Natural Resource Governance Institute

People-Powered Energy Transitions in Resource-Rich Countries

ANA CAROLINA GONZÁLEZ-ESPINOSA, DANILO BORJA, JULIANA PEÑA-NIÑO

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Introduction

The climate crisis has negatively impacted developing countries and marginalized groups disproportionately in comparison with their developed counterparts.[1,2] Since 1991, developing countries have accounted for 79 percent of recorded deaths due to extreme weather, and 97 percent of the total recorded number of people affected by the impacts of such weather.[3] Women and girls are more likely than men and boys to die in extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent and intense.[4]

Worryingly, solutions to fight the climate crisis, including the energy transition, might add new burdens to low- and middle-income countries and marginalized groups.[5,6] This situation is particularly challenging for resource-rich countries, given possible shocks to resource revenues and labor markets, socioenvironmental and governance challenges, the intensification of social conflicts, and the lack of universal, affordable and reliable energy access.

The energy transition could also represent a financial opportunity for many countries. According to the Global Commission on Economy and Climate Change in 2018, the green economy could yield gains of USD 26 trillion by 2030, compared with business as usual.[7] The International Energy Agency (IEA) predicts that if the necessary policies are implemented, 14 million jobs could be created by 2030.[8] Yet this will require significant efforts by governments, companies and other actors in the education and technology sectors to ensure these new jobs and opportunities reach women, youth and other marginalized populations. This document seeks to advance a framework to ensure equity in resource-rich countries in the context of the global energy transition.

It provides insights into the equity and development challenges that oil, gas and mineral-rich countries face as the world attempts to fight climate change, and offers inputs to define policies, practices and tools that can help address such challenges and promote a just, people-powered energy transition. By suggesting the notion of a people-powered transition, the framework emphasizes the need for all people—with special focus on the most marginalized groups—to benefit from transition processes, avoiding the inequities of traditional development models and explicitly addressing the question of who benefits from a "just" outcome. A transition powered by people explicitly includes these groups and civil society as agents, and not simply as passive recipients of policies—although it recognizes that both people and nature need to be at its core.

The text is the product of a research process undertaken by NRGI, based on: 1) a review of relevant academic literature 2) analysis of key global and regional organizations' positions on a just transition,[i] and 3) the incorporation of initial lessons learned from NRGI and partners' projects on the just transition, especially at country level.[ii] The report has three sections. The first analyses the equity challenges that resource-rich countries face. The second describes equity concerns linked to asymmetrical power relations at international level. The third section explains the evolution of the notion of a just transition and different approaches related to it, and proposes a framework for people-powered energy transitions in resource-rich contexts.

i These include global international organizations that have become a key reference in the matter, organizations in the natural resource governance field where NGRI works, and some regional organizations and social movements. The objective was to provide a general overview of definitions and approaches to just energy transitions in relation to the mining and energy sectors, bringing local, regional and global perspectives. However, we did not aim to develop an exhaustive review. We reviewed available online guidelines, statements or tools from these organizations. Many other important guidelines on other sectors (such as food or housing) were not included. See Annex 1 for a full list of organizations.

ii This process included: 1) interviews with NRGI teams and review of the documents produced by those teams as part of ongoing projects conducted in 2023 2) three gender and energy transition documents prepared by consultant Rosalind Cavaghan, compiling information on this topic and lessons learned from recent NRGI work in the area 3) written feedback on the framework provided by NRGI staff working on just transition or related projects 4) two open-house meetings with all NRGI staff, where feedback was gathered, and 5) a learning and strategy workshop with NRGI staff and partners organized in Ghana in January 2024, convening around 30 participants from Colombia, Ghana, Mexico, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and regional organizations from Latin America and Africa.

Resource-rich countries face several equity challenges

Equity challenges linked to the global energy transition manifest in resource-rich countries in different forms, depending on factors such as the specific resources available, the economy's dependency on them, and the level of economic diversification.[9] However, to pave the way towards a greater understanding of the need for justice and equity in resource-rich countries, this document outlines some general trends across fossil fuel and mineral-producing countries.

Fossil fuels

The IEA projects that global demand for fossil fuels will peak this decade. This represents a major challenge for developing countries that rely on fossil fuel production for their domestic energy mixes or export revenues.[10] Carbon Tracker has estimated that $8 trillion will be lost across 40 petrostates between now and 2040.[11] Under a scenario that envisages 2 degrees Celsius of global warming, fossil fuel revenues in BRICS countries could drop to around 35 percent of their 2019 levels by 2050.[12]

In addition, the IEA reports that around 5 million people who work for the fossil fuel industry may lose their jobs by 2030.[13] Many of these workers will not be readily able to adopt new roles.[8] New jobs created by the transition are not necessarily located where most jobs are lost, and the closure of fossil fuel operations could affect direct and indirect employment. The oil and gas sector is not a major employer at the national level, meaning that job losses might be concentrated at the subnational level, or impact people indirectly engaged with the industry, including in the informal economy.[14] Marginalized groups such as women or youth might be impacted more severely. Women are more likely to have informal jobs linked to activities like cooking or cleaning that tend to remain outside re-employment and reskilling schemes to help workers transition.[15] In addition, in the context of a growing young population, especially in Africa, youth can be particularly affected by job displacement and the lack of alternative opportunities and educational programs. Box 1 presents the impacts of coalmining closures in Colombia, and concerns about the oil phase-out in Nigeria.



Photo by Musseln for iStock

→ Box 1

The impacts of fossil fuel phase-outs in Colombia and Nigeria

The impacts of the coalmining closures on women in Colombia

In 2021, Prodeco, a subsidiary of Glencore, suspended coalmining operations at its Calenturitas and La Jagua mines in Cesar, Colombia. Together, the mines employed more than 7,400 people—1,200 in direct jobs and 6,200 as contractors.[16] The suspension had a strong impact on labor, given that a substantial part of the local economy relied on direct employment and the provision of services for the mines and their workers. Field visits and interviews conducted by NRGI with local stakeholders during August 2022 and September 2023 revealed the gendered dimension of these impacts. While some women directly employed by the company lost their jobs, a much more significant number of women who provided services were impacted, given the lack of demand and an increase in the tax burden as the local government attempted to compensate for the reduction in royalties and tax income linked to coal extraction. An even larger group of women was involved in the informal economy, renting rooms in their homes, running food stalls or providing laundry services to workers. Women in domestic work and unpaid care were also affected by their partner or spouse's job losses, with divorce and family breakdown not uncommon as a consequence. Many other men experienced mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, due to feeling incapable of continuing their role as provider, which in some cases generated an additional burden of care for women. In this new context, some women have resorted to prostitution to cope, while existing sex workers have also been impacted by the closures.[17]

Women and young people's job worries in the Niger Delta

A 2023 workshop held by NRGI and BudgIT with women and youth in the Niger Delta[iii] highlighted the potential impact of the energy transition on oil-producing communities. If demand for oil from Nigeria's trade partners declines, Niger Delta States like Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Cross River—which rely on oil for up to 70 percent of their revenues—will have less income to invest in public services, in addition to facing impacts on the labor force. Women and young people, who tend to benefit from indirect employment linked to fossil fuel extraction, such as cooking and cleaning, stand to lose their opportunities for work. Participants in the workshops suggested that the federal and subnational governments should diversify their revenue streams and develop other sectors of their economies with potential to replace the revenue loss anticipated from fossil fuel companies.

iii In a series of just energy transition workshops in the Niger Delta (Nigeria), women and youth expressed concerns about losing their formal and informal jobs, not being ready for employment in the clean energy sector, and the risks of unresolved socioenvironmental liabilities resulting from decades of extraction. See the BudgIT workshop: Empowering Gender and Youth Inclusion in Nigeria's Energy Transformation (budgit.org).

A possible decline of oil, gas and coal production could increase the number of unresolved socioenvironmental liabilities. Several oil companies are selling upstream petroleum assets, partly to shift emissions off their books and ostensibly achieve their decarbonization goals.[18] But research has shown that, on balance, asset ownership is going from public to private markets and from companies with higher environmental commitments to those with weaker ones.[19] These sales do not simply transfer emissions to new parties, but may increase them, as buyers often operate these assets less efficiently or scrupulously.[18] Some of these buyers also have less financial capacity, raising questions about their ability to pay for decommissioning at the end of operations (see Box 2). Incorrect or incomplete closure, decommissioning and environmental remediation can generate significant environmental and economic harm. Without appropriate policies and enforcement, these environmental liabilities commonly end up being transferred to national or local governments, creating additional economic burdens, or are left unattended, worsening the ecology of oil regions and hindering efforts to build alternative economic pathways.[20,21]

→ **Box 2**

Challenges to ensuring a responsible exit from fossil fuel extraction in Nigeria

In Nigeria, as international oil companies such as Shell look to sell their onshore operations, concerns have been raised regarding the potential environmental and social impacts. Nigerian organization Stakeholder Democracy Network, together with Amnesty International and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations, has led efforts to argue that Shell should not be allowed to divest without taking responsibility for its "toxic legacy of pollution" in the Niger Delta. This responsibility includes ensuring the safe decommissioning of abandoned oil infrastructure, and addressing years of chronic oil pollution. In October 2024, through regulatory bodies like the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission and the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency, the Nigerian government acknowledged these concerns and indicated that it would assess environmental liabilities before approving the transfer of Shell's onshore operations. This move was seen as a critical step to prevent the new owners from inheriting a legacy of pollution without the financial resources and technical expertise to manage it responsibly. It also addresses the risk that local communities would be left with the burden of pollution and deteriorating infrastructure if the divestment process was not carefully managed. This could exacerbate existing socioenvironmental challenges in the Niger Delta, including oil spills, environmental degradation and conflicts over resource control. However, in December 2024, Shell received approval from Nigeria's oil minister for the sale of its assets, and it is unclear whether the issues raised by civil society have been addressed.[22]

Again, the most marginalized populations can be dramatically impacted. Indigenous Peoples have historically borne most of the negative impacts of oil and gas extraction, such as cultural dilution, dislocation and environmental degradation, while benefitting least from these industries.[23-27] The effects of the global energy transition on oil extraction could subject Indigenous Peoples to new social and environmental challenges. Some countries are doubling down on exploiting existing oil fields while oil prices are still high to prevent stranded assets,[iv] which increases socioenvironmental risks. Conversely, as oil fields start to be decommissioned, Indigenous Peoples can be affected by unattended impacts or by a reduction in revenues or compensation they receive from oil extraction.

The energy transition could also be seen as an opportunity. Fossil fuel-dependent countries could use this moment to promote more equitable energy systems and inclusive, diversified economies. Existing resource revenues could be invested in more sustainable and participatory sectors, especially as some countries start to discuss new industrial policies. Countries could democratize access to technology, create potential new jobs and, with cleaner energy systems, build more competitive economies. However, this requires a deliberate effort to ensure all populations are involved and can benefit, especially the most marginalized groups.

Transition minerals

Demand for transition minerals is expected to increase drastically over the next two decades.[28] Lithium demand rose by 30 percent in 2023; demand for nickel, cobalt, graphite and rare earth elements saw increases ranging from 8% to 15%, and more traditional minerals like copper and nickel are also experiencing growth in demand.[29] For countries where these minerals are extracted, the boom could mean an increase in resource revenues, presenting an opportunity for economic development, including possibilities for industrialization.

However, in the past, mineral extraction has faced important governance-based challenges to translating the growth in the sector into effective socioeconomic development. Booms have often come with increased corruption risks, a watering-down of socioenvironmental standards, and mismanagement of revenues.[30, 31] The impacts of mining operations are visible across the world. It is estimated that metal-mining pollution has affected around 23 million people worldwide,[32] threatening health and food security.

The traditional challenges of mining include negative impacts on marginalized groups. Women have faced important barriers to benefiting from opportunities in the mining sector, including access to well-paid, highly skilled jobs or compensation for land, with the most severe impacts linked to small-scale mining operations.[33,34] Women have also been exposed to sexual exploitation and trafficking, and to the additional burdens of care work linked to chronic illness caused by pollution.[35,34] Artisanal mining has similarly exposed them to gender-based violence and exploitation.[36,37] The situation is more acute for women and girls from communities of color, marginalized tribes and Indigenous Peoples.[38, 34, 39]

Given existing difficulties, the expansion of mining for the provision of clean technologies raises important challenges. Environmental governance—including adequate licensing, monitoring and compliance—can be compromised by the rush to ensure the supply of metals for clean energy infrastructure. Most transition minerals are located in developing and emerging countries, including in tropical forests. According to Earth Insight,[40] 20 percent of critical mine sites are located in biodiversity hotspots. More than 60 percent of the world's lithium reserves are in what is known as the lithium triangle in Bolivia, Chile and Argentina,[41] and 80 percent of the lithium exploitation in Chile takes place in water-stressed areas.[42] Indonesia accounts for over 50 percent of global nickel production, which has already resulted in an area of tropical forest at least the size of New York City being cleared (30 percent of this since 2019).[43]

iv Stranded assets refer to the depreciation of assets (e.g., oil infrastructure and reserves) before the end of their expected economic life, resulting from unanticipated changes, such as the energy transition.

For minerals such as copper, there is increasing need to exploit lower-grades ores as reserves of high-grade ores are depleted, with important impacts from expanding mining to environmentally sensitive areas like the Amazon.[44,40] Local communities have expressed rising concern about the potential impacts, along with the need to address the legacies of past mineral extraction.

In addition, more than half potential transition mineral reserves are located in lands over which Indigenous Peoples or subsistence farmers have recognized or claimed rights.[45] The rush to extract transition minerals risks sidelining international safeguards for Indigenous Peoples, such as the right to free, prior and informed consent. The consequences could include new vulnerabilities for Indigenous Peoples; the exacerbation of uneven power dynamics, and colonial legacies triggering dispossession, loss of livelihood and human rights violations.[45] The Transition Minerals Tracker developed by the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) has identified 510 allegations of human rights abuses associated with transition mineral mining between 2010 and 2022. Of these, 133—more than a quarter—are related to alleged attacks against human rights defenders.[46]

Yet exploitation of transition minerals could potentially be beneficial for populations and communities, if these challenges are addressed and new opportunities equitably shared. As conversations advance around local transformation due to the extraction of transition minerals, the creation of new state-owned companies, and the deployment of new taxation configurations, a people-powered approach that ensures benefits reach communities and populations is essential.

Energy access and renewable energies

Populations in resource-rich countries that supply the world with energy have a particular right to enjoy the developmental benefits of affordable and reliable energy access. In Colombia, the northern region of La Guajira has high potential wind energy, and there are plans to develop at least 45 wind projects by 2034 that will deliver about 8 gigawatts of capacity, over a third of the country's total installed energy capacity.[48] Yet the region has one of the lowest rates of access to energy in the country. In some municipalities, only 5.6 percent of the population has access to energy, compared with the national average of 96.5 percent.[48] However, most of the proposed wind-energy projects do not aim to address this problem, but to serve the energy needs of other regions. Across the African continent, the situation is even more acute, as almost 9 out of every 10 people living without electricity in the next decade are projected to be African, and the continent's power supply needs to triple by 2030 to meet the fast-growing demand.[49] In Tunisia, while electrification rates are high, the government's plans to position the country as a strategic supplier of green hydrogen for Europe are raising questions about how this goal would compete with the country's own targets for electricity production from renewables.[50]

Additionally, during the global energy transition, the prices of fuels used in electricity generation might increase.[51] In the absence of sufficient affordable renewable energies, this could pose a major challenge for historically marginalized and low-income groups by making electricity more expensive. The export revenues that governments of resource-rich countries often use to subsidize power for the poorest consumers might shrink.[52] This has important impacts on economic activities and income generation, but also on state provision of health and education services.[53] In this context, countries endowed with significant gas reserves might want to use this resource to expand access to energy and limit increases in electricity prices in the domestic market. However, these ambitions might encounter difficulties due to financial restrictions, especially for countries needing to build expensive infrastructure. As pressure to decarbonize increases, gas-to-power projects are also exposed to the risk of becoming stranded,[54,55] and even though gas is often depicted as a greener transition fuel than oil, power plants and pipelines still emit methane and dangerous pollutants. These affect nearby communities, imposing enduring impacts on the most marginalized populations.[56]

The deployment of renewable energies offers important opportunities to increase access to energy. By boosting these opportunities and addressing long-overdue needs for electricity, governments can reduce people's resistance against the energy transition. In addition, investing in renewables can translate into job creation at various levels.[57] However, the ways in which renewable energies are deployed matter from an equity perspective. Marginalized populations can be left behind if the beneficiaries are mostly in higher-income urban areas or abroad. The intensive investment needed for energy infrastructure and technology could also result in limitations to the poorest populations' access to energy. Studies in lower-income countries suggest that the expansion of renewable energy does not always result in benefits for the local economy where power plans are built,[58-60] and may even fail to improve host communities' access to cheaper, more reliable electricity.

→ **Box 3**

Renewable energy challenges in the Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with abundant solar and wind resources amounting to 19 gigawatts of power-generation capacity in 2023, faces challenges in its energy transition due to economic disparities, weak governance and social impacts. While countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) can leverage their fossil fuel export revenues to drive diversification of their economies and energy mixes, countries lacking fossil fuel resources, such as Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco, face financial constraints. These include IMF loans, high unemployment rates and consumer subsidies. Investing in the energy transition risks exacerbating the macroeconomic challenges of these countries, which are likely to be further locked into international debt in their attempts to increase renewable production.

In North Africa, large-scale renewable projects often marginalize local communities, exacerbating existing socioeconomic issues.

For instance, the Ouarzazate Solar Power Station in Morocco and the Borj Salhi wind farm in Tunisia are perpetuating the marginalization seen in traditional extractive industries. Similarly, Amazigh (Morocco), and the Cap Bon region (Tunisia) have faced land grabs and resource depletion, worsening their socioeconomic conditions. Other issues faced in the MENA region include environmental and health problems from improperly installed wind turbines. These challenges highlight the need for better governance and more equitable practices in renewable energy development.

In addition, inadequate legal frameworks and governance in many MENA countries hinder transparent environmental and social impact assessments, limiting access to information, civic participation and accountability in the energy transition process.

The rights of communities living around these projects can be affected by the urgency of the need to move to cleaner energy sources or expand energy access. For example, offshore wind farms can affect small-scale fishing communities by making traditional fishing areas inaccessible, causing local people to incur increasing costs to reach new fishing grounds.[61] The BHRRC documented 2,300 allegations of human rights abuses allegedly perpetrated by 156 renewable energy companies in Latin America between January 2010 and September 2020, and an increase in abuses of 1,050 percent during that period.[62] The lack of information and consultation can further reinforce power asymmetries harmful to communities impacted by renewable energies.[63,64] There are also environmental impacts linked to the generation of renewable energies, including possible ecosystem alteration, biodiversity loss and deforestation,[65] as well as challenges associated with the waste produced from green infrastructure. For example, only about 5 percent of lithium batteries are being recycled worldwide, with the remainder mostly ending up in landfills, which increases the risks of underground water pollution and landfill fires.[66] In the rush to accelerate renewable energy investments, monitoring and compliance around managing environmental impacts could be compromised. Many of the impacts described fall disproportionately on already marginalized groups.[67,68]

Inclusion and accountability in the energy transition in resource-rich countries

Lack of information about energy transition plans tends to be the norm in resource-rich countries, along with restricted spaces for participation by civil society and citizens.[69,70-72] A report by the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) found a lack of stakeholder consultation over energy transition plans, and barriers to participation by civil society and affected groups such as women, youth and rural communities.[72] This has raised concerns from different actors—for example, that oil communities, women and youth groups lacked opportunity to engage in the development of Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan in 2023.[73] Similarly, the lack of participation and dialogue around Chile's lithium strategy aroused criticism,[74-76] while energy experts and youth groups in Ghana appealed to the government to broaden consultations on its energy transition and investment plan, to avoid negative effects on local economies (see Box 5).[77,78]

This limited or non-existent participation is often linked to vested interests. In many places, powerful actors such as states, corporations or donors impose their discourse and agendas on less powerful, underrepresented groups, shaping public opinion about energy resources, technologies and policies, while exacerbating conflict.[79,80] In general, governance structures in the extractive sector have been set to concentrate power and decision-making at the national level, to enable development of regulations and policies that favor elite interests, while local governments and communities have little say in those decisions.[81,24] Local governments in resource-rich regions have also sought to benefit from companies that provide rents and play a prominent role in the local economy.[81,24] These same governance structures tend to prevail in the energy transition decision-making process.

The absence of participation triggers polarization and conflict, which can translate into major economic and social losses. Impacted communities have shown a willingness to mobilize against the phase-out of fossil fuels and the scale-up of clean energy projects, including transition minerals, when they perceive that their individual and collective rights are not being respected. A recent study showed that more than 60 out of 120 active mining projects in Argentina and Chile were affected by socioenvironmental conflicts.[82] Colombia's wind farms have faced increased resistance from Indigenous communities.[83,84]

→ Box 4

Young people struggle for a voice in Ghana's energy transition

Ghana's energy transition framework was launched at the COP27 climate negotiations in 2022. While the process for developing the framework seemed consultative, involving multiple state institutions and regional engagements, the final output excluded segments of the population who would be most impacted. NRGI's engagements with key stakeholders in Ghana prior to the framework's development and after its launch revealed several gaps and unresolved concerns identified by many non-state actors. Despite being organized and active in the sector, young people were left out of consultations, as were people with disabilities, women and communities—even those in resource-producing areas. Yet youth are essential drivers of progress under the framework, which has an implementation period spanning up to 50 years.

To promote young people's involvement, NRGI in Ghana partnered with the Ministry of Energy and a youth advocacy group, the Strategic Youth Network for Development.

The Network also convenes the Youth in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (N-REG) platform, to engage young people across the country on the risks and opportunities the transition presents for them. NRGI also engaged with the seven communities in the oil-producing enclave in southwest Ghana to evaluate their awareness and responses to the energy transition, and with the nationwide Federation of Persons with Disability. The federation discussed key concerns with the process, and presented these to the Ministry of Energy, explaining how its members would be affected, and the opportunities that could benefit them under the energy transition framework.

After this process, all the groups acknowledged being more aware of the contents of the framework, and the Ministry of Energy committed to using these consultations to harvest ideas for review of the plan and its implementation.

Another challenge relates to tensions among different groups and regions. Aligning goals and beliefs, and creating a common language between various social and political groups, represents a major challenge.[82] There can be important differences in how specific regions within a country experience the energy transition, and how it is perceived at the national versus the subnational level. For example, the fiscal importance of fossil fuel production could be much higher in a specific region than at the national level, especially in countries where there is decentralization of taxes or royalties, or where there is significant revenue sharing from the national to subnational governments, creating economic dependence at local level.

A precondition for accountability—even before information, participation and influence—is civic space. This requires basic respect for rights and democracy, yet levels of state capacity, engagement of labor organizations, civil society power or even private-sector openness to the energy transition differ among countries.[79] In many, shrinking civic space represents a challenge to fundamental rights and freedoms, the availability of channels to express disagreement, and the implementation of energy transition policies designed with and by populations.[85] Populism, state capture and authoritarianism threaten good governance in the energy transition, as well as overall climate governance, by limiting public participation and dismantling regulatory institutions.[86] Violence against environmental defenders has increased across the world, with the mining and energy sectors particularly affected. According to Global Witness, almost 160 of the 177 recorded killings of environmental defenders in 2022 were in Latin America.[87] This could potentially be aggravated by the presence of illegal armed groups in transition mineral value chains.[88]

Participation and citizen engagement could support a more effective transition.[89] Populations are a key force in ensuring these major changes advance, not only through their consumption behaviors, but also through their political preferences in democratic contexts.[90] The energy transition agenda needs to be supported by populations who keep track of plans and efforts beyond the tenure of governments. Some countries have set up multi-stakeholder engagement platforms or dialogues, such as the Ghana Energy Transition Committee, consultations about the lithium strategy in Chile, or regional dialogues about the energy transition roadmap in Colombia. These spaces are opening the conversation in useful ways. However, more effort is needed to follow through on the outcomes of these dialogues, establish the exact parameters of collaborative action, and—crucially—to fund such action.



Photo by Dave Primov for iStock

The international equity challenge

The energy transition reveals and perpetuates complex power asymmetries between the Global North and South, with the risk of maintaining patterns of uneven development and unequal distribution of benefits and burdens.[91,6] These asymmetries manifest in relation to fossil fuel production and phase-out policies, but also in relation to transition minerals and the scaling up of renewable energies.

Developed countries have been the main historical producers of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and it is an accepted principle that they should have a more important responsibility in the fight against climate change.[92,1,93] The top three GHG emitters (China, the United States of America and India) contribute 42.6 percent of the world's total emissions, while the bottom 100 countries emit only 2.9 percent.[94] However, 19 developed countries, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and the United States, still produce 35 percent of the oil and gas consumed globally.[95] There are also new fossil fuel projects planned in many of these countries.

This has reopened debates about who should focus on cutting emissions, and who should lead the way in phasing out oil and gas production. Developed countries have more fiscal capacity to bear the economic and social cost of closing down oil extraction than low- and middle-income countries that heavily depend on this sector.[95,12,97] Yet unless there is a clear international mechanism to define just timelines for such measures, there is a risk that the biggest burden of transitioning away from fossil fuels will be borne by those with less responsibility for GHG emissions and fewer resources to absorb transition costs. At the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Western countries' response of procuring oil, gas and coal from developing countries that were previously denied funding to address climate change raised indignation and denouncements of hypocrisy by some African leaders.[98]

There have been attempts to bring equity considerations into transition timelines—for instance, the phase-out pathways report by the Tyndall Centre at the University of Manchester[95] and the call for a reference framework for a fair global phase-out by the Civil Society Equity Review.[99] Other efforts in the Global South have made similar calls—for example, the Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South,[100] and the open letter to the Extinction Rebellion movement by grassroots collective "The Wretched of the Earth".[101] Yet political support to translate these proposals into concrete action is still lacking.

In mining countries, geopolitical disputes over transition resources could also weaken national sovereignty and resource governance.[102-104] Global powers such as the G7 members, China and Russia have long competed to control the supply of natural resources from developing countries.[88,6] Such international pressure and interference might block developing countries from ensuring just deals to develop and commercialize their natural resources, and expose them to risks of corruption. It could also result in lower standards and rushed licensing processes with disproportional environmental impacts in regions where transition minerals are extracted.[105,106] This poses the risk of perpetuating the role of the many countries in the Global South as suppliers of raw materials, who disproportionally bear the social and environmental costs of extraction so the Global North can benefit from industrialization, capital and control of markets.[6,107]

The speed of the transition and increasing access to clean energy is highly contingent on the scope and scale of financial investments and policies, as well as access to technology—both of which entail important north-south imbalances that need addressing. The IEA has indicated that in order to meet commitments under the Paris Agreement, annual investments in clean energy in emerging markets and developing economies will need to grow from $770 billion in 2022 to an estimated $2.2 trillion–$2.8 trillion annually by the early 2030s.[57]

However, developing countries lack the financial means to invest intensively in energy transition infrastructure and technology, with hindrances including international debts, lack of private investment, and the need to meet other development priorities. There is therefore an important ongoing discussion about who should finance the costs of the energy transition.

Given these global challenges, several grassroots groups are arguing that the current development model brings about the inequity challenges we face. These perspectives highlight how mainstream economic models rely on the intensive extraction of natural resources that embed anthropocentric worldviews,[v] inequalities and uneven power relationships. According to these ideas, this development model has triggered biodiversity loss, climate change, social conflict and dispossession. From this perspective, the energy transition not only involves the challenge of advancing political action to decarbonize the economy, but also dismantling colonial relations between the Global North and South, and predatory relationships with nature.[108,109]

A people-powered energy transition framework for resource-rich countries.

Justice and equity can only be achieved if the specific contexts, problems, potential and visions of justice are considered when defining transition pathways. The following framework is intended to be adapted to these different contexts, and will evolve as we assess the implementation of policies and identify new impacts and opportunities during the transition. The framework builds on discussions of the just transition and other relevant developments in resource governance, and on what we have learned from decades of work in resource-rich countries. In this section, we describe the evolution of the concept of just transition, and reflect on existing definitions. We then propose a set of principles for people-powered energy transitions in resource-rich countries.

The evolution of the just transition concept

The concept of a just energy transition originated in the North American labor movement in the 1970s and 1980s as a "call to protect workers in polluting industries whose livelihoods were jeopardized by environmental policy".[110] Yet the notion is also deeply rooted in movements and literature on environmental justice that call attention to the unequal distribution of environmental impacts.[111] This notion evolved after the creation of the Just Transition Alliance in 1997 by a group of workers in the United States. It became a prominent narrative in 2015 after its inclusion in the Preamble of the Paris Agreement, and with the publication of the ILO's *Guidelines for a just transition*. Since then, climate justice and other social movements have expanded the initial labor-focused approach to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change and climate solutions on communities and various lower-income groups, especially in the Global South. Other pressing concerns such as gender equality, Indigenous Peoples' rights and environmental justice have been associated with a just transition.[110]

Energy justice scholars have contributed to the discussion, with literature based on the concept that "all individuals should have access to energy that is affordable, safe, sustainable, and able to sustain a decent lifestyle, as well as the opportunity to participate in and lead energy decision-making processes with the authority to make change".[112] The academic field has primarily considered three elements in energy justice. Distributional justice looks at the distributions of economic, social and environmental benefits and ills, as well as of costs and responsibilities (this last element is often described under the idea of remedial justice). Procedural justice proposes that all groups should be able to participate in and influence decision-making. Recognition justice calls for individuals to be fairly represented, and for acknowledgement of diverse perspectives from different groups.[69,70,111]

v An anthropocentric worldview considers humans as the most important entity and subjugates nature to human service. This worldview is often articulated through dichotomies and separations between humans and nature.

These principles have been used by different organizations to shape approaches to the transition, and have also guided NRGI's reflections around a people-powered energy transition in resource-rich countries.

Many researchers and social movements have criticized governments and corporations for depoliticizing the idea of just energy transitions by, for example, reducing the discussion to one on creating green jobs, or on mechanisms for compensating and retraining workers.[79,110] As a response, activists are calling for a more transformative approach that integrates changes in energy systems, economic structures, social relationships, and interactions between humanity and nature, as well as for more sustainable modes of production and consumption.[85,79,100,54,107]

Tensions in diverse visions of a just transition

After reviewing the approaches of 17 organizations and networks to the concept of a just transition, it is clear that the definition depends heavily on context—for example, cultural practices, societal arrangements and whether at international, national or local level. Definitions also depend on actors' area of focus. For example, while the ILO definition focuses on workers' rights, the IEA includes concerns about energy security and energy access, while multilateral development banks are interested in mobilizing funding. Similarly, in 2024, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched a development cooperation report calling for the green transition and the fight against climate change to seriously consider policies and tools that also tackle poverty and inequality.[113] The South Eco-Social and Intercultural Pact (*Pacto Eco-Social e Intercultural del Sur*) in Latin America, and the African People's Climate and Development Declaration 2023 subscribe to more transformative socioecological visions of just transitions.

It is encouraging to observe so much interest in promoting justice from many different angles. However, this presents a challenge for integration and collective work. Tensions and questions emerge from competing priorities:

- **Benefit-sharing vs compensations**. Most organizations—including the ILO, the IEA, the Sierra Club and Oxfam—identify both the need to maximize benefits to affected communities and to compensate them for the impact of the energy transition. However, those like the IEA and the Sierra Club focus more on ensuring job creation and inclusion in the clean economy, leaving considerations of compensation to other types of organization like the ILO or civil society organizations (CSOs) such as the BHRRC. This raises the question of how to ensure that these two dimensions are adequately considered and managed in practice.

- **Outcomes vs processes**. Most of the definitions, including those of the IEA, the BHRRC and the EITI, focus on the outcome of the transition, while also recognizing the need for inclusion and suggesting some sort of public participation. However, few define the scope and implications of these processes. Yet for organizations such as the Climate Justice Alliance, the process is as important as the outcomes, and the process of consultation can imply that specific impacted communities should be able to decisively influence policymaking. For those such as the BHRRC, this is also linked to safeguarding civic space, while others such as The African People's Climate and Development Declaration conceive these processes as a space to rebalance uneven historical power asymmetries. Questions arise over how to ensure that participation is not tokenistic, but guarantees populations, communities and the most marginalized groups are truly recognized and enabled to influence decisions. It is also important to consider how to balance different groups' visions and needs, and the asymmetric relations among them.

- **Energy for development vs deeper societal transformations**. Many of the definitions of a just transition are linked to changes in energy sources and the economic impacts and opportunities linked to them. These definitions—such as that of the OECD—work within the traditional development categories of poverty, social inclusion and sustainability. However, for many CSOs—including the African People's Climate and Development Declaration, the Climate Justice Alliance, and the South Eco-Social and Intercultural Pact—the

process needs to go beyond the energy transition, encompassing structural changes in production and consumption patterns that redefine our relationship with nature and rebalance power asymmetries. This requires consideration of how to ensure that proposed changes do not maintain the same unsustainable production and consumption patterns, but advance a transition that addresses deep sociopolitical challenges, and how to address traditional structural inequalities, to move toward a more just development model.

- **Fast vs slow transitions**. Tension also emerges from definitions of a just transition in relation to the speed of the decarbonization process. Participatory processes require time,[114] and rushed consultations that fail to influence policy or decisions do not constitute effective participation. However, while participatory processes may increase justice, they can also can slow down the pace of the transition,[114] which could have major implications for populations and communities, by increasing the impacts of climate change. In addition, as accelerating the transition might require the participation of private-sector actors who might lack incentive to encourage broader participation, this reinforces the dilemma between slow and just transitions, or accelerated but inequitable ones. This raises the question of how to ensure policy-makers and other actors have the incentives to open spaces for populations and communities to participate, while also acting with the necessary urgency. There is also need to ensure communities are ready to engage in the energy transition, and propose alternatives that lead both to rapid transitions and equitable distribution of benefits.

These tensions further underline the need for a framework that provides a basis for understanding, and for addressing the challenges and power dynamics embedded in energy transitions.

A framework for people-powered energy transitions

The challenges that resource-rich countries face in the context of the global energy transition require policies and processes that consider equity and justice. Unfortunately, the voices and visions of governments and populations in these countries have been largely absent from international discussions about a just transition. People-powered energy transitions are needed, involving deeper understanding of the complex agendas at play at both national and subnational levels, and greater focus on the different people and groups impacted by the transition, and their role as agents for equitable change. For example, ensuring equity as copper extraction increases in Peru's Andean south requires different policies from those needed to manage a possible phase-out of oil production in the department of Loreto in Peru's Amazon region, as different types of groups are impacted in different ways.[vi] Given the local context, what is needed for a just transition in the Peruvian Amazon might more closely resemble what local people say is needed in the Niger Delta, where dependence on oil revenues for social services and local socioenvironmental liabilities are top priorities to address in the transition process.[vii] In other countries, universal access to energy seems to be the top concern during discussions of justice and inclusion, as in Senegal, a new producer of fossil fuels.[viii] There is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing equity challenges in fossil fuel and mineral-producing countries. Therefore, it is more relevant to use the notion of people-powered transitions—in the plural, to accommodate different local and national realities—where people are able to drive the process and benefit from it.

vi Together with CooperAcción, Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales and Oxfam, and with the support of the Moore Foundation, NRGI organized a workshop in March 2024 on what a just energy transition means for Peru.

vii In Nigeria, NRGI conducted a series of just energy transition workshops in collaboration with the BudgIT Foundation. These addressed the positive and negative impacts of the transition away from fossil fuels in the Niger Delta region, and called on government actors to include women at every step of decision-making processes.

viii A just energy transition workshop was organized with civil society organizations in Senegal from 29 January to 1 February 2024 by NRGI, Oxfam, the African Climate Foundation, Natural Justice, Heinrich-Boll Stiftung and the Meliore Foundation. This civil society training workshop included the launch of a multi-stakeholder platform on the just transition and Just Energy Transition Partnerships.

What we propose below is not a unifying agenda with policies that could be applied in different contexts. It is a framework grouping principles, institutions, policies and processes that could potentially address certain challenges within the context of broader just transition agendas. Many were identified in the literature review, in conversations with partners, and in pilot projects and workshops organized by NRGI in 2023 and 2024.

New ideas will continue to emerge as national and local governments, CSOs and communities, and partners in the private sector identify their priorities and define their own visions of justice. The framework below is a work in progress, which could be updated as we learn. The goal is to share knowledge across countries, boost South-South collaboration, and enable local and national experiences in resource-rich countries to influence international negotiations and standards.

Principles of people-powered energy transitions in resource-rich countries

Drawing from other frameworks and concepts, and identifying what is relevant for mining and energy-producing countries through work with our partners, we propose the idea of people-powered energy transitions that: 1) recognize the rights of populations, communities and particularly of marginalized groups, and ensure impacts are mitigated or compensated for (recognition and remedial justice) 2) enable and guarantee public participation and community voice and influence in decision-making (procedural justice) 3) equitably distribute opportunities and benefits across society, and consider communities' wellbeing (distributional justice), and 4) ensure the voices and needs of resource-rich countries in the Global South—including their populations and communities—are acknowledged and bring about partnerships and financial flows that support their just transitions (international justice).

These definitions of justice need to be translated into specific tools to help deliver results. We propose four principles.



Principle 1: Legal and institutional safeguards recognize rights and leave no one behind

An appropriate legal and institutional setting is key for enabling processes and outcomes that deliver people-powered energy transitions. The recognition of rights and the definition of rules should ensure due process and a more equitable distribution of benefits and compensations. Governments must ensure that their national legal frameworks recognize and protect universal rights effectively, particularly those of marginalized groups who may bear the brunt of the fossil fuel phase-out and of the focus on transition minerals and renewable energies. These include general human rights, as well as economic, social, environmental and cultural rights. Legal and institutional safeguards and accountability mechanisms must be in place to avoid harm and compensate for or remediate impacts and injustices. This also means enforcing the obligations that many states have as signatories of relevant international treaties.

To leave no one behind in energy and mining-producing countries also means taking diversity and intersectionality into account, considering the specific experiences and needs of historically

marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including women, youth and children, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, subsistence farmers, and people with low incomes. As energy transition dynamics often overlap with the negative legacies of the extractive sector, recognition and remedial justice in resource-rich countries will frequently entail understanding and consideration of historical inequalities and injustices. In this context, the recognition of free, prior and informed consent and other collective rights, such as cultural preservation and self-determination, is key. Enforcement of rights recognized by the Escazú Agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean could contribute to effective participation and access to compensations.[69,71] These rights include access to information, public participation, access to justice and protection of human rights defenders. Requirements for environmental or gender impact assessments at project or regional levels could help map whose rights would be affected by any energy transition project.

In addition, the private sector—including companies, traders, banks and investors along the value chains of oil, gas, mining, energy and clean technologies—should also ensure human rights due diligence frameworks are in place and reinforced with adequate grievance mechanisms.[115] This could include the United Nations *Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights* and the *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct*. The international community could support the recognition and protection of rights by adopting environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards for transition minerals or for divestment from fossil fuels.

Principle 2: Processes and instruments strengthen inclusion and participation

People-powered interventions ensure that decision-making respects due process and includes the representation and meaningful participation of civil society, including disadvantaged and marginalized populations. It starts with protecting civic space, enabling a safe environment for populations and communities to engage in public debate and participate, without the risk of violence against their leaders.[116]

The Escazu Agreement contains specific provisions to protect environmental and human rights defenders as a pillar of participation.[117] Civic space is key to reducing power asymmetries between citizens and companies, experts and governments, and to fostering accountability throughout energy transition planning processes.[118] However, for participation to be effective, populations and communities need access to reliable public information about projects and their potential impacts, including gender-disaggregated data and translation into local languages.[119] In EITI member countries, the initiative can be a platform for the public to request and access information relevant to the energy transition.[120]

A diverse range of instruments can be used to foster inclusive decision-making. Governments should define specific spaces and tools to raise awareness of energy transition-related projects and policies, and inform and consult people about them.[13] The effective use of free, prior and informed consent mechanisms is key to ensuring inclusion of Indigenous Peoples, as has been demonstrated by demands from Wayuu communities around wind energy projects in Colombia.[83] For an inclusive, participatory process, it is crucial to take specific groups into consideration and use consultation-sensitive tools—for example, those tailored for gender and youth, such as the European Commission's *Youth for a Just Transition* toolkit. Referendums are also a direct participation tool, as held in Ecuador in 2023 to stop oil drilling in the Amazon Basin's Yasuní National Park.[121]

Besides project-specific consultations, countries should consider participatory planning processes involving all stakeholders at national and subnational levels. This would ensure that broader policies and plans consider the specific needs and visions of key groups, and that they interact more regularly. In addition, as energy transition plans bring new funds for their implementation, citizen monitoring will be very useful to ensure transparency and effectiveness. Several countries have employed multi-stakeholder commissions to advise governments with recommendations around transition processes.[122] These commissions can be useful to address longstanding societal conflicts and to overcome situations of gridlock, possibly triggering more ambitious change.

Civil society, communities and marginalized groups should always be represented when key decisions are being made and in multi-stakeholder commissions or consultation processes—including by leveraging EITI multi-stakeholder groups where they exist.

Principle 3: Policies, programs and plans equitably distribute benefits and compensations

Governments, companies and the international community need to ensure that energy transition processes and policies provide concrete opportunities that are sustainable and benefit all populations, including the most marginalized groups, in terms of job creation, access to energy, local transformation of minerals, technological transfer and economic diversification. Policies and plans must be explicit about the tools and instruments required to achieve these results, and about how progress will be tracked.

In mineral-producing countries, measures to maximize benefits for the population might include taxation systems and revenue-sharing configurations that define concrete allocations for local people and their needs, as well as more direct benefit-sharing agreements.[123-125,27] The BHRRC has documented measures that could potentially lead to better sharing of prosperity with Indigenous communities, including local taxation, revenue distribution, job creation, negotiated agreements, community development programs and co-ownership.[115]

A better distribution of benefits between mineral consuming and producing countries could also result from producers adding value, transforming minerals and ensuring local content in ways that benefit the country and its populations.[126] As the governments of Chile and the Democratic Republic of Congo promote industrialization linked to lithium and cobalt, respectively, and develop local-content policies for extraction, they need plans to ensure that their efforts benefit their populations and the most marginalized communities, including women and young people.[127] Energy transition policies focused on expanding access to energy should also ensure affordability and benefits for communities, including support for people in rural areas to become clean-energy entrepreneurs. Examples include the community energy projects promoted by the Colombian government, such as small-scale hydroelectric, solar, geothermal and wind energy projects.[128] Other opportunities are linked to training and access to technology for youth and women; new ownership configurations in renewable energy projects; more equitable approaches to managing existing oil and coal revenues for economic diversification; and employment generation through the rehabilitation of coalmining and oil production sites.

Since the energy transition is likely to produce negative impacts, related policies and programs must compensate the most marginalized affected populations. Measures could include financial support and reskilling or upskilling programs for workers in fossil fuel industries—including those in the informal economy, especially women and youth. Initiatives must support them in envisioning careers in the renewable energy sector or other areas of the economy.[129] This might need to include aspects such as creating comprehensive care systems to reduce and redistribute care work—for example, care of children and elderly people—which is currently performed mostly by women.[130] Former workers who face permanent disabilities linked to their activities in the sector also require special attention. Lessons could be learned from programs supporting people with disabilities in countries such as the United States.[131]

Compensation for environmental degradation should be at the forefront of these measures.[132] States could establish and enforce explicit legal requirements to identify and compensate for socioenvironmental impacts in the closure, decommissioning or transfer between companies of fossil fuel projects, including consideration of the impacts on marginalized populations.[133,115] Among other aspects, policies must ensure that funding is available for the closure of mines or decommissioning of hydrocarbon operations, to prevent the costs of inadequate closure planning from being transferred to the state, and the creation of environmental and social liabilities.[134] For example, Argentina has incorporated into law financial instruments to ensure responsible mine closure.[135]

Local and national governments, as well as companies and the international community, should identify the specific impacts on Indigenous Peoples, subsistence farmers, small-scale fishing communities and other marginalized populations. The historical legacy of the fossil fuel industry and prior mining projects should be considered when seeking intergenerational justice.[112]

Principle 4: Transformative international partnerships and agreements address power asymmetries

Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption—resource depletion, inefficiency, carbon emissions, biodiversity loss and waste production, among others—mean that a global reset is needed. Challenging these patterns requires transformative partnerships and unprecedented levels of international and regional co-operation. The ability of resource-rich developing countries to build people-powered energy transitions relies on reducing power asymmetries and ensuring geopolitical considerations do not hinder their efforts to benefit from the transition and receive compensation from the international community for any damages. International justice systems should uncover and address the social, political, environmental and economic legacies of (neo)-colonialism.[6,107]

Within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the international community has agreed that there are differentiated degrees of responsibility in the transition process. This principle needs to be effectively implemented. The Global North remains the main driver of the agenda for the global energy transition, but low- and middle-income countries should have a voice and a place at the table.

In practice, this could include agreeing on different deadlines for the phase-out of fossil fuels, according to levels of dependency and capacity. A 2022 report by the Tyndall Centre at the University of Manchester suggested that the wealthiest countries that produce more than a third of the world's oil and gas must cut output by 74 percent by 2030, with the poorest nations given until 2050 to end production.[95]

The criteria to determine the sequencing of a country's phase-out could include economic efficiency, wealth, dependence, development, historical responsibility and procedural justice, though it is important to recognize the needs and rights of marginalized communities in these timelines.[97] The Civil Society Equity Review in 2023 proposed a framework for equitably phasing out fossil fuel extraction that would anchor phase-out timeframes on capacity, responsibility and dependence. It also provided quantitative estimates of how fast each country should phase out, and with how much international support.[99]

Another essential way to address international asymmetries is to make sufficient energy transition funding and technical support available to low- and middle-income countries. The IEA estimates that the private sector will need to provide approximately 60 percent of the clean energy finance in emerging markets and developing economies (excluding China), or between $900 million and $1.1 trillion annually by the early 2030s.[57] Levels of finance link to sustainability, benchmarked against ESG-considerations or from blended public-private sources, have increased significantly in some countries. However, a mandate to maximize financial returns, rather than development and equity considerations, continues to drive private finance. This risks further entrenching global economic disparities. International aid funders and multilateral development banks therefore have a key role in de-risking investment, including by reassuring markets and creating economic incentives for low- and middle-income countries that decide to accelerate their phase-out of fossil fuel production or promote clean energy.

Currently, public funding available to build capacity for the generation, transfer and storage of renewables is directed towards only a small group of middle-income countries, most of which are already perceived as proven lower-risk investment destinations.[62] However, it is just as important to support these countries to sustainably and inclusively diversify their economies and energy systems, while addressing the fiscal challenges of replacing rents from commodities such as oil and coal.[136]

Expanding the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) established between developed and developing countries could also be useful, but these efforts require more transparency and accountability.[137] Recent initiatives in Colombia and Ecuador to drive development beyond oil and gas have faced major obstacles, which could have been reduced by more international funding and support.[138-140]

For mineral-producing countries, co-developing technical and financial mechanisms and establishing partnerships for mining governance and local transformation around transition minerals will be also key. High-income countries and low- and middle-income countries producing transition minerals could define biding international mechanisms to ensure socioenvironmental and good governance standards in the production, trade and consumption of such minerals. Recognizing the roles of different actors, such as states, private companies and state-owned enterprises, and enforcing responsibilities will be essential.[136] The partnerships and deals that are emerging around transition minerals must be transparent and must secure just outcomes for resource-rich countries, including by defining fair terms and due process in contracts, while promoting institutions that help realize economic and social opportunities.[113] The recent recommendations of the UN Secretary General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals are very relevant in this respect.[141]

Moreover, there is an increasing need for accountability from different actors working to fund and implement transition actions. International co-operation could play an important role in this. There are useful indicators for tracking corporate efforts towards a just transition.[142] However, indicators are needed to assess countries' just transition or people-powered energy transition efforts beyond emissions-focused elements. These could help track and compare progress on transition-related financial and socioenvironmental risks and strategies. They could also evaluate progress towards targets on universal access to energy, workers' inclusion and compensation, fossil fuel subsidies, and the development of inclusive nationwide and local-level strategies, among other key areas. A global survey conducted on a regular basis could support constructive engagement between governments and multilateral organizations to evaluate equity considerations. This process could foster engagement between governments and civil society within each country to identify trends and track progress over time. Beyond spurring domestic improvement, indicators can also stimulate peer competition across assessed countries, and learning from country or local practices and programs. Such a tool could provide a basis for constructive dialogue between energy producers and consumers on how to achieve a global just transition, including through enhanced international policy coherence.



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Conclusion

The global energy transition could leave many people in low- and middle-income countries behind, unless it is just. Countries whose economies rely on fossil fuel production or the extraction of minerals have an important opportunity to foster more equitable development models. Yet there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing pressing equity challenges in these contexts. It is key that different groups, especially the more marginalized communities, can participate to drive the transition process and ensure it benefits all. Drawing on different conceptual definitions and conversations held with partners in different countries, we propose the idea of people-powered energy transitions that advance the legal and institutional safeguards to protect the rights of those impacted; the processes and instruments to ensure inclusion and participation; the policies to distribute benefits and compensation equitably; and the international partnerships and agreements to address power asymmetries. These principles intend to overcome some of the tensions currently prevailing in discussions about a just transition by:

1. Ensuring compensation of countries, regions and communities exposed to the impacts of phasing out the production of fossil fuels, so that they reap the benefits and avoid the harms of introducing a low-carbon economy. This means ensuring and balancing recognition, remedial and distributional justice.

2. Acknowledging that the climate crisis and equity challenges require multiple transitions that go beyond the energy system. These acknowledgements might have implications for economic, social and environmental policies, among others, meaning they require a more holistic approach. Building broader coalitions and working across silos is needed for a wider transformation.

3. Recognizing that the transition's equity and justice agenda overlaps with longstanding development demands in resource-rich countries. It therefore needs to address negative legacy issues and build on former development and resource governance efforts. This means understanding the shortcomings of some of these frameworks and the need to consider different visions of well-being.

4. Ensuring meaningful inclusion, dialogue and participation, open to multiple stakeholders and to all populations, but considering the specific needs of marginalized populations. This starts with sharing relevant information, but goes further, to provide space for influence and collective decision-making, ensuring procedural justice, but also more equitable power distribution.

5. Assuming there is no business as usual, so there are strong incentives for action. A fast transition risks leaving communities behind, but a slow transition could also have a dramatic impact for producing countries if they do not plan and prepare for the economic impact of climate change.

6. Considering people-powered transitions as a moral obligation as much as a practical consideration. Developed economies must ensure that developing countries and their populations are involved as key players. Most developing countries in Africa and Latin America are not the main states responsible for climate change, but they are key for the green transition. Ensuring the right financial and technical support is available to these countries to ensure good governance of both transitional mineral extraction and the fossil fuel phase-out is key for global climate action.

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Natural Resource Governance Institute

About the authors

Ana Carolina González Espinosa is Senior Director for Programs at the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI). Juliana Peña Niño is Colombia Country Manager at NRGI. Danilo Borja is an expert in resource and energy policy, with a focus on energy justice and Indigenous rights.

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About NRGI

The Natural Resource Governance Institute is an independent, non-profit organization that supports informed, inclusive decision-making about natural resources and the energy transition. We partner with reformers in government and civil society to design and implement just policies based on evidence and the priorities of citizens in resource-rich developing countries. Learn more at **www.resourcegovernance.org**