investment for their countries. In contrast, African elites operate with impunity, compromising the governance system and lacking effective judicial oversight (Fofana, 2022; De’Nyok, 2025).

Finally, the article provides an in-depth discussion of the issues underpinning the implementation of service delivery that are expected to be funded by the large investment in natural resources. The Researcher draws on recent peer-reviewed articles and books on natural resource investment in African countries to reach this conclusion.

2. Methodology

Since this is a review paper synthesizing existing literature, it does not include a specific methodology section detailing data collection or analysis methods. Instead, it follows a comprehensive review approach, examining relevant academic journals, books, reports, and scholarly sources. The process involves searching databases using keywords related to African natural resources enterprises, governance, and challenges in the economic and investment context. Selected articles and documents offer insights into conceptual frameworks, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, case studies, and practical implications of resource governance settings. The review systematically identifies key themes, trends, and gaps. Data synthesis involves organizing and summarizing these findings to create a clear narrative aligned with the review’s goals. The process’s rigour is maintained through careful source selection, critical evaluation of relevance and quality, and transparent reporting. It follows established guidelines to ensure credible, insightful conclusions about resource governance and challenges.

3. Theoretical Foundations

3.1. The Resource Curse Revisited

Traditional resource curse theory suggests that resource wealth is associated with weaker institutions, rent-seeking, macroeconomic instability, and authoritarian regimes. However, recent empirical studies show that institutional quality plays a mediating role in these outcomes (Muhirwa et al., 2023). Instead of assuming a direct cause-and-effect relationship, scholars now focus on governance capacity, transparency mechanisms, and political settlements as key factors (El Hamad et al., 2024).

Recent panel analysis across African countries indicates that natural resource

rents hinder growth primarily in nations with weak governance indicators (Fofana, 2022). This suggests that strengthening institutions—rather than restricting resource extraction—is the key to driving meaningful transformation. Therefore, it can be concluded that natural resources are not a curse; rather, the misfortune lies in the mismanagement of their utilization for the benefit of citizens and sustainability, with corruption leading to the abandonment of service delivery, institutional governance and political fragility (Breakey et al., 2025).

3.2. Political Settlement and Extractive Governance

Political settlements theory offers a framework for understanding how elite bargains influence the design and enforcement of institutions (Bebbington et al., 2017). In numerous African settings, extractive industries operate within patronage systems in which resource rents bolster ruling coalitions. Achieving sustainable change thus depends on changing incentives and enhancing accountability networks, rather than merely implementing technocratic reforms.

Extractive governance encourages corruption and alienates the core principles of nationalism, sovereignty, and integrity from performing accountability, equity, the rule of law, and institutional responsiveness. Extractive governance is very dangerous in a politically fragile state where the rule of law and institutions are weak in governing, delivering, and performing ethically (De’Nyok, 2023). Most of the countries endowed with natural resources are struggling with the impunity of governing elites.

3.3. Sustainability Transition and Ecological Modernization

Sustainability transitions theory emphasizes systemic shifts towards low-carbon and resource-efficient development pathways (Ali et al., 2026). For Africa, this involves leveraging resource endowments to finance renewable infrastructure, local value addition, and climate adaptation, rather than maintaining extractive dependency. African governments should promote investment in renewable energy to transition away from high-carbon, resource-intensive practices.

4. Discussion

4.1. Governance Challenges in Africa’s Natural Resource Sectors

Governance deficits remain key barriers to sustainable transformation. Empirical research highlights ongoing issues in fiscal transparency, regulatory enforcement, contract negotiations, and anti-corruption efforts (Osawe & Uwa, 2023). Additionally, illicit financial flows from extractive industries persistently hinder development funding (Afolabi et al., 2024).

Community governance gaps intensify tensions, often leading to conflict due to poor consultation, weak benefit-sharing, and land dispossession (Smith, 2015). Formalizing artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) has become a major policy focus to address informality and environmental issues (Bansah, 2023).

Gendered governance gaps persist as well. Women remain underrepresented in

extractive decision-making processes and disproportionately bear social and environmental costs (Li et al., 2020).

4.2. Climate Change, Energy Transition, and Critical Minerals

Africa is especially susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including drought, floods, and food shortages (Fonjong et al., 2024). At the same time, the continent possesses significant mineral reserves crucial for decarbonization efforts. The key governance challenge is to balance increased mineral extraction with environmental protection and fair benefit sharing.

Strategic integration into global green value chains offers potential for industrial upgrading, yet without value-addition policies, African economies risk replicating historical patterns of raw-material export dependence (Laisani, 2023; Pryor et al., 2020).

4.3. Fiscal Governance and Sovereign Wealth Funds

Resource revenue volatility requires stabilization mechanisms. Sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) can support fairness across generations if protected from political interference (Botlhale, 2024). However, inadequate oversight structures can undermine their effectiveness.

Transparency reforms such as disclosure initiatives and beneficial ownership registries are linked to measurable improvements in accountability (El Hamad et al., 2024). For instance, some countries overlooked the implementation of annual fiscal governance. This lack of fiscal governance affects accountability and service delivery.

4.4. Regional and Continental Frameworks

Continental coordination is vital for enhancing bargaining power and aligning policies. The African Union's frameworks, such as mining and industrialization strategies, focus on value addition, transparency, and the integration of sustainable development. Regional cooperation can help curb harmful tax competition and improve negotiation leverage with multinational corporations.

In summary, resource governance provides a framework for enhancing service delivery with an emphasis on sustainable development. Africa's extractive resources hold significant potential to increase development and service delivery by 9% - 31% over ten years, given substantial investment. Better resource management will foster social and economic infrastructure, improving services in education, health, roads, ICT, and energy sectors. The focus is on fiscal transparency, accountability, and the effective use of investment revenues, as part of a strategy to strengthen the socio-economic infrastructure enabled by these abundant resources (Nalule, 2023; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2021).

5. Proposed Integrated Model of Sustainable Resource Transformation (IMSRT)

Africa has extensive natural resources, including minerals, oil, gas, forests, and

fertile land, which account for between 30 and 50 percent of the total wealth. However, many countries still struggle to translate this resource wealth into sustainable and inclusive growth. Recent research highlights that the real issue lies not in resource availability but in governance systems that control how these resources are managed and shared (World Bank, 2021).

Weak institutions, poor industrial linkages, environmental damage, and social conflicts often hinder resource-rich nations from gaining long-term development benefits. As a result, policymakers are increasingly supporting integrated governance strategies that link resource extraction with economic diversification, climate action, and social inclusion.

Continental policy initiatives driven by the African Union highlight the need to align natural resource governance with wider development goals. For example, the Africa Mining Vision continues to steer African nations toward transparent, fair, and development-focused management of mineral resources. Recently, policy debates have also linked resource governance to the objectives of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which seeks to boost regional markets, promote industrialization, and increase Africa's participation in global value chains (African Union, 2022; African Development Bank, 2023). Within this changing policy landscape, an integrated approach to sustainable resource transformation can be built around five interconnected pillars: institutional strengthening, climate-focused industrial policy, community-driven governance, fiscal transparency, and regional coordination. This model Figure 1 is shown below, followed by an explanation of each component.

A. Pyramid Conceptual Framework Format

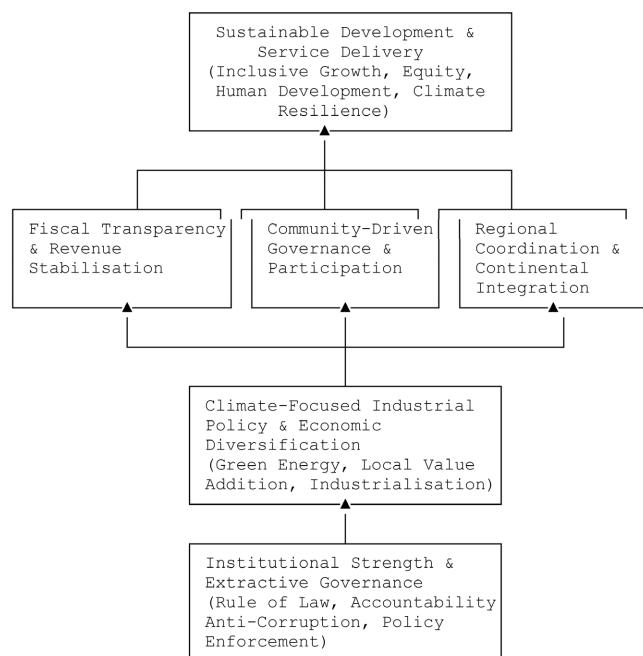


Figure 1. Proposed Africa's integrated model of sustainable resources transformation.

Explanation for Integrated Model of Sustainable Resources Transformation

First, strengthening institutions and enforcing anti-corruption measures are essential for effective resource governance. Strong regulatory bodies, transparent licensing procedures, and accountability systems can decrease corruption and ensure that revenues from natural resources support national development goals. Recent research indicates that countries with transparent governance and robust institutions tend to turn resource wealth into better economic outcomes and public services ([Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2021](#)). Building institutional capacity is therefore vital for the sustainable management of resources.

Second, the significance of climate-aligned industrial policies has grown as nations work to meet global climate commitments and transition to cleaner energy sources. Traditionally, African economies have focused on exporting raw materials with little added value, restricting industrial growth and employment opportunities. Combining natural resource extraction with green industrial practices—such as renewable-energy-powered mining, sustainable processing, and local manufacturing—can enhance economic diversification while promoting environmental sustainability ([Guo & Dong, 2020](#); [UNCTAD, 2020](#)). These strategies also enable African countries to compete more effectively in the growing global markets for critical minerals essential for renewable energy technologies.

Third, community-focused governance and the creation of a social license to operate are essential for managing the social and environmental impacts of resource extraction. Mining and energy projects frequently impact local communities via land acquisition, environmental hazards, and shifts in livelihoods. Approaches that include community participation in decision-making, fair benefit-sharing, and strong environmental protections can help minimize conflicts and support long-term stability in resource-rich areas ([African Development Bank, 2023](#); [Bebbington et al., 2017](#)).

Fourth, it is essential to have fiscal transparency and revenue stabilization mechanisms to manage the volatility of economies that depend on commodities. Changes in global commodity prices can lead to fiscal instability and hinder long-term development efforts. Implementing transparent revenue management systems and sovereign wealth funds, and enhancing public financial management, enable governments to stabilize income from natural resources. This stability enables investment in key sectors such as infrastructure, education, and health ([World Bank, 2021](#)).

Ultimately, coordinating regional policies and harmonizing regulations across African nations can bolster Africa’s leverage in global resource markets. Fragmented rules and competition among neighbouring countries can diminish their bargaining power with multinational firms. Regional collaboration—especially via trade and industrial programs connected to the African Continental Free Trade Area—can foster common standards, develop cross-border infrastructure, and create integrated mineral value chains ([International Monetary Fund, 2017](#)).

These five pillars together provide a comprehensive framework for transforming Africa’s natural resource sectors from isolated extraction to catalysts of sustainable and inclusive growth. By integrating institutional reform, climate-aware industrial policies, community engagement, fiscal responsibility, and regional collaboration, African nations can progress from minor reforms to significant structural change. This holistic approach aligns with contemporary sustainable development goals and underscores the increasing recognition that natural resources should be managed within wider economic and social development strategies (Odijie, 2018). Below is the policy matrix that also justifies that proposed resources governance and transformation.

a) Conceptual Framework b) Proposed Policy Matrix.

Strategic Pillars	Governance Objectives	Key Policy Instruments	Expected Outcomes	Sustainability Dimension
Institutional Strength & Extractive Governance	Strengthen accountability and rule of law	Anti-corruption laws, regulatory reforms, judicial oversight	Transparent governance and reduced corruption	Governance Sustainability
Climate-Focused Industrial Policy	Promote green industrialisation and diversification	Renewable energy investment, local mineral processing, green technologies	Industrial growth and reduced carbon dependency	Environmental Sustainability
Community-Driven Governance	Enhance social inclusion and participation	Community benefit-sharing, stakeholder engagement, local content policies	Reduced conflicts and improved legitimacy	Social Sustainability
Fiscal Transparency & Revenue Management	Improve accountability in resource revenues	Sovereign wealth funds, open budgeting, revenue disclosure systems	Stable revenues and improved service delivery	Economic Sustainability
Regional Coordination & Integration	Strengthen continental bargaining power	AfCFTA integration, regional mining policies, cross-border infrastructure	Regional trade growth and policy harmonisation	Regional Sustainability
Sustainable Development & Service Delivery	Transform resource wealth into public welfare	Investment in health, education, roads, ICT, and energy	Inclusive development and poverty reduction	Long-Term Sustainability

6. Conclusion

Reinventing Africa’s natural resource enterprises entails a fundamental shift in how countries, markets, communities, and ecosystems connect. Historically, Africa’s rich natural resources have led to enclave economies, elite domination, environmental damage, and recurring conflicts, often called the “resource curse.” The persistence of weak institutions, lack of fiscal transparency, and externally influenced extraction methods have limited the growth potential of resources such as oil, gas, minerals, forests, and fisheries.

The proposed Integrated Model of Sustainable Resources Transformation (IMSRT) offers a comprehensive, interconnected framework to go beyond this legacy. Its main strength is its systemic approach: building strong institutions that

ensure the rule of law is enforced; climate-oriented industrial policies that align resource extraction with global sustainability goals; community-led governance that boosts legitimacy and fairness; fiscal transparency that fosters trust and efficiency; and regional coordination that increases scale and bargaining power. These pillars are closely connected—they actively influence each other. For example, fiscal transparency depends on strong institutions, and effective climate policies require regional cooperation in energy and trade systems.

More importantly, IMSRT shifts the perspective on natural resources from being simply raw commodities for export to becoming strategic assets that can drive industrial growth, technological advancement, and sustainability efforts. It emphasizes the importance of increasing value within Africa to reduce dependence on unpredictable global markets and support local industries. Additionally, it recognizes that sustainability is vital, as climate change is already affecting access to resources, agricultural output, and energy infrastructure across the continent. Therefore, integrating environmental management into resource governance is essential both economically and as a crucial responsibility.

Simultaneously, the transformation agenda must face political economy realities. Entrenched interests, governance shortcomings, and capacity constraints can hamper reform efforts. Without strong political will and citizen oversight, even well-crafted frameworks risk remaining symbolic rather than producing real change. Therefore, success depends not only on technical solutions but also on reshaping power dynamics, enhancing democratic accountability, and ensuring that citizens—particularly those in resource-rich regions—are the main beneficiaries of resource wealth.

Ultimately, reforming Africa's natural resource sectors offers a vital opportunity. Proper management can foster inclusive growth, accelerate structural transformation, reduce poverty, and establish African economies as leaders in the global green transition. Conversely, inaction may lead to growing inequality, environmental harm, and economic instability amid rising global competition and climate challenges.

In conclusion, transforming Africa's natural resource enterprises presents both governance challenges and opportunities for future generations. The proposed IMSRT approach provides a clear pathway, but its effectiveness depends on how well it is adopted and implemented at national and regional levels. When governance reforms are aligned with sustainability and inclusive growth objectives, African nations can transform their natural resource wealth into a basis for resilient, fair, and forward-looking economies.

7. Recommendations

A transformative approach to managing natural resources in Africa involves going beyond basic reforms to fundamentally redesign institutions. Key to this approach is creating governance systems that are independent, professional, and fully accountable. Regulatory agencies should be protected from political interfer-

ence and supported by strong oversight from parliaments and courts. Specialized agencies with clear, focused mandates should supervise resource extraction, while robust anti-corruption measures—such as asset-declaration laws, whistleblower protections, and independent audits—are vital to maintaining sector integrity. Furthermore, investing continuously in human capital—training geologists, environmental scientists, economists, and legal experts—is essential, enabling countries to negotiate and manage resources independently. These institutions need the flexibility to adapt to technological innovations, environmental challenges, and evolving global markets.

Effective governance of natural resources should be integrated into a climate-focused industrial strategy. Instead of treating extraction as separate, governments should link resource sectors with green industrial initiatives, such as processing critical minerals for renewable energy technologies. Using carbon pricing, emissions standards, and green certifications can help align extractive industries with sustainability goals. Nevertheless, targeted incentives such as subsidies, tax benefits, and concessional loans are vital to attracting private investment in clean technologies and sustainable supply chains. National strategies must coordinate with global climate commitments while supporting domestic development. In this context, circular economy principles—centred on recycling, reuse, and resource efficiency—offer a way to maximize benefits and lessen environmental impacts.

Digital transformation is crucial for enhancing governance and transparency in the resource industry. Implementing advanced technologies such as satellite monitoring, AI, and blockchain enables real-time oversight of extraction operations, environmental impacts, and revenue flows. Integrating geological, environmental, and financial data into national systems can foster better policymaking. Open data initiatives further promote transparency by allowing civil society, researchers, and citizens to monitor sector performance. However, these technological innovations must be safeguarded with strong cybersecurity and data governance to protect sensitive national information.

Building resilience and supporting long-term sustainability are both essential efforts. Governments should include climate risk assessments in every resource development project, such as planning for extreme weather events and price fluctuations. Diversifying economies is vital to lessen reliance on narrow export markets. Additionally, improving disaster preparedness and investing in environmental restoration can help minimize the harms caused by resource extraction. Developing long-term national resource strategies spanning two to three decades is crucial to ensuring that the benefits of development persist for future generations.

A truly transformative framework must prioritize community involvement in resource governance. This includes legally mandating free, prior, and informed consent for all affected groups. Community development agreements should guarantee tangible benefits, such as revenue sharing, infrastructure development, and employment opportunities. Decentralized governance structures enable local governments and traditional authorities to participate actively in decision-making

processes. Implementing transparent grievance and conflict resolution systems is essential for addressing disputes fairly and efficiently. Moreover, sustained investments in social infrastructure—such as education, healthcare, and water services—are vital to ensure that resource wealth genuinely enhances the living standards of communities in resource-producing regions.

Effective resource management depends on robust fiscal governance. Governments should go beyond mere transparency by providing contracts, production data, and revenue streams in clear, accessible formats. Strengthening tax administration is crucial to combat transfer pricing, tax evasion, and illicit financial flows. Establishing sovereign wealth and stabilization funds with transparent, well-defined rules can help manage revenue volatility and support long-term development objectives. It's vital that resource revenues are directly tied to national development plans and invested productively, rather than being used for recurrent expenses. Promoting citizen participation in budgeting and oversight enhances accountability and builds public trust.

Innovative financing and investment strategies are essential for enabling this transformation. Countries should expand their financial sources by attracting green finance, climate funds, and impact investments aligned with sustainability goals. Carefully structured public-private partnerships can help manage risk, safeguard public interests, and yield long-term national benefits. Developing domestic capital markets can reduce dependence on foreign borrowing and provide sustainable funding for industrial projects. Encouraging local entrepreneurship and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises will promote broader participation in resource value chains and foster inclusive economic growth.

Given the fragmented nature of global resource markets, regional coordination becomes crucial. Harmonizing mining laws, environmental standards, and fiscal policies across regional economic communities can help close regulatory gaps and strengthen collective bargaining. Building regional value chains, particularly in critical minerals, energy, and agriculture, can enhance intra-African trade and industrial ties. Collaborative investments in cross-border infrastructure – including transportation, power networks, and digital connectivity – are essential to support this integration. By working together, African countries can bolster their international negotiating power and leverage frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area to foster resource-based industrial development.

Steady progress relies on building robust knowledge systems and human resources. Creating centres of excellence at African universities can foster expertise in areas like resource governance, mining engineering, environmental science, and energy systems. Boosting investment in research and development will facilitate innovations in sustainable extraction methods and improve resource efficiency. Collaboration among academia, industry, and government is crucial for translating knowledge into practical applications. Additionally, expanding technical and vocational education programs can provide the workforce with essential skills to support industrialization.

Rebalancing power and increasing accountability are crucial to ensure that resource wealth benefits everyone in society. Civil society organizations, media, and independent watchdogs must be empowered to hold governments and corporations accountable. Institutionalizing participatory governance can promote the inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups in decision-making processes. Greater transparency in political financing can reduce the influence of resource wealth on elections and encourage a culture of accountability within public institutions. In such a system, public officials are responsible not only for managing resources but also for the outcomes of their policies.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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