Exploring Just Transition in the Global South

south to south JUST TRANSITIONS

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About this report

The South to South Just Transitions initiative explores the concept of a just transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient societies in nine diverse countries across the Global South – Argentina, Bangladesh, Colombia, Indonesia, Ghana, Kenya, Laos, Malawi, and Vietnam.

This project is convened by Climate Strategies, in partnership with Dala Institute (Indonesia), Fedesarollo (Colombia), the University of Ghana, the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Environment for Development Kenya, CEPA (Malawi), Hanoi University of Science and Technology (Vietnam), National University of Laos and Sociedad y Naturaleza (Argentina).

Country teams are exploring how the just transition concept is embedded in the thinking of different stakeholders and identifying issues that are likely to need managing to achieve a just transition in key sectors. The initiative's aim is to deepen our understanding of what a just transition means in the Global South, and to identify resources and develop guidance that can help create dialogue and guide planning.

This co-created briefing shares some early insights of the initiative. It highlights how country teams see the relevance of the just transition concept as various stakeholders promote actions to tackle climate change. It also offers some preliminary suggestions for how climate (and development) finance might be re-oriented to take better account of transition planning needs.

Colophon

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south to south JUST TRANSITIONS

Executive Summary

Just climate transitions across different sectors like energy, agriculture and transport require that the impacts or costs associated with changing practices are fairly distributed, and do not increase inequality or make some people more vulnerable. Just transition also requires that the process of planning involves a wide range of stakeholders, ideally driven by those living and working in regions that will be most affected.

These themes should resonate particularly in countries of the global South, which not only must tackle climate change but also address sometimes significant socio-economic development challenges, including poverty reduction.

Just transition is being explored in a diversity of contexts and sectors. While the contexts and sectors may differ, there are many common issues and questions that need to be asked to ensure just outcomes. Work by the country teams in this project has identified that, at present, familiarity with the meaning of the just transition concept is quite superficial in many countries, even when governments have identified the development of a just transition strategy as part of their NDC or domestic climate plan.

Some recurring challenges for developing countries particularly are being identified, which need to be recognised as greater emphasis is placed on planning for just transition. These include:

- Much of the labour market in the Global South is informal, and lack union representation.
- Land rights are not always clearly defined, regulated or recognised in the Global South, so land-related transitions can leave some people particularly vulnerable.
- Access to natural resources, such as forests, is part of the spiritual and cultural identity of some communities, which creates social impacts where access becomes more restricted as a result of measures to tackle climate change.
- Persistent poverty, high unemployment, energy access gaps, and weak regulation of land-related activities are common features in many countries, and this socio-economic context make implementing climate policy in a just way even more complex – but also more important.
- Transition debates in the energy sector do not necessarily begin from the premise of a low-carbon transition, but the just transition concept can still be useful in helping to understand the distributional impacts of energy choices.
- Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – but those most in need of support are often less aware of the transitions they may be facing, and/or less able to access support.
- There are instances of adaptation programmes which in fact exacerbate vulnerabilities, so just transition thinking is important to apply to adaptation and resilience policies and programs.
- Skills and knowledge gaps can impair the low-carbon transition, and need to be addressed to empower stakeholder engagement and sound decision making. For instance, there can be a lack of data on the impacts on income, poverty, and employment, which then hinders dialogue and transition planning.
- It is challenging to maintain continuity in planning where there is only a small, emerging pool of local expertise about just transitions, so wide capacity building about the concept is needed.
- Alignment of climate and development policies/goals will be critical to securing buy in and coherence for the just transition.
- The use of international climate finance is presently focused on implementing techno-economic

transitions – to low-carbon or climate resilient practices – with little financial support for ensuring the outcomes are socially, economically and environmentally just.

To deepen dialogue about just transition, support is needed to broaden awareness of the concept and to expand its utility in different developing country contexts. This support must be tailored to negate the issues that add complexity and that may create additional vulnerabilities when planning a transition. This may include capacity building and engaging stakeholders, for example translating just transition literature into local languages, convening dialogues with different stakeholders and sharing lessons learned from other countries.

Alongside this, promoting better coordination between different decision-makers such as national and local governments, creates a more inclusive stakeholder process. There must also be an increase in support to close data gaps that inhibit dialogue and planning for a just transition.

International development partners and climate finance providers can play an important role in advancing and supporting just transitions, including by:

- Funding initiatives to fill gaps in the data needed by national and local governments to evaluate transition impacts and opportunities.
- Broadening the way funding is targeted, so that it not only supports 'technical' transitions to reduce GHGs or adapt to climate impacts but simultaneously support programs and investments that help affected regions and communities to manage the socio- economic impacts of transition. This includes supporting complementary programmes such as programmes for re-skilling of workers or public policy reform to strengthen social safety nets for those affected who cannot find re-employment.
- Supporting greater dialogue around just transition planning as part of country engagement.

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Background

South to South Just Transitions is the latest initiative of Climate Strategies to progress just transition in the Global South.

Since COP24 in Katowice in 2018, Climate Strategies has collaborated with researchers across the globe to engage stakeholders on a local, regional, national and global level to understand and explore how a just transition framing can accelerate climate action.

Our 2020 Reflection Paper, Incorporating just transition strategies in developing country Nationally Determined Contributions based on insights from an international round table provided the background to our work. It highlighted some of the labour-specific challenges to just transition in developing countries, provided guidance for policymakers and identified research and implementation gaps.

In order to address these identified gaps, in 2020 we partnered with in-country researchers in three diverse countries in the Global South: Colombia, Ghana and Indonesia. These case studies confirmed that there is no one size fits all framework for a just transition, and highlighted the importance of working with and empowering local actors to take ownership of the just transition concept. Through this work we produced a set of key guiding principles and recommendations for national governments in advancing the just transition (see Incorporating just transition strategies into developing countries NDCs and Covid-19 responses Comparing insights from Ghana, Colombia, and Indonesia). These can help inform the approach to technical and capacity building support and stakeholder engagement, including the informal economy.

Our South to South initiative now operates as a knowledge and impact network. In each country, we have an academic partner who leads on research and stakeholder engagement. Climate Strategies convenes the network and provides guidance, reflection and coherence of methodologies as well as organises global dissemination of research outputs. Our intention is to continue working with all nine countries and expand to more, based on relevant circumstances to the Global South just transition context.

This report is based on insights of the past year of the South to South initiative from our nine study countries.

Photo: Andreea Popa/Unsplash

Introduction

Avoiding dangerous levels of climate change requires major structural changes in the way we live. This includes how we produce energy, food, and other goods and services like mobility, as well as the way we manage land, waste, and protect our forests, seas and other natural resources.

Some of these structural changes are profound, and will create livelihood risks for some communities who, today, depend on particular economic activities that need to be phased out to achieve climate goals (IPCC, 2022). The transition process needs to understand and manage these impacts, in order to avoid an unfair distribution of the risks and costs associated with the transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient societies. Appropriate management of these impacts is also likely to reduce resistance to change. This is vital given the urgency of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting resilience to climate impacts.

Just Transition

The concept of just transition is increasingly being used to draw attention to the fact that some of the potential impacts of transition are likely to be unevenly distributed, within and between societies. It highlights issues such as the impacts on workers from certain sectors who may lose their jobs, on communities whose local economies will likely be hit by reduced employment and income, and who may be left to manage the rehabilitation of degraded lands once mining or other heavy industries leave, and especially on marginalised or particularly vulnerable groups.

Just transition also relates to the process of planning for change. It demands an inclusive process where many stakeholders have a say in the vision and strategy for renewing affected regions. In addition to managing the negative impacts of transition, it is also important to consider how the positive benefits of transition are distributed while aiming at a wide benefit sharing within communities. This is part of a broader goal to tackle some of the pre-existing inequalities, of using the transition window to bring about wider socio-economic reform that promotes a more equitable, fair society (Atteridge & Strambo, 2020).

The just transition concept has been gaining traction across the Global North, where in examples like the European Union's Just Transition Mechanism it has been applied to the phasing out of fossil fuel economy e.g. coal production or carbon-intensive industries. The concept appears less present in climate debates or policy formulation within the Global South, even though – in global climate negotiations at least – developing countries have long emphasised the importance of equity in the formulation of climate policy (in global negotiations, this is often framed as equity between countries rather than within countries). However, we do observe a growing interest in many developing countries in ensuring that equity issues are understood and managed well as countries take on, and implement, climate commitments domestically, including through their NDCs. The UNFCCC's Paris Agreement makes explicit reference to just transitions, albeit with a rather narrow focus on affected workers (Błachowicz et al., 2021).

Developing countries are disproportionately affected by climate change

Not only are developing countries disproportionately affected by climate change - requiring significant investment to boost adaptive capacity and resilience - but the context of many is such that the distributional effects of climate interventions may be magnified and may be more complex to manage. At the same time, there may be fewer institutional structures in place to enable these to be carefully managed. Developing countries also have fewer resources to manage transition, alongside urgent needs to tackle poverty and rapid environmental degradation, and to pursue sustainable economic growth.

So, is the just transition concept helpful in furthering debate about, and design of, climate policy in the Global South?

What kinds of ‘transitions’ are being explored?

The nature of climate-related socio-economic transitions is highly specific to individual countries and their contexts. Since transitions are local, the context at a sub-national level is also important. There are different transitions facing each country.

Figure 1 on page 11 presents some of the sectors facing transition, based on commitments in the NDCs of our nine study countries. While these are diverse, the NDCs are only likely to be a partial expression of the scope of changes that will be catalysed in these countries, and many do not present detail on the character of transitions but merely point to sectors that need to be tackled.

The country teams are using the just transition concept to explore specific sectoral transitions, as a way of teasing out the challenges and issues that may need to be better understood and managed. This process has been mostly self-guided by each of the country partners, with Climate Strategies in a supporting and facilitation role. Building on the expertise of the country partners, they each carried out desk-based research to identify which sectors would be the most appropriate to explore a just transition. Following this, the partners have undertaken relevant engagements with local stakeholders. This has mostly involved capacity building and understanding the level of awareness of different actors.

Argentina

In Argentina, Sociedad y Naturaleza are looking at the agriculture and energy sectors, which together are responsible for over 90% of the country’s greenhouse gas emissions. Argentina’s NDC envisages a virtual economy-wide stabilisation of the national GHG emissions (359 MtCO2e by 2030, versus 366 MMtCO2e in 2018). Nevertheless, the NDC does not include specific targets for each sector. The country’s grid is heavily dependent on fossil fuels (87%) and the economy relies heavily on agricultural exports – almost 60%, as described below. The fossil industry has links to the country’s labour movement, with high formality rates and salaries. The shift to renewables cannot only be seen as a technological transfer but increasing local skills and capacity to shift the industrial outcome. In the agricultural sector, there are different grassroots movements promoting agro-ecological practices linking social justice and environmental justice. However, landowners and big producers linked to the Argentine oligarchy have a strong position as the country is one of the top three exporting countries of genetically modified soya. The just transition concept is included in the NDC as part of the “guiding axes”, but without further clarifications.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) are looking at the ready-made garments (RMG) sector, as well as agriculture (which provides around 40% of the country’s employment) and energy. The RMG sector contributes around 11% to Bangladesh’s GDP, and employs over 4 million people, 80% of whom are women from impoverished rural backgrounds (ILO, 2020). Around 10 million people depend, directly or indirectly, on the sector. However, it is beset by concerns about environmental, and particularly social, sustainability. Workers experience unsafe and physically degrading environments, lack freedom of labour association, and have insecure employment with poor pay. Following a major disaster in 2013 (the collapse of Rana Plaza, which housed five garment factories in Dhaka, killed more than 1100 people and injured many more)[1], the Government of Bangladesh and major trade organisations of the country began initiatives to overhaul and reorganise the entire industry, and transition it to sustainability. The sector adopted several green initiatives (e.g., green garment factory, green button initiative) that promote eco-friendly production, efficient energy and water consumption, circular economy, and innovative technology adoption, which call for knowledge transfer and transformation, but possibly displacing unskilled, often female, workers.

While not a response to climate change, the team is exploring whether the reform process for the RMG sector that involves workplace safety, insurance for occupational hazards, health, inspection, and monitoring might be an opportunity to identify and put in place some of the broader mechanisms or conditions that could support a wider just transition

1. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS_614394/lang--en/index.htm

in Bangladesh. The sector has the potential to eradicate poverty, and simultaneously promote good environmental management, gender inclusion, and equity, if just transition principles are embedded in the green initiatives and reformation processes.

Colombia

In Colombia, Fedesarrollo are exploring the oil and coal production sectors. As high-carbon export commodities, industrial continuity in both sectors depends on external demand, and both are vulnerable to price shocks and the potential for falling demand. Oil is Colombia's main export (nearly two thirds, by value, over the period 2014 to 2020) and contributes around 12% to the national government's budget. Coal makes up around a quarter of all exports (by value, over the period 2014 to 2020). The energy industry makes up 4% of GDP[2].

Any significant reduction in exports would thus affect government revenue and their ability to finance basic services and sustainable development within Colombia. It would also cause economic problems for coal producing regions within the country, where municipal governments will lose royalty income and local economies will retract. Employment effects may not be as significant since only 1% of total employment is in this sector (energy and mining). However, these are formal jobs in a context where a high share of workers is informally employed (64% in 2020) and there is low capacity in the productive sector to create new formal jobs.

Ghana

In Ghana, the University of Ghana is looking at transition in the transport industry. In 2020, the government's new transport policy committed to developing an extensive public transport system, to alleviate congestion and reduce the sector's impact on air quality, as well as GHG emissions. These changes might affect existing road transport providers, including taxis, tro-tro (mini vans), buses and okada (motorcycle taxis). The University of Ghana's study is exploring whether the re-introduction of road tolls for private car users might provide a mechanism for just transition to a low-carbon economy, by shifting the burden of transport-related taxation to more affluent private-car road users. This may help partly address the high, and rising, income inequality in Ghana, while further encouraging the use of mass transit buses and public transport to reduce pollutant emissions.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, Dala Institute is exploring the transition in the energy sector, particularly in the country's coal phase-out plan as part of Indonesia's net-zero emission goals by 2060. Indonesia signed the Global Coal to Clean Power Transition Declaration at the COP26 and the government has devised a coal retirement programme starting from 2030. The coal transition is important to look at as Indonesia is the world's biggest exporter of thermal coal in the world (IEA, 2022).

Coal-producing regions such as several districts in East Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and South Sumatera Provinces have a high economic dependence on the coal industry. The coal industry contributes significantly to local revenues through land rent, royalty, tax, and sales of exported mining product. Global and national energy transitions will lead to the global decline of coal demand, which in turn, will cause a sharp decrease in domestic/local revenue in this area.

If not planned and managed properly, this transition could increase unemployment and slow local economic growth. In addition to the coal transition, Dala Institute is also looking at the labour transition in the tourism industry on the island of Bali as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The slowdown in the tourism industry has prompted many workers in the tourism industry to change their livelihood to sectors like agriculture, which are climate vulnerable. It also means that many workers who were previously formally employed have had to shift to informal employment.

Dala Institute is exploring the alignment and/or intersection between the government's Covid-19 recovery programs, which provide social and economic support to sectors like tourism, and broader climate-related transition issues in sectors like agriculture and energy which will also likely affect labour.

2. https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/02/the-strength-of-colombias-oil-production-recovery-hangs-in-the-balance

What kinds of 'transitions' are being explored?

Kenya

In Kenya, Environment for Development (EfD) Kenya is exploring transition issues in the energy, transportation and waste management sectors. On transport, planned investment in areas such as sustainable mobility and electrified public transport should provide greener jobs, lower carbon emissions, and contribute to a more equitable society. However, the introduction of a planned Bus Rapid Transit system in Nairobi risks leaving thousands of today's workers, many in the informal economy, without jobs or an alternative livelihood. Workers in urban transport include bus drivers and conductors (including in Kenya's matatus, or minivans), along with those engaged in maintenance, administration, ticketing, cleaning, and information technology. In cities like Nairobi, many of these people work informally, without access to decent pay, social security, safe working conditions, or union representation.

In the waste sector, there is increasing emphasis on a transition to making the sector greener, for instance through more attention on creating a circular economy. This may create greener jobs – in activities like recycling and refurbishment, for instance – but could come at a cost for some people whose livelihoods depend on today's waste sector: from garbage truck loaders and drivers to sorters at dumpsites who extract and sell some of the waste back into local markets.

Laos

In Laos PDR, the National University of Laos are focusing on transition issues in the land-use and forestry sectors. About 60% of Laos' population works in the agriculture sector, and a higher portion in rural areas. However, the agriculture sector today suffers from low productivity due to typical swidden (slash and burn) agricultural practices, and as a result many people in rural areas also depend on forestry resources including Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP). Forestry cover has been declining because of large development projects, swidden, and illegal logging, among other drivers.

In response, the Laos government has given high priority to protecting forestry resources through the 2020 Forestry Strategy, which aims to restore forest area to 1940 levels (70% land coverage), and to developing agriculture as a strategy for poverty reduction through the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NDP).

To ensure the efforts to tackle deforestation and transition to more sustainable agriculture do not negatively impact poverty rates in rural areas, the just transition concept may offer a way to help the government and other stakeholders. This may include fully considering the potential impacts of land-related transitions, and creating dialogue and design measures to address these impacts, including through benefit-sharing mechanisms that can result in a wider spread of the economic benefits from these changes.

Malawi

In Malawi, the Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) is looking at the forestry and agriculture sectors. Malawi's economy is highly dependent on its agriculture sector which contributes 30% to the country's GDP and employs 64% of the total workforce. The sector generates over 90% of foreign exchange earnings.

Agriculture, in turn, is highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. There are ongoing efforts to support adaptation in the agriculture sector, but also emerging concerns that some of these initiatives are, in fact, exacerbating rather than reducing vulnerability. The concept of just transition, therefore, seems highly relevant as an entry point for discussion about the way adaptation is being planned and delivered.

Vietnam

In Vietnam, Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST) together with Vietnam Initiative for Energy Transition (VIET) is exploring transition issues in the energy sector, specifically the prospect of shifting away from coal power to lower-carbon energy sources. Vietnam is still building new coal plants, but if indeed it succeeds in shifting the trajectory of its energy sector away from coal, as pledged at COP26, this will have implications for miners, power plant workers and local communities in the North of Vietnam. Moreover, Vietnam's energy transition process will involve changing the role of the state in managing the sector. Whereas today energy prices are controlled through cross-subsidies from the state budget, in future the Vietnamese government needs to develop a roadmap so that domestic energy prices will approach prices in the international market.

This process will likely have many impacts, including on low- and middle-income people who today work in coal mining or coal power plants; as prices for coal rise, many people may fall back into poverty due to job losses, or move into energy poverty due to their inability to pay higher prices.

Cocora Valley, Colombia. Photo: @0fernanda7/Unsplash

Figure 1

Sectors prioritised by the NDCs of nine countries in the South to to South Just Transitions initiative

What are the challenges of just transitions in the Global South?

Here we summarise some insights that are already emerging from across the countries, about how the just transition concept might be applied in the Global South, and what kinds of issues may be particularly complex in developing country contexts. Many of these create additional vulnerabilities to transition, which reinforces the value of understanding what a just transition means and how it might be implemented.

1 Much of the labour market in the Global South is informal

Key climate-related sectors like agriculture, mining, and transport tend to have high rates of informal labour. And in some cases, also workers engaged in illegal activities (e.g. mining without approval). Less than 40% of workers in **Colombia** are formally employed, and an even smaller fraction are unionised. In **Indonesia**, informal groups usually do not unionise, and although indigenous groups do have unions, they are not included in the International Labour Organisation's just transition framework (see International Labour Organisation, 2018).

Informal workers account for more than 60% of the Indonesian labour force; they are unregistered, undocumented, unregulated, and unprotected, and are often linked to vulnerable employment and unstable income. Indonesia's 'Law on Manpower' and its supporting policies do not recognise informal workers, defining workers as only those who possess formal working arrangements (contracts) with and receive income from an employer. Informal workers normally do not pay official taxes, which in turn also restricts the government's ability to provide social security support. The Social Security Agency for Worker's Welfare (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan) launched the non-employee scheme in 2015, which informal workers can sign up and pay for independently. However, uptake of the non-employee scheme has been relatively low. Data from the agency indicates that only around 7% of informal workers had signed up for the scheme as of 2019. Similarly, informal workers in **Bangladesh** have very limited access to social rights and safety-nets.

A just transition, therefore, has to help different stakeholders to recognise the diversity of working conditions, and working status, of people who may be affected by climate-related transitions. Strategies need to be developed to engage meaningfully with informal workers during the process. This implies expanding the concept of 'tripartite dialogue', promoted by organisations like the ILO, so that all workers are represented, regardless of whether they are members of an organised labour union.

In the Global South context, including some of these groups into formal dialogues can be very challenging, especially if their activities are deemed 'illegal'. The process will rely on relationship and trust building, most likely built through informal and open dialogue between actors. There is also the issue of getting as many people as possible into safe and decent green jobs, and all that entails such as skills development, labour standards, investment in regional regeneration.

2 Land rights are not always clearly defined, regulated or recognised in the Global South

Around 53% of land tenure in **Colombia** is informal, and land ownership is inequitably distributed. Although by law women may have rights to land, these often cannot be properly exercised due to social norms and practices, as well as more limited access to resources like finance. Consequently, in **Ghana**, farm ownership is more than three times higher among men than women, and more than eight times higher for medium and large farms. In **Indonesia**, land ownership (tenurial) is a challenging issue in forest and land management. Land is regulated by a combination of traditional, customary, formal, and informal arrangements, and this leads often to legal ambiguity. The resulting tenure insecurity affects community livelihoods and can perpetuate land-related conflict. A lack of understanding and recognition of indigenous customary laws are among the main factors in these land-use conflicts; Indigenous people often find themselves living in an area classified as a forest designated for timber or palm oil concessions.

What are the challenges of just transitions in the Global South?

Indonesia has introduced the One Map Policy that aims to produce a standardised single map that can clarify and provide a consistent record of land tenure to resolve land-use conflicts. However, the implementation of this policy has so far faced several challenges such as clashing political interests, coordination and logistics and involving indigenous groups.

Insecure land tenure is an example of how existing socio-economic problems and inequalities can be compounded during climate transitions. Unclear or lack of tenure can mean some people are inadvertently locked out of support strategies – for instance, support to farmers for adaptation or low-carbon land management, or interventions intended to deliver GHG mitigation or improve resilience in the forestry sector. Unclear land tenure may also affect eligibility to access emergency programmes and financial transfers that are otherwise intended to help vulnerable groups during the transition. Therefore, the planning of climate-related interventions that affect land, such as shifts to more sustainable agriculture or changes to forestry practices, need to specifically consider potential impacts on people, often women, who do not have secure tenure.

3 Access to natural resources, such as forests, is part of a community's spiritual and cultural identity but becoming more restricted due to large scale economic activities

Forests are not only a livelihood source, but also often a source of community identity and spirituality. This means that when climate transitions relate to the management of forest resources, and particularly where they restrict access to forests, transition planners need to do more than offering alternative livelihood strategies for affected communities. They also need to engage with communities about the non-economic aspects of transition. Psychological impacts, and mental health problems, are common in major socio-economic transitions in different sectors. These are well documented in mining communities, for instance, when mines close and communities are left with few livelihood options (Strambo et al, 2019).

These issues are not always being handled well during the development of climate policy. One third of **Colombia**'s territory is managed under collective ownership by indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, which means they should be important stakeholders in discussions about land-use change and tackling deforestation. Yet many discussions around establishing and achieving the country's NDC goals have proceeded without dialogue with these communities.

4 The socio-economic and political context in many developing countries presents multiple challenges to the successful implementation of climate policy

High unemployment levels, high external debt levels, low public revenues, high income inequality, and limited financial or institutional mechanisms to ensure support to the most vulnerable people, are all issues that are likely to affect climate policy, and to exacerbate the distributional impacts of transition. If these structural challenges are not recognised and addressed as part of the transition, the transition is likely to be unjust.

Argentina has a poverty rate of nearly 43.8% and total gross debts (public, private and multilateral) of roughly 102.8% of GDP. **Ghana** has one of the fastest growing rates of income inequality in Africa (World Bank, 2021). **Colombia**'s unemployment rate is 13.7% and among young people is 21.5%. The Covid-19 pandemic meant a direct increase in poverty levels of 3 million Colombians, and a possible indirect impact in the medium term because of lower productivity levels due to discontinued schooling.

Similarly, in **Kenya**, socio-economic factors such as increase in population, poverty, urbanisation, intensification in agriculture, and market failure especially for environmental goods are compromising the integrity of the natural environment and affecting the country's development initiatives. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, pushing

unemployment and poverty levels higher.
In these contexts, it may be difficult initially to engage some sections of government or broader society in planning for just transition, where governments contest the fundamental relevance of a low-carbon transition and feel they first need to tackle other socio-economic problems. Indeed, governments in various of the project countries – from **Malawi** to **Bangladesh** and **Argentina** – are using socio-economic development arguments to push support for expanding industries that are high carbon emitters, like new coal plants.

To play a positive role, those working with the just transitions concept may need to demonstrate the utility of the concept to broader socio-economic development planning. It can be used to highlight how sustainable pathways, in sectors like energy, transport and agriculture, should – if well designed and implemented – deliver more just outcomes, through wider benefit sharing, a more socially inclusive planning process based around local priorities and needs, and even more stable financial outcomes in the longer term.

5 Transition debates in the energy sector do not necessarily begin from the premise of a low-carbon transition

Compared with the Global South, many industrialised countries – where there are already clear signs of transitions to low-carbon energy sources – are characterised by relatively high energy access rates, relatively affordable energy, and relatively stable energy demand.

Many developing countries, however, have high levels of energy poverty, low electricity access rates, and (actual or planned) rising energy demand. Debate about energy transitions in these contexts does not always begin from agreement that the energy sector should move away from fossil fuels. **Malawi**'s national development framework, Malawi Vision 2063[3], emphasises increased investments into the energy sector – hydro, thermal, solar and coal – particularly as a strategy to drive industrialisation, as the basis for wider economic growth, and notably the government has mooted plans to develop new coal-fired power plants.

Bangladesh has a low per capita energy consumption by world standards and is embarking on plans to boost electricity supply with new coal-fired capacity, and imported liquified natural gas (LNG), in addition to expanding the use of the renewables.

Vietnam's economy-wide energy demand is increasing by almost 10% per year, and has large scale plans for new coal plants, yet its government committed at COP26 to phase out coal, so it faces these twin challenges simultaneously. The opportunity of replacing coal with renewables offers the chance to cut coal imports and improve energy sovereignty, whilst also offering the opportunity to leapfrog fossil fuel development pathways and avoiding costly transitions in the future, such as pre-empting and avoiding stranded assets. There is, however, a significant political economy associated with the coal industry – both mining and electricity generation – that makes discussions about phasing out coal challenging.

6 Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – but those most in need of support are less aware and/or less able to access support

Agriculture is a key component of many economies, and is important not only for jobs but also for global food supply and export revenue. Subsistence agriculture is the basis of many livelihoods across the Global South.

In **Argentina**, the agriculture, forestry and land use sectors contribute around 39% of GHG emissions nationally, but are also highly exposed to the impacts of climate change, facing challenges such as: water stress due to increased temperatures, particularly in the North and West of the country; a potential water crisis in the Cuyo region; the retreat of glaciers in the Patagonian Andes; a decline in average flows of the River Plate Basin; a rise in sea level coupled with a higher frequency of extreme precipitation and floods in the North East, as well as west of the humid region.

3. Malawi Vision 2063, https://malawi.un.org/en/108390-malawi-vision-2063-inclusively-wealthy-and-self-reliant-nation

The agricultural sector has an outstanding fiscal role, in particular due to the exports of oilseed complex (30.5% of exports in 2020), cereal (17.4% of exports in 2020) and bovine (8% of exports in 2020). In 2021 the export duties of this sector accounted for 7.2% of total tax collection.

It is crucial that stakeholders in sectors that are likely to be affected by climate change, or by climate policy, are aware of the coming changes and understand what this means for them. A just transition also means they should be engaged in a process of devising the local response. Here, governments – but also civil society and the private sector – may need to better enable stakeholder participation in planning processes, through capacity building, the creation of genuinely participatory planning processes (for example, citizen assemblies) and by mobilising resources that put communities and affected stakeholders in the driver's seat.

Many stakeholders in **Indonesia** are not aware of, or have a limited understanding of, climate change issues. Awareness tends to be highest in urban areas and among the young generation, while people in rural areas tend to have less understanding of climate change, with many small-scale farmers viewing the changing climate as their 'destiny'.

In **Bangladesh**, the introduction of climate-smart practices has been identified as an important component of building the sector's resilience. However, most farmers are smallholders, and many may not be in a position (e.g. lack time or financial resources) to receive training or other support that enables this shift. Consequently, the transition to climate-smart practices could end up empowering the larger agricultural producers while leaving behind smaller farmers. There is already a trend observed of larger farmers and companies taking over some of these smallholders, and the farmers becoming workers who receive low wages.

In **Colombia** and **Kenya**, too, agriculture will be one of the hardest hit sectors by climate change, and as further research continues on climate-resistant varieties and production techniques, there is a need to ensure that technology transfer mechanisms address the needs and constraints of smaller producers.

7 There are instances of adaptation programmes which in fact exacerbate vulnerabilities, so just transition thinking is important to apply to adaptation and resilience policies and programs

As climate resilience and adaptation projects are implemented, their distributional impacts need to be fully considered to avoid creating, or exacerbating, inequality and vulnerability.

In **Malawi**, the National Agriculture Policy identifies irrigation development as a key strategy to reduce the vulnerability of agricultural production to the impacts of climate change. The same policy also promotes greater commercialisation of the sector, through market development and value-addition strategies, as a means of increasing agricultural revenues.

If these priorities are poorly planned and implemented, they may benefit larger 'investors' in the sector but increase the vulnerability of smallholder farmers who could lose access critical resources like water. A systematic lack of consideration for distributional impacts in the design and implementation of adaptation plans, and projects, has been noted as a concern elsewhere[4]. Examples like this from Malawi illustrate the immediate relevance of just transition concepts to adaptation and resilience-building activities.

8 Skills and knowledge gaps can impair the low-carbon transition

This has been noted in several of the project countries. For example, in **Bangladesh** the skills needed in the energy sector to support clean energy – such as technicians to install, repair and monitor solar energy equipment – can be in short supply. Designing re-skilling programs for workers who are affected by the energy transition to fill these gaps might help both 'sides' of the transition move forward, and produce more just outcomes.

4. E.g. https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/wcc.500

In **Colombia**, there is a large gap between the skills needed in a future, low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and what the education and training system are offering today. This is especially true for green jobs. Even though in 2017 the *Green Growth National Policy* called for a catalogue of the skills that could be used for curricula design, there have been no advances so far to construct the catalogue.

A woman in rural Vietnam. Photo: @united_2209/Unsplash

9 There is a lack of data on the impacts of transition – for instance on income, poverty and employment impacts – which hinders dialogue and transition planning

This is noted in various countries, including **Kenya** and **Laos**. In **Kenya**, the lack of data on for instance the number and type of workers in an area and sector is one of the initial barriers to just transition planning. In Laos there is a lack of up-to-date data collection systems and analysis within the government (Vongvisouk et al. 2020). Capacity for socio-economic modelling and scenario planning is also critical to just transition planning, at different scales from community level up to the level of national governments.

Therefore, an important early activity may be to bring together research and analysis that can encourage dialogue and, eventually, support decision-making.

10 It is challenging to maintain continuity in planning where there is only a small, emerging pool of local expertise about just transitions

Normal turnover of government staff between jobs can greatly affect public sector capacity where there is only a limited, emerging expertise on just transitions. Awareness and progress can be quickly lost if certain individuals move on, as is noted in **Indonesia** and **Colombia**, for example.

This highlights the importance of building quickly a broader knowledge about just transitions, and a broader coalition for action, so that such losses do not impact ongoing planning.

One approach to maintaining continuity, being pursued in **Colombia**, is to embed just transitions into the country's national development plan. This gives the work legitimacy, connects it to a broader set of stakeholders and policy and planning processes, and should also mean that there are budget resources allocated to help implement what is needed (e.g. to develop just transition plans).

11 Alignment of climate and development policies/goals will be critical to securing buy in and coherence for the just transition

A related issue is ensuring coherence between policies. In **Argentina**, as in many countries, there is an apparent inconsistency between energy sector policies and those detailing the country's climate commitments (such as the NDC). This is partly because of the way the climate change agenda is defined in public policy (i.e. as a stand-alone, rather than cross-cutting, issue), but it also reflects the many other barriers that, in practice, hinder the decarbonisation of the energy sector.

What are the challenges of just transitions in the Global South?

12 The use of international climate finance is presently focused on implementing techno-economic transitions – to low-carbon or climate resilient practices – with little financial support for ensuring the outcomes are socially, economically and environmentally just

Even in countries which have explicitly committed to preparing a just transition strategy, such as **Colombia** in its most recent NDC, the question of how to finance such a strategy is currently not included in the country's discussions about the use of international climate finance. This echoes the example from **Argentina** above, showing how just transition planning is not being recognised as a cross-cutting, overarching strategy that should permeate climate action. So, while just transition may be an increasingly familiar concept to some governments, climate policy planning is not at the mature stage where just transition is central; it remains for now a tangential issue that is not well integrated in climate planning.

Further, various observations have been made by country teams that the way international climate finance is being spent in country is not transparent. In both **Laos** and **Kenya**, for example, it is noted that, it is unclear to many stakeholders where, or for what, funding from donors and investors has been allocated. This lack of a good, common overview of the various projects and initiatives that are being mobilised to deliver on the vision undermines the ability of different stakeholders to engage, and to effectively plan a coherent just transition strategy.

Tasuri, former wildlife, and wood hunter taking care of a coffee tree that grows wild in a tropical rain forest in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia. Photo: Dhana Kencana / Climate Visuals Countdown

What solutions are being suggested to ensure just transitions?

Some preliminary suggestions are emerging through our initiative about the kinds of actions needed to initiate, or to deepen, just transition planning across these nine countries. The suggestions are likely to resonate across many countries, especially (though not only) in the Global South.

1 Support is needed to engage stakeholders, increase access to information and create dialogue

Across all of the nine countries, the need for greater dialogue about transition and greater engagement of different stakeholders around the topic, is highlighted as a crucial early step. Many different stakeholder groups are highlighted as important: governments at the national and provincial level (across different portfolios), academia and think tanks, labour unions but also representatives of informal workers, private sector entities, youth, women and indigenous groups, as well as financial institutions, international donors and private investors.

Education institutions, too, are highlighted as important actors, for example in **Bangladesh** and **Vietnam**. Dialogue is needed at the national level, for instance in **Malawi** to build consensus on the national application of the concept and to use it to promote national development that addresses the challenges of climate change and inequality, but also at the local or provincial level as flagged in **Colombia**, **Indonesia** and **Kenya** for example. In **Argentina**, it is noted that all stakeholders will need to accept that difficult questions and answers, difficult conversations, are an important part of the process. Rather than being a deterrent to engagement, this sensitivity should reinforce the importance of creating space for dialogue around transition planning that brings together the concepts of climate and social justice.

2 Capacity building of stakeholders is needed, to empower their engagement with transition planning

Awareness of the type of the transitions expected, and of the impacts these could have, remains quite low even among stakeholders who may be significantly affected. In **Kenya**, for instance, a survey of workers in the transport sector highlights that most are unaware of any link between their jobs and climate change effects and policies, even though the transition to cleaner transport systems could have major ramifications on the livelihoods of today's transport sector workers.

Similarly, across the nine countries, many stakeholders – from government to the private sector, workers and civil society – have a very limited (or non-existent) understanding of what the concept of 'just transition' refers to. In **Indonesia**, various ministries including the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) are starting to use the terminology of just transition, or just and "affordable" transition. However, commonly they use the concept when referring to the technical and financial aspects of how to transition to a low-carbon economy, with little or no focus on the socio-economic aspects and risks associated with this transition. The term 'just transition' is sometimes used in reference to equity issues between different countries rather than *within* the country.

It could be the case, however, that many of the themes and issues are implicitly recognised – and some of the basic capacities already in place to respond – but are for now being dealt with in a siloed manner rather than as a dedicated, high-level policy agenda. Greater coordination across government on this theme is imperative.

Therefore, various types of capacity-building efforts are needed as an early step in fostering stakeholder dialogue about transition. Both in **Bangladesh** and **Vietnam**, the importance of the education sectors to enabling a transition for local communities and economies is noted; capacity building at an early stage may therefore be needed to bring education institutions into the process and build their familiarity with future skills needs in the key sectors or industries.

What solutions are being suggested to ensure just transitions?

In **Laos**, capacity is needed at the central government and sub-national government level, and among research community, to model climate change and its impacts, and to collect and analyse data on potential socio-economic impacts arising from transitions in key sectors like agriculture and forestry.

3 Better coordination needs to be fostered to support transition planning

Coordination is an important element of creating an inclusive stakeholder process to plan for just transition. Coordination challenges are noted across most of the nine countries. In **Argentina**, there is a need for more cross-sector and cross-government coordination on socio-economic planning generally, and on climate transitions specifically. A similar need is also flagged in **Indonesia**, **Laos** and **Colombia**. Colombia's NDC already references just transition as an important issue, however the responsibility for drafting a national just transition strategy (due by 2023) has been given to the Ministry of Labour. It is noted that this Ministry does not have all the relevant expertise to deal with the broad range of related issues, and to date has not reached out across government to bring in other portfolios.

In **Kenya**, it is noted that establishing and maintaining coordination between the Kenyan national government and its county governments is an ongoing challenge. This coordination needs to be improved because the effects of transition – and much of the action required to manage these – is at the local or county level. In **Indonesia**, as elsewhere, local governments in coal-producing regions are likely to be significantly affected when the industry closes down and need, at least, to prepare for fiscal shocks and devise strategies to ensure they can continue providing services and play a role in economic rejuvenation. Being more proactive, local governments can play a role in driving just transition planning for local economic rejuvenation, since economic diversification will create new revenue streams that can further support the process and offset losses from declining sectors.

Better coordination is likely to come only after there is a clear vision for transition and commitment to ensuring just outcomes. It is noted that, **Laos** and **Indonesia** for example, first need a clear strategy that can guide planning and programmes for decarbonisation in sectors like energy, and land use change and forestry.

Two men load solar panels on a boat at Lake Turkana, Kenya.
Photo: Maurizio Di Pietro / Climate Visuals Countdown

4 Identify specific investment needs, gaps and funding mechanisms

Finance for managing transition risks and impacts is needed. This is in addition to the already major funding that is required to be able to meet existing, let alone increase, commitments to reduce GHG emissions and to invest in adaptation. There are currently knowledge gaps about where funding is needed specifically for initiatives that help ensure socio-economic transitions are just. From a more proactive perspective, finance for broader just transition planning and regional economic diversification strategies should also be a priority.

What solutions are being suggested to ensure just transitions?

Once key actions are identified, there is a need – as highlighted in **Kenya** – to map out investment gaps and identify sources of finance. There are funding sources visible for activities that reduce GHG emissions or support adaptation, but less clearly so for managing the distributional impacts of these changes. In **Colombia**, there have been efforts made to identify investment needs for mitigation and adaptation actions outlined in the country's NDC, but there is no information available on the resources needed for a just transition strategy, even at the local level for oil and coal producing regions.

In **Indonesia**, the government has postponed the implementation of its carbon tax (from April 2021 to July 2022). Its aim is to generate revenue that could be used for managing distributional impacts and ensuring the burdens of transition for poor or marginalised groups are offset. However, at present it is unclear how revenue from this tax will be used. In **Bangladesh**, the Central Bank has launched a comprehensive green banking initiative to encourage environmentally sustainable financing, though there is presently minimal emphasis on how this finance might explicitly support a socially just transition. Other potential mechanisms have been mentioned as potentially playing a role, for instance discussions in **Laos** have included Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), payments for environmental services (PES), and other benefit-sharing mechanisms.

5 Involve the private sector in initiating and designing support programmes for workers

It is highlighted in **Indonesia** that reskilling initiatives, to help workers transition to new sectors in the green economy, would be more effective if developed collaboratively between the private and public sectors. As noted, several countries including **Bangladesh** and **Vietnam** flagged the important role of the education sector in devising curricula, pedagogical methods, and assessment systems that prepare students for work in emerging industries or activities that are part of the green economy. The private sector should be involved in advising curricular design that supports the development of skills that are needed in emerging and future industries.

Amazonian women during the mobilization for International Women's Day. Photo: Karen Toro / Climate Visuals Countdown

Insights for climate and development finance

The range, and complexity, of social, economic and environmental issues that need to be managed during transition is broad, hence the funding needs may be significant. Governments will have to turn to a variety of funding sources.

Domestically, governments might raise funds for just transition programs through fiscal reform, and in the process remove subsidies that are undermining sustainability transitions.

Many developing countries may find it difficult to mobilise domestic funds, given limited financial resources. They may need to complement their just transition efforts by seeking external support, including international climate finance. International development and climate finance providers, therefore, have an important role to play –in helping to ensure that not only developing countries are able to transition to low-carbon, climate resilient practices/production, but also that the distributional impacts of these transitions are well managed.

To do this, the purview of climate finance will need to broaden its focus beyond initiatives that are primarily designed to reduce emissions or to lower risks from the impacts of climate change itself. Funding is also needed to support complementary programmes that help the socio-economic transition process. This may include, for example, programmes for re-skilling of workers affected by the transition, or public policy reform to strengthen social safety nets for those affected who cannot find re-employment.

This means broadening how 'climate action' is framed so that it also integrates transition planning elements, and requires that a wider group of stakeholders are invited into the discussion about the programming of funding. A broad range of government agencies, working cross-department, will need to be involved, moving further away from siloed work in individual sectoral ministries. Here too, MDBs and other international funders can play a helpful role, by using their convening power to create dialogue about just transition planning, and to introduce broader, programmatic approaches into climate planning.

Funders could also overcome some of the initial barriers that inhibit dialogue about just transition planning. These include raising awareness of the concept, de-politicising the space for discussion about the likelihood of socio-economic change and the importance of transition planning, and filling data and knowledge gaps that make planning difficult. Transition impacts, and the responsibility for addressing these, affect all levels of government. Particular attention is needed to ensuring municipal governments are supported with knowledge and funding to be able to prepare for potentially major socio-economic changes. As highlighted in **Indonesia** and **Kenya**, just transition support needs to target the local and the national level to be effective.

The country studies also suggest that greater transparency is needed, particularly within countries, over how climate finance is being spent. This will better assist more stakeholders in both understanding the nature of local transitions, and being able to engage with the response. It should support a more socially inclusive planning process, which is central to the concept of just transition. It should also provide a basis for wider input into the strategy for ensuring climate finance is used to ensure an overall just transition.

Finally, the observations that some adaptation finance is being used for activities that are actually increasing vulnerability for certain groups (e.g. in **Malawi**) should give policy makers, funders and programme developers cause to integrate just transition principles more deeply into the design of adaptation plans, programmes and funding proposals.

Concluding remarks

As countries work to design and implement their responses to climate change, addressing the transition risks and impacts will increasingly be important. The just transition concept can help to frame dialogue about these impacts, help identify and engage the stakeholders that may need to be involved in planning and identify the types of strategies that may be employed to ensure transition risks are fairly managed.

At present, familiarity with the meaning of the just transition concept is quite superficial in many countries, even when governments have identified the development of a just transition strategy as part of their NDC or domestic climate plan. For example, in **Argentina** and **Colombia** just transition is included in the NDC, but in the former without clarifications on what this means in practice and in the latter existing in siloed conversations rather than materialising into a comprehensive strategy. In addition, in **Indonesia**, the just transition concept has been included in the country's most recent NDC and in the 2050 Long-term Strategy for Low Carbon and Climate Resilience (LTS LCCR). Yet, there is no clear path on how this will be translated into sectoral policies and programmes.

To deepen dialogue about just transition, support is needed to broaden awareness of the concept and to expand its utility in different developing country contexts. This support must be tailored to negate the issues that add complexity and that may create additional vulnerabilities when planning a transition. This may include capacity building and engaging stakeholders, for example translating just transition literature into local languages, convening dialogues with different stakeholders and sharing lessons learned from other countries.

Alongside this, promoting better coordination between different decision-makers such as national and local governments, creates a more inclusive stakeholder process. There must also be an increase in support to close data gaps that inhibit dialogue and planning for a just transition. The above can be achieved by support from the international community and climate finance providers, not only through tailored funding and initiatives but by supporting in-country actors to take ownership of developing their just transition.

Outlook

The South to South Just Transitions initiative will continue raising awareness and engaging with stakeholders in our different countries and regions. The insights presented in this briefing will be deepened and further tested in our partner countries to develop guidelines for just transition to be applied in more diverse and unique regions and settings.

Over the next year our newer partners in Argentina, Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi, Vietnam and Laos will produce an accessible report contextualising and informing relevant stakeholders on the benefits on incorporating just transition strategies into climate policy. Our partners in Colombia, Ghana and Indonesia will produce specific guidelines for national policymakers to incorporate and implement just transition strategies.

The project will also activate in-country collaboration with relevant donors and funders, with Colombia, Ghana and Indonesia producing a report highlighting investment opportunities and gaps. These will then be used to facilitate national workshops to implement this collaboration.

We will continue to host collaborative international events to promote this work, these include at London Climate Action Week, Bonn Intersessional and COP27.

Keep up-to-date at: climatestrategies.org/projects/south-to-south-just-transitions.

south to south JUST TRANSITIONS

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