

# BUILDING A GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION NARRATIVE:

challenges and approaches  
to turn a Global North concept  
into a common agenda



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Just Transition comes very much from the Global North: initially mobilised by the USA workers in the late 1970s, the concept has been taken up at the international level since the Conference of the Parties (COP) in 1997, when international trade unions mobilised around climate change. Just Transition provides a framework to **overcome tensions between social and environmental objectives and needs**.

In Europe, since the launch of the European Green Deal in 2019, the European Commission has been promoting Just Transition through several measures to make Europe a climate neutral continent by 2050.

## The European Green Deal

The European Green Deal (EGD) conveys the EU's ambition to adjust and "green" its economic growth and become climate-neutral by 2050, as part of its contribution to the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. The EGD is a set of policy initiatives covering a wide range of sectors including energy, construction, biodiversity, transport and food. While Europe can make significant progress in reducing its environmental impact, it is essential to engage with other countries and regions to address the global nature of the climate challenge effectively. Furthermore, in a globalised world as the one we live in, ambitious policies and initiatives as the Green Deal inevitably entail effects and consequences on other countries. Even if these consequences can be positive, there is a risk of negative spillover effects on the rest of the world that need to be tackled.

Indeed, much of the European Union (EU) policies towards Just Transition still rely on the use of resources located in the Global South, as well as on the traditional economic growth model, where global production chains have a key role. This economic

growth model is very much the source of the current environmental and social crisis, whose effects have a disproportionate impact on the Global South, experiencing extreme climate events, adapting to climate impacts, and carrying the economic burden of reducing climate-destructive industries. The Global South is paying the highest price for the climate crisis.

**For the Just Transition framework to be truly 'just', the voices of the Global South need to be heard.**

Therefore, since 2021, SOLIDAR has been working with its members and partners to develop a joint vision for a Just Transition from the perspective of Global South's civil society organisations, including social and environmental NGOs, Trade Unions, workers' education associations, research centres, think tanks, grassroots organisations, environmental groups, indigenous groups, women, and youth organisations.

This Narrative is the result of consultations and exchanges started with the report "[A Just Transition for the Global South](#)", involving trade unions and CSOs from South Africa and the Philippines, and further developed in 2023 through a series of online workshops bringing together partners from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

As a result of this two-years process, a Global Just Transition Working Group was created, bringing together National European CSOs and CSOs from Asia, Africa and Latin America, covering more than 20 countries. The participants possess different and cross-sectoral expertise, and through capacity-building and peer-learning activities, the group aims to build international solidarity and collaboration on the topic of Just Transition.

As the first output of this group, this narrative aims to present the Group's vision on what a Global Just Transition should look like, and what it should entail.



# 2. JUST TRANSITION: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The concept of 'Just Transition' originated in the USA from the need to safeguard and enhance the well-being of workers and communities, dependent on economic sectors that needed to change, ensuring that they are recognised, listened to, their rights protected, and alternative, decent jobs and livelihoods secured for them. The diffusion of the concept extended through various trade unions in different countries and regions, primarily in the Global North, where initiatives addressing the social and health aspects of environmental change were already underway.

As the new millennium approached, trade unions increasingly started advocating for Just Transition on the international stage, particularly in the context of United Nations climate dialogues and Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations climate process emerged as a pivotal platform for the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to advance its Just Transition agenda. Consequently, within the international climate community, the concept of Just Transition gained increasing recognition and started to be used by many actors in the global climate discourse.<sup>1</sup>

By analysing the social impact of climate change, Just Transition addressed a crucial gap in the international climate dialogue. Its language has become entrenched in mainstream climate change discussions, adopted by diverse entities including UN agencies, governments, NGOs, indigenous groups, feminist organisations, businesses and philanthropic foundations. However, it is essential to note that different countries, stakeholders and communities may associate Just Transition with varying interpretations and priorities.

## HOW IS JUST TRANSITION INTERNATIONALLY DEFINED?

Different stakeholders associate the term of Just Transition with a variety of worldviews and strategies:

- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines Just Transition as: *"Promoting environmentally sustainable economies in a way that is fair and inclusive to everyone concerned – workers, enterprises and communities – by creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. It involves maximising the social and economic opportunities of climate and environmental action, while minimising and carefully managing any challenges, including through effective social dialogue and stakeholder engagement and respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work."*<sup>2</sup>
- The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) defines Just Transition as *"the fair transition from a fossil-based economy to a low-carbon or decarbonised world"*<sup>3</sup>
- The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Definition *"A set of principles, processes and practices that aims to ensure that no people, workers, places, sectors, countries or regions are left behind in the transition from a high carbon to a low carbon economy."*<sup>4</sup>
- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Definition *"The concept of a 'Just Transition' recognises that a shift to a more sustainable economy can have significant impacts on workers and communities that are currently dependent on fossil fuels. A Just Transition*

1 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2018) *"Mapping Just Transition(s) to a Low-Carbon World"*.

2 ILO (2023) *"Resolution concerning a Just Transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all"*.

3 Ibidem (n2).

4 IPCC (2022) *"Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Annex I: Glossary"*.



*means transforming the economy and economic system in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind.”<sup>5</sup>*

## 2.1. OUR VISION

Since 2021, SOLIDAR has been working with its members and partners to build a vision for a Just Transition, raising the perspective of Global South’s civil society organisations.

Through this work, we have heard and shared the stories, experiences and testimonies from different CSOs (Trade Unions, workers’ education associations, research centres, think tanks, grassroots organisations, environmental groups, indigenous groups, women and youth organisations) to develop a joint understanding of Just Transition.

SOLIDAR members and partners presented what Just Transition shall or looks like for their constituencies and communities.

The **Labour Research Service** from **South Africa**, brought the perspective of Trade Unions in Africa and their understanding of Just Transition, explaining **how to frame the Energy Just Transition discourse in a way that resonates with the workers, what are the Trade Unions’ priorities and how to ensure a Transition in the African context.**<sup>6</sup>

From **India**, we heard about the work of the **Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA)** and how they are promoting the concept of 100 miles (around 161 kilometres): *“A sustainable world is the one which believes in connectivity. In 100 miles you are sustaining the livelihoods of the people around you, and you don’t have to go far to obtain basic things such as education, shelter, food, financial inclusion, all these things should be available within the 100 miles you live in.”* SEWA promotes a Just Transition

## 5 TRADE UNION PRIORITIES

1. **Labour creation and sustainable industrial policy:**
  - a) Government support for sectors that create decent jobs through industrial policy.
  - b) massive investment in public sector climate jobs which support a just transition.
  - c) government should support the increased provision of social services (i.e. care work) that prioritises the well-being of all people and the environment.
2. A **Universal Basic Income Grant (UBIG)** provides a source of income which would support groups most vulnerable to unjust transition.
3. **Reskilling and upskilling:** Workers who are most vulnerable to job losses can demand training programmes to equip them for jobs that will be created through a just transition.
4. **Land reform:** Lack of access to land undermines the ability of communities and individuals to adapt, utilise the opportunities of a just transition, and institute mitigation measures.
5. **End austerity for a Just Climate Macroeconomic Framework:** A revised macroeconomic framework which prioritises care and well-being is environmentally sustainable, and rights-based.

*Source: Framing a Just Transition for Trade Unions in Africa, LRS, 2023.*

through the concept of *“Clean sky”*: *“A vision of the world where everything is clean, from the air we breathe to the values we promote.”* This entails **sustainable agriculture through organic farming, natural resource management, climate literacy to promote clean energy in rural communities and community level activities to improve access to unpolluted water and land.**

From **Nicaragua**, the feminist organisation **Fundación Entre Mujeres** (Foundation Among Women) showed **how through agroecology rural women are empowered, access lands and achieve financial independence. In this way, they are also empowering the local communities by producing food in a sustainable way.**

**“We can’t work alone: we must organise to fight violence, for productive diversification and access to international markets. We must**

<sup>5</sup> UNFCCC (2023) *“Leaving no one behind in the transition towards a low-carbon economy”*.

<sup>6</sup> Labour Research Service (LRS) (2023) *“Framing a Just Transition for trade unions in Africa”*.

change every aspect of the capitalist model; we want to transform the model of continued growth. We want to produce in different ways and redistribute the income. We produce for ourselves first, and then we can get to the market." Civil Society, Latin America



The result of this process is our shared vision on what we mean when we talk about a Global Just Transition:

**“Just Transition is a shift to a society which meets everyone's needs within the planet's boundaries.”**

“Just Transition is about acting for social and environmental justice at the same time. Countries must cut emissions in line with the Paris Agreement and adapt to the consequences of the climate crisis, while protecting and radically restoring nature. Industrialised countries have an historical responsibility, since they have contributed significantly to the current climate crisis, and for this reason they must cut emissions faster and compensate those who are hardest hit, while lower-income countries must have time to develop and ensure that everyone has access to essential services within the planet boundaries. The consumption and production cycle which only benefits Global North actors must be stopped, while Global South nations and local communities should be properly compensated for the resources they share with the outside world.

To be effective, the transition must turn the spotlight on rich elites, monopolies and companies that are fuelling the climate and environmental crisis. In this sense, workers play a key role to shape solutions that focus on the life and dignity of all, including women, and lead the paradigm shift towards equal and just societies instead of an economy-oriented society. To do so, workers' rights must be ensured and secured. This approach will guarantee a shift to a more democratic society where power is no longer in the hands of a few, but people can come together and implement the solutions needed”.

# 3. A GLOBAL SOUTH'S APPROACH TO JUST TRANSITION<sup>7</sup>

In our interviews and meetings within the Global Just Transition Working Group, Just Transition emerged as an opportunity, and an imperative, to address the wider social and economic injustices in society.

The following emerged as major common elements of a Global South's Approach to Just Transition:

## 1. JUST TRANSITION NEEDS SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The climate and ecological crisis need a radical change of our economic model. Global injustice and the global economy are two sides of the same coin. We need to overturn the idea of eternal economic growth as a measure of wellbeing, rather than the fair distribution of resources, social wellbeing, or environmental sustainability. We need to replace the current economic system with one that has a more equal distributive power and limits to wastefulness.

With its roots in global inequality, the climate and ecological crisis in the Global South is part of many different and historic challenges and injustices. The Global South has dealt with greater levels of gender injustice, land-grabbing, extractivism, poverty, and lack of access to basic rights and services for centuries.

To truly address the root causes of the climate crisis, the transition must be radical. It would need to confront, restrain, or reinvent the market system that is designed for perpetual growth, and that is built to amass wealth into the hands of the few.

The South African labour-support organisation, Labour Research Service, has outlined the different levels of a Just Transition<sup>8</sup>. At the most conservative level, a Just Transition refers to superficial shifts through jobs, training, and the continued commodification of nature. For deeper transformation, a Just Transition would need more profound changes in economic and political

systems. It needs systems that resolve the conflicts and self-interest of a market-driven economy and dismantle inequalities in society.

## 2. GREEN EXTRACTIVISM IS NOT JUST TRANSITION

**"Extracting from the poor to supply the elite with energy at rates that are unaffordable to the poor inflicts a lot of harm on communities which still stand to be sacrificed if they are in a zone where a particular mineral is being mined." Civil society, South Africa**

The exploitation of natural resources to create climate-friendly technology or other green products is no different from any other form of extractivism. Extracting raw materials for alternative 'green' technology at the lowest possible cost leads to land-grabbing, poor health and safety, low-paid, dangerous and precarious jobs, pollution, and destruction of local ecosystems—alongside workers' reliance on these harmful local industries for survival. In some cases, environmental and social injustices in these new, 'climate-friendly' industries are even worse than in established industries, since they lack the safeguards of many decades of unionisation, scrutiny, legal disputes and rights activism. A green transition rooted in the injustices that have created war zones for indigenous, rural or marginalised people for centuries, is no better than colonisation.

Moreover, partners raised that many of those fighting to protect their environment, land and livelihoods face extreme danger. Leaders, activists, and communities are subjected to intimidation, violence and even assassination.

<sup>7</sup> OPIC, SOLIDAR (2021) "A Just Transition for the Global South".

<sup>8</sup> Labour Research Service (LRS) (2021) "*Defining a Just Transition for Sub-Saharan Energy Workers*".



# 4. BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION VISION

As highlighted above, Just Transition is the concept that foresees social justice in sustainable and climate policies and dialogues, intended as the equal distribution of wealth, knowledge, income and power within our global societies, as well as a guaranteed access to universal and quality social services, lifelong and life-wide learning, decent work, social protection and a decent life for all, expressed through a new social contract and in the form of a truly social citizenship.<sup>9</sup>

To establish a transition that is truly just and promotes social justice, the Global Just Transition Working Group led by SOLIDAR has identified the following building blocks:

## 1. CUTTING EMISSIONS

This concept refers to the need to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to limit global temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, aiming to limit it to 1.5°C, as called for in the Paris Agreement. At the current state of play, the Earth is already about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s, and emissions continue to rise. According to the UN, to keep global warming to no more than 1.5°C, emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.

This is a global effort, but current and historical emissions are highly unequally distributed within and among countries, reflecting global patterns of inequality. Globally, the 10% of the population with the highest income accounted for nearly half (48%) of emissions, with two thirds of this group living in developed countries. The bottom 50% of the world population contributed only 12% of total emissions. For this reason, to reduce emissions efficiently,



**countries with greater capacity and greater historic responsibility for emissions not only will need to take more ambitious and rapid action, according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, but they will also need to provide financial and technical resources to support low- and middle-income countries in their transformation, reflecting differentiated timelines.<sup>10</sup>**

Within the Global Just Transition Working Group, the need to cut emissions emerged as an urgent objective to be met together with measures and public policies to support incomes and wages, offer re-skilling and up-skilling, transfer technical knowledge and financial incentives in a deep dialogue with the most vulnerable collectives that may not, without public support, be able to benefit from the transition to a cleaner industry. The case of the Filipino Jeepney workers is a positive example in this regard.

<sup>9</sup> SOLIDAR definition of social justice, retrieved from *Our Work*

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) (2023) *"Broken Record Temperatures hit new highs, yet world fails to cut emissions (again)"*.

## Cutting Emissions through Organising: Just Transition in the Philippines Jeepneys' phase out<sup>11</sup>

Military jeeps, in service since the 1950s, remain a common form of public transport in the Philippines. Unfortunately, they are fuel-inefficient and highly polluting. Therefore, in 2016, the government declared that they were to be phased out. The new laws gave major advantages to investors who had the capital to buy cleaner, modern buses or electric vehicles. Informal owner-drivers or small jeepney fleets were at risk of being excluded.

The Filipino National Confederation of Transport Workers' Unions, NCTU, organising transport workers in the informal sector, led a campaign to negotiate a better deal for the Jeepney sector. They opposed the policy in many consultations and national conferences over two years.

*"Workers initially had no way of affording these new buses to get into the new green job market. ... We are not against modernisation, but the way it is done by the government is not fair. It is antiworker. We have been working for a proworker policy during the last two years."* Unionist, Philippines.

Their one-day transport strike, in 2017, led to nation-wide consultation and an agreement to ensure a more equitable and longer transition process.

The terms that were successfully negotiated included:

- A slower phasing out of jeepneys, with an extension from June 2020 to March 2021, and a further grace period for cooperatives to March 2022.
- Although individual ownership of vehicles was no longer allowed, NCTU negotiated for cooperatives to be allowed to purchase licences to operate. This has permitted drivers and owners of the old jeepneys to continue to have ownership in their industry.
- The cost of a licence to own and operate the new buses was 1,000 USD. The NCTU campaign negotiated this down to 400 USD for cooperatives if they could show financial management capacity.
- Government's grants or loans to purchase the new vehicles.

These compromises have been valuable, allowing the livelihoods and the investments of generations of Jeepney drivers to be better protected. The role of unions and allies was key, especially in giving support to advocacy as well as capacity development for the workers' cooperatives.

*"We have started doing cooperative education with them and helping to apply for registration of cooperatives, so that they can be accredited with the government. It is not an easy process. There are a lot of legal documents. They must raise money for the initial capital."* Civil society, Philippines

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem (n7).



## 2. CLIMATE ADAPTATION

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adaptation refers to “*the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.*”<sup>12</sup> It refers to a wide range of transversal measures in various sectors such as agriculture, energy, transportation or infrastructure, to cope with the effects of climate change, enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability.

As the impact of climate change accelerates — including more extreme weather and sea level rise — it is increasingly urgent that countries and communities adapt. This urgency is even more pressing for developing countries, given their higher vulnerability to the repercussions of natural hazards. This vulnerability arises from a combination of factors such as their geographical and climatic conditions, heavy reliance on natural resources and limited capacity to adapt to the changing climate. Moreover, adaptation efforts are crucial for safeguarding vulnerable groups like women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, refugees and displaced individuals, who are disproportionately impacted by climate change.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem (n5).

<sup>13</sup> UNDP (2024) “*What is climate change adaptation and why is it crucial?*”

<sup>14</sup> SOLIDAR, MPDL (2021) “*Transición Ecológica Justa, Feminista y desde los Pueblos*”.

Within the Global Just Transition Working Group, climate adaptation emerged as an objective to be met by supporting local, community-led good practices such as the Madre Selva Collective in Guatemala.

### Energy transition with justice: The experience of communities in the Zona Reina in Guatemala<sup>14</sup>

As the world grapples with the impact of climate change, Guatemala’s energy transition takes on heightened significance in the context of climate adaptation and resilience-building efforts. The energy landscape in Guatemala has been marked by overexploitation of resources and marginalisation of indigenous and rural communities, sparking resistance against extractive policies.

Furthermore, despite efforts to increase hydroelectric production, many areas in Guatemala still lack electricity coverage, particularly in isolated regions. Paradoxically, the department producing the most electricity has the highest number of households without access. Additionally, environmental degradation, such as the confinement of river channels used for hydroelectric production, has further impacted communities’ access to water.

In response to these injustices, the Madre Selva Collective has pioneered **community-led energy projects** in the Zona Reina, where 95 rural communities were living without electricity, providing alternatives to the centralised energy model. By building small-scale hydroelectric plants owned and operated by indigenous communities, they have ensured equitable participation, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment. These projects have not only provided access to electricity but also facilitated economic development and strengthened social cohesion.

However, challenges remain, including scaling up energy production to benefit more communities



and advocating for policy reforms to prioritise community energy sovereignty. The resistance against large-scale hydroelectric projects, such as the Xalalá Hydroelectric Project, reflects communities' determination to protect their territories and natural resources. Looking ahead, **there is a need to expand the use of alternative energy sources like solar and wind power and to promote community-based energy solutions nationwide.** This involves fostering partnerships between communities, municipal governments, and grassroots organisations to develop sustainable energy infrastructure and advocate for inclusive energy policies.

**The efforts of grassroots initiatives like the Madre Selva Collective highlight the potential for community-led approaches to pave the way towards a more just and sustainable energy future.**

### 3. PROTECTION AND RADICAL RESTORATION OF NATURE

Nature is fundamental for the functioning and well-being of the planet, as well as for humanity's survival and health. In fact, ecosystems support all life on Earth and the healthier our ecosystems are, the healthier the planet - and its people. However, human activities have significantly impacted three quarters of the land and two thirds of the oceans, exacerbating the loss of nature.<sup>15</sup>

We are using the equivalent of 1.6 Earths to maintain our current way of life, and ecosystems cannot keep up with our demands. Furthermore, ecosystem degradation does not affect everyone equally, its worst impact mainly affects people living in poverty and marginalised communities. The only path towards a resilient future for both the planet and communities is through the conservation, restoration, and sustainable utilisation of nature and ecosystems.



15 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2021) *"Making Peace with Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies"*.

In fact, restoration plays a crucial role in mitigating climate change, ensuring food security for a growing population and halting biodiversity loss. Decarbonising our energy systems to reduce emissions will not be enough to limit global temperature increase to below 2°C, and preferably to 1.5°C. Alongside decarbonisation efforts, the integration of nature-based solutions such as restoration is imperative.<sup>16</sup>

Within the Global Just Transition Working Group, the need to preserve indigenous communities' ancestral practises to protect the environment has been identified as a needed set of measures to protect nature.

## What is ecosystem restoration?

“Ecosystem restoration is the process of halting and reversing degradation, resulting in improved ecosystem services and recovered biodiversity. Ecosystem restoration encompasses a wide continuum of practices, depending on local conditions and societal choice.”<sup>17</sup> Many of the most common restoration activities include, for example, tree planting, coral rehabilitation, forest rewilding, invasive species eradication, green space creation etc.

## Nature is Life: Indigenous knowledge and the four worlds of the Awá<sup>18</sup>

The Awá people are located in Nariño, in the district of Tumaco, Colombia.

*“We, the Inkal Awa people, are people of the mountains and the jungle. A community made up of 31,000 individuals, living in the jungles of the southern Colombian Pacific. Of these, more than 15,000 of us are women, and have always been defending life and the territory.”*

The Awá women practice the concept of “cosmogony” which in their language is known as Ampara Su, meaning “four worlds”. These four worlds consist of the world of the small beings that live under the earth, the world of the human beings that live above the earth, the world of the spirits that are already dead and have left the world of the living, and finally, the world of the Creator, the Great Spirit. The balance of these four worlds is what allows the millenary Awá culture to remain in perpetuity.

The Awá people regard nature as life itself; their existence and survival revolve around it and for this reason, the Awá people deeply respect the environment and are in harmony with it through different practices. For example, they utilise efficient sowing techniques that facilitate temporary fertilisation of the soil through the process of plant decomposition.

The Awá People is recognised as a collective subject of rights and of reparation by different organs, institutions, and judicial bodies given that – as indigenous people and as ancestral territory - they have been affected by the actions of armed actors and by the activities of transnational corporations, megaprojects, mining activities, hydrocarbon extractivism, large-scale palm oil production and illicit crop planting for more than 30 years.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2021) “*Becoming #GenerationRestoration: Ecosystem restoration for people, nature and climate*”.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Observatorio por la Autonomía y los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia, (OADPI) (2021) “*Awá Women Spreading the Word*”.



## 4. CLIMATE FINANCE

Climate finance refers to the provision of economic resources, whether from local, national, or international sources, including public, private and alternative funds, aimed at supporting actions for both mitigating and adapting to climate change. Climate finance plays a crucial role, given the substantial investments required for transitioning to a low-carbon global economy and assisting communities in enhancing resilience and adapting to climate change impacts. The principle underlying climate finance, as outlined in agreements like the Kyoto Protocol or the Paris Agreement, involves the provision of financial assistance from wealthier countries to those less economically endowed and more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, also recognising the varying capacities of countries to address climate change and its effects.<sup>19</sup>

In line with the principle of “*common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities*” established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Global North Parties are to provide financial resources to assist Global South Parties in implementing the objectives of the UNFCCC. However, finance remains

a fundamental barrier to the acceleration of climate action in the Global South. Climate action requires significant investment and many lower- and middle-income nations are grappling with both debt distress and multi-dimensional crises simultaneously.<sup>20</sup>

Debt relief is therefore a key demand for a Global Just Transition.

### Loss and damage

The concept of loss and damage refers to the adverse effects of climate change that persist despite efforts in mitigation and adaptation. While mitigation targets the root causes of climate change, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and adaptation focuses on coping with its impacts, like constructing sea defences against flooding, loss and damage addresses the unavoidable and irreversible consequences of the climate crisis. Climate change impact is increasingly intricate and challenging to mitigate. Scientific evidence indicates that loss and damage are disproportionately affecting vulnerable countries from the Global South, as current adaptation and mitigation measures fall short. Moreover, the convergence of multiple climate hazards intensifies risks across various sectors and regions. In certain ecosystems, adaptation has reached its limits, exemplified by low-lying islands facing inundation due to rising sea levels. These islands have witnessed losses in biodiversity, ecosystems, cultural heritage, property, and livelihoods. Consequently, communities may confront challenges beyond their capacity to adapt, potentially leading to displacement, migration, and relocation.<sup>21</sup>

19 United Nations Climate Change “*Introduction to Climate Finance*”.

20 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2023) “*What is climate finance and why do we need more of it?*”.

21 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) “*About Loss and damage*”.



## What our Partners say<sup>22</sup>

### 1. Green funding to the private sector and the Global North

Green funding is seen as inaccessible and unaccountable to Just Transition. It seems to go directly to governments and private actors, and not always linked to the objective of a Just Transition. Similarly, while the climate emergency is acknowledged as a global crisis, far more is being invested in the Global North than in the South to ensure an effective climate response, as well as safety nets for workers and affected communities. Respondents asked for transparency and advocacy for far more equitable sharing and use of resources for a response to the global climate emergency.

### 2. Making sure that global and national financial support reaches southern movements

Small-scale and responsive direct funding for local level participation should be part of a Just Transition,

but local actors and civil society have had little or no information about how money from global initiatives like the Green Climate Fund<sup>23</sup> could be accessed. Top-down must meet ground-up to achieve a Just Transition that supports both national economies for the benefit of all as well as leads to local benefits and change.

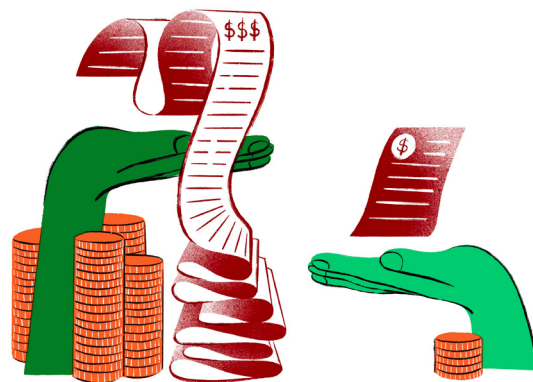
### 3. Demanding Just Transition responsibility from international corporations

Employers must take responsibility for their workers and their environmental impacts—not, as has been the norm, ‘privatising the profits and socialising the costs’. Where job losses are likely, but there are no workers’ safety nets, legal requirements must include paying for those financial safety nets through the whole supply chain.

## 5. TAX JUSTICE

Just Transition requires the mobilisation of both international and domestic resources, and a key lever to do so is to fight tax evasion, tax avoidance and illicit financial flows, while developing progressive tax systems.

Income and wealth inequalities are very large worldwide. The latest World Inequality Report<sup>24</sup> points out that an individual from the top 10% of the global income distribution earns around 87,000 euros per year, whereas an individual from the poorest half of the global income distribution makes 2,800 euros per year. The poorest half of the global population possesses just 2% of total wealth, whereas the richest 10% of the global population owns 76%



of all wealth. The report also notes that over time, private wealth increased while governments have become poorer. These global income and wealth inequalities are linked with climate inequalities.

With a sustainable and fair taxation, those that pollute the most will contribute the most to financing

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem (n7).

<sup>23</sup> The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is the world’s largest climate fund, established within the framework of the UNFCCC, mandated to support developing countries with climate change adaptation and mitigation activities.

<sup>24</sup> Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., Zucman, G. et al. (2022) “*World Inequality Report 2022*”.

the Just Transition; a progressive taxation system will make a better use of available funds to accelerate the transition, while protecting the most vulnerable and people negatively affected by the green transition. Fairer taxation systems can ensure both wealth redistribution as well as accelerating green investments.

**“The root cause [of the climate crisis] is a capitalist economy. It is all about the monetary system with no investment in people and the bottom line of funding economies for the rich by the rich—not structured around meeting people’s needs.”**  
Civil society, South Africa

## 6. FAIR TRADE

Fair Trade is a partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, which seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalised producers and workers - especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade.”<sup>25</sup>

The basic idea behind Fair Trade is clear: the current system of global trade does not properly support most producers of basic goods and services. Fair Trade aims to fix this by establishing fair terms for trading commodities. Its goal is to help producers and workers in disadvantaged countries create sustainable livelihoods for themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Global South countries are the source of a wide range of raw materials that are extracted from nature and which the global economy depends on. However,



these resources are often produced under poor and dangerous conditions for workers, while the bulk of the profits generated by this unfair trade is reaped by Global North companies and richer elites. Global South nations and local communities should be properly compensated for the resources they share with the outside world.

In recent decades, palm oil cultivation, trade and consumption saw an explosive expansion. Originally used for cooking in the Global South, the use of palm oil and its derivatives as feedstock for renewable energy production has also grown over the last two decades. However, if not done in a sustainable and fair way, production and trade of palm oil can have detrimental impacts on the environment and local communities in the areas where it is cultivated, as illustrated in this case study from Colombia.

<sup>25</sup> Tomy, G. T. (2009) *“Enhancing the Global Linkages of Cooperatives - The Fairtrade Option”*  
<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

## The social effects of oil palm monoculture in Montes de María in Colombia<sup>27</sup>

Colombia is the largest oil palm producer in Latin America and the fourth largest in the world. This crop has been promoted as a development factor since the end of the last century and it is widely used to produce biofuels. It is currently the most widespread agricultural sector in the country, and that which has experienced the biggest growth in the last decade. In the case of the Montes de María region, in the North of Colombia, the recent expansion of the oil palm agribusiness model was due to a combination of pressure and violence during the armed conflict, public policies aimed at stimulating growth in agribusiness and the implementation of public private partnership models.

The expansion of agribusiness is associated with massive land sales processes and the dispossession and displacement of peasant communities. Oil palm cultivation changed land use, thereby weakening traditional production practices. The climate necessary for this crop is associated with greatly diverse biomes; it requires deforestation of the area, resulting in loss of plant and animal species, which alters the balance of local ecosystems. This has left a significant mark on the life of communities and of fragile ecosystems, breaking down social structures, facilitating the violation of human rights, the loss of biodiversity, and the contamination of water sources.

## 7. GREEN DECENT JOBS

The term 'Green Jobs' has become popular. It is defined by the ILO as: *"decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency."*<sup>28</sup>



As the economy moves towards environmental sustainability, employment will be impacted in three main ways:

- Jobs creation: According to an International Labor Organization (ILO) report, 24 million new jobs will be created globally by 2030, provided sustainable practices are adopted and implemented.<sup>29</sup>
- Job elimination: there will be some loss of employment, for example in the petroleum industry, which should be offset by jobs created in new sectors, for example renewable energies.
- Job transformation: many existing jobs will change as their tasks and methods become more environmentally friendly and new and more advanced technologies will be introduced.

<sup>27</sup> MPDL, SOLIDAR (2024) *"Unveiling the social effects of oil palm monoculture in Montes de María in Colombia, A Case Study"*.

<sup>28</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) (2016) *"What is a green job?"*.

<sup>29</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018) *"World Employment and Social Outlook 2018 – Greening with jobs"*.



The ILO highlights how there might be significant potential for decent work in new and emerging industries. The action needed to address climate change and protect the environment will necessarily have a transformative impact on society, including opportunities and challenges for employment creation and social justice. For example, implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change can generate 24 million new jobs by 2030 while 6 million jobs may be lost in resource-intensive industries.<sup>30</sup>

Although job creation estimates might show that there may be many new jobs, doubts are raised about the quality of those jobs. Precarious employment, with inadequate workers' rights or education, poor health and safety standards, low-paid and dangerous work, and workers' dependency on these jobs for survival, are a common feature of new and rising sectors in the Global South, particularly in the mining industry. Many of the work environments are significantly harsher than those found in well-established sectors.

**“To move from coal to renewable energy you need minerals. That means more mining of critical minerals, and much more recovery and recycling of minerals. Right now, the jobs, especially in the recycling and recovery of minerals, are terrible. They're informal, dangerous and poorly paid” Union, International**

Within the Global Just Transition Working Group, participants stressed that the new jobs generated by the transition shall be not only green but also decent, meaning respectful and protective not only of the natural environment, but also of workers' health, human needs, and rights. The case of Ready-Made Garment Workers in Bangladesh highlights the risk for a decoupling these two objectives.

## Unfair Trade Practises in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Sector<sup>31</sup>

*“While they focus on being ‘green,’ they forget about the human beings behind the machines. The stress, the silence about our rights, it’s suffocating.” Amir, RMG worker*

The textile and garment industry serves as a vital engine of Bangladesh's economy, employing 4 million workers, 3.6 million of whom work directly in the RMG sector. Notably, women constitute 55% of the workforce in this industry. This sector, crucial for employment, has around 4000 export-oriented garments factories, and largely employs unskilled and semi-skilled workers, as well as workers from climate vulnerable backgrounds. However, these workers endure many challenges, such as precarious jobs, low wages, and labour rights violations, including long working hours, overtime, safety and health related hazards and restricted rights to associate or engage in collective bargaining. Furthermore, the efforts of the RMG factories to transition to climate resilience are often accompanied by overwhelming physical and psychosocial stress for the workers. In fact, while the government and industry are taking measures to address the issue of climate change and rescue the Ready Made Garment sector, the workers report a different reality, unveiling contradictions in the transition towards a greener RMG sector. The greening initiative, despite its environmental and economic benefits, falls short of directly addressing the underlying challenges faced by RMG workers, including labour rights violations and ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions. This in effect amounts to little or no improvement in already deplorable working conditions for RMG workers. Automation threatens to render a significant portion of the workforce redundant and there are also some instances of workers in green factories finding themselves working longer hours, with diminished labour rights and job security, compelled to accept overtime to subsist. This scenario highlights the need for a balanced approach to environmental initiatives that do not compromise human and labour rights.

<sup>30</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) (2022) *“Greening with Jobs and a Just Transition”*.

<sup>31</sup> Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE), Solidar Suisse, SOLIDAR (2024) *“Ready-Made Disparity: The Impact of Unfair Trading Practices on Just Transition in Bangladesh's Ready Made Garment Sector, A Case Study”*.



## 8. GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality refers to the concept that women and men, girls and boys must have equal rights and opportunities for realising their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to, and benefitting from economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and people whose gender does not fit into the norm. Equality means that people's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.<sup>32</sup>

Climate change impact affects differently women and men, due to the patriarchal stereotypes and gender roles associated to them, which exacerbates situations of vulnerability and disadvantage. As women are disproportionately impacted by climate change and gender inequalities, a gender responsive Just Transition requires mainstreaming women' and girls' rights when designing and implementing climate policies.<sup>33</sup>

Within the Global Just Transition Working Group, participants recognised the intersectionality of the challenges of climate change, gender inequality, and environmental degradation. In this regard, Just Transition is recognised as an opportunity to promote equality for women, while advancing alternative sustainable models of production. As a clear testimony of this approach, the story of Fundación Entre Mujeres (FEM) underscores the crucial link between advancing gender equality and achieving a Just Transition by promoting feminist agroecological principles.

## Feminism and agroecology as alternatives for life

The Fundación Entre Mujeres (FEM) has been actively engaged in empowering women and advocating for feminist agroecological principles for 26 years. Operating within Nicaragua's dry corridor, they confront the challenges of climate change and gender inequality. Women in this region face health issues due to overwork and structural violence. FEM members merge agroecology and feminism, challenging the perception of them as separate spheres. They promote ecological production, recognising the urgent need to change conventional models to address environmental degradation.

FEM's journey involves acquiring land and transitioning from domestic roles to productive agricultural activities. This shift requires confronting ingrained gender norms and building self-esteem through feminist education programs. They assert food sovereignty as a fundamental right, resisting market-driven food systems and reclaiming control over what they eat. Over the years, they have also advocated for a life free from violence, understanding that transforming power dynamics is essential for true empowerment.

Their vision extends beyond agricultural practices; they emphasize the need to challenge patriarchal norms within households and communities. Agroecology, to them, is not merely a set of techniques but a way of life centred on environmental sustainability and gender equality. They advocate for equal participation of men and women in productive activities, while also redistributing domestic and care responsibilities.

In essence, FEM's political proposal advocates for a feminist agroecological model that prioritises life, food sovereignty and equity. They emphasise the urgency of this transition to restore ecosystems and end violence against women, envisioning a future where all beings can thrive in harmony.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2027) "*Glossary of Terms and Concepts*".

<sup>33</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020) "*Gender equality and inclusion for a Just Transition in climate Action. A practical guide*".



## 9. DEMOCRATIC INFLUENCE AND PARTICIPATION

A strong and transparent collective dialogue is essential for a Just Transition, and it must be based on real trust and cooperation, with transparency of information, public scrutiny and the right to access documents at the centre. Governments need to build on specific mechanisms that guarantee participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of public policies, and at the same time promote a structure and methodology on how and who to involve in the process, to ensure that relevant groups and communities are represented. For example, indigenous people must be able to influence decisions that concern their lands. Workers and their Trade Unions must also be heard through social dialogue, in order for the transition to be just.

The Working Group highlighted that, local movements reclaiming local power are essential for fostering democratic influence and participation. In this regard, Just Transition needs to be “glocalised”. It means, supporting local actions while, at the same time, promoting international alliances and multi-lateral cooperation at the regional and the international level to enhance meaningful and safe public participation in decision making.

## Just Transition Made in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Escazú Agreement<sup>34</sup>

Concluded in 2018 and entered into force in 2021, the **Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters** negotiated by all thirty-three countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a landmark international treaty in the field of environmental law.

The Escazú Agreement promotes a Just Transition by ensuring that environmental decision-making processes are inclusive, participatory, and transparent, which helps to address the social and economic dimensions of environmental policies and projects.

Some key points of the Escazú Agreement include:

- 1. Access to Information:** Governments are required to provide access to environmental information to the public upon request. This includes information on environmental laws, policies, and projects.
- 2. Public Participation:** The agreement promotes the active involvement of the public in environmental decision-making processes. This involvement includes public consultations, hearings, and other mechanisms to ensure that citizens have a say in environmental policies and projects that may affect them.
- 3. Access to Justice:** The agreement ensures that individuals and groups have access to justice in environmental matters. This includes access to courts and other mechanisms to seek remedies for environmental harm or violations of environmental laws.
- 4. Protection of Environmental Defenders:** The Escazú Agreement recognizes the importance of protecting environmental activists and defenders who may face threats or violence for their work. It includes provisions to protect these individuals and ensure their safety.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations (2018) “*Regional Agreement On Access To Information, Public Participation And Justice In Environmental Matters In Latin America And The Caribbean*”.



# 5. GLOBAL CHALLENGES REQUIRE GLOBAL ACTION

All along our consultations and workshops, it has emerged that:

1. If well-structured and properly done, Global South CSOs see Just Transition as **an opportunity** to address the existing social and economic injustices in society.
2. Just Transition needs a **holistic approach** that integrates social, economic, and environmental justice at the same time. This includes cutting emissions in line with the Paris Agreement, promoting climate adaptation, protecting and restoring nature, and ensuring fair trade and taxation systems.
3. The transition must prioritise the creation of **decent and inclusive** green jobs, ensuring that workers are not left unemployed or exploited in the shift to a sustainable economy. This requires investment in skills development, labour rights, and universal social protection to ensure that all workers can benefit from the transition.
4. **Gender equality and democratic participation** are essential pillars of a Just Transition. Women and marginalized groups must be included in decision-making processes and have equal access to opportunities and resources, and Trade Unions must have a seat at the table when decisions about the transformation of work are made.

**“We need a broader coalition against climate change. The Global South is the victim of something caused by the Global North.” Unionist, Philippines**

Nations most responsible for the climate crisis need to compensate the most affected countries, both for developing their economies with far lower emissions than the development of the North produced, and for disaster adaptation to climate crisis events. It is imperative that countries in the Global North acknowledge their historical responsibility for the climate crisis and support Global South nations in their transition efforts. This includes not only providing financial and technical assistance but also engaging in genuine dialogue to ensure that the transition is fair and inclusive.



Our future is shared, and we must shape it together: northern and southern allies need to explore their experiences and concerns and reflect as a global community with shared advocacy goals and objectives.

## Global solidarity in advocacy: The Global Just Transition: Not Just for (E)U campaign

Within the Global Just Transition Working Group, we have launched a campaign to hold the European Union accountable for its policies that have negative impacts on Global South countries, hampering their Just Transitions.

In fact, while environmental and climate action and social justice are two sides of the same coin, if policies for them are not planned and implemented in a coherent and inclusive manner, the European green transition can lead to environmentally and socially harmful impacts in the Global South. For example, Global South countries will need to adapt to new European standards developed in the framework of the European Green Deal and cope with negative spillover effects of the European production and consumption patterns.

If not done with a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, the burden of greening the EU economy will fall on the shoulders of Global South countries, the most vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis and the least responsible for it.

For these reasons, the Global Just Transition Campaign calls on the EU to implement a Global Just Transition strategy in its relations with Global South countries, to ensure policy coherence, accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement objectives, while incentivising partner countries to move in this direction instead of hindering them. In this sense, at the core of this Global Just Transition Strategy, we advocate for a Global Green Deal in line with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, meaning a Green Deal with an external dimension to guarantee a fair distribution of the cost of the transition between Europe and partner countries. In this framework, the EU and its representatives shall:

- Lead on the implementation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a comprehensive

EU sustainable development strategy and ensure Policy Coherence to tackle the potentially negative impacts of the EU policies, programs, and actions on partner countries. They should conduct in depth sustainability impact assessments (ex ante and ex post) of its policies, programs, and actions to assess and address the external economic, social, environmental and political impacts of EU policies, especially on the most marginalized communities.

- Revise its trade policy and economic relations to incorporate sanctions on labour and environmental standards. Ensure that all EU business enterprises respect human rights, do not infringe them; addresses adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved, and ensures access to effective remedy in case violations occur.
- Increase incentives, such as technical and financial support, as well as grants-based funding for loss and damage, mitigation and adaptation for partner countries to undertake their own Just Transition processes and mechanisms.
- Promote, protect and enable civic space and counter shrinking space for civil society. Ensuring meaningful, inclusive and safe consultations and dialogues with CSO and TUs, during the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its policies. At the same time, the EU should promote an open civic space and protect human rights defenders, such as environmental, women', indigenous people', workers' rights defenders, as well as the right to defend rights.
- Strengthen social justice during the green transition by promoting and facilitating the mobilisation of domestic and when needed international resources to set up and scale up Universal Social Protection Floors and systems, including income support schemes, re-skilling and up-skilling programs, and quality public services such as health care.

# 6.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE), Solidar Suisse, SOLIDAR (2024) *“Ready-Made Disparity: The Impact of Unfair Trading Practices on Just Transition in Bangladesh’s Ready Made Garment Sector, A Case Study”*.
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- Women on Farms Project, FOS, SOLIDAR (2024) *“Exported Toxicity: The EU’s Banned Pesticides in South Africa, A Case Study”*.





# 7. PARTICIPANTS IN THE GLOBAL JUST TRANSITION WORKING GROUP

1. Conseil Pour La Défense Environnementale Par La Légalité Et La Tracabilité (CODELT) - Democratic Republic of Congo
2. Environews - Democratic Republic of Congo
3. Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) – South Africa
4. Fundación Entre Mujeres (FEM) - Nicaragua
5. Fundación para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Comunal (CORDES) – El Salvador
6. Groupe Educatif Pour Le Developpement Durable (GEDD-GAO) - Niger
7. Human Rights Defenders Network – San Marcos - Guatemala
8. INKRISPENA- Research Centre for Crisis and Alternative Development Strategy - Indonesia
9. International Federation of Workers Education Association (IFWEA) - South Africa
10. Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LEDRIZ) - Zimbabwe
11. Labour Research Service (LRS) - South Africa
12. Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad (MPDL) - Spain
13. Mozambique Workers’ Organization (OTM-CS) - Mozambique
14. National Confederation of Free and Independent Labor Unions of Mozambique (CONSILMO) - Mozambique
15. Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE Foundation) - Bangladesh
16. Olof Palme International Center (OPIC) - Sweden
17. Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) - India
18. Solidar Suisse - Switzerland
19. Solidar Suisse Mozambique - Mozambique
20. Tanzania Youth Vision Association (TYVA) - Tanzania
21. Unidad Indígena Del Pueblo Awá (UNIPA) - Colombia
22. Women on Farms Project (WFP) – South Africa
23. Women’s Leadership Center (WLC) - Namibia
24. Youth Alive! Kenya - Kenya

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SOLIDAR is a European and worldwide network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. Our over 50 member organisations are based in 27 countries (19 of which are EU countries) and include national CSOs in Europe, as non-EU, EU-wide and organisations active at the international level.

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