



Just Transition

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Climate change is one of the seminal issues that is currently facing all of us globally. A shift from fossil fuels, to cleaner and sustainable renewable energy sources that are energy efficient and accessible as well as affordable for the people are extremely important factors to consider when determining the essential building blocks toward incorporating the ‘Just Transition’ principles in national energy policy.

The transition to a low carbon economy is underpinned by issues such as equity and justice for people living in poverty that currently do not have access to reliable energy supplies and to those whose livelihoods are based on the fossil fuel economy¹.

According to EMBER, an independent climate and energy think tank; their annual Global Electricity Review for 2021 shows that South Africa’s electricity is sourced from coal, a direct contrast with the global average of 34%.² The Just Energy Transition has to be approached with relative caution and it must promote inclusivity as the voices of marginalized groups; including women, must be included to ensure that there is meaningful engagement to a participatory renewable energy system.

Accessibility and affordability must be considered for the millions of South Africans that lack access to electricity; affordability of low carbon electricity to provide for basic needs in households must be considered. Some of the interventions that can be applied could include subsidizing low-income households and prioritizing renewable energy sources for households that currently do not have access to electricity.

Corporations must be part of the solution and they play a large role in ensuring that there is a “Just Transition”; there must be a shift towards renewable energy sources as they are the biggest energy consumers and carbon emitters. There must be strict legal compliance with the national environmental legislation and the private sector must have their own transition plans that protect workers and ensure that social and environmental issues are prioritized.

¹ Peter Newell and Dusan Mulvaney (2008) “The political economy of the ‘Just Transition’”

² EMBER (2021) Annual Global Electricity Review for 2021.

The polluter pays principle must be applied to ensure that polluters pay for the restoration of degraded ecosystems.

A large aspect of the “Just Transition” means that there must be a concerted effort toward ensuring that opportunities for more community owned decentralized energy generation.

The system of decentralized renewable energy generation can be applied in townships across South Africa; in places such as Gugulethu and Soweto; which have both been going through recurrent blackouts over the past few years. In order to ensure that this decentralized approach to energy production is feasible; communities must be supported in setting up their own independent energy projects; with a specific emphasis on including marginalized groups such as women, the youth and the disabled in the ownership of these community based independent power producers. No one should be left behind; and it should be open for all communities to adopt this approach.

The coal based fossil fuel economy workforce must be given an opportunity to be retrained and to be given training and support to ensure that they are also part of the independent power production move; which will promote economic diversification and the creation of alternative industries.