Climate Strategies’ submission to SBSTA and SBI on the UAE Just Transition Work Programme

Lessons from international research and practice

As an international research and knowledge brokerage organization with a network of over 100 leading climate researchers, including IPCC contributors and authors, Climate Strategies is grateful for the opportunity to share research-based recommendations for the most critical work and topics to be undertaken by the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) to achieve ambitious Just Transition pathways.

Introduction

Evidence from research demonstrates that there is international momentum for Just Transitions. The JTWP—through its work and dialogues—could create an upward spiral of ambition and implementation at the local, national and international level by:

a) Taking a broad approach to Just Transitions, emphasizing that Just Transitions are multi-sector, multi-stakeholder, and multi-pathway.

b) Connecting and aligning international dialogues and activities on Just Transitions with the lived realities and priorities of the local communities that will be most affected by climate change.

c) Ensuring the engagement and participation of a wide range of stakeholders, particularly underrepresented and marginalized voices, and practitioners at the level of local implementation.

d) Overcoming barriers to international cooperation by providing spaces for real, impactful, and sometimes challenging conversations. The JTWP could empower the international community to build trust and a mutual understanding of the diverse pathways to Just Transitions to achieve transformational change.

Evidence-based recommendations for JTWP dialogue topics

Early dialogues on Just Transitions focused on labour transitions in the energy sector, predominantly in European economies. In recent years, the topic has expanded in scope to include a variety of sectors, countries and stakeholders. Research on Just Transitions in countries in the Global South has revealed that challenges in developing countries are often context-specific and cross-cutting, and there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to planning and implementing Just Transitions.

The following recommendations for dialogue topics draw on research from diverse international contexts, including research conducted in both the Global North and South.

1. Just Transitions towards climate resilience

Adaptation is an urgent global challenge, which—like mitigation—can create myriad impacts on the livelihoods of vulnerable people, resulting in unequal and unjust outcomes that redistribute climate risk rather than reducing it.

Research demonstrates that national adaptation policies can have significant impacts on vulnerable populations. Our research in Malawi suggests that although agricultural industrialisation policies may result in more resilient food systems at the national level, they risk leaving behind smallholder farmers, who may lack capital for such investments. Similarly, our research in Bangladesh demonstrates that...
farmers without secure land rights—particularly women, who are often excluded from land tenure—are at risk of losing their livelihoods if they are not included in decision-making.vii

Adaptation policies can also have transboundary impacts. In a globalised world where systems are interconnected, the impacts of climate policies are increasingly felt beyond the places where they are implemented. Truly just and equitable transitions will require countries to engage in enhanced cooperation to manage transboundary impacts, which includes avoiding measures that redistribute risks or reinforce existing vulnerabilities.viii

Key questions for this dialogue include:

- How could frameworks for Just Transitions be applied to adaptation policies to fairly distribute the benefits and burdens of these policies?
- How could policies on Just Transitions be leveraged to enable transformational adaptation and achieve just resilience?
- How can international collaboration on Just Transitions reduce the transboundary impacts of climate adaptation policies?

2. Identifying opportunities for needs-based support and capacity strengthening to achieve Just Transitions

To date, the overwhelming scale of unmet development needs, added to a context characterised by vast disparities of wealth and access to sustainable development, has resulted in imbalances in countries’ mitigative and adaptive capacities. Limited institutional, technical, and financial capacity hampers countries’ abilities to implement ambitious Just Transitions. Means of implementation are therefore an essential requirement for an effective and equitable global climate regime. However, the scale and form of support must be fit for purpose in order to address context-specific challenges.ix

Research in Laos and Malawi demonstrates that increased institutional understanding of Just Transitions across ministries is necessary to accelerate Just Transitions planning in the agricultural and forestry sectors.x In Indonesia, research indicates that building institutional capacity to convene social dialogues and engage stakeholders is critical to implementing a truly just energy transition.xi Research in Kenya and Bangladesh illustrates the importance of building technical capacity for data analysis and modelling to plan Just Transitions.xii

A needs-based approach is invaluable to addressing these challenges, as it focuses on identifying what exactly is required (and by whom) to enable action at the desired scale. Taking this approach yields domestic benefits, because it requires a process of identifying and articulating actual requirements for enabling action and facilitates international cooperation. This approach ultimately opens a direct conversation about strategies for meeting very particularised needs.

Finance is a central component of capacity building discussions. But a needs-based approach does not necessarily stop at, or even prioritize, finance alonexiii. A needs-based approach to capacity building includes strengthening political capacities and institutional arrangements in all countries, including in the Global North, to facilitate financial flows and international cooperation for genuinely global Just Transitions.

Hosting a dialogue with the explicit intention of identifying the contextually specific needs of Member States at the national and subnational level would be necessaryxiv. Such a dialogue would ensure that all discussions on means of implementation are responsive to the challenges faced by those attempting
to scale up climate action across mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. The dialogue will help the UNFCCC identify areas for capacity strengthening and establish the scale of support required for ambitious action on Just Transitions.

Key questions include:

- What are key social, economic, environmental and development needs that must be addressed to achieve the ambitious implementation of Just Transitions?
- How can capacity building and means of implementation be tailored to those key needs?
- How can international cooperation help facilitate the scale and type of support needed?

3. Bringing diverse stakeholders into decision-making on Just Transitions

Multi-level, multi-context and multi-stakeholder engagement is a fundamental principle of just and inclusive transitions. The inclusion of diverse groups throughout the process enhances policies’ success and social acceptability. However, there is a gap between traditional decision-making arenas and lived realities at the local level. Research indicates that we need new fora to connect high-level decision-makers with those most impacted by climate change and climate policies through the “creation of new spaces of citizen engagement through climate assemblies, Just Transition partnerships and the like.”

Research indicates that integrating top-down and bottom-up approaches creates national momentum for Just Transitions, while ensuring that initiatives are place-based and locally owned. Research from Kenya reveals the importance of having local policies (County Integrated Development Plans) that include climate change units and interact with national ministries. By integrating strategies for Just Transitions into CIDPs and climate change units, Kenya could promote the creation and ownership of local plans for Just Transitions. A bottom-up approach is also key to financing Just Transitions. For example, the European Union’s Just Transition Mechanism provides EU-level financial support and coordination for Just Transitions, while building capacity at the national and subnational level. This mechanism enables countries, particularly most vulnerable regions, to take ownership over their pathways toward Just Transitions in-line with the EU’s 2030 and 2050 climate goals.

Given that policymakers are facing the challenge of how best to engage diverse stakeholders in implementing Just Transitions, a JTWP dialogue on participatory processes could provide an opportunity to explore best practices (successful collaboration has been seen in the Nairobi knowledge-to-Action hub and the GST World Cafe). Including a wide range of voices in the discussion will allow for a more open and honest conversation, where ideas and information are shared in a less formal format compared to negotiations.

Key questions for this dialogue include:

- How can leaders design and implement effective and inclusive participatory processes to support pathways toward Just Transitions?
- What forms of public consultation can be used to increase meaningful public engagement with Just Transitions?
- How can public engagement be tailored to successfully connect with a broad range of stakeholders from varied contexts?
4. Using Case Studies to identify different transition pathways in varied sectors, levels, and contexts

We need to start building confidence in the socio-economic benefits of Just Transitions, demonstrating that transformational change is possible. To ratchet up ambition and implementation, policymakers need clear, concrete, and practical examples of successful pathways to Just Transitions. We need assessments of what works in terms of delivering Just Transitions on the ground. We currently have several examples of unfair transitions and most existing macrolevel pathways are not just. There are, however, some smaller and tangible transition examples from stakeholders in different sectors from which we can generate a conversation. For example, India’s Green Skill Development Programme supports youth in building soft skills and abilities to tackle global climate challenges—with a focus on socio-cultural contexts, local community needs and stakeholder consultation—to increase the socio-economic benefits of the transition. An example from the private sector includes Orsted’s green transformation, in which the company went from generating 85% of its energy from fossil fuels to generating 90% of their energy from renewables over the last decade.

COP28 negotiations on the JTWP called for a space to exchange experiences, knowledge, and best practices. With this in mind, one of the JTWP’s dialogues could take a participatory and engaging approach to sharing lessons learned—building on tangible examples—to articulate diverse transition pathways. Although Just Transitions are context and country-specific, our research has found that there are overlapping challenges when planning and implementing Just Transitions where commonalities can be found.

The challenge for this dialogue is, however, finding a format that goes beyond presentations and traditional interactions around the negotiating table, and instead developing ways to share guidance, engage all country representatives and allow them to go from lessons to implementation.

Key questions include:

- What are best practices for Just Transitions which, building on diverse examples, could help different countries build pathways?
- What are practical examples of successful Just Transitions for different pathways, contexts, and sectors?
- What does a good and economically viable plan for Just Transitions look like?
- How do we upscale emerging and new transition efforts and initiatives to achieve the transformational, equitable and fair transitions that are needed?

Methodologically informed suggestions on work to be undertaken under the JTWP

The planning and operationalisation of Just Transitions occurs mostly at the national and local levels. Yet international cooperation on Just Transitions can support collective action, overcome barriers to implementation, and strengthen political will for ambitious climate action. The following recommendations cover key activities to be undertaken under the JTWP, drawing from research and practice:

1. Develop indicators and metrics to measure and track the justice component of Just Transitions

The United Arab Emirates Just Transition work programme decision decides that the JTWP should inform the second Global Stocktake (GST), yet there is no consistent approach or set of indicators to
measure and monitor the social justice elements of Just Transitions. The work programme could support the GST and the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by developing multidimensional indicators and metrics to track the justice component of Just Transitions. Understanding how to track justice, a task far harder than monitoring the technical elements of the transition, will be key in ensuring that the social elements of Just Transitions are equally prioritised.

Climate Strategies research noted the need to explore tangible examples of transition indicators that are comprehensible and measurable to track the implementation of Just Transitions. These indicators would be key in bridging the ambition-implementation gap.

The development of indicators and metrics for Just Transitions should be based on the best-available science. This will be key to creating indicators and metrics that are non-prescriptive, but specific and measurable. Furthermore, co-creating justice dimensions with businesses, trade unions, CSOs, vulnerable populations and other local actors will help develop inclusive and multi-faceted indicators and metrics.

2. New assessment tools for the economic modelling of Just Transitions

Traditional economic models typically consider the economy as a machine operating under equilibrium. These models are biased against policy interventions that aim to facilitate low-carbon transitions on the basis that they may disrupt this equilibrium. Due to such assumptions, traditional economic models do not provide a complete picture of the societal impacts that would result from Just Transitions, given that pathways are inherently transformational and diverse in nature, scope, and benefits over time. With this in mind, there is a need for a new approach to modelling that captures the economy as a dynamic ecosystem.

The Economics of Energy Innovation and System Transition (EEIST) project develops cutting-edge complexity-based modelling solutions to support government decision-making around low-carbon innovation and technological change in order to facilitate a rapid transition. Frameworks for Just Transitions are often left out of discussions of economic modelling – EEIST challenges the status quo by integrating socioeconomic considerations into its models. The project’s upcoming Synthesis Report illustrates how complexity-based modelling can more accurately outline the effects of policy decisions on factors that are crucial for Just Transitions, including jobs, economic impacts, and more.

This report is slated to be published and can be accessed here upon its release:
https://eeist.co.uk/eeist-reports/

3. Build a supportive global governance architecture of Just Transitions

Just Transitions to a lower carbon economy need to be financed, governed, regulated, and coordinated. Currently, there are a variety of multilateral and international institutions working on Just Transitions, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank (WB) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the UNFCCC. Given their varied interests and responsibilities—in areas as diverse as labour, finance, technology development, trade, and investment—their visions for Just Transitions differ. However, unless the UNFCCC bridges the global governance gap to work effectively with these organizations and mediate between their different interpretations of justice, ambitious and urgent Just Transitions could be hampered.

A key challenge for the JTWP is to improve the coordination of collective efforts to mobilise finance, build capacity and support public participation in Just Transitions by exploring a supportive and
coherent global governance architecture for Just Transitions. Experience to date, however, suggests that transitions imposed from above and without a sense of public ownership are often rejected, so interventions need to reflect local realities. Assumptions are often made in discussions of Just Transitions about a strong state, powerful trade unions and civil space to debate and plan pathways to Just Transition, conditions which poorly describe many areas of the world.

Furthermore, the JTWP will also have to consider issues wider than compensation and retraining of unionised workers, which has been the dominant framing of Just Transitions to date. Issues such as the industrial and trade policy tools that developing countries might need to support infant industry and protect emergent local carbon sectors, and broader questions of economic justice such as debt repayments, which constrain the fiscal space many countries have to fund Just Transitions, need to be part of the conversation. Additionally, an effective governance of Just Transitions would require the inclusion of other approaches to justice such as feminist and indigenous approaches.

In that sense, the JTWP could work on developing a supportive and coherent global governance architecture that addresses current gaps, misalignment and silos found between and across discourses and practices undertaken by other multilateral and international organisations, to deliver effective and inclusive frameworks for Just Transitions.

4. Identify needs-based opportunities to finance Just Transitions

Unmet development needs can require decision-makers to choose between investing in climate action and responding to urgent national priorities. To increase ambition and implementation, financial support from external sources may be required. To ensure that international financing is addressing country-specific contexts, finance should be needs-based and promote recipient priorities over those of donor countries, and should provide financing for the social justice, as well as technical, elements of Just Transitions.

Cross-country comparative research—drawing on policy contexts in the Global South—demonstrates that aligning finance for Just Transitions with international development goals is key to ensuring national buy-in and long-term support for investments in Just Transitions. Furthermore, cross-country comparative research—with a particular focus on Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa and a perspective from Germany—noted that having an integrated approach to climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation is essential to maximise efforts, close financing gaps and meet climate targets. Climate policies and finance are critical to these synergies.

The JTWP could create a forum for the coordination of development needs, socio-economic and environmental policy impacts, and climate finance. The JTWP could collaborate with the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance and the Standing Committee on Finance to achieve greater coordination between development needs, socio-economic and environmental policy impacts, and climate finance. By developing tangible avenues to address unmet development needs, the JTWP could create an upward spiral of Just Transition ambition and implementation.

5. Build trust by understanding international positions on restorative justice

The Just Transition empowers actors to take ambitious climate action to achieve rapid decarbonisation and increase equity in the critical years to come. However, corrective justice and restorative justice—which address historical injustices—are key to building trust and enhancing cooperation on Just Transitions. Research on Just Transitions in Argentina indicated that Just Transitions could provide
restorative justice for ethnic minorities and migrant workers in the agricultural sector. Research from Kenya similarly highlighted the potential for Just Transitions in the energy sector to create opportunities for gender-based restorative justice in an industry that has historically excluded women.

The United Arab Emirates Just Transition work programme decision recalled the importance of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR). CBDR recognises nations’ shared responsibility for climate change, while also acknowledging historical imbalances in industrial development and resulting emissions.

International cooperation on Just Transitions can only progress at the pace in which trust and mutual understanding can be built, as communities who have suffered from historical oppression will present holistic demands that are hard to address. The JTWP could create informal spaces for Member States to share their positions on restorative justice, establishing a shared understanding of how CBDR interacts with Just Transitions while contributing to the goals of the Paris Agreement, thus, providing a strong foundation for future negotiations.

6. Support the creation of ambitious NDCs that incorporate and centre Just Transitions

Currently, 30% of the latest available Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) incorporate social dimensions and reference Just Transitions. NDCs set overarching climate objectives at the country level, and therefore offer an opportunity to operationalise and contextualise Just Transitions within national climate agendas.

By integrating Just Transitions into NDCs, member states signal to stakeholders that Just Transitions are a long-term national priority. Research in Colombia found that by embedding Just Transitions into the country’s development plan, the government has enhanced Just Transitions’ legitimacy, better integrated Just Transitions into policy processes, and increased resources for planning Just Transitions.

The JTWP could provide support with drafting feasible targets for Just Transitions goals, mainstreaming social justice and integrating considerations for Just Transitions across all implementation areas for the next round of NDCs. Focusing on achieving NDCs that incorporate frameworks for Just Transitions could ensure that aims to address socio-economic consequences, enhance equity, protect Human Rights, include vulnerable communities, and empower previously marginalized groups, along with broader reduction targets, are emphasised in future climate policies.
develop national recommendations for strategies on Just Transitions. The initiative aims to spearhead Just Transitions by identifying cross-cutting issues, challenges, opportunities and trends for Just Transitions in key sectors drawing from Just Transition applications in diverse countries of the Global South.

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Endnotes


2 COP28: Climate Strategies’ Statement for the 2023 High-Level Roundtable on Just Transitions: https://climatestrategies.org/cop28-climate-strategies/

3 Side Event: Connecting international cooperation to the local realities of just transitions: https://climatestrategies.org/event/just-transition-work-programme/

4 Climate Strategies research shows that these challenges are typically enhanced by background contexts of low income, high poverty rates, high rates of informality/illegality in employment in sectors facing transition, high inequality in access to services and energy, and other social inequality. These gaps, which we found in country research across the Global South, are highlighted in our flagship report, ‘Exploring Just Transitions in the Global South’.


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