



GLU Working Paper No. 67

JUST TRANSITION CONCEPT: THE STATE-OF-PLAY

October 2025

Dinga Sikwebu and Woodrajh Aroun



Global Labour University (GLU) is a network of trade unions, universities, the ILO and labour support organisations across the world. GLU:

- develops and implements university postgraduate programmes on labour and globalization for trade unionists and other labour experts;
- undertakes joint research and organizes international discussion forums on global labour issues;
- publishes textbooks, research and discussion papers on labour and globalisation issues.

Editorial Board

- Anne Lisa Carstensen (University of Kassel, Germany)
- Anselmo Luis dos Santos (The State University of Campinas, Brazil)
- Ben Scully (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)
- Christoph Scherrer (Kassel Institute for Sustainability/GLU, Germany)
- Eugenia Troncoso Leone (The State University of Campinas, Brazil)
- Frank Hoffer (Global Labour University, Germany)
- Hansjörg Herr (Berlin School of Economics and Law, Germany)
- Matt Fischer-Daly (Penn State University, USA)
- Melisa Serrano (University of the Philippines)
- Praveen Jha (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India)

Contact Address

Global Labour University - Freunde und Förderer e.V. - Prof. Dr. Christoph Scherrer; Prenzlauer Allee 186, 10405 Berlin, Germany

E-mail: scherrer@uni-kassel.de

<http://www.global-labour-university.org>

Copyright © Global Labour University – Freunde und Förderer e.V.

First published 2025.

Publications of the Global Labour University – Freunde und Förderer e.V. enjoy copyright under Protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, short excerpts from them may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to Global Labour University – Freunde und Förderer e.V. Prenzlauer Allee 186, 10405 Berlin Germany , or by email: glu_foerderverein@global-labour-university.org

ISSN: 1866-0541 (print) ; 2194-7465 (PDF)

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the Global Labour University – Freunde und Förderer e.V. of the opinions expressed in them.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
1. Use of Just Transition (JT) Concept.....	5
1.1 <u>Labour, Climate and Environmental Justice movements.....</u>	7
1.1.1 <u>The labour movement and just transition</u>	7
1.1.2 <u>Environmental organisations and just transition</u>	12
1.1.3 <u>Ecofeminism and just transition</u>	15
1.1.4 <u>Indigenous peoples and just transition</u>	18
1.2 <u>Just transition as policy</u>	19
1.2.1 <u>UNFCCC and just transition</u>	20
1.2.2 <u>Regional initiatives</u>	21
1.2.3 <u>National initiatives.....</u>	22
1.2.4 <u>Subnational initiatives</u>	26
1.2.5 <u>Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), Business and just transition</u>	28
2. Findings and Analysis.....	30
3. Reclaiming JT.....	46
References.....	50
About the Authors.....	61

Introduction

The just transition (JT) concept is in vogue. Presently, an array of forces has adopted the JT concept, either as a goal or policy. Since its emergence within the trade union movement in the 1990s as a response to global warming, multilateral bodies, civil society organisations, and corporations, have endorsed just transition with intentions to use it as a guide in their actions and interventions to mitigate climate change. To comply with international treaties, national and subnational governments are also introducing hard and soft laws to facilitate what they regard as just transitions.

In addition to above uses, the JT concept has moved into the academe and is utilised in diverse economic sectors such as energy, food and agriculture, healthcare, finance and tourism. After years of climate denialism, corporations and business associations have achieved what has been their goal since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, recognition as a key non-state actor in climate negotiations (Mousu, 2020). Viewed positively, the popularity of the JT concept reflects a “growing awareness of and concern about deepening inequalities between the world’s rich and poor, and how the climate and environmental crises, and efforts to address them, are accentuating them” (Stevis, Morena and Krause, 2020, 4).

Considering its spread, attempts are underway to operationalise the concept. To enhance its utility and simplify the expansive use of JT concept, Harrington (2022) makes a distinction between climate and non-climate transitions. Climate-related transitions require shifts away from large-scale greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation by sectors that are potential carbon sinks. Non-climate transitions involve changes required in sectors such healthcare, agriculture and food production.

While widespread endorsement of the JT concept may reflect a victory for those who agitated for its adoption, the explosion in its use has created challenges. For trade unions and communities at the coalface of environmental degradation and sectors from which the concept originated, calls for just transition were attempts to inject justice and equity into the climate debate. Since then, the concept means different things to different people (Heffron, 2021 and Nuñez, 2021).

Conceptually, different interpretations make it difficult to define what just transition is all about, what its aims are, who the beneficiaries are, and who drives it. According to Stevis, Morena and Krause (2020, 2) the popularity of JT concept has exposed a chasm “between climate policy makers’ narrow understanding of just transition, and the complex and multifaceted reality of a ‘living concept’ whose origins and meanings lie deep in the everyday experiences of workers and frontline communities”.

It is therefore appropriate and timely to take stock of how the JT concept is being used and suggest ways that can make it a useful analytical and mobilising tool. This is what this synthesis report aims to do.

The report is divided into three parts. Part 1 surveys how the JT transition concept is utilised within civil society and in policymaking across various levels: multilateral, regional, national, and subnational levels. Part 2 presents an overview of our findings and analysis. This section is a distillation of common themes emerging from current

uses of just transition. It identifies similarities and divergences in the way the JT concept is deployed. It asks whether there are significant gaps in the use of the concept. Part 3 looks at how to reclaim the concept's defensive and emancipatory visions.

Although cognisant of the expansive use of the concept, to ensure rigour and brevity, the report examines the use of the JT concept in climate-related transitions, particularly the shift from fossil fuels to low-carbon energy sources.

1. Use of Just Transition (JT) Concept

Although different actors now use it, the concept of a just transition (JT) emerged within the labour movement and its allied organisations. Before its adoption by multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (UN), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and World Bank, the JT concept was a war cry of some trade unions and frontline communities that faced disastrous impacts of global warming and climate change. Labour, joined later by climate justice movements, vigorously campaigned for governments at multilateral, regional, national and subnational levels, to adopt policies centred on equity, justice and fairness when dealing with climate change. There are numerous accounts of the history of the JT concept (Rosemberg, 2020; Rosemberg, 2013; Snell and Fairbrother, 2013; Stevis, 2023; Stevis, Morena and Krause, 2020).

This synthesis report will not rehash the genealogy of the concept. What this part of the report will do is examine how the concept is deployed and utilised in the following sectors: (1) Labour movement, climate justice movements and the rest of civil society (2) Policymaking institutions. For each sector, the examination will probe the following themes:

- The multiplicity of definitions given to the concept
- Motivation and drivers of the transition
- Agency and perceived coalitions to drive the transition

Methodology

The report uses a range of case studies to highlight and explore different uses of the JT concept. The report is not exhaustive and does not cover every case. The sectors that the study explores are the following: labour, environmental and climate justice movements, ecofeminist groups, indigenous movements, multilateral climate negotiations, regional climate initiatives, national government case studies, subnational governments and business initiatives.

Sector	Case studies	Motivation
Labour	ITUC, WFTU, TUCA, ITUC-Africa, Cosatu and OWTU	To investigate how unions with different political orientations and at different scales may be using the JT concept differently.
Environmental and climate justice movements	Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth International (FoEI), Extinction Rebellion (X-R) and Climate Action Network (CAN)	To enquire how global environmental and climate justice movements may have different interpretations of JT.
Ecofeminist groups	Grid Alternatives, Mothers Out Front, Women's Environment Development Organisation (WEDO) and West and Central African Women's Climate Assembly (WCA)	To find out how grassroots ecofeminist groups approach the question of JT.
Indigenous movements	International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) and Indigenous Environment Network (IEN)	Given their links with nature, to discover how global indigenous federations deal with the issue of a JT.
Multilateral climate negotiations	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	To look at how the JT concept has been incorporated into multilateral climate negotiations.
Regional climate initiatives	African Union (AU) and European Union (EU)	To investigate how regional governments and blocs are dealing with the idea of a JT.
National government case studies	South Africa and Spain	To see how JT is translated into national legislation and frameworks.
Subnational governments	C40 and Colorado State	Given the role that cities and subnational governments are playing on climate change, it is important to find out how they are dealing with JT.
Business initiatives	Business for Inclusive Growth (B4IG), Council for Inclusive Capitalism and Climate Action 100+	To investigate how business bodies are interpreting the JT concept and guiding companies to become net-zero corporations.

1.1 Labour, Climate and Environmental Justice movements

1.1.1 The labour movement and just transition

It is common cause that the just transition concept emerged in North America in the 1970s used by the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) in response to corporations that opted for relocation instead of complying with environmental regulations. After some hiatus, the concept reemerged in climate negotiations in the 1990s. Even in this round, the labour movement spearheaded its use. Since then, different unions across the globe have adopted and are using it in their contexts. In doing so, the unions in different parts of the world have given the concept their definitions and meanings. This they have done in line with their own traditions and political orientations.

Definitions

In a statement issued by ITUC (2009) on the eve of the UN Climate Summit (COP 15) as well as in Cancun (2010) the international trade union federation ITUC made a strong call for a JT. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) the livelihoods of workers and communities affected by a transition to a low carbon economy must be secured in a way that is just and equitable (Just Transition Centre, n.d.). ITUC strongly advocates for a JT plan that places a high premium on decent work, job security, social protection and access to training opportunities in the shift to a zero-carbon economy.

Recognising that JT has wide geographical and universal implications for both humans and nature to coexist in a mutually beneficial manner the confederation has played a leading role by introducing JT onto the global agenda of climate change negotiations at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Conference of the Parties (COP's). This has created an important space for trade union federations such as the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU) and the WFTU amongst others, to canvass their views on JT.

In its definition of JT, ITUC-Africa Just Transition Consultative Meeting held in Lagos in May 2018, called for a transition that prioritised the needs “of working people, women, youth persons with disabilities, people in arid communities, and other vulnerable groups” as well as those whose livelihoods depended on a growing informal economy (ITUC-Africa, 2018, 3). The meeting concluded by accepting wide-ranging principles including, but not limited to the UNFCCC principle of common but differentiated responsibility, polluter pays principle, human rights and respect for the rights of indigenous people.

In September 2023, trade unions under the banner of ITUC-Africa issued a further statement calling on leaders attending the Africa Climate Summit 2023 to include decent work and quality jobs, labour rights and just transition plans, reskilling and upskilling, social protection, worker participation, gender equity and investment in green jobs in its JT agenda (ITUC-Africa, 2023).

In Latin America, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) adopted JT by calling for a deeper understanding of environmental issues to include not only substitution of fossil-dependent energy sources with renewables but the preservation and protection of all life on earth – plants, animals, oceans and soil (Nuñez, 2021). TUCA argued that the voices of workers and communities should not be subordinated to market forces bent on increasing profits. According to Nuñez (2021) the federation pledged to use social dialogue as an instrument to tilt the balance of power in favour of those most affected by the climate crisis. A JT would have to make provision for fundamental labour rights such as fair pay, social protection and trade union rights.

In 2014, TUCA adopted a Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA) paving the way for a regional approach “built by and for the people [that places] social, environment and labour considerations” above those of rent-seeking corporations (Nuñez, 2021, 32).

Sub-Saharan Africa’s largest trade union federation the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) also stressed the centrality of workers and communities directly affected by transition policies to be at the heart of JT demands. In 2022 COSATU released its JT Blueprint for Workers Summary document. Building on the principles that the federation adopted in its Framework Document on Climate Change in 2011, COSATU reaffirmed its position for a JT that does not compromise the interests of the working class and addresses poverty and unemployment across all sectors of the economy. The federation insists that JT must include all social partners who must be allocated sufficient resources to achieve its objective of social and climate justice (COSATU, 2022). In so doing COSATU opted for a broader scope of JT as opposed to the narrow approach that focused on protecting workers and their communities directly affected by fossil industries. The federation went further and argued for a JT to include trade unions in a much deeper transformative struggle to shift the balance of power in favour of the working class and their allies. Although labour has been involved in defining JT in its terms, the process has been a trench warfare with trade unions and their allies having to fend off attempts to redefine the concept.

In response to a Just Transition Draft Policy for an Equitable Low Carbon Future for Trinidad and Tobago the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU, n.d.) acknowledged government’s intent to initiate a discussion with stakeholders for a fair and equitable transition to safeguard jobs and decarbonise the economy in line with its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC’s) to reduce carbon emissions by 15% by 2030, “conditional upon international financing” (Just Transition Draft Policy for an Equitable Low Carbon Future for Trinidad and Tobago, 13). The draft policy included “human rights, good governance, due participation, gender equality, social equity, decent work and resilience, NDC-SDG alignment, and climate ambitions” in its

pathway towards a Just Transition for all. (Just Transition Draft Policy for an Equitable Low Carbon Future for Trinidad and Tobago, 2).

Warwick (2024, para.2) argues that the government’s Just Transition Draft Policy was an attempt to “package a structural adjustment programme to further privatisation, commodification and liberalisation of the economy as a just transition”. The draft just transition policy document went on to say: “Trinidad and Tobago commits prioritising incentives for the private sector to lead the Just Transition” (Just Transition Draft Policy for an Equitable Low Carbon Future for Trinidad and Tobago, 21). The union was also sceptical of government plans to privatise the provision of water, electricity and social services and advocated for “public ownership of energy” (Warwick, 2024, para. 8).

With assistance from the Trade Union for Energy Democracy (TUED) OWTU drafted a response to the proposed draft based on 4 pillars: (1) the need for the trade union to become active participants in the process of drafting a JT; (2) that the JT process is all-inclusive targeting those in need and of benefit to all; (3) transitioning to cleaner sources of energy taking into account local economic conditions and enterprises; and (4) creating an enabling environment that addresses the social and economic needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and opening spaces for all to contribute towards the global debate on decarbonisation (Warwick, 2024). While the union put the brakes on government’s neoliberal agenda to liberalise the economy, they argued that system change was a prerequisite for a meaningful JT to resolve the social and ecological crisis caused by capitalism.

At its international congress held in November 2023 in Colombia, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU Book 4, 2023, 18) committed the global labour federation to campaign for “a just transition that is fair to all workers and all countries”. For WFTU, the struggle to mitigate climate change and the fight for social justice are interlinked. To combat climate change cannot be at the expense of working people. According to WFTU working people and all countries should be beneficiaries of just transitions. At the centre of just transition must be people’s needs such as jobs, food and water. Failure to centre these needs will lead to increased inequality and conflict.

Drivers

In advancing their definitions of JT, different union bodies articulate what they understand as causes of global warming and climate change. While some unions have been explicit about the link between global warming and capitalism, others are coy. In an interview with the United Nations (2021) the former General Secretary of ITUC, Sharan Burrow linked climate change devastation to the social crisis exacerbated by increasing levels of poverty, unemployment, loss of social protection, low wages, etc. ITUC has been vocal in its argument that the current global economic order and globalisation failed to protect both nature and its people.

ITUC-Africa (2018) questioned the desirability of investments on the continent that favoured extractive industries but contributed little to the overall development of its people. The organisation was equally critical of the role of multilateral finance institutions and foreign direct investment that favoured neo-liberal economic reform

as the solution to Africa’s socio-economic development. In this context, ITUC-Africa argued that the continent that contributed the least to GHG emissions had to bear the brunt of catastrophic outcomes caused by global warming and climate change. African trade unionists unanimously agreed that rich industrialised economies must be held accountable and responsible for measures to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

TUCA also argued that consumption patterns under capitalism fuelled by the fossil energy paradigm were responsible for the ecological crisis. Conscious of the predominance of excessive consumption in the global North and its imposition on the global South (of which Latin America was part of) the union embraced JT as part of its strategy to challenge capitalism (Nuñez, 2021). Noting the disproportionate share of carbon emissions between the Global North and Global South TUCA called on the Global North to honour its share of the climate debt by providing aid to countries least responsible for carbon emissions.

COSATU (2022, 11) is of the view that “capitalist accumulation has been the underlying cause of excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore global warming and climate change.” The federation believes that developed countries must shoulder the lion’s share to service the climate debt.

Critical of the role that capitalist expansion has played in worsening the climate crisis through its reliance on fossil fuel economy, the OWTU of Trinidad and Tobago were equally outraged when their government planned to outsource the country’s renewable energy transition to oil producing companies, viz. Shell and BP (Warwick, 2024).

In its congress resolution, WFTU (2023) is explicit that capitalist accumulation and the drive for profits are the causes of global warming. “What lies at the root of the climate crisis is the tendency of capitalism to prioritise profits at the expense of the people and the environment” (WFTU Book 4, 2023, 17).

Agents

In the discourse on just transition, there are varied answers to the question of which social forces are to act as agents for the ecological shift.

Although ITUC believes that power and greed of global corporations have a stranglehold over governments, the confederation has called for a new global social contract to guarantee the inclusion of labour rights, decent work, a living minimum wage, collective bargaining and social protection as part of a package to ensure that workers interests in JT does not succumb to market forces (ITUC, n.d.). To pursue its JT strategy ITUC is committed to strengthening solidarity with social partners, civil society and communities. In 2016 ITUC established the Just Transition Centre to bring workers and their unions, businesses and governments together to find common ground in matters related to JT, e.g. The Just Transition Centre and the B-Team (2018) – a global consortium of business leaders, published a JT Business Guide to attract potential business corporations keen on implementing a JT in the workplace. Social dialogue plays an important role in facilitating ITUC’s engagement with social partners in all matters of JT.

In a working paper published by the Trade Union for Energy Democracy (TUED), two contrasting approaches to JT are discussed in some detail. According to Sweeney and Treat (2018, 19) the social dialogue approach “lies at the heart of global trade union politics [and] central to trade union engagement” around Just Transition, as well as challenges confronting workers such as collective bargaining, new forms of work, international trade and sustainable development. Grounded in the “historic compromise” or “social pact” politics of post-war Europe (Sweeney and Treat, 2018, 19) social dialogue has gained traction by organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and several global union federations. However, as Sweeney and Treat (2018, 19) argue social dialogue has its limitations, reducing trade unionists to the level of passive onlookers as opposed to “active agents of change”. In spite of sporadic periods of trade union militancy, social dialogue ... effectively codifies a rejection of “class struggle” politics in favour of a “permanent peace” (Sweeney and Treat, 2018, 19). They find it questionable whether social dialogue poses “any serious challenge to current arrangements of power, ownership and profit, opting instead to draw comfort from uncritical endorsement of “win-win” solutions and “green growth” for all” (Sweeney and Treat, 2018, 3).

By comparison the social power approach calls for a radical transformation and “restructuring of the global political economy ... guided by the belief that current power relations must be challenged and changed” (Sweeney and Treat, 2018, 5). Dobrusin (2021) believes that the two approaches serve to reinforce each other, bringing together a broad coalition of social forces and trade unions to participate on matters of social and ecological importance. Sweeney and Treat (2018, 4) are equally optimistic and believe that the “Social Power” approach is gaining prominence across the trade union movement backed by major social movements that share similar goals and ambitions.

At the Rio+20 conference in 2012 TUCA in collaboration with a broad coalition of social movements, indigenous organisations, peasants’ movements and allied trade unions expressed similar concerns of the corporate sector’s interests in JT and the green economy as nothing more than an attempt to commodify the transition to generate more profit at the expense of workers and the poor. In 2014 TUCA participated in the Lima Climate Summit in solidarity with a coalition of social forces critical of the current climate regime. TUCA also embraces social dialogue as a tool to shift the power relations in favour of the working class (Nuñez, 2021).

Workers from the energy and mining sectors affiliated with COSATU cautioned against a JT that “is being greenwashed and will contribute to a new wave of capital accumulation for the wealthy” (COSATU, 2022, 8). To counter the influence of the private sector in the JT discourse, the federation opted for a transformative agenda to ensure that the interests of workers were not compromised in the transition to an ecologically sustainable economy. COSATU’s participation in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) is anchored in social dialogue. But the federation is open to interaction with a broad range of social movements and institutions in pursuit of a transition that is fair and just.

OWTU also rejected its government's draft JT policy on the basis that it represented a shallow attempt to reinforce a business-as-usual approach to attract investment and increase profits. They also saw this as an attempt to introduce neoliberal economic reforms such as privatisation, deregulation and restructuring of state assets and to undermine the collective bargaining power of the trade unions (Warwick, 2024). The union made use of the media to raise public awareness of the government's weak JT proposals, but more serious canvassing involved setting up a task force to meet with workers and their families, community members, business representatives and other stakeholders to consolidate their views on the transition. While OWTU hasn't ruled out protests and strikes, the union is not averse to social dialogue in its dealings with officialdom and the business sector.

WFTU is very critical of the role of business in the transition. The global trade union federation warns against a possible business capture of just transition. The union body cautions its affiliates about dangers of a green transition being a new site of accumulation. The WFTU has pledged to cooperate and work with non-member organisations and other international trade union organisations on common problems to build solidarity and confront capitalism. Common problems include the destruction of the environment and pollution as well as issues of poverty, exploitation, erosion of social security and low wages (WFTU, 2023).

1.1.2 Environmental organisations and just transition

Confronted by the global ecological crisis international environmental non-governmental organisations and networks like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) and Climate Action Network (CAN) have built an effective public platform to pressure governments and corporations to keep global warming within 1.5°C, raise awareness of conservation and posit alternatives by connecting social justice to issues of sustainable development and climate change.

Definitions

Greenpeace International has aligned itself with the climate justice movement and advocates for a JT to an environmentally sustainable economy that focuses on quality jobs, decent livelihoods and the "creation of a fairer and more equal society" (Greenpeace, n.d.-a, para.8). The organisation represents and coordinates the work of a global network of 25 independent national/regional organisations. The scale of its operations stretches over 55 countries across Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Its scope has evolved beyond the coverage of harmful environmental practices to include issues of social and climate justice across all economic sectors as part of a broader JT to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of climate change and global warming.

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) believe that people and justice must be at the frontlines of a JT. With 70 member groups and regional structures across Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in the USA and

Canada, the federation is made up of autonomous organisations bound by a shared belief that the principle of justice and fairness must lie beneath any transition towards a sustainable and ecologically just society.

In a summary document *People Power Now – An Energy Manifesto*, FoEI sums up its demands, including amongst others a JT to protect vulnerable workers and their communities in the energy sector, 100% shift to renewable energy and a climate-just world free from all forms of oppression and inequality (FoEI, 2020). The organisation advocates for system change by placing people and justice at the frontlines of the transition (FoEI, 2023). According to the global network, resistance to neoliberal economic reform, the diminished role of the state, privatisation and deregulation must be part of the struggle for a just transition. The demand for system change highlights the growing ambition that the organisation has set in its manifesto for a better world.

Climate Action Network (CAN) represents approximately 1 900 civil society organisations in over 130 countries (CAN, n.d.-a). Tasked with coordinating the activities of civil society at the level of the multilateral climate negotiations such as UNFCCC conference of parties (COPs), CAN is a strong advocate for a JT that is all-inclusive, transparent and involves full participation of civil society in pursuing a transformative agenda to procure climate justice for all. CAN is aware that engagements with social, economic and political systems are necessary to achieve desired JT outcomes.

In 2018 activists in Britain launched a movement that they called Extinction Rebellion (XR). Backed by a set of ten values for a shared vision for change “underpinned by cultures rooted in respect for nature, genuine freedoms and justice”, XR is of the view that governments have to take immediate steps to accelerate a transition that is socially and ecologically just (XR, n.d.-a).

Drivers

Similar to unions, environmental groups are grappling with the question of what drivers are propelling global warming and climate change. Greenpeace International believes that the current economic system is primarily responsible for the climate crisis: “The never-ending race towards more economic growth, more profits, and more consumption is silencing alternative approaches” towards a more sustainable and climate-resilient economy (Greenpeace, n.d.-b, para. 2)

According to FoEI, the root causes of environmental and social decay stem from uneven power relations between the rich and the poor. The key drivers are corporate greed, profits, exploitation of the working class, gender and racial inequalities. These drivers lead to the indiscriminate plundering of the earth’s natural resources. FoEI argues that the current economic model “puts greed and private interests ahead of people and the planet” (FoEI, n.d., para. 1).

CAN argues that the underlying socio-economic and political systems are primarily responsible for the ecological crisis and that governments, particularly the largest emitters must be held accountable for the continuous stream of investments into fossil fuels – some \$250bn by the end of 2020 (CAN, n.d.-b).

XR believes that the cause of our toxic calamity lies squarely at the foot of governments inaction to stem the flow of carbon emissions exacerbated by fossil-driven economies that place growth before people (Lowe, 2020).

Agents

Greenpeace has evolved as one of the world's foremost environmental organisations and its support for a JT has reinforced its ambition for social and climate justice.

The movement recognises and collaborates with a range of civil society organisations championing the cause of a JT including labour, environmental, ecofeminist and indigenous groups. Greenpeace has secured an important place in climate negotiations and opened up spaces for marginalised communities to share their experiences often overlooked in mainstream economies.

FoEI works with social movements, including feminists, indigenous people and peasant movements across the globe to strengthen international solidarity struggles (e.g. Columbia, Ecuador, Honduras, Philippines, Palestine) against human rights violations, land dispossession and environmental destruction. By connecting the climate crisis to broader issues of social justice and sustainable development, FoEI has supported multiple initiatives amongst grassroots communities to build mutually beneficial cooperatives and public services to reduce inequality, promote gender equality and “expand the role of cooperation, community management and sustainable planning in all aspects of life” (FOEI, n.d., para. 6).

CAN commits itself to building organisational power across civil society and empowering grassroots movements and local communities to become active participants in transformative change. The bottom-up approach allows for transparency and ensures that JT decisions are democratically taken to serve the best interests of workers and communities affected by adverse climate conditions. The organisation works collectively with “trade unions, justice groups, youth movements, the women and gender constituency, faith groups and Indigenous People’s networks” (CAN, n.d.-c). Social dialogue underpins much of CAN’s work with social partners and the organisation has built a solid support base internationally by strengthening its research capacity.

XR brings people from all walks of life, cultures, political affiliations and encourages activists across the globe to act as non-partisan pressure groups to break the hiatus that has thus far prevented governments from taking meaningful steps to address the environmental crisis. There are no political barriers or leaders in XR and the movement supports non-violent action and civil disobedience to bring about change (XR, n.d.-b).

1.1.3 Ecofeminism and just transition

The extraction of critical minerals such as lithium and nickel that are necessary for construction of renewable and low-carbon technologies impact on women very negatively. This has prompted feminist advocacy groups to propose strong ecofeminist approaches to all aspects of the JT, for fear that if women are not involved in the planning and implementation of the JT projects, they could be left far worse off than they are, currently. Ecofeminism essentially argues that the destruction of the environment and oppression of women are the results of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy (Buckingham, 2015). The intersectional nature of challenges facing women means that none of problems that confront them can be solved without attending to coexisting problems. “(W)omen’s equality should not be achieved at the expense of worsening the environment, and neither should environmental improvements be gained at the expense of women” (Buckingham, 2015,1).

Definitions

According to Verónica Montúfar (2022, para. 4), Equalities Officer for Public Services International (PSI) a just and feminist alternative calls for a transition that addresses the change of the relations at the workplace “including the transformation of the sexual division of labour, the revalorisation of the work of women and feminised sectors, as well as the elimination of the patriarchy of the wage”. Montúfar (2022, para. 5) argues that the capitalist system of production alienates care work, is unjust and inequitable and “traps women in the sphere of the family (nuclear or collective), closing the doors to their participation, education, stability, equality and progression in the labour market”.

An ecofeminist perspective rejects the view that nature should be seen as a resource for humans to exploit, and also rejects a patriarchal approach that marginalises women from making decisions about their interactions with nature. It further highlights the “differentiated impacts of climate or environmental crisis on women specifically” (Randriamaro & Hargreaves, 2019, 20).

Ecofeminist perspectives on the JT often form part of a pluralised energy justice that incorporates feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, and postcolonial perspectives (Sovacool et al., 2023). The point then isn’t so much about women having access to more energy but rather one that challenges patriarchal and oppressive behaviour that tends to subordinate and exploit women in traditional energy sectors. (Bell et al cited in Sovacool et al., 2023, 2)

Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (cited in Clark, 2012, Ecofeminism section) is critical of the view that “women are more oppressed in traditional societies, and that Westernization and technological and economic development” has improved their lives in many ways. Shiva argues that traditional subsistence production promotes “greater interdependence and complementarity between men and women, whereas development typically marginalizes women, reduces their status and that of their labour, and increases male dominance” (Cited in Clark, 2012, Ecofeminism section).

Clark's appreciation for the work of Australian ecofeminist Ariel Salleh serves to deepen our understanding of political ecology "which is associated with efforts to reconcile differences, create harmony, access resources, and create a sphere of safety ... protection, and restoration at the level of the community and the larger world" (Salleh cited in Clark, 2012, Ecofeminist section). In addition to the social (exploitation of labour) and ecological debt (exploitation of our natural resources), Salleh argues that there is an "embodied debt, resulting from the reproductive labour of those who produce and care for those who constitute the labour force, and owed by those who benefit globally from this unpaid labour to those who perform it" (cited in Clark, 2012, Ecofeminism section).

Drivers: Feminist Organisations

In September 2023 the second West and Central African Women's Climate Assembly released a declaration condemning "the new 'green' exploitation of Africa's resources, and false climate solutions that allow big corporations to keep harming the planet and make more money" (WCA, 2023, para. 3).

WCA (2023) argues that the JT concept brings with it, the imposition without consultation of "so-called development". The organisation calls for women to have a say in decisions made about their land, and "clean energy solutions that serve us, as women, and our communities, and which we have full control over" (WCA, 2023). Representing some sixty-two communities from twelve countries across West and Central Africa the organisation has called on their governments to cease collaboration with corporations dependent on fossil fuel energy to drive development. WCA is passionate about earth's resources such as land, rivers, forests, and sea. It is also united in its belief that nature together with all those who live on it, including plants, animals, and all living species must be protected from polluting agents and corrupt bureaucrats that continue to destroy the planet in the name of development.

In the United States (US) feminist organisations such as Grid Alternatives that provide low-income households with solar energy and Mothers Out Front, an advocacy group that actively opposes the development of new fossil infrastructure, highlight that women are marginalised from renewable energy discussions in JT (Allen et al., 2019). Both these organisations recognise that the fossil fuel industry has a negative impact on human health and the natural environment and emphasised the importance of gender inclusivity in their work to reshape their thinking on environmental activism. They believe that the industry is directly responsible for climate change. They also believe that the fossil fuel industry has been fanning climate denialism. But denialism is gradually changing amongst new entrants that have joined both movements in pursuit of social and environmental justice. (Allen et al., 2019)

Established in 1991, Women's Environment Development Organisation (WEDO) with its headquarters in New York is a global movement that has consistently championed the cause of environmental justice with a strong gendered orientation. WEDO recognises that capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism are interlinked forces that perpetuate oppression and the exploitation of resources and "concentration of wealth in the hands of a few contributing to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and other global and socioeconomic crises" (WEDO, 2023, 6).

WEDO's principles for a gendered JT include shifting power to communities and countries in the Global South that have been disadvantaged through colonialism and the imposition of capitalism. It is also about redistributing resources in a just and equitable manner, the creation of decent work, and the removal of barriers that exclude women from participating fully in all aspects of economic life (WEDO, 2023). The organisation operates across the globe and its scope covers all aspects of social, economic and political dimensions to ensure that JT is built on a solid foundation grounded in principles of equity, justice and feminist values that are often overlooked in the realm of policymaking.

Agents

By bringing together women-led movements against dirty energy, WCA has provided an important platform for some 72 communities and 23 supporting organisations in Central and West Africa. This has enabled these communities and organisations to articulate and formulate their positions on a JT and to present their views in multilateral institutions such as the UNFCCC (WCA, 2023).

In Africa the *Lumière et Synergie pour le Développement* (LSD), a member of the Coalition of African Civil Society Organisations on the African Development Bank, and the *WoMin African Gender and Extractives Alliance*, also known as *WoMin*, have devised an ecofeminist assessment framework that can be used both to study polluting industries and JT projects. This framework evaluates projects based on whether women have been involved in the planning and research in a participatory manner and their involvement in the “implementation and ongoing monitoring” of the project (Randriamaro & Hargreaves, 2019: 20).

In Carolina, a small town surrounded by coal mines and coal-fired power stations in the province of Mpumalanga, South Africa, residents face a bleak and uncertain future (Majavu, 2023). Apart from living in a polluted environment that threatens their health women interviewed for a report said “they fear for their future if the province’s coal industry is closed down as part of a transition to less-polluting power generation. They called for a greater role for women in decision-making, better education about climate change in both classrooms and communities, and for transparency over companies’ green transition plans” (Majavu, 2023, Key Ideas).

Another example highlights the role played by activists to prevent the development of coal mines on the border of Africa’s oldest wildlife reserve, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi (Bond, 2019). As tensions grew amongst residents in the Somkhele and Fuleni villages flanking the reserves southeastern entrance - “Somkhele men expressing a desperate need for work ... on the one hand, and women articulating their self-preservation of homes, clean air, water access, small farms and livelihoods on the other”, activists working together with eco-feminist women farmers, environmentalists and the group *African Women Unite against Destructive Extraction* (*WoMin*) waged a prolific struggle against extractive industries that threatened their livelihoods. (Bond, 2019, ‘Coalisation’ section). While activists have successfully prevented a coal mine from opening at Fuleni, “mineworkers and ethnic leaders in league with the coal company” succeeded in obtaining a court ruling to expand the existing Somkhele mine. (Bond, 2019, ‘Coalisation’ section).

Mothers Out Front and Grid Alternatives rely on volunteers to promote the goals of their respective organisations. Using their maternal instincts Mothers Out Front has attracted activist volunteers to promote policy and fulfil the task of women as protectors and defenders of communities. Grid Alternatives has a dedicated program to recruit more women trainees into the solar and renewable energy industry by offering them an opportunity to acquire installation skills (Allen et al., 2019).

WEDO (2023) coordinates and provides secretariat and fiscal support to several feminist advocacy groups and coalitions. In addition, the organisation publishes periodical briefs to support trade unions, partners, civil society and allies engaged in matters of mutual interest such as implementation of JT policies and programmes.

1.1.4 Indigenous peoples and just transition

As communities that find themselves deeply attached to nature unmitigated climate shocks threaten indigenous people’s livelihoods. It is therefore understandable that an important voice is emerging amongst indigenous peoples affirming their right to be heard on JT.

Representatives of indigenous communities are asserting their voices in international institutions like the UNFCCC and Conference of the Parties (COPs). They are also doing so at a national and subnational levels by resisting attempts to dispossess them of their land. Examples of these are those of the NoDAPL (NoDakota Access Pipeline) movement in the US (Kojola, 2021) and the struggle over land usage waged by the National Māori Forestry Association in New Zealand (Dewes, n.d.).

Definitions

The International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) has a clear position on JT. The movement believes that their “rights, perspectives, knowledge systems and lived experience” must be considered in the definition and implementation of JT projects (IIPFCC, 2024). The forum has called on the UNFCCC to set up a dedicated fund to be directly accessed and managed by indigenous peoples to strengthen and develop mitigation and adaptation strategies and protect their livelihoods that have been threatened by climate change. They also want the UNFCCC to commit to the principle of free prior and informed consent (FPIC) to enable indigenous people to participate and decide on their future (IIPFCC, n.d.-a).

The Indigenous Environment Network (IEN) represents a movement that is deeply attached to nature and sensitive to the historical injustice that has displaced indigenous communities through colonialism and forced removals from their land. To the IEN, JT “is a framework for a fair shift to an economy that is ecologically sustainable, equitable and just” (IEN, n.d.-a). The movement adopted a set of resolute principles in support of a just transition. In its principles, IEN rejects the commercialisation of nature. The organisation’s framework includes the right of indigenous people to determine their future, sovereignty, restoration of the ecosystem that forefronts indigenous knowledge, affinity and respect for earth’s

resources, indigenous-based green economy, meaningful work and sustainable community-based planning.

Drivers

The IIPFCC recognises that major infrastructure projects and industrial agriculture contribute significantly to the rise of greenhouse gases and climate change. The forum fears that greenwashing will ditch the good intentions of a JT, if proper environmental safeguards and rights are disregarded (IIPFCC, 2024).

The IEN, on the other hand is critical of “the profit-driven, growth-dependent, industrial economy” (IEN, n.d.-a). Supported by 100 environmental and frontline groups the organisation petitioned the Senior Advisor to the President of the US for International Climate Policy to oppose carbon markets and offsets. They claim both mechanisms as nothing more than a sham that will permit highly developed countries to redeem carbon credits by paying poorer countries not to pollute (IEN, 2024).

Agents

The Indigenous Peoples (IP) Caucus represents members interests across global, national and subnational levels by providing a platform for representatives to share their views, priorities and proposals. This allows them to canvass their positions for inclusion in the IIPFCC mandate that is presented at the UNFCCC’s Conference of Parties (COPs) on climate change. (IIPFCC, n.d.-b).

Since its establishment in 1990, the IEN has grown into a formidable force providing support to indigenous communities not only in the US, but globally as well. The involvement of grassroots indigenous communities has swelled the ranks of the movement and strengthened their resolve to protect their natural resources such as land, water and air for all living species. The IEN has consistently campaigned for environmental and economic justice by building the capacity of the organisation through education and public awareness and by confronting their adversaries through direct public action. This they have done by building alliances with indigenous communities across the US, and by cementing ties with faith-based and women groups, youth, labour and environmental organisations (IEN, n.d.-b).

1.2 Just transition as policy

Since the conclusion of the Paris Agreement in 2015, there have been ongoing attempts to make and turn the JT concept into a concrete and implementable policy. These attempts are happening at various levels: multilateral, regional, national and subnational levels. Companies and business corporations are also involved in aligning their practices to the JT concept. According Hizliok and Scheer (2024) the integration of JT principles into corporate strategies and practices, as well as private sector’s financial participation have to be aligned with the overall objectives of the transition to ensure that the process unfolds evenly.

1.2.1 UNFCCC and just transition

At a multilateral level, the UNFCCC is the governing body responsible for climate change negotiations. The convention initiates action plans to reduce carbon emissions and provides technical and fiscal support to countries most affected by the adverse effects of climate change.

The UNFCCC adopted the UAE COP28 JT Work Programme in 2023 as the base document to guide the organisation in its work to achieve a just transition over the coming years. Member states are encouraged to establish JT Commissions that are all-inclusive and JT Framework policies to identify decent work opportunities and social protection measures. Regional initiatives focus on transitions in areas of high carbon activities, like coal-producing regions (Hizliok and Scheer, 2024). Until 2015 when the Paris Agreement was reached at COP21, the UNFCCC made no mention of the just transition (JT) concept. Except at the launch of the conference of the UNFCCC’s technical paper on just transition of the workforce, decent work and quality jobs, reference to just transition at the conference only found its way to the Paris Agreement’s preamble in 2015 (Müllerova, 2023).

Since then, attempts have been made to incorporate the JT concept into global climate negotiations. The first step was at COP24 in Poland where 50 countries signed the Silesia Declaration on Solidarity and Just Transition in 2018. After parties agreed to support just transition at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, a year later the Sharm El Sheik Implementation Plan agreed on a work programme on just transition. It is this programme that was adopted at COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Proposals have been adopted to turn JT into concrete and implementable actions to address the climate crisis.

The UAE Consensus, which is the title given to COP28 agreements, states that when tackling climate change, parties to the agreement should “respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity” (UNFCCC, 2023a, 1-2).

The UAE Consensus acknowledges the decision taken at COP26 in Glasgow which said that the aim of just transition is promotion of sustainable development, poverty eradication, creation of decent work and quality jobs. The Conference of Parties (COP) two years before the last one emphasised that these objectives of just transition could be realised through urgent financial flows to developing countries, deployment and transfer of technology (UNFCCC, 2023a). The international body further underscores that all these measures must occur “through social dialogue, social protection and the recognition of labour rights” and “inclusive and participatory approaches” (UNFCCC, 2023a, 2).

COP28 Climate Action (UNFCCC, 2023b, 1) is underpinned by four key pillars that will oversee the implementation of the Just Transition Works Programme through various institutional arrangements:

- i) fast-tracking a just, orderly, and equitable energy transition.
- ii) fixing climate finance.
- iii) focusing on people, lives and livelihoods; and
- iii) underpinning everything with full inclusivity

1.2.2 Regional initiatives

There have been other multilateral initiatives to define just transition, albeit on a regional level. At the level of the European Union (EU), there is the 8th General Union Environmental Action Plan (EAP) to 2030 which promises to meet agreed climate and environmental goals while “protecting the health and well-being of people from environmental risks and impacts and ensuring a just and inclusive transition should be the priority” (European Parliament, 2022, art. 5).

EAP to 2030 came in the footsteps of the European Commission’s Communication on the European Green Deal announced in December 2019. The Green Deal saw the establishment of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) with arms such as the Just Transition Fund, Invest EU Just Transition Scheme and the Public Sector Loan Facility. The motivation for setting up these mechanisms is simply that, it is vulnerable workers and citizens that climate change and ecological degradation adversely affect.

These changes are also expected to unevenly affect regions and states. Mechanisms such JTM and its arms are designed to make the transition just. Through the Just Transition Fund, economic diversification programmes and reskilling of affected workers will be initiated. Invest EU Just Transition Scheme and the Public Sector Loan Facility are there to support infrastructure projects linked to decarbonisation. To access funding under the JTM EU countries have to develop Territorial Just Transition Plans aligned to their national energy and climate plans and the EU’s ambition to phase out coal by 2030. The plans have to be submitted to the EU Commission for approval (WRI, 2021b).

Some criticism has been levelled at the JTM, e.g. lack of involvement of trade unions, workers and other stakeholders in planning and governance, failure of most affected member states to align or adopt targets in sync with EU goals and the reduction of the fund from 40 billion euros to 17.5 billion euros as inadequate to cover the broader ambition of JTM towards a fossil free sustainable economy. However, JTM has been lauded for targeting those affected in the most vulnerable regions, e.g. workers and communities whose livelihoods depend on coal. The JTM has also played a positive role by providing support for Territorial Just Transition Plans and the provision of technical assistance to public authorities by the JT Platform and EU banks to beef up local administrative capacity in regions most affected by the transition (WRI, 2021b).

An African Union (AU) press statement released in July 2022 stated that at its 41st ordinary session, the AU Executive Council adopted the “African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Transition” (AU, 2022, para.1). The statement said that the AU will pursue the goals of universal energy access and transition “without compromising its development imperatives” (AU, 2022, para.1). The regional body vowed to utilise “all forms of its abundant energy resources including renewable and non-renewable energy to address energy demand” (AU, 2022, para. 2). Included in the list was gas, green and low-carbon hydrogen and nuclear energy.

Outlining dimensions of justice such as redistributive, restorative and procedural justice, the African Development echoes sentiments similar to those of the AU. “A Just transition affirms Africa’s right to development and industrialization based on the Paris Agreement negotiated language of equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances” (African Development Bank, 2022, A JT towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient future, para. 4).

1.2.3 National initiatives

Consistent with the UNFCCC call for member states to form JT Commissions and policy frameworks, several countries have proceeded to do so. To illustrate how they have gone about doing this, we focus on developments in Spain and South Africa. The two countries have made remarkable progress by becoming the first among many countries that have adopted framework policies towards achieving a JT (KCI, 2022).

Both countries are heavily dependent on fossil fuels and coal is the major source of electricity. Drawing from official documents and country specific reports such as the UNFCCC Katowice Committee on Impacts (KCI), ITUC Just Transition Centre and some individual accounts of JT strategies (Azzellini, 2023), the two case studies serve to illustrate some of the concrete proposals that these countries have implemented since the inclusion of JT in the Paris Agreement preamble of 2015.

A. Spain

Decarbonisation of Spain’s economy has been the driving force for the adoption of pro-JT policies to mitigate the adverse effect of job losses in the energy and mining sectors. In 2019 the Spanish government approved the Strategic Framework for Energy and Climate to facilitate the country’s transition towards “an economic, sustainable and competitive model to help curb climate change” (MITECO, 2020, 4). The framework document is supported by a set of three key instruments: the draft bill on Climate Change and Energy Transition which sets an ambitious target of 100% renewable energy and neutral greenhouse gases by 2050; a draft National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (PNIEC) to reduce 23% of GHG emissions by 2030 and a Just Transition Strategy to ensure that the ecological change is fully inclusive of all people and territories (MITECO, 2020). A €250 million fund was set aside to drive projects initiated by the JT framework. However, it should be noted that prior to the strategic

framework, JT agreements were in place to oversee sectors such as coal mining and thermal power plants. These sectoral agreements signed by the trade unions, companies and government in 2018 and 2020 respectively, to reinforce territorial just transition agreements and protect affected workers (KCI, 2022).

Unlike earlier agreements that lacked participation, Spain's new JT Strategy is participatory and takes a holistic view of sectors affected by closures, predominantly coal, some thermal and nuclear plants. Previous agreements paid no attention to territorial agreed planning and focused on protecting the workforce as well as providing aid to companies. The signing of just transition agreements between government, trade unions and companies across all regions affected by climate transition policies and the adoption of Territorial Action Plans form an important part of the strategy (MITECO, 2020).

By mapping out specific actions and collaboration between administrative structures and finance agents responsible for development projects that create jobs, the strategy is now firmly anchored to drive Spain's transition towards a more socially just and ecologically sustainable economy (KCI, 2022). Under the banner of the JT Strategy and responsible to the Ministry for Ecological Transition, the Institute for Just Transition plays an important role by providing "technical, financial and legal assistance for just transition agreements, identification and optimization of opportunities for economic activity" and support for industrial, training and employment policies amongst ministerial departments, regional authorities and municipalities (KCI, 2022, 36).

Prior to the publication of this KCI report the Institute for Just Transition was committed to processing fourteen just transition agreements to oversee the closure of ten coal-fired power stations and two nuclear power plants spread across the country (KCI, 2022). Plans to decarbonise key sectors of the economy such as industrial, transport, mining and tourism have been aligned to substantive macroeconomic policies. This is part of a broader transition to transform the economy, promote employment opportunities in a green economy and to achieve socially-desirable outcomes, in a way that is mutually beneficial to humans and nature (MITECO, 2020).

According to the Just Transition Centre (2019, 12) "an action plan will be created for each mining community, including plans for developing renewable energy and improving energy efficiency, and investing in and developing new industries". The Plan de Carbón includes training for employment in productive sectors of the green economy, proactive employment policies and social security measures. A key component of the action plan is to focus attention on coal mining regions of the country and power plant closures. Extraordinary measures include early retirement and severance pay for workers affected by the transition (WEF, 2015).

A broader recovery programme to upgrade facilities in former mining communities includes areas targeted for rehabilitation and environmental restoration, forest recovery, water treatment plants, utilities infrastructure and recycling facilities. (Just Transition Centre, 2019) The strategy has a strong gender focus geared towards increasing the role of women in all aspects of the transition, promoting cooperatives

and non-profit companies and establishing specialised employment programmes for regions most affected by the transition (Azzellini, 2023).

Spain increased its emissions the most between 2014 and 2017 and ranks 20th amongst countries that contributed to the global ecological footprint (MITECO, 2020). The country acknowledges that climate change is directly linked to the energy system that is heavily dependent on fossil fuels. Air pollution is cited as a serious problem and the country has been urged to take serious stock of its water resources. (MITECO, 2020). According to Ecologistas en Acción, an alliance representing radical environmental groups, the capitalist system has to be overcome for social and ecological transformation to take place (Ecologistas en Acción 2019, cited in Azzellini, 2023, 49).

Social dialogue forms the basis of consultations and negotiations amongst social partners. The signatories to the Just Transition Framework Agreements include a broad pact of institutional agents made up of the Ministry for Ecological Transition, regional and local administrations, companies, trade unions and social organisations. The road leading up to the signing of these agreements is an all-inclusive public participatory process (KCI, 2022). Trade union representatives from the CCOO (Comisiones Obreras) and the union UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores) played an important role in identifying projects and possible sources of finance to execute the action plan (KCI, 2022). The coalition between the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español) and the left-leaning Unidas Podemos (United We Can) are supportive of progressive environmental legislation to decarbonise Spain and work closely with the trade unions (Azzellini, 2023).

In 2020, environmental organisations like Ecologistas en Acción, Greenpeace Spain and Oxfam Intermón instituted legal action against the Spanish government for not taking a firmer stance against climate change. They argued that the court should rule in favour of a new nationally integrated energy and climate plan that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 (Azzellini, 2023). Ecologistas en Acción represents an alliance of some 300 environmental groups that sees capitalism as the problem responsible for climate change. The organisations are not opposed to the Green New Deal (GND) but argue that further steps are necessary beyond the provision of “solar energy, electric vehicles and sustainable consumption” to decarbonise Spain’s economy (Azzellini, 2023, 49).

B. South Africa

South Africa ranks amongst the world’s top 15 carbon emitters and its dependence on coal to provide more than 80% of the country’s electricity has come at a huge cost to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the country (KCI, 2022).

In January 2024, the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy issued a notice inviting the public to comment on the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) 2023 (DMRE, 2024). The Plan sets out the country’s diversified energy mix, but coal remains the dominant source of electricity generation (38 GW installed capacity) as per IRP 2019 (DMRE, 2019). Notwithstanding the country’s commitment to diversify its energy mix, South Africa is confident that it would meet its revised nationally determined

contributions (NDC's) target ranges of 398 to 510 Mt CO₂-eq for 2025, and 398 to 440 Mt CO₂-eq for 2030 (PCC, 2021).

Since 2011 the country has adopted several initiatives to mainstream JT into policy documents such as the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP2030) and its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in 2015 (WRI, 2021c). In June 2022 the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) released a report entitled "A Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa" (PCC, 2022). Government, labour, civil society and business are amongst some of the key social agents that contributed widely to the drafting of the country's JT Framework document. The views of communities affected by mining and environmental organisations were also canvassed during the drafting process of the framework document. Anchored in social dialogue prior consultation with social partners at the level of the National Planning Commission and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) provided valuable insight into the drafting of a vision for the JT Framework (PCC, 2022).

In its definition of a JT the report highlights quality of life, eradication of poverty, social inclusion and decent work, as the objectives of JT. The document asserts the right of marginalised communities, women, the disabled and youth to participate in a transition that directly affects their future and that of the environment. (PCC, 2022). The report goes on to say that a JT can be achieved "through affordable, decentralised, diversely owned renewable energy systems; conservation of natural resources; equitable access of water resources; an environment that is not harmful to one's health and well-being; and sustainable, equitable, inclusive land use for all, especially for the most vulnerable" (PCC, 2022, 7).

In addition to placing people at the centre of the transition, the framework emphasises the need for distributive justice to mitigate the impact of the transition on those affected the most, restorative justice addressing historical damages to communities and the environment and procedural justice that would allow those affected by the transition to determine their own "development and livelihoods" (PCC, 2022, 9). These three dimensions of the framework underscore the importance of SA JT policy to decarbonise the economy in a way that benefits both humans and nature. The principle of distributive justice highlights the need to consider race, gender and class inequalities so that workers and communities do not have to bear the costs of the transition. Distributive justice also places an obligation on those responsible for the climate and social crisis to bear the cost of the transition. Restorative justice is about addressing "historical damages against individuals, communities and the environment" while procedural justice embodies support for trade unions, civil society and advocacy groups to participate fully in the transition decision making process. (PCC, 2022, 9).

The remaining pillars of the framework include an assessment of risk sectors and value chains, key policy areas to address the transition, governance and finance. According to the framework document South Africa would need US\$250 billion over the next 30 years to finance changes to the energy system and at least US\$10 billion "to support workers and communities in the transition e.g., compensation, retraining, relocation, and rehabilitation of regions and communities" (PCC, 2022, 24). Through

the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) South Africa has secured US\$8.5 billion from USA, UK, EU, France and Germany to support the country's JT initiatives. The framework identifies a number of priority interventions to translate the aims of the JT into desirable social outcomes.

While South Africa's leading trade union federation COSATU "centres capitalism as the cause of the climate crisis" (COSATU, 2022, 10), the Climate Justice Movement (CJM) has been more vocal in its critique of the JT framework document. According to members of the Climate Justice Charter Movement (Satgar, et al., 2022, para. 5), South Africa's JT framework fails "to underline the climate emergency challenge we face and the need to place the country on a climate emergency footing". Recent announcements by the country's energy utility Eskom to postpone the decommissioning of three coal fired powered plants to 2030 (Faku, 2024) serves to vindicate CJM's position that SA is not addressing decarbonisation policies seriously. According to Satgar, et al. (2022) the framework document fails to address the issue of decarbonisation of key utilities such as Eskom and Sasol and other intensive energy users like foundries and smelters. CJM members also noted the frameworks lukewarm response to restorative justice. Although restorative justice is mentioned, the framework stops short of holding the rich responsible for paying their ecological debt (Satgar, et al., 2022).

1.2.4 Subnational initiatives

Cities and states or provinces have been active in translating the JT concept into an implementable policy. Approximately 100 city mayors drawn from Europe, North and South America, East Asia, South and West Asia and Southeast Asia and Oceania have come together in a coalition called C40 to explore ways to deal with climate change and just transition at city levels. In this section, we will focus on the activities of C40 and Colorado State to understand what subnational governments are doing on just transitions.

A. C40 activities on just transition

C40 members have pledged to reduce greenhouse gases and limit global warming to 1.5°C in line with the Paris Agreement of 2015. To do this the C40 Climate Action Planning Framework was created in 2018 to support cities whose level of ambition to reduce greenhouse gas emissions matched that set by the Paris Agreement, viz. 1.5°C. The Cities Climate Transition Framework of 2023 is the most recent update based on progress and lessons learnt since the adoption of the 2018 framework document. (C40, n.d.-a). A Climate Action Planning Guide provided a useful template for cities to design appropriate action plans according to specific needs and requirements. The guide highlights the need for stakeholder and community engagement to ensure that the process is all inclusive and collaborative. Support from communities and residents adversely affected by climate change, as well as involvement of civil society groups, businesses associations, city government departments and academic experts paved

the way for the adoption of a more credible, strong and politically acceptable plan (C40, n.d.-b).

The Urban Climate Action Programme (UCAP) with financial support from the UK provides assistance to 15 C40 cities in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. The support comes in the form of providing customised technical assistance and capacity building to projects including renewable waste management, low emission public transport systems and energy efficiency. The incorporation of climate action into city governance planning and decision-making structures forms part of UCAP. (C40, n.d. - c).

B. Colorado

In 2019 the State of Colorado passed “A Bill for an Act Concerning a Just Transition from Coal-Based Electrical Energy Economy” (WRI, 2021, para. 3). The Bill opened the way for a JT plan to mitigate the adverse effects of job losses resulting from the closure of coal mines and coal-fired power stations across the state of Colorado. Legislation provided for the establishment of an Office of Just Transition (OJT) to coordinate, protect and provide support to coal miners and their families during the period of transition. Also provided was the establishment of a Just Transition Advisory Committee (JTAC) to develop a draft plan to give effect to “a just and inclusive transition” as part of Colorado’s decarbonisation policy (CDLE, 2020, 1).

Colorado’s Just Transition Action Plan places displaced workers and their communities at the centre. This is to ensure that their livelihoods are not disadvantaged as a result of the transition away from coal. The plan intends “to help workers who are laid off from the coal industry or related businesses secure good new jobs ... without sacrificing their families’ economic security” (CDLE, 2020, 2).

The issue of economic diversification to counter the negative impacts of closure proved to be a challenge for all stakeholders involved in the transition. By supporting communities to determine their own economic options, the plan has put in place measures to attract investment and funding from public, private and non-profit sources (CDLE, 2020). The legislature has allocated \$32.5 million to fund the operations of the OJT, split between \$17.5 million for economic development and \$15 million for worker support programmes (Bluegreen Alliance, 2023).

In addition to a long-term commitment from the Colorado General Assembly to support the transition, the action plan has formulated several strategies to address community challenges and to protect the economic well-being of coal workers and their families. According to Bluegreen Alliance (2023) the OJT has prioritised seven areas to drive the transition: economic development, worker support, negotiations with utilities, negotiations with mines and supply chain companies, legislative strategy, communications and resource management.

The JTAC has also made provision to work with low-to-middle income communities and indigenous groups that have been disproportionately affected by pollution. This forms part of a longer term strategy to ensure that the transition keeps track of environmental considerations and legislation (CDLE, 2020).

The urgency to address the global impact of fossil fuels on the environment solicited a positive response from progressive members of the Colorado General Assembly. Without disregarding the economic significance that coal played in their economy, the decision to close coal mines and coal-fired power plants brought with it an ambitious JT strategy to address environmental concerns without compromising the security of mine workers and their families during the period of transition.

The JTAC is made up 19-persons with “representatives from local government, state government, organized labour, utility companies, and workforce and economic development” (Bluegreen Alliance, 2023, 1). An alliance between environmentalists, environmental justice communities and labour persuaded hesitant unions to become part of a participatory and transparent process to manage a transition that is fair and just (Stevis, 2023).

1.2.5 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s), Business and just transition

Based on scientific evidence presented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of the United Nations to keep “global warming below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C” (B4IG, 2021, 2) there appears to be an understanding amongst some global corporations that net-zero emissions have to be achieved by 2050 to avert a climate crisis that has already had catastrophic consequences.

The 111th session of the International Labour Conference, 2023 singled out the role of social partners as indispensable in the process leading up to a just transition. Transition agents outside of labour that are involved in struggles to mitigate the disastrous effects of climate change include Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s), indigenous movements, marginalised women struggling against extractivism and young people worried about the future have resisted attempts by pro-fossil adversaries to mute their voices. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) further recognises that the private and public sectors have a crucial role to play alongside social partners in facilitating a transition that would respect and promote “freedom of association and collective bargaining as enabling rights” (ILO, 2023:3).

According to Lyon (2010, 1) NGO’s “lobby governments to adopt new policies, campaign against corporate polluters, partner with forward-looking companies to adopt sustainable practices, purchase endangered habitats, reach out to educate the public [and] monitor compliance with environmental laws”. Although a considerable amount of work has to be done to enhance our understanding of NGO’s and the impact that they have in shaping environmental policy - “they seem to fall between the cracks that divide the social sciences” (Lyon, 2010, 1). Lyon (2010) goes on to argue that NGO’s have emerged as important players, often playing a dual role in advancing social justice in tandem with ecological protection. Two broad strategies that have emerged from their engagement with corporations and government can be summed up either in the form of direct action-confrontation (e.g. Rainforest Action Network successful boycott campaign in the 1980’s to stop Burger King from sourcing

beef from regions contributing to deforestation) or consensus through “constructive partnerships” such as 2000 Global Compact on Environmental Protection endorsed by multinational corporations, United Nations and the World Wildlife Fund and Amnesty International.

To avoid oversimplifying the role of NGO’s, Stevis (2023, 3) argues that not everyone has found favour with just transition and that “many unions, communities, corporations and states are indifferent or opposed to transitions ... even if they support other social or ecologically welfare policies”. For example, in the struggle to halt the development of coal mines on the border of Africa’s oldest wildlife reserve, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi in KwaZulu-Natal, not all NGO’s opposing the coal mines have been united in purpose, with some adopting a reformist approach “to merely ameliorate local damage from mining, and who rarely if ever consider climate change” as a threat to the preservation of natural resources (Bond, 2019, ‘Coalisation’ section). Notwithstanding the differences in approach, corporations have had to weigh up the pros and cons of non-collaboration with agents representing NGO’s. Consumer boycotts could be harmful and corporate reputations tarnished, but the flip side of the coin also carries rewards in the form of endorsements and mutual benefits (Lyon, 2010). Depending on the issue at stake the pendulum could swing in either direction. Where battle lines have been drawn between NGO’s and corporations, e.g. the current case between Energy Transfer (company behind the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline) vs Greenpace USA (part of a global environment movement acting in solidarity with the indigenous people affected by the construction of the pipeline), the courts too have been called upon to adjudicate in matters that could indirectly affect the rights of indigenous people to protect their physical and cultural environment from harm. While the jury in the North Dakota Court delivered a verdict for the sum of US\$660m in favour of Energy Transfer, Greenpeace USA has vowed to appeal against a judgement that some in the movement believe is an attempt to silence dissenting voices in the environmental justice movement (Kusnetz, 2025).

Across the globe countries have embraced JT by implementing policies, projects and programmes to meet their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC’s) and reduce carbon emissions. Stevis (2023) points out that the concept of JT has also found resonance amongst the corporate sector - business advocacy groups and philanthropies, e.g. the Just Transition Fund in the USA, Bloomberg Philanthropies, the European Climate Foundation, and Foundations Platform F20 representing some of the major economies belonging to the G20 group of countries.

In the last few years, numerous individual companies have adopted plans to align their business models with the JT concept. Spearheaded by a global coalition of major corporations called Business for Inclusive Growth (B4IG), a number of companies have taken a keen interest in climate politics through B4IG’s Working Group on Just Transition. In a statement issued in November 2021, the coalition called for putting of “people at the heart of climate action” (B4IG, 2021, 1).

B4IG believes that JT presents an opportunity to transition to a more sustainable economic model. By juxtaposing the need to maximise positive environmental outcomes alongside the need to minimise adverse social impacts (B4IG 2021). The

organisation argues that vulnerable workers, communities, and consumers should be insulated from the negative effects of the transition through constructive dialogue with all social partners including governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations and citizens (B4IG, 2021).

B4IG has proposed a set of indicators to strengthen its partnership with social partners. These include consultations amongst companies, unions and civil society, creating new opportunities for employment, reskilling and upskilling to meet the demands of ecological change and access to affordable goods and services for consumers (B4IG, 2021).

The Council for Inclusive Capitalism, another global business network, has adopted a Just Transition Framework for Company Action. In its framework the Council proposes four pillars that should underlie a JT: universal access to energy and net-zero carbon emissions; support from the energy workforce for a zero carbon energy future; building community resilience; collaboration and transparency (Council for Inclusive Capitalism, n.d.).

The work of Climate Action 100+ is coordinated by five investor networks on climate change with more than 700 investors “engaging companies on improving climate change governance, cutting emissions and strengthening climate-related financial disclosures, in order to create long-term shareholder value” (Climate Action 100+, n.d.-a). Through its Net Zero Company Benchmark the group is able to assess whether the world’s largest corporate greenhouse gas emitters are taking remedial action to reduce their carbon footprint (Climate Action100+, n.d.-b). In addition the Benchmark serves as an evaluation tool to improve governance, strengthen climate-related financial disclosure and “implementation of net-zero transition plans” (Climate Action100+, n.d.-b).

2. Findings and Analysis

In our review of the literature, several issues have emerged that underscore the expansive nature of the discourse on JT. However, our findings are not by any means conclusive. Hopefully, they will add to the growing list of debates that have become part of the JT discourse.

Finding 1: Different meanings of the concept

What emerges from the literature review conducted is that the JT concept has different meanings. Different people and sectors give it interpretations, leading to different framings. The framings are used to distinguish between different meanings.

Cock (2011, 2014), COSATU (2022) and Satgar (2018) distinguish between a shallow and deep just transition. According to Cock (2011, 1) “a ‘just transition’ could involve demands for shallow change focused on protecting vulnerable workers, or it could involve deep change rooted in a vision of dramatically different forms of production and consumption”. The latter approach directly challenges the logic of capitalist

accumulation. It ensures that resources and power are distributed equitably and fairly without being compromised by those “that favour profit over any social, environmental or labour consideration” (Nuñez, 2022, 32). Trade unions such as the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU), starting from the distinction between shallow and deep just transition argue that since capitalism is the underlying cause of the climate crisis, a “broad and transformative transition” is necessary to change the economic system (COSATU, 2022, 10).

In many respects, there is little difference between the above distinction and the differences between minimalist and transformative JT approaches that Bell et al. (2023) point to. Drawing from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s articulation of ‘hegemony’ which sees wealth and power as the preserve of a privileged class, Bell et al. (2023, 282) argue that the formation of counter-hegemonic forces or blocs is incumbent upon those wanting a broader transformative vision of JT. They go on to argue that the dominant capitalist class favour solutions that are “focussed almost entirely on decarbonisation rather than wider sustainability issues” (Bell et al., 2023, 284).

In their interpretation of JT, Krawchenko and Gordon (2021, 1) argue that the transition could either focus on jobs, and the environment or take on a much wider dimension in what they call a “society-focused JT”. In a ‘jobs-focused’ approach the emphasis on protecting the livelihoods of workers and communities is paramount. This approach also calls on the state and capital to assume some responsibility towards workers affected by the transition, like that put forward by Stevis and Felli (2014) in their characterisation of JT. In an environment-focused approach the preoccupation of achieving zero carbon emissions by 2050 through technical applications is on top of the JT agenda while the ‘society-focused’ approach has wider implications to safeguard the interests of workers, communities and society by advocating for system change and “universal equity and justice” (Krawchenko and Gordon, 2021, 2).

In their framing of a JT, Felli (2014) and Stevis and Felli (2014) identified three paradigms that impact labour. The first paradigm is the shared solution approach where global trade unions are encouraged to collaborate with international organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) to win support for growth in the green economy. This approach is strongly supported by mainline unions within the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and favours a partnership amongst social actors such as governments, businesses and labour to facilitate a win-win situation for all.

The second paradigm is the differentiated responsibility approach. It calls on the state and businesses to assume collective responsibility to mitigate the negative impact of the transition on workers who stand to lose their jobs. In this approach, unions negotiate “a social safety net... for people and communities that have been marginalized by economic development” (Stevis and Felli 2014). According to this paradigm, workers in fossil fuel industries and their communities will be losers. States and employers, therefore have a responsibility to adapt work and technologies to

eliminate or reduce emissions. Workers must be trained in new technologies (Stavis and Felli 2014).

The third paradigm is the socio-ecological approach. According to this perspective, to ensure a just energy transition, an overhaul and restructuring of the economy are required. The paradigm demands a move away from the profit motive. Key trade unions in the global South are protagonists of the socio-ecological approach. The International Transport Federation (ITF) and some advocates in the US such as the Labour Network for Sustainability, Australia, the UK and the EU argue for a more radical reorganisation of capital, state and labour to challenge market forces that compromise social and ecological justice.

In his critique of JT, Snell (2018) acknowledges that there are disagreements on forms of intervention to achieve a just energy transition. In response to climate and economic crises, since 2019 there have been calls for a Green New Deal or ‘green’ Keynesian approach, urging the government to take stock of the social and ecological dimensions of the climate crisis by increasing investments to mitigate the adverse effects on workers and vulnerable communities and to drive the transition towards sustainability. For others the JT “requires the complete transformation of the social relations of production and state formation as expressed in ecosocialist perspectives” (Schwartzman, 2011 cited in Snell, 2018, 553).

Finding 2: Narrowing of ambitions

In preparing the report, we surveyed JT initiatives at multilateral, company and government levels, including what is happening at subnational levels. Accompanying the shift in the use of the JT concept by labour movements and frontline communities to its implementation and transformation into concrete policies is a narrowing of ambitions for just transitions.

A number of the initiatives are narrowly focused on decarbonisation. There is little on broader issues about dealing with inequality and redistribution. Initiatives are driven as projects and take place through public-private partnerships (PPPs), auctions and bidding systems. This has led to a ‘technicisation’ of the just transition concept. Although governments and the private sector acknowledge that their operations have contributed to the climate crisis, their solutions are “primarily technical with no intention to scale back operations” (Bell et al., 2023, 284). Rätzl and Uzzell (2019, 160) also argue that “suggestions for a just transition that come in the shape of technological fixes do not consider the ways in which humans and workers are inseparable from nature”. According to Sovacool et al. (2017, 689) energy planning, in its deliberations, must go beyond the boundaries of “techno-economic” development and include issues of power relations, social cohesion, equity and justice.

In their study of resistance to lithium mining in Northern Portugal, Canelas and Carvalho (2023, 2) argue that “a ‘corporate energy transition’ promotes weak sustainability measures, generally adopting authoritarian techno-economic perspectives, where ‘green-growth’ discourses foster the accumulation of wealth and power, thus expanding extractivism”.

However, it is questionable whether everyone agrees that the energy transition is “an ineffective technological solution to the broader socioeconomic, cultural, ecological and political issues underlying the climate crisis” (Canelas and Carvalho, 2023, 34). For example, the recently published United Nations Climate Katowice Committee on Impacts: Implementation of Just Transition and Economic Diversification Strategies (KCI, 2023) maps concrete examples from 21 stakeholders and provides a report on strategies to drive just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work. The report acknowledges progress that is being made on this score.

Snell (2018, 553), although pointing out the dim contribution to social justice of business JT initiatives, supports the optimistic observation in the Katowice Committee report. He argues that “private firms are finding innovative solutions to addressing environmental problems through technological innovations” and in some cases have outpaced government initiatives to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

Lack of consultation and inclusiveness have also left a mark on the transition. In their critique of the European Green Deal, Akgüç et al. (2022, 2) argue that the policy falls short in addressing some of the social dimensions of JT although there is some attempt to “mitigate the impact of the transition on the most affected regions, vulnerable individuals and businesses”. According to Akgüç et al. (2022, 3), EU JT policy needs a comprehensive package of measures to address “the distributional effects of decarbonisation policies, jobs losses and employment transitions, the protection of basic social rights and the inclusion of citizens in decision-making”. The authors strongly argue that these social issues need foregrounding. Frameworks such as the European Green should not cast these issues aside as supplementary.

In the JT discourse, social dialogue is frequently mentioned as a preferred medium of engagement amongst social partners involved in the transition. However, many agents have cautioned against a corporate energy takeover and attempts to subordinate their interests in favour of capital accumulation. There are also complaints about the lack of consultations in many of JT initiatives.

In her thesis, Smith (2019, 31) argues that Denmark’s preoccupation with the need to incentivise and encourage a business-as-usual approach undermines the principle of multi-stakeholder partnerships and weakens their Partnering for Green Growth (P4G) project. “It is a noteworthy fact that civil society seems left out of the communication, even though it may represent the non-commercial partner in public-private partnerships” (2019, 33). In a critique of South Africa’s 2011 Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme’s community participation requirements, Sovacool et al. (2017) argues that requirements only demanded financial contributions from private power company owners and did not extend to designing a just process for rolling out renewable projects. There was no “meaningful engagement” with communities and thus the “full socio-economic potential that would have been gained from a more sustained approach” (Sovacool et al., 2017, 685) was not realised.

A more recent example of sham consultations occurred in Trinidad-Tobago when the OWTU exposed the government’s shallow attempt to use JT as a means to unilaterally

restructure the country's economy along the lines of neoliberal reforms (Warwick 2024). In April 2023, the IEN tabled a written response on green financing to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In their submission, the IEN raised concerns over how international financial institutions including the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) assumed control over green financing. In negotiations on climate financing, indigenous voices were relegated to stakeholder consultations without any meaningful participation (IEN, 2023).

Lack of consultation has been more pronounced in the race for critical minerals. In Argentina, Chile and Bolivia mining of lithium to fuel the demand for the future electric transport system in the global North has adversely affected communities living close to sites of extraction or salt flats from which lithium is extracted (Nuñez , 2021). In many of the operations, there have been little meaningful consultations with frontline communities. Referring to the "Lithium Triangle" bordering Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, which produces more than half of the world's lithium, Abelvik-Lawson (2019) found that there was little information sharing with indigenous communities on the impact of lithium mining on the environment and that consultation was weak. In her thesis, Frost (2022) argues that despite the constitutional gains of indigenous people in Bolivia, their land rights were often overlooked by state authorities in favour of servicing the extractive industries.

Finding 3: JT concept's inability to transcend its Northern origins

In his latest book, Dimitris Stevis (2023, 9) disputes contentions that labour environmentalism is "a product of the North". To support his argument, Stevis (2023) cites efforts by Brazil's Rubber Tappers' Union in 1975 and other work in Latin America exploring relations between social struggles and the environment. By citing these roots of labour environmentalism in the global South, Stevis is eager to counter accusations that just transition is a Western or Eurocentric concept. In our study of just energy transition, we discovered that the JT concept has been unable to transcend its Northern origins.

Unlike authors who trace the concept back to the 1970s, we strongly feel that the history of JT can be divided into two phases. The first phase goes back to the 1970s when the concept was a response to corporations that were relocating to southern states in the US in response to the introduction of environmental regulations. The second phase which we call the 'second coming of JT' is when demands for just transition were made in climate negotiations in the 1990s.

Our finding is that the concept of labour environmentalism of the 1970s and its use of just transition is broader than the JT concept of the 1990s. JT's second coming in the 1990s and its close association with climate negotiations gave it a narrower interpretation. Just transition meant a shift from carbon-dependent to low-carbon economies, with little focus on questions on energy poverty. The distinction between the two phases and uses is vital. Universal access is a major issue for countries and most people in the global South. According to Mohlakoana and Wolpe (2021, 3) "energy poverty can be summarised as the inability to meet one's energy needs, especially the needs directly impacting the household". While energy poverty is

prevalent in most of the global South, they argue that the situation is much worse in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa amongst low-income households. According to Abe and Azubike (2025) about 600 million African people do not have access to reliable and affordable energy. High levels of inequity and poverty exacerbate energy poverty. They argue that a transition to a low-carbon energy system must expand energy access in a sustainable way and for governments to “integrate energy justice into all their energy policies [and] that rural and historically disadvantaged communities are put first” (Abe and Azubike, 2025, para.18-19).

Although there are attempts to bring energy poverty into the JT discourse, in our research we found that the issue was not central in the concept’s ‘second coming’ in the runup to COP 15 and 16 in Copenhagen in 2009 and Cancun in 2010, respectively. In a statement issued by ITUC (2009) on the eve of the UN Climate Summit (COP 15) as well as in Cancun (2010) the international trade union federation ITUC made a strong call for a JT but failed to mention energy poverty, let alone call for its eradication. Energy poverty is still seen as a preserve and separate process linked to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Interestingly it is business initiatives that have tried to link the JT concept with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Denmark, for example, the Partnering for Green Growth and Global Goals 2030 (P4G) project sees “sustainability ... to be a good business opportunity” (Smith, 2019, 31). Again, a report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs (MIBFA) states that ‘the SDGs are considered to be a market opportunity for Danish businesses’ (MFA 2019 cited in Smith 2019, 7).

Unfortunately, the twin challenges of energy poverty and lack of universal access to energy services are among many challenges that face billions of people in the world.

In 2018 the General Secretary of Public Services International (PSI), Rosa Pavanelli addressed the UN High Level Political Forum and highlighted the billions of people that lacked access to energy and hundreds of million more that found energy to be “unreliable and unaffordable” (Pavanelli, 2018, para. 2). Pavanelli did not hesitate to point out that women were the most affected and marginalized as “energy supply is not gender neutral” (Pavanelli, 2018, para. 2). PSI went on to make a strong call for a JT to include social justice and labour rights.

In their study of the Silesia Region in Poland whose economy is almost entirely dependent on coal mining, Janikowska and Kulczycka (2021) argue that energy poverty is likely to increase in households occupied by single women. Anticipating that more households will be driven into poverty, their study focuses on households caught in the grip of economic transformation. The two authors call for just transition as a “tool for preventing energy poverty among women in mining areas” (2021, 2). They call for JT transition programmes that are tailored and dedicated to “women working in mining (about 10%) as a significant transformation is foreseen which will phase out coal mining in Poland by 2049” (Janikowska and Kulczycka, 2021, 2).

Finding 4: A historical presentation of just transition

Missing in attempts to upgrade JT from a demand to a concept, is a history of energy development and cycles of previous energy transitions. In our review of the literature

on just energy transition, there are few attempts to locate ongoing changes and desired shifts in the current fossil fuel-dominated energy system in the history of changes in energy regimes or systems. This ahistorical approach creates an impression that the transition to renewable energy is the first energy transition to take place. It also predisposes us to linearity. However, for many in the trade union movement, a historical understanding of earlier transitions is crucial.

There are different approaches and concepts used to understand how in a long arc that saw a shift from biofuels to fossil fuels, one energy source became dominant over others (Smil, 2010). The shifts are slow and protracted, with years of slow movements followed by rapid movements. While changes emerge, the shifts are not unidirectional. Movements are punctuated by extended periods of stasis. Although the 50-year cycles are loosely referred to as energy transitions, a shift does not mean that one energy source becomes completely replaced by the other. Side-by-side with a dominant energy source, there exist other energy sources from previous cycles. “All of the past shifts to new sources of primary energy have been gradual, prolonged affairs, with new sources taking decades from the beginning of production to become more than insignificant contributors, and then another two or three decades before capturing a quarter or a third of their respective markets” (Smil, 2010, 143).

To understand these shifts, Podobnik (1999) suggests that we use the ‘energy regime’ concept and long-wave interpretations of global energy shifts. According to this perspective, energy is not just an input in production but is embedded in social relations and civilisational cultures. These relations and cultures not only structure how energy is produced, distributed, and consumed, but energy as a source simultaneously shaping the relations and cultures.

For Niblett (2017), an energy regime or energy system therefore focuses both on the energy source, as well as sectors linked to it for production, distribution and consumption. The concept of energy regimes/systems also deals with commercial, political, social, and cultural relations that the dominant use of the source produces and that are also necessary for the energy source to remain dominant.

Unfortunately, in our review of the literature on just energy transition, there are few attempts to locate ongoing changes and desired shifts in the current fossil fuel-dominated energy system in a long view of changes in energy regimes or systems. This lack of history robs us of several important insights. Firstly, it takes away a historical fact that none of the previous shifts from one energy regime to the other were just. This is not an academic point about history. It is vital to underlie the fact that just transition is primarily a demand and aspiration. To make it a concept, rigorous work to operationalise it conceptually is required. There is no guarantee that energy transitions will be just. Ensuring that the transition is just, will be a product of class struggle.

The second effect of an ahistorical treatment of just transition is that it predisposes us to linearity where the shift takes place in one line and in a unidirectional way. Shifts in energy regimes do not mean the complete displacement of one energy source by another. One source becomes dominant and can, for considerable periods, co-exist with others. As Fressoz argues in a recent interview with the Philonomist, “Energies

don't replace each other, they don't compete on a limited market – they add up and even reinforce each other” (Gastineau, 2023, para.3). Thirdly, treating just transition as if it has no relationship with previous energy shifts, robs us of an appreciation of the complexity of energy transitions; how technological changes intersect with social and political relations, struggles between incumbents and technology first-movers and coalitions that are forged in the course of the transitions.

Finding 5: Reliance on Western notions of justice

Our research reveals that in the literature on just transition, there are attempts to unify different concepts of justice: environmental justice, energy justice and climate justice. McCauley and Heffron (2018) called for a conceptual unity of different perspectives of justice applied to environmental, climate and energy sectors. There is also a search to operationalise dimensions of justice that come out of these perspectives. These attempts have produced the following dimensions: procedural, restorative, and redistributive elements of justice.

It is our finding that despite these attempts to unify and fashion dimensions of justice related to just transition, the outcome and product continue to emphasise Western notions of justice such as procedural, restorative, and redistributive justice. The synthesis does not centre on notions of energy democracy, gender justice and energy sovereignty.

Sovacool et al. (2017) caution against reliance on Western notions of justice and call for the inclusion of other dimensions of justice. In pursuit of a broader approach, Sovacool et al. (2017, 677) define energy justice as one in which benefits of energy are shared equitably and “one that contributes to more representative and inclusive energy decision-making”. According to this broad definition, energy planning and policymaking by governments should not be based on the view that technology and systems are “simply hardware ...devices for distributing barrels of oil, conduits for cubic meters of natural gas, mechanisms for conveying coal, or intricate socio-technical systems delivering electricity, mobility, heat, and so forth” (Sovacool et al., 2017, 688). Viewing energy provision as a technical matter only will not address, let alone solve, problems of energy supply, inequality, energy racism and energy poverty.

To meet the criteria of energy justice, energy planning must be “justice-aware” (Sovacool et al., 2017, 677). Being aware of energy justice also means looking across time into the impacts of energy planning far into the future, specifically environmental degradation and waste that will have to be managed by future generations.

According to Sovacool et al. (2017), we need to learn from indigenous movements and move closer to these movements’ notions of justice. The right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), for instance, is a foundational principle that underpins indigenous peoples’ approach to energy justice. The International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) has called on the UNFCCC to honour the principle of free prior and informed consent (FPIC) to enable indigenous people to participate and decide on their future (IIPFCC Key Issues, n.d.a).

Sovacool et al. (2017, 3) argues that the notion of indigenous energy justice demands “regulatory changes to energy systems to align with international law, codify FPIC, and afford critical recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in energy development processes”. Restorative justice must go hand-in-hand with deliberate attempts to address past imbalances and inequities imposed on indigenous people, in many cases through colonial conquest and dispossession. Arguably, energy justice for indigenous peoples means energy sovereignty and their right to design, manage and implement energy systems without compromising “indigenous natural laws, relationality, and kinship to bring together human and more-than human relations in healing for planetary wellbeing through reconciliation” (Sovacool et al., 2017, 4).

Foregrounding the relationship between institutional racism and environmental movements in the USA Fitz-Henry (2023, 1166-1167) draws our attention to “pervasive anti-black racism” where struggles for racial justice have been sidelined by more “pressing environmental concerns”. Tracing the transformation of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) and their acceptance endorsement of the Movement for Black Lives, shows the intersection between the struggle against racism intersects with the struggle for environmental justice. Fitz-Henry (2023, 1167) believes that the intersection has the potential to “transform the movement’s long-standing reluctance to centre social justice issues”. He argues that there is a need for more empirical work to unpack the “intersecting crises of racial injustice and environmental collapse” amongst grassroots environmental movements (Fitz-Henry, 2023, 1167). His study further highlights the ‘rights of nature’ discourse within the CELDF has profoundly transformed “their understandings of the core problems facing the environmental movement in response to anti-Black violence and highly visible acts and assertions of white supremacy” (Fitz-Henry, 2023, 1167).

Finding 6: JT and anthropogenic notions of justice

Our survey of indigenous movements’ perspectives on just transition reveals that these movements have a different take on human-nature relations. Humans are seen as part and not separate from nature. This is different from perspectives that see nature as a resource to be exploited. The International Environment Network (IEN) is explicit about their rights, values, customs, traditions and laws in defining their relationship with nature: “We are the land and the land is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands, waters and atmosphere-sky and territories and they are linked to our survival” (IEN, n.d.a). For indigenous movements, justice to ecosystems and non-humans is for moral reasons, and not only for conserving them as natural resources for human use.

The perspective of indigenous movements on energy justice coincides with the development of rights of nature (RoN) movements in different parts of the world (Fitz-Henry 2023). Both groups have multispecies notions of justice. Chao and Celermajer (2023, 2) argue that “the dominant political institutions for delivering justice are not up to the task of attending to the multiple dimensions and experiences of injustice in a multispecies world”. Trees, rivers, mountains and animals, have rights that need to be recognised, preserved and protected. In a special issue of Cultural Politics published in March 2023, the two authors have brought together a collection of

articles that challenge “anthropocentric, hierarchist, and individualist understandings of justice” (2023, 6). They argue that such a multispecies approach to justice must extend legal rights “toward more-than-human life-forms and the environment” (2023, 3). The inclusion of justice from a multispecies dimension is a radical move in the current ecological discourse.

Finding 7: Centrality of care in just transitions

Although different notions of justice, including gender, are now utilised to frame the JT concept, what is missing is the link between energy transitions and care (Wågström and Michael 2023). As an activity necessary to maintain and repair species on earth, it is crucial to examine the impact of energy transitions on activities associated with care. According to Fraser (2017), we are experiencing a ‘crisis of social reproduction’. Social reproduction involves the capacities to raise children, care for families, maintain households and communities.

The cause of the crisis is the nature and form of the capitalist society that we are experiencing. Today’s capitalism “systematically undermines social reproduction” which entails “both affective and material labor and often performed without pay” (Fraser 2017, 21). The crisis of social reproduction is part of an economic, ecological, social and political crisis. According to Fraser (2017) the ‘crisis of care’ is “a more or less acute expression of the social-reproductive contradictions of financialized capitalism” (Fraser 2017, 21-22). One feature of this social-reproductive contradiction is the dual nature in which social reproduction is organised: externalisation of care onto families and communities, and privatisation of this work to those who have the means to pay for it.

Climate change exacerbates the social-reproductive contradiction. It “intensifies the work involved in caring for people, animals, plants, and places” (MacGregor, Arora-Jonsson and Cohen 2022, 1). Instead of approaches linked to ‘gender-mainstreaming’ in JT and climate change discourses, it is our considered view that there must be a search on how to resolve the social-reproductive contradiction of financialised capitalism. It is also important to find alternative ways to carry out care work.

In defining what it calls a Gender Just Transition, a global advocacy organisation Women’s Environment Development Organization (WEDO) has adopted valued and paid care work as one of its principles. “A gender just transition necessitates the recognition, redistribution, and remuneration of unpaid care work. It should also ensure women and girls have recognized and rewarded roles in both the reproductive and productive sectors” (WEDO 2023, 8).

Finding 8: Social forces beyond organized labour

Our research found that there are strata and movements outside of labour that engage in struggles to mitigate the disastrous effects of climate change. We identified indigenous movements, marginalised women struggling against extractivism and young people worried about the future, as some of the social forces that are struggling for a just transition.

Ecofeminists and indigenous peoples are in the forefront, calling for a more thorough critique of JT and its relationship to extractive industries. Sovacool et al. (2023, 3) argues that gender justice in the JT discourse and struggles is connected to indigenous energy justice struggles. “(V)iolence against Indigenous women and girls is linked to settler-colonial energy expansion in Indigenous territories”.

It is therefore not an accident that struggles for a just transition are erupting in lands and territories of indigenous people. Mines that produce critical minerals for energy transitions and shifts to renewables are set up on indigenous land. An example is a site of the 1865 massacre by white colonisers of Native Americans in Thacker Pass, Nevada. This site has been part of an indigenous reservation but after being found to be the “largest known lithium deposit in the US” (Sainato, 2023, para. 3), the Lithium Americas mining company began mining there.

Women have also been at the forefront of struggles against unjust transitions. In Indonesia women farmers have had their farmlands destroyed, particularly on communal lands, to make way for nickel mines. Nickel is an essential mineral used in electric cars and lithium-ion batteries (Stambaugh & Jamaluddin, 2023). To dispossess the women, the government seized the land, and the mining company was asked to pay a token compensation to the farmers, which they had no choice but to accept.

In Northern Portugal, women farmers have been displaced by lithium mining companies. According to a study by Canelas and Carvalho (2023, 1) “multiple forms of violence [are] reproduced by lithium mining projects”. Jobs that are offered in exchange for supporting these mining projects are viewed with scepticism by female farmers, such as cow herders, who believe that highly mechanised mining will not provide any jobs for women. Interestingly, the study included how LI-mining impacted plants and animals “which co-produce local landscapes and support local livelihoods” (Canelas and Carvalho, 2023, 9). The study also found that extractivist violence - a form of “green grabbing” of the lithium mine - marginalised rural women in particular. Opposition to the mines is presented as the result of a lack of education, cultural and economic “underdevelopment” (Canelas and Carvalho, 2023, 11).

The emergence of strata and social forces who are struggling for just transition beyond labour raises questions on how coalitions are to coalesce considering the challenges posed by climate change. How does one build alliances between labour and non-workplace movements?

According to Dobrusin (2021) broader coalitions including indigenous and community movements have expanded the boundaries of just transition to include not only workers in the fossil fuel industries but also frontline communities affected by carbon-emitting industries and precarious workers in low-carbon service sectors.

While there is some convergence between labour movements, environmental organisations, ecofeminists and indigenous peoples’ organisations to take stock of the climate crisis and address the urgent need for a JT, the issue of coalitions and alliances is not very clear. In some cases, these movements have been very explicit in their working relations with social partners. For example, the BlueGreen Alliance in the US unites labour and environmental organisations, intending to find common

positions on issues of environmental injustice. Organisations such as ITUC, COSATU, TUCA, OWTU, CAN, FoEI, and IEN have publicly committed themselves to alliance-building.

Although many agents have committed themselves to working with like-minded organisations to pursue their JT objectives, they are less likely to give up their own political identities. Greenpeace, for example values its independence as “vital for [them] to be effective in [their] campaigning work”, a core principle that forms the basis of fundraising by the organisation (Greenpeace, n.d.-c, para. 2).

There appears to be no uniform approach on how to conduct struggles and campaigns in support of just transitions. As Kalt (2022) and Sikwebu and Aroun (2021) argue, labour can in certain situations facilitate carbon lock-in and be part of incumbency regimes defending fossil fuel interests. Despite their size and resources, trade unions have, in some cases, not been the unifying force in coalitions.

Although South Africa has seen a mushrooming of environmental movements (Bond, 2019, ‘Çoalanisation’ section) argues that “fragmentation has prevented the emergence of a general movement against coal, and indeed against climate change ... the mainstream climate action scene remains predictably tame and unambitious”. In South Africa, tensions between Greenpeace Africa and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)/National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) surfaced amidst media reports that the unions sought to interdict the signing of renewable energy contracts with Independent Power Producers (IPP’s). “In its bid to stop the signing of the contracts, the union also warned of massive job losses along the coal supply chain” (Sikwebu and Aroun, 2021, 60). Even though Greenpeace Africa has adopted a conciliatory approach towards the trade unions, a lot has to be done to bridge the gap between labour and environmental movements.

A study commissioned by Just Transition for a Circular Economy (JUST2CE) claims that trade unions have a limited view of the circular economy concerning the waste sector (Guillibert et al., 2022). This added dimension questions whether it is desirable for trade unions to exclude workers against claims that a JT must “advocate for an ecological transition project that leaves no one behind, i.e. that does not place the burden of mitigation measures on the most precarious workers and communities” (Guillibert et al., 2022, 4)

Agents have also been at odds with each other for various reasons. For example, the Māori in New Zealand (Aotearoa) have taken issue with the dominant role that some social partners have played in subordinating the views of those affected by the transition. The Chair of the National Māori Forestry Association expressed his dissatisfaction over the way the farming and environmental lobbies were seeking to impose their views over the future of Māori land (Whenua Māori): “What their approach boils down to is simply a desire to assert their control. Once again, Māori are being told how others believe it is best to use our land” (Dewes, n.d., para. 9).

A more striking revelation of the fractured nature of labour-Indigenous relations appeared when some segments of the trade union movement refused to support the Sioux Tribe’s No Dakota Access Pipeline (NoDAPL) campaign to stop the construction

of the Dakota gas pipeline over ancestral land. Leading the pro-DAPL faction, the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) mobilised their members to support the construction of the pipeline “given the lack of substantial policies to create other employment in green sectors” (Kojola, 2021, 378).

Unlike LIUNA, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Communication Workers of America (CWA), New York Nurses Association (NNU) and the Labor Coalition for Community Action added their voice in support of the NoDAPL campaign and the rights of the indigenous Sioux Tribe to assert their sovereignty: “Rank-and-file union members and broader working-class movements also supported the NoDAPL movement, often based on critiques of capitalism, colonialism, and racism” (Kojola 2021, 378).

This fractured nature in labour-Indigenous relations highlights the growing tensions between unions in favour of “business unionism ... focused narrowly on securing pay and jobs for members and working collaboratively with industry” and those more closely aligned with the environmental-indigenous alliance – social movement unionism to transform excessive patterns of consumption and further the cause of social and environmental justice (Kojola, 2021, 374-375). For indigenous and environmental activists, the NoDAPL movement marked a significant step forward in cementing relations with labour. While this coalition augurs well for the building of a resilient climate justice movement Kojola (2021) argues that more research is needed to explore the relationship between labour and Indigenous peoples to advance our understanding of a much wider network of environmental and climate justice formations.

Romanticisation of the working class and labour movement can also be a setback towards achieving a JT. The assumption that the working class shares a common approach to JT is equally misleading. An acknowledgement that different sections of the working class can have varying interests will have a bearing on how coalitions/alliances are to coalesce and whether they would be resilient enough to pursue a transformative JT agenda. We also need to avoid downplaying how the labour movement can form part of and facilitate carbon capture and be a key constituency in incumbency regimes. We cannot ignore the dialectic of the JT and how it has turned into its opposite. Instead of facilitating decarbonisation, in some instances, labour’s use of the JT concept helps to prolong the lifespan of fossil fuels.

South Africa is a case in point. According to Sikwebu and Aroun (2021, 60), “the labour movement that championed the transition to low-carbon energy was fighting the government and appeared to be now acting as defenders of fossil fuels”. In his comparative study of coal transitions in Germany and South Africa Kalt (2022, 500) argues that South African unions that were receptive to JT “have backstepped since the decommissioning of coal plants has begun”.

Finding 9: Unjust transitions

While discussions on the nature of just transitions are ongoing, our study discovered a range of unfolding ‘unjust’ energy transitions. In a working paper on just transition, a union network Trade Union for Energy Democracy (TUED, 2018) identifies what it

calls ‘two transitions’: a worker-focused transition and a socio-economic transition. A worker-focused transition addresses the here-and-now concerns of workers and their communities. Socio-economic transitions are about society-wide shifts and change. According to TUED the two aspects of the transition need to be integrated and must proceed simultaneously. “This is because a transition that is ‘just’ from the perspective of workers or “the workforce,” but which fails to advance or help achieve the needed socioeconomic transformation, will ultimately achieve little in the light of climate-related and broader ecological concerns. Alternatively, policies aimed at driving a socioeconomic transformation that are (potentially) robust enough to achieve climate and environmental targets (such as those adopted in the Paris Agreement), but which ignore the impact on workers in specific locations or industries, risk being unable to secure the kind of social and political support from workers that such a transformation will need in order to be successful” (TUED, 2018, 2-3).

As a result of the separation between the aspects of the transition that TUED identifies, our research found that several energy transition cases that are underway were unjust. These unjust transitions are unfolding from angles such as gender, class and global North-global South axis.

The struggles of women farmers in Indonesia and Northern Portugal cited above are proof of how unjust transitions are unfolding in different parts of the globe. In June 2024, TUED convened a meeting under the theme: Women’s Leadership Project for a Public Pathway. Acknowledging a growing emphasis on gender inclusivity in discussions on climate change and just transition, the trade union network noted how this inclusion of gender was unlikely to lead to justice. According to TUED (2024), gender inclusion into exploitative energy systems will not free women from materially oppressive conditions. “There is a growing level of interest in gender inclusivity in discussions on climate change and energy transition. However, the majority of these discussions remain stuck in a market-based approach to decarbonisation that insists on neoliberal energy policies that private profits, socialise losses, and ultimately slows the transition to renewables and other forms of low-carbon energy”.

South Africa’s lauded Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) has proven to be an unjust transition. In a study of solar plants in three towns in the country’s Northern Cape province, Taylor (2023) found widespread scepticism amongst workers and within communities about the introduction of renewable energy. According to her investigation, there were two sources for the scepticism. In terms of localisation, European firms dominated the REIPPPP. These firms employed temporary workers through subcontractors. The introduction of the solar plants also did not restructure the traditional labour regimes. Employment remained gendered with the representation of women working on the solar plants being 24% on average. White people dominated managerial levels at the companies. Household care, maintenance and support remain undervalued and carried by women, children and other underclasses. “The experiences of the working class and surplus populations in three towns in the Northern Cape show that this shift has not materialised as the jobs and livelihoods surrounding solar power plants have not improved their ability to survive or even their access to electricity” (Taylor, 2023, 77).

The third level at which unjust transitions are happening is the global one. An instructive example of this unjust movement is the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) which the South African government entered with governments from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (US), along with the European Union (EU). Eager to detach themselves from the United Nations' (1992, 4) principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)" architects of the JETP have put together a finance package known as the JETP.

Widely acclaimed as the perfect model to assist developing countries realise their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) and faced with a bulging electricity crisis in the country, South African politicians, policymakers, energy consultants and the recently appointed Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) jumped at the chance of securing US\$8.5 billion to fast-track the country's decarbonisation programme. However, the JETP has not sustained the wide acclaim afforded at its launch at COP27. Trade unions and coalitions of civil society organisations such as Life After Coal and Fair Finance South Africa have publicly questioned whether the partnership plan will serve the poor's interests in a socially just and ecologically compatible manner.

In a letter addressed to Mr Daniel Mminele, Head of the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team (PCFTT), President Cyril Ramaphosa and several high-ranking Ministers and officials representing JETP-Secretariat, the PCC and Treasury, the Life After Coal coalition and Fair Finance South Africa raised several concerns about the lack of transparency and exclusion of civil society engagement and representation. Both organisations requested that "any climate finance which would have been intended for repurposing Eskom's coal-fired power stations to rely on renewable energy, [must] not be re-directed to the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) for purposes of building new gas and nuclear plants" (Govender and Kajee, 2022, 11). In their submission, the organisations emphasised the need for community-led projects to benefit from the International Partners Group (IPG) – PCFTT engagement and for finance to support the creation of "publicly-owned and community-owned renewable energy" projects (Govender and Kajee, 2022, 14).

In a similar vein, the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) dubbed the package a "secretly negotiated South African 'climate finance deal' a gift to private investors ... with little meaningful consultation and engagement with civil society, organised labour, and other stakeholders" (IEJ, 2022). In a press statement released in November 2022, IEJ outlined flaws in the JETP Investment Plan (JET-IP). According to the IEJ, the finance package includes several instruments such as grants, loans and guarantees, with only 4% made up in the form of grants. Instead of "pouring money into decarbonisation", stated the institute that works with labour and civil society, the Global North has lured the country into a deal that "relies heavily on utilising these funds to 'de-risk' investment by the private sector and on 'blending' public financing with private financing to attract foreign private finance" (IEJ, 2022, para. 3). Apart from the lack of meaningful public consultation and undermining local content requirements, the JETP-IP fails to provide adequate "social security and employment guarantees to affected workers, youth, and communities affected by the energy transition" (IEJ, 2022, para. 12-23).

Finding 10: Methods of struggle and theories of change

In our study of how the JT concept is used, we found theorisation of methods of struggle has moved beyond the initial dichotomy of social dialogue and social power. Using Canada as a case study, Dobrusin (2021, 310) compares two different approaches informing the struggle for a just transition. According to him the social dialogue approach “prioritizes workers and communities directly affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy” whereas the social power approach builds on a broader coalition of forces working collectively with progressive trade union organisations including those representing informal-unemployed workers, social movements, frontline communities and non-governmental organisations.

As Dobrusin (2021, 308) correctly argues there is no need for these two approaches to cancel out each other, several organisations have used social dialogue and social power in complementary ways. Without eschewing traditional social dialogue approaches such as bargaining, they have formed coalitions with community groups, tested with power and went beyond traditional tripartite forums in pursuit of the goals for a just transition.

The distinction that Dobrusin (2021) makes is not different from the characterisation that Healy and Barry (2017) make between policy management approaches and disruptive and systemic-structural socio-energy transformation calls. Policy management approaches to just transition focus on switching energy technologies. Politically, these approaches have a techno-economic determinist bent and rely on reformist and incrementalist angles. Disruptive socio-energy transformation is about limiting and ending the extraction and use of fossils. It is about completely changing ideological, governance and political dimensions associated with fossil fuels.

The entry of organisations such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) into the fray, has forcefully raised questions about appropriate theories of change in climate politics. There have been calls for struggles and resistance to symbols and institutions of energy injustices. In his study of forms of protest, Berglund (2023, 6) focuses on civil disobedience or what he calls “disruptive protest”. He puts the spotlight on XR, a British climate change movement targeting “disruption against industries with high carbon emissions or actors that they perceive to enable emissions, such as government, banks or media corporation”.

More radical forms of action have been articulated to stem the tide of the ecological crisis. Several movements believe that “alongside disruptive technological innovations what is required is disruptive and confrontational political action” (Healy and Barry, 2017, 453). Malm (2021), disillusioned with negotiations and COP processes has called for acts of sabotage of fossil fuel infrastructure. Although appearing extreme and somehow individualistic, calls for targeting fossil fuel infrastructure are part of a growing search for what Healy and Barry (2017, 452) describe as “disruptive intervention and resistance to energy injustice”.

An interesting movement which champions divestment from fossil fuels has emerged. Starting in US colleges in 2011, the movement has spread across the globe. Global union federations such as Education International have become part of the

campaign. The divestment movement calls for “institutions and individuals to sell stock market-listed shares, private equities or debt from firms investing in fossil fuels” (Healy and Barry, 2017, 453).

What the divestment movement has been able to do is raise ethical, ecological, political, economic and justice issues. Targeting fossil fuel value chains, from extraction to consumption, has allowed the divestment movement to build solidarity across the globe in countries where extraction takes place, along transportation routes and where the energy is consumed. The movement “has enabled a broad democratic involvement, particularly youth participation in institutional energy-related investment decision-making and attempts at disruptive systemic-structural (institutional and political economic) socio-energy transformations”(Healy and Barry, 2017, 453).

3. Reclaiming JT

In an article written for the Just Transition Research Collaborative (JTRC) Stevis (2018, para. 1) argues that “we have recently entered a period of deep contestation over the ownership and meaning of Just Transition”. As this report has indicated, there are different interpretations of the concept. Due to these multiple interpretations, there are different calls on what to do with the JT concept.

Renowned historian and author Jean-Baptiste Fressoz called for the concept to be dropped as it is based on an illusionary assumption that one source of energy replaces the other. According to him, different energy sources have historically co-existed. Fressoz argues that different energy sources will do so in future (Gastineau, 2023). Another radical approach in relation to the JT concept is the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT). Initiated by Pacific leaders in 2015, the FFNPT is a proposal for a treaty that will block further production and expansion of fossil fuels. The protagonists of the treaty believe that a ban and phase-out of fossil fuels is the only way to meet the 1.5C goal set at the Paris climate talks. In addition to the ban and phase-out, the movers believe that the treaty can establish a Global Just Transition Fund and a Global Marshall Plan for JT. The fund and plan can ensure planning of the transition, support for diversification and technology transfers (FFNPT 2023).

Although not calling for the concept to be jettisoned, TUED (2017, 12) argues that “it is highly misleading to suggest that renewable energy is displacing fossil-fuel-based power”. According to the organisation what is happening is not an energy transition but an addition of renewables to existing sources of energy. In line with the organisation’s criticism of market-based approaches to decarbonisation, TUED calls for a public pathway to energy transition where public-owned and democratically-controlled entities play a leading role.

This report concludes that to be egalitarian and regain its emancipatory vision, the JT concept will have to be strengthened.

To strengthen the concept will have to first centre in its discourse and implementation, issues of energy poverty and universal access. There are two ways to do this. One is to take the advice of Mohlakoana and Wolpe (2021) and the other is to use the concept of vertical and horizontal transitions that the Energy for Growth Hub utilises in its work on the African continent (Barasa and Thurber, 2022).

Mohlakoana and Wolpe (2021, 3) argue that energy poverty and access to safe and affordable energy must become part of the JT debate and accelerate the developmental agenda as outlined by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) more broadly and Goal 7 in particular as it relates to the provision of “affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for all”.

According to the Hub's Barasa and Thurber (2022, 1), while the challenge in rich countries “is to displace energy from large fossil fuel fleets with renewable sources”, poor countries “fall far short of the Modern Energy Minimum”. The implication of this is that energy transitions required for rich and poor countries are different. Rich countries have the potential to embark on a horizontal energy transition where the shift is from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, whereas poor countries “must add large quantities of renewable energy while rapidly building out grid and distribution infrastructure, grid management capability, workable energy market regulations, and dispatchable capacity to back up intermittent sources like wind and solar” (Barasa and Thurber, 2022, 1).

The second way to strengthen the JT concept will be to ensure that the dimensions of depth and breadth that Stevis (2023) proposes will have to strongly incorporate aspects of energy poverty. In our discussion of the labour movement and civil society we drew attention to the evolution of JT surpassing both the scale and scope of its operations. From its roots in the labour movement and subsequent endorsement by international trade union federations and non-governmental environmental organisations the concept has swept across the globe. Although the scale of JT may be prescribed by jurisdictional limits and boundaries this has not stopped trade unions from pursuing a holistic approach to JT that is all-inclusive, humane and just (Stevis, 2023). In the process, JT has evolved beyond the coverage of harmful environmental practices to include a deeper transformative agenda that addresses both social and ecological justice.

The third way to strengthen the JT concept is to anchor it in the labour movement. Although in our review, we highlighted the emergence, in the struggle for a just transition, of social forces and strata beyond labour, trade unions are still the strongest civil society organisations. It is trade union members that will be affected by a just energy transition. According to Kalt (2022, 502), JT may be the answer “for developing new power resources to revitalise unions in times of crisis”. Building union power in response to the climate crisis could take on different approaches. In its narrow sense unions in carbon-intensive sectors might be very defensive and hostile to green transitions. On the other hand, unions opting for transformative, or system change will engage in much broader struggles against forces that seek to use JT as a means to accrue wealth and power. In all these struggles building union power is critical even though not all unions might share similar ideologies or cultures.

Räthzel and Uzzell (2019, 160) argue that it is imperative for trade unions to “treat nature as an indispensable ally [to] challenge the destructive forces of our present growth system”. In their arguments for a global environmental labour movement they advocate for a trade union programme to include five pillars: research to bridge the gap between workers in the global north and south; a democratised global trade union movement; harnessing the skills and innovation of workers across the globe to produce “socially useful products”; enabling production systems “that leaves the earth at least in the same, if not in better shape than before the production processes”; and fifthly embracing the challenge of “degrowth” towards a more emancipatory vision of society that is socially and ecologically just (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2019, 164-165).

Fourthly, for the JT concept to regain its emancipatory character, a movement will have to be built around it. In their argument, Bell et al. (2023) argue that the formation of counter-hegemonic forces is necessary to tilt the balance of power away from the dominant ruling class. Such a bloc could include workers, environmental non-governmental organisations and social justice movements. In his article on ‘(Re)claiming JT’ Stevis (2018, para. 3) argues that not all JT’s are socially and ecologically just and that “decarbonized industrial policy can be as ecologically unjust [and harmful] as the current, carbon-based, industrial policy”. In calling for a comprehensive transformation of society and its institutions Stevis (2018, para. 8) cautions against initiatives masquerading as JT but whose intentions serve to “deflect attention from deeply unjust transitions”. Acknowledging that socially responsible capitalism can play an innovative role by contributing to JT policies, despite its limitations, Stevis et al. (2019, 4) argue that businesses are unlikely to “challenge the world political economy while its scope is limited to the workers of particular corporations, rather than workers as a broader category or class”.

Fifthly, work needs to be done to strengthen the notion of JT, conceptually. This must primarily be the spelling out of what the transition envisages. We suggest that the concept of an ‘ecologically just energy system’ is used as a related concept to JT. Work needs to be done to define what we mean by an ‘ecologically just energy system’ using considerations dealt with in the findings of this report: ending energy poverty and injustice, energy democracy, multispecies notions of justice and energy sovereignty. Also, crucial will be to say how an ‘ecologically just energy system’ differs from existing and previous systems. This will deal with the ahistorical manner in which the JT concept has been presented.

The sixth way in which the JT concept can be strengthened is to open it to other progressive political traditions. This report has demonstrated how the JT concept came from the labour movement. This has imbued the concept with social democratic traditions that are dominant within labour movements. Strengthening the concept will involve a dialogue with other political traditions such as degrowth discourses and decolonial movements.

Reclaiming JT’s emancipatory vision is not going to be easy. Bell et al. (2023) call for the formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc to prevent dominant political and class forces from diluting JT has merits. Stevis (2018, para. 1) argues that progressive



elements amongst labour, environmental non-government organisations and social justice movements have the potential to rescue JT from the vice grip of neoliberal forces. “It is, therefore, important to think about it [JT] systematically so that we can, at the very least, differentiate initiatives that co-opt and dilute its promise from initiatives that contribute to a global politics of social and ecological emancipation”.

References

- Abe O, and Azubike V (2025) 600 Million Africans don't have electricity – the green energy transition must start with them. *The Conversation*, Jan 27, 2025. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/600-million-africans-dont-have-electricity-the-green-energy-transition-must-start-with-them-245282>. Accessed 16 April 2025.
- Abelvik-Lawson H (2019) *Indigenous Environmental Rights, Participation and Lithium Mining in Argentina and Bolivia: A Socio-Legal Analysis*. PhD thesis, University of Essex.
- African Development Bank (2022) *The African Development Bank's Just Transition Initiative to Address Climate Change in the African Context: Discussion Paper*. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2022/12/09/just_transition_in_the_african_context.pdf. Accessed 9 April 2024.
- African Union Directorate of Communication and Information (2022) *Africa Speaks with Unified Voice as AU Executive Council Adopts African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Energy Transition* [Press Release] Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/42071-pr-PR-The_Executive_Council_Adopted_African_Common_Position_on_Energy_Access_and_Transition.pdf. Accessed 9 April 2024.
- Akgüç M, Arabadjieva K and Galgóczi B (2022) Why the EU's patchy 'just transition' framework is not up to meeting its climate ambitions. *ETUI Policy Brief*.
- Allen E, Lyons H and S, Jennie C (2019) Women's leadership in renewable transformation, energy justice and energy democracy: Redistributing power. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 57:1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.101233>.
- Azzellini D (2023) *Sustainable Work and Just Transition - Policies and labour movement actors in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Spain, Poland, Colombia, Mexico and the Philippines*. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Geneva.
- Barasa M, and Thurber M (2022) *Energy-poor countries face a special challenge: vertical energy transitions*. Energy for Growth Hub. Available at: <https://energyforgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Energy-poor-countries-face-a-special-challenge-vertical-energy-transitions-2.pdf.%20Accessed%2026%20June%202024>. Accessed 26 June 2024 .
- Bell K, Price V, McLoughlin K, and Kojola E (2023) The necessity of a transformational approach to just transition: defence worker views on decarbonisation, diversification and sustainability. *Environmental Politics*, 33(2):281-301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2023.2199661>
- Berglund O (2020) *Disruptive protest, civil disobedience and direct action*. *Politics*, 1-19.
- Bluegreen Alliance (2023) *Lessons learned from the Colorado Office of Just Transition*. Available at: <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CO-Just-Transition.pdf>. Accessed 16 April 2024.

Bond, Patrick (2019) Fighting Fossil Fuel in South Africa, Campaigners Invoke the Spectre of Climate Chaos. Toxic News, August 29, 2019. Available at: <https://toxicnews.org/2019/08/29/fighting-fossil-fuels-in-south-africa-campaigners-invoke-the-spectre-of-climate-chaos/>. Accessed 17 February 2024.

Buckingham S (2015) Ecofeminism. In: Wright, James D. (ed.) International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition), 845-850. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.91020-1>.

B4IG (Business for Inclusive Growth) (2021) Business for Inclusive Growth (B4IG) calls to put people at the heart of climate action. Available at: https://www.b4ig.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/B4IG_JT_PR_vEN.pdf. Accessed 18 April 2024.

C40. n.d.-a. Cities Climate Transition Framework. Available at: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Cities-Climate-Transition-Framework?language=en_US. Accessed 24 April 2024.

C40. n.d.-b. How to engage stakeholders for powerful and inclusive action planning. Available at: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/guide-navigation?language=en_US&guideRecordId=a3t1Q0000007IEWQAY&guideArticleRecordId=a3s1Q000001iahwQAA. Accessed 24 April 2024.

C40. n.d.-c. UCAP Climate Action Implementation Programme. Available at: <https://www.c40.org/what-we-do/raising-climate-ambition/1-5c-climate-action-plans/ukaid-climate-action-implementation-programme/>. Accessed 24 April 2024.

Canelas J, and Carvalho A (2023) The dark side of the energy transition: Extractivist violence, energy (in) justice and lithium mining in Portugal. Energy Research & Social Science, 100:1-13.

CAN. (Climate Action Network). n.d. -a. Tackling the Climate Crisis. Available at: <https://climatenetwork.org/>. Accessed 21 April 2024.

CAN. n.d. -b. Ending fossil fuels. Available at: (<https://climatenetwork.org/our-work/undermining-the-fossil-fuel-industry/>). Accessed 21 April 2024.

CAN. n.d. -c. Building Power Through Movements. Available at: (<https://climatenetwork.org/our-work/building-power-through-movements/>). Accessed 21 April 2024.

CDLE (Colorado Department of Labour and Employment) (2020) Colorado Just Transition Action Plan. Available at: <https://cdle.colorado.gov/sites/cdle/files/documents/Colorado%20Just%20Transition%20Action%20Plan.pdf>. Accessed 16 April 2024.

Chao S and Celermajer D (2023) Introduction- Multispecies Justice. Cultural Politics, 19 (1): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-10232431>

Clark J.P (2012) Political Ecology. In: Chadwick, R.F. (ed.) Encyclopaedia of Applied Ethics, 2nd Ed, Vol. 3, 505-516.

Climate Action 100+. __ n.d.a. About Climate Action 100+. Available at: . <https://www.climateaction100.org/about/>. Accessed 22 April 2024.

Climate Action 100+. __n.d.b. Net Zero Company Benchmark.

Available at <https://www.climateaction100.org/net-zero-company-benchmark/>.

Accessed 23 April 2024.

Cock J (2011) Contesting a 'just transition to a low carbon economy'. GLU Global Labour Column. Number 76, October 2011. Available at:

https://global-labour-university.org/wp-content/uploads/fileadmin/GLU_Column/papers/no_76_Cock.pdf.

Accessed 28 Jan 2024

Cock J (2014) The 'Green Economy': A Just and Sustainable Development Path or a 'Wolf in Sheeps's Clothing'? Global Labour Journal, 5(1): 23-44.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15173/glj.v5i1.1146>

COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) (2022) Just Transition Blueprint for Workers Summary Document 2022. Available at: <http://mediadon.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Cosatutu-JT-Blueprint-Summary-Documnt.pdf>.

Accessed 3 April 2024.

Council for Inclusive Capitalism. n.d. The Framework: Pillars for Action. Available at: <https://www.inclusivecapitalism.com/just-energy-transition-company-framework/>.

Accessed 22 April 2024.

Dewes TK (ed.) ____n.d. Māori need real options not wishful thinking on land use. National Māori Forestry Association.

Available at: <https://whenuaoho.maori.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Opinion-editorial-Nga-Pou-a-Tane.docx>. Accessed 19 Jan 2024

DMRE (Department of Mineral Resources and Energy) (2019) Integrated Resource Plan 2019. Available at: <https://www.energy.gov.za/IRP/2019/IRP-2019.pdf>.

Accessed 15 April 2024.

DMRE (2024) Publication for Comments: Integrated Resource Plan, 2023. Available at: <https://www.energy.gov.za/IRP/2023/IRP%20Government%20Gazette%202023.pdf>

Accessed 15 April 2024.

Dobrusin B (2021) A Just Transition for All? A Debate on the Limits and Potentials of a Just Transition in Canada. In: Rätzl N, Stevis D, Uzzell D (eds). The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, 295-316.

European Parliament, Council of the European Union (2022) Decision (EU) 2022/591 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 April 2022 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030. Available at:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32022D0591>.

Accessed 9 April 2024.

Faku D (2024) Delay in closing coal plants 'right call'. Sunday Times Business Times. Available at: <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bt/business-and-economy/2024-06-02-delay-in-closing-coal-plants-right-call/>.

Accessed 19 August 2024.

Felli R (2014) An alternative socio-ecological strategy? International Trade Unions' engagement with climate change. Review of International Political Economy, 21(2), 372-398.

Fitz-Henry E (2023) The 'rights of nature' in an age of white supremacy EPC: Politics and Space, 41(6): 1166-1182.

FoEI (Friends of the Earth International).__n.d. Economic Justice and resisting neoliberalism. Available at: <https://www.foei.org/what-we-do/economic-justice-and-resisting-neoliberalism/>. Accessed 23 April 2024.

FoEI (2020) People Power Now - An Energy Manifesto Summary. Available at: <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/09-FoEI-PPN-manifesto-summary-A5-12-pager-ENG-lr-hyperlinks.pdf>. Accessed 3 April 2024.

FoEI (2023) Achieving a Just Transition: how can we scale-up renewables in a fair way? Available at: <https://www.foei.org/just-transition-scaling-up-renewables/>. Accessed 18 February 2024.

FFNPT (Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty) (2023) The Global Just Transition Pillar of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Fraser N (2017) Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism, in Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.) Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression. London: Pluto Press.

Frost L.B (2022) Bolivia, Colombia & Canada - How the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have and have not been adopted. Dept. of Global Political Studies Bachelor programme - IR103L Thesis. Malmö University

Gastineau N (2023) "The term 'energy transition' must be dropped"- Interview with historian Jean-Baptiste Fressoz. Philonomist. Available at: <https://www.philonomist.com/en/interview/term-energy-transition-must-be-dropped>. Accessed 01 July 2024.

Govender L. and Kajee A (2022, September 2). South Africa's Participation in the Just Energy Transition Partnership ("JETP"): Civil Society Participation and Input. Available at: <https://lifeaftercoal.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/LAC-and-FFCSA-Climate-Finance-Letter-2-September-2022.pdf>. Accessed 29 September 2024.

Greenpeace. n.d.-a. Just Transition: a fair way to move to a sustainable economy. Available at: <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/challenges/environmental-justice/just-transition/>. Accessed 21 April 2024.

Greenpeace. n.d.-b. Our present is struggling - Our future needs alternatives. Available at: <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/alternative-futures/>. Accessed 21 April 2024.

Greenpeace. n.d.-c. Our Values. Available at: <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/values/#our-mission>. Accessed 26 April 2024.

Guillibert, Paul, Barca, Stefania and Leonardi, Emanuele (2022) Labour in the Transition to the Circular Economy- A Critical Literature Review on Just Transition and Circular Economy. Version 1.1 JUST2CE.

Harrington A.R (2022) Just Transitions and Future of Law and Regulation. Switzerland, Cham: Springer Nature.

Healy N and Barry J (2017) Politicizing energy justice and energy system transitions: Fossil fuel divestment and a “just transition”. *Energy Policy* 108: 451-459.

Heffron R.J (2021) *Achieving a Just Transition to a Low Carbon Economy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hizliok S and Scheer A (2024) What is the just transition and what does it mean for climate action? London School of Economics and Political Science and the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/explainers/what-is-the-just-transition-and-what-does-it-mean-for-climate-action/>. Accessed 8 April 2024.

IEJ (Institute for Economic Justice) (2022, November 10) Statement – Secretly-negotiated South African ‘climate finance deal’ a gift to private investors while choking local development [Press Release]. Available at: <https://www.iej.org.za/statement-secretly-negotiated-south-african-climate-finance-deal-a-gift-to-private-investors-while-choking-local-development/>. Accessed 28 September 2024.

IEN (Indigenous Environment Network). n.d.-a. Just Transition. Available at: <https://www.ienearth.org/justtransition/>. Accessed 22 April 2024.

IEN. n.d.-b. Celebrating Twenty Years 1990-2010. Available at: <https://www.ienearth.org/about/>. Accessed 22 April 2024.

IEN (2023) Call for Inputs Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Green Financing, a just transition to protect Indigenous Peoples Rights. IEN 21 April 2023. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/green-financing-just-transition-protect-indigenous-peoples-rights>. Accessed: 18 Jan 2024.

IEN (2024) Special Envoy John Podesta Must Oppose Carbon Markets and Offsets in the Paris Agreement to Solve the Climate Crisis – Environmental & Frontline Groups Call to Reject False Solutions Expanding Fossil Fuels. Available at: <https://www.ienearth.org/groups-call-to-reject-false-solutions-expanding-fossil-fuels/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CCarbon%20markets%20have%20failed%20to,of%20the%20Indigenous%20Environmental%20Network>. Accessed 4 April 2024.

IIPFCC (International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change). n.d.-a. Key Issues. Available at: <http://www.iipfcc.org/key-issues>. Accessed 22 April 2024.

IIPFCC. n.d.-b. About the International Peoples Forum on Climate Change. Available at: <https://www.iipfcc.org/who-are-we>. Accessed 22 April 2024.

IIPFCC (2024) Final Advocacy Paper on “Just Transition” for UNFCCC COP 28. Available at: <http://www.iipfcc.org/blog/2024/2/10/international-indigenous-peoples-forum-on-climate-change-final-advocacy-paper-on-just-transition-for-unfccc-cop-28>. Accessed 31 March 2024.

ILO (International Labour Organisation) (2023) Outcome of the General Discussion Committee on a Just Transition. Record of Proceedings 7A International Labour Conference – 111th Session, 15 June 2023.

ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation). n.d. A New Social Contract. Available at: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/a-new-social-contract>. Accessed 21 April 2024.

ITUC (December 2009) Trade unions and climate change Equity, justice & solidarity in the fight against climate change [Press release]. Available at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/climat_EN_Final.pdf. Accessed 16 June 2024.

ITUC (2010) Trade Union Recommendations for Cancun's Deliberations of the AWG-LCA 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) UNFCCC. Available at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/COP16_ITUC_Recommendations.pdf. Accessed 16 June 2024.

ITUC-Africa (2018) Developing a Just Transition Framework for Africa - Key Issues Arising. Available at: https://www.itucafrica.org/IMG/pdf/synthesis_report_just_transition_consultative_meeting_7993.pdf. Accessed 3 April 2024.

ITUC-Africa (2023) Africa Climate Summit: African trade unions call for a just transition. Available at: <https://ituc-africa.org/Africa-Climate-Summit-African-trade-unions-call-for-a-just-transition.html#:~:text=The%20Just%20Transition%20agenda%2C%20strongly,the%20Opromotion%20of%20social%20justice>. Accessed 19 March 2024.

Janikowska O and Kulczycka J (2021) Just Transition as a Tool for Preventing Energy Poverty among Women in Mining Areas - A Case Study of the Silesia Region, Poland. *Energies* 2021, 14, 3372. <https://doi.org/10.3390/en14123372>.

Just Transition Centre. n.d. Available at: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/just-transition-centre>. Accessed 21 April 2024.

Just Transition Centre (2019) Just Transition in action - Union Experiences and lessons from Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Nigeria and Spain. Available at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/191120_-_just_transition_case_studies.pdf. Accessed 4 April 2024.

Just Transition Centre and the B-Team (2018) Just Transition: A Business Guide. ITUC. Available at: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/just_transition_a_business_guide.pdf. Accessed 4 April 2024.

Just Transition Draft Policy for an Equitable Low Carbon Future for Trinidad and Tobago. n.d. Available at: <https://justtransitionforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Trinidad-Tobago-Govt-Draft-Just-Transition-Policy.pdf>. Accessed 12 February 2025.

Kalt T (2022) Agents of transition or defenders of the status quo? Trade union strategies in green transitions. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 64(4): 499-521

KCI (Katowice Committee on Impacts) (2022) Implementation of just transition and economic diversification strategies: a compilation of best practices from different countries. Bonn: UNFCCC. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/documents/624596>. Accessed 10 April 2024.

Kojola E (2021) Whose Labour, Whose Land? Indigenous and Labour Conflicts and Alliances over Resource Extraction. In: Rätzl N, Stevis D, Uzzell D (eds). *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 365-387

Krawchenko T.A. and Gordon M (2021) How do we manage a Just Transition? A comparative review of national and regional Just Transition initiatives. *Sustainability*, 13 (11), 6070. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116070>.

Kusnetz N (2025) What a \$660 Million Verdict Means for Greenpeace and the Environmental Movement. Inside Climate News, 21 March 2025. Available at:

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/21032025/energy-transfer-awarded-660-million-verdict-against-greenpeace-for-role-in-standing-rock-protest/>. Accessed 27 March 2025.

Lowe A (2020) XR Fundamentals Tell the Truth. Available at:

<https://rebellion.global/blog/2020/12/11/tell-the-truth/>. Accessed 25 April 2024.

Lyon, T.P (2010) Introduction in Thomas P. Lyon ed. Good Cop/Bad Cop Environmental NGOs and Their Strategies toward Business. New York: Routledge

Majavu A (2023) South Africa: Little hope in green transition in town with “the dirtiest air in the world”. Mongabay. Available at:

<https://news.mongabay.com/2023/04/south-africa-little-hope-in-green-transition-in-town-with-the-dirtiest-air-in-the-world/>. Accessed 9 March 2025.

Malm A (2021) How to blow up a pipeline: Learning to fight in a world on fire. Verso.

MacGregor S, Arora-Jonsson S and Cohen M (2022) Caring in a changing climate: Centering care work in climate action. Oxfam Research Backgrounder Series.

McCauley D and Heffron R (2018) Just Transition: Integrating climate, energy and environmental Justice. Energy Policy, 119: 1-7

MITECO (Ministry for Ecological Transition and The Demographic Challenge) (2020) Just Transition Strategy. Available at:

https://www.miteco.gob.es/content/dam/miteco/es/ministerio/planes-estrategias/transicion-justa/Just%20Transition%20Strategy_ENG.pdf.

Accessed 14 April 2024.

Mohlakoana N and Wolpe P (2021) A just energy transition to facilitate household energy access and alleviate energy poverty. Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) Policy Brief No. 5.

Montúfar V (2022) A feminist just transition must be anti-patriarchal and decolonial. Public Services International.

Available at: <https://publicservices.international/resources/news/a-feminist-just-transition-must-be-anti-patriarchal-and-decolonial?id=13045&lang=en>.

Accessed 10 March 2025.

Mousu N (2020) Business in just transitions: The never-ending story of corporate sustainability, in Edouard Morena, Dunja Krause and Dimitris Stevis (eds). Just Transitions: Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World. London: Pluto Press.

Müllerová H, Balounová E, Ruppel and Oliver C, Houston L and Jane H (2023) Building the Concept of Just Transition in Law: Reflections on Its Conceptual Framing, Structure and Content. Environmental Policy and Law 1:275 – 288. DOI 10.3233/EPL-230012

Niblett M (2017) Energy Regimes, in Szeman, I., Wenzel, J. and Yaeger, P (eds.) Fueling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment. New York: Fordham University Press.

Nuñez J (2021) Just Transition: Latin American Debates for the Energy Future. Observatorio Peterolero Sur. Available at: <https://opsur.org.ar/2020/12/15/just-transition-latin-american-debates-for-the-energy-future/>. Accessed 22 Jan 2024.

Pavanelli R (2018) A Just Transition based on social justice and Labour Rights. Public Services International (PSI). Available at: <https://www.world-psi.org/en/just-transition-based-social-justice-and-labour-rights>. Accessed 6 August 2024.

PCC (Presidential Climate Commission) (2021) South Africa's NDC Targets for 2025 and 2030. Available at: <https://www.climatecommission.org.za/publications/south-africas-ndc-targets-for-2025-and-2030>. Accessed 16 April 2024.

PCC (2022) A Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa. June 2022. Available at: https://pcccommissionflo.imgix.net/uploads/images/22_PAPER_Framework-for-a-Just-Transition_revised_242.pdf. Accessed 15 April 2024.

Podobnik B (1999) Toward a Sustainable Energy Regime: A Long-Wave Interpretation of Global Energy Shifts. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 62(3): 155-172. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-1625\(99\)00042-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-1625(99)00042-6).

Randriamaro Z and Hargreaves S (2019) Women stand their ground against BIG coal: The AfDB Sendou power plant impacts on women in a time of climate crisis.

Räthzel N and Uzzell D (2019) The Future of work defines the future of humanity and all living species. *International Journal of Labour Research*, 9(1-2): 145-172

Rosemberg A (2013) Developing global environmental union policies through the International Trade Union Confederation, in Nora Räthzel and David Uzzell (eds) *Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the environment*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Rosemberg A (2020) 'No jobs on a dead planet': The international trade union movement and just transition, in Edouard Morena, Dunja Krause and Dimitris Stevis (eds). *Just Transitions: Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World*. London: Pluto Press.

Sainato M (2023) 'We were not consulted': Native Americans fight lithium mine on site of 1865 massacre. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/oct/13/native-americans-1865-massacre-lithium-mine-thacker-pass>. Accessed 18 February 2024.

Satgar V (2018) The Climate Crisis and Systemic Alternatives. In: Satgar, Vishwas, (ed.) *The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives*. Wits University Press, 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.18772/22018020541>

Satgar V, Cimane C , Buthelezi A , Cherry J and Adam F (2022) South Africa's framework for a just transition fails to recognise the climate emergency. *Daily Maverick*. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-08-16-framework-for-sas-just-transition-fails-recognise-the-climate-emergency/>. Accessed 18 August 2024.

Sikwebu D and Aroun W (2021) Energy Transitions in the Global South: The Precarious Location of Unions. In: Räthzel N, Stevis D and Uzzell D (eds). *The Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 59-82.

Smil V (2010) *Energy Transitions: History, Requirements, Prospects*. California: Praeger.

Smith T (2019) *The Hegemony of Green Capitalism: A critique of the imaginary that the environmental crisis can be solved by capitalism*. Masters Thesis. Lund University DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.11373.33762

Snell D (2018) 'Just transition'? Conceptual challenges meet stark reality in a 'transitioning' coal region in Australia. *Globalizations*, 15(4), 550-564, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2018.1454679

Snell D and Fairbrother P (2013) *Just transition and labour environmentalism in Australia*. Nora Räthzel and David Uzzell (eds) *Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the environment*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Sovacool B.K, Burke M, Baker L, Kotikalapudi C.K and Wlokas H (2017) New frontiers and conceptual frameworks for energy justice. *Energy Policy*, 105: 677-691.

Sovacool B.K, Shannon E,B, Daggett C, Labuski C, Lennon M, Naylor L, Klinger J, Leonard K and Firestone J (2023) Pluralizing energy justice: Incorporating feminist, anti-racist, Indigenous, and postcolonial perspectives. *Energy Research and Social Science*, 97:1-9.

Stambaugh A and Jamaluddin M (2023) 'They destroyed our trees': Women say their farms were seized to support Indonesia's electric vehicle boom. CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/08/asia/indonesia-sulawesi-nickel-ev-as-equals-intl-hnk/index.html>. Accessed 18 February 2024.

Stavis D (2018) (Re)claiming JT. Just Transition Research Collaborative (JTRC). Available at: <https://medium.com/just-transitions/stavis-e147a9ec189a>. Accessed 18 June 2024.

Stavis D (2023) *Just Transitions: Promise and Contestation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stavis D and Felli R (2014) Global labour unions and just transition to a green economy. *International Environmental Agreements*, March 2015

Stavis D, Krause D and Morena E (2019) Reclaiming the role of labour environmentalism in Just Transitions. *International Union Rights* 26(4):3-4

Stavis D, Morena E and Krause D (2020) Introduction: The genealogy and contemporary politics of just transitions, in Edouard Morena, Dunja Krause and Dimitris Stavis (eds). *Just Transitions: Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World*. London: Pluto Press.

Sweeney S and Treat J (2017) *Energy Transition: Are we winning?* New York: Trade Union for Energy Democracy (TUED) Working Paper No. 9

Sweeney S and Treat J (2018) *Trade Unions and Just Transition - The Search for a Transformative Politics*. New York: Trade Union for Energy Democracy (TUED) Working Paper No. 11

Taylor J (2023) Just an energy transition? A gendered analysis of energy transition in Northern Cape, South Africa. *Agenda* 37(3):76-89. DOI: 10.1080/10130950.2023.2240855

TUED (2024) Unions declare: “Feminist Public Pathway Now!” A Public Alternative to Market-Based “Gender Inclusivity”. Bulletin #151. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/bulletins/unions-declare-feminist-public-pathway-now#:~:text=To%20continue%20developing%20the%20work,energy%20and%20the%20public%20pathway>. Accessed 29 September 2024.

United Nations (1992) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>. Accessed 28 September 2024.

United Nations (2021) ‘Sharan Burrow: Shared prosperity provides hope and security’. UN Climate Action. March 2021.

Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/sharan-burrow-shared-prosperity>. Accessed 22 March 2024.

UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) (2023a) Work programme on just transition pathways referred to in the relevant paragraphs of decision 1/CMA.4. Available at:

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_L14E.pdf.

Accessed: 1 April 2024.

UNFCCC (2023b) Summary of Global Climate Action at COP 28. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Summary_GCA_COP28.pdf.

Accessed 01 April 2024.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.) About indigenous people and human rights. Available at:

[https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/about-indigenous-peoples-and-](https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/about-indigenous-peoples-and-human-)

[rights#:~:text=The%20situation%20for%20indigenous%20women&text=The%20semi%20autonomous%20status%20and,national%20averages%20in%20many%20countries](https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/about-indigenous-peoples-and-human-rights#:~:text=The%20situation%20for%20indigenous%20women&text=The%20semi%20autonomous%20status%20and,national%20averages%20in%20many%20countries). Accessed 15 June 2024.

Wågström A and Michael K (2023) Caring for energy, energy to care: Exploring the energy-care nexus through examples from Sweden and India. *Energy Research & Social Science* 99 (2023) 103042. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103042>

Wang X and Lo K (2021) Just transition: A conceptual review. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 82, 102291 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102291>

Warwick O (2024) Oil workers’ struggle for a just transition in T&T. *GLU Global Labour Column*. Number 475, March 2024. Available at: <https://global-labour-university.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/No-457-Warwick-just-transition.pdf>.

Accessed 23 March 2024.

WFTU-TUI PS&A (2023) XIV International Congress Book 4, 21–23 November 2023 Bogota city, Colombia. Available at: <https://www.wftucentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Congress-ENGLISH-Book-Combined.pdf>. Accessed 21 Jan 2024

WCA (Women’s Climate Assembly) (2023) Declaration of the 2ND West and Central African Women’s Climate Assembly 24 - 28 September 2023 Lagos, Nigeria. Available at: <https://womin.africa/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/declaration-of-the-second->

[west-and-central-african-womens-climate-assembly-24-28-september-2023-lagos-nigeria.pdf](#). Accessed 18 February 2024.

WEDO (Women's Environment Development Organisation) (2023) Gender Transition: A Path to System Change. Brief on Gender Just Transition Nov 2023. Available at: https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/WEDO_Just-Transition-Brief_COP28_Nov2023.pdf. Accessed: 30 March 2024.

WEF (World Economic Forum) (2015) Just Transition Strategy, Spain. Available at: <https://initiatives.weforum.org/micee/case-study-details/just-transition-strategy,-spain/aJY6800000000ESGAY>. Accessed 14 April 2024.

WRI (World Resource Institute) (2021a) Colorado, United States: State-Level Planning for a Just Transition from Coal. Available at: <https://www.wri.org/update/colorado-united-states-state-level-planning-just-transition-coal#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20Colorado%20enacted%20legislation,to%20communities%20that%20have%20been>. Accessed 23 April 2024.

WRI (2021b) European Union's Just Transition Mechanism: Transnational Funding and Support for a Just Transition. Available at: <https://www.wri.org/update/european-unions-just-transition-mechanism-transnational-funding-and-support-just-transition>. Accessed 9 April 2024.

WRI (2021c) South Africa: Strong Foundations for Just Transition. Available at: <https://www.wri.org/update/south-africa-strong-foundations-just-transition>. Accessed 23 April 2024.

XR (Extinction Rebellion). n.d.-a. Our Values 1. Available at: <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>. Accessed 25 April 2024.

XR. Why Rebel? n.d.-b. Available at: <https://rebellion.global/why-rebel/>. Accessed 25 April 2024.

About the authors

Woodrajh Aroun is the former Parliamentary Officer of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). He played an active role in the union's energy research group and was part of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) labour delegation that participated in the ILO Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs (Geneva, 2015). He participated in a panel session on Work and Nature at the International Sociological Association Congress in Toronto 2018 and coauthored a chapter on unions and energy transitions in the global south, Palgrave Handbook of Environmental Labour Studies (2021).

Dinga Sikwebu is a retired South African trade unionist based in Johannesburg. For 25 years, he was the head of education and research at the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Presently, Sikwebu is a Global Labour University (GLU) research associate at the University of Witwatersrand. He works on energy, climate change and decarbonisation.

Global Labour University - Freunde und Förderer e.V.
Prenzlauer Allee 186, Berlin 10405, Germany
www.global-labour-university.org
scherrer@uni-kassel.de