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energy transition

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Just Transition Roadmap to COP30:

Advancing Equitable Climate Action and Economic Prosperity

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Summary

This publication is part of the "Just Transition Roadmap to COP30" project, an initiative of the E+ Institute for Energy Transition. The study seeks to connect the Just Transition agenda with efforts to reduce inequality and poverty, while promoting economic prosperity and well-being in the countries of the Global South.

The document explores the role of Just Transition within the climate agenda, its conceptual evolution, its relevance in international negotiations, and the associated economic opportunities. It also presents proposals to advance this agenda in the lead-up to COP30. This is the first of two publications that make up the project.

1. Introduction

The global energy transition is one of the most significant economic and social transformations in human history, requiring a profound shift from fossil fuel dependence to renewable energy systems within a few decades. Driven by the urgency of mitigating the impacts of climate change, this transformation not only creates opportunities for sustainable development, but also risks deepening inequalities if the costs of the transition are distributed unevenly across workers, communities, and nations. The concept of a "just transition" has emerged as a fundamental principle to ensure that the path toward a low-carbon future promotes social justice, human rights, and equitable development, without compromising these values. Originally conceived in the American labour movement of the 1970s, as a mechanism to protect workers from job losses due to environmental regulations, the concept of just transition has evolved into a comprehensive framework that encompasses multiple dimensions of justice: distributive, procedural, recognition, restorative, intergenerational, and global equity. This evolution reflects a growing recognition that climate action cannot be separated from the broader issues of social equity, economic development, and historical responsibility, especially given the urgency of decarbonisation, which demands structural transformations capable of reshaping entire sectors, regions, and economic systems. In this context, the fundamental role of civil society organisations that produce and disseminate knowledge—particularly in developing countries—is highlighted in the development of proposals that link decarbonisation to inclusive economic development. These actors often perform as bridges between local needs and international frameworks, helping to align global agendas with the specific contexts and challenges of the Global South.

In international climate negotiations, transition has recently come to the forefront as both a diplomatic tool for building consensus and a contested terrain where different visions of development, responsibility, and equity compete for recognition. The inclusion of the term in the preamble of the Paris Agreement marked a watershed moment, allowing climate action to consider impacts on the workforce and communities. However, subsequent negotiations have revealed persistent divergences between developed and developing countries on the scope, financing, and implementation of just transition principles, reflecting deeper questions about how to balance rapid decarbonisation with the imperatives of social protection and development.

These negotiation dynamics expose fundamental questions about the relationship between climate action and socioeconomic threats. While some view just transition narrowly as compensation for those who suffer losses from climate policies, others see it as a transformative opportunity to restructure economic systems toward greater sustainability and equity. The concept's flexibility as a "boundary object" allows diverse stakeholders to find common ground while maintaining distinct priorities, but this very adaptability complicates efforts to establish specific commitments and accountability mechanisms.

Understanding the trajectory of the just transition, from labour protection to a framework for economic transformation, is essential to advancing climate and development goals. The massive investments needed for decarbonisation—estimated in the trillions of dollars globally—create unprecedented opportunities for innovation, job creation, and sustainable development, if planned and implemented. Concepts such as "powershoring" and transition finance point to new models of international cooperation that could redistribute global production patterns while advancing emission reductions and development goals.

This roadmap reviews the conceptual evolution of just transition, examines its contested inclusion in climate negotiations, and explores different interpretations among groups of countries and stakeholders. Rather than viewing transition solely as a mechanism for managing transition costs, this analysis proposes understanding it as a pathway to building new models of economic prosperity that can simultaneously achieve climate goals, protect human rights, and promote equitable development. By examining how just transition functions as both a social protection mechanism and as an economic engine, this paper seeks to shed light on how energy transitions can serve as dynamic development models that overcome false dichotomies between environmental protection and economic growth, offering insights for advancing just transition on the global agenda through transformative approaches that benefit all communities.

2. The Frontier of Knowledge on Just Transition

From Labour Movement Origins to Comprehensive Climate Framework

The concept of "just transition" has undergone significant evolution since its inception in the 1970s. Originally rooted in the North American labour movement, it emerged as a response to the tension between environmental regulations and worker livelihoods. Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) first articulated the concept, advocating for protecting workers facing job losses due to environmental regulations through what he called a "Superfund for workers" (García-García et al., 2020; Cha, 2024).

The concept's trajectory through subsequent decades reveals its continuous expansion and institutionalisation. The formation of the Just Transition Alliance in 1997 marked a critical evolution, broadening beyond a labour-centric focus to include environmental justice communities. The early 2000s witnessed the concept's entry into international climate governance when the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions introduced it to the climate negotiations at COP6. The inclusion of just transition in the Paris Agreement's preamble represented a diplomatic milestone, formally recognising the concept in global climate governance.

Contemporary Justice Framework: Multiple Dimensions

Today's just transition framework encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions of justice that extend far beyond its original labour focus:

Distributional Justice addresses who bears the costs and benefits of transition, ensuring the equitable allocation of both the burdens and opportunities across different groups and regions.

Procedural Justice emphasises inclusive decision-making about transition pathways, guaranteeing the meaningful participation of affected communities in shaping the policies that impact them.

Recognition Justice acknowledges historically marginalised groups and Indigenous peoples' rights, addressing power imbalances and ensuring that diverse voices are heard and valued in the transition processes.

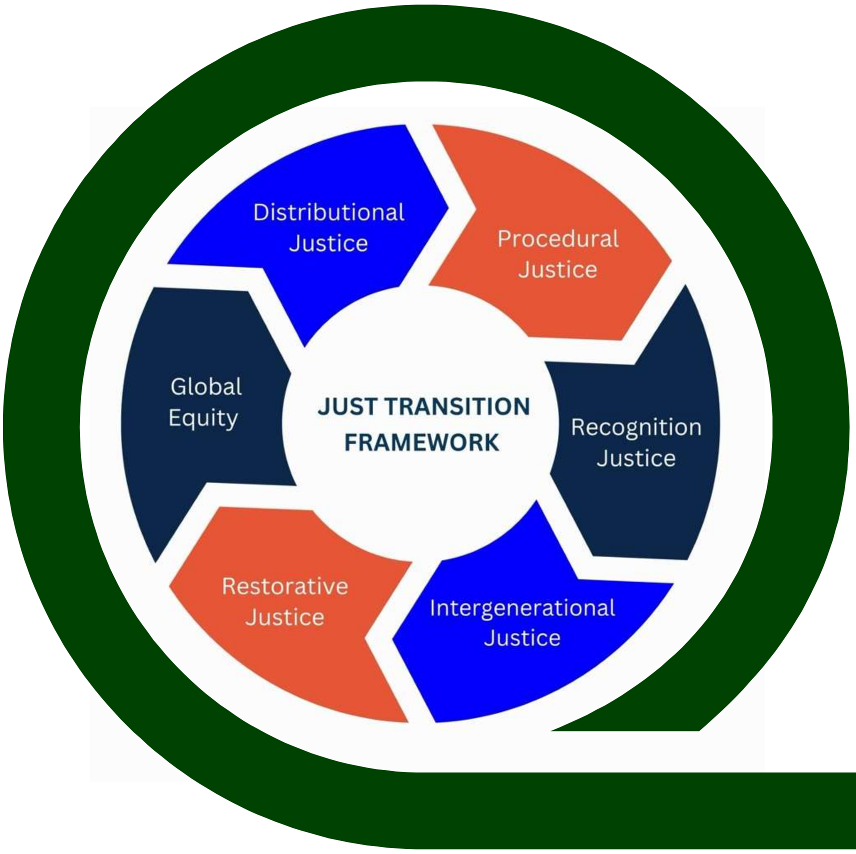
Restorative Justice focuses on addressing past environmental and social damage, particularly in communities that have borne disproportionate impacts from extractive industries.

Intergenerational Justice considers the rights and needs of future generations, balancing the immediate transition costs against long-term sustainability and equity.

Global Equity manages the disparities between developed and developing nations, addressing historical responsibilities and varying capacities for climate action.

This multidimensional approach represents a fundamental shift from a relatively narrow, defensive concept focused on protecting workers to a comprehensive framework for managing climate action in ways that advance social justice, human rights, and equitable development (Committee for Development Policy, 2023).

Building on this foundation, the concept's adaptability enables context-specific applications across diverse global settings.



Dynamic Contextualisation Across Global Settings

The concept's remarkable adaptability allows for context-specific applications while maintaining the core principles of justice and equity. In developed economies, with a historical reliance on fossil fuels, just transition emphasises protecting workers and communities dependent on carbon-intensive industries through alternative economic opportunities, skills retraining, and social protection (Heffron, 2021). Germany's comprehensive coal phase-out exemplifies this approach through infrastructure investments, government agency relocations to mining regions, and extensive worker retraining programmes.

Conversely, in developing economies, just transition assumes a more transformative character, becoming intertwined with broader development objectives including energy access, poverty alleviation, and reducing historical inequalities. These contexts must contend with colonial legacies, extractive relationships, and development imperatives that differ markedly from those in the Global North (Alarcon & Schwab, 2022). South Africa's Just Energy Transition Partnership demonstrates this approach, linking decarbonisation to the goals of reducing poverty and inequality while addressing ongoing energy challenges (Xaba, 2023).

Analytical Frameworks for Implementation

Scholars have developed complementary frameworks for understanding the different approaches to just transition implementation. From an implementation strategy perspective, the approaches range from protective measures that compensate those who lose from transition to proactive strategies emphasising the new economic opportunities, to transformative approaches seeking fundamental systemic change (Newell et al., 2023).

From a systemic change perspective, the Just Transition Research Collaborative identifies approaches ranging from status quo market-based greening within existing systems to transformative approaches advocating radical economic restructuring, with managerial and structural reform approaches occupying the middle ground (García-García et al., 2020).

Disciplinary perspectives contribute additional analytical layers, with labour-oriented approaches focusing on worker protection, environmental justice integration addressing community impacts, sociotechnical transitions emphasising innovation, governance strategies examining institutional frameworks, and public perception models analysing social acceptance (Cha, 2024).

This analytical diversity reflects the just transition's status as a "boundary concept" that bridges diverse stakeholder interests while maintaining relevance across varying contexts and preserving core commitments to justice and equity.

This theoretical richness provides the foundation for understanding how different institutions and stakeholders have operationalised these concepts in practice.

Institutional and Stakeholder Approaches

International Organisations

The International Labour Organization (ILO) anchors just transition in the Decent Work Agenda through social dialogue, social protection, rights at work, and employment. The ILO's five operational pillars include government support for affected workers, transition planning, social dialogue, worker training, and dedicated social protection schemes (Munerati, 2024).

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) emphasises policy coherence between climate action and socioeconomic development, establishing the Just Transition Work Programme at COP27 to address "energy, socioeconomic, workforce and other dimensions, all of which must be based on nationally defined development priorities" (Committee for Development Policy, 2023).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) contributes through the scientific assessment of socioeconomic impacts, highlighting how equity considerations can enable more ambitious climate action by building social acceptance. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD frames just transition through economic and regional development lenses, emphasising market-based mechanisms complemented by targeted government interventions.

Non-Governmental Stakeholders

Trade unions remain consistent advocates, with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) championing just transition as a key strategy for protecting workers while advancing climate action. Civil society organisations have expanded the concept to include marginalised communities and frontline populations, often advocating for more transformative approaches addressing systemic inequalities (Alarcon & Schwab, 2022).

Indigenous organisations provide distinct priorities centred on self-determination, Free Prior and Informed Consent, and the recognition of traditional knowledge systems—particularly significant given that the Indigenous lands contain up to 80% of the remaining biodiversity and intersect with 54% of the critical mineral resources (UN Secretary-General's Panel, 2024).

Industry stakeholders engage with varying approaches, from corporate social responsibility lenses to strategic integration for long-term business planning in a carbon-constrained world.

3. Just Transition in Climate Negotiations

Integration with Human Rights and Development

Just transition operates at the convergence of human rights frameworks, decarbonisation strategies, and equitable development imperatives. Human rights integration encompasses labour rights, broader socioeconomic rights, Indigenous peoples' rights, and intergenerational justice concerns. The UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals (2024) exemplifies this integration by placing human rights at the core of the transition mineral value chains.

The relationship with decarbonisation reveals tensions about pathways, pace, and distributional impacts. Different decarbonisation approaches carry varying implications for justice and equity, with ongoing debates about whether green growth can simultaneously deliver emission reductions and social justice (Cha, 2024).

In developing countries, just transition intersects with longstanding concerns about global inequality, development rights, and historical responsibilities. Resource-rich developing countries face additional complexities around economic diversification and value chain participation, navigating "incomparably more challenging circumstances" (Committee for Development Policy, 2023, p. 3), such as greater fiscal constraints; underfunded social security systems; higher poverty rates; substantial infrastructure gaps; high unemployment and informality; limited technological capacities; and greater vulnerability to external shocks".

Synthesis: Theoretical Foundations for Practice

The evolution from labour movement origins to a comprehensive development framework reveals just transition's capacity to integrate multiple justice dimensions while maintaining analytical coherence. The framework's strength lies in its ability to accommodate protective, proactive, and transformative approaches simultaneously, enabling different stakeholders to find common ground while pursuing distinct priorities. This theoretical flexibility becomes crucial when examining how these concepts translate into the negotiated outcomes in international climate governance.

Conclusion: Toward Inclusive Economic Transformation

This analysis reveals just transition's evolution from a defensive mechanism for protecting workers to a comprehensive framework for managing equitable change. The concept's capacity to transcend traditional boundaries while maintaining core justice principles demonstrates its potential as a pathway for constructing new models of economic prosperity that can deliver sustainable development outcomes while advancing climate goals representing a fundamental shift from managing transition costs to actively building inclusive economic agendas that benefit all communities.

Drawing from the theoretical foundations established above, the evolution of just transition within the UNFCCC reveals how conceptual flexibility enables diplomatic progress while simultaneously creating tensions between different interpretations of justice, equity, and responsibility in climate action.

The UNFCCC negotiations represent a critical arena where the boundary-spanning nature of just transition becomes both an asset and a challenge. While the concept's adaptability has enabled its inclusion in major climate agreements, the process of negotiating specific language and commitments has exposed fundamental disagreements about the scope, financing, and implementation of just transition principles.

From Conceptual Advocacy to Negotiated Text

The introduction of the concept of just transition into the UNFCCC processes reflects the convergence between conceptual development and diplomatic strategy. Since Eco-92 and Rio+20, trade unions have played an active role, seeking to influence policies that protect workers and overcome the "jobs versus the environment" dilemma. The main international representatives of workers are the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and its successor, the ITUC. These efforts culminated in the recognition of trade unions at Eco-92 as one of the new key groups for decision-making on sustainable development, ensuring their mandatory participation in conventions.

The transfer of trade union status in the UNFCCC gained momentum in 2008, when they received official recognition as constituents, with the ITUC acting as the focal point of the group and participating in the UNFCCC secretariat. Taking advantage of this position, unions have strengthened their advocacy for just transition, positioning it as a practical necessity and aligning social justice and environmental sustainability in global climate negotiations.

The first mention of the concept of just transition in international climate negotiations occurred at COP6 in The Hague, Netherlands, initiating a complex process of incorporating union advocacy into negotiated texts. However, it was only at COP16 in Cancún, Mexico, that the term "Just Transition" was formally included in the final decision, the Cancún Agreements. Just transition was mentioned twice, the first time as part of a shared vision for long-term cooperative action and the second time reflecting on the role of just transition in the economic and social consequences of response measures.

The concept of just transition gained greater consistency with its explicit mention in the Paris Agreement, but its application has moved away from both the original approach of the union movement and the discussion on the socioeconomic impacts of climate policies in the context of response measures. At COP26, held after the pandemic and marked by the Glasgow Pact, the term took on a broader meaning, emphasising the protection of the poorest and most vulnerable populations, considering national specificities and promoting the eradication of poverty and the creation of decent, quality jobs. This evolution, from COP6 to the Paris Agreement and COP26, reflects the influence of the coalitions of developing countries and civil society organisations, which have transformed just transition into a more comprehensive concept, focused on the implementation of inclusive climate policies that leave no one behind.

The inclusion of just transition in the Paris Agreement represented a diplomatic compromise that satisfied multiple constituencies while maintaining sufficient ambiguity to accommodate different interpretations. This formulation declared the practicality of the concept as a boundary object capable of facilitating agreement between parties with divergent priorities and worldviews.

Negotiating Scope and Implementation

The period following the Paris Agreement has seen an intensification of negotiations on the practical meaning and implementation of commitments related to the just transition. It was at COP27, within the framework of the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, that the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) was involved, aimed at discussing ways to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

The creation of a specific work programme, focused on its implementation and separate from the issue of Response Measures, reflects not only the growing centrality of the concept in the negotiations, but also the persistent divergences regarding its scope and operationalisation.

During the development of the working group's mandate, scheduled to last until 2026, it is possible to observe the different positions among countries. Nations are generally dedicated to defending approaches centred on social protection structures, worker qualifications and basic market solutions. This perspective reflects their national experiences of industrial restructuring and the preference for preserving existing economic structures, while seeking to maintain the social impacts of the transition.

On the other hand, developing countries—especially those represented by the G77 coalition and China—have consistently advocated broader interpretations that incorporate transformative approaches, as mentioned above. Their proposals emphasise financing, technology transfer, and adaptation, integrating just transition into broader sustainable development agendas and principles of differentiated historical responsibilities.

The Politics of Definition and Finance

Negotiations around the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) illustrate how disputes over definitions reflect deeper disagreements about responsibility, capacity, and development pathways. The tension between narrower, workforce-focused definitions and broader, development-oriented interpretations echoes the distinction between the incremental and transformative approaches discussed earlier. In particular, ongoing disagreements over financing and technology transfer mechanisms reveal how the concept of just transition intersects with long-standing debates on climate finance and North–South equity.

Developing countries have consistently emphasised that just transition must include robust financial and technical support. This insistence reflects an understanding of the concept as intrinsically linked to their capacity to pursue alternative development models—aligning with transformative perspectives that view just transition as a vehicle for restructuring economic systems and addressing historical injustices. Countries such as Sudan, Tunisia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and India have underscored the importance of ensuring financing, technology transfer, and adaptation support, so that the transition does not undermine the development prospects of the most vulnerable nations.

At COP29, Egypt, speaking on behalf of the G77 and China, reiterated that without adequate support in these key areas, a just transition would be unfeasible—particularly for the most fragile economies. The Group also reaffirmed the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), emphasising that each country should act in accordance with its capabilities and that international cooperation remains essential.

The integration of the principles of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) into the just transition agenda represents a significant evolution from the concept's original, narrower focus. This development highlights how the comprehensive nature of just transition allows it to be linked to broader climate justice frameworks. At the same time, it introduces new layers of complexity in terms of implementation, operationalisation, and accountability.

Institutional Dynamics and Future Prospects

The existence of a Work Programme, which ensures the holding of two annual high-level roundtables and two annual dialogues, through a consensus decision among the parties, signals the institutionalisation of just transition within the UNFCCC system. However, these institutional developments also reveal persistent challenges in translating conceptual agreements into operational consensus. Continued divergences between developed and developing country positions suggest that the flexibility of just transition as a frontier concept, while enabling initial agreement, may also complicate efforts to establish specific commitments and accountability mechanisms.

The evolution towards the inclusion of concepts of human rights, gender equality and the rights of indigenous peoples in the just transition negotiations reflects the broader expansion documented previously. While this expansion enhances the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the concept, it also increases the complexity of the negotiations and implementation.

Looking ahead to future negotiations, the challenge lies in maintaining the conceptual flexibility that has enabled the diplomatic success of just transition, while developing sufficient specificity to guide meaningful implementation. Upcoming global stocktaking processes and ongoing work programme activities will test whether the concept can evolve from a useful diplomatic tool to an effective framework for coordinating international cooperation on equitable climate action.

Summary: Negotiation Dynamics and Implementation Challenges

The climate negotiations reveal the dual nature of just transition, as both a diplomatic resource and an implementation challenge. While conceptual flexibility has allowed inclusion in important agreements, persistent disagreements over scope, financing and accountability reflect deeper tensions between the priorities of developed and developing countries. These negotiation dynamics set the context for examining how just transition principles can be translated into concrete strategies for economic transformation.

The negotiation dynamics examined here reveal the potential of just transition as both a framework for international cooperation and a space for contestation on fundamental issues of development, accountability and equity. These dynamics set the stage for examining how just transition can contribute to building new models of economic prosperity that can meet both climate and development imperatives.

4. Just Transition and the Construction of an Economic Prosperity Agenda

Building on the theoretical foundations and negotiation dynamics established above, just transition functions as both a social protection mechanism and as an economic driver—these dual aspects must be understood as complementary rather than competing elements. This analysis leads to examining how the framework's evolution creates opportunities to address both the immediate needs of affected workers and the broader imperative of constructing inclusive prosperity.

Just Transition as an Innovation Driver

Given the frameworks established previously, just transition's role as a catalyst for innovation and sustainable development represents a critical evolution that builds upon rather than abandons its social protection roots. The shift from "jobs versus the environment" dichotomies to integrated approaches reflects a fundamental reimagining of how societies can pursue both environmental sustainability and economic prosperity.

The innovation potential emerges from several interconnected dynamics. The massive scale of investment required for decarbonisation creates unprecedented opportunities for technological development and deployment. Unlike previous organic industrial transitions, climate action's urgency necessitates a deliberate, accelerated transformation that channels resources toward innovative solutions in renewable energy, energy efficiency, circular economy practices, and sustainable production methods.

The participatory nature of the just transition processes brings diverse knowledge systems into innovation processes. When workers, communities, Indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders actively participate in designing the transition pathways, they contribute practical insights, traditional knowledge, and creative solutions that enhance both legitimacy and outcomes through place-based knowledge and local needs integration.

The Ruhr Valley's transformation exemplifies this innovation potential, transforming from coal dependency to become a centre for environmental technology, services, and cultural industries through investment in educational institutions, research centres, and innovation hubs. Similarly, Scotland's transition from North Sea oil toward offshore wind demonstrates how existing industrial capabilities can be redirected toward sustainable industries through deliberate policy intervention.

Realising this potential requires addressing the tension between narrow workforce-focused approaches and broader transformative interpretations. The challenge lies in designing strategies that protect vulnerable workers while leveraging transformation as an opportunity for innovation and sustainable development.

Synthesis: From Protection to Economic Driver

The evidence demonstrates that just transition's evolution from defensive labour strategy to innovation catalyst represents not an abandonment of social protection but its expansion. By creating new economic opportunities rather than merely managing decline, just transition transcends the jobs-versus-environment dichotomy that characterised early debates. This transformation enables the framework to simultaneously safeguard vulnerable communities while driving broader economic transformation toward sustainability and equity.

Green Jobs and Workforce Transformation

Building on this understanding of just transition's dual nature, the creation of green jobs extends beyond numerical replacement of lost employment to encompass decent work providing income, dignity, security, and advancement opportunities. This qualitative dimension addresses legitimate worker concerns about inferior conditions in new green jobs compared to traditional industrial employment.

Geographic mismatches between job losses and job creation pose particular challenges, as renewable energy resources may concentrate in different regions than the existing fossil fuel industries. Without deliberate strategies ensuring communities losing employment also participate in new opportunities, just transition risks exacerbating regional inequalities.

The renewable energy sector illustrates both potential and limitations. While solar and wind industries generate significant employment, questions persist about job quality, unionisation rates, and long-term sustainability. Many positions offer lower wages and less security than traditional energy employment, while manufacturing often occurs in different countries than deployment.

Effective workforce reskilling must encompass broader capability development enabling workers to navigate ongoing economic transformation, including digital literacy, systems thinking, and adaptive skills preparing workers for careers rather than jobs. Integration with regional development strategies proves essential, embedding reskilling within comprehensive approaches addressing infrastructure development, business support, and market creation.

Gender dimensions demand explicit attention, as women's underrepresentation in both traditional energy sectors and emerging green industries risks perpetuating inequalities. Targeted strategies addressing barriers to training, workplace discrimination, and care responsibilities prove essential for inclusive development objectives.

Sustainable Investment and New Markets

Given the workforce transformation challenges identified above, transforming investment patterns and market structures represent a fundamental requirement for achieving just transition at scale. Traditional investment frameworks focused on risk-adjusted financial returns fail to capture the full value creation potential of the just transition initiatives, as broader benefits typically appear as externalities rather than investment returns.

Transition finance addresses critical gaps in sustainable finance by recognising the need to transform existing carbon-intensive assets and industries. This distinction proves particularly important for developing countries with significant fossil fuel infrastructure, enabling the transformation of existing industries rather than forcing choices between stranding assets and continuing emissions.

Innovative financing mechanisms better align with just transition objectives through green bonds with explicit social co-benefits, blended finance structures combining public and private capital, and community-owned renewable energy projects demonstrating alternative ownership models ensuring local benefit capture.

Strategic public investment proves crucial for catalysing and directing private capital by creating markets, demonstrating viability, and reducing risks to unlock larger private capital flows. The challenge lies in designing public investment strategies that mobilise capital while shaping deployment toward just transition objectives.

The concept of "powershoring" represents an innovative market creation through relocating energy-intensive production to regions with abundant renewable energy, simultaneously reducing emissions and creating development opportunities. Brazil's potential to produce solar-grade silicon with significantly lower emissions or supply low-carbon steel illustrates how clean energy comparative advantages can translate into industrial development opportunities.

Reducing Inequalities and Strengthening Economic Security

Consequently, the intersection of climate vulnerability and economic inequality creates vicious cycles that just transition must explicitly address. Communities facing the greatest climate risks often experience the deepest economic marginalisation, reflecting historical exploitation and exclusion processes. Without deliberate intervention, climate policies risk exacerbating inequalities by imposing costs on vulnerable communities while benefits flow to those with capital and capacity.

Geographic inequality presents particular challenges, as fossil fuel-dependent regions often exhibit economic monocultures, limited diversification, and political marginalisation. The spatial mismatch between job losses and new opportunities can leave entire regions behind, potentially creating a political backlash undermining climate action.

The *Consenso de Belém* framework offers a comprehensive vision addressing structural challenges through mechanisms like powershoring, nearshoring, and job sharing that challenge hyperglobalised models concentrating production based solely on cost minimisation. This approach envisions industrial location decisions considering renewable energy availability, community development needs, and emission reduction potential.

Implementing such strategies requires new international cooperation forms going beyond traditional development assistance, through technology transfer building local capacity, trade agreements protecting policy space for just transition initiatives, and financial mechanisms addressing the additional costs that developing countries face in low-carbon development.

Social protection system design emerges as crucial for ensuring economic security during transition periods. Traditional unemployment insurance and retraining programmes prove insufficient for managing climate transition scale and scope. Innovative approaches including universal basic services, job guarantee programmes, and community wealth-building initiatives offer more comprehensive solutions, recognising that security comes from enabling communities to adapt and thrive amid fundamental change.

Toward Transformative Implementation

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates that constructing an economic prosperity agenda through just transition requires maintaining its dual character as both a social protection mechanism and economic driver. The examined pathways—leveraging innovation for inclusive development, creating quality green jobs, mobilising sustainable investment, and reducing structural inequalities—demonstrate that economic dynamism and social justice can be mutually reinforcing.

Realising this potential requires fundamental changes in how societies conceptualise and implement transition strategies. Narrow technical approaches must give way to comprehensive strategies addressing structural barriers and creating enabling conditions for transformation through governance centring affected communities, investment prioritising inclusive local development, and international cooperation enabling equitable global transition participation.

The vision of just transition as an economic prosperity agenda offers a compelling alternative to narratives framing climate action as a costly burden. By demonstrating how transition can drive innovation, create employment, reduce inequality, and build economic security, this approach transcends false environment-development dichotomies. The task ahead is building the political coalitions, institutional frameworks, and implementation capacity to realise this transformative potential.

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