Climate Strategies

CLIMATE STRATEGIES FLASH BRIEFING

Implementing a Research-led Just Transition

A COP24 Commentary and Agenda

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This flash briefing has been produced as an outcome of the "Just Transition for All" event, hosted by Climate Strategies, ILO and the COP24 Presidency on Monday the 3rd of December at the UNFCCC COP24 meeting in Katowice, Poland.

With insight into the expertise of researchers and key practitioners, this flash briefing provides a series of state-of-the-art, research-led insights into the implementation of the just transition.

CONTEXT HIGHLIGHTS

- Transitions must be both fast and fair if they are to obtain the social favour required to reach the targets enshrined in the Paris Agreement.

- The Silesia Declaration represents a significant milestone towards the just transition, sending a crucial message that workers will not be sacrificed in an effort to cut emissions and arrest climate change and that the low-carbon economy will be fair and inclusive.

- We require empirical evidence of the just transition and its in-country impacts to inform governments and UNFCCC negotiators of appropriate strategies and response measures.

- The just transition requires bespoke action with a common framework, united by a set of overarching messages.

RESEARCH-LED EVIDENCE AND JUST TRANSITIONS MESSAGES

To be impactful, just transitions interventions must be informed by bespoke, context-specific action with a common framework. This commonality can take the form of a set of research-led messages emergent from the presentations:

- The just transition approach must be **fully integrated in UNFCCC discussions**. Stated in the text of the Paris Agreement, the just transition sits alongside human rights, gender equality and indigenous rights principles, thus forming a major commitment on what climate action *should* be. Yet with almost 200 countries negotiating, it is inevitable that there will be winners and losers. The just transition discussion is one part of a series of measures that can tackle the negative transboundary consequences of mitigation actions.

  Recognising the fundamental link with debates on nationally defined contributions (NDCs), the just transitions approaches should be seen as an enabling element of their implementation and an important mechanism for securing support.

- Decision-makers must **learn from other countries, sectors and historical transitions**, such as negative experiences of the coal phase-out in South Wales and its impact on poverty. Doing this ensures the development of best practice and provides cautionary tales.

- Action must be **multi-scalar and multi-stakeholder,** recognising: (1) the locally embedded nature of the labour force and the necessity of context, (2) the role of the state, (3) the importance of systematic and ambitious international change and (4) each various actors and stakeholder groups that exist at each intersection. This requires collaboration between the state, local communities and trade unions. In line with the Paris Agreement, the centre of these discussions and the policy cycle could be profitably positioned at the national level. The international level then provides a forum for the dissemination of information, exchange of experience, drawing of comparisons and agenda setting under UNFCCC oversight and regulation.

- **Pre-emptive planning is essential.** If nation states are able to plan in advance of significant transitions and manage them appropriately, they can yield huge benefits in line with the SDG goals, including the preservation or reimagining of national identify and pride, jobs and health. Pro-active energy subsidy policy reform in Indonesia serves as a positive example as

despite raising energy prices, it led to the simultaneous reduction in poverty indicators. Planning is critical in the business and industrial sector too both in order to create positive investments environments for transitioning or emergent sectors and to mitigate risks, including those associated with reputational, legal, legislative, market and workforce restructuring. This may be delivered through three guiding phases of participatory action: (1) engagement and dialogue, (2) planning (including workforce management) and (3) implementation.

- Stakeholders should **define the scope and nature of change** during the process of coalition building and policy design, considering whether it is **transitional or transformative**. Transitional change continues with the current economic model, whereas transformative change is more radical, moving towards a broader conception of communities and more collaborative energy production and ownership.

- We must consider not only the scope, but also the **pace of transition.** The establishment of short and long-term strategies are critical, and ambitions must be clearly defined. As an illustration, one perspective argues that the phase-out of coal in Poland would take around 30-35 years, with implications for who is included in just transitions policy (e.g. not the workers set to retire in this timeframe) and the manageability of how it is implemented, including the ability of phased forward-planning. Another perspective contradicts this stance, emphasising that change in the Polish case would have to be rapid, and would therefore be complex and challenging. Each approach carries significant policy and practice implications.

- In order to develop adaptive capacity, **change must be participatory and achieved through social dialogue**. Transitional and transformational change has the potential to present more inclusive, robust solutions, but only if stakeholders are engaged in determining what is right in each context. Participatory dialogue in Appalachia, Kentucky led to the identification of an emerging digital economy, and the subsequent reskilling of coal miners to be computer coders, for example. This participation must be two-way, with the delivery of information top-down, *and* the shaping of priorities bottom-up.

- "**Communities" must be clearly defined**. It must be clear who is being targeted in the policy process or we risk implicitly deciding and excluding particular groups. Definitions may include:

(1) Direct workers (e.g. those at a particular facility)

(2) Indirect workers (e.g. those in the supply chain)

(3) Communities of fossil fuel industry (e.g. teachers who depend on tax revenues for their salaries)

(4) Communities in other countries when we cut back on fossil consumption

And/or

(5) "Fence line" communities (e.g. those not benefitting from an energy structure that works for them)

- The just transition necessitates **international solidarity and negotiation.** The sector-by-sector and country-to-country impacts of climate action and mitigative response measures will be unequal. Representing a common theme around this distributional inequity, Kusum Lata (UNFCCC) reported to the group that:

"The discussion is not happening around whether to take those actions or not to take those actions, but the discussion is around how to minimise those impacts on developing countries regarding economic impacts and social impacts. Here is the link with just transitions".

Beyond a focus on developing countries, we must also acknowledge the disproportionate burden on particular social groups, including migrant workers, poor workers, those in high-risk physical environments and women. The affordability of national transitions also varies significantly between countries, as a comparison of Polish and Norwegian GDPs illustrates.

The targeted application of the just transitions and modernisation funds, obtained from auction revenues from the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) is a positive step in supporting countries and regions dependent on carbon-intensive industries. Pressingly, we also require particular response measures for countries without formal unions and nation-wide legislative structures.

- It is not a given that workers will be able to access net job gains or that the new jobs will be decent ones, so decision-makers must explore a range of **practical, targeted tools** for establishing social protection and long-term economic security. Potential mechanisms include targeted pension and job guarantees, cash transfers, income support, retraining and education, relocation packages and community grants. Response strategies can also be considered more broadly, including as one example, the development of road infrastructure that encourages long-term regional investment.

- The just transition requires **consistent finance** from international and national organizations as well as investors, enabling a connection between climate action, inclusive growth and sustainable development. This includes both long-term support to ensure not only the protection of ageing communities, *and* the preservation of long-term opportunities necessary to secure continued optimism in and migration to transitioning regions.

- The just transition must be **sensitive of cultural context.** Energy production is often historically embedded and that communities strongly identify with their energy industries as part of their identities. Where it is determined to be relevant by local voices, cultural cohesion and continuance should form a particular strand of participatory dialogue.

- **Empirical analysis is required** to highlight, in part, the net gains resulting from the transition as a whole. Critically, we must remember that the just transition is not just related to coal, but also encompasses renewables, efficiency, modern fuels and a range of other opportunities. Thus, to capture its true and diverse nature, we require empirical evidence of a larger sector and policy-relevant data. This includes evidence, for example, of the potential net gain of 18 million jobs in energy efficient sectors highlighted by research from the International Labour Organisation.

Fears have emerged over whether the attainment of a just transition will delay radical climate action. It is clear that the just transition agenda should never be used to delay or to weaken climate ambition. On the contrary, we must secure and strengthen current political agreements, and the just transition must be seen as a concrete means to allow the acceleration of and increase the ambition of climate action. In this frame, research-led guidance on the just transition process will secure its role as a complementary and enabling priority in the attainment of the Paris Agreement goals.

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE JUST TRANSITION

Research plays a critical role in the attainment of the just transition, and not least because current UNFCCC response measures and just transitions forums do not currently involve research-gathering exercises. Thus, beyond a call for pro-active and ambitious policy, the just transitions agenda also represents a call to arms for scholars.

Research studies consider at least the following elements:

- Concrete examples of both positive and negative transition experiences, including historical analyses
- Detailed, empirically-rich case studies
- Qualitative reports reflecting perspectives from diverse working groups and community concerns
- Quantitative evidence, including evidence of net gains
- Knock on impacts on other priority areas such as health, gender and indigenous rights
- Short and long-term measures
- Cross-country comparisons
- Suggestions for participatory approach methods
- Suggestions for UNFCCC policy structures and evaluation measures
- Comprehensive methodologies to assess inequalities

Critically, research studies should also incorporate political considerations from their inception, ensuring they are developed in such a way that their results can feed directly into both national and international decision-making.

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